

STALINISM

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1. Introduction

I see "Stalinism" as a social phenomenon that is not historically limited to the period in which Stalin was the undisputed ruler of the Soviet Union, 1925/29-1953. One may discuss when it started. But it ended neither with Stalin's death in March 1953 nor with the famous Khrushchev speech at the 20th Party Congress in Moscow, January 1956, denouncing Stalin, claiming that Stalinism had cost the Soviet Union millions of lives. As an institutionalized rejection of human rights, to put it mildly, it continues as a phenomenon into our days and will probably still be with us for some time. It has its ups and downs. Whenever it goes up fear is instilled not only in the people of the Soviet Union but also in the neighboring countries - "if they can treat their own people like that; one day they will also do it to us". When it goes down, there is a corresponding relaxation, a feeling that the worst is possibly over, that better periods are being ushered in. And it certainly makes a difference: according to some (demographically based) calculations the losses in human lives of the Russian Revolution, the (civil) wars and the atrocities under Stalinism including the whole Gulag system and the elimination of the Kulak "as a class" has cost 66 millions lives - pointing out that the figures quoted by Khrushchev referred only to party members. This should then be compared to the list of political prisoners in the Soviet Union today (1984); according to Amnesty International there are 903 political prisoners in that enormous territory. Perhaps is the first figure an exaggeration and the second figure unrealistically low. But as indications of a tremendous change it tallies with what happened to Hitlerism, if one compares the enormous atrocities committed inside, and by, Nazi-Germany to the relative peacefulness of the two Germanies today.¹⁾

The question to be discussed is of vital importance and it has been discussed many, many times: what are the roots of Stalinism? The question calls for exact definitions, it calls for an effort to come to grips with the phenomenon historically, structurally, culturally in such a way that it can be better comprehended - including the comprehension of how the phenomenon could be brought under control, perhaps even be put to rest, to an end. So, let us try!

2. Homo Sovieticus

How should one try to think about the Soviet Union? What would be the necessary and sufficient factors to take into account if one should try to describe it as a "civilization", or as a "macro-culture" - to use a term which has few connotations but here is taken to mean exactly the same? There seem to be at least three answers that would have to be put into this necessary and sufficient nucleus: the Russian element, trying to incorporate some of the more fundamental aspects of history and social structure; the orthodox element, trying to characterize some of the more important elements of that type of christian theology; and marxism, trying to build into the description some basic elements of that particular ideology.

A glance at Russian history will bring out two points that are used by everybody, but unfortunately usually singularly, not combined to characterize Russia: on the one hand Russia as a victim of very many and very cruel invasions, on the other hand Russia as an expansionist power, showing a steady pattern of increase in size for almost 1,000 years. In short, Russia the victim, and Russia the aggressor.

Everybody knows, or at least should know the list of invaders of the Soviet Union/Russia, highly visible in the form of monuments for anybody who travels around in that vast territory. It makes sense to read the list backwards since it starts just one generation ago with Hitler's Operation Barbarossa of June 1941, a gigantic effort to try to get rid of the whole population, or at least 100 million - to empty the territories for German colonization. Before that the participation by interventionist forces from 14 foreign countries after the Russian Revolution, mixing into the civil war 1918 - 22. Before that the German Kaiser in August 1914, weakening the Tsarist Army in a way that certainly was a necessary condition for the Russian 1917 Revolution. Before that the Japanese invasion of 1904 - 05. Before that Napoléon in 1812. Before that at least five waves of Swedish invasions, and there were also the Teutonic Knights, although at the border (Lithuania, Poland), in the 13th and 14th centuries.

And then, before that again, and we are now talking of events 1,000 years ago: the Viking invasions from Scandinavia, and the Mongolian invasions known by the name of Djenghis Khan. Both of them tremendously cruel, leaving a lasting impact on what might have been a relatively peaceful agricultural people. The Viking onslaught seems to have been particularly important; in fact, the very name for the Russian people, Rus, comes from Nordic language and many of today's Russians first names are originally Skandinavian, in Slavonized form. According to Koestler²⁾ one modern historian, McEvedy,³⁾ has summed it up:

Viking-Varangian activity, ranging from Iceland to the borders of Turkestan, from Constantinople to the Arctic circle, was of incredible vitality and daring, and it is sad that so much effort was wasted in plundering. The Northern heroes did not deign to trade until they failed to vanquish; they preferred blood-stained, glorious gold to a steady mercantile profit.

Koestler continues, summarizing in his own way:⁴⁾

Thus, the Rus convoys sailing southwards in the summer season were at the same time both commercial fleets and military armadas; the two roles went together, and with each fleet it was impossible to foretell at what moment the merchants would turn into warriors. The size of these fleets was formidable. Masudi speaks of a Rus force entering the Caspian from the Volga (in 912-13) as comprising 'about 500 ships, each manned by 100 persons. Of these 50,000 men, he says, 35,000 were killed in battle. Masudi may have been exaggerating, but apparently not much. Even at an early stage of their exploits (circa 860) the Rus crossed the Black Sea and laid siege on Constantinople with a fleet variously estimated as numbering between 200 and 230 ships.

The Mongol centuries, the 13th and the 14th were also very cruel and in addition structurally disastrous, turning what by that time had become Russians into a people barely eking out a living on their soil. "The elimination of the urban middle classes smoothed the path of an autocracy which imitated its Mongol overlords in ruthless terror and efficient extortion"⁵⁾
(The Times Atlas of World History, p.114)

Hence, a victimological approach to Russian history would take this as a basis and ask how one could expect a people not to be brutalized suffering such onslaughts, and how one would expect a people not to be "security-minded" given such a consistent experience over such a long period.

And then there is that other perspective, Russia as expansionist power. The territory of the world controlled from Moscow has grown considerably from a tiny spot in year 1300 northwards (14th and 15th century), eastwards (16th, 17th centuries) and southwards/westwards (18th, 19th centuries - and 20th!⁶⁾ But this also applies to United States, Great Britain, and France if one thinks in terms of the part of the world controlled from Washington, London and Paris respectively. There are some differences, though. For England and for France de-colonization implied a rather severe decline in the size of territory control. But there has been no similar process for the Soviet Union, nor the United States. They started only barely two centuries ago this kind of process and has not as yet suffered any serious decline. The Russian process has been long in coming, and almost consistently an increase; expansion - never contraction.

The net result is, as we know, a somewhat strange empire when we look at the territory controlled, by and large, by Moscow. First of all, it is contiguous - it does not have as the Western powers always did and do an "overseas" component.⁷⁾ Second, economically it is often poor at the center and richest at the periphery, the non-Russian Soviet Republics being very often better off than the biggest republic of the Union, the Russian Socialist Federal Soviet Republic; and the "satellite" states in Eastern Europe being by and large better off than the corresponding territories on the Soviet side (exception to this). Third, and certainly related to the two preceding points: the whole construction may be regarded as a security arrangement with Russia protecting herself by having an inner security belt of non-Russian Soviet Republics and this construction, the Soviet Union, in turn protecting itself by having an outer security belt of

client states. For protection to work it has to be contiguous, particularly in a country where the military leadership still thinks in terms of land-wars. And there have to be some limits to the amount of economic exploitation lest the security-belt becomes too mutinous.

Given that there are both Russia the victim and Russia the aggressor; who is the stronger of the two? Obviously they are related: Russia the victim may in more quiet periods go in for some aggression in order to construct security belts; and Russia the aggressor might invite the type of activity from neighbors near and far away that will turn her into a victim. Would she have been a victim nonetheless? The answer seems to be yes; many of the invaders (the Vikings, the Mongols, the Swedes, the Germans at least in some periods, Napoléon) were not the slightest threatened by Russia by any stretch of imagination and nevertheless attacked.⁸⁾ Would she have been aggressive in any case? This is less obvious, but the answer is probably yes as evidenced by the Russian tendency to fill "the great emptiness" to the East, Siberia, like the Americans did for the great emptiness to the West, all that eventually became the United States. Thus, one guess might be that the victim aspect is the stronger one, but also that we shall have to live with both in our effort to come to grips with Russia as a historical phenomenon. And why not - it is only in the rather simplistic mind that victim and aggressor are two mutually exclusive phenomena.

All through this period a feudal structure seems to be a predominant theme. Admittedly the great Russian plains lend themselves to feudal constructions: vast, vast lands, difficult to hide, easily controlled through quick land-transport and impressive rivers. Verticality combined with fragmentation become the dominant themes in the social construction, and they are certainly not mutually exclusive. This would apply to traditional Russian feudalism which actually was close to a slave society, to the brief period of capitalism and to the more long-lasting period of socialism. The systems come and go, the structure remains. At the top rights only; duties only at the bottom as opposed to French, Chinese and Japanese feudalism with some duties at the top and rights at the bottom.

How does the orthodox church enter into this picture? It is christianity, but like the other two branches of a special kind. More particularly, perhaps four characteristics should be taken into account, at least as an hypothesis.

First, the orthodox church, as the name indicates, is the one that in a sense may be said to be closest to the original faith. The Eastern church, being christianity surviving the schism between West and East both politically and theologically, clinging to the original faith, must have become a value institutionalized in and by the system, making "orthodox" a euphemism rather than the way that word is used, for instance, by protestant countries, "something negative, rigid, dogmatic, unimaginative." Out of date.

Second, it is generally agreed that the orthodox church is more ceremonial and emotional, less verbalizing than the other two, particularly much less so than the protestant churches where the priest has a lot of opportunity to express himself verbally, in the sermon. Enter an orthodox church; it is often dark, filled with incense, the ikons are blackened by centuries of smoke from the candles, people are clad in dark, there is a murmur of voices, chanting, gregorian songs. A church like that will have less difficulties surviving changes in the regimes. A lack of expression during religious service is to be expected anyhow, hence one does not have to be on a collision course with the powers that be. And on the other hand: since there is not much verbal expression anyhow this in no way means consent, acquiescence. A protestant priest, say in Norway during German occupation not finding some way of expressing his opposition during a sermon will be seen either as a collaborator or as a coward, because he has the opportunity to say something and yet does not do so. An orthodox priest does not have a choice between expression and non-expression, and hence can be interpreted as no nuisance to the authorities and as "one of ours" to the congregation.

Third, Christianity is about sin and death and salvation, and particularly salvation from sin through grace, and salvation from death through resurrection. Imagine now that protestant christianity puts the emphasis on the former and orthodox christianity on the latter. "He is arisen" was an old greeting in Russia, and the answer was and is "Truly, he is arisen" - it is Easter Sunday rather than Good Friday.⁹⁾ Eternal life, not just death and dissolution is given unto man. Christianity becomes a message of eternal life as a gift, a guarantee - not only liberation from sins.

And, fourth, there seems to be something defensive in orthodox christianity. At least in recent times one does not find missionary activity in anything approximating the levels of protestant and catholic christianity, nor the tremendous aggressiveness expressed in catholic inquisition and protestant/catholic witch processes.¹⁰⁾ May be the pogroms against jews is a homologous element, but they are usually not seen as coming from the church but from population in general, and more particularly from tsarist anti-Semitic practices.

Let us then bring marxism into the picture. Marxism is an occidentalism, produced by a person of jewish decent in a christian setting. There is christian progress provided one can be liberated from sin (exploitation); the progress is given in the Stufengang with the well-known six steps: primitive communism, slavery, feudalism, capitalism, socialism, advanced communism. If one disregards the last two that are for the future (at least when Marx wrote about this) one ends up with the Stufengang with four elements, the same number as Hegel had in his system, the system that Marx "stood on its head". Of course, regardless of what one stands on its head it looks pretty much the same particularly if it is looked at up-side down, and even more particularly if it has a fairly simple structure. Marx did not change Hegel's Stufengang that much!¹¹⁾ Hegelian childhood or oriental world becomes sometimes primitive communism and sometimes the Asian mode of production; Hegel's Greek adolescence and Roman-christian adulthood become antiquity and with slavery whereas Hegel's German-christian adulthood is split into

feudalism and capitalism in Marx. More important, however, is that they both end up with about the same chosen peoples and chosen countries. It is Germany for Hegel as the most mature country. It is also Germany for Marx but then together with England as the country of advanced capitalism, and hence the countries where the socialist revolution would come first. As is well-known Marx tended to have a dim view of non-European peoples, and among the European peoples of Latin peoples, Nordic peoples (with the exception of Denmark because the Danish capital was said to be in Hamburg rather than in Kopenhagen!) and Slavonic peoples. Rather traditional.

How could Lenin, himself a marxist, dare defy a marxist prediction by starting a socialist revolution, leading to the dictatorship of the proletariat, in such a backward country as Russia, located somewhere in-between late feudalism and early capitalism, according to the marxist Stufengang of history? Or, more important for the present purpose, how could Stalin, himself a pupil of the orthodox seminary in Tbilisi in the 1890s understand it?¹²⁾ May be one tentative answer could be that Stalin's historical role was to combine orthodox and marxist eschatology, that the last should be the first like in the Sermon on the Mount; that "the Lord has arisen" becomes "Mother Russia has arisen". Beaten in the war against the German Kaiser, emaciated, starving, immensely big and equally immensely, poor what else could give Mother Russia a position through a "quantum jump" from being last to being first? Could not a marxist revolution also by some twist of the thought become a way of gaining Paradise here and now, just combining two eschatologies, one religious and one materialist?

At least the basic figures of thought are compatible, including the very important idea of irreversibility: once converted a christian is not supposed to slide back into paganism; once the revolution has been made capitalist society has been undone for ever and socialist society is not supposed to slide back into capitalism. Let us only add the obvious: the point is not whether Stalin was a believing and/or practising orthodox christian in some period of his life. The basic point is the force of the underlying metaphores.

So, let us try to combine the three building blocs for social into what might constitute the setting for Homo Sovieticus in a more systematic manner, following the scheme for social cosmology analysis:

SPACE: Russia as the real center of the occidental center of the world, the place where real, genuine faith has survived, faithful to its roots, the home of the third and the fourth Rome after first one and then the other parts of the Roman empire had collapsed. Vulnerable, yes, because pagans and heretics believe her periods of weakness to be a perennial condition, underestimating the tremendous resilience of these vast spaces on earth, making the real center of the world's center look like its periphery, waiting for her time to come. The sleeping giant.

TIME: waiting, yes, with tremendous patience and time perspectives as vast as her geographical space, supported by the double apocalypse, promised both in orthodox christianity and in orthodox marxism.¹³⁾ The revolution becomes the occasion for the last to become the first, for the periphery to become center, for the New Age (novoja vremja) to be ushered in on that patient, but also very fertile, Russian soil.

KNOWLEDGE: To be ushered in, yes, in fundamental discontinuity with the past, "before the revolution/after the revolution" becoming the latter day version of the Earth/Paradise dichotomy, very dichotomous, manichaeian, or, to refer to the Slavonic version of this type of black-white thinking: bogomil.¹⁴⁾ There were some fits of dialectics in the way of approaching social history, inspired by the weak dialectical tendency in Marx/Hegel thought.¹⁵⁾ But that trend very soon disappears in favor of seeing Soviet society in all essentials as an Endzustand, with no autonomous inner dialectic, only minor operations to be carried out in a technocratic manner from above, inspired by the scientific-technical-revolution (STR). Dialectical materialism becomes a-dialectic, and the "materialist" aspect becomes the label for a civilization systematically unconscious of its own idealistic roots. With this the knowledge basis becomes castrated, incapable of producing new, fertile thoughts.

PERSON/NATURE: nothing particularly original appears here that is not found in homo occidentalis in general. It is the right, and under socialism indeed a duty of man to make use of, even exploit nature to the utmost. Like in Teutonic thinking this is combined with a considerable amount of nature romanticism. Lush Russian summer nature, birch trees, the little lake, the orthodox church being mirrored in its waters, the sky with drifting white clouds - nobody will deny the accommodating, addictive appeal. To spoil and even desecrate a beloved object is, however, nothing new in the Occident.

PERSON/PERSON: the old feudalism in its perverted form - with rights only at the top and duties only at the bottom, to the point that individuals at the bottom are possessed, owned by those at the top so that the latter may make the former disappear, with or without traces - is replicated in a peculiar four-class-structure known as the Soviet society of today. At the bottom are the farmers/peasants, producing the food, but being treated so badly that even with those vast territories they are not able to feed the population. They are the objects of primitive/primary accumulation, the cynical theory of Preobzhansky¹⁶⁾ to legitimize, under socialism, the same exploitation of the people on the land known from feudalism and capitalism. Their task is to produce that minimum cost to the state so that the next class from the bottom, the workers, also can be paid at minimum cost to the state, because what is needed to feed them is so cheap. Then, on top of these two classes comprising the majority of the population come to non-manual intermeshing formations: the party-military-police complex and the bureaucracy-state corporation-intelligentsia complex. The former should still be put on top because they are the producers of ideology, and also those who ultimately control reward and punishment. In other words, they are the wielders of normative, remunerative and coercive power. The second come somewhat lower down: they are the instruments, bureaucracy for the planning and administration of that vast phenomenon, the corporations for the production and distribution; and the intelligentsia for the production of forms of understanding for the other five. However, it goes without saying that those on top of the second

complex rank far above those lower down in the first complex, hence the expression "inter-meshing". And the second complex is ascending.

In this system the channels of upward mobility are obvious: party membership; joining the military or the police if one comes from a peasant or worker family; get higher education if one comes from the upper two layers. Thus, the intelligentsia would tend to be a self-recruiting stratum in the system, perhaps more oriented towards professional standards that can be exercised in bureaucracy, or corporation, or the "free" professions, whereas the first complex is more oriented towards loyalty, the supreme virtue of the party-military-police complex in general (and certainly not only in the Soviet Union). It is equally clear what would constitute downward mobility or even punishment: to become a worker, to be put into the factory or out on the land for those in the first and second complexes who do not behave - a strange punishment indeed in a country presumably made for the benefit of workers and peasants/farmers.

PERSON/GOD: orthodox God becomes orthodox Marx; the Bible becomes das Kapital; Jesus Christ becomes Lenin who appears in the mausoleum in "arisen" form; this is also the location of the holy tomb, symbolizing Moscow as the capital of the Chosen People. Joining the church becomes joining the party; conversion remains conversion; salvation becomes revolution; both of them are presumably irreversible. God's meaning with creation becomes the meaning of History; the priests interpreted God and the party interprets History and even rides in front of everybody else, on top of that huge wave, through time.

So much for homo sovieticus. What, in addition to this, can be said of homo stalinensis?

3. Homo Stalinensis

The general thesis would be that homo stalinensis = homo sovieticus in extremis. It is an extreme version of what has been said in the preceding section; the question is exactly how. I think Stalin can be said to take the idea of Russia as the chosen people, and the Soviet Union, one of Russia's creations, as the chosen country one step further. Socialism in one country became his big slogan, as opposed to Trotsky's call for a world socialist revolution, highly understandable against the background given. How could Russia/the Soviet Union remain a chosen people/country, the vanguard of History if all the others were to go the same way, right now? Stalin possibly wanted socialism to be a Russian/Soviet monopoly. He probably wanted to consolidate it so that those who came later, or were permitted to come later, would look to the Soviet Union as the fatherland of socialism, with mother Russia at its roots, and pay adequate tribute to her.

One interesting phenomenon here is how Stalin himself was able to replicate the "periphery-becoming-center" trick. Himself a Gruzian, born in rather insignificant Gori not too far from Tbilisi the son of a former serf, he nevertheless became the father of all the peoples of the Soviet Union, in Krem1. The last became the first, inside that vast setting itself the last becoming the first. Of course, in this there is also something corresponding to the structure of that strange empire, alluded to above: the power is at the center, the material well-being - to the extent there is some of that - in its periphery.

I think it can be said that Stalin did something corresponding with time. He needed his own apocalypse, his own re-birth, his own tremendous discontinuity. And he got it in The Great Patriotic War, 1941 - 45. Whether he expected Hitler to attack or not can be disputed. The important point is how he made use of the situation to catapult himself into the position as redeemer.

But to this should be added another relationship Stalin seems to have with time: a way of trying to telescope the whole process, a tremendous impatience, trying to get things done not as quickly as possible, but much more quickly than that so that it became an impossibility - thereby creating his own discontinuities. He must somewhere have had tremendous faith that dawn was coming. It was just a question of unleashing the mechanisms, of getting rid of the shackles. And this, then, carries over into his view of knowledge: pushing, kicking a screaming population into the "paradise" of socialism, whether they wanted it or not.

Even nature had to be forced, much beyond its capacity, it seems. Genetics was not very helpful as a science, it had to be changed. A Lysenko genetics, promising that acquired characteristics could be inherited had to come about, hopefully reflecting a nature that - unfortunately for Stalin - did not exist, or at least not at that time, in that way.

And the same with society. Nothing had to stay in the way of the regimentation and organization of the peasants/farmers for the purposes mentioned: no independent peasantry, nothing however faintly reminiscent of landlordism. All that was lumped together as kulaks, to be exterminated. And nothing should stay in the way, either, in the two complexes mentioned: two thirds of the central committee of the party in the 15th Congress of 1927 had been killed by the end of the 1930s, in 1939.¹⁶⁾ The same with the intelligentsia: anybody who was not orthodox/loyal was to disappear, socially in the Gulag, and/or biologically, exterminated. Any opposition was opposition to History as such, any person opposing History was not only anti-historical but a-historical, a-human. How can it be otherwise? How can any human being resist, oppose the New Age, paradise on earth? How could anybody but vermin do such a thing, and was that not in itself a sign, almost a guarantee that they were vermin and hence should be exterminated? Was that not simply the duty in order to make the blessing irreversible? It was not a question of fighting an opposition, it was not a question of your view vs. ours/mine. It was a question of correct opinion vs. human insanity. And, it was

not a question of not tolerating insanity, but of getting rid of it, as one gets rid of dirt in general: exterminating Gulag, psychiatry.

From this fascist attitude to other human beings, like real fascism justified by some kind of transcendental ideology, the last step was but a short one: Stalin as God, the "personality cult". There is some indication of a tremendous jealousy at work, relative to Lenin, in all of this. What could be above the Saviour, if not God himself? May be, may be not - it is perhaps difficult to tell how the personality cult was engaged in by Stalin himself. But he certainly made himself omnipotent through the terrifying power-over-others he commanded, and to a large extent omniscient through his system of informers, his way of spying on his own population, today known as KGB. But he failed, of course, in one rather important regard. God is also supposed to be at least partly benevolent, not always malevolent. God is supposed to deliver goods, not only bads; services, not only dis-services. The balance, for the Stalin period, became too negative.

So, he ended to some extent whence he came, down in Gruzia, and more particularly in Gori, the local son who made it, hated as a symbol of terror most other places, with some exceptions around the world such as Mongolia, Albania, for some period China.¹⁷⁾ Periphery countries in that system. Probably he will soon be evicted from these last refuges, but only under the condition that some alternative system, sufficient to emerge from Stalinism, makes him look even more dismal and tyrannical, even more hopelessly anti-human; simply a reactionary force for those who believe in some kind of progress for human-kind.

4. Will the Soviet Union survive until 1984?

This is the title of Andrei Amalrik's book¹⁸⁾, a challenging title indeed in a world already used to the symbolism of Orwell's 1984. Amalrik was born in 1938, expelled from the University of Moscow at the age of 25 and sentenced to two and a half year exile in Siberia in 1964 for "parasitism". Finally, as a dissident, he went abroad, working at the University of Amsterdam for a period until he died in an accident (?), colliding with a truck when driving to a meeting, in Spain.

Many Orwell ingredients come together in this tense essay of only some 60 pages. It has been acclaimed as the best essay written about the Soviet Union after the Second World War, inside that country or outside.¹⁹⁾ It is certainly a very penetrating essay, indeed. As a point of departure let us note that the answer to the question posed by the essay, summer 1984 - as opposed to April-June 1969 when the essay was written - seems to be yes; the Soviet Union will survive. It will survive not only as a country, but as the Soviet system. It will to a large extent remain relatively de-stalinized, the terror of stalinism, the permanent fear, the disappearance at night - all or almost all of that including the cult of personality, will remain as horrible memories, but of an increasingly distant past. So, why could Amalrik at all put forward the hypothesis that the Soviet Union might not be able to survive?

He bases this on two arguments. One is the internal revolt of the masses of the Soviet people against the System, the other is a war with China - and it is the combined effect of these two strong factors that might bring down the system. Of these two he seems to believe more in the latter, and it is quite clear that that is the one about which he knows least.

My own impression from the Soviet Union is that a war with China might be popular with the Soviet people, at least with sufficiently may

to make the war viable as an enterprise. There will be three major reasons for this: not the Soviet people but the Russians seem to be a rather racist nation, filled with ignorance prejudices, contempt for non-white peoples. Then, there is the teaching-China-a-lesson argument: China has challenged, even humiliated the great Soviet Union, thrown doubts on her motivations, being disobedient, ungrateful. But above all, and this is the most important argument although it is no longer valid: China under Mao-Zedong was somehow "communist", "proletarian", not only verbally but in terms of collectivism and some type of enforced egalitarianism; not only in terms of standard of living but also in terms of power distribution (I am then referring to the period of the Cultural Revolution, incidentally a term borrowed from Soviet history). The Soviet people probably hate "communism" in this more strict sense of enforced egalitarianism/collectivism. The Soviet people probably like a vertical society with differences in power and privilege, provided there are some possibilities of climbing in that society, somebody high up to admire and envy, somebody low down to make one feel good, "I am at least not that bad." Consequently, a war against China would be a war against "communism"; in a sense already mentally prepared by the Soviet authorities' enormous propaganda war against maoism, and their own history.²⁰⁾

However, none of these, not even combined, is sufficient reason to go to war against a country, not even after the 1969 Ussuri river incident. The war has not taken place, whether Moscow never had the intension or was effectively deterred by China's vast lands and population.

More importantly, however, I have some doubts about Amalrik's contention, that China might go to a aggressive war against the Soviet Union. According to Amalrik the Soviet Revolution passed through three stages²¹⁾ (p. 45): international, national linked with the colossal purge of the old cadres, and then military-imperialist, ending with establishment of control over half of Europe. He assumes that China will go through the same stages, and is now entering the third stage where there will also be "revolution at the top", the transition from blood-stained stalinist dynamism, first to relative stability, and then to the present day stagnation. Amalrik: "in the logic of events a period

of external expansionism must ensue"²²⁾. But this presupposes that China is steered by the same logic as an occidental country, expansionist, like the Soviet Union.²³⁾ It may also be that China's major concern is defensive, to protect the "sinic space", perhaps even to absorb all of it. In this space Tibet certainly belongs, as seen by Beijing; so does Vietnam, so does possibly Korea. But certainly not India, from which China withdrew immediately in 1962/63 after what Amalrik seems to think was an aggressive war on her part. Nor does - in my view - the Soviet Union; negotiations about border areas, even claims, notwithstanding.²⁴⁾

More interesting is Amalrik's thinking about what might happen inside the Soviet Union. Roughly speaking his point is as follows. There is the motivation for a Democratic Movement, arising from the intelligentsia, and there is also the basis for strong protest movements with strikes, real internal revolts, coming out of the lower echelons of the Soviet society, the peasants/peasants and the workers. However, up against this is one basic difficulty: "in our country, since all of us work for the state, we all have the psychology of government workers"²⁵⁾ (p. 19). This is a point to which much too little consideration has been given in the general thinking about socialism. In capitalist countries people may revolt against private/corporate capitalism, always thinking in the back of their minds that the state remains as an alternative society, possible to be captured through evolutionary or revolutionary processes. Or, in despotic societies one may revolt against the state, again on the assumption that there is a private parallel society that can take up the tasks that have to be done when the state is in ruins. But what about a society where there is only a public sector, only the state, and everybody is a government worker? Would not a revolt be a way of hitting oneself? Would there not be some kind of feeling that the state nevertheless is the guarantor of basic security in material terms; and that destroying it is like for a child to destroy the parental home? And even more than this, destruction of a parental home on an island, with only one family living on it - - - .

In short, Amalrik's conclusion is not so clear when one reads through his essay as it might look on the first reading. He has the indication of a mechanism of irreversibility, and it is not the mechanisms mentioned and analyzed so brilliantly by Orwell. It is simply this: there is a limit to disloyalty to the state in a socialist country. And one could add: there is also a limit of disloyalty to the state in a non-socialist country, by the socialists themselves - one reason why the state sector probably can feel relatively safe under a socialist government. And that safety itself might serve as a reason for expanding the state sector; others might like to join in with that security even if it is at a somewhat grey level. Steady income, guaranteed pension.

As Amalrik says ²⁶⁾:

"- - - every government worker considers himself too insignificant in comparison with the power apparatus of which he is only a small cog to demand of that apparatus any kind of change. At the same time, he has been relieved of all social responsibility, since his job is simply to carry out orders. Thus, he always has the feeling of having performed his duty even though he has done things that he would not have done had he been given a choice."

"We all have the psychology of government workers"²⁷⁾. Since this comes on the top of "the planned elimination from society of the most independent minded and active of its members, which has been going on for decades"²⁸⁾, and "that section of the middle class which most clearly recognizes the need for democratic reforms is also the section that is most imbued with the defensive thought" ("well, there is nothing I can do anyway" or "you can't break down a wall by beating a head against it")"- the situation does not look too promising" from Amalrik's point of view.

It is interesting to relate this to the use of psychiatrization as a way of handling opponents. Imagine that there are people in the Soviet Union, even many of them, who simply believe in the marxist Naturgesetzlichkeit of the Stufengang. One element in this is the dictatorship of the proletariat - of course, in practice it means the dictatorship of the party and not of the proletariat but over the

proletariat. But regardless of this, when some individuals are not only opposed but openly come out, trying to fight it, would that not look like fighting laws of nature? And would it not look like a psychiatric rather than a legal case, to any one really thinking that way? I am mentioning this because I myself in a very minor way have been exposed to something of the same when I was made to answer for my sins at an international conference, by the Soviet delegation (I had try to explain what the Chinese meant by "social imperialism")²⁹⁾: "You cannot change the world alone, that is like a man running his head against the wall - he only harms himself". My punishment for my crimes was that a book of mine that had been translated (which I doubt) but would not be published (which I do not doubt). Had I been a "sovjetskij thelovek" something more. I could leave the hotel room. They cannot, or hardly not, leave their country.

Amalrik adds to this analysis something which he finds characteristic for the Russians, but perhaps it is rather human:³⁰⁾

"This idea of justice is motivated by hatred of everything that is outstanding, which we make no effort to imitate but, on the contrary try to bring down to our level, by hatred of any sense of initiative, of any higher or more dynamic way of life than the life we live ourselves. - - -
In general when the average Russian sees that he is living less well than his neighbor, he will concentrate not on trying to do better for himself but rather on trying to bring his neighbor down to his own level" (p. 35).

This goes a far way to explain how isolated the dissidents are, not only "who are you, thinking you can do something about this", but "who are you to humiliate us by standing up against a system we do not dare stand up against!" Again, some insights in the mechanisms of irreversibility, not necessarily based on control from the top.

All of this notwithstanding Amalrik nevertheless comes to this conclusion³¹⁾:

"Summing up, it can be said that as the regime becomes progressively weaker and more self-destructive it is bound to clash - and there are already clear indications that this is happening - with two forces which are already undermining it: the constructive movement of the "middle class" (rather weak) and the destructive movement of the "lower

classes", which will take the form of extremely damaging, violent and irresponsible action once its members realize their relative immunity from punishment. How long, though, will it be before the regime faces such an upheaval, and how long will it be able to bear the strain?"

Amalrik's reasoning is that the regime has to be weakened further before anything like this happens, and he mentions how the government of Nicolas II was weakened by the war with Japan 1904 - 05, as a condition for the revolution of 1905 and by the war against Germany 1914 - 17 as a condition for the 1917 revolution. If the war with China will not do this weakening, then perhaps an uprising in the Eastern European countries will do? Or, if all the countries that have some kind of issue or of territorial claims on the Soviet Union raise at the same time?

I let this do as an indication of Amalrik's thinking, and would like to add some of my own. I will base it more on the internal contradictions in the Soviet system, arising from its peculiar four class social structure. I will take as a point of departure the discontent of the farmers/peasants, how they seem to want more land for themselves, and more marketing possibilities - which is not the same as a general return to privately based agriculture. Second, I will take as a point of departure the workers' demand for trade unions, for protection against exploitation by the two complexes on top of them. Third, I would take the demands by the intelligentsia in that top system, for more freedom of impression and expression. Fourth, I would take the general demand of the socialist bourgeoisie, everybody in the top complexes except for the people really at the top, the apparatshiki, the nomenclatura, for better consumers' goods, for a more bourgeois life, enjoyment of good life now rather than postponement till an uncertain future. And I would take the rivalry between the technocratic complex (the BCI complex) and the partocratic complex (PMP complex) (in the present analysis about the Soviet system the two complexes at the top) for power, with technocracy gradually replacing partocracy, or least so it seems - nevertheless with the frightening power of the military

and the police (KGB) remaining. And then I would add to this all the tensions with the non-Russians in the system, and they are many; meaning tensions with the autonomous republics (so-called, because they are not autonomous) within the Russian republic; with the 14 non-Russian republics and with the countries in the second security belt, the client states, the "satellites". On top of this I would probably add the tensions within the system of communist parties in the world, often referred to as the rise of euro-communism (which actually is latin communism) - now in decline.

In short, looking at the conflict formations emerging within the system one might say that it is not strange that the Soviet leaders look the way they do: highly unsmiling, not only sour and dour and grey, but as if they are almost crushed under the weight of the terrible problems they have to confront everyday. Of course they try to keep the system under control, concentrating on the sector they can handle, the two top complexes, leaving the teeming masses to their relatively simple lives. In other words, exactly the orwellian formula of the inner party, the party and the proletariat. But it may not work, not because of the multiplicity of conflicts within the system, but because these conflicts may one day come to recognize each other and be aligned with each other. It is easily seen what holds this up: there is tremendous class distance in the system, and it is not easy for the technocrats to cooperate with the more free-floating intelligentsia, for both of them to cooperate with the workers, for these again to cooperate with the peasants/farmers - and in general for Russians to cooperate with non-Russians. In other words, the stability of the system seems to be based mainly on the ability of those in power not so much to prevent any manifestation of conflict (this was Stalin's line) but to prevent alignment of the conflicts (which seems to have been Brezhnev's line). How long that can last is another matter and here my own thinking would be exactly the opposite of Amalrik's: the higher the pressure from the outside, the less will the peoples of the Soviet Union be likely to permit any release into action of the enormous conflict potential they have. And the lower the pressure, the more likely is it that they might do so, but then in a way which is short of what Amalrik seems to predict:³²⁾

"- - - It is not difficult to imagine what forms and directions popular discontent will take if the regime looses its hold. The horrors of the Russian revolutions of 1905 - 07 and 1917 - 20 would then look like idyls in comparison (p. 40).

And all of that leads to an interesting theoretical question from the social scientist's point of view and a horrifying practical question from everybody's point of view: will "irreversibility", or efforts to arrive at that make for more or less violence in a conflict? Of course, nobody will quite believe in total irreversibility. There is so much imagination in human beings, so much effort to transcend whatever the system has forced upon them. But the forces are nonetheless there, and may make a rather slow awakening, tiny small efforts, difficult both when it comes to consciousness-formation and organisation. And, then, one might also argue that exactly for that reason when the awakening comes of age, the revolt will be tremendous, and it will be like a tidal wave, over-powering everything that stands in its way, once the shackles have been broken.

We shall see, qui vivra, verra. The horrifying problem, however, is that if Amalrik is right, that what is needed in order to break the shackles is a pressure from the outside of the magnitude of a world war, then so many of us who might like to see what happens would no longer be around and alive to see it because of the likelihood of a nuclear exterminism as a response. Hence, there must be other ways of completing the fight against Stalinism!