

MATERIAL

LUBOMÍR SOCHOR

and the Pragmatics of Stalinism*

Ivan Landa

Lubomír Sochor (1925–1986) was a Czech Marxist philosopher and sociologist. In his work, he focused mainly on the historiography of Marxism, the methodological problems of historical materialism, the theories of elites, and the study of Soviet-type societies.

Sochor's intellectual development has various elements in common with that of his fellow travellers of the same generation – not only in Czechoslovakia (such as Karel Kosík), but also elsewhere in Central Europe (Leszek Kołakowski, for example). During the war he was involved in the resistance against the Nazis. Philosophically, he was an adherent of Marxism and politically an advocate of socialism. During his studies in the second half of the 1940s he became radicalised and came to identify himself intellectually with Stalinism. This is documented by articles that Sochor published in the official Communist Party journal *Nová mysl*, where he worked as an editor from 1949 to 1957. He soon experienced an intellectual crisis, which in his case became apparent immediately after Stalin's death but did not fully show itself until the revelation and criticism of the "cult of personality."

This crisis brought with it a range of questions to which Sochor sought answers for what was essentially the rest of his life. His attention was attracted in particular by the phenomenon of Stalinism: its essence, the conditions of its formation, its possible transmutations after Stalin's death, as well as the presence of Stalinism in everyday life. In the light of the critique of the aforementioned phenomenon, Sochor envisioned

* This text originated within the framework of the project "Marxist Humanism in Societies of the Soviet Type," which is a component of the programme "Evropa a stat: mezi barbarstvím a civilizací" (Strategie AV21). Translated from the Czech by Ashley Davies.

the prospects for democratic socialism and inquired into the causes behind the deformations of the ideals of socialism that happened in the course of its realisation. With reference to intellectual Stalinism, a burning question for him became the relevance of the history of Marxism for the further development of Marxist theory, as well as the explanatory potential of Marxist theory to grasp the reality of socialist societies.

In the second half of the 1950s, Sochor was a member of the so-called “Yugoslav group.” Its members were prominent members of the municipal committees of the Communist Party in Prague and of the Evening School of Marxism-Leninism (which included Klement Lukeš, Eduard Novák, Jaroslav Opat, and Jiří Pelikán). Those participating in the meetings openly discussed the phenomenon of Stalinism. They debated why the realisation of socialism had found itself at a dead end and whether the Yugoslav model could represent a way out of this impasse. The discussions were also actively attended by Yugoslav diplomats and journalists and were frequently held at the Yugoslav embassy, a fact that caused problems for the group’s members. They were arrested and interrogated, and subsequently accused of espionage and sentenced. In 1961 Sochor was expelled from the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia and reassigned to manual labour. For two years he worked in a factory as a milling machine operator.

He regained his Communist Party membership in 1963 within the framework of political rehabilitations. In the same year he started working at the Faculty of Law at Charles University in Prague, where he taught history of Marxism and sociological theory. The next six years were among Sochor’s most productive. He contributed to academic journals and cultural periodicals (*Plamen*, *Orientace*, *Světová literatura*, *Literární noviny*, and so on), and reported on current discussions in Marxist theory and critical theory occurring in foreign academic journals and Party magazines (for example, *Rinascita*). He prepared a range of publishing proposals, which came to fruition in the publication of a representative anthology of Marx, *The Prison Notebooks* by Antonio Gramsci, and anthologies of the works of Antonio Labriola and Abram Deborin; furthermore, several of these titles were translated by Sochor himself.¹ At the same time, he worked systematically on his two books: one on the history of Marxism and the second on the concept of alienation.

Sochor’s interest in the historiography of Marxism was provoked by his intense coming to terms with the phenomenon of Stalinism, primarily understood not as a political, social, or economic system, but rather as a theoretical system sui generis. Among other areas, this system behaved harshly towards its own philosophical tradition, that is, the

¹ As regards translations, Sochor contributed to the translation of the anthology of *The Prison Notebooks* by Antonio Gramsci (only two out of a planned three volumes were published). He translated Lukács’s *History and Class Consciousness* into Czech as well as the slim volume *Lenin: A Study on the Unity of His Thought*, Korsch’s *Marxism and Philosophy*, Trotsky’s *The Revolution Betrayed*, and Marcuse’s *Eros and Civilization*. Sochor’s unpublished translations are being issued by the FILOSOFIA publisher in the series “Emancipace a kritika.”

history of Marxism. Sochor points out that “one of the greatest sins of dogmatism is [...] utter nihilism with regard to the values that were bequeathed by the actual history of Marxism and with regard to their philosophical legacy, the problem that this history contains.”² To come to terms with Stalinism means, therefore, to reject such historical nihilism, which Sochor accomplished in a dual manner. On the one hand, he historicised Stalinism and made it a part of the history of Marxism, and on the other he attempted to retrieve from oblivion the *values* of Marxism that Stalinism had either consciously denied or unconsciously overlooked. In 1965, Sochor completed and defended his inaugural dissertation *Studie z dějin marxistické filosofie* (Study in the history of Marxist philosophy). However, his literary estate also contains the later, slightly amended and supplemented version, *Příspěvky k dějinám marxismu* (Contributions to the history of Marxism), dated 1975. Despite the fact that Sochor continued his work on the history of Marxism until the 1980s, this was never published in book form.³

His work on the concept of alienation was completed in 1961 and bore the title *Marxova teorie „odcizení“ a spory o „mladého“ Marxe* (Marx’s theory of “alienation” and the controversy over the “young” Marx). Sochor’s plan had been to publish it in book form under the title *Spory o mladého Marxe* (The controversy over the “young” Marx); unfortunately, this never happened, although a study in which Sochor summarised the main argument of the book appeared in print.⁴ Sochor was convinced that it is necessary to apply Marxist conceptions to a social reality which itself declares that it is building upon the theoretical pillars of Marxism. Sochor regards the concept of alienation as suitable for this purpose, since it can attest to the explanatory, hermeneutic, and critical potential of Marxism, which was suppressed by intellectual Stalinism. With the aid of the concept of alienation, it is possible to uncover the dehumanising tendencies present in these societies, consisting in the systematic displacement of the first person perspective. In other words, it is possible by this means to understand easily why Stalinism led to a devaluation of the explanatory, hermeneutic, and critical values of those Marxist concepts that took into account a first person perspective.

² Lubomír Sochor, *Sociologie románu* [Sociology of the Novel], 1965, p. 3 [typescript]. Elsewhere, Sochor states: “The Stalinist period made it impossible for Marxism to apply its own critical revolutionary method to its own history.” Lubomír Sochor, *A. M. Děborin a dvacátá léta v sovětské filosofii* [A. M. Deborin and the 1920s in Soviet Philosophy]. In A. M. Děborin, *Filosofie a politika*, přel. Lubomír Sochor (Prague: Nakladatelství politické literatury, 1966), p. 505.

³ In a letter from Robert Kalivoda to Sochor (dated June 21, 1981), one can read the following: “I think that you have the prerequisites to finally compile a proper history of Marxism, which must be *critical* also with regard to Marx and Engels – in the sense that it shows the greatness of their scientific discoveries, but also the metaphysical (primarily Hegelian) narrowness of their focus. It is simply not yet a concrete dialectic (as opposed to a dialectic of the concrete – which is dialectical-metaphysical speculation on concreteness).”

⁴ Lubomír Sochor, “Filosofie a ekonomika” [Philosophy and economics], in Jiří Cvekl et al., *Sedmkrát o smyslu filosofie* (Prague: Nakladatelství politické literatury, 1964), pp. 71–99.

In the late 1960s Sochor was publicly and politically engaged, taking an active role in the events surrounding the Prague Spring of 1968. During the course of the 14th Congress of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia he was elected to the party's Central Committee. After the failure of the reformist endeavours he was expelled not only from the Central Committee but also from the Communist Party entirely. He was subsequently banned from academia, without official permission either to teach at university or to work in any research institution. He started to work as a bibliographer in the library of the Faculty of Law of Charles University, under the surveillance of the secret police (in 1972 he was arrested and briefly imprisoned for disseminating anti-government materials). Although he was isolated in the library, he nonetheless had good access to academic literature. In addition to thoroughly researching the literature of the time relating to political parties, socialist legality, the dictatorship of the proletariat, and theories of revolution, he immersed himself in an intensive study of the theories of elites,⁵ and during the same period he also continued to work on his history of Marxism. Along with this he completed his legal education in 1975, defending his Candidate of Science's thesis *Zákaz incestu a československé trestní právo* (The incest prohibition and Czechoslovak criminal law).

In 1978, Sochor left Czechoslovakia to join his family, who were living in France (his second wife was French). He then lived in Paris, where he taught at the *Université Paris VII*, until his untimely death in 1986. He regularly offered courses focusing on Soviet-type societies, such as: iconography, the theory of communication, the role of the mass media, or socialist realism. In addition, he began to work on a new, ambitious book project on the theories of Stalinism. Although only sketches, excerpts, comments, outlines of structure, and a number of annotations have been preserved, on the basis of this material it is nevertheless possible to gain a relatively clear picture of Sochor's overall argument.

His main intention was to thematise Stalinism as an ideology or as a theoretical system with reference to the various forms of its realisation and practical application. Sochor planned to dwell in detail on a genetic examination of Stalinism, as well as on its systematic, ideal-typical reconstruction. Nonetheless, the focal point to his argument seems to be an analysis of the pragmatics of Stalinism. Sochor attempted to rehabilitate methodologically the first person perspective within a study of social reality, since such perspectival accounts were suppressed by intellectual Stalinism. To put it differently, he tried to reach a better understanding of the diverse ways by which individual and collective subjects – who are an integral part of ideologised reality – understand themselves. At the centre of his interest was also the issue of how they practically pursue their own conceptions of the good life.

⁵ Ondřej Lánský published a slightly supplemented anthology on the theories of elites, which Sochor prepared in the 1970s. See Ondřej Lánský, Lubomír Sochor (eds.), *Materiály k teorii elit a k její kritice* (Prague: Filosofia, 2018).

Probably Sochor's most extensive paper concerning an analysis of the pragmatics of Stalinism is a study on "real socialism," *Contribution à l'analyse des traits conservateurs de l'idéologie du "socialisme réel."* We reprint it in a slightly abridged version in English and Czech translation. Sochor originally wrote it in French as a publication within the framework of a project on Soviet-type societies that was directed from Vienna by Zdeněk Mlynář.⁶

Sochor understands "real socialism" literally: as a reality that is permeated with ideology, or as a realised ideology. In a situation in which ideology becomes real and reality becomes ideological, ideology is sublated: it is abolished and at the same time preserved (even if in altered form). It is abolished in the sense that the ideological content that acts within and through human consciousness loses its significance. It thus blurs the boundaries between idea and fact, image and portrayed. However, ideology also remains preserved in the form of ritualised practice, which contributes to the constitution and at the same time reproduction of social reality.

In my view, Sochor's core insight is that ideology during the 1970s was progressively voided of its content, formalised, and transformed into a liturgy and repressive ritual. The principal change consists in a reappraisal of the alleged primacy of ideology. Within the context of religion, liturgy or ritual has a more or less ancillary function and is not an end in itself; it serves the religious content. And something similar applies in the case of a political ritual, which serves a certain ideology or doctrine. However, if ideology is realised, or reality ideologised, the relationship of subservience is radically transformed. Now it is ritual that has primacy, while ideology fulfils a mere ancillary function within the framework of liturgy. It is then a question concerning to what extent – if at all – individual or collective subjects, immersed in ideologised reality, are able to realise their concrete visions of the good life within a framework of ritualised practices. It appears that Sochor in his study points to a direction which the search for answers could take: a cultural-anthropological examination of Soviet-type societies – on the basis of an analysis of the various forms of ritualised practices on one hand, and the specific actors who effect them on the other – may reveal to us the extent and the precise ways in which individual or collective subjects realise their visions of the good life, often not despite ideology but in accordance with it.

⁶ Lubomír Sochor, *Contribution à l'analyse des traits conservateurs de l'idéologie du "socialisme réel"* (Köln: Index, 1983). It was concurrently published also in German and English by the same publisher. After Sochor's untimely death it was republished under an amended title: *Le "socialisme réel": une idéologie tournée vers le passé* in the Sartrean journal *Les Temps Modernes*. Comp. Lubomír Sochor, "Le 'socialisme réel': une idéologie tournée vers le passé," *Les Temps Modernes* 41 (1985), no. 468/469, pp. 158–238. A Czech translation was made from the last named publication and included in the anthology *Úvahy o ideologii a praxi reálného socialismu* [Reflections on the Ideology and Praxis of Real Socialism], edited by Jan Auerhan, who did the translation. See Sochor, L., *Úvahy o ideologii a praxi reálného socialismu* (Köln: Index 1987).

“REAL SOCIALISM”

Ideology Turned toward the Past

Lubomír Sochor

The term “real socialism” (or, less frequently, “existing socialism”) has become established in the political vocabulary of Western countries with some delay. But as distinct from other terms coming from Russia or its Soviet present such as “tsar,” “knout,” “Cossack,” “soviet,” “shock-worker,” “kolkhoz,” “self-criticism,” or “gulag,” the term “real socialism” is not taken seriously. While no one doubts that the terms I have cited at random refer to definite and tangible facts, the expression “real socialism” arouses justified mistrust because of its ambiguity: it refers to the obscure and not easily identifiable area between reality and pure imagination.

This explains why the admirers of the Soviet regime avoid it carefully. They sincerely believe that when defining the social or political system of the Soviet Union and its satellites it is quite sufficient to speak of socialism without an epithet. Their mistrust is in no way mitigated by the fact that this qualification had been introduced by the Soviet leaders, who also set it afloat. In the West, this term is generally used only by the critics of the Soviet system who place it in inverted commas to set themselves ironically apart from Soviet reality. Moreover, the term is a suitable pretext for coining witticisms. Nothing can be simpler than to play with words while contrasting the ideology of “real socialism” with the reality of a society and its institutions in which socialism is absent and non-existent. True, there are people for whom this is not a joke. They are the intransigent adversaries of any socialism, with or without an epithet and no matter what adjective accompanies it. They declare with satisfaction that Brezhnev, Suslov, Andropov, and all the other heralds of the ideology of “real socialism” are quite right: a socialism other than that set up in the USSR and in its bloc is unthinkable. Any attempt, even made with the best intentions, to invent or establish a different kind of

socialism will inevitably lead to despotism, terror, the gulags, and barbarism. One must not, therefore, tempt the devil. The old dialectical dictum which claims that extremes meet remains valid. In both cases socialism is identified with Russian reality and the contradiction only exists between the completely different assessments of the latter.

Even though I agree with neither Brezhnev nor his successor, nor with Husák, I do not think that we can just dismiss the term “real socialism” with facile jokes. I am convinced that the term must be seen as an important ideological phenomenon, that it must be thoroughly analyzed and its meanings clarified. I do not think that it is a mere word launched by accident. The term expresses a significant metamorphosis of Marxism-Leninism of Soviet provenance. It is essential since it reflects a major reshaping of Soviet ideology and the transformation of its functions which have emerged in the post-Khrushchev era. One often forgets that the Brezhnev era has brought about a profound change in the mentality of the Soviet power elite which has had its repercussions in equally profound modifications of Marxism-Leninism. The latter has changed from a bureaucratized revolutionary ideology into a conservative one concealed under the cloak of a pseudo-revolutionary vocabulary. To use a somewhat picturesque expression one could say that the reign of utopia which was in one way or another typical of the times of Lenin, Stalin, and even Khrushchev has been replaced by a reign of anti-utopia, based on the complete repudiation of the utopian elements of Stalinist Marxism-Leninism. This restructuring of official ideology, the transformation of its function, its excessive ritualization, and its transformation into liturgical Marxism-Leninism are expressed in the ideological formula extolling “real socialism,” the doctrine of “real socialism” expresses the ultimate abandonment of the plan to change social reality; it expresses the cult of the status quo and abandons a “radiant” future that inspires no one, implying a return to the “heroic” past and the determination to preserve the present state of immobility.

I have my doubts whether Brezhnev himself was the author of this doctrine even though it is officially attributed to him in the panegyrics glorifying him as the theoretician of “real socialism.” The ideological formula of “real socialism” is rather a collective creation that reflects the mentality and psychology of the ruling bureaucratic elite; this doctrine reflects the fatal loss of dynamism in Soviet society, its ideological and political sclerosis, and its gradual slump into immobility as regards both its ideas and its institutions. The doctrine of “real socialism” not only expresses these tendencies: it actually glorifies them and enhances them to the level of the sublime, of an ideal state of affairs, and turns them into a virtue. It presents them – values superior to the castles in the air invented by the reformers within the Soviet bloc or by those in the West who advocate socialism with freedom, without a one party system or gulags. The ideology of “real socialism” reflects the will of the power elite to perpetuate the existing institutional and ideological immobility. It is the product of objective social trends which operate within the Soviet bloc societies. But it has also become a powerful

cause of backwardness which prevents all change and contributes to maintaining the social *status quo*. [...]¹

[...]

The Principal Elements of the Ideology of “Real Socialism”

In one of his articles, Milovan Djilas has compared Stalin to a vampire which continues to haunt the world. Today no one any longer refers to his heritage (with the exception of the Albanian leadership), yet many people still draw their energy from him. Even though he has been dead for a long time, Stalin is still present among the living thanks to the institutions established under his leadership and thanks to the Marxist-Leninist ideology which he has elaborated and systematized. The fact that the present leaders behave as though Stalin had never existed and pretend that his practical and ideological creations are a collective effort demonstrates the vitality of his ideas and their objective presence in the institutions. Technical inventions of vital importance for mankind such as fire or the wheel have no authors. [...]

The same goes for Stalin and Stalinism. Official Soviet society is trying to forget Stalin but Stalinism without Stalin is as much alive today as in the past and continues to be its institutional and ideological foundation. The ideology of “real socialism” has its origin in Stalinism.

It can even be said that the corpus of the doctrine has not undergone any spectacular transformations. *Grosso modo*, the doctrine of Marxism-Leninism has remained as Stalin elaborated and codified it, with the exception of some minor and hardly noticeable adjustments of content and form. Certain notions have been eliminated, others incorporated in the doctrine, the meaning of certain terms has been modified and emphasis has been shifted.

The ideology of “real socialism” has not broken with Stalinist Marxism-Leninism. It is, rather, a new method of applying the doctrine, a new rule of interpreting or re-interpreting Marxist-Leninist ideology. In this way Marxism-Leninism is permanently transformed from a bureaucratized revolutionary doctrine into a doctrine that consecrates the social *status quo*, into instructions for the exercise of brute power, into an instrument of managing the accumulated past and the present.

First of all, some brief observations about formal modifications. Under the impact of the formula on “real socialism,” Marxism-Leninism is becoming increasingly impoverished and is gradually being reduced to a mere list of “principles.” The “universally valid principles” of Marxism-Leninism can almost be counted on the fingers of one hand. According to the speeches of the present Soviet leaders and their lieutenants in Prague, Warsaw, Berlin, and Sofia the following are the axioms of “real socialism”: the

¹ Text omitted from the original is indicated by these ellipses. (Editors’ note)

leading role of the Marxist-Leninist party in society and the State; the construction of a socialist State exercising the function of the dictatorship of the proletariat; nationalization of the means of production, natural resources, etc.; planning of the economy and its management in accordance with the plan; proletarian internationalism, and so forth.

In fact, these are not principles but merely some elementary rules to be followed by the new power elite. The term “principle” is retained in the vocabulary of “real socialism” by tradition or inertia, yet it has little in common with the principles of the Marxist-Leninist doctrine of the Stalin period: it is much more a caricature.

“Orthodox” Marxism of the Second International (Kautsky, Plekhanov, and others) has transformed the critical, that is to say dialectical, theory of capitalist society and the workers’ movement elaborated by Marx into a systematized Marxism or doctrine claiming to be a *Weltanschauung*, a general science on “the most general laws of nature, society, and thought.” Lenin had given a voluntarist and instrumentalist interpretation of Marxism, and Stalin was the first to attempt to present Leninism *more geometrico* by reducing Marxism into principles from which he deduced corollaries. This deductive method, based on syllogism (and, in Stalin’s case, above all on paralogism), was by no means original. Stalin drew his inspiration from theology and scholastic philosophy, but did not, of course, come up to their conceptual accuracy and logical rigor. At present, juridical dogmatism continues to employ this method in the exegesis of positive law. In the formulations of the laws it looks for their fundamental principles, which it then uses as a guide for the interpretation of the meaning of specific provisions. When applied to Marxism, this method, undeniably necessary and useful as an instrument for the interpretation and systematization of positive law, has been productive only in one sense: while entirely sterile in the sphere of producing knowledge it has facilitated the construction or systematization of Leninism, later re-named “Marxism-Leninism.” At the same time, with the help of his principles and his “axiomatic method,” Stalin succeeded in nipping in the bud other possible interpretations of “Leninism” or, if they did develop, combating them effectively as heresies in flagrant contradiction with the “sacred” principles.

But in the period of “real socialism,” the principles of Marxism-Leninism have lost even this fictitious productivity of the early days of Stalinism. They are no longer suited for interpretation or for systematization: they resemble much more a signal, a symbol which briefly sets forth injunctions and restrictions. The official communiqués published after the meetings of the masters of the Kremlin with leaders of “fraternal parties” reveal this function of the principles of “Marxism-Leninism.” Reference to them is often tantamount to a final warning, such as before the military intervention in Czechoslovakia or before General Jaruzelski’s coup in Poland. It is no longer deemed necessary on such occasions to list them, they are merely mentioned *en bloc*.

In the period of “real socialism,” the “principles of Marxism-Leninism” increasingly resemble the triple formula of Count Uvarov, a minister of Tsar Nicholas I: “Autocracy,

nationality, orthodoxy.”² The doctrine is thus reduced to a few elementary and immutable slogans. In Count Uvarov’s formula, “autocracy” could easily be substituted by “the leading role of the Party,” “nationality” could be replaced by “the moral and political unity of the people,” and “orthodoxy” by “the Party spirit.” But the main thing is the resemblance of the function of Count Uvarov’s principles with that of the principles of present-day Marxism-Leninism and their conservative character. They proclaim the immutability of the foundations of society; they launch an anathema against change and obstruct new ideas.³

The ritualization of the doctrine of Marxism-Leninism goes hand in hand with this formalism of principles. The ritualization of the doctrine, the constant repetition of subjects, formulas, and quotations is accompanied by the ritualization of the language. Ideology ritualized by the ritualized word is conveyed by the mass media resembling the “praying wheels” used by Tibetan Buddhists. And all this is backed by an increasingly elaborate system of festivities, ceremonies, and rigid rites that brings the communist party in power close to being a church, though an atheist church. I call this phenomenon “liturgical Marxism-Leninism.” This metamorphosis, which began in the Stalinist period, is completed in the period of “real socialism.” While under Stalin the rites and ceremonies backed and accompanied the doctrine, in the period of “real socialism” the “logos” – the ideological word – is entirely absorbed by the rite and transformed into its auxiliary instrument. The significance of this liturgical Marxism-Leninism grows as ideology sheds the last remnants of a rational content and finally loses the capacity of throwing light on social reality. Since this is a phenomenon of primary importance, I only mention it here among the formal metamorphoses of the ideology and intend to devote a separate chapter to it. Let it be said in passing that this ritualization of the ideology of Marxism-Leninism is close to the traditions of the Oriental church. The Orthodox Church has always placed greater emphasis on ceremonies than on theology. It has been and remains primarily a liturgical church. The believer absorbs the logos by his participation in the rites.

This formal decadence of the Marxist-Leninist ideology in the phase of “real socialism” is accompanied by an intellectual degradation of its servants. Theoreticians, even genuine ideologists, exist no longer. The ideology of “real socialism” has only administrators of ready-made ideological patterns and of their pragmatic application,

² In Russian: “Samoderžavie, narodnost, pravoslavie.”

³ This is how K. Chernenko, member of the Politburo and Secretary of the Central Committee of the CPSU in charge of ideological questions, exhorts the social science scholars towards creativeness at a meeting of the Central Committee devoted to ideological work: “Naturally, new facts may make it necessary to complete and specify existing opinions. However, there are truths that cannot be revised, problems that were solved unambiguously a long time ago. When working toward the solution of scientific problems one must not ‘forget’ the fundamental *principles* of the materialist dialectic.” *Rudé právo*, June 15, 1983 (L.S.’s emphasis).

of the treasure of quotations from Lenin and from speeches by the general secretary in office and the bureaucratic administrators of bureaucratized “ideological work.”

Since the days when A. Zhdanov and his counterparts in the fraternal countries, such as J. Revai in Hungary, used to intervene in philosophical or artistic debates and attempted to give stimulating injections to languishing ideology, things have reached a point of no return. Their present successors no longer have anything to say. They no longer strive to produce “ideological events.” It seems that they have completely lost the spirit of invention. At most they make long and boring speeches from time to time addressing a plenary session of the central committee in which they confirm the total absence of new ideas.

It is completely wrong to describe the bureaucrats administering “ideological work,” such as Suslov or his successor K. Chernenko, as “guardians of orthodoxy.” This title may still have applied to A. Zhdanov, but its use is utterly wrong when referring to the overseers of official ideological sterility. These bureaucrats devoid of any creative capacity produce nothing. All they do is sign and read reports drawn up for them by anonymous bureaucratic subordinates, which are then passed on as circular letters to their underlings working on the “ideological front”: to the secretaries of Party committees responsible for ideological work, to professors of Marxism-Leninism, to journalists, and so forth. Because of the total absence of originality, they are easily replaceable and interchangeable.

It is, therefore, not surprising that the title of theoretician is attributed to the reigning general secretary by virtue of his office. This stems even from the bureaucratic logic. As the supreme leader of the Party-Church he is simultaneously its great pontiff. As the direct successor of Lenin (but in reality of Stalin), he is automatically supposed to have the quality of a great theoretician. It is impossible to verify whether the Soviet bureaucracy really believes this but it at least pretends to believe it. In any case, the praises chanted about the theoretical performance of the reigning general secretary testify to a pitiable idea of theory. The platitudes pronounced by Brezhnev were celebrated by his flatterers as an enrichment of science. The same applies to Andropov. He has only held the office of general secretary for a few months during which he has made only a few speeches and published one article. But he is nevertheless already reputed to be a theoretician.⁴

⁴ Here is what the “ideologist” of the CPSU, K. Chernenko, had to say in his report on ideological work: “Let us now deal with theoretical problems. We rightly regard the theses and conclusions formulated in the documents approved by the 24th, 25th, and 26th Congresses of the CPSU and by the sessions of the Central Committee and in the speeches of the General Secretary of the CPSU Central Committee, Yu. Andropov, as true achievements of Marxist-Leninist thought in recent times. The elaborated conception of advanced socialism, the discovery of roads leading to greater efficiency of production in the conditions of a scientific and technological revolu-

Finally a few words on the modifications of content which have been made in the doctrine of Marxism-Leninism under the influence of the ideology of “real socialism.” The most important one concerns the phases of the passage from the lower stage to the higher stage of communism. After the complete fiasco of the programme of the CPSU adopted by the 22nd Congress in 1961 and its promises of paradise on earth, the passage towards a higher phase of communism was put off indefinitely. From now on it is being said that not only communist society as a whole but also its inferior phase has several stages.

According to the ideologists of “real socialism,” the passage from socialism to communism is far more complicated than Marx or Lenin anticipated. The first phase of communism (socialism) is divided into, first, a period of transition from capitalism to socialism (the period of revolutionary transformations), second, a period where the foundations of socialism have just been created and, finally, a period of developed (advanced) socialism which is again divided into several stages.

The present leaders define advanced socialism as a long historic phase. They note that Soviet society has reached its threshold but they are most discreet about its duration. In brief, they have learnt a lesson from the failure of the programme adopted under Khrushchev and no longer promise the advent of a higher stage of communism. It is to be expected that when the time comes they will invent other historic periods separating Soviet society from its “goal.” In the light of the ideology of “real socialism,” communism thus begins to resemble the *Deus absconditus* of the theologians: he moves out of sight of the believer as the latter wants to come closer.⁵

According to its ideologists, advanced socialism is a society where the economic basis, the social structure, and the political system are in keeping with socialist principles that have already been established. It is a socialism that develops on its own foundations. There are authors who define developed socialism as an organic qualitative whole which, in the process of developing, subjects more and more spheres of social life to its principles and rules and which suppresses the vestiges of the regime based on private ownership and social phenomena alien to socialism. Harmony between its elements

tion, the implementation of a classless social structure in the historical framework of the first phase of communism, the development of our ideas on the content of the national questions in the present phase and on important trends of international life, the development of the Leninist theory on war and peace and the defence of the socialist fatherland, these theoretical and other general conclusions arm our Party with new ideas and give it a scientifically founded approach to the topical problems of the present era.” *Rudé právo*, June 15, 1983.

⁵ Yu. Andropov, speaking about the need to prepare a new edition of the Programme of the CPSU, notes that certain points of the Programme adopted in 1961 “have not stood the test of time since they were marked by elements divorced from reality, or ahead of reality, and because they unduly entered into detail.” Yu. V. Andropov, *Speech at the CPSU Central Committee Plenary Meeting: June 15, 1983* (Moscow: Novosti, 1983).

and components manifests itself increasingly in this whole. The organic whole thus steers towards its ultimate form.⁶

From this it follows, therefore, that it must be perfected in all its aspects so that it becomes increasingly complete. Y. Andropov characterizes this task as the axis of the new version of the Party programme, and K. Chernenko defines the perfecting of advanced socialism as a “strategic task.” On this point, the Soviet leaders are much more outspoken and accurate than when they talk about the higher stage of communism.

According to Andropov, advanced socialism tends towards social homogeneity: “Life leads us to understand that a classless social structure will evidently be formed in its principal and general features at the stage of mature socialism.”⁷ Of course, this homogeneity of society in no way means that the Politburo will dissolve into the homogenous mass of wage-earners. Only naive people can believe that. In fact, society will become more homogenous because its political system will be faultless, because the Party will exercise its leading role even better and because it will leave no vacuum between itself and the people in which usurpers seeking to take on the function of spokesmen of the workers’ interests might appear.⁸ To reach this goal, production relations must be perfected as much as the political system in the sense of etatism. This perfecting process will take place chiefly by developing the all-people’s State and by gradually broadening the participation of the masses in the running of society. This then provides a happy medium between Stalin’s doctrine on the reinforcement of the State under communism and Khrushchev’s idea of communist *self-government*.

Karl Marx had based his theory about the extinction of the state in the wake of the victorious social revolution on the idea of communal councils. In Russia the opposite has occurred: municipalities have been placed under state control and rudimentary elements of communal or territorial self-government, set up with difficulty over the last decades of the old regime, have been suppressed. Now it has been promised that one of the future achievements will be to grant citizens the possibility to have a seat on certain commissions organized around state bodies so as to assist the bureaucrats – as executors – to apply decisions made above. The homogenization of the social structure advocated by the ideologists of “real socialism” as a goal has but one precise aim: to perfect the system in the sense of etatism, to take preventive measures obstructing every form of free association and autonomous expression of the interests of social groups. Homogeneousness is identical – as regards its latent sense – with bureaucrat-

⁶ This is what one of the ideologists of “real socialism,” R. I. Kosolapov, has to say. In his modesty he attributes the merit of this ideological discovery to L. I. Brezhnev. The latter really did use the expression “organic whole” in his report on the draft Soviet Constitution. See Richard I. Kosolapov, *Socialismus. K otázkám teorie* (Prague: Nakladatelství Svoboda, 1982), pp. 449–490; the Russian original appeared in Moscow in 1979.

⁷ Andropov, *Speech at the CPSU Central Committee Plenary Meeting*.

⁸ *Ibid.*

ic totalitarianism. And since the national diversity of the Soviet empire is a serious obstacle for the “homogenization of the social structure,” it is necessary to reinforce the Russification in its direct, linguistic form as well as in its indirect cultural form by imposing on the peoples of the empire not only the Russian language but also the bureaucratic mass culture. That is why they have brushed up the old Stalinist doctrine on the future fusion of the nations and national languages into a single international language in a sense that cannot be unequivocal in the present situation, despite references to Lenin and the caution with which Andropov professes it. And his acolyte Chernenko draws the practical consequences.⁹ According to his logic any “alien” is forced to assimilate the Russian language so as to become familiar with world culture and increase his contacts with the world. Russification has a double objective. On the one hand it makes it easier for the civilian and military bureaucracy to cope with its tasks, on the other hand it is designed to reinforce the “great Chinese wall” separating the peoples of the Soviet empire from world culture.

The ideology of “real socialism” has abandoned the slogan of “catching up with, and surpassing, the most advanced capitalist countries in per capita production,” with of course the exception of the armaments industry. Apart from the failure on the practical level, ideological reasons, closely linked with the foregoing failure, determined the abandoning of this objective too. The idea that advanced socialism is an organic entity that develops on its own foundation leads to the uselessness and impossibility of drawing comparisons with capitalism as regards quantitative measures. Each body has its pace of growth: the growth of rye is not comparable with that of the fir tree when it comes to the rhythm or final result. It would therefore be nonsense to draw a quantitative comparison between the most advanced capitalist countries and most advanced socialist countries. So a virtue has been made of necessity.

The ideologists of “real socialism” are talking more and more often of the falseness of quantitative criteria and, as good champions of sociological organicism, they are beginning to highlight purely qualitative criteria. They have rediscovered the notion of the quality of life which they were still repudiating some fifteen years ago. True,

⁹ Here they are: “Or take the progressive phenomenon which is the perfect assimilation not only of the mother tongue but also of the Russian language, the language drawing together the Soviet peoples and nationalities. This phenomenon is rather widespread. But there are also many cases where an *inadequate knowledge of Russian prevents people from having access to the wealth of international culture* (L.S.’s italics), narrows the scope of their activity and of their contacts. The CPSU Central Committee and the Council of Ministers of the USSR have just adopted a decision to create conditions that should make the study of Russian easier for the populations of the national republics. This decision must be actively implemented.” Konstantin Chernenko, “Report Presented at the Meeting of the CPSU Central Committee,” June 14, 1983. Contrary to Chernenko’s pronouncements, the knowledge of Russian will, of course, prevent the non-Russian peoples from becoming familiar with Western culture; it makes it easier for the bureaucracy in Moscow to select those elements of world culture that are harmless in its eyes and consequently worthy of being passed on to the peoples of the Soviet empire.

they have rebaptized it “socialist civilization” and added moralizing and ideological components as well as elements of a policy of austerity that are at present pursued in the most advanced capitalist countries.¹⁰

The doctrine of advanced or mature socialism – a long and qualitatively determined period not limited in time – accentuates the conservative characteristics of the ideology of “real socialism.” Advanced socialism is no longer a period of transition but a permanent era. The official periodization of history and the concept of historical time reflected in the calendar, and repetitive campaigns conveyed by the mass media, demonstrate this conservative spirit and contribute to it. It is sufficient to open a Soviet history textbook: each Party congress is characterized as “historic” and as the beginning of a historical era. And each era is subdivided into shorter periods whose temporary landmarks are plenary sessions of the Central Committee – also “historic.” And the time between these landmarks is filled with the effort of the whole of society to apply the decisions of the leading bodies of the Party. History is thus written in advance and secured against the emergence of anything new and unforeseen. This pseudo-historiography based on pseudo-events essentially contributes to the homogenization of historical periods, of the past, the present and above all the future. Try to distinguish the 24th CPSU Congress from the 25th or 26th Congress! They are as alike as two eggs. Even the Soviet leaders are compelled to refer to these three congresses of the Brezhnev era in one breath, as they are simply indiscernible from one another.

The same method is applied in the other countries of “real socialism.” Official historiography of the normalized regime in Czechoslovakia describes the truly historic event, the Prague Spring, as a minor leadership crisis set in between two “great events” which are milestones in the history of the country: the 13th Congress of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (held under Antonín Novotný) and the 14th Congress (naturally not the Vysočany Congress of August 1968 but the one in 1971). In this way, contemporary history is being presented as a monotonous continuity marked by the eternal recurrence of the same.

The present is no longer seen as the beginning of the future but as the final moment of the past. Furthermore, and this is due to the control of the calendar based on an-

¹⁰ Let us once again quote the highest authority, General Secretary Yu. Andropov: “The formulation ‘growth in living standards’ is frequently used. Yet it is often interpreted in a simplified manner, taking into consideration only the growth of the population’s revenue and the production of consumer goods. However, the notion of living standards is actually much broader and richer. It also embraces the steady development of the civic consciousness and culture of people, including the standard of housing, and of behaviour and also what I would call the culture of rational consumption. Perfect public order, a good health service, rational nourishment and high quality services for the population (where, as we know, things leave a great deal to be desired in our country) are all a part of this. The useful employment of leisure both from the aesthetic and moral points of view, in brief, everything that one could sum up by the term socialist civilization, comes within this notion.” Andropov, *Speech at the CPSU Central Committee Plenary Meeting*.

niversaries and their celebration, historical time is dissolved so that the past coexists with the present and is conceived as an element of the present and of the future.¹¹

Under the domination of the ideology of “real socialism,” all the major projects of the past have been abandoned and no more is said about them: the plan of the transformation of nature, the revolution of everyday life and of the way of life, the idea of the fully developed man, the withering away of the state. One no longer dreams of teaching each cook to run the state and no one believes any longer that each cook will become a statesman. On the contrary, the statesmen have dropped to the level of the cook: they run the state and society the way a cook would do it, following a manual of bureaucratic recipes. Utopia in power has been replaced by a bureaucratic anti-utopia in power. The Russian revolutionary zeal, which Stalin had linked with another, no less characteristic element – “American practical sense.” “Russian revolutionary zeal,” as Stalin noted almost sixty years ago – “is the invigorating force that rouses thought, pushes forward, breaks with the past, and offers prospects. No progressive movement is possible without this zeal. But in practice it has every chance of degenerating into empty “revolutionary” Manilovism if it is not coupled with the American practical sense of work [...]. Yet the American practical sense stands every chance of degenerating into narrow business speculation devoid of principles if it not coupled with Russian revolutionary zeal.”¹² Stalin’s appraisals have become out of date: under the keynote of “real socialism,” sclerotic bureaucratic routine is coupled with vulgar business speculation, in other words, the cunningness of the population. Liturgical Marxism-Leninism based on the use of rites and public ceremonies is united with the values of an American-style consumer society in people’s private lives.

Liturgical Marxism-Leninism

Liturgical Marxism-Leninism is a by-product of Marxism as an ideology that has irretrievably lost its character as a critical theory and has ceased to be usable as an instrument for the sociological analysis of social phenomena. This form of Marxism-Leninism, entirely sterile where ideas are concerned and unproductive in the field of knowledge, is not of recent origin. It dates back to the Stalinist era but has acquired increased significance at present. Whereas under Stalin the Marxist-Leninist liturgy was still an accessory of State ideology, in the era of the ideology of “real socialism” it has taken over the doctrine and has swallowed it up. Present-day Marxism-Leninism is a liturgy and virtually nothing else.

This transformation of Marxism-Leninism into liturgy has resulted in its formalization, in its becoming a rigid and carefully listed set of symbolic gestures and acts. It sets out

¹¹ For this perception of historical time that is typical of conservatism, see Karl Mannheim, “Das konservative Denken,” in Karl Mannheim, *Wissenssoziologie. Auswahl aus dem Werk* (Berlin and Newwied: Luchterhand, 1964), pp. 437–440.

¹² Joseph Stalin, *Les questions du leninisme* (Moscow: Edition en langues étrangères, 1947), pp. 86–87.

the formal rules of ritualized speeches and ritualized behaviour. It is Marxism-Leninism for the use of great solemn masses, festivities, and the celebration of anniversaries by which the regime seeks to legitimize its existence. It is Marxism-Leninism incarnate in gestures, icons, in ceremonies and rites.¹³

Liturgical Marxism-Leninism has its mythological symbols, its ritual symbols, and its iconographic symbols. Its study for the purposes of an overall examination of the phenomenon is beyond the scope of this paper and goes beyond my own capacities. That is why I shall focus my attention on the three elements of liturgical Marxism-Leninism that I consider to be the most essential: the Leninism mythology and the cult of the General Secretary, civic festivities and control of the calendar, and the ceremonies and rites which are of relevance for public holidays and the life of the individual.

Let me say in passing that ritualized Marxism-Leninism gives rise to a new pseudo-science: normative Marxist-Leninist liturgy which aims at elaborating and canonizing detailed rules of ceremonies and new rites. Once established, this discipline in turn produces the liturgist, the apparatchik specializing in the rites and the organization of festivities.¹⁴

Leninist Mythology and the Cult of the General Secretary

The Leninist myth and Lenin's cult constitute a major element of the ideology of "real socialism." The almost religious cult of Lenin was born immediately at the time of his death: the invention of the term "Leninism" by Zinovyev ("Lenin is dead, long live

¹³ This phenomenon, of capital importance, has not so far been sufficiently studied. I would recommend that the reader take a look at Jean Pierre Sironneau's *Sécularisation et religions politiques* (Hague-Paris-New York: Mouton Editeur, 1982), in particular chapters 8 and 9.

¹⁴ The festivities, ceremonies, and rites of "real socialism" are an interesting subject for anthropological research. Of course, such research is not tolerated, let alone encouraged, in the countries of the Soviet empire. The bureaucracy is aware that it would be destructive and that it would desecrate the "holy." Marxist-Leninist liturgy, the official discipline dealing with festivities and ceremonies, has nothing in common with unbiased scientific research. It seeks to systemize the bureaucratic practice in this sphere for purely bureaucratic objectives. I shall quote as an example several Soviet publications devoted to this subject. This literature abounds at present: *Naši prazdniki. Sovetskie obšegosudarstvennye, trudovye, voïnskie, moloděžnye i semejnobytovyje prazdniki, obrády, ritualy* (Moscow: Izdatelstvo političeskoj literatury, 1977). The book contains a vast bibliography. Several "scholarly" gatherings have been held on these questions as well as on "Soviet traditions." On the question of iconography and liturgical iconology it is interesting to consult the book by A. N. Shefov on the image of V. I. Lenin in Soviet painting and sculpture (Leningrad 1980), in which the author maintains that portraying Lenin is "an eternal subject" of Soviet painting and sculpture while also being their "principal task." To enrich this small catalogue of contemporary obscurantism, I would also mention the book by I. Yerofeyev, *Le nom de Lenine a travers l'URSS* (Moscow: Progres, 1981), containing a list of holy places (municipalities, districts, factories, establishments, canals, mountains, etc.) bearing Lenin's name, as well as the book by N. V. Zajcev, *Pravda i poëziã leninskogo obraza: Teatr i kino* (Leningrad: Iskusstvo, 1967), devoted to the rules for presenting Lenin on the screen or on the stage.

Leninism”) and the construction of Lenin’s Mausoleum are an illustration of this. The mausoleum, a strange mixture of Egyptian reliefs from the days of the Pharaohs, a county fair attraction, and the supra-natural Grevin wax museum in Art Nouveau Paris, at first shocked Western feelings. In the meantime, everyone has gotten used to it and even found some excuses for it. The fraternal countries began to imitate it but with little success. The Klement Gottwald Mausoleum in Czechoslovakia has been put to another purpose. The only mausoleum in the European Soviet-bloc countries today is the Georgi Dimitrov Mausoleum in Sofia.¹⁵

The Lenin Mausoleum is the most important material pillar of Leninist mythology. But it is only the pivot point of the truly material infrastructure conveying it; further elements are the Central Lenin Museum in Moscow, its branches in the capitals of the Republics of the federation, museums of the same type in all the “fraternal” countries, local museums set up on Leninist sites (places where Lenin stopped over or stayed), statues of Lenin (there are more than fifty of these in Czechoslovakia, a relatively small country, alone!). As there is no cult without relics and since there is only one mummy, there is a collection of Leninist objects on show in these temples: a chair on which Lenin sat, the inkpot in which he used to dip his pen, the telephone he used, or even the steam engine repaired during the first “communist work Saturday,” in which he personally participated in 1919.

We must not forget the Marx-Engels-Lenin Institute at the CPSU Central Committee, which has a triple function. First, it collects Leninist documents, every scrap of paper on which Lenin jotted down a couple of words, even order forms he filled in for the public library, for its archives. Second, the Marx-Engels-Lenin Institute enriches, with its archives, both the complete works of Lenin and thematic collections in which Lenin is depicted not only as a political thinker but also as the founder of Soviet radio, cinematography, and aviation. And the third function is hagiographic. Since his official one-volume biography was considered too succinct and modest the institute has built up a true hagiographic pyramid, the chronicle of the life of V. I. Lenin in twelve volumes, in which Lenin’s acts and deeds are described day by day and hour by hour. Incidentally, this chronicle has become the point of departure of a no less monstrous undertaking by Soviet television: a series on the life of Lenin in twenty-four parts. Television viewers in the countries of “real socialism” can look forward to twenty-four

¹⁵ Lenin’s Mausoleum is an enigma and it is not easy to penetrate its secrets. In his essay “La notion de Mausolée dans le Marxisme,” in Roger Dadoun and Armando Verdiglione (eds.), *La folie politique* (Paris: Payot, 1977), pp. 71–75, Philippe Sollers has raised several problems. I think the most important aspect of the enigma is the long and patient queue in a country where to queue has become a daily necessity. The crowd stands outside the mausoleum without any material constraint. True, the mausoleum has its technical and spiritual secrets. Its infrastructure, little known but easy to guess (equipment and staff keeping the mummy eternally fresh) is the paradigm of a cultural industry conveying Leninist mythology. Its spiritual secrets, once decoded, provide the key to the understanding of the social role of this mythology.

evenings of viewing Lenin the child, Lenin quarrelling with the Pharisees, Lenin tempted by Satan, Lenin surrounded by his disciples, including his favourites as well as Judas the traitor (L. Trotsky, of course).

The Leninist mythology – the set of myths telling the exploits of the hero endowed with almost supernatural qualities – is disseminated in literature, official historiography, in the theatre, the cinema, and the mass media. The story is backed by elaborate Leninist imagery, by pictures depicting scenes from his life, by allegorical and symbolic statues, and by the system of Leninist rites and acts: solemn commemorations of Lenin's anniversaries, "communist work Saturdays." The press talks about the exemplary philatelists who only collect stamps with pictures of Lenin. It publishes photographs of activists who imitate Lenin's mimicry and gestures when speaking at party meetings, or rather the statues and pictures depicting him: his head slightly thrown back, his determined chin, the right arm stretched out and pointing towards the ultimate goal. The Young Communists and Pioneers organize excursions, outings, or mountain climbs to Leninist sites, following in Lenin's footsteps to the last detail.

Certain symbolic actions of the Leninist cult even reveal a mystic nature: Lenin is treated as though he were actually alive. For example, when checking the Party files and exchanging Party cards, the card with the number one is always issued to V. I. Lenin (and number two to the reigning General Secretary). Lenin is accepted as a permanent deputy of the Moscow soviet. Not only is he issued the card of a deputy, but he has his chair in the soviet's meeting hall. There are phrases in the ritualized language which point to a mystic communion between the Party and Lenin. For example, a member of the Soviet Party, looking for a quotation from Lenin, does not say "I will refer to Lenin's complete works," but "I shall consult Vladimir Ilyich." An even more extraordinary case is that of Mrs. Lazurkina, a Party veteran, who spent many years in Stalin's camps. She was rehabilitated under Khrushchev and elected a delegate to the 22nd Congress, and in her address she said that at night she had had a discussion with Lenin, who had appeared in her dream. Lenin, she said, had asked to be rid of the unpleasant company of his unworthy successor in the mausoleum and had asked her to inform the Congress of his wish.

Even though it must be said that this phenomenon of mystic communication with the Leninist beyond is fairly rare nowadays, the existence of irrational elements in the Leninist mythology and cult is disconcerting. It is extremely difficult to make forecasts but this phenomenon may well spread in future as a result of the absence of rationality in official ideology and its even more pronounced ritualization. Participation in rites and ceremonies may not only lead to boredom and frustration, but in some cases it may even produce exaltation or even genuine mysticism.

In any case, the weight of Leninist mythology in the ideology of "real socialism" is growing. The same applies to the almost religious cult of Lenin and his adulation. Even though the Party has always on principle condemned the "personality cult" and the adoration of the heroes of history (even during the Stalinist period, and Stalin himself did

so) it has never ceased to practice it. Where lies the origin of this flagrant contradiction between professed principles and a diametrically opposed practice? In the fact that the “personality cult” stems from the very structure of the antidemocratic and totalitarian regime and that it is indispensable for its functioning. Of course, the cult of the highest leader has its fantastic and purely ideological components as well as its excesses. Stalin’s “oriental” character gave his cult a specific colouring and exuberance of style. But the cult of the chief of the ruling party also has its rational elements reflecting reality. In a Soviet type system, the role of the General Secretary is really unparalleled not because of his personal qualities of “being a genius,” but owing to the importance of the office exercised. He incarnates the domination of the new class of officials; he is not only the summit of the pyramid of power but to a certain extent also its foundation. In the decision-making circle he is the point where every decision originates and ends. The office with its exorbitant attributes provides him with an almost supernatural halo even though he may be no more than a mediocre personality. In other words, the domination of the new power elite tends to be personified. The cult of the supreme leader is but a symbolic attribute of the office and the ideological repercussion of a social reality.

That is why the cult of Lenin emerged almost simultaneously with the Soviet regime even though during Lenin’s lifetime it never took on the almost religious form which it was to assume with the triumvirate of veteran Bolsheviks (Zinovyev, Kamenev, Stalin), Lenin’s “most outstanding disciples.” Since Lenin had been a charismatic leader it was not possible to immediately create a cult of his successors. Towards the end of the 1920’s the cult of Lenin was transformed into an extension and ideological accessory of the cult of Stalin. The extravagant eulogies chanted about Lenin were directly reflected onto Stalin, the “worthy continuator of Lenin’s work,” the “Lenin of today.”¹⁶

It is evident that the condemnation of the cult of Stalin and his crimes by the 20th CPSU Congress as well as the proclamation of a “return to Leninist norms” in the life of the Party and the State have led to the revival of the cult of Lenin. It was necessary to bridge the ideological vacuum created by the destruction of the Stalinist myth.¹⁷

¹⁶ In support of this argument let us quote from a book which was deemed authoritative and which the present Soviet leadership would like to push into oblivion: Stalin’s official biography, elaborated by G. F. Alexandrov, M. R. Galaktionov, V. S. Kruzhkov, M. B. Mitin, V. D. Mochalov, and P. N. Pospelov. The book was used as a textbook for party political education courses: “The life and work of comrade Stalin are inseparably linked with the work of V. I. Lenin, his master and teacher, with the history of our heroic Bolshevik Party, and with the history of the great Soviet people.” “The boys and girls in the country of socialism, the young Pioneers, carry Stalin’s name in their hearts. Their most ardent desire is to be like Lenin and Stalin, to be politicians of the Leninist-Stalinist type.” In popular poetry, Stalin’s name merges with that of Lenin. “We march with Stalin as with Lenin, we speak to Stalin as to Lenin; he knows all our thoughts, he looks after us throughout his life,” says a brilliant Russian popular legend.

¹⁷ M. Djilas has correctly noted that this tendency is intrinsic to the Soviet bureaucracy: “It is true that the Soviet apparatus has condemned Stalin’s ‘mistakes,’ and has done so all the more willingly since the terror was threatening its own stability. But it is unable to repudiate the ideology

The worship of Stalin proved to be dangerous for the ruling stratum itself. The cult of the General Secretaries devoid of charisma who succeeded Stalin – Krushchev, Brezhnev, and Andropov – is only possible henceforth in the form of a cult of Lenin. They shine more modestly just as the moon reflects the rays of the immortal Sun. The persons favored by the cult of Lenin change and will continue to change but the structure of the worshiping mentality remains immutable. An anecdote dating back to the days of partial de-Stalinization provides a good example: it is said that in a federal republic in central Asia it was decided to remedy the vestiges of the personality cult by removing a twenty-meter statue of Stalin and replacing it with an even more gigantic statue of Lenin.

It is, furthermore, evident that the historical materialism professed by the ideology of Marxism-Leninism is nothing but a verbal cliché, a mere vestige of the Marxist vocabulary. In fact, Marxism-Leninism has been transformed into the most vulgar idealistic concept of history, one that has nothing in common with the theory of Marx except maybe a few terms. In my opinion, it could not have been otherwise: historical materialism is inapplicable within the framework of Marxism-Leninism, it has no place in its categorical structure. It cannot serve to justify the established order, and this explains why it has died out and cannot be revived. The return towards the historical materialism of Marx is only imaginable outside the regime owing to its destructive and demystifying functions.

That is why two elements can be distinguished in the present cult of Lenin: one is timeless (the adoration of the archetype of the ideal guide and father of the bureaucracy), the other is purely temporary (the cult of the reigning General Secretary, compensating for his lack of personal charisma by that of Lenin).

The cult of Lenin fulfils several functions. Firstly, it is the function of the founding myth. It legitimizes the established regime. An anti-democratic regime needs it and needs it increasingly the more the distance separating it from the historic event in which it seeks its legitimacy, the October Revolution, grows. The USSR is no exception in this respect: every dictatorial or authoritarian regime whose existence and institutions are not the outcome of the constituent will of the people sealed by universal suffrage must seek its legitimacy in the decrees of Providence, in the divine historical right, or – and this applies to the Soviet regime – in the objective laws of history which have placed

since it alone – though being illusory and devoid of any creativeness – justifies its domination and continued existence. One can even add that this apparatus was unable to do without a ‘new and charismatic’ chief. This role could only be attributed to Lenin, the ‘unblemished’ founder of the apparatus, the man who had built up the ideology. That is how the Party bureaucracy has achieved its material, intellectual, and historic continuity. Even the ‘mistakes’ committed by the former chief modified neither the essence of the system nor the ‘validity’ of Leninism! Stalin, still alive at one time, was replaced by a Lenin long dead, but the idolatry, the absence of any critical spirit – the cult of the chief – remained unchanged,” Milovan Djilas, *Ecrits politiques*, trans. E. Joet (Paris: Belfond, 1983), pp. 180–181.

it in power, and in the action of a semi-historical, semi-mythical hero who was their instrument.

Secondly, the cult of Lenin has been, is, and remains a specific form of the cult of the reigning General Secretary, and provides an ideological remedy to his personal shortcomings. The ruling General Secretary is always the best Leninist, the guide of the peoples of the Soviet empire and the guide of world revolution (even though at present this is not publicly declared). His legitimacy is not derived from his predecessor, he is not an heir to the throne but the direct successor of Lenin in the same way the Pope in Rome pursues the holy mission of St. Peter, the first bishop of Rome. The regime has thus found an ideological means to facilitate the succession to the post. The ideology of “real socialism” finds it easy to shelve unpleasant historical phenomena, “unworthy” supreme leaders such as Stalin or Krushchev. There have been no intermediaries between Lenin and Brezhnev, and neither will there be any between Lenin and Andropov. [...]

Thirdly, the cult of Lenin fulfils an important educational function. Lenin’s official biography is a collection of instances of model behaviour in all imaginable situations of public and private life. With pseudo-historical pictures manufactured *en masse* by bad Soviet painters, stored in the Lenin museums, and reproduced in illustrated magazines, with films made on the basis of this biography, theatrical plays and even operas on the life of Lenin, the Lenin cult is a surrogate for the New Testament and its parables. The ideology of “real socialism” thus secretes an atheist pseudo-religion, founded neither on faith nor on the law. Its function is to produce conformism necessary for the circular functioning of the regime.

Control of the Calendar and Civic Holidays

Even a cursory glance at the Soviet calendar tells us a great deal about the social nature of that society, certainly more than certain Byzantine discussions on no less Byzantine definitions. One holiday follows another, commemorating and celebrating not only centenaries or bicentenaries of historic events but also the sixtieth, sixty fifth, seventieth, and upward anniversaries of a Party congress, of a brochure or article by Lenin, anniversaries of the foundation of factories or kolkhozes, and, of course, the birthdays of the General Secretary and the members of the Politburo. Where is the origin of this unusual structure of the calendar, and of that *passéiste* passion for anniversaries, and what do they mean?

To justify this fetishism of the calendar, this inexhaustible source of anniversaries to be celebrated and unfailing reservoir of pseudo-events filling the front pages of newspapers and suppressing genuine events or making up for their absence, the ideologists of “real socialism” like to refer to an aphorism coined by Lenin: “The revolution is a holiday of the oppressed and exploited.” The notion of the “holidays” and that of the “revolution” are thus considered to be inseparably linked. However, even if we admit that the October Revolution was experienced as a festive occasion it must

be pointed out that the relationship between the festive occasion and the revolution has been turned around radically in the society which has emerged. As time passed, the revolution was reduced to a commemorative occasion. The revolution is no longer carried out, it no longer continues, it is simply celebrated as an anniversary, that is to say as an event of the past. Let us add that at a time of “real socialism” revolution and socialism are nothing but imaginary elements of the festive occasion. It is futile to look for them in everyday life.

“The social revolution of the 19th century,” wrote Karl Marx, “cannot draw its poetry from the past but only from the future. It cannot begin with itself before it has stripped off all superstition in regard to the past. Earlier revolutions required recollections of past world history in order to drug themselves concerning their own content. In order to arrive at its own content, the revolution of the 19th century must let the dead bury their dead. There the phrase went beyond the content; here the content goes beyond the phrase.”¹⁸

The Bolshevik leaders naturally knew Karl Marx’s writings all too well. Yet they very soon started to deviate from the ideas of the Founding Father. Firstly, reality was stronger than their intentions. Secondly, a certain tendency in their mentality has contributed to this. N. Berdyayev describes it as the irresistible inclination of the Russian intelligentsia to transform everything into religious dogma: Darwinism as well as Marxism. According to Berdyayev, the Russian soul tends towards the universal, it is obsessed with the Absolute. That is why it confuses the relative with the eternal, the specific with the general. It degenerates in abuse and idolatry. The Russian is capable of applying his religious energy to objects which are not religious, of dealing in a spirit of religion with spheres of the relative and the specific such as science or social life.¹⁹ Those who distrust Berdyayev because of his staunch anti-Marxism can find a similar idea in the works of another Russian scholar, a Marxist this time. Bogdanov objected to Lenin’s *Materialism and Empiriocriticism* for his tendency towards fideism.²⁰ And I do not think he was wrong. Neither let us forget that certain Bolsheviks, such as Lunacharskiy and Gorkiy, tried to combine socialism and religion after the defeat of the first Russian revolution: they attempted to interpret socialism as a new and superior religion of the future. Even though these “builders of God” were vehemently fought by Lenin, their ideas can be regarded as a premonitory symptom of trends which gained the upper hand after the victory of the revolution.

¹⁸ Karl Marx, “The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte,” in *Basic Writings on Politics and Philosophy* (London: Collins, 1969), p. 363.

¹⁹ Cf. Nikolay Berdyayev, *Les sources et le sens du communisme russe*, trans. L. J. Cain (Paris: Gallimard 1970), pp. 33–35.

²⁰ Cf. A. Bogdanov, L. Aksel’rod, V. Barazov, P. Juskevich, and M. Gorki, *Fede e scienza. La polemica su “Materialismo ed empiriocriticismo” di Lenin* (Torino: Einaudi 1982).

However that may be, the Bolshevik Party soon allowed the superstitions about the past which it had driven out of the door to enter through the window. With the passage of time it drew poetry not only from its own past but from the Russian past in general. It finally reconstructed its entire ideology on the basis of “historical recollections.” An illustration is the manual of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, the principal source of the political knowledge of its members.

At first, following the example of the French Revolution, the new regime purged and reconstructed the calendar even though it did not go as far as the Jacobins had gone. The revolution intended to place the calendar under its control and to impose on it its linear concept of historical time and the rhythm of renewed social life. Initially, it had some success in this respect. However, in endeavouring to suppress the last remnants of holidays that had a religious origin and in decreeing an avalanche of new holidays and commemorative dates, the regime drew up a calendar orientated towards the past. A boomerang effect occurred in the end. Today it is the fetishist and *passéiste* calendar which imposes a circular concept of historical time on society and repetitive rhythms on social life.

The “red” calendar introduced in 1918 abolished the holidays of the old regime as well as all religious festivities. It replaced them with six public holidays: January 1 (New Year’s Day), January 22 (the anniversary of the “bloody Sunday” of 1905), March 12 (the overthrow of the autocracy), March 18 (the anniversary of the Paris Commune), May 1, and October 7 (anniversary of the revolution). In addition, several days, such as March 8, April 17 (anniversary of the massacre on the river Lena in 1912), and others were commemorated but not public holidays. In the first years after the revolution the holidays had a truly revolutionary character. Their celebrations were fairly spontaneous; their staging was inventive; they often looked like revolutionary carnivals.²¹

During Stalin’s era the calendar was modified several times. Some holidays were changed to commemorative occasions but remained working days. A whole series of days devoted to the celebration of professions or trades considered to be important were introduced even though this measure did not increase the number of public holidays. During the period after Stalin the list of professional festivities was enriched even further. There are almost forty of them nowadays if you include the days dedicated to military professions (for example, the day of the tank troops, the day of the artillery, etc.). Incidentally, this proliferation of celebrations has enriched only the ceremonies and not the leisure-time of Soviet workers. All in all, there are only eight public holidays in the Soviet calendar whereas in France, for example, there are eleven. The Soviet calendar is firmly geared to production.

²¹ The book by Rene Fülöp-Miller, *Geist und Gesicht des Bolschevismus* (Zürich/Leipzig: Amalthea, 1926), provides a genuine testimony of this. In 1978 it was re-published by Elefant Press (Berlin-Hamburg) under the title *Fantasie und Alltag in Sowjet-Russland*.

The character of Soviet festivities changed greatly during the Stalinist era. Nothing remained of the revolutionary carnivals. On the contrary, the festivities changed into manifestations of the established order. They are true State, militarist, and “patriotic” celebrations. They reflect the petrified social order and hierarchy as well as the water-tight divisions within society. Nothing any longer is left to spontaneity: even the official list of slogans for the May Day celebrations is published in advance on the front page of *Pravda* year after year. At public demonstrations, organized along the principles of a true architecture of the human mass, the roles are shared out in accordance with immutable rules: the leaders watch the workers from the roof of the Mausoleum or from a grand stand. They have long abandoned the idea of marching with the procession, even at its head. They observe with satisfaction their own huge portraits carried in the march past and accept the homage of their subjects.

The function of the celebrations of professions and trades (Railwaymen’s Day, Building Workers’ Day, Iron and Steel Workers’ Day, Geologists’ Day, and so forth), which have a marked tendency to proliferate, is worth examining. True, their obvious aim is entirely practical: they provide a regular opportunity for reviewing a given branch of the economy, of offering awards to shock workers or of criticizing shortcomings in the production apparatus. On these occasions, “workers’ dynasties” are also feted, that is to say families where the same trade is handed down from one generation to the next. Grandfather was a bricklayer, the son is a bricklayer, and the grandson will be the same, while the trade of the yet unborn offspring is thus ideologically predetermined.

When speaking about the “workers’ dynasties,” the ideologists of “real socialism” like to use the term “distinguished Soviet persons” (*znatnyye lyudi*). The celebrations of professions and trades and the pathetic vocabulary (of aristocratic origin) are clearly meant to make the trade attractive and induce young people to swell its ranks.

I venture to affirm, however, that these festivities and symbolic and verbal honours also have a latent meaning, far more important than their ostensible sense. First of all, by consolidating the cohesion and professional consciousness of certain privileged trades, these celebrations hinder the formation of a nationwide class consciousness. They are only a symbolic instrument of the corporative separation of the workers. The corporative spirit which the State inculcates is a surrogate of the corporation, the elementary and preliminary embodiment of class consciousness. Since the workers are unable to form their own associations, the State rallies them in a bogus fashion by means of these celebrations.

Secondly, the celebrations of professions and trades coupled with the cult of workers’ dynasties manifest a tendency of social stratification to become petrified, and they contribute towards achieving this. These symbols express in ideological terms the fact that manual workers, as well as their offspring, are condemned to remain manual workers and that the era of increased vertical mobility with the great chances of social promotion is finally a thing of the past. Stagnation and the general immobility

of society are accompanied by reduced possibilities of social advancement and by the individual heredity of social roles.

And thirdly, the celebrations of professions and trades carry a new “pseudo-religion of labour.” They broaden the grip of the regime over the workers’ leisure time and dupe them with the aid of ceremonies which are unproductive in themselves but useful for production, since they make the workers think less of their spare time and more about work.

Under the grip of the ideology of “real socialism,” civic holidays have changed into carefully organized routine. Any Dionysian element has been eliminated as a precaution. They are celebrated in an orderly manner as manifestations of order, obedience, military force, and social hierarchy. The ideology of “real socialism,” thus incarnate in visible and tangible actions and symbols, seeks to mobilize the irrational in support of its influence. The manual of the new Soviet social science, the science of festivities, ceremonies and rites says so openly: “The specific characteristic of ceremonies as an instrument of communist education means that they influence the consciousness of people both on the rational and the emotional levels.”²² In this conjunction of two elements it is, of course, the irrational that prevails. In this way, “scientific socialism” is transformed into an instrument of social magic. According to the same manual, festivities, ceremonies and rites “are an effective way of educating people in the spirit of Marxist-Leninist ideology.”²³

Marxism- Leninism is thus well defined as what it has really become in the present phase: a set of ceremonies and rites.

In the period of “real socialism” the hierarchy of temporal values has been turned upside down. The glorious and mythical past has been raised to its summit. In the ideological campaign against corruption and other “vestiges of capitalism” it is extolled as the age of virtue. The present is devalued less than it was when revolutionary millenarianism dominated, but it is conceived as the continuation of the past. The past reappears cyclically in the present, historic developments (that is, the October Revolution, collectivization, or the Great Patriotic War) are turned into myths, historic personalities become archetypes (for example, the founder of Cheka, Feliks Dzerzhinskiy, is the “Knight of the Revolution” or “the conscience of the Revolution”), and institutions such as police bodies (the Cheka, the GPU, the NKVD, all predecessors of the present KGB) become the “weapons of Hercules,” or the “sword of the revolutionary proletariat.” Since historical time has lost its millenarian finality, it begins to resemble a cyclical concept of time.²⁴

²² *Naši prazdniki*, pp. 1-2.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

²⁴ It is interesting to note the obstinacy with which modern Russian avoids the term “modern” and instead uses the word “contemporary” (*sovremennyj*), giving the terms “modern,” “modernist,”

Of course, every calendar is anchored in the celestial mechanism and in the corresponding cycles of nature. The result is repetition. But the calendar also has a social and historical base, it organizes social time. And as such it is subject to the prevailing concept of historical and social time. As a result, it is open not only to the past but also to the future. However, the totally atheist character of the Soviet calendar, with the suppression of all holidays of Christian origin, brings it dangerously close to the ancient farming calendar, determined by the cycles of nature. It is true that not all the countries of the Soviet empire have dared go that far. At least two traditional holidays have been spared: Christmas and Easter. But the ideology of “real socialism” seeks to empty them of the last elements of religious content and tries to make Christmas a family celebration and Easter a spring holiday, the feast of the equinox. By such an ideological operation it also deprives them of their eschatological dimension, of the element which introduces finality and a dimension of the future in what repeats.

The mass media under “real socialism” unintentionally accentuate this return to the organization of social time along the pattern of the old farming calendar. In an indissoluble mixture, the past-present reappears on the front pages of newspapers according to the seasons of the year. The contents of the press and the audio visual media are largely dictated by the seasons. Even a moderately observant reader can easily detect this phenomenon. Year after year, he reads the same editorial articles, the same headlines, the same reports, and sees the same photographs. In the spring he will read articles on the importance of ploughing and sowing, in the summer on the harvest and on the shortage of drinks, in the autumn there will be criticism of the bad functioning of the railways, in the winter articles on the difficulties caused by the frost and on the need for a more intensive development of the power base which is not up to its tasks. He has read the same things the previous year (only the figures and the

or “modernism” a pejorative meaning. “Modernism” is always the principal enemy of Soviet socialist realism, especially in art. While the expression “modern” and its derivatives imply the idea of innovation (towards decadence, in the Soviet interpretation), the term “contemporary” is neutral. It expresses existence in the present and suppresses the distinction between that which is new and things consecrated by the past and by tradition. It might be useful to quote the Russian mediaevalist Aaron Gurevich: “In the Middle Ages the conviction that any change inevitably leads to decadence was widespread. A poem of the 12th century says that “all that changes loses its value.” The terms “modernus,” “novus,” and their derivatives at that time much more represented notions of appreciation than of time. During the first centuries of Christianity these words had a positive connotation: “new” meant Christian, “old” was synonymous with pagan. But later the true Antiquity was almost entirely forgotten and the term “antiquus” acquired a positive meaning and had a value of prestige. In the Middle Ages, the term “modernitas” (modernism) assumed a slightly pejorative, deprecatory meaning. Everything new, not consecrated by time or tradition, inspired distrust. The accusation of “innovation” or of “new ways” was directed chiefly against heretics (“novi doctors”) and was a formidable means to socially discredit somebody. See Aaron J. Gourevitch, *Les catégories de la culture médiévale* (Paris: Gallimard 1983), pp. 127-128. Any further comment is superfluous.

names mentioned we different), and he knows only too well that he will read them again the following year. Consequently, he becomes used to the fact that the rhythms of social life come to resemble the rhythms of nature as they did in pre-industrial society.

Ceremonies and Rites

Soviet doctrine divides festivities, ceremonies, and rites into three categories according to their ideologico-political contents: 1) national and revolutionary holidays; 2) labour holidays; 3) family festivities, ceremonies, and rites connected with everyday life; 4) festivities and rites connected with the seasons of the year and the cycles of nature. Certain Soviet ritualists regard military festivities and the rites of young people as a special group. Other ritualists consider military festivities and ceremonies as something that falls between the festivities of various occupations and national holidays.²⁵

Since the public holidays and their ceremonies are fairly well known and I have discussed them at length, I shall turn my attention to the rites concerning the life of individuals, the family, and the rhythms of nature. They are precisely those which were expanded and developed the most during the Brezhnev era. Of course, the passage devoted to this phenomenon will by no means be exhaustive: I shall confine myself to a few general observations, leaving a thorough analysis to anthropologists, who may find this a fascinating subject for their research.

I shall leave aside ceremonies and rites whose elements begin to appear in the internal life of communist parties in power in Soviet-type one-party systems. There are some usages and customs not set out in the statutes which have been established and turned into true rites, such as ceremonies in connection with the admission of new Party members. Their photographs, often to be found especially in the Soviet press, cause one to think.²⁶

²⁵ *Naši prazdniki*, pp. 2-3.

²⁶ Eric J. Hobsbawm has pointed out that “modern social movements present a conspicuous lack of deliberately and specially elaborated rites. Officially it is the essence and not the form that unites their members [...]. A person who joins a communist party has to perform a series of activities and duties comparable – at least for certain members – to those of a religious order. But the only ceremony consists in his accepting a piece of cardboard with a purely utilitarian design on which stamps are regularly affixed [...]. This obviously does not mean that the trade unions and political parties have no ritual. If their founders or leaders have not anticipated one the ritual develops spontaneously even if only because of the inclination of human beings to ritualize and formalize their relations [...]. In organizations whose spontaneous development is less hampered by rationalism than workers’ movements the need to create rites may flourish like tropical flora [...]. But the fact that people attribute a ritual significance to their acts to the point that the annual distribution of membership cards in certain communist parties is a far more solemn event than the mere acquisition of a new piece of cardboard is secondary [...]. What unites the communists is the programme of the party to which they belong [...].” See Eric J. Hobsbawm, *Les primitifs de la révolte dans l’Europe moderne* (Paris: Fayard, 1966), pp. 175-176.

Marxist-Leninist “ritualists” declare that new rites must be given to “new men.” They claim that it would be wrong to assume that as religion withers away society will need fewer and fewer ceremonies and rites. On the contrary: according to them rites and ceremonies will spread further as elements of a new tradition and as a tie between the individual and society, or, to be more exact, the State. Rites and ceremonies of Christian origin must be replaced by a non-Christian ritual: I no longer dare call it atheist.

The erection of the necessary material infrastructure began in the middle of the 1960’s. The drab government offices in large Soviet cities have been replaced by sumptuous palaces built in a pompous style with a staff qualified to organize ceremonies and exercise rites. And civic temples, though more modest, continue to be built everywhere.

An entire system of rites has been elaborated, rites connected with the human life cycle, rites of “initiation” and change of situations, copying religious rites without much imagination. So the solemn entry of the newborn baby in the register of births replaces baptism. The decoration of young school children with the Pioneers’ red scarf (here the rite takes place in a Leninist sacred place) strongly resembles the first communion while the solemn issue of the identity card is a kind of civil confirmation. The latter sacrament is not performed by a priest but by a high police official, the incarnation of order and discipline. Naturally there are carefully elaborated marriage rites, and neither have the civic funeral ceremonies been left to chance.

The rites of initiation and of change in one’s position tend to proliferate. Initiation ceremonies are staged for young people who become workers or collective farmers, initiation rites are also held for students at schools of higher learning. A ceremony has been devised for the payment of the first wages, and so forth. There exist manuals with detailed scenarios, samples of moving speeches and ritual formulas. On all these occasions an oath (*klyatva*) is taken and orders and recommendations (*nakaz*) from the State are handed down. The frequency of the adjective sacred and holy (*sviato*, *sviyashthenniy*) is more than abundant.

What are these rites for? First of all, the ideology of “real socialism” seeks to vie with the church and deprive it of its followers. To achieve this, the Marxist-Leninist ritualists shamelessly imitate the church and use the same means: architecture (the temple), pseudo-religious paintings, choirs, liturgical formulas, and the interplay of light and shade. Here a subtlety ought to be mentioned: candles, which play an important role in the rites of the oriental church, have been substituted by torches.

Secondly, the State also uses the ceremonies of initiation and of change in a person’s position to penetrate the private lives of the individual and his family. It appears that the ideology of “real socialism” is stricken with “horror vacui” and tries to fill the entire social space. The State wants to show its omnipresence even in the matrimonial bed or in the cemetery, at least symbolically. The strange rite, popularized by the mass media, compelling newly-weds to conclude the wedding ceremony with a visit to the local statue of Lenin, the monument of the Great Patriotic War (in most cases a

tank standing on a pedestal with its gun in a threatening position) or the monument to the Unknown Soldier who died for the Fatherland, and to place a wreath there, is a bizarre combination of submission to the all-powerful father, of love and brute force, of procreation and death. This phenomenon is worth examining as well. In any case, the new rites are meant to cultivate social and political conformism, reinforce discipline and submission to the authority of the State.

Finally, certain rites have an entirely prosaic function which is never discussed: the fight against excessive consumption of vodka on receiving one's first wages or commencing university studies, and so on.

The new rites are no longer a challenge to the old world and its traditions as was the case after the October Revolution, when “red” christenings or engagements were arranged. No one nowadays thinks of giving one's daughter or son “revolutionary” names such as Oktyabrina, Turbina, or Vladlen (from Vladimir Lenin). There is no need to be sorry. The new rites are devoid of all revolutionary and non-conformist elements. Therefore, strange as this may seem, the nonconformists these days are those who go to church to consecrate their wedding or have their child christened. They manifest civic independence and civic courage.

In the past few years the authorities have been trying to encourage the revival of popular rites linked with the cycle of nature: farewell to winter, the feast of the Russian birch-tree, the Latvian ligo, the Tartar sabantuy (the feast of the summer solstice), the navruz (feast of the spring equinox), and the Iola (feast of the tulips) in Central Asia. These rites of pre-Christian, pre-Islamic, or pagan origin are to replace Christian rites doomed to oblivion. They are considered to be good and “progressive” because they are archaic. According to the logic of the bureaucracy, anyone who worships the god of a monotheist religion is exposed to official reprobation as a backward and superstitious person, whereas anyone engaging in archaic rites of the sun and fire practices the “scientific” ideology of Marxism-Leninism.

These rites, seemingly apolitical or neutral with regard to the ideology of “real socialism,” arouse less distrust among persons sceptical about everything that is official. By taking part in them one does not feel oneself being indoctrinated. Yet they are not harmless. Since they are free from all transcendence (and not only in the religious sense), they serve the cause of “real socialism” and its fetishism of the immediate and of repetition in social life. The rites of the end of winter indirectly help to prolong the great social winter.

It would be possible to carry on with a long list of other aspects of the ritualization of social life: the election rite, the ritualization of socialist competition, and so on. This also includes the ritualization of the language which I have already mentioned. The ideology of “real socialism” would not be possible without the modification of the function of the language, without its transformation into an instrument of domination, without the rulers' monopoly of naming and assessing that which is real, and without

their power to impose this ritualized language on the subjects. Since it is impossible to separate these problems from the specific system of mass communication in the countries of the Soviet empire they must be discussed in a separate study.²⁷

Liturgical Marxism-Leninism, whose role is growing, brings the ideology of “real socialism” close to being a State religion. But one must not overlook two important differences: first of all, it is a religion without a god, or to be more exact, the State holds the place which is reserved to divinity in a traditional religion. Secondly, it is a religion without faith. Even if faith may exist as an exception, its significance is entirely secondary. The ideology of “real socialism” does not call for enthusiasm, identification with ideological notions, and innermost conviction. The present regime demands only conformity and participation in rites, half-hearted as this may be. This external character of ideological influence as well as purely external criteria of adherence to the ideology are an important element of its fragility. In situations of political crisis, this ideology cannot stand up to a confrontation with other ideologists capable of putting forward a more rational argumentation or to a confrontation with reality.

But this same ritualization of ideology is the source of its strength in a normal or “normalized” situation. Its ostensible acceptance on an intellectual and moral scale is easy and comfortable. It does not provoke internal conflicts, it does not create a thirst for the truth, it does not stimulate a quest for the absolute, and it shifts responsibility for individual actions to supra-individual bodies: to the State and the Party. Participation in ceremonies and the practice of rites are not as harmless as they appear at first sight. Ritual gestures provoke faith even if the political faith produced in this manner is weak and vague. The same applies to ritualized ideological language. Anyone using it accepts willy-nilly ideological clichés and categories of the vision of the world it conveys. By assimilating the vocabulary one assimilates the ideology, and notwithstanding mental reservations, one falls under its spell, even if only to some extent. In any case, what religion has only saints, ascetics, or devotees among its flock? What matters is to practise and observe the rites even if faith is weak or absent.

²⁷ I would at least, however, like to draw the reader’s attention to the highly interesting reflections on this subject by Cornelius Castoriadis, *Devant la guerre: I. Les réalités* (Paris: Fayard, 1981), p. 232 et seq., and by Edgar Morin, *De la nature de l’URSS* (Paris: Fayard, 1983), 63 et seq., as well as to a remarkable study by Ladislav Bod, “Langage et pouvoir politique. Réflexion sur le stalinisme,” *Études* 342 (1975), no. 4, pp. 177–214.