

Books

HOW THE SOVIET UNION IS GOVERNED

by Jerry Hough and Merle Fainsod

(Harvard University Press; 679 pp.; \$18.50)

POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN THE USSR

by Theodore H. Friedgut

(Princeton University Press; 353 pp.; \$18.50)

A. James McAdams

How are we to think about Soviet politics? Not too long ago most experts were agreed on the fundamentally totalitarian nature of Communist rule and the rigidly structured, immobilized nature of its politics. In the past decade, however, a new generation of Sovietologists has argued that this old perspective was simplistic, misleading, and unreflective of current Soviet reality. The Soviet Union might be far from our image of utopia, but systematic, empirical studies suggest that the country's political life is a lot more complex than we have previously assumed.

The most prominent of these critics was Jerry Hough, who made his reputation in 1969 with the publication of a detailed study of the rationality of local-level Communist party politics and industrial decisionmaking in the USSR. Responding to the immense impact of this work on the field of Soviet studies, Harvard University Press invited Hough to update the discipline's preeminent textbook, Merle Fainsod's *How Russia Is Ruled*. The Press may

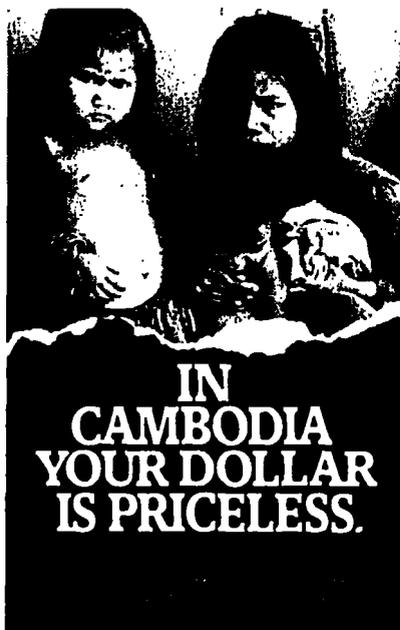
have gotten more than it bargained for. While Fainsod's tome seemed to embody the spirit of the old "totalitarian" approach, Hough's new work is a *major* revision, which unabashedly bears little resemblance at all to the former book. Many of Hough's reviewers have been thoroughly displeased. Some have openly lamented the loss of Fainsod's ostensibly "elegant" prose. Others have offered more concrete criticisms, arguing that Hough's controversial conclusions make his book unsuitable as an introductory text to Soviet politics. For example, Hough seems to rely uncritically on Soviet census data when he suggests that there were far fewer victims under Stalin's purges than we had thought. And, at least in comparison with Fainsod, Hough's historical account seems rather light in its treatment of the roles of the secret police and army. Hough also takes an unusual stand in his appraisal of the dissident question, suggesting that the protestor's lot has improved under Brezhnev. Additionally, Hough devotes surprisingly little space to what many consider the chief problem confronting the Soviet leaders today—the nationalities issue.

Undeniably, there are problems with Hough's account. But we simply can't afford to pass up his manifest strengths. Hough does offer one of the best available analyses of the formation and enactment of Soviet public policy. All of the decisive questions are scrutinized: the composition of the Party apparatus and its responsibilities, governmental composition and structure, regional and local politics, the processes by which forces from below—the factory manager, the labor union, the critical technical journal, the finance officer, the letter to the editor—are not only influenced by but also influence the leadership. In Hough's view, the Soviet policymaking process can't be understood as solely a Party-dominated enterprise.

The presence of such varied influences makes the Soviet policymaking process quite complex, and Hough is right in turning our attention in this direction. But when he speculates on what all this means, he runs into trouble. The point, according to Hough, is that while the Soviet Union may not be quite like the United States, the complexity of this process indicates that it nevertheless "obviously is a participatory society." I do not deny that Soviet Party leaders seek out advice and information from their subordinates before instituting policy—no complex organization can survive if it fails to do so. But Hough seems to argue that the *defining thrust* of Communist politics is not Party management of society but, rather, a kind of reciprocal relationship between the Party and various points of societal influence. At the same time, however, he is also forced to admit that there are many issues the Party will never open to public debate; he certainly knows that state-sponsored "voluntary" organizations operate only under Party supervision, and he readily admits that organized opposition is impossible. None of this adds up to that critical, spontaneous, and autonomous activity which we normally associate with participatory cultures, and as long as the Communist party reserves the right to intervene selectively on whatever issues it considers significant, it is hard to imagine how the limited participation that does exist will ever be truly critical in the determination of Soviet public policy.

But there is a kind of "participation," more properly called "mobilization," which is central to Soviet politics, and that is the subject of Theodore Friedgut's new book. Friedgut is a meticulous scholar, and his ten years of research, some in the USSR, have produced easily the best available account of Soviet local politics. His approach is fairly straightforward: The Party is undeniably the leading force in Soviet politics, and there is little room for truly autonomous participation, even at the local level. We know, of course, that the quasi-democratic institutions that do exist—elections, soviets (state councils), and community organizations—hardly meet their supposedly representative functions. But Friedgut asks an important question: What functions *do* they fulfill?

He has lots of convincing answers. Soviet elections, for example, are a



sham in any Westerner's eyes. How could anyone (even a Russian) take seriously an event for which 99.98 per cent of the electorate turn out, especially when candidates for office run unchallenged? But as Friedgut demonstrates, such "elections" do have their functions. Among these is an important socializing contribution; by which large masses of people are mobilized through the nominating, campaigning, and voting processes to demonstrate social unity and harmony. Secondly, elections fulfill a legitimizing function, since the regime can subsequently point to overwhelming popular support for its candidates and policies. Finally, information is transmitted between the regime and its citizens, regarding production goals, achievements, and, occasionally, popular dissatisfaction.

The same can be said for the functions of the local soviets, which are the central embodiments of regime legitimacy. Not only do they act as chief socializing agents, but they also serve an educational role in training citizens in modern Soviet administration. Also, the leaders of city and village soviets are key links in the Soviet policy chain, sources of information and the distribution of goods and services. These soviets are supported by numerous quasi-voluntary organizations, self-help groups, "comrades' courts," community police, and service committees, which supplement socializing and legitimizing functions. More important, however, the existence of so many diverse groups provides the Party with countless avenues by which the masses can be mobilized, information conveyed, and deviance controlled. This capacity for social access is virtually unprecedented.

Is there any chance that the system will change in the coming years, perhaps shifting in a more liberal direction? Though their interpretations of Soviet politics differ, I think that both Friedgut and Hough would agree that the forces of inertia are strong and that the Party jealously guards its power and manipulative prerogatives. In fact, the chances for an even more authoritarian future may be just as likely. Regrettably, the recent course of world events and the parlous deterioration of détente suggest that this unpalatable authoritarian scenario is quite probable, and any participation which does develop, far from being spontaneous, will be initiated and directed exclusively according to Party design. 

**JAPAN AND THE UNITED STATES:
CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES**

edited by William J. Barms

(New York University Press, 286 pp.; \$15.00/\$6.95)

JAPAN AS NUMBER ONE

by Ezra F. Vogel

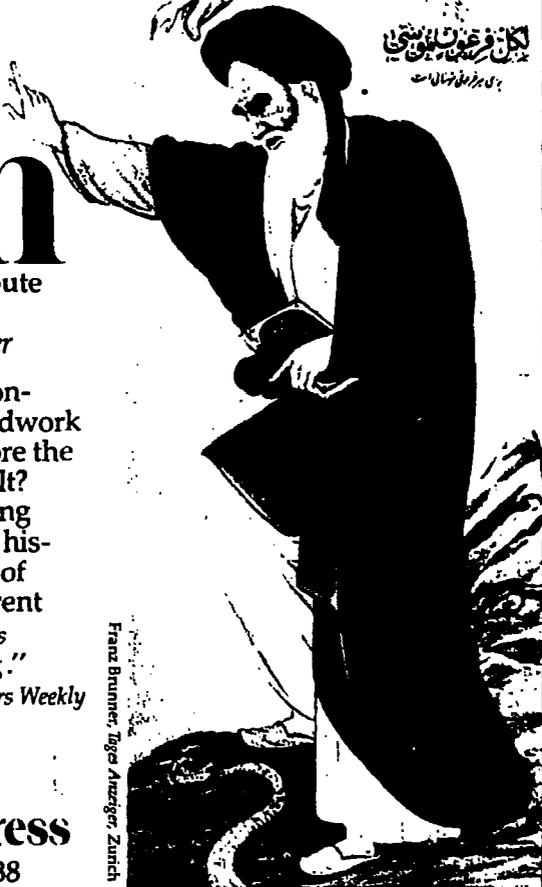
(Harvard University Press, xi + 272 pp.; \$12.50)

Jon Woronoff

Here are two books that deal with the same countries but take a fundamentally different approach. The first tries to explain Japan and Japanese policy to America and show how America might react, while also enlightening Japan about America. It does a credible job.

Japan and the United States is the result of a series of discussions at the Council on Foreign Relations, under whose auspices it appears. Like many similar books in recent years, it attempts to do more than just describe the state of affairs, hoping no doubt to contribute to understanding on both sides of the Pacific. However, because the Japanese know considerably more about America than vice versa, it ends up being, as it must, largely an analysis

of the Japanese situation. Since Japan has not ceased being an economic giant and a political midget, it was necessary to study the strengths of Japan's economy. Much to everyone's regret, these have led recently to more friction with the United States than has any other cause. The analysis, by William V. Rapp and Robert A. Feldman, is more than competent, but unfortunately a bit too technical for the layperson. Martin E. Weinstein gives a clear and broad analysis of another unexpected stumbling block to good relations, the weaknesses of Japan's foreign and defense policies. The only question that is somewhat overlooked here, as everywhere else, is what would happen if Tokyo did indeed adopt its own more



Iran

From Religious Dispute
to Revolution

Michael M. J. Fischer

Michael Fischer conducted intensive fieldwork on Islam in Iran before the revolution. The result?

"A ground-breaking analysis that ties the historical development of Shi'ism to Iran's current crisis." — *Kirkus Reviews*

"Essential reading." — *Publishers Weekly*

\$17.50

Harvard University Press
Cambridge, MA 02138

Franz Brunner, Tages-Anzeiger, Zurich