LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND THE RUSSIAN STATE: 
THE QUEST FOR LOCAL SELF-GOVERNMENT 
AND THE ORGANIZATION OF POWER

by

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for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy 
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The Quest for Local Self-Government and the Organization of Power

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation is a study of local self-government in Russia, that order of domestic administration under which local affairs and officials are managed and conducted by local residents. In order for local self-government to exist, local organs must be in possession of some measure of power to manage and conduct their affairs. This requirement demands that the state ensure an organization of power among disparate tiers of government to include organs of local government. Without such an organization of power, local organs are but appendages of higher levels of government, unable to adequately represent local affairs. By extension, these local affairs will then be mismanaged and poorly conducted. The organization of power in such a way as to include local self-government without negatively affecting the integrity and capacity of the Russian state has been one of the central challenges of contemporary Russian state building. This challenge, however, did not begin with the collapse of the Soviet Union: it is part of an historical quest that finds its origins alongside the rise of Moscow. This dissertation adopts an institutional approach to the study of organizing power in the Russian state. Through historical analysis, it examines the legacies of autocracy and centralization on local government and exposes what the author refers to as the paradox of over and under government. It then studies various ill-fated attempts to reform local government, and suggests that the ultimate collapse of the Soviet regime was at least partially a consequence of this paradox. Two case studies of local self-government in the period from 1990-94, of federal legislation, and of politics in Omsk, suggest that local self-government failed to develop because existing institutional dynamics did not advance the interests of local government. As such, it is the existing organization of power which has been, and continues to be, the most relevant obstacle to the emergence of local self-government in Russia. The dissertation will be of interest to students of state building, historical institutionalism, and Russian politics.
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The geneses of new political institutions that redefine relations between a state and its society occur at rare moments in history. From the remnants of the collapsed Soviet regime, a struggle has emerged to define the new political order in Russia. Central to this definition is the organization of power among state institutions. For if the existence of state requires the legitimate use of power, then the allocation, demarcation, and distribution of power is critical to what the state actually is. Conversely, if power is neither defined nor accepted by those involved in its application, then the struggle over the organization of power will persist as the primary struggle within any political system. This struggle would be to the detriment of both economic and social concerns.\footnote{Even scholars without a specific methodological orientation to the state recognize the primacy of organizing power. Almond and Powell, for example, referred to the requirements of integration and penetration as the initial requirements of "system-building". See Gabriel Almond and G. Bingham Powell, Jr., \textit{Comparative Politics: A Developmental Approach} (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1966. p. 35).} This has certainly been the case in post Soviet Russia, where conflict over the horizontal separation of central power between president and parliament overshadowed all other political, economic, and social developments in the first two years after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

The conflict over the separation of powers between executive and legislative bodies was at best partially resolved by armed conflict and subsequent ratification of a new "transitional" constitution by the end of 1993. But this conflict was essentially a struggle over who would hold
the reins of central power. A different dimension of state building, more critical in the long term
to the distribution of power and authority, consists of the vertical relationship between center and
locale. This dimension encompasses not only who exercises power, but where power is located.
Whether a stable, even democratic political order will emerge in Russia’s future will depend less
upon any intrigues between executive and legislative bodies in Moscow than upon the tenuous
relationship between Moscow and its periphery. The various tiers of government which radiate
along a myriad of "vertical" axes from the capital, through 89 distinct federal jurisdictions, to the
countless municipalities and villages need to be fitted together in such a way that power and
authority are defined, demarcated, and recognized. This ordering of power is the essence of state
building, and the source of much confusion and disorder in Russia.

One of the most powerful legacies that Russian and Soviet history bestowed upon
ccontemporary Russia is a legacy of a unitary system of power (edinyi sistem vlast'iu) - the idea
or belief that political power cannot be separated or divided without weakening the power of the
state. This dissertation is a study of how this legacy has affected the development of local
government in post Soviet Russia. But this is more than a study of Russian local government.
It also represents an approach to the more general problem of state building. The organization
of power necessary for the development of local self-government not only represents the success
or failure of the fitting together of various institutions in an attempt to forge a coherent, stable
state, but it also highlights the prospects for the future of the Russian state. How well the
institutions of the post Soviet Russian state are constructed, and how well they are accepted by
those involved in the "game" of politics, are critical elements of Russia’s political development.

This dissertation began during the implosion of the Soviet Union. Like many observers,
this author was much enamoured of the prospects for democratic transitions and the blossoming of civil society. The development of new institutions of local governance was originally intended to be part of the impending success story of Russia's transition to democracy. During the past five years, however, this author has grappled with the problems of a "moving target" - it is, for example, impossible to explain how and why an institution, or series of institutions, emerged when they have not yet succeeded in doing so. As a consequence, this dissertation focuses on the quest for local self-government in Russia, and what this quest can tell us about the task of state building.
INTRODUCTION: STATE BUILDING AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

It may be overstating the obvious to point out the primacy of state building among the many tasks confronting post Soviet Russia. But the question that subsequently arises is this: How does one study the genesis of the state, and, in particular, the genesis of a new state emerging from the assorted remnants of its predecessor? What kind of methodological framework exists to study the process of forging authoritative political institutions and the fitting together of various levels and organs of political power? While contemporary political science has become more enamoured of the state, particularly of its role in the development and implementation of policy, the actual process of state building, or how a modern state is actually pieced together, has been woefully ignored. While the state is routinely recognized as a basic concept of political science, few studies focus on how states as organizations of power actually came to be.¹ This chapter provides a brief overview of approaches to the state as an organization of power. It then highlights recent approaches to the organization of power, and discusses in greater detail the relevance of local government to the issue of state building. It concludes with a discussion of the methodology used for the study and an outline of subsequent chapters.

¹ In a recent summary of political theory devoted to the question of the origins of the state, Martin Sicker has concluded that the "true origin of the state and political authority continues to remain a mystery, and political theorists will persist in their search for a general concept that will provide a satisfactory explanation of the phenomenon of the state." The Genesis of the State (New York: Praeger. 1991) p.139. In the preface to his well known book, The Development of the Modern State (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1978), Gianfranco Poggi bemoaned the lack of attention to the state throughout numerous disciplines of the social sciences. See pp. ix-xiii.
Early, pre-twentieth century, attempts to explain state genesis relied on theories of spontaneous origin followed by evolutionary development, divine creation, or a combination of both. The spontaneity theory generally suggested that the state as a construct of power in both idea and reality emerged as a consequence of the rational and natural inclination among men to "quit the state of nature". From Aristotle to Hobbes and Locke, the state was considered a voluntary, contractual agreement entered into as a means of protection from violence and as a guarantor of security. Its power and authority derived from this contractual arrangement. But the process and details of the contract (or, more clearly, the merging of interests involved in actual state formation) were regarded as "spontaneous development," which underscored the fact that it was little understood. And since the actual processes involved in the development of state could not be explained, the process of changing the state remained an issue of contention. Hobbes, for example, suggested that any change would have to come "from above", since the state, once it had emerged, was sovereign. In contrast, Locke believed change would emanate "from below", since the contract of state power was entered into freely and thus could be altered by a majority of the subjects. Even more significant to our purposes, spontaneity as explanandum also underestimated the potential complexities of state power. For the modern state is now much more than any singular monocratic institution, and consists of a variety of institutions from national executive to local councils. The classical notion of state as a spontaneous construct of singular dimension is incapable of explaining the realities of these multiple dimensions of the modern state - akin to the proverbial explosion in the printing shop culminating in the publication of an English dictionary.
With the emergence of the modern state in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, some theorists adopted an holistic approach to explain the state's various dimensions. The reverence accorded the state by many German theorists of the nineteenth century upheld and deepened this holism, which emphasized the sum of the parts at the expense of specific dimensions of the state. To Hegel, for example, the state was the "march of God in the world." and he explicitly defined it in organic terms. His reverence rejected the very idea that a state was merely an assortment of institutions and conventions to guarantee security of its individual members. Instead, the state, as a normative concept, reconciled competition among disparate interests. Its very idea was actualized reason, the body universal, nurturing the conscious merging of particular interests. But while Hegel and other German statists pointed out the need for state, and the requirements and benefits of power and authority, they too ignored the question of how states and their institutions actually emerged. While German theorists recognized the vital function of the state in reconciling conflicting political interests, their fundamentally normative conception of a state as a primordial entity, "the necessary outward form which the inner life of a people bestows upon itself," ensured that its origins were not subject to inquiry.² Hegel, for example, was reluctant to even question the actual origins of state:

But if we ask what is or has been the historical origin of the state in general, still more if we ask about the origin of any particular state, of its rights and institutions..., if we ask in what light the basis of the state's rights has been conceived and consciously established..., all these questions are no concern of the Idea of the state.³

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The organicism of the state was premised upon the belief that the state was more than the mere sum of its parts. And in this regard, Hegel and others recognized that the state represented a complex of institutions woven together in such a way as to form something bordering on the divine. To be sure, the "state" can be more than the sum of its parts, and may even border on organicism, but this is so only if the power and authority of each part is defined and accepted by all other parts. The reverse is also true: a state will be less than this sum if political conflict over the organization of power consumes much of the energy of the state. In spite of this recognition of organic complexity, which underlies much of the concept of state used in this study, a quasi-divine organicism is a wholly unsatisfying approach for those intrigued by the process and dynamics of state formation and institutional genesis.

While respect is given to internal relationships of power among various parts of the state, there is little to develop our understanding of how each part came to be, nor is an attempt made to understand how the various parts are woven together.

In short, neither the spontaneous emergence of states followed by evolutionary development nor the holistic organic creation of quasi-divine origins offer a satisfactory approach to the study of the origins of state. Neither approach can help us identify and comprehend the processes of state building. This is particularly evident when we think again of the problems of state building in Russia. Post Soviet Russian state building is less a problem of creating something from nothing, than a task of creating something new from the rubble of the old. An assumption of spontaneous emergence, for example, can tell us nothing about the processes involved in building the new Russian state. And while some measure of organicism can provide some of the context of state building, it also fails to draw attention to
the dynamics of the process.

Twentieth century political science has also been negligent in understanding the genesis of the state. During the first half of the century, mainstream political science was dominated by formal-legal, or constitutional studies, which focused on the ordination, definition, and demarcation of power among institutions within a political order. Because of this focus on the distribution of power and authority, one might expect to find in this approach attention to institutional genesis and state building. Unfortunately, however, constitutional studies also ignored the important question of process. Its primary concern was on structuring state institutions according to normative theories of optimal state design. There was little, if any, focus on studying the political forces engaged in the struggles for power within a state, and the commonly held belief was that successful principles of the distribution of power and authority could be exported successfully around the world. The abject failures of most of the constitutions that emerged between the two world wars belied the utility of this approach. In spite of attention to legal detail, constitutional studies ignored the very societies within which state institutions were constructed. The new constitutions thus neglected various interests and political actors already involved in the political struggle at the very time that power and authority were demarcated and allocated and new political institutions were created. Unless such interests were directly involved in this distribution of power and the creation of new political institutions, there would be little interest on the part of political actors to play by any newly established rules and participate in the emerging political order. In other words, the process of state building is not only relevant as an academic exercise on

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how something came to be: how a particular state came to be is also critical to an understanding of what that state actually is. The processes and dynamics at work within a state, and the prospects for its further development, cannot be fully understood unless we also understand the processes involved in forging that state as it came to be.

In the Russian context, the processes at work in forging the organization of power will highlight the shape of the new Russian state. Additionally, the prospects for political stability and, potentially, democracy, are premised upon the acceptance of, and compliance with, the organization of power among various institutions, interests and elites involved in the game of politics. This argument is supported by at least two distinct approaches to political development: Samuel Huntington’s suggestion that political order and institutional coherence must precede political participation and social mobilization if political development is to obtain; and Giuseppe Di Palma’s claim that democracy involves the arrangement of rules and institutions in a manner acceptable to those involved in the process. In the latter instance, the organization of power not only represents progress in this arrangement, but also facilitates acceptance.⁵

Given the void in theory concerning the origins of state, there is little wonder that the very concept was in hibernation for a generation of political scientists.⁶ During that time, prior to the recent assurgency of the state, political scientists cast the state in a variety of roles, from weathervanes and cash registers, to various incarnations of the executive

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committee of the bourgeoisie. There existed little incentive to make the state the focus of inquiry. since it ostensibly only reflected various social and economic forces at work. Group theorists, such as David Truman, for example, dismissed the very concept of state by first subsuming it under the concept of a national interest, and then pointing out that a singular national interest did not exist.\(^7\) The concept of state was transmuted into a much broader concept of "system", to include political parties, interest groups, communication, education, religion, and other social organizations within the scope of analysis.\(^8\) Likewise, marxist analysis offered little reason to study institutional genesis or state building, since the state remained above all else the executive committee of the ruling class. While debates among marxist scholars over the role of the state and its relative autonomy from the capitalist ruling class emerged, marxist ontology left little justification for the study of state formation in and of itself. State institutions were dependent upon the dominant class and the forces of economic production.\(^9\) This instrumentalism was also evident in Soviet political thought: the socialist state was also a tool with which the dictatorship of the proletariat might establish the economic and social conditions for the withering away of the state. Building the socialist

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\(^7\) David Truman, *The Governmental Process: Political Interests and Public Opinion* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1963), pp. 49-52. Truman relied heavily on Arthur Bentley's much earlier work. One problem here is that when Truman dismissed the state because no universal interest exists, he ignored the organic theory of state that suggested the state only attempts to achieve a universal interest. The absence of a universal is not proof of the absence of state any more than death would be proof of the absence of medical science.

\(^8\) The original proposal for this dissertation labelled the process of the organization of power in Russian government "systematization", based on the Russian term used in this same context, *sistematsatsia*. But given the conceptual baggage that comes with the English equivalent, we rely on the hopefully less confusing phrase, "organization of power."

\(^9\) The debates between instrumentalist and structuralist marxists, for example, may question the relative autonomy of the state, but neither focus on the origins of state institutions. These debates turned the Marxist (Leninist) approach to the state upside down. Poulantzas, for example, recognized the state as both a product of class domination, and a force that shaped class relations. This conflict between state as dependent variable and as independent variable will surface below, although in a different context. See Martin Carnoy, *The State and Political Theory* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984) p. 250.
state was thus equated with the economic task of industrialization, which would serve as the first step to the state's dissolution. Since it was little more than a transitional phenomenon, there was little need to make the state the object of more detailed study, particularly concerning its origins.\textsuperscript{10}

An approach which did possess promise for understanding the processes involved in the organization of the state was elite theory. In very general terms, elite theorists postulate that power and authority are always in the hands of the few. The structuring of power, or perhaps more correctly, the structures of power, could thus be perceived as consequences of the political action of elites.\textsuperscript{11} Yet notwithstanding this contribution of what might be considered the obvious in the institutionalization of power, the actual genesis of the state was never the focus of any detailed inquiry among elite theorists.\textsuperscript{12} In the decades after World War II, elite theory focused much less on the state and its institutions, and more on the personnel positioned in its offices. Elite theory thus dealt primarily with the advantageous access specific elites had to the reigns of power rather than any change in institutional


\textsuperscript{11}In Weber's words: "Political action is always determined by the principle of small numbers, that means, the superior political maneuverability of small leading groups." This, he suggested, was "as as it should be." \textit{Economy and Society} edited by Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich. (Berkeley CA: University of California Press. 1978) vol II, p. 1414.

\textsuperscript{12}Mosca, for example, viewed the state as a uni-dimensional construct of a rather monolithic, central elite, and ignored the vertical dimension of political power and authority. Almost by accident, however, Mosca did point to one historical weakness of early states: their inability to absorb regional or emerging rival leaders from the periphery. Yet he almost tripped over this point later, when he praised those political organizations which possessed an united elite that could maintain a unity of power in the name of the state. Gaetano Mosca, \textit{The Ruling Class: Elementi di Scienza Politica} (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1939), pp. 338-393. Among other leading theorists of elitism, Pareto made no direct reference to the state or its origins (although he did refer to elite reliance on the use of government coercion). Michels focused on political parties, and Weber, while interested in the concept and the inner workings of the state, never wrote a tome dedicated to the state or its origins.
delegation of power and authority.\textsuperscript{13}

To answer our original question, then, concerning how we might study the genesis of new states, political science must respond with a collective shrug of its many shoulders. Since the very concept of the state has been neglected and misunderstood, our understanding of state building, of the processes involved in the organization of power, remains limited. Indeed, the very concept of state building is a rather vague term, generally used in an all inclusive manner that encompasses the entire gamut of government institutions and of society. The term is used to cover such seemingly disparate topics as the development of military strength, of national consciousness, and the mobilization of support for political parties.\textsuperscript{14} In this study, however, state building will have a specific bias towards the structural, institutional dimension, and the organization of power among these institutions. This structural bias can help compensate for the vagueness that encumbers the concept.

Such a bias, however, does not leave the term immune to criticism. Gianfranco Poggi, for example, critiqued his own understanding of state building, and questioned whether or not a "purposive effort and conscious arrangement to a design" could actually bear fruit. How plausible is the notion of the state being "built"? Who does the making? For those who view the state as an ideal, rather than a reality, such criticism is valid. Poggi, however, prefers to view the state as the mechanization of power:

\textsuperscript{13} An example of contemporary neglect of the state among elite theorists is the recent work by Eva Etzioni-Halevy, \textit{The Elite Connection: Problems and Potential of Western Democracy} (Cambridge, MA: Polity Press, 1993). While the book is a thorough discussion of elite theory, there is no mention whatsoever of the state.

In sum, the state is designed, and is intended to operate, as a machine whose parts all mesh, a machine propelled by energy and directed by information flowing from a single center in the service of a plurality of coordinated tasks. The state is not just a contrivance: it is a complex and sophisticated contrivance, made up of multiple parts, each of which, in operation, delivers resources to or places constraints upon the operation of another.  

State building may not be entirely conscious and purposeful, and the end result may not match the original purposes of those involved in the process. But surely those involved in state building are motivated by more than unconsciousness. Were it not so, we would best return to the unsatisfying explanations of spontaneous evolution or divine creation. And even if no master blueprint for state design exists, we are still left with the question of how states emerge, how the institutions of state are created and fitted together. And we need an approach to help us in this endeavour.

Rather than rely on macro historical accounts of the state situated in its external environment, we need to examine in greater detail the internal dynamics of state building. For in spite of any motivation derived from a threat of foreign invasion, state building is first and foremost an internal task. The premise of this dissertation is that the process of organizing power is, inherently, a political process, which involves competition and compromise among various interests and existing institutions. This is precisely why the process of state building should be of great interest to political science. The identification of these interests, and, specifically, the forces that constrain, the give-and-take, competition and compromise, among these forces that determine the distribution of power and authority is, in the truest sense of the word, pure politics. Illuminating the dynamics that animate this

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process should be one of the basic tasks of political science.

Not all scholars have ignored the politics involved in the origins of state. and we need to return to some of those who attempted to address such issues. In examining states at the turn of this century. Otto Hintze made a concession to the organicism of both state and society. noting that "no one has observed the origin of either." But Hintze did suggest three processes at work in creating state institutions: the social processes (which emerge from the organic life of the community); the political process (from the conscious intelligence and the ubiquitous will to dominate); and external influences on internal social and political development. In later work. Hintze delved a bit deeper into the problem. suggesting that two phenomena affected the organization of the state: the structure of social classes: and the external ordering of states (their position relative to each other). In Hintze's work were the suggestions that thought. will. and action. would all be of considerable consequence in institutional creation and the formation of the state. Such a suggestion begged the question "of whom?" Whose thought? Whose will? And whose action? Hintze's contribution was a break from the simplistic spontaneous or deterministic approaches of previous scholars. But beyond macro level theorizing on an international perspective. there was little empirical work to answer such questions.


18 In the nineteenth century. John Burgess had also questioned state origins. and suggested that the origins of the state could be explained with three propositions: divine origins; human agreement; and historical product. Burgess claimed that the last of these propositions was the correct view. although its real value was that historical habituation of institutions and power might also include the other two propositions. John W. Burgess. The Foundations of Political Science (New Brunswick. NJ: Transaction Publishers. 1994) pp.53-71.
By recognizing this political dimension to the origins of the state, Hintze provided a broad framework for studying the emergence of states, particularly the parameters within which states emerged. But by themselves, these parameters tell us little about the actual process. To use an analogy, it is one thing to say a football game lasted three hours, was played in the rain, that teams moved the ball up and down the field, and the home team won. But unless we know which teams were playing, we know almost nothing about the game. And surely any fan of football would appreciate knowing the final score, descriptions of some of the stellar plays, individual statistics of specific players, and so on. Likewise, unless we glimpse the actual play of politics involved in state building, we actually know little about the process.

So let us return to the original question - how do we study the emergence of states? Or, alternatively, how do we understand the game? Let me suggest another analogy - how does one eat an elephant? Such endeavors can only be accomplished one piece or segment at a time. Each piece needs to be savoured and digested on its own. The difficult challenge is not to relax one's focus and lose sight of the larger objective. In the case of the state, we need to recognize that the object of study is more than a singular entity, but a complex of institutions. Examining the creation and development of each of these institutions, while keeping in mind that each institution is but a piece of the larger whole, is the only way we have to focus on the process of state building. To try and ingest the entire process of state building at once is simply too difficult a task. If we can focus on the building of particular institutions involved in the definition of power, and yet recognize that these institutions are but parts of a larger whole, we will be able to observe the processes involved in the broader
issue of state building. To this end, the study of local government in Russia can provide important insights into the processes of state building in post Soviet Russia.

Before we continue, however, let us be sure to define the term state building. The structural bias adopted for this dissertation has been noted. Also noted is that the problem of state building in post Soviet Russia is not at all a problem of building something from nothing. For Russia, and for any political order of the twentieth century, state building is a task of building something from something else, from a remnant of an existing or crumbling political order. In his study of the development of American administration, Stephen Skowronek defined the task as an "exercise in reconstructing an already established organization of state power." With the noted exception of revolution, the success of state building "hinges on recasting official power relationships within governmental institutions and on altering ongoing relations between state and society."\(^{19}\) For Skowronek, state building, at bare minimum, was little more than institutional innovation. But, in a more complete sense, it could also involve the complete overhaul of the whole capacity and reach of the state and of its operations concomitant to the establishment of new institutions.\(^ {20}\) In either case, however, the primary focus was on either the creation of new institutions or recasting existing institutional arrangements of power. This is precisely why we require an approach that allows us to examine specific institutions in greater detail, especially those which require political power.

Again, we are concerned here with organizing power among various institutions of the

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\(^{20}\) Ibid., p.15
state, and, as will be pointed out, of local governments in particular. First, however, let us turn to look at approaches to the study of the organization of power and of the creation of separate institutions as smaller pieces of the puzzle of state building.

**Institutions and the Organization of Power**

The concept of power is central to state building and to the development of local self-government. To explain the processes behind the organization of power in Russia, the concept of political power must be defined. Here we want to distinguish between power and authority, and between power and autonomy. Power, particularly in the sense of intergovernmental relations, refers not to any right or claim a governmental institution may make to decide a particular matter, but to the ability of that institution to actually do something. The legal right or claim to power (authority) can be quite distinct from this actual ability (power). What matters, then, is not so much whether local governments have the legal authority to resolve a specific matter, but more importantly, the ability to do so. This ability is contingent upon both resources and opportunity. Without resources there can be no power. Throughout much of the Soviet period, for example, local governments had the legal authority to resolve all housing matters in their jurisdiction. But they usually lacked the resources to do so, and relied instead on large enterprises to build much of the housing for local residents. These housing projects then remained under the control of the enterprises, which weakened the power of local governments over housing. Additionally, ability is not merely a function of resources. It also suggests the opportunity to use them, or more concretely, the existence of some kind of rational process, where power can usually be exercised without the necessity
of constant struggle over its application. In the absence of such a process, power can be consumed in the struggle for naught.

Talcott Parsons pointed out the relational context of power, and suggested that its relevance in any given system was conditional upon three factors: whether or not it could be exercised; the existence of norms for its application; and whether or not it could be regulated. Parsons also highlighted two distinct dimensions of power: the "economic," which he linked to resources or means; and the "political", which referred to the relational, or hierarchical. While Parsons' work focused on the entire social system, his comments on power are relevant to this discussion. By pointing out the connection to both resources and the relational context within an hierarchical structure, we have a concept that fits well with our focus on local government. Among different tiers of government, for example, power is a relative commodity: particular levels of government have power in inverse proportion to their dependence on other levels of government. The relative autonomy of one level of government is measured both by its control over resources sufficient to resolve matters as well as its ability to resist with impunity incursions from other tiers of government.

Although the existing literature in comparative local government is very local and rarely comparative, it is this concept of local autonomy that is one of the key concepts in the field. Yet on its own, autonomy is a flimsy concept for studying local government and its


22 "The problem of control of political power is above all the problem of integration, of building the power of individuals and sub-collectives into a coherent system of legitimized authority where power is fused with collective responsibility." Parsons. p. 127.

relationship to the state. The distinction between power and autonomy needs to be clarified: on one hand, autonomy can be a consequence of power; but on the other hand, the mere existence of autonomy does not necessarily suggest the existence of power. Local autonomy may exist due to a lack of central power. In this sense, an inability of the center to implement policy or penetrate territory does not mean that local institutions of themselves possess the capacity to act. This distinction is particularly relevant in the context of Russian politics. It explains, for example, the strange occurrence of *smuta* in Russian history, the "time of troubles", where central power breaks down and state administration is left in abject chaos. In 1990-91, the most recent *smuta*, the inability of local governments to govern in the absence of central control was a direct consequence of the acute lack of local government power.²⁴

Over the past few decades, numerous scholars in the social sciences have shifted their focus towards the study of structure and the consequences of the organization of power in the development and implementation of policy. What follows is a brief review of the literature which deals with this organization. This review will set the table for a study of institutional formation, which we can then use to return to our focus on state building.

In political science, the shift to structure is evidenced by the emergence of two related approaches to politics. The first of these is the "new institutionalism", an approach most

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²⁴ *Smuta* will be discussed in greater detail in chapter one.
forcefully summarized a decade ago in an article by March and Olsen. In this article, the authors suggested the need to reverse the general inclination to see causal links between society and its political institutions as running from the former to the latter. March and Olsen postulated that institutions, as structures of power, were themselves critical independent variables in political science. The actual extent to which institutional factors affected political decision-making and policy outcomes, however, continues to be a question of debate. This debate includes both the overstated argument of moncausality of institutions implicit in March and Olsen, to the more restrained institutionalism of Peter Hall and Kathleen Thelen and Sven Steinmo, who recognize the multicausality of policy and political action. All institutionalists, however, assert that institutions shape the goals of political actors, and structure power relationships among them.

The second approach to represent this shift to structure in political science is the "return to the state" movement supported by Theda Skocpol, Eric Nordlinger, Stephen Krasner, and others. Krasner differentiates the statist movement from behavioral political science by underscoring five characteristics of the former. The first of these characteristics, he suggests, is that politics is more a problem of rule than of allocation, it is a struggle of "us against them." Second, the state should be considered an actor in its own right, an

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independent variable as opposed to a mere reflection of society. Third, statists place greater emphasis on the institutional constraints which bind actors in their policy choices. Additionally, statists recognize the historical consequences of particular decisions and patterns of development on future policy alternatives (historical cure). In Krasner's words, "once a particular fork is chosen, it is very difficult to get back on a rejected path." Lastly, statists focus more on disjunctures and stress on a given state, which reflect the concern and possible breakdown of the existing rules of the game of politics. "Political life is thus characterized not simply by a struggle over the allocation of resources, but also periodically by strife and uncertainty about the rules of the game within which this allocative process is carried out."²⁸

With a modest amount of conceptual stretching, Krasner's statism pays homage to two of the three processes Hintze identified some eight decades earlier. Policy choices and historical development, for example, mesh with Hintze's notion of "social processes." and there is attention in both to international factors. But in his attempt to emphasize the problems of rule over the struggle for allocation, Krasner (and other statists) neglect the full concept of the political. In this sense, Krasner adopted the concept of the political as defined more than half a century earlier by Carl Schmitt. The "us and them", or "friend and foe" dichotomy is a useful distinction if one wants to identify the state as an actor in the international, or external environment. Yet one problem with this point of departure is that "us", as collectivity, ignores the fact that the collectivity itself needs to be established, and is itself the product of politics, particularly of the internal allocation and demarcation of

power. In other words, emphasis on the external dimension of the state overshadows the internal dynamics which help define what the state actually is. This is probably why Krasner tries to downplay the allocation of resources in order to promote the "problem of rule", which unfortunately divorces the two issues. What we need, however, is an approach that recognizes that rule and allocation may both be parts of the same political process of the organization of power.

Both of these two approaches - new institutionalism and the new statism - can be lumped together, not only because of their mutual claim to certain authors, but, more importantly, because they share a conceptual bias towards the study of the organization of political power. But there are distinct differences. In contrast to the statist emphasis on international factors, institutionalists deal predominantly with domestic case studies at the micro level, such as regulatory and social policy. But while the new found attention to the organization of power and the importance of the state as an actor in its own right has become widely acknowledged in political science, there yet remains a dearth of research in either approach concerning how the state and its institutions came to be. This returns us to the original question. If the organization of power is such a critical element in the determination and implementation of policy, how does power get organized? Likewise, what interests are involved, or to pose a parallel question, who organizes power? What are the origins of institutions, and how can one explain the genesis of states as structures of power and authority? Without attention to such questions, the new institutionalism and the new statism

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30 Indeed, March and Olsen viewed the statist movement as an example of the tendency throughout the social sciences towards an institutional approach.
are both excessively static approaches to the study of politics, unable to account for significant change in the organization of power, regardless of any claim to the contrary.\textsuperscript{31} In this regard, neo-statist and institutional approaches differ little from the earlier state theories of yester year. All such approaches have high regard for states as embodiments of power, yet are unable to explain how power became embodied.

The most cited model of institutional change within the statist literature is Stephen Krasner's adoption of the biological model of "punctuated equilibrium". This model distinguishes long periods of institutional stability - where the structures of power explain policy outcomes - from periodic outbursts of rapid institutional change, which are brought about by institutional crises emanating from changes in the external environment. While Krasner and others can explain, albeit in only very broad terms, \textit{why} such junctures emerge (crisis and conflict), the actual recasting of institutions is left undescribed and unexplained. Krasner, of course, was taking a first and very quick stab at what he admitted was a much needed area of study for the development of state centered and institutional approaches in political science. But there are significant problems with this general model. The first of these problems is a tendency to reify the state, to characterize it as nothing more than a conglomeration of atomized and exclusively central political institutions. This reification ignores the many interrelationships and power dynamics that exist among the various political institutions at various levels of the state, local as well as central. While Hegelian organicism may limit motivation for questioning the origins of state, Krasner now swings the pendulum too far in the opposite direction, oversimplifying the state as a mere assortment of institutions.

\textsuperscript{31} With few exceptions, Krasner's claim to focus on disjunction and stress simply has not been realized in research. See also Thelen and Steinmo. "Historical Institutionalism." p. 15.
and ignoring the various dimensions that collectively define what the state is.  

A second problem with Krasner's model is the confusion surrounding his methodological position, where institutions exist as independent variables which explain politics and restrain society, and are then suddenly transformed into dependent variables, wholly shaped and determined by processes from the surrounding environment. What is sorely lacking is any kind of indication concerning the nature of these "processes" that determine the shape of new institutions. When institutions become dependent variables, what then are the independent variables? What role, if any, do former patterns of power have on the reconstitution of new institutions of the state? Or how much influence do individual and group interests, and the distribution of resources, have on the organization of power?

Alternative approaches to the structuring of power and institutions, such as rational choice and a relatively new approach known as historical institutionalism, address such issues. Rational choice is premised on the assumption that individuals are rational actors. When given knowledge of the rules of the game and of alternative choices, the choices and actions of these rational individuals can be understood, and even predicted. Rational choice thus has a methodological bias towards understanding the institutional structures within which the game of politics occurs. But this approach, like institutionalism in general, needs to shift gears when institutions change. What happens, for example, when political order breaks down and existing rules are no longer enforced, or when rival structures compete for control and the loyalty of actors? George Tsebelis concedes the difficulty in theorizing about periods

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of institutional creation and change. Such a period demands political innovation, which he suggests, defies theory. Yet he postulates that institutions are the conscious political design of political actors, and that we need only study the motivation of these actors in order to understand and predict institutional design.

Rational choice thus presents a primary focus on actors in the creation and development of institutions. But while the individuals involved in forging structures of power are relevant to the end result, Tsebelis' approach is overly simplistic because it has little room for recognizing other influences on institutional design. One of the weaknesses of his conclusions, for example, is his explicit rejection of any tendency towards the evolutionary approach of institutions. Such an approach, suggests Tsebelis, would sacrifice any assumption of rationality in institutional design. It is this normative bias inherent in much of rational choice literature, the substitution of what "ought to be" with what "can be", that clouds the actual processes of institutional genesis. Tsebelis can also be faulted for ignoring the complexity of political and social relationships, and the power inequality inherent among multiple actors. In short, by assuming rationality to be the determining factor in institutions, Tsebelis ignores politics.

Yet from within rational choice, there are others who recognize the more complex political dimensions of institutional creation. Margaret Levi and Jack Knight, for example, direct their focus of inquiry away from a Schmittian notion of "us" against "them", towards

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33 Where constraints exist, Tsebelis suggests they lead only to postponement of the quest for maximization rather than a lasting agreement of suboptimality. Thus he rejects such constraints as having any lasting effect on institutions. See George Tsebelis, Nested Games: Rational Choice in Comparative Politics (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990).

the more internal issue of control over resources. Levi suggests that institutions represent concessions of power by one group to another, in order to resolve conflict among various actors. Institutional change thus occurs as a consequence of change in the distribution or availability of resources and/or the withdrawal of contingent consent from those actors involved in the political game.\textsuperscript{35} Likewise, Knight points out that institutions are "by-products of substantive conflicts over distributional gains." and the "final form of institutional rules (are) a product of the conflict of interests among the relevant actors."\textsuperscript{36} Here, then, are approaches from within rational choice more palatable to the study of institutions, which take into consideration the importance of actors and resources.

In spite of these insights, however, rational choice has too many weaknesses to adopt as an approach for the study of state building in general and local government in particular. Firstly, rational choice is far too broad in its definition of institutions, which includes everything from norms of behaviour to the market and property. We wish instead to focus on the institutionalization of state power, and possess biases towards structure and power. We move, therefore, beyond a study of institutions as collections of interrelated rules and routines, and focus on a particular subsection of institutions which are part of the organization of state power. Secondly, rational choice entertains visions of grandeur, attempting to explain everything at both the macro and micro level. On top of that, it is far too inaccessible, mutating alleged political preferences into numbers and then distorting them further through

\textsuperscript{35} Levi. "Logic of Institutional Change".

regression analysis and game theory. While rational choice can help us here by emphasizing the roles of actors and the importance of resources, it cannot assist us in our greater quest of understanding the actual processes of institutional creation. Lastly, rational choice not only neglects the historical dimensions of institutional creation, but more importantly ignores the organic dimension of the state, the multiple dimensions of power that exist among the center and the various levels of government below.

A newer approach in comparative political science which may offer insight into institutional creation is historical institutionalism. Much of this approach focuses on the consequences of institutions - not only as constraints, but also as determinants of choices - on policy formation over time. But historical institutionalism also tackles the problem of institutional change and formation. Although this problem may be "one of the most important issues in comparative politics," historical institutionalism recognizes that this field has received scant attention. One reason for this deficit is that, Krasner notwithstanding, institutionalists focus on constraints and offer explanations of continuity rather than change." For our purposes here, the main distinction between historical institutionalism and institutionalism is that the former incorporates elements from rational choice theory, and is concerned with both problems of rule and of allocation. It studies institutional change, and by extension, genesis by first rejecting monicausality, and then explaining how political

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37 While the rational choice approach has made some valuable contributions to political analysis, my own bias against it is best explained by Reinhard Bendix, who in a different context claimed that "comparative analysis should sharpen our understanding of the contexts in which more detailed causal inferences can be drawn. Without a knowledge of contexts, causal inference may pretend to a level of generality to which it is not entitled." See Reinhard Bendix, Kings or People: Power and the Mandate to Rule (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), p.15. The make believe contexts of rational choice are not only a poor substitute for the real life of politics, they are far less interesting.

38 Thelen and Steinmo, p.15.
struggles are mediated by the institutional setting in which these struggles occur. Yet there is also a critical difference between historical institutionalism and rational choice. The former maintains a dominant focus on politics. Historical institutionalism questions the formation of preferences and attempts to explain how these preferences are determined. In rational choice, preferences for maximization of power or benefits are assumed, but historical institutionalism recognizes that preferences are shaped by new ideas, leaders, groups, and, most significantly, by institutions and the institutional setting within which the political battle occurs. The slate is not simply wiped clean when institutions break down, but the old institutional order affects the new political battles that emerge.39 "Political actors of course are not unaware of the deep and fundamental impact of institutions, which is why battles over institutions are so hard fought. Reconfiguring institutions can save political actors the trouble of fighting the same battle over and over again."40

The strength of historical institutionalism is that it appears to take some of the best attributes from each of the various approaches mentioned above. By focusing on the influence and constraints which emanate from other structures and institutions, historical institutionalism recognizes that even new institutions are only parts of a broader complex of institutions which comprise the state. It also provides opportunity for the study of actors, both individuals and groups, as well as stressing the relevance of resources to the political struggle inherent in institutional creation. Although Skowronek's study of American administration predates the emergence of historical institutionalism per se, his work is well


cited in the literature and serves to illustrate two critical components of the approach. The first of these is that new governing arrangements are not spontaneous responses to changed conditions, but represent the results of protracted conflict among disparate interests, represented through such institutions as political parties, the courts, presidency, congress, and states. State building is thus a task of getting the powers that were to agree upon the powers that will be. The second component is that the authority and capacity of new institutions are affected by the parameters established by existing institutions which influence the environment within which new institutions arise.

One of the most compelling reasons to embrace historical institutionalism is that among institutional approaches, it attempts to reject the tendency to blur the line between the role of institutions in shaping preferences of various actors and the role of various actors shaping institutions to reflect existing preferences. Unfortunately, however, this rejection is not as clear as one might hope. In Thelen and Steinmo's introductory essay on historical institutionalism, for example, the authors go on at length about how institutions shape preferences. In this regard, they reflect the position of of Peter Hall, who suggested that "the organization of policy-making affects the degree of power that one set of actors has over the policy outcomes." and, additionally, that organizational position also influences an actor's definition of his own interests, by establishing his institutional responsibilities and relationships to other actors. In this way, organizational factors affect both the degree of pressure an actor can bring to bear on policy and the likely direction of this pressure.41

It is only later in their introduction, however, that Thelen and Steinmo stress that at the point

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of institutional formation. Conflict over the organization of power clearly reveals various interests and existing power relations. The outcomes of such conflict not only reflect but also magnify and reinforce the interests of the winners. Bo Rothstein, in the same volume, emphasizes this motivation of actors and interests at these formative moments.

The analysis of the creation and destruction of political institutions might thus serve as a bridge between the "men who make history" and the "circumstances" under which they are able to do so. Thus my theoretical object in this essay is not restricted to showing that institutions are important in shaping political behavior but that at certain **formative moments** in history, these institutions are created with the object of giving the agent (or the interests the agent wants to further) an advantage in the future game of power.

Historical institutionalism thus recognizes both the role of institutions in affecting outcomes and the role of interests during moments of institutional formation. Yet in this regard, the approach needs more work to show the linkage between institutional settings and political preferences. This linkage is especially important in the case of the organization of power among state institutions. We will return to these various approaches at the conclusion of this dissertation, to assess the utility of historical institutionalism in explaining institutional formation and any possible relevance to the broader issue of state building. At this stage, however, historical institutionalism provides us with a framework for the study of institutional formation. Not only do we need to study the actors involved in the process, but also their motivation. Even more important are the struggles to define rules of the "game," the control over resources, and the existing institutional environment within which the process is set.

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42 Thelen and Steinmo, p. 27.

Local Self-Government and State Building

Local governments are universal institutions, indispensable to every modern political system. In liberal democracies, for example, local governments perform a variety of functions covering a wide range of public services and provide an important forum for local democratic input. Even in so-called "totalitarian" regimes, local governments were designated specific and significant responsibilities. That local governments in Soviet Russia, for example, lacked the resources or political power necessary to resolve independently local matters should not obscure the fact that they nevertheless were expected to perform important functions, from the implementation of national directives to the delivery of essential public services. Indeed, one of the most serious pathologies of the Soviet system was the lack of power of local governments and their inability to perform the roles allotted to them.

The importance of local government to both state and society has long been recognized. Normatively, local governments have been defended as both bastions of democracy and schools of democratic participation. Others have linked local governments to the development of civil society, and the emergence of pluralism. Empirically, local governments are considered as requirements for efficient and accountable administration, and to provide assurance that governments respond to local concerns and issues. Regardless of the validity of any such arguments, however, the most critical issue for local government

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concerns the organization of power. In Russian, the term for local government - *mestnoe samoupravlenie*, or local *self-*government - highlights the relevance of power. In the nineteenth century, A. Vasil'chikov defined the term as "that order of domestic administration under which local affairs and officials are managed and conducted by local residents." More recent efforts at defining local self-government are more concise. The concept thus includes the legal right and actual capacity of local communities to control and administer a significant part of their common affairs which fall under their collective responsibility and lie within the limits of the law. Aleksandr Kostiukov has pointed out three critical characteristics contained within this definition. The first of these is the concept of a local community (*mestnoe soobshchestvo*), without which the notion of local self-government is meaningless. Self-government thus goes beyond institutions and administrative functions and is linked conceptually with population and territory. Second, the principle of collective responsibility presupposes an absence of interference by federal or regional organs in those issues defined by law as exclusively local concerns. And third, "to control and administer" highlights the right of local communities to devise their own organs of administration in accordance with basic principles of governance.

More relevant here is the relationship between local self-government and state building. With its emphasis on building executive power, existing literature on state building seems to suggest that the concept is coterminous with the expansion of central power.

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throughout a given territory.\(^{48}\) To Skocpol, for example, the state is conceptualized as more than an arena for socioeconomic struggle. It is "a set of administrative, policing, and military organizations headed, and more or less well coordinated by an executive authority. Any state first and fundamentally extracts resources from society and deploys these to create and support coercive and administrative organizations."\(^{49}\) Thus building the state in Britain, France, or Germany, is to extend the power of London, Paris, or Berlin. It is argued here, however, that state building involves the organization of power throughout a given territory. Power need not reside exclusively with central institutions, but can (and should) exist outside the capital.\(^{50}\) This perspective is influenced not only by the organic conception of the state, but, more importantly, by the object of study of this dissertation: political power in Russia has for too long been dominated by St. Petersburg or Moscow. As will be discussed in the next chapter, the extension of central power throughout Russia actually had a negative effect on state building and governance. The task of modern state building in the Russian context supposes that power now be shared with institutions of local government. A study of local self-government in Russia is therefore a window on the process of state building - whether or not the process is distinct from the autocratic nature of Russia's past. Without an adequate measure of power, local self-government cannot exist, and local government cannot fulfill any meaningful role.

One of the earliest and strongest advocates for local government in the modern era was

\(^{48}\) On state building, see, for example, Perry Anderson, *Lineages of the Absolutist State* (London: Verso, 1979); Theda Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions*; and Charles Tilly, ed., *The Formation of National States*.

\(^{49}\) Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions*, p. 29.

England’s Toulmin Smith. In 1851, he suggested that the relationship between central and local governments was the defining characteristic of any state. Regardless of the nominal "form" of government - be it monarchical, aristocratic, democratic, or mixed - the heart of the matter for Smith was whether local self-government or centralization was the fundamental principle underlying the constitution:

There are two elements to which every form of Government may be reduced. These are. Local Self-Government on the one hand. and Centralization on the other. According as the former or the latter of these exists more or less dominant. will the state of any nation be the more or less free, happy. progressive. truly prosperous. and safe.  

For Smith. local self-government represented a system of government under which "the greatest number of minds. knowing the most. having the fullest opportunities of knowing it." and the greatest interest in the well-working of government. have the management of. or control over. government. In contrast. centralization is a system of government under which "the smallest number of minds. knowing the least. having the fewest opportunities of knowing it." and the smallest interest in its well-working. have the management of. or control over. government.  

Smith may well be guilty of overstating his case. Few would argue. for example. that there is no need for a central government. without which there could be no state. But any recognition that both local and central governments are required presents an enduring dilemma. Local interests are often quite distinct from those of the center, and the reconciliation of mutually exclusive interests and positions is not a simple task. There are,  


\[^{42}\text{Ibid., pp. 12. 395.}\]
perhaps, two primary responses to this dilemma: a political response, where only the general interests of the state are concentrated in one place and local issues are resolved at the local level by those interests affected; or an administrative response, where not only general, but even local interests and concerns are resolved in only one place, by one organization which monopolizes power. The former response entails a significant measure of the sharing of power (which assumes an organization of power) and subsequent negotiation among vested interests. The latter response operates under the assumption that the center can adequately respond to and resolve all matters.\(^5\)

Each of these responses has distinct consequences for the state. The political response, for example, may invite a certain level of political conflict between center and subnational governments. This can lead to what LaPalombara termed a crisis of penetration, where the center cannot get what it wants from the people or territory it claims to govern.\(^5\) In a worst case scenario, such conflict can lead to war, as witnessed in Chechnya. Such an extreme, however, represents the breakdown of any organization of power, rather than a sharing of power. The organization of power forces central and local governments into bargaining with each other, which places constraints over each. This bargaining may be dominated by the center or by regional and local units, but it will always involve significant give and take among different tiers of government. In some states, the ruling elites shy away from the

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political response because they view the potential conflict among various levels of power and authority as disruptive to the power of the "state." This is particularly so because the bargaining is continuous (it is forced to adapt to new issues and concerns.) and can only be successful when based on the premise of acceptance of those parties involved in the bargaining.

In spite of any concerns over conflict, the political response is superior to the administrative response. The latter invites a more curious and debilitating constraint on the use of state power. This constraint is labelled here the 'paradox of over and undergovernment', and will be detailed in subsequent chapters. In short, by trying to control everything, the center becomes overburdened and ultimately exercises little control or authority over anything. Politics is thus replaced by diktat from the center, even in the resolution of local matters. These diktats are then routinely ignored unless accompanied by rare and difficult shows of force. The administrative response is thus only a temporary solution to the problems of local governance, and is more likely to lead to armed conflict.

For its part, the administrative response suggests the belief that the distribution of power is simply not necessary, because the center maintains its perogative over all issues. History suggests that, sooner or later, power must be granted to local institutions of government. This granting of power is critical for samoupravlenie, premised upon the recognition that there are particular spheres of influence exclusively relegated to local institutions. Without this power, local organs are but administrative tentacles of the center.

But the organization of power is a critical part of both the political response and of the modern state. The inclusion of local government within that organization is essential to the
health of both the local community and the state itself. And the inclusion requires some balance between central and local power, or in the case of federal states, a balance among three different tiers of government. While attempts to achieve such a balance has animated much of Russian history, this task is by no means unique to Russia. The relative autonomy and power of towns, for example, was an integral part of the tug-of-war over power in pre-modern states, and provided part of the dynamic that moved early states through pre-modern stages of feudalism, the staendestaat, and absolutism, and then into the modern era. Tensions between central and local governments exist in every country. This tension arises from the fact that local government is required to perform state functions and reflect local interests. In France, for example, these tensions animated much of French politics for two centuries after the revolution before decentralization successfully strengthened local government. Albert Feuerwerker also emphasized the relevance of this relationship in Chinese politics. An equilibrium in central-local relations was critical for political stability:

"The complex of political institutions centering on the emperor and his bureaucracy represented only one-half of the Chinese political synthesis. The long-lived and much remarked political stability should be seen as the product of a continuing equilibrium between institutions that can be described as tending in the direction of universalism and specificity and emanating from the political center, and a competing or overlapping set emanating from the local governmental and kinship level that tended in the direction of particularism and diffuseness...

The long life of China’s traditional political institutions may be seen, in part, as the product of an equilibrium in tension between these two levels of the polity. Whatever the claims of Peking, government of a country of China’s size and

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population from a single center and by means of detailed prescriptive regulations - what one today would call a centralized authoritarian state - was an impossibility before the twentieth century, if for no other reason than because premodern technology, especially in the means of communication, ruled it out of the question. Conversely, a political system founded entirely on the above-mentioned local complex of institutions would simply not provide an adequate basis for subcontinent wide political integration. Both hemispheres were needed: the problem was to see that they fitted properly, a problem that runs through the whole of China's imperial history.58

In the case of Russia, however, any "equilibrium" that was established generally left the preponderance of power for the center, and ignored the need for some demarcation of the center's perogatives and the subsequent allocation of sanctioned power to local bodies. And twentieth century technology did not make the need for an organization of power which extends to the local level any less salient. While communication theoretically enables the center to be more aware of local interests, these same interests simply cannot be well represented from the center. Modern state formation is thus premised upon overcoming a mere "parcelization of sovereignty", of not only alloting power and authority to one place or another, but ensuring that this allotment is recognized and accepted by the constituent parts. The reconciliation of what some have suggested is an inherent conflict between local interests and central power is thus a vital component of the Hegelian notion of the state.59

**Eating the Elephant**

How then can we study the organization of power in post-Soviet Russia? A complete

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study of every component of the Russian state is well beyond the realm of this dissertation and the capacity of this author. Rather than eat the elephant, this dissertation will focus on a particular piece, the struggle to create local self-government, as but one piece of the much larger whole. The question here is not whether or not there should be local government - it is a given that local government exists in every modern state. Neither do we ask how much power local governments should possess in relation to the center. The amount of power required for local government depends upon a number of other questions: whether or not local governments have seven functions or seventeen, or if social services need to be efficiently provided or equitably distributed. Instead, the primary task is to ensure that each tier of government has sufficient power to accomplish the responsibilities allotted it. This is precisely why local government is relevant to the process of state building. Local government must be included in the organization of power in such a way that it enhances rather than detracts from the general welfare of the state. The organization of power across different tiers of government is thus a prerequisite to the functioning of any government, and a complex issue which defies any simple solution and differs from state to state.

The primary foci of this dissertation concerns (1) the development of local self-government in Russia, with particular attention to the post-Soviet period, and (2) what the relationship of local government to the overall structures of power can tell us about the more general process of state building in Russia. The two foci complement each other: by studying the first, we can then address the second. Accordingly, the following questions animate the dissertation: What is the status of local self-government in post-Soviet Russia? Has a new relationship emerged between local governments and federal institutions of the state? If so,
how can this change be explained? Or, if little change has occurred, what factors have constrained such change?

Answering all such questions involves studying local government power. How will we know power when we see it? Or, more specifically, how do we study the organization of power? This dissertation contrasts power with dependence, a contrast which facilitates the study of intergovernmental relations. Local governments thus have power inasmuch as they possess both various resources at their disposal and the ability or opportunity (what we earlier labelled rational processes) to use such resources. In conceptualizing power for the study of local government, R.A.W. Rhodes suggested focusing on five specific areas: legal-constitutional: hierarchical (to enforce directives within its jurisdiction); financial: political (institutional coherence and legitimacy); and informational (reliance on external experts and specialists).\(^{60}\) Each of these areas is relevant to local government. But in the Russian context, some are more relevant than others, and the distinctions among all five are not as clear as Rhodes suggests. In this regard, this dissertation focuses on three specific areas: the legal framework for local self-government; the access and control over resources, especially financial; and the political coherence and opportunity for the use of power, reflected in both the horizontal and vertical organization of power. While further attention is given to the influence of outside elites and the expertise of local administrative personnel, this issue plays a less central role in our discussion, since non-governmental elites have played minimal roles in attempts to organize power in post-Soviet reform. Since the aim is to comprehend the process involved in the organization of power, we attempt to reveal not only who is involved

in local government reform, but why they are involved as well.

Rather than separate chapters on each of the various components of local government (budgets, executive-legislative relations) this dissertation also attempts to chronicle the struggle for local self-government in Russia. To this end, this study adopts an historical perspective. The relationship between power and local government is not one without historical roots. and trying to understand the process of post-Soviet Russian state building without reference to the legacy of both the Russian and Soviet states would be impossible. This is so for at least two important reasons: first, because prior arrangements of power may have consequences on the manner in which power is subsequently organized; and second, because what has happened in the past can provide insight into what is happening in the present. In this regard, diachronic comparison of local government reform can assist in understanding the current struggle to create local self-government in Russia by providing a sense of distance to many events which have occurred too recently for full assessment. The first part of this dissertation is devoted to this historical approach, and reveals the approaches, obstacles, and motivations, and attempts to explain the failures in earlier reforms of local government in Russia.

The values of historical insight aside, the question of contemporary motivation is not an easy one to answer. One way to illuminate the motivation of various actors would be through lengthy and detailed surveys of those involved in the process. But this methodology assumes not only a knowledge of who those individuals are, but also unfettered access to these individuals, as well as honest answers to what should be penetrating questions. My own experience in researching such matters was shaped during my first research trip to Omsk. In
an interview with an oblast deputy who chaired the committee for cooperative work with the oblast administration. I asked him his opinions concerning the *gubernator* (head executive) of the oblast administration. He replied with a short but very harsh (and profane) assessment. One week later, in a second interview, the same deputy made a favourable comment concerning the executive. When I asked for clarification, he pointed out that his earlier comment had been made *last* week - this week was quite different. Surely, he suggested, I was aware of the rapid pace of change in Russian politics. This is but one reason why the utility of survey research concerning matters of personal motivation and behavior has definite limits: answers are generally functions of time and attitude, rather than an accurate reflection of structural dynamics. To compensate for these limits, detailed survey data needs to be accumulated over a prolonged period of time, something that requires both financial support and research opportunity. Even then, with the rapid pace of change, such answers can be dated before they are even tabulated.

A different approach in social science emphasizes detailed observation, including interviews with politicians and other actors involved in the political process. The shortcomings of this method as "science" are well known. But since this dissertation, as a study of the organization of power, began during a period of great political, economic, and social change, the methods involved required a focus on observation. Part of the research had to chronicle *what* was happening before it could attempt any explanation. This dissertation is thus based primarily on "high contextual" research, no panacea for social science, but the most accurate in periods of great flux. In hindsight, we may see things from a much different perspective, and have access to information that remains concealed today. Yet the advantage
of researching current issues and events is that we can get an understanding of the contemporary climate and context within which these issues and events occur. This climate and context is often lost to future researchers. Rather than a liability, contextually based case studies of contemporary issues, regional developments, or acts of legislation therefore benefit from the opportunity to meet with those individuals involved. For these reasons, understanding the dynamics of reform in Omsk, for example, requires more than a week collecting statistical data. Likewise, studying the process involved in drafting legislation takes more than a few articles from newspapers and journals.

Negative aspects of high contextual research, however, include the amount of time and effort required to conduct such, and the difficulty in both maintaining a degree of objectivity and sorting out relevant information from the merely interesting. To invest such time on one specific case study may limit the ability to see the "big pictures". I have therefore tried to provide rich context in two instances, in a case study of local government in Omsk (the view "from below"), and on the 1991 law on local self-government (the view from "above"). While some of my conclusions may reflect my own biases and impressions, I also have attempted to remain objective and neutral in my assessments of individuals and their motives. In a perfect world, one could provide further case studies from a large number of provinces and municipalities, as well as a wide array of statistical data. In the hope of finishing this dissertation within my lifetime, I rely also on case studies by other authors and articles in newspapers and journals. I have done so, however, in order to further illustrate points already established.

Since this study attempts to provide insight into the process of state building, one
might legitimately ask why the study is confined to local self-government, which, after all is but a small piece of the puzzle. If the organization of power extends throughout the state, how then can one small segment of Russian politics serve as a window on the process? Can one extract local self-government from other processes such as federalism or the presidential administration? This has been one of the challenges of this dissertation. And since the organization of power is a multidimensional task, the focus here is occasionally widened to include reference to regions and President Yeltsin. Yet since there is a growing literature on these other topics, and comparatively little on local government, the primary emphasis here is on local self-government for two specific reasons: first, to incorporate whole sections of the dissertation on federalism and regional politics would overshadow the fate of local self-government; second, because whether or not the new Russia is organized in a way that will fundamentally alter state-society relations depends to a large degree on the opportunities for society to interact with its governmental institutions. Since local government remains the critical link to society, there is good reason for such a focus. Thus, this study is not a study on federalism or on state administration. It is a study of local self-government.

The remainder of this dissertation is organized in three parts, each consisting of two chapters. In chapters one and two, the roots of local government in Russia are identified, to reveal patterns and obstacles to local power in Russian history. This is intended to provide the framework for a diachronic comparison of local government in Russia, particularly between contemporary Russia and the zemstvo reforms of the latter half of the nineteenth century. Chapters three and four study local government reform in the latter stages of the Soviet Union. They build on some of the historical patterns identified in part one, and
augment the historical legacy with the more immediate consequences of Soviet power to post-
Soviet local government. Chapters five and six comprise a study of local government reform in post-Soviet Russia. These chapters chronicle the difficulty in creating local government: chapter five represents a view of reform "from above". based on research conducted with the Russian Parliamentary Committee for local government in 1992: while chapter six represents the view "from below". based on research conducted in Omsk during the summer of 1992 and August 1995. The conclusion summarizes the research, returns to the theoretical questions posed in this introduction, and discusses the prospects for Russia's future political development.
Part I

THE LEGACY OF OVER AND UNDER GOVERNMENT

All institutions acquire and seek some measure of autonomy, vis-a-vis the centers of power which would dominate them. Their autonomy consists in their unintegratedness into the order sought by the central authority of the society.

Edward Shils
CHAPTER ONE: AUTOCRACY AND SELF-GOVERNMENT

Writing on the eve of the Bolshevik revolution, one Russian scholar of local government, A.A. Kizevetter, wrote that the transformation of the then existing system of local administration constituted one of the most immediate and important tasks of the day.\(^1\) Kizevetter’s statement, though valid at the time, can also be applied to a number of periods throughout Russian history. Indeed, most of Russia’s best known political leaders have attempted comprehensive changes to local administration and government, including Ivan the Terrible, Peter the Great, Catherine II, Alexander II, and, more recently, Mikhail Gorbachev. Kizevetter’s verdict also applies to the contemporary post Soviet political landscape. Making sense of all the various levels of administration, and tying them together in a coherent system of government, with defined jurisdictions and the commensurate separation of political power, is a formidable task that is a critical component of the task of state building that confronts post Soviet Russia.

The complexities of this task are made more apparent when one realizes that Russia has no lasting legacy of effective, coherent sub-national government with the authority and power necessary to resolve local issues and play a positive role in the local community. Instead, local organs functioned as appendages, even tentacles, of the centralized state, and the

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\(^1\) A.A. Kizevetter. *Mestnoe samo upravlenie v Rossii: IX-XIX st.* (Petrograd: Zadruga, 1917), p.1. Kizevetter used the historical approach to highlight the difficulties of creating effective local government in Russia, not unlike the purpose of this chapter.
interests of the center routinely dominated local interests. Since the rise of Muscovy and the forging of the Russian state in the 16th century, political authority and power, and, local government and administration, with but one temporary exception, were considered the domain of the center. As a result, state building, or the creation of institutions of governance and administration, was continually conducted from the top down, rather than from the bottom up. While such a process may be justified historically in light of a continual fear of foreign invasion and the need for political and economic order in Russia, one of the consequences of ogosudarstvlenie (state building from above) has been to render local organs dependent upon the good will and benevolence of the center.

This predicament is a primary reason why the issue of reforming local government in Russia has surfaced so often, with so little progress, over more than four centuries of history. As noted in chapter one, sooner or later, the organization of power must be addressed. In Russia, the response has always been left for later. As a consequence, local government has rarely possessed any real, legitimate authority, and even less political power. This does not mean that power was alien to local communities, but that political power was not integrated with the center. The center has therefore never effectively "penetrated" the territory it purported to govern: instead, the Tsars relied heavily on corrupt and poorly monitored state officials for local administration. Before the nineteenth century, these officials were small in number, and probably less effective than even their small numbers warranted. The result was a chronic state of undergovernment in Imperial Russia, where St. Petersburg had little control over the provinces, and where economic and social development progressed at a glacial pace.²

As regards local government, little changed during the Soviet period. Local state organs were effectively divorced from authority and Moscow thus relied either on the Communist Party organization, theoretically outside the state apparatus, or on economic ministries and their subordinate branches to administer and govern much of the vast territory of the state. Although the western "totalitarian" approach to Soviet politics suggested that the Soviet state was, in theory, "overgoverned" by Moscow's elite, the actual state of affairs had remarkable similarities to the Imperial past. Russia under the Soviet regime remained, "undergoverned" in terms of the state penetration of central state authority and in terms of controlling political and economic development outside the main urban centers.

This paradox of over and undergovernment surfaces repeatedly in Russian history, and is critical to understanding the legacy of local government in Russia. It is the central theme to this chapter. Overgovernment is a heavy handed response to the problems of governance, premised upon pronounced reluctance to divide authority and power. It is the consequence of trying to coordinate and administer everything from the center, and leads to a weakness of administration and governance in the periphery. This weakness can be manifest by, among others, the dominance of local elites, limited implementation of national policy, the poor development of local infrastructure, and the limited development of local services. This paradox is hardly unique to Russia, and occurs in varying degrees in a majority of countries around the world. In Russia, this paradox is the key to understanding Russia's legacy of local government and is examined here with two main purposes: first, to understand the reasons for

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the enduring weakness of Russian local government; and second, to use the history of local
government in Russia as a foil to help in the understanding of the more recent attempts at
local government reform.

Sidney Hook, responding to the idea that historical patterns are repeated through time,
onece commented that history does not repeat itself, but historians do. A focus on the
historical dimension of local government may invite criticism of historical determinism, the
idea that since Russia has never experienced strong, autonomous local government, it can
never experience such. This chapter, however, does not suggest that the historical difficulties
of establishing effective local government in Russia have, of necessity, closed any doors for
Russia's future political development. Such a claim would ignore the fact that in the
eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, local government per se was only just emerging from the
shroud of absolutism in much of continental Europe. Historical determinism would also
ignore the advances that Russia did make towards local self-government prior to the Soviet
interregnum. Rather than endorse a deterministic outlook, this chapter and the next reflect a
comment by Mark Twain, who suggested that history may not repeat itself, but it certainly
rhymes. It is this rhyming of history that is of interest here. What these two chapters attempt
to show is that there are distinct similarities among the various attempts at reforming Russian
local government through history - patterns of motivation and of design. And in spite of any
modest gains in Russian local government in the nineteenth century, numerous and complex
obstacles to the inclusion of local government in the overall organization of power remain to
this day. An understanding of these historical obstacles will then be of assistance later as we
endeavour to comprehend the difficulties of contemporary local reform.
Local Government and the Rise of Moscow

Prior to the rise of Muscovy, various principalities—constituent parts in a very loose confederation of city states known as Kievan Rus—fulfilled the then limited roles of local administration. As in most of Europe, the idea of a nation as a political union was limited by territorial identification, and the population considered themselves Tverans, Muscovites, Novgorodians, etc. In many of these principalities, local princes exercised political authority alongside popular assemblies known as the veche. The often tenuous relationship between what were essentially proto legislative and executive bodies provided a foundation for measures of "democratic" participation, but the relationship also was marked by antagonism between assembly and prince. This antagonism weakened the Kievan alliance when the concerns of the confederation were subordinated to either princely aspirations or local interests. The divisiveness among these principalities and the subsequent weakness of the central government help explain why Rus fell so quickly to the Mongol invasions of the 13th and 14th centuries. Under the Mongols, political power and authority were derived almost exclusively from above, from the Khan, and, at the local level, from local princes commissioned by him to collect his tribute. One of these local princes, residing in Moscow, proved rather adept at collecting revenue for the Mongols, and was soon placed in a position

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4 V.O. Kluchevsky, *History of Russia* trans., C.J. Hogarth, (New York: Russell and Russell, 1960) volume II p. 243. Much of the early part of this chapter is based on this masterful five volume study, which devotes much attention to local government and administration.

5 In order to wage war, for example, a prince relied on the participation of the popular militia, which required the consent of the veche. Sergei Pushkarev, *Samoupravlenie i svoboda v Rossi* (Frankfurt: Possev, 1985) p. 8. George Vernadsky suggested that relationships among princes and veches were often of mutual distrust and competition.

6 Vernadsky pointed out that princes were willing to swear allegiance to the Mongols to help quash the irksome veches. In spite of this conflict, the veche has been romanticized by, among others, Solzhenitsyn and Pushkarev as an early foundation for participatory government in Russia. It should also be emphasized that Russian statists used the weak state and the subsequent Mongol invasion as rationale for strong centralized leadership.
of leadership over other Russian princes. With that development began the slow process of Moscow’s gathering of the lands of Rus. As Mongol control over Russian territory weakened, the neighboring city states were soon either enticed or coerced into recognizing Moscow’s power. In the 15th and 16th centuries, as Moscow consolidated its control over these territories, it recognized the need to establish some type of administration and order throughout Russia.

At the outset, local administration was a continuation of the appanage system, wherein the territory in question remained the personal fiefdom of the local prince, now under allegiance to Moscow. At the levels of towns and villages, officials were appointed to perform simple judicial functions and collect revenue for the state. These officials possessed a remarkable amount of leeway in fulfilling their responsibilities as long as they succeeded in collecting and remitting revenue to the state. They were routinely guilty of milking the local population of excessive taxes, and of giving and receiving bribes. Local administration was thus untethered, rife with corruption, and widely loathed by the local population. The title given these officials, kormlenshchiki, reflects the trait of administrators "feeding" themselves at the expense of the administered. This system of administration proved very inefficient in the two areas of most concern to Moscow: taxation revenue and political power. Under kormlenie, officials within the hierarchy of agents that brought revenue to the center had no reliable way of knowing how much tribute subordinates should be submitting. Neither was there an effective method of monitoring the implementation of central directives by local kormlenshchiki, nor any security in the extent of central authority.

Given Moscow’s concerns over foreign invasion, its urges for a unity of political
power and greater control over law and order throughout Russia, and a persistent need for more revenue, there was, by the mid 16th century, an acute need to increase supervision over local authorities and organize the Russian state in a more functional manner. In 1552, after a number of administrative experiments in various locales, Tsar Ivan IV (or Ivan the Terrible) announced the reorganization of provincial administration which began to phase out kormlenshchiki. The reforms included a general plan of localized administration wherein elected representatives of the local community would independently manage some local affairs, and, more importantly, monitor the local officials, now to be remunerated by set fees and wages. Given this electoral content, such reforms at first glance appear to represent a decentralization of administration, even a devolution of political authority to local communities. Ivan's reforms did proffer some measure of improvement in local government compared to its predecessor. Local officials were now more responsible for local economic affairs, for the protection of the locale from "villianous men", and, most importantly, were charged with specific state functions: the collection of revenue, the distribution of state resources as allowed by their superiors, as well as limited judicial functions. As a result, local institutions began to take a more active part in the work of general and legal administration.

Ivan's attempts to bring some measure of central control to Russia, however, had numerous negative consequences for local government. His reforms emphasized a process of statification of local administration that remained dominant for the next three centuries. The primary responsibility of these local administrative bodies was not to resolve matters of local concern, but to collect revenues for the central government. And, in spite of appearances,

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7 Kizevetter. p.52
Kluchevsky points out that compared to the earlier system of administration, Ivan's reforms were actually a sharp move towards centralizing state authority:

...There can be no real self-administration where local elective authorities transact, not local, but general state affairs at the behest, and under the supervision, of the central government... Consequently, the essence of the local self-administration of the 16th century did not so much lie in the right of the local communities to manage their own affairs as in their obligation to undertake general-department tasks of government - to elect responsible workers "for the labours of the state".8

Local self-administration, Kluchevsky argued, requires not only some measure of local representation, but also local authority to tax the population and independently dispose of public property and local revenues. Kluchevsky suggested that the earlier form of appointed kormlenshchiki was actually decentralist, since the center then exercised little or no control over local officials, while Ivan's reforms instituted a centralized administration because local officials, though elected, then did the bidding of the center. "The important point is not so much whether local authorities are elected or appointed, but what may be the nature of the functions which they are called upon to perform and the degree to which they are dependent upon the central power."

Tying local and central government together, the organization of power, proved to be a horrendously difficult task. In granting local organs a measure of power necessary for them to accomplish any relevant task, the center would also be forced to recognize an autonomous sphere of activity outside of its direct control. Without an organization of power among different tiers, the coherence of state administration would crumble. Elections, for example, designed to augment administrative control over local officials from above with control from

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9 Kluchevsky. II p. 286.
below, had a negative effect on any national unity that may have been emerging in Russia. As local communities elected officials of their own, the communities became increasingly distinct from one another, and split up into a number of petty and often fractious local units.\(^\text{10}\) This localism was a primary reason why local communities were later split into smaller corporate communities: since the various 'classes' possessed distinct interests and state obligations, they were broken up into different corporate communities, each with elected officials, and each maintaining independent relations with the central *prikazi*, precursors to central ministries. The result was a decline of territorial identity in local government, and a failure to address the center-local requirement of state building.\(^\text{11}\)

Up to the mid sixteenth century, appanage princes and suzerains that had pledged allegiance to Moscow and their successors were part of a class of nobles known as the boyars. These grand families were the highest echelon of advisors and statesmen in Russia. And as the territorial size of Muscovite Russia increased after the defeat of the Mongols, the number of boyar families also swelled, from 40 to more than 200 prior to Ivan's reign. Now while the boyars have generally been characterized as a class, they were also part of any remaining territorial arrangement of power in Muscovite Russia. While some resided in Moscow (and many did not), boyars were the remnants of the appanage arrangement of political power. As

\(^{10}\) This reflects a slightly different dimension to the Huntington's concern over the relationship between institutionalization and participation. See Samuel P. Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1968).

\(^{11}\) Kluchevsky, II pp. 288-312. Kluchevsky points out that the Zemski Sobor, or territorial council, was an attempt to overcome this lack of unity. The first was convened in 1550, and the chief subject concerned the improvement of the general and judicial administration of the provinces. The Zemskii Sobor was born not for the purpose of political representation, but of administrative exigency, to consolidate state administration through the territory of Muscovy, and parallel reforms of local government. In volume III, Kluchevsky writes that "Ivan's provincial reforms had broken up the province, the canton, into a few departments and a multitude of local corporate communities, urban and rural, which consisted only of state servitors and state taxpayers. Each such local community acted alone, and possessed its own elective administration." p. 151.
such, they retained significant portions of their former authority in their principalities. And those boyars who served as administrators and governors, as well as those who maintained large land holdings, thus represented a dimension of local authority. Ivan wearied of any manifestation of local interests of any kind, and viewed such as a threat to central power. Instead of a state with increased control over its territory through effective local administration, what emerged instead was a regime bent on eradicating opposition to the exercise of autocratic power.

It is, perhaps, in this light that the terror of Ivan IV can be best understood. Ivan’s motivation to undermine the boyar class was most certainly to eradicate political opposition and establish an autocracy. But this motivation derived not only from boyar power in Moscow, but also from the power and authority the boyars retained throughout the Muscovite state. The challenge of creating a viable, coherent domestic administration, of penetrating the very territory Moscow purported to rule, was as much a fundamental component of Russian state building as the threat, real or imagined, of foreign invasion. Ivan’s response was the oprichnina, a new administrative elite established by Ivan to rival the existing state administration dominated by boyars, and the instrument used by Ivan to establish an autocratic order. The oprichniki, members of this new administration, swore allegiance to Ivan, and were used to deport, imprison, and murder numerous boyars and destroy particular towns.

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12 Kluchevsky, II pp. 39-44. 73. While Kluchevsky does intimate that the boyars emerged under Ivan IV as a pan-territorial, corporate class, he ignores the alternative, or supplemental case concerning this territorial dimension of the boyars that is briefly discussed, but more strongly implied in his own work.

within Russia. The autocracy that emerged was Ivan’s method of dealing with the need to exercise greater control throughout Russian territory, after the general failure of his local reforms.

That this territorial dimension was part of the motivation for Ivan’s terror can be supported by what occurred in the aftermath of the oprichnina and Ivan’s reign. A short two decades after Ivan’s death, Russia was thrown into political and social chaos by a series of famines and a political succession crisis. The centralized power that Ivan had fought so hard to establish crumbled rapidly, and Russia collapsed into various city states and anarchy known as smuta or smutnoe vremia (time of troubles). This period of anarchy and chaos was partly the result of the revenge of the remaining boyars, who backed a false pretender to the throne against Boris Godunov. For more than a decade, Russian political power was undermined by extreme localism and a lack of law and order. Cities throughout Russia played one pretender to the throne against another. It was only after the very existence of Russia was threatened by foreign invasions from Sweden and Poland that the Orthodox Church rallied the nation, convened a Zemskii Sobor in 1613, and elected a new tsar, who returned the country to the path of autocratic power.

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14 That the Time of Troubles was a direct consequence of Ivan’s reign is, of course, unsubstantiated. Kluchevsky, however, is one who suggests that such a connection can be made. He quotes an unnamed source, writing during the chaos of the early 17th century. “In those days, the Tsar (Ivan) did cause a great sundering of the state, and this division (competition between tsar and the nobility), methinks, was the forerunner of all divisiveness by which the land is vexed to this day.” II p.89.

15 Sergei Pushkarev, an emigre Russian historian who attempted to show the perseverance of the tradition of self-government in Russia from the veche to the zemstvo, suggested that, for a few months at least, the Time of Troubles turned Russia into “a kind of republic.” His romantic notion of Russian society cooperating to defeat the foreign invaders ignores the decade and more of conflict prior to these few months. Sergei Pushkarev, Samoupravlenie i svoboda, p.15.

16 See also A.A. Kizevetter. Mestnoe samoupravlenie vRossii: IX-XIX v. (Petrograd: Zadruga, 1917), p.56. The legacy of the Time of Troubles lives on in Russian politics: 1917 and the civil war that followed is sometimes referred to as the third smuta, and the contemporary period has been called a fourth, following the first, the dissolution of Kievan Rus. and the
The new Romanov dynasty confronted problems of state building similar to those that had challenged Ivan IV, namely that of creating and establishing an effective and efficient means to administer and govern the expanding territory of Russia. The initial response was to rely on appointed voevodi or military governors to head local administrations and restore central authority. These voevodi had authority over all legal and financial matters and all social classes, and were appointed by the central prikazi, not by local electors. As the center regained its grip over the territory of Russia, local councils functioned only to collect taxes for the capital and resolve minor issues concerning the local economy.¹⁷

A few proposals for reconstituting the Russian state on entirely new lines of political power did, in fact, surface, but ultimately failed to find enough support from various interests. One plan, which surfaced in the mid seventeenth century and was backed by some of the strongest boyar families, tried to transform Russia into a proto federation, with various states led by these same boyars. These plans were even initially approved by the new tsar, but then vetoed by the Orthodox Church, leary of Russia again breaking into principalities.¹⁸ Other attempts at reforming taxation and local administration led one statesman to push for local self-government as an instrument directed against the abuse of Moscow's appointees in the locales. Administrative experiments were conducted in Pskov, where the municipal

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¹⁷ Vinogradoff suggests that in spite of increasing centralization, the "legacy" of self-government lived on with the local gentry, but this claim seems rather specious, given first, that the legacy in fact did not exist, and second, as we see below, that the local gentry was not very enthusiastic about prospects for electoral control over local officials. Paul Vinogradoff, Self-Government in Russia (London: 1915), pp. 37-39.

administration was placed under the control of a city council, with 15 elected deputies. While the reforms were, by objective measures, quite successful, they were opposed by state officials and by rich merchants who could no longer avoid paying their taxes.19 And so Moscow continued to rely on the form of control already familiar to officials and public alike. In such matters, the voevodi functioned in a manner quite similar to the earlier kormlenshchiki and most often were their very descendants.

Thus, Russia by the end of the 17th century had come again to rely on a strong central bias to its government and administration. Marc Raeff characterized the period as a time when all governmental activities were Moscow-centered, when taxes and services were levied to satisfy the needs of Moscow, not of the localities. Raeff suggested that Moscow viewed the prospects of penetrating the countryside as rather hopeless, and so the tsar in the Kremlin became little concerned with his tsardom beyond Moscow. "satisfied that its communal ways would suffice to bring in the taxes and furnish the manpower he required for his God-ordained tasks or preserving Orthodoxy from domestic and foreign threats."20 As much as power actually existed in domestic political structures, such power resided largely in Moscow, with little to connect it to the territory outside the capital.

The Paradox of the Weakness of the Ostensibly Omnipotent Central Power

In his study of the French bureaucracy, Michel Crozier pointed out that if authority is

19 Vernadsky. pp. 726-728.

conceived as absolute and cannot be shared, then the centralization of authority is the only alternative. The consequence, however, is the "paradox of the weakness of the ostensibly omnipotent central power" - where the power wielded by the center is not very useful because it cannot provide effective leadership on a daily basis to all subordinate strata. Although the center may be 'all-powerful' because it is at the apex of the whole centralized system, it is made weak because it uses its power only in exceptional circumstances.21

When Peter ascended to the throne in the late 17th century, he faced virtually the same problems in local administration as his predecessors. Although, as Yaney points out, the system of government and administration had grown more complex. The local voevoda now received administrative assistance from an assortment of other appointed local officials, all of whom had vaguely defined powers and were directly responsible to Moscow. In spite of this proliferation of local agents, or perhaps more appropriately, because of it, the central administration was in complete disarray when it came to monitoring local administration. There were more than 40 distinct departments in Moscow, each of which had some degree of authority over local officials.22 For their part, local officials still functioned primarily as individuals in a system geared towards the gathering of tribute, and so the state reluctantly tolerated their profiteering from their position. Indeed, the corruption of local officials had not subsided from the earlier form of kormlenie, and local officials continued to draw profit


from their appointments.\textsuperscript{23}

Peter's motivations for the reform of local government were based on two interrelated purposes. First, his plans to strengthen the Russian military set off a domino effect: to finance his army and navy, he required more money, which involved more tax revenue, which, in turn, required administrative reform.\textsuperscript{24} Second, he wanted to clean up the lack of coherence and rationality in the existing administrative system, not only to weed out corruption and abuse of office, but also to extend the authority of the capital over Russia. Thus, during his reign, Peter launched three attempts to reform local administration, in 1699, in 1708, and again near the end of his reign in 1720. All these efforts at reform were in line with the already established tradition of local administration and government in Russia. Peter did nothing to rearrange the distribution of power between central and local organs, and his reforms of administration only increased central control over local institutions. Local administrations were strengthened, but only in as much as they were appendages of central authority, in particular as instruments of the state treasury.\textsuperscript{25} By holding state power to the capital, Peter left little power to the locales to govern themselves, which stifled participation and encouraged greed and corruption among local officials who continued in the tradition of \textit{kormlenie}. In spite of his efforts, these reforms were, by any objective measures, failures.

\textsuperscript{23} In a decree of 1713, Peter declared that he "desires to eradicate all suffering and affliction caused by unjust and perfidious misappropriations of government funds, for it has come to his notice that great injustices and pillages are on the increase, to the detriment of the entire nation, through illicit profiteering and embezzlement of government funds." Sergei M. Soloviev, \textit{History of Russia, v.XXIX: Peter the Great: The Great Reforms Begin} K.A. Papmehl, ed., trans. (Gulf Breeze, Fl.: Academic Press International. 1981), p. 50. Soloviev provides numerous accounts of such official corruption. See pp. 50-91.

\textsuperscript{24} Kizevetter, p.52.

They were poorly conceived, hastily implemented, and, in the last instance, based upon a Swedish model of local government that failed to take root in Russian soil.26

As a consequence, a weak and ineffective system of local administration continued to "govern" the Russian provinces - if govern could be used at all - through the eighteenth century. For the most part, there were no schools or medical facilities, no grain reserves, few permanent roads or bridges, land transactions required approval from St. Petersburg, and courts could take up to a decade or longer to render decisions. The provinces formed by Peter proved to be much too large for effective administration, local institutions were poorly staffed, and there were only weak and confusing lines of administrative responsibility and accountability, both at the horizontal level and connecting provinces to the center.

Similar patterns of local reform can be found during the reign of Catherine II. The Empress was motivated by a number of factors to confront this enduring problem of Russian government. First, problems of law and order throughout the empire aroused much concern among nobles and government alike. In the capital itself, it was reported that there was so much robbery that one could not leave home at night without escort, while highwaymen and roving gangs of robbers were plundering travellers and nobles' estates with impunity.27 Second, both central administrative officials and provincial voices were demanding decentralization of state administration. The former advocated such to relieve the burden of paperwork constantly flowing to the capital, while the latter, manifest most clearly in the

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26 See Kluchevsky IV, pp. 150-167.

27 Soloviev. History of Russia. v. XLII: Empress Catherine the Great. pp.131-135. The problems of law and order were accentuated with the Pugachev rebellion in 1773, which briefly shook the empire and underscored the problems of provincial administration.
Empress' Legislative Commission of 1767 desired more control over local affairs and lower taxation rates. Further motivation emerged from Catherine's self image as a liberal philosophe, and her desire to reform the Empire along more enlightened principles. Her liberal ideas, however, ran counter to her recognition of the necessity of autocratic power in Russia, and so local reforms were a way to introduce Montesquieu's principles concerning the separation of powers at the local level while maintaining strong central power in the Empire. Local reforms were also a prerequisite to much needed education and social reforms.

Catherine abolished the earlier provincial jurisdictions and in their place divided the empire into 50 smaller provinces, each subdivided into ten or more uezdi. She also established an identical system of local institutions for each, trying to separate executive, legislative and judicial responsibilities, but without curbing central control. Each province would be governed by a gubernator, who, along with his staff, would be assisted by three boards (finance, civil affairs, and criminal affairs) comprised of appointed and elected officials. The gubernator would appoint ispravniki to preside in each uezd, which would also have local boards accountable to the provincial boards. The Empress also allowed elections among the local gentry to local offices, a measure that one author suggests was motivated by the concern that the autocratic state lacked the resources to provide effective local administration.

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28 Local representatives attending the commission included gentry, merchants and peasants. Kizevetter, p.94


30 Kluchevsky, V pp. 54-60.

31 Jones. p.510
The new system of administration had a much more important role for appointed provincial governors. While the administration of the empire from the center was in many ways much stronger, local government itself remained virtually nonexistent. Governors became the primary agents in local affairs, and perhaps as a consequence, also became players in imperial politics. But Catherine's provincial governors were first representatives of the Empress and her government, and local representatives a distant second. As such, they too began to weaken under the burden of duties and responsibilities placed by the center on their shoulders. Local organs were neither allowed nor capable of sharing this load. Thus, Sergei Uvarov, later the minister of education under Nicholas I, described the dilemma of the provincial governor:

In order to maintain his authority, the governor is compelled either to form a party among the various (local) powers or engage in war with all of them. In the first case, there results a struggle of subtlety and intrigue. In the second, complete anarchy... A conjunction of happy accidents, upon which a governor cannot always count, is necessary if he is to keep his equilibrium in such a dangerous situation. Truly, there is something peculiar in the position of a man who enjoys the title of chief without the corresponding authority and who can wield power only through guile or scandal.33

While the structures of Catherine's reforms lasted almost a century, the actual effect of these reforms on local government was the gentrification of local administration, creating, as it were, "squirearchies" throughout the provinces.34 A subsequent move, in 1785, to


33 The reference to local power is a clear indication that while centralization was the operative principle of Russian administration, the consequence of overgovernment was such that local "powers" existed. This local power, however, was neither institutionalized nor legitimate, and instead represented the paradox of undergovernment, manifesting the inability of the central government to penetrate the territory it purported to govern. The quote can be found in I. M. Strakhovskii, "Gubernskoe Ustroistvo," Zhurnal ministerstva iustitsii 19 (September 1913) p. 62. Cited in Robbins, p. 15.

34 Vinogradoff, p. 43
introduce urban self-government for the benefit of merchants and guilds confronted the heavy hand of provincial governors. and new urban councils frequently clashed with stronger gentry interests. Gentry participation increased at a brisk pace, fueled in part by the triennial meetings of gentry in provincial capitals, which fulfilled not only a political function, but important social functions as well. This participation, and, more correctly, domination by the gentry in local institutions fulfilled the need for greater numbers in the administration of the Empire. In 1774, some 12,712 officials were involved in local administration, at a cost to the state of 1.7 million rubles. By the end of Catherine's reign some 20 years later, however, there were 27,000 officials, 10,700 of whom were elected, at an annual expense of 10.9 million rubles. More relevant to the 'development' of local government, however, was the increased opportunity for abuse by local elites. In this sense, the actual penetration of central power was only modestly furthered by Catherine's reforms.

These efforts to reform local administration in the 18th century accomplished very little in terms of the quality of local government or the delivery of various services to local communities. By the early nineteenth century, roads, education, health care, and other local services were still abysmal. Of greater concern to the tsarist government, however, was that the center was actually more burdened than ever by tasks concerning the administration of all of Russia. To tackle such problems, a variety of new reform ideas surfaced. One example of such was the request by Tsar Alexander I of his most able advisor, Michael Speransky, to draft plans for a constitutional order. These incredibly progressive plans were comprised of

\[\text{Klueckovskv, V p.55}\]
\[\text{Jones, p.511}\]
four basic levels of government - the volost, or township; the district; the province; and the
country - with legislative bodies and administrative boards at each level. Such a scheme ran
into stiff opposition from both officialdom and from the gentry, and constitutionalism lost
favour during the war with Napoleon. Other proposals, for local elections, for example, led
to experiments in various provinces, but also were shelved.\textsuperscript{37}

Instead of focusing on local government, the imperial court decided instead to further
strengthen the central administration. To this end, central ministries were introduced in 1802.
The proto-ministries that had functioned prior to that time were not only overburdened with
work, but were incapable of accomplishing the tasks assigned to them. Over the next
decades, these ministries directed an always expanding number of "field agents." who
functioned as local representatives of these central ministries. The ministries came to rely on
these agents as their only primary source of information on local affairs, and for the
implementation of central directives.

Rather than toy with notions of local government and elected legislatures, Alexander's
successor, Nicholas I approached the problems of administration with a remedy based on
increasing central power and bureaucratic control. One document of 1827 sums up his
approach:

Orderliness in the gubernii will be established only when the administration and the
courts in all areas have been brought under precise and uniform rules; when all areas
are set under a single, supreme, central administration, each to be administered on the
same common basis.\textsuperscript{38}

\textsuperscript{37} Starr. Decentralization and Self-Government in Russia p. 92, refers to experiments with election for provincial governor
in Voronezh, as well as numerous drafts of "constitutions" which circulated the capital.

\textsuperscript{38} Quoted in Gradovskii. I p. 321: as cited in Yaney. p.216.
Thus, instead of the development of any meaningful local government, the first half of the 19th century witnessed a strengthening of central control, the mushrooming of bureaucracy, and the further development of local organs as tentacles of the center. Such was the result of trying to establish order and administration throughout the vast territory of Russia without any distribution of political power. This attempt to preserve the established principle of autocracy effectively preserved the ungovernability of the Russian provinces. As Starr commented,

(It) seems clear that bureaucratic formalism in the provinces was an unacknowledged substitute for the correct hierarchical organization of authority which the Russian administration lacked. It was an attempt to reduce to apparent order the fragmentation of authority caused by the proliferation of poorly staffed and uncoordinated bureaus in regional and district capitals. Because the central ministries could not trust their personnel they checked them at every turn. In the end, the central authorities sought to eliminate rule by caprice by hiding it behind an opaque wall of petty procedures. Instead, the entire system was built on the false hope that the relation of the provinces to the capital could be reduced to a matter of form and not of power.9

This increasingly immobile and enervated system of administration and governance stumbled along. By the 1850’s, there had been a six-fold increase in the number of officials in provincial administrations.40 The only substantial benefits, however, were in the number of reports requested by the interior ministry from provincial offices, which soon totalled almost seventeen million.41 Such was the structure of Russian government. In form it was top heavy, with central power the only recognized solution to the many enduring problems of state. As a result, the more power the center tried to exercise over the provinces, the less effectual control it had, particularly as the state entered into the modern era. Newer demands

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40 Ibid., p. 12.

for roads and infrastructure, for education and law and order, which emerged from commercial and societal interests, remained mostly unsatisfied. While the state was, in theory, all powerful, it proved to be incapable of governing its own territory, resulting in administrative chaos and ineffective government. The paradox of the weakness of the ostensibly omnipotent central power had become the defining paradox of Russian administration.

**Decentralization and Local Self-Government**

Amidst all this administrative chaos, calls for decentralization began to increase. A shift towards decentralization gathered steam as it became increasingly apparent that centralization of administration and control had exacerbated the problems of governance. That the state was willing to seriously entertain such ideas as decentralization is testament of the difficult situation in which the state found itself. The reasons for the pronounced shift to decentralization are many. First, the attempts by Nicholas I to strengthen administration and government through increasing centralization were abject failures. The more centralized the administration became, the less control it seemed to exercise in the provinces. The increasing problems of administration throughout Russia could no longer be avoided and demanded fresh alternatives.

Second, numerous provincial governors themselves became strong advocates for strengthening provincial authority, as a measure to improve local administration. In the mid

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42 The accounts in Russian literature of local officials, especially in the stories by Gogol, are indicative of both the general problems of administration outside St. Petersburg and Moscow, and public perceptions of bureaucracy in nineteenth century Russia.
19th century, provincial governors were weighed down with numerous demands from the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD), to which they were accountable. Governors were chronically understaffed, and repeatedly ran into conflict with agents from other central ministries working in their province, i.e., the local treasury office answered directly to the Ministry of Finance (MF), and state peasant affairs were overseen by the Ministry of State Domains. Governors not only wanted more authority and power from the MVD, but also over the other officials from disparate, even rival ministries. In 1856, Tsar Alexander II proclaimed that governors would receive the opportunity for greater individual initiative in their jurisdictions, and the MVD began consultations with a large group of governors bent on the decentralization of political authority. As strong advocates for reform, these governors had independently established themselves as a political pressure group within the autocracy.43

Another group of advocates for decentralization included a group of central bureaucrats that knew first hand the impossibility of effective centralized government in Russia. Since the beginning of the nineteenth century, no less than five special commissions had been formed within the MVD to study problems of urban government, and though these commissions all failed to offer any real solutions, they represented the ongoing concern for local government. During the decades leading up to the great reforms of the 1860s, there were many talented and reformist young nobles engaged in efforts to improve their

43 Robbins, Tsar's Viceroys, pp. 1-19; Lincoln, pp. 95-99. Starr discusses the role of provincial governors in the shift to decentralization in his book, Decentralization and Self-Government, pp. 122-137. He calls the governors an able group, "though not radical reformers - yet they were driven to such, demonstrating the 'pluralism of interests' that existed within the nominally unitary autocratic government," p.123.
It was within the offices of the MVD that some of the strongest advocates for decentralization emerged. There were strictly rational reasons to advocate such - by the 1850s, some thirty one million documents circulated within the ministry annually. Decentralization could strengthen gubernatorial authority to resolve many local issues independent of central ministries. But the MVD was also interested in decentralization as a way to strengthen its own position vis-a-vis other ministries in the tsarist government. Since governors would remain accountable to the MVD, placing all provincial administration under the control of the governor would strengthen the authority of the MVD, and lessen the power of the MF and other ministries that maintained local officials and agents in the provinces. The MVD's plans for decentralization thus ran into strong opposition from rival ministries, but no other ministry could make a stronger case for implementing local reform than the MVD.

A fourth reason for decentralization was that the state was bordering on bankruptcy, and fiscal necessity demanded an improved system. not only for revenue collection, but also as a forerunner to offload some of its fiscal responsibilities. Decentralization became a favoured programme for reform in light of Russia's defeat in the Crimean War, which revealed, among other things, how woeful the provinces were in terms of infrastructure and

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45 Cited in Lincoln, Great Reforms, p.96.


47 Ibid., pp. 43-44.
basic services. And Alexander II's plans to liberate the Russian peasants from serfdom, which would necessitate new forms of local government for the peasants, was further fuel for local reform.

Lastly, decentralization gained favour in Russia as a result of a much broader movement towards decentralized administration throughout Europe, and of increased exposure and acceptance to western ideas among the Russian intelligentsia. In Russia, the civil service and intellectual circles were not beyond the reach of the ideas of decentralization. De Tocqueville's work, *Democracy in America* was well read among members of the Russian civil service, and was eventually translated into Russian in 1861 (albeit by Ukrainian federalists).48

In spite of this advocacy for decentralization, the concept only gained a small toehold in Russian politics. While its proponents succeeded in fostering its acceptance as theory, putting the idea to work in practice was a much more difficult proposition. From the beginning, reforms of local government ran into three primary obstacles. One was the issue of leadership and participation in the institutions of local government. Since Catherine II, the local gentry had dominated those local organs that did exist. The extent to which all the local population should now be included in local government became an important issue. Some of the leading proponents of local reform were adamant that the leadership of local organs be reserved for the nobility. Aleksei Unkovskii, for example, a leader of very progressive reforms in Tver and a strong advocate of emancipation, claimed that "only the nobility, the most enlightened of all rural classes, can direct and instruct the masses in fulfilling

48 Ibid., pp. 64-90.
government decrees."\textsuperscript{49} The role of the nobility in local governments became a divisive issue among liberal advocates for reform.

The details of reform also became points of contention among the central ministries and led to resistance to reform from ministries other than the MVD. These ministries were leery of the amount of authority that the MVD would have over local governments at their expense. While the need for reform was recognized by all ministries, reform was perceived as a zero-sum game, where any increase in power to, for example, provincial governors over the collection of state taxes, was viewed as a loss of authority by the Ministry of Finance, since the governors answered to the MVD.\textsuperscript{50} While MVD officials lobbied directly for decentralization of administration and the emergence of local self-government, rival ministries were actively involved in blocking such reforms.

A third obstacle that hindered local reform was the absence of any real tradition concerning local organs separated from state control. For more than three hundred years, local organs were considered as appendages of the central state authority, and to now entertain ideas of distinct realms of central and local interests was an exceptional revision of the conception of the autocratic state, and a concession to some measure of local power. Starr has argued that the zemstvo reforms, rather than radically altering the then existing patterns of power, actually reflected a fair amount of continuity with the Russian past. He suggested, for example, that peasant communes and volost institutions under gentry domination possessed, prior to reforms, actual ‘power’ to resist incursions from state officials, and cites the example

\textsuperscript{49} Cited in Lincoln, \textit{Great Reforms}. p.78.

\textsuperscript{50} For more on ministerial conflict over local reform, see Lincoln, pp. 96-99; and Pearson, pp. 28-39. 47-49.
of unpaid taxes as a case in point. But such "autonomy" was a direct reflection of the lack of state power and institutional strength that penetrated the countryside. The reforms of the mid nineteenth century now tried to create effective local government, based on distinguishing between state and societal issues, and on the organization of power to include these local institutions. Prior to reforms, it was the absence of power that had patterned local relations between center and local administration.

In attempting to put into practice the concept of self-government, even many of its proponents began to recognize that to do so would mean a thorough restructuring of the tsarist autocracy. These proponents thus began to moderate the concept of local government as something completely distinct from state administration. Separate, distinct institutions endowed with public authority, regardless of any intended limitations to their functions, were bound to come into conflict with state interests. Thus, on the eve of reforms, Dmitri Miliutin, the war minister who had been a strong advocate of elected local councils stated that in spite of the need for stronger local government,

Reform (in Russia) can be carried out only by authority. We have too much disturbance and too much divergence of interests to expect anything good from the representation of these interests... Besides, our reforms must cover the whole empire; any exceptional usages in this or that locale will harm the unity of the state, giving rise to separatism and rivalry... Strong authority does not preclude the personal liberty of the citizen or self-governing institutions... But he who desires the true welfare of Russia... should firmly renounce anything that can weaken the unity of authority.  

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52 Emmons suggests that the emphasis on organs of local self-government existing outside the realm of state admin may have been an attempt to reassure the state bureaucracy that there was little to fear from self-governing organs. Ultimately, such an attempt failed to convince those involved in central ministries. See "The Zemstvo in Historical Perspective," in Emmons and Vucinich, eds., The Zemstvo in Russia, pp. 423-446.

Given such obstacles to local government and the concerns of the central administration, the preparation of reforms to introduce societal local self-government ran into the statist hegemon that twisted and tailored reform proposals to mesh with the existing power structures. When the reforms were finally introduced in 1864, they had been watered down and compromised in such a manner that while reformers could label the new zemstvos (provincial and county councils) organs of self-government, the local institutions in reality possessed little independent power and few resources, and were yet beholden to the central ministries to fulfill many state functions. Rather than emerge as autonomous organs of local self-government, zemstvos were weird hybrids of an autocratic political system and the rhetoric and rationale for decentralization. On one half, they were institutions of state administration, and on the other half, organs of societal self-government. While the organization of power among different tiers of government requires this duality, the lack of power among local institutions left a soulless caricature of local self-government. In this sense this lack of power and the confusion between state administration and local functions weakened the efficacy of both.54

This is not to suggest that the reforms were a complete failure. After 1864, elected assemblies, or zemstvos, were convened at the uezd (district) and provincial level, the latter comprised of representatives from the uezd zemstvos. The uezd zemstvo was elected by three different estates, which included the landowners (gentry), urban merchants, and the (recently emancipated) peasants. These assemblies elected their local executive, which then had

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responsibility over a wide assortment of local services and administrative functions. This electoral element infused the zemstvos with a certain dynamism that carried through into the early twentieth century. The zemstvos did become the institutional home of numerous progressive politicians, as well as the employers of doctors, teachers, engineers and agronomists that furthered development in various communities. Although in the original statutes, zemstvos were prohibited from inter-zemstvo communication and from forming any union of representatives, a Union of Zemstvos eventually did emerge in the twentieth century, and came to play a role in national politics. When the Tsar abdicated in 1917, for example, the chairmen of zemstvo executives were elevated to a new office of provincial commissars, and the zemstvos seemed poised to assume a critical role in the emergence of a new constitutional government. Indeed, the history of the zemstvo in Russia has been romanticized by its defenders to the point that zemstvos were considered the bastions of the new liberalism, the educators of the masses, the proving grounds for new statesmen, and popular organs of local self-government with peasant participation.

This romantic interpretation of the zemstvo ignores many of the weaknesses of the

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55 These responsibilities included public education, apportionment and allocation of local taxes, construction and maintenance of local roads, charity and health services, and development of local trade and industry. For succinct accounts of the zemstvos and greater detail concerning their functions, see Sergei Pushkarev. The Emergence of Modern Russia: 1801-1917, translated by Robert H. McNeal and Tova Yedlin (Edmonton: Pica Pica Press, 1985), pp. 147-152; and Jacob Walkin. The Rise of Democracy in Pre-Revolutionary Russia: Political and Social Institutions Under the Last Three Czars (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1962), pp. 153-182.

56 See, for example, the introduction by Prince George Lvov to Tikhon J. Polner. Russian Local Government During the War and the Union of Zemstvos (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1930), pp. 1-15. Lvov was a former Prime Minister in the Russian Provisional Government, and the President of the Union of Zemstvos. This romanticism continues, in varying degrees, to this day. Some proposals for local reform in contemporary Russia are based on the zemstvo model. See Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn. Rebuilding Russia: Reflections and Tentative Proposals Alexs Klimoff, trans., (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1991), originally published as "Kak nam obystroit' Rossitu?" in Komsomolskaia pravda 18 September, 1990. There has also emerged a Russian Zemstvo Movement, which seeks to reform local government in Russia based on the historical model of the zemstvo. See Nezavisimaia gazeta 14 January 1994. Much of the romanticism regarding the zemstvo stems from the belief that Russian society was, at the turn of the century, capable of self-government, and on the verge of emerging as a liberal society.
zemstvo reforms. From a perspective of participation, the peasantry (more than 80% of the population) played only a marginal role in these local governments. The indifference of the peasantry towards local organs was less a result of political culture than the recognition that there was little incentive for peasant involvement. Simply stated, the vast majority of the population had no real say and little power in local organs.\textsuperscript{57} Indeed, Roberta Manning has suggested that gentry domination has been vastly underestimated - and while the liberal element in the zemstvos was both visible and vocal, it was a small minority.\textsuperscript{58}

Throughout the fifty years of zemstvos, elected councils were not allowed below the \textit{uezd} level. In spite of some pressure to extend self-government to the \textit{volost} (rural county) by liberals and radicals, such did not occur until after the collapse of the Tsarist autocracy in 1917. Also, zemstvos originally were allowed in only thirty-four of the fifty provinces, none in territory dominated by Polish nobility until the Western Zemstvo Bill in the last decade of Tsarist government. And, while zemstvos did not penetrate the entire territory of the Empire, the lack of a unified voice for all organs of local self-government in St. Petersburg led to the common criticism of zemstvos as structures without a foundation (poor connection to the volosts) and without a roof (no representation to the center).

Yet the real source of the failure of the zemstvo reforms was that these organs of local self-government were not given the requisite amount of power necessary to fulfill their

\textsuperscript{57} See Kermit E. McKenzie, "Zemstvo Organization and Role Within the Administrative Structure," in Emmons and Vucinich, pp. 31-78. The peasant population had its own assemblies and local officers, which were not connected to the zemstvo institutions at the \textit{uezd} and provincial level. These peasant volosts were further evidence of the lack of penetration of state authority. See also Pearson, \textit{Russian Officialdom} pp. 84-89.

responsibilities. Article six of the zemstvo statutes, for example, declared that zemstvo institutions would act independently within the sphere of matters entrusted to them, but article nine allowed the governor of the province the right to suspend any execution of any decision of the zemstvo institutions deemed to be contrary either to existing state laws or to the general interest of the state (however it might be defined). 59 Even membership to the elected zemstvo boards (executives) required the approval of the governor. While the zemstvos had the right to tax and spend, they had no authority over revenue collection, and had to rely upon state officials to enforce local taxation. In short, political power remained undivided, solely in the possession of the state and exercised by its ministries and local representatives. As Gradovsky described. "In the hands of governmental offices and officials (governors, and agents of central power) remained power without competence; in the hands of the zemstvo institutions were concentrated competence without power." 60 Dmitri Shipov, a leading proponent of the zemstvos towards the turn of the century, compared these local institutions to a steam engine functioning under negative circumstances, where the majority of the engine's energy was lost to friction and only a small amount of the energy is translated into useful work. The zemstvo executive, Shipov declared, could not merely devote its energy to local matters, but instead expended the bulk of its time and energy warding off the incursions and counteractions of the state authorities. These attempts were unfruitful, and zemstvo work "was doomed inevitably to prolonged, unproductive friction." 61

59 See Pushkarov. Emergence of Modern Russia.


The move towards decentralization of administration through the emergence of local self-government, in spite of the early excitement of reformers, never really blossomed. The zemstvo reforms failed to bring a permanent and fundamental shift in Russian politics and society precisely because the seeds for self-government were sown in soil barren of the essential requirement that local government requires to bear fruit, namely a measure of power necessary to fulfill the requirements asked of it. The fate of the zemstvo illustrates well a specific difficulty in resolving the paradox of over and under government. The exclusion of local government from state control makes it difficult for the center to justify the distribution of power outside its control. Yet, as we shall see in later chapters, the inclusion of local government into the state apparatus can have enormous negative consequences as well and open the door for state intrusion on local affairs. This is precisely why the paradox of over and under government requires an organization of power that can achieve the best of both.

Return to Centralization

Not only did decentralization fail to take root and bear fruit in Russia, but the attempt to reform local governments and state administration fueled political and administrative chaos. Pearson has pointed out that the zemstvo reforms in 1864, and the municipal reforms which followed in 1870, led to a crisis of authority in local government. Peasant self-government was woefully mismanaged, highly unpopular, and poorly connected to other institutions of local government: state offices and zemstvos were incapable of collecting the bulk of tax revenues (in some provinces, 80% of taxes were in arrears); and local governments did little to alleviate the chronic problems of food supply. Conflict emerged between state
administration and local zemstvos over questions of authority and political power.\textsuperscript{62} Provincial governors sometimes rejected elected zemstvo boards, or vetoed zemstvo resolutions. Zemstvos were accused by the administration of neglecting state interests and pursuing exclusively local concerns. This crisis of authority was described, alternatively, as \textit{bezvlastie} (the absence of power) or \textit{mnogovlastie} (multiple powers).\textsuperscript{63} As one spokesman for the gentry claimed in the early 1880's, "there are too many authorities and too little authority."\textsuperscript{64}

Some advocates for local government suggested that such problems could be rectified by increasing the amount of independence and authority of local zemstvos. Senatorial inspections and the Kakhanov Commission, both of which studied the problems of local government, proposed a strengthening of executive power among zemstvo boards, and an end to separate estates among local organs of self-government. Yet proponents of strengthening zemstvos were outnumbered by the many provincial governors, members of the gentry, and central ministries that decried the disunity and chaos that had been the result of reforms. Central authority needed to reign supreme, and the idea of societal organs of local self-government were viewed by many as violations of central power. Thus, in spite of the theoretical premise of societal local self-government that had been the starting point of reforms, those involved in state administration viewed zemstvos as subordinate institutions


\textsuperscript{63} \textit{Ibid.}, pp. 116-117. The fact that these two terms are sometimes used to describe the same predicament suggests that lack of tradition regarding the separation of powers.

\textsuperscript{64} K.F. Golovin, \textit{Nashe mestnoe upravlenie i mestnoe predstavitel' stvo}(St. Petersburg, 1884), p.6, as quoted in Pearson, p. 117.
within the state hierarchy. Local governments, in other words, were tentacles of the state, rather than autonomous organs of self-government. The minister of Internal Affairs, for example, noted that.

His majesty has made it clear that the basic principles underlying zemstvo administration are to be the unity and independence of the local interests of each gubernia and uezd. Matters touching local interests are to be entrusted to local institutions. (But) the unity of the central administration, the force and integrity of state authority, cannot yield to the demands of local interest, however important and legal they may be. The zemstvo administration is only a special organ of the state. Its rights and powers come to it from the state. The zemstvos have their place in the organism of the state and they cannot exist outside it. Like the other parts of the organism, they are subordinated to those general conditions and regulations that are established by the central government.65

The many critics of the earlier reforms now pushed to integrate zemstvos into the existing order. The societal theory of local self-government, which had been behind the emergence of the zemstvos, was challenged and then replaced by a statist theory that justified direct oversight of local government by the state administration. One Russian professor of administrative law explained that since elected organs of self-government were also organs of state administration, they had no juridical legitimacy as concerns public representation. In fact, self-government as the autonomous activity of local communities was considered scientifically inadmissible.66 By the 1880s almost all statesmen and officials in administration embraced the statist approach, which became the foundation for the so-called "counterreforms" of Alexander III.

65 Pavel A. Valuev, Oblasnitelnaiszapiska k proektam polozhenii o zemskikh uchreshdeniakh i vremennykh pravil dlia ikh uchreshdenii (St. Petersburg, 186_), p.26, as cited in Yaney, p.241. It appears that Yaney incorrectly identified the author of these words as Pavel Valuev, rather than Petr Valuev.

These counterreforms are often perceived as a conservative backlash against the emergent liberalism within Russian society. Such a view is a dangerous mistake that ignores the root cause of the subsequent changes in local government. Pearson has convincingly argued that the reforms in local government were the result of the chaos in administration that followed the zemstvo reforms. In 1889 the Tsarist government began to tighten control over the executive offices of local governments, creating, for example, the office of land captain to function as executive and state representative over peasant communities. Appointment to this office was made directly by the MVD, rather than by zemstvos, as suggested in earlier proposals. In 1890, electoral laws were altered to increase gentry representation in local governments, and state ministries and provincial governors exercised increasing control over zemstvo boards. Later, stricter property requirements effectively disenfranchised about 60% of municipal voters. After flirting with administrative decentralization, the tsarist autocracy now attempted to reign in any possibilities of conflict within the polity, and once again increased the volume of praise for unity in government. But even with these measures, the state failed to create effective and coherent local government. At the center, reforms and counterreforms were weakened by repeated failures to build any consensus on the best way to reform local government. The center was continually unwilling to mete out the requisite measures of power that local institutions needed to fulfill meaningful roles in their communities. As Witte explained, the concepts of autocracy and self-government were contradictory.

Our own local administration lies in the most abnormal, in the most unfortunate

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circumstances. We have, or are supposed to have, introduced local (zemskii) institutions. But the activities of these institutions are more and more shameful, and they are put into such conditions under which they cannot succeed in their assignments. Alongside these institutions, the old administration continues its activities, omnipotent in the scope of its arbitrariness (proizvol), yet, by its own organization, impotent as regards any vital activity.\textsuperscript{68}

In effect, however, the state experiment with self-government had not been given a fair shake: there had been no attempt to delineate the identity, role and limits of local self-government. And where the boundaries between state and local organs of government are blurred, conflict and confusion, as well as public disenchantment are quite likely to follow.\textsuperscript{69} Zemstvos were never really part of the system of state power, and thus became noisy chambers of criticism and opposition. (and, in some instances, of conservative reaction). As far as providing the state more effective penetration of Russian society and territory, the zemstvos accomplished little, and Russia began the twentieth century in much the same situation as she had begun the previous - undergoverned and overgoverned at the same time.\textsuperscript{70}

Conclusions

Romantic notions of the zemstvo reforms are partially understandable if the reforms

\textsuperscript{68} S.Iu. Witte, Samoderzhavie i zemstvo: Konfidentsiul'naiazapiski Ministraf'ransov' Stats'-SekretariaS. Iu. Witte (Stuttgart: 1903), pp. 17-18, 184.

\textsuperscript{69} Pearson, p. 259.

\textsuperscript{70} This is not to say that the so-called "counterreforms" were successful. While they scaled back the authority of local organs, they also led to increased recalcitrance of local councils, some staunchly conservative, others politically radical. The common ground for such councils, however, was not ideological, but territorial - in their opposition to St. Petersburg. While many authors have debated the class and ideological characteristics of the zemstvos, they have often overlooked the territorial dimension, of local interests in conflict with the center.
are viewed from the limited perspective as precursor to the 1917 revolution. Indeed, they did represent a certain liberal tendency in Russian politics. But the failures of these reforms represent more strongly the enduring problems of local government in Russia which existed since Ivan. Terence Emmons has noted that zemstvo reforms thus reflect less a liberal tendency than the dominance of autocracy:

The history of the relations between the autocracy and the zemstvo seemed to be repetitive in a fundamental way of a pattern that became established in Russian history no later than the mid-sixteenth century: the central government, casting about for the means to extract revenues from the provinces and keep them under control, would turn in periods of crisis to the practice of involving elected representatives of "society" in local administration: then, almost as soon as reform was completed, there would begin the process of tightening controls over the "self-administration," circumscribing its area of competence, and assimilating its officials into the state bureaucracy: "The elected institutions are progressively transformed into subordinate, second-level executors of various tasks assigned them by the bureaucracy, losing in the process their vital moral tie with the communities that had elected them and all traces of independent initiative in the conduct of their affairs."

Throughout these centuries, Russia grappled with the paradox of over and under government. Consistently, efforts to reform local government were motivated primarily from above: by fiscal crises, a perceived need to exact greater central control over state territory, to improve law and order, and to curb administrative corruption. In most cases, the calls for reform emanated not only from the center, but also from those involved in various administrative positions including nominal experts in the subject. Rarely, however, was there any public groundswell for local reform. Indeed, local reform was an administrative dilemma, which is further evidence of the role that local organs possessed in Russian government.

Of particular importance, however, are the constraints to the emergence of local self-

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71 Emmons, "The Zemstvo in Historical Perspective." Quote on p. 432, the end quotation is from Kizevetter, pp. 117-118.
government. The absence of local self-government in Russian history made it difficult to achieve an organization of power that extended to local institutions. Such an organization not only invited questions concerning local leadership, but also invited political conflict among central ministries and institutions. Such conflict made the reorganization of power a political issue in which the interests of local government were defended by central institutions. The local communities themselves had little or no say in the process. Perhaps the reason for the lack of public input can be explained by the lack of any strong middle class, of a bourgeoisie, that would pressure the center for greater authority and increased power.\textsuperscript{72} Yet this class based analysis seems to me to be overly deterministic. Another explanation may be the pronounced reluctance by the center to allow the development of local power, which emanated from a variety of political and economic factors. One might posit that there was no local power because there was no developed bourgeoisie. But the reverse might be just as true: there was no developed bourgeoisie because there was no real local power. This is, of course, a chicken and egg conundrum. and is mentioned here to point out the relevance of the issue of local power.

The lasting legacy, however, is that of undivided power and the problem of undergovernment of the territory of Russia. The most favourable prospects for alleviating this predicament involved the zemstvo reforms of the 1860s, but even in this instance there were limits and constraints to the emergence of local power. In spite of the positive aspects of the zemstvo reform, the zemstvo was only a timid step towards local self-government. The

primary point here is that throughout its history. Russia avoided the need for an organization of power among different tiers of government and therefore has little to build on in the contemporary period. The paradox of under and over government persisted, reflecting the irreconcilable nature of local power in an autocratic state. This legacy continues to affect Russian political development today. And the manner in which the current government grapples with this issue has remarkable similarities to earlier attempts at reform.

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73 S. Iu. Witte. Samoderzhavie i zemstvo (Stuttgart. 1903).
CHAPTER TWO: SOVIETS AND SELF-GOVERNMENT

For all the scholarly attention to social revolution and the conspiratorial menace of bolshevism, Western studies of 1917 often neglect other important factors in Russian politics which helped set the table for October 1917. Two such factors were the implosion of Russian government in February and the subsequent inability of the Provisional Government to establish a coherent political system. These two factors were part and parcel of the general problems of local government and state penetration that represented the failures of the tsarist state, and contributed to its collapse. Prince George Lvov commented on this role in his introduction to T.J. Polner's study of the zemstvos during World War I. "The omnipotence of an autocratic government in a country as vast as Russia is illusory," he stated, "the Imperial Government was never overthrown: it merely failed as result of its own internal weakness."1

This chapter examines the consequences of this collapse to local government, subsequent attempts to construct an alternative system of government, and the bolshevik led return to centralization. In many ways this account will parallel some patterns of the organization of power established during the tsars. But it will also provide further parallels to the contemporary period of Russian state building.

The Return of Smuta

The abdication of Tsar Nicholas II in February 1917 marked the beginning of another smuta in Russian politics. Without a monarch to head the autocracy, the body of state institutions suffered multiple fractures along the vertical axis. In the days after the fall of the autocracy, the vast majority of tsarist officials, from provincial governors to village police, were dismissed from office, some even arrested. A "provisional" government was created from the ranks of the state duma (legislature), which attempted to restore some semblance of government throughout Russia. At the local level, the provisional government extended zemstvo institutions to the level of volost, appointed the chairmen of zemstvos to a new office (local commissar) to lead and direct local administration, and initiated plans for the creation of a new constitutional system. These plans included the resurrection of the societal theory of local self-government from earlier attempts at zemstvo reform.²

Efforts to establish state authority through the provinces, however, were unsuccessful. The zemstvos, which the provisional government hoped would provide a foundation for local government, were themselves struggling for legitimacy and public support. Throughout the country, local politics increasingly were influenced by various groups and organizations which had emerged spontaneously and proclaimed themselves organs of self-government. In many locales, five or more such organs competed with each other, with rival bids for authority and

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² In a treatise written between February and October, I.V. Lebedinskii strongly advocated the transfer of state authority to local and regional legislatures, granting them the authority to create their own laws and govern local communities and provinces (oblast level) based on the clear demarcation of authority that possessed some resemblance to federalism. Such measures, concluded Lebedinskii, would necessitate a difficult struggle with vested interests in the center, but offered the best prospects for the political, economic and social development of Russia. See his Mestnoe samoupravlenie i oblastnaia autonomia (Petrograd: 1917).
overlapping functions.\textsuperscript{3} The provisional government tried to strengthen the legitimacy of municipal councils and zemstvos by holding local elections in April and May, respectively. The provisional government went so far as to transfer authority over the civil militia to local organs from central control. But these efforts were in vain. Popular legitimacy in local affairs, especially in urban centers, had shifted already to newly formed soviets.

According to most Russian sources, local soviets popped up after February throughout most of Russia, "like mushrooms after rain".\textsuperscript{4} In actuality, they emerged predominantly in urban centers with strong proletarian and/or military populations. The soviets were patterned after earlier renditions of worker councils that had formed spontaneously during 1905. A nominal claim to leadership of all soviets was made by the Petrograd soviet, although occasional congresses of soviets held in regional centers and a national congress held in the capital maintained more legitimate status as representatives of local soviets. Predominantly comprised of delegates elected by workers and soldiers, the majority of deputies initially had extremely weak, if not nonexistent, party affiliation.\textsuperscript{5} The soviets generally were fractious, noisy, meetings held sporadically, with a minimum of institutionalization.\textsuperscript{6} Initially, they functioned to monitor and control existing organs of local administration, and left municipal


\textsuperscript{4} L.M. Kaganovich, \textit{Mestnoe sovetskoe samoupravlenie} (Moscow: 1923), p.4. Trotsky estimated that by May, 1917, some 400 soviets had been formed, and by October, 900. Trotsky, \textit{History of the Russian Revolution} (Pathfinder: New York, 1987 II pp. 290-97. See also Anweiler, p. 113. Richard Pipes has disputed this claim, pointing out that soviets were formed almost exclusively in urban centers, seldom in rural areas. See his, \textit{Russian Revolution} pp. 738-742. While the extent and pace of formation of soviets throughout Russia may be disputed, there is little argument that in those locales where they were formed they quickly constituted a rival source of authority to existing zemstvos and municipal dumas.

\textsuperscript{5} Anweiler, p.115-116.

dumas, various self-governing committees, zemstvos, and state officials to actually conduct administrative matters. There was, however, an important feature among some of these local soviets during these months of turmoil: the existence of power. The source of soviet power emerged from their de facto control over local militias, and from the popular support of workers and soldiers. And as soviet executive committees gained some measure of experience in administrative matters, local soviets came to play more active roles in local administration and government. In some cases, for example, soviets administered criminal and civil law, transferred ownership of factories to trade unions, and expropriated land for communal cultivation.\(^7\) In rural areas, soviets per se were less common, particularly those with control over resources. But peasant assemblies and land committees filled much of the void in terms of local government, particularly concerning such matters as the redistribution of land.\(^8\) This emergence of power among local soviets and other organizations was an important concern for the provisional government. While the soviets and various committees generally lacked the resources to build roads, strengthen local food supplies, or provide education and health services, they could declare strikes, ignore central decrees, and pursue alternative policies. Most important was their claim to represent local interests - much of their popular support was a function of this representation, often in direct proportion to the soviet’s opposition to the center. For this reason, the ascendance of soviets as institutions of public authority deepened the crisis of state power in post Imperial Russia.

Much attention in the literature dealing with 1917 is devoted to the predicament of

\(^7\) Anweiler, p.137.

dvoevlastie or dual power, in which Russian national politics were dominated by two distinct institutions: the Provisional Government, and the Executive Committee of the Petrograd Soviet of Workers’ Deputies. The headless, fractured body of the state was now disabled even further by two new heads claiming to control the body. Soviets around the country initially pledged qualified support to the provisional government, but collectively maintained a firm upper hand in the power dynamic. The Petrograd Soviet actually resisted many clear opportunities to assume control of the government because of the precarious nature of national politics. Anweiler suggested three reasons why soviet leaders were reluctant to assume sole power. First, few of these leaders were bolsheviks, and they recognized that their support was of a fragile nature, and that soviet government might invite intense opposition from the bourgeoisie and peasants. Second, soviet leaders were completely inexperienced in administrative matters. Third, and perhaps most important, a bid for full "soviet power" would demand the consolidation of authority among existing soviets, which would force soviets to instill centralization and corrupt the fragile unity among various soviets of different tiers. Thus, the problem of dvoevlastie represented more than a struggle between two rival institutions. It also represented the crumbling of central authority and power throughout Russia. Neither the provisional government nor the soviets possessed a solid base for state authority that would penetrate the country. That soviet power had a better foundation than the provisional government was clear, but it itself recognized that local support was

* Anweiler, pp. 139-140.
incumbent upon the existence of a fraternal enemy.\textsuperscript{10}

During the summer of 1917, many local governments made claims of independence and sovereignty. The soviet in Kronstadt, for example, passed a decision in May that effectively declared the sovereign republic of Kronstadt, with its soviet as the sole authority. "The central government," it declared, "has no right whatever to meddle in a specific territorial unit, or to make decisions for the individual cell rather than for the state as a whole." Representatives from the Petrograd Soviet were asked by the Provisional Government to intervene, which they did by asking the Kronstadt Soviet if they wanted Russia to drift further into anarchy, and if they would be so kind as to explain where local autonomy would end and central authority could begin. While the Kronstadt Soviet agreed to comply with the Provisional Government on a voluntary basis, it maintained its claim to sovereignty.\textsuperscript{11} And such claims were the rule rather than the exception. By the end of the summer of 1917, what remained of the Russian state "had fragmented into a collection of autonomous local 'republics'- informal 'governments', elected by demokratiiia, which enacted their own revolutionary 'laws' without regard to the interests of the national state."\textsuperscript{12}

Lenin's plan to resolve the problems of dvovevlastie was to put an end to soviet support

\textsuperscript{10} Michael Melancon, "The Syntax of Soviet Power: The Resolutions of Local Soviets and Other Institutions, March-October 1917," \textit{Russian Review} 52 (October, 1993), pp. 486-505. Melancon argues that through the summer of 1917, local support for the Provisional Government, conditional at best, waned significantly. Melancon posits time, rather than ideology as the nexus of support, with increasing local support for soviet power through the summer months. What he fails to accentuate (but is supported) in his article, however, is the territorial dimension to the problems of dvovevlastie: that soviet power became the most legitimate authority in Russia because it had stronger support from the provinces.


\textsuperscript{12} Orlando Figes, \textit{Peasant Russia}, p. 66.
for the Provisional Government. In this regard, the Bolshevik leader supported soviet power as a tactical move against the post-imperial, fledgling Russian state. That soviets were also ideologically compatible with his own brand of Marxism was of secondary importance to the tactical advantage to be gained in the struggle against the "bourgeois government" of Prince Lvov. "All power to the soviets!" thus became the bolshevik battlecry against all non-proletarian institutions of power, from the Provisional Government to any remaining institutions of pre 1917 local governments. It was not a philosophical position in defense of popular self-government, but a recognition of the functional role that local councils could play in destroying the state. Soviets were but midwives for the birth of proletarian rule. After the dictatorship had been achieved, the assumed coincidence of local and central interests would make autonomous local organs redundant.\(^1\) Lenin's approach was thus in sharp contrast to the societal theory of local self-government that had resurfaced and gained currency in Russia among mensheviks and SRs.\(^2\)

When the bolsheviks seized power in Petrograd, the three concerns that had curbed the ambitions of proponents of soviet power were quickly realized. The bid for power elicited opposition from various segments of society, and the administrative inexperience of soviet

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\(^1\) This point is made forcefully by Lenin in his State and Revolution. Criticizing Bernstein's interpretation of Marx's *Civil War in France*, Lenin claimed that the foundation for the centralized state would be based upon the voluntary coincidence of local and central interests. "Bernstein cannot conceive of the possibility of voluntary centralism, of the voluntary amalgamation of the communes into a nation, of the voluntary fusion of the proletarian communes, for the purpose of destroying bourgeois rule and the bourgeois state machine. Like all philistines, Bernstein pictures centralism as something which can be imposed and maintained solely from above, and solely by the bureaucracy and the military clique." Lenin's assumption of coincidence displayed a woeful ignorance of local interests and the territorial dimension of politics, and is the result of his acceptance of economic determinism. See his *State and Revolution* in *Selected Works* vol II (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1977) pp. 270-276.

executives and bolshevik leaders was quickly apparent. But most critical to the fate of local government was the realization of the third concern - the bid for soviet power would demand centralization which would bring dishord to any harmony between local and central soviets that had existed through 1917 and was premised upon the existence of a common rival. In short, once in power, the bolshevik government was forced to confront the problems of state building head on. specifically, the challenge of organizing power, including the establishment of functional and authoritative relations among various tiers of government.

Bolshevik State Building and Local Self-Government

On October 28, days after the bolsheviks seized power in the name of the soviets, the Second All Russian Congress of Soviets issued a telegram to all local soviets, declaring that all power now belonged to the soviets. Local commissars of the provisional government were released, and chairmen of the soviets were to communicate directly with the revolutionary government. A special commissariat for local self-government was organized in Petrograd (although the commissar was one of four SRs in the cabinet). In January 1918, the Third Congress resolved that all local affairs were to be decided only by local soviets. Those organs of local administration that yet remained could continue their work if they recognized soviet power and would be accountable to them. Those remaining organs of local self-government, refusing to acknowledge soviet power were to be dissolved.

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15 For a full discussion of the bolshevik dilemma concerning administrative experience, see Rigby, Lenin's Government.

16 Kaganovich, p.14. Higher soviets, however, were given the right to regulate relations among lower soviets and resolve contradictions between them.

17 V'estnik Narkomvnudela No.4 1918, as cited in Kaganovich, p.14.
The new Bolshevik government expected that the transfer of nominal authority and power to the soviets would resolve the problems of state penetration and local administration. Yet as local soviets assumed the responsibilities of local government and administration, their executive bodies, often of necessity, began to appropriate increasing measures of power and authority. This rise of executive power led to a drastic deterioration of the relationship between executive and legislative organs of local soviets. This horizontal conflict, however, was overshadowed by a complete breakdown in relations among soviets of different levels. With the provisional government vanquished, the Constituent Assembly dissolved, and an end to dvoevlastie at the center, the bolshevik government was left as the sole representative of central power. But there were, quite simply, no viable linkages on the vertical axis, among provincial, city, district, and village soviets. The consequence was a descent into extreme mnogovlastie - each soviet considered itself the exclusive authoritative institution for its territory. V. Tikhomirov wrote that city, district and village soviets recognized no authority except their own. And if they did recognize any other institution, such recognition was replete with conditions and qualifications. There was almost a complete absence of administrative structures in the soviets, hardly less any means to tie administration and government together. "Soviet Russia" thus appeared to be a Russia of unbound, exclusively local soviets, with only a common hatred against "exploiters" to bring them

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Russia had unravelled, which in some respects only justified some of the fears of earlier statesmen opposed to the organization of power among different tiers of government. The bolshevik claim to the mantel of Russia's central government was forced to confront this lack of penetration throughout the territory of the state. The problems of state authority along the vertical axis were manifest not only by the many strong expressions of mestnichestvo (localism), but also by early tendencies towards oblastnichestvo (regionalism). Walter Pietsch, for example, identified some six distinct regional centers for soviet power in 1917-18: Moscow; Petrograd; Ekaterinburg; Minsk-Smolensk; Omsk; and Irkutsk. Each of these centers viewed themselves as legitimate and authoritative organs of state power irrespective of any national government. These local soviets and regional blocs caused much grief to central interests. Pietsch comments that this period of oblastnichestvo directly forced the decision whether the new state would be a completely decentralized republic of soviets or a centralized state.\(^{20}\)

It should be little surprise that the choice was made for a centralized state. That a highly centralized organization of power was justified by Lenin's rendition of Marxism was a secondary matter. More important to its realization, centralization was a good fit with the

\(^{19}\) V. Tikhomirov, Vlast' sovetov No. 27, 1918 p.12 quoted in Walter Pietsch, Revolution und Staat (Koln: Verlag Wissenschaft und Politik, 1969) p. 76. This is, of course, in as much as local soviets actually possessed any real power. In rural areas, with but few exceptions, there was an acute lack of coherence both within and among local governments. Olga Narkiewicz cited one early official in the bolshevik government: "Strictly speaking, there is no soviet government in the majority of the uyezdy. At present the soviets exist in most places only on paper; in reality, representatives of kulaks and speculators, or self-interested people, or cowards, who carry out the work without any definite direction, work under the name of soviets." The Making of the Soviet Apparatus (Manchester: Manchester University Press), pp. 59-77. Pipes also discusses the poor penetration of soviets to the rural countryside, The Russian Revolution (New York: Vintage Books, 1991), pp. 738-41.

\(^{20}\) Oil from Baku, for example, could not reach Moscow until it had been taxed by each regional soviet through which it passed. See Pietsch, pp. 76-87.
pattern of power established through Russian history. Criticisms against Lenin and the bolsheviks were made by Russian liberals and from European Social Democrats such as Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Kautsky. But such criticism was to no avail: centralization was demanded not only for the functioning of the bolshevik version of the socialist state, it was also required for the preservation of revolution. Lenin’s bolsheviks thus initiated a centralizing tendency that rolled back any gains in local autonomy that had emerged and in some cases begun to blossom with the implosion of Imperial Russia, and instead returned the country to its dominant legacy of central control.

One of the earliest Soviet attempts to consolidate soviet authority and centralize state power was the 1918 Constitution. One scholar suggested that the constitution itself was spurred by the need to consolidate the many disparate local organs into a coherent state system. While all authority in Soviet Russia theoretically was vested in the workers and organized in soviets at regional, provincial and district levels, actual power was exercised by the executive committees. These committees functioned to implement soviet decisions and resolve matters between congresses of soviets. The constitution granted higher soviets the right of control over all lower soviets, allowing higher soviets to void decisions passed by lower. Local revenues were also determined largely by the center - while local soviets could

21 Moshe Lewin suggested that centralization was a solution to a particular set of administrative circumstances which arose during the Civil War in Russia. In order to maintain power and defeat the counterrevolution, the bolsheviks were forced to rely on centralized power, on state intervention, coercion, and agosudarstvenie. Moshe Lewin, "The Social Background of Stalinism." in Robert C. Tucker, ed., Stalinism: Essays in Historical Interpretation (New York: W.W. Norton, 1977), pp. 111-136. Certainly these tendencies towards central control became glaringly evident during the civil war. But the breakdown of any democratic practice and the centralization of authority and power were already well underway by November 1917, well before the beginning of the civil war.

22 G.S. Gurvich, Istoriia sovetskoi konstitutsii (Moscow: 1923), p.4. Gurvich probably overstates his case, but there is little doubt that the chaos of local government was a significant factor in the emergence of the 1918 constitution.
tax for local needs, they became heavily dependent upon transfer payments from above. Later amendments to this first constitution lengthened the period of time between the meetings of local soviets, which effectively strengthened executive committees. And the authority to form education and public health committees at the local level soon shifted from local bodies to higher levels. Moscow bolstered this constitutional control with numerous postanovlenie during the seventh and eighth congresses of soviets, which nominally strengthened dual subordination, and effectively increased control from above.

More importantly, the practice of government in Soviet Russia quickly began to ignore what little authority local soviets did possess. The center soon began to make end-runs around existing state organs as a means to facilitate efficient government. Rather than implement policy through soviets, Lenin’s government formed various state committees and agencies, and commissariats, all of which circumvented the authority of local soviets and strengthened control from the center. This is further evidence of Lenin’s perception of local soviets as instruments of rule rather than sovereign bodies. The latter would jeopardize the vanguard role of the bolshevik party. As Keep has noted,

it was therefore inevitable that the soviets’ real decision making power should be rapidly eroded in the post-October period, at the centre as well as in the various localities... Local leaders were soon obliged to take their cue from agents of the central power, the ubiquitous commissars. The soviets became administrative bodies whose operations were subjected to close regulations by functionaries within the

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24 For the 1918 Constitution, with commentary, see Andrew Rothstein. ed., The Soviet Constitution (London: 1923).

25 See M. Vladimirskii, "Vzaimootnoshenia tsentral’nykh i mestnykh organov po postanovleniiam VII-go i VIII-go s”ezdov sovetov," in Flast’ sovetov No.1 (January) 1921, pp. 1-4.
mushrooming bureaucracy.\textsuperscript{26}

And in those instances where local soviets expressed opposition to bolshevik policy, soviets were either dissolved or neutered. When the Council of People’s Commissars began to appropriate power to dissolve local soviets, an amendment proposed by non bolsheviks in the council to allow dissolution only on the initiative of the Central Executive Committee of the Soviets (where bolshevik and central influence was less strong) was ruled out of order.

Commenting days later on this bolshevik tendency for centralization of bolshevik power, the menshevik Sukhanov declared,

the present (bolshevik) government is incapable... It does not know how to build, only how to destroy. Remember what it has done with the law courts, the banks, and municipal self-government: everything has been destroyed. We need a government which would unite all the forces of democracy...\textsuperscript{27}

His speech was loudly jeered by bolsheviks and their supporters in the Executive Committee.

To facilitate this centralization, the Commissariat of Finance attempted to curb local revenues and the budgets of local soviets became increasingly dependent upon transfer payments from the center.\textsuperscript{28} And the structures of local soviets were encouraged to conform to more uniform organizational schemes.\textsuperscript{29} Yet such changes took a number of years to


\textsuperscript{27}See Keep, \textit{Soviet Power}, pp. 141-142, 249. The decline of the Central Executive Committee in 1918 and 1919, particularly with the death of Sverdlov, is viewed as a significant turning point in the fate of local soviets. See T.H. Rigby, \textit{Lenin’s Government}, pp. 170-184.

\textsuperscript{28}R.W. Davies, pp. 19, 33. Note the struggles between local soviets, supported by NKVD, and the NKFin.

\textsuperscript{29}In the first three years after the bolsheviks seized power, local soviets displayed a wide variety of administrative structure and relationships. Local organs used the journal of the People’s Commissariat of Internal Affairs, \textit{Vlast’ sovetov} as a nationwide bulletin board to share their problems and successes in local administration. As the party strengthened its control, this became less common. Various organizational schemes and advice can be found in any issue of 1919. See, in particular, "Sovetskaia vlast’ na mestakh," No. 11, pp. 7-30.
achieve their full effect. The most significant development concerning the centralization of state authority was the tendency towards the "partification" of local government and administration. In early 1918, local party organizations were still insignificant factors in local politics, especially in comparison to local executive committees. The transition of the party from bit player to starring role in the local soviet was the critical element in subordinating local government to central control. As Sverdlov pointed out, local party organs were merely the agitation departments of local soviets.\(^{30}\) To change this, elections to local soviets were manipulated by bolsheviks to ensure that the majority of executive posts were reserved for Communist party members.\(^{31}\) While Schapiro, in his well known study of the communist party, suggests that the party helped to quell manifestations of extreme localism by mid 1918, such as witnessed in Kaluga and Kazan, he yet refers again to the problems of localism the following year. The fact of the matter is that the bolshevik government continued to grapple with the problems of penetration of central authority through the civil war and beyond. The primary measure to resolve this problem was the encouragement of local party organs to "guide and influence" local executives. In the 1919 Party Programme, for example, the party was challenged to "win decisive influence, complete leadership, and full mastery of the soviets." When this call for party dominance was criticized by Kautsky, Trotsky responded by claiming the convergence of interests:

> We have more than once been accused of having substituted for the dictatorship of the soviets the dictatorship of our party. Yet it can be said with complete justice that the dictatorship of the soviets became possible only by means of the dictatorship of the party. It is thanks to the clarity of its theoretical vision and its strong revolutionary

\(^{30}\) Quoted in Schapiro, p. 247.

organization that the Party has afforded to the soviets the possibility of becoming transformed from shapeless parliaments of labour into the apparatus of the supremacy of labour. In this 'substitution of the power of the party for the power of the working class' there is nothing accidental, and in reality there is no substitution at all - the communists express the fundamental interests of the working class.\textsuperscript{32}

With the Eighth Congress of the Party in March 1919, the struggle against localism increased in the ruling party, particularly as party control over local soviets increased: by December 1919, for example, 92.8\% and 82.2\% of provincial and district soviet executive committees respectively were members of the Communist Party.\textsuperscript{33} Local soviets soon lost any effective control over local executives and became formal chambers of consent for policy determined elsewhere. Party organs and party secretaries became the functional local authorities. This extension of party responsibilities necessitated a sharp increase in personnel: the party ranks swelled from about 150,000 in autumn 1919 to more than 600,000 by March 1920.\textsuperscript{34}

This rapid growth of the party was a consequence of the two dominant tendencies within the party from 1918-1921: party substitution of soviet authority (podmena), and the centralization of the party apparatus. These tendencies were not the products of popular interest, and were strongly opposed by those outside the party and also from within. Much of what passed as peasant uprisings and "counterrevolution" in the countryside during the civil war were really ill fated attempts to halt the incursions of central control and preserve "local government" in local hands. In this light, the reaction, or "counterrevolution" directed against Bolshevik power was more than just an ideological struggle among monarchists, anarchists,


\textsuperscript{33} Schapiro. p. 246.

\textsuperscript{34} \textit{Ibid.} p. 235.
foreign capital and revolutionaries, but also a reaction against the bolshevik intrusions on local and regional soviets. In spite of his spirited defense of party control over the soviets, for example, Trotsky appears to have recognized the dangers involved in the hypercentralization of power. Opposition to the centralization of power in the party was voiced by a number of different interests during the eighth, ninth and tenth party congresses. In spite of this opposition, the centralization of power increased over time. By 1920, when Kamenev could perceptively claim that the Communist party was the government of Russia, there was little doubt that the government was concentrated in Moscow.

This transfer of government and administration to the party was an attempt to resolve the enduring problems of center-local relations, and bypass the problem of organizing power in a manner which could forge a working relationship between the capital and local governments. Such an organization would necessitate a real division of power. The bolsheviks, however, attempted to create a Hegelian concrete universal by strengthening the unity of state power, relying on the Communist Party, through which power could be more strictly, and more easily, controlled from the center, and with less ideological backtracking. To openly curb soviet power would be an open renunciation of their revolutionary platform.

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37 Ninth Congress, 1920, cited in Pietsch, p. 147. The tendency towards the partification of government continued unabated. By the 11th Congress in 1922, Lenin expressed doubts as to extent of party substitution of state organs. At this last party congress he attended, Lenin belatedly noted that the party machinery must be separated from the machinery of soviet government. See, in particular, "Political Report of the Central Committee," Collected Works vol XXXIII (Moscow: 1966), pp. 263-309.
Transfering power to the party, on the other hand, allowed the facade of local control to continue under the guise of soviets, now controlled by local party organizations.

The attempt to moderate center-local relations through the party, however, did not come without a price. Indeed, the reluctance to demarcate and allocate power to local organs under societal control was a primary reason for the emergence of local elites. In short, the attempt to overgovern from the center was again the cause for a form of undergovernment - the center's inability to effectively monitor the affairs of the locales. Local party organs now became the purveyors of local interests, and, in spite of the dominance of the center, the party itself became susceptible to manifestations of localism and the inevitable conflict between central and local interests. Local party organizations were staffed less by dedicated revolutionaries than by individuals from the local community. As such, these organizations were often led by local elites whose personal interests were often a higher priority. When such interests came into conflict with central directives, the conflict was not always easily resolved in the center's favour. Gill has noted this predicament:

> the centralization which occurred at each level often served to cut across party boundaries and, rather than strengthening the party as an institution, served to weaken it. What became important here were the concepts of 'localism' and 'familyness'. Throughout the period a constant source of complaint on the part of the central authorities was the localist attitude adopted by lower level party leaders. In essence, this consisted of a tendency to put local interests and considerations ahead of national priorities. In practice this meant a refusal to implement central decisions because they conflicted with the perceived needs of the local area or, perhaps more commonly, the interests of the local elite. This is where 'localism' merged with 'familyness' or 'groupism'. 38

Rigby has also pointed out how, in these early years of the Soviet regime, the

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38 Gill. p. 37
Communist Party was beholden to strong local cliques. These cliques were not only guilty of various bureaucratic pathologies such as nepotism, horizontal ties and collective backscratching, but provided fertile ground for the clientelism that emerged within the party and provided much of the justification for Stalin to strengthen further vertical control of the party apparatus. Peter Solomon has also conveyed the image of local cliques as impediments to state administration in the realm of criminal justice, stating that through the 1920s and into the 1930s, these cliques "represented one of the primary obstacles to the development of an orderly and consistent administration of justice." The autonomy of these cliques was not limited to the realm of justice, but extended to economic, social, and political realms as well. Thus, while the centralization of power was a dominant and consistent trend in the new Soviet state, there is no reason to believe that the trend was absolute, nor anywhere near complete. Indeed, while the centralization of state power was an ongoing process that stripped local soviets of any significant power, it also came to reflect the paradox of over and under government, manifest by the virtual autonomy (as opposed to the power) of local elites. Without local self-government, and given the restraints on Moscow's ability to effectively monitor local government, this autonomy proved to be fertile ground for corruption and administrative incompetence.

The Soviet regime thus emerged from the civil war as a state structured around the dominant power of the center, with weak, subservient appendages in the form of soviets in the locales. The regime came to rely upon the party to integrate the various levels of government


something that was not always an easy task. This is not to say, however, that local party organs were exceptionally powerful in their own right. The power of local cliques was less a consequence of actual local power than a result of the continuing problems of penetration from the center, especially in rural areas. To paraphrase Shils, local autonomy was a reflection of the unintegratedness into the order sought by the central government. In some cases, local party leaders led their own local fiefdoms, in which these leaders were able to ignore policy directives from the center that might run counter to their interests. When Moscow was determined to replace a local clique, it was able to do so eventually, but only after sustained effort and determination. In the absence of such, local cliques possessed a relative amount of autonomy to abuse their office and position, and came to resemble the kormlenshchiki of centuries past.41

Return to Autocracy

Through much of the 1920s, problems of state penetration and of over and under government were either overshadowed by power struggles at the center or tolerated as part of the costs of the New Economic Policy. Merle Fainsod suggested that the Soviet countryside experienced little change during the first decade of Soviet power precisely because the state had little, if any presence outside urban areas.42 After Stalin’s consolidation of power during the latter half of the 1920s, however, the real revolution began. As he succeeded to "smash" opposition to his leadership, he began to turn his attention to other concerns, which included

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building the socialist state. To do this, Stalin required not only the economic and social change that became part of his legacy, he also needed to eradicate the many manifestations of local autonomy which he now blamed for the failures of central policy. For Stalin, local autonomy was a challenge to the state. Rather then organize power in a manner which involve the representation of local and national interests, Stalin’s response was an attempt to extend central power throughout the entire territory of Soviet Russia. This response paralleled earlier attempts in Russian history, most notably that of Ivan the Terrible.

Agriculture and the first five-year plan provide a case in point. With shortages of consumer goods and cheap prices for grain, the state experienced difficulties in the procurement of grain from the peasants. Stalin’s solution was a shift from market oriented mechanisms of procurement to coercion and confiscation. This shift was followed by the even more coercive policy of collectivization. But as the five-year plan gathered momentum, there was but weak local interest in collective farms: only 4% of peasant households had voluntarily entered the kolkhozy. This led to the mobilization of the communist party and the central government aimed towards the liquidation of the kulaks as a class. The horrors of collectivization and the resultant famine were part of the state’s campaign to enforce central policy on a recalcitrant countryside.43

At the seventeenth congress in 1934, the so-called congress of victors. Stalin admitted that up until then, the party had been consumed with its struggle against trotskyists, anti-leninists, right wind deviationists, and so on. But, as he noted, there were no more

43 Moshe Lewin has argued that collectivization was critical in establishing the primacy of central policy, and in forging state-society relations which persisted throughout the Soviet period. See his The Making of the Soviet System pp. 142-177. See also Brower, "Smolensk Scandal," and the more detailed work on collectivization in Lynne Viola, The Best Sons of the Fatherland (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987).
ideological battles left, nothing left to prove, and "no one to fight". He then pointed out that nine-tenths of the responsibility for failures and defects in party work now rested with the party itself, and he emphasized strongly that he now considered the success of the socialist revolution to be an organizational question. He continued his speech with criticisms of "big shots" and "windbags" in positions of local power in the party, and with the benefit of hindsight it appears he was beginning the justification for the purges that followed.

Corruption and incompetence among local party and government officials was perhaps more endemic than in the 1920s, and reflected again the paradox of over and undergovernment: the party had taken the task of both performing and monitoring government functions, and as the center relied on cadres to 'decide everything', the center effectively lost its ability to govern much at all. And because local party organs had usurped most of the functions of local government, the center became wary of any conflict of interests. As Getty has noted,

the chain of command collapsed more than it functioned. The Communist Party, far from having penetrated every corner of Russian life, was more an undisciplined and disorganized force with little influence outside the cities. Soviet Russia in the thirties resembled a backward, traditional society far more than it did the sophisticated order of totalitarianism.

Getty's portrayal of local party organs was of offices staffed by young and uneducated party members, and a crying need for anyone with experience and skill in organizations. The result

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was a reliance on drunks, embezzlers, petty thieves, and womanizers, who "freely abused their positions."47 As Ivan the Terrible had attempted to undermine such corruption with local elections, Stalin too endorsed the electoral principle among party officials.48 Yet his endorsement was motivated not by any concern for improving the representation of local interests, but towards improving the calibre of party officials at the local level and thus strengthening the reach of the party apparatus.

In this sense, Stalin's terror was less an attempt to aggrandize power to himself than to restore and then extend the central power of the Russian state. The purges that followed, and the role of terror throughout the remainder of Stalin's reign reflected the degree to which he would go to further the reach of the state and also the degree to which he had to go to compensate for the limits of central power. Rather than an organization of power among different tiers, the Soviet state thus was built (or rebuilt) upon a foundation of extreme centralization. The very idea that local power might be independent of the center was inconceivable in the Stalinist political system. While the horrors of Stalinism were dramatically different from the tsarist period, this particular characteristic of local power paralleled the Russian past.49 Rather than recognize, and then tolerate the divergence of local interests, Stalin forcefully asserted their coincidence with the directives of the center. This was, in essence, a continuation of a pre-modern understanding of the arrangement of power, and Stalin actually came to rely on pre-modern relationships to enforce the dictates of

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47 Getty, p. 31.
48 Ibid., pp. 141-149.
49 In this sense, Robert Tucker's comparison of Stalin to Ivan the Terrible is illuminating. See his Stalin in Power: The Revolution from Above, 1928–1941 (New York: W.W. Norton, 1990), pp. 13-65.
In spite of the limited opportunities for local self-government that emerged during the *smuta* of 1917, local government was thus brought back under the tutelage of central power. The party became the primary agent for this tutelage, particularly after it had been whipped into conformity. By the end of the Stalin era, local government resembled but a weak tentacle of the central state apparatus. It was defined as such in very clear terms:

As state power functions in the center, so it also functions in the locales. The realization of state power over all state territory demands the formation of local organs as branches and carriers of state power in the locales in accordance with the territorial demarcations of the state. The history of the state shows wide diversity in the systems of organs of local state power, from an extreme degree of decentralized power to an extreme degree of centralization. However, in all exploitative states, independent of the form of constructed organs of local soviet power, the masses were always refused from active and deliberative participation in all links of administration. Bourgeois local self-government, progressive when compared to absolutism, never responded to the interests of workers and nowhere ensured authentic self-government of the people. Local self-government in essence plays the role of consultative organs before effective fully authoritative agents of central government, appointed by the center, and subordinate only to the center.\(^{51}\)

**Conclusion**

Throughout the historical period from Ivan through Stalin, the restructuring of local government was a much needed attempt to rationalize and strengthen state authority throughout the territory of Russia, to overcome the lack of penetration of central state power

\(^{50}\) In his later years, Stalin had a tendency to parcel out regional fiefdoms to his lieutenants. Charles Fairbanks has pointed out that within a particular fiefdom a member of the leadership was "responsible for almost everything in a given locality, administering it through a network of clients personally linked to him." Charles H. Fairbanks, Jr., "National Cadres as a Force in the Soviet System: The Evidence of Beria's Career, 1949-53," in Jeremy Azrael, ed., *Soviet Nationality Policies and Practices* (New York: Praeger, 1978), p. 177.

through to the Russian provinces and to various local governments. Western approaches to Russian government, often rooted in autocratic and totalitarian models widely used in the study of Imperial Russian and Soviet politics, ignore this problem of undergovernment which persisted throughout Russian and Soviet administration. The reform of local government in Russia has been a recurring theme throughout Russian history precisely because Russia never has established a successful, workable relationship between local and central power. The center has thus required a large measure of arbitrary power over local governments precisely in order to compensate for the lack of any rational vertical separation of power.

Not only has Russia never experienced strong local government, it has never experienced an organization of power that moved beyond the hording of power in the center. Consequently, the shroud of centralized power cloaked an administrative system that failed to penetrate the territory of the state. The continuing paradox of over and under government was thus the dominant legacy of Russian local government.
PART TWO

SOVIETS AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Local soviets are the highest organs of state power on their territory, the master of the city or village.
And the soviet should be a good, zealous, master.
Its duty is to think and take care of all, to do everything so that the people might live, work and rest better.

Leonid Brezhnev
CHAPTER THREE:
LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND THE URGE TO REFORM

The system of local government that emerged from the excesses of Stalin was consonant with the many enduring features of Russian local government highlighted in preceding chapters. The western stereotype of the Soviet state in the 1950's resembled the concept of the leviathan: all-knowing and all-powerful; the dominance of a central burро, complete with local organs which implemented central policy without question or significant variation.¹ Like all stereotypes, however, such a depiction confused the nature of the Soviet state as much as it explained it. Certainly, the center was unrivaled as the source of policy and personnel appointment, and it fully expected local organs to implement central directives. In this sense, Fainsod's classic work on Soviet power was particularly astute - soviet leaders had actively resisted any pluralization of authority.² Political power remained the domain of Moscow. Yet the weakness of this stereotype was the result of an assumption that because Moscow's power was unrivalled throughout the Soviet polity, its power necessarily penetrated the entire state.

Moscow's power throughout the Soviet Union was less the result of any coherent system of state power than the absence of institutionalized power outside of its control. The


natural assumption that the center was inordinantly powerful was valid in a relative sense - compared with an acute lack of power in the locales, for example - but in a quantitative sense, without the use of coercion. central power in local areas could be quite weak. This is one major reason why the totalitarian model used in the West to study the USSR was misplaced: Soviet Russia continued to confront the enduring paradox of over and undergovernment. This paradox was represented by weak penetration of central authority and the limited capacity of local governments. With deStalinization and the commensurate decline in terror and coercion, the state, in terms of center-local relations, was eventually exposed as the proverbial giant with feet of clay. Its limited and gradually crumbling authority in the locales represented the weakness of the ostensibly omnipotent center. This lack of penetration of central power through the provinces, and the weakness of local government were critical problems for Moscow throughout the remaining years of the Soviet regime.

The obstacles to local government reform in the post Stalin period, as in the nineteenth century, reflect this paradox of over and under government. Ultimately, repeated efforts to establish effective institutions of local government failed because they were not, indeed could not, be endorsed by those institutions already endowed with power. The only interest the CPSU or various central ministries had in pursuing stronger local governments was as a means to extend or rationalize the existing organization of power. Any meaningful devolution of authority to local soviets would necessitate a redistribution of power which would jeopardize the existing system of unitary power. The general fear was that any such distribution would be an admission that disparate legitimate interests existed within the developed socialist state.
Under the Soviet regime, Russian society became educated, industrialized, and urbanized. Such change came complete with many modern demands, such as health care, roads, communications, housing, day care, heating, and sewers. Moscow, however, proved itself incapable of effectively dealing with all these matters. On one hand, it appealed continually to local governments to play a stronger role in meeting such demands, but on the other, displayed an unwillingness to share the kind and amount of power necessary for local governments to fulfill such expectations. As such, the limited power and authority and lack of autonomy and capacity of local government was an obstacle to the emergence of a modern state in Soviet Russia. Without effective local government, i.e., without the requisite amount of power to resolve local issues, such demands could not be met.\footnote{Brzezinski, in an exceptionally accurate prediction of Soviet degeneration, suggested in 1969 that the danger of Soviet systemic degeneration was premised on the absence of basic institutional development. See his "The Soviet Political System: Transformation or Degeneration?" in Zbigniew K. Brzezinski, Dilemmas of Change in Soviet Politics (New York: Columbus University Press, 1969) p.33. Perhaps nowhere was this prediction more applicable than in the realm of local government.}

This chapter is an examination of the various problems of local government in post Stalin Soviet Russia, and a survey of numerous attempts at reform. These attempts are significant to our discussion of local government for three reasons: first, because for many Russian citizens the period between 1955 and 1985 shaped the beliefs, expectations and behaviour that affects the manner in which local governments function in the post Soviet period; second, because in terms of the types of problems and attempts at reform, there is a large degree of continuity throughout this period, which then provides a proper foundation for the study of later reforms of the 1980s and 1990s discussed in subsequent chapters; and third, because the reform efforts of this period illustrate the difficulties inherent in reforming Russian local government without a commensurate reorganization of power to include the
local level. While contemporary studies of Russia still draw a distinction between the still recent Gorbachev era and those of his predecessors, distance and greater hindsight will recognize the many themes and approaches common to these decades. A more detailed study of all the developments of local government during this period of time would exhaust both reader and writer. We discuss here the salient points, namely the structures and functions of Soviet local government, its weaknesses and problems, and the various attempts to reform and revitalize local government in post Stalin Soviet Russia.

Structures and Functions

Before we go on to discuss the various problems confronted by local governments in post Stalin Russia, we need to construct an image of what local government was, both in theory and practice. We have already established that local governments were very limited in terms of how much power they wielded, and that in principle they were based on the legislative body known as the soviet. In practice, however, soviets were the least important institutions involved in local politics. In order to understand how local governments operated, and the relationships among various organizations and institutions, we need to identify the various actors involved in local affairs.

According to both the 1936 and 1977 constitutions, soviets were the political foundation of the USSR, and local soviets functioned as organs of state power in territories (*krai*), provinces (*oblasty*), autonomous oblasts and *okruga*, districts (*raiony*), cities, towns and villages and rural settlements. In *theory*, soviets were charged with the direction and supervision of all other state organs within their jurisdiction. As concerns local government,
the differences between the two constitutions, aside from changes in nomenclature, were more of detail than substance. The Brezhnev constitution flushed out the functions of local soviets in more detail, suggesting that local soviets were accountable for the implementation of state policy and all local affairs. We will discuss the reasons for this greater detail below, but for now wish to point out that according to the Constitution, the actual structures of local government remained the same. Indeed, the local soviet as the theoretical foundation of local government remained throughout the Soviet period.

The various structures of government at the local level are represented in illustration 4.1 (The Local Soviet). By 1985, there were more than 52,000 soviets in the USSR, all but 36 of them (1 Union, 15 republic and 20 autonomous republic Supreme Soviets) classified as local soviets. These councils were comprised of anywhere from a few dozen elected deputies at the village level to more than 250 at the oblast level. In the Soviet Union, more than 2 million citizens served as deputies to soviets at various levels. Elections to local soviets were held every two-and-a-half years, with universal suffrage but only single candidate constituencies. Western observers generally considered soviet elections as shams, mere

4 Articles 146 and 147 of the 1977 Constitution, for example, enumerate in far greater detail than the earlier constitution the role of local soviets. They were to "resolve all questions of local importance, keeping in mind general state interests and the interests of the citizens living in the territory of the Soviet, implement the decisions of higher state organs, direct the activity of lower-level Soviets of People's Deputies, and also participate in the discussion of questions of republic and all-union importance, and submit proposals concerning these questions... Within their territory, local Soviets of People's Deputies direct state, economic, and socio-cultural organization; confirm plans of economic and social development and the local budget; exercise leadership over the (activities of) state organs, enterprises, institutions, and organizations, subordinate to them: ... Within the limits of their authority, local Soviets of People's Deputies ensure integrated economic and social development within their territory..." See the comparison of the two constitutions, side by side, in F.J.M. Feldbrugge, ed., The Constitutions of the USSR and the Union Republics: Analysis, Texts, Reports (Alphen aan den Rijn, The Netherlands: Sijthoff and Noordhoff, 1979), pp. 159-161.

5 The maximum number of deputies allowed at the oblast/krai level in the RSFSR in 1987 was 500, the minimum, 150. See Jeffrey W. Hahn, Soviet Grassroots: Citizen Participation in Local Soviet Government (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988), p.99.
Illustration 4.1: The Local Soviet

Chairman (Accountable to Superior Executive Committee)

Executive Committee (ISPOLKOM)

Administrative Apparatus (Otdely/Departments)

Soviet

Standing Committees

Deputies

Directly Elected

Supervises Subordinate Executive Committees

Illustration 4.2: Institutions of Local Governance

Superior Executive Committee

Superior Party Committees

Central Ministries

First Secretary Party Committee

Large Enterprises

Party Organization

Local Enterprises
exercises in propaganda for Soviet-style democracy and public mobilization. Be that as it may, Soviet citizens regularly trooped to the polls and almost unanimously "endorsed" their candidates selected by Party organizations. The soviet then met for a day or two quarterly, in the case of oblast level soviets, or up to six times annually at lower levels. Because part-time deputies meeting for such infrequent and short periods of time could not adequately conduct the affairs of local government, the bulk of responsibility for the soviet routinely fell to the executive committee (ispolkom).

Deputies to local soviets were usually drawn from all walks of life, and attempts were made by local party organs to nominate candidates along gender and occupational criteria. The higher the level of soviet, however, the less representative the deputy corps, reflected by increased percentages of: party members; those with higher education, and males. Aside from their attendance at sessions of the soviet, deputies also formed standing committees, which paralleled the various departments of the ispolkom, and were designed to enable the soviet to monitor the work of its executive. At all levels, however, these committees were generally relegated to matters of little or no consequence, and were convened infrequently.

The ispolkomy of local soviets were the functional administrations of local government. The ispolkom was comprised of a chair, "elected" by the soviet, one or more deputy chairs, secretaries, and, at higher levels, numerous other members leading various

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8 Hahn notes that standing committees of local soviets convened about four times annually, on national average. See Ibid., p. 241. For more on standing committees, see pp. 228-246; G.V. Barabashev and K.F. Sheremet, *Sovetskoe stroitel'stvo* (Moscow: 1965), pp. 190-216.
committees and departments of the administration. Members of the ispolkom possessed a much higher degree of managerial experience, were often professional administrators, and predominantly party members (up to 90% at the oblast level). The ispolkom possessed the authority to resolve all affairs under the corresponding soviet’s jurisdiction, with the exceptions of the formation of soviet organs, official approval of local economic plans and budgets, and ratification of some personnel changes. The ispolkom, however, drafted the local budget, controlled the agenda for sessions of the soviet, oversaw the work of local enterprises and of the executive committees of subordinate soviets. Executive committees not only monitored lower level executive committees, but were themselves accountable to the executive committee of the soviet one tier above. This was the principle of dual subordination - ispolkomy answered to both the corresponding soviet (horizontal) and their superior executive committee (vertical). This dual subordination was critical to the "linkage", which ensured a unitary system of soviet power.

Such were the institutions of Soviet local government. On paper, soviets appeared as rather democratic structures with the authority and power to resolve local issues. In practice,

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9 On local executive committees, see Barabashev and Sheremet, *Sovetskoje stroitel'’stvo*, pp. 232-247; I.A. Azovkin, *Oblastnoi (kraevoi) sovet deputatov trudovshchikhialia: pravovye voprosy organizatsii i deiatel'nosti* (Moscow: 1962), pp. 195-210; and idem, *Mestnye sovety v sisteme organov vlasti* (Moscow: 1971), pp. 125-148. In English, see Hahn, *Soviet Grassroots*, pp. 114-126; Everett M. Jacobs, "The Organizational Framework of Soviet Local Government," in idem, ed., *Soviet Local Politics and Government* (London: Unwin, 1983), pp. 11-14. There seems to have been some academic debate in Soviet Russia concerning the autonomy of the executive committee from its corresponding soviet. In theory, of course, the executive committee remained accountable to the soviet. In practice, however, the executive committee dominated the local soviet to the extent that the soviet most often functioned as a rubberstamp for the executive committee’s decisions. On whether or not the executive committee was an independent organ of local government, connected to vertical line of state administration versus the more palatable (to Soviet state theory) perception of the executive as mere implementer of soviet authority, see the collection of articles edited by I.F. Butko, *Ispolniteli'nyi komitet mestnogo soveta narodnykh deputatov* (Kiev: 1980) and the review of the book by V.A. Pertsev, in *Sovetskoje gosudarstvo i pravo* No.2, 1983.

10 On dual subordination, see the series of articles in *Sovetskoje gosudarstvo i pravo* No. 1 (1968), pp. 48-49; No.2 (1968), pp. 65-71; No.5 (1973), pp. 32-33.
however, local soviets were dominated by their executives, and possessed little power at all, even over their own affairs. The executive, for example, determined the agenda for the soviet, and in many cases various public proposals and appeals from the soviet became stuck in the offices of the executive committee. During a session of one local soviet, some 30% of proposals were neglected, and 50% were given only cursory treatment, carried over to the next session when they were no longer applicable. Yet while the ispolkom dominated the soviet, it in turn was dominated by other institutions. The political power that did exist at the local level generally could be found in either of the local branch organs of the Communist Party or of central ministries (see illustration 4.2: Institutions of Local Administration).

*The Party.* Party control of the soviets and executive committees was a given in Soviet society. Each local party organ was granted the authority necessary for effective party leadership through party statutes. These rights included "the selection, placement, and training of the leading cadres of the (corresponding) soviet apparatus," and the authority "to direct and coordinate all soviet, trade union, komsomol, and economic organizations, and guarantee the

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12 In perhaps the best book on local politics of post Stalin Soviet Union, for example, Jerry Hough used the model of the French prefect to suggest that oblast party secretaries were the functional political commissars for their respective regions, and provincial coordinators "of the growing services of central ministries." Jerry F. Hough, *The Soviet Prefects: The Local Party Organs in Industrial Decision-Making* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1969), p.5. While I agree with Hough's characterization, my point here is quite different: that party organs and industrial enterprises had assumed many of the functions of local government because soviets did not have enough power to do so, and because Moscow was better connected to its local party organs and branch enterprises than it was to local soviets. Hough suggested that the party did not necessarily have to assume the role of prefect, and that such a role might have been played by various local executive committees, but such would have "entailed a governmental restructuring that would have complicated the organizational chart" (p.5). More to the point, in spite of dual subordination, executive committees could not ensure central control over local governments as well as local party organs.
realization of Communist Party and Soviet government policies. Indeed, Soviet conventional wisdom stated that "the enhancement of the guiding role of the Party in the soviets is indissolubly associated with elevating the role of soviets themselves as agencies of state power". Party control of state organs was even made explicit in article 6 of the 1977 Soviet Constitution, until it was amended in 1990. Throughout the post-Stalin era, the Communist Party was the primary agent through which central control was exercised over local soviets - the tendons and ligaments which connected the "tentacles" to the center.

Party control was carried out in a variety of ways. The majority of people's deputies in any given soviet prior to the reforms of the late 1980's owed allegiance to the CPSU (either as members, candidate members or Komsomol). The higher the level of the soviet, the greater this preponderance would be (generally between 60 and 80%). Party approval was the determining factor in the nomination and election of any deputy. Communists also dominated the executive committees of local government, most often about 90% of the ispolkom were affiliated with the CPSU. In addition, personnel moved rather freely between executive committees and the corresponding Party committees. The result, as one raion soviet ispolkom chairman stated, Party and ispolkom workers knew both Party and soviet work, and they "very quickly found a common language." A further method of Party control was established by the many organizational links between Party and ispolkom. The departments of

13 Barabashev and Sheremet. Sovetskoe Stroitels'vo, p. 72.


a local Party secretariat corresponded to the various departments in the ispolkom, allowing the Party to observe and supervise the day to day work of the soviets and "provide concrete assistance and flexible organizational work to eliminate existing shortcomings."\(^{16}\)

One consequence of this Party tutelage was the problem of *podmena* (substitution). In an effort to offset the red tape and formalism of executive organs, Party committees often simply assumed the functions of soviet bodies. More than half of the questions and proposals examined by the Moscow city party committee in 1985, for example, were within the purview of the city soviet.\(^{17}\) Carried to its natural conclusion, party guidance became, in effect, direct control, nullifying the ability of soviets to respond to their electorate and neutering their political significance. Podmena, it should be noted, was not only considered a hindrance to soviet authority, but also a problem for the Party organization as well.\(^{18}\) While party leadership of the soviets was viewed as a requirement for effective local administration, finding the right mix of party supervision and soviet authority proved as elusive as the quest for the holy grail. Carried to its natural conclusion, party 'guidance' became, in effect, direct control, nullifying the ability of soviets to respond to their electorate, and neutering any

\(^{16}\) Barabashev and Sheremet, "KPSS i Sovety", p. 38. See also the description of the raikom first secretary's responsibilities over construction, provided by Levitskii in Levitskii and Kucheriavyy, p. 19. Slightly more revealing of the relationship between the CPSU and local soviets are the Communist Party rules, which describe how Party organs and Party members within the soviets attempt to "guide" the work: "Party organs ... in local soviets ... exercise supervision over the work of the apparatus in the implementation of directives of party and government ... They must actively promote the perfection of the work of the apparatus, the selection, placement and education of their employees, increase their responsibility for the work entrusted to them, ... take measures for improving state discipline, lead a decisive struggle vs. bureaucracy and red tape, [and] promptly inform Party organs about shortcomings in the work of institutions." See Graeme Gill, *The Rules of the CPSU* (London: Macmillan, 1988) article 59 pp. 247-248.


possible political significance. Since Party secretaries were, for the most part held responsible for local affairs, it was not illogical for these secretaries to simply usurp the duties of soviet committees. And since real power ultimately lay with Party organizations, it was a natural consequence for citizens to direct their requests and demands not to their local deputies, but to Party officials. Degtiarev noted:

We have become so greatly accustomed to such a gradually established understanding of the role of the Party authorities in society, that today we can poorly imagine any other forms of interaction. Where does an economic manager who needs an industrial area go, to the sectorial department or the obkom? The experienced one goes immediately to the obkom, knowing that the ispolkom would at any rate have to obtain the obkom's approval. The functions of Party and soviet authorities have become so interwined... That is why no one wonders at cases of releasing a raikom secretary for the poor organization of trade in vegetables or for poor preparations for healing supplies in winter.19

The results of podmena, as the Soviet scholar Shakhnazarov described, were hardly beneficial:

When the party begins to take upon itself tasks that require government attention, a double loss ensues: first, the great power embodied in the system of popular representation is not fully tapped; and second, the working people develop a rather skeptical attitude to the representative institutions and begin to doubt their effectiveness.20

Both of these effects were prevalent in Soviet Russia, particularly by the 1980's. An account in *Moscow News* told of a deputy from a village soviet who resigned her position because, in her own words, it was "a waste of time, energy and nerves."21 The Kursk Oblast first


21 *Moscow News* No. 28 (10 July) 1988, p.12.
secretary complained in *Pravda* that the people’s deputies kept interrupting his work, coming to him for advice, permission, and to find out the "Party line."²²

**The Ministries.** Local soviets were not only limited by local party organs in fulfilling their function as the foundation for local government. In many instances, even party committees themselves played second fiddle to large industrial enterprises that could dominate a local economy and that answered directly to republic, or even union ministries.²³ Bill Taubman was one of the first Western scholars to point out the amount of control such enterprises exercised over particular local jurisdictions. The example of Magnitogorsk in the 1960’s was particularly revealing. Built during Stalin’s industrialization campaign of the early 1930’s, Magnitogorsk was dominated by one enormous metallurgical combine, which owned the vast majority of state housing, and operated most municipal services. The city soviet, in comparison, owned less than 2% of all local housing. When, for example, industrial production required extra power, the factories simply would cut public power to the rest of the city, which led young girls to sing a rather curious skipping song, which roughly translated meant "On Lugavaia Street, the lights are out, so the chairman of the city soviet hopes for the light of the moon." Such powerful factories generally ignored the interests and demands of local soviets, and violated local regulations with impunity. In Taubmann’s

²² *Pravda* 5 October 1988.

²³ In the post-Stalin period, local soviets ostensibly had the right to monitor enterprises over such issues as sanitation, housing construction, and the provision of cultural and domestic services, but no authority to penalize enterprises for non-compliance in such matters. They could only appeal to superior organs for assistance. See A.V. Luzhin, "Vzaimootnoshenia mestnykh sovetov s sovnarkhozami i predpriyatiiami soiuuzno-respublikanskogo podchineniia." *Sovetskoe gosudarstvo i pravo* No.4 1959, pp. 43-54. Ukrainian Second Secretary N. Podgorny noted that local soviets viewed enterprises under all-union control as "extra-territorial principalities." *Kommunist* No.16 1955, p. 50. My thanks to Bill Tompson for bringing this article to my attention.
account, the chair of the city soviet appealed to the Union Ministry of Municipal Services, asking why the ministry refused to help the city. Ministry officials replied, matter of factly, that there was no such city as Magnitogorsk. The area was the property of the metallurgical combine, previously subordinate to the Ministry of Ferrous Metals, and (at that time) under the Chelyabinsk Economic Council (Sovnarkhoz). Years later, after the sovnarkhoz reforms had ended and the ministry had been reconstituted, Magnitogorsk remained a company town. The only noteworthy improvement was that the city soviet had received from the factories nominal control over retail stores and the public baths. 24

Magnitogorsk may have been an extreme case, but the problems of ministerial control over large enterprises, and the problematic relationships between these enterprises and local soviets were endemic throughout Russia. In many instances, large factories performed many of the functions supposedly under the perview of local soviets, from housing to day care and retail shops. As a result, there was an incredibly low level of urban planning and low quality of local infrastructure: roads, transit, housing, power, waterworks, were all underdeveloped. Without the resources required to construct such, soviets were forced to rely upon local enterprises, which sometimes looked after its own workers, but generally entertained no interest in community development. Relationships between enterprises under ministerial control and local soviets were either dysfunctional or heavily dominated by the enterprise in

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question. Stuck between territorial divisions of government and administration, and the sectoral approach to economic production, the latter approach dominated the realms of investment and control over resources. Problems of industrial enterprises under ministerial control remained throughout the entire Soviet experience.

So in spite of the theoretical premise that soviets were the foundation of the Soviet political system, local soviets performed largely symbolic roles in local government. They were weak, without the power to fulfill their responsibility of resolving all local issues, and quite far removed from the locus of decision-making. Power was exercised through organizations and institutions theoretically outside the bounds of the state apparatus and beholden to Moscow - a predicament which only exacerbated growing problems of social development, political legitimacy, and administrative control.

Some Western scholars of the late 1970's and 1980's questioned the prevailing stereotype of local soviets as rubberstamps, suggesting that local governments and soviets performed essential functions, and possessed enough autonomy and power to manoeuvre and alter central policy to conform better with local interests. In as much as these scholars

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26 Donna Bahry has pointed out that from 203 steps in compiling a ministry’s plan, the regional dimension was introduced only at step 179, after key decisions had been made, and even then were non-obligatory for the ministry. Outside Moscow: Power, Politics, and Budgetary Policy in the Soviet Republics (New York: Columbia University Press. 1987). p.35.


28 Taubmann; Hahn, Soviet Grassroots; Carol W. Lewis, "Economic Functions of Local Soviets." in Jacobs, Local Politics. pp. 48-66; Theodore H. Friegut, Political Participation in the USSR (Princeton: Princeton University Press); idem, "The Soviet Citizen’s Perception of Local Government," in Jacobs, Local Politics. pp. 113-130; all posit varying degrees of local control over the implementation of central policy. Cameron Ross, Local Government in the Soviet Union, critiques this position, pointing out that the problems of implementation and control had less to do with local power and interests, and
were working against the stereotypes of Soviet local government enforced by the totalitarian approach to Soviet politics, then these authors were not entirely incorrect. For while there remained little question of the center’s ultimate dominance in terms of policy development and personnel selection. Moscow’s capacity to penetrate Soviet territory remained limited. Moscow relied less on local soviets than on institutions more beholden to direct central control, which may have offered local soviets limited room to maneuver. But this limited room should be perceived more as the consequence of Moscow’s limited reach than the result of local soviet power. Local soviets were effectively powerless, and functioned more to endorse decisions made elsewhere than to exercise any meaningful measure of autonomous power. As Izvestiia somewhat facetiously, yet not inaccurately reported, the verbatim record of any session of any soviet could be summed up as "All those in favor? Please lower your hands. Opposed? None. Abstentions? None. Adopted unanimously."

Let us look at local control over the local budget as an example of strict limits to local power and autonomy. While local governments worked with limited resources throughout Russian history, the early Soviet period witnessed a marked decline in their already limited share of government expenditures. Under Stalin’s industrialization of the late 1920s and 1930s, for example, local expenditures shrunk dramatically as a share of total government expenditures. from 31% in 1928 to 18% in 1933. Although local soviets theoretically retained responsibility over local education, health, infrastructure and local economic development, the center appropriated more and more revenue to itself, leaving local governments with a

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more to do with bureaucratic problems of processing information. Ross’ positions is more consistent with the general theme concerning the paradox of over and under government.

29 Izvestiia 29 April 1988.
declining share of revenue except that transferred by the state.\textsuperscript{30}

Davies has pointed out two developments which strengthened central control over local budgets. The first involved the actual process, through which all local budgets were drafted by local executive committees only after they had received general guidelines from above. Budgets were then submitted to superior ispolkomy, all the way up the vertical ladder, until the all-union budget was approved at the center. After approval at the center, the budget then came back down the ladder, wrung by wrung, to the various locales, to be approved at each level by the corresponding soviet.\textsuperscript{31} In this manner, the unitary system of soviets was linked together further by a unitary budget: the process ensured that local governments were but appendages of the regions, which were but large appendages of the center.

The second method of control was the central authority to determine rates and norms for most local revenues. This left little, if any, local control over the local revenue base. Local organs may have received monies from particular taxes directly into their own accounts, but had no control over the tax rates, which were established by the Ministry of Finance in Moscow. Limited power over budgets, in the words of Donna Bahry, left local governments with "the obligation but not the power to integrate plans for local development." The result was an inability to fully coordinate or control where and how the local economy could grow. On average, she continued, local budgets represented even in the mid 1980s only about 5% of

\textsuperscript{30} By 1939, for example, 70% of all local revenue was derived from state taxes. R.W. Davies, pp. 297-313. Figures from pp. 300 and 312.

\textsuperscript{31} Although their share of revenues fluctuated widely over the next three decades, local budgets remained under tight central control. In addition to Davies, see M.I. Piskotin, Sovetskoe gosudarstvo i pravo No.1 (1969); William Taubmann, Governing Soviet Cities, appendix B: "The Budget-Plan Drafting Process," pp. 118-119; Cameron Ross, Local Government, pp. 90-109; Carol W. Lewis, "The Economic Functions of Local Soviets," in Jacobs, Local Politics and Government, pp. 48-66.
the funds spent in a particular locality for industrial development, and about 10% for agricultural development. While local governments yet controlled the lion's share of expenditures for many social services and road construction, they remained functionally impoverished by such strict limits to revenue. There was no opportunity, for example, for local governments to issue local bonds, or engage in creative forms of increasing revenue. Indeed, local fiscal autonomy flew in the face of a perceived need to control government financing from above.

In summary, in spite of any constitutional premise, local soviets remained powerless organs. In terms of their organizational structure, appointment of personnel, and control over their own budget, local "governance" was conducted through other institutions. Such methods left a myriad of administrative problems directly connected to the paradox of over and under government. One such problem was the continuing weakness of the center in terms of state penetration. This "weakness" of the center, to reiterate, was not a consequence of local power, but of the exact opposite - a consequence of the absence of power among local governments. Other consequences were the poor development of local infrastructure and social services: an overloaded party apparatus, which could not manage the administrative burden; corruption in administration and production, at least partially the consequence of poor monitoring; and a growing crisis of socio-political legitimacy, which stemmed from the fact that citizens had poor opportunity for input in the political process.

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32 Donna Bahry. *Outside Moscow.* pp. 134-135. The share of local expenditures as a share of government expenditures did fluctuate through 1955-85, particularly with later attempts to overcome the problems of overgovernment. But local control over expenditures was consistently minimal.

33 Don Nelson has noted this paradox, stating that "achieving the goals of the central government requires a degree of local autonomy." See his "Dilemmas of Local Politics in Communist States." *Journal of Politics* 41:1 (February, 1979). pp. 23-54.
Attempts at Reform

Trying to resolve such problems of Russian local government was an inordinately complicated task. The numerous and varied efforts to reform local government in the three decades after Stalin indicate just how complicated the process was. Both academics and government officials devoted much attention to the task. By 1957, there were frank discussions in academic circles concerning the shortcomings of local government and its widely acknowledged moribund condition. These discussions were the opening salvos for three subsequent decades of local government reform. The many and varied reform proposals and resolutions can be classified into three main approaches. The first of these was aimed at restructuring center-local relations, with a commensurate boost to local decision-making, particularly in the realm of economic production (decentralization). The second approach focused on reforming party-soviet relations to liberate the latter from the overbearing tutelage of the former. The third approach was a reform effort to boost the authority of the soviet itself vis a vis its executive committee. Here we examine in more detail the nature of these approaches in the three decades preceding Gorbachev.

Decentralization. In post Stalin Russia, as in Russia of the mid 19th century, the merits of central power were being clouded over by the many negative consequences of

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34 Hahn identifies 1957 as the turning point in local government, when the Soviet Union commenced concerted efforts towards reform. See his "Evolution of Local Soviets" in Peter J. Potichnyi, ed., The Soviet Union: Party and Society (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp. 142-158. At the 20th Party Congress, where Khrushchev launched deStalinization, the party officially recognized the need to revitalize the soviets. "in order to raise decisively their role in economic and cultural development, in satisfying the everyday needs and requirements of the population, and in the cause of the communist training of the workers."

overcentralization. Decentralization, however, is a rather ambiguous concept. As Weissman noted in his study of nineteenth century reforms of local government, it can be understood as *deconcentration* (the transfer of authority from superior to subordinate administrative offices), or *devolution* (the transfer of administrative responsibility from the state bureaucracy to nonbureaucratic outside agencies, such as autonomous organs of self-government). While the administrative difficulties of central planning and the low quality of social and economic development in local communities led Moscow to recognize the need to transfer some decision-making responsibility to local organs, the issue of central control and the monopoly on power limited the number of alternatives to local reform. Thus, during subsequent decades, the idea of a qualified decentralization in economic and state administration animated various reform ideas - Moscow entertained little interest in decentralization in the sense of actual devolution of power, and instead promoted the deconcentration of decision-making away from Moscow, thus maintaining its ability to supervise and control. The unity of central power, in other words, remained inviolate. The many unsuccessful reforms of post Stalin Russia reflected this rather half-hearted approach towards decentralization.

The best example of the problems inherent in Soviet attempts at decentralization can be found in the case of the *sovnarkhoz* reforms of the Khrushchev era. These reforms were partly a political campaign against the power of central ministries, but also a shift towards the deconcentration of administration, hoping to move administration closer to productive forces. The deconcentration of authority thus was not directed against centralism per se, but, was intended to make central power more effective by enabling local officials to take local

conditions into account in implementing central policies in pursuit of centrally-defined goals. The reforms transferred authority over industrial enterprises from central ministries to the hands of the only other institutions with power at the oblast level - the party committees. But while the party was an organization beholden to central guidance, the consequences of the sovnarkhoz reforms made this "vanguard" organization more susceptible to the problems of Russia's center-local dynamic. In this manner, reforms increasingly exposed the party to the problems of center-periphery relations rather than resolve conflict between central and local interests. In trying to ignore the inevitability of conflict between universal and particular interests, Khushchev actually weakened his best agent of central power. Regional party secretaries increasingly responded to local needs and ignored many of the central directives and orders emanating from Moscow. Khushchev had counted on the national interest being defended by local party secretaries. But local secretaries were ultimately judged according to economic production in their respective locales.

Nove cites one minor example that symbolized this localist tendency. In Omsk, oblast party secretaries forbade soviet officials from obeying an order from Moscow to send trucks to assist transportation in a neighboring oblast. This example was cited in a party journal as an example of mestnichestvo (localism) - yet no attempt was made to ascertain whether or not the trucks were actually needed in Omsk, or whether the local party officials were justified in resisting central directives. Any such localist tendencies were routinely ruled as trespass.

Mestnichestvo (localism) was characterized as a troublesome pathology of administration,

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37 My thanks to Bill Tompson for his discussions on this matter.

rather than a legitimate expression of local interests. This was particularly true during the sovnarkhoz reforms. While the sovnarkhoz reforms were a step towards addressing regional problems in economic production, the main thrust of the reforms remained a matter of &quot;reorganizing central planning.&quot; Attention was given to the fact that some 3,400 enterprises were transferred from ministerial control to local soviets, and that the resurgence of soviet authority would help resolve many of the administrative problems restraining economic growth. Yet claims that the reforms would lead to the empowerment of local soviets were never realized. Cattell suggested that the sovnarkhoz reforms actually deprived local soviets of any further hope of assuming a significant role in local affairs. When Moscow tried to recover from the chaos caused by the sovnarkhoz reforms, central power was justified even more than before the reforms were instituted.

Decentralization thus ran up against the demands for central control. And Soviet leaders were unwilling to break beyond the notion that central power was required for the welfare of the state. Any manifestation of local authority in conflict with Moscow was considered trespass. Manifest in the practice of condemning any local advocacy against all-union (or &quot;general&quot;) interests. Mestnichestvo remained a censure that was used throughout the 1960's and 70's against alleged &quot;gross violations of state discipline&quot;.

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39 Ibid., pp. 198-199, 204.

40 See the editorial &quot;Novyi etap v razvitii i deiatelnosti sovetov deputatov trudiashchikhcia.&quot; in Sovetskoe gosudarstvo i pravo No. 3 (1959), pp. 3-12. Statistic on p.6. The enterprises transferred to local control were, not surprisingly, unprofitable.

41 David Cattell, &quot;Local Government and the Sovnarkhoz.&quot;

42 On mestnichestvo, see M. Katsuk and N. Onipko, &quot;Bor'ba s mestnichestvom.&quot; Sotsialisticheskaia zakonnost No. 11 (November, 1960), pp. 47-50.
the sovnarkhoz reforms and the inevitable conflict between local and central interests was equally true of subsequent efforts through the next three decades:

Localism, rivalry, and poor methods of planning were blamed for the (1957 reform) failure, but in fact these were only symptoms. The real cause was the refusal of the leadership to face up to the fundamental premises of a decentralized economy. The crucial questions which needed to be answered were 1) how to reconcile and delimit centralized planning with local initiative, and 2) how to change the incentive system to achieve the desired type of local initiative. The first question presents a troublesome dilemma. While local initiative and self-government is often an end in itself in a plural society, in a planned society with comprehensive and uniform goals such as the USSR, it is not clear how local government can be anything more than an instrument of the central planning authorities.43

Similar obstacles to decentralization surfaced throughout the Brezhnev era. The Kosygin reforms, for example, while theoretically more sound, were poorly implemented and obstructed by the interests of the Communist Party and central ministries. Local experiments in the latter years of the Brezhnev era, which increased the ability of local soviets to coordinate economic production, were also shelved. Although some of these experiments, such as those in Poti, were highly successful, central concern for the ‘dark shadow’ of mestnichestvo curbed any support from the center for further strengthening local power.44 Instead, weak attempts at deconcentration were the preferred approach to resolving the maladies of centralization. These attempts accomplished little because at their foundation they endorsed an organization of power antithetical to local government.

**Party Reform.** One of the primary tasks of the Communist Party was to monitor the affairs of local soviets. As noted above, however, local party organs usurped the responsibilities of

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43 Cattell, p. 440.
local soviets and became the *de facto* organs of local administration. In the post Stalin era, there were repeated attempts to reform this relationship. In January, 1957, for example, the Communist Party passed a resolution devoted to improving the work of the soviets. An ambitious document, the reform highlighted, in rather strong language for Soviet system, the various shortcomings of local soviets.

The most important questions in the practical work of the soviets are rarely brought before sessions for consideration. Many executive committees, heads of administrative departments, and directors of economic organizations are not being held accountable to the soviets, which results in an absence of supervision, and a weakening of the directing role of the soviets as the organ of state power at the local level. In many instances, sessions of the soviets limit themselves to discussions of minor questions, are conducted in a formalistic fashion, at times simply to parade forth approval of the draft decisions prepared by the executive committees. As a result, the sessions are conducted in a passive fashion; shortcomings and mistakes in the work of the soviet organs and of the executives are not criticized; proposals of the deputies often receive no attention, while those decisions which are adopted lack concreteness and are full of generalities.⁴⁵

The real irony in this regard, however, is that it was not the state or local communities pushing to reform local government, but representatives of the ruling party itself. Party leaders were aware of the difficulties of local government, and were trying to divest some of the responsibility for local affairs to local soviets and executive committees. But this divestiture did not really contain any transfer of power. Party organs were repeatedly encouraged to resist meddling in soviet affairs, but soviets were never given the authority and power to resist party interference. In short, party reform of local government was a mediocre attempt to have local party organs voluntarily monitor themselves more closely. The tenor of party reform concerning its relationship with local soviets changed little over subsequent

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decades, until Gorbachev's reforms in the late 1980's. As a consequence, soviets continued to perform very poorly in terms of economic development and production, social services, and in the development of local infrastructure.

Soviets were, of course, still chastised for their unsatisfactory work, and reprimanded for failing to resolve economic and social problems, and for their "lack of initiative". Tellingly, most of these reprimands were issued with a parallel need for corresponding local party organs to improve their party guidance. This conflict inherent in these reform attempts is manifest by a party resolution in 1971. The Central Committee noted with approval that the training of deputies had improved, and that local soviets were devoting "more attention" to local issues. Soviets, however, were again criticized for formalism in their work and for neglect in fulfilling their responsibilities. Party committees were again charged with petty tutelage, but were held responsible for improving the soviet's work. "There are still many cases of petty tutelage over soviets and of the usurpation of their function, and party decisions are often made on issues that are totally within the jurisdiction of soviets." There was a half-hearted attempt to boost the soviets by transferring some local enterprises to municipal and raion soviet control, which would boost the revenues from profit tax. But the bulk of responsibility was with the party: The resolution obliged "raion and city party committees to show daily concern for enhancing the role and authority of soviets, to support and develop their independence and initiative so that soviets bear full responsibility for the solution of questions that fall within their competence."40

The bottom line here is that as long as the party considered it its own responsibility to reform local government, then local government was doomed, because the party was part of the problem. What kind of real interest could the party have in fostering the strengthening of institutions outside the party? While podmena was a widely recognized problem in local government, the obvious solutions of actually restricting party involvement in local affairs was in contradiction to the role of the party as the nucleus of the political system. Any restriction would also curb the ability of the center to control local organs.

**Reforming the Soviets.** The third category of reform measures concerning local government emanated primarily from academics studying the problems of local government. The core of this category was the proposal to strengthen the authority and power of the legislative branch of local government, placing it above its own executive committee. Theoretically, of course, this was already the case. But the new advocacy to realize legislative control over the executive marked the beginnings of a return to the societal approach to self-government.

Beginning around 1962, and continuing for the next 4-5 years, numerous articles and books were published which advocated the strengthening of soviet power. Various proposals emerged. One such proposal was to encourage the activity of standing committees, formed to study and review particular policy areas, such as budget, education, health, economic development. As noted above, most standing committees rarely met, and possessed little expertise in their respective fields. Aside from their function as public complaint registries, they were little more than well-intentioned clubs that discussed legislation prior to its unanimous approval by the soviet. Reformers wanted standing committees to play more critical roles in the development of legislation, removing from the hands of executive
committees much of the background work and preparation of various proposals and solutions to local issues.47

Perhaps the most important reform proposal in this category was the idea to restore the office of presidium to conduct local soviet affairs. Phased out in the late 1920’s and 1930’s to effect greater central control through executive power, the restoration of presidia would theoretically generate increased organizational independence of the soviets and thus help soviets realize their constitutional rights. As it was, some executive committees routinely ignored their obligation to report to soviets.48 A presidium would be comprised of an elected chair, a deputy or two, plus the chairs of the various standing committees of the local soviet. This last provision would also facilitate the development and strengthening of standing committees in local government. Rather than rely upon executive committees to conduct most of the organizational work of the soviet, the soviet would now have control over its own affairs. There were even some practical experiments carried out in Irkutsk and Semipalatinsk city soviets, where presidia performed admirably as the organizational center for the city soviets.49 Yet presidia brought a new factor into the equation of local government, and there was some academic conflict concerning the proposed relationship between executive committees and presidia. The dilemma was phrased in the enduring

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47 A.Ia. Goncharov, "K voprosu o rasshirenii prav postoiannykh komissii." Sovetskoe gosudarstvo i pravo No.8 (1962), pp. 100-103; A.M. Zhilin, "Povyshenie roli mestnykh sovetov i razvitie obschestvennykh nachal v ikh rabote." Sovetskoe gosudarstvo i pravo No.5 (1966), pp. 56-64. In some soviets, there were concerted efforts to utilize standing committees, although these were the rare exception rather than the rule.

48 For an explanation on the move to phase out presidia, see Lepeshkin, Mestnye organy vlasti, pp. 43: 392-393. For more on the attempts to create presidia and reform executive-legislative relations, see A.M. Zhilin, "Povyshenie roli mestnykh sovetov," and V.F. Kotok, G.V. Nechiatilo, and P.G. Semenov, "Ob odnom iz pugei povyshenii roli sovetov." Sovetskoe gosudarstvo i pravo No.9 (1966), pp. 123-126.

49 Kotok, Nechiatilo and Semenov. "Ob odnom iz pugei".
Russian query of administration, *kto - kogo ?*, or "who (is accountable) to whom?". Some argued for presidia to be superior to ispolkomy, while others argued that they were distinct and thus could not be in positions of authority over one another.\(^5\) Resolving such an issue would necessitate a clear division of horizontal authority, something that conflicted with the unity of power and the center’s ability to control its use.

Other proposals that emerged were calls for higher calibre deputies,\(^5\) and for the creation of clearer and more concise legislation regarding the authority of local soviets. spelling out precisely what soviets at various levels "could decide without reference to other state organs (higher soviets, lower soviets, executive committees)."\(^5\) Yet even these advocates did not cross any explicit lines concerning a violation of the unitary system of soviets, and the concept remained sacred. Also advocated was the elevation of the status of people’s deputies, granting them more authority as public plenipotentiaries. This latter proposal led to new legislation regarding deputies in 1972.\(^5\)

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\(^5\) The calls for increased training and diligence among deputies occurred repeatedly through the Soviet period, up to and including the time of Gorbachev. Compare, for example, the similarity between two documents 23 years apart: the party resolution "O rabote mestnykh Sovetov Deputatov Trudiashchikhsia Poltavskoi Oblasti," in *Partiiniia Zhizn’* No.23 (December 1965), pp. 16-19; and the declaration by the presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the RSFSR, "O rabote Tavricheskogo raionnogo Soveta Narodykhk Deputatov Omskoi oblasti po vypolneniiu reshenii IXI vsesoiuznoi konferentsii KPSS o dal’neishi demokratizatsii obshchestvennoi zhizni, glasnosti, bor’be s biurokratizmom i sobliudeniiu zakonnosti," *Vedomosti verkhovnogo soveta RSFSR* No.6 (9 February 1989), pp. 91-94.

\(^5\) Hill discusses this work by Sheremet in his article "Local Government since Stalin."

\(^5\) See *Ibid.*; and A. I. Lukyanov. *Razvitie zakonodatel’stvo sovetskikh predstavitel’nykh organakh vlasti* (Moscow: 1978) for detailed discussion of legislative development under Brezhnev. Hahn points out that while most of the reformist legislation emerged under Brezhnev, it was rooted in the Khrushchev period. See his "Evolution of Local Soviets."
Conclusion

Through the decades after Stalin, there were concerted efforts among academics to establish local soviets as authoritative institutions with important roles to play in local government. Yet in spite of the plethora of reform ideas from academics and reams of resolutions and legislation passed by institutions of various levels, the actual effect of all these reform efforts was limited. That is not to say that they were entirely useless: reforms did boost the amount of budgetary funds transferred from the center to local soviets, for example, and calls for increased activism from local soviets did not always fall on deaf ears. But the critical point is that there was no real progress in terms of the distribution of power. Local soviets lacked any real autonomous power. There may have been agreement concerning the need for promoting the role of local soviets in local government, but there was no widespread consensus among those institutions which already possessed power. In this sense, the process of reform was sterile. Legitimate ideas for reform were watered down as they passed through party organizations and were reviewed by central ministries. The language of legislation was therefore restricted to normative proposals: soviets possessed the "right" to "introduce" proposals in economic planning; they "might" utilize such and such an authority; they were "obligated" to take care of such an issue, and so on. This was why the 1977 Constitution discussed local soviets in much greater detail than the earlier rendition - in trying to elevate the soviets with more exact definition of their authority, the regime was trying to compensate for the fact that soviets possessed no "levers" or administrative power to actually fulfill their
detailed authorities. As a consequence, reform efforts in the post Stalin period resembled Starr's description of local reform during the nineteenth century: bureaucratic formalism became a substitute for a much needed organization of power.

Years later, in introducing Union legislation for the reform of local soviets during perestroika, one scholar stated that all deputies had witnessed the passing of numerous resolutions devoted towards strengthening the authority of local soviets. But not one of these resolutions was successful, because there was no mechanism for the realization of soviet power. More concisely, there was, throughout these decades of reform proposals, a gaping deficit of institutional support for substantive reform - power could not be given to local soviets without curbing the power of other institutions. Party organs and central ministries thus had little vested interest in supporting the strengthening of local soviets as the core of local governments.

If reforms failed to alter the real plight of local soviets and local governments in general, the official position regarding local soviets overlooked these shortcomings and claimed that soviets continued to represent all that was virtuous and praiseworthy in socialist self-government. One Soviet author, I.A. Azovkin, critiqued the mistaken notion in the West of local soviets as mere "transmission belts" from the center to local communities. He

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44 Konstantin Sheremet, in "Konstitusia SSSR i razvitie sotsialistichestoi demokratii." Sovetskoie gosudarstvo i pravo No.10 (1982) claimed that the Brezhnev constitution would expand the role of local soviets as venues for public participation. His arguments, however, are unconvincing. While the constitution and subsequent laws on local soviets widened the scope of activities, and provided more detail, they provided no actual change in the real power exercised by soviets. In short, legislation may have expanded legal competence, but did not expand the power of soviets to act on their functions, particularly regarding their relationships with enterprises subordinate to ministries and to party organs. On later legislation, see Zakon SSSR, "Ob osnovnykh polnomocach kraevykh, oblastnych Sovetov Narodnykh Deputatov, Sovetov Narodnykh Deputatov avtonomnykh oblastei i avtonomnykh okrugov." Vedomosti verkhovnogo soveta SSSR No.27 (2 July 1980), pp. 501-521; and the follow up Zakon RSFSR, "O kraevom, oblastnom Sovete Narodnych Deputatov RSFSR." Vedomosti verkhovnogo soveta RSFSR No.48 (27 November 1980), pp. 1047-75.

recognized that such judgements were at least partially valid when reviewing the period of excessive centralization (Stalin), and allowed that some negative consequences of this period unfortunately persisted through the 1960's. But, in Azovkin's opinion, such stereotypes ignored the constructive role played by local soviets. There was too much focus on whether or not soviets possessed the power to resolve local issues, and not enough attention was given to the role they played in strengthening the "practical participation" in general state affairs.\(^5\) Azovkin's suggestion was that soviets were critical in helping to assert the universal interest, the interest of the center, or even the convergence of central and local interests. Yet he ignored the fact that unless local soviets possessed some opportunity to "go their own way," or defy the universal interest, then the alleged convergence of interests was based solely on the overpowering dominance of central institutions rather than any imagined voluntary convergence.

Essentially, this was the fate of Russian local government under Brezhnev. In spite of early efforts to reform local government to play a more meaningful role in Soviet politics, by the 1970's there was a tacit concession that substantive reform would be too difficult and too disruptive to the entire political system. So, Brezhnev merely tried to wish local soviets into a more meaningful existence: actually existing socialism found harmony with actually existing local self-government. "Local soviets," he stated,

> are the highest organs of state power on their territory, the master (khoziain) of the city or village. And the soviet should be a good, zealous khoziain. Its duty is to think and take care of all, to do everything so that the people might live, work and rest better. And if the soviet manifests the necessary initiative and industriousness, then it will be valued by its electors. We are talking, of course, of healthy, thoughtful

initiatives, and not about those which manifest mestnichestvo to the detriment of all state interests.⁵⁷

As three decades of post-Stalin Soviet Russia drew to a close, Moscow had accomplished very little in terms of improving the weakness of its penetration to local territories. Public legitimacy of state organs waned, corruption in administration and economic production grew, and the fate of local government reflected the failure of the Soviet regime to effectively devolve any political power away from the center. Moscow continually danced around the issue of local government reform, teasing, tempting, but never quite taking the plunge towards local power.

CHAPTER FOUR:
DEMOCRATIZATION AND THE COLLAPSE OF CENTRAL RULE

The Gorbachev era was dominated by ill-fated but well-intentioned economic, social and political reform. By the time Gorbachev came to power, the Soviet Union faced a variety of impending crises, in terms of economic production, in terms of public apathy and anomie, and in terms of bureaucratic sclerosis. The approach of the late Brezhnev era, to merely stick one's head in the sand and pretend that the Soviet Union was developing as planned, was no longer an option. Fundamental reform was necessary, and political reform, particularly of state administration, had become a prerequisite for radical economic and social reforms. As one soviet author suggested, the need for administrative reform was mandated by the fact that the existing system could not satisfy the new demands for economic production.

In the early years of Gorbachev's leadership, soviets once again were identified as a potential source for improving state administration. Initially the focus was on central agencies supporting local soviets in their various conflicts with Union and republic ministries. With central help, it was argued, local soviets could assume a more effective role in economic production, in efficient management of resources, improve the coordination of supplies,

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2 D.D. Tsabriia, Sistema upravleniia (Moscow: 1990). In contrast to Tsabriia's economic determinism, Ron Hill pointed out that society outgrew the administrative system and thus demanded increased opportunities for participation. See his "Party-State Relations and Soviet Political Development." British Journal of Political Science 10 (1980).
resolve housing shortages, and foster the growth of technical schools and health care. Yet the success of local soviets in conflict with ministries proved to be more the exception than the rule. And it was apparent that soviet power would have to become more than a mere ornament to foster economic production. More radical administrative reform was required.

The critical questions were: how could the administrative system become more accountable?; how could public legitimacy be strengthened?; how could corruption and inertia be overcome?; and how could the system give more consideration to the so called "human factor"? One solution for many of these problems was the idea of self-government, which by the mid 1980's began to make a sort of conceptual comeback. Self-government was heralded not only by academics, but also by workers, community groups, and the mainstream press as a much needed solution to many of the ills plaguing Soviet society and economic production. Self-government, it was argued, could serve as a panacea for the ills of bureaucracy and increase the accountability of administration. It would increase democratic norms and behaviour in society, foster public interest and participation, and serve as a vital link between state and society.

Perhaps the first realm for the realization of democratization was found in the factories. The Law on State Enterprises, which came into effect in January 1988, mandated

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1 S.V. Solov'eva, Sovety narodnykh deputatov i uskorenie sotsial'no-ekonomicheskogo razvitiia (Moscow: 1989).

2 Izvestiia 16 February 1988. See also V.I. Karpov et al., Organizatsionnaia rabota mestnykh sovetov: resery vysheniia effektivnosti (Moscow: 1988) p. 3.

the election of councils by worker collectives (STK). These STKs would monitor the
directorship of the enterprise and were a modest step towards infusing worker input in
economic management. Originally recommended in the June 1987 plenum of the Central
Committee, many workers' councils were already in place even before the law took effect.
This early democratization, however, was not without birthing pains and numerous such
councils were stillborn. Party organs and enterprise directors routinely interfered in
nominations and elections. In Tambov, for example, the only two candidates for the chair of
one STK were the enterprise director and his assistant. The latter withdrew his candidacy to
endorse the director, who was elected by acclamation and then chaired the very council
intended to monitor his leadership of the enterprise. In those instances where local party
organs were unsuccessful in manipulating elections in labour councils and social
organizations, the relationships between them were strained and marked by conflict. STKs
critical of enterprise leadership and resistant to party interference were criticized for lacking
the requisite experience and professionalism, which foreshadowed the fate of local soviets
elected two years later. Nonetheless, pushed strongly from above, democratization continued
and led to screened multi-candidate elections in party organs and various social organizations.

This push for democratization was not limited to economic and social organizations.
Critical to the success of democratization was the extension of elections to all levels of
administration and government. Soviets and self-government thus became parts of the core of

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8 Sovetskaia torgovlia 10 March 1988; Sovetskaia Sibir' 29 December 1988.
Gorbachev's campaign for political restructuring. The Leninist slogans of 1917 were quickly dusted off and regained currency - "All power to the soviets!" became the battlecry for political reform.

How could soviet power be achieved? In 1987, a commission was formed by the Politburo to examine the question of local government, to detail the problems and recommend possible solutions. The commission reportedly included such leaders as Chairman of the Kazakhstan Council of Ministers Nursultan Nazarbaev and Central Committee member Anatolii Lukyanov, both later named to the Politburo, and specialists in local government such as Konstantin Sheremet. As well, various academic groups held smaller round table discussions on the subject. By the end of 1987, the topic was a well known issue among those involved in political reforms. Ideas for soviet reform were predominantly based upon the many earlier proposals that had circulated through the 1960s: promote the legislative function of the soviet over the executive, strengthen the role of standing committees, improve soviet relations with local social organizations, extend the constitutional and legal rights of soviets, boost the role of deputies, and increase the authority of soviets to monitor and control enterprises and executive authority. Indeed, the various ideas that circulated in academic journals and the popular press were nothing new, in spite of increased attention and the hype of reform under Gorbachev.

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* From personal interview with K. F. Sheremet, November 1992

These discussions in 1987-88 were more relevant than those of the 1960s, however, because of full endorsement from prominent Soviet leaders. By mid 1988, the decision had been taken within the ruling circles of the Party to open all state organs to multicandidate elections, and democratize the whole of administration, from union to village. The "May Theses," published as a reform platform for the 19th party conference, included a call for democratic elections and for the restructuring of soviets to free them from party and ministerial branch tutelage. This was a bold step, even more so in hindsight than it appeared at the time. Limited experiments in various constituencies had been held in 1987, and were deemed to be successful enough that local elections would become part of the local political landscape. Explaining the decision at the 19th party conference in the summer of 1988, Gorbachev noted that "the competition enlivened the elections, stepped up the voters' interest in them, and increased the deputies' sense of responsibility."11

In addition to elections, the reform platform included provisions for revamping executive-legislative relations and for the creation of presidia at oblast, city and raion level soviets. The proposals were met at the conference with some concern, which influenced Gorbachev to back pedal and announce that local party secretaries should be elected as chairmen of the presidia, ensuring the Party the opportunity of working through the soviets. In addition to the chairman’s tasks as first party secretary, the chairman would head the soviet and its presidium, and properly organize the work of the soviet

11 Izvestiya 23 May 1988. In a personal interview, Georgii Barabashev claimed that among the leadership, Aleksandr Yakovlev and Anatolii Lukyanov were the two strongest advocates of reforming local government, including democratization of the soviets and strengthening soviet power. Personal interview. September, 1992.

sessions and permanent deputy commissions and thus influence all matters, and keep under daily control the activities of the ispolkom and its services. The main thing which will be demanded of the chairman is to be the generator of ideas, to constantly provide the necessary impetus for the entire work of the soviet and its deputies.13

This proposal was rife with contradictions. In short, Gorbachev proposed to strengthen local soviets by strengthening the party’s leadership. Yet party secretaries would be exposed to direct public pressure and public ballots, although only when they wore their alternative hat as chairman of the presidium.

After the platform was endorsed by the conference, working groups were set up to draft amendments to the Soviet constitution and to write a new law on elections. Published in the fall of 1988, the amendments represented the first real fruits of local government reform under Gorbachev. They established the principles for the separation of executive and legislative bodies, asserted the prestige of standing committees, set the table for the formation of presidia, and called for open democratic elections.14 But the amendments did not include the detailed provisions necessary for these principles to be realized. Such details were to follow in subsequent legislation.15 A new election law also established procedures and rules for open, multicandidate elections, with local electoral commissions to coordinate and monitor the electoral process.16 But the details for the restructuring of local soviets took more effort.

Elections to republic and local soviets, originally intended to be held throughout the Union in

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14 At the national level, the amendments called for a new Congress of People’s Deputies, with direct elections for 1,500 of the 2,250 seats. Amendments can be found in Izvestia 3 December 1988.

15 Some Union deputies expressed concern in the Supreme Soviet over the nature of these as yet unknown details. See Pravda 1.2 December 1988.

16 Izvestia 2 December, 1988.
the fall of 1989. were postponed in Russia and most other republics until the spring of 1990 because the necessary legislation was not ready. The background of this legislation is critical to any chronicle of local government reform.

In July, 1988, the same time that committees were formed to ready the constitutional amendments, the plenum of the Communist Party Central Committee proposed that specialists prepare a draft law on local self-government to provide the required legislation. The mandate of the legislation was to strengthen self-government, self-financing, the coordination of regional interests with all-state interests, and improve connections of local soviets with enterprises and collective farms, STKs, and social groups. The draft project became a golden opportunity for reform minded academics to push for the realization of their various "pet" proposals. During the next year, this draft project became a veritable battleground for various notions of what local government should be. The controversies and disputes reflected all the earlier concerns over the development of local government in Russia and the Soviet Union. There was agreement that soviets should play stronger roles in government and administration, and that soviets could become such if they received more autonomy from higher levels of government, if they possessed more control over their own budgets, and agenda, and if they could exercise greater control over local enterprises. But there was little consensus on how each of these points should be developed. Discussion concerning the creation of a new system for local budgets, for example, was strongly influenced by the Union Ministry of Finance, which rejected any development of local budget autonomy.

Economic ministries were likewise adverse to transferring any authority over economic

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enterprises to local soviets. Neither was there any agreement on the conceptual basis of local soviets. without which the draft could be developed. Were local soviets to remain as organs of state power? Or become the foundation for local self-government? Could the two concepts be merged, or were they mutually incompatible? Even the term mestnyi was questioned - whether it should refer to anything above the level of village and neighbourhood communities. One participant in an academic roundtable suggested that two distinct laws should be developed; one law on socialist self-government, and another devoted to the authority of local soviets. Another academic argued that any development of self-government required true decentralization, which could be measured only by the increase in horizontal and vertical relations of power and subordination.

One point was established clearly: that the new law needed to be more than just a statement of general ideas. The failure of the many legislative acts of previous decades, noted one, was that they all teemed with general declarations but lacked concrete measures to guarantee any real strengthening of the role of local soviets in local communities. Academics involved in the draft project were soon joined by a surge of interest that emerged from local soviets, and by representatives from advocacy groups for municipal government, such as the newly formed Association of Siberian Cities. These representatives were hopeful that the new law would strengthen the material resources and revenues available to soviets, thus decreasing local reliance on republic and union organs. The draft, declared one

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18 Ibid.
20 "K razrabotke proekta."
municipal official, would be "the kind of law for which local soviet workers have waited for years."\textsuperscript{21} The debates among representatives from the center and those from below continued through the spring of 1989, when the project was transferred to the USSR Supreme Soviet Committee for Issues Concerning the Work of Soviets of People's Deputies, and the Development of Administration and Self-Government, newly formed in May of 1989, after Union elections to the Congress. The committee was led by N.D. Pivovarev.\textsuperscript{22}

The transfer proved to be a positive development for advocates of local soviet power. In the new committee local advocates could push more strongly for local autonomy and non-statist self-government, and the legislative committee infused a measure of dynamism into the legislative project. Many of the Union deputies who worked on the legislative committee for the development of the union law had been elected from local constituencies, and were involved in administrative positions in local institutions. And although there had been fairly effective screening processes through which candidates had to pass in order to be elected in the 1989 elections, the degree of local representation in Pivovarev's committee was much stronger than had been the case when the committee worked under the auspices of the Central Committee.

It would be erroneous, however, to think that the draft project was controlled by advocates of local government. In spite of the new initiative by local advocates, there remained significant opposition to any increase of local power, based on the danger it might

\textsuperscript{21} Vostochno-Sibirskaiapravda 29 December 1988.

\textsuperscript{22} The Committee was called the Komitet po Voprosam Raboty Sovetov Narodnykh Deputatov, Razvitiia Upravleniia i Samoupravleniia (Committee for Issues of Soviets of People’s Deputies and Development of Administration and Self-Government). In March 1991, it changed its name to the Komitet po gosudarstvennomu stroitel’stvu (Committee for State Building).
pose to the center. Opposition came from a variety of sources, including deputies in the newly elected Congress, central ministries, and various local party organs. One Union deputy from Rostov, in an address to the Congress in May 1989 on the problems of local budgets and governments, echoed the centuries-old concern of state unity when he suggested that any rise in local power would inevitably fracture state power:

As soon as we grant local soviets real power, we will see manifestations of mestnichestvo and attempts to drag our state down into pieces. Our role here as People's Deputies is not to allow this, but to rise above local interests, important though they may be.23

In the end, when the Union law finally emerged in April 1990, it reflected the disparate interests involved in its creation. And the hopes that local politicians had entertained for a radical new law that would finally empower local governments were not realized. Instead the law expressed a timidity towards the emergence of local government autonomy, and a proclivity towards maintaining much of the foundation of the Soviet legacy towards local government. The Union law thus represented a stalemate over principles instead of a finished piece of legislation. Each Union republic was to follow with more detailed pieces of legislation. In spite of attempts in the draft to distinguish authority among various levels of soviets, such as the inclusion of municipal property and self-government at levels below the oblast, the final version of the law still explicitly referred to the time-honored approach of soviet power as links connected in one great chain of unitary state power. While many of those involved in the project had laboured diligently to strengthen the independence of local budgets, the Ministry of Finance successfully rallyed at the last to protect its authority

to establish norms and rates for local taxes and to maintain the existing process of budget formation. The Ministry rejected the proposal to allow local soviets to independently formulate local budgets and Valentin Pavlov defended his ministry’s authority to raise revenue. And in spite of some good intentions towards strengthening local soviet control over local enterprises, there were no appreciable gains in this regard.

Still, the success of the law was that it was a stalemate rather than a defeat for advocates of local self-government. Many of the unresolved battles concerning separation of executive and legislative power, local budgets and the vertical demarcation of power would be fought again at the republic level, as each republic designed its own laws. As one Soviet scholar had noted earlier, the overall spirit of the local government reform was "the conservation of a number of specific features of the soviets justified by historical experience and the simultaneous combination of several elements of the parliamentary representative system acceptable to us." On the obstacles to the development of local government, a participant in the drafting of the legislation concluded that one needed to recognize the reality that this new law was mandated from above, and thus would reflect central interests above local demands. Indeed, the Union law was not intended to develop local self-government, but instead intended to improve local administration. Local power was endorsed by the center
only in as much as it increased the power of the center. Any attempts to weaken the principle of dual subordination were frustrated by those central interests that endorsed the principle as a requirement for effective central control. Measures to heighten the autonomy of local governments were encumbered with vague and fudgy terminology. Indeed, the concept of the unitary system of soviets, from top to bottom, remained sacrosanct. And in spite of the renewed advocacy for societal self-government, the statist conceptual framework remained. As another Soviet scholar described, the Union law represented the dawn of a new age in local government, but carried the birthmarks of the totalitarian state.

Local Elections and the Return of Smuta

The Union law provided a shaky foundation for the significant reform in local administration that followed. Even before the law was finished, Soviet leaders declared that multi-candidate elections for all republic and local soviets would be held. These elections were intended as a panacea for the many enduring problems of local administration and government. Instead, however, they sounded a veritable death knell for the Soviet regime. The ultimate consequence of Gorbachev's restructuring was thus the breakdown, then collapse, of the entire political-administrative system in the Soviet Union.

In Russia, these local elections were held in the spring of 1990, and were much bigger

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25 Later, the Union government clarified this fudginess in October of 1990 with a new law obliging the obedience of lower soviets to higher ones.

wildcards than Union elections, held the previous year. The Union elections had galvanized nascent anti-establishment movements. Introduced local constituencies to the possibility (and, in some cases, the reality) of alternative leadership, and altered the status of People's Deputies. Public perceptions shifted away from the deputy's previous role as plenipotentiary towards that of political representative and political leader, with identifiable ideas and goals. While many local constituencies were heavily manipulated by the local nomenklatura, particularly in rural areas, urban centers returned large numbers of often radical, often unpredictable, certainly anti-establishment deputies. Gorbachev's reformers had hoped that such elections would revitalize the local soviets, and inject not only public legitimacy, but also reformist values in the enervated organs of local administration. The consequences, however, were quite unexpected: local soviets, elected under slogans of "all power to the soviets!" now demanded the upper hand over their executives, ignored and attacked local party committees, and launched attacks against large enterprises. In short, by promoting the role of local soviets, reforms disrupted the entire system of local governance that had dominated Russia since the 1920's.

As an example of these developments, let us look at the consequences of elections in Omsk in 1990. There were 13 seats contested in the oblast for the republic Congress. All urban seats failed to declare a winner in the first round, since nobody received a clear majority of votes. Among those eventually elected were Sergei Baburin, who has since established himself as a leader of the patriotic right, and V.A. Varnavskii, the then respected first secretary of the city party committee. In contrast, all the rural seats elected members of

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31 See, for example, the discussion in Vechernii Omsk 4 December 1989.
the *nomenklatura* on the first round, including Anatolii Leont’ev, the former chairman of the executive committee of the oblast soviet, and then current first secretary of the oblast party committee. All in all, the party did not fair too badly. Leonid Polezhaev, the new chairman of the oblast executive committee and Yurii Glebov, former chairman of the city executive committee, both lost their elections in urban ridings. But so did a few prominent "democratic" candidates.32

Some 638 candidates contested the 250 seats in the oblast soviet. Numerous rounds were required - a second round was held in late March, with two more in April and one in May. The electoral turnout declined with each round: initial turnout was between 80-90%, declining to 60-70% in April, with some constituencies falling as low as 31%. By May, the media seemed reluctant to cover results, merely listing those elected. In some instances, deputies were elected without majority support. N.I. Shkedrov, for example, was finally declared the victor in okrug No.58. Of 8,149 eligible voters, 6,902 ballots had been cast: 2,930 for Shkedrov, 3,895 against. His last opponent had received 2,295 for, 4,530 against.33 Although runoffs were not finished until May, the first session of the new oblast soviet opened in April, with 43 seats still vacant (at least 36 from the city), and about 70% of its deputies from the nomenklatura. The number of vacant urban seats helped Leont’ev win election as chair of the soviet. On the issue of allowing the obkom first secretary to serve as the chair, 115 voted for, 82 against. Of the 115, 95 were from rural ridings, only 20 from the

32 *DemokratscheskiiOmsk* No. 6 (June 1990). In Glebov’s case, he received only 7% of the vote. *Omskaia pravda* 8 March 1990.

33 *Omskaia pravda* 9 May 1990.
city. Of the 82 opposed, 65 were from the city, 17 from rural areas.34

City elections were more dynamic than those for the obsoviet, animated not only by a better election campaign waged by the gorkom, but also by a stronger front from the democratic movement. The first session in April had 164 elected deputies, and Varnavskii was elected chair, winning 92 votes. He accepted, however, the pressure from democratic deputies to appoint the runner up, Ryzhenko (a democrat), as deputy chair. Although Varnavskii was the incumbent chair of the gorsoviet and first secretary of the gorkom, he quickly won strong support from many of the democrats for his fair play and effective leadership. This support served to stabilize city soviet politics and foster cooperation. By May the full 200 deputies were elected, of which only 20% were incumbents.35 40% were "conservatives", 40% were "democrats" (although both groups were broad coalitions), and the remaining 20% were independents in the true sense of the word - loose cannons, without solidarity to one side or the other.36

Local Elections and the Reorganization of Power

Local elections left much more than changes in personnel. They fundamentally altered the political landscapes of the communities in which they were held. Two such changes warrant detailed discussion: the rapid decline of the Communist Party; and the high expectations for the newly elected soviets. The consequences of these changes are discussed

34 Ibid.
35 Interview with A.N. Kostiukov, chairman of the City Electoral Commission, and professor of law at Omsk State University.
36 DemokraticheskiiOmsk No.7 1990. These figures were supported by prominent officials in the city soviet.
with reference to developments in Omsk.

**The Party:** At the crux of the issue regarding soviet power was the fact that prior to elections, local political authority and power resided with local party organizations. Soviets had never been authoritative legislative chambers, and were woefully prepared for their new role. Local party organs maintained and controlled many of the organizational skills, expertise, and resources that the soviets lacked. The gorkom appeared to endorse the transfer of authority to the city soviet, but this may have been a function of Varnavskii’s unchallenged and astute leadership of both. Immediately after Union elections in 1989, the gorkom, for example, had drafted a local election platform that promised new methods of party work, full power to the soviets, democratization of the party, and professed a willingness to fully support the electoral process, including voter clubs and initiative groups.

In the oblast party committee (obkom), the Party suffered first from a lame duck leader preparing for retirement, and then a succession of first secretaries that limited the influence of the obkom. Pokhitailo stepped down in December of 1989, and was succeeded by Leont’ev, the chairman of the oblast executive committee. Leont’ev was later elected chairman of the oblast soviet, and, as noted, won enough support in the soviet to maintain his party post. Due, however, to constant criticism from both within and without the party, he

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37 Important to note here that the city party committee had no small history of conflict with the oblast party committee. This conflict, however, was mediated within the party apparatus.

38 Vechernii Omsk 28 December 1989. At the gorkom plenum following the Union elections in 1989, party leaders emphasized that soviets were the new powers, and that the party had to learn to work through them. One astute secretary sounded the alarm: there could be no holiday between elections, and unless the party was capable of influencing soviet work through political persuasion and the strength of its policies, the party’s role would cease to exist. The complete restructuring of party work was necessary for party survival. Vechernii Omsk 29 May 1989. The obkom was also trying to redefine its role, although more in keeping with the party’s traditional vanguard role. See "Ob osnovnykh napravleniiakh raboty Omskoi oblastnoi partiinoi organizatsii v sovremennoi politicheskoi situatsii." Omskaja pravda 5 January 1990.
gave up his party post in September of 1990. It was filled temporarily by N.V. Zhuravlev, who lost the subsequent election for first secretary of the obkom two months later to Nazarov, one of six candidates. Nazarov, a Union deputy and former raion party committee first secretary, was to quit his new post and the Party in July of 1991. These rapid changes in leadership (four obkom leaders in nineteen months) represented the turmoil within the party and its rapid decline of political authority.

In the summer of 1990 the oblast party organization underwent serious restructuring in an attempt to compensate for declining membership and revenues and increased expenditures (subsidies to lower organizations). The "new" obkom had 90 employees, down from 125. And instead of 695 employees at the city and raion levels, the slimmed down organization had 348. More symptomatic, however, was the breakdown of Party unity. Delegates to the oblast party conference in June of 1990 advocated a variety of policy positions and priorities - from the formation of the (very conservative) Russian Communist Party, to the decentralization of central authority, and increased power for Primary Party Organizations. Also advocated were the transfer of power from party to soviet, the increased accountability of officials, a stronger role for labour collectives, and acceptance of inner party opposition. All were contentious issues. That the party organization had elected alternative candidates for Party and government posts had allowed fissures to appear within the party, which soon


40 Gorkom workers numbered between 16 and 24, city raiony 10-11, rural raiony 8-9.

41 Omskaia pravda 2 October 1990

42 Omskaia pravda 2 June 1990. The biggest schism was between those advocating a Russian Communist Party, and those representing the democratic platform of the CPSU. DemokraticheskiiOmsk No.7 (July) 1990.
widened to fractures that divided the once united organization. About the only point of agreement at the obkom Party conference in June was that the concept of party unity was dead.\textsuperscript{43}

Also at issue was the role that party member deputies should play within the soviets. In April of 1991 the obkom issued a \textit{postanovlenie} to help Communist deputies understand their new role.\textsuperscript{44} The postanovlenie recognized that soviets were the main organs of state power, but called for members to form strong party groups within these soviets. Nazarov pointed out that a majority of people's deputies were party members, and that in order to "realize public hopes", these deputies had to ensure that they coordinated their efforts and became strong, active representatives of public interests. The party organization had to adapt and develop as a parliamentary party, with effective information and analysis, and assist its deputies with their speeches and committee work.\textsuperscript{45} In spite of these attempts to adjust, however, the "vanguard" party was really at a loss in terms of redefining its role, and soon resorted to polling deputies of all levels to see how they thought the party could play a more constructive role.\textsuperscript{46} Many new deputies, owing their allegiance to the electorate rather then their party, routinely ignored party directives, and others simply left the party altogether.\textsuperscript{47} The junior editorial staff of \textit{Vechernii Omsk} the joint newspaper of the city party committee

\textsuperscript{41} \textit{Omskaia pravda} 2 June 1990.

\textsuperscript{42} "O rabote kommunistov v sovetakh Narodnykh Deputatov" \textit{Omskaia pravda} 16 April 1991.

\textsuperscript{43} \textit{Omskaia pravda} 16 April 1991

\textsuperscript{44} \textit{Omskaia pravda} 29 March 1991

\textsuperscript{45} One of the deputies of the RSFSR Congress, Lotkov, announced he was leaving the party in August 1990. He was followed by a few other deputies from the oblast and city soviets. \textit{Demokraticheskii Omsk} No.10 (August) 1990.
and the city soviet, also bolted from the party.

In short, after the elections, local party organs were only a shadow of their former selves. As thousands turned in or failed to renew their party cards, the vanguard was left without many of its more intelligent and progressive members. The remnants of the Omsk oblast party organization was dominated by "hardliners" and pensioners, and its agenda began to reflect that of an opposition party. It loudly criticized both oblast and city soviets for the lack of apartment construction and poor hospital care, in spite of the fact that, as an organization, it claimed a majority of deputies in both.\textsuperscript{48} Nazarov appealed for greater party unity, suggesting that the rising chaos in Omsk and the country was a direct result of the disintegration of the party, but his appeals fell on deaf ears.\textsuperscript{49} The consequences of this party breakdown were both a blessing and a curse for local soviets. On the one hand, \textit{podmena} of soviet functions by corresponding party organs was over. But on the other hand, the glue that had held the Soviet administrative system together for decades crumbled without the emergence of a viable alternative system of administration. The slogans that were routinely chanted throughout the country, of "All power to the Soviets!" were incapable of providing those same soviets with the power necessary for them to play meaningful roles in local affairs.

\textbf{The New Soviets:} Prior to elections, the soviets themselves had no power. They had limited political authority, no independent resources, and little institutional order. They were without status, without means, and without legitimacy. Elections in 1990 endowed them with a

\textsuperscript{48} \textit{Omskaia pravda} 20 March 1991.

\textsuperscript{49} \textit{Omskaia pravda} 16 April 1991.
measure of public legitimacy, but that in itself was woefully insufficient. And at a time that soviets were supposed to become stronger organs of popular power the independent financial resources of most local soviets actually became weaker. In 1989, for example, the Russian Republic had stepped in to assist oblast economic subsidies in Omsk that had ballooned out of control. with 85 million rubles additional to budgeted transfers. In 1990, however, the republic refused to increase its transfers, forcing oblast budget cuts totalling 4%. Union law had attempted to strengthen local budget revenues by having union-republic enterprises pay directly into local budgets, but the sharp decline in enterprise profits provided no real revenue for Omsk oblast. By 1991 oblast revenues were increasingly reliant on transfers from the republic budget - 811 million rubles of a total of 2.54 billion rubles, or 32%, up from 5.6% the previous year. But what the republic gave with one hand, it partially took back with the other. Reciprocal payments from oblast to republic were 10.7 million rubles in 1990 (about 1.5% of total expenditures). but mushroomed to 233 million in 1991 (10% of total).

An example of the post election frustration concerning a lack of political power is found in environmental policy. Many of the deputies to local soviets, particularly those identified with the democrats, had made the environment a dominant part of their election platform. They were eager to fulfill their promises and exercise their new political power. By August of 1990, only 4 months after the elections, the Omsk oblast and city soviets held a joint session devoted entirely to environmental concerns in an attempt to develop common

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50 "Ob ispolnenii byudzheti Omskoi oblasti na 1 Yanvaria 1990 goda": "Ob ispolnenii byudzheti Omskoi oblasti na 1 Yanvaria 1991 goda; both documents from the Omsk Oblast Administration's Executive Committee. Also, from an interview with G.V. Bun'kov, financial administrator for Omsk oblast administration, 4 June 1992.

51 Ibid.
ground and pursue united goals. Most crucial was the issue of exercising soviet authority over large union-republic enterprises. Motivation came, in part, from the planned construction of a large factory in the city by a union enterprise. The question, for the deputies, was not whether or not there would be a factory, but whether or not soviets possessed any real power. Local soviets had enjoyed legal authority over environmental issues since the early 1980's, but lacked the forcefulness and the political power necessary to pass and implement effective decisions.

The oblast and city soviets passed legislation that effectively blamed the sorry state of Omsk's environment on poor administration. There had been, it was pointed out, an absence of correlation among various local inspectorates, poor attention from executive and legislative organs and from local enterprises. The legislation included 28 measures: including full recognition to the crisis situation, and a declaration that Omsk was a zone of ecological disaster. The two soviets formed a joint standing commission to coordinate environmental issues, which would deal with industries, construction, land use and natural resources. The commission would be funded by deducting payments to the Union budget of union-republic enterprise profits greater than 12% until 1995. The money would be used to finance ecological measures, compensation and public health. Omsk would also request republic and union ministries to retool their enterprises, especially those most guilty of environmental pollution. That the newly elected soviets were willing to confront the center so quickly suggests that the deputies were eager to carry through on their election promises. That the

52 Omskaja pravda 23 August 1990.

53 Decision of Omsk Oblast and Omsk City Soviets "Ob ekologicheskoj obstanovke v oblasti i neotloznykh merakh po ee ozdorovleniui" Omskaja pravda 14 September 1990.
issue was relatively "safe" (ie. who would oppose environmental protection?) made it a judicious issue on which the soviets could "cut their teeth".

The early promise of soviet work, however, quickly subsided. By March of 1991, it was evident that nothing had changed, and that any visible improvement in the ecological situation was not on the immediate horizon. Union-republic enterprises continued to ignore local soviets, and the construction noted above proceeded in spite of protests. Indeed, the only changes that had taken place locally were a result of raion deputies directed against local enterprises. Leonid Polezhaev, chair of the obispolkom explained that economic factors, most notably the sharp decline in profits, made it an inopportune time to mandate retooling and environmental protection.54 In May, the chair of the city standing committee on the environment asked to be released. He acknowledged that his work had produced no results, in spite of his active efforts. "Everything," he declared "depends on the center, on higher organs of power, which control and distribute resources."55 Since deputies were now held accountable for their work, he refused to be a part of the powerlessness.

Deputy frustration was not limited to environmental concerns. One year after elections, local deputies in Omsk had already tired of their responsibilities. Meetings of the city soviet were sometimes cancelled because of poor attendance, and only 14% of the 200 deputies had not missed a session. Average attendance was about 135, and routinely fell after a break in proceedings. A variety of explanations for such poor attendance were offered: the abundance of trivial issues, or "melochi" that ate up time and energy; the heavy workload of

54 Omskaia pravda 22 March 1991
deputies; the decline in public interest; and the amount of knowledge and competency required inhibited input. But the most accepted explanation was that the overwhelming sense of powerlessness and frustration of deputies was keeping them away.56

The decline of the Communist party as the coordinating agency for local administration and the lagging fervour for local soviets in Omsk parallel developments throughout the rest of Russia. In some cases, local party organs tried to carry on as if reforms had never happened. Their level of administrative experience granted them some measure of continuing control over the allocation of resources. Yet such influence was now subjected to increasing measures of public criticism. from newly elected deputies and from local independent newspapers. Likewise, executive committees were now the targets of criticism from local soviets, which desired control over the implementation and execution of soviet legislation. There was often little change if any in the personnel of local executive committees, and the lines of accountability and authority between newly formed presidia and executive committees was anybody’s guess.

The final year of the Soviet Union witnessed an acute crisis of authority and a breakdown of state power. And as noted legal columnist Yurii Feofanov noted in the Fall of 1990, the most profound manifestation of this crisis could be found in local administration.57 As disparate institutions and local organs began to compete with each other over who possessed authority over whom, the Soviet Union was beset with mnogovlastie (multiple powers), which corresponded to the complete breakdown of power and authority throughout

56 Vechernii Omsk 16 May and 4 June 1991.

57 Izvestia 15 October, 1990.
the state. Russians referred to this predicament with the term *bezvlastie* (absence of power). One Russian author referred to the onset of a new time of troubles (*smuta*), and suggested that Russia had again broken down into appanage principalities. The solution? A tightening of central power and authority. "If we cannot guarantee concentrated and consistent administration during reforms, then there is an increased danger of authority disintegrating into various jurisdictions, sectors, republics and other appanage principalities."58

This disintegration is precisely what occurred in Soviet Russia in 1990-1991. The Communist Party and central ministries had been the primary institutions which "glued" the state together. When the authority of these institutions was undermined, there was nothing left to prevent large fractures from rendering the state asunder. Local soviets had no experience in exercising autonomous power, and in hindsight it is surprising to realize how many observers and academics (both in Russian and the West) were shocked at the manner in which regions and locales moved in disparate directions after the elections of 1990. This new "time of troubles", or *smutnoe vremia*, was the most recent culmination of the continuing paradox of over and under government, which had plagued Russia for centuries. Just as the communist party had been used to bind local administration to the center after 1917, the decline of the party in 1990 caused the Soviet system to unravel. *Smuta* thus represented the unintegratedness of the Russian state, the acute lack of an organization of power that existed behind the facade of the all powerful totalitarian system.

The assertion of local interests versus the claims of the center caused all manner of assertions of sovereignty - not only among the republics of the Soviet Union, but of various

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national and territorial units throughout Russia. This "parade of sovereignties" led to a "war of laws" among different levels of government and between different branches of government at the same level. (The collection of newspaper cartoons in illustration 4.3 portray this situation.) For their part, soviets were woefully incapable of assuming a constructive role. Yet the assertion of soviet power and their new found legitimacy strengthened local resolve to resist the center, and so disrupted the existing order. But without the capacity to do anything, soviets were an unsuitable foundation for a new political system and they were rarely more than noisy debating chambers, incapable of any constructive activity.\(^{59}\)

This crisis of state was the cause of the attempted coup of August 1991. To members of the Emergency Measures Committee, the GKChP. Gorbachev’s attempt to hold the Union together through concessions enumerated in the Union Treaty was the antithesis of the Soviet version of the unity of power. And Gorbachev’s critics only had to observe the breakdown of power throughout Russia, let alone its empire, to believe that the Soviet state would never hold without a reimposition of central power.

**Understanding Smuta**

How then do we comprehend the breakdown of administration in the Soviet Union? There are three points that need to be emphasized: first, that historical explanations for administrative collapse are relevant to the contemporary period; second, that political and administrative confusion was the result of the difficulty in reconciling conflicting interests; and third, that conflict developed over a competitive struggle over power.

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This cartoon represents the so-called "war of laws" between the Moscow City and Moscow oblast. It suggests neither will win the conflict, and portrays the futility in local government.


Here is a characterization of the logical conclusion to the "parade of sovereignties". Each home would soon become sovereign.

From Buckley, p. 225.

In this cartoon, both the raion soviet and the raion party committee are trying to escape the burden of responsibility - so much so that it seems to have become a game.

Here, two parts of a whole declare their sovereignty, rendering both comparatively useless.

From Buckley, p. 227.
In the first instance, as noted in chapter two, Russia did not possess any real legacy of effective, coherent sub-national government endowed with both authority and power. When central power crumbled in the past, such as in the early seventeenth century and in 1917, the administrative tentacles of central power in the locales proved to be quite useless in maintaining any semblance of order. In this sense, the paradox of under and over government manifests itself most clearly in those brief periods when central power (overgovernment) falls apart. Without the center, all that remains are powerless institutions of local administration. This is why the collapse of central power in Russia has always been such a fearful predicament. Without a strong center, Russia quickly unravels. Local administrations have little experience in dealing with significant matters of government, and no levels of government have experience in political negotiation with other tiers of government. Perhaps this is why brief periods of smuta seem to follow a generation later as reactions to prevailing tendencies of centralization. In the seventeenth century, smuta followed Ivan’s oprichnina, in 1917 it followed the "counter-reforms" or centralization that followed half-hearted experiments with local self-government. And in 1990, it developed after a few decades of attempting to overcome the negative aspects of Soviet and Stalinist centralism. It is of interest to note that in each instance in the past, a strong effort towards centralization has followed.

Second, we need to point out that manifestations of local interests are not the primary result of any one local political leader, or of any conflict over ideology. Instead, mestnichestvo is the manifestation of often legitimate local interests, which cannot be adequately addressed by simply defending the interests of the center. Since Russia has no
tradition of organizing power to allow local organs to legitimately resolve important local matters. The crumbling of central power is exacerbated by those brief windows of opportunity where local governments can assert their demands with impunity. This is why some local governments seem to behave in radical and bizarre fashion - they are unaccustomed and unschooled in the political game of negotiation and compromise. Rather than assert positions that are open to negotiation, *smuta* represents those occasions when local organs are intoxicated with their new unshackled opportunities to make claims for their constituencies after decades of frustration.  

Third, the collapse of central administration ushers in a period of intense institutional darwinism (reminiscent of Krasner’s metaphor of punctuated equilibrium), where the survival of the fittest would determine which institutions would continue to survive and which institutions will wield any power and authority. Zemstvos were thus made redundant by soviets, which were then usurped by local party organizations. In the contemporary period, party organizations lost out to rejuvenated soviets and executive committees, which then became the nexus for a further struggle. To understand the nature of this darwinian struggle, we must be sure that we underscore the nature of contest: these institutions are struggling for power, which is found primarily in the resources at the disposal of local institutions. These resources include such things as control over property, over the flow of information and the local press, over the appointment of personnel, and over budgets. Such resources are as critical to local power as they are to central control. They are necessary in order for local governments to possess the capacity to resolve and implement policies which effect local

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affairs.

The real nature of smuta cannot be understood unless we realize that it represents those moments when this struggle over resources and power breaks loose from previous constraints and rises to the fore. Naturally, the struggle for power is an ongoing process that exists even in political systems with long established traditions of ordered power and authority. Smuta, however, represents those occasions in Russian history when the existing order breaks down and a new arrangement of power has not yet been established. Let us look at examples of the political conflict among different levels and branches of local government throughout Russia in 1990-1991.

The earliest battles at the local level after local elections were between newly elected soviets and the corresponding party committees. These battles were primarily over material resources such as property. Sergei Stankevich, then deputy chair of the presidium of the Moscow City Soviet (later a prominent federal politician) was shocked when the new city government took over in the Spring of 1990. It was only then that he realized that almost nothing in Moscow belonged to the city soviet. Instead, 80% of everything belonged to a wide variety of departments, and what ownership did exist was almost always held jointly with the Party. Of the 33 buildings that housed Moscow Party committees, for example, 30 were built by joint efforts with city soviets. The fight over land ownership led to a decision by the city soviet in June 1990 to repeal all earlier acts allocating land within its territories, and declared that the use of land owned by the soviets would be allowed only

\[\footnotesize^{61}\textit{Pravda} 29 \text{ June} 1990.\]

\[\footnotesize^{62}\textit{Izvestiia} 28 \text{ April} 1990.\]
through direct contractual arrangements. This struggle over land was directly connected with the struggle to improve the revenue base for the city soviet.

The local press is also an important resource upon which political power is built. In Moscow, the newspaper Vecherniaia Moskva was jointly held by the city soviet and the city Party committee. Before local elections, ownership was transferred over to the Party, and this decision was then reversed by the new city soviet. In the provinces, the struggle for the press was less successful. In Krasnodar, for example, the city soviet decided to publish a newspaper entitled Krasnodarskaia izvestiia. But since the city did not possess any printing facilities, it had to rely on the krai executive committee, which was still dominated by the Party. The Party effectively blocked the paper’s publication over concerns that the new paper’s ideology "would not be adequately supervised." In the Altai Krai, the editorial office of the local newspaper became the battleground between the Party and the local soviet. Each appointed an editor for the newspaper, and the ensuing chaos led to turmoil in the production of the paper.

Declining Party committees were not the only institutions to compete with local soviets. The structural remodeling which led to the creation of presidia created a problem of dual power (dvoevlastie). This confusion was evidenced even in mundane issues. There was, for example, confusion in both the Russian and Western press concerning who the mayor of a

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65 Moscow Television. 22 October 1990, as reported in FBIS SOV-90-205, 23 October 1990, p. 69.

66 Izvestiia 12 December 1990. See also Pravda 23 December 1990 for a more general discussion of conflict over the press between local soviets and party organizations.
particular city was - the chairman of the presidium, or the chairman of the ispolkom. Other issues, such as questions of salaries, provoked institutional fighting. Since money was limited, ispolkom chairmen were even asked to share their salaries with the new chairman of the presidium.67 These mundane examples portray the wedge that was driven between the soviet and the executive committee. While the soviet could claim new legitimacy, it continued to rely on the ispolkom for virtually everything it needed to exercise its legal authority, even for paper and paperclips. Ispolkomy most often proved to be unwilling to cooperate with soviets. In one account, when the chairman of a raion ispolkom in Tambov left for holiday, the accountant would not disperse any public funds without the chairman’s signature.68 In Saransk, the chair of the city soviet had to wander around the halls of the soviet for weeks without an office, which was denied him by the chair of the city ispolkom.69 Soviets and their executive committees struggled over such things as control over money, the right of the executive to veto decisions, the right of the soviet to declare no-confidence, and the authority over appointments.

Just as important as these horizontal battles over power were the struggles among local institutions of different levels. In Moscow, 34 different soviets functioned within the city. And in smaller cities such as Tambov, 8 different soviets could claim power over disparate parts of the city.70

Exactly which resources belonged to whom, and which level had

67 Sovetskai Rossii 16 October 1990.


69 Komsomolskaia pravda 30 September 1990.

70 Pravda 24 November 1990.
authority over what was a complete mystery to all.71 Soviets throughout Russia tried to resolve this dilemma by declaring sovereignty, which gave them an excuse to ignore the decisions and resolutions of other soviets. The response of the RSFSR Supreme Soviet in October 1990 was to pass legislation obliging all lower soviets to execute the decisions of higher soviets.72

An example of the struggles between different levels of government was the fight over the appointment of the Moscow city police chief. In January 1991, the Moscow City executive committee appointed V. Komissarrov to the post of chief of the Municipal department of Internal Affairs, replacing a certain Bogdanov, who had jointly served as the deputy minister of the Union Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD). The Union MVD quickly responded by anulling the order and reappointed Bogdanov to his position, which was strongly protested by the City ispolkom. Gorbachev's presidential decree of March 26 then combined the separate Moscow City and oblast departments of internal affairs, and the Union appointed Ivan Shilov as the new police chief in Moscow. The RSFSR government entered the fray on March 28, when the republic suspended Gorbachev's decree and transferred the city administration of internal affairs to the republic ministry of internal affairs. The RSFSR appointed Komissarrov the new city police chief, but then this appointment was anulled by the Union MVD, which announced that Shilov (also first deputy of the Union MVD) was still

71 Barabashev and Sheremet has identified the nature of this problem in 1988. See their "Pravovaia baza obnovleniia mestnykh sovetov." Sovety narodnykh deputatov No. 9 1988, pp. 7-18.

72 The law is discussed in Komsomolskaia pravda 11 October 1990. One of the consequences of the law was that it actually granted more independence to executive committees, since vertical integration depended on their compliance. With dual subordination, the executive committee had greater opportunity to ignore its soviet with impunity if it could claim to be following the lead of the superior executive or soviet.
head of the city police. By April, the city soviet decided to set up its own police force.\textsuperscript{73}

The problems of jurisdictional confusion is most evident within the urban areas. City soviets and ispolkom workers were all quick to denounce the interference of central ministries and representatives of the Union and Republic government. Yet these same voices were even quicker to denounce raion soviets and executives as nothing but obstacles to effective municipal government. They seemed to ignore the fact that their own complaints against higher level institutions were clearly mirrored in the complaints of raion representatives against the city. In Moscow, raion soviets struggled with the city soviet for control over buildings, gas and electricity, water, sewage, and even garbage collections. Stankevich even suggested that raiony would soon declare birds flying over their territory to also be the property of the raion.\textsuperscript{74}

Conclusion

The idea of reforming local government in Russia did not just emerge during the Gorbachev era, but was an issue that had been part of Russian politics throughout most of the past century. In spite of all efforts, however, reforms were never successful in creating local governments that could fulfill the tasks that the center expected or that the public required. Why did these reforms fail? There are two parts to this answer. First, throughout the entire history of local government reform, the dominant interests involved in reforms had too much to lose and not enough to gain in the development of local power. Autocracy, ministerial

\textsuperscript{73} Izvestiia 8 April 1990.

\textsuperscript{74} Komsomolskaia pravda 20 September 1990; and Vecherniaia Moskva 15 October 1990.
control, the vanguard role of the CPSU or the unitary system of power were all institutional constraints which worked against the very idea of local power. As a consequence, local governments remained administrative tentacles of the center instead of emerging as organs of local self-government.

Second, Russia lacked a meaningful legacy of local government. There was an acute lack of experience in Russian administration in dealing with manifestations of local interests. Rather than a recognition that such interests could be legitimate, and dealing with them in a rational way, local interests were too often ruled as trespass against the interests of the center. In short, there was no experience in learning to deal with disparate interests on a political level.

In the end, however, the necessity of dealing with the demands of a modern state forced some serious attempts to restructure the political order. The alternative was the continuing paradox of over and under government. In spite of any hype about all power to the soviets, Gorbachev yet tried to maintain a semblance of party hegemony. His failure to do so is the primary reason why the political order collapsed. The pillars of party power were shaken and local governments were not capable of providing the required support for the Soviet regime. Exposed as they were to local interests, local soviets lacked the glue or mortar that had enforced central dominance. As a result, each of the various bricks making up the foundation for political order shifted in disparate directions and the edifice collapsed.

The question that animates the rest of this dissertation concerns the process within which a new edifice is created. Has Russia been successful in organizing power among its political institutions? It might have been fair to assume in late 1991 that with the demise of
the CPSU and the Union ministries, local soviets had an unique opportunity to emerge from central tutelage and exist as institutions of power within the broader whole. Part three of the dissertation chronicles the struggles for local self-government in post Soviet Russia and then concludes with explanations of the process of organizing power and a discussion of what this process tells us about the new Russian state.
PART III

LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND RUSSIAN STATE BUILDING

In the beginning, there is invariably a push toward decentralization,
in the end, and extensions of centralization.
In starting, one follows the logic of one's principles;
in the finishing, one follows that of one's habits,
of one's passions, of power.
In sum, the last work always remains with centralization which,
to be honest, increases in depth at the same time
it diminishes in appearance.

Alexis de Tocqueville
CHAPTER FIVE:
CREATING THE MOULD
THE RUSSIAN LAW ON LOCAL SELF-GOVERNMENT

After local elections wreaked havoc on the existing organization of power, the Soviet regime tumbled into administrative chaos. The Union law on local government not only failed to organize power to include local government, it also failed to establish the necessary norms and institutions for coherent government. In fact, the Union law abrogated any *de facto* Union responsibility over local organs of administration, transferring such to the various Union republics. As the largest of these republics, Russia had the greatest need to establish a viable state system of administration through which the government might penetrate the territory it purported to govern. But the nature of the task was such that there was no easy solution to the problem of local government. This chapter focuses on efforts in the Russian Republic to create local government amidst the chaos of *smuta*. It details the legislative process involved in the organization of power among local institutions, and highlights the various obstacles and constraints to this process. Much of the research for this chapter is based on the author’s access to the minutes of the Supreme Soviet Committee which drafted the legislation. As such it relies on contextual evidence in asserting the roles of specialists, politicians, and institutions in the attempt to create local self-government. The chapter begins with a discussion of the various and ongoing calls for reform of local government, and then
studies the development of the RSFSR law on local government, the aptly titled "Law on Local Self-Government," which emerged during the summer of 1991. It concludes with attention to the "Law on Krai and Oblast Soviets and Administrations," which then sets the table for further discussion.¹

The Lack of a Conceptual Base

Prior to local elections, the various problems and weaknesses of local administration could be blamed on institutions external to organs of local government, more specifically, local party committees or large enterprises. After elections, however, it was increasingly apparent that local political institutions themselves required fundamental reform if they were to provide a foundation for a revitalized political system. The decline of the communist party and the increased pressures for radical economic reform established further the clear need for restructuring the arrangement of power at the local level. In response, there were three broad streams of proposals for local government reform. Each of these streams is manifest in three respective works dealing with reforming the Russian political order, all written during the first year of political chaos that followed local elections.²

The first of these streams was a suggestion that Russia should return to its pre-Soviet traditions. In a characteristically long essay published in Russian newspapers in September

¹ Zakon RSFSR "O mestnom samoupravlenie v RSFSR" Sovetskaia Rossiia 20 July 1991. All further references to the law are from this source; Zakon Rossiskoi Federatsii "O kraevom, oblastnom Sovete narodnykh deputatov i kraevoi, oblastnoi administratsii Rossiskai Grazeta 20 March 1992

² The three works are Aleksander Solzhenitsyn, Rebuilding Russia: Reflections and Tentative Proposals translated by Alexis Klimoff, (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1991). The original was published in Komsomolskaia Pravda 18 September, 1990; R.V. Panov, Flast' na mestakh: kak organizovat' rabotu sovetov (Leningrad, 1990); Gavriil Popov, Chto delat'? (Moscow: 1990). Solzhenitsyn and Popov wrote broad tracts for political reform, dealing with local government as one of may important issues.
1990. Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn emphasized that Russia’s road back to health must begin at the grassroots. One of Russia’s primary concerns must be to create the proper institutions for local self-government. In this regard, according to the famous writer, the necessary foundation for such could properly be borrowed from the Russian past. The *zemstvo* could thus become the model for modern local government. Solzhenitsyn suggested that four different levels of *zemstvo* be established: the local (towns, municipal wards, groups of villages); the *uezd* (large city or county); the oblast (provincial); and the all Russian Assembly. He proposed that the transition to *zemstvos* occur over a period of at least four years. Direct elections would be held as soon as possible for local and *uezd* level *zemstvos*, which, after a two year period would then elect deputies to the oblast level. The oblast *zemstvo* would then in turn elect delegates to the All-Zemstvo Assembly. In this manner of representation, the bottom rungs on the hierarchical ladder would be able to emerge from under the dominance of superior institutions. Each *zemstvo* would also appoint its own executive, which would be accountable only to it.

The *zemstvo* proposal possessed some strong selling points. Local officials would exist outside the state’s employ and thus serve local interests, *zemstvos* would develop their own structure, appoint their own personnel, and develop their own financial base. The connection with the Russian past would help local organs establish legitimacy, and perhaps most importantly, the separation of state and local government would be a step in the direction of local self-government. Real self-government, as one advocate later suggested, would demand "...the elimination of the state’s monopoly on political power ‘from below.’"
Where people are aware of the necessity for and strength of political and economic self-organization, state power is compelled to share its rights and responsibilities.\(^3\)

Unfortunately, the zemstvo alternative to local self-government placed little focus on the "sharing" of rights and responsibilities between state and local government. While Solzhenitsyn was quick to propose a return to the zemstvo, he made no effort whatsoever to describe how his version of local government would be much different from the then existing structures of local administration. Indeed, there was no detail concerning the amount of power or types of authority each level would possess. In short, there was no organization of power included in his proposal. In this regard, Solzhenitsyn seemed caught up in that notion of divine organicism of the state that prevailed among slavophiles in the nineteenth century, which envisioned some kind of spontaneous merging of central and local interests.\(^4\) Like his slavophile predecessors, Solzhenitsyn came across as completely unaware of the discrepancies that might emerge between central and local interests, and the conflict that would ensue in trying to reconcile them. His proposal made no mention of how such disputes might be reconciled, how executive organs might be connected among different tiers of administration, or, most importantly, how power and authority might be organized among different levels of government. His "tentative proposal" lacked any specific suggestions for improving local government. It merely returned Russia to its past, complete with many of the same glitches that had troubled Russian local government a century earlier. This was no solution.


The second main stream of proposals for reforming local government in 1990 was premised on the notion that soviets had not been given a fair opportunity to prove themselves as a foundation for local government. Since soviets had not yet possessed any real power, the task of reform would be to transfer power to the soviets, and transform them from noisy debating chambers to functional institutions of self-government. To accomplish this task, constitutional and legislative changes would be necessary to end the jurisdictional confusion that encumbered soviets at all levels. Such changes would need to clearly delineate authority along both vertical and horizontal axes, and put an end to the confusion that emanated from dual subordination. Proponents of this stream of proposals advocated that soviets should gain a strong upper hand in relation to their corresponding executive committees. The horizontal axis would thus be dominated by the soviet, which would then be more capable of assuming control thanks to its new presidium and the enhanced status of its deputies and standing committees. Yet while due attention was given to the horizontal dimension of power, there was very little discussion concerning the vertical dimension. Which level of soviet would have the upper hand along the vertical axis? How would power be demarcated among the many different tiers of Russian government? In short, this stream of proposals was hardly radical, and represented only a rehashing of reform efforts that had been discussed for more than three decades.5

The third stream of proposals for reform suggested that the fortunes of local government would benefit greatly if Russia were to simply get rid of the soviets altogether. Such an idea was advanced by the then chairman of the newly elected Moscow city soviet,

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5 Panov, 'Last 'na mestakh; see also N.M. Amelin, Mestnye sovety narodnykh deputatov v sisteme territorial'nom samoupravlenii (Moscow: 1991).
Gavriil Popol, who suggested that Russia needed to experience a process of "desovietization." The utility of the soviets, he claimed, had been realized in their ability to finally purge society of the "partyocracy". But soviets, he pointed out, provided no foundation for the future. Local councils were simply not set up for administration and government, and had proven themselves incapable of any real action or implementation. What was needed instead was strong executive power at the local level, directly elected at fixed intervals by the general public.⁶

Some of the more prevalent attributes of these general streams of reform proposals were mirrored in a number of local drafts for local government reform which emerged during 1990. These local drafts for self-government emerged at about the same time or shortly after the Union law, but prior to the development of Russian Republic legislation dealing with local government. As such, the drafts were attempts to fill the void in local government, and were written in local environments minimally influenced by central interests. The contents of these drafts reveal the variety of approaches and the concerns of local institutions. They also reveal, in some cases, the lack of experience in dealing with any organization of power and authority.

The most identifiable feature of these drafts was the general emphasis on transferring "all rights and authority," or the foundation for state power, to lower levels of government. In some cases, this devolution of power was advocated in a complete sense (i.e. *all* rights and authority to the lowest level, the village or microraion soviet), in others it involved a complete

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shift of power away from Moscow, but with a division of authority between urban/rural and
oblavt soviets. In Belgorod oblast, for example, an area then dominated by collective farms,
the draft suggested that all power and authority would be granted to the primary level of
government, at the village or community level, and could only be transferred higher by
decision of that local community. Elsewhere, in Kapansk, a five year transition plan was
worked out by "specialists" in local government and soviet and party workers from the oblast.
Their rendition envisioned a devolution of property rights, budget revenues and jurisdiction to
the oblast, but with commensurate divisions of oblast property and limits on oblast authority
to benefit lower level soviets. The primary emphasis of such local drafts that this author
has had the opportunity to peruse points to explicit efforts to gain local control over budgets,
property, and to encourage local economic independence. While these drafts were detailed
statements of purpose, however, they rarely provided the legal detail necessary in any
functional division of power. They represent the predicament in which advocates of local
power found themselves at this juncture in Russian political development. Dividing power
was an extremely difficult process, even at the theoretical level. Where should they start?
Where could they start?

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7 Belgorodskaiia pravda 7 April 1990.
8 Sovetskoе Zaural'e 30 March 1990.

9 See also Magadaniskaia pravda 22 May 1990; Mariiskaia pravda 11 April 1990; Onskaia pravda 28 June 1990; Kabardino-Balkarskaia
pravda 24 May 1990; Tikhookeanskaia pravda 13 February 1990; Penzenskaia pravda 29 March 1990; Volgogradskaiia pravda
20 January 1990. The last of these drafts was based on an experiment approved by the RSFSR Supreme Soviet which would
transfer all Union and Republic ministry enterprises to the oblast soviet to increase the latter's financial base, authority and power.
My thanks to the library of the Institute of State and Law of the Russian Academy of Sciences for their clipping service of local
newspapers.
An example of the problems inherent in dividing up power can be found in what was perhaps the most bizarre of these drafts for local government reform, written in Gorkii (now Nizhnii Novgorod). This draft, titled "Fundamental Principles for the Transition to Self-Government in Gorkii Oblast," envisioned nine distinct levels of local government. Four of these levels would exist in rural communities: one for each village; another for the internal concerns of each economic organization (collective farm); a third to govern a number of economic organizations; and a fourth for the rural county. There would also be five more levels for urban areas: the dvor (block); the microraiion (neighborhood); the industrial enterprise; the municipal district or ward; and the city. According to the draft, each of these levels would independently define their own institutions of local government, based on local conditions. Villages, for example, could appoint a village elder, while the second and third level of rural government might be comprised of councils of elders. The raion government might have two chambers, one of village elders, the other of elected deputies. Whatever kind of structures emerged, the draft naively suggested that the whole system of governments and administration could be woven together, based on an assumed convergence of urban and rural interests. In reading this particular draft, one is struck by the naivety of the whole proposal, which resembled the wild schemes of an energetic undergraduate student of political science, desperate to incorporate any and all sorts of interesting ideas and structures into a system of government. While the draft presented an interesting structural scheme of local government, it was oblivious to the fact that each of these nine levels of government might in turn represent distinct interests.

10 Gorkovskaja pravda 30 March 1990.
While such drafts possess some entertainment value, they also testify of the relevance of local government reform, particularly to local and central politicians, and to academics. Their pleas for fundamental reform of local government became louder than ever. Local administrators and newly elected deputies complained loudly that neither their administrative functions nor their political authority were clearly defined, and that they lacked the necessary power to play an effective role in local affairs. Associations of local governments issued resolutions demanding that the Russian government create laws and means through which local organs could resolve their political and economic problems.\textsuperscript{11} Deputies in the newly convened Supreme Soviet of the RSFSR pointed out that without a comprehensive law creating and defining organs of local government, economic reform would be impossible, and the country would slide further towards civil war and social chaos. One deputy from Vladivostok pointed out the need for a new law. Referring to the crisis of power in local governments, he declared that, "each (organ of local government) understands power in its own way. Today soviets can not yet govern in a new manner, but they will not allow executive committees to govern in the old manner. In such a situation, there is no power in the locales."\textsuperscript{12}

\textsuperscript{11} An example of such is the resolution by the Association of Siberian Cities, issued in early 1991. This was well after the Supreme Soviet had begun to address the issue, but still well before the legislation was finished. See \textit{Iechernii Omsk} 20 February 1991.

\textsuperscript{12} \textit{Biulleten': sov'mestnoe zasedanie verkhovnogo soveta RSFSR} No.10 (20 September 1990), p. 41. Hereafter \textit{Biulleten'} with number and date. See also the general discussion of local government by various deputies at this same session.
Genesis of the Russian Law on Local Self-Government

The many difficulties involved in establishing a conceptual framework for the separation of powers is apparent in the issues and problems which arose in the drafting of the RSFSR law. After its election, the RSFSR Supreme Soviet quickly formed a parliamentary committee to deal with the numerous issues surrounding local government. The Committee for Issues of Local Soviets and the Development of Self-Government was formed by late June 1990, and elected Nikolai Travkin as its first chairman. The Presidium of the Supreme Soviet established the legislative agenda for the Committee, which included drafting laws on creating special status for Moscow and St. Petersburg, and on improving the status of People’s Deputies. The Committee also participated in the drafting of various laws in other parliamentary committees. The highest priority, however, was on drafting a comprehensive law dealing with the structures and functions of local government and the demarcation of power. To this end, Travkin’s committee called a meeting in Moscow of representatives from local soviets all over the federation. On 17 July, some 560 local representatives met in Moscow to discuss their demands and perspectives towards the project, providing valuable input from below. These representatives formed working groups, many of which continued to function throughout the remainder of the year and provided valuable contributions to the development of the draft legislation. The biggest contribution of these working groups, however, was their emphasis on the need for clear vertical and horizontal separation of powers.\footnote{Originally the task included two laws: a law on local soviets and a second on local self-government. The first was to clearly demarcate jurisdictions of soviets from village to oblast/krai, the second, to form the system of local self-government. The committee, however, balked at the prospect of clearly defining the authority of each and every level, as numerous issues demanded some measure of joint responsibility. Instead, as we shall see below, the law developed a much stronger version of executive power than had been originally intended.}
authority and power. Their emphasis reflected the emerging shift from legislative power to a more realistic demand for executive authority.

Although the volume of ideas and demands were such that the Committee was initially overwhelmed by the enormity of the task at hand, Travkin was pressured by the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet and by the worsening chaos of local government to steer the project onto a fast track. Ignoring the need to build a consensus within the Committee first, the chairman pushed for a draft to be presented for first reading to the Supreme Soviet by mid September. This was a serious mistake. When the Committee met only a week before the presentation was to be made, confusion over the specific content of the draft was rampant, and there was strong opposition to even presenting any draft. Conflict in the committee emerged on a variety of issues. First, while all agreed that executive and legislative power needed to be separated, there was little agreement on the specifics of separation. Soviet presidia were still favoured by many to become the dominant organs of local government. Yet the practical experience of those working in local government was such that newfound emphasis was placed on the executive - the branch of local government that would actually execute and implement decisions. A detailed separation of powers was left for further discussion.

Second, while a consensus on the need for a vertical division of power existed, there was no agreement concerning how that division should be established. Should the "primary" level of self-government be the local community, the raion, or the city? Some members advocated two tiers, the oblast and urban settlements, while others emphasized the primacy of urban centers. Not surprisingly, the most vocal supporters of municipal primacy in the system of local self-government were either committee members who doubled as chairs of city soviets,
or representatives of city soviets in attendance at committee meetings. Third, the issue of property and local budgets proved to be an issue on which no consensus could be achieved. Some members felt that local organs should be the primary revenue recipients, while others continued to advocate the traditional Soviet method of central control over revenues dispersed back to the locales. Another issue revolved around the problem of whether the law was to be a temporary, transitional law, or a more lasting contribution to the Russian state. Some advocated postponing the law until a new constitution was finished, others suggested that a well drafted law would contribute to the formation of a new constitution. 

In spite of such conflict, Travkin was determined to push ahead with the project. A renewed push for economic reform (at the Union level, debates raged over the 500 day plan for economic reforms), and demands from local deputies for a new law combined to provide a strong impetus to move the draft forward at a rapid pace. This "Travkin draft," contained explicit provisions for an elected executive with authority to choose his own "cabinet" and veto decisions from the corresponding soviet. But beyond that, it was little more than a skeletal enunciation of the problems that the law would attempt to address. Presented to the Supreme Soviet on the 20 September 1990, it claimed to provide a foundation for the establishment of functional relationships among contiguous soviets and between executive and legislative organs. The content of the draft, however, provided scant detail on how a separation of authority and power on either the vertical or horizontal axes would be established. Instead, Travkin naively proposed that local soviets would negotiate and agree

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14 "Protokoly zasedanii komiteta verkhovnogo soveta RSFSR po voprosam raboty sovetikh narodnykh deputatov i razvitiu samoupravleniiia (hereafter Protokoly), No.5 (14 September 1990), and No.7 (dated 27 September 1990, but by its content it appears to have occurred before the presentation to the Supreme Soviet, probably on the 17 September)."
among themselves which institution would possess power over what. On the vertical axis, the draft proposed three levels: the primary (pervichnyi - villages, towns and urban raiony); the base (bazovyi - rural raiony and cities); and the oblast (or krai). All three levels would be included in the law, although few provisions or details were given concerning any differentiation at each level. Travkin freely admitted that the proposals were still weak in detail, but claimed they would be worked out in the future.\(^{15}\)

While politely complimented for attempting to address critical issues, Travkin's draft was criticized on first reading by a large majority of those deputies that addressed parliament for its lack of specific content. Some felt that the draft did not create strong enough executive power. Other concerns included: insufficient attention to local finance and economic matters; a concern that small towns were left without any authority; that vertical separation was inadequate; and that such a conception would only invite further conflict without sufficient means for resolution. The deputies pointed out that more emphasis was needed on how power and authority would be separated in practise, not only in theory. Due attention should be given to territory, property, and to local budgets. As one deputy suggested,

If I had not known that the Committee was led by a well known figure in the democratic movement, and if I did not know the members of the Committee were of sound mind and body, then while reading the draft, I would have thought that the draft was merely pulled from a dusty shelf in the archives of Leonid Ilych (Brezhnev).\(^{16}\)

Travkin was encouraged to widen the scope of input to include specialists in the field of administrative law. All deputies voicing criticism pointed out that they recognized the

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\(^{15}\) *Biulleten' No.10 (20 September 1990)*, pp. 11-44.

\(^{16}\) See the comments by deputy S.N. Andronov in *Biulleten' No.10 (20 September 1990)*, p.42.
urgency for a law to help resolve the crises of power in the locales, but suggested that unless the law was more comprehensive, it would solve nothing. Perhaps the most condemning development of this criticism in Parliament were the speeches made by committee members that spoke out against Travkin's draft and their circulation of alternative conceptions for the law on local government between sessions of parliament.17

When the Committee met again on the day after the fiasco in parliament, Travkin continued to receive criticism for his questionable leadership. Members agreed to start over again, this time bringing in experts and allowing for the presentation of alternative conceptions upon which the law should be based.18 By October, four alternative conceptions had been prepared: a revised edition of Travkin's draft; another draft by Valerii Kirpichnikov; one by a group of other committee members including Sergei Polozkov, Igor Murav'ev, and Viktor Balala; and an invited submission by Georgi Barabashev and Konstantin Sheremet, the foremost Russian academics on local government.19 The Committee then listened to each of the four presentations. Travkin's revised draft was presented by another deputy, and showed only modest improvement over the draft presented weeks earlier. It described the power of the Russian republic as a construct of its constituent parts, drawn together by a mutual

17 Ibid. Some of these alternatives are discussed in more detail below.

18 "Protokoly" No.8 (21 September 1990). In the interim, the Soviet passed make-shift laws to overcome the war of laws in the provinces. See "RSFSR Law on Relations with Soviets Adopted," FBIS-SOV-90-198 (12 October 1990), translation of Komsomol'skaia Pravda 11 October, 1990. The law obliged lower level soviets and executives to execute decisions made at higher levels. Yurii Sorokin suggests, however, that "It is hardly to be expected that the adoption of a law on Krasnopresnenskaya Embankment (the location of the Russian White House) will mean that order will immediately reign in Russia." As a further example of legal attempts to hold Russia together in the interim, see Zakon RSFSR "O dopolnitel'nykh polnomochiakh mestnykh Sovetov narodnykh deputatov v usloviakh perekhoda k rynochnym otnocheniiam." Vedomosti RSFSR no. 26 (29 November 1990) pp. 411-416.

19 Kirpichnikov was a committee member and RSFSR deputy from Leningradskaya Oblast, where he also served as chairman of Sosnovyi Vor city soviet. He later served as president of the Association of Russian cities. Polozkov, Murav'ev and Balala were part of a group that became part of the then emergent parliamentary group "Smena," which cut its teeth on the issue of local government.
recognition of common interests, and offered no mechanism for the resolution of the inevitable political conflict among different institutions.\textsuperscript{20}

Kirpichnikov’s presentation paid even less attention to structural detail. It was based on a more radical concept of political power, popular among local politicians and similar to some of the earlier drafts from local soviets: power would be built from the bottom up. Local soviets would receive all revenues, and have full control over their own budgets. Power and authority would be transferred up to higher levels only if local soviets so desired. In Kirpichnikov’s conception, there was no focus on executive power, nor on a rationalized separation of vertical power. While this proposal was recognized as an honest attempt towards establishing real self-government, it was heavily criticized for its neglect of the realities of Russian politics.\textsuperscript{21}

The two most coherent proposals were those presented by Polozkov and Barabashev. Polozkov pointed out that political and economic reforms would be impossible without effective administration. Strong executive power which extended from Moscow to the locales was needed. In addition, each soviet would require a detailed revenue base and defined property. But Polozkov’s presentation was criticized as a law on executive power, not on local soviets. In the attempt to create effective administration, it created the opportunity for executive domination, perhaps to the detriment of local self-government. And while the

\textsuperscript{20} "Protokoly" No.13 (4 October 1990).

\textsuperscript{21} "Protokoly" No.10 (1 October 1990).
proposal received praise for linking political power with property and tax revenue, it ignored the need for resolving conflict between different levels of government. Barabashev’s and Sheremet’s conception, in contrast, placed strong emphasis on the structures and functions of each level of local government. The specialists explicitly excluded oblasts from their proposal, and attempted to define the competence and jurisdiction of each level of government, from the village to the city. The coherence and detail of this presentation appeared to have overwhelmed the committee, and given all concerned a true sense of the enormity of the task at hand. The wide assortment of ideas and the discrepancies of the four alternatives forced the deputies to break into smaller working groups in order to develop the various elements that required inclusion in the law: the multi-tiered vertical division of authority, the horizontal separation of powers, and due attention to territory, budgets and property. With that decision, the Committee granted working groups a few months to work extensively in their assigned areas of concern, and hammer out detailed recommendations for the draft law.

Travkin stepped down as chairman in December, in conjunction with his leadership of the Democratic Party of Russia. He was succeeded by Georgi Zhukov, a deputy from Tomsk who proved quite adept at fostering negotiation and compromise among rival politicians with disparate ideas and proposals. Deputies also travelled abroad to observe local governments in Europe and the United States. It was during the three months after the decision to start over that the framework for the law began to take a definite shape. Within the working groups and

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22 "Protokoly" No. 13 (4 October 1990), and personal interview with Sergei Polozkov.

23 "Protokoly" No. 13 (4 October 1990), and personal interviews with Georgi Barabashev and Konstantin Sheremet.
the meetings of the committee, the law grew beyond the symbolism of slogans announcing "All power to the soviets!" and emerged instead as a document which attempted to demarcate power along both the horizontal and vertical axes. These demarcations distinguished two concepts critical to an ordering of power along the vertical and horizontal axes: municipal power and executive power.

**Municipal Power:** The rise of municipal power came as a direct result of the need to find an appropriate dividing line on the vertical axis. Numerous representatives from municipal soviets attended committee meetings and working groups, and advanced the interests of city governments. Their specific claim was that a definite break in authority between oblast and city was vital for local self-government. Original conceptions for local government had suggested drawing the line at the level of raion. But since most of the supporters for strengthening local government emerged from large urban centers with strong "reformist" elements in the city soviets, the prospects for municipal power were strong. Committee members supported the concept of municipal power as a means to overcome the meddling of oblast governments, which continued to control property and local budgets, and interfered in municipal appointments.

Various experiments and ideas from municipal governments and administration were observed carefully by the committee, while chairmen from municipal soviets or their representatives met a total of nine times to contribute to the law.\(^\text{24}\) These meetings later led to the formation of the Association of Russian Cities in April 1991, which perpetuated the

\(^{24}\) See the comments by Riumen in *Biulleten' No.28* (15 May 1991), p.54.
contact and influence of municipalities in the formation of federal policy. The proponents of municipal power were motivated both by an institutional interest in maximizing the authority and capacity of their own institution, and in breaking the grip of more conservative regional governments. These advocates pushed for the concept of municipal property to be clarified and realized, for increased fiscal resources and budget authority, and for greater clarity in defining the jurisdiction and authority of municipal government.

Yet while proponents of municipal power found support for the concept of municipal power, its practical development was much more problematical. Examples of these difficulties can be found in various experiments conducted by municipal governments throughout Russia. In 1990, large municipalities (one million residents or more) possessed the opportunity to request temporary power in order to "experiment" with novel ideas and concepts concerning the organization of local power. This opportunity was granted officially as long as the city in question had the approval of the Soviet of Ministers, the agreement of the respective oblast, and if the experiment concerned issues tabled in the draft for the law on local self-government. These opportunities were extended only for fixed periods of time.

One such experiment to strengthen municipal government in Ryazin attracted national attention. According to one of its architects, the experiment was premised upon the idea that the oblast "was a lazybones, while the city was a toiler". The experiment granted the city

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25 Arguments for municipal power are discussed in N.V. Postovoi, "Ekonomicheskaia Osnova Mestnogo Samoupravleniia" Sovetskoe gosudarstvo i pravo No.11 1990, pp.15-23; and Kostiukov, "Mestnoe upravlenie i munitsipal'noe pravo"; S.I. Shtan', "Formirovanie munitsipal'noe soobstvennosti mestnykh sovetov narodnykh deputatov." in Materialy respublikanskoikonferentsii pp. 190-193; and Vasil'ev, "Sovety ili munitsipsalitet?"

26 Whether or not the experiment received official approval and satisfied the conditions enumerated above seems to have been in question. There seems to have been little, if any, support from the oblast. According to the protokoly, Ryazin was the topic of some heated discussion in the Committee. See also l'vovskiia6 December 1990. Moscow News No.6 (10-17 February 1991).
greater power and control over economic production, at the expense of the oblast. The city soviet liberated municipal government from the tutelage of the oblast by appropriating the functions of its own executive committee, which was abolished in November 1990. While advocates from the city claimed that their experiment was successful, they also pointed out that had there been greater cooperation from the oblast, there would not have been as many problems. It seems that throughout the experiment the oblast abused its right to act as intermediary between the city and the rural raiony throughout the oblast, which spelled disaster to the delivery of foodstuffs to the city.

Although there had been much support for the concept of municipal power throughout the committee meetings, members of the committee began to express growing concern over the practical implications involved in defining municipal power as distinct from the oblast. Critics of the Ryazin experiment claimed that the experiment had been the ruin of the oblast economy. And representatives from the Ministry of Finance pointed out that any attempts to distinguish municipal budgets from the budget process of the RSFSR would have debilitating effects on the Russian Federation. Strengthening municipal budgets came with a cost. The majority of soviets were at the village and raion level, and the revenue at these local levels was extremely weak and seasonal. The committee was cautioned not to be so naive as to think that revenue levels could be strengthened at every level. What the city would gain would be lost to the oblast or the rural communities. This is why the ministry felt it required more, not less, control over the entire budget process. Additionally, the Ministry of Finance argued that the integrity of the state demanded a unity of administration, particularly in the
development and implementation of the budget. In the end, the committee did not endorse the results of the Ryazin experiment and determined that any vertical separation of power could not be so severe as to curb the prospects for cooperation in policy areas important to both levels. Municipal power would lead to unnecessary confrontation with oblasty, and the prospects for such confrontation might jeopardize the entire law if the draft presented to the Supreme Soviet contained such measures. In essence, the organization of power was viewed as a zero sum game, and the committee deemed that the benefits of the Ryazin experiment came at the expense of the oblast. Replication throughout Russia would undermine control from above. Thus the dilemma of local reform was that municipal power required an organization of power at the local level, which jeopardized the existing arrangement of power.

One positive note was that the emerging concept of municipal power facilitated the exclusion of oblasty and krai, thus helping to establish a theoretical framework for dividing power on the vertical axis. Organs of samoupravlenie would thus include villages, towns, raiony and cities, as well as territorial self-governing committees. Oblasty and krai would be the subjects of a different law, and were identified as organs of state power as opposed to organs of self-government. But a more determining element to the prospects for local self-government was that this theoretical distinction of municipal power was the sum total concerning the distribution of power. In other words, local self-government was excluded

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29 Precedents had been set for this separation in legislation which emerged in late 1990, such as the RSFSR law on property in December 1990. Municipal property had been mentioned but not defined in the Union law on local self-government.
from the organization of power. More practical developments of municipal power did not follow suit, and this theoretical distinction, while viewed by local government advocates as a positive step in the development of local self-government actually made the distribution of power to local governments more difficult. Additionally, oblast-city relations were only one part of the equation. Municipalities would still have to deal with municipal wards and self-governing committees, while oblasty would deal with rural raiony and village soviets. The vertical dimension was much more than oblast-municipal relations, and extended much further than is detailed here. Each of these levels required some measure of detailed organization of power. Unfortunately, this detail was not forthcoming. The haste with which the committee was committed to work led them to push the draft forward without clearly defining the divisions of power.

Executive Power. The separation of power between the executive and legislative branches raised a wide number of issues focused on the broader question of kto-kogo (who would be above whom?). What would be the procedure for the appointment of executive personnel? To whom would the executive be accountable? To the public at large? To the superior executive? Or to the corresponding soviet? Should the executive be able to veto decisions passed in the soviet, or should the soviet have the authority to replace the executive? Should executive power be expanded at the expense of the soviet or of the superior executive? What mechanism would exist for the resolution of conflict between the two powers? The effective separation of powers required detailed solutions to all such issues. Nobody appeared willing

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to suggest that executives did not need greater power. The difficulty, as identified by Zhukov, was not to let the pendulum swing too far in the other direction. What was needed, he suggested, was a balance between executive and legislative power.

Again, there were a large number of experiments underway in dealing with executive-legislative relations at the local level. In most cases, these experiments involved a fusion of offices. In Tiumen', the city soviet abolished the city executive committee, claiming that its collegial nature was an obstruction to the rational and efficient use of authority. Executive functions were transferred to the presidium of the city soviet. As the chair of the city soviet explained, "these changes do not abolish executive power, but strengthen it!" In Volgograd, the city soviet forced the merger of executive and legislative branches. The deputy chair of the gorsoviet served jointly as the chair of the city executive committee. These experiments found varying degrees of success. In some cases they improved cooperation between the two branches of government, in others they made decision-making and implementation of decisions more futile. In almost all cases, however, these experiments seemed to have created problems with the respective oblast government, which sought to maintain its control. An easy solution to executive-legislative relations was not available.

The ablest advocates for legislative power in the committee were the two specialists the committee had asked to assist in drafting the law. Georgii Barabashev and Konstantin

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31 Izvestiia 1 October 1990.

32 Izvestiia 4 October 1990

33 Proposals for such are in V.S. Vil'amskii, "Organizatsionnye struktury mestnykh sovetov i razdelenie vlastei," in V.S. Vil'amskii, A.E. Kravchenko, and A.I. Radchenko, eds., Mestnye sovety v usloviakh politicheskikh i ekonomicheskikh reform (Moscow: 1991), pp. 40-46. Vil'amskii advocates strong executive power, but points out the more critical element is a clearly defined relationship between the two.
Sheremet. And it was their variant that became the starting point for further negotiation. As noted, their position was criticized by Polozkov and his group for what was perceived as a weak executive. The critics suggested that executive accountability should be given to one individual - *edinonachalie*, rather than the collegial accountability endorsed by Barabashev and Sheremet. This individual would be independent of the soviet and directly elected by the public. In trying to forge a compromise between these two competing positions, a middle ground was agreed upon verbally in February, 1991, which proposed a 'strong executive, strong soviet'. But this compromise really only masked the fact that the committee had difficulty resolving the issue. When the verbal compromise was spelled out on paper, Polozkov and other advocates of executive power complained that the draft paid only lip service to executive power. Subsequent revisions to the draft failed to appease either side.

For his part, Zhukov pushed the draft forward. In the end, with continual pressure from local officials for a law, and with the spring momentum in 1991 on the side of executive power, concessions to executive power were made: the executive would be "accountable" but not "subordinate" to the soviet. But the exact relationship between the two was vague enough to prolong a variety of problems in local administration. As one member explained, "the situation changes so quickly, this has to be only a temporary law. There will be changes every month. Don't worry about clarity - let the soviets alter their own structures as they see fit."  

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34 "Protokoly" No. 35.
When the committee met on the 19 March, Polozkov had the honour of presenting a new draft that represented the stalemate and aimed to achieve a balance between executive and legislative power. In spite of the fact that the draft was trying to be all things to all people, the draft seems to have satisfied the minimal requirements of those in attendance. As one visiting representative from a city soviet stated,

"(the draft) is not, by any means, a perfect document, but it allows for the development of local structures, and will help determine jurisdictions. If we don’t advance this draft, then nothing will happen, and without a new law, we (at the locales) cannot function. The most important issues are the divisions of competence, property, budgets, and tax. The rest the soviets can decide for themselves."  

Zhukov proposed that the committee accept this draft and then divide again into groups for minor revisions and juridical consultation. In spite of some continuing criticisms, committee members were convinced that it would be impossible to achieve each of their individual ideals. The committee passed the draft by a vote of 29 to 1.

The 1991 Law on Local Self-Government

In May 1991, the draft was presented to the Supreme Soviet. By way of introduction, Zhukov pointed out that the purpose behind the draft was to create the possibility for local power to function independent of who might win elections to central or local governments. He described how his committee had shifted away from early slogans of strengthening soviet power. This shift was based on the recognition that executive power had to escape from direct legislative control, and the draft would now forge a new balance between the two. Zhukov enumerated four conceptual principles of the draft. First, the primary tier of self-

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15 “Protokoly” No. 36.
government would be the city or raion; oblasty and krai would now require their own law. Zhukov admitted that this issue continued to be a point of debate within his committee, but that there was general agreement among deputies, specialists, and local officials. Second, the law would provide for a functional separation of power between local executive and legislative bodies. The head of administration, for example, would receive a nalozhenie (suspensive) veto, while the soviet could resort to a vote of no confidence to offset executive dominance. Third, Zhukov declared the principle of 'one man accountability' instead of the more familiar collegial executive. Heads of local administration would be directly elected by the local community. Fourth, the head of administration would form his own "cabinet", which would include the power of appointment supported by approval from the corresponding soviet. Zhukov continued his introduction to the draft by conceding that the attempt to define the jurisdiction and authority of each and every organ at every level made for a very long text. He pointed out that the length of the text reflected its importance, and that the vertical and horizontal organization of power required a clear delineation of authority.\textsuperscript{36}

It was apparent to the Supreme Soviet that the draft was not a finished product. But Zhukov preempted much of the expected criticism - he first admitted that it would be better if the committee had more time to work out such issues, and then stressed that the great need and demand for a law was adequate justification for the haste. He challenged deputies to focus on the basic parameters for local self-government established by the draft, and suggested that by passing the draft the process of liquidating the paralysis of power would begin. Deputies responded by pointing out various gaps in the legislation, particularly concerning the

\textsuperscript{36} *Bisulleten* No. 28 (15 May. 1991) pp. 30-34.
lack of detail in executive-legislative relations, municipal property, and matters dealing with local budgets. But they were favourably disposed towards the basic principles of the committee’s draft. The most serious concern was the conflict which would emerge with the existing constitution. Deputies debated whether or not they should pass a draft in violation of the principle of the unity of soviets, or first amend the constitution. In the end, the draft was accepted with guarded enthusiasm, as deputies realized that negotiations over the details could be left for the future. Constitutional changes concerning local self-government were then made after approval of first reading.\textsuperscript{37}

During the next six weeks, the committee worked to add necessary details to the basic framework of the law. It continued to meet with various ministries (including agriculture, justice, labour, finance, economic reform and nationalities), and solicited further input from various local governments, other parliamentary committees, and specialists in the field of local government. It also met with representatives of newly elected President Yeltsin, who reportedly encouraged the committee to forge a workable balance between executive and legislative bodies.\textsuperscript{38}

At second reading in July, the various gaps were debated in more detail. A good example of the tenor of these debates involved the discussion concerning local budget autonomy. In developing the concept of municipal power, the committee had made attempts to establish revenue sources and ensure adequate resources for local governments. But these attempts had faced the opposition of the Ministry of Finance. As a compromise, the first

\textsuperscript{37} Zakon RSFSR "Ob izmeneniakh i dopolneniakh konstitutsii (osnovnogo zakona) RSFSR v sviazi s reformoi mestnogo samoupravleniia." Verdomosty Verkhovnogo soveta RSFSR no. 22 (30 May 1991) pp. 881-883.

\textsuperscript{38} Biuletyn' No. 38 (4 July, 1991) p. 55.
draft included provisions for guaranteed revenues for local government as a percentage of minimal expenditures. More preferable to these advocates would have been autonomous revenue sources, such as a percentage of natural resources or a share of a specific federal tax. but the compromise was made in order to speed the draft through the legislative process.

During preparation for second reading, however, specific figures for guaranteed revenue were excluded and the draft was watered down to reflect greater degrees of fiscal control from above. The Ministry of Finance and representatives from the parliamentary finance committee also presented amendments at second reading to exclude further detail from the law and further weaken local fiscal control. These motions were accepted by the Supreme Soviet, in spite of opposition from most committee members. Zhukov pointed out to the Supreme Soviet that these changes to the draft left local soviets without finances. An outspoken advocate of local government complained that the changes effectively buried any chance for local self-government.

The conflict over local budgets was but one example of conflict and changes in the law which annoyed advocates of local self-government. Other issues included provisions for a combination of executive and legislative power at the village level, and the attempted erasure of municipal ward soviets. When the draft passed final reading and became law in mid-July, it represented only a partial victory for local self-government. On paper, the law seemed to be a big step forward in the development of local self-government. Its success is especially evident when the law is compared to the many drafts for local government which had

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circulated throughout the country and to the Union law from the previous year. The structural component of the new law was actually quite impressive, and the prospects for directly elected "mayors" and village elders was generally viewed as an opportunity for effective executive power, which would be balanced by local soviets.

The separation of power between local executive and legislative bodies was based on the direct election of the head of the local executive (see Illustration 5.1: 1991 Law on Local Government). Local soviets would be led by a chair chosen by the deputies from among their members. The chair would control the agenda and all sessions of the soviet, and be assisted in conducting his work by a deputy chair and by chairs of the various standing committees of the soviet. Standing committees were intended to help draft and observe the implementation of legislation. The administration remained subject to dual subordination, accountable to the corresponding soviet and to the executive office above. The glav, or head of administration, was to be elected for a five year term, and fulfill his duties according to edinonachalie. The glav was forbidden to resolve questions which fell under the jurisdiction of the soviet. He could determine the structure of the local administration, but this then required the approval of the soviet. He could also appoint personnel within the administration, although appointments in finance, health care, education, and culture all required approval from the soviet. The administration was responsible for the implementation of local legislation, for the day to day work and local finances of local self-government, and the formation of local budgets, which were then approved by the soviet.

There were, however, a number of weaknesses in the new system of local government. The first of these was the sheer size of local legislatures, which often had as many as 200
Illustration 5.1 - 1991 Law on Local Government

Higher Level Executive

Accountable to

Local Executive (glav)

Reports to

Local Administration

Local Enterprises and Services

Lower Level Executives

Confirms

Local Soviet

Chair

Direct Elections
deputies. City and raion soviets thus lacked a degree of professionalism, accentuated by an acute lack of full time deputies, and a tendency for soviets to be preoccupied with matters of little or no significance. Soviets tended to make noise and cause distractions to local government, and accomplish little else. A second weakness was the continuation of dual subordination, which placed local executive accountability between the corresponding soviet and the executive of the superior level of government. The perpetuation of this principle reflected the concern for a unitary system of executive power, and neglect for the representation of local interests. Even though the law was conceptually based on the separation of local self-government from the state, this was never realized in practice. Third, because budget matters were inadequately resolved, local revenues remained dependent upon transfers from higher levels of government and local governments had little control over their own revenues. In this regard, the very concept of local self-government was crippled from the outset by an acute lack of power. While the law provided attention to the "rights" of local government, there was little attention to issues of local power. Instead, the law left important detail to subsequent legislation: a new law on local budgets was intended to supplement the law on local self-government, and further legislation on property was also expected. Local governments were also responsible for drafting local legislation in full compliance with the federal law, even though subsequent legislation concerning budgets and property would affect these local charters. Barabashev and Sheremet even provided a model text for municipal government: all that was needed was to fill in a number of blanks and the city would have its charter.
Perhaps the biggest weakness, however, was the idea that the law itself could create local self-government by emphasizing the structures of local government. Even had the law more clearly defined the authority and power of local institutions, this emphasis on structure robbed local communities of the opportunity to define their own local government. Thus, in spite of the credibility of the academics as strong advocates of local self-government, the law, (and the model text) represented the continuance of a top-down approach to local self-government. In this regard, the law paralleled earlier attempts in Russian history to create local self-government, containing a number of compromises between the concept of local self-government and the demands of central power. Local self-government was thus to be conducted through existing political institutions (soviets, and their corresponding administrative organs) and various forms of referenda and citizen meetings; and exist at a number of different levels, including municipal, municipal wards, rural raiony, towns and villages. While federal organs of state did not possess the right to individually examine questions which fell under the purview of organs of local self-government, they did have the "responsibility to interfere" in those issues relevant to state security, social security, health, and constitutional rights. The law also obliged federal organs of state (including oblast and krai) to assist in the development of local self-government on their respective territory by ensuring balanced budgets, the just distribution of resources, the necessary financing for republican programmes, and the implementation of controls over local expenditures. In short, power remained outside the purview of local government.

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These shortcomings notwithstanding, the most significant obstacle for the development of local self-government was a series of events after the law was passed, including the aborted coup of August 1991 and the final collapse of the Soviet state. Prior to the collapse of the Union government, Yeltsin, in his capacity as speaker of the Supreme Soviet, had encouraged the development of local power as part of a strategy to consolidate local support for the government of the Russian republic and decrease Union control in Russian territory. While in Bashkiria in 1990, for example, Yeltsin told the people to "take that amount of power which you yourselves can ingest." Yeltsin repeated this statement in Tatarstan and to the Russian press. But Yeltsin’s election as president and the aftermath of the coup brought a new dynamic to center-periphery relations. By September, Yeltsin’s initiatives were geared more towards the consolidation of Russian state power than the disintegration of the Union. To strengthen federal control, Yeltsin first appointed his own namesniki or predstaviteli (representatives) to function as his "eyes and ears" throughout the regions. He also postponed elections to local administrations, which had been scheduled for the fall of 1991, and justified the postponement by declaring the economic and political situation in Russia as "too fragile." Elections would be held in one year’s time. In the interim, executive posts would be appointed directly by the President and, in the case of local governments, by his appointed regional executives, upon ‘approval’ of the corresponding soviet. These

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43 The namesniki were not to interfere in local administration, but report on the implementation of federal law and presidential decrees. See the presidential decree and the subsequent discussion in Izvestia 24-28 August 1991, as well as Komsomolskaia Pravda 6 September 1991 and Izvestia 25 November 1991.

44 The postponement of elections came before the law on local executive elections was even finished. See Zakon RSFSR “O vyborakh glavy administratsii,” Rossiiskaia gazeta 14 November 1991.
appointments were critical to the creation of a unitary system of executive power which came to dominate Russian politics in both the local and federal arenas in the following years. They also were opposed to the basic principles of local self-government.

Thus, in spite of the commitment to local self-government on the part of those deputies, academics, and local politicians involved in creating the legislation, the legal foundation for local self-government was not strong enough to lead to its development. Instead of a "clean slate" during the collapse of the Soviet Union, there remained a number of institutional interests opposed to an organization of power that would limit their own capacity to effect decision making and allocate resources. Obstacles to local self-government not only included the resistance from such institutions as the Ministry of Finance, or concerns expressed by oblast administrations, but most importantly, from the office of the president, concerned about the consolidation of executive power in post-Soviet Russia.

The flaws and shortcomings of the the legislation and the changes involved in implementation left a high degree of dissatisfaction with local self-government by 1992. Attempts to augment the law with further legislation on the budgetary rights of local governments failed to improve the legal foundation for local self-government. The draft legislation on local budgets, for example, was led by Sergei Polozkov, who seemed only mildly aware of the conflict inherent in securing adequate independent revenues for local government and the legacy of unitary budgets, and was motivated more by what was politically possible rather than what was theoretically optimal.45 When the budget law was passed in spring 1993, the text affirmed the "independence" of local budgets, yet required

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45 Personal interview with Polozkov, October, 1992.
local budgets to be confirmed by regional governments. The unitary budget was thus replaced with a "consolidated" budget for the Russian Federation, which offered guarantees to local governments that their revenues would not be less than seventy percent of the minimal requirements. Since the law had no visible enforcement mechanism, however, the law failed to address the needs of local self-government.46

Georgii Barabashev enumerated some of these main obstacles to the emergence of local self-government: elections for local administrations were shelved in favour of unitary executive power; the expected law on budgetary rights of local government was much delayed (and watered down); and in spite of progress regarding the concept of municipal property, little had been achieved in practical measures to strengthen municipal control against superior tiers of government and ministries.47 By the spring of 1992, advocates of local self-government began to propose a myriad of changes in the law.

Formal submissions for changes to the law were received by the Local Self-Government Committee. There were a total of sixty one proposals, from twenty three different sources: eight oblast or krai soviets; four city soviets; three raion soviets; three experts on local self-government; two deputies of the Supreme Soviet (including V.V. Riumen, the mayor of Ryazin); the Association of Small cities of Russia; the Construction Ministry; and the Committee itself. Only fourteen of these proposals were eventually

46 Zakon Rossiiskoi Federatsii. "Ob osnovakh biudzhetnykh prav i prav po formirovanii i ispol'zovaniyu vnebiudzhetnykh fondov predstavitel'nykh i ispolnitel'nykh organov gostardarstvennoi vlasti respublik v sostave Rossiiskoi Federatsii, avtonomnoi oblasti, avtonomnykh okrugov, kraev, oblastei, gorodov Moskvy i Sankt-Peterburga, organov mestnogo samoupravleniia." Rossiiskaia gazeta 30 April 1993.

accepted (augmented by seven more changes from unknown origins), yet the origins of these proposals shed a bit of light on the process involved in reworking the legal framework for local government. Table 5.1 (The Origin of Proposals for Changes and Additions to the Law on Local Self-Government) classifies the proposals in four categories: textual (in pursuit of greater clarification); procedural (dealing with non power related functions); power (altering the organization of power among organs of local government); and procedural matters with consequences for the organization of power (a combination of categories two and three).

Table 5.1:
The Origin of Proposals for Changes and Additions to the Law on Local Self-Government

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Origin i Number-</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institution</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experts</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deputies</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Association</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: ‘Predlozheniia po vneseniiu uzmenenii i dopolnenii v zakon Rossiiskoi Federatsii ‘O mestnom samoupravlenii v RSFSR’,” Protokoly No. 70 ((June 1992)
* some proposals originated from multiple sources

As the origin of these proposals, institutions dominate three categories, excluding textual issues, which suggests a strong interest of institutions in the organization of power. As an indication of the relative activity of soviets in particular, almost two-thirds of all proposals originated from soviets of various levels. Noticeably absent from this list is input from executive offices. Supreme Soviet Deputy Riumen, who also served as mayor of Ryazin was the only figure to register input in these legislative changes. One possible explanation for this
absence is that changing existing rules may have been a task for the soviets since local executives, connected to higher level executives, already dominated local affairs.

Alterations to the law included such changes as stricter limits on the authority of municipal administrations to establish rules of commerce, and the opportunity for the liquidation of municipal raiony prior to expiration of their elected term of office only with the agreement of the raion in question. Yet such changes did little to alter the status of local government and include it in the organization of power.

Deconcentration, Decentralization, and the Rise of the Oblasty

In contrast to the fate of local self-government, the regions (respubliki, krai and oblasty) in Russia fared much better in the organization of power during the aftermath of the Soviet collapse. A full explanation of why this occurred is beyond the realm of this study. But the distinction between oblast and local government can be chronicled here. The reasons for doing so are two-fold: first, because the legislative process behind the law on oblast and krai soviets and administrations runs parallel to that on the law on local self-government; and second, because attention to the role of oblasty in post-Soviet Russia is necessary for our discussion of local government in chapter six. This regional tier of government has become an integral part of the story of local self-government in post Soviet Russia.

As noted above, oblasty and krai were intentionally excluded from the law on local self-government, thereafter considered territorial administrative units of the state rather than institutions of self-governance. This contrast was clearer in theory than in practice, and the

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48 Закон РСФСР "О внесении изменений и дополнений в закон РСФСР "О местном самоуправлении в РСФСР." "Российская газета" 12 November 1992.
realities of Russian politics came to suggest a somewhat warped version of the reverse. Initially, however, the dynamics behind the emergence of the regions in Russian politics reflected a critical dilemma in the vertical organization of power in Russia: were oblasty and krai organs of decentralized state power, or institutions of deconcentrated central power? The initial conceptual basis for oblast and krai governments remained ambivalent, although what oblast and krai government was not was largely established during deliberations on the local government law. In this regard, the distinction between regions and local government was influenced by earlier legislation. But the relationship of oblast and krai to the center also was shaped by Russia's struggles for sovereignty during the last years of the Soviet Union.

In this latter case, Russia's pursuit of sovereignty was replicated in various degrees by sixteen autonomous republics and numerous autonomous okruga. These republics successfully defended their existing status as constituent parts of a nominal federation and gained recognition and then concessions from the Russian government. This federal arrangement between Moscow and the republics led oblasty and krai to pursue similar relationships with the center, even though krai and oblasty in the Soviet period were but regional offices of a unitary structure of state power. These early initiatives to forge federalism were part of the political environment within which the law on oblasty and krai was written.

Unlike the local government law, Barabashev and Sheremet wrote the initial draft for the law on oblasty and krai without competition from other groups. They presented their proposals to the committee in July 1991. An early draft was sent to other committees and the

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49 See Darrell Slider, "Federalism, Discord, and Accomodation."
deputies of the Supreme Soviet, and to oblast and krai soviets, and then became the point of reference for five regional meetings held later throughout Russia (in the north Caucasus, Povolzhya, Central Black Earth Zone, Siberia, and the Far East). More than sixty proposals for additions or changes were sent back to the committee in response. After a two month lay-off, owing to the August events, the committee met again in October to hear Sheremet present a more detailed draft. The most contentious issues all concerned the executive office, especially its relationships to the corresponding legislature and to the president of Russia. Should, for example, the president's predstavitel' serve as executive? How might the predstavitel' be incorporated into oblast administration? What about elections to the executive office: would they not damage links to the central government and limit executive accountability to the soviet? The committee held a vote on the election of executives, but the result was an even split: seven for and seven against. One member pointed out that they could not reopen the law on local self-government, and the oblast law required parallel structures and principles. Another member suggested that given the Presidential decree postponing elections, executive elections could not be held regardless of their decision. Thus the law should leave a window for future elections and focus on jurisdiction, property and finance. Of further concern was whether or not the committee should go ahead with the law in light of efforts to create a new Russian constitution. Barabashev suggested that until the constitution was finished, the legal vacuum between local government and the Russian government was the source of too much chaos to be ignored.10

10 "Protokoly" No. 48 (1 October 1991). The committee was often called upon to reconcile conflict between regional and municipal governments, and between executive and legislative bodies, such as in Krasnodar, Moscow oblast, and Rostov.
The committee then requested further comments and input for the draft from various sources. Table 5.2 (Proposals to the Legislative Project on Oblast and Krai Soviets and Administration) classifies two different sets of proposals. the first received in October and early November 1991, as the draft was prepared for first reading to the Supreme Soviet: the second in December and early January, in preparation for second reading.

Table 5.2: Proposals to the Legislative Project on Oblast and Krai Soviets and Administration

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Set of Proposals</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Source: People's Deputies</th>
<th>Oblast Soviets</th>
<th>Legislative Committees</th>
<th>Executives</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. (10-11/1991)</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>49/38%</td>
<td>68/52%</td>
<td>12/9%</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>1/1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. 12/1991-1/1992</td>
<td>176</td>
<td>58/33%</td>
<td>66/38%</td>
<td>39/22%</td>
<td>13/7%</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Protokoly, no. 58 (10 January 1992); no. 60 (21 January 1992)*

While many of these proposals ultimately were ignored, and others were limited to clarification of language, even a limited glimpse at the source of these proposals provides some insight on the process involved in creating the legislation dealing with oblast government and administration. Aside from the committee and specialists in the field, there was much input from deputies, oblast soviets, other committees and regional executives. Of course, influence on the draft was by no means limited to formal proposals, and the bulk of
the draft was already written before most proposals were made. Nevertheless, a comparison of the two sets suggests that in the second round, there was stronger input from Supreme Soviet committees and from oblast and krai executives. Proposals from other committees dominated substantive matters such as budgets, attempting to limit executive power over budget formation and implementation. And although there was still limited input from executive offices in the second set of proposals, this was significantly more than the complete absence of input during the first round. This absence, of course, was probably a consequence of executive appointments made by Yeltsin only in September and October.

The table also masks a significant change in the type of proposals submitted from deputies. In the first instance, 71% (35 of 49) were proposed by one deputy from Volgograd. E.C. Kuznetsov, who seemed to think the draft depended upon his personal approval. In the second set of proposals, 36% (21 of 58) were from two deputies representing specific interests. These details aside, the table suggests that the law was influenced in its formative stages not only by experts and the committee, but also by elected deputies, and regional soviets and executives. This supports and augments the contextual evidence provided by the minutes of the committee meetings.

The committee meeting in January returned to the question of the role of oblasty and krai, and their position in the hierarchy of state institutions. On one hand were those who considered this role as a critical balance to state power. One member suggested that the lack of status of oblasty and krai under the previous regime had "allowed the opportunity for the

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51 Iu. F. Yarov represented the chair of the Supreme Soviet, Ruslan Khasbulatov, who had begun to grow concerned about the plight of legislative power in Russia; and N.P. Medvedev spoke for the Committee for national-state formations and multi-cultural relations, which seemed bent on including autonomous okruga in the law. Medvedev was later appointed by Yeltsin in 1993 to head the the president's administration over the regions.
centralization of state power, manifested by the exploitation of Russia by Union ministries." The new law should provide for the decentralization of power, which would boost the status of oblasty and krai, consolidate gains made in other legislation, and provide a foundation for the future constitution. Certainly, the committee noted, oblasty and krai would not share equal status with the autonomous republics, but they could share status as constituent members of the Russian Federation. On the other hand were those who claimed that oblasty and krai should serve as the lowest structures of deconcentrated state power, ensure the implementation of state laws, and "tighten" the relationship between state and local self-government.

In the end, the committee crafted legislation which claimed to emphasize both roles for krai and oblast: as representative organs of regional interests and as regional organs of state power. Both soviets and administrations at the krai and oblast level were required to fulfill the laws of the Russian Federation and all acts and decrees of the President and government. Additionally, oblast and krai were to serve as the connection between state power and local self-government. In this latter instance, krai and oblast governments were called on to help develop, guarantee, and safeguard local self-government. This role as monitor meant that oblasty and krai required a measure of power, which then required a means for the center to monitor the use of that power. This then raised the question which central institution could best monitor that use of power. This predicament left the vertical separation of powers in a

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53 Ibid.
troubling position, and reflected growing tensions between president and parliament concerning how power across different tiers of government should be organized.

As Yeltsin attempted to create a unitary system of executive power, premised on his power of appointment of executive office, his choices often were at odds with candidates nominated or supported by various oblast and krai soviets. By 1992, regional soviets were increasingly at odds not only with Yeltsin, his predstaviteli, and economic reforms, but also with his appointed executives. An example of this kind of conflict was in Krasnodar Krai. After the August coup, Yeltsin appointed Vasilii Diakonov as gubernator (head of administration). Diakonov immediately began to reorganize local power in the krai, liquidating the krai ispolkom, and firing all members of the krai soviet presidium. He also replaced managers in the agricultural sector and executive officers in the raiony executives. In some measure, Diakonov had the support of Yeltsin, since the Krasnodar elite had been in open opposition to Moscow concerning the delivery of agricultural production. Not surprisingly, the opposition to Diakonov loudly criticized the actions of what they considered an "appointed lackey of Moscow". In this sense, executive-legislative conflict at the oblast or krai level was not just about economics, but also about the representation of local, or regional interests and their conflict with the center.54 While the law on oblast and krai government attempted to establish a balance of power between executive and legislative organs, Yeltsin’s power of direct appointment over regional heads of administration ensured that regional

54 See Sovetskaia Rossiiia 6 November, 1991. Diakonov was later replaced as governor in the fall of 1992.
governors were linked directly into the vertical chain of executive authority descending down from the office of president.\footnote{See Darrell Slider, "Federalism, Discord, and Accomodation: Intergovernmental Relations in Post-Soviet Russia," in Friedgut and Hahn, pp. 239-269.}

As executive-legislative relations soured at the regional level, they also became part of the battleground in a much bigger conflict between President Yeltsin and the Russian parliament. Both Yeltsin and Ruslan Khasbulatov, the speaker of the Supreme Soviet, sought the approval of regional governments to consolidate the power of their respective institutions, offering competing visions of executive and legislative relations. Thus regional soviets tended to side with the Supreme Soviet, and the majority of executives endorsed Yeltsin.\footnote{For Khasbulatov’s defense of parliamentary power, which contains numerous, though oblique references to regional and local government, see Ruslan Khasbulatov. The Struggle for Russia: Power and Change in the Democratic Revolution (London: Routledge, 1993), especially pp. 210-261.}

While executive-legislative relations did not "boil over" for more than a year, the new law on oblast and krai governments was passed by the Supreme Soviet in this environment of increasing tension between appointed executives and (generally) conservative soviets, elected almost two years earlier. Before the law was passed, Yeltsin threatened not to sign it, claiming that soviets would gain an advantage over executive power at the regional level. Instead, the presidential administration proposed a number of changes to the law, particularly concerning soviet endorsement of personnel appointments to administration. These changes, it was suggested, would limit legislative interference in administrative work.\footnote{See Jeffrey W. Hahn, "Reforming Post-Soviet Russia: The Attitudes of Local Politicians," Friedgut and Hahn, eds., Local Power and Post-Soviet Politics, pp. 212-213.} The Supreme Soviet, however, decided against accepting the proposed changes. Sergei Shakhrai, representing President Yeltsin, defended the president’s position to Parliament but failed to
convince the deputies that executive power was threatened by the law. In fact, Shakhrai was criticized for trying to strengthen the power of unelected executives at the expense of elected legislatures. When the Supreme Soviet passed the law on March 5, Yeltsin refused to sign it, which shoved the law into a legal limbo where it remained until well after the new Constitution was adopted in 1993. Although many soviets and administrations at the oblast and krai level used it as a guideline for much of their work, violations of the law were not prosecuted. Augmenting this predicament between executive and legislative bodies was a presidential decree in September 1992 to again postpone all local and regional elections, which meant that executive offices remained under the power of presidential appointment. In this sense, the early rise of the oblasty and krai was connected directly to their role as appendages of state power, and their strategic value in the battle between president and parliament for control of the Russian state.

Conclusions

The limited success of the legislation on local government aside, the laws provide fairly clear pictures of the processes involved in attempts to organize power. The first step was to overcome the lack of a conceptual base for local self-government. To overcome this hurdle, a large role was played by specialists in the field of local government, who correctly pointed to the importance of elections and a balance of power between executives and legislatures. Deputies within the committee also played critical roles in the conceptualization of local power. In all this, participants were spurred on by the need for legislation, manifest

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by the demands from cities and regions. Once the ideas for reform were drafted, further input from local governments helped to shape the draft into a detailed piece of legislation, which addressed structures, authority, budgets and revenues, and lower tiers of government. In spite of all this initiative, however, the law ultimately failed to have much of an effect on the development of local self-government.

Why did the law not succeed? One explanation was that it simply could not keep up with the pace of change in post-Soviet Russia. The law started as Russia was yet part of the Soviet Union, and was finished after Russia had elected its first president and just before the August coup hastened the collapse of the Soviet state. Another, more satisfying, explanation would point to the rival conceptions about the role of local government. The attempts of local politicians to establish local self-government originated with the perception that only with actual power could local government be relevant in Russian politics and overcome the legacy of the hypercentralization of power. In contrast, central institutions were motivated by the need to establish more order in state administration. The conflicts between these two rival conceptions remained unresolved. And this led to a failure to reorganize power. In other words, all the theory and structures of local self-government aside, the law failed to create a new foundation for the organization of power. Attempts to forge autonomous local revenue and local budgets, for example, were blocked by the Ministry of Finance. Prospects for local elections to executive offices later were blocked by the requirements of consolidating presidential power. Even the law on oblasty and krai, which in many ways mirrored the process of the local government law, also succumbed to such forces. Where the two laws differed was linked to the conceptualization of oblasty and krai as appendages of state power.
This difference became the foundation for much of the dynamics of post Soviet Russian local politics, as the next chapter shows.
CHAPTER SIX

THE VIEW FROM BELOW:
LOCAL POLITICS IN OMSK

This chapter is a study of local politics and political change in Russia, based on the view from below. It begins with a thorough study of politics in Omsk from the failed August coup of 1991 through 1994, and then ends with a discussion of the broader scope of local politics in Russia. The previous chapter suggested that much of the dynamics concerning the drafting of legislation on local self-government was influenced by institutions and their representatives: either from local governments or from central ministries. This leads to a subsequent question concerning the motivation behind this influence. As noted in the introduction, it may be appropriate to suggest that institutions shape preferences and offer constraints on the choices of political actors. Yet can such influence exist even in times of great flux and institutional change? Without due attention to the processes involved in the genesis of institutions, institutional literature cannot answer this question. Indeed, the problem of linking the influence of institutions to the institutions themselves rather than to specific actors or interests is itself problematical. Because this chapter is a study of local politics, it attempts to shed some light on this problem concerning the relationship between interests and institutions. It also highlights the dynamics between regional and local politics, which represents the contrast between the statist "top down" approach to local government and the alternative "bottom up" approach to local self-government. While most of the chapter is devoted to the study of Omsk, the end of the chapter broadens the scope to include similar
developments in Russia.

In Omsk, local politics have been animated by a variety of factors. One of these factors is the activity of elites, both old and new, which reflects both the lack of self-government and limited penetration of the state. While the previous chapter was devoted to the legislative foundation for local self-government, the political dynamics at the local level itself is just as critical to the prospects for local self-government. In this sense, the interplay between elites and institutions in Omsk help not only to explain why federal reform initiatives bogged down in the post-Soviet period, but also to reflect the dynamics of local politics in post-Soviet Russia.

Omsk is a sedate city of some 1.2 million inhabitants situated along the Irtysh river in southwestern Siberia, some 2,500 kilometers east of Moscow. It is the capital of the Omsk oblast, which has 140,000 square kilometers and 2.2 million inhabitants (68% urban). From its early role as a transportation center for western Siberia, Omsk emerged during the Soviet period as a strong industrial center, ranking fourth among Russian cities in gross volume of production behind Moscow, St. Petersburg and Ekaterinburg. But in spite of a strong and diverse industrial base, there is much more than distance that separates Omsk from Moscow or St. Petersburg. Because of the strategic importance of much of its production, Omsk was closed to foreigners until 1991. As such, there is a palpable difference in character and temperament among the city’s inhabitants that reflects not only a pronounced detachment from the nation’s capital, but also a certain disdain for anything connected to Moscow. Omsk

\[\text{At least 60\% of industrial production in Omsk was under the umbrella of the military industrial complex - from tires to T-80 tanks, and communication equipment, to aerospace technology and petrochemicals (Omsk is connected by pipeline to Tyumen). The city also services a productive regional agricultural industry.}\]
possesses a small town feel that exudes strong civic pride and yet, paradoxically, also emanates a certain inferiority complex about how Omsk measures up to other cities in Russia or the West. In the economic and political climate of post-Soviet Russia, omichi are quick to admit that things are undoubtedly bad, but even quicker to point out that life in Omsk is certainly better than most anywhere else in the country.

It would be difficult for the average resident to suggest otherwise. While economic production declined sharply and some of the large enterprises worked at less than half capacity, Omsk displayed much less of the disparities in wealth evidenced in Moscow. Through 1992, for example, the ruble remained the currency of use, if only because an alternative choice was nonexistent (the circulation of the German mark or American dollar in Omsk was virtually nil). Even by 1995, much of the "westernization" evident in large cities elsewhere was still foreign to Omsk. For the layman, in spite of rampant inflation and the shift to marketization, Omsk maintained more in common with its Soviet past than with the post Soviet future. In this regard, Omsk is part of the glukhoman, the "boonies" or "backwoods" of Russia, often characterized as places where reforms bogged down and support for Zhirinovsky or Zyuganov was high. As such, Omsk represents strong, although not necessarily universal, tendencies in Russian politics. It is a large urban center, but one that is well situated within the broader context of Russia as a whole.

This chapter studies local politics in Omsk with an eye towards the relationship between the oblast and local self-government. The previous chapter discussed the creation of laws for both levels, and suggested that oblasty were endowed with some measure of power, as part of the state, while local self-governments were not. The consequences of this
predicament are detailed below. Since the city of Omsk represents two-thirds of the oblast population, one might expect the city to have significant clout within the oblast, and so it provides a firm basis for studying oblast-municipal relations.

The Oblast Government

After the failed coup, as the Soviet Union vanished from the political map, politics in Omsk were marked by increased activity directed towards establishing political and administrative order. The first move came when Yeltsin appointed Aleksandr Minzhurenko as presidential representative (*predstavitel’*) to Omsk in September 1991. Minzhurenko was then a deputy in the soon to be abolished USSR Congress of People’s Deputies. He had worked previously as an instructor at the Omsk Pedagogical Institute, and had risen to local prominence during the election campaign of 1989. During the August coup, Minzhurenko led small public street meetings, and formed the "Committee for the Defense of Legal Organs of Power." Minzhurenko’s new duties were to function as the new President’s "eyes and ears" in the oblast, informing Yeltsin on the fulfillment of central laws and decrees, and assisting the federal executive in establishing political power and authority throughout the oblast.

The most significant move in establishing such executive power was the President’s decision to delay elections for local executives - initially for one year, and then later until 1995 - and instead appoint the heads of oblast administration by presidential ukaz. The oblast level executives would then appoint lower level executives in agreement with the corresponding soviets, and allow these executives to appoint subordinate executives in turn.²

² See "O poriadke naznacheniia glav administratsii." *Vedomosti RSFSR* No.48 (28 November 1991). Yeltsin reserved the right to appoint the heads of administration (mayors) of cities that functioned as oblast centers.
Defending this decision, Minzhurenko stated that he himself "was a democrat through and through," but that he had become convinced that direct appointment was the only real solution to the current dilemma of executive power. Elections, simply put, were too risky. They might lead to conservative local executives that would cause a fractured executive along the vertical axis. He pointed out that almost all rural areas in the oblast were staunchly conservative, and that a third of the city would also support a conservative candidate. The democrats in the oblast would thus have poor chances of winning a general election. Direct appointments, on the other hand, would establish a stronger system of executive power throughout the country, and would place local executives on a "short leash", which would compel local administrators to support and implement presidential decrees. Given the need for radical economic and political reform, Minzhurenko suggested that no other alternative was available.¹

Minzhurenko asked the local democratic movement to advance a candidate for glav administrator of the oblast, but the only name raised was that of Vladimir Ispravnikov, a Russian deputy representing Omsk in the Russian Parliament, who had already agreed to join Khasbulatov's parliamentary team. Yeltsin wanted to make the appointment quickly, and Minzhurenko was pressured to come up with a recommendation. He felt that he had two choices: either the chair of the oblast soviet, Anatoli Leont'ev, or the chair of the obispolkom, Leonid Polezhaev. He justified his decision by claiming that "one does not change horses midstream." and that some professional experience was mandatory. While Leont'ev had served as chairman of the oblast executive committee for many years prior to his election to

the soviet in 1990, his connections to the discredited Communist Party (he had also served as obkom first secretary) and the old guard ruled him out as a credible candidate for the position.

That left only Polezhaev, a 51 year old native of Omsk, who had spent much of his adult life in Kazakhstan supervising canal construction. He had worked as deputy chair of the Karandinskii oblast ispolkom until conflict with local officials convinced him to quit and return home. Within two years, he had become an assistant to Leont’ev in the oblast executive committee, and then succeeded him as chair of the ispolkom in 1990, after Leont’ev became chair of the oblast soviet. Polezhaev had a credible reputation as an effective administrator, but had been defeated in elections to the RSFSR Congress. During the coup, Polezhaev was the most vocal supporter of legality and the Russian Government at a joint meeting of the oblast soviet presidium and ispolkom, even though the general tenor of the meeting was one of waiting out central intrigues and encouraging life in Omsk to continue as before. Polezhaev appeared on local television on the evening of August 20, the second day of the coup, but his appeal was for public calm in the face of political uncertainty. In the end, however, Polezhaev was instrumental in encouraging the oblast leadership to ignore calls from the GKChP for emergency measures. Their rationale was that the local situation in Omsk was stable and that such measures were not needed. After the failed coup, Polezhaev claimed to support strong executive power, suggesting that responsibility for reforms without

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4 Polezhaev stood for election to the Russian Congress but failed to win his urban constituency, contested by 8 other communists and one noncommunist. *Omskaia pravda* 8 March 1991

5 The joint meeting was held on 20 August. See *Omskii vestnik* 3 September 1991 for a stenographic report.

6 *Omskaia pravda* 22 August 1991.
an effective structure with which to implement them was impossible.\footnote{Omskii vestnik No.46 (29 November - 5 December 1991). It seems Polezhaev had promised Minzhurenko that, if appointed glav administrator, personnel changes in the oblast administration would be a given. See Vechernii Omsk 14 November 1991. A brief note on the main local newspapers: Omskaia pravda was the newspaper of the oblast Communist Party and the oblast soviet until late 1990, when Omskii vestnik was started as a voice of the oblast soviet. Vechernii Omsk was a joint newspaper of the city Communist Party and city soviet until after the coup, when it became sole possession of the city soviet. After the coup, Omskaia pravda continued as a "popular" newspaper, although it resurfaced only in October of 1991.}

The oblast ispolkom suspended its existence on November 11 1991, and Polezhaev was officially appointed the head of administration, or gubernator of the Omsk oblast. In accordance with presidential decree, Polezhaev quickly began to select his administrative team. His appointments were a mix of former apparatchiki and supposedly fresh faces (though established administrators) from local institutes and enterprises, with an emphasis on qualifications of expertise and experience. Chairman of the economic committee, for example, was V.V. Malykhin, who had functioned in that capacity since Polezhaev had become chairman of the ispolkom in 1990. Lykhenko, a director of a large collective farm was appointed as new head of agriculture, while an instructor with administrative experience from the local pedagogical institute was given responsibility over education. Defending his choices, Polezhaev stated that new demands required new faces, but the public could not entrust the fate of the economy and society to the hands of novices. There was also a need for experienced organizers of production.\footnote{Omskii vestnik No.46 (29 November - 5 December 1991).} On relations with the oblast soviet, Polezhaev was optimistic. He expressed his belief that a common language, or mutual understanding, would be found, and pointed out that there were no objective reasons for conflict with the soviet. The oblast soviet, he suggested, should concentrate its attention on deputies' affairs and legislation, and should not bother to interfere in the managerial affairs of the administration.
Although he acknowledged that the soviet presidium had often interfered in the work of the oblast executive in the past, he was confident that the oblast administration would be allowed to take responsibility for its managerial activity, and would answer to the people and the president.  

Almost immediately after Polezhaev's appointment, Minzhurenko began to express second thoughts over his recommendation. He stated publicly that he thought Polezhaev was inconsistent, and that he had hoped the new gubernator would be more progressive, particularly concerning his appointments. Polezhaev himself felt that the oblast was caught in the middle of reform - between a public worried about the realities of daily life and a Russian government that continued to promulgate laws and decrees that pushed radical change. The task, as he perceived it, was to try to fit such decrees and laws into local conditions, or to "smooth the sharp corners of reform so that they would be less difficult for the people." Later, he stressed his recognition that reform was necessary, but conceded his opposition to the techniques and principles of acting Prime Minister Gaidar's radical policies - on the grounds that they were not in the best interests of residents of Omsk. And in response to criticism that Omsk oblast lagged behind Novosibirsk in agricultural reform, Polezhaev responded "what of it? This is not a race."

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9 Ibid.  
11 Omskaiapravda 17 January 1991. Polezhaev's political position thus resembled more the platform of the Civic Union in the federal arena, and had more in common with Aleksandr Rutskoi and Arkady Volskii than with President Yeltsin. Still, as an astute politician, he directed his criticisms against then acting Prime Minister Gaidar rather than Yeltsin.  
In the oblast soviet, Leont’ev and his staff also attempted to come to grips with the new realities of local power. Leont’ev staffed the soviet leadership with many of his old assistants from the party and the executive committee. And among this crowd there was not much love or respect for Minzhurenko, who was viewed as an unelected and inexperienced puppet without any real authority. The legislative body remained relatively immune to Yeltsin’s decrees, and organized a "small legislature" or malsovet by the new year, to strengthen legislative authority through a smaller, more effective chamber. The malsovet of the Omsk oblast was comprised of thirty four deputies, including Leont’ev, a few of his assistants, one representative from each of the fourteen standing committees, and a number of oblast deputies elected to full time positions. The fourteen soviet committees paralleled the committees, otdely and upravleniia of the oblast administration, and were geared towards drafting legislation and supervising the implementation of obsoviet legislation. The malsovet soon came under criticism from reformist deputies in the obsoviet for aggrandizing legislative power. Of particular concern, many urban deputies in the oblast soviet opposed the perceived "rural bias" of Leont’ev’s leadership.

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14 See the RSFSR law "O Nekotorykh Voprosakh Pravogo Regulirovaniia Deiatel’nosti Kraevykh, Oblastnykh Sovetov Narodnykh Deputatov" Vedomosti RSFSR No.51 (19 December 1991). The oblast soviet had 250 deputies, and met two to four times a year. The malsovet would be a more permanent legislative chamber. Although the law specified that malsoviets were to be organized at the oblast level, most city soviets, with authority to form their own organs, followed suit.

15 Personal interview with V.M. Shipilov, chairman of the obsoviet standing committee for soviet affairs, and Omskaia pravda 9 April 1992. The committees have between 9 and 30 deputies each. For more information on the obmalsovet, see "O raspredelenii obyazannostei mezhdu chlenami malogo soveta i oblastnogo soveta narodnykh deputatov" Reshenie malogo soveta Omskogo oblastnogo soveta, No.15 (16 January 1992).

16 Leont’ev and his close assistants owed the bulk of their political support to rural constituencies. Leont’ev’s own seat was in the small city of Tara (pop. 100,000), which historically had been the home of obkom first secretaries and chairmen of the obsoviet ispolkom for the Omsk oblast. Leontyev’s close assistants in the soviet are all from outside the city of Omsk. Leont’ev had been elected chairman of the soviet in April 1990, before run off elections had been finished, and when 43 vacancies remained (36 from the city of Omsk). Support for his candidacy was connected to the proposal to allow the combination of party and soviet leadership. This proposal was supported by 115 deputies, 95 of which were from rural seats. 82 deputies were opposed, 65 from the city. A full complement of deputies would have made Leont’ev’s leadership less
Initially, the relationship between obsoviet and administration had been amiable, a function of the personal relationship between Leont’ev and Polezhaev, who was generally willing to defer to his former boss. After Polezhaev’s appointment as gubernator, however, executive - legislative relations began to show cracks as Polezhaev bore increased responsibility to implement central decrees. As the relationship declined, Polezhaev suggested that, for all their good, soviets really only complicated matters of administration. An early source of conflict between the two concerned a rivalry between the property committees of each branch of government. In early 1992, the obsoviet demanded that the administration implement specific decisions regarding the allocation of property, including office space for legislative committees. The administration, however, ignored many of the soviet’s demands, and allocated only 40% of the requested office space. To clear up any confusion surrounding authority over state property, Polezhaev issued an executive decree, which granted all authority over the institutionalization, reorganization, and liquidation of government enterprises belonging to the oblast, as well as the right to make any contracts with enterprise directors (including the rental and use of oblast property) solely to the administration’s property committee.

Conflict also emerged over planned expenditures in the first quarter budget of 1992. The oblast administration pushed for capital investment in construction and industrial conversion. But while the administration pointed out the 78% shortfall in funding for secure. In all, one-third of the oblast deputies were “reformers”. See DemokracheskiiOmsk No.7 1990.


buildings already under construction (many already abandoned), the oblast soviet countered by stressing the oblast’s fiscal responsibilities to lower level soviets: without adequate transfer payments. local governments could not fund health clinics, schools, and kindergartens. Debate over which constituency should get how big a slice from the shrinking budget pie raged along urban-rural, industry-agriculture, and capital investment-social services axes. Further conflict developed when oblast deputies began to pressure Polezhaev to withhold money due for transfer to the federal budget. They wanted to express opposition to acting Prime Minister Gaidar’s economic reforms. While pointing out his own reservations regarding these reforms, Polezhaev refused to accede to their demands and delivered a strong speech to the soviet that linked the fall of the Soviet Union to republics withholding their required contributions to the Union budget. Questioning the position adopted by conservative deputies, he asked them if they now wanted Russia to break apart as well. He requested deputy support in making the required payments, and received the necessary number of votes.

At the roots of conflict between oblast soviet and administration in Omsk were two dominant factors: first, that Polezhaev was accountable to both the federal executive and the oblast soviet; and second, that there was a natural conflict between the constituencies represented by the two institutions. Yeltsin’s "short leash" over local executives obliged Polezhaev to walk a fine line between local and central interests. That the oblast soviet represented a different constituency than that of President Yeltsin, and possessed different,

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even rival, perspectives and goals, made this walk a difficult task for the oblast gubernator.

Through the second half of 1992, Polezhaev was forced to compromise on issues of conflict between the oblast soviet and executive, which caused cracks within his administration.

In September 1992 for example, the oblast malsoviet passed a decision which infringed on the authority of the administration and increased the wholesale price of milk and meat by more than 30%. Polezhaev responded by declaring that the whole reform process would be impossible if the administration did not have control over prices. He pointed out that such increases would create too big a difference between retail and wholesale prices, that increased subsidies were beyond the capacity of the oblast budget, and that the new prices were beyond that which the public could afford. He blamed the malsoviet for bowing to a strong agricultural lobby, and for allowing political factors to transcend economic reality. Within his administration, however, Lykhenko (head of agriculture) endorsed the price hikes, while Malykhin (economic committee) vocally denounced the decision at a meeting of the obmalsoviet. When the Union of Agricultural Workers threatened to strike over the issue, Polezhaev worked out a compromise that allowed a 15% increase in wholesale prices. Malykhin made a public display of opposition.

For Polezhaev, the issue remained one of tailoring central policy to local interests. Price regulation and subsidies were defended as crucial to maintaining a balance between purchase and retail prices. Opponents, he claimed, either did not understand the dangers of

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21 Leont'ev’s decision to push for price increases was credited to the obsoviet’s ties to the agricultural lobby, dominated by directors from collective farms.


23 Omskaia pravda 8 September 1992, personal interviews with V.V. Malykhin, and A.A. Mikhailov, Malykhin’s assistant.
ending such regulation, or desired to bring social concerns in Omsk to a boil. While he worked to implement central policy, Polezhaev remained sensitive to local interests. He publicly advocated increased input from regional administrations in federal government policy, and also for more clearly defined powers between both executive and legislative branches, and central and regional organs. Continual conflict over which organ had authority over pricing, property or investment policy served neither the cause of reform nor of effective government.

Perhaps the most telling aspect of Polezhaev’s political position requires some attention to his perception of regional interests. The gubernator was an open advocate for large industrial enterprises in Omsk. In a speech to the oblast soviet in February 1992, Polezhaev pointed out that industrial production accounted for more than half of the oblast income, and that it had fallen in virtually every sector. Gross agricultural production, on the other hand, accounted for about one quarter of oblast economic output, and procurement prices had risen almost 90% since 1990. Less attention, he suggested, should be given to agricultural problems, and more effort and attention given to industrial subsidies, investment, conversion, interregional trade and the coordination of supplies.

The gubernator’s inclination towards large industry was not the result of any sudden change in perception. Since April 1991, Polezhaev had been a founding member of a conglomerate of large industries and commercial enterprises in the oblast known as Omskii

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26 From a transcript of Polezhaev’s speech “K Deviatoi Sessii Oblastnogo Soveta Narodnykh Deputatov,” Material v doklad Polezhaeva L.K., in the library of the Economic Committee of the Omsk Oblast Administration.
torgovyi dom (OTD). This conglomerate functioned as a large insiders' club, local trade cartel and lobby group, which had been buying up profitable local industries. Polezhaev had served as OTD's first president, but the position was soon given to Yuri Glebov, former chair of the city executive committee. For his part, Polezhaev saw nothing out of the ordinary with his connections to OTD. The problems of the oblast economy were directly connected to industrial production, and therefore of concern to all residents. What was good for industrial production and OTD was good for Omsk.

**Municipal Government**

In municipal politics, the executive committee and its chairman G. Pavlov faced a scandal in late October 1991, when it became known that the city ispolkom had transferred title over two municipal buildings to OTD. If that was not enough, the ispolkom also had invested some 500,000 rubles in OTD, led by Pavlov's predecessor in the ispolkom, Glebov. Pavlov's credibility was damaged further when he tried to appoint a few members of the previous executive to his administration. The city soviet pushed for open nominations, and thirteen candidates vied for two posts in the ispolkom. An emboldened soviet then began to push its own candidates for appointment by Polezhaev to head the city administration. The gubernator was invited to attend a meeting of the city malsoviet to discuss the appointment of a mayor. Given the pro-democracy euphoria of late 1991, city

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27 In between these two posts, Glebov had worked as Polezhaev's assistant in the oblast executive committee. After the August coup, OTD became the main employment opportunity for out of work party and government officials. OTD has been the recipient of central media coverage. See, for example, Izvestia 27 April 1991. For local media, an article in Omskaia pravda 21 May 1992, is quite detailed.

28 I'echernii Omsk 22 November 1991. Glebov had faced pressure to resign his post in municipal administration when he received only 7% support for his candidacy to the Russian Congress in 1990.
deputies put Polezhaev on the spot by suggesting he nominate the candidate put forward by a vote in the city malsovet. A prominent local businessman, Yuri Shoikhet, won a plurality of the votes, and his name was immediately advanced for the position. By all accounts, Polezhaev was visibly flustered by the unforeseen circumstance, but agreed to appoint Shoikhet, a man with no government experience, as mayor.29 The new head of the city administration received support from local enterprises and cooperatives, from the presidential representative Minzhurenko, and from various social organizations.

Shoikhet was somewhat of a local hero among the emergent small business interests. Born in 1950 in Perm, he was a former fighter pilot in the Soviet airforce who had been stationed in Omsk in the 1970s. Retiring at age 35 (fighter pilots received double time for service), he started a small fishing enterprise in 1986, and then began a cooperative that employed pensioners and invalids in the manufacturing of fishing tackle. He was instrumental in the emergence of the Omsk oblast Union of Cooperatives, and in early 1991 established AO Omsk, a shareholder’s company that enjoyed immediate success in food services and other sectors of the local economy.30

Shoikhet’s well intentioned point of departure was that the new statutes and structures of administration possessed clearly defined authority and a separation of executive and legislative power. His understanding of the responsibility of the city administration was to prepare normative acts and introduce them to the soviet, which would then pass municipal

29 *Fbid.* and interviews with various deputies and officials in the city soviet and administration. For his part, Shoikhet personally claimed that his nomination had been entirely proper, and that he had been appointed on the strength of his abilities (from an interview with Shoikhet).

30 Personal interview with Shoikhet, and *Omskii vestnik* No.46 (29 November - 5 December 1991).
statutes and oversee their implementation by the administration. His first day in office he sacked the entire administrative team of his predecessor, and began to appoint academics and individuals successful in small enterprises to the city administration. Of his ten chairmen of city administration committees, for example, only one could be identified as a bonafide member of the former nomenklatura. Shoikhet quickly launched an agenda that pushed for an international business center, a foreign currency hotel and bank, an international airport, and capital expenditures for developing the local infrastructure for local business (especially direct telephones and fax services). In February, Shoikhet and his administration held an open meeting for all local enterprises, establishing contact and open communications with the business community. He knew his constituency: in less than ten months the number of small enterprises and cooperatives had mushroomed from 1,000 to just less than 4,200 (1,178 cooperatives, and more than 3,000 small enterprises and associations) - with earned receipts more than six hundred million rubles.

The city soviet represented a much wider variety of interests. Elections in 1990 had returned only 20% of incumbents, and the deputy corps was comprised of roughly 40% "conservatives". 40% reformers (although both groups were very loose coalitions), with the remaining 20% independents in the true sense of the word - individuals without solidarity to

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31 Personal interview with Shoikhet, and "Mer i ego komanda: press-bulleten' administratsiia goroda" No.1 (Omsk 1992). Shoikhet conceded that at least one individual with experience was helpful in establishing an efficient administration.


one side or the other. Vladimir Varnavskii, who served also as first secretary of the gorkom and was an influential member of the Supreme Soviet Committee on local government, had been reelected chairman of the soviet, winning 92 of 164 votes. But Varnavskii accepted pressure from reformers to appoint the runner up, Ryzhenko, as deputy chair, and soon won support from many reformers for his fair play and effective leadership.

The new administration led by Shoikhet was supported by a significant minority of city deputies, but less so by the soviet leadership and apparatus. For the most part, both executive and legislative branches stayed within the parameters of their authority defined by the Russian Law on Local Self Government. But among the ranks of the city soviet apparatus, Shoikhet's name most often evoked derisive comments. The mayor was criticized for his style of leadership, for an overly pro business agenda, and for overstepping his authority. His success as a businessman and his personal wealth were noted frequently by a critical press, and was often turned against him with the claim that having him in charge of municipal administration was like having a wolf guard the sheep - the mayor stood the most

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34 This classification was made by Sergei Bogdanovskii, editor of a succession of pro-democratic newspapers. The same figures were given by prominent officials in the city soviet. See DemokraticheskiiOmsk No.7 1990. Unfortunately it is easier to identify a "reformer" than describe what the term represents. In the shifting sands of Russian politics, the term has been applied to those who support legislative power against the executive, and vice versa. Much depends on the particular issue at hand, and the time frame within which the issue presents itself. Thus, a "reformer" tended to support legislative power from 1990-91, but recognized the need for strengthening executive power in 1991-92. Through all this, economic reforms, such as privatization, have been strongly supported by "reformers". In contrast, many "conservatives" have shifted from opposition to market reforms and legislative power towards defending legislative power and grudgingly accepting the need for economic reform, but advocating a slower, controlled pace.

35 Ibid.
to gain by the "commercialization of government." While all sources recognized him as a dynamo of action and a strong advocate of change, he remained much more the businessman than the politician, guilty of being sometimes an abrasive personality. In his defense, some local newspapers defended the mayor, pointing to an alleged alliance between the city soviet and oblast administration directed against Shoikhet. For their part, the leadership of the city soviet did line up closer to the oblast administration on the political spectrum. While the city soviet represented the vast array of interests that could be found in the city, the soviet leadership maintained a middle of the road approach to government, supporting reform, but trying to cushion the blows of change. Its main priorities included rationalizing its authority, and establishing and developing local resources in an "orderly" manner. A new law on municipal taxes, for example, attempted to establish a firm base for revenue without contributing to economic decline. At the second reading of the law in the malsoviet, opposition was directed against the law from those representing business, who felt a payroll tax and commercial licensing fees were undue attacks on local enterprises. In contrast, other deputies claimed the law did not tax local business enough, and proposed a tax on the use of computers (since any firm with computers must have excess money!). In defense of the law, officials pointed out that the law did not aim to "maximize" revenue as much as it aimed to strengthen revenue with a minimum of fiscal pain. Of the eighteen sources available to

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16 "Razmyshleniia nad programmoi razvitiia predprinimatel'stva i grust'yi mysli iue naveiannye" (no author, no date, but, during private conversation, claimed to have been written by an official in the Oblast Administration). See also Omskaià pravda 21 May 1992, which hinted at well circulated local rumours that Shoikhet was buying up local enterprises for his wife.

17 Oreol No.27 (July 1992) Both organs of municipal government held the oblast soviet in contempt, although officials from the city soviet blamed Shoiket's loud and obnoxious style for poor relations with the oblast. It seems, however, that Shoikhet's concern for small business has definite limitations - he later launched attacks against unlicensed street kiosks. See Izvestiia 23 February 1993.
municipal governments for tax revenue, this new law used only six. Why, deputies were asked, should the soviet endorse taxing the private sector into further poverty?  

Institutions and Political Conflict

The emergence, all within two years, of four "new" organs of government and administration (one might even include a fifth: Minzhurenko's office of predstavitel') - each with its own position on the political spectrum, and each struggling to establish independence, and strengthen political power - was at the center of local politics in Omsk in the aftermath of the collapse of the Soviet Union. Each of the four institutions represented distinct local constituencies: the oblast soviet strongly represented rural and agricultural interests; the oblast administration had close ties to large industry in Omsk; the city administration advanced a small business agenda; while the city soviet represented varied and disparate urban constituencies. Additionally, the oblast executive was called on to represent state interests in the oblast. In 1992, a number of local issues reflected the clash of local interests and personalities, and conflict among government organs. In this section, I draw from dominant issues of local politics in 1992 in Omsk to portray the different dimensions and various dynamics of local politics.

Privatization opened up the question of current property ownership. Decades of public ownership bequeathed a legacy of confusion when the unitary system of soviets was finally vanquished in 1991. Which properties were owned by the oblast and which belonged to

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38 "Polozhenie 'O mestnykh nalogakh i sborakh na territorii g. Omska' (Proekt)"; meeting of the Omsk city malsoviet. 7 July 1992; interviews with A.N. Kostyukov, who wrote the law and, in addition to his responsibilities as dotsent at Omsk State University, worked for the city soviet.
municipal authorities? Federal legislation decreed that municipalities would receive the following properties that exist within their territory: residential properties; establishments dealing with city infrastructure; enterprises of retail trade, public catering, and domestic services; and wholesale and industrial complexes required for same.\(^{39}\) Oblast property was not identified by law, since oblasty remained territorial divisions of state power. Yet there were many grey areas concerning the issue of property and privatization, and many property titles which needed to be transferred to the proper owner. This transfer of property to municipalities was a crucial component in any development of municipal power. The ownership and control of property is directly linked with political power, and revenues from privatization were important additions to municipal budgets. In 1992, for example, municipal privatization added more than 2 billion rubles to the city budget.\(^{40}\)

An example of the problems involved in the process of privatization is found in the privatization of housing. The city administration rejected the December 1991 oblast proposal to privatize housing, which would have merely turned over residences to their occupants without any compensation. In late January, 1992, the city alternatively proposed to transfer title of domestic dwellings to their respective inhabitants - free of charge for apartments and homes where there was less than 18 square meters per resident, and for compensation when living space exceeded that measure. Various other factors were to be considered, such as the floor on which the apartment was situated, the age of the building, and the location. The

\(^{39}\) Postanovlenie verkhovnogo soveta RSFSR "O razgranichenii gosudarstvennoi sobstvennosti v Rossiiskoi Federatsii na federal'nuju sobstvennost', gosudarstvennuju sobstvennost' respublik v sostave Rossiiskoi Federatsii, krai, oblasti, avtonomnoi oblasti, avtonomnykh okrugov, gorodov Moskvy i Sankt Peterburga, i munitsipal'nuiu sobstvennost'." Ekonomika i zhizn' No.3 (January 1992).

\(^{40}\) Izvestiia 28 January 1993.
rationale behind the city's proposal was twofold. First, it would target some of the old nomenklatura that had secured access to superior housing during the previous regime. Second, and more important, the city hoped to augment its limited sources of independent revenue and strengthen its financial autonomy. A.P. Potapova, head specialist for the municipal committee for privatization of housing, stated that the city's hopes were "that the means gained from privatization of apartments would find its way into the extremely tight local budgets."41 The oblast responded by ridiculing the city's proposal, and pointed out that according to Russian law, municipal authority had no jurisdiction over the privatization of housing.42 The city administration, however, based its claim on the law concerning the transfer of property cited above. It refused to concede its case, in spite of support for the oblast position from the city procuracy and the oblast court. Through 1992, the case lay before the Federal court, delaying the privatization of housing in Omsk until the matter could be resolved.

A further example of city vs. oblast conflict was the battle over the Torgovyi Tsentr (TTs), which operates a large retail "mall" in the middle of the city. The TTs is a member of the OTD conglomerate. During the spring of 1992, worker collectives from TTs submitted their application for the transformation of TTs to a closed shareholders' company to the office of Aleksandr Saraev, chairman of the city municipal property committee. Saraev's committee normally required at least 3 weeks to process applications, and then required the agreement of the city soviet before the process can continue. In this instance, the city administration had

41 Omskii vestnik 20 February 1992.

42 "O privatizatsii zhilishchnogo fonda v RSFSR" Vedomosti RSFSR No.28 (11 July 1991). See, in particular, article 12. This law seems to directly contradict the postanovlenie of 27 December 1992 cited in footnote 39, above.
some doubts concerning the formation of a closed shareholders' company, which often served as a front for the privatization of profitable firms to former members of the nomenklatura.

As the city administration considered the application, the oblast administration began to create waves, claiming that TTs was really oblast property. At issue was the vested interest of the TTs directorship, coupled with the fact that the lion's share of any privatization revenue went to the institution that held title. Once the oblast administration began meddling in what even the oblast soviet agreed was municipal property, Saraev and Shoikhet went on the attack. Rather than allow TTs to become a closed shareholders' company, it approved only the creation of an open type shareholders' company, a move that the city administration believed would limit control of TTs by large corporate interests in the city (i.e. OTD). Called to explain the decision before a meeting of the workers' collective, Saraev failed to show. He later appeared at a subsequent meeting accompanied by Shoikhet, where the latter made a spirited defense of his subordinate's decision. As a prime investment opportunity, he declared, TTs should be available to all citizens of Omsk, rather than to allegedly manipulated labour collectives from TTs. The whole incident was a public relations disaster for the city administration, but it was successful in preventing (at least in the short term) any buyout by OTD interests. At the end of 1992, TTs had only temporary status as a shareholders' company, while the issue awaited permanent resolution.

Another example concerns a private domestic service corporation known as

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43 Rumour mongers quickly claimed that Shoikhet, whose personal wealth was well known throughout Omsk, was interested in buying controlling interest in TTs for his wife.

44 On TTs see Omskaia pravda 4 June, 16 June 1992; Omskii vestnik 1 June 1992; Biznes Omsk No.12 (15-22 June 1992). Also from personal interviews with Shoikhet, Saraev, and Malykhin.
Omskservis. The formation of this company is a prime example of *prikhvatizatsia* (piratization) of state property by members of the nomenklatura that was rampant in 1990 and 1991. By late 1990, the directors of the state domestic service industry in Omsk oblast moved to maintain their positions of privilege and authority, and forced the rapid creation of AO Omskservis. The "new" closed shareholders' company assumed the functions of managing state run domestic services ranging from film developing to hair salons to television and radio repair. At the founding meeting of the company, which was attended by workers' delegates and controlled by the existing directorship, the vast majority of delegates reportedly spoke out against the formation of Omskservis. Yet the vote for privatization "mysteriously" showed two thirds support. The oblispolkom supported the move, and even contributed a sizeable donation to the "new" enterprise. They transferred some 65 million rubles of what would shortly have become municipal property to Omskservis free of charge. And so, as one local reporter observed, the leadership of the oblast domestic service administration resettled into the easy chairs of the board of directors of AO Omskservis. Thereafter, Omskservis began to put the squeeze on its competition and uncooperative labour collectives, buying up its own stock, and maintaining a commanding monopoly over local services.\(^5\) According to oblast administration documents, Omskservis held a 60% market share of local domestic services, which was then a 588 million ruble industry in Omsk oblast.\(^6\)

The existence of Omskservis contradicted Russian law. But since Omskservis ducked in under the wire of legislation intended to prevent the formation of such privately owned

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\(^5\) *Novoe obozrenie* 18 October 1991.

monopolies. the company continued to exist while political and legal battles were waged over its status. The city administration responded by issuing a decree in February 1992 with three basic demands: the reorganization of Omskservis and its constituent enterprises independent of any official (state or municipal) property by March; the return of municipal property transferred earlier to Omskservis by the oblast ispolkom; and then the liquidation of Omskservis and re-creation of municipal commercial enterprises. Directors would then be appointed by city and (outside the city) raion administrations. The motivation for city soviet and administration opposition to Omskservis is multifaceted. On one hand, the pro small business platform of the city administration has been noted.

But two other factors are also significant. The first of these is the issue of property. Property valued at 65 million rubles prior to the rampant inflation of 1992-94 was a valuable collection of real estate. That it was essentially pilfered from city authorities prior to the emergence of viable municipal power was a loud call to arms for municipal officials, led by Yuri Shoikhet. The mayor's stated purpose in the struggle was to strengthen the power and authority of the city administration against that of the oblast.

The second factor is that Omskservis was also part of the grand conglomerate (OTD), the nemesis of small business in Omsk. Shoikhet's opposition to OTD was based not only on his concern for small independent enterprises, but, more importantly, a result of concern for


48 "O kommersializatsii predpriiatii byтовogo obsluzhivaniia," postanovlenie of the head of administration of the city of Omsk. 20 February 1992, No.91-P.

his own trust. AO Omsk, which made inroads into the domestic service industry. Placed in trust during Shoikhet’s tenure as mayor, it was run nevertheless by Pavel Borisov, his close assistant. Polezhaev did reverse the decision that transferred property to Omskservis, but the company continued to operate and hold on to the property with impunity. The oblast administration appealed to the oblast soviet and rural constituencies for support in a losing cause to defend Omskservis, claiming that if the corporation fell into municipal hands, the service sector in rural areas would be decimated. Shoikhet, they claimed, was only interested in maximizing profit, and would quickly close any unprofitable shops. As with other examples, the issue of Omskservis was tied up in the courts.

**Anti-Monopoly Politics.** The Omsk Anti Monopoly Committee (AMC) was formed in January 1992 by the State Anti Monopoly Committee in Moscow. Local AMC officials, self-described "commissars of the market", were agents of the state committee, and answered directly to the center. The AMC had no direct horizontal accountability. The Omsk AMC was led by Sergei Sumenkov, a former engineer from "Polyet," a large aerospace company in Omsk. He was recommended for the position by Aleksandr Minzhurenko. Leonid Polezhaev had recommended someone else for the post, and so there was a significant amount of administrative opposition to Sumenkov’s appointment. According to Malykhin, chairman of the oblast administration’s economic committee, Sumenkov and his assistants were "unprofessional", had no understanding of economics, and did not comprehend the "common language" of administration.50

The AMC had 70 comprehensive and complicated criteria through which they defined

50 Personal interviews with V.V. Malykhin and with V.A. Sharov. Sumenkov’s assistant.
a monopoly. When their equations and formulas identified an enterprise as such, the AMC attempted to force the enterprise to reduce either the price of a given product or its market share. If these endeavours failed, the AMC would slap the enterprise with a fine. Problems emerged once enterprises were "listed" as monopolies. When enterprises failed to comply with price or market share reduction, the AMC could act unilaterally and impose a fine, transferred directly out of the enterprise's accounts. Appeals were directed not towards resisting payment, but for the return of monies already confiscated. This transfer of money from an account to the AMC, however, required the approval of the chairman of the oblast administration's economic committee. The oblast administration's ties to the large enterprises in the territory has already been noted, and Vyacheslav Malykhin had no qualms about defending the interests of these firms. For example, when the AMC determined that "Omskshina," a large tire manufacturer, possessed a complete monopoly over the sales of tires throughout Omsk and applied a fine of 1 million rubles, Malykhin refused to approve the confiscation of monies. He argued that Omskshina really produced for the national market, and that its market share throughout Russia was the only criterion upon which such judgement could be made.

A more revealing example of the oblast administration's defense of large firms was the case of "Khozstroimebel'torg", a domestic furniture maker and wholesaler that controlled 96% of the oblast domestic furniture market. Of 38 retail furniture stores in the oblast, all were compelled by contract to purchase their goods from this firm. When Khozstroimebel’torg

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51 *Omskii vestnik* published the AMC's initial list of some 72 monopolies in Omsk on 19 February 1992.

was listed by the AMC, its director quickly appealed to Malykhin, who gathered alternative data and information and was influential in preventing the firm from being fined. Sumenkov pressed his case, enlisting the help of Aleksandr Saraev, the chairman of the municipal property committee of the city administration, and state agent for privatization. Saraev’s stated interest in breaking the monopoly of Khozstroimebel’torg was to help out the smaller retailers in the city (part of the platform of the city administration), but he also had a personal feud going with Malykhin, his former boss. While Malykhin was initially successful in defending Khozstroimebel’torg, the issue soon transcended mere economic concerns and developed as a battle between rival institutions and personalities. Encouraged by the support of the city administration, the AMC continued to press its case, and eventually succeeded in penalizing Khozstroimebel’torg.

Local Self-Government and Local Elites

Politics in Omsk were thus dominated by conflict among the various institutions of local government. The question that then arises concerns an explanation for the conflict. Two alternative answers appear most plausible. The first suggests that some measure of institutional interests were at work. New institutions of government and administration had not yet established functional working relationships. And all the institutions of local government were engaged in the pursuit of resources (especially such independent revenues as

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53 *Biznes Omsk* No. 12 (15-22 June) 1992; and personal interviews with Malykhin and Saraev. Both Malykhin, the chair of the oblast administration economic committee, and Saraev are candidates of economic science. The former was a protege of Aganbegyan at Novosibirsk, the latter was a student of Gaidar in Moscow. In addition to rival approaches to economics, it was apparent that Malykhin had held back the able and more gregarious Saraev from promotion and academic opportunity while Saraev was employed in the economic committee of the Omsk oblast. Both were young - Saraev 38, Malykhin 41. Malykhin was tragically killed in late 1992, and Saraev was then appointed by Polezhaev to head the oblast economic committee.
those from privatization) necessary to increase their political power. Oblast and municipal governments continued to lack the necessary revenues to provide even basic services. If we ask how clearly the jurisdictions and authority of local organs were defined, how unambiguous and effective the accountability of executives had been established, how independent institutions of local government were from particular local interests, and how capable local institutions were of implementing policy, then we go a long way towards understanding the many problems of local government and administration in post-Soviet Russia. Analysis of the situation in Omsk leads to the conclusion that the breakdown of the old Soviet administrative system had not been replaced by a functional system of government in the provinces. What existed instead were immature organs of local government that possessed ill-defined authority and generally lacked the resources for real political power, and yet were called upon to implement far reaching and often unpopular reforms. Until such problems as property ownership and adequate tax revenues, as well as those involving the lack of clarity in defining and dividing local powers and authority, were fully addressed, local politics would be marked more by conflict than cooperation. ⁵⁴

Notwithstanding this institutional confusion, or perhaps even because of it, local elites were the dominant actors in local politics in Omsk. In each of the examples described here, particular interests, such as the agricultural lobby, big and small business, were represented by

⁵⁴ A new law on local budgets was in the works throughout late 1991 and 1992, and was finally passed in April 1993. Experts on local government in Moscow in late 1992 entertained little hope that the new law would resolve the problems of local budgets. The law reflected the conflict between those who recognized the need for local budgets to be based on independent revenues, and those who advocated the need for superior organs to create norms and control the budgets of lower levels. See "Ob osnovakh biudzhetnykh prav i prav po formirovaniu i ispol'zovaniu vnebiudzhetnykh fondov predstavitel'nykh i ispolnitel'nykh organov gosudarstvennoi vlasti respublik v sostave Rossiiskoi Federatsii, avtonomnnoi oblasti, avtonomnykh okrugov, kraev. oblastei, gorodov Moskvy i Sankt-Peterburga, organov samoupravleniia." Rossiiskaia gazeta 30 April 1993.
various institutions of government. In some instances, the distinction between an institution and a particular interest was sufficiently blurred to cause one to wonder when a political leader was acting as a leader of an institution, and when he was acting as a member of a particular elite. The relationship between the oblast administration and OTD, for example, goes well beyond what would be acceptable in a mature political system. The fact that these local leaders were working with poorly defined authority, weak institutions, and limited official resources forced them to rely more heavily on local elites. As one group of authors on American local politics has pointed out.

Leaders are, of course, more keenly aware of governing arrangements than are ordinary members (of coalitions). And they may regard themselves not only as leaders of particular groups, but also as members of the governing group. If so, they have a stake in these governing arrangements, perpetuating what they are a part of and perhaps bending these arrangements in a way that corresponds with their understanding of what is appropriate.

Scarce resources remained concentrated in the hands of local elites. Institutions of local government lacked required resources and hence sufficient amounts of political power for local self-government to emerge. Politicians were thus required to rely on narrow coalitions of elite interests, and a "workable power sharing arrangement" among these elites was extremely tenuous. This suggests that one problem plaguing post-Soviet Russia was not so much that of an excess of autonomy of local governments, but an excess of power of local elites. This predicament paralleled earlier manifestations of the paradox of under and over government from Russian history: the conflict and chaos in Russian government was the result of a combination involving a lack of power of certain government institutions and the

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unintegratedness of power among different tiers of government. In either case, the organization of power was inadequate. The consequences of this paradox remained the lack of penetration of state power, which then served to justify attempts to strengthen control from Moscow.

**Gubernator Uberalles**

Through 1993 and into 1994, the power of the oblast administration became much stronger. This was partially a consequence of Polezhaev's position within the Omsk regional economy, but also very much a result of his political power over the oblast and local governments. The *gubernator*, originally conceived as accountable to both oblast soviet and president, became instead the primary agent of deconcentrated executive power, extending down from President Yeltsin into the regions of Russia. This next section is a discussion of the consolidation of oblast executive power over municipal government in Omsk through examples of control over information, the control over personnel, and the power of the regional budget.

One aspect of power in intergovernmental relations concerns the control over the flow of information. Regions may be vulnerable to the power of national television and press, but in local news regions possess an abundance of control that strengthens power throughout their jurisdictions. In Omsk, governor Polezhaev did not like the press coverage his administration received from either the local independent newspapers or in articles that found their way to the federal press. One method to resolve this matter was to reduce the availability of national newspapers (which are difficult to find in Omsk), while promoting the two oblast newspapers
(which are heavily biased in favour of the oblast administration) by slashing the subscription and single copy rates to less than half their previous costs. In this manner, the oblast administration also curbed the influence of alternative perspectives on local news which were forced to raise their prices to keep up with inflation. Significantly, this reduction in prices came during the local election campaigns in the spring of 1994. and, not surprisingly, two thirds of the deputies elected to the oblast assembly supported Polezhaev. Such press subsidies are actually subtle forms of censorship, allowing two regional newspapers with a subsidized advantage to dominate circulation throughout the city and oblast. The two oblast newspapers are known in Omsk as the "Governor’s Tribunes".56

A stronger indicator of oblast power and the weakness of local self-government was evidenced through the fate of Omsk’s mayor. In February 1994, Leonid Polezhaev dismissed Yuri Shoikhet as mayor of Omsk. The dismissal came in the form of a postanovlenie from Polezhaev, and Shoikhet received notification of this decision through the press. The explanation for dismissal was Polezhaev’s allegation that the mayor was guilty of "destabilizing" the political and economic situation in Omsk. When supporters of the mayor defended him by pointing out that there had been no strikes or manifestations of disorder, no municipal crises in heating, and not even a single protest of municipal administration decisions from the procuracy, Polezhaev responded by pointing to the mayor’s failed bid two months earlier to win election to the Russian Duma (December 1993). Shoikhet ran in the

56 Sergei Suslikov. "Kak v Omske priruchili pressu." Izvestia. 22 June 1994. p.4. Prior to his dismissal, Shoikhet tried to defend against this oblast control of the press, and subsidized the municipal paper. These subsidies were no match for oblast support, and the subsidy war was won by Polezhaev. This author’s own impressions of the municipal paper since 1994 is that it has adopted a very supportive stance towards the oblast administration. Some of this favourable press may be accounted for by the fact that Polezhaev has a full time committee in his administration devoted to ensuring positive press coverage.
parliamentary elections under the banner of Yegor Gaidar’s party Russia’s Choice. And Polezhaev interpreted the loss as a vote of non confidence in Shoikhet’s responsibilities as mayor.57

The mayor’s questionable popularity, however, was hardly a cause for dismissal. Under such criteria, the vast majority of politicians throughout Russia would be forced to leave office. The real reason for the dismissal was that Shoikhet had been a thorn in the side of the oblast administration since taking office. He had consistently pushed for municipal power and greater autonomy at the expense of the oblast. Most importantly, his representation of small business interests came into direct conflict with large corporate interests connected to Polezhaev and the oblast administration. The dismissal, however, was not unpopular with the majority of the local population, for the public perception was that the conflict between oblast and city had only deepened the crisis of administration. Polezhaev offered local elections for both the mayor and the city assembly - the soviet was dissolved the previous fall - as an alternative. The election was held in the spring of 1994, but failed to give a majority to any of the mayoralty candidates and returned only eleven deputies to the seventeen member city assembly. The city government was thus incapacitated until Polezhaev appointed his own assistant in the oblast administration, Valerii Roshchupkin, to the mayor’s office. Subsequent elections in the fall of 1994 eventually filled the remaining six vacancies. In the interim, municipal government relied exclusively on its executive, functionally subordinate to the oblast administration. In fact, it often became difficult to determine which level of government was formulating municipal policy, a situation that changed little during

the first year of the new municipal administration’s tenure.

The most telling example of regional control over local governments in Omsk concerns budget relations. Expenditure needs of the municipal government increased dramatically from 1991-94, as both oblast and industrial enterprises dumped financial responsibilities on the city. Funding for day care centers, health clinics, and housing, much of which was provided earlier by industrial enterprises and subsidized by the oblast, all diminished as a percentage of transfer payments. From 1991-94, the municipal share of all education costs more than doubled, from 33% to 70%. All but 5% of medical clinics became dependent upon the city budget, as did 55% of all residential services. In contrast to rising expenditure needs, municipal revenues remained extremely limited, dependent upon the oblast for the lion’s share of the municipal budget. The city’s share of the oblast budget, however, declined from 40% in 1990 to 35% in 1994.

In 1994 the city government received only 60% of its budgeted revenue, and was desperate to augment municipal funds. It set up local lotteries (awarding prizes of apartments, garden homes, and cash), and attempted to create a municipal commercial bank, an idea which ran into conflict with the oblast administration and other existing financial institutions. Each time the city found any new sources of revenue, the oblast decreased transfers to the city accordingly, justifying this action by pointing to the oblast’s financial

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58 "God proshel pod znakom skudnogo biudzheta." Vechernii omsk. 5 January 1995. pp. 1-2. Other large shares of these expenditures are carried by municipal raions and other forms of local government.

59 Ibid. The 1993 share was 33%, so there was marginal improvement. The city, however, demands a 50% share, to compensate for greater expenditure needs.

woes. Yet Omsk oblast remained above the national average in terms of oblast revenues, even as the city crumbled: municipal infrastructure is in dire need of capital investment. Housing shortages continued, and social services, in the words of mayor Roshchupkin, were in a state of crisis.

While the city gained authority over a vast array of services, local self-government remained undeveloped in Omsk. This predicament left the municipality with little real power to address adequately important matters on its own. As a reflection of this relative impotence, the municipal administration failed to attract or keep qualified personnel; those with ability quickly moved on to the business world or to the oblast administration. In the latter instance, the oblast offers not only greater remuneration than the city, but also more power to resolve local and regional matters. Perhaps the only sense of municipal power is found in the degree to which the city has influence over municipal districts (raions) and other levels of local government, which possess even less power and have greater degrees of dependence than the city.

Local Self-Government and Regional Politics

The power of the governor in Omsk is not anomalous in Russian politics, but reflects a general tendency throughout the Russian federation. This is not to say that regions completely dominate local governments. Indeed, without some support from federal organs

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and legislation. the fate of local government in Russia may have been much gloomier than at present. Federal support for local government has come in a variety of forms. In the Spring of 1992, for example, V.A. Barabanov, the oblast governor in Bryansk grew tired of complaints from the municipal administration about alleged oblast sabotage in the delivery of foodstuffs to the city, and of general political opposition from the city. He tried to resolve the matter with a directive (rasporiazhenie) that, among other things, released the city mayor from his office and recommended the self dissolution of the municipal soviet and administration. The city tried to defend itself by appeal to the oblast court, which ruled in Barabanov’s favour. Eventually, the Committee for Local Soviet Affairs and the Development of Self-Government of the Supreme Soviet stepped in and made peace between the city and the oblast administration. affirmed the right of the mayor and city soviet to function in their responsibilities. and challenged Barabanov to gain a more professional understanding of his responsibilities as governor.

A more recent example of the benefit to local government of central involvement is a recent ruling by the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation. In February 1994, V.A. Chepelev, the mayor of Uglich, a smaller city in Yaroslavl Oblast, was released from his responsibilities by order of the oblast administration. Chepelev was replaced by E.M. Sheremet’ev, who soon travelled at city expense with other executive personnel from the oblast to California to attend business seminars. This incensed residents of Uglich, who

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64 The mayor was also one of Barabanov’s assistants in the oblast administration. See “Rasporiazhenie No. 396 ‘O zamestitele glavy administratsii oblasti’ (30 March 1992); in Materialy po rezul’tatom proverki v Bryanskoi oblasti, documents from the Komitet Verkhovnogo Soveta RSFSR po voprosam raboty sovietov narodnykh deputatov i razvitiu samoupravleniia.

65 The oblast soviet, which was also at odds with Barabanov, was left to mediate between oblast and city.
complained that according to the existing law on local self-government, administrative organs should be formed directly by the local population without any interference of higher levels of government. In November, the oblast court supported the actions of the oblast administration and ruled that there were no anomalies concerning these events in Uglich. But when residents protested further, the case went to the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation, which ruled that the oblast involvement in Uglich contradicted both the constitution and presidential decrees. The court ruled that between November 1991 and October 1994, executive authority over appointments to lower executive offices was premised upon Yeltsin’s decree No. 239, which granted executives the right to appoint lower executives with the agreement of the corresponding soviet. But since soviets could not participate in the decision after October 1993 (they had since been dissolved), the Supreme Court ruled that in Uglich, the selection of a new mayor was the sole purview of the city.

Without such federal and judicial intervention, local governments would be left open to the kind of political interference from governors that is directly in conflict with the principles of local self-government. These two examples, however, are successful tales of defense of local government in light of interference from the governor. Instead of a myriad of anecdotes about the rise of local government in Russia, these are more the exceptions than the rule. Rather than the emergence of local self-government, Russia has experienced the rise of the regional governors. This led to increased calls for the accountability of regional

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67 A mitigating circumstance may have made this ruling easier, since the Uglich appointment was made not by the governor, but by his assistant. Igor’ Murav’tsev, "Glava administratsii - dolzhnost’ vybornaia," Rossiiskaia federatsiia, 10 (1995): 36-37; and Rossiiskaia Gazeta, 12 April 1995. p.13.
governors from regional soviets and from the public.  

Conclusion

Political dynamics in Omsk suggest a number of predicaments and consequences of early efforts to forge local self-government in Russia. The first of these is that in spite of attempts to use executive power as a method to further local and regional government by compensating for the often loud and fractious soviets, executives instead were pressured to reflect Russia's dominant legacy of the unitary system of power. At the oblast level, the governor was pulled in different directions by the President, who possessed the power of appointment, and the corresponding soviet, which legally was supposed to monitor the use of executive power. The public was left with little or no say in the affairs of regional government. At the level of local self-government, the fate of the city of Omsk suggests that it became little more than an appendage of oblast administration. Any early success of autonomy, such as represented by Shoikhet as mayor, was soon swallowed by the power of the oblast. In both cases, soviets were rendered obsolete by Yeltsin's decree in September 1993. New executive-legislative relationships required new legislation that was only forthcoming at the end of 1995.

It is important to note, however, the neither Polezhaev nor Roshchupkin are unpopular leaders in Omsk. Indeed, the governor and his protege are both praised as capable and

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58 See, for example, Igor Belikov, "Regional Governors in Russia," Analytica Moscow: Politica Weekly Press Summary (October 29 - November 4, 1994). Other examples of the heavy handedness of regional governors can be found in many other regions of Russia. One such example is in Nizhni Novgorod. There, the poster boy for reform, governor Boris Nemtsov fired the city mayor Dmitri Bednyakov. See New York Times 29 April 1994. Other such examples can be found in Vladivostok and Khabarovsk.
effective administrators. The relative harmony between oblast and city is in stark contrast to the political battles and squabbles which dominated Omsk politics prior to 1994. These good relations led some of my more astute acquaintances in Omsk to suggest that local self-government is not a necessary condition for political, social and economic development. Yet this observation misses the primary point: the earlier conflict between the oblast and city in Omsk was not a consequence of self-government, but of its absence. Conflict between oblast and city prior to 1994 was based on the city's struggle to exercise authority and strengthen its power in an environment where it possessed little of either. In place of this conflict was a reassertion of a unitary system of power, justified by the gains made in the coherence of administration, which effectively spelled an end to any immediate prospects for local self-government.
CONCLUSION

This study began with a discussion of state building, and suggested that the fate of 
local self-government in post-Soviet Russia could help us understand the dynamics of state 
building in Russia, and the nature of the "new" Russian state. State building is viewed here 
not as the extension of central power throughout a given territory, but as the organization of 
power among different levels of government. The emergence of local self-government 
necessitates an organization of power in order to provide opportunity for local communities to 
control and administer some of their common affairs. This opportunity demands both a legal 
right of self-government and the ability to make and implement local decisions. Accordingly, 
this study has focused on Russian legislation on local government and the capacity of local 
governments to act.

The Limits of Local Government

What is the status of local self-government in contemporary Russia? Can it be said 
that local government has emerged? Federal legislation represents a partial maturation of the 
concept of local self-government, away from lofty ideal and towards more specific and 
practical components such as municipal property, direct elections and executive power. The 
1991 law on local self-government, for example, made noticeable progress in addressing some 
of these components. It established basic principles for executive-legislative relations and 
strengthened the foundation for local elections. Given the powerful legacy of unitary power 
in Russia and the fear of political pluralism, even such limited progress should be viewed as a
notable achievement. Motivation for much of this legislation came from two sources: from the administrative need to establish order in government; and from the energy and optimism of local politicians and officials in pursuit of more authority and power for their local institutions. In this regard, both the product and the process of local government reform appear to reflect the interests of improving Russian administration.

Administrative reforms, however, failed to address the one element of local government essential to both state building and local self-government - the organization of power. In the contemporary period, this has meant that local governments have gained more responsibility without sufficient increases in their capacity to act. The collapse of the former regime has left local governments with real responsibility for such issues as education, housing, health services, and local infrastructure, but without the independence or means required to resolve such issues. As a consequence, local governments in post-Soviet Russia are no more self-governing than at other stages in Russian history.

At the level of legislation, gains made under the 1991 law were insufficient for the development of local self-government. Instead of radical notions such as Kirpichnikov’s "bottom up" approach, and in spite of the energy and demands from local politicians, the legislation came to reflect the limited possibilities defined by the existing organization of power. Local self-government thus reflected the interests of the center in establishing a more unitary system of executive power. Central ministries, such as the Ministry of Finance, were very influential in curbing any substantial reorganization of power that might include local self-government. The budget process, for example, remained dominated by the center. And
local government institutions were meant to serve more as implementors of central directives rather than the originators of local policy.

Beyond such legislative developments, the capacity for local governments to act was also inhibited by the growing power of the regional governor. In fact, central interests notwithstanding, *gubernatory* dominated local politics in the first three years of the post-Soviet Russian state. The rise of regional power stemmed partially from the *de jure* federalism of the Russian republic, from the political struggles between president and parliament in Moscow, and from constitutional wrangling in the aftermath of the Soviet state. But regional power was also a consequence of the region’s role as an intermediate stage between Moscow and local governments. In an effort to establish firmer control within Russian territory, Moscow relied on the regions to adopt a supervisory role over local government. This top down approach had significant consequences: beyond contributing to the rise of regional power, it also hindered the emergence of local self-government.

Rather than local communities managing their own affairs through their elected representatives, municipal and rural governments continued to be dominated by appointed officers and hindered by meager independent revenues. The fate of local government in Omsk illustrates this predicament. There, the oblast administration was able to dismiss the city mayor and consolidate regional control over the public purse. Yuri Shoikhet may or may not have epitomized the future of local self-government in Omsk, but he and his supporters did represent rival interests to the oblast administration and alternative visions for Omsk’s future. The appointment of Polezhaev’s assistant as the new mayor in 1994 clearly reflects tendencies against any fracturing of power and towards the consolidation of "unitary power"
within the oblast. Rather than an organization of power extending to local tiers of
government, a decentralization of power which is a prerequisite for self-government.
developments in Omsk suggest that only a deconcentration of state power might occur. The
consequences of these developments suggest that the problems of over and under government
will continue into Russia's future. Indeed, the dominance of local elites, such as the OTD
consortium in Omsk, will be furthered by the lack of power of local governments. In this
sense, it is the absence, rather than the presence, of local self-government that contributes to
the limited penetration of the state. The attempt to accomplish governance without an
organization of power across all tiers of government leaves a void at those tiers excluded from
the distribution of power. These voids can then be filled by specific interests which remain
relatively immune to the state.

In these two cases, the drafting of legislation and the dynamics of local politics in
Omsk, the process of local government reform in post-Soviet Russia has been dominated more
by what has not been done than what has been accomplished: there remains an acute deficit
of power, or the ability or capacity to act, at the level of local government. While Omsk is
but one example of local government in Russia, this deficit of power is a universal
phenomenon throughout the country. Even in such cutting edge, reformist cities as Nizhnii
Novgorod, governors have dismissed popular mayors from office. The primary obstacle to
resolving this deficit of power lies in the existing organization of power within Russia. In
spite of the energy and commitment among academics devoted to local self-government and
the pursuit of power by local politicians, reformers have been unable to foster local self-
government beyond the realms of theory into practice.
This failure is by no means a recent phenomenon. Local government reform has surfaced repeatedly through Russian history as Moscow grappled with a continuing paradox of over and under government. Throughout this history there has been a pronounced fear of divided power, which, in the context of local government, is manifest by an assumption of opposition between national unity and local power. As a consequence, the center has had little interest in tying its many different hands and curbing its ability to both define and defend state interests by fostering the development of local power. Local reform, from Ivan the Terrible through the Soviet period, has been motivated less by any concern for authentic community rule by the perceived need to strengthen the power of the center. This ogosudarstvenniy (statist) approach to local reform has thus been devoted towards improving central control over such concerns as revenue collection, the implementation of central directives, or law and order. Even local elections were motivated in the past less as a means to legitimize local and individual choice or improve the representation of local interests, than as a process to alleviate excessive corruption and autonomy of local elites. Still none of these efforts to strengthen the power of the state through more effective local administration has proved successful. In fact, local reforms historically increased the chaos of state administration in proportion to the degree in which reform was implemented. A more successful reform of local government necessitated the organization of power among different tiers of government. The historical reluctance to do this perpetuated the dilemma of over and under government throughout Russia’s past - a dilemma then used to justify further centralization of power.
The contemporary record of local government reform shares many parallels with these earlier attempts. Local reform under Gorbachev, for example, was motivated by the interests of the state for more effective administration and accountability of the bureaucracy, which by then included the Communist Party, rather than an interest in better representation of local interests and needs. While reformers were able to mobilize public support for the revitalization of the soviets, various central interests were able to moderate proposals in such as way as to obstruct any shift of power to local government, first in legislation, and then in implementation. Evidence of this influence is the vision of local government that emerged from the reform process during perestroika, a weird hybrid between reformist and traditional patterns of power. This hybrid included both a surrender of initiative for local reform from the Union government to the republics and a simultaneous attempt to maintain a unity of central power and control. This duality led to increased frustration among newly elected deputies unwilling to labour in local soviets which lacked both sufficient power to accomplish their required tasks and coherent relationships of authority along vertical and horizontal axes. Additionally, changes in the administrative role of local Communist Party organizations undermined the "glue" of local administration, which had not only fused executive-legislative relations, but also was instrumental in fostering local government compliance with superior tiers of government. Such administrative changes demanded real opportunity for political negotiation and compromise among different tiers of government. But the overarching legacy of government in Russia was of administrative fiat from the center. These growing tensions were a large part of the reason why the Soviet system imploded: to paraphrase Prince Lvov's
explanation of the collapse of the tsarist autocracy. the Soviet state was never overthrown, it failed as a consequence of its internal weakness.

Thus, from the emergence of autocracy in the sixteenth century and state ministries in the nineteenth, to the CPSU and Union ministries in the twentieth, institutions with a preponderance of power defended the perogatives of the center. The principle of the unity of power, or the unity of central power, served as justification to prohibit the development of power of local government institutions. The reform of Russian local government has been premised upon broadening the authority of local government without a commensurate increase in the power of local government. And the power to do is often distinct from the power to say. Without control over resources, local governments possessed little capacity to accomplish the tasks assigned to them and thus could not provide a foundation for local self-government. When local organs pursued power in order to accomplish these tasks, they were accused of injuring the interests of the state. Any administrative chaos that followed such pursuit would then be used by central organs as rationalization for centralization.

In short, if local governments do not possess power, there is no local self-government. The ongoing dilemma for Russian state building is to foster the development of local power in such a way that local power is not only encouraged, but is also in some measure recognized and accepted by the center. In this regard, the task of state building involves the organization of power in such a way that power can both represent various interests and reduce conflict between them, rather than cause it. Russian history has witnessed repeated neglect of this onerous task, and power has been vested instead in central institutions rather than establish a workable organization and distribution of power. This centralization is an
attempt to resolve the task of organizing power across different tiers of government by simply refusing to do so and leaving it all in one location. This has been the dominant legacy of Russian politics, and has influenced the process of state building through the successive periods of Russian history.

Yet a different series of questions emerge concerning the process and origins of reform. How do we explain the motivation for reforming the existing organization of power? What are the factors that lead to such attempts to change this organization? If central power was loathe to jeopardize its control, why then would it feign local reform on so many occasions? To answer these questions, it is instructive to remember that in spite of any stereotypes, central power in Russia has rarely, if ever, been monolithic. While local power has been negligible, central power has been vested in a number of different institutions. Among disparate central institutions some saw it not only as the perogative of the center to maintain power, but as their own perogative to protect and promote their own interests against other central institutions. When local reform, as a means to strengthen central power, also furthered the interests of any particular institution, it was advocated as policy. This was true not only in the early days of Russian autocracy, with Ivan and Peter, but especially so during later reforms. So, for instance, one reason the Ministry of Internal Affairs promoted local reform was as a means to further its own prominence in the latter half of the nineteenth century against rival ministries such as the Ministry of Finance. Khrushchev and his supporters in the CPSU saw sovnarkhozy as a means to weaken the power of the industrial ministries. And Gorbachev and his coterie of reformers hoped for an alliance with stronger local governments to promote the cause of economic reform against a recalcitrant state
bureaucracy. The motivation for reform came not just from some nebulous "above", but from specific institutions and interests well situated at the center. The Russian reforms in 1990-91 were a slight variation on the same theme: they were part of a broader initiative to weaken the power of the Union government and its ministries, and thereby strengthen the claim to power of an assurgent and rival "central" government from the Russian republic. The onset of smuta in the last years of the Soviet Union allowed this rival government the opportunity to contest for power.

Initiatives for local reform have thus become the proverbial political football to be kicked around by the representatives of various central institutions. And it has been these central institutions which have dominated the process of local reform. Just as attempts to reform local soviets in the 1960s and 1970s often depended upon the CPSU to "reform itself" and correct the substitution of local soviet authority, such a top down process achieved little in terms of strengthening local government. Even when reform was strongly supported by local advocates in 1991, the quest for local power could not break past the existing arrangement of power dominated by central institutions. Local reforms were acceptable, but local power was not. And left to their own devices, local politicians and academics in support of local self-government simply lacked the resources to compete for such large stakes. Local self-government thus failed to emerge because the consequences were too disruptive to the end game of central control.
Dilemmas of State Building

These reform efforts and their general lack of success provide a glimpse into the process of state building. The greatest obstacle to local self-government in Russia has been the fact that motivation for reform has always emerged from above. Moscow's eternal quest for administrative order has desired more efficient and effective local government - not for the representation of local interests, but for the strengthening of the Russian state. As a consequence, Moscow has pursued administrative order by strengthening its control over local institutions, identified at the outset of this study as an administrative response. Efficient and effective local government, however, requires a political response, which demands an organization of power inclusive of local government and invites politics among all tiers of government. Trying to accomplish a challenging political task through administrative means suggests that the results of reform would continue to reflect the paradox between the administrative and political responses: while deputies, specialists and local institutions all took an active part in drafting the legislation, central institutions and representatives of central interests moderated and shaped the legislation, particularly concerning any issues relative to power. The end product was legislation that in spite of structural and conceptual progress, failed to establish an adequate foundation for local self-government.

Organizing power, then, is above all else a political task. The process of creating, recreating, or reforming institutions both represents and requires the active involvement of disparate and vested interests, and its resolution expects compromise and negotiation among them. The struggle to create local self-government in Russia, however, has been shaped by an already established organization of power. Attempts to reorganize power reflects the
interests of existing arrangements of power. This predicament reflects Skowronek’s definition of state building as getting the powers that are to agree on the powers that will be:

State building is prompted by environmental changes, but it remains at all times a political contingency, a historical-structural question. Whether a given state changes or fails to change, the form and timing of the change, and the governing potential in the change - all of these turn on a struggle for political power and institutional position, a struggle defined and mediated by the organization of the preestablished state.¹

The role of existing organization of power does not mean that any reorganization of power is the result of any one specific plan for reform. Political actions often lead to unintended consequences precisely because they are mediated by an existing organization of power.

Thus, Gianfranco Poggi’s suggestion that state formation may be conducted at an unconscious level ignores the fact that any attempt to organize power is jealously examined by all institutions and interests involved in the existing arrangement of power.

Who organizes power? In the case of local government, local politicians and academics played a significant role as advocates of local self-government. But because local self-government has yet to emerge, so far the dominant roles have been played by institutions and politicians representing interests either opposed or ambivalent to the emergence of local power. This involvement underscores Margaret Levi’s claim that institutions represent concessions of power by one group to another, in order to resolve conflict among various actors. In the case of local self-government, however, the concession of power has been hindered most by those unwilling to complicate the use of central (and, recently, regional) power. To paraphrase Thelen and Steinmo, political actors are not unaware of the impact of institutions, which explains why the organization of power is such a difficult process.

Reconfiguring institutions can save actors the trouble of fighting the same battle over and over again: yet the trouble is only saved either if the actors can come to some kind of mutually acceptable organization of power or if a particular interest or group of interests can dominate the others. In the case of Russian local self-government, the same battle has been fought many times throughout history, but never won, because the battle has been dominated by those with an interest in maintaining existing perogatives.

If attempts to organize power are shaped by the existing patterns of power, the fate of local self-government in post-Soviet Russia will continue to reflect a fair degree of continuity with the Russian past. This does not mean that history will repeat itself, but, as Twain pointed out, it will surely rhyme. In this sense, deTocqueville’s description of the legislative history of decentralization in France applies equally well to Russia:

In the beginning, there is invariably a push toward decentralization... in the end, an extension of centralization. In starting, one follows the logic of one’s principles; in finishing, one follows that of one’s habits, of one’s passions, of power. In sum, the last work always remains with centralization which, to be honest, increases in depth at the same time it diminishes in appearance.²

This rhyming of Russian politics is a critical element of post-Soviet Russian state building. And the fate of local self-government in Russia brightly illuminates the relevance of history in understanding contemporary political dynamics within the Russian state. The legacy of political hypercentrism, for example, is much more than marxist-leninist baggage that could be dumped along with communist ideology. Instead, the institutional legacy of both autocracy and the Soviet Union will continue to affect Russian politics into the next millennium.

Additionally, while some authors cite the Soviet "syndrome" as a poor foundation for civil

² Vivienne Schmidt, Democratizing France, p. 10. Schmidt’s study of the 200 year struggle to democratize France through the reform of local government suggests that institutional constraints can eventually be overcome.
society, the institutional challenges confronting contemporary Russia extend back far beyond the twentieth century.  

The failure to create local self-government suggests that the institutional capacity to articulate societal interests remains limited. Indeed, the recasting of state-society relations in post-Soviet Russia, as manifest by the emergence of local self-government, is far from complete. Some Russian academics suggest that society is ready to manage its own affairs, but that those interests already endowed with power obstruct the reorganization of power required for self-government. Other Russian scholars argue that the people themselves are simply not ready or interested in self-government. Regardless of which side is correct in this debate, the absence of local self-government means that even if society were anxious to engage in self-government, the opportunity to do so remains severely constrained. If post-Soviet Russia is to establish some kind of enduring democratic system, the emergence of local government power would represent a successful transition.

To organize power in Russia to include local government is by no means a simple task. Western models of local government, inasmuch as they reflect a sharing of power, cannot merely be exported to assist the challenges of state-building. To do so would ignore the role that various interests of the host country possess in the organization of power. This organization must reflect arrangements and agreement among existing interests. In this sense, the current quest to organize power in Russia reflects a three-dimensional chess game with a

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multitude of various players representing different pieces on the boards. Russian state building is thus much more than establishing executive-legislative relations in Moscow or in creating functional relationships between Moscow and the various regions. Power must extend also beyond the regional level to the local communities themselves. Without such, Russia will prolong the paradox of over and under government that has been such a large part of its past.

Whither Local Self-Government in Russia?

What are the prospects for local self-government in Russia? Certainly, the process of organizing power in Russia is not over. No state has a static distribution of power, and continual attempts for a redistribution of power lie at the heart of the political process in the most stable of states. But four years into the post-Soviet era, we can point to the current organization of power as something that will continue to affect the prospects for local self-government. There is room for optimism. First, the growth of regional power suggests that structural principles, or existing patterns of power, are not completely deterministic. Indeed, local government may now benefit from competition between central and regional organs in the same way that regions benefitted from the struggle between the RSFSR and the Union, or between president and parliament. The federal government, for example, might move to undercut the growing power of the regions by promoting local self-government. The 1993 Constitution established local government as the joint jurisdiction of federal and regional

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1 My thanks to Todd Foglesong for this analogy.

governments. A new federal law on local self-government, passed in August 1995, establishes general principles of local self-government applicable to all regions. Yet much of the detail of the new legislation awaits new regional legislation and local charters. Since so much legislation is yet to follow, it is still too early to provide any telling assessment of this 1995 law of local self-government. Certainly the law continues the conceptual and textual progress established by the 1991 law. But the fact that much of the initiative for the authority of local self-government now lies in the hands of regional governments is also cause for concern. Regional leaders can manipulate the process to strengthen their own power, and guarantees for local self-government are only weakly established.7

It may be tempting, however, to read too much into these developments. Any prospects for local self-government in Russia will now be determined primarily by the interests of federal and regional levels of power. And there will also be sufficient rationale for these two tiers to curb the development of local self-government. The federal government, for example, is already resorting to administrative solutions to political problems. Continuing concerns over law and order, the implementation of central directives, or tax arrears, may well lead to a recentralization of power in order to protect "state interests". Certainly there is no shortage of such tendencies in Russian history. The growth of federal branch agencies in various regions and locales is thus cause for concern. Additionally, local governments may find it difficult to break free from regional domination. The window of

opportunity that was open in the early years of post Soviet state building for a distribution of power to local governments may now be closed as regional governments will protect their own interests. In short, the future of local self-government may look brighter than at any time since 1917. But the organization of power in post Soviet Russia continues to be stacked against it.
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