Soviet Society in the Era of Late Socialism, 1964–1985

Edited by
Neringa Klumbytė
and Gulnaz Sharafutdinova

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Chapter 2
A Middle Class without Capitalism?
Socialist Ideology and Post-Collectivist Discourse in the Late-Soviet Era
Anna Paretskyaya

In the years since the official end of the Soviet socialist project in 1991, both Russian elites and the Russian public have been wary of capitalism, democracy, and civil society, which were supposed to replace the Soviet party-state. However, it seems that everyone has embraced the idea of the middle class, a group that is usually seen as a precondition, an agent, or a product of capitalism, democracy, and civil society. Politicians from the “reformer” Boris Yeltsin to the “autocrat” Vladimir Putin have viewed the middle class as a cornerstone of the country’s future.¹ Both scholars and market research organizations frequently conduct studies of the group’s wealth, consumption preferences, and political attitudes, and the media publish the results and invite specialists to discuss them.² Over the years, the public has enthusiastically identified with this recently resurrected social group: already in the late Soviet period, over 40 percent of the respondents in one survey described themselves as middle class (Sovetskii prostoi 1993, 53), in 2003 the number was at 50 percent,³ and five years later, according to another study, “Some 80% of the population consider themselves to be middle class.”⁴

Interestingly, middle-class status is often measured not simply by occupation, income and wealth, or education, but by lifestyle choices and attitudes. For example, a 2006 study of the middle class in Moscow stipulated that to be even considered part of the group, prospective members must own at least five of the following items: a color TV, VCR, camcorder, two or more cars, camera, personal computer, electric drill, deep fryer, clock radio, and a second apartment or a summer house.⁵ Researchers who designed the survey did not explain how and why these particular items ended up on the list, but one can assume that it is not so much their price—an electric drill and a second home are obviously in differ-
ent price categories—that is significant, but rather a certain “middle-class lifestyle” that they create and that sets their owners apart from others. These consumer goods convey an image of the home-owning, technologically savvy, and easily mobile (for work or pleasure) middle-class households in the West. But at the same time, in the post-socialist context, they may signify their owners’ aspirations for individuality, autonomy, and self-reliance when it comes to entertainment, travel, household repairs, and work.

Surveys testify to such connections between the middle class and individualism and independence as well. Two-thirds of the members of the middle class, according to one study, lived by the old Russian saying that “everyone is a blacksmith of his own happiness” and believed they could determine their life goals and achieve them on their own. More than 50 percent of the middle class (as opposed to less than 30 percent among the general population) thought they were capable of providing for themselves and their families without any help from the state.6 And 60 percent declared they liked to “stick out” and were not afraid to find themselves in a minority by taking risks in their private or professional life.7 As one representative of this new class, now a stockbroker, summarized, “I was an employee, merely a hired worker. . . . Financially I’ve gained nothing so far. . . . What I’ve gained is independence and prospects. I wanted to be independent. . . . Now everything depends on me. . . . I’m starting life anew” (Semenova and Thompson 2004, 141). This view testifies to a sense of agency and, at least when there are no serious economic troubles, to a sense of optimism detected in many in-depth interviews with members of this class (Dilijanets 2002, 64–78). Surveys and interviews alike show that members of the Russian middle class tend to value personal freedom and prefer equality of opportunity over equality of income more than their lower-class compatriots (Novye izvestia May 29, 2008; Dilijanets 2002, 91).

Why is there such comfort with the concept of the middle class and these values so soon after the end of a regime that purportedly championed the primacy of the proletariat, collectivism, equality, and asceticism? Was no one listening? Or did the propaganda simply backfire? There is no doubt that the reappearance of the term “middle class” post-dates the death of the Soviet Union and that the rise of the group—both on paper and in reality—is a product of post-Soviet development. However, perhaps the term’s meaning for today’s Russians is rooted not so much in the political and economic reforms of the last 15–20 years, but originates in the pre-perestroika years, when the seeds of these values of individualism8 and middle-class lifestyles were sown by the party-state. Can we say that if socialism, as it was presented (although not necessarily practiced) by the Communist Party to the Soviet people, did not create a “real” or “paper” middle class, then at least it introduced and embedded in its subjects values other than workerism and collectivism? Did it begin to exercise symbolic power, “the power to make groups and to consecrate or institute them” (Bourdieu 1987, 14), on behalf of a group whose name would not even be mentioned until after the political death of the Party?

My analysis of Soviet newspapers and official speeches during late socialism reveals that alongside predictable rhetoric about fulfillment and overfulfillment of the five-year plans, the leading role of the working class under the guidance of the Communist Party, and the creation of the “New Soviet Man” and the “Radiant Future,” there was another discourse that promoted values of individuality, self-reliance, and privatism, which I call “post-collectivist values.” To be sure, this alternative discourse never mentioned a middle class and was framed in the customary terms of socialist ideology, but its contradictions with the conventional ideological language of communism are nonetheless obvious.

Why do I associate these values with the middle class? Are they intrinsic to the middle class anywhere and at any time? Of course not; what constitutes “middle class” and the values and lifestyles this group exhibits vary across space and time. For example, many studies of the nineteenth century American middle class stress the centrality of tolerance and egalitarian and collectivist values (Williams 1961). On the other hand, Bell ([1976]1996), Bellah et al. (1985), and Gans (1988) have suggested that central to identities and values of the post–World War II middle class in America were “individualism and achievement, privacy, familism, consumerism, and conventionality” (Archer and Blau 1993, 34).9 In the same manner, a “quasi-middle class” that existed during the earlier years of the USSR, particularly under Stalin, displayed and strived for values different from their post-Soviet counterparts: civilized personal conduct in public, proper hygiene, acquisitive but cultured consumerism, and general uniformity of behavior, cultural tastes, and consumption patterns (Dunham 1976; see also Fitzpatrick 1988b). I link self-reliance, individualism, and privatism to middle class, because the post-Soviet discourse does, as is evident from the surveys mentioned above.

I base my argument on a close analysis of the official Soviet press and the minutes of three Party Congresses (1971, 1976, 1981). I examined every issue of three major newspapers—Pravda, Trud, and Literaturnaia gazeta—between 1970 and 1986, and looked at random issues of Izvestiia, another major publication, from 1970 to 1980.10 I chose these papers because, on the one hand, they were nation-wide publications of the four major Soviet institutions—the Communist Party, the Council of Trade Unions, the Writers’ Union, and the Soviet parliament, respectively—and everything printed there (including items from citizen-correspondents and letters from readers) was sanctioned, if not directly commissioned, by the authorities. Therefore, nothing that contradicted the official point of view could appear in these pages. On the other hand, they had somewhat diverse audiences: while Pravda and Izvestiia did not target any specific segments of the population and, hence, published materials presumed to be of interest to all, Trud had a more working-class readership and paid more attention to their specific milieu. Literaturnaia gazeta was a weekly newspaper mostly for educated audience with contributions—articles, as well as poetry and works of fiction—from literati. However, despite these differences, all four papers printed stories, editorials, letters to the editor, and other items that in one
way or another reproduced the ideas of what I call "post-collectivist discourse," demonstrating its uncanny pervasiveness.

In this chapter I look at three areas of life where distinctions between social groups are formed and manifested: work, consumption, and leisure. In the area of work, this new discourse was promoting what can be called the professionalization of manual labor. In an era of accelerated technological revolution, the Soviet party-state began to encourage broad professional education for workers beyond the skills needed in their immediate jobs. Such education, in theory, would facilitate workers' autonomy in work-related decision making. The image of the worker-intellectual, often wearing a white coat on the shop floor and compared to a professor, doctor, or artist, replaced the image of a rugged proletarian in soiled overalls with permanent dirt under his nails but revolutionary ideas on his mind. Second, the austerity of life and personal sacrifice associated with the early Soviet years were sidetracked by the promise of abundant consumer goods now—not in some distant future. More important, the consumer goods promoted in the Soviet press were admired for the features that allowed their owners to set themselves apart from fellow citizens and to rely less on state-provided services and thus facilitate a certain post-collectivist lifestyle. Lastly, the new discourse endorsed new cultural tastes for the Soviet people, especially, again, among the workers. People were urged to create their own works of art in their free time but with near-professional commitment. These practices were promoted not only to broaden people's intellectual horizons, but also to encourage original and independent thinking, even a certain contempt for the establishment. In short, if we look closely, we can see a departure in pronouncements—if not actual policies—of the Soviet state from the collectivist and workerist ethos usually associated with socialism and the inauguration of values that today are represented by Russia's emerging and growing middle class.

**Professor-Pipefitter: Making Trades into Professions**

This new discourse most strikingly manifested itself through an attempt to remake manual labor into professional work and praised blue-collar workers for broad academic knowledge rather than technical skills, physical strength, or political consciousness. As one newspaper correspondent noted, "Today's working class differs greatly from the working class of the 1920s–1930s. Now, we see an educated, philosophically thinking worker. At times, I don't even know where a worker ends and an intelligent begins." As they became known and whose numbers were reportedly in the millions, brought "creative spirit, scientific approach, daring exploration" to their day-to-day work and were a living testament to the eradication of distinctions between physical and intellectual jobs.

Educational credentials and the type of knowledge each group used in their respective work were the most obvious distinctions between professionals and blue-collars. The Communist Party pressed workers to complete secondary education and pursue technical and college degrees, although without giving up their manual jobs. Younger workers faced special pressure to comply, and they were encouraged to continue their schooling by appeals to their political consciousness, but also by offers of tangible rewards such as passes to summer resorts, bonus pay, and extra vacation days. This was in stark contrast to previous eras. For instance, Nikita Khurshchev's 1958 education reform aimed at steering more people into working-class trades: all 15-year-olds, instead of finishing high school, were to enter the labor force for a minimum of two years, preferably in manufacturing. This arrangement sought "to reduce the inbuilt advantages enjoyed by children from professional families, and to encourage more young people to take up skilled manual trades, which the economy desperately needed" (Hosking, 1993, 354; emphasis added). In essence, intending to reduce inequalities, this reform was raising the prestige of the working class at the expense of everybody else, by forcing everyone to be a part of it—at least temporarily. Needless to say, this policy met considerable resistance and was never fully implemented. The need for an expanded labor pool in the manual professions, however, remained, as did the necessity to showcase the progress toward ever-growing equality. But General Secretary Leonid Brezhnev's administration employed the opposite tactics: in its rhetoric, and frequently in its policies, it elevated the blue-collar workers to the level of white-collar professionals. Newspapers and official speeches regularly mentioned the growing numbers of manual workers with secondary, and often more advanced, schooling. They meant to celebrate the USSR's achievements in education, but also to signal to workers that they, as a group, were gaining on the professionals in terms of the complexity, creativity, and importance of their work—even without necessarily moving up the occupational and social hierarchy. "Not all of us are engineers, but all study," wrote one foreman about his brigade.

But even those blue-collar workers who did not want to pursue education formally could choose to participate in the "schools of communist labor"—often referred to as "workers' academies"—set up at many factories. There, as part of the effort to professionalize their positions, the most capable workers were prodded to defend "worker dissertations." By the late 1970s and early 1980s, hundreds of them had gone through the process from Leningrad to Khabarovsk, from Berdiansk to Taganrog. Since, as Pravda pointed out on April 21, 1972, "The word 'dissertation' is from an academic vocabulary," to merit the title, the workers' theses had to satisfy certain requirements of complexity and sophistication. And they did, as newspaper reports testified: For example, when a Leningrad steelworker was presenting his dissertation in front of the committee, "It seemed everyone forgot he was a worker . . . [He] freely used scientific terminology, referred to diagrams . . . convincingly demonstrated the viability of his technical ideas. In front of us," the observer concluded, "was a worker-intellectual, worker-scientist."

This broad knowledge not only "expanded the intellectual horizon" of the worker, but it also allowed him to learn a second or third trade. Professional branching out was good not only for business, but for workers themselves: di-
verse skills allowed them to perform different tasks and to avoid “monotony, tedium, and the boredom of labor.”22 It also made workers more independent, putting them in charge of their own work routine and time-management. This was, according to newspapers, especially true—although somewhat paradoxical, perhaps—for conveyor-belt operators, whose work seemed to be entirely regulated by the production line. For instance, operations on an assembly line at the transistor radio factory in Riga, Latvia, were reorganized. While before the workers had performed only a handful of operations each, now each worked on the product from the beginning to end. As a result, a featured female worker, Svetlana, became “the mistress of the conveyor and hence her own mistress.” She regained independence from the assembly line and gained control of her own time (which she could use to get a haircut at the factory salon “at a time convenient for her”).23 For a manual worker, this break was probably the equivalent of a professor’s summer off from his teaching responsibilities.

Even if additional education did not yield formal degrees for workers or admission to scientific professional associations, official discourse nonetheless often likened at least some of them to scholars. Frequent were stories featuring “professors of fittery” and “professors of the assembly line” who possessed exemplary skills and knowledge albeit without any academic seal of approval.24 A good example is a poem in which a young fitter with failed college aspirations gets comforted by a kind old-timer who opens the young man’s eyes to the true value of their profession by equating it with rocket science:

Stand firm, my son!
To be a fitter is not that simple!
Here, knowledge
with skillfulness you must combine.
Technology advances!
It’s tough to keep up with its progress.
But, no, it
can’t do without fitters.
Look, in the sky
a rocket treads a virgin path
and spacecrafts glide in space.
But they, you know,
are also made from metal.
Which means
they were assembled
by the fitters.
And a fitter everywhere reaps respect
when he works from his heart, his soul.
You— are a Doctor here!
Professor of the metals—
in your hands
is the steel life of the machines.25

Besides drawing comparisons between manual and highly abstract, intellectual work, this poem, like many other newspaper publications, emphasized the individual’s professional self-worth, as opposed to his political consciousness as a member of the proletariat. “Reaping respect” and recognition for his knowledge and skill was, according to the poem, as important for the worker as actually building communism (in the form of spaceships, in this case). Likewise, an article in Trud about two highly skilled turners saluted them for “finding their place [in life] and making a wonderful career. Because the mastery they possess has brought them recognition, respect, [and] a realization of their self-worth.”26 Moreover, in a number of articles that appeared in the 1980s, “The Stakhanovites of the 1930s [were] presented as having been motivated by concerns for self-actualization” rather than driven to overfulfill the Plan by ideology or economic necessity. In other words, “Official statements have recognized that workers may find satisfaction in the ‘content of their work,’ irrespective of its contribution to societal development” (Shlapentokh 1986, 52). This stress on individual professional satisfaction and advancement was yet another signal that manual labor and the people who performed it were catching up with white-collar professionals, in whose line of work individual contribution was more evident and pride in personal achievement was more legitimate.

In addition to informal academic honorifics and symbolic comparisons with artists,27 Soviet manual workers made claims, with support from the press, for more tangible—although not necessarily material—rewards similar to those of the professionals they were being compared with. At the Party Congress in 1971, a grinder from Leningrad complained about a lack of “moral stimuli.” In particular, he was upset that many workers were not permitted to put a personal stamp on goods they made.28 Such a stamp, analogous to an artist’s signature on a painting, would not only indicate the worker’s mastery, but also mark his particular contribution to the overall product instead of it being lost in a collective effort. The grinder also proposed holding local and national competitions for workers, especially novices, in various trades: “We have young musician laureates—vocalists, violinists, pianists. Why not establish a contest for a turner laureate?” he posed under the audience’s applause.29 The Congress attendees were also enthusiastic about his other idea (which was, undoubtedly, dictated by the Party, just like his entire address): he suggested that, as “members of scientific and artistic intelligentsia, doctors and teachers” were bestowed official honorary titles and special prizes (the Honored Artist of the Soviet Union, Honored Scholar of Ukraine, etc.), it was now time to institute the same official honorifics for manual workers. “It would sound so great, ‘The Honored Worker of the Republic!’” he exclaimed.30 And sure enough, by the next Party Congress blue-collar workers with extraordinary achievements in their fields received a special medal, “The Labor Glory.”31 Moreover, the USSR State Prize, previously awarded only to professionals in arts and sciences, was also extended to workers who, in the words of a working-class Congress delegate, “considered it only appropriate.”32 Newspapers annually reported the names of the workers receiving the high honor and often profiled winners of the “professional mastery contests.” And again, they underscored that these challenges tested not only work-
ers’ manual skills, but also their broader competence. In short, workers were revered in a similar way and for similar skills and knowledge as were engineers, artists, and other professionals.

Newspapers also covered the presumed fading of probably the most acute and visible distinction between blue-collar workers and professionals, their working conditions. According to one report, workers at a Moscow electronics factory wore “sterile, spotlessly clean coats and snow-white caps,” a depiction that evoked in readers’ minds a laboratory or a hospital. Many facilities in different industries were also reportedly working to reduce industrial noise, a particular blue-collar problem: the transistor radio factory in Riga mentioned above built a “recreation room” with soft music, dim lights, and plush armchairs for its workers; and a Leningrad timber-cutting shop placed potted greenery on its factory floor to moderate noise and dust pollution. Even industrial machines were becoming more “cultured,” the press reported. The October 26, 1973, issue of Trud waxed poetic about the new lathes at one factory: “Their movements are now quicker, more precise, more intricate... They are attractive in their modern beauty of smooth concise lines, hidden inside impetuous force, matte white or multihued panes of facing.” Such tools were obviously “smarter” than old ones and made work of their operators less strenuous. But, more importantly, they were designed with much attention to their appearance, and their descriptions evoked a doctor’s scalpel, an architect’s compass, and possibly the most sophisticated and sleekest of all devices—a space rocket. Although Soviet blue-collars were still mainly doing physical work, at least their workplace was changing to approximate, as much as possible, white-collar offices and labs, which were clean and pleasantly lit, spolied comfortable office furniture and modern slick tools, and where the only sound audible was soothing music.

In a society of “developed socialism,” the party-state, for reasons of politics and economics, could not allow everyone to become a white-collar professional. But it had to demonstrate to its people that some tangible progress toward a classless, homogeneous social system was being made and that more and more of the barriers between social groups were being torn down. Still maintaining the notion of the working class as the “vanguard of society,” the Soviet press—indefatigably with the consent of the state and Party leadership—worked hard to prove that members of the Soviet working class did not need to actually move up into the ranks of the intelligentsia to perform equally intellectual, creative, and sophisticated labor in similarly comfortable working conditions, enjoy same symbolic rewards, and be honored and respected in comparable ways. Yet, by likening the blue-collar workers to Soviet professionals, the “scientific and artistic intelligentsia,” public discourse under Brezhnev signaled to the Soviet workers that professions were more desirable than trades, that white-collars with their creative independence were superior to manual workers, and that the future of socialism lay in the professionalization, individual or collective, of all labor.

To Make Consumers Happy: Marketing Post-Collectivist Lifestyles

The 1970s also saw a shift in priorities, as a consumer-oriented discourse supplanted revolutionary asceticism and sacrifice. At the Party Congress in 1971, General Secretary Brezhnev declared that Soviet citizens no longer would have to sacrifice their material comfort and that comrades who failed to recognize this shift did not understand the Party’s current agenda (Materialy, 51–52). Prime Minister Alexei Kosygin described the Party’s new course even more forcefully: “For the first time in history, socialism is turning the wealth of the society into the wealth of its every member,” signaling an audacious turn in priorities away from austerity and the primacy of collective interests over personal desires; now the state would work for the benefit of men, rather than men working for the benefit of the state.

Indeed, the state’s interests were sacrificed at least on one occasion during the following Five-Year Plan (piatiletka). In 1975, after several years of poor grain crops, the government imported 30 million tons of grain—wheat, corn, soybeans, and so on—from abroad, worth a total of nearly $5 billion. A November 1975 letter from Kosygin to the CPSU’s Central Committee detailing the sources of hard currency to finance these purchases recommended that the Party (partially) forego buying Western industrial equipment, accelerate exports of natural resources (such as copper, aluminum, nickel, oil, gasoline, and diesel fuel) instead of stockpiling them in the national reserves, and borrow hard currency from foreign banks at a 10–12 percent annual interest rate. The letter predicted that the first two measures would slow down industrial output necessitating “austere economizing” in industrial production, while the last one would place the country “into a severe dependency on the capitalist financial market.” Nonetheless, Kosygin was willing to recommend them to the Central Committee; the time of “belt tightening” and food rationing had passed.

While this rhetoric somewhat dissipated at the 1976 Party Congress (Breuslauer 1977; Grossman 1977), it did not mean that the leadership abandoned—or even lessened—its dedication to people’s well-being. If indeed financial commitment to the production of consumer goods decreased, the party re-oriented its discourse to the quality of consumption, both in terms of the quality (rather than sheer quantity) of goods produced and of satisfying consumer demand, rather than producing to meet the Plan. In his report to the 1976 Congress, Brezhnev stressed the need to improve quality and expand the inventory of manufactured merchandise: if consumer demand was not yet satisfied, “The problem was not with the amount, but rather the lack of high-quality, fashionable products.” Even in their internal communications, where, presumably, there was no need to feign concern, the Party’s Central Committee and its Secretariat upheld this position. Since, in its own view, people judged the Party’s performance based on how it handled consumer issues, the Secretariat of June 11, 1979, sent to the heads of republican and regional Party organizations, stipulated:
The Central Committee once again underscores the topmost significance of an all-out increase of consumer goods output, unequivocal compliance with the set goals of their production and improvements of their quality... These issues at all times ought to be in the center of attention of all Party organizations because satisfying consumer demand is one of the most crucial economic and socio-political tasks [of the Party].

Catering to consumers’ ever-rising expectations regarding the quality and range of products had safely risen to the level of a political and economic priority in the first socialist state.

Attention to consumption was not new in late socialism. In the 1930s, consumption was envisioned as a part of a “civilizing process” to convert Soviet workers, especially newcomers to the class, into cultured builders of communism who, at the same time, could—at least in theory—indulge in the consumption of luxury goods (such as champagne, chocolate, and caviar) previously available only to nobility and bourgeoisie (Hessler 2000; Volkov 2000; Gronow 2003). In the 1940s and early 1950s, Stalin’s policies rewarded middle managers of the Soviet state with expanded consumption options that installed middle-class, or rather petty-bourgeois, values in their clients (Dunham 1976). Khrushchev’s administration used consumption “to renew and maintain its popular legitimacy [especially among women] without surrendering its exclusive hold on power” (Reid 2002, 221). But under Brezhnev, the discourse around consumption was elevating the values of individuality, self-reliance, and privacy—attitudes that are usually associated with consumption outside of state socialist societies. In short, it undercut the main tenet of socialism—its collectivist spirit.

It was not so much the goods themselves that mattered, but the lifestyles they represented and how they would change the lives of people and society and what lifestyles they encouraged. If household durables and means of individual transportation would supposedly save time and energy that people could instead apply to collective endeavors, it remained unclear how fashionable and often custom-made clothes, stylishly decorated apartments, and high-tech sound- and video-recording and reproducing devices would necessarily contribute to the advancement of a collectivist spirit and socialist values. Instead, this rhetoric fostered “a new ethos [of]... the pleasure of purchasing goods, including new gadgets, the placing of personal interests at the center of one’s private life and the acquisition of as much money as possible to satisfy the new wants” (Hirschowitz 1980, 116–17).

The early 1970s brought about a new type of a grocery store—the universam. Universams, which first opened in new residential neighborhoods in Moscow, were different from more traditional shops in two respects. First, they were to carry and sell a wide variety (univer, universal) of foodstuffs, as opposed to specialized stores selling just dairy, meat and fish, or produce. More importantly, in these stores, customers were to help themselves (sam, self-service) to prepackaged products displayed in the open. Both innovations were to reduce the time consumers spent on acquiring food items: the former minimized the number of stops the shopper had to make to buy all the ingredient she needed to prepare meals, and the latter reduced the time she had to spend in the store. Newspapers unanimously hailed universams for this time-saving quality, but also for the greater control customers gained over the process of shopping: “Ordinary shoppers have become active participants of the buying-selling process because most store counters that for centuries were an insurmountable barrier for consumers have now disappeared,” as Trud summarized ten years later. If there were any complaints about this new shopping experience (in addition to ordinary grievances regarding shortages and the poor quality of some goods), they usually were about the staff at universams who attempted to regain control over shoppers: customers—both newspaper journalists in their articles and readers in their letters—grumbled about having to check their bags when entering the store and being subjected to searches when leaving it. Even though shop clerks were not necessarily viewed as agents of the state, the introduction of the new type of store and its generally positive depiction in the press reinforced for readers the value of autonomy and self-reliance when making their consumer choices and, perhaps, a more general opposition to a supervised communal existence.

The new Soviet consumption discourse encouraged a retreat from collective life into private life more directly as well. Many of the products publicized by the media—especially home appliances and gadgets—not only helped to conserve time, but they reduced the need to rely on communal services by making “private space” more usable, comfortable, and desirable. In 1973, Pravda and Trud each ran news items that featured, respectively, a new model of a refrigerator with a built-in bar and an electric fireplace with a similar feature. In the midst of an anti-alcoholism campaign, these products were praised for creating a cozy atmosphere at home, where residents could consume endless chilled drinks by the fireplace “with the flickering flame of simulated coal framed by imitation brick.” Similarly, the proliferation of television sets, transistor radios, reel-to-reel tape players and recorders—typically the most frequently and most proudly advertised gadgets—privatized leisure by allowing people to enjoy various kinds of entertainment in their own home, rather than in movie theaters, concert halls, or sports arenas. The Soviet press was especially enthusiastic about portable devices, such as small color televisions, battery-powered tape-recorders, and mini-fridges powered by a car battery. Not only could Soviet citizens evade, with the help of this equipment, leisure activities regimented by the state and escape into the relative privacy of their own home, but they also could, if they wanted, create their own entertainment and carry it far away from, if not the authorities, then their noisy neighbors.

Furthermore, the official rhetoric was mixed on how the time saved with the help of the new consumer products and services was to be spent. On one hand, once liberated from household chores, the Soviet people were expected to use their new-found free time on socially meaningful endeavors: civic and political engagement, improving their professional qualifications and labor productivity, and collective educational leisure. On the other, Soviet newspapers often elevated, if not outright glorified, the most primordial and unproductive form of
comfort of Soviet family cars. An article in Pravda, reporting on an experimental model of Moskvich, the second-most popular Soviet family car, began its description by noting the prototype's golden color, which its creators dubbed "Stradivari." In a country where car models had numbers rather than names and most of them came in primary colors, a rare shade with a foreign name that evoked the sophistication of classical music must have seemed extremely desirable even to journalists at the Communist Party mouthpiece.

The media's ongoing promotion of fashionable clothes, smart-looking appliances, funky furniture, and uniquely painted cars was supposed to demonstrate to audiences the extraordinary achievements of the Soviet way of life and, in particular, the much improved standard of living of the Soviet people who now could afford "quality goods" that would satisfy any customer's demands. In other words, the notion of "the average consumer" was no longer acceptable. Rather than breeding the New Soviet Man, this new discourse around consumption gave birth to a tenacious consumer and once again reinforced postcollectivist values: independence and self-reliance as opposed to submission to societal supervision; withdrawal into the private sphere versus commitment and contribution to collective living and interests; individualism rather than blending in with the rest of society. Similar to some other historical contexts, mass marketing in the Soviet Union, however embryonic, did not lead to the "homogenization of . . . lifestyle . . . [but] encouraged experimentation with identity and an ideal of individualism" (Young 1999, 66).

The Soviet Renaissance Man:
A Do-It-Yourself Cultural Snob

The Soviet party-state was nurturing its people to be not only educated producers and savvy consumers, but also active creators and avid admirers of artistic creations made by others. Just as broad professional knowledge—for both workers and the intelligentsia—was saluted and propagated, so was the notion that a more wide-ranging erudition was beneficial for personal growth and success outside of work. Soviet people were supposed to become well-versed in the social sciences, civics, and current affairs—which were to raise their political consciousness—but also in the natural sciences and arts. The general education and acculturation of the people had been the Party's pet project since the Revolution, but in post-Stalinist times, especially in the 1970s and early 1980s, it took a different direction. In the early Soviet years, the two main goals were the eradication of illiteracy and the creation of a new, distinct proletarian culture. Under Stalin, universal literacy was attained, but the project of the proletarian culture was abandoned. Instead, the focus shifted to across-the-board kul'turnost' and "the elimination of egoism and the championing of collectivism over individuality" (Hoffmann 2003, 16). Others goals of Stalin's cultural policies included promoting social—class and ethnic—unity and sustaining the regime's legitimacy, which was done, in part, through the inauguration of Socialist Realism and the reintroduction of selected pre-revolutionary works of art instead of the
vant-garde style dominant during the previous decade (Hoffmann 2003, 159–75). Some forty years later, official Party rhetoric pushed Soviet people, especially but not only of working-class backgrounds, to develop knowledge in the arts and sciences that would cultivate original and independent thinking and even a certain disdain for the authority of cultural and scientific elites.

In 1959, amid the USSR’s achievements in space exploration and nuclear and hydrogen energy, Boris Slutskii, a well-known poet, published a short poem (a mere 20 lines) titled “Physicists and Lyricists” where he wistfully observed that the former were now held in high esteem whereas the latter—not so much. He blamed the poets themselves for uninspired writing and all but ceded the hegemony to “the logarithms” (Biblioteka 1965, 13–14). His phrasing clearly struck a chord as it grew wildly popular and for years to come became an aphorism for Soviet society’s dilemma: who were more indispensable, technocrats or humanists, and, more broadly, should the Soviet people be highly competent but “narrow” specialists or well-rounded individuals with wide-ranging knowledge? While often-heated discussions of the topic appeared in newspapers for decades, the official public discourse ultimately came down on the side of broad knowledge. Various state, party, industrial, and cultural bureaucrats, as well as journalists themselves, concluded that for all strata of society, but especially for the working class, having diverse interests when it came to cultural pursuits was preferable.

As with their professional training, workers (but others as well) were prodded to pursue a variety of interests for leisure. Usually, of course, the main reason for engagement in diverse leisure activities was that, as one factory manager (a “physicist”) summarized, a learned worker “gives more to [his] factory, to our [entire] society than the one who is limited by narrow professional interests.” But there was a less ideological and dogmatic reason as well. As with consumption, individual cultural attainment had less to do with the benefits for society than with the advantages it created for individual success. Responding to a query from a welder who questioned whether it was necessary and realistic to be erudite in a time of narrow professional specialization, prominent writer and critic Viktor Shklovskii (a “lyricist”) insisted that it was impossible and unavoidable not to be well-educated in the rapidly changing world where broad knowledge served as a roadmap. “If you don’t know it inside out, aren’t capable of exploration, you cannot choose [and] determine your destiny, your life. You are blind,” the writer concluded. Such a response, didactic as it was, encouraged individuals, specifically Trud’s working-class readers, to be in charge of their own fate, present and future, rather than rely on somebody else, including the powers-that-be. Individualism and self-reliance, rather than dependence on community and its organizations (whether one’s work collective or the party-state), seemed to be the skills necessary in the modern Soviet, not just Western and capitalist, milieu.

Another eminent “lyricist,” a playwright and a State Prize Laureate, made a similar statement, only he spoke of the impact of culture not as something hypothetical, but as already happening. According to him, the Soviet people had be-
throw. Teague (1988) also suggests that during the Brezhnev era the Soviet Communist Party grew less certain about its legitimacy—even in the absence of widespread organized discontent—especially after the rise of the Solidarity trade union movement in Poland. Lastly, perhaps the shift was a consequence of the Party’s cynical attempt to co-opt the working class by convincing them that they led a middle-class life or by emphasizing socialism’s continued superiority over the West (Brown 2007; Kotkin 2001). On the other hand, perhaps this discourse of post-collectivism was a logical, if not necessarily inevitable, result of Enlightenment-rooted modernity, of which the Soviet Union was a part (Kotkin 1995; Yurchak 2006), and that is why it partially resembles the discourse of post-Fordism and post-materialism in the West (cf. Boltanski and Chiappello 2005; Inglehart and Welzel 2005).

As for the empirical outcomes and theoretical implications of this post-collectivist discourse, I discuss many of them elsewhere (Paretskaya 2010, 394–98). Here I want to stress that my analysis challenges those, such as Eyal et al. (1998) most recently, who argue that state socialism was not and could not be a class society. They conceptualize Soviet-style socialism as a society based on rank order where social capital—institutionalized as political capital—was the major source of distinction, power, and privilege. Such representation divides the society into party and state elites—those who have access to social capital—and the rest, who don’t (or patrons and clients, as they put it). Class-based stratification emerges, according to them, only with the transition to post-socialism, which is “a historically unique system of stratification in which cultural capital is dominant.” (Capitalism, in their view, is a class system where economic capital is dominant.) I believe that my story demonstrates that the ascendance of cultural capital as a source of distinction began years before the fall of socialism. The three areas that I have described—work, consumption, and leisure—correspond though imperfectly to three ‘subspecies of cultural capital: an embodied disposition that expressed itself in tastes and practices [consumption], formal certification by educational institutions of skills and knowledge (an institutional form, [work]), and possession of esteemed cultural goods (an objectified form [leisure])” (Sullaz and Zavisca 2007, 23–24).

This chapter has also tried to show that the attitudes of today’s middle class in Russia originated in the old regime and at the instigation of the Party itself, which through its rhetoric gave this nascent group identity and, possibly, mobilization (Swartz 1997, 45). How well this discourse “took,” whether and how this middle class in discourse became a class on paper and in reality, is an empirical question for a different study (Paretskaya, n.d.), but there is some evidence already (as some of the other essays in this volume demonstrate) that people did respond to the Party’s encouragements to work toward self-cultivation, independent thinking, and autonomous action. Desire for better and more satisfying jobs; for bespoke clothing and attractive consumer goods that facilitated individuality and a certain freedom from society; for more and more varied knowledge, if not necessarily brought down the Soviet Union in a ferocious

Conclusion

What can explain the shift in the Communist Party’s discourse toward post-collectivism? While my interests are not so much in the origins, as in the consequences of this transformation, I can suggest a few possible explanations. First, the Iron Curtain was not rock-solid, and information about the lives of people in the West and in other socialist countries invariably made its way into the Soviet Union (Bushnell 1980; Lapidus 1987). Secondly, as Bunce (1980) explains, Communist leaders paid more attention to rising standards of living—professional growth and social mobility, as well as expanded choices for material consumption and leisure—in the aftermath of political succession crises that often created uncertainty and potential for mass unrest. Therefore, it is no surprise that the rhetoric of the primacy of individual needs over the economic and ideological exigency of the state emerged soon after Khrushchev’s over-
popular uprising, then at least slowly eroded the legitimacy of a regime that would not allow—or was unable to deliver—what was portrayed and promised as a good, almost middle-class, existence, one quite different from the more orthodox "Soviet way of life."

Notes

1. In 1998, then-President Boris Yeltsin asserted that Russian middle class "is the most reliable foundation for the country's stability, its best guarantee against revolutionary turmoil." See Kommersant-Daily (February 28, 1998). This view was echoed by economist Evgenii Iasins who said, commenting on the results of a 2006 study of the Moscow middle class, "The more Russians can be called middle-class, the more stable our country will be." See Komsomol'skaya pravda (June 27, 2006). Yeltsin's successor, Vladimir Putin, and "the leaders of [his] United Russia Party consistently speak of the middle class as a force for stability in society and as their natural constituency" (Remington 2010, 19).


3. Izvestia (November 12, 2003).

4. Remington 2010, 2. The actual size of the group, according to social scientists, is a lot smaller. For an informative overview of different ways to measure the middle class see Remington 2010. Almost all major survey centers in Russia have conducted studies of the middle class in the past decade or so. Many of them can be found in an online database EAESD/ESDATA. I am well aware of the problematic nature of many opinion polls conducted in Russia (flawed sampling, unaccountable interviewers, reliance of some polling organizations on state funding). However, I use these studies not for hard data, but to demonstrate patterns and trends in discourse, among both the public and professional researchers.

5. Komsomol'skaya pravda (June 27, 2006).


7. Komsomol'skaya pravda (June 27, 2006); Izvestia (January 13, 2006).

8. Pierre Bourdieu claims, "Classes do not exist ... what exists is a social space, a space of differences, in which classes exist in some sense in a state of virtuality, not as something given but as something to be done" (1998, 12; emphasis in the original). As a result, he distinguishes between "classes on paper" and "real classes," the former—"fictitious regroupings"—drawn up by social scientists, often arbitrarily, while the latter are "real groups that are constituted as such in reality" (1998, 10). "Classes on paper" can become "real classes" "only if there is symbolic and political work to give them actual identity and mobilization" (Swartz 1997, 45) "as a result of the struggle of classifications which is a properly symbolic ... struggle" (Bourdieu 1998, 11; emphasis in the original).

9. "The broad distinction between individualism and collectivism continues to be a central theme in ... research on cross-cultural differences. [Individualism is often] defined as a focus on rights above duties, a concern for oneself and one's immediate family, an emphasis on personal autonomy and self-fulfillment, and basing identity on one's personal accomplishments" (Inglehart and Welzel 2005, 135).

10. The post-war West German Chancellor Ludwig Erhard described the middle class in very similar terms: "people whose qualitative characteristics are a feeling of self-worth, independence of view, self-reliance, social resilience, daring to make their exist-

ence dependent on the results of their own labor, and with the desire to assert themselves in a free society and free world" (quoted in Remington 2010, 17).

11. My methodology is hermeneutics more than content analysis. My purpose was not so much to examine how frequently certain concepts appeared in Soviet press, but to uncover their embedded meanings. Because of the constraints of space, I reference only a small selection of data here.

12. If this post-collectivist discourse seems to have mostly targeted manual workers, it is probably because they were the biggest social group in the country. According to official numbers, in the 1970s the working class was estimated to be 57–64 percent of the urban population, while white-collar professionals comprised 32–39 percent (Shkaratan and Rukavishnikov 1974, 41); or 60 percent and 19 percent, respectively, of the entire population (Pikhoia and Sokolov 2008, 55).

13. An ideal-type model of professionalism consists of five elements: "(1) specialized work ... grounded in a body of theoretically based, discretionary knowledge and skill and ... given a special status in the labor force; (2) exclusive jurisdiction ... controlled by occupational negotiation; (3) a sheltered position ... based on qualifying credentials created by the occupation; (4) a formal training program ... which is ... associated with higher education; and (5) an ideology that asserts greater commitment to doing good work than to economic gain" (Freidson 2001, 127).


15. I translate rabochii-intellectual as worker-intellectual even though "intellectual" in Russian does not have quite the same connotation as intelligent.


18. Even during the Brezhnev years, professionals were often called on to perform manual jobs—harvesting, spring cleaning of their work places, fixing and cleaning playgrounds and public parks, and so on—but those were "voluntary," short-term, and sporadic.


29. Archives, film #2.537, f. 582, op. 1, d. 12, 1. 15.

30. Archives, film #2.537, f. 582, op. 1, d. 12, 1. 15.

31. This medal, established in the year of the 30th anniversary of the victory in World War II was analogous to "The War Glory," a decoration given to many participants of the war.

32. Archives, film #2.573, f. 604, op. 1, d. 5, 1. 12.

35. Archives, film #2.537, f. 582, op. 1, d. 11, l. 71.
36. Volkogonov Collection, reel #18, box 27, folder 10.
37. Archives, film #2.573, f. 604, op. 1, d. 1, l. 92.
38. Archives, film #2.577, f. 620, op. 1, d. 2, f. 1.66.
39. Fond 89, film #1.1000, op. 32, d. 4, f. 1.
40. In older shops she usually had to queue at least three times: to have her purchase weighed at the counter, to pay for it to a cashier, and finally to exchange her payment receipt for her purchase back at the counter. Often the cycle would repeat if the products she needed were sold at different counters in the same store.
41. Trud (May 22, 1977): 1; Trud (October 20, 1979): 4. This is contrary to Verdigy's (1992) analysis of the "eulogization of time," which suggests that state-socialist regimes were seizing time from their subjects—often by purposefully creating consumer queues, among other things—in order to minimize the amount of free time citizens could spend, outside of direct control of the state, socializing with friends and family or making money in the "second economy."
42. Trud (September 24, 1980): 2; see also Trud (July 1, 1973): 3.
47. As Volkov argues, privacy cultivated in 1930s "was connected with political self-education and the cultivation of Bolshevik consciousness.... But whatever the initial purposes of regime-approved privacy, its further development was more and more likely to escape direct control" (2000, 228).
56. Zukin and Maguire observe, "Media advertisements... are extremely important in socializing people to be consumers even before the goods are widely available" (2004, 190). Even though the Soviet press's promotion of goods was not exactly advertising, in the absence of a marketing industry it played a similar role.
57. On the Bolsheviks' early attempts to craft a proletarian culture—and the proletariat as a class—their ambiguities, and outcomes, see Fitzpatrick (1988a).
61. Literaturnaia gazeta (June 1, 1970): 3.
71. Eyal et al. (1998, 7). In this view, cultural capital and differences in cultural dispositions did matter in socialism, but only among socialist elites distinguishing bureaucrats from technocrats and humanistic reform intelligentsia (Konrad and Szelenyi 1979). Different coalitions of socialist elites, which were a result of intra-class struggles, explain the divergent paths of post-socialist countries in Europe and Eurasia. See, for example, Eyal et al. (1998); Eyal (2000, 2003); King (2002); King and Szelenyi (2004, chapters 4–6).

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Chapter 3

“Cultural Wars” in the Closed City of Soviet Ukraine, 1959–1982

Sergei I. Zhuk

In January 1969, A. Vatchenko, the first secretary of the regional committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) in Dniepropetrovsk, explained to Komsomol activists that the main essence of socialist cultural consumption was the ability of young Soviet consumers to give a “correct class evaluation of the pieces of bourgeois arts and music and avoid non-critical attitudes toward a eulogy of the capitalist way of life.” He emphasized that a Marxist ideological approach would help residents of Dniepropetrovsk to make good choices in their cultural consumption. In contrast to the Western degenerate culture, Vatchenko noted, Komsomol members had to promote the best forms of their own socialist national culture. They should use the most progressive patterns of their Ukrainian culture in the struggle against Western influences.¹ In April 1970, Z. Soumina, a representative of the city administration in Dniepropetrovsk, elaborated this theme further:

We are not against consumption. But this should be a cultured consumption. Take a look at our city offices of music recording and what our youth is consuming there as “music.” They are recording the tapes with songs of Vysotsky, music by the Beatles (bitlova). Where is the real cultural consumption here? You can’t see that our young people are recording classical music by Tchaikovsky or Glinka. They still prefer the dances with their boogie-woogie to the concerts of classical music. In their search for the recordings of their Western idols, young people forget their national roots, their own national culture.²

The Soviet apparatchiks, party workers who experienced first-hand the real problems of consumerism in the post-Stalinist society, tried to draw a line between cultural (good) and non-cultural (bad) forms of consumption. The most serious problem for the Soviet ideologists was to sort out such forms of consumption and protect socialist national culture from “ideological pollution of cosmopolitan bourgeois influences.” Soviet ideologists clearly understood the