1 Press Systems

Nowadays nomenklaturist propaganda does not even take the trouble to try to make people believe what it says. Its aim is a different one, namely to make Soviet citizens understand that they must use a definite phraseology.

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The press reflects the political environment in which it is situated. In pluralist, competitive regimes, the press can serve as an active force, a fourth estate, which is accessible to the public, provides a wide array of information, and enjoys relative autonomy from the government. However, in highly centralized, non-competitive regimes, access and information are limited. In some cases, governments settle for a conservative approach, controlling and censoring the press in order to maintain order and stability. In other cases, they give the press a more transformative role, using it to promote policies, inculcate ideology, and even to help create a new definition of humanity. At the peak of Communism, the Soviet press was an extreme example of the latter.

This chapter seeks to identify some of the defining features of totalitarian and post-totalitarian press systems. The vast literature on mass media systems has been augmented by that on regime typologies and liberalizations/transitions in order to contextualize the material and situate the study more firmly in the field of politics. The goal of the chapter is to offer background which can help explain the changes which took place in the Gorbachev period.

TOTALITARIAN AND POST-TOTALITARIAN PRESS SYSTEMS

At the beginning of the Gorbachev period, the Soviet press can best be described as a post-totalitarian press system. In order to understand the specific components which constitute such a system, it is best to begin with a description of a totalitarian media system, in part because the distinction between the two has not been effectively elucidated in the media systems literature. Drawing
from Linz's work on regime typologies, one can say that the essential attributes of a totalitarian press system include the following:

The press is consciously identified with and subordinated to a monistic centre of political power which maintains positive and negative control over it. The political centre views the press as an instrument for promoting its authority, policies and ideology.

The ideology promoted by the press is modern in that it is supposed to be scientifically determined, represent some ultimate meaning, a sense of historical purpose and an interpretation of social reality. It is expressed in a particular discourse or political language called Newspeak.

All legal publications are required to present information which serves to educate the readership and/or mobilise it towards the fulfilment of the regime's goals.5

The key elements which distinguish the totalitarian press system from the other press systems are access, control and ideology.

Access to the press in the totalitarian model is not simply sanctioned by the party/state, as it may be in other authoritarian systems.6 Rather, the party/state exercises both positive and negative control over the content of the entire (legal) press.7 It controls all elements of the publishing process, including everything from paper distribution to the appointment of media personnel. Journalists serve as little more than extensions of the party apparatus, contributing to the general ideological education of the populace.8 All publications are viewed instrumentally and are expected to continuously perform the function of educating and teaching the population about how to think and act. The press also must attempt to mobilize the population to help achieve the regime's goals. Interestingly, the totalitarian press model emerged in part because of the modern belief in the indoctrinating and transformative power of mass communications.9

Totalitarian press systems are further defined by the constraints imposed by the distinctive form of ideology which governs them.10 Totalitarian ideologies are unique in that they offer scientifically determined truths which explain history and the nature of human order while promoting an archetype of humanity, the Aryan or the New Soviet Man.11 This produces univocacy: 'for every politically significant word, one meaning; for every historical event, one interpretation; for every social problem, one solution ...'.12

The comprehensive nature of totalitarian ideology has a tremen-