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Leninism Versus Lennonism; Reflections on Rock Music Culture in East Europe and the Soviet Union

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From December 16 to 18, 1965, the Central Committee of the East German communist party devoted a special session to the ideological welfare of the country's youth. The committee intended to set the ideological agenda, and to underscore the importance of protecting young people from the pernicious influences of western youth culture, in particular, the increasingly pervasive phenonemon of rock and pop music. The East German leaders identified gowing rowdiness in schools, drunkenness on the streets, rising incidents of criminal activity, including physical asaults and rape, and equally disturbing a noticeble rise in ideological disaffection among the youth. Horst Sindermann, responsible for press and radio, emphasized this latter point with a concrete example.

"A 15-year-old, who had not learned a single word of English and who had to leave school in the fifth grade because he could not even speak German properly, sang popular songs in English evening after evening", Sindermann reported. "How could he do this? He listened to tapes forty times and learned by his own phonetic method to give off sounds that he perceived as being English. There is no doubt that with these methods, you could teach beat music to a parakeet". The party chairman,Walter Ulbricht, underscored the ideological threat by invoking the lyrics of a song from the Beatles: "The endless monotony of this 'yeah, yeah, yeah' is not just ridiculous, it is spiritually deadening".

Rock music represented not just an undesireable cultural distraction but an ideological, and hence existential, threat to the very nature and structure

of the East German state, whose leaders adhered to an orthodox interpretion of the Marxist theory of "Basis-Überbau," or "Base-Superstrure", According to Karl Marx, the "base" represented the foundation of economic activity in a society, including the means of production and property relations. The relationship between employers and the employed, in the division of labor, ultimately determined the very nature of society and its "superstructure", the collective set of activities that any society needed to function, ranging from political structures and forms of governance, to education and healthcare, to language culture and the arts. Marx further maintained that a "dialectical relationship" existed between the "base" and "superstructure", in which the means of production influenced the nature of society, and society in turn influenced the nature of the means of production. In brief, the way one lived determined the way one worked and vice versa. This interface was especially critical in societies transitioning from capitalism to communism, from private ownership to state ownership. It was easy to confiscate the places where people worked. It was more complicated to change the way they thought.

The East Germans underscored this point in August 1961 following the construction of the Berlin Wall. With the sealing of the border, they were able to protect East Germany's state-owned means of production from destabilization by the flight of workers to the west, but the challenge remained, to use a phrase from the time, to construct a "Mauer im Kopf," a "Berlin Wall of the mind", to keep western influences from eroding the ideological commitment of the people.

While rock music and its concomitant cultural manifestations—blue jeans, long hair, drug use—were unquestionably one of the most pervasive cultural influences across the Soviet bloc—seven East European countries plus the Soviet Union with more than 380,000,000 people, spanning nine time zones of the Eur-Asian landmass—the official responses varied depending on diverse social, political, cultural and even geographic situations. East Germany, with Berlin split between East and West Germany, was on the frontline of the Cold War and confronted radio and television broadcasts not only from West Germany, but also from RIAS—Radio in the American Sector—from West Berlin. The large Polish diaspora and a relatively lax ideological apparatus, coupled with an historic aversion to dictates from Moscow, fostered a relatively receptive environment to western rock and pop culture. Ideological orthodoxy varied greatly among the fifteen republics of the Soviet Union. A relatively liberal atmophere prevailed in the Baltic states, which had access to western rock culture through their seaports and proximity to Scandanavia. The distant Caucasian Republics were isolated both geographically and culturally from western influences. There did emerge, however, a lively black market in music recordings when it was discovered that the emulsion on discarded x-ray plates could be used for recording music. These "bone recordings" became a common source of early music distribution across the Soviet

Union.

What was common across the region, whether in Moscow or Berlin, Warsaw or Prague or Sophia, or thousands of other cities, towns, and villages, was a collective failure to suppress or eradicate the youth obsession with this western cultural phenomenon. Already in the mid-1950s, just as the rock and roll scene was emerging western rock tunes were finding their way into the repertoires of musical ensembles across the region, usually along with a mix of jazz and boogie woogie and other forms of dance music. Attempts to eradicate western songs from repertoires proved to be a vexingly difficult task as a Romanian cartoon from the 1950s suggests. In one scene, a band plays traditional music with violins and woodwinds. The caption reads: "While the Investigation Commission is present". A second scene shows the same band breaking out in exuberant "rock" music. The caption reads: "After the Investigation Commission has left".

Another cartoon, in a satiric Czechoslovak publication, from August 1956, underscored the assumption that rock music was being employed as an ideological weapon in the west's arsenal of Cold War weaponry. The cartoon shows a caricature of West German chancellor Konrad Adeneuer strumming a machinegun as if it were a guitar. A half-read copy of Hitler's *Mein Kampf* is on the floor beside him. Across from him, the architect of America's Cold War policy of "rolling back" communism, John Foster Dulles, sits with his sleeves rolled up at a set of drums in the shape of hydrogen bombs. Such assumptions were only heightened two years later when the American singer Elvis Presley was drafted into the military and stationed in West Germany.

While the west never harnessed rock music as an official means of subversion, its influence did not go unrecognized. Radio Free Europe included rock music in broadcasts into Soviet occupied Eastern Europe, and had a record library of the latest recordings. In 1958, *Revue militaire générale*, a NATO journal, stated: "Whenever a rock and roll or calypso tune imbeds itself in a communist mind, it tends to erode other things, and this ultimately has an impact on one's ideology".

In Hungary, state officials embraced western rock music as a pressure valve following the failed 1956 revolution. Hungarians had begun demanding more autonomy from Moscow in response to Khrushchev's call for de-Stalinization. In July 1956 the Hungarians deposed the Stalinist leader Mátyás Rákosi, resulting in a nation-wide revolt. Imre Nagy, the Hungarian premier who had been forcibly removed from office by the Soviets the previous year, was reappointed prime minister and immediately began reforming the government, including abolishing the one-party system and demanding the removal of Soviet troops from the country, which the Soviets refused to do. When Nagy withdrew Hungary from the Warsaw Pact, the Soviets responded with military force, killing thousands of Hungarians and "restoring

order". The new Communist leader, János Kádár, who took office in November 1956, sought to appease the youth by opening the country to western pop culture. Restaurants and dance halls were permitted access to imported Wurlitzer jukeboxes supplied with the latest Western releases. Young people were able to rent albums and record them on their Hungarian-made tape recorders.

Beatlemania altered the nature of Soviet bloc rock dramatically. Until then, the music scene was eclectic and sporadic. Jazz, pop and rock were often inerchangeable, even indistinguishable for fans of western music. With performers like Bill Haley, Paul Anka, Cliff Richards, Elvis Presley and their distinctive voices and personalities, they could be listened to but not easily imitated or emulated. The Beatles changed that. "And then there were the Beatles", Erich Loest, an East German writer, wrote. "Suddenly they were heard everywhere and were in every hit parade, everyone talked about them and knew them, every week they produced a fresh hit, it was like a fever, it grabbed us and shook us and threw us about and made us different from what we had once been". What had been a scattered and sporadic movement became an identifiable mass movement. Hungarian youth styled their hair into "Beatles-frizura". They wore "Beatles-kabát" (jackets) and "Beatles-cipö" (boots). The Hungarian sociologist Iván Vitánya attributed Beatlemania in Hungary to the fact that the Beatles were the first role models kids could relate to. Young people could "roar and scream together with them, somehow become their equals, and the Beatles even make a special point of the fact that fans and audiences are their equal".

Beatlemania spurred the proliferation of new bands. In Bulgaria, the band Bundaratsite was one of the first to form in 1963 and then morphed into the popular band Shturtsite (the Crickets) in the mid-1960s, becoming one of Bulgaria's most popular and enduring rock bands. In Prague, Petr Janda formed his band Olympic in 1963, which became Czechoslovakia's premier rock band, and became popular in other East Bloc countries, notably Poland, where the band also toured. Olympic's covers to the Beatles songs earned them the name Pražký Beatles (Prague Beatles). In Hungary, the popular band Illés styled themselves after the Beatles and in 1967 released an album with a cover strongly resembling *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band.* In Poland, Czerwone Gitary (Red Guitars) dressed in Beatles-style garb and sported Beatles-haircuts.

In the Soviet Union, Beatles fans dressed in Beatle-style jackets called "*bitlovka*" and formed a Beatles-fan movement. "I first began to hear rumors in the spring of '64, and the rumors were a result of the Beatles' visit to the United States that year", recalled Kolya Vasin, founder of the first Beatles fan club. "The visit was so successful, such a sensation, that even our own press began to write about it. Let me just add, our press did not write about those other, earlier rock and roll heroes. Nothing about Chubby Checker, nothing

about Elvis. But as soon as the Beatles showed up, our press was flooded with a ton of venomous reports –'hooligans,' horrible hairdos, screaming fans, wild behaviour and so on and so forth". The Soviet weekly, *Krokodil*, wrote in an article, that the Beatles, "know how to ignite the darkest and most primitive passions in their audience". When an article appeared in a youth newspaper explaining how to convert an acoustic guitar into an electric one with telephone pickup devices, aspiring rock musicians disabled virtually every public phone in Moscow overnight.

By 1968, Prague had one of the most vibrant rock scenes in the Soviet bloc. Rock clubs proliferated and with them, membership in official youth clubs dwindled. In 1965, students at Prague's Charles University complained that the youth clubs did not represent their interests, and students became ever more vocal. Students held "happenings", inspired by the American poet Allen Ginsburg who visited Prague in 1965, and was crowned by the students on 1 May "Král majálesu" (King of May) only to be deported to London a week later when the officials decided he was an "immoral menace". In the winter of 1967 students in Prague held spontaneous happenings and drug use was on the rise. Drugs, though difficult to acquire, were often smuggled in by visitors from Austria and Germany. Locally concocted drugs like Fenmetrazin and Yastyl were combined with alcohol for hallucinogenic effects.

On January 5, 1968, Antonín Novotný was replaced as the first party secretary of the Czechoslovak Communist Party by Alexander Dubček. Dubček, having spent years in Moscow, had strong contacts in the Kremlin and was considered a faithful servant to the Soviet cause. However, two months later Dubček began reforming the government, replacing Soviet hardliners with his own cadre of officials.The Prague Spring had begun. In April, he announced his "27,000 Word Action Program" intended to establish a "socialist democracy" in Czechoslovakia. Part of that action including lifting censorship from the media, releasing political prisoners from jail and promoting "socialism with a human face". Rock bands proliferated and the neighborhood propaganda centers, known as agitačné stredisko, traditionally venues for espousing Marxist-Leninist propaganda, began allowing garage bands to use their space for concerts. In June, the Soviets watched uneasily as more radical reforms were demanded by writers and intellectuals, and the Soviets, who noted that other East Bloc leaders were becoming increasingly nervous about possible change in their own societies, took action.

In late July, Brezhnev began negotiations with Dubček when they met in the town of Čierna nad Tisou, on the Czechoslovak border with the Soviet Union. Reports have it that Brezhnev told Dubček, "Eto vashe delo"—it is your affair, a warning but which many interpreted as a green light for further liberalization. The Soviets continued negotiations demanding a halt to liberalization, but Dubček held his ground. On August 20th, the Soviets lost patience. Soviet military units stormed Prague's airports, and in the early hours

of August 21st, an estimated 175,000 Warsaw Pact troops from Poland, Hungary and Bulgaria launched a massive military operation crossing into Czechoslovakia. Two thousand Soviet tanks and hundreds of thousands of soldiers flooded the country, Young people throwing rocks at tanks on Wenceslaus Square were gunned down by Soviet fire. Dubček, ordered to Moscow for "consultation" returned on August 26th, five days after the invasion and announced on the radio, "The time is gone and far behind us. And not only this party but this nation will not permit a return to pre-January conditions under any guise". The Prague Spring continued though the Warsaw Pact tanks remained. And five months later, in December, the Lucerna Hall hosted to the country's second rock festival. Protest singers abounded.

As in Hungary a decade earlier, the rock scene became a pressure valve for youth discontent. The 28-year old Karel Kryl wrote Dylanesque songs that captured the spirit of the time, among them: "Close the Gate, Little Brother", about a young boy who is urged to close the door before "the wolf gets into the theater". In the months that followed, Kryl toured Czechoslovakia with those lyrics, often performing two or three concerts daily.

In June of 1969, the popular American group, the Beach Boys, premiered at a rock festival in Bratislava, where they were joined by leading Czechoslovak performers, including Waldemar Matuška and Karel Kryl. The Beach Boys also performed in Prague's Lucerna Hall, where Mike Love greeted the audience by saying, "We are happy to be here, all the way from the west coast of the United States of America. We'll dedicate this next number, which is called 'Break Away' to Mr. Dubček who is also here tonight".

That spring, in April 1969, Dubček was replaced as first party secretary by Gustáv Husák, a former supporter of the Prague Spring reforms, who acquiesced to Moscow. Playing on the metaphor of the Prague Spring, the cultural journal *Tribuna*, wrote that the government would not "permit all flowers to blossom…We will cultivate, water and protect only one flower, the red rose of Marxism". Within a year, many of Prague's leading rock venues were closed, Arena, Sluníčko, Olympik, F-Club, and others. Bands still wishing to perform were forced to use Czech names. A popular band, Blue Effect, changed its name first to Modrý Blue Efekt, then just Modrý Efekt, and finally M Efect. The third rock festival was postponed until April 1971, and only Soviet bloc bands were permitted to take the stage.

The gradual strangulation of the rock scene that took place in Czechoslovakia contrasts with the abrupt crackdown in Romania. After 1965 when Nicolae Ceauşescu came to power, the state seemed at first more open to the West and to western music. Romania was keen to foster tourism both from the East and West. Swedish travel agencies promoted trips to the country, and with the arrival of Western tourists, the state had to make concessions to western culture. Pepsi-Cola opened a factory in Romania in 1967 and both

Pepsi and Coca-Cola became available in clubs and special stores. Discotheques and night clubs sprang up, disc-jockeys -*prezentator de discotecă* – played popular rock albums. The national record company Electrecord encouraged musicians to sing and record songs in English in order to sell more albums. By the mid-1960s Romania had ceased jamming foreign broadcasts and rock music could be heard on the BBC, VOA, Radio Free Europe, and Radio Luxembourg. Romania even allowed foreign bands such as the British beat band, the Federals, to perform in Bucharest.

Nevertheless, western-style clothing, especially mini-skirts, and long-hair on men were discouraged. Student demonstrations were brutally suppressed. In the summer of 1970 the US State Department had managed to arrange a tour in Poland, Yugoslavia and Romania of the American rock group Blood, Sweat and Tears (BS&T). During the opening concert in Bucharest, the crowd went wild, dancing in their seats and screaming "USA". The local militia and police were called in to restore order. The band was instructed to play more jazz and less rock. They were also told to dress more moderately, not to throw objects on stage and to limit their encores to two songs. The band remembers refered to the instructions as the "The Bucharest Manifesto". During the next performance heavy security made sure the audience stayed in their seats. During the song "Smiling Faces" the band leader Clayton-Thomas was ready to hurl a gong but caught the eye of a policeman shaking his finger at him. Clayton-Thomas then hurled it offstage and, in his words, the "crowd went crazy" and the police intervened. "[T]hey turned dogs loose on the crowd, they had brought in German shepherds", the singer recalled. "Kids went through plate glass windows. It was a very, very bad scene". The tour was canceled and tha band left Romania three days later. Authorities tightened their control on western music and by the following summer English lyrics and western songs were banned.

On July 6, 1971 Nicolae Ceauşescu held addressed the Executive Committee of the Romanian Communist Party, outlining measures to bring culture back under the strict rules of socialist realism and state authority. The Central Committee took direct control of the State Committee for Culture and Art, and under this orthodoxy English lyrics and music were banned. Music patrols controlled the repertoires of bands and solo performers. Some of the leadings bands were dissolved. The leader guitarist and lead singer for Olympic 64, one of Romania's most popular bands, emigrated to the west. The rest of the band was smuggled West inside the band's concert-size Marshall speakers. Certain bands survived by compromising their music, lyrics and stage appearance. These included two of the country's biggest bands, like Sfinx, which had started in 1963 performing covers by Beatles, Jimi Hendrix, Doors, the Kinks and then transitioned to lyrics in Romanian, and Phoenix, which had begun with songs by the Beatles and Rolling Stones. Originally named The Saints, in 1965, the band was forced to change its name because

of the religious conotation. As Phoenix they held their first large concert in 1965, followed by record releases on the state recording label and a major tour in 1967. Following the crackdown, the band turned to performing traditional folklore, before fleeing the country to Germany. By the late 1970s, the rock scene in Romania languished.

By the early 1970s, the initially uncontrolled exuberance on the rock scene appeared to have been quelled, with bands either crushed, driven underground, forced into emigration, or co-opted by the state authorities. By then, the state authorities had developed powerful incentives for bringing bands into alignment with socialist values and ideology—concert tours, recording opportunities, and, most important, access to high quality electric guitars, stage equipment and sound systems. In East Germany, the Puhdys and Renft, played out the classic rivalry between the Beatles and Rolling Stones, until authorities banished the hard-edged Renft from the rock scene. When Renft was refused an audition for formal recognition as an ensemble, and a band member asked if that meant the group was banned, he received an Orwellian response: "I did not say you are banned. In our opinion, you no longer exist". The Puhdys became the official face of East German rock and roll. In Poland, where the Rolling Stones had been invited to perform in 1967, leading to a full scale rock and roll riot that left the Warsaw's Palace of Culture in shambles, the music scene was soon populated with enaembles whose names reflected their domesticated and ideological tones, the Troubadors, Blue-Blacks, and the Red Guitars. The Polish blues singer, Czesław Niemen, became a major national export, performing the opening concert to the 1972 Olympics in Munich.

The Hungarian band, Lokomotiv GT, delivered the era's iconic tributes to the ideologically tamed rock and roll scene, the rock opera, "Fictitious Report on an American Rock Festival." Based on a novel by the writer, Tibor Déry, Fictitious Report recounts the murder of Meredith Hunter, an African American who was killed by members of the Hells Angels motorcycle gang during the Altamont Rock Festival in December 1969. The rock opera was written as a substitute for the western rock musical, "Jesus Christ Superstar", after it was banned in Hungary. The piece was an instant success in Hungary with critics and fans alike. Evoking the nightmarish world of the drug-induced decadence of American youth culture, Fictitious Report was welcomed by its socialist neighbors with performances in East Germany, Czechoslovakia, Romania and Yugoslavia.

The Soviet Union was confident enough of its own control over its official rock scene, that in March 1980, it hosted it first official rock concert, in the southern city of Tblisi, the capital of the Soviet republic of Georgia. The compeition, known as "Spring Rhythms", brought together Vocal Instumetnal Ensembles, the official euphemism for rock bands, from cities across the Soviet Union, including some of the leading bands from Moscow

and Leningrad. The winner of the festival was the iconic ensemble Machina Vremini, Time Machine, whose career path tracked in some ways the course of the Soviet rock scene itself. The band was founded in the late 1960s, by Andrei Makarevich, who was inspired form an ensemble when his father returned from a business trip abroad with a copy of the Beatles' album, *A Hard Days Night*. Initially, the band performed songs in English, but soon began writing their own songs with Russian lyrics. Their success in Tblisi elevated the band to superstar status, leading to record album releases on the state label, Melodiya, concert tours, and the performance of sound tracks for film. By the early 1980s, the Soviet-bloc cultural authorities could look with satisfaction on a rock scene that had either been coopted, disbanded or driven underground.

The emergence of punk rock in the late 1970s was viewed by Soviet-bloc ideologues as a manifestation of western decadence and the growing desperation among disaffected youth in capitalist society. The raw sounds and fierce lyrics of bands like the Sex Pistols and The Clash contrasted with the tamed, even sedated, sounds of state-approved, and supported, Soviet-bloc bands. There were, of course, alternative bands like the Plastic People of the Universe, in Czechoslovakia, and the underground bands in Leningrad like Kino and Aquarium, the latter of which caused a scandal in Tiblisi when the lead guitarist Boris Grebenshikov, exposed himself on stage, but for the most part, the Soviet-bloc rock scene was populated by state-supported ensembles playing songs in service of the Soviet socialist system. It thus came as an unsettling development when bands made their appearance on the Soviet-bloc rock scene, drawing on the provocative style and lyrics of punk. In Bulgaria, a band called Novi Tsvety, or New Flowers, adopted the graphics from the Sex Pistols' album, "Never Mind the Bullocks", along with the raw-edged sound and raging vocals. Similarly hard or provocative sounds came from bands ranging from Pražský výběr, or Prague Selection, in Czechoslovakia, to Beatrice in Hungary, whose lead singer called himself as the "cockroach of the nation", to Propeller and Thunder in the Soviet Union's Baltic republics.

The imposition of martial law in Poland led to an explosion of punk and heavy metal bands. By the end of the 1970s, the rock scene in Poland had been languishing. The Polish Beatles knock-off, Czerwone Gitary, had not evolved very far from the hits they produced in the 1960s. Czesław Niemen, a star from the early 1970s, had retreated from public view. The first Polish punk bands began performing in 1979 and 1980, many promoted by the director of the Riviera-Rement Club, Henryk Gajewski, who was among the first to record Polish punk bands.

Opposition to the government had been mounting in the late 1970s and early 1980s. In December 1981, General Wojciech Jaruzelski declared martial law, rounding up political activists and severely limiting freedoms for Polish citizens. As in Hungary in the 1950s, following the Hungarian revolution,

and in Czechoslovakia in the late 1960s, following the Warsaw Pact invasion, the Polish government relaxed restrictions on the rock scene as a social pressure valve. Polish rock bands were given free reign to perform on radio and in concert halls. Emboldened, punk bands between 1982 and 1985 targeted the Jaruzelski regime with bitter lyrics. Lady Pank, one of the most popular and enduring Polish punk bands, released "December Nights", which lambasted martial law. The lead singer of the band Perfect, Grzegorz Markowski, would change lyrics previously approved by state censors, during live performances, such as "Don't be afraid of anyone" to "Don't be afraid of Jaruzelski". Fans screamed in support when the band sang "Pepe Come Back", alluding to a call for the return of Solidarity. Perfect's 1982 punk-heavy metal album *Unu,* featured a cover with black-and- white police mug shots of the the band's five musicians.

The government openness to the rock scene was underscored in the summer of 1984 when the British heavy-metal band Iron Maiden was permitted to launch its "World Slavery Tour" in Poland. The band performed in Warsaw, Łódź, Poznan, Wroclaw, and Katowice, to packed concert halls. In August 1984, the Jarocin Rock Festival featured over sixty bands and drew nearly 20,000 fans over five days. The Polish weekly *Polityka* reported open hostility among "punks", "skinheads", "poppers" and "killers" at the festival. In the course of 1984, with increasing violence among the disaffected youth, the Jaruselski regime decided to clamp down on Poland's rock scene. By year's end, many of the country's punk bands had disbanded. A sense of futility and exhaustion permeated the rock scene. "The groups change, but the structure always remains the same", Zbigniew Holdys, Perfect's bass guitarist and songwriter, observed. "The same sound men; the same technicians, the same bookkeepers, the same directors, the same record presses, and the same old publishers".

In East Germany, which appeared to be a bastion of ideological orthodoxy, punk and new wave had greater success in challenging the status quo, in particular, the East Berlin band Pankow. Named provocatively after a Berlin suburb popular among East Germany's political elite, but also hinting at the word "punk", Pankow combined the politicized edginess of The Clash with the innovation of the Talking Heads. In 1983, band leader, André Herzberg, scandalized the East German media when he appeared on stage at an official televised concert in the Palace of the Republic wearing a World War II German army uniform that drew parallels between the Nazi and East German regimes, causing the television station to interrupt the broadcast. While Pankow's music tended toward new wave more than the hard-edged sounds of punk, its songs could be unsparing in both tone and content. In the song, "Hans Negativ", the lead singer screams a fierce, near apocalyptic condemnation of the socialist society, "The air is poisoned, the water is polluted, the

land sucked dry, scavanged by vultures, plagued by hunger, gnawed by disease, without rest or respite, the world is collapsing", followed by the refrain, "Alles Scheisse," or "Everything is shit". The band's immense popularity among the youth, and the state's wavering resistence to rock music, permitted Pankow to continue to perform, release albums on the state label, and even perform in the West.

The flagging resistence to rock was increasingly evident across the Soviet bloc. In 1982, Soviet premier Yuri Andropov had sought to curtail the increasingly belligerent rock scene and re-impose a more austere ideological orthodoxy, denouncing in particular Machina Vremini, as "depressive" and "ideologically unsound", but the band's popularity led to a nationwide wave of protest that saw newspapers deluged with thousands of letters by fans supporting against the denunciation with sending thousands of letters to newspapers. The emergence of Michael Gorbachev, in 1985, shifted official attitudes toward rock culture decisively when he met publicly with Yoko Ono, the widow of John Lennon, and told her that he and his wife were fans of the late Beatle. Hardline Soviet ideologues continued to rail against the deleretous influences of rock and roll in the press, but there was no going back. Indeed, following the meltdown of the nuclear plant at Chernobyl, Soviet rock musicians staged a fundraising concert for the survivors. The concert was attended by thirty thousand fans and broadcast on Soviet television.

Without question, the most significant sign of change came in July 1988, when Bruce Springsteen was permitted to hold a concert outside East Berlin, the most significant Soviet bloc appearance since the Rolling Stones concert in Warsaw two decades earlier. The concert attracted 160,000 East German rock fans and laudations in *Neues Deutschland*, the official newspaper of the communist party, which praised Springteen for his ability to perform "straightforward, powerful rock and roll" while he "uncompromsingly points out the inequity and injustices in his country". The newspaper failed to mention the exuberant reaction of the audience when Springsteen sang his iconic hit, "Born in the USA". Thousands of young East Germans raised their fists and pounded the air as they sang with Springsteen, the songs refrain, "Born in the USA. I was born in the USA". The newspaper also failed to quote Springteen's prophetic stage observation. "I would like to tell you", Springsteen spoke in heavly accented German. "I am not for or against any government. I have come to play rock and roll for you East Berliners in the hipe that one day all barriers can be torn down". Within a year, the revolutions in East Europe had begun and by the end of 1989, the Soviet bloc had ceased to exist.

There were clearly broader economic, political and security issues that contributed to the collapse of the Soviet system, but western popular culture, driven primarily by rock and pop music, played its part in eroding the ideo-

logical commitment of two generations of young people. This western subversion of the communist system represented one of the most pervasive forms of cultural and social expression, with far more profound and enduring impact than any competing aspects of state-promoted socialist realist culture or even the protests of alternative or counterculture. Literature, poetry and art could be seditious, but it lacked the visceral, even transformative impact of rock music. Several factors contributed to rock music's singular penetration of Soviet bloc society. The first was the nature of the music itself. The electric guitar provided a singular capacity to convey hard-edged protest, and sound systems to deliver this music to large audiences. While underground bands like Plastic People of the Universe attracted the attentions of western human rights advocates, it was the more accessible and available forms of rock music that significantly shaped youth attitudes, and ultimately forced the state authorities to adapt. The Soviet bloc had been able to withstand, then absorb the impact of the first generation of rock musicians, from the 1950s and 1960s, but ideological resistance weakened demonstrably as the subsequent generation adopted the even more aggressive sounds of punk and heavy metal, and the pervasive presence of this singularly Anglo-American form of cultural expression. Rock music, first feared as a mere distraction, ultimately became a transformative cultural and social phenomenon.

While many Marxist-Leninist theories may not have seemed tenuous, and indeed impractical in terms of implementation, the impact of western rock music on the ideology of the youth, and ultimately on Soviet bloc society at large, underscored the practical wisdom of Karl Marx's understanding of the dialectical relationship between the economic base of a society and its broader cultural and social superstructure.