

*Stanley Z. Pech*

## MANNERS AND MORALS BEHIND THE IRON CURTAIN

ONE OF THE MOST SACRED ARTICLES OF FAITH to a Marxist has always been the proposition that crime, alcoholism, corruption, suicide, and other forms of aberrant social behaviour that have for more than a century afflicted the "decadent" West, are the products of the capitalist society. The abolition of capitalism would, according to Marxism, eliminate the basis for anti-social behaviour and pave the way for its rapid disappearance. According to this remedy, the Communist world of Eastern Europe should now have been well on its way to eliminating its own social evils. Forty-four years have elapsed since the introduction of the Marxist system in Russia and approximately fifteen since its introduction in the smaller states of Eastern Europe. Capitalism has been abolished and the basis for anti-social behaviour allegedly destroyed: nevertheless, anti-social behaviour stubbornly persists, and its symptoms are multiplying.

Under Stalin the entire question had been treated with puritanical reticence, but since his death greater publicity has been given in the Communist press to the persistence of "bourgeois survivals". Official information, to be sure, is still far from satisfactory, but we are in a better position now than we were five years ago to judge the existing trends. A good deal of the new evidence comes from Poland and Yugoslavia, the two countries that exhibit a considerable degree of candour in dealing with these delicate issues.

High on the list of problems demanding urgent attention throughout the Communist bloc is crime. Whereas Canada and the United States issue detailed and regular crime statistics, neither Russia nor any other state within its orbit publishes comparable data. Whatever information they supply is fragmentary and limited to specific periods, regions, types of offence, and the like. Nevertheless, sufficient evidence has accumulated since Stalin's death to show that in the Communist world crime is increasing and that it has become a matter of great concern

to the authorities.<sup>1</sup> The increase in some categories of crime—notably the pilfering of state property and various other forms of corruption—is positively alarming. In order to check the deluge of pilfering, Rumania and Bulgaria, in 1958, made large-scale theft of state property a capital offence, and since then many individuals have, according to official accounts, been executed for “economic” crimes. On rare occasions, the death sentence for economic crimes has also been imposed in Hungary (1958) and Poland (1960). In May, 1961, the Soviet Union, following the example of Rumania and Bulgaria, instituted the death penalty for counterfeiting and large-scale theft of public property.

Nothing illustrates more clearly the mounting wave of crime and corruption in the Soviet Union than the history of capital punishment. Abolished completely in 1947—on the ground that it was “no longer necessary in peacetime”—it was restored in 1950 for crimes of treason, espionage, and sabotage, extended in 1954 to cover deliberate murder in aggravating circumstances, further extended in 1958 for acts of terrorism, and again in 1961 for economic crimes. In July, 1961, the new law claimed its first victims—two Soviet citizens convicted of currency speculation. Having failed to liquidate crime, the Soviet government seems bent upon liquidating the criminals.

Pilfering assumes a variety of forms. Trains and railroad stations may be stripped of fixtures and accessories, on a mass scale, as has been reported in the Czechoslovak press. According to *Rudé Právo* (Prague, March 13, 1958), the articles stolen included rugs, baskets, curtains, light-bulbs, mirrors, fire extinguishers, sinks, and even stoves.<sup>2</sup> The loss to the Czechoslovak railways for 1957 was estimated at about two million crowns. Employees of state-owned stores have stolen the merchandise they deal in and then have made up the loss by cheating their customers. Factory employees have purloined raw materials and half-finished products from their plants, not infrequently with the connivance of managers. The complaint of a Hungarian newspaper (*Nepakarat*, November 12, 1957) that pilfering in some plants created a “wrong kind of solidarity” among employees and that the pilferers were regarded with approval by their fellow workers,<sup>3</sup> indicates how deep-rooted the evil has become. In the Soviet Union peasants have plundered the standing crop on collective farms, a practice so widespread in some regions that as Khrushchev disclosed in January, 1961, some collective farms do not harvest even half of their crop. One is compelled at times to pay reluctant tribute to the ingenuity and enterprise of the culprits, such as the Czech chimney sweeps who, over a period of time, abstracted hundreds of pounds of meat from a meat plant through its chimneys (*Svobodné Slovo*, Prague, December 23, 1960).

An act of theft is not, as one might suppose, necessarily committed from poverty. A Polish writer estimated (*Nowa Kultura*, August, 1959) that in the Warsaw district, pilfering by executive and technical personnel accounted, in some branches of the economy, for over eighty per cent of total losses. Repeatedly throughout the Communist bloc, executive and technical personnel are involved in embezzlement, fraud, and similar scandals. It should be borne in mind that these men are identified with the Communist movement either as outright members or as followers, and as such are supposed to exemplify the new "Socialist morality".

The number of people involved in pilfering is considerable, as are the resultant losses to the state. Pilfering is not an exception; it may properly be described as a mass phenomenon. It has become so common that in Czechoslovakia, for instance, minor cases are no longer brought before the court but are dealt with directly in the plant. From the information occasionally published by Communist newspapers, it is possible to gauge the magnitude of the problem, as the following examples indicate. In Czechoslovakia, 28 per cent of the employees in domestic trade had to be punished for dishonesty in 1958. In Hungary, the losses from pilfering in one year (1960) were estimated at 200,000,000 forints. In Poland, economic crimes composed the largest single category of offences handled by the courts in 1960. The actual number of offences is undoubtedly much larger, but they cannot be uncovered because the public tends to protect the offenders. According to government statistics, the number of economic crimes in Poland dropped from 152,000 in 1958 to 144,000 in 1959, but a Polish newspaper (*Rada Narodowa*, February 20, 1960) offered this explanation:

Is the number of economic crimes diminishing? According to official data—yes. However, when we look around with open eyes . . . we come to the conclusion that the number of economic crimes must be growing . . . Are these facts really so concealed that nobody knows about them? By no means. They are difficult to discover only for the inspectors, and difficult to prove before the courts. But the neighbours know very well what is going on. They know but keep quiet when interrogated by the militia or at the courts.<sup>4</sup>

In Yugoslavia, according to official information, no marked increase in offences against the national economy was evident.<sup>5</sup>

Penal offences have not only multiplied in the last few years but have likewise become diversified. Smuggling, gangsterism, black-market speculation, extortion, bootlegging—these all have been frequently reported in the Communist press in the past five years. Even a narcotics ring was recently uncovered in Russia.<sup>6</sup>

Occasionally, there are crimes with comic overtones that are peculiar to the

environment in which they are committed. In Czechoslovakia, for instance, it was disclosed (*Mladá Fronta*, Prague, December 29, 1960) that some young Czechs had had their fingers deliberately injured by "experts", in order to escape work. Some even paid a "fee" to have this performed. Here the latent "Soldier Schweik" mentality of the Czechs was brought into play, as so often in the past, against the state—in this case against the ceaseless demands for the overfulfilment of quotas and for "voluntary" work brigades.

All the evidence indicates beyond doubt that behind the Iron Curtain crime has become a serious problem. To the present writer's knowledge, the only country in which a substantial improvement in the crime situation has been claimed is Czechoslovakia. The state prosecutor in Czechoslovakia declared in September, 1961, that the number of criminal convictions has declined in recent years and that it was 66% below the pre-war level (1934). This statement, however, can hardly be accepted at its face value. If the crime situation has been improving so satisfactorily, then it is difficult to understand why no regular statistics on crime are being published and why we have to rely on such fragmentary data as those offered by the state prosecutor. His statement also contrasts curiously with the frequent reports and complaints about pilfering that have been appearing in the Czechoslovak newspapers in the last five years.

To add to the general moral crisis, juvenile delinquency is increasing. Official statistics, for limited periods, are available only for Yugoslavia<sup>7</sup> and East Germany,<sup>8</sup> and they clearly reveal a growing incidence of juvenile offences. Poland freely admits that its juvenile problem is becoming ever more serious. Except in Poland and Yugoslavia, the official line maintains that the juvenile problem is being solved; but supporting statistical evidence that would allow an observer to examine long-range trends and make long-range comparisons is conspicuously lacking. An ambitious claim is made by Bulgaria, where the newspaper *Narodna Tribuna* stated in February, 1960, that the country's record in the struggle against juvenile crime was one of the best in the world. The only supporting evidence provided for this claim, however, was the statement that since 1944 juvenile crime had dropped to "three percent" of the total crimes committed (cited in *East Europe*, June, 1960, p. 9). From such isolated data as this it is hardly possible for an outside observer to draw his own independent conclusions. By contrast, Belgium—one of the exceptional countries with a declining rate of juvenile crime—can corroborate its claims with statistics for every year since World War II.

Newspaper accounts of individual cases of misdemeanour, reports from juvenile courts, and intensified police activity testify to the mounting wave of hooliganism,

including rape and vandalism. Hooliganism was unknown in Eastern Europe until a few years ago, and its present existence may well have been influenced by the relaxation of controls since Stalin's death. In the Soviet Union, in 1958, militias had to be organized to assist regular police in the maintenance of order and to help conduct a struggle against what was, on the pages of *Pravda*, called "gangsterism, murder and hooliganism" (December 1, 1958). The word "hooligan" (rather than hoodlum) has become a recognized sociological term, an unfortunate contribution of the English language to the vocabularies of other nations. In Poland the problem is probably more serious than elsewhere in Eastern Europe; it is no coincidence that the most significant Marxist study of hooliganism has appeared in that country, under the title *Niebezpieczne Ulice* (*Dangerous Streets*, Warsaw, 1960). Its account—of a gang of youngsters who went about Warsaw asking the names of passers-by and striking down everybody whose name was "Kowalski" (about as common as our "Smith")—exposes the total senselessness of hooligan acts. The hoodlums often gather in the vicinity of cafés—in Budapest they are known as "Anna-hooligans" after the café "Anna". In the Soviet Union they are called "stiliagy" because of their style of dress ("stil" is the Russian word for fashion). According to a Czech source (*Literární Noviny*, Prague, Number 14, 1961), the problem is also acute in Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria, and Rumania. Hoodlums in all countries show one common characteristic: a rejection of the society surrounding them regardless of its political form. Hooliganism is a social sickness of the age, affecting Communist no less than democratic countries.

Among youth as well as adults there are growing signs of instability. Family bonds are weakening, and divorce is more and more resorted to as a way out of a difficult family situation. In this area, reasonably adequate statistics are available, and they reveal a steadily rising divorce rate in the last fifteen years throughout the Communist bloc. An exception is East Germany where (as in West Germany and most countries of Western Europe) there has been a decline, a levelling from a high peak reached immediately after World War II. Russia, which had one of the lowest divorce rates in Europe before 1914,<sup>9</sup> is now, according to figures published in the latest (1960) *U.N. Demographic Yearbook*, ahead of most European countries. Its rate (1.1 per 1,000 population in 1959) is equalled or exceeded by only two non-Communist European countries, Sweden and Austria, and six Communist countries. Communist Hungary has now overtaken all the European countries and has the second-highest divorce rate in the world, being exceeded only by the United States. Of the nine European countries with the highest divorce rate, seven are Communist

(*U.N. Demographic Yearbook*, 1960, p. 599). Undoubtedly, the anti-religious policies of the Communist states have influenced this development.

The weakening of the family is reflected also in the growing number of abortions which have been legalized in some Communist countries. In countries where statistics regarding abortions have been released, such as Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and Poland, increases are evident. The Czechoslovak newspaper *Smena* (July 27, 1961) complained that, in 1960, 100,000 applications had been made for the purchase of a new car and that in the same period, 100,000 abortions had been authorized, and noted also that in some cities the number of legal abortions exceeded that of new-born babies. In the face of this revelation, the newspaper concluded gloomily that the people of Czechoslovakia displayed greater interest in cars than in their families.

Another problem that claims the attention of Communist governments is alcoholism. In Canada and the United States, private and public organizations have for years been compiling and publishing statistics on alcoholism (not merely alcohol consumption). Comparable data for the Communist countries are lacking. Some of them, however, publish statistics on alcohol consumption, and they show a sharp increase in the last ten or fifteen years. Everywhere it was found that alcoholism is an important factor in labour absenteeism, accidents, suicides, and crime. From about the year 1957, official campaigns against drunkenness have been stepped up. The prices of spirits have been raised; the sale of spirits has been severely restricted and the drinking of wine encouraged instead; educational programs have been launched and therapeutic facilities expanded. In some countries, these drastic measures have resulted in a slight drop in alcohol consumption in the last two years, but the drop does not begin to offset the increase of the past ten or fifteen years. In Poland, the problem of alcoholism appears to be especially acute, so serious in fact that the Warsaw radio observed (1957) that "perhaps there is no Polish road to Socialism but there is a Polish road to alcoholism" (*East Europe*, December 1957, p. 16). The per capita consumption (in litres) of vodka in Poland was 1.9 in 1949, 2.5 in 1959, and 2.4 in 1960; comparable figures for beer are 10.4, 22.6 and 22.7, and for wine, 0.6, 4.8, and 4.5.<sup>10</sup> In August, 1961, the Polish press announced that the per capita consumption of alcohol had again begun to rise, and that it was necessary to increase the price of spirits. Elsewhere, the increase has not been so sharp, but the trend has been similar. The only country where an appreciable improvement is claimed is Yugoslavia,<sup>11</sup> an achievement duplicated, on this side of the Iron Curtain, by France.

It is interesting to note that in the Soviet Union the number of alcoholics dropped considerably during World War II, a phenomenon also observed in some other

European countries at the same time. However, since the early fifties drunkenness has greatly increased. In an unprecedented move, alcoholism was discussed in the Supreme Soviet, and in October, 1958, Khrushchev declared publicly that "one cannot shut one's eyes to the fact that in our society there are still drunkards". It was revealed that 70 percent of persons sentenced for premeditated murder committed the crime in a state of intoxication. Since 1958, the government has been forced to resort to stringent measures. Penalties and laws against drunkenness have been tightened, and a seven-year plan for the development of psychoneurological facilities for alcoholics has been inaugurated. But the demand for vodka, coupled with the government restrictions upon its distribution, created a new complication in the form of bootlegging, which has become a highly profitable business. In January, 1961, Khrushchev railed bitterly against Soviet bootleggers who were, in his words, as busy distilling alcohol as the United States was "manufacturing armaments". In discussing alcoholism, Khrushchev and other Communist spokesmen still adhere to the obsolete line that it is the offspring of the "rotten bourgeois-capitalist system". Only in Poland and Yugoslavia can one perceive a readiness to dispense with clichés and treat the question rationally.

In countries in which all the sociological indicators point in the direction of crisis, it will occasion no surprise that neurosis is taking its toll. Regarded until recently as a mark of the "decadent" West, neurosis has now become, for the first time, a matter of concern behind the Iron Curtain, especially in the western parts of the Communist region. In Poland, where conditions are probably more tense than elsewhere, one can detect the familiar signs: the inability to relax, the compulsive need to be constantly "on the go", the nightmare of trying to endure a vacation, all so vividly described by the noted Polish authoress, Dabrowska, in a recent essay (in *Przegląd Kulturalny*, December, 1959). Conditions in Czechoslovakia are similar. A recent observation by the director of the World Federation of Mental Health that in Czechoslovakia (as well as in Poland and China) emphasis on increased production "was taking a toll of mental illness"<sup>12</sup>, has been corroborated by the statement of a Czechoslovak physician (*Kulturni Zivot*, February, 1961) that neurosis and diseases associated with neurosis, such as ulcers and asthma, are affecting more and more people. The expression "mental hygiene", almost unknown to the man-in-the-street in Eastern Europe until as recently as ten years ago, is now becoming a commonplace, and psychiatry as a profession is gaining a new status. It is significant that in 1960 Czechoslovak psychiatrists held the first national congress in the history of the country.

Hand-in-hand with neurosis goes suicide. The figures released from time to

time by the U.N. Statistical Office and the World Health Organization serve to confirm what is generally known: that every year increasing numbers of people in all civilized countries die by their own hands. Among Communist states, only Hungary and Poland have been publishing regular statistics for some years, and in both countries the suicide rate has been rising steadily. In the last five years it has risen very sharply in Hungary, making that country's present rate (25.7 per 100,000 in 1959)<sup>13</sup> the highest in the world. Until 1958, this dubious distinction had belonged to Japan. There can be no doubt that with respect to suicide the Communist region constitutes no exception to world-wide trends. The rising incidence of self-inflicted deaths makes ironic the Communist claim that Communism is bringing greater happiness to its subjects.

The materialism of the West has long been a favourite theme of both Communist and non-Communist writers and critics. Many sincere critics have been led to the conclusion that it is an exclusively Western phenomenon. As the above account demonstrates, nothing could be farther from the truth. The pilfering and corruption that plague the Communist states are manifestations of a materialism as real as that in any Western nation. Countries in which families prefer cars to children can hardly be said to be displaying non-materialistic attitudes. The Polish weekly *Polityka* conducted a poll among the young people concerning their life motivations and the results, published in June, 1960, provide significant insights into the aspirations of the new Communist-trained generation. The young people were asked to state, first, their goals in life, second, the motives for their choice of occupation, and third, their scale of values. To the first question, 44 percent—the largest group—answered “material well-being”, while 20.2 percent gave as their goal “good professional training” and 18.5 percent “luck in love”. The leading motives for the choice of occupation were “good salary” (40.4 percent), “personal liking for a particular job” (28 percent) “social usefulness” (11 percent). Concerning the scale of values, the main answers were “knowledge and professional skills” (28.6 percent), “beauty” (12 percent), “great deeds” (10.7 percent), “high salary” (10.6 percent), and “service to the fellow man” (9.7 percent).<sup>14</sup> An earlier poll taken by another organization produced similar results. Thus the “new Socialist man” stands revealed for what he is: a man motivated largely by self-interest and principally concerned—like his Western counterpart—with his own well-being. He is the product of years of Communist education, yet the pursuit of material and personal objectives continues to dominate his life.

What are the reasons behind the present crisis in the Communist bloc? To some extent, the Second World War may be regarded as a factor, but the case of



neutral Sweden, where much the same difficulties have been experienced as in other civilized countries, suggests that wars only hasten and strengthen the tendencies already present. Another reason is industrial development, the pace of which has quickened in recent years under the impetus furnished by Communist governments. Urbanization and industrialization have brought new complications and social stresses. However, the Marxist has always believed that social problems arising out of urbanization are only a "capitalist" phenomenon. He has assumed that when a Communist government would come into power and socialize the means of production, the social problems would be rapidly reduced. The socialist system was supposed to create an atmosphere within which man would be less and less impelled to steal, to kill, to cheat, and to seek escape in alcohol. Obviously this ideal has not been realized. Far from creating an atmosphere of trust and security, the Marxists have contributed to the present trends by the arbitrary nature of their regimes and by the methods of the official propaganda with its patent exaggerations and repetitions of outdated clichés, which themselves seem almost calculated to reinforce public apathy and scepticism. The years of the cult of personality under Stalin and the subsequent revelations of his misrule could not fail to have an effect upon public confidence. It is difficult to see how, from such an environment, a superior type of man could emerge. Finally, there is the corrosive force of the realization that in a Communist state man continues to face certain universal problems and anxieties of everyday life which no single political ideology can solve, and that the oft-promised millenium can never be attained.

## NOTES

1. The only Communist state to have made available official statistics covering a longer period of time (1950-1956) is Yugoslavia. During this period the crime rate in that country increased from 558 to 702 per 100,000. See the report *Prevention of Types of Criminality . . .*, U. N. Department of Economic and Social Affairs (1960), p. 57.
2. *East Europe*, January, 1959, p. 16.
3. *Ibid.*
4. Quoted in P. Landy, "What Price Corruption?", *Problems of Communism*, March-April, 1961, p. 20.
5. *Prevention of Types of Criminality . . .*, p. 58.
6. *New York Times*, Sept. 19, 1960, p. 5.
7. For Yugoslavia, the figures released cover the years 1950-1956; during that period the number of convicted juveniles rose from 1,819 to 4,414—an increase of 142 per cent. See *New Forms of Juvenile Delinquency*, U.N. Department of Economic and Social Affairs (1960), p. 12.

8. In East Germany, juvenile convictions almost doubled between the years 1951 and 1957, from 4,346 to 8,532. See *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, August 25, 1959.
9. The Tsarist government did not publish regular divorce statistics. The only figures this writer was able to find (*Entsiklopedicheski Slovar*, St. Petersburg, Vol. 51, 1889, p. 135) give Russia the second lowest place in Europe in 1889.
10. *Concise Statistical Year Book of the Polish People's Republic* (Warsaw, 1961), p. 173.
11. See the article by D. Petrovic in *Mental Health*, Summer, 1960, pp. 51-57.
12. *New York Times*, April 23, 1960, p. 46.
13. *U.N. Demographic Yearbook*, 1960, p. 565. Only West Berlin exceeds Hungary, but the two cases are not comparable as the suicide rate is always higher in urban areas than in the country as a whole.
14. I have omitted answers that received a low percentage of support, and consequently the percentages do not add up to 100.

## THE GARDENER

*Lilian Symons*

I shovelled the brown earth, crumbed with nitrogen, potassium,  
veined with invisible substance,  
sweet-moistened with the weeping of young winds.  
I raked it with the rake of solicitude  
after I had wounded it for kindness with a disciplined cultivator.  
With the honour I give to words I made a runnel with a delicate hoe  
and then I planted carrots.

After a pregnant time, after a moon circle and a square of patience  
the carrot foetuses feathered in a row, in a beloved row, in a row of love.

In a breath, on a pulse, through a too soon dread  
the weeds came, the weeds sat there, beside, across, among the green feathers  
broad, dark, heavy-fleshed, implacably strong-rooted,  
blindly sipping the wine of the winds,  
devouring in fearful innocence the earth's warm richness.

And then the carrots sickened.  
Why did the carrots die? I loved, I loved, I loved.  
Was it because I did not wish to eat the weeds?