

leyball, lectures, slide shows, and “lots and lots of dancing.” To try to meet demand, state officials built simpler facilities—rest homes and tent camps with cots and a central area for do-it-yourself meals.

Access to a vacation required possession of a voucher passed from central trade union authorities to local union organizations to local enterprise committees. Some vouchers were awarded for meritorious service or given to workers in great need, and the others were sold for a percentage of their face value. There were never enough to go around, and it was virtually impossible for a couple to get two vouchers to the same place at the same time. Children were forbidden at most spas and rest homes.

After World War II, construction of vacation facilities, which had ceased during the war, recommenced and expanded, and in 1963 the health spa planning agency commissioned its first and only market research survey to determine how Soviet citizens wished to vacation. A completely unexpected 72 percent said they would like to travel from one place to another, not sit in one spa. Some 45 percent wished to vacation with their families, and 41 percent with friends or coworkers; only 15 percent said they preferred being with strangers.

Even so, tourism officials still called for building expensive spas and rest homes that shut out children, claiming that expansion of family facilities would require “huge preparatory work,” a phrase Koenker describes as “code for foot-dragging.”

The earliest Soviets had harbored utopian dreams of the withering

away of the family (along with the state). But both the family and, especially, the state refused to comply. Nonetheless, tourism officials remained addicted to building spas even as the public clamored for swing sets. Soviet leaders never did come to grips with family life and sexuality. To the end, Koenker writes, the beds in Soviet hotels were always single and narrow.

## OTHER NATIONS

## Corruption's Hidden Benefit

**THE SOURCE:** “Buying Peace? Oil Wealth, Corruption, and Civil War, 1985–99” by Hanne Fjelde, in *Journal of Peace Research*, March 2009.

NO PEACE RESEARCHER WOULD be caught dead endorsing corruption, but Hanne Fjelde, a Ph.D. candidate at Uppsala University in Sweden, proposes a “more nuanced” view of the role of political payoffs in oil-rich countries. It has long been thought that oil wealth raises the likelihood of civil war as surely as heat rises from a fire. But a high level of corruption in an oil-producing economy has a countervailing effect. Corrupt leaders can use their oil wealth to buy off potential opponents, and the chances of armed conflict appear to diminish as the corruption gets worse.

Public corruption prolongs poverty and worsens economic inequality. It hampers economic growth and siphons money from projects that benefit all. But it can also co-opt restive groups and give them an economic stake in maintaining the status quo. Gabon,

Libya, and Saudi Arabia illustrate how doling out oil largess has been used to buy stability, according to Fjelde. Gabon buys off the middle class through public expenditures, for example. Libyan leader Muammar al-Qaddafi has staved off opposition to his rule for long periods by paying off political competition, and Saudi Arabia has made military staffing decisions a key route to personal enrichment. Cameroon has used its oil-export wealth to pacify restive ethnic groups.

Patronage allows the “ruler to selectively target supporters, while expending as little of the pie as possible,” says Fjelde. Several corrupt countries that have been plagued by civil war lack oil wealth that can be doled out to regime opponents—Haiti, Sierra Leone, Liberia, and Uganda among them.

Although oil-based economies are especially conducive to corruption because of the extraordinary wealth that’s available, oil is not the only source of such bonanzas. Civil war was largely kept at bay in Zaire until the foreign aid with which Mobutu Sese Seko bribed his opponents was withdrawn in the 1990s.

Rather than dismiss political corruption as nothing but a terrible scourge of dysfunctional oil-rich nations, policymakers should consider whether corruption is a “default option for soliciting support where state institutions are weak.” If the international community wants a warning signal of civil war, Fjelde writes, its leaders should monitor the social consequences in countries when the money runs out to pay the bribes.