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Reply

Aleksander Gella's study prompts me to offer only two marginal observations. His remarks might suggest that the strength of the Stalinist system was founded on the compulsion and force of the police system alone. Such an opinion, if I have not misunderstood it, is contestable at least as far as the people's democracies are concerned. Stalinist ideology, primitive and mendacious as it was, was a real force. It had its believers among the intellectuals, not only in socialist but also in Western countries. Without believing in all the details of the official doctrine, such people were genuinely convinced of the "historical justification" of Stalinism, and their faith contributed very significantly to the functioning of the system as a whole. There is nothing surprising in such an attitude. The story of intellectuals who consciously reject the spiritual values of their own civilization and humble themselves before the power of rising barbarism (known and accepted as such) is as old as the first centuries of our era. Even Fascism and Hitlerism attracted some West European intellectuals, blinded by Spenglerian or similar philosophical teachings and believing in the inevitability of the disintegration of Western civilization in the face of an energetic new savagery that would restore the youth of the world.

It would seem that the fundamental difference between the Stalinist and post-Stalinist systems lies precisely in the collapse that the socialist ideology has suffered. It is no longer a real force in socialist societies. To be sure, the old phraseology about the international workers' movement, historical laws, the inevitability of socialism, et cetera, is still in circulation and indeed cannot be abandoned, since it justifies the claims of the Soviet state to impose its control on other socialist countries and on the Communist movement in the West. Similarly the old phraseology is necessary in those countries where the ruling class owes its existence only to the fact that the Soviet Union was decisive in the accession of Communists to power there and remains the foremost member of the bloc of states to which those countries belong. However, the only ideological values that retain genuine vitality are national values, which are not easy to reconcile with the principle of bloc unity. I would not attribute the rise of nationalism to the special conditions prevailing in the socialist bloc alone. The growth of nationalism is a worldwide phenomenon that challenges all the earlier predictions of its disappearance—which then seemed reasonable in view of the many factors appearing to accelerate the cultural unification of mankind.

I would not emphasize the distinction between Western and Eastern cultural traditions in examining the relation or confrontation between the present Western and Eastern political systems. Totalitarian socialism has a basis that is firmly rooted in the Western intellectual inheritance.

I am not sure to what extent the remarks of Cyril Black are intended as criticism of mine. Of course I do not deny that valuable contributions in the field of the social sciences may be and are in fact being made in the socialist countries. Neither would I deny the possibility of cooperation in solving many social problems common to the industrial societies—on the technological level. I would mention only one obvious and important fact: neither the fundamental issues concerning the functioning of society nor the views of the public about such issues may be investigated or discussed in socialist countries without exposing the power system to mortal danger. *A fortiori*, the basic ideological values—no less than before—must still be protected from being subjected to open discussion. It is true that the point where the protective barrier is established may sometimes shift slightly. However, the consciousness that any attempt to extend what freedom may exist in any domain may always be turned against the power system is today stronger than ever in the minds of the members of the ruling apparatus—after so many bitter experiences. A deep-seated fear of freedom is not an irrational prejudice of theirs but is the result of well-founded observations. The fact that no self-regulatory mechanisms or feedback information systems are able to function within the framework of these societies is not a defect that is transitory or remediable. It is an innate feature of a system wherein social stratification is based not on a quantitative inequality of wealth but on a qualitative inequality of privilege. A monopoly of power cannot be “partially” removed. That is why the only improvements possible in such systems can occur through more or less violent crises that require unusual coincidences of events and may scarcely be planned in advance.