A prominent ideologist of the Communist Party of Austria discusses how a generation or more of communists developed gravely distorted views concerning the theories of Marx and Lenin. This translation from Weg und Ziel No. 11, 1968 is by Henry Zimmerman.

ONE OF THE MOST OUTSTANDING phenomena of intellectual history: the judgments and prejudices, feelings and ideas of hundreds of thousands of people have been stamped for dozens of years by two books, which became a material force because they gripped the masses. What has been called “Marxism-Leninism” for dozens of years was in reality essentially embraced in two books which Stalin wrote — the first alone, the second in collaboration with others.

In 1924, immediately after the death of Lenin, Foundations of Leninism — the foundations of “marxism-leninism” — was published. In 1938 there appeared The Short History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, showing “marxism-leninism” in action. This was studied by all communist parties in all languages, and attained the highest circulation of any book since the “Foundations”. What was presented as “marxism-leninism” in these two books and in their combination was a peculiar mixture of marxist perceptions and pragmatic considerations dictated by the policies of the first socialist state, together with scientific considerations and authoritative proclamations. In a simplified, vulgarised and misinterpreted form this combination frequently reduced a complicated scientific theory to a catechism of truths, half truths and untruths, which, by a compelling logic, deduced from false premises logically correct but objectively false conclusions. Because they were simple, easily taught and learnt, these books blessed tens of thousands of idealistic fighters with the uplifting feeling that they understood all problems, that they could fathom the heart of all problems in a few theses; at the same time the simplicity and

A working definition of “mythos” might be: a model held in a society, which is a reasonable framework the members of that society are prepared to accept; which hides or explains away certain contradictions; and which is also flexible enough to allow a certain latitude for people who are loyal to the model to have disagreements on certain aspects of it.
clarity of the principles they set forth strengthened conviction of a speedy and inevitable final victory.

We dare to assert that even honest and serious attempts by communist publicists and politicians to free themselves from the pressure of the theses hammered in for dozens of years — and we do not exclude this article — bear the stamp of that period and often carry out the liberation from the Stalin-mythos with conceptions and ideas which entered their hearts and minds in that period, for example, the peculiar final slogan: "Long live Marxism-Leninism!", as if this wish for the well-being of a scientific theory had more meaning than the slogan: "Long live the quantum theory!"

Seen historically, this slogan made more sense of course. Strictly speaking the "marxism-leninism" of the Stalin period was the scientific trimming of the Stalin-mythos. Earlier, during Lenin's lifetime, the term "leninism" was used to denote the perspectives of the Russian Labor movement as seen by Lenin and the Bolshevik fraction of the Russian Social-Democratic party. These interpretations, based on a high degree of deliberation and perception, were to become of general significance. They were concerned primarily with the perspectives of a socialist revolution in a mainly agrarian country, the role of the party and its organisational form in the revolutionary struggle. Lenin considered his conceptions as an application of marxism to Russia and defended them against those who — without regard to the particular conditions in Russia — stuck to the words of Marx and Engels and to Marx's model of a revolution.

The general significance of Lenin's intellectual achievement emerged when Lenin, following upon the outbreak of world war, analysed monopoly capitalism, and characterised imperialism, the capitalism of the monopolies, as the highest phase of capitalism. The relevant studies and conclusions were undoubtedly the most significant and creative development of scientific socialism since Marx and Engels. They carried, in the truest sense of the word, a new world within them, not least because of the hypothesis of the possibility of a socialist revolution in one or more even backward countries — in contradistinction to Marx's model of revolution, which counted on the simultaneous victory of the proletariat in the most developed capitalist countries. Furthermore, Lenin had recognised, with the prophetic vision of a genius, the revolutionary potential of the national anti-imperialist movements of the suppressed colonies and semi-colonial countries, as a part of the socialist world revolution.

Nevertheless, Stalin's definition of leninism as "the marxism of the period of imperialism and proletarian revolution" was a neo-
logism and a simplification. Zinoviev tried to save the old approach in the famous inner-Party discussion of the Bolsheviks — less so in his speech to the 5th World Congress of the Communist International — by describing leninism as marxism under the specific conditions of a backward country, where the peasantry comprised a majority of the population. This limiting definition did not do justice to the real genius of Lenin and to the significance of his perceptions. But the ready-made formula of Stalin facilitated a canonisation, which far too often dissolved marxism in “marxism-leninism”, in the sense that marxism certainly remained perceptible, touchable, but amputated in certain important spheres, which had less significance for Russian conditions and were not developed by Lenin. The whole wealth of thought of the young Marx for instance, with the significant concept of alienation, disappeared, remained unknown and not allowed for, withheld for dozens of years from the revolutionary labor movement, not least because Lenin, who had died before the publication of important writings of the young Marx, had not dealt with them. Systematising, schematising Marx and Lenin, “marxism-leninism” led again and again to unreal, voluntaristic generalisations, which arose from the Russian situation, from Soviet considerations of state (that is, whatever the Soviet leadership considered desirable) and from the proclaimed theses of Stalin. It sinned against marxism and against the thoughts of Lenin by simplification, vulgarisation and falsification, and from it one took whatever was needed. Thus in philosophical questions Materialism and Empirio-Criticism was preferred to the later, more mature Philosophical Notebooks.

The liberation from the Stalin-mythos occurred first of all by a return to the sources, to Marx and Lenin. Many of those who returned to or studied the sources frequently felt like the community in the self-critical Jewish joke, which decided to lay down asphalt in a street and after the necessary cleaning of the street discovered that the street had already been asphalted.

On the Theory of Revolution

Let us take for example the problem of the socialist revolution. Lenin had adapted Marx’s model of the revolution to the transition of a bourgeois-democratic revolution into a socialist revolution in a backward country with feudal remnants. Lenin’s references to the possibility of revolution in one or in a few countries play an important role in the “Foundations” and the “Short Course”, in the “marxism-leninism” of the Stalin period generally. And yet there are literally only a few sentences of Lenin’s in two articles of the years 1915 and 1917, which are not very clear, not developed, not commented upon. Stalin needed these words of Lenin for his polemic with Trotsky, for the orientation of socialist
construction of socialism in one country; but they became a credo, without even an attempt being made to work out a really scientific theory of revolution, despite the fact that the theses of Lenin, which had been corroborated by the October Revolution in Russia, had been shown to be somewhat incomplete by the revolutions of Asia, Africa and Cuba. Hand in hand with this amputation went a vulgarisation of the marxist law of motion, which the classics had derived from West European history, and which was generalised as a linear succession of social formations; in this connection the “Asiatic mode of production” was deleted for the sake of simplicity.

Connected with this: for the marxist theory of revolution it was critical that the development of the productive forces of capitalism resulted in material maturity for the transition to socialism, that the social character of the productive forces make itself felt already within the framework of capitalism, in joint-stock companies, cartels, trusts, and in the growing role of the state in production. Lenin developed this important thought further. He studied the new, state monopoly capitalism and wrote that socialism already knocks at the door. So that the main thing now depended on moving forward to revolutionary democracy, so as to help the material maturity of socialism to break through politically as well. In the “Foundations” and in the “Short Course”, this problem disappears. As it was mainly a question of justifying the construction of socialism in one country, to present the Russian October Revolution as a model for all socialist revolutions, this serious amputation occurred. As a result, the Communist movement found it more difficult to analyse in time the problems of modern capitalism, to analyse scientifically the role of the state in modern capitalism. This amputation played a part in the fateful delay in the orientation of the revolutionary movement of the developed capitalist countries towards new roads to socialism.

The fact that statements and thoughts of Marx and Engels about the possibilities of a peaceful road to socialism had been neglected and historical facts concealed, undoubtedly contributed to the simplification and vulgarisation of the theory of revolution. In the “Short Course”, it was decided once and for all that in July 1917, on the road to October, the possibility of a peaceful revolution in Russia was lost — in accordance with a statement of Stalin at the 6th Congress of the Bolsheviks: an alteration to the facts which undoubtedly facilitated the teaching that the October Revolution was the compulsory model of all socialist revolutions. Only after the death of Stalin was it recalled that Lenin, shortly after the defeat of the Kornilov rising, in August 1917, had again raised the possibility of a peaceful revolution, which could have counted on the support of the majority of the left forces, and that he had
still written of this possibility in September 1917. The marxist concept of the many roads to socialism, ever underlined by Lenin, faded during the Stalin period.

Lenin had written that marxism is all-powerful, because it is true. Simplifying, one could say that “marxism-leninism” of the Stalin period was true, because Stalin was all-powerful.

*Revisions as Dogmas*

If it is said of that period that dogmatism dominated, this is not to be understood to mean that the interpretations of Marx, Engels and Lenin were treated as dogmas, holy and untouchable. Stalin repeatedly spoke of creative marxism, which was the enemy of every kind of dogmatism, about the need to develop theory, etc. If one starts from the basic propositions of the classics, one would have to describe Stalin as one of the greatest revisionists in the history of marxism. The “marxism-leninism” of that period stood under the sign of the revision of important basic propositions of scientific socialism. But as Valentino Gerratana¹ correctly states, this “creative marxism” was first of all a pragmatic instrument which, in the name of the struggle against dogmatism and with appeals to the need to develop theory, justified considerations of state and arbitrary acts of the party leadership, and which, instead of an independent development of marxist theory, led to a development often independent of marxism which was revised as required. If, for instance, to justify the trials of 1936 and 1937, the theory was proclaimed that with the advance of socialist construction, the class struggle became ever sharper, then already by 1939 it was asserted that the class struggle had been overcome in socialist society and that only saboteurs and spies harmed socialist construction. The revision of Marx’s principles often went so far that in the name of the development of theory, there resulted a complete rejection and ignoring of important principle, with scorn and derision for those who upheld them. Thus Stalin’s proposition that even communism could be built in one state, in one country, narrowed the conception and the presentation of the development of socialist society to production and productive forces, (as distinguished from the basic propositions of the classics) took the soul out of the concept of communism, and changed completely the notions bound up with this concept. The scorn which was heaped on the potential and unnamed opponents during the proclamation of this theory at the 18th Congress of the CPSU was really a mockery of marxism. Opponents were often treated like Aesop, who was thrown from the cliff, not because he disregarded Apollo, but because he mistrusted the Delphic priests.

The fully developed mythos allowed only scorn and violence towards doubters. It was a period of "blood and iron" as Togliatti once wrote, a period of gigantic difficulties for the first socialist state, which explains many anomalies, but which are irrelevant for the arguments with which we are primarily concerned here. Here we are concerned with the structure of a mythos, whose momentary theses were declared as eternal dogmas. And in this sense and only in this sense can we speak of the dogmatism of that time. All problems seemed clear and resolved; they could be summed up in two, three, four maxims; they could be contained in two, three, four conclusions. Anyone who did not understand this was at best an idiot — "if not something worse" to use a phase popular in the 'thirties. Marx and Lenin did not treat their opponents with indulgence, but during the Stalin period, the history of the labor movement was a chain of triumphs over idiots, rogues and spies.

Thus the "Short Course" is a short history of how the Bolsheviks overcame fools and criminals — not to speak of the caricature of various philosophical trends in the fourth chapter of the book. We take the most remote, most harmless example: the "economists" with whom Lenin polemised in What is to be Done? (1902). From opportunists, who represented the point of view that the Russian workers could only be moved by means of social questions, they became fools who rejected all political perspectives. One only has to read Lenin's What is to be Done? to note how the argumentation of this standard work has been vulgarised.

Voluntarism and Laws of Development.

The canonisation of all theses, which left no room for doubt and discussion, but only the task of interpretation and commentary, reached its peak in a fantastic bowdlerisation of the basic problem of the marxist conception of history, the relationship of individual will to the general regularity of social development. The momentary decision of will was glorified as an expression of the general laws of development and thereby transfigured as infallible and irresistible. The momentary decision of will was so closely identified with the general laws of development of historical progress, that every doubter and critic was aware in advance of the ridiculous role of trying to act counter to the iron "must" of history. He thus became a lawbreaker in two senses of the word, one ridiculous, and the other criminal. While the possibility of mistakes (in the past) was basically admitted by Lenin's formula for the need for self-criticism, this possibility was excluded for the present and for the future — all the more, as what were rightly or wrongly considered reasons of state, were identified with "marxism-leninism". No wonder there were ideological disputes later, when there were
many socialist states, led by pupils of Stalin, with differing state interests.

When state interests could be identified with the laws of development, this had to lead to different laws of development in view of the differing positions of socialist states. On the 8th December, 1961, the then Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, Ilyichev, declared: "The unity of the International Communist Movement is a law of development of Marxist-Leninist Parties". On the 4th February, 1964, the Leadership of the Communist Party of China declared that the splitting of the communist movement was an objective law of development.

The mythos resembled a cloud cuckoo land in which everything became always more beautiful, better and bigger. Lenin had warned not to regard the road of the revolutionary labour movement as a straight and smooth Nevsky Prospect, and his essay on art, on climbing high mountains, belongs to the most beautiful pages of marxist ideology. But as, according to the mythos, everything that was willed had to appear right and inexorable, reality had to demonstrate the wisdom of the decisions and the triumph of the general laws of development. There were no doubts, no problems, no mistakes; a world was constructed whose inner logic could not be gainsaid, whose compelling logic convinced revolutionary minds. Only this world was not the real world. This compelling logic often

2 The "marxism-leninism" of the Stalin-mythos was a pragmatism, which proclaimed the momentary interests of state, whether reasonable or not, as an eternal truth and principle of "marxism-leninism". Richard Wagner was honoured after the German-Soviet non-aggression pact. Hegel was exposed as a reactionary after the attack on the Soviet Union. The necessary solidarity of the revolutionary labor movement with the first socialist state was the basis of the monolithism which belonged to the essence of the Stalin-mythos which appeared the more inexorable the closer the bearer of it stood to doubt and hesitation. The glorification of the Russian working class and the Russian people, who after all had carried out the first socialist revolution, first attempted the building of socialism, and carried the main burden of the struggle against fascism, was the basis and pre-condition of the mythos, although it was connected with historical simplifications, as for instance, the statement that the Russian Party was the only party which had carried out a decided struggle against the first imperialist world war. Occasionally the Bulgarian "Tesnyaks" were mentioned. But in no text book was there any mention of the great and self-sacrificing struggle conducted by the Italian labor movement.

The Stalin-mythos had its decisive roots in the warm link of the revolutionary labor movement with the first socialist state, the first proletarian revolution, the first socialist experiment. Gramsci, the most significant marxist theoretician between the two world wars, expressly formulated in his theses for the Lyons Congress of the Italian Communists, that history justified the predominating and leading function of the Russian Party in the formation of the Communist International or the basis of the position of the Russian state — "the first and only real conquest of the working classes in the struggle for power." This very internationalist duty of solidarity later led to the position that every doubt in the mythos could be said to endanger this solidarity.
yielded doubtful arguments, because the conclusions were deduced very logically from a premise which was inexorable, even if not correct. Thus the discussion took on the form of a scholastic interpretation of inexorable quotations. Stalin had described leninism as the marxism of the period of imperialism and of proletarian revolution. There would certainly have been no dearth of propagandists who would have been ready to describe marxism as the leninism of the period of rising capitalism and the formation of the labor movement.

The Stalin-mythos at times took on real liturgical forms. These had their origin in certain significant speeches and documents of Stalin, in which perhaps the influence of the seminary attended by the young Stalin made itself felt. This is particularly traceable in the writings of his youth, but even later the simplifying conclusions and solemn repetitions act like the amens in prayer. Read for instance the last work of Stalin, his impressive speech at 19th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union on the position of communists on democracy and national independence (1952). All propositions end with similar phrases, with the repetition of the same themes, and take on a compelling and logical character just because of this solemn repetition — except that the starting point is at the least a gigantic over-simplification.

In the very liturgical presentation of scientific socialism in the Stalin-mythos, certain basic ideas of the classics were lost. The works of the young Marx, which were intolerable philosophically to the mythos; many political thoughts of the older Engels, which were not sufferable tactically to the mythos; important allusions of Lenin before his death, with their democratism, their fighting position against bureaucratism, their rejection of any personality cult, would have been fatal to the mythos. As regards the history of thought before marxism and the history of the labor movement before the formation of the communist parties, marks were allotted and visible breaks introduced. The greatest minds of "before" were given a place, roughly equivalent to the place given in hell by Dante in the Divine Comedy to the greatest heathens who were not Christians and could not be Christians, as they were born before Christ.

"Where faith dwelt for thousands of years, doubt now dwells", it is said in Brecht's Galileo. It also dwells where the mythos has ruled for dozens of years. How could it rule for dozens of years?

The Mythos and the Labor Movement

In the Stalin-mythos there was mingled theory and institutionally conditioned propaganda, marxist concepts and argumentation often determined by reasons of state, together with scientific soc-
ialism. Even marxists, experts in scientific socialism, succumbed to the mythos, as one succumbs to any mythos which, as Levy-Strauss showed, demands general acceptance, but at the same time allows a certain range of doubt and unbelief. Even in the sense of the modern study of mythology, the term "Stalin-mythos", which Togliatti used, is preferrable to the concept of "personality cult", which only complicates the comprehension of how this phenomenon could arise and become effective. The mythos, writes Levy-Strauss, gives man a reference system which tries to overcome, to veil, the contradiction between the concepts and reality by a logical model. The Stalin-mythos overcame and veiled the contradictions which arose in the construction of socialism in an immensely backward country; the contradictions between the ideas of scientific socialism and the methods used in the first socialist experiment; between the illusions of the revolutionary labor movement and the difficulties which it confronts after its first conquest of power, the conflicts arising therefrom. It is thus understandable that even significant marxists and socialist idealists succumbed to the mythos, because they had faith in the first socialist state and had no alternative to this faith.

One thing must not be over-looked: the appeal to marxism and the study of the classics left wide room for correct analysis, for reasonable conclusions, and particularly for splendid struggle, in which the whole readiness to struggle and sacrifice of the communists could be proven. All the more so as the development of the mythos did not proceed evenly. In certain periods — for instance, during the spring of the anti-fascist struggle and of the ideology of the 7th World Congress of the Communist International in 1953 — the interests of the first socialist state coincided so closely with the interests of the revolutionary labor movement that the mythos did not hamper the development of the struggle and even united them in such a figure as Dimitrov. The existence of the first socialist experiment was after all — as Otto Bauer often stressed — identical with the basic interests and perspectives of the labor movement; so every decision for governmental reasons by this state, whether right or wrong, was felt as an obligation. The Communist Parties were born as children of the October revolution, they grew up in solidarity with it; in the development of this solidarity, they then, step by step and often imperceptibly, slid into acceptance of the mythos.

Here also lies the explanation, why tens of thousands of the most noble people, and hundreds of the greatest artists and scientists, succumbed to the mythos. Enzensberger has tried in an essay on Pablo Neruda to explain a poem about Stalin by the great poet

by reference to the shocking conditions in Latin America. What then of Barbusse? Picasso? Aragon? Joliot-Curie? Bertol Brecht? Bloch? Guttoso? And, at a certain period, Pasternak? Herbert Marcuse proclaims solemnly and correctly: “There are forms of violence and suppression which no revolutionary situation can justify, because they negate the very end for which the revolution is a means.”

But were the Communists suddenly confronted with this alternative?

They had first accepted a conception, which they thought correct and still hold as correct today, that in the 'twenties, there was no other road but the course of building socialism in backward Russia. In the inner-Party discussion of the Bolsheviks, in the inner-Party discussions of the communist movement, Stalin, borrowing heavily from Bukharin, personified this point of view. Stalin became the personification of that trend, which meant socialism to the communists, not just socialism in one country, but socialism as such, as against the betrayal of socialist hopes which they had experienced in the practice of the Social-Democratic Parties. To be for socialism at that time, when Stalin represented the trend for socialist construction in Russia, meant to be for Stalin.

And this applied even more, when the pathos of the first Five-Year Plan gripped the land of the October Revolution, in the midst of a severe economic crisis which was seen as the proof of the instability of capitalism, at the beginning of the fascist wave, which was seen as proof of the fragility of bourgeois democracy. The worst anti-communists and enemies of socialism spoke at that time of the Stalin Five-Year Plans, of the Stalin experiment, thus helping to weave the mythos which slowly and almost imperceptibly was spun around the movement. The communists saw all their hopes made concrete in the grandiose construction. And Charles Peguy had already written that only those who touch nothing have clean hands. Then came the victory of Hitler fascism, then came Spain — and admittedly there also came at the same time the Moscow trials. Much seemed unbelievable in these trials, but the communists wanted to believe, had to believe if they were not to abandon every alternative. Should they orientate themselves on those Social-Democratic Parties, which capitulated to fascism, which delivered Spain to Franco and the fascist Axis Powers? After all, no one today who wishes to help Vietnam orientates himself on Wilson. The bloody war waged by the Secret Services, to which King Alexander of Yugoslavia and the French Foreign Minister Barthou fell victims, appeared to explain many things, as did the fact that former communist leaders, like Doriot and

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4 Hans Magnus Enzensberger *Einzelheiten* (Suhrkamp 1962) p. 316.
5 *Kultur und Gesellschaft II* (Suhrkamp 1965) p. 138.
others, in an unbelievably short time found their way from "opposi-
tional communism" into the fascist bog. Did not also the heroes
of the first period of the Great French Revolution commit treason
because of their rejection of later developments?

One looked for arguments, and because one looked, one found
them. Thus one succumbed to the mythos, which left room for a
certain range of doubt when there was asquiescence in general.
And during the struggle, which for hundreds of thousands of com-
munists was a life and death struggle, there was little time for
thought — and soon there was the Second World War, in which
the Soviet Union bore the main burden. Her victory was linked
with the name which previously personified the policy of socialist
construction. Step by step, in the midst of struggle one had slipped
into the mythos without any other alternative.

Read Brecht's *Book of Changes* and follow chronologically how
from general and unconditional acceptance, the assent remained
even after the trials, with all his reservations. Even after his rec-
novation that there were many people whom Lenin convinced,
that there were only a few whom Stalin commanded, he has no
doubt in the correctness of the policy — until the 20th Congress.
And in the period of "blood and iron", hundreds of thousands of
wonderful idealists, ready to make the last sacrifice, were also pre-
pared to believe Stalin that they were men of a special mould that
there were no fortresses which they could not take. About them
Brecht said in his *Joan*

"Not one of them
Cared only for himself.
But for the bread of strangers
They toiled without rest."

Similar thoughts are to be found in Steinbeck's first novel *In Dub-
ious Battle*. And if the survivors, sore and humbled, knowing that
they are not unconditionally trustworthy, think over that time, in
honest searchings of their conscience — they find no other alter-
native which they could have chosen.

Of course, where the mythos once reigned, there now stands
doubt.