



COMMUNISM

IN ITS TIME

AN EXHIBITION BY
GERD KOENEN,
EDITED BY THE FEDERAL
FOUNDATION FOR THE STUDY OF
THE COMMUNIST DICTATORSHIP
IN GERMANY AND BY THE
GERMAN HISTORICAL MUSEUM

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COMMUNISM IN ITS TIME — A GLOBAL MOVEMENT

Communism was a global movement that spread across the world in the 20th century. It was a political and economic ideology that sought to create a classless society. The movement was inspired by the ideas of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. It was a response to the social and economic conditions of the time. The movement was a global phenomenon that spread across the world. It was a response to the social and economic conditions of the time. The movement was a global phenomenon that spread across the world.



RUSSIA 1917 — FROM REVOLUTION TO CIVIL WAR

The Russian Revolution of 1917 was a pivotal moment in world history. It marked the end of the Russian Empire and the beginning of the Soviet Union. The revolution was a response to the social and economic conditions of the time. It was a global phenomenon that spread across the world. The revolution was a response to the social and economic conditions of the time. It was a global phenomenon that spread across the world.



THE GREAT UTOPIA — ANYTHING IS ACHIEVABLE. ANYTHING POSSIBLE

The Great Utopia was a vision of a perfect society. It was a response to the social and economic conditions of the time. It was a global phenomenon that spread across the world. The Great Utopia was a vision of a perfect society. It was a response to the social and economic conditions of the time. It was a global phenomenon that spread across the world.



ARGONAUTS OF THE WORLD REVO- LUTION — THE COMMUNIST INTERNATIONAL

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OLD PEOPLE, NEW PEOPLE — THE GREAT EXPERIMENT

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THE GRAND ILLUSION — THE COMMUNISTS AND THE WORKERS

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THE GRAND SCHEME — INDUSTRIALISATION THROUGH COLLECTIVISATION

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THE GREAT TERROR — DREAM OF A FINAL PURGE

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EFFUSIVE SONG- WRITING — LEADER- SHIP CULTS AND HEROIC MYTHS

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FASCISM AND ANTI-FASCISM — THE DEADLY GAME

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FROM THE ELBE TO THE YANGTZE RIVER — THE BIRTH OF THE "SOCIALIST WORLD CAMP"

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"THE EAST WIND WILL PREVAIL OVER THE WEST WIND" — ASIA THE STORM CENTRE

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ANTICOLONIAL LIBERATION MOVEMENTS — PHANTASMS OF A THIRD WORLD

Anticolonial Liberation Movements were social and economic experiments that took place in the Soviet Union. It was a response to the social and economic conditions of the time. It was a global phenomenon that spread across the world. Anticolonial Liberation Movements were social and economic experiments that took place in the Soviet Union. It was a response to the social and economic conditions of the time. It was a global phenomenon that spread across the world.



OLD LEFT, NEW LEFT — THE RED DECADE

Old Left, New Left was a social and economic experiment that took place in the Soviet Union. It was a response to the social and economic conditions of the time. It was a global phenomenon that spread across the world. Old Left, New Left was a social and economic experiment that took place in the Soviet Union. It was a response to the social and economic conditions of the time. It was a global phenomenon that spread across the world.



ATHEISM AS A CREDO — THE BATTLE AGAINST RELIGION

Atheism as a Credo was a social and economic experiment that took place in the Soviet Union. It was a response to the social and economic conditions of the time. It was a global phenomenon that spread across the world. Atheism as a Credo was a social and economic experiment that took place in the Soviet Union. It was a response to the social and economic conditions of the time. It was a global phenomenon that spread across the world.



EMANCIPATION AND EROS — WOMEN AND SOCIALISM

Emancipation and Eros was a social and economic experiment that took place in the Soviet Union. It was a response to the social and economic conditions of the time. It was a global phenomenon that spread across the world. Emancipation and Eros was a social and economic experiment that took place in the Soviet Union. It was a response to the social and economic conditions of the time. It was a global phenomenon that spread across the world.



EVERYDAY SOCIA- LIST LIFE — WORK, CONSUMPTION, LEISURE TIME

Everyday Socialist Life was a social and economic experiment that took place in the Soviet Union. It was a response to the social and economic conditions of the time. It was a global phenomenon that spread across the world. Everyday Socialist Life was a social and economic experiment that took place in the Soviet Union. It was a response to the social and economic conditions of the time. It was a global phenomenon that spread across the world.



THE NARROW MATRIX — "SCIENTIFIC SOCIALISM"

The Narrow Matrix was a social and economic experiment that took place in the Soviet Union. It was a response to the social and economic conditions of the time. It was a global phenomenon that spread across the world. The Narrow Matrix was a social and economic experiment that took place in the Soviet Union. It was a response to the social and economic conditions of the time. It was a global phenomenon that spread across the world.



SOCIALIST URBANITY — AS AN ANTITHESIS TO BOURGEOIS URBANITY

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COMMUNIST INTER- NATIONALISM VS. BOURGEOIS COSMO- POLITANISM

Communist Internationalism vs. Bourgeois Cosmopolitanism was a social and economic experiment that took place in the Soviet Union. It was a response to the social and economic conditions of the time. It was a global phenomenon that spread across the world. Communist Internationalism vs. Bourgeois Cosmopolitanism was a social and economic experiment that took place in the Soviet Union. It was a response to the social and economic conditions of the time. It was a global phenomenon that spread across the world.



"POLITICAL POWER GROWS OUT OF THE BARREL OF A GUN" — COMMUNIST MILITARISM

Political Power Grows Out of the Barrel of a Gun was a social and economic experiment that took place in the Soviet Union. It was a response to the social and economic conditions of the time. It was a global phenomenon that spread across the world. Political Power Grows Out of the Barrel of a Gun was a social and economic experiment that took place in the Soviet Union. It was a response to the social and economic conditions of the time. It was a global phenomenon that spread across the world.



REFORM & REVOLUTION — THE DEFEAT OF COMMUNISM IN EUROPE

Reform & Revolution was a social and economic experiment that took place in the Soviet Union. It was a response to the social and economic conditions of the time. It was a global phenomenon that spread across the world. Reform & Revolution was a social and economic experiment that took place in the Soviet Union. It was a response to the social and economic conditions of the time. It was a global phenomenon that spread across the world.



REVOLUTION & RESTORATION — FROM COMMUNISM TO POST- COMMUNISM

Revolution & Restoration was a social and economic experiment that took place in the Soviet Union. It was a response to the social and economic conditions of the time. It was a global phenomenon that spread across the world. Revolution & Restoration was a social and economic experiment that took place in the Soviet Union. It was a response to the social and economic conditions of the time. It was a global phenomenon that spread across the world.



REFLECTING ON AN ERA — COMMUNISM IN THE 20TH CENTURY

Reflecting on an Era was a social and economic experiment that took place in the Soviet Union. It was a response to the social and economic conditions of the time. It was a global phenomenon that spread across the world. Reflecting on an Era was a social and economic experiment that took place in the Soviet Union. It was a response to the social and economic conditions of the time. It was a global phenomenon that spread across the world.



COMMUNISM IN ITS TIME

COMMUNISM IN ITS TIME — A GLOBAL MOVEMENT

Communism was the largest and most radical mass movement of the 20th century. The parties of the „Communist International“ were „of a new type“, as called for by Lenin. As cadre organisations they demanded total commitment and absolute discipline from their members. Once a communist party had gained power, all citizens had to actively submit themselves to its „leadership“.

This forcibly imposed aspiration to shape all spheres of life, rightly labeled as „totalitarian“, destroyed countless existences and ruined millions and millions of lives. And it left behind immense spiritual and social wastelands.

In their heyday, however, the communists were also able to mobilise a surprisingly youthful enthusiasm as well as significant intellectual and artistic energies — before the permanently high levels of tension led to fatigue, passiveness, cynicism or dissidence.

The sudden collapse of the „socialist camp“ and of the Soviet Union after 1989 nevertheless came unexpectedly — as did the rise of China under the uninterrupted dictatorship of its Communist Party. Both make it all the more necessary to explain the historical „evolution“ of world communism since 1917.



Sergei Eisenstein's 1928 silent film "October" dramatizes Lenin's return from Swiss exile on April 3, 1917, and depicts it as an event of historical significance.

Film still: picture alliance / CPA Media / Pictures From History

RUSSIA 1917 — FROM REVOLUTION TO CIVIL WAR

The "storming of the Winter Palace" on 25 October (7 November) 1917 becomes the central mythical narrative of communism. In reality, the Bolsheviks seize power almost without a fight.

Revolution had already started in Russia with the toppling of the tsar in February (March) 1917. But the Provisional Government, comprising socialists and liberals, was unable either to put an end to the world war or to avoid economic collapse.

When the Bolsheviks lose the elections to the Russian Constituent Assembly in November 1917 and dissolve the latter by force in January after its constitution, the actual coup takes place, ending the democratic revolution. The Bolsheviks allow peasant farmers to keep their land (for the time being) — but seize their surpluses. They promise workers' self-government and "soviet rule" — but crush all defiant factory committees and soviets. They conclude a separate peace with Germany — but immediately start building a 'Red Army'. They propagate the right of national self-determination — but forcibly reunite the multi-ethnic Russian empire in four years of civil war, which claims more lives than World War I, while the Bolsheviks emerge stronger from that chaos.



Boris Kustodiev's 1920 "The Bolshevik" is one of the first of many monumental paintings that stylize the less-than-spectacular 1917 October uprising as a magical event of great significance for world history.

Photo: picture alliance / CPA Media

THE GREAT UTOPIA — ANYTHING IS ACHIEVABLE, ANYTHING POSSIBLE

In the wake of the apocalyptic world war, the communists believe themselves to be in a historical endgame. From the ruins of the old world, they set out to create a new society that is free from corruption, superstition, possessive instinct and individualism, and that is radically cleansed, homogenised and disciplined. They believe they have deciphered the laws of political economics and history, and that they embody this omniscience themselves.

Especially the vagueness and totalitarian absoluteness of this aspiration are fertile soil for all sorts of delusions of omnipotence. And in the 1920s they inspire avant-garde artists, futurists, constructivists or supremacists, as well as the ideologists of "social engineering", to fill the void following the great break with utopian designs. Initially their works impart a nimbus of uttermost modernity to Soviet communism that has little in common with the sober reality.

Stalin violently brings this modernism and artistic pluralism to an end in the 1930s — and has himself portrayed and praised as a godlike creator of worlds in the classical style. After the death of the "immortal one" in 1953, more profane technological utopias supersede the delusions of omnipotence of those former years.



"Tasks of the Dobrochim: In War / In Peace" — The Russian acronym stands for "Voluntary Society of Friends of Chemical Defense and the Chemical Industry".

Poster, 1924: picture alliance / akg-images

COMMUNISM IN ITS TIME

ARGONAUTS OF THE WORLD REVOLUTION – THE COMMUNIST INTERNATIONAL



Otto Griebel's painting "The Internationale" (1928/30) depicts singing workers of every nationality. The battle anthem of the same name, dating back to the Paris Commune, is adopted as the hymn of the world Communist movement.

Photo: Deutsches Historisches Museum, Berlin / A. Psille

In 1919, the "Communist International" is founded in Moscow. It is not a loose association but a "world party" in which the new communist parties are required to submit themselves as "sections" to the strategies, doctrines and organisational principles dictated by Moscow.

The "International" aspires to be the counter-organisation to the Geneva "League of Nations" and an instrument for the forthcoming global civil war for liberation from capitalism and imperialism. Thousands of professionally trained "Internationalists" assume leadership as instructors in those struggles — often against local party leaderships. Their missions merge increasingly with the operations of Soviet secret services. Many of these professional revolutionaries either die in the dungeons of their opponents or are murdered during Stalin's Great Purge in the 1930s.

The "International" is a nightmare and a bearer of hope at the same time. Its evolution over almost 25 years is characterised by bloody defeats and senseless sacrifices, countless schisms and defamations, and questionable alliances with nationalist revolutionary forces.

But in all of this it is, until its dissolution in 1943, also the school for future leaders of world communism, from Europe to Asia, from Tito to Ho Chi Minh.

OLD PEOPLE, NEW PEOPLE – THE GREAT EXPERIMENT



Androgynous "New Man and Woman" in the catalog designed by El Lissitzky for the 1929 Russian Exposition in the Zurich Kunstgewerbemuseum. This image was created in 2013 at an exhibition at the MoMA in New York.

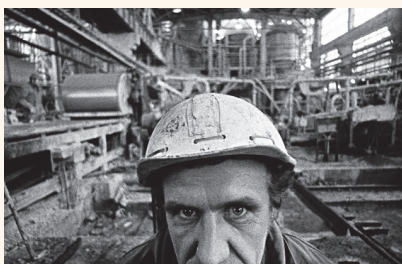
Photo: picture alliance / Sergi Reboredo

The communists are driven by an all-consuming hatred of representatives of the "old society", be they aristocracy, military, civil servants or religious leaders, modern "bourgeoisie" such as industrialists, business people and bankers, the "petty bourgeois", "bourgeois intellectuals", liberals, social democrats and, last but not least, prosperous peasants ("kulaks"). All of them are regarded as "parasites" and "enemies of society" — as "old people" of whom society must be cleansed.

The place of these "old people" is to be taken by androgynous "new people" with healthy bodies and trained intellect who would harness the endless potentials of science, technology and culture. This ideal of optimising "human material", which is most typical of the era, is an especially extreme view advocated by the communists.

De facto, for lack of "class-conscious proletarians", the communists look mainly to children and adolescents whose energy, thirst for experience, willingness to make sacrifices and aspirations are easier to exploit. Ambitious "climbers" and young careerists soon form the backbone of the bloated administration, propaganda or repression apparatus that is the hallmark of communist regimes everywhere.

THE GRAND ILLUSION – THE COMMUNISTS AND THE WORKERS



A worker in a cement factory which processes carcinogenic asbestos in Małkinia Górna in Poland, 1976. Despite claims to the opposite, heavy physical work in the Eastern Bloc is not paralleled by sufficient occupational safety.

Photo: SZ Photo / Forum

Communism was originally meant to "liberate" the industrial proletariat and be the "work of the workers themselves". But at no time, anywhere, do the communists seize power through "proletarian class struggles"; and only very seldom do they enjoy lasting support from the working class. The vast majority of trade unions and works councils in the industrial and developing countries remain dominated by socialists, social democrats, Christians and other actors.

In the communist countries in which they allegedly constitute the "ruling class", workers are not only disenfranchised politically. They are also robbed of their possibilities to organise themselves and represent their own interests. Unquestionably, many avenues open up for young workers to advance socially via the party and state. But the bulk of the new power and functionary elites tends initially to stem from proletarianised peasant farmer families, the petty bourgeoisie or educated classes.

Eventually, the party bureaucracy and intelligentsia recruit mainly from their own offspring, thus acquiring the profile of a "New Class" against which especially the workers, too, revolt in the social unrest of the post-war decades.

COMMUNISM IN ITS TIME

THE GRAND SCHEME — INDUSTRIALISATION THROUGH COLLECTIVISATION

The “Great Turnaround” of 1929/30 — the transition to the enforced collectivisation of agriculture and industrialisation of the Soviet Union — coincides with the Great Depression. Although there is no direct link between them, it opens up major opportunities for Moscow propagandistically, economically and diplomatically. Especially German and US enterprises vie for “Russian orders”. The communists, on the other hand, reach a low point in their influence in the West — or become worn down in “sectarian” street fighting and strikes.

In reality, the “socialist development” in the Soviet Union is achieved through complete exploitation of the workers. The boundaries between paid and forced labour become blurred. The triumphal performance indicators are questionable; new industrial complexes often stand like cathedrals in a social wilderness. And the collectivisation of the agricultural sector leads to an unprecedented famine disaster which claims millions of lives.

The more austere the living conditions, the more colourful the fiction created in propaganda about the “good life” in the “fatherland for all workers”. In the late 1950s, the People’s Republic of China will repeat this experiment in an even more extreme manner with its “Great Leap Forward”.



Map of the USSR in 1931. The caption says: “This map is not like the old maps. ‘The five-year-plan takes action’. [...] Hundreds of large construction sites are not even mentioned in here [...].”

Photo: DHM / Sammlung „Memorial“ Moskau

THE GREAT TERROR — DREAM OF A FINAL PURGE

The dream of liquidating all enemies and “vermin” socially, politically and also physically is a structural element of communist rule and celebrated in propaganda and art as “heroic determination”.

Once all actual or potential enemies have been eliminated, the terror shifts to ever new categories of so-called public enemies. Article 58 of the Soviet Penal Code makes almost any independent thought and action punishable. It creates the legal basis for forced labour on a massive scale, for the deportation of entire ethnic groups, and for the excessive use of the death penalty. The Great Terror of the 1930s, orchestrated by Stalin himself, came frighteningly close to annihilating entire sections of the population, with hundreds of thousands shot and millions imprisoned.

The repeated “purges” that all communist parties and their power structures go through in one way or another are also unique historically. These include show trials and ostracisms, mutual denunciations, and masochistic self-criticism. In many things it remains inconceivable how “terror” actually functioned as a regular political instrument and as an everyday psychological condition.



The Gulag Archipelago: In 1989, in the time of perestroika and glasnost, a map of the Soviet Union shows all prison and labor camps that have existed in the Soviet Union since the 1920s.

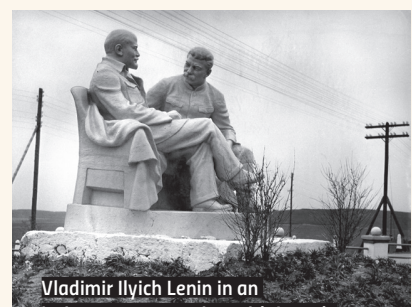
Photo: picture alliance / akg-images

EFFUSIVE SONGWRITING — LEADERSHIP CULTS AND HEROIC MYTHS

Communism attracts artists and intellectuals around the globe. Major writers and poets in the East and West dedicate fulsome hymns and praises to the leaders of the communist world movement — from Lenin to Stalin and Mao to lesser “deities” such as Tito, Kim Il-sung, Enver Hoxha, or Fidel Castro.

These “effusive songs” in many languages become a chapter in literary history that tends to be withheld. The same applies to the countless statues and paintings, posters, films and photos, songs and music which immortalise the communist leaders and heroes. Often the prescribed style of “socialist realism” quite effectively combines folkloristic and classic motifs with highly modern and sophisticated artistic styles.

When Nikita Khrushchev condemns “personality cults” at the 20th Congress of the CPSU in 1956, he makes Stalin solely responsible for all the crimes of the Communist Party. In China at the same time there are the beginnings of a Mao cult which, every so often, reaches unprecedented levels of political idolatry. Yet also the “New Left” of 1968 in the West indulges in a cult of its idols in a postmodernist way and completely on its own impulse, which in some cases still lives on today in pop culture.



Vladimir Ilyich Lenin in an intimate conversation with Joseph Vissarionovich Stalin, his “most loyal scholar”. Monument at the Minsk–Moscow highway.

Photo, 1950: SZ Photo

COMMUNISM IN ITS TIME

FASCISM AND ANTI-FASCISM — THE DEADLY GAME



Paris World Fair 1937. The pavilion of the German Empire (left) and the Soviet Union (right) directly face each other and are awarded with gold medals for their architecture.

Photo, coloring subsequently applied: SZ Photo/Rue des Archives/CCI

“Anti-fascism”, which post-1945 will serve the communist regimes as their central legitimisation, obscures two decades of fatal games played both with emerging fascist movements and with nationalists of every hue. The communists also refer to any political opponents as “fascists”, be they “social fascists”, “clerical fascists” or “national fascists”. With the result that ‘all cats look grey at night’.

During the terrorist “purges” of the 1930s, “Trotskyists” are declared to be the spearhead of world fascism. The Stalinist hate speeches against the “Judas Trotsky” often come across as a mirror image of the National Socialists’ concept of their enemy, namely “Jewish Bolshevism”. All of this confuses the situation, as well as people’s minds, even more. While the next world war is looming, the Soviet Union keeps all of its options open, which is why the Hitler-Stalin Pact of August 1939 does not encounter any major ideological obstacles — either in Berlin or in Moscow. Hitler, according to an internal directive by Stalin, is doing a good job, for the time being, of smashing global imperialism. This dangerous geopolitical gamble backfires in June 1941 when the German Wehrmacht devastatingly catches the Red Army off-guard.

FROM THE ELBE TO THE YANGTZE RIVER — THE BIRTH OF THE “SOCIALIST WORLD CAMP”



Group portrait of the leaders of the new socialist camp on the occasion of Stalin's 70th birthday on 21 December 1949 in Moscow. To the left of Stalin is Mao Zedong and behind him to the right is Walter Ulbricht, the powerful man of the newly founded GDR.

Photo: picture alliance / akg-images

In the same way that World War I was the catalyst for the global communist movement, World War II was instrumental in the spread of the communist sphere of influence “from the Elbe to the Yangtze River”.

After Stalin’s regime successfully mobilised patriotic sentiments in the “Great Patriotic War” and gained legitimacy domestically, it enjoys unprecedented international prestige as the main victor over Germany in 1945.

The years up to 1949 see the formation of a “socialist world camp” which, in Europe, correlates with the sphere of influence which Moscow has gained militarily. The “people’s democracies” in eastern/central Europe are formed using political violence and terror, which initially is directed at the opponents of the new order and soon, also, against the state parties themselves. Show trials and purges are the order of the day. Tito’s Yugoslavia, which turned its back on Moscow in 1948, cannot be allowed to be copied elsewhere.

The popular uprisings in East Germany in 1953 and in Hungary and Poland in 1956 demonstrate how shaky the ground is on which these dictatorships are built. Their armed suppression by their Soviet “friends” ensures the creation of a politico-military bloc that becomes increasingly isolated from western Europe by the Iron Curtain.

“THE EAST WIND WILL PREVAIL OVER THE WEST WIND” — ASIA THE STORM CENTRE



North-Korean and Chinese soldiers celebrating the armistice that was signed by the end of July 1943 and ended the Korean War. Although the two Communist states did not achieve their war aim, they consider themselves to be on par with the West, at least in terms of military strength.

Photo: picture alliance / United Archives / TopFoto

The Berlin Blockade of 1948 is the prelude to the Cold War between East and West. It is Asia, however, that becomes the actual storm centre of the global confrontations.

There the defeated Japanese occupiers have left a vacuum that patriotic resistance movements use and in which communists are often dominant. In 1945 they bring the northern halves of Vietnam and Korea respectively under their control.

The rise to power of the Chinese communists in October 1949 changes the situation fundamentally. In 1950 an attack by communist North Korea on South Korea quickly develops into a military confrontation between the United States and China, which ends in a stalemate in 1953.

The victory of the North Vietnamese over the French at Dien Biên Phu in 1954 also alters the architecture of world politics and leads to a new, almost twenty-year-long war throughout Indochina, this time with the United States. When they withdraw in 1975, the US troops leave behind devastated countries and traumatised peoples.

After Stalin’s death in 1953, Mao becomes the new charismatic leader figure of world communism. The Chinese Communist Party generally questions the “peaceful coexistence” between Moscow and Washington, thus creating a deep split in the global communist movement.

COMMUNISM IN ITS TIME

ANTICOLONIAL LIBERATION MOVEMENTS — PHANTASMS OF A THIRD WORLD

The communist victories in East Asia encourage “national liberation movements” in Africa, the Middle East and Latin America. Fidel Castro establishes a “Tricontinental” in Cuba in 1966 which is to serve as a tool for national and social liberation all around the world.

Argentine revolutionary Ernesto “Che” Guevara, killed in Bolivia, becomes a global icon. His teachings on “Guerilla Warfare” become the universal handbook for purging all capitalist egotisms. In the 1970s, especially Latin America becomes the setting for armed uprisings that produce just as many dictatorships as they topple.

The “Non-Aligned Movement” co-initiated by Tito’s Yugoslavia in 1961 is more moderate in its actions. Its aim is to bring countries led by socialists and left-wing nationalists together as a “Third World” between East and West and to safeguard their national and economic sovereignty.

Communists, in many instances, play a prominent, often polarising yet sometimes also moderating role in the anti-colonial wars of independence in Algeria, the Congo, Angola, Mozambique, Zimbabwe and southern Africa. They neither prevent the new states from descending into civil war, nor are they the sole cause of them doing so.



Egypt's head of state Gamal Abdel Nasser, Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, and their host, Yugoslav Prime Minister Josip Broz Tito (from left to right), in Brioni on 20 July 1956. They are the driving force behind the Non-aligned Movement which is founded in 1961.

Photo: picture alliance / United Archives / TopFoto

OLD LEFT, NEW LEFT — THE RED DECADE

In 1966, Mao unleashes a “Cultural Revolution” which, yet again, drastically changes the face of communist regimes. China’s youth is (seemingly) given free rein to crusade against red tape, corruption and decadence in a pandemonium of public accusations and random violence. While the cult surrounding Mao becomes ever more extreme, Mao himself eliminates his rivals within the party, alleging they are Moscow’s lackeys.

Also in the 1960s, radical criticism of culture and capitalism as well as militant anti-imperialism undergo a global renaissance. In the youth rebellions of 1968, a “New Left” combines emancipatory aspirations towards life and culture, and fantasies of liberation, in an often paradox manner with Marxism, Leninism, Trotskyism or Maoism.

Between this new left-wing radicalism with its terrorist extremes and the old Moscow orthodoxy, “Eurocommunism” establishes itself in the 1970s. In Italy, France and Spain, communists renounce the goal of establishing a “dictatorship of the proletariat” and, in return, gain considerable influence in elections and social conflicts.

All this expedites the differentiation and, thus, the demise of the world communist movement.



The International Vietnam Congress in West Berlin on 17/ 18 February 1968 with 5,000 participants from 14 different nations is one of the heydays of the West German student movement. In April, Rudi Dutschke (in the middle of the picture), the prime initiator of the congress, is gravely wounded in an attempt on his life.

Photo: SZ Photo / Manfred Vollmer

ATHEISM AS A CREDO — THE BATTLE AGAINST RELIGION

Communists fight a long battle against the religions with huge repressive and propagandistic effort — and almost invariably lose. By the end of the 1930s the CPSU already recognises that it will not succeed in replacing the old religious orthodoxy with a new atheist orthodoxy in the hearts and minds of many people.

The rehabilitation of the Russian-Orthodox church in 1943 is owed to the hardships of the “Great Patriotic War” — as well as to the resistance of religious believers. The staying power of religion is even greater in Poland and in other countries of eastern / central Europe after 1945.

The arrangement between party and church, such as the one reached in Poland and East Germany, is already a telltale sign of revisionism and betrayal in the eyes of the Albanian communists for example. China’s “Cultural Revolution” also channels its energy into destroying religious writings and places of worship.

While, from the 1970s onward, the Eastern Bloc comes to appreciate the liberation theologians of Latin America as potential allies, every conceivable effort is undertaken to suppress political comments made by the churches at home. But these efforts fade, as evidenced by Poland and East Germany where the churches, to different degrees, pave the way for radical change in 1989.



On 30 May 1968, the Leipzig University Church, which survived the war practically unscathed, is dynamited. Both in the GDR and the USSR, “socialist city planning” again and again also serves the purpose of creating a mental tabula rasa.

Photo: picture alliance / epd

COMMUNISM IN ITS TIME

EMANCIPATION AND EROS — WOMEN AND SOCIALISM



Parade of female athletes on the Red Square in Moscow in June 1936. The photo promotes the prototype of the new woman who combines military discipline, physical strength, and mental determination with a restrained eroticism.

Photo: picture alliance / RIA Nowosti

The active and equal inclusion of women is one of the principal attractions of the communist movements, where they are in contention for influence and power. The communists, however, put a more militant tone on the pledge of emancipation, which is social democratic in origin. The ideal typical female cadre is an androgynous being: fighter, comrade, activist, mother and muse — who renounces all bourgeois vanities and female weaknesses.

In the communist countries, women indeed play a major role at the mid-level of state and society. They are physicians, teachers or judges, but only seldom rise in rank to top positions. Their employment in production, on the other hand, including heavy physical work, is a typical characteristic of socialist societies.

Being a housewife is frowned upon: no income, no family. The notorious supply problems are a worry for women in particular — something that can hardly be compensated for with red carnations on International Women's Day and similar forms of ritualised gratitude.

The communist power hierarchies themselves remain a male domain. That "half of the sky", as Mao put it in so flowery terms, was still off-limits to women.

EVERYDAY SOCIALIST LIFE — WORK, CONSUMPTION, LEISURE TIME



Open-air fashion show in the Polish county capital Piotrków Trybunalski, winter 1978. For a period of time, Poland becomes the fashion Mecca of the Eastern Bloc, in which state-owned enterprises and private tailor shops compete for customers.

Photo: SZ Photo / Forum / Maciej Osiecki

State socialism is more "geared toward production" than "bourgeois societies". Newspapers vie with one another with reports about successes in "socialist construction" or on the "harvest front".

Plan fulfilment according to quantitative, seldom qualitative, criteria has a decisive influence on careers and positions of power. Such incentives tend to reward "uneconomical" behaviour compared with free-market return-on-investment and profit expectations. Planned economies are characterised structurally by ineffectiveness and wastage instead of streamlining and economisations.

The subversive influence of western consumerism and lifestyles, as well as their own propagandistic ambitions, put the communist regimes under pressure. The practical value of mass products alone is no longer enough. Socialist consumers also expect an attractive variety of commodities.

Gradually, an everyday culture with distinct rituals and established routines develops. It is underpinned by the promise of social security and characterised by an inventiveness ensuing from an economy of scarcity as well as by private barter relations. All the polemics against "western decadence" cannot hide the fact that this is one of the Achilles heels of "real socialism".

THE NARROW MATRIX — "SCIENTIFIC SOCIALISM"



The numerous training events, which not only SED members but also ordinary citizens had to attend, were commonly referred to as "red light treatment". The photo shows a training lesson in a large industrial company in Karl-Marx-Stadt, 1975.

Photo: picture alliance / Klaus Rose

The "leading role" which the communist state parties claim for themselves is legitimised through the aspiration of understanding the "laws" of historical and social developments "scientifically".

Education and training, coupled with repression and censorship, are the means by which to shape the next generation of those who are ambitious and conformist. Marxism-Leninism is very dry to digest and dull in theory. But those with inquisitive minds will find in it an extensive, self-contained historical narrative and interpretation of the world.

Soviet-style "real socialism" expresses its own real-life conservatism, which is accompanied by a solemn classicism of visual imagery. This is popular with those who have no taste for sensory overload and the hectic pace of the western cultural scene.

Narrow-minded thinking eventually cuts the communist world off from many developments of the 20th century, making it an intellectual backwater. It is also a reason why the development of modern information technologies largely passes it by. Although digital data processing is adopted in state and economic bureaucracy as well as in the military, "personal computers" however remain unattainable for the average citizen.

COMMUNISM IN ITS TIME

SOCIALIST URBANITY — AS AN ANTITHESIS TO BOURGEOIS URBANITY

Socialism is originally an urban movement. From St. Petersburg to Berlin to Paris, and from Shanghai to Saigon, the first communist party organisations are formed in the same urban jungle that they also consider to be morally corrupt.

Social democrats and modern urban planners also cherish plans of an ideal socialist industrial, functional-cum-garden city. In communist urban planning, however, such projects are transformed by the need to represent power and authority. A pompous neo-classicism thus displaces functional modern designs. The centres of Stalinist metropolises are characterised by a monumental style including palatial housing blocks or metro stations, parks, gigantic statues and empty parade grounds. Much remains uncompleted, however. Older buildings fall into disrepair or are pulled down.

An often semi-rural way of life blossoms, in the meantime, in the suburbs with their standardised mass accommodation in monotonous prefabricated-slab buildings. In combination with extensive dacha and allotment garden districts, this offers scope for niche cultures, barter markets and elementary self-sufficiency. All of which gives socialist towns and cities their typical, essentially anti-urban, character.



In the 1970s, countries all across the Eastern Bloc start building prefabricated building complexes, so-called Plattenbausiedlungen, in order to alleviate the severe housing shortage. Often, however, it takes many years until the development of a residential environment begins.

Photo, Warsaw, 1978: SZ Photo / Maciej Osiecki / Forum

COMMUNIST INTERNATIONALISM VS. BOURGEOIS COSMOPOLITANISM

Communists from all countries pay homage to an empathic internationalism. Its counterpart is not so much nationalism, which it seeks to succeed politically and culturally, but rather a bourgeois cosmopolitanism based on global trade and global cultural exchange. Communist “anti-cosmopolitanism” is associated in many respects with a militant “anti-Zionism”, which embarrassingly resembles the old hate-filled stereotype of “world Jewry”.

The internationalist slogans of the communist regimes stand in striking contrast to their isolationist policies toward the West as well as within their own camp. Visitors from abroad are subjected to fastidious controls and observation. Even “friendly exchanges” suffocate in their ritualistic rigidity. Youth festivals, which offer small tastes of freedom, are exceptions. An unstylish “socialist homeland” cult is engineered to help get over the fact that it is impossible for most citizens of East Germany, the Soviet Union or China to travel to “capitalist countries”.

The most prominent leaders of world communism lie in their mausoleums not as champions of the “international proletariat” but as “great patriots”, as founders of new states and “fathers of the nation”.



The border between Czechoslovakia and the Federal Republic of Germany, July 1968. With an “Iron Curtain” of almost 7,000 kilometers and stretching from the Barents Sea to the Black Sea, the Communist regimes seal themselves off from the rest of Europe.

Photo: picture alliance / CTK

“POLITICAL POWER GROWS OUT OF THE BARREL OF A GUN” — COMMUNIST MILITARISM

Communist movements and regimes develop their greatest organisational and technological achievements in the military field. All of the “people’s republics” that they establish are the outcome of civil wars and/or wars between states or against foreign occupants.

The constantly kept-alive feeling of being surrounded by a world full of enemies becomes the communists’ elixir of life. This continual state of tension is perpetuated in the never-ending search for the enemy within and in the militarisation of everyday life. Revolutionary holidays bear a military stamp. The Party’s “democratic centralism” is, essentially, a command hierarchy. And everyone, be it in the political, economic or cultural sector, has to obey this principle.

The Soviet Union also styles itself as a “peacekeeping superpower” that with its gigantic panoply of armaments keeps “US imperialism” in check around the globe. In reality, the arms race and the rivalry between the systems fuel conflicts and civil wars on all continents.

When, in the mid-1980s, the global political tensions start to ease, the loss of its external enemy plays a key part in the disintegration of the Eastern Bloc. As a totalitarian state, the Soviet Union collapses in peace-, not wartime.



The military branches parading on the Red square in Moscow on 7 November 1987, the 70th anniversary of the Russian October Revolution.

Photo: picture alliance / dpa

COMMUNISM IN ITS TIME

REFORM & REVOLUTION — THE DEFEAT OF COMMUNISM IN EUROPE



9 October 1989: More than 70,000 people are taking to the streets in Leipzig. The peaceful events of this "Monday demonstration" are later described as the watershed event for the history of the Peaceful Revolution.

Photo: SZ Photo / ap / dpa / picture alliance

Glasnost and perestroika — it is under these slogans that Mikhail Gorbachev strives from 1986 onward to modernise the ailing Soviet Union and to improve relations with the West. It is a reason why, in the summer of 1989, he grants the Eastern Bloc states greater self-determination. Although the opposition in Poland triumphs in semi-free elections on 4th June, Soviet supremacy in the Eastern Bloc seems to be set in stone. Communist China appears to be under much greater pressure and, during the night from 3rd to 4th June, violently suppresses mass protests that have been going on in Beijing for weeks, as they threaten to spill over to the provinces.

Without any hope of imminent changes, tens of thousands of East German citizens attempt in their summer holidays to flee via Hungary or Czechoslovakia to the West. And despite the spectre of a "Chinese solution", more and more East Germans now take to the streets and squares and demand reforms. This marks the beginning of the Peaceful Revolution, which opens the floodgates with the fall of the Berlin Wall on 9th November. The communist regimes fall like dominoes in a series of mostly peaceful revolutions.

By the time the democratic revolution reaches Moscow, the historic centre of the communist world, it can no longer be stopped by tanks. In August 1991, the Russian flag is hoisted over the Kremlin.

REVOLUTION & RESTORATION — FROM COMMUNISM TO POST-COMMUNISM



The gleaming skyline of Shanghai: Since the 1990s, the Communist Party has completely opened up China's economy to the world market. The Communist party equates socialism with the unity and greatness of the nation, and claims that only the party's dictatorship could guarantee said unity and greatness.

Photo, 2015: SZ Photo / Kevin Lee

Whereas the breakup of Yugoslavia degenerates into a series of deadly conflicts and "ethnic cleansings", the disintegration of the Soviet Union proceeds relatively peacefully at first. But, despite new freedoms, many former Soviet citizens perceive the collapse of the state and economy as a personal calamity. Privatisations mostly resemble mafia-type robbery. There emerges a new oligarchic order of power and property ownership whose backbone is often formed by secret service officers.

However, pogroms and wars ensue, such as in Chechnya, Nagorno-Karabakh, Abkhazia or, as at present, in Eastern Ukraine. They claim tens of thousands of lives and displace hundreds of thousands from their homelands. The driving force this time is, not least of all, the Kremlin's renewed hegemonial ambitions under Putin.

The transformation of eastern central Europe also proves to be more complicated than expected in the 1990s. The heroes of the upheavals have difficulty holding their ground. 'Flipped' ex-communists experience a comeback before they are superseded by new, often nationalist-authoritarian parties and leader figures

The People's Republic of China, as an engine of the globalised world economy, is meanwhile heading under the (seemingly) unshakeable dictatorship of the Communist Party for new shores that no one as yet can identify.

REFLECTING ON AN ERA — COMMUNISM IN THE 20TH CENTURY



From classicism to postmodernism: Museum of Socialist Art, Sofia (Bulgaria), 2011. Similar museum parks with the statues of the founders and heroes of the former "Socialist Camp" which had been dismantled after 1989 can be found in all parts of eastern Europe.

Photo: picture alliance / ap Photo

It is time, 100 years after the October Revolution, to scrutinise the history of communism afresh. It is inextricably intertwined with the crises of the capitalist world economy and the two world wars. Intermingled within it are resistance to western hegemony and culture and hopes for emancipation and liberation that have largely been disappointed.

At its centre is the fate of two old shattered empires, Russia and China, which the communists pieced together again — and today have re-emerged with a different ideological mix and new economic foundations as cultural and global political opponents of the West. Is it in any way possible to relativise the wording "end of communism"?

Researchers have calculated that communism is responsible for the deaths of up to 100 million people. Unlike the National Socialists, the communist regimes of the 20th century used violence and terror mainly against their own societies. Which is why their heirs in Moscow or Beijing today would like to cloak everything in a mantle of heroic tragedy. And many people, similarly, cannot and do not wish to face up to the legacy of violence on a massive scale that has affected every second family. For precisely those reasons it is so difficult to "come to terms" with the history of communism.

COMMUNISM IN GEORGIA





The „Sovietization“ of Georgia

On February 25, 1921, the Red Army entered Tbilisi. The occupation of Georgia was engineered by the Georgian Bolsheviks Stalin and Ordjonikidze and by the “Revcom” (Revolutionary Committee) formed on the very first days of the occupation.

The armed forces of the Democratic Republic of Georgia, cadets, and volunteers fought for the independence of the country for over a month, but the superiority of the enemy forces decided the outcome.

Soviet propaganda resorted to the euphemism of ‘Sovietization’ that veiled the occupation and annexation of the country, but the Bolsheviks took the liberty to hold an election of Soviets (Councils) after only a year, as they were afraid of the strong influence of the Social Democratic Party among the workers and peasants.

The Sovietization of Georgia coincided with fundamental changes in party policy: the abandonment of the radical “War Communism” and the movement towards the more concessionary “New Economic Policy” (NEP) at the 10th Party Congress in March 1921; and also the adoption of a comprehensive “Nationality Policy” at the 10th Party Congress (with further elaboration at the 12th Party Congress in 1923). Soviet national policy envisaged the promotion of representatives of the local ethnicities into the party and state hierarchy, as well as setting up and strengthening educational and cultural organizations, which in its turn facilitated the collaboration of local elites with the Soviet regime.

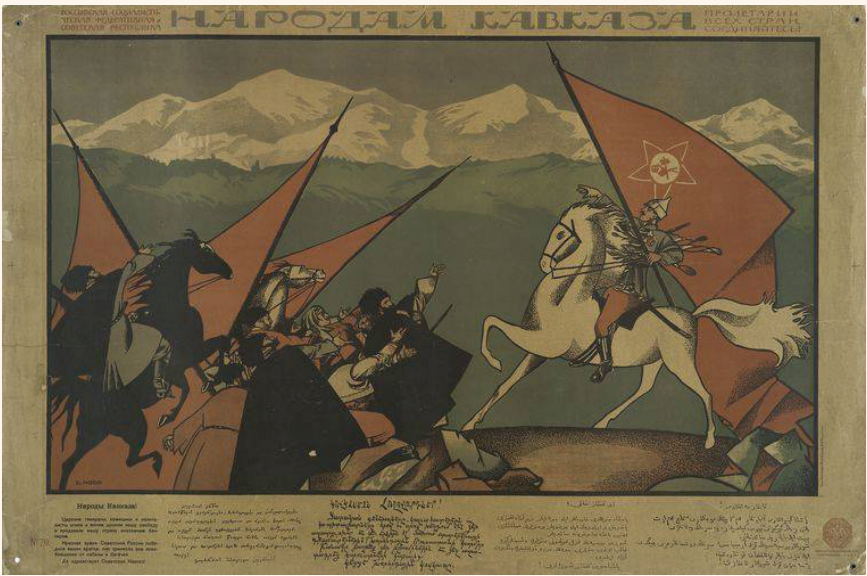
Despite this fact, the first half of the 1920s was a period of confrontation and resistance to the Soviet regime. The anti-Soviet movement started as early as in the spring of 1921, and was particularly strong in the mountainous regions of Svaneti, Pshav-Khevsureti and Mtiuleti. Guerrilla groups were formed, and anti-Bolshevik forces set up a coordinative body to fight for independence, the ‘Committee for Independence,’ to which the ‘Military Center’ was subordinated. Such resistance was put down by force (subverting such opposition movement provided early career advancement opportunities for the ambitious young policeman Lavrenty Beria), but also by co-optation and concessions.

There was no unity among the Georgian Bolsheviks either. One faction openly opposed the designs of Stalin, particularly on the question of the formation of the Soviet Union in 1922. The so-called ‘Georgian Question’ became a subject of confrontation even in Moscow. This group of Bolsheviks, referred to as the ‘National-Deviationists’ would later be severely punished by Stalin.



The Red Army troops entry to Borjomi. March, 1921.
National Parliamentary Library of Georgia

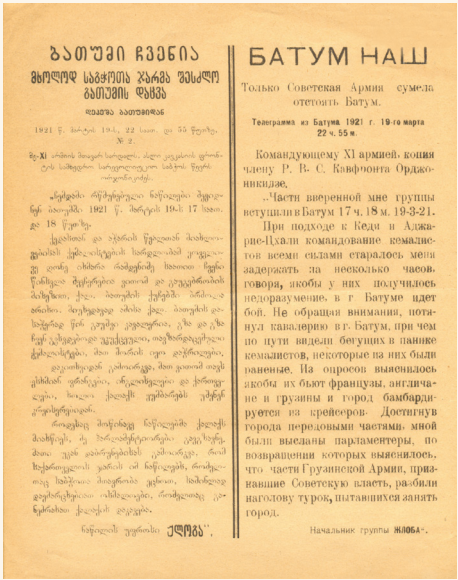
COMMUNISM IN ITS TIME



“To the Peoples of the Caucasus”. Soviet soldiers are saluting the Caucasians. National Parliamentary Library of Georgia



The first days of Sovietization in Tbilisi. National Parliamentary Library of Georgia



D. Zhloba's telegram about the liberation of Batumi from Turks. 19 March, 1921. National Parliamentary Library of Georgia



From left to right: Anastas Mikoian, Josef Stalin, Sergo Ordjonikidze. Georgian National Museum Photo Collection



The Red Army's entry to Tbilisi. National Parliamentary Library of Georgia

Economic Transformation – “The Great Turn”

At the 15th Party Congress in Moscow in December 1927, the first Five-Year Plan of rapid, state-led industrialization was approved. The comparatively liberal period of NEP ended, and the process of forceful industrialization and collectivization began as a ‘Revolution from Above.’

Only farm-laborers, the landless and the poorest peasants joined the collective farms voluntarily. The better-off peasants (the so called kulaks) became the main victims of collectivization. Not only did they have their property confiscated, many of the well-off peasants were deported from Georgia. Unbearable conditions in the villages led to the abandonment of countryside and a ‘proletarianization’ of the peasantry who fled to the cities and turned into the labor force necessary for industrialization. Central to the Five-Year Plan was the construction of huge infrastructure projects: hydro-electric stations, irrigational systems and manufacturing facilities, draining the Kolkheti marshes and cultivating large scale tea and citrus plantations. The uncontrolled exploitation of fossil fuels, deforestation, and the pollution of rivers and lakes with complete disregard for the demands of the natural ecosystems posed a real threat to the environment as a whole.

Collectivization profoundly changed the character of the village, as this social experiment forced the peasants into a new kind of serfdom. Some industrial growth was accomplished, but there was insufficient attention to consumer goods and the level of food production remained low. The share of agriculture in the economy still outweighed that of industry. The Georgian economy, as part of that of the USSR, was completely integrated into the industrial network of the Soviet empire and was unable to function independently.



The poster depicts the victory of Socialism over the international Capitalism. Photo courtesy Mr. O. Janelidze

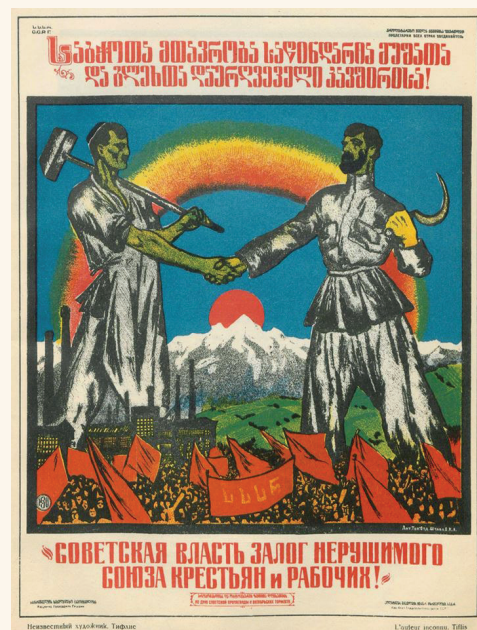


Exaggerated demands of the soviet five-year plans.
National Parliamentary Library of Georgia

COMMUNISM IN ITS TIME



"We Will Conquer drought!" Propaganda poster trying to demonstrate the almighty of the soviet industrialization. National Parliamentary Library of Georgia



The poster depicts the "brotherly" unity of builders of socialism - workers and peasants, as the guarantee for the construction of the communism; National Parliamentary Library of Georgia



The newspaper article about the mechanization of the tea production. Along with the citrus, Georgia is the main producer of tea in the Soviet Union.

From the archive of the newspaper "Leninis Droshta"



Georgia is the main supplier of the USSR with the citrus. National Parliamentary Library of Georgia

The Evolution of the Terror

The Soviet party and state labeled their opponents as “enemies of the people”, “traitors”, “saboteurs” and “diversionists”, and consigned them to annihilation. Political repressions of unprecedented scale in Georgia took place in 1937-38, and were primarily associated with the name of Lavrenty Beria.

The Georgian intelligentsia, the “Old Bolshevik” veterans of the Caucasus underground-revolutionary movement, and the first generation of the Georgian Party leadership (there was significant overlap among these three categories) were hit with particular vehemence. While such elites were the first targets of Stalin’s purges throughout the USSR, the fact that many of those in Georgia knew Stalin personally (and knew the reality of the history that Stalin was deliberately attempting to rewrite) put them in particular jeopardy.

The “Great Terror” touched all layers of the society and all ethnic groups. Only in Georgia, according to rough data, 63,000 people were arrested, of whom some 10,000 were executed. The exact number of other victims of repressions, such as those who died in the GULAG or in exile, is still unknown.

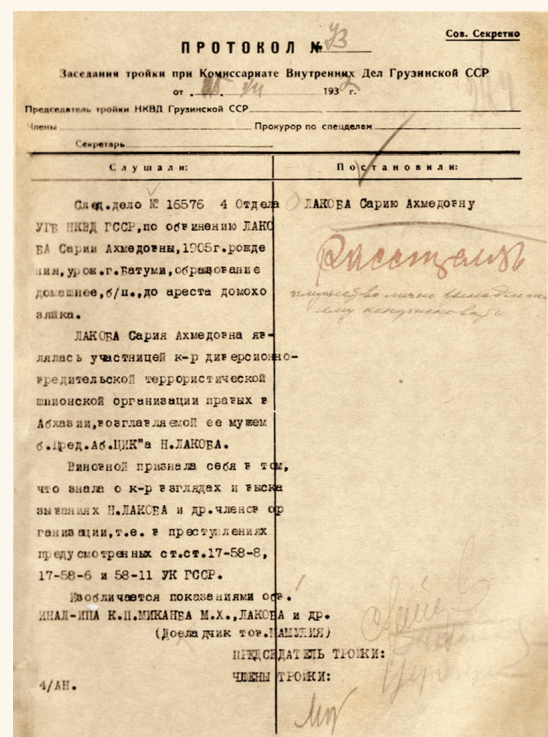
Lavrenty Beria’s effectiveness in overseeing the Terror in the Caucasus led to his promotion to Moscow to head the Soviet Secret Police (then called the NKVD) in 1938, many of Beria’s Caucasus-based party and police clients moved up with him. Beria, supported by his patronage network, became one of Stalin’s top magnates before, during, and after the Second World War.

During the Second World War, many Soviet prisoners of war (among them thousands of Georgians), were handed over to the USSR by the allies, and were either executed or sent to the labor camps. In 1951, some 10,000 people were deported from Georgia to Kazakhstan and Central Asia for political reasons. The repressions also touched those who had relatives living abroad.



Lavrenty Beria. Communist leader of Georgia and Transcaucasia. Different years hold the positions of: the head of the Georgian OGPU – People’s Commissariat of Internal Affairs (so called Che-ka), the First Secretary of the Communist Party of Georgia and the Chief of the Internal Affairs of the USSR. His name is associated with the great terror

in Georgia. National Parliamentary Library of Georgia(Collection of Levan Dolidze)



COMMUNISM IN ITS TIME



So called commission of purge, which carried out the punitive operations during the 30th in Georgia. The archive of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia.



Bolshevik leaders: sitting from right to left: S. Orjoniidze, J. Stalin, V. Molotov, and S. Kirov. Standing: K. Voroshilov, L. Koganovich and V. Kuibishev. National Parliamentary Library of Georgia

▶ The resolution about S. Lakoba's execution, signed by "Troika". She is accused in facilitating her husband, party leader of Abkhazia, N. Lakoba in his « rightist espionage, sabotage and subversive terroristic activities in Abkhazia.» Punishment or even execution of the family members of "enemies" was broadly practiced by the Soviet regime. The archive of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia

The Personality Cult of Stalin – “Long Live the Great Stalin!”

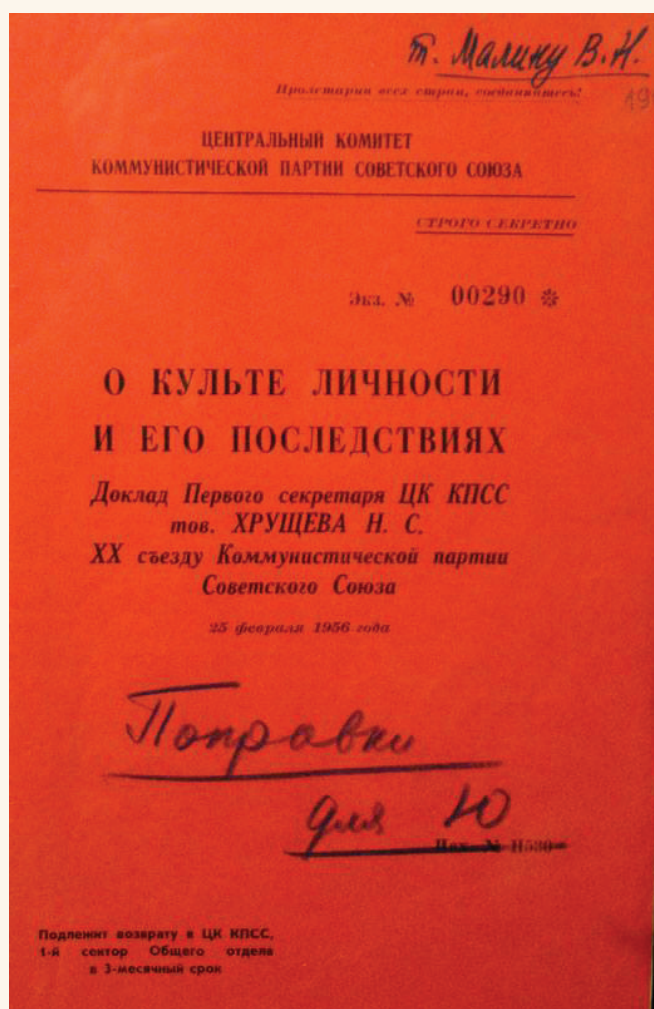
Stalin's personality cult had been shaping since the late 1920s, as he consolidated his hold on the reins of power and violently did away with all opposition and critical opinion. A work published under Lavrenty Beria's name, the “History of the Organization of Bolsheviks in the Transcaucasus”, as well as the constant praise and glorification of Stalin by writers, poets, and filmmakers greatly contributed to the formation of the Stalin's cult.

With the death of Stalin in March 1953, a power struggle broke out among the Great Leader's former top lieutenants. Beria is the first out of the gate, attempting to win support by undoing the dubious “campaigns” of Stalin's last days, such as the “Doctor's Plot” and the “Mingrelian Affair” (the latter was aimed particularly at Beria's client network in Georgia), and by appealing to national minorities through the USSR. Ultimately Beria's bid for power failed, and his rival Nikita Khrushchev orchestrated Beria's arrest and execution, together with a number of his top lieutenants.

After Khrushchev's denunciation of the “personality cult” of Stalin in his “Secret Speech” at the conclusion of the 20th Party Congress in February 1956, rumors of this “desecration” of Stalin begin to cause unrest in Georgia. This culminated in mass demonstrations in Tbilisi and other cities around Georgia, primarily by students and young people, in early March. On the night of March 9 the Soviet Army opened fire on the demonstrators, killing and wounding a number of participants. The families were given the remains of their dead only on the condition that they bury them without attracting attention.

Under Khrushchev's command Georgian army units were disbanded, Georgian generals and officers were distrusted and were dismissed from service; and the admission of Georgians to military academies was curtailed. The appointment of ethnically Russian officials to the position of Second Secretary in the union republics became a standard practice as a result of the March 1956 events, whom Moscow intended to use as its eyes and ears'.

Paradoxically, the March 1956 events became a catalyst for the Georgian dissident national-liberation movement, which was lead by the very young participants of those events.



On the Cult of Personality and its Consequences. N. Khrushchov's report on the 1956 20th congress of the Communist Party of the USSR. Source: Electronic Library –Profile. <https://profilib.com>

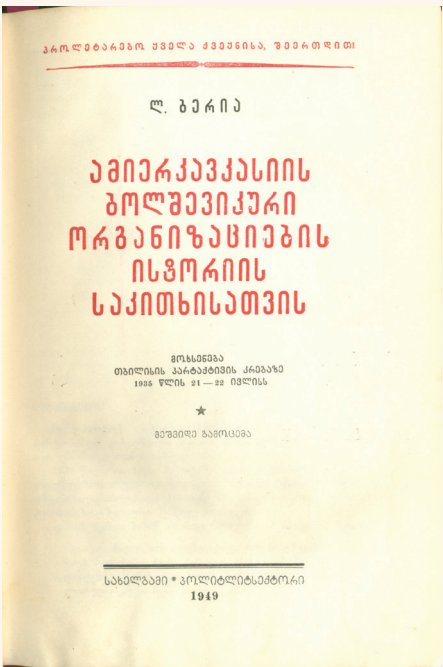
COMMUNISM IN ITS TIME



A pioneer girl pays tribute to the deceased Stalin. National Parliamentary Library of Georgia



9 March, 1956, peaceful demonstration at Stalin's monument. National Parliamentary Library of Georgia



L. Beria. "On the History of the Bolshevik Organizations in Transcaucasia". The book, the actual writer of which, according to one of the versions, was Bolshevik Eric/ Ermile Bedia; G. Leonidze State Museum of Georgian Literature



Molotov, Vorosilov, Beria and Malenkov at Stalin's coffin. National Parliamentary Library of Georgia



The Soviet Georgian newspaper "Komunisti". The communique on Stalin's health condition. National Parliamentary Library of Georgia

The “Thaw” and Stagnation – “Ottepel’ and Zastoi”

Khrushchev’s so called “thaw” (‘ottepel’) was, to a certain extent, characterized by a liberal attitude from the center towards the union republics. As long as they met their economic targets, kept overt nationalism within acceptable margins, and curtailed their ambitions to career ambitions outside of their republics, local party and government elites were given a certain autonomy in managing their own affairs (and despite the imposition by Khrushchev of ethnically Russian Party Second Secretaries, whose appointments were intended as a means of central control, but who in reality often became thoroughly co-opted into local politics and dealings).

The period of the leadership of Leonid Brezhnev, following the deposing of Khrushchev in October 1964, came to be characterized as one of “stagnation” (“zastoi”). This period saw a flourishing of the grey and black economies throughout the Soviet Union, as the leadership turned a blind eye to this “grease” that allowed the formal system to continue to function.

A kind of “social contract” emerged, with the regime assuring continued increases in standards of living in return for political deference. Georgia, located at the periphery of the Soviet empire, became a center of corruption and “second economy” activities, with entire “underground factories” producing in-demand consumer goods that the official economy was unable to accommodate.



Nikita Khrushchev, Vasili Mjavanadze and Givi Djavakhishvili while hunting. 1957. National Parliamentary Library of Georgia. Owner Givi Kurashvili



5-3 Leonid Brezhnev at the anniversary exhibition. 1971, Tbilisi. Georgian National Museum Photo Collection

Georgian underground dissidents during this period interacted with the larger Soviet dissident community, publishing in underground “samizdat” journals. A number such people were persecuted and arrested during the Brezhnev era crackdown on dissidents in the mid-1970s, driving the movement further underground, and many of its leading representatives were sent into internal exile or to psychological hospitals (“psikhushki”).

On April 14, 1978, disgruntlement with Soviet policies of Russification and national assimilation led to mass protests against an attempt to amend the Georgian SSR constitution in a way that was seen to diminish the status of the Georgian language in the republic and to give official status to Russian. This peaceful mobilization of nationalist sentiment forced the central authorities to back down and refrain from altering the language article of the constitution.

COMMUNISM IN ITS TIME



Leader of Cuba Fidel Castro, Nikita Khrushchev and Rodion Malinovski, the Minister of Defense of the Soviet Union visiting Abkhazia. 1963
http://www.resonancedaily.com/index.php?id_rub=5&id_artc=31556



Leonid Brejnev and the first secretary of the Communist Party of Georgia Vasili Mzhavanadze during Leonid Brejnev's first visit to Georgia.
National Parliamentary Library of Georgia



Leonid Brejnev giving award to the Georgian Government for the 50th anniversary of sovietization of Georgia. 1971. National Library of the Parliament of Georgia



The first Secretary of the Communist Party of Georgia Eduard Shevardnadze is handing a red challenge banner to Zhiuli Shartava, the Georgian First Secretary of the Leninist Young Communist League (Komsomol). Late 1970's.
Georgian National Museum Photo Collection

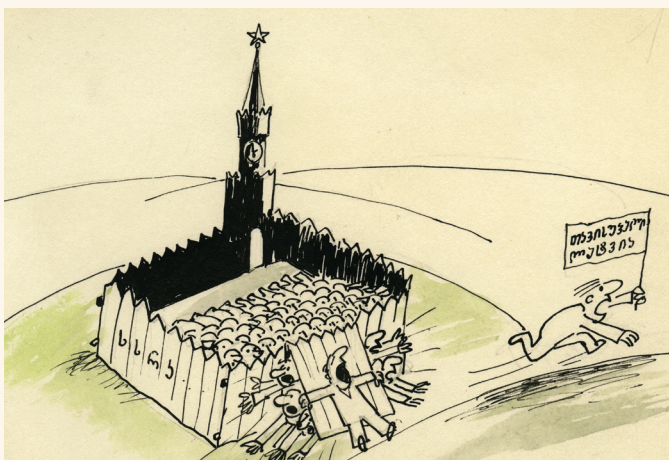
Last Years of the USSR – The Unexpected Ending

Mikhail Gorbachev launched “Perestroika” upon taking up the position of General Secretary in March 1985 to reform the faltering Soviet economic and political systems. While Georgian Party First Secretary Eduard Shevardnadze, a key ally of Gorbachev, was brought to Moscow to serve as USSR Foreign Minister, the changes of Perestroika were slow to take effect in Georgia.

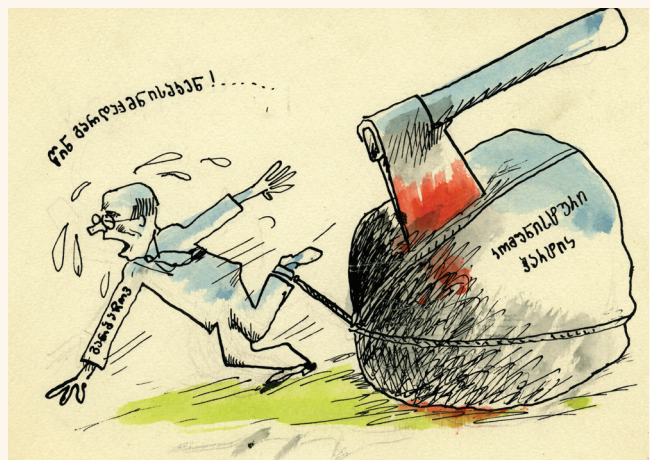
In 1986, in attempting to use pressure from below to force the bureaucrats in the party and state bureaucracies to implement his intended reforms, Gorbachev declared the policy of “glasnost”, or openness, reducing censorship, releasing political prisoners, and encouraging the population to voice their concerns and complaints. In national republics such as Georgia, this new spirit of openness allowed into the open nationalist discontent that had long been boiling beneath the surface.

Protests about dissatisfaction with the situation in the Abkhazian ASSR graduated to sentiments of national independence in April 1989, and on the night of April 9 the Soviet Army was dispatched to quell the demonstrations. The soldiers were ordered not to shoot, so they used shovels and possibly gas, resulting in the deaths of 20 participants, mostly women. The April 9 massacre became a watershed event in modern Georgian history, discrediting the Soviet regime and the local party nomenklatura and creating a vacuum that came to be filled by representatives of the dissident nationalist intelligentsia.

Almost overnight, Georgia became radicalized and joined the Baltic republics at the forefront of opposition to the continued existence of the USSR. Using Gorbachev’s institutional reforms that shifted power away from the party and towards partially democratically elected national and local legislatures, the nationalist dissidents were able to gain a voice in the political system and eventually to unravel the legal basis for the existence of the Soviet Union.



The caricature depicts the collapse of the Soviet Union, while presumably, then the General Secretary of the Communist Party Gorbachev, is trying to save the situation. Author: Murtaz Abashidze. The magazine “Niangi”. National Parliamentary Library of Georgia



The caricature of Mikhail Gorbachev. Communist Party is trying to put obstacles to the initiator of the Soviet perestroika. Author: Murtaz Abashidze. The magazine “Niangi”. National Parliamentary Library of Georgia

COMMUNISM IN ITS TIME



Peaceful demonstration some days before 9 April, 1989.
National Parliamentary Library of Georgia



The leaders of national-liberation movement in Georgia. Merab Kostava and Zviad Gamsakhurdia. The latter became the first President of the Independent Georgia. Photo from the social portal www.sazogadoeba.ge

Culture in Soviet Times

Distance from the center and the permissiveness of the period allowed Georgia to become a center of artistic creativity, in literature, art and especially in film. Soviet Georgian film became recognized for its ingenuity and originality throughout the world, and a number of Georgian directors, screenwriters, composers and performers were awarded on different international festivals.



The poster for the Ioseliani's film "Giorgobistve" painted by the artist Dimitri Eristavi. National Parliamentary Library of Georgia.



Irakli Toidze's poster "The Motherland Calls" is a call for the all out mobilization for struggling in "The Great Patriotic War". 1941. Georgian National Museum poster collection



Scene from the shot in 1955 film "Magdana's Donkey", directed by Tengiz Abuladze and Rezo Chkheidze, starring –Dudukhana Tserodze. In 1956 was awarded a prize for the best short film at International Film Festival in Cannes. National Parliamentary Library of Georgia



Scene from the film "Once Upon a Time There was a Singing Blackbird". Directed by Otar Ioseliani. 1970. Otar Ioseliani gained the international recognition while still living and working in the Soviet Union: Giorgobistve (1966) Special prize of cinema press at Cannes Film Festival and the Prize of George Sadull; 'Pastoral' (1976). Prize of cinema press at Berlin film festival. National Parliamentary Library of Georgia Today Otar Ioseliani lives and works in France. In 2011 he was awarded a prize for the outstanding contribution in the development of the cinematography (CineMerit Award) at Munich International Film Festival. Photo: National Library of the Parliament of Georgia

COMMUNISM IN ITS TIME



Giya Kanceli. Composer. Since 1996 has lived and worked abroad. 2008 Wolf Award winner in Arts. National Parliamentary Library of Georgia



The scene from the play "Caucasian Chalk Circle."
Directed by Robert Sturua. 1975



After The May Day Demonstration.
Robert Sturua (the Elder). 1964.
Georgian National Museum



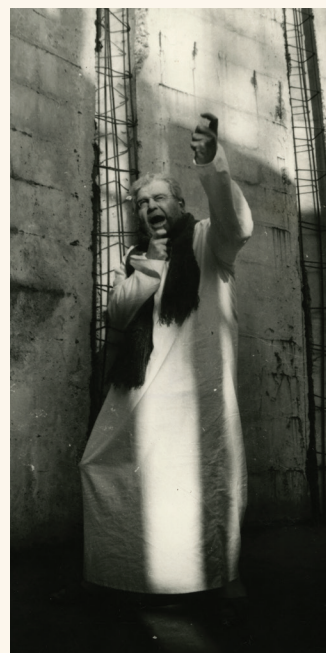
The scene from the play "King Lear". Directed by Robert Sturua. Starring Ramaz Chkhikvadze. 1987
His works brought a wide recognition to the director. He received different prizes, such as Albert Schweitzer Award (1975), Award of English Criticism (1980), Award of Italian Criticism (1981), Award of The State University of Argentine (1988) etc. photos: National Library of the Parliament of Georgia



The band "Via 75" at Tbilisi rock festival. Held in March, 1980 rock festival became the most important event in Russian rock music and is still remembered as "Soviet Woodstock". Photo courtesy Besik Kalandadze



Leonid Brezhnev is greeted by one of the best soviet Georgian actresses, Veriko Andjaparidze, the laureate of the State Award and three times holder of the order of Lenin. Notwithstanding the comparative creative-artistic liberty, the soviet censorship was still an obligatory attribute. For the so called "cultural and art workers" demonstration of good attitude towards the state officials was somehow a certain necessity



Scene from the film "Repentance". The director Tengiz Abuladze. 1984. The film was awarded three prizes of 40th International Film Festival in Cannes: Grand Prize of the main jury, the prize of the Ecumenical Jury for Humanism and the prize of the International Federation of Cinema Press "Fipresci"; prizes in Chicago and Haugesund International Film Festivals (1987), the prize for the best foreign film of the National Association of Cinematographs of Italy (1988).



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www.bundesstiftung-aufarbeitung.de
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Who are the people behind this exhibition?

The author of the exhibition is **Dr. Gerd Koenen**. In his 2001 book "Das Rote Jahrzehnt" (the red decade), he vividly explains the development of radical left-wing groups between 1967 and terrorist German Autumn in 1977 and critically analyzes the motives of the activists – including his own. Further books by the author address the literature of the socialist personality cult ("Die Großen Gesänge", 1991), German terrorism ("Vesper, Ensslin, Baader", 2003), the way Russia is viewed in Germany ("Der Russland-Komplex", 2005), or the narratives of the Latin American guerilla ("Das Guevara Projekt", 2008). In 2017, C.H.Beck will publish his new book "Die Farbe Rot — Kommunismus als Weltgeschichte". www.gerd-koenen.de

The responsible project manager was **Dr. Ulrich Mähler** (Bundesstiftung Aufarbeitung), who selected and commented the photos and documents in cooperation with Gerd Koenen. The exhibition design was developed by Leipzig-based graphic artist **Dr. Thomas Klemm**. www.thomasklemm.com

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