

SOVIET PUBLIC OPINION AND THE EFFECTIVENESS  
OF PARTY IDEOLOGICAL WORK

by

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Comprehensive and centralized control of the means of communication has been a hallmark of Soviet party rule since early in the existence of the regime.<sup>1</sup> The party's monopoly over what a Soviet writer has called "the ideological process" covers the elaboration of theory, guidance of culture, and political education and communication.<sup>2</sup> The latter functions are performed by a dense and differentiated network of oral, print, and broadcast media, all under the immediate direction of territorial party committees situated in each administrative jurisdiction of the country. Through them, the leadership endeavors to shape popular consciousness and to prevent the dissemination of facts or ideas antithetical to the regime's doctrinally-based legitimacy.

As the volume of party-guided communications has grown, the party has expanded and refined its repertoire of controls without substantially enlarging the size of the full-time apparatus charged with oversight of the ideological process. This has been accomplished by combining direct with indirect controls. Following tradition, we may classify the lines of direct control as either "vertical," i.e. those subordinating a particular party committee to the committee at the territorial level superior to it in the hierarchy, or "horizontal," referring to the control exerted by a territorial party committee over the government and other organizations located in its jurisdiction.<sup>3</sup> An example of vertical control is the power exercised by the agitation/propaganda department of a provincial party committee

(obkom) over the equivalent department of a district party committee (raikom). The second type of control is illustrated by the authority of the same obkom department over the editorial board of the provincial newspaper. From the standpoint of the party's success in maintaining political control over communications, it is notable that no one party committee must exercise direct control over an impossibly broad range of communications channels: the span of control at each level is kept manageable through extensive delegation of power to unpaid activists, who serve as agitators, propagandists, political information specialists, lecturers, and so on (see below), as well as by a variety of levers over the careers of those who serve as communicators by occupation.

Simply maintaining political control over the ideological process is not considered an end in itself. While the party's structures of control generally suffice to preserve ideological coherence in the presentation of facts and ideas, with only occasional lapses,<sup>4</sup> the final goal of the communications system is to shape public consciousness. The success of the system in meeting this larger objective, particularly in the politically demobilized and bureaucratically rigid period since the late 1960's, is much less clear. It is this question that we shall examine here on the basis of recent published Soviet research on the subject.

## Formal Organization

Let us begin by briefly reviewing the formal structure of party control over communications. At any given administrative level, the organization of communications can be viewed as a set of spokes radiating from a hub made up of full-time staff officials employed in the agitation/propaganda departments of the more than 4500 territorial party committees. Each such department falls under the supervision of the corresponding department at the next level, and all are directed by the Propaganda Department of the Central Committee in Moscow. The agitation/propaganda departments oversee all aspects of political communication and socialization in their jurisdictions. There are, however, relatively few full-time employees in the agit/prop departments. For example, the agit/prop department of a rural district committee (raikom) will typically employ a department head, a deputy department head, and two or three staff officials called instructors; the instructors maintain liaison with the activists in the primary party organizations and perform the bulk of the record-keeping and report-writing duties for the department. A city party committee might have seven or eight full-time officials in its agitation/propaganda department. I estimate, from the fragmentary figures which are published, that nation-wide some 26,000 or 27,000 apparatchiki are employed in the ideological sphere, or perhaps 12 to 16% of the apparat of the party.<sup>5</sup>

The full-time ideological officials are assisted by a corps of non-staff, or volunteer, instructors. The non-staff

instructors are treated as a first line of reserves, appointed and supervised by the regular staff. Files are kept on them, they attend party schools, and they are the primary pool of candidates for staff positions when a vacancy opens. Maintaining these back-up cadres not only allows the party to demonstrate its representative and participatory character, but also, and more practically, it compensates for restrictions on the personnel budget. There may be one such non-staff instructor for every three to four regular staff officials, but this is the roughest of estimates.

Under the direct supervision of each territorial party committee are a variety of media organizations, such as newspapers, radio and television studios, and publishing houses. Party control over the media is facilitated by the censorship system, but full-time party officials themselves spend a considerable part of their time in contact with media personnel, giving briefings and discussing editorial plans. Editors also receive direction from party officials in charge of other branches, such as industry and agriculture, in addition to the ties they maintain with the ideological officials. The span of direct horizontal control is kept relatively small by virtue of the fact that editorial officials deal almost exclusively with the party committee proper to their own jurisdiction: union-republican party officials, for example, oversee union-republican media organizations and guide the provincial party organizations on how to deal with the governmental media. Except at the central (All-Union) level, where an estimated fifty-odd full-time officials of

the Propaganda Department must cope with the roughly thirty central newspapers, most of the country's publishing houses, and the central radio and television studios, most party committees do not have immediate responsibility for more than a dozen media organizations.

The largest component of the ideological process comprises the work of millions of party and non-party activists (collectively called the "ideological aktiv") who perform the work of agitation, political-information, political and economic education (i.e., propaganda), lectures, and reports. Common to all these forms is their reliance on direct interaction with live audiences. Agitators mobilize support for close-at-hand tasks, such as raising productivity or voting in elections to the soviets. Lecturers and reporters present authoritative reviews of current knowledge on political or scientific topics. Political information specialists give briefings on current affairs. Propagandists teach classes in the adult political education system.<sup>6</sup> By winning the trust of their audiences, by responding in a convincing and informed way to their questions, the oral communicators are expected to serve as the crucial link between regime and society, the primary source of opinion and information for all groups of the population. The party operates on the assumption that there is never an ideological vacuum: the weakening of socialist ideology leads to the strengthening of an alien doctrine.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, the Handbook of the Party Group Leader writes in its 1979 edition, communists must try to influence public opinion in the collective, using personal

contacts to explain party policy to the masses. They must seize the initiative in conversations so that attitudes of indifference, parochialism, and passivity do not take hold.<sup>8</sup>

The role designated for the activists resembles the part played by the "opinion leaders" identified in the 1940s and 1950s in American models of social influence.<sup>9</sup> The opinion leaders were those who drew opinions most widely from the mass media, and in turn influenced the opinion of others with whom they came into contact. As Alex Inkeles stressed in his study of political persuasion in the Stalin era, the effectiveness of political indoctrination depended on the party's success in making its activists into actual opinion leaders among the rank and file members of society.<sup>10</sup>

The division of labor in ideological work between party activists and mass media has persisted since before the Bolshevik Revolution, as have the functional distinctions among agitation, propaganda, and information. In addition, since early in the regime's existence, when the establishment of centralized political control over communication eliminated independent institutions for aggregating public opinion, it has been necessary for the party to devise means of monitoring the questions, ideas, and complaints of the populace. Letters and visits to newspapers, offices, and the comments made in oral settings, have long been used as forms of feedback by which to gauge the effectiveness of ideological work.<sup>11</sup> However, these are not fully trustworthy guides to the state of public opinion. Spontaneously initiated contacts often concern parochial and quotidian interests, safe subjects for articulation.<sup>12</sup>

Accordingly, the party in recent years has employed more systematic methods for studying public opinion, particularly survey research. The growth of empirical sociology since the 1960s has been uneven, but it is fair to say that the Soviet Union is currently undergoing a boom; it is estimated that a half-million citizens are surveyed each year on some matter or other.<sup>13</sup> In 1980 it was reported that there are at least 400 sociological units working under the auspices of party committees or other organizations throughout the country.<sup>14</sup> One of the principal tasks of the surveyers has been to assess the effectiveness of ideological work. In pursuit of answers, the researchers have investigated a range of related issues: how well-informed Soviet citizens are about current affairs and points of doctrine; the sources from which individuals obtain information about various topics; the sources of influence on public opinion; and the correlation between political activism and doctrinal knowledge or conviction.

Several Western studies have now reviewed parts of this literature.<sup>15</sup> A debate has arisen over the degree to which published Soviet research--as opposed to say, surveys of emigres--can be assumed to depict Soviet public opinion reliably. While it is undeniable that the methodological sophistication of such studies has grown, several weaknesses both in their design and in their reporting remain. Almost no national surveys have been conducted, and controlling for the effects of regional, ethnic, economic or other variables on the results is not possible. Frequently the reporting leaves much to be desired. In some

cases, even in the scientific literature, data on sample size and construction are not given; sometimes not all the results are published. Thus the reporting is often incomplete and potentially misleading. Also questions are commonly posed in such a way as to exclude answers which are ideologically unacceptable. For example, among the many studies inquiring into the communications channels from which citizens acquire information, in none was "Western radio broadcasting" listed as a possible answer.<sup>16</sup> A similar form of error may exist in the propensity of citizens to offer what they regard as the "correct" answer in order to avoid incurring official disfavor. In such a situation they may also respond with an answer such as "don't know" or "hard to say" (zatrudniaius' otvetit'). Finally, we must recognize the possibility of deliberately misreported results.<sup>17</sup>

Without knowing for certain the magnitude and direction of error in the Soviet studies, one can only adopt an attitude of caution in using them. Two assumptions will be made about the utility of these studies. First, where possible, analogous local studies will be compared and the ranges of responses will be taken as the basis for analysis when it can be shown that they are broadly convergent.<sup>18</sup> Second, the studies will be treated as "schematic" rather than "true" maps of the distribution of opinion. That is, like a subway map, they will be used as indicators of the relative rather than absolute location of points on similar scales. In this way, we can avoid some of the problems inherent in taking the reported findings too literally, while preserving at least some of the useful information they contain.

What do the Soviet opinion studies tell us about the impact of party ideological work? As we know, as American research on the effect of mass communications on political behavior in the U.S. proceeded, investigation of "opinion leadership" led scholars to rediscover the importance of the primary groups that mediated the influence of opinion leaders.<sup>19</sup> Soviet public opinion research, it appears, has reached a similar point. Soviet scholars have found that, in keeping with the intended pattern of diffusion, party officials and the media supply the information which oral activists in turn transmit to the broader populace; but before it is absorbed by individuals, it is filtered through primary social groups, especially labor collectives.<sup>20</sup> The collective opinion of these localized primary groups may weaken or counter the influence of the party's ideological activists. Several reasons account for this phenomenon.

#### Levels of Knowledge and Comprehension

The role of primary collectivities as mediating groups for ideological influence has been underscored by a distressing discovery of the audience research projects. This is the fact that, despite great gains in raising the educational attainments of the population, low levels of informedness about political and doctrinal matters persist. Low levels of informedness are linked with another problem, the surprising high proportion of people who simply find it hard to understand the language of official communication. To compensate for limited comprehension or knowledge, many rely on their comrades for explanation.

Soviet researchers call attention to the wide gap between active and passive knowledge. In one survey conducted in several enterprises in Moscow and Tomsk, sociologists sought to ascertain how many workers could answer a battery of questions about doctrine at the start of the political education year, and then administered the same test at the end of the year. On average, fewer than half could answer the questions at the beginning; the following spring, 70% could identify the correct answers but only 27% had "active knowledge," that is, could supply the right answer to a question themselves. Many still tended to oversimplify complex issues or to draw absolutes out of statements about tendencies or probabilities.<sup>21</sup> Political education has a favorable effect. But the level of active knowledge is still insufficient. Memory distorts and screens the knowledge acquired. Campaigns are quickly forgotten; newspaper articles pertaining to one's own labor collective are remembered dimly and with distortions.<sup>22</sup> An article in Pravda recently estimated that fewer than 40% of the students in Schools of the Fundamentals of Marxism-Leninism (the intermediate link in the party education system) fully mastered the concepts of the doctrine and fewer yet grasped the laws and methodological principles.<sup>23</sup>

Not surprisingly, informedness varies not only with levels of education, but also by topic. Typically the highest levels of economic knowledge among workers concern such practical matters as wage rates, fines for disciplinary infractions, and opportunities for job retraining. The lowest levels of informedness are found on questions about the enterprise's progress towards plan

fulfillment, the state of its social consumption funds, and the growth of labor productivity.<sup>24</sup> Knowledge is also higher on the basic issues of doctrine than on the fine points. Asked to define the fundamental advantages of socialism over capitalism, 85% of the respondents in one large survey conducted over three provinces could do so. However, when asked about the contents of the Soviet "Peace Program," the conditions of international detente, and the manifestations of detente, nearly half could not answer satisfactorily.<sup>25</sup> These are points requiring subtler knowledge of the current line, information which is likely to shift, unlike basic doctrines about socialism and capitalism.

More striking from the standpoint of the ideological process, however, is the high proportion of individuals who simply cannot understand the jargon in which political ideas are expressed. Terms such as "initiative" and "deviz" (i.e., the "banner slogan" of a particular campaign), which are continually used in association with campaigns for "socialist competition" (i.e. the contests among collectivities to achieve the highest production), turn out not to be understood by over half of those with less than a complete secondary education.<sup>26</sup> A survey in Krasnodarsk asked newspaper readers to summarize a current and widely publicized political campaign; scarcely over half could do so.<sup>27</sup> Another study reports that from 20 to 30% of the readers of the local press are unable to draw appropriate conclusions from materials in the central press concerning local, national, and world events; one of the tasks of the local newspapers, accordingly, is to provide short and comprehensible summaries of current affairs to their readers.<sup>28</sup>

One of the most innovative attempts to classify the types of incomprehension of official messages is that of Tamara Dridze, whose research was based on a massive and multi-faceted sociological project centered in the city of Taganrog between 1968 and 1970. She concluded that for many individuals, the commonly used terms of doctrine are barriers rather than aids to understanding. Mastery of political language, she found, depends only partly on education. Her work was based on a sample of 300, which she broke into seven categories based on the respondents' ability to grasp the texts of ordinary newspaper articles. Only 12% of her sample could fully and properly understand the media. Another 17% could follow the articles, understanding the key terms only if they were used in familiar contexts. Fully a third, most of whom had at least a secondary education, could define the key words but could not understand their sense in the articles because word strings confused them. Almost 40% lacked knowledge crucial to understanding, either because they did not understand the words or could not follow the text.<sup>29</sup>

Her figures are hard to believe. However, Soviet scholars cite them frequently, perhaps because they too, in research which cannot be published, reach corroborating results. Even if her sample is unrepresentative, however, it cannot be doubted that as many as a third or more of the population lacks the conceptual and/or linguistic equipment to absorb the information provided in official sources without help.

## Patterns of Personal Influence

One consequence of limited comprehension and informedness is the habit of relying on word-of-mouth channels for news and opinion. A survey of rural newspaper readers found that more obtained news from their friends and acquaintances than from the newspapers.<sup>30</sup> Overall, newspapers are widely consulted as a source of news about domestic and world events (although television news is catching up as a source) but in most surveys, interpersonal contacts emerge as an important source as well. For example, in Boris Firsov's surveys of media habits in Leningrad, the latest findings show that virtually the whole population of both city and oblast' uses the media extensively (and almost 10% of the households now have two televisions sets), yet 50% continue to cite word-of-mouth conversation as a source of information about local news.<sup>31</sup> How important a source interpersonal conversation is depends on the particular individual and the collective as well as on the type of information being sought.

Surveys which reveal wide variation in the degree to which individuals depend on interpersonal contacts as a major source of news. For example, in studies of the principal channels within enterprises of information about the enterprise, the proportion of respondents citing conversation with fellow workers range from 6 to 26 percent. Party and factory meetings received much higher ratings (39-77%), lectures and reports roughly similar ones (11-24%).<sup>32</sup> A survey in two enterprises, where 20% of the employees were party members and another 20% were Komsomol members, investigated sources of economic information. Thirty-four to

forty-five percent cited interpersonal contacts as an important source. These proportions were substantially higher than party and worker meetings (23.5-31%) and far below television (84-88%).<sup>33</sup>

One study selected four current topics of public interest -- the adoption of a new law on marriage and the family, the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr., an interesting new movie, and a major sports event -- and asked respondents how they had heard about each one. Respondents reported using a different combination of sources in each case. "Hard" news, as represented by the law and the assassination, had been learned via newspapers and radio; the movie, through conversation with acquaintances and in the newspapers; and the sports event, through newspapers and television. Moreover the patterns of discussing these events differed. Twenty-nine percent said they discussed the King assassination and the marriage/family law at work; far higher proportions had discussed the film (61%) and the sports event (77%) at work.<sup>34</sup> An interesting study of how people working on the Baikal-Amur Railroad (BAM) had heard about what it was like to live and work there determined that by far the most important source of such information was conversations with relatives, friends, and acquaintances; 51.1% cited this channel, as opposed to 19.6% for Komsomol officials, 15.2% for official recruiters, and 8.6% for the mass media. Since close to half said their opinions about living and working conditions changed for the worse once they got there, the sociologists warned against the harm done by unscrupulous recruiters in painting an unduly rosy picture.<sup>35</sup>

It comes as no surprise that news about sports, films, and life on the BAM is discussed widely among co-workers, acquaintances, friends, and family. The interesting finding is the reliance on such channels for hard news. To some extent, as I have argued, this is a product of low information and comprehension levels among workers and peasants, particularly individuals with low educational attainments or who live in remote and rural localities. However, the habit of turning to other members of primary groups for information is not confined to those who are poorly equipped to comprehend the language of official communication. For many, the habit of word-of-mouth newsgathering is a product of other factors, such as dissatisfaction with the limited fare provided in the media and the low credibility of information received through official channels.

These factors are illustrated in studies conducted among intellectuals and scientists. A survey of two scientific research institutes in Moscow found that while nearly all the scientists polled read the central newspapers daily and used them as a source of news about domestic and world events, 46.1% also cited conversations with co-workers and others as a source of similar news, a proportion even higher than that usually obtained among workers. This and like studies have found that persons with higher levels of education tend to be more critical and dissatisfied with existing channels of information; for example, only one third of the scientists polled believed that the current state of ideological work corresponded to the needs. It is likely that the strength of interpersonal newsgathering acts to stimulate

the official oral communicators in such high-status groups to provide more reliable information. This may account for the paradoxical finding from the same study that while 45% of the respondents criticized political information sessions on the grounds that they offered little that was new, some 44.2% cited the answers they received to their questions at such sessions as a prime source of information.<sup>36</sup> In this connection, a point made by Inkeles and Bauer on the basis of the Harvard Project still bears repeating: the quality of word-of-mouth information tends to be higher among those of higher social and political status; hence individuals in such circles rely on it to supplement the official channels.<sup>37</sup>

The evidence indicates that mistrust of the official media is widely shared, and is somewhat stronger at the two ends of the spectrum of education and socio-political status.<sup>38</sup> Similarly, newsgathering through interpersonal conversation occurs in all socio-political strata, suggesting that these patterns are motivated by a combination of factors, including informedness and comprehension as well as inclination to trust official sources, the specific profile of which varies with the individual, the collective, and the socio-political status of the milieu. Many citizens (one-fifth to one-third of the population of cities, according to Radio Liberty's estimates)<sup>39</sup> also listen to foreign radio broadcasts, which offer another source of information requiring interpretation. Much indirect evidence suggests that news obtained by listening to Western radio is widely discussed, and inferring from the data presented, it is likely that

individuals are not only sharing news, but they are also seeking and forming opinions as to the significance of what they have learned.<sup>40</sup>

The surveys reveal that many Soviet citizens, subjected to streams of often contradictory information, shape their opinions in interaction with their comrades at work. For example, a study in Moscow determined that the moral-psychological climate of the labor collective was influential in shaping the moral outlook of young workers.<sup>41</sup> A survey in Gorkii in 1980 asked workers and managers to rate the effectiveness of four intra-factory communication channels as sources of ideological influence. Rated first were officially sponsored discussions and political information sessions; second came unofficial interpersonal contacts. Behind these were lectures, and last the internal factory radio system and newspapers.<sup>42</sup> A third survey asked violaters of labor discipline what, in their opinion, was the most effective sanction for infractions of labor rules; the most commonly cited was discussion by the other workers of the collective. At 40.2%, this method just outpolled the material sanction of deprivation of bonus; trial by comradely court lagged far behind, at 20%.<sup>43</sup> The collective, judging from these studies, serves as a reference group for its members, and its consensual opinion evidently possesses a normative authority not wholly shared with the party.

Recognition of the role played by primary groups in the formation of collective opinion has strengthened the party's traditional determination to co-opt the authority of the

collective for its ideological purposes. However, the normative authority of the group must be recognized before it can be shaped and directed. Where it is ignored, the results may backfire. As an example, Soviet writers cite a case occurring in Poland several years ago. A Cracow newspaper presented conventional stories about leading workers in two factories. In one factory, evidently, the journalists chose an individual who really did enjoy the esteem of his comrades; only 6% of the workers felt that a better subject could have been found. At the other factory, 40% of the workers believed a more appropriate person could have been chosen. After the articles appeared, 82% of the workforce in the first factory treated the person better; but in the other factory, 56% of the workers treated the unfortunate hero worse than before, and only 34% better.<sup>44</sup> The image of the hard-working conscientious worker who earns authority among his fellow workers for his industry and creativity is a stock in trade of Soviet journalism. A content analysis of 5848 texts taken from thirteen newspapers and radio and television broadcasts revealed that this iconic creature was the most common hero portrayed in the media.<sup>45</sup> The danger, of course, of stereotyped, conventional imagery is that instead of reinforcing propaganda, it may undercut its credibility.

#### Correlates of Conviction

So far we have examined the influence of comprehension, informedness, and trust on the assimilation of political messages through official channels. We have seen that where these are

weak, interpersonal contacts are strong as sources of information and opinion. However, we have not considered the issue of variation in the influence of official communications on ideological conviction. What does account for the variations in the effectiveness of ideological work? Taking such variables as level of information, level of comprehension, and attentiveness to the mass media now not as independent variables, but as surrogate measures of successful socialization, we find that they are positively correlated with such independent variables as participation in public volunteer work, membership in the party or Komsomol, and enrollment in political education courses. But the influence of participation is not direct. We know that the effect of exposure to political communication is mediated through primary collectivities; hence we can infer that the impact of ideological work is determined by the nature of the group with which an individual identifies himself. For some, the relevant reference group is made up of ideological activists and political elites. For others, the primary group comprises peers outside the channels of power.

One of the most widely cited studies of media audiences, which came out of the Taganrog project, found that media users differed less by demographic characteristics such as sex, occupation, or age than according to the way personal orientation to official information sources was shaped by social role. The researchers found that media habits clustered in three patterns. "Critical" users evaluate the media's messages independently, on the basis of their own background knowledge; they seek a personal

meaning in what they read and hear. The "functional" users, who correspond to the party's political activists, those with organizing, opinion leading, or executive roles, employ the media's messages as cues for their own extensive contacts with others. Finally, "consumers" passively and uncritically absorb the media's messages, often depending on others for interpretive information.<sup>46</sup> Here it seems clear that an individual's orientation to mass communications is primarily determined by the nature of the social milieu with which he affiliates himself.

Other studies also demonstrate the link between political activism and an attentive orientation to the channels of political communication. Knowledge levels on issues of doctrine are higher among party and Komsomol members.<sup>47</sup> Moreover, knowledge levels as well as habits of media use are more satisfactory, from the party's standpoint, among students in the political education system than among non-participants. Their levels of informedness about international, doctrinal, and economic issues are higher on the average by from 15-30 percent. A similar effect is noted among those who regularly attend agitation and political information sessions. Further, participation in voluntary public service has some effect on ideological conviction. A large survey in Samarkand concerning religious belief found that 95.4% of those with permanent public assignments considered themselves atheists, whereas a majority of non-participants considered themselves believers.<sup>48</sup>

Of course these categories of activism are intercorrelated: party and Komsomol membership would nearly also be accompanied by

participation in voluntary public work and with enrollment in political education. Activists are certainly exposed to a greater volume of official communication. However, the evidence presented here suggests that their higher levels of knowledge and conviction are best explained by the prior decision to serve as an activist, which acts as an intervening variable between exposure and effect by increasing the predisposition to be receptive to official communications.

Interposing the mediating influence of the collectivity between exposure and effect allows us to refine the old hypothesis of selective attention. Both Western and Soviet researchers have observed that religious believers tend either to ignore or to reinterpret newspaper articles denouncing religion.<sup>49</sup> Alcoholics are less likely than others to read articles denouncing alcoholism. Parents of problem children tend not to read articles about raising problem children. The psychological explanation works at the individual level, but should be supplemented by one which points to the normative authority of the reference group. Gayle Durham Hollander, writing at the time that Soviet opinion research was beginning to acquire a scientific basis, suggested such a connection:

A more sophisticated study of 'who speaks to whom about what' should also include a study of who takes the initiative, how far a single network of informal opinion leadership extends, and a more differentiated picture of the social characteristics of those friends and coworkers who are asked for advice and information.<sup>50</sup>

In the post-Stalin era, the party has sought to use the forms of self-government--mass participation in elections, voluntary societies, workplace committees, social service activities--as an

instrument of political socialization.<sup>51</sup> Popular participation is intended to confirm their claims of propaganda that the laboring people are the masters (khoziaeva) of their society. Indeed a very large proportion of the population does engage in regular public work.<sup>52</sup> Nearly all officials, specialists, and intellectuals have occasional or permanent social assignments. Among workers, the figures range between a third and a half.<sup>53</sup> But the number believing that through such participation they can actually effect decisions in the enterprise is far lower.<sup>54</sup> In one survey, over three quarters of the respondents expressed the desire to take a personal part in enterprise decision-making; only a third considered their chances of doing so "great" or "moderate."<sup>55</sup>

Moreover, studies show that a great deal of public activity is nominal or is carried out on work time. Figures on participation are grossly inflated; in one city, sociologists added up the number of people at public posts, gathered figures from each organization, and found that the total exceeded the total population of the city.<sup>56</sup> The great majority of those with such assignments do at least some of the work on company time.<sup>57</sup> Engineering and technical personnel tend to do so more than workers; well over 80% use company time for their voluntary duties. Awareness of these facts affects popular assessments of public participation. Asked whether they thought public assignments necessary, only half of the respondents in one survey answered without reservation that public work was necessary; 46% answered that they should not be performed if they distract from

production and other activities.<sup>58</sup> Skepticism about the meaningfulness of formal participation as an exercise of popular power is thus apparently widespread. Does this influence other attitudes? A recent article in Kommunist indicates it does. It linked the dissatisfaction among workers over work conditions and over the insufficient opportunity to participate in enterprise management to the severe national problem of low labor productivity.<sup>59</sup>

Among a self-selected category of political activists, then, the effect of participation is to reinforce the receptive disposition toward regime communication that ideological work seeks to induce. Like the "opinion leaders" of Erie County, they are functional users of the media, extracting the interpretive cues they need to explain news to others. Envisioning how they will present information in their collectives guides them in scanning the media. Their identification with the political elite makes their use of information instrumental for them and functional for the system at the macro-level, since by using news didactically they help to sustain the legitimacy of party rule in each micro-environment. However, other groups may be less receptive in their orientation to official media. For many, the experience of ceremonial participation may undermine the credibility of the media images of the toiler-citizen, and thus strengthen the tendency to seek out the opinion of co-workers. The effect of the ideological process in socialization is thus attenuated or even counter-productive when individuals identify themselves with groups who cannot or do not share the picture of the world presented by the party.

## Modifying Ideological Work

Taken in conjunction with such phenomena as widespread corruption, falling labor productivity, and increasing consumption of alcohol,<sup>60</sup> the evidence of insufficient ideological penetration of primary collectivities has evidently stimulated the authorities to undertake a "moral rearmament" campaign. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, the party has sought to improve the effectiveness of ideological work in three specific ways. First, it has further increased the number and specificity of the tools it uses to disseminate information and shape opinion, concentrating particularly on increasing the number of contacts between officials and ordinary citizens through public meetings and broadcast media. The forms of political education and mass political work have become further differentiated, especially by creating specialized settings for various occupational groups. The effect is to draw theory closer to the practical issues confronted on the job. Second, the party has become more concerned with responding to the questions and comments made by individuals and using these to guide its ideological and administrative work. The greater attention to the analysis of letters from the toilers to party and government offices and to the media, manifested in the creation of a Central Committee Letters Department to give the analysis of feedback a standardized and systematic form, is an example. Third, the party has sought to overcome the inevitable tendency towards oversimplification, dogmatism, repetition, and staleness that often characterizes the content of official communication.<sup>6</sup>

The most noteworthy indication of high-level leadership concern with the state of ideological work was a major party resolution, dated 26 April 1979, entitled, "On the Further Improvement of Ideological, Political-Educational Work."<sup>62</sup> Published by the press on 6 May 1979, it became the focal point of an extensive political campaign to restructure ideological work. It was evidently a particular priority of the late Mikail Suslov, known as a conservative with special authority over the ideological sphere. Virtually all subsequent official statements on the subject of ideology and political education paid obeisance to its mandates. The decree may thus be assumed to demonstrate the leadership's concern with the need to strengthen ideological work with the masses.

The decree, and others which have followed it, endorsed the tendency towards differentiation of forms in the realms of the mass media, mass-political oral communication, and political education which has characterized the Brezhnev period.<sup>63</sup> For example, after each party congress, new types of schools in the adult propaganda system have been created, but rarely are any forms discarded. Most recently, in 1981, the party institutionalized "Schools of Young Communists" and separated the schools serving the economic aktiv from those designed to aid the ideological aktiv.<sup>64</sup> A 1982 decree reorganized economic education and called on it to emphasize the priority of raising productivity, improving the moral climate, and conservation.<sup>65</sup> Professional and political training have been combined in specialized settings for members of a variety of occupations, and

within each school, it appears to be customary to group classes by their particular occupation: in schools for journalistic cadres, for example, young journalists are in one course, editors another, photographers another, and so on.<sup>66</sup> In some large cities, the system has become so extensive that follow-up study is nearly always available for continued training after the completion of each course.

At the level of mass-political work, a similar exfoliation of structures can be observed. Agitation has been supplemented since the mid-1960s with "political information" and it, in turn, has been supplemented by the practice of "reports" made to general audiences by ranking experts and officials. Parallel with these forms is one which has gained particular favor in the last few years, called the "political day," an occasion when specialists and officials fan out across a particular jurisdiction to address nearly every labor collective on a common theme. The party ideological officials prepare reference aids for speakers and in some cases, write the speeches outright. The political day has spread and become routinized so rapidly (in most jurisdictions, apparently, they are held monthly, often on a set day each month) that they are losing their credibility and effectiveness.<sup>67</sup>

Similar forms of mass political work include open letter days and Lenin Fridays, which give ordinary citizens the chance to hear and respond to ranking officials in their regions. The broadcast media are also beginning to use equivalent formats more widely: in the Baltic Republics, call-in shows on television and radio allow listeners to ask questions directly of the guests; and a similar

program on Central Television has entered its second season with resounding audience response.<sup>68</sup>

Within enterprises, a trend towards greater specialization among the activists charged with ideological work is observable. When surveys in Ivanovo revealed, for example, that the moral values which entering workers absorbed were significantly affected by the climate of the enterprise, the city party committee responded by experimenting with the use of three deputy ideological secretaries in the PPO rather than just one; each would be responsible for a different branch of ideological work.<sup>69</sup> There is also an effort to bring greater coordination to the scores of intra-factory bodies which tangentially perform some socializing functions.<sup>70</sup> Often they are given nominal representation on the factory ideological commission.

The growing differentiation of the forms of propaganda and mass political work has made the task of their coordination considerably more complex. The evidence indicates that the staff ideological officials of the party committees consider themselves severely overworked: they barely keep up with the flood of paperwork and experience high rates of turnover. The key to success in coping, we are informed, lies in shifting as much of the work of planning and monitoring these activities to spare-time councils and commissions. The ideological decree of 1979 gave considerable impetus to the formation of these ideological commissions, which the party had sought to establish back in the 1960s with little success.<sup>71</sup> By now most lower party organizations have at least nominal commissions.<sup>72</sup> I do not wish

to overestimate their actual effectiveness. One staff instructor wrote, for example, that his colleagues frequently remarked that these non-staff support organizations were a fiction and of no real help.<sup>73</sup> Nevertheless, the emphasis in the party literature on planning and coordination of ideological work suggests that more attention is being given to matters of organization.

The second area in which changes are being made in ideological work concerns the procedures for dealing with letters and other materials from ordinary citizens. Receiving letters and petitions from the masses has of course long been a function of all authoritative bodies in the country, including prominent public figures; and newspapers and party and government agencies have receiving hours when individuals can bring personal problems to the attention of the authorities. In the last year or two, however, the party has paid a great deal of attention to making these practices systematic. A Central Committee resolution in the spring of 1981 called for improving work with letters.<sup>74</sup> The experience of handling mail addressed to the Central Committee before and during the 26th Party Congress has been widely publicized as a model. During preparations for the congress, Central Committee officials prepared fifteen surveys and reports on the mail, and over the course of 1980 and 1981, they prepared over 100 reports based on the mail, most of which were sent to the Politburo and Secretariat for examination.<sup>75</sup> In 1979, a new Central Committee Department was formed specifically to oversee the analysis of the mail and to encourage the institutionalization of this practice among lower party committees. It should be noted

that political sponsorship of this drive has been provided by Central Committee Secretary and Politburo member Konstantin Chernenko, who enjoyed Brezhnev's patronage while the latter was alive.<sup>76</sup> With Yurii Andropov's assumption of power, the future of such methods is in question.

Finally, the party has pushed propagandists and journalists to improve the quality of their work and to avoid hollow, vacuous expression. Principles and actions, or "words and deeds," are to be brought into harmony. The 1979 ideology resolution stressed this point, and writers have continued to press the theme. The premise of the 1979 resolution was that the growth of the general public's informedness had not been matched by a corresponding increase in the sophistication of ideological work, and that when the public found official messages stale and tiresome, their effectiveness was lost. The sponsors of the campaign have warned against "campaign-ism," or responding with purely formal gestures to the call for truly effective ideological work.

There is little reason to believe that these exhortations and organizational changes have had much effect on the impact of ideological work. Possibly the trend of combining political with practical professional education does push ideological work in the direction of greater pertinence, but the same social and institutional factors which have weakened the quality of ideological work in the past remain unaffected by the campaign. Among social factors, we have noted the persistence of traditional habits of word of mouth newsgathering and disparities in educational levels. However, as the society comes under greater

saturation by the mass communications system and the proportion of the population with at least secondary education rises (today close to two-thirds of the population over ten years of age has at least some secondary education), institutional barriers assume greater relative importance. These include the dogmatic attachment to a unified theoretical doctrine, the dependence of effective ideological work on the widely varying levels of personal skill on the part of the communicators, and the fact that the structure of incentives for officials and activists, of whom at least nominal participation is expected, fails to penalize them for formalistic participation. They are accordingly likely to respond to the demands for more effective ideological work by making minimal, pro forma responses. For these reasons, the very campaign for improving the effectiveness of ideological work has become self-negating. It is unlikely, therefore, to affect public opinion appreciably.

## FOOTNOTES

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1. Alex Inkeles, Public Opinion in Soviet Russia, 3rd ed. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1958); Gayle Durham Hollander, Soviet Political Indoctrination (NY: Praeger, 1972); Paul Lendvai, The Bureaucracy of Truth (Boulder: Westview, 1981); Mark W. Hopkins, Mass Media in the Soviet Union (NY: Pegasus, 1970); Ellen Propper Mickiewicz, Soviet Political Schools (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967); idem, Media and the Russian Public (NY: Praeger, 1981); and Stephen White, Political Culture and Soviet Politics (London: The Macmillan Press, 1979).

2. B. M. Morozov, V. E. Fadeev, V. V. Shinkarenko, Planirovanie ideologicheskoi raboty: nekotorye voprosy teorii i praktiki (Moscow: Mysl', 1980), pp. 23-5.

3. See Erik P. Hoffman, "Ideological Administration under Khrushchev: A Study of Intra-Party Communication," Canadian Slavic Studies, IV, no. 4 (winter 1970), pp. 736-766.

4. Lapses occur when, owing to inadvertence or overriding political considerations, the normal rules concerning public expression are violated. For example, references to power struggles among the political leaders are illegitimate. But during Brezhnev's last months, coded signals of a succession

struggle were transmitted in Pravda. (See Sidney Ploss, "Signs of Struggle," Problems of Communism, vol. 31 (September/October 1982), pp. 43-4.) The use of esoteric or coded messages in such a case upsets the customary balance between the role of the media in indoctrinating the general public and their role as a channel of intra-elite communication.

5. These estimates, and much of the material on organizational structure which follows, are drawn from a larger work in progress, tentatively entitled, "Political Communication and Soviet Party Rule."

6. A fuller account of these forms will be found in Gayle Durham Hollander, Soviet Political Indoctrination.

7. "Kommunisticheskaia partiia vysoko neset znamia Lenina," Partiinaia zhizn', no. 2 (1982), p. 7.

8. Sputnik partgruporga, 1979 (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo politicheskoi literatury, 1978), pp. 129-134.

9. Paul F. Lazarsfeld, Bernard Berelson, and Hazel Gaudet, The People's Choice, 3rd ed., (NY: Columbia University Press, 1968), pp. 49-51, 151, passim.

10. Alex Inkeles, Public Opinion, part 2: "Personal Oral Agitation and Opinion Leaders."

11. See Spravochnik sekretaria pervichnoi partiinoi organizatsii, 2nd ed. (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo politicheskoi literatury, 1980), pp. 179, 269; V.Kolesnikov and B. Batkibekov, "Den' otkrytogo pis'mavazhnaia forma partiino-politicheskoi raboty," Partiinaia zhizn', no. 15 (1980), pp. 21-2.

12. For example, most people visiting newspaper receiving offices (obshchestvennye priemnye) come with personal and particular problems. More come with complaints than with proposals for action. A. B. Mandeleev, Chto za gazetnym slovom? (Moscow: Mysl', 1979), p. 114.

13. D. D. Dzhamalov and G. S. Batygin, "Sotsiologicheskaiia sluzhba gorkoma partii," Sotsiologicheskie issledovaniia, no. 1 (1982), p. 52.

14. V. G. Britvin, "Sotsiologicheskaiia sluzhba predpriiatiia i problemy povysheniia effektivnosti sotsiologicheskikh issledovaniia," Sotsiologicheskie issledovaniia, no. 4 (1980), p. 70. On the spread and use of empirical sociology, see the anonymous article, "Sotsiologicheskie issledovaniia: rezul'taty, problemy i zadachi," Kommunist, no. 13 (1980), pp. 79-92; also see the paper by Darrell Slider, "Party-Sponsored Public Opinion Research in the Soviet Union: The Georgian Public Opinion Council," presented at the annual conference of the AAASS in Washington, DC, October 14, 1982.

15. In addition to the books by Stephen White, Political Culture, and Ellen Mickiewicz, Media and the Russian Public, also see Elizabeth Ann Weinberg, The Development of Sociology in the Soviet Union (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1974); William A. Welsh, ed., Survey Research and Public Attitudes in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union (NY: Pergamon, 1981); and Walter D. Connor and Zvi Gitelman, ed., Public Opinion in European Socialist Systems (NY: Praeger, 1977). The latter two works present East European public research data in addition to Soviet data. In

their paper at the AAASS conference in 1982, "Recent Public Opinion Research in Poland," T. Anthony Jones, David Bealmear, Piotr Drozdowski and Michael Kennedy make the point that in the crises of the Prague Spring in 1968-69 and Poland in 1980-81, public opinion research bearing on unusually sensitive issues was conducted and published. However, the Soviet Union's tradition in such research is weaker than that of Poland or Czechoslovakia, and party constraints on such research have never been lifted to such an extent as in those two anomalous cases.

16. See Ellen Mickiewicz, Media, p. 139.

17. See Ibid., ch. 1.

18. See Stephen White, Political Culture, p. 97.

19. Elihu Katz and Paul F. Lazarsfeld, Personal Influence (Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press, 1955), p. 33 and passim.

20. G. T. Zhuravlev, Sotsiologicheskie issledovaniia effektivnosti ideologicheskoi raboty (Moscow: Mysl', 1980), p. 154.

21. P. V. Pozdniakov, N. Ia. Kop'ev, and A. I. Iakovlev, Effektivnost' ideino-vospitatel'noi raboty (Moscow: Mysl', 1975), p. 147.

22. V. A. Poltorak, "Metodika izucheniia glasnosti sotsialisticheskogo sorevnovaniia," Sotsiologicheskie issledovaniia, no. 4 (1981), p. 156; Mendeleev, p. 87.

23. A. Iakovlev, "Leninskie printsipy sovershenstvovaniia ideologicheskoi raboty," Pravda, 21 August 1981, pp. 2-3.

24. Sergei Runov, "Samaia skuchnaia tema, ili kuda smotrit obshchestvennost'," Zhurnal'ist, no 12 (1981), p. 56.

25. V. G. Baikova, Ideologicheskaiia rabota KPSS v usloviakh razvitogo sotsializma (Moscow: Mysl', 1977), pp. 143-5.
26. Poltorak, p. 156.
27. Mendeleev, p. 108.
28. Ibid., p. 167.
29. T. M. Dridze, "Lingvosotsiologicheskie aspekty massovoi informatsii," Sotsiologicheskie issledovaniia, no. 4 (1975), p. 159.
30. L. G. Svitich and A. A. Shiriaeva, Zhurnalist i ego rabota (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo moskovskogo universiteta, 1979), p. 47.
31. B. M. Firsov, ed., Massovaia kommunikatsiia v usloviakh nauchno-tekhnicheskoi revoliutsii (Leningrad: Nauka, 1981), pp. 158-9.
32. V. P. Vasil'ev. "Mnogotirazhnaia pechat' kak instrument formirovaniia mneniia trudovogo kollektiva," Vestnik moskovskogo universiteta, series 10 (Zhurnalistika), no. 1 (1981), pp. 16-22; Kompleksnyi podkhod v ideologicheskoi rabote. Stil' i metody. (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo politicheskoi literatury, 1976), p. 158.
33. V. A. Beliaev, "K voprosu ob effektivnosti ekonomicheskoi propagandy v pechati (opyt sotsiologicheskogo issledovaniia)," Voprosy teorii i metodov ideologicheskoi raboty, vyp. 12 (Moscow: Mysl', 1980), pp. 167-70.
34. N. S. Mansurov, "Sistemnyi podkhodk izucheniiu sredstv massovoi informatsii i uchrezhdenii kul'tury," A. V. Dmitriev et al., Massovaia kommunikatsiia v sotsialisticheskom obshchestve (Leningrad: Nauka, 1979), pp. 123-6.

35. V. V. Voronov and I. P. Smirnov, "Zakreplenie molodezhi v zone BAMa," Sotsiologicheskie issledovaniia, no. 2 (1982), p. 17.
36. T. P. Arkhipova and V. F. Sbytov, Voprosy teorii i praktiki politicheskogo rukovodstva: Opyt deiatel'nosti raikoma partii (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo politicheskoi literatury, 1981), pp. 232-3.
37. Alex Inkeles and Raymond Bauer, The Soviet Citizen (NY: Atheneum, 1968), p. 176.
38. Ellen Mickiewicz, Media, pp. 134-5.
39. R. E. Parta and M. S. Rhodes, "Information Sources and the Soviet Citizen: Domestic Media and Western Radio," RFE/RL AR 5-81 (June 1981), p. 19.
40. Sergei Voronitsyn, "Latest Soviet Efforts to Counter the Influence of Foreign Radio Broadcasts," RFE/RL RL 272/82 (5 July 1982), pp. 1-2.
41. N. N. Bokarev, "Sotsiologicheskie issledovaniia v deiatel'nosti partiinykh komitetov," Sotsiologicheskie issledovaniia, no. 1 (1982), p. 44.
42. Zh. T. Toshchenko, "The Unity of Organizational, Economic and Ideological Work in Labor Collectives," Sotsiologicheskie issledovaniia, no. 4 (1980), trans. in JPRS 77574, 12 March 1981, USSR report, Sociological Studies, p. 38.
43. G. Shilova, "Ideino-politicheskaia podgotovka rukovodiashchikh kadrov," V. A. Smirnov and P. P. Khil'kevich, ed., Kompleksnyi podkhod v ideologicheskoi rabote: Sbornik (Moscow: Moskovskii rabochii, 1979), p. 162.
44. Mendeleev, p. 87.

45. Ibid., pp. 140-1.
46. Ibid., pp. 128-9. This typology is discussed in Thomas Remington, "The Mass Media and Public Communication in the USSR," Journal of Politics, vol. 43, no. 3 (1981), pp. 807-8.
47. Baikova, pp. 144-5.
48. A. B. Bazarov, "Osobennosti musul'manskikh religioznykh perezhitkov," Sotsiologicheskie issledovaniia, no. 2 (1982), p. 172.
49. Mendeleev, p. 133; Gayle Durham Hollander, p. 168.
50. Gayle Durham Hollander, p. 168.
51. Theodore H. Friedgut, Political Participation in the USSR (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979).
52. Jerry F. Hough, for example, observes that the 27.9% representation of blue-collar workers among the members of standing committees of local soviets "is very substantial by international standards, and the number of workers on committees at the plant level is probably higher." See Jerry F. Hough and Merle Fainsod, How the Soviet Union is Governed (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1979), p. 311.
53. Runov, p. 55; Baikova, p. 189.
54. Nikita Vainonen, "Byt' khoziainom. Chto eto znachit?" Zhurnalist, no. 2 (1982), p. 42; Britvin, p. 145; Runov, p. 55.
55. Britvin, p. 145.
56. Runov, p. 55.
57. T. M. Novikova, "Obshchestvennaia deiatel'nost' v biudzhete vremeni promyshlennykh rabochikh," Sotsiologicheskie issledovaniia, no. 2 (1981), pp. 80-4.

58. Britvin, p. 145.
59. "Voprosy sotsial'nogo planirovaniia i vospitatel'naia rabota," Kommunist, no. 2 (1982), pp. 51-3.
60. On the pervasiveness of corruption, Konstantin M. Simis, USSR: The Corrupt Society (NY: Simon & Schuster, 1982); on falling labor productivity, see Daniel Bond and Herbert Levine, "The 11th Five-Year Plan, 1981-85," Seweryn Bialer and Thane Gustafson, ed., Russia at the Crossroads (London: Allen & Unwin, 1982), which estimates that overall labor productivity has not grown at all in the last two years (p. 89). Finally, on the rising level of alcohol consumption, see Vladimir G. Treml, Alcohol in the USSR: A Statistical Study (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1982).
61. Zh. T. Toshchenko "Vospitatel'naia rabota kak ob"ekt sotsial'nogo planirovanii," Sotsiologicheskie issledovaniia, no. 2 (1981), p. 42.
62. "O dal'neishem uluchshenii ideologicheskoi, politiko-vospitatel'noi raboty," Pravda, 6 May 1979, pp. 1-2.
63. Two which followed the 26th Party Congress are: "O dal'neishem sovershenstvovanii partiinoi ucheby v svete reshenii XXVI s"ezda KPSS," Partiinaia zhizn', no. 12 (1981), pp. 9-13, and "O dal'neishem uluchshenii ekonomicheskogo obrazovaniiu i vospitaniia trudiashchikhsia," Kommunist, no. 10 (1982), pp. 3-5. The first called for a reorganization of the party political education system, the second for changes in the system of economic education.
64. "O dal'neishem...partiinoi ucheby," pp. 9-13.
65. "O dal'neishem...ekonomicheskogo," pp. 3-5.

66. Len Tsarev, "Podmechaia novoe," Zhurnalists, no. 12 (1981), pp. 62-3.
67. V. Boikov, "Edinyi politden': dokladchik, auditoriia, deistvennost'," Partiinaia zhizn', no. 3 (1982), pp. 32-3.
68. "Avtorit et peredachi," Televidenie i radioveshchanie, no. 5 (1982), pp. 6-9; Estonian radio and television are using the call-in format as well: see K. Vaino, "Delovoi nastroi," Zhurnalists, no. 2 (1982), p. 12.
69. Bokarev, p. 44.
70. P. Luchinskii, "Nekotorye voprosy ideino-vospitatel'noi raboty v trudovom kollektive," Partiinaia zhizn', no. 10 (1980), p. 38.
71. Gayle Durham Hollander, pp. 146-7.
72. "Ideologicheskaiia komissiiia partiinogo komiteta," Partiinaia zhizn', no. 15 (1980), p. 9.
73. A. Shyrybyrov, "Opiraiias' na aktiv," Partiinaia zhizn', no. 5 (1982), p. 53.
74. "O merakh po dal'neishemu uluchsheniiu raboty s pis'mami i predlozheniiami trudiashchikhsia v svete reshenii XXVI s"ezda KPSS," Pravda, 4 April 1981, p. 1.
75. B. Iakovlev, "Vnimatel'noe otnoshenie k pis'mam i predlozheniiam trudiashchikhsia--dolg kazhdogo rukovoditel'ia pered narodom, pered partii," Partiinaia zhizn', no. 9 (1982), pp. 44-5.
76. See. for example, K. Chernenko, "Leninskaia strategiiia rukovodstva: o nekotorykh voprosakh deiatel'nosti partii v usloviiakh razvitogo sotsializma," Kommunist, no. 13 (1981), p. 15.

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