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**“SOFT POWER” IN MYTHOLOGY OF SOVIET CIVILIZATION:
SOVIET INTELLIGENTSIA’S VALUE SYSTEM
TRANSFORMATION**

Vasiliy A. Smirnov (a)*, Sergey A. Malenko (b), Andrey G. Nekita (c)

*Corresponding author

(a) Yaroslav-the-Wise Novgorod State University (NovSU), Veliky Novgorod, Russian Federation,
novtransa2010@yandex.ru,

(b) Yaroslav-the-Wise Novgorod State University (NovSU), Veliky Novgorod, Russian Federation,
olenia@mail.ru,

(c) Yaroslav-the-Wise Novgorod State University (NovSU), Veliky Novgorod, Russian Federation, beresten@mail.ru

Abstract

The Soviet system of values, which until a certain point in time was shared by a large part of society, was eventually discredited and replaced by the Western one. This happened not so much due to some kind of gross manipulation but due to the hidden work of the mechanisms of “soft power” that managed to change the mind first of the Soviet elite and then of the Soviet intelligentsia. Those actors, who promoted the Western system of values, struck selected targets of the topics essential to a Soviet man, gradually transforming the attitudinal matrices of the widest sections of the population. The first target of such a transformation (after the elite) was the intelligentsia. Through the so-called “opinion leaders”, messages on the excesses of the Soviet system and the advantages of Western social organization were methodically hammered into their minds. The ideas of disarmament, transition to a market economy and liquidation of kolkhozes (collective farms), which encompassed the Soviet intelligentsia with the help of the “soft power” of the West, when implemented, did not lead to economic prosperity and the establishment of friendly relations with neighboring countries. In this study, based on an analysis of materials from the Ogoniok magazine, the most popular in the circles of the intelligentsia, we have tried to answer the following question: With the help of what mechanisms it became possible to change the attitude of Soviet citizens to certain basic institutions of Soviet society?

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1. Introduction

As is known, the Cold War resulted in the collapse of the Soviet Union and the transformation of our world from bipolar to unipolar with the absolute domination of the West. The reasons for the collapse of the USSR are described in detail in domestic and foreign literature where opinions on this issue are very diverse. According to a fairly popular point of view, the circumstances that led to the collapse of the USSR are primarily related to the so-called ideological “disarmament of Soviet society”. The Soviet system of values was discredited and replaced by the Western one. There is no doubt about the idea of a direct connection between values and ideology (Passini, 2020) when ideology often becomes an instrument for achieving certain political goals. However, we would like to analyze the transformation of the consciousness of Soviet people not through the prism of “war” and various “conspiracy theories” (Martin, 2020), where an ideological “enemy” carries out aggression against a certain object, but through the mechanisms of “soft power” that operate less rigidly, forming the attractiveness of certain images. As noted in the literature, “soft power” operates not with harsh methods of coercion, but with non-forcible instruments of forming sympathy (Nye, 2021) for a certain value system. Values are known to play a defining role in human social behavior (Dahl, 2020). Moreover, the first to feel the attractiveness of the Western way of life and Western values, and did it quite voluntarily, without any violence, was the Soviet elite. In this study, we would like to explore the influence of Western “soft power” on the most educated part of Soviet society – the intelligentsia. And if the elite of the USSR began to feel sympathy for the Western way of life approximately starting from the 1960s, then the turn of the Soviet intelligentsia “facing the West” on a massive scale began during “Perestroika”. It seemed to the Soviet intelligentsia at that time that Perestroika would become a springboard that would help transform the USSR first into a society where there is “socialism with a human face” – the so-called “hybrid state” according to modern political science terminology (Kim, 2020), and then make it a democratic country with a market economy which is immanent in all the features of Western society, including market, democracy, a multi-party system, private property, the system of a social bourgeois state (Haber, 2020), etc. Western “soft power” acted in two directions through the so-called channels for forming public opinion (authoritative citizens of the USSR, people's deputies, opposition media). On the one hand, it was necessary to discredit the Soviet system and its inherent institutions (planned economy, state property, kolkhozes, monopoly of one party, etc.), and, on the other, to emphasize the advantages of Western social organization. For example, the “welfare state” with all its hallmarks (Henry, 2020). Although the Western social organization had and still has a lot of shortcomings (Macdonald, 2020), “soft power” should act in such a way that these shortcomings seem insignificant. Without solving these problems, the demolition of the Soviet system would have been impossible. Moreover, there is every reason to believe that any attempts to reform the USSR would face resistance from the population.

2. Problem Statement

The problem of many so-called illiberal studies related to the interpretation of the causes of the collapse of the Soviet Union is to consider the Soviet person as a passive object of manipulation, who was duped by the “democratic” media, who went over to the side of the “geopolitical enemy”, and was

beckoned into the “world of Western dreams” which, in fact, turned out to be not as wonderful as it was described in anti-Soviet propaganda. In this aspect, the Soviet common man is presented as a kind of not entirely intelligent creature who became a victim of propaganda. We consider this approach to be rather narrow. The effectiveness of the so-called “soft” power is precisely determined by the fact that the “victim” is not a victim at all, since they make a choice in favor of a certain attractive system of values completely voluntary and, most importantly, consciously (as opposed to direct manipulation). The dismantling of the Soviet system was not due to the “stupidity” of the Soviet common man but to the more effective instruments of “soft power” at the disposal of Western actors. According to the theory of dissemination of opinions (Gaisbauer et al., 2020), people tend to speak openly only about what is widely supported in their social environment. If the Soviet intelligentsia was, as they say, the “guide” of Soviet society, then we are interested to know how and through what mechanisms the consciousness of this part of the population changed.

3. Research Questions

In this study, we have tried to answer two fundamental questions: was the Soviet intelligentsia a target of “soft power”, and with the help of what mechanisms it became possible to change its attitude towards certain basic institutions of Soviet society.

4. Purpose of the Study

The paper is devoted to the analysis of the most important topics for Soviet society, presented in the most “intelligent” mass publication of the Soviet Union – the Ogoniok magazine – for 1989–1990, through the mechanism of “soft power”.

5. Research Methods

A huge amount of research has been devoted to the concept of “soft power”. The ability to achieve certain goals in politics depends on the ability to operate not only with methods using force but also with the voluntary consent of the target audience. In this context, the key role is played by the attractiveness of the value system of the power agent. From our point of view, the collapse of the Soviet Union was carried out precisely with the help of the above “soft” instruments which transformed the mind of the Soviet man through the mechanism of myth-construction. This happened, in many respects, due to the fact that the “opinion leaders” (intelligentsia, media, public activists, artists) were “captured” by Western ideology. At the same time, since they were influential figures in Soviet society, their opinion (in fact, the opinion of a minority) soon began to be shared by other Soviet citizens who initially did not have much sympathy for the Western social order. Therefore, the analysis of such a transformation of the social consciousness of the Soviet people is very important and significant from a scientific point of view.

As a material for the analysis (limited by the framework of this paper), the Ogoniok magazine, popular among the Soviet intelligentsia, has been chosen. It is of scientific and analytical interest for several reasons. Firstly, the magazine was a tribune for the “opinion leaders” of the Perestroika intelligentsia; such famous personalities as E. Yevtushenko, G. Arbatov, M. Zakharov, D. Sakharov and

others were published there. Secondly, the circulation of the magazine then amounted to more than 4.5 million copies of one issue (as of 1989), and with a relatively low subscription price of 20 rubles per year, it can be argued that the publication got into almost every apartment where people with higher education lived. education. Thus, based on the analysis of several important topics for Soviet society, presented on the pages of the aforementioned publication, we can show how the “soft power” of the West conquered the “minds” of the educated part of society in the USSR.

6. Findings

An important idea that captured a large number of minds among the intelligentsia was the concept of liquidating kolkhozes. A completely false message was methodically hammered into the mass consciousness of the people through the so-called “opinion leaders”: in the United States, private farmers constituting 2% of the population fully provide their country with food, while in the USSR, 40% of rural residents cannot even feed themselves (at the end 1980s, Soviet Union spent approximately \$ 1 billion on food imports). Thus, from the pages of the oppositional Ogoniok, Y. Chernichenko, popular during Perestroika, often criticized the kolkhoz system for its “inefficiency” associated with the inability to provide the country with food, for the “serfdom” prevailing in the countryside, which deprived rural workers of the motivation to work. The author advocated the immediate transfer of any state land to peasant families. “The main thing – as in the whole world – will be the peasant farms economy. Conscious and effective labor will increase the production of food not only without an increase of capital investments, but also with its decrease” (Chernichenko, 1989, p. 5). The people's deputy either did not know, or deliberately concealed from the reader the fact that the efficiency of farming in the West was connected not with “conscious and effective labor”, but directly with state investments. For example, in Japan, wheat production is covered by government subsidies by 97%, in the USA – by 44% (Kara-Murza, 2005, p. 372).

Together with the idea of liquidating kolkhozes, the “soft power” of the West actively imposed the opinion that it was necessary to reform the Soviet economy on the Soviet intelligentsia. The first step on the path of transition from a state economy to a market economy was made in 1988, when the so-called Law on Cooperatives was adopted, which allowed engaging in any kind of entrepreneurial activity not prohibited by law. Public opinion was gradually prepared for the idea that capitalist relations would better satisfy the country's basic needs than socialism with its administrative-command system could do. For example, a certain Shalaev (1990) in his article “Technology of Poverty” defends the cooperative movement, because, firstly, “in cooperatives, salaries are much higher than in the public sector” (p. 8), and secondly, cooperatives actively saturate the market with scarce goods, showing significant growth in turnover. The opinion that all the troubles were caused by overall state control on the basis of state property was imposed on a Soviet man. We have examined all issues of the aforementioned magazine for 1989–1990 and can conclude that the opinions of opponents of economic reforms were not actually reflected in the publications of Ogoniok.

Another idea that captured the Soviet intelligentsia is the idea of unilateral disarmament. Thus, a certain Doctor of Economics, Kireev (1989), referring to the data of the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, stated that the USSR spent up to 15% of its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) on

defense, while the military spending of the United States did not exceed 6.6% of its GDP, thus, the “militarization” of the Soviet Union was at least two times higher than that of its main geopolitical enemy. Based on these figures, the author says that the Soviet Union, ranking first in the world in terms of spending on the army, is only the 23rd in terms of socio-economic development. It is not difficult to guess what conclusion the reader comes to (or, more precisely, is led to): the army, with its excessive and unreasonable expenses, takes a significant part of the national income which, instead of unnecessary tanks and missiles, could benefit the real economy by saturating it with goods of everyday demand. Further, Kireev (1989) makes several “proposals” which, in his opinion, could help the country reduce the “burden” of defense spending. Firstly, it is necessary to halve the size of the Soviet armed forces, while simultaneously “improving their technical equipment and combat training”; to maintain “the largest in the world – 5 million – army in peacetime is completely impractical” (Kireev, 1989, p. 8). Secondly, as the author notes, “creating a professional army should be considered”, which would reduce the size of the armed forces and save the national economy from the need to “drive millions of workers to the parade ground”.

It is worth noting that the supporters of disarmament forgot several obvious things. Firstly, in the late 1980s, the geopolitical opponents of the USSR (NATO, Turkey, Japan, China) would not follow Moscow's example and in any way reduce the number of their own armed forces. The Soviet Union was surrounded by hundreds of military bases, and several American carrier groups with carrier-based aircraft on board were deployed off the coast of the country. Secondly, a number of countries had territorial claims to the USSR, proposing to conduct an “audit” of the results of the Second World War. Thirdly, Russia has historically always had an army recruited “from the people”. A similar principle of manning the armed forces in the late 1980s was typical not only for the Soviet Union, but also for many so-called capitalist states (Germany, Italy, Turkey, etc.). All these arguments were set out in sufficient detail by Akhromeev (1989) in the same Ogoniok. It is characteristic that S. Akhromeev's open letter was placed on the same page with clearly “anti-militarist” materials of the well-known journalist Borovik (1989) about the Afghan war, where there are, in particular, the following recollections of one Soviet conscript soldier: “6 months of service passed in this way. I became like everyone else: I closed the eyes of my fallen comrades. Smoked drugs. The sweet-sour smell of blood did not turn my insides anymore” and so on (p. 28).

7. Conclusion

The liquidation of the kolkhoz system, which was approved by the intelligentsia according to the prescriptions of the aforementioned Chernichenko, did not lead to the emergence of a large number of private farmers eventually. It is worth noting that, after the war, the West opted for the paths of the Soviet Union during Stalin's rule – made agriculture an object of state regulation and funding, where large agricultural holdings began to have a major role. Whereas “small farms” were only a specially supported and guarded showcase of the Western way of life, not playing a significant role in the total volume of agricultural products. As a result of reforms “in a Chernichenko way” in the 1990s and 2000s, millions of hectares of land were withdrawn from agricultural land. Thus, Russia has lost its food production security and is now completely dependent on imports of products from abroad.

Regarding the efficiency of the market economy in comparison with the planned one, the following figures are needed to be cited: in 1970, the USSR ranked second in the world in terms of the size of the economy with a share in world GDP of 12.8%; the world leader of those times – the USA – had 31%. At present, the United States is still the holder of gold, although it has somewhat lost ground, its share in world GDP has decreased to 25%. Silver, which was first held by the Soviet Union, then by Japan, went to China (which rose from 8th place in 1980 to second in 2000), and now “Celestial Empire” is rapidly “stepping on the toes” of the world leader, with a share of 15%. Although many researchers see the reason for the Chinese “miracle” in civilizational foundations (Li, 2020), we tend to believe that China's successes are largely due to the advantages of the socialist system. At the same time, the Russian economy during Perestroika, “wild” nineties and “Putin's two-thousands” fell from 2nd place in the world in 1970 and 4th in 1980 to 12th in 2017. Today, Russia is being overtaken even by such countries as Canada, a smaller state, with a population of 37 million (10th place) and South Korea (11th place). For the period 1990–2016 China's economy in real terms grew by 850%, Vietnam's economy – by 560%, India's economy – by 480%. Over the same 26 years, the Russian economy grew by only 12% compared to the 91st year. At the very end of 1991, immediately after the dismemberment of the Soviet Union, the economy of the Russian Federation accounted for approximately 4.2% of world GDP. In 2016, after a quarter of a century of Russia's confident movement along the path of market reforms, the Russian GDP was only 2% of the global one. Over the past 25 years, there has been a relative (in 1991, global GDP was about \$ 25 trillion, now it is 73 trillion) and an absolute – two times – reduction in the Russian share (The World Bank, 2021). And this is the objective result of reforms and the transition to a market economy.

Thus, as for the idea of disarmament, the Soviet public was rather indifferent (or even positive) to the news of the dissolution of the Warsaw Treaty Organization, as well as the withdrawal of the Western Group of Forces from Germany. At the time of B. N. Yeltsin, the strategic position of the country deteriorated: all troops were withdrawn from Eastern Europe, in addition, three former members of the Warsaw Treaty Organization – Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic – joined NATO. The bases of the block became closer to the Russian borders by almost 500 km. And the exclave Kaliningrad region was backed up from the south by Poland, NATO. To sum up, we can conclude that the ideas of disarmament, the transition to a market economy and the liquidation of kolkhozes, which encompassed the Soviet intelligentsia, when implemented, did not lead to economic prosperity and the establishment of friendly relations with neighboring countries. On the contrary: Russia has lost its food production independence, has moved backwards in terms of economic development by many positions and found itself in a circle of unfriendly states.

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