

# Marxist Roots of Stalinism

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## *What Do We Ask and What Do We Not Ask About?*

When we ask, "How were the Stalinist system of power and the Stalinist ideology related to Marxism?" the main difficulty lies in the proper way of shaping the question. Our problem can be, and in fact used to be, specified in different manners; some of its specifying forms are unanswerable or pointless, and some are rhetorical, as the answers are obvious.

An example of a question that is both unanswerable and pointless is: "What would Marx say had he survived and seen his ideas embodied in the Soviet system?" If he had survived, he would have inevitably changed. If by miracle he was resurrected now, his opinion about which is the best practical interpretation of his philosophy would be just an opinion among others and could be easily shrugged off on the assumption that a philosopher is not necessarily infallible in seeing the implications of his own ideas.

Examples of questions to which answers are obvious and hardly require any discussion: "Was the Stalinist system causally generated by the Marxian theory?" "Can we find in Marx's texts implicit or explicit value judgments which run counter the value system established in Stalinist societies?" The answer to the first question is obviously negative because no society has ever been entirely begotten by an ideology or may ever be accounted for by ideas of people who contributed to its origin; anybody is Marxist enough to admit that. All societies reflect in their institutions many of their members' and makers' ideas—conflicting with each other—about how the society ought to be; but none was simply produced by these ideas as they had been conceived of before its existence, and to imagine that a society could ever spring up entirely out of a utopia (or *kakotopia*) would amount to believing that human communities are capable of getting rid of their past history. This is a commonsense platitude and purely negative at that. Societies have always been molded by what they thought about themselves, but this dependence has always been partial only.

The answer to the second question is obviously positive and is irrelevant to our problem. It is easy to see that Marx had never written anything to the effect that the socialist kingdom of freedom would consist in one-party despotic rule; that he did not reject democratic forms of social life; that he expected from

socialism the abolition of economical coercion in addition to, and not by contrast to, the abolition of the political one, etc. If this is true, it still may be true either that there are logical reasons why his theory implies consequences incompatible with his ostensible value judgments, or that empirical circumstances prevented this theory from being practically implemented in a way much different from how it actually was to happen. There is nothing odd in that political and social programs, utopias, prophecies bring about an outcome which is not only different from, but significantly opposed to, the intention of their authors; some previously unnoticed or neglected empirical connections make the implementation of one part of the utopia possible only at the price of denying other ingredients. This again is a commonsense triviality; most of what we learn in life consists of the knowledge about which values are compatible and which exclude each other; most utopians are simply unable to learn that there are incompatible values. More often than not, this incompatibility is empirical, not logical, and this is why their utopias are not necessarily self-contradictory in logical terms, only impracticable because of the stuff the world is made of.

Thus, in discussing the relation of Stalinism to Marxism, I dismiss as irrelevant sayings like: "This would make Marx spin in his grave"; "Marx was against censorship and for free elections"; etc.—whether or not such statements might be validated unambiguously (which is somewhat doubtful in the case of the first saying).

My curiosity would be better expressed in another fashion: Was (or is) the characteristically Stalinist ideology that was (or is) designed to justify the Stalinist system of societal organization a legitimate (even if not the only possible) interpretation of Marxist philosophy of history? This is the milder version of my question. The stronger version is: Was every attempt to implement all basic values of Marxian socialism likely to generate a political organization that would bear marks unmistakably analogous to Stalinism? I will argue for the affirmative answer to both questions, while I realize that to say "yes" to the first does not logically entail "yes" to the second (it is logically consistent to maintain that Stalinism was one of several admissible variants of Marxism and to deny that the very content of Marxist philosophy favored this particular version more strongly than any other).

### *How Can "Stalinism" Be Identified?*

It is of no great importance whether we use the word "Stalinism" to designate the well-located period of one-person despotism in the Soviet Union (i.e., roughly from 1930 to 1953) or to embrace any system that reveals clearly similar features. Nevertheless, the question of how far the post-Stalinist Soviet and Soviet-type states are essentially the extensions of the same system is obviously not a terminological one. There are reasons, however, why the less historical and more abstract concept, stressing the continuity of the system, is more convenient.

We may characterize "Stalinism" as an (almost perfect) totalitarian society based on the state ownership of the means of production. And I take the word "totalitarian" in a commonly used sense, meaning a political system where all

social ties have been entirely replaced by state-imposed organization and where, consequently, all groups and all individuals are supposed to act only for goals which both are the goals of the state and were defined as such by the state. In other words, an ideal totalitarian system would consist in the utter destruction of civil society, whereas the state and its organizational instruments are the only forms of social life; all kinds of human activity—economical, intellectual, political, cultural—are allowed and ordered (the distinction between what is allowed and what is ordered tending to disappear) only to the extent of being at the service of state goals (again, as defined by the state). Every individual (including the rulers themselves) is considered the property of the state.

The concept so defined—and, in so defining it, I believe that I am in agreement with most authors dealing with the subject—calls for a few explanatory remarks.

First, it is clear that to achieve the perfect shape, a totalitarian principle of organization requires the state control of means of production; in other words, that a state which leaves some significant parts of the productive activity and of economical initiative in the hands of individuals and which, consequently, leaves segments of society economically independent of the state, cannot reach the ideal form. Therefore, totalitarianism has the best chances to fulfill the ideal within a socialist economy.

Second, it should be stressed that no absolutely perfect totalitarian system has ever existed; we know, however, societies with a very strong, constantly operating, built-in tendency to “nationalize” all forms of human communal and individual life. Both the Soviet and Chinese societies are or were in certain periods very close to the ideal; so was Nazi Germany, even if it did not last long enough to develop itself fully and if it was satisfied with coercively subordinating economical activity to state goals instead of nationalizing everything. Other fascist states were (or are) far behind Germany on this road; nor have European socialist states ever achieved the Soviet level of totalitarianism in spite of an incessant, and still working, drive in that direction.

It is unlikely that the “entelechia” of totalitarianism could ever be actuated in its impeccable shape. There are forms of life which stubbornly resist the impact of the system, familial, emotional, and sexual relationships among them; they were subjected strongly to all sorts of state pressure, but apparently never with full success (at least in the Soviet state; perhaps more was achieved in China). So is individual and collective memory, which the totalitarian system is permanently trying to annihilate by reshaping, rewriting, and falsifying history according to actual political needs. It is obviously easier to nationalize factories and labor than feelings; and easier hopes than memories. The resistance to state ownership of the historical past is an important part of anti-totalitarian movements.

Third, the above definition implies that not every despotic or terroristic system of ruling is necessarily totalitarian. Some, even the bloodiest, may have limited goals and do not need to absorb all forms of human activity within state goals; the worst forms of colonial rule in the worst periods usually were not totalitarian; the goal was to exploit subjugated countries economically, and, since many

domains of life were indifferent from this point of view, they could be left more or less untouched. Conversely, a totalitarian system does not need to use permanently terroristic means of oppression.

Totalitarianism, in its perfect form, is an extraordinary form of slavery without masters. It converts all people into slaves and thereby bears certain egalitarian marks.

I certainly do realize that the application of the concept of totalitarianism and the very validity of this concept have been, in the last period, increasingly referred to as an "outdated" or "discredited" theory. Yet I am not acquainted with either conceptual or historical analyses which actually discredited it—as opposed to many earlier analyses which justified it (in fact the prediction that communism would mean the state-ownership of human persons appeared in Proudhon; that this was what actually happened in Soviet society was pointed out and described later on by so many well-known authors—whether or not the word "totalitarianism" was used—that it would be a useless pedantry to quote them here).

### *The Main Stages of Stalinist Totalitarianism*

The Soviet variety of totalitarian society was ripening for many years before reaching its excellence. The well-known main stages of its growth need only to be mentioned briefly.

In the first stage, basic forms of representative democracy were done away with: parliament, elections, political parties, uncontrolled press.

The second stage (overlapping with the first) is known under the misleading name of "war communism." The name suggests that the policies of this period were conceived of as temporary and exceptional measures to cope with the monstrous difficulties imposed by civil war and intervention. In fact, it is easy to perceive from relevant writings of leaders—in particular, Lenin, Trotsky, Bukharin—that they all envisaged this economic policy (abrogation of free trade, coercive requisitions of "surplus"—i.e., of what local leadership estimated as surplus—from the peasants, universal rationing, compulsory labor) as a permanent achievement of the new society and that this policy was eventually abandoned as a result of the economic disaster it had caused, and not because the war conditions which forced it no longer existed. Both Trotsky and Bukharin emphatically assured that compulsory labor made up an organic part of the new liberated society.

Important elements of totalitarian order that were set up in this period persisted, to become permanent components of Soviet society. Such a lasting achievement was, first of all, the destruction of the working class as a political force (the abrogation of soviets as an independent expression of popular initiative; the end of independent trade unions and of socialist parties). Another was the suppression—not yet definitive—of democracy in the party itself (the ban on factional activity). Throughout the NEP era the totalitarian traits of the system were increasingly strong, despite the fact that free trade was accepted and that a majority of the society, i.e., peasants, enjoyed economic independence of the state. Both in a political and a cultural sense, NEP meant the mounting pressure

of the party-owned state on all not yet state-owned (or only half-state-owned) centers of initiative, even though it was only the subsequent stages of development which would bring full success in this respect.

The third stage was coercive collectivization, which amounted to destroying the last not-yet-nationalized social class and gave the state the full power to control economic life (which did not mean, of course, that it enabled the state to set up real economic planning; it did not).

In the fourth stage the party itself as a potential (albeit no longer actual) non-nationalized force was destroyed in purges. The point was not that any effective rebellious forces survived in the party but that many of its members, in particular the older ones, kept loyalty to the traditional party ideology. Thus, even if perfectly obedient, they were rightly suspected of dividing their loyalties between the actual leader and the inherited ideological value system; in other words, of being potentially disloyal to the leader. The party was to be taught that ideology is what the leader in any given moment says it is, and the massacres performed this job successfully; they were the work of an ideological *Führer*, not of a madman.

### *The Face of Mature Stalinism*

The upshot of this process—of which all phases were deliberately decided and organized, though not all were planned in advance—was a fully state-owned society which came very close to the ideal of perfect unity, cemented by party and police. Its integration was identical with its disintegration; it was perfectly integrated in that all forms of collective life were entirely subordinated to, and imposed by, one ruling center; and it was perfectly disintegrated for the same reason: civil society was virtually destroyed, and the citizens, in all their relations with the state, faced the omnipotent apparatus as isolated and powerless individuals. The society was reduced to the position of a “sack of potatoes” (to use Marx’s phrase applied to French peasants in the *Eighteenth Brumaire*).

This situation—unified state organism facing atom-like individuals—defined all the important features of the Stalinist system. They are all well-known and described in my books. We should briefly mention a few of them, the most relevant to our topic.

First, the abolition of law. The law persisted, to be sure, in the sense of rules of procedure in public matters. It was entirely abolished, however (and never restored), in the sense of rules which could in any point infringe upon the state’s omnipotence when dealing with individuals. In other words, the law was supposed to be such as to never restrict the principle that citizens are property of the state. The totalitarian law, in crucial points, has to be vague and imprecise, so that its actual application should hinge on the arbitrary and changing decisions of executive authorities and so that each citizen, at virtually any moment, could be considered a criminal. The notable examples have always been political crimes as defined in penal codes; they are constructed in such a way that it is virtually impossible for a citizen not to commit crimes almost every day; how far these crimes are actually prosecuted, or how much terror is employed, are a matter

of the rulers' political decisions. In this respect nothing has changed in the post-Stalinian period: both the transition from mass to selective terror and the better observance of procedural rules are irrelevant to the persistence of characteristically totalitarian law, as long as they do not limit the effective power of the state over the lives of individuals. People may be actually jailed or not for telling political jokes; they may have their children forcibly taken away or not if the parents fail to raise them, as it is their legal duty, in the Communist spirit (whatever this means). Totalitarian lawlessness consists not in the fact that extreme measures are always and everywhere applied but in the fact that individuals have no protection in law against whatever forms of repression the state wants to use at any given moment; in the disappearance of law as a mediating device between the state and people and in its being converted into an entirely malleable instrument of the state. In this respect, Stalinist principle has not been abrogated by now.

Second, the one-person autocracy. It seems to have been a natural, "logical" outcome of the perfect-unity principle which was the driving force in the development of the totalitarian state. This state, to achieve its full shape, called for one and only one leader endowed with limitless power. This was implied in the very foundation of the Leninist party—conforming to the often-quoted prophecy of Trotsky (soon to be forgotten by the prophet) of 1903. The whole progress of the Soviet system in the twenties consisted in the step-by-step narrowing of the forum where conflicts of interests, of ideas, and of political tendencies could be expressed: for a short period, they still were articulated publicly in the society, then their field of expression moved up to the party, then to the party apparatus, to the Central Committee and eventually to the Politburo. Since, however, sources of social conflict could be prevented from being expressed, yet had not been eradicated, it was Stalin's well-grounded contention that even in this narrowest caucus the conflicting trends, if allowed to continue, would convey the pressure of the not-yet-killed conflicting interests within the civil society. This is why the destruction of the civil society could not be consummated so long as different tendencies or factions had room to articulate themselves, even in the supreme party organ.

The changes which occurred in the Soviet system after Stalin—the transition from personal tyranny to an oligarchy—seem to be the most salient in this particular point. They resulted from the incurable contradiction inherent in the system: perfect unity of leadership, as required by the system and embodied in personal despotism, was incompatible with other leaders' need for minimum security; they were degraded, under Stalin's rule, to the same precarious slave status as other people, and all of their enormous privileges did not protect them against sudden fall, imprisonment, and death. Oligarchical rule after Stalin became a sort of mutual security pact of the party apparatus. This contract, to the extent of its effective application, runs counter to the principle of unity. In this sense, the decades after Stalin's death may be properly spoken of as an ailing Stalinism.

It is not true, nonetheless, that Soviet society, even in the worst periods, has

ever been ruled by the police. Stalin governed the country, and the party itself, with the police machine, yet he governed as party leader, not as police chief. The party—which for a quarter of a century was identical with Stalin—has never lost its all-embracing sway.

Third, the system of universal spying as the principle of government. That people were both encouraged and compelled to spy upon each other was obviously not how the state defended itself against real dangers but how it forced to the extreme the same principle of totalitarianism. As citizens, they were supposed to live in the perfect unity of goals, desires, and thought—all expressed through the mouth of the leader. As individuals, they were expected to hate each other and to live in never-ending mutual hostility. Only thus could the isolation of individuals from another achieve perfection. In fact, the unattainable ideal of the system seems to have been a situation where all people were at the same time inmates of concentration camps and secret police agents.

Fourth, the apparent omnipotence of ideology. In all discussions on Stalinism this is the point in which more confusion and disagreement appear than in any other. We can see it when we follow the exchange of statements on the subject by Solzhenitsyn and Sakharov, respectively. The former's point, roughly, is: The whole Soviet state, in both internal and foreign policy, in both economic and political matters, is under the overwhelming rule of the false Marxist ideology, and it is this ideology which is responsible for all disasters of the society and of the state. Sakharov replies that the official state ideology is dead and that nobody takes it seriously anymore; consequently, it is silly to imagine that it could be a real force guiding and shaping practical policies.

It seems that both observations are valid within certain restrictions. The point is that the Soviet state has had an ideology built in its foundation from the very beginning as the only principle of its legitimacy. It is true, to be sure, that the Bolshevik party seized power in Russia under ideological banners that had no specifically socialist, let alone Marxist, content (peace and land for peasants). But it could establish its monopolistic rule on the Leninist ideological principle, i.e., as a party which by definition was the only legitimate mouthpiece of the working class and of all "toiling masses," of their interests, will, and desires (would they be unknown to these masses themselves), and it owed its ability to "express" the will of the masses to its "correct" Marxist ideology. A party is supposed to be a voluntary organism tied together with ideological bonds. A party which wields despotic power cannot get rid of the ideology which justifies this power and remains, short of free elections or the inheritance of the monarchic charisma, the only basis of legitimacy. The ideology is absolutely indispensable in this system of rule, no matter by whom, by how many, or how seriously it is believed, and it remains such even if—as is now the case in European socialist countries—there are virtually no believers anymore, among either the rulers or the ruled. The leaders obviously cannot afford to express the real and notorious principles of their policy without risking the utter collapse of the power system. The state ideology believed by nobody has to be binding to all unless the entire fabric of the state is to crumble.

This does not mean that the ideological considerations cited to justify each step in practical policy are real, independent forces before which Stalin or other leaders bowed. Still, it would be unfair to say that they do not limit this policy to a certain extent. The Soviet system, both under and after Stalin, has always pursued the *Realpolitik* of a great empire, and the ideology was bound to be vague enough to sanctify any particular policy—NEP or collectivization, friendship with Nazis or war with Nazis, friendship with China or condemnation of China, support for Israel or for Israel's foes, cold war or detente, tightening or relaxation of the internal regime, oriental cult of the satrap or its denunciation. And still it is true that this is an ideology which keeps the Soviet state and preserves its integrity.

It has been frequently pointed out that the Soviet totalitarian system is not intelligible unless we take into account the historical background of Russia, with its strongly pronounced totalitarian traits. The autonomy of the state and its overwhelming preponderance over civil society was stressed by Russian historians of the nineteenth century, a view that was endorsed with qualifications by some Russian Marxists (Plekhanov, in his *History of Russian Social Thought*; Trotsky, in the *History of the Russian Revolution*). This background was repeatedly referred to—after the revolution—as the genuine source of Russian Communism (Berdyayev). Many authors (Kucharzewski was one of the first) saw in Soviet Russia a straight extension of the tsarist regime, including its expansionist policy and the insatiable hunger for new territories, and the “nationalization” of all citizens and the subordination of all forms of human activity to the state's goals. Several historians have published very convincing studies on the subject (recently, R. Pipes and T. Szamuely), and I do not question their findings. However, this background is not sufficient to explain the peculiar function Marxist ideology has had in the Soviet order. Even if we went so far as to admit (this is how Amalrik would have it) that the whole meaning of Marxism in Russia ultimately consisted in injecting into a shaky empire fresh ideological blood that would allow it to survive for a while before falling apart definitively, we would still have no answer to the question: How did Marxism fit into this task? How could the Marxist philosophy of history, with its ostensible hopes, aims, and values, supply the totalitarian, imperialist, and chauvinistic state with an ideological weapon?

It could, it did; and it did not need to be essentially distorted, just interpreted.

### *Stalinism as Marxism*

In discussing this question, I take it for granted that Marx's thought from 1843 onwards was propelled by the same value-loaded idea for which he was continuously seeking a better and better form of expression. Thus I share the opinion of those who emphasize the strong continuity in Marx's intellectual development and do not believe in any more or less violent break in the growth of his leading ideas. I cannot argue now in favor of this controversial—albeit not original at all—viewpoint.

In Marx's eyes the original sin of man, his *felix culpa*, responsible for both great human achievements and human misery, was the division of labor with its inevita-



ble result, alienation of labor. The extreme form of alienated labor is the exchange value which dominates the entire production process in the industrial societies. It is not human needs, but the endless accumulation of exchange value in money form, which is the main driving force of all productive efforts. It resulted in transforming human individuals, their personal qualities and abilities, into commodities that are being sold and bought according to anonymous laws of market, within the system of hired labor. It generated the alienated institutional framework of modern political societies, it produced an inevitable split between the personal, selfish, self-centered life of people in civil society on the one hand and their artificial and mystified community in political society on the other. As a result, human consciousness was bound to suffer an ideological distortion: instead of affirming human life and affirming its own function as an "expression" of life, it built an illusory separate kingdom of its own, designed to perpetuate the existing split. In bringing about private property and, consequently, the division of the society into hostile classes struggling for the distribution of the surplus product, the alienation of labor finally gave rise to the class which, being the concentration of the entire dehumanization, is destined both to demystify consciousness and to restore the lost unity of human existence. The revolutionary process starts with smashing institutional devices which protect the existing labor condition, and it ends with a society out of which all basic sources of social conflict have been removed and the social process subordinated to the collective will of associated individuals. The latter will be able to unfold all their individual potentialities not against the community but to enrich it, the necessary labor having been step by step reduced to the minimum and the free time exploited for the sake of cultural creativity and high-quality enjoyment.

The entire meaning of both past history and present struggles is revealed only in the romantic vision of the perfectly unified mankind of the future. This unity implies that people will not need mediating devices separating individuals from the species as a whole. The revolutionary act that will close the "pre-history" of mankind is both inevitable and directed by free will, the very distinction between freedom and necessity having disappeared in the consciousness of proletariat, a class which ruins the old order in the very process of becoming aware of its own historical destiny.

My suspicion is that this was both Marx's anticipation of perfect unity of mankind and his mythology of the historically privileged proletarian consciousness which were responsible for his theory's being eventually turned into an ideology of the totalitarian movement: not because he conceived of it in such terms, but because its basic values could hardly be materialized otherwise. It was not the case that Marx's theory lacked any vision of the future society; it did not. But even his powerful imagination was incapable of stretching as far as to envisage the transition from the "pre-history" to "genuine history" and to fancy a proper social technology which would convert the former into the latter. This gap was to be filled by practical leaders, and this necessarily implied that additions and specifications had to be done in the inherited body of the doctrine.

In dreaming of perfectly unified humanity Marx was not, properly speaking,

a Rousseauist; Rousseau did not believe that the lost spontaneous identity of each individual with the community would ever be restored and the poison of civilization effaced from human memory in the future. Marx did believe precisely that: not as though a return to the primitive happiness of savagery and the jettison of civilization were possible or desirable, but because he believed that the irresistible progress of technology would ultimately overcome (dialectically) its own destructiveness and offer humanity a new unity based on freedom from wants, rather than the suppression of needs (in this respect he shared the Saint-Simonists' hopes).

Marx's liberated mankind does not need any machines set up by the bourgeois society in order to mediate and to regulate conflicts of individuals between each other or between each of them and the society; and this means: law, state, representative democracy, and negative freedom as conceived of and proclaimed in the Declaration of Human Rights. All these devices are typical of a society ruled economically by the market, made up of isolated individuals with their antagonistic interests, and trying to keep its stability with the help of these instruments. The state and its legal skeleton protect bourgeois property with coercive means and impose rules on conflicts; their very existence presupposes a society where human activities and desires naturally clash with each other. The liberal concept of freedom implies that "my" freedom inevitably limits the freedom of my fellow men, as it is the case indeed if the scope of freedom coincides with the size of ownership. Once the system of communal property replaces bourgeois order, these devices lose their ground. Individual interests converge with the universal ones; there is no need to support the unstable equilibrium of the society with regulations that define the limits of an individual's freedom. Not only "rational" instruments of the liberal society will be done away with: tribal or national ties inherited from the past will disappear soon in the same process, and in this respect the capitalist order paves the way for communism; old irrational loyalties are crumbling anyway, both under the cosmopolitan power of capital and as result of the internationalist consciousness of the proletariat. The end of this process will be a community where nothing is left except for individuals and the human species as a whole, and individuals will directly identify their own lives, their abilities, and their activities as social forces. Thus, to experience this identity they will need no mediation of political institutions or of traditional national ties.

How could this be achieved? Is there any technique of this social transubstantiation? Marx did not answer the question, and it seems that from his viewpoint the question was wrongly put. The point was not to look for the adequate technique of social engineering after having drawn an arbitrary picture of a desirable society, but to identify and to "express" theoretically social forces already at work, forces which tend toward such a society. And to express them meant to reinforce practically their energy, to provide them with indispensable self-knowledge, to let them consciously identify themselves.

Practical interpretation of the Marxian message offered different possibilities, depending on which values were considered fundamental to the doctrine and

which formulations were supposed to give the clue to the whole. It does not seem that anything was wrong with the interpretation that would become a Leninist-Stalinist version of Marxism and may be reconstructed as follows:

Marxism is a ready-made doctrinal body which is the same as the class-consciousness of proletariat in its mature and theoretically elaborated form. Marxism is true both because of its "scientific" value and because it articulates the aspirations of the "most progressive" social class. The distinction between "truth" in the genetic and in the current sense of the word has always been obscure in the doctrine; it was taken for granted that the "proletariat," by virtue of its historical mission, has a privileged cognitive position, and thus that its vision of the social "totality" is bound to be right. And so what was supposed to be the "progressive" automatically became "true" whether or not this truth could be validated with universally admitted scientific procedures. This was a simplified form of the Marxian concept of class consciousness. Certainly, the claim of the party to be the monopolistic owner of truth did not automatically follow from that concept; such an equation required in addition the specifically Leninist notion of party. There was nothing anti-Marxist in this notion, however. If it is true that Marx did not work out any theory of party, he had a concept of a vanguard group that was supposed to articulate the latent consciousness of the working class, and he did conceive of his own theory as an expression of this consciousness. That the "proper" revolutionary consciousness of the working class had to be instilled from without into the spontaneous workers' movement was an idea taken up by Lenin from Kautsky and supplemented with an important addition: since in a society torn by the class struggle between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat only two basic ideologies can exist, it follows that an ideology which is not proletarian—i.e., which is not identical with vanguard-party ideology—is necessarily a bourgeois one. And thus, considering that the workers are unable to reach with their own forces their own class ideology, they are bound to produce a bourgeois one; in other words, what the empirical, "spontaneous" consciousness of workers can generate is essentially a bourgeois *Weltanschauung*. Consequently, the Marxist party is both the only vehicle of truth and entirely independent of the empirical (and, by definition, bourgeois) consciousness of workers (except for the fact that the party sometimes has to make tactical concessions in order not to run too far ahead of the proletariat if it canvasses for its support). The same remains valid after the seizure of power. Being the sole owner of truth, the party not only may completely discard (except in a tactical sense) the inevitably immature empirical consciousness of masses, but cannot do otherwise without betraying its historical mission. It knows both the "laws of historical development" and the proper connections between the "base" and the "superstructure"; therefore, it is perfectly able to discern what in the real, empirical consciousness of people deserves destruction as a "survival," a remnant of the past historical epoch. Not only do religious ideas obviously fall into this category, but so does everything that makes people's minds different in content from the minds of the leaders. The dictatorship over minds *is* entirely justified within this concept of proletarian consciousness; the party really knows better than the

society which are the society's genuine (as opposed to empirical) desires, interests, and thoughts. Once the spirit of the party is perfectly incarnated in one leader (as the highest expression of society's unity), we have the ultimate equation: truth = proletarian consciousness = Marxism = party's ideology = party leaders' ideas = chief's decisions. The theory claiming for the proletariat a sort of cognitive privilege culminates in the statement that Comrade Stalin is never wrong. And there is nothing un-Marxist in this equation.

This concept of the party being the sole bearer of truth was strongly supported, of course, by the expression "dictatorship of the proletariat," which Marx used casually two or three times without explanation. Kautsky, Martov, or other Social Democrats could well argue that what Marx had meant by "dictatorship" had not been the form of government but its class content, and that he had not opposed "dictatorship" to a democratic state. But Marx did not specifically say anything of this sort in the context, and there was nothing obviously wrong in taking the word "dictatorship" at its face value, meaning precisely what Lenin meant and expressly said: a reign based entirely on violence and not limited by law.

Next to the question of the party's "historical right" to impose its despotism in all domains of social life, the question of the content of this despotism was solved basically in keeping with Marxian predictions. Liberated mankind was supposed to abolish the distinction between civil society and the state, to abrogate all mediating devices that prevented individuals from achieving the perfect identity with the "whole," to get rid of the bourgeois freedom that implied antagonisms of private interests, to demolish the system of hired labor that compelled workers to sell themselves like commodities. But Marx did not say exactly how to achieve this unity except for one indisputable point: the expropriation of expropriators, i.e., the abrogation of private ownership of the means of production. One could and ought to argue that once this historical act of expropriation has been performed, all remaining social conflicts are nothing else but the expression of a retarded (bourgeois) mentality which has survived from the old society. But the party knows what is the content of the correct mentality corresponding to the new relations of production, and it is naturally entitled to suppress all phenomena out of keeping with that content.

What technique, in fact, is appropriate to reach this desirable unity? Its economic foundation has been laid. One could argue that to Marx civil society was not to be suppressed or replaced by the state, but rather the state was expected to wither away; political government was to become superfluous and only the "administration of things" to remain. But once the state by definition is an instrument of the working class on its road to communism, it cannot by definition use its power against the "toiling masses," only against the relics of the capitalist society. And how could the "administration of things," or economic management, not involve the use and distribution of labor power, i.e., of all working people? Hired labor (and this means a free market of the labor force) was to be eliminated, and it was. But what if people do not want to work under the impetus of communist enthusiasm alone? If they do not, this obviously means that they

are imprisoned in bourgeois consciousness, which it is the task of the state to destroy. Consequently, the workable way of abrogating hired labor is to replace it by coercion. How are we to implement the unity of civil and political society once only the political society expresses the "correct" will of the people? Whatever opposes that will is again, by definition, the resistance of the capitalist order; thus, the destruction of civil society by the state is the proper way toward unity. Whoever argues that people should be first educated to cooperate freely and without compulsion must answer the question: when and how can such an education be successful? It certainly runs counter to Marx's theory to expect that this education is possible within a capitalist society, where the working people are under the overwhelming influence of bourgeois ideology. (Did not Marx say that the ideas of the ruling class are ruling ideas? Is it not a pure utopia to hope for a total moral transformation of the society in a capitalist order?) And after the seizure of power, education is the task of the most enlightened vanguard of the society; compulsion is used only against the "survival of capitalism." And so there is no need to make the distinction between the production of the "new man" of socialism and sheer coercion; consequently, the distinction between liberation and slavery is bound to be blurred.

The question of freedom (in the "bourgeois" sense) becomes irrelevant to the new society. Did not Engels say that genuine freedom was to be defined as the extent to which people were capable of both subjugating their natural environment and consciously regulating social processes? If so, then, first, the more a society is technologically advanced, the freer it is; second, the more social life is submitted to unified direction, the freer it is. Engels did not mention that this regulation would necessarily involve free elections or other bourgeois contrivances of this sort. There is no reason to maintain that a society entirely regulated by one center of despotic power is not perfectly free in this peculiar meaning.

And there are many quotations from Marx and Engels to the effect that throughout human history the "superstructure" was at the service of the corresponding relations of property in a given society; that the state is "nothing else" but a tool to keep the existing relations of production intact; that the law cannot but be a weapon of a class power. There is nothing wrong in concluding that the same situation prevails, at least so long as communism in the absolute form has not entirely dominated the earth. In other words, the law is an instrument of the political power of the "proletariat," and since law is just a technique to wield power, and, more often than not, its main task is to cover violence and to deceive the people, it makes no difference whether the victorious class rules with the help of the law or without it; what matters is the class content of power and not its "form." Moreover, the conclusion seems quite valid that the new "superstructure" must serve the new "basis," which means, among other things, that cultural life as a whole should be entirely subordinated to political "tasks" as defined by the "ruling class" speaking through the mouth of its most conscious segment. Therefore it is arguable that universal servility as the guiding principle of cultural life in the Stalinist system was a proper deduction from the "basis-superstructure" theory. The same applies to the sciences; again, did not Engels say that the

sciences could not be left to themselves, without theoretical philosophical guidance, lest they fall into all sorts of empiricist absurdities? This was in fact the reason many Soviet philosophers and party leaders used to evoke from the very beginning to vindicate for philosophy—i.e., party ideology—the right to control all the sciences (in their content, not only in their scope of interest). In the twenties Karl Korsch had already pointed out the obvious connection between the philosophy's claim to supremacy and the Soviet system of ideological tyranny over the sciences.

Many critical Marxists used to say, "This was a caricature of Marxism." I would not deny that. However, I would add that one may talk meaningfully about "caricature" only insofar as it resembles the original, as it does in this case. Nor would I deny the obvious fact that Marx's thought was much richer, much more differentiated, and much subtler than could be supposed on the basis of a few quotations endlessly reiterated in Leninist-Stalinist ideology to justify the Soviet system of power. Still, I would argue that these quotations were not essentially distorted; that the dry skeleton of Marxism, deprived of its complexity, was taken up by Soviet ideology as a strongly simplified, yet not falsified, guide to building a new society.

It is not Stalin's invention that the whole theory of communism may be summed up in the single phrase "abolition of private property"; or that there can no longer be any wage labor when there is no longer any capital; or that the state has to have centralized rule over all means of production; or that national hostilities are bound to disappear together with class antagonism. All these ideas, as we know, are clearly stated in the *Communist Manifesto*. Taken together they do not simply suggest but actually imply that once the factories and the land are state-owned—and this is what was to happen in Russia—the society is basically liberated; Lenin's, Trotsky's, and Stalin's claim was precisely that.

The point is that Marx really, consistently believed that human society would not be "liberated" without achieving unity. And, except for despotism, there is no other technique known to produce a unity of society; no other way of suppressing the tension between civil and political society but the suppression of civil society; no other means to remove the conflicts between the individual and "the whole" but the destruction of the individual; no other road toward "higher," "positive" freedom—as opposed to "negative," "bourgeois" freedom—but the liquidation of the latter. And if it were true that the whole of human history is to be conceived in class terms—that all values, all political and legal institutions, ideas, moral norms, religious and philosophical beliefs, artistic creativity, etc., are "nothing else" but instruments at the service of "real" class interests (and there are many fragments to this effect in Marx's writings)—then it is true that the new society should start with breaking violently the cultural continuity with the old one. (The continuity, in fact, cannot be entirely broken, and in Soviet society a selective continuity was accepted from the beginning, the radical quest for "proletarian culture" having been only a short-lived extravagance, never sponsored by the leadership; the stress on selective continuity grew stronger with

the development of the Soviet state, mostly as a result of its increasingly nationalist character.)

My suspicion is that utopias (meaning visions of a perfectly unified society) are not simply impracticable but become counter-productive as soon as we try to create them with institutional means; and this because institutionalized unity and freedom are opposed to each other, and a society that is deprived of freedom can be unified only in the sense that the expression of conflicts is stifled, not conflicts themselves, consequently, it is not unified at all.

I do not neglect the importance of changes that occurred after Stalin's death in the socialist countries, even if I maintain that the political constitution of these countries has remained intact. The point is that to admit, however reluctantly, a limited impact of the market on production, and to give up or to loosen rigid ideological control in certain areas of life, amounts to renouncing the Marxian vision of unity. All these changes reveal rather the impracticability of that vision and could hardly be interpreted as symptoms of a return to the "genuine" Marxism—no matter what Marx "would have said."

An additional—certainly not conclusive—argument in favor of the above interpretation lies in the history of the problem. It would be utterly false to say that "nobody could predict" such an upshot of Marxism humanist socialism. It actually was predicted by anarchist writers, long before the socialist revolution, that a society based on Marx's ideological principles would produce slavery and despotism. At least in this respect mankind cannot complain that the Great History deceived and surprised it with unpredictable connections of things.

The question we have discussed is a "genetic versus environmental factors" problem in social development. It is very difficult to distinguish the respective role of these factors even in genetic inquiry, when the properties under investigation are not precisely definable or if they are of a mental rather than physical character (e.g., "intelligence"). This is much more true in discussing the respective weight of "genetic" and "environmental" circumstances in social inheritance (an inherited ideology versus contingent conditions in which people try to implement it). It is commonsensical to state that in each particular case both factors are at work and that we have no way of calculating their relative importance and of expressing it in quantitative terms. To say that the "genes" (inherited ideology) were entirely responsible for the actual shape of the child would obviously be as silly as to state that this shape is to be exclusively accounted for by "environment," i.e., contingent historical events (in the case of Stalinism, these two inadmissibly extreme interpretations are expressed respectively as a view that Stalinism was "nothing more than" Marxism in actuality, or "nothing more than" the continuation of the tsarist empire). Unable though we are to perform a computation and to devolve upon each set of factors its "fair share," we may reasonably ask whether or not the mature form was anticipated by "genetic" conditions.

The continuity I have tried to trace back from Stalinism to Marxism appears in still sharper outline when we discuss the transition from Leninism to Stalinism.

Not only was the general tendency of Bolshevism perceived and its outcome pretty accurately predicted just after 1917 by the non-Bolshevik factions (the Mensheviks, not to speak of the liberals); the despotic character of the new system was to be attacked soon within the party itself, long before Stalinism was definitively established (the "Workers' Opposition," then the Left Opposition, e.g., Rakovsky). Trotsky's belated rejoinder to the Mensheviks, who in the thirties saw all their predictions borne out ("We told you so") is pathetically unconvincing; all right, he argued, they did predict what would happen, yet they were entirely wrong; they believed that despotism would come as a result of Bolshevik rule; now it has come, but as the result of a bureaucratic coup. *Qui vult decipi, decipiatur.*