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## The Challenges to Social Control in Brezhnev's Soviet Union, 1964–1982

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**Abstract:** This article examines the development of social control in the Soviet Union under Leonid Brezhnev, who was General Secretary of the Communist Party from 1964 to 1982. Historians have largely neglected this question, especially with regard to its evolution and efficiency. Research is based on sources in the Russian State Archive of Modern History (RGANI), the Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History (RGASPI) and the Moscow Central State Archive (TSGAM). During Brezhnev's rule, Soviet propaganda reached the peak of its development. However, despite the fact that authorities tried to improve it, the system was ritualistic, unconvincing, unwieldy, and favored quantity over quality. The same was true for political education, which did little more than inspire sullen passivity in its students. Although officials recognized these failings, their response was ineffective, and over time Soviet propaganda increasingly lost its potency. At the same time, there were new trends in the system of social control. Authorities tried to have a foot in both camps – to strengthen censorship, and at the same time to get feedback from the public. However, many were afraid to express any criticism openly. In turn, the government used data on peoples' sentiments only to try to control their thoughts. As a result, it did not respond to matters that concerned the public. These problems only increased during the “era of stagnation” and contributed to the decline and subsequent collapse of the Soviet system.

**Keywords:** social control, propaganda, censorship, public criticism, public opinion, USSR, Leonid Brezhnev, Mikhail Suslov

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## Проблемы эффективности системы социального контроля в СССР, 1964–1982 гг.

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**Аннотация:** Рассмотрена проблема развития системы социального контроля в СССР в период с середины 1960-х по начало 1980-х гг., которая до сих пор недостаточно освещена в исторической науке. В том числе лишь фрагментарно рассмотрены тенденции ее развития и проблемы эффективности. Новизна представленного в статье исследования заключается в том, что до сих пор не появилось труда, в котором была бы проанализирована советская система социального контроля в комплексе, в том числе ее новые тенденции и проблемы эффективности в рассматриваемый период. Исследование построено на материалах Российского государственного архива новейшей истории (РГАНИ), Российского государственного архива социально-политической истории (РГАСПИ) и Центрального государственного архива г. Москвы (ЦГАМ). Системы пропаганды и «политического образования» в период правления Л.И. Брежнева достигли пика своего

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развития. Однако, несмотря на то что власти СССР пытались прилагать усилия к улучшению системы пропаганды, ее характерными чертами были формализм, надуманность и громоздкость, погоня за количеством мероприятий. Этим же страдала и система политического образования. Слушатели этой системы проявляли пассивность. Проблемы системы пропаганды в определенной степени были осознаны властями, однако в итоге эффективность реакции властей была слабой. В дальнейшем советская пропаганда пришла к еще большему выхолащиванию. Одновременно в системе социального контроля стали явными новые тенденции. Власти пытались усидеть на двух стульях одновременно и усилить цензуру, и в то же время получить «обратную связь» от народа в виде критики и общественного мнения по тем или иным вопросам. Однако многие люди опасались открыто высказывать свое мнение. В свою очередь, власти сами использовали данные о настроениях людей не для реальных и глубоких перемен, а лишь для контроля над массовым сознанием. Соответственно, не было и эффективной реакции на проблемы, которые волновали людей. Все перечисленные выше проблемы, касавшиеся системы социального контроля в СССР в середине 1960-х – начале 1980-х гг., вели к дальнейшему ослаблению советского строя.

**Ключевые слова:** социальный контроль, пропаганда, цензура, публичная критика, общественное мнение, СССР, Л.И. Брежнев, М.А. Суслов

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## Introduction

The history of social control<sup>1</sup> in the Soviet Union under Leonid Brezhnev leadership (1964–1982) remains highly relevant. Historians differ in their assessments of these years, with some calling them the Era of Stagnation (*zastoi*), while others look back on them as the country's golden age. It is difficult to overstate the importance of social control today, given the almost total “informatization” of the world's population.

This period has attracted little academic attention, and only such questions as Soviet propaganda<sup>2</sup>, censorship<sup>3</sup>, and public opinion have even cursorily been addressed.<sup>4</sup> However, no one has analyzed the system of social control overall during the Brezhnev years.

This article's research is based on both published and unpublished documents in the Russian State Archive of Modern History (RGANI), the Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History (RGASPI) and the Moscow Central State Archive (TSGAM).

<sup>1</sup> The system of methods and strategies by which the society / state directs the behavior of individuals.

<sup>2</sup> I.V. Il'ina, “Ideologicheskaya rabota partii i chelovecheskii faktor,” in *Mekhanizm tormozheniya: istoki, deistvie, puti preodoleniya*. Moscow: Izdatelstvo politicheskoy literatury Publ., 1988), 257–266; E.P. Hoffmann, R.F. Laird, *Technocratic Socialism: The Soviet Union in the Advanced Industrial Era* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1985); E. Mickiewicz, *Changing Channels: Television and the Struggle for Power in Russia*. (New York – Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997); T. Remington, *The Truth of Authority: Ideology and Communication in the Soviet Union* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1988).

<sup>3</sup> A. Blium, *Kak eto delalos' v Leningrade: Tsenzura v gody otpepli, zastoya i perestrojka* (St. Petersburg: Akademicheskii projekt Publ., 2005); T.M. Goriaeva, *Politicheskaya tsenzura v SSSR. 1917–1991 gg.* (Moscow: ROSSPEN Publ., 2009); E.E. Dmitrieva, “Igrovoe pole sovetskoy tsenzury (1970–1980 gg.),” in *Yazyki rukopisei* (St. Petersburg: Soiuz pisatelei Sankt-Peterburga Publ., 2000), 247–271; M.R. Zezina, *Sovetskaya khudozhestvennaya intelligentsiya i vlast' v 1950-e – 1960-e gody* (Moscow: Dialog-MGU Publ., 1999); O. Lavinskaia, “Tsenzura v SSSR i ogranicheniya informatsii o sobyitiakh v Chekhoslovakii,” in *Prazhskaia vesna' i mezhdunarodnyi krizis 1968 goda: Stat'i, issledovaniya, dokumenty* (Moscow: MFD Publ., 2010), 129–136; D.V. Lozhkov, “Censorship in the USSR in the Conditions of Détente (1970s),” *Moscow University Bulletin*, no. 1 (2013): 146–166; A.L. Posadskov, “Provintsialnaya tsenzura ot 'zastoi'a' k 'perestrojke': po materialam Sibiri i Dalnego Vostoka 1970-kh – 1980-kh gg.” in *Grani knizhnoy kultury* (Moscow: Nauka Publ., 2007), 192–206.

<sup>4</sup> D.P. Gavra, “Istoriya i perspektivy izucheniya obshchestvennogo mneniya v SSSR i Rossijskoy Federatsii,” in *Sotsiologiya i sotsialnaya antropologiya: Mezhhuzovskiy sbornik* (St. Petersburg: Aleteia Publ., 1997), 190–204; B. Grushin, “The Institute of Public Opinion of ‘Komsomolskaia Pravda’,” *Monitoring of Public Opinion*, no. 1 (2003): 60–74; M.G. Pugacheva, “The Institute for Specific Social Research of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR (1968–1972),” *Bulletin of the Russian Academy of Sciences* 65, no. 2 (1995): 164–175; Iu.N. Shcheglov, *Vlast' i formirovanie massovogo soznaniya na regionalnom urovne v seredine 1960-kh – nachale 1980-kh gg. (na primere Penzenskoy oblasti)* (Penza: PGU Publ., 2005).

## The Development of Propaganda and Censorship

Propaganda<sup>5</sup> always played an important role in the Soviet Union. Its importance as a tool of social control increased significantly in the 1960s because of the increasing flow of information to the public (including that from abroad), the rise in the level of education, and major changes in mass consciousness.

Until 1965, this task was entrusted to the Ideological Commission of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union's (CPSU) Central Committee as well as the Department of Propaganda and Agitation.<sup>6</sup> However, when these bodies were abolished, the Central Committee set up the all-party Department of Propaganda and Agitation. While the Ideological Commission's closure caused some confusion among the staff of the party's propaganda organs,<sup>7</sup> its replacement performed the same function. Brezhnev explained that the Department of Propaganda

monitors ideological institutions, schools, universities, technical schools, professional education, radio and television, the press, party education and the Academies of Sciences and of Social Sciences, as well as organizing courses.<sup>8</sup>

Although the goals of their propaganda, namely to mold public opinion, did not change,<sup>9</sup> officials had to adjust their methods to the new doctrine of “developed socialism,” which was introduced in 1967. First, they decided to improve the way of presenting the most pressing issues of the past, i.e., the reaction to the “ideological fluctuations” after the 20<sup>th</sup> Party Congress in 1956 and the fall of Nikita Khrushchev eight years later. Second, to stress the advantages of socialism over capitalism in response to improvements in Western propaganda. Third, “strengthening of the communist movement,” to counter “revisionism and nationalism.”<sup>10</sup> At the same time there were also efforts to tackle the growing challenges of “consumer society.”<sup>11</sup>

Soviet propaganda reached its peak under Brezhnev. As elsewhere, the most important developments were in the broadcast media, including the Ostankino television center, powerful relay stations, and the “Orbita” system of relaying broadcasts. Beginning in 1964, installing radios became mandatory in all new apartments. Studies in the 1960s and 1970s showed that the vast majority of the Soviet population regularly listened to radio and watched television.<sup>12</sup> If in 1967 there were 25.5 million television sets in the Soviet Union, by 1981 that number had virtually tripled to 75. In large cities, more than two out of every three residents watched television almost every day.

The oral propaganda system also grew: In the late 1960s the regime employed over one million propagandists, and by the mid-1980s their number had doubled.<sup>13</sup> Meanwhile, “political education” expanded rapidly: During 1965–1966 academic year, 8.5 million people were involved in this activity, compared to 23 million in 1981, and if in 1969 there were 170 “houses of political education,” 203 “houses” and 8 168 “offices” operated throughout the Soviet Union by 1981.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>5</sup> In the concept of “propaganda” we also include agitation, which in the conditions of the USSR during the period under review is difficult to separate from each other.

<sup>6</sup> In 1965–1970 the department was headed by V.I. Stepanov, in 1970–1973 by A.N. Yakovlev (acting), in 1973–1977 by G.L. Smirnov (acting), 1977–1982 by E.M. Tyazhelnikov. In addition, until April 1966 the Department of Propaganda and Agitation of the Central Committee of the CPSU for the RSFSR worked.

<sup>7</sup> Rossiyskiy gosudarstvennyy arkhiv noveyshey istorii (thereafter – RGANI), f. 5, op. 58, d. 32, l. 12.

<sup>8</sup> RGANI, f. 104, op. 1, d. 41, l. 34.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., f. 5, op. 60, d. 19, l. 77; Ibid., f. 104, op. 1, d. 25, l. 12–13; Ibid., f. 104, d. 28, l. 2.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., f. 5, op. 60, d. 19, l. 78–82; Ibid., f. 89, op. 46, d. 35, l. 3; *Kommunisticheskaya partiya Sovetskogo Soiuza v rezolyutsiyakh i resheniyakh s'ezdov, konferentsii i plenumov TsK* (Moscow: Politizdat Publ. 1986), 146, 241.

<sup>11</sup> Tsentralnyi gosudarstvennyi arkhiv g. Moskvy (thereafter – TsGAM), f. P-63, op. 1, d. 2500, l. 20.

<sup>12</sup> T. Remington, *The Truth of Authority: Ideology and Communication in the Soviet Union* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1988), 184–185.

<sup>13</sup> RGANI, f. 5, op. 61, d. 31, l. 58; M.F. Nenashev, “Nasushchnyye voprosy sovershenstvovaniya organizatsii i stilya ideologicheskoy raboty,” *Voprosy teorii i praktiki ideologicheskoy raboty*, no. 17 (1985): 6.

<sup>14</sup> RGANI, f. 5, op. 4, d. 127, l. 1; Ibid., op. 61, d. 31, l. 58; Ibid., op. 84, d. 89, l. 2–3.

The USSR maintained an extensive system of supplementary education. While most of it provided instruction in science or technology, some also operated in the political and ideological sphere. Already in 1969, there were 15 788 “people's universities” in more than 30 regions, with some three million students. For those who could not attend them, courses were also broadcast on television and radio.<sup>15</sup>

Censorship, another important means of social control, was directed not only at protecting state secrets and countering anti-Soviet media from the West, but was also deployed against domestic criticism and dissent. The Party instructed newspapers and magazines which articles should be published, while it “determine[d] the content and specific profile of each program on Central Television,” and even directed how they should be broadcast.<sup>16</sup> The same was true for radio. Meanwhile, the “telephone law” applied to mass media,<sup>17</sup> while the Union of Journalists did the Party’s bidding. Indeed, without a membership card, no one could be considered a “real” journalist.

Although during the “thaw” under Khrushchev in the late ‘fifties and early ‘sixties, political censorship was prohibited.<sup>18</sup> However, in August 1966, not long after Brezhnev came to power, the powers of the department tasked with censorship – the Main Directorate for the Protection of State Secrets in the Press at the Council of Ministers of the USSR (Glavlit) – were once again expanded.<sup>19</sup> Under the general secretary tolerance of any criticism of the regime also began to be reduced, as some demanded

to stop releasing ... denouncing films and books such as *Clear Skies*, *Silence*, and *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*, among other.<sup>20</sup>

The law on freedom of press that the Czech government adopted during the Prague Spring of 1968 had a strong negative impact on Soviet leadership.<sup>21</sup> Moscow’s attitude towards literature from other socialist countries, especially from Cuba, Czechoslovakia and Romania, became more strict<sup>22</sup> and jamming Western radio was resumed.

After the 1968 April Plenum of the CPSU Central Committee on ideology, the party line in literature and art became more combative.<sup>23</sup> Thus, in February 1969 leading newspapers began harshly criticizing a wide variety of television and radio shows, the magazines *Theater* and *Novy Mir*, as well as the publishers *Iskusstvo* and *Mysl’*, for their “ideological sins.”<sup>24</sup>

During the previous month, the Central Committee’s secretariat had adopted a secret resolution ordering the heads of publishing houses, the press, radio, television, cultural and art institutions to adopt self-censorship.<sup>25</sup> Five years later, in November 1974, a new regulation on Glavlit tightened control over the media, publishing houses, and museums, as well as literature, audio and videos from abroad. Thus, practically all possibilities for uncensored publications were forbidden.<sup>26</sup> At the same time, censorship also began to be imposed on the book trade and libraries.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>15</sup> RGANI, f. 5, op. 61, d. 31, l. 65; *Kommunisticheskaya partiia Sovetskogo Soiuza v rezolutsiakh*, 374.

<sup>16</sup> RGANI, f. 5, op. 60, d. 19, l. 77; *Ibid.*, d. 28, l. 25, 46–47.

<sup>17</sup> E. Mickiewicz, *Changing Channels*, 25.

<sup>18</sup> A. Blium, *Kak eto delalos*, 17.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> RGANI, f. 5, op. 58, d. 20, l. 11.

<sup>21</sup> E.E. Dmitrieva, “Igrovoe pole sovetской tsenzury,” 249.

<sup>22</sup> O. Lavinskaia, “Tsenzura v SSSR,” 133.

<sup>23</sup> M.R. Zezina, “Sovetskaya khudozhestvennaya intelligentsiya,” 360.

<sup>24</sup> *Sovetskaya Rossiya*, February 4, 1969, 1; *Sovetskaya Rossiya*, February 11, 1969, 1.

<sup>25</sup> *Istoriya sovetской politicheskoy tsenzury: Dokumenty i kommentarii* (Moscow: ROSSPEN Publ., 1997), 189.

<sup>26</sup> V. Pribytkov, *Glavlit i tsenzura: Zapiski zamestitelya nachalnika Glavnogo upravleniya po okhrane gosudarstvennykh tain v pechati pri Sovete ministrov SSSR* (Moscow: Molodaia gvardiia Publ., 2014), 33–34.

<sup>27</sup> A.L. Posadskov, “Provintsialnaya tsenzura,” 195–196, 199.

## Declaring openness to criticism

Along with increasing propaganda and censorship, the methods of social control also changed. First, the government declared that it was striving to be more open to criticism.<sup>28</sup> Arguing that this was largely in the interests of the state, officials warned that otherwise “the vacuum will immediately be filled with anti-Soviet propaganda.”<sup>29</sup> Furthermore, they reasoned that criticism from the public is inherent in a mature political culture,<sup>30</sup> which was believed to have been achieved in the Soviet Union as it entered the stage of “developed socialism.” The media were warned that anyone guilty of suppressing criticism could be fired and lose their party membership.<sup>31</sup> Meanwhile, public demands to be allowed to express criticism also grew.<sup>32</sup>

There were heated discussions in the media of non-political questions, including economic problems and shortcomings in the service sector.<sup>33</sup> In addition, citizens were permitted to complain to officials about important matters – provided they did not touch on politics – through feedback (*obratnaya svyaz'*) to the media, trade unions,<sup>34</sup> “peoples’ control,” party leaders, bureaucrats<sup>35</sup> and even telephone calls.<sup>36</sup> In 1971, the Central Committee received an average of 1 000 letters a day, and by 1981, about 1 500.<sup>37</sup> A special department was set up to process them. The media also received a large number of letters with various questions from readers – every year more than 500 000 were delivered to each of the major newspapers.<sup>38</sup> Moreover, people also expressed their anger when, during elections for lower party organizations, some officials were voted out “for the wrong style of leading or rudeness with subordinates.”<sup>39</sup>

## Acknowledging the Importance of Public Opinion

Under Brezhnev, Soviet officials began to acknowledge the importance of public opinion. Although until the second half of the 1960s the leadership, especially Mikhail Suslov, considered sociological studies to be “unnecessary,”<sup>40</sup> scholars did carry them out on their own.<sup>41</sup> Beginning in 1960, the newspaper *Komsomolskaia Pravda* operated the Institute of Public Opinion, which was headed by B.A. Grushin. Not surprisingly, Soviet citizens also thought it necessary to pay attention to public opinion, since “this is one of the surest ways to make the life... of people happier and more prosperous.”<sup>42</sup>

As the government began to understand the importance of monitoring the public mood, they noticed that sociologists had already been carrying this out.<sup>43</sup> Deciding that it

<sup>28</sup> E.P. Hoffmann, R.F. Laird, *Technocratic Socialism*, 128.

<sup>29</sup> RGANI, f. 104, op. 1, d. 28, l. 10.

<sup>30</sup> R.A. Safarov, “Obshchestvennoe mnenie v politicheskoy sisteme razvitogo sotsializma,” *Problemy partynogo i gosudarstvennogo stroitel'stva* (Moscow: Mysl' Publ., 1982), 162.

<sup>31</sup> RGANI, f. 5, op. 59, d. 27, l. 144; RGANI, f. 104, op. 1, d. 28, l. 10; *Partynaya zhizn'*, no. 18 (1979): 51–52.

<sup>32</sup> B.A. Grushin, *Chetyre zhizni Rossii v zerkale oprosov obshchestvennogo mneniya: Ocherki massovogo soznaniia rossiiyan vremen Khrushcheva, Brezhneva, Gorbacheva i El'tsina* (Moscow: Progress-Traditsiia Publ., 2006), 622, 704–705, 707–708.

<sup>33</sup> E.P. Hoffmann, R.F. Laird, *Technocratic Socialism*, 142–144.

<sup>34</sup> A.V. Buzgalin, “Sotsialno-ekonomicheskaiia sistema «realnogo sotsializma» i ee samorefleksii. Tri teksta,” in *Zastoi': Potentsial SSSR nakanune raspada* (Moscow: Kulturnaia revoliutsiia Publ., 2011), 28.

<sup>35</sup> *Massovaia informatsiia v sovetskom promyshlennom gorode: Opyt kompleksnogo sotsiologicheskogo issledovaniia* (Moscow: Politizdat Publ., 1980), 379.

<sup>36</sup> *Partynaya zhizn'*, no. 18 (1979): 55.

<sup>37</sup> RGANI, f. 104, op. 1, d. 41, l. 6; *XXVI s'ezd Kommunisticheskoy partii Sovetskogo Soyuz: Stenograficheskii otchet* (Moscow: Politizdat Publ., 1981), 93.

<sup>38</sup> E.P. Hoffmann, R.F. Laird, *Technocratic Socialism*, 141.

<sup>39</sup> TsGAM, f. P-63, op. 1, d. 2222, l. 43.

<sup>40</sup> B. Grushin, “Institut obshchestvennogo mneniya,” 70.

<sup>41</sup> RGANI, f. 5, op. 34, d. 119, l. 181; M.G. Pugacheva, “Institut konkretnykh sotsialnykh issledovaniy,” 45.

<sup>42</sup> B.A. Grushin, *Chetyre zhizni Rossii*, 707.

<sup>43</sup> D.P. Gavra, “Istoriia i perspektivy,” 191.

should do the job itself,<sup>44</sup> the Institute of Public Opinion was abolished at the end of 1967. A little over a year later, in February 1969, the Central Committee adopted a resolution “On the state and measures to improve party political information.”<sup>45</sup> Authorities understood that the purpose of studying public opinion was to “determine the degree of actual conviction”<sup>46</sup> with which people received information. Meanwhile, as the leading Soviet ideologist G.L. Smirnov noted, the attitude of the masses to the state’s policies was “of great importance for organizing propaganda” and “practical activities.”<sup>47</sup> As a result, the party now began to set up its own organizations to study public opinion, including the Institute for Concrete Social Research of the USSR Academy of Sciences.<sup>48</sup>

Their first task was to circulate draft plans for socio-economic development as well as important laws to the broader public for a nationwide discussion.<sup>49</sup> However, the results were questionable, since citizens were afraid openly to express critical opinions, and their suggestions tended to be of minor importance.

Officials often reacted to public opinion point by point. For example, the Council of Ministers studied letters to *Literaturnaia Gazeta* to address problems in management training. In 1977, after a two-year discussion, the Party took concrete steps<sup>50</sup> through production and workers’ meetings to solicit suggestions for improvements.<sup>51</sup>

Article nine of the new Constitution of the USSR, which had been adopted in 1977, pledged “constant attention to public opinion” to “further develop socialist democracy.” As a result, over the following years practically all Central Committee decrees, as well as propaganda, mentioned to the importance of public opinion. At the same time, officials announced that it was now “integrated” into the political system. The “effectiveness” and “social prestige” of public opinion were enhanced, and therefore became “impossible to ignore.” The result, it was proclaimed, was the “subordination of the state to the interests of society.”<sup>52</sup>

### The Effectiveness of Propaganda and Censorship

Soviet authorities believed that controlling mass consciousness was a simple matter. In their opinion, propaganda had a “direct” effect, according to a basic formula involving a “stimulus” (information sanctioned by the authorities) and a predictable “response,”<sup>53</sup> which made its efficiency “automatic.” To Party leaders, propaganda reflected the truth and was effective.<sup>54</sup>

The reality was different. One characteristic of the Soviet media was its reluctance to report on certain events,<sup>55</sup> above all, those that involved bad news or put the government in a bad light,<sup>56</sup> or to be slow in providing details.<sup>57</sup> Even if propaganda did not al-

<sup>44</sup> RGANI, f. 104, op. 1, d. 25, l. 14–15.

<sup>45</sup> *Ob ideologicheskoy rabote KPSS: Sbornik dokumentov* (Moscow: Politizdat Publ., 1983), 191–192.

<sup>46</sup> R.A. Safarov, “Politicheskii status obshchestvennogo mneniya,” *Sotsiologicheskie issledovaniya*, no. 4 (1979): 17.

<sup>47</sup> RGANI, f. 104, op. 1, d. 25, l. 15.

<sup>48</sup> D.P. Gavra, “Istoriya i perspektivy,” 192; M.G. Pugacheva, “Institut konkretnykh sotsialnykh issledovaniy,” 166–167, 169.

<sup>49</sup> D.V. Lozhkov, *Tsenzura v SSSR*, 158.

<sup>50</sup> E.P. Hoffmann, R.F. Laird, *Technocratic Socialism*, 142–143.

<sup>51</sup> S.D. Mizerov, *Obshchestvennoe mnenie rabocheho klassa: upravlenie, pravoporyadok: Uchebnoe posobie* (Moscow: Akademiia MVD SSSR Publ., 1979), 33, 45.

<sup>52</sup> R.A. Safarov, “Politicheskii status obshchestvennogo mneniya,” 13–14, 21; R.A. Safarov, *Obshchestvennoe mnenie v politicheskoy sisteme*, 160, 162, 165, 171.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>54</sup> RGANI, f. 104, op. 1, d. 41, l. 8, 18; TsGAM, f. P-4, op. 158, d. 44, l. 60–61.

<sup>55</sup> RGANI, f. 5, op. 60, d. 39, l. 13; Rossiyskiy gosudarstvennyi arkhiv sotsialno-politicheskoy istorii (thereafter – RGASPI), f. 614, op. 1, d. 27, l. 6.

<sup>56</sup> E.P. Hoffmann, R.F. Laird, *Technocratic Socialism*, 131.

<sup>57</sup> *Vestnik Arkhiva Prezidenta: Spetsialnoe izdanie: Generalnyi sekretar L.I. Brezhnev: 1964–1982* (Moscow: Vestnik Arkhiva Prezidenta RF Publ., 2006), 108.

ways falsify facts, at least it distorted them and provided a biased interpretation, as well as superfluous and irritating bathos<sup>58</sup> meant to deceive. Although this was hardly new, Soviet citizens were more aware that the state's propaganda did not accurately portray developments at home and abroad.<sup>59</sup> Some party members even agitated for "a confidential bulletin, a special radio program,"<sup>60</sup> so that, as the most ideologically reliable citizens, they could get a more accurate understanding of current events.

Propaganda was losing its grip as the public became better educated and the flow of information increased. As a result, people increasingly turned to alternate sources of news, such as the traditional rumor mill and, above all, foreign media. In 1976, 41 radio stations of countries hostile to the Soviet Union broadcast programs totaling 253 hours a day.<sup>61</sup> Although the broadcasts of many foreign radio stations were "jammed," such efforts focused on large cities, and were much less prevalent in cities with a population of less than 500 000 people and the countryside.<sup>62</sup> With relations having begun to worsen in the late 1950s, China was also bombarding the Soviet ether with propaganda. By 1965, Beijing Radio had significantly stepped up its broadcasting to the Soviet Union, with 23 short and medium wave transmitters operating simultaneously.<sup>63</sup> Since reliable information was scarce, the authorities found it difficult to block citizens from alternate sources.<sup>64</sup> Many regularly listened to foreign radio,<sup>65</sup> and read foreign newspapers and magazines,<sup>66</sup> which all had their effect.

Meanwhile, as travel to foreign lands increased, Soviet citizens became more aware of the discrepancy between the realities of life in the West and their portrayal by the government's propaganda.<sup>67</sup> Going abroad also made people more aware of different views of events back home, and talked about them when they returned.

The poor training of much of the propaganda machinery's staff made it more difficult to keep up with the increasing sophistication of information flow. And, as in the press, the growing demand for employees led to decreases in their level of education and competence. Meanwhile, like the rest of the population, they largely relied on official sources of news, with all their defects and distortions. The same was true for university lecturers. The result was that propagandists could not effectively counter conflicting information, which diminished their authority among the public.

Party and Komsomol members also often lagged behind their non-party colleagues and friends, and were increasingly unable to fulfill their ideological tasks. Indeed, in the mid 'sixties, more than half of the CPSU's 12 million members had not even completed secondary school. Some party leaders openly complained that "wrong people were agitating in the country."<sup>68</sup>

<sup>58</sup> "...Otchuzhdennoe ot partii sostoyanie": KGB SSSR o nastroeniyakh uchashchikhsya i studenchestva. 1968–1976 gg." *Istoricheskiy arkhiv*, no. 1 (1994): 176.

<sup>59</sup> B.A. Grushin, *Chetyre zhizni Rossii*, 460–461.

<sup>60</sup> RGANI, f. 5, op. 60, d. 39, l. 13.

<sup>61</sup> "...Otchuzhdennoe ot partii sostoyanie," 196.

<sup>62</sup> E.P. Hoffmann, R.F. Laird, *Technocratic Socialism*, 131.

<sup>63</sup> RGANI, f. 5, op. 33, d. 216, l. 14, 104; *Ibid.*, d. 229, l. 7; *Ibid.*, op. 63, d. 88, l. 124; *Ibid.*, f. 104, op. 1, d. 35, l. 6; *Ibid.*, d. 41, l. 7.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, f. 5, op. 33, d. 216, l. 14; *Ibid.*, f. 104, op. 1, d. 28, l. 6; *Ibid.*, d. 35, l. 20; *Ibid.*, d. 41, l. 8; *Ibid.*, f. 614, op. 1, d. 27, l. 6.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, f. 614, op. 1, d. 27, l. 7.

<sup>66</sup> L.G. Churchward, *The Soviet Intelligentsia: An Essay on the Social Structure and Roles of the Soviet Intellectuals during the 1960s* (London and Boston: Routledge & Keagan Paul, 1973), 58.

<sup>67</sup> RGANI, f. 104, op. 1, d. 28, l. 10.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, f. 5, op. 33, d. 216, l. 14, 124; *Ibid.*, d. 229, l. 7; *Ibid.*, op. 58, d. 18, l. 22, 26; *Ibid.*, d. 20, l. 71, 73–74; *Ibid.*, op. 84, d. 89, l. 3; *Ibid.*, f. 104, op. 1, d. 35, l. 5–6; *Ibid.*, f. 614, op. 1, d. 27, l. 5; TsGAM, f. P-4, op. 158, d. 44, l. 56, 66, 68; "...Otchuzhdennoe ot partii sostoyanie," 181–182, 184, 186; *Partiy'naya zhizn*, no. 16 (1965): 4.

Soviet propaganda was formulaic, unrealistic, and awkward. Its preference for quantity over quality led to a deluge of events, posters, books, films and other media, all distinguished by their “excessive, obtrusive repetition of the same calls and slogans.” Visual material was largely “decorative,” while some rallies and speeches only took place on paper, with participation being “quasi-voluntary.” Others were marred by the poor oratory of party officials and Old Bolsheviks, resulting in a “negative ideological effect.” By the same token, agitational activities in schools tended to degenerate into “festive noisy events.”<sup>69</sup>

By the second half of the ‘sixties, party officials reported that propaganda and “agitation ... had become commonplace... [and] uninteresting. Little attention is paid to it.” Demand for books on “socio-political” subjects and documentaries was weak and led to a drain on government finances. Many complained about the “inefficiency of visual propaganda” – to the point that they could not remember the content of the slogans and posters that festooned their workplaces. In short, much propaganda aroused hostility, did not attract attention, or was ignored as “meaningless.” Youth dismissed it as “primitive and unsatisfying.”<sup>70</sup>

As distrust of official printed media intensified, the number outlets began to decline.<sup>71</sup> As in the West, television was partly to blame for the fall in newspaper readership.<sup>72</sup> However, tedious and uninteresting articles also had an impact,<sup>73</sup> although *Pravda*’s executive editor, S. V. Tsukasov, argued that “the acceleration of the rhythm of life” was to blame.<sup>74</sup> Those who did continue to read the dailies often leafed through them cursorily, only occasionally stopping to read about sports or major events.<sup>75</sup>

The government paid little attention to what might capture the reader’s interest. For example, circulation of the popular “Nedelia” supplement to the daily *Izvestiia* was restricted, leading to shortages despite public demand. The same was true for books,<sup>76</sup> whose print runs were dictated by the Party’s ideological needs rather than popular appeal.

Some mass media did favor the public’s desires over propaganda. This was especially true of television, and party leaders expressed their irritation that “showing creative portraits of actors and film directors became a tradition on television,” whereas “the programs dedicated to workers, engineers, collective farmers, doctors, teachers are a rare phenomenon, and their level is low.”<sup>77</sup> To their dismay, most viewers saw television as entertainment, rather than an “educational tool.”<sup>78</sup>

Gaps in censorship also hampered Soviet efforts at social control. In particular, the lists of banned authors circulated to local censors could be late and incomplete. Combined with their low intellectual level and favoritism, some authors managed to publish despite efforts to restrict them.<sup>79</sup>

<sup>69</sup> RGANI, f. 5, op. 33, d. 216, l. 124; Ibid., d. 220, l. 86, 93; Ibid., d. 229, l. 7; Ibid., d. 241, l. 19–20; Ibid., op. 58, d. 20, l. 7–8; Ibid., op. 59, d. 24, l. 65–67; Ibid., d. 30, l. 64; Ibid., op. 60, d. 23, l. 23–24; Ibid., f. 104, op. 1, d. 35, l. 5; *Ob ideologicheskoy rabote KPSS: Sbornik dokumentov* (Moscow: Politizdat Publ., 1983), 242; *Kommunisticheskaya partiya*, 146; “...Otchuzhdennoe ot partii sostoyanie,” 182, 186; B.A. Grushin, *Chetyre zhizni Rossii*, 492.

<sup>70</sup> RGANI, f. 5, op. 33, d. 241, l. 19; Ibid., op. 59, d. 24, l. 67; Ibid., d. 30, l. 151; RGANI, f. 5, op. 60, d. 39, l. 13; Ibid., f. 614, op. 1, d. 27, l. 5; “...Otchuzhdennoe ot partii sostoyanie,” 206; B.A. Grushin, *Chetyre zhizni Rossii*, 606.

<sup>71</sup> B.A. Grushin, *Chetyre zhizni Rossii*, 853; TsGAM, f. P-63, op. 1, d. 2222, l. 45.

<sup>72</sup> B.M. Firsov, K. Muzdybaiev, “K postroeniiu sistemy pokazatelei ispolzovaniia sredstv massovoi kommunikatsii,” *Sotsiologicheskoe issledovaniya*, no. 1 (1975): 115.

<sup>73</sup> B.A. Grushin, *Chetyre zhizni Rossii*, 581.

<sup>74</sup> S. Tsukasov, “Sovetskaya pechat – puti povisheniya effektivnosti i kachestva,” *Kommunist*, no. 7 (1977): 15–16.

<sup>75</sup> “...Otchuzhdennoe ot partii sostoyanie,” 183.

<sup>76</sup> RGANI, f. 5, op. 59, d. 30, l. 71, 73.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., op. 60, d. 28, l. 23–24.

<sup>78</sup> E.P. Hoffmann, R.F. Laird, *Technocratic Socialism*, 133–134.

<sup>79</sup> A. Blium, *Kak eto delalos*, 214, 216–217.



## Problems of Political Education

One major shortcoming of political education was that, like many censors, its instructors were poorly schooled. Furthermore, many were over 45 years old and had been party members for more than 10 years. At the same time, the authorities were not satisfied with their class origins. In 1968, the Central Committee complained that there were “few workers, collective farmers, and in particular young people among them.”<sup>80</sup>

Political education also resembled propaganda in its formalism, mendacity and an excessively large network that some party members considered exorbitant. Factories could boast hundreds of study circles, schools and seminars, all devoted to ideological agitation output, although many of them, especially those for younger workers, were fictitious.<sup>81</sup>

The pedagogy of those that did function tended to be of poor quality, uninteresting and obsolescent.<sup>82</sup> Students were expected to learn by rote memorization, while effectiveness was measured by quantity instead of quality. The result was that many of them openly admitted that they learned nothing. The same was true for ideological courses in universities.<sup>83</sup> The lack of its appeal often led more practically minded local officials to combine political education with vocational training, effectively substituting the former with the latter<sup>84</sup> – which clearly was more in demand.

Students of political education tended to be thoroughly disinterested. One of them expressed their typical attitude: “Nobody listens to the talk ... Many are yawning and dozing. There was not a single question”.<sup>85</sup> As a result, attendance could only be assured by making it obligatory.

## Responding to Propaganda’s Shortcomings

Right up to Brezhnev,<sup>86</sup> officials understood that the Party’s propaganda suffered from shortcomings. Furthermore, they were well aware that mass media was ineffective in spreading it.<sup>87</sup> As a result, attention began to be paid to make it more responsive to current events as well as more appealing.<sup>88</sup> One measure was to differentiate between different audiences instead of purely focusing to the broad masses.<sup>89</sup>

To make propagandists more aware of current events, in 1965 the Central Committee created “a restricted collection of details about the struggle to strengthen the world communist movement,” and at the regional level, “restricted reviews...on the most important issues of domestic and international life” were distributed to newspaper offices.<sup>90</sup>

Another new development was to involve members of the intelligentsia in producing propaganda, both because of their better understanding of rapid changes in science and technology as well as to compensate for the low educational level of employees.<sup>91</sup> Attention was also paid to solicit the participation of youth.<sup>92</sup>

<sup>80</sup> RGANI, f. 5, op. 34, d. 127, l. 18–19, 36–37; *Ibid.*, op. 60, d. 23, l. 23; *Kommunisticheskaya partiya*, 375.

<sup>81</sup> RGANI, f. 5, op. 34, d. 118, l. 10–11, 13.

<sup>82</sup> B.A. Grushin, *Chetyre zhizni Rossii*, 543–544.

<sup>83</sup> RGANI, f. 5, op. 59, d. 23, l. 97; *Ibid.*, op. 60, d. 23, l. 23; *Kommunisticheskaya partiya*, 375; “...Otchuzhdennoe ot partii sostoyanie,” 177, 180; I.V. Il’ina, “Ideologicheskaya rabota partii,” 258–259.

<sup>84</sup> RGANI, f. 5, op. 34, d. 118, l. 7; *Povyshat’ uroven’ marksistsko-leninskoy ucheby*, 3.

<sup>85</sup> B.A. Grushin, *Chetyre zhizni Rossii*, 544, 622–628.

<sup>86</sup> RGANI, f. 5, op. 33, d. 216, l. 14; *Ibid.*, d. 229, l. 7; *Ibid.*, op. 59, d. 24. l. 65, 67, 69; *Ibid.*, f. 104, op. 1, d. 28, l. 4–5; *Ibid.*, d. 41, l. 8.

<sup>87</sup> R.A. Safarov, “Politicheskii status,” 17.

<sup>88</sup> E. Mickiewicz, *Changing Channels*, 30.

<sup>89</sup> E.P. Hoffmann, R.F. Laird, *Technocratic Socialism*, 129, 136.

<sup>90</sup> RGANI, f. 5, op. 33, d. 216, l. 15; *Ibid.*, op. 58, d. 18, l. 26–27.

<sup>91</sup> T. Remington, *The Truth of Authority*, 4, 7.

<sup>92</sup> *Delo vsey partii: Materialy Vsesoyuznogo soveshchaniya ideologicheskikh rabotnikov* (Moscow: Politizdat Publ., 1980), 34.

Meanwhile, one way to counter anti-Soviet propaganda from abroad was to allow newspapers to include

materials of the foreign press, in which the internal and foreign policies of the CPSU and the Soviet government are reported objectively (i.e. positively – *author's note*).<sup>93</sup>

Despite such efforts at reform, growing challenges to the regime, including economic malaise, shortages of consumer goods and an ageing leadership, proved difficult to surmount by propaganda. Above all, the Party did little to address its irrelevance and excess, and continued to waste material, technical, financial, and human resources on agit-prop.<sup>94</sup> Even officials understood that its message to the masses had a “grey, straightjacketed style.”<sup>95</sup> At the same time, those involved in its production, not to mention lower level party members, continued to complain about the paucity of relevant news.

Publishing Western articles that spoke well of the Soviet system in the press did little to stem the growing distrust of the Party’s propaganda, and such pieces were largely dismissed by a skeptical public. Efforts to discredit Western propaganda as manipulative and deceitful also proved increasingly ineffective.<sup>96</sup>

Recruiting members of the intelligentsia and the social elite did yield results, as according to the Central Committee, by 1981, 96% of political information officials and 75% of agitators were engineers, technicians, agricultural specialists, foremen and “shock workers.”<sup>97</sup> While these numbers were impressive, the extent of their devotion and sincerity was highly questionable.

Political education also languished. Decisions to implement reform were rarely implemented, while formulaic pedagogy and rote memorization continued to be the order of the day.<sup>98</sup> Despite the appeals from the field to stem the “unreasonable expansion of the party education network,”<sup>99</sup> it continued to grow. At the same time, those charged with the task lost interest in their subject.<sup>100</sup>

Authorities continued to voice their concern about the poor quality of ideological work through the seventies. In April 1979, the Central Committee adopted a resolution “On further improving ideological, political and educational work.” Repeating complaints of whitewashing, censorship, ritualism and irrelevance, the document included appeals to strengthen and develop such efforts. The decision did result in some “ostentatious” reorganizations and large rallies.<sup>101</sup>

A discussion about progress in implementing the resolution was on the agenda of the All-Union Conference of Ideological Workers in October 1979. Although Suslov delivered a report on “The Party’s Cause,” he said practically nothing about any real shifts in the propaganda system. As debates about the Department of Propaganda and Agitation’s textbook of 1980, *Fundamentals of Political Propaganda*, revealed, there was no attempt even to adopt a unified approach to the directive. Both Brezhnev’s speech at the 26<sup>th</sup> Party Congress in February-March 1981, and another Central Committee resolution that October likewise had little effect.<sup>102</sup>

<sup>93</sup> RGANI, f. 5, op. 60, d. 19, l. 233.

<sup>94</sup> B.A. Grushin, *Chetyre zhizni Rossii*, 496.

<sup>95</sup> *Kommunisticheskaya partiya*, 335–336.

<sup>96</sup> RGANI, f. 104, op. 1, d. 35, l. 21; *Ibid.*, d. 60, l. 3, 31.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, f. 5, op. 84, d. 89, l. 4.

<sup>98</sup> *Ob ideologicheskoy rabote KPSS*, 346.

<sup>99</sup> RGANI, f. 5, op. 34, d. 118, l. 11.

<sup>100</sup> I.V. Il’ina, “Ideologicheskaya rabota partii,” 259–260.

<sup>101</sup> T. Remington, *The Truth of Authority*, 4–5.

<sup>102</sup> RGANI, f. 5, op. 77, d. 120, l. 1; *Ibid.*, f. 104, op. 1, d. 60, l. 1–2; *Ob ideologicheskoy rabote KPSS*, 352, 354–356; *Delo vsei partii*, 33–35; *XXVI s’ezd Kommunisticheskoy partii Sovetskogo Soyuza: Stenograficheskii otchet* (Moscow: Politizdat Publ., 1981), 94–95.

## Reacting to Criticism and Public Opinion

Party officials solemnly proclaimed that, in the USSR “criticism is free everywhere”<sup>103</sup> and “prompt,”<sup>104</sup> and that they were “taking measures,”<sup>105</sup> i.e., responding to public opinion. During Brezhnev's rule, public criticism of the authorities became accepted.<sup>106</sup> But in reality, the government was unable or unwilling to be open to such criticism. On the contrary, complaints were either suppressed, or replaced by “carefully-worded” disapproval of “individual shortcomings,” thereby deflecting calls for any real changes to the system.<sup>107</sup>

The result was that the gulf between Soviet citizens and the government continued to widen, while, as an outlet for public opinion, the media became increasingly irrelevant.<sup>108</sup> During the ‘seventies, the flow of letters of complaint to the government and newspapers diminished,<sup>109</sup> while the more sophisticated generation of the late Brezhnev era became adept at self-censorship.<sup>110</sup>

Archival documents indicate that the public now tended to question Party leaders and bureaucrats about foreign policy rather than domestic matters. Official accusations of “inconvenient” and “negative criticism” hardly encouraged a more open dialog.<sup>111</sup>

The government's study of public opinion was hardly disinterested. B.A. Grushin noted “the blatant disinterest of the governing bodies in the production of objective social knowledge” and their “more than cautious attitude to any more or less serious information.”<sup>112</sup>

## Conclusion

The content, forms and methods of Soviet propaganda had not changed since the regime's early years in power – demagoguery, pathos, and a preference for long speeches over brief newspaper articles to convey important information remained the order of the day. But, during the decades since the October Revolution, the people did. Their intellectual level rose, while also becoming more critical and less susceptible to appeals to their emotions. The enthusiasm of the period immediately after the Bolsheviks came to power, which propaganda could easily exploit, faded away. Soviet citizens began to value their leisure, which they did not want to fritter away by listening to interminable speeches or reading long articles. And they were increasingly exposed to new, alternate sources of news, above all foreign media.

Despite the fact that, by the Brezhnev era, propaganda reached the peak of its development. Despite attempts at revival, the country's leaders allowed it to fade into irrelevance. Their hours-long addresses to plenums and congresses were filled with hollow, formal statements and appeals, window dressing, and reiterations of what was said earlier. In turn, propagandists repetitively restated the words of their chiefs as if by rote.

Although the Soviet Union's leadership, including Leonid Brezhnev<sup>113</sup> was to a certain extent aware of these problems, it was unable to solve them. Among other, this would have required fundamental changes to the Party's ideology.<sup>114</sup> The authorities did not dare reorganize its propaganda; they only tightened censorship.

<sup>103</sup> RGANI, f. 89, op. 25, d. 47, l. 12.

<sup>104</sup> TsGAM, f. P-63, op. 1, d. 2222, l. 34.

<sup>105</sup> RGANI, f. 89, op. 25, d. 47, l. 12.

<sup>106</sup> B.A. Grushin, *Chetyre zhizni Rossii*, 863.

<sup>107</sup> Yu.N. Shcheglov, *Vlast i formirovanie massovogo soznaniya*, 19.

<sup>108</sup> B.A. Grushin, *Chetyre zhizni Rossii*, 749.

<sup>109</sup> Yu.N. Shcheglov, *Vlast' i formirovanie massovogo soznaniya*, 23.

<sup>110</sup> T.M. Gorjaeva, *Politicheskaya tsenzura*, 347–348.

<sup>111</sup> TsGAM, f. P-63, op. 1, d. 2500, l. 15.

<sup>112</sup> B. Grushin, “Institut obshchestvennogo mneniya,” 73.

<sup>113</sup> *XXVI s'ezd Kommunisticheskoy partii*, 94–95.

<sup>114</sup> Soviet ideology by the 1960s faced colossal challenges and threats. An attempt to respond to these challenges was the concept of “developed socialism,” but for various reasons it did not become effective.

At the same time, officials tried to solicit feedback from the population in the form of criticism and opinions. These new trends in Soviet social control were progressive. The country's leadership understood that, much like the rest of the world, the public growing awareness and education had increased the importance of their opinions to the point that they could no longer be ignored. Both overt and covert criticism of problems in society continued to increase.

However, the authorities used data about the sentiments of the citizenry not for real and profound changes, which were clearly necessary, but mainly to solve various details, such as shortcomings in the services sector, housing and the dismissal of corrupt officials at the lower level, etc., as well as to head off dangerous opinions. As Iurii Andropov famously admitted to the Central Committee's plenum in June 1983: "We have not yet sufficiently studied the society in which we live and work."<sup>115</sup> The inability to respond to the country's urgent internal challenges, which might have become more evident by gauging the public mood, played a major role in the Soviet Union's collapse.

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<sup>115</sup> *Materiali Plenuma Tsentralnogo komiteta KPSS. 14–15 iunia 1983 goda* (Moscow: Politizdat Publ., 1983), 19.

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