

“RENDER UNTO CAESAR ...” – THE IDEOLOGICAL EXPERIMENT OF THE TOTALITARIANISM IN UKRAINE

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The article illustrates the process of the re-shaping of the political consciousness of the Ukrainians under the Soviet occupation in the mid-20th century. Special attention is paid to the role of doctrine, research of the place of the leader and the party in the lives of the Ukrainians. The article shows how they destroyed Ukrainian self-identity and imposed a supra-personal and supra-national identity.

Key words: political consciousness, leader, Stalin, CPSU, ideology, UkrSSR, Ukrainian / Soviet political Identity.

“КЕСАРЮ КЕСАРЕВЕ ...” – СВІТОГЛЯДНИЙ ЕКСПЕРИМЕНТ ТОТАЛІТАРИЗМУ В УКРАЇНІ

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Стаття ілюструє процес зміни політичної свідомості українців під радянською окупацією у середині ХХ століття. Спеціальна увага приділена ролі доктрини, досліджується місце лідера та партії у життях українців. Показано, як руйнувалася самоідентичність українців та нав'язувалася над-особова та над-національна тотожність.

Ключові слова: політична свідомість, лідер, Сталін, КПРС, ідеологія, УРСР, українська / радянська політична ідентифікація.

The Soviet society was primarily a materialistic. The building of the strongest and the wealthiest state on Earth was the leading goal of the whole country. Thus, its citizens were to be the richest and the happiest. All troubles in their lives with poverty were named transient obstacles on the way to Communism. While reading periodicals and watching documentaries from the mid-20th century one can find a pretty ideal everyday life for the Ukrainian people. But, as Viktor Kocur has noticed, immersion into the secrets of everyday life helps to refute the myths of the totalitarian system in the best way (Kocur 2010, 9).

The evolution of the political consciousness of educators distinguishes among the studied range of problems. The reason of attention to the issue is logical. The historian John Robert Seeley argued in the late 19th century that history was actually the past of politics and politics manifested as modern history (Seeley 1914, 189). The idea of the subject of Ukrainian national history had been kept in the depths of the history of the state since the Soviet times. The most

significant layer of research therefore was formed with the works revealing “the view of the historians from above” as they were called by Peter Burke (2010, 13). It was true because the scholars described politics, state-building and prominent political figures first of all.

However, the main components in the current study of everyday life of the educators of the UkrSSR are not politicians themselves but their images in the minds of the people. Why images? The Ukrainian philosopher Jevhen Sverstjuk, when lecturing to the students of the Poltava State Pedagogical Institute in 1957, observed: “image is a focus reflection of life” (State archive of the Poltava region, f.R-1507, op. 1, spr. 620. ark. 321). Repeating the words of the famous contemporary, I can state that the collective image of politicians was formed as the focus of their actions and expressions of opinions about them. People hated or idolized not the real Stalin but the image that they produced in their minds under the influence of personal preferences, collective mood in the micro-groups and of ideological pressure.

The proposed study deals with the political component of the self-identification of the Ukrainians of the mid-20th century. Truly, the Soviet Union was as a stained glass created from the nations with their own languages, values and beliefs glued with the totalitarian pitch. Thus, there should have been a difference in the influence on the conciseness of various peoples in the stripy state. And there was. In our recent essays we have already covered the peculiarities of the creation of a Ukrainian national or pseudo-national identity during Soviet rule (Luk"janenko 2014) with the new pantheon of heroes and “cursed” betrayers (Luk"janenko 2015). The Communist state also had a strict plan of moulding a new language identity in the Ukrainian environment (Luk"janenko 2013) as well as influencing the elite in the creation of the specific common global worldview (Luk"janenko 2016). However, the latter had differences that one can identify as “national significance” or a distinct Ukrainian Soviet identification. This variety existed because the country was seeking ways to unify inside the aboriginal nations once added to the melting pot of the socialist land. The state of the minds on the topic of world politics was closer to the problem of the current study. The USSR enforced all its ideas only through the strong state position. We can endlessly argue on the question of autonomy or sovereignty of the UkrSSR, on the issues of the “national specifics” of the policy of Ukrainization once being choked by Stalin or on other points of national liberalization during the whole 70-year period of Communist rule. However, VKP(b) (then CPSU) did its best to eliminate any signs of the unique Ukrainian Communism among Ukapists, Borotbists and others. And by the time discussed in this study – the early 1950's – the central power tolerated no regional diversity in the question of political thought. One could have worn an embroidered shirt but the *Brief Course of the History of VKP(b)* by Stalin should have been the gospel of political truth. If answering the question whether there was a specific Ukrainian Soviet identity I would say “surely, there was one”. However, the scope of the study is not national, but Party authentication. Was there any political difference when

even KP(b)U copied the laws and orders of its “supreme sister” in Moscow? Keeping this in mind I propose to find the peculiarities of the formation of the Soviet political identity in Ukrainian examples – the works of the country’s poets, artists and educators. They were the ones who added local color to the routine process of mincing worldviews.

The beginning of the 21st century was marked by a broad campaign started by the Russian Orthodox Church against new religious movements that Orthodox clerics dubbed as “destructive totalitarian sects”. The war for control over the human minds continues on all fronts. Orthodox missionaries are trying to find destructive and violent totalitarian elements in the actions, statements and ideas of each denomination that is different from the official Russian State Orthodoxy. However, ‘sect-fighters’ of the 21st century seek the worst and the most violent elements of enslaving a free human mind in the organizations that, in fact, are acting merely as toy-shops compared with what 1/3 of the globe has been through in recent years. Indeed, it is 70 years of Soviet hypnotic power that with the greatest confidence can be defined as the most successful period of a “totalitarian sect”. That name corresponded to the Communist consciousness much better than to the modern secular movements. That was noted long before today. The Russian religious philosopher Nikolaj Berdjaev mentioned in his work *Origins and Sense of Russian Communism* that “monism of the totalitarian state in any case is not compatible with Christianity, it turns the State into the church” (Berdjaev 2006, 40). In this article we will have a look at the basic elements that made political consciousness of the Soviet citizens in general and educators in particular look like at religious worldview. Soviet Ukraine was forced to mold its citizens’ identity on All-Soviet patterns. The totalitarian state could not let one of the most freedom-loving peoples differ in the melting pot of “brotherly nations”. The distinguishing feature was only in the usage of local artists, educators and images to fulfill the mission of ideological expansion. Thus, the difference in the creation of the god-like image of the totalitarian leader in the hearts and minds of Ukrainians will diverge from the same Russian variant mostly in illustrations but not in methods.

The first point is the creation of the doctrine. Communist society was formed with the help of severe control over information circulation. Everything read, written and proclaimed was under the censorship of party organs. No wonder there was a constant hunger for information. The state used special controlled methods of dosage of information given to the public. In such a deficit of knowledge of events, the close-knit and self-isolated community as a rule put forward a set of ideas that with time turns into the doctrine. The Country of the Soviets as no other in the world could have boasted of an elaborated doctrine of social development. Detailed and promoted from each city square and a village street, it was thrown to the masses as a source of understanding the way to the Flourishing Future. Thousands of trees had died in order to bring to ordinary citizens the tenets of the “Manifesto of the Communist Party” or the next brilliant reasoning of the “Great Leader” Stalin. Thus, only a single Stalin’s speech

“On the task of the executives” or “On industrialization and the right slope of the CPSU (b)” issued 125.000 copies in the Ukrainian language alone (Vydannja promov 1953). The data revealed after the death of Joseph Stalin speaks for itself. The implantation into the consciousness of the masses of the ‘correct’ – Stalinist – attitude towards the reality by the year of 1953 had been made with the help of 9.000 editions of the works of the ‘greatest thinker’ in 101 languages with total circulation of 672.058.000 copies (!) (Vydannja v SRSR, 1953). Bearing in mind that the population of the USSR in 1953 was close to 188 million people, we see that theoretically each citizen could own 3 or 4 books written by the ‘father of nations’. That was more than enough to convince oneself of the sanctity of the teaching.

The teachings of Communism spread “from Moscow to the outskirts” not only as an abstract theory living in the pages of dusty books. In fact, numerous attempts were made (and it is worth noting, quite successfully) to turn the doctrine into reality. There were numerous permanent restructurings of the teaching courses in universities and schools after each ideological infusion from above. We can recall the fateful period of the forced ‘revival’ of the illogical Stalin’s doctrine of language that swept over the Soviet Union in the early 1950s. The idea of the supreme and non-perspective languages was thrown to the masses after being born by the decrepit mind of the old-aged dictator. The theory was created and the masses had to drink it like mother’s milk.

To accomplish that, the educators were forced to rewrite the study programs (curricula) yet again. The new teaching became part of the old courses and new special seminars where the ‘genius’ statements of Stalin were explained to the public. Even the special councils for teachers were held so the ‘linguistic truth’ could be translated to the new generations without disfigurement (M.V. 1951). The seed of the new ideological norm was planted. It was watered down by daily routine. Thus, the students had an obligation to study the brilliant work of a living classic and to refer to it during every study project. For example, Fedir Butko from the Poltava State Pedagogical Institute was criticized for not using a couple of references from Stalin’s linguistic work in his history course report in 1953 (Archive of PNP, f. 1, op. 1956 (B-I), spr. 2289, ark. 23). But the young educators were not the only ones to suffer from the dominance of the new communist theory of languages. The university professors had to correct their plans of research to reinforce the loyalty to the theory of the state leader (State archive of the Sumy region, f.R-5369, op. 1, spr. 166, ark. 16).

As with any mystical doctrine, the Soviet one was much too complicated and trickily coded by the numerous theoretical generalizations and new interpretations of the previous truths. So it was really hard for its ordinary ‘believers’ to verify its truthfulness. The questions could appear only in three cases: if you were in the circle of the opponents of the regime, between the lecturers of Marxism-Leninism during the long targeted debates or simply in times of ‘domestic philosophizing’ in the small communal kitchens when the everyday problems were drowned with the liquid of “stoličnaja” vodka.

The architects of a totalitarian society understood the mechanisms of ideological aggression. In such a way they struggled to distract people from thinking about the essence of the ideology by driving people's attention to the numerous issues socially important and necessary to the state affairs. Being involved in solving the problems (or thinking about being involved), the Soviet citizens paid little attention to the disparity of the doctrine and the reality. As an example, we can name large constructions of Communism – the Baikal-Amur Mainline, the Volga-Don Canal, the Dnipro Hydroelectric Plant, the Poltava (then the Dnipro) Mining Processing Plant and so on. But even they were organized to strengthen the love to their leaders and to their ideas. The beginning of the extensive building, which had to divert the person from reflection, was crowned with the names of famous geniuses who lead forward along the steadfast way to the Communism. Oles' Jurenko, a Poltava poet of the last century, enthusiastically wrote in 1953 confirming that statement:

*And are tirelessly growing
new buildings in our side.
Along with Lenin's, is glowing
Stalin's name far and wide*¹⁰⁶

To avoid the unwilling search for truth among the ideologically processed masses, every conscious Communist had to deliver a large amounts of lectures. For taking the teaching to the masses was the process all neophytes were engaged in throughout the history of humankind. The Soviet disciples did it as well as constantly replenishing the communal treasury with the 'tithe' – party contributions. However, during these educational meetings with the masses the lecturers themselves lost their capability of analysis, becoming normal transmitters and receivers of the information filtered by the state. Educators were the leaders among those reading ideological lectures to the people in the 'kolchozy', plants, in city halls and everywhere needed. The lecturers were recruited from among the students as well – from the rows of all those -able to say what they were asked to. It was a real mental mockery. It exhausted not only emotionally but also physically. So teachers and students of the Poltava State Pedagogical Institute were frequent guests of various institutions and organizations, where they held a large number of lectures. Sometimes the scale of the accomplished ideological work was impressive when one group of lecturers was reading up to 34 reports on the related topics at a time (State archive of the Poltava region, f. P 251, op. 1, spr. 4829, ark. 78).

Soviet doctrine, though being dressed in the robes of scientific dialectical materialism, in fact, was not projected to be understood. The breadth of the material and the infinity of spheres of its influence convinced that one had to believe in it first. Moreover, that turned it into a universal truth. The "real understanding" of the vague canons became the achievement of a narrow elite group

¹⁰⁶ Here and after the verse is given in our translation – O. L.

of lecturers of historical and dialectical materialism – the interpreter of the ideology. However, even they were not the bearers of the original truth. Special meetings were organized for their enlightenment regularly. Newspapers even published the schedules of the study courses in the school of political education (Prymirnyj 1957). In addition, by being taught, they designed the models of delivering that Soviet truth to the masses.

To ensure the correct interpretation of the “Word” that had come through the sieve of mass consciousness, the center published some “Abstracts”. They had the only faith canons and rules among their lines to correlate the public opinion with the legitimate one. This happened even after the death of the ‘brilliant manipulator’ Stalin. The Communist Party successfully used his methods long after the dictator’s death. Among such examples we find the official point of view on arts through Nikita Chruščev’s speech “On the close relationship of literature and art with the life of the people” (Chruščov 1956) or the legitimized explanation of history in the Abstracts of the Department of Propaganda of the Central Committee of the CPSU and the Institute of Marxism-Leninism of the Central Committee of the CPSU “To the fortieth anniversary of the Great Socialist October Revolution (1917–1957)” (Do sorokariččja 1957).

All others, for whom the doctrine seemed difficult and obscure, already had the answer if they found some discrepancies that had not been polished yet by the ideological sculptors. They should work hard for the public, because when you did not have enough skills to grasp the Communist idea, you should not bother those who had already found the light.

The Soviet machine, as true as any totalitarian sect, tried to create its own world living to its own rules. In addition, it did not stand on the three elephants and a turtle. Everything was as in the old Zoroastrism dualist religion. As befits a doctrine that intends to control the masses, the universe was divided into two parallel worlds – ‘them’ and ‘us’, ‘black’ and ‘white’ (or better to say ‘red’), ‘good’ and ‘bad’. Not only ideological workers, but also artists labored for the benefit of this idea. Therefore, the Ukrainian poet Maksym Ryl’s’kyj (1952) sanctified this foundation of Soviet totalitarian sects with his lines:

*There are two forces on the Earth, the one is shining to the backward,
The slavery is pedestal, the lie is its upright, –
Before the second – there is a boom of songs of all the world,
The gardens of the future and surf of art.*

Needless to specify what kind of power the poet meant under the victors in the struggle between good and evil.

As befits a closed religious formation, the Communist machine did not tolerate free interpretation of its norms and canons that could undermine its unquestionable right to own the truth. That is why the Soviet Union was constantly searching for and pursued representatives of the foreign ‘charities packs’. They were brought to the light so the ordinary people could see that the ‘evil West’

maintained ‘Trockyists, Menševiks, Social Revolutionaries, the bourgeois nationalists, members of kulak parties’ and so on. One of the last examples of those witch-hunts in the USSR was the case of “Joint”, inspired by the inflated imagination of Stalin in winter of 1953. It was named a US intelligence branch to make it look more horrible (Džojnt 1953). But the successors kept the canons of ‘true socialism’ no less zealously even after Stalin. It is seen in the struggle for the only truthfulness with the Yugoslav ideologies. Chruščov in 1957 made it clear that all variants of national characteristics of socialism and ‘special paths’ of the movement to Socialism were considered damaging to the cause of socialist construction in this country as well as to the whole community of socialist states (Vidpovidi 1957). This meant the existence of a ‘new’ socialist doctrine was a menace to the collective ideology and doctrine that allowed controlling of mass consciousness.

If one wants the general doctrinal norms of religious organizations to operate and for masses deftly to execute orders, a religious group needs enemies. And there may be a large number of foes – the more the better for unity. They can be both immanent and transcendent, distant and close. Soviet leaders skillfully used public hysteria about the conspiracy and debunking of all hidden destroyers of the Soviet social myth. It is worth mentioning the almost theatrical trials of the “mean-spirited Judas” Berija or the ‘retrograde’ quartet Malenkov, Kaganovič, Molotov and Šepilov that joined them.

Like most modern destructive religious cults, communist ideology tried to call enemies not only evil capitalists, but also relatives that somehow prevented the ‘true believers’ in their progress to “the light of truth”. And the most successful example is the textbook example of Pavlik Morozov, who exposed his father to the Communist authorities and was in turn killed by his family. Perhaps he may be an illustration not only of communist loyalty, but also the religious tenet “He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me” (Matthew 10:37) in the light of the new – Communist – faith. But then it was better to love the Party, not Christ.

Such facts are connected with the idea that members of a closed religious organization have imposed the idea of continuous monitoring of their actions. Much has been said about the collective mania about the comprehensiveness of actions of the KGB in the Soviet Union. Its total monitoring of actions and words only strengthened the religious nature of power politics to be everywhere and to know everything. We will note, however, that such godly characteristics were attributed to the party leader and not to the specific authority body. The best illustration of the glorification of the leader are the words written by the 8th grade student of school № 23 of Poltava – Ljudmyla Synjahovs’ka – about the late Stalin in the days of mourning in March of 1953 (Paško 1953):

*He knew about everything, he was following everybody,
He always found the needed word for each one*

Not infrequently, the supporters of religious faith are told about their chosenness and uniqueness. The Soviet people felt themselves to be in a constant struggle for the salvation of the world. This Messianic predestination is reflected in the title of one of the articles published in regional press in the Sumy region in 1951 – “The Soviet people – the vanguard of progressive humanity” (Lavruchin 1951). Their actions are actions of the chosen foremost of humankind. Here, in Eurasia, people have taken control over their history into their own hands. This has spurred them to outstanding titanic labor feats. Moreover, they were to become the model for imitation to the whole “dark” world.

Oddly enough, but such an understanding of their views and beliefs undoubtedly leads to the fact that people believe the adherents of opposing religions to be mesmerized slain servants of the dark arts. This is suitable for describing how workers of the USSR characterized their US colleagues as well as other ‘opposition’ to the Soviet Union. Even having the same problems and the same wishes, the American laborers did not learn the truth because of their own limitations and bias. Thus, even the talented poet Andrij Malyško joined the ideological propaganda when he published a series of poems under the single name “Beyond the Blue Sea”: among the poetic lines, we find (Malyško 1953):

*I could not swallow sandwiches,
see the false grace,
That bread was like with poison
For me in Detroit and Portsmouth,
For where I had then my route –
The kids were begging for some bread.*

In addition, backed by the voice of the inspired ones of that world, the ideological machine was enveloping more and more ordinary citizens, arguing that the West was living behind the veil of its own ignorance and ghostly values that had been debunked by Muscovite rulers long before that.

The Soviet Union showed the best example of the rule associated with totalitarian sects according to which individuality is subject to a collective spirit. The Soviet realm required one to think about the country first, and only then about self. Everything boiled down to the fact that the fulfillment of individual needs and desires by the ordinary people was regarded as a deviation from accepted norms. The solving of problems at work was in many cases regarded as immoral behavior. They could hardly exist in the country of laborers. Individualists were persecuted by the mass zombified by the constant propaganda and demagoguery of the conformists who had learned to ignore personal reflections.

In order to keep followers under control, leaders of religious groups often change the entourage for organizing the hypnotic actions. The new environment helps to bring new emotions to the sacred dream. Something like that was coded into the organizing of the campaigns of major constructions in the undeveloped

lands of the USSR. The same method was present in the involvement of young members of 'Komsomol' into the agricultural deeds on the virgin lands. The same scope was hidden under the sending of newly graduated specialists from their native regions to areas of the boundless state very different in culture, language and beliefs from their home. It was quite a successful method of permanent switch of attention from one activity to another during which a person perceived and created something new in the material sphere, not thinking about the problems of the doctrinal truth. In order to stay in a constant state of readiness, the state also organized a 'career swing' when an imperious hand either threw the person up to the new career opportunities, or, on the contrary, dropped him below the known potential lowlands of the profession and the social pyramid.

Another technology of mind control needs mentioning in which the believer is tantalized with an immense goal that he can not reach, but still should work towards for his children to have the opportunity to harvest the results of his great aspirations. And the people of the USSR really 'believed' in it with all their hearts. The Poltava poet Andrij Hrinčenko wrote in 1951 (Hrinčenko 1953):

*We heard the party from the Kremlin with our hearts,
it inspires in our hearts the faith
that on our starry earth
the eternal spring of commune will come.*

That was a dream and only we – the grandchildren of that generation – know if that communist spring ever visited the "gardens" of the Soviet land.

One of the driving forces that moved the builders of Communism to be strong in their beliefs without asking questions was the fear inherent in most modern destructive religious organizations. Back in the middle of the 20th century, they had their own "devils" who tried to seduce the true believers and to stain the light of communist ideals. The periodicals urged to keep vigilance constantly, because there "still were alive the vestiges of bourgeois ideology, ... there were also preserved the carriers of bourgeois views and bourgeois morality – real people, hidden enemies of our people" (Leninism 1953). In such circumstances when there always was some invisible dark force, one needed a "Soviet Creed of Faith" to dissociate oneself from the invisible praying shield from these 'ethereal' and not identified enemies who might stand in a queue and ride in a bus with every citizen.

Moreover, of course, everyone in a close-nit religious community has to follow the leader. Otherwise, it is not worth of talking about any loyalty to the ideals. This issue should be widely discussed in further studies. Here we just note that the Soviet people as religious neophytes tried to get a decent mentor, proven in ideological battles. The students and lecturers of higher education were among those who stepped forward after each call of the Party. They went to the wider public and set the examples to follow on the path to taking after the ideal leader in Moscow.

The coordinated work of the ideological political machine of the USSR of the mid-20th century was based on similar positions and quite recalls the activities of most totalitarian religious organizations of today. That is why the political everyday life of the educators of the UkrSSR were considered from the point of view of the dominance of 'political religion'. It had its hidden mechanisms of action until the demiurge of Soviet society led it from the Kremlin. However, the time has changed. In addition, like a destructive sect – the being of the totalitarian state came to an end when the resources of the Communist religion came to an end. And now, living in Ukraine after the De-Communization laws of 2015, looking at the attempts of the sovieto-philes to use the lost memory of the past in the destructive activities on behalf of pro-Russian terrorists and standing on the pieces of that demolished Communist colossus, I once again remind myself of the truth, reviled by the Strugackij brothers, that it is really "hard to be a god" in a society of free minds.

As a conclusion, we can state several thoughts outlined in the study:

- the political identity of the Soviet Ukrainians was moulded according to All-Soviet patterns,
- the distinguishing features were seen only in the use of local artists, educators and images to fulfill the mission of ideological expansion,
- the formation of the 'sacred image' of the totalitarian leader in the hearts and minds of Ukrainians bore the same characters as the Russian model varying mostly in illustrations but not in methods,
- Soviet citizens did not pay much attention to the disparity of the doctrine and the reality,
- the educators were among the leaders of those reading ideological lectures to the people mostly losing the capability of analysis, becoming a mere transmitters and receivers of information filtered by the state,
- the 'real awareness' of the political canons was the privilege of a small elite group who gained the right to interpret ideology.

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