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Author(s): Oksana Klymenko

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Soviet Ideology in Workers' Memoirs of the 1920s-1930s (A Case Study of John Scott's and Borys Weide's Memoirs)

Oksana Klymenko

National University of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy,
Department of History

Abstract

Ideology was the basis of Bolshevik policy and was used as a means of control over society. Key Bolshevik ideological postulates were created and disseminated in the 1920s-1930s. The goal of this study is to analyze the influence of Soviet ideology on workers of the 1920s-1930s in the memoirs of John Scott and Borys Weide, who participated in the building of Magnitogorsk and DniproHES, respectively. Based on the memoirs, the article investigates the dissemination of ideology and describes its main tasks in the 1920s-1930s, such as “the building of socialism,” and the glorification and formation of the “new Soviet man.” These two constructs have several components, which are considered in the article. For example, glorification of “the building of socialism” was achieved through demonstrating Soviet “achievements” in industry, “superiority” to “capitalist countries” of the West, etc. To form the “new man,” images of “self” and “other” were created and an anti-religious campaign was conducted. The study focuses on the writing style of workers' texts, as the memoirs were written in a formalized “Bolshevik” language through which their authors demonstrated their loyalty to the state. Also studied are changes in workers' attitudes to the state despite ideological influence.

Key Words: memoirs, “new man,” “building of socialism,” Soviet ideology, Bolsheviks, workers.



Ideology in Soviet society was an integral part of all political, economic, social, and cultural processes. According to the newly created class concept developed by Marxist historian Mikhail Pokrovsky, the October Revolution was the starting point of “Bolshevik” history. It was interpreted as the beginning of a new era. The revolutionaries claimed themselves as builders of a “new,” “fair,” “peaceful,” and “perfect” world.¹ In addition, the Bolsheviks identified themselves with the revolutionary movements of previous eras such as the Paris Commune, and with “predecessors” such as Spartacus, along with his revolt.² One of Soviet ideology's features was its objection to concepts that were propagated in the Russian Empire. For example, Soviet ideologists of the

1 Stefan Plaggenborg, *Revoliutsiia i kultura: Kulturnye orientiry v period mezhdu Oktiabrskoi revoliutsiei i epokhoi Stalinizma* [Revolution and Culture: Cultural Orientations in the Period between the October Revolution and the Era of Stalinism], trans. from German (St. Petersburg: Zhurnal “Neva,” 2000), 7.

2 Serhy Yekelchuk, *Imperiia pamiaty: Rosiisko-ukrainski stosunki v radianskii istorichnii uiavi* [Empire of Memory: Russian-Ukrainian Relations in the Soviet Historical Imagination] (Kyiv: Krytyka, 2008), 35.

1920s denied the concept of “national history.” The motivation for this was the “Communist Manifesto,” which declared that “workers have no fatherland.”³ According to the “Manifesto,” “the history of all societies that existed before this time is the history of class struggle.”⁴

It should also be noted that Soviet ideology during the first two decades of the Soviet Union’s existence underwent some changes. In particular, the implementation of world revolution, as the Bolsheviks indicated in 1917 and the early 1920s, in time was transformed into a movement for the liberation of “oppressed” peoples in the “capitalist” countries of the West. “World revolution” would wait for more favorable conditions. In addition, after October 1917 the Bolsheviks, using various methods, tried to form an image of the “new man.” Instead, in the second half of the 1920s, with the proclamation of first five-year plan, and under the influence of new postulates in Soviet ideology, changes occurred in the image of the “new man”: he was now a worker with a “correct” lineage, meaning that his family before the October Revolution was of poor peasant or worker stock, not belonging to either “capitalist” or “exploiter” camps. These were composed of former landowners and public servants of imperial times.

The dissemination of ideology was closely linked to the politics of memory that was pursued by the Bolsheviks. The politics of memory in the first decades of Soviet existence was characterized by the peculiar organization of “memory projects” under the supervision of specially created state institutions, including the Commission on the History of the Communist Party and the October Revolution (Istpart), and the Commission on the History of Factories and Plants under the Central Committee of the CPSU(b). Implementing “memory projects” involved the introduction of a new version of Bolshevik history and the formation of a “new man.” The instrument for this was the construction of memoirs about the October Revolution and the “building of socialism.” The first “memory project” was dedicated to the events of October 1917 that were presented as a revolution in the memoirs of revolutionaries. The next campaign was the writing of memoirs by workers about their “struggle” for a “bright socialist future.” It took place during the first two five-year plans. In his article published in the newspapers *Pravda* and *Izvestiia* on September 7, 1931, Maxim Gorky explained the need to note the success of the “building of socialism” and of the involvement of workers in this process: “The workers have created a factory, they have to write the history of its creation.”⁵ Organizing and holding these “memory projects” became the motivation “from the top” for workers to think and reflect about themselves, and about what was happening around them. In this way, workers had to learn to think and write “as one had to,” “like Bolsheviks,” using a formalized language, thereby becoming “new men.”

3 Yekelchuk, *Imperii pamiati*, 35.

4 Yekelchuk, *Imperii pamiati*, 35.

5 L. M. Zak and S. S. Zimina, eds., *Gorky A. M. i sozdanie istorii fabrik i zavodov. Sbornik dokumentov i materialov v pomoshch rabotaiushchim nad istoriei fabrik i zavodov SSSR* [A. M. Gorky and the Creation of the History of Factories and Plants: A Collection of Documents and Materials in Aid of Those Working on the History of USSR Factories and Plants] (Moscow: Izdatelstvo sotsialno-ekonomicheskoi literatury, 1959), 27.

The character of the first Soviet “memory project” is presented in research done by Frederick Corney and Katerina Clark.⁶ The influence of ideology on memory policy was described in Serhy Yekelchuk's and Stefan Plaggenborg's studies devoted to social and cultural policies implemented in the Soviet Union during the 1920s–1930s.⁷ Jochen Hellbeck and Stephen Kotkin studied the influence of ideology specifically on the memoirs of workers during the first decades of Soviet existence.⁸ These authors propose a methodology and approaches to the study of Soviet ego-documents.

The goal of this study is to analyze the influence of Soviet ideology on workers of the 1920s–1930s through referencing their memoirs. To achieve this goal two texts of memoirs were selected. They were written during the second Soviet “memory project” dedicated to the “building of socialism.” The memoirs were presented in the form of diaries: John Scott's “*Za Uralom. Amerikanskii rabochii v russkom gorode stali*” (Behind the Urals: An American Worker in Russia's City of Steel) and Borys Weide's “*Zapysky budivelnyka*” (Builder's Notes) (1908–1935).⁹ Common to both diaries was a description of the wide-scale industrialization campaign held in the USSR in the late 1920s — early 1930s. In addition, the personal experience of both authors was related under ideological influence. At first glance, it may appear that these reminiscences are very similar, as they were written at about the same time and describe the “building of socialism” on two prominent projects: the building of Magnitogorsk, and the Dnipro Hydroelectric Station (DniproHES). However, the influence of Soviet ideology on the authors was different. Their individual origins may provide the explanation. The first author, John Scott was an American. He wrote his memoirs in the form of a diary while living in Magnitogorsk (from 1931 to 1937). His reminiscences were first published in the USA in 1941, after he had left the Soviet Union. In 1991 they were published in Russia. Pictures of Scott, his family, and Magnitogorsk were added in the Russian edition. The choice of these reminiscences for my research is not accidental, as their author, an American, positioned himself as a Soviet worker, a “native.” These memoirs show how an American, under the influence of Soviet ideology, attempted to become a “new man” and learned to write about himself “like a Bolshevik.” Another feature of these reminiscences

6 Frederick Corney, “Rethinking a Great Event: The October Revolution as Memory Project,” *Social Science History* 22.4 (1998): 389–414; Katerina Clark, “‘The History of the Factories’ as a Factory of History: A Case Study on the Role of Soviet Literature in Subject Formation,” in *Autobiographical Practices in Russia*, ed. J. Hellbeck and K. Heller (Göttingen: V&R Unipress, 2004), 251–78.

7 See Yekelchuk, *Imperii pamiati*; Plaggenborg, *Revoliutsiia i kultura*.

8 Jochen Hellbeck, “Working, Struggling, Becoming: Stalin-Era Autobiographical Texts,” *Russian Review* 60.3 (2001): 340–59; Jochen Hellbeck, “Fashioning the Stalinist Soul. The Diary of Stepan Podlubnyi, 1931–1939,” in *Revolution on my Mind: Writing a Diary under Stalin*, ed. J. Hellbeck (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), 77–115; Stephen Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as a Civilization* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).

9 See John Scott, *Za Uralom. Amerikanskii rabochii v russkom gorode stali* [*Behind the Urals: An American Worker in Russia's City of Steel*], trans. from English (Moscow: Izdatelstvo Moskovskogo universiteta; Izdatelstvo Uralskogo universiteta, 1991); Borys Weide, *Zapysky budivelnyka (1908–1935)* [*Builder's Notes, 1908–1935*] (Kyiv, 2012).

is that they show how Scott changed his attitude to the Soviet Union, and accordingly, if he succeeded in not being an “outsider” in Soviet society.

The next author is Borys Weide, a Latvian, whose family lived near Melitopol. He positioned himself as a Soviet worker, as he had worked on two Soviet projects, the plant in Zaporizhia and DniproHES. The title of his memoirs (“Builder’s Notes”) is also indicative of his self-identification. According to some researchers, his memoirs were a life-long project and can be divided into three parts, only one of which is extant (about the period from 1923 to 1935).¹⁰ Events of the first two five-year plans are in the center of these reminiscences. The memoirs were first posted on the Internet, and later issued as a publication in 2012.¹¹ This part of the reminiscences could have been rewritten in the postwar period as they were dedicated to Weide’s son, Felix Borysovych.¹² These memoirs, like John Scott’s, were written as a diary, but their main feature is that their author was a “new Soviet man” who wrote about himself “correctly,” demonstrating his commitment to the state. For a time he had worked as a correspondent for the local *Chervone Zaporizhia* (Red Zaporizhia) newspaper. On the Dniprobud project he was a member of a committee that identified “subversive elements” among workers. Thus his diary is an example of how external control influenced inner self-censorship during its writing.

The Methods of the Spread of Soviet Ideology

The dissemination of Soviet ideology is clearly represented in John Scott’s memoirs. His reminiscences demonstrate the spread of Bolshevik ideology not only on Soviet territory but outside of it as well, as the author indicates at the beginning of his text:

I read much about the Soviet Union, and gradually came to the conclusion that the Bolsheviks had found the answers, at least to some of the questions that Americans were asking each other. I decided to go to Russia to work, to learn and to help build a society that seemed to be at least one step ahead of American society.¹³

The example of this American is very demonstrative of how at first Bolshevik ideology, which eventually acquired new forms and was subsequently renamed Soviet, could affect foreigners and involve them in the “building of socialism.” As Scott wrote in his memoirs, he came to the Soviet Union to “build socialism.” His choice was fully conscious. On the advice of his father, by becoming a welder he specifically learned a trade that he could make use of in the USSR. The very first pages of the reminiscences present a 20-year-old youth who has convictions and sincerely believes in communist ideals. From what the author writes, it is clear that after arriving in the Soviet Union in 1931 he was not disappointed, and enthusiastically accepted what

10 Nadiia Shvaiba, “Borys Weide i yoho chas [Borys Weide and his Time],” in *Zapysky budivelnyka (1908–1935)*, ed. N. Shvaiba (Kyiv, 2012), 7.

11 Nadiia Shvaiba, “Vid uporiadnyka [From the Editor],” in *Zapysky budivelnyka (1908–1935)*, ed. N. Shvaiba (Kyiv, 2012), 4.

12 Shvaiba, “Borys Weide i yoho chas,” 6.

13 Scott, *Za Uralom*, 30. All translations from the Russian are mine.

he saw: "I was very happy. In the Soviet Union there was no unemployment."¹⁴ However, the transition from another country gave him a chance to compare certain things, particularly the standard of living: "It took me very little time to understand that they eat black bread mainly because there is no other, and wear rags for the same reason."¹⁵

Through Scott's memoirs it is possible to determine the ways Soviet ideology was spread. To this end, Scott repeatedly identifies the Soviet press, radio, schools teachers, agitators, the party, and Komsomol leaders. Other effective methods of influence were education, theater, cinema, clubs, and books. All of these channels taught people to believe in the "correct" ideals. As an example, we read about Scott's impression after he saw a play that greatly affected him. The following is a small excerpt:

The play made a great impression on the workers of Magnitogorsk in the same way as it did on me and Joe Burns (Scott's friend and "New York Herald Tribune" correspondent. — Oksana Klymenko). It clearly demonstrated that everyone has to cooperate with the government to expose foreign spies. On the other hand, it did not show the danger and tragedy of the over-enthusiastic conduction of purges.¹⁶

These words were about the events of the second half of the 1930s. Obviously, every play of the time had a certain ideological burden and performed a certain "educational" function. In this case, the term "cooperation with the government" meant constant spying on each other by Soviet citizens and writing denunciations about the detection of "spies." This passage also shows the author's criticism of the purges and terror that was occurring at the time.

Scott compared some Soviet ideological aspects to what he had seen in the USA during his visit there in 1936. For example, he said that after living in the Soviet Union it was unusual to see American advertisements, as these were almost absent in Russia: the state instead advertised bonds and savings banks in an attempt to restrain people from buying everyday goods, which were few. No product, except for cosmetics, was advertised in the press, in the underground, on posters and playbills, or through announcements on radio.¹⁷ Scott also noted that, instead of being encouraged to buy and smoke a certain brand of cigarettes, people were constantly called upon to study Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin, increase output, improve quality, reduce production costs, and be vigilant.¹⁸ That is, advertising in the Soviet Union was not a way to offer goods and services to people. It was a way to spread "correct" slogans in society, calling upon people to read and work "as one has to." And it was a way of forming the "new man," always attentive to revealing "subversive elements."

It is more difficult to trace the manner of ideology's spread in Borys Weide's memoirs than in Scott's, as in Weide's memoirs the reader can see a fully formed "new Soviet man" thinking in "categories" and able to write "like a Bolshevik." There are many clichés in the text typical of

14 Scott, *Za Uralom*, 31.

15 Scott, *Za Uralom*, 32.

16 Scott, *Za Uralom*, 210.

17 Scott, *Za Uralom*, 231.

18 Scott, *Za Uralom*, 231.

ego-documents of the time. The author is presented “correctly,” having a “correct” lineage, and adhering to communist ideals. This style of writing, “as one has to,” was learned by the author during his work as a correspondent. Borys Weide wrote not so much about the methods of influence of ideology on people, as John Scott did, but provides information that is absent in Scott’s reminiscences, particularly on the spread of literature in Soviet society through libraries. Having completed librarian courses, he documents his work as the director of a library before working on the building of the DniproHES. Weide also writes about the books he’s read: “I read voraciously and spent most evenings in the library close to the fireplace.”¹⁹ One passage about libraries and books contains information about the control “from the top” over literature, of concern to library users:

I had received the “New World” journal for the library, the distributor telling me to “read the Pilniak story [...] a sensational obligatory story about Frunze!” But the story remained unread. When the last library users had left, Okrlit came and took the book, leaving a receipt. The next day it became known that the story had deciphered M. F. Frunze’s cause of death. So said the people who had managed to read it...²⁰

It should be noted that Weide does not comment on the episode. Instead, he seemingly demonstrates his detachment from a “wrong” kind of literature, and relates a 3rd person comment, underlining his neutrality.

Such attention to libraries as a means of spreading ideology is not accidental. As Stefan Plaggenborg notes, state organs used libraries in several ways: they were important in the extracurricular political education of the masses, could provide for the distribution of a large number of books, and were centers for the dissemination of classical literature.²¹

Thus, according to Scott’s and Weide’s memoirs, the main conduits for the spread of Soviet ideology among others were theater, “advertising,” and books (“correct” literature in libraries, which were also disseminated abroad).

The Role of Soviet Ideology in Workers’ Perceptions and “Remembrance” of the “Building of Socialism”

We consider the influence of Soviet ideology on workers through representations of the “building of socialism” in their memoirs. It is first necessary to identify common clichés of the time about the “building of socialism” present in the memoirs. For example, John Scott describes construction projects almost as a struggle for a “bright communist future”:

In Magnitogorsk I was thrown into battle. I found myself on the front line of cast iron and steel. Tens of thousands of people patiently endured incredible hardships to build

19 Weide, *Zapysky budivelnika*, 34.

20 Weide, *Zapysky budivelnika*, 43.

21 Plaggenborg, *Revoliutsiia i kultura*, 151.

blast furnaces, and many did so willingly, eagerly, and with boundless enthusiasm, so that I was infected upon my arrival.²²

However, later in the memoirs the attitude of the author to the “building of socialism” becomes different. The author notes that at work in the plant and in the city he always felt how Magnitogorsk was built with blood and sweat.²³ He also notes that despite difficulties (for example, a two-week delay in salary), he saw positive developments: Scott went to the archives where his friend Andre worked, and found reassuring news: for example, despite the difficulties, Magnitogorsk accounted for about 10% of the total amount of iron produced in the country.²⁴

This example clearly demonstrates one more feature of writing “like a Bolshevik.” From its first words it seems that the author will describe in detail the difficulties of life and work in Magnitogorsk, but Scott presents this in a way that the difficulties seem like a temporary sacrifice necessary for the future, and today there are achievements to be proud of.

Borys Weide's memoirs also detail moments devoted to the “building of socialism,” but focus more on the fact that the “building of socialism” represents more than just a reason for pride, it has the potential to affect the world:

The pace of Dniprobud has already surprised the world. Bearded men in sandals, young people with KIM logos on shirts, all these men and women have tirelessly shown miraculous dedication, surprising even the Americans.²⁵

Besides, to Weide the “building of socialism” meant not merely doing his job, but doing it as best he could. He saw his role in the “building of socialism” in that he had to carefully identify “subversive elements,” which hinder the construction of a new “perfect” society, as it was proposed by the Bolsheviks.

Many foreigners worked on the building of Magnitogorsk and DniproHES. In Scott's reminiscences they are presented as partners in the “building of socialism” in the USSR, whereas in Weide's memoirs they are always opposed to the processes taking place in the country. He wrote about them as people who do not believe in the “building of socialism” but in time are incredibly surprised by its “success.”²⁶ An explanation for this can be found in the fact that Soviet ideology propagated superiority over so-called capitalist countries that allegedly posed a threat not only to Soviet industrialization, but also to the whole of its society and the Soviet Union per se. John Scott's reminiscences are similar in this respect, and provide the example of local party leaders' speeches as evidence. One such leader, Shevchenko, noted that it was necessary to complete industrialization as soon as possible, doing everything possible and not sparing anyone, because, as he said, the Soviet Union was surrounded by “hostile capitalist states.”²⁷

22 Scott, *Za Uralom*, 32.

23 Scott, *Za Uralom*, 99.

24 Scott, *Za Uralom*, 99.

25 Weide, *Zapysky budivelnika*, 49.

26 Weide, *Zapysky budivelnika*, 49.

27 Scott, *Za Uralom*, 49.

Shevchenko called Magnitogorsk an extremely important center of heavy industry in the Soviet Union, where millions of rubles were invested, and thousands of workers came to from all over the country.²⁸ He also emphasized, although indirectly, the obligation of everyone to assist the state in its “struggle” with the “capitalist world”: “Our country expects from us iron and steel.”²⁹

An additional huge influence of ideology can be gathered from another passage of Scott’s memoirs, in which he describes a discussion among workers with their picture of “the capitalist world.” A worker named Anna claims that in five or ten years the USSR will not need anything from “capitalist countries.”³⁰ This is followed by a comment from another worker, who says that the “capitalist world” will not exist in a decade because the workers of those countries “are not about to starve during this ten-year crisis, they will not tolerate this.”³¹ His thesis is picked up on by others: “Of course, not. They will rise up. And we will help them when it happens.”³² Thus the “capitalist world” is presented as something awful, where workers starve. The image of foreign workers is extremely interesting because in the imagination of their Soviet colleagues they are victims. Proof of this can be garnered in fragments of John Scott’s wife Masha’s diary, which he included in his memoirs.

I had never seen any Americans, and it was very interesting to see John Scott, who came from a country which was under capitalist oppression and found a new home in the land of socialism.³³

As is shown in this particular passage, Masha’s imagination of the world was based on a clear division of countries into two hostile camps: “a perfect proletarian world” and “the capitalist world.” Overall, these quotes and further descriptions of Masha’s impressions from her first meeting with Scott are full of clichés of the time. First, she indicates that she perceives him as “a product of capitalist oppression.” Second, she provides her vision of his “unhappy” childhood: work at a factory for a paltry salary, “which apparently only suffices for a slice of bread in order to not die of hunger and to have the strength to come to work the next day”; and fear of losing his job.³⁴ Owners of factories are called “parasitic owners.”³⁵ In this way Scott’s future wife demonstrates her loyalty to the “correct” Bolshevik regime, which, unlike in the “capitalist West,” according to the slogan “Land to the peasants!” and “Factories to the workers!” proclaimed workers as the owners of factories.

Such a description of the “capitalist world” was written, of course, under the influence of ideology and propaganda. The use of the phrase “capitalist oppression” is not accidental in the passages. Thus, on the one hand, there is a clear link to the victimization of workers in “capitalist”

28 Scott, *Za Uralom*, 49–50.

29 Scott, *Za Uralom*, 50.

30 Scott, *Za Uralom*, 67.

31 Scott, *Za Uralom*, 67.

32 Scott, *Za Uralom*, 67.

33 Scott, *Za Uralom*, 132–33.

34 Scott, *Za Uralom*, 133.

35 Scott, *Za Uralom*, 133.

countries, and on the other hand, it is emphasized that thanks to the Bolsheviks, the “correct” choice has already been made “here,” and the country is on a “correct” path of development. In addition, the use of the word “capitalist” connotes something hostile and oppressive.

The image of the “hostile” “capitalist” West quickly spread in Soviet society because its cultivation came “from the top,” and always sounded in speeches of party leaders and above all Stalin himself. According to John Scott, in January 1931, Stalin delivered a speech at a meeting of directors:

Through his inimitable, simple language, Stalin steadfastly explained the need to accelerate the pace of industrialization. He warned the Russian people that in ten years they would have to make their country as strong as surrounding capitalist countries, otherwise Russia would be overrun and destroyed.³⁶

In this passage Stalin is described not just as a leader, but as a “father” who “warns” his people about the external threat. And this is not the only such passage in Scott’s reminiscences. He describes Stalin as an ideal, wise leader, who sees it his duty to protect the state from the “aggressor” in case of attack.³⁷ Such protection was “possible” on account of the “building of socialism,” which in itself was due to the “leader”: the Magnitogorsk, Ural and West-Siberian industrial plants being built thanks to Stalin.³⁸

Generally such attention to Stalin in workers’ memoirs is not arbitrary, as they date from the early 1930s, a time when practically all power was in his hands. Additionally, the cult of Lenin had faded into the background. Reminiscences of the October Revolution written by its “participants” had cultivated the cult of Lenin as the leader of the revolution. However, in workers’ memoirs the cult of Stalin replaced the previous cult. Most probably, a canon on how to write about the Stalin cult existed. The question may arise as to whether the cult of Stalin had completely replaced the cult of Lenin by the 1930s. On the basis of John Scott’s diary it is possible to answer “yes.” But it should be noted that Scott came to the Soviet Union after Lenin’s death, in 1931. Therefore, descriptions of Lenin are absent in Scott’s reminiscences. Lenin is mentioned in the reminiscences of another American, John Reed. His memoirs about the October Revolution were published in 1919 under the title “Ten Days that Shook the World.”³⁹

The cult of personality in Borys Weide’s memoirs features other characteristics. He mentions many party leaders, but does not elaborate on any of them. Nevertheless, it is necessary to highlight several illustrative episodes. Unlike in Scott’s memoirs, the cult of Lenin is present in Weide’s reminiscences, although in a specific way. He describes how people in the Soviet Union perceived Lenin’s death: “Plant, city, and country were in mourning.”⁴⁰ In addition, he notes that after the news about Lenin’s death many people submitted applications for

36 Scott, *Za Uralom*, 84.

37 Scott, *Za Uralom*, 83.

38 Scott, *Za Uralom*, 84.

39 John Reed, *Ten Days that Shook the World* (New York: Bony and Liveright, 1919).

40 Weide, *Zapysky budivelnika*, 33.

admission to the party.⁴¹ In his short description Weide very clearly demonstrates what the cult of Lenin represented in the 1920s: he was a leader who people followed, even after his death. At the beginning of his reminiscences the author writes about his being acquainted with Felix Dzerzhinsky, whom he calls “a knight of revolution.”⁴² Details of this acquaintance are almost absent, the author only noting that Dzerzhinsky helped him in some way. This was probably important help, because the author admits that after his acquaintance with Dzerzhinsky he gave his son the name “Felix.”⁴³

Thus, due to the influence of ideology, the “building of socialism” in workers’ memoirs was presented as a struggle for a “bright future,” conducted on a daily basis in order to defeat the enemy, the “capitalist countries.” Both authors state that the “building of socialism” was something that affected the world, occurring due to the workers’ efforts and Stalin’s central role in the industrialization of the USSR.

The Influence of Soviet Ideology on the Formation of the “New Man”

Soviet ideology penetrated almost all spheres of society, significantly impacting the formation of the “new man.” This is also represented in workers’ memoirs. The education of the “new man” occurred primarily through schools, institutes of higher learning, and various programs of study. In Borys Weide’s memoirs this concern is represented through the author’s self-education. As described above, Weide read many books that he found in his local library. John Scott instead presents a complete picture of his study at a Communist University. Almost everyone who entered the Communist University was semi-literate. Everyone who wanted to study at the university had to have a grade five-level education, but in reality only the ability to read and write was strictly checked.⁴⁴ Thus, the level of education in the 1930s, despite a state educational program (*liknep*) begun in the previous decade, remained relatively low.

Study at the Communist University lasted three years and involved such subjects as the Russian Language, Arithmetic, Political Economy, Leninism, the History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, the History of the Revolutionary Movement in Western Countries, and Party Building and Dialectical Materialism.⁴⁵ As this list demonstrates, most subjects were dedicated to Bolshevik history. Thus, the delivery of a “correct” version of history formed a “correct” attitude of people to the past, and represented a means of forming the “new Soviet man.”

However, the teaching of certain subjects was always accompanied by problems. For example, as Scott noted in particular, there were difficulties with providing textbooks, especially on dialectical materialism, as only one book was available on the subject, its author being Bukharin. It was forbidden to use the book because it was considered “opportunistic.”⁴⁶

41 Weide, *Zapysky budivelnika*, 33.

42 Weide, *Zapysky budivelnika*, 30.

43 Weide, *Zapysky budivelnika*, 30.

44 Scott, *Za Uralom*, 68–69.

45 Scott, *Za Uralom*, 69.

46 Scott, *Za Uralom*, 69.

In addition, Scott also noted the complexity of the situation regarding teachers of dialectical materialism: during one academic year (1933–1934) four teachers had been changed, two of them arrested.⁴⁷

Thus, not only students, but also teachers were “educated.” A striking example of the “appropriate” attitude to the past is served by the words of Maxim Gorky, who claimed that “we have to know everything that happened in the past, not as has been previously described, but in accordance to the teachings of Marx-Engels-Lenin-Stalin.”⁴⁸ An “incorrect” presentation of history could lead to the arrest of a teacher, which often happened. Reasons for “incorrect” interpretations of history by teachers often included their inability to keep abreast of the constant fluctuations and changes taking place in official interpretations of the past. In addition, the construction of history in the 1930s took place virtually under the personal control of Joseph Stalin. An example of this was a campaign on the approach to writing history textbooks in the 1930s that was carried out under the direct control of the leader.⁴⁹

The emphasis on history was not accidental. Indeed, already in 1919, by decree of the CC of the SCP(b), history was defined as one of the main outposts on the ideological front.⁵⁰ Despite noting that history for him was a particularly interesting subject, John Scott makes an important observation: every historical event was presented either in black or white; each question received an unequivocal answer, in consequence sometimes not reflecting objective reality.⁵¹

Scott's reminiscences show that the state tried to form an obedient citizen who would unquestioningly believe in communist ideals and would not think about distinguishing truth from fiction. The state attempted to teach people to believe in a “revolutionary past” and “bright future.” But in his case, the American's memoirs demonstrate that the realization of this plan was not entirely successful, as Scott had visited other countries and could compare what he had seen. For example, Scott describes a discussion with his teacher who was conducting a class, saying that according to Marxist laws, the “working classes” of Germany, the US, and the UK were becoming ever more impoverished since the time of the industrial revolution in the eighteenth century.⁵² After the class Scott objected to the teacher, who answered by suggesting that Scott “read the textbook, it is written there.”⁵³ Scott completed the description of the discussion with a brief characterization of the teacher:

47 Scott, *Za Uralom*, 69.

48 Quoted in Mikhail Geller, *Utopia u vlasti: Istoriia Sovetskogo Soiuzs s 1917 goda do nashykh dnei* [*Utopia in Power: A History of the Soviet Union from 1917 to the Present*] (London: Overseas Publications Interchange Ltd., 1989), 8.

49 See M. V. Zelenov, “Kak Stalin kritikoval i redaktiroval konspekty shkolnykh uchebnikov po istorii (1934–1936 gody) [How Stalin Criticized and Edited the Summaries of School History Textbooks, 1934–1936],” *Voprosy istorii* 6 (2004): 3–30.

50 Quoted in Natalia Shlikhta, *Istoriia radianskoho suspilstva* [*The History of Soviet Society*] (Kyiv: NaUKMA Press, 2010), 39.

51 Scott, *Za Uralom*, 69.

52 Scott, *Za Uralom*, 69–70.

53 Scott, *Za Uralom*, 70.

It does not matter to this man that the following month the “textbook” could be declared counterrevolutionary. When this happens, he will be given another textbook. The party does not err. The party gave him the book. That was enough.⁵⁴

This dispute is very demonstrative for several reasons. First, it indicates that the state did not need a thinking person. The “new man” had to read the textbook that the party gave him and had to believe what was written in it. To think and speak “like a Bolshevik,” as the teacher did, meant to demonstrate faith in what was written on paper rather than to “see” what was happening in real life. He thus demonstrated his loyalty to the state and guaranteed a safe existence for himself, free of arrest. Second, the dispute also showed the role of the party: “The party does not make mistakes.”⁵⁵ What the party says suffices, because it represents the “only correct way.” Other options are impossible. To object to the party meant to put oneself in danger. An understanding of the party’s role in education by teachers led to the situation described above, Scott’s teacher is proof of that. In general, the role of the party in society, particularly in its approaches to history and the politics of memory can be clearly seen in George Orwell’s observation:

The past, the entire past, beginning with yesterday, was destroyed [...] Every document was forged or destroyed, every book was rewritten, every picture was repainted, every statue, street, and building was renamed, every date was changed. The process continues every day, every minute. History has stopped. Nothing exists except for the endless present. And in the present the Party is always right.⁵⁶

An analysis of Scott’s diary shows that he had a dual attitude to what he studied, evidenced by his refusal to become a professional propagandist:

It is one thing when you are taught subjects in which you do not believe or accept with reservation. But it is an entirely different matter to teach these subjects to others. I wanted to study disciplines that I could more easily understand, to study disciplines that I could master, and then pass on my knowledge to others, without any sense of intellectual hypocrisy.⁵⁷

Scott’s reminiscences were published after he left the Soviet Union. Perhaps this passage was written after leaving, not when he was being asked to deliver Bolshevik ideology to the masses. Such an outspoken demonstration of his views can be interpreted as a rejection of communist ideals because the author admits that he only partly believed in what he was taught at the Communist University and openly terms this “intellectual hypocrisy.”

54 Scott, *Za Uralom*, 70.

55 Scott, *Za Uralom*, 70.

56 Quoted in Geller, *Utopiia u vlasti*, 313.

57 Scott, *Za Uralom*, 148.

A somewhat different approach to reading literature can be seen in Borys Weide's memoirs. If Scott writes about instructive literature provided by the party, Weide provides a long list of the books he's read, including:

Gorky's "Delo Artamonovykh," with its fading merchant family; Malyshkin's "Padenie Daira," where the liquidation of the Vranghel movement is described; Fadeyev's "Razgrom," where the spiritual world of Levinson and Morozka and Mechik bourgeois individualism are revealed; Forsch's "Odety kamenem," Tynianov's "Kiukhlia," Babel's "Konarmiia," Furmanov's "Chapaev," and others. In comparison to the ideals put forth in these works, our existence outside of the factory seemed philistine, shallow...⁵⁸

However, the list of books is not accompanied by commentary on how Weide perceived them, as aside from leaving short notes about the books he does not convey his impressions of them. It is obvious that the author knew about the division of literature into "correct" books and those "not to be read." The incident about a book's removal from the library described above shows the author's awareness about the division of books into those that are "ideologically correct" and those whose reading can be dangerous. Nadiia Shvaiba notes that in the 1930s "Weide continued to be interested in the details of the revolutionary years: Nikolai Kornatovskiy's 'Severnaia kontrrevoliutsiia,' Alexander Hukovskiy's 'Antanta i Oktiabrskaiia revoliutsiia,' S. Usherovych's 'Krovavyi smierch.'"⁵⁹ However, this shouldn't be considered simple curiosity, as the revolutionary topic in Bolshevik ideology remained a key element during the entire Soviet period.

The influence of Soviet ideology on the formation of the "new man" is also evident in another way: the division of society into "us" and "others." The division in Scott's text appears very specifically, as the author by definition is an "alien," "the other" in Soviet society. Questions are immediately raised concerning the nature of "the other," whether this "other" can be transformed into one of "us," thereby becoming a "new Soviet man"? The memoirs demonstrate that the "other" was primarily a foreigner who tries to become a "new Soviet man": he studies, attends or participates in various cultural activities, and organizes Red Clubs among other activities. In general, the author identifies several types of "aliens": 1) foreigners (he divides them into specialists and workers), who are characterized as people who at first did not believe in the "building of socialism," but in time admired the process, results and people involved, 2) prisoners (who can be either specialists-builders or ordinary workers), and 3) kulaks (Scott provides several examples of peasants allegedly spoiling machinery, thereby taking revenge on the state).

At the beginning of his reminiscences Scott believes that he is able to integrate into society: "My comrades at work perceived me as one of their own."⁶⁰ But he clearly positions

58 Weide, *Zapysky budivelnika*, 42.

59 Nadiia Shvaiba, "Vernyie druzia — knigi": Chytatskyi prostir dniprobudivtsia Borysa Weide ["True Friends — Books': The Reading Experience of Dniprobud Builder Borys Weide]," *Istoriia i kultura Prydniprovia: Nevidomi ta malovidomi storinky* 8 (2011): 95–96.

60 Scott, *Za Uralom*, 32.

himself as part of the masses, an ordinary person, and demonstratively distances himself from the party's leadership: "While political leaders in Moscow bartered deals and were involved in intrigue, I labored in Magnitogorsk along with the ordinary people."⁶¹ This position could be due to a belief in Soviet workers, who in Soviet ideology were proclaimed the main builders of the future. But by the end of the memoirs the author completely changes his views:

Western people have no place in Russia. This country belongs to the Russians, this is their revolution. Perhaps Americans and western Europeans are sometimes able to understand this, but it is very difficult for them, almost impossible, to find their place here.⁶²

This represents a dramatic change in the author's attitude to both Soviet ideology and reality, especially considering that at the beginning of his reminiscences Scott writes that he is happy in the Soviet Union, and is perceived as "one of us," a Soviet worker. By the end he clearly positions himself as an "alien," as an American. The reason for this is that the state eventually took notice of him too. He, like Stepan Podlubnyi, whose diary was described by Jochen Hellbeck, changed his attitude after a personal tragedy. Stepan Podlubnyi was a Ukrainian worker who worked in Moscow. Hellbeck traces the change in the worker's attitude to the "system": after the arrest of his mother his doubts grew and he reconsidered his value system and existence amidst Soviet propaganda.⁶³ A similar situation occurred with Scott. After a trip to his homeland and after the purges of 1937–1938, Scott noticed a cardinal change in attitude of the local residents toward foreigners. At first their presence was welcomed. Later, foreigners were avoided. The author could not find a job in Magnitogorsk, was avoided, in fact, again becoming an "alien": "I realized that my friends feel very uncomfortable when I come to visit them, so most of time I sit at home, banging on a typewriter."⁶⁴ Scott subsequently left his family for several years because he had to go to work in Moscow. The title of Scott's memoirs ("Behind the Urals: An American Worker in Russia's City of Steel") also confirms the fact that Scott did not become "one of us." It demonstrates that by emphasizing himself as an American in a Russian city, he clearly distances himself from the Soviet Union.

During his entire stay in the USSR Scott always wrote about what he saw, including the last several years when he worked in the capital as a correspondent. He described his role in the "building of socialism" very eloquently and answered the question of why he did not ultimately become a "new man": "I left Magnitogorsk with the firm conviction that I was an actor who had played a very insignificant role in a premiere of international importance."⁶⁵ Thus, despite some disappointment, Scott remained under a certain ideological influence, calling the building of Magnitogorsk "a premiere of international importance." Nevertheless, he considered himself only as an actor who had played the role of the "new man."

61 Scott, *Za Uralom*, 32.

62 Scott, *Za Uralom*, 249.

63 See Hellbeck, "Fashioning the Stalinist Soul."

64 Scott, *Za Uralom*, 234.

65 Scott, *Za Uralom*, 250.

In his memoirs Scott presented not only the image of the “new man,” but also of the “new woman.” While working on the building of Magnitogorsk, Scott married a local girl from a “correct” peasant family, who worked as a teacher and was an activist. Describing his wife, Scott characterizes the new generation of women:

They grew up in the 1920s, when the destruction of such an entity as the bourgeois family was being advocated. They wanted to devote as little time as possible to cooking, washing dishes, and washing diapers. These jobs were for servants, who did not possess the intellectual capacity or had not yet received the necessary training and education to work professionally in a specialty...⁶⁶

In this passage the role of ideology on the formation of a “new woman” is shown very well, manifested through a specific attitude to life and work. Regarding the latter, we can observe that it was not about the division of work between men and women. It was about the division of work among women, governed by Soviet ideology and propaganda: a “correct” woman worked professionally in her specialty; those who could not be called “new Soviet women” did the housework and were servants. As evidence, Scott describes his wife’s attitude: whereas Masha sometimes liked to cook and do the laundry, she thought it was wrong from the ideological point of view.⁶⁷

The image of the “new Soviet woman” is also presented in a different light in Borys Weide’s reminiscences. His “new woman” is best understood in contrast to his understanding of a “spoiled woman.” Interestingly, he includes in this latter category all the women with whom he had unsuccessful relationships. Weide explains the reason for this indirectly, through an ideological prism, explaining women’s behavior through origin and work activity: “NEP women,” “the old bourgeoisie” etc. From the author’s writing style it can be assumed that in writing about women Weide attempts to demonstrate his own “correct” character traits (for instance, he does not engage in extramarital affairs and is opposed to his wife’s abortion) and thus convince the reader (and perhaps himself) that he has become a “new Soviet man.”

In general, the DniprohES builder’s memoirs also show an “us” — “them” dichotomy. Moreover, an “alien,” “other” almost always means a “subversive element.” Weide even includes numbers and names. Those considered “alien” in Soviet society can be delineated in the following passage:

Many people have arrived: ex-prisoners, gangsters, Petliurists, thieves of all stripes, former white officers, smugglers, priests, speculators, kulaks, killers, parties to riots, aristocrats, and others. But mostly, there were ordinary, simple, unpretentious, upstanding people.⁶⁸

66 Scott, *Za Uralom*, 145–46.

67 Scott, *Za Uralom*, 146.

68 Weide, *Zapysky budivelnika*, 47.

The list specified in the first part of the quote forms the image of the “alien.” The last phrase, however, brings us back to Scott’s memoirs (“I worked in Magnitogorsk together with ordinary people”): he, like the American, identifies himself with ordinary workers.⁶⁹ This self-identification of both workers with ordinary people is not accidental, and has ideological overtones. Through it the two authors position themselves as “new Soviet men.”

Emphasis should be made on Weide’s attention to such categories in Soviet society as kulaks (and their children) and priests. Weide gives them such a negative characterization that the reader sees not only an image of the “other,” but an image of the “enemy.” The image of a class enemy turns into an image of Weide’s personal enemy. All possible negative characteristics are attributed primarily to priests and kulaks. In particular, as Weide writes, the latter said that the DniproHES would not be built, that it was an invention of the Bolsheviks.⁷⁰ This could have been the case, especially given the fact that a large number of Ukrainian peasants worked on the DniproHES. However, not everything described in Weide’s memoirs seems probable. The following passage in particular, raises doubts:

A banquet was organized in Dniprobud’s medical station. It seemed as if there had not been a revolution, a civil war. A lamp was burning in front of an icon of St. Nicholas in the corner of a large hall. On the opposite side were portraits of Nicholas II and his wife. A luxuriously set table graced the middle of the room, on which many expensive wines and aperitifs were found. Around the table sat guests dressed in costumes of 1915, ladies in silk and diamonds, only the higher aristocracy. They drank and sang “God Save the Tsar”... From the words of eyewitnesses, this secret banquet became known to the masses.⁷¹

As this quote reads, the author retells the words of someone who theoretically could have been present at this *banquet*. Weide was not a witness. It is therefore impossible to say if the described event had actually taken place. The details about the table, portraits of the tsar and his wife, and clothing seem improbable. The quote reads more like a text retold and written in a specific pattern. The passage is an example of the typical clichés that were used in the anti-religious campaign of the time.

Soviet ideology and the formation of the “new man” were questions that were closely intertwined. The examples of Soviet workers’ reminiscences demonstrate that the impact of ideology on society was significant and manifested in an “us” — “them” opposition, as well through an anti-religious campaign.

Conclusions

Soviet ideology of the 1920s-1930s was a key element in all social and political events in the USSR. The class principle formed the basis of the ideology. An important role was also held by the

69 Scott, *Za Uralom*, 32.

70 Weide, *Zapysky budivelnnyka*, 48.

71 Weide, *Zapysky budivelnnyka*, 49.

October Revolution, which the Bolsheviks regarded as the starting point of their history. However, Soviet ideologues also promoted the implementation of the “world proletarian revolution.” The spread of communist ideals took place through the organization and implementation of “memory projects,” which taught people to remember the past and talk about the present “as one has to.” The results of these “remembrance” campaigns were workers’ memoirs describing their participation in the “revolutionary events” and the “building of socialism.”

Workers’ memoirs demonstrate the ways in which Soviet ideology was disseminated among the people: through the speeches of party leaders, plays in theaters, radio messages, and other means. However, the most effective method was workers’ education. Soviet ideology was mainly spread through books on historical subjects. Textbooks were presented as the main source in which the party gave answers to all questions that could exist in Soviet society. In time, outside of work and the classroom, Soviet postulates were also carried across through the printed word: fictive literature written on “correct” topics and distributed through libraries was also used by the state.

The main tasks of ideology in the late 1920s and early 1930s included demonstrating the success of the “building of socialism” and the formation of the “new man.” The “building of socialism” in workers’ memoirs appeared as the conscientious work of every person who was part of the struggle “for the socialist future.” The main accents in the descriptions of workers about the “building of socialism” were made on demonstrating the rapid industrialization of the state, which supposedly would impress the world and in such a way “show superiority” over the “capitalist countries” of the West. However, the “building of socialism” was shown not only as an achievement of the common people, as an important role was allotted to party leaders, especially to Stalin.

Ideological influence was one of the main ways of forming the “new man.” In the memoirs the image of the “new man” appears in contrast to descriptions of the “other,” also termed the “subversive element.” This category included kulaks, priests, landowners, and those in public service in the Russian Empire. In contrast, the “new man” was a worker who selflessly worked on “building of socialism,” actively studying, attending cultural events, and closely monitoring the “other” so that he would not harm the state.

One characteristic of the workers’ memoirs is their formal “Bolshevik” style and language. In such a way the workers described the past and present “correctly” and demonstrated that they were “new Soviet men.” These characteristics are typical of the reminiscences because they were written during the period of the second Soviet “memory project,” which was organized “from the top” and devoted to the “building of socialism.” However, writing their memoirs, Scott and Weide did not always follow all the rules. Because the workers’ memoirs were written as diaries, they demonstrated a certain ambiguity in the authors’ perception of the “building of socialism.” In addition, despite the ideological influence, the attitude of the authors toward the state was prone to change if the system led to personal tragedy.

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Oksana Klymenko is a PhD student at the Department of History of the National University of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy. She received her Master of Arts in History in 2014. In 2015–2016 she was an intern at Gießener Zentrum Östliches Europa (University of Giessen, Germany). Her research interests include Soviet political celebrations (e.g. Victory Day), and the politics of memory in the Soviet Union in the 1920s-1930s ("memory projects" about the October Revolution and the "building of socialism").