

Chapter 2

The Delay of Communism: Stalin and Proleptic Communism

When will that be? Not soon, of course [*Konechno, ne skoro*]’ (Stalin 1934g, 360, 1934h, 353).

From this initial biblical framework, my argument in this chapter concerns the ‘delay of communism’, which was a major feature of Stalin’s theoretical innovations. After the world’s first socialist revolution, it became clear that a world revolution, if not global communism, would not arrive any time soon. As the interim between the revolution and communism became the norm, it gained a name, socialism, in distinction from communism. But how to define it? Stalin deployed biblical texts to distinguish socialism and communism, as well as developing a series of dialectical definitions of socialism as a result of pushing communism into a well-nigh mythical future: the diversity and unity of languages and cultures (as we have seen); the intensification of class conflict as the goal drew nearer; socialism in one country; strengthening the state as the means to its withering away. Perhaps the most intriguing is a proleptic approach to that goal—in which the future state determined and was thereby actual in the present.

Stalin’s involvement in these theoretical developments is as inescapable as it is crucial.¹ But I would like to add another factor: the analogy or ‘translation’ with the Christian theological development known as the ‘delay of the Parousia’. In both cases, the pushing back of the desired goal had significant implications for theory and practice. By ‘delay of the Parousia’ I refer to the early Christian awareness that—in contrast to expectations—Jesus Christ was not hurrying to return in glory and

¹Few indeed are the studies that deal seriously with the theoretical developments I analyse here. Those that do so attribute the developments either to the constant tension between Soviet and ‘Western’ social and economic systems, in which socialism and capitalism became coexistent rather than the former succeeding the latter (Marcuse 1958), or to the internal tension in Marxist thought and practice between objective and subjective factors, or between *tekhnika* and *politika* (Priestland 2007, 36–37). I have been able to find only one study that hints at the delay of communism in the development of key elements of Stalin’s thought, although it merely suggests that the fading of hopes for a world revolution fostered a nationalist agenda (Mehner 1952, 20, 118).

usher in a new age. The interim gradually became the norm and the various churches adjusted to the situation—to the point of becoming the ideology of not a few states. In the following analysis, I begin with this delay of the Parousia in order to highlight a number of analogies with Stalin's thoughts on the delay of communism.

Before proceeding, I should make clear what this chapter is not. What follows offers a philosophical and indeed theological study of Stalin's thought, rather than a historical or political study. Thus, I am not interested here in the common suggestion that Marxism in its different forms constitutes a secularised version of Jewish or Christian 'messianism', in which the state of sin will be overcome by a messianic figure (the proletariat) in order to usher in an eschatological age (communism). First proposed by Berdiaev (1937), it has become a staple in some analyses of Marxism. However, it is a speculative thought bubble taken as 'fact' through thousands of repetitions (Boer 2011). Nor am I interested in Stalin as a 'messianic' figure (Demaitre 1967; Duncan 2000, 60–61), for this is a loose category that is better analysed in terms of veneration and demonization. And I do not focus on the whole political and social dimension of Moscow as the Third Rome, Slavophilism and the world-historical mission of the Russian people (Duncan 2000, 11–47; Miner 2003, 13–19). This is a worthwhile study on its own, but it is beyond the scope of my study. Instead, I am resolutely concerned with the philosophical and indeed theological dimensions of Stalin's thought in relation to the two delays, which may be seen in terms of the model of translation.

2.1 Delay of the Parousia

I begin by situating my analysis in terms of the delay of the Parousia in Christian thought, with an eye on the particular slant given by Eastern Orthodox interpretations. A staple of New Testament scholarship is that the early Christians believed fervently in Christ's immanent return. The New Testament texts span the first two centuries of the fledgling church's life, with the earlier of those tending towards immanent expectation. The clearest indication of such an anticipation appears in 1 Thessalonians, Paul's earliest letter, in which he speaks repeatedly of Christ's return. In Chaps. 4 and 5 (the 'little apocalypse'), he elaborates on Christ descending from heaven 'with a cry of command' and raising the dead first. 'Then we who are alive', he writes, 'who are left, will be caught up in the clouds together with them to meet the Lord in the air; and so we will be with the Lord forever' (4:17). Paul seems to have included himself and some of the Thessalonians among those who would still be living when Christ returns. In contrast to those who preach Roman imperial propaganda, 'peace and security', the day of the Lord will come 'like a thief in the night' (5:2). However, since Christians are of the day and light, they need not fear such a thief, for they will be taken up whether they 'wake or sleep' (5:6). If anything, this is a radicalisation of the saying of the thief (Matt 24:43–44; Luke 12:39–40; 2 Peter 3:10; Rev 3:3), for instead of watchfulness at all

times, Christians may rest secure in the knowledge that they will join Christ on his return (Koester 2000, 120; Ehrman 2000, 281–288). How is one to live in such anticipation? Soberly, quietly, praying ceaselessly, avoiding the lusts of this world, and working hard without exploitation and in love for one another. This strongly eschatological orientation seems to have characterised many of the fledgling churches, coming to influence the way the Gospels presented Jesus: his sayings were reinterpreted and reformulated as the words of a near future redeemer and bringer of salvation, with direct implications for how Christians should live in expectation of Christ's immanent return (Mark 13; Luke 10:1–16; 12:35–46; 17:22–37; Matt 8:19–22; 9:35–10:15; 10:37–38; Didache 16).

After Paul's death and by the turn of the first century, it had become clear to many that Christ was not in a great hurry to return. The response to this awareness took various forms, although I am specifically interested in the theoretical dimensions. Other dimensions focused on continuing to exist in the world as it is, in terms of social structures, economics and politics—most famously in the way Christianity came to terms with and indeed dominated the Roman Empire after Constantine—which would have ramifications a Russian situation, manifested in the Third Rome and Slavophilism. But these items are not my concern, for I focus on theoretical questions. At that level, we find that the responses to the delay of the Parousia marked the real beginning of theology as such (perhaps one of the most significant and unexpected by-products of the delay). The initial responses to the delay sought to deal with and reinterpret the tension between immanence and delay: (1) revitalised and intensified expectation; (2) realised eschatology, in which Christ's first appearance, death and resurrection had already inaugurated the new age; (3) explanation of the delay, usually with an increasing number of conditions that had to be met before Christ's return; (4) proleptic eschatology, in which the future moment determines the present. The first of these responses appears in the *Shepherd of Hermas*, with its radical eschatology on a personal register, and Revelation, which is infused with an impatience borne of immediate political developments (Bovon 2009, 84). As for the second response in terms of realised eschatology, we find this particularly in the deuterio-Pauline epistles to the Colossians and Ephesians, which emphasise the benefits of salvation in the present rather than expectation of fulfilment in the future (Holladay 2005, 555, 563, 577; Puskas and Robbins 2011, 222).²

I am most interested in the third and fourth responses, which are related to one another. The effort to explain the delay appears most clearly in 2 Thessalonians, a letter written in Paul's name that offers a neat contrast with 1 Thessalonians, in which Paul expected Christ's return in his own lifetime. This was also a crucial text in Eastern Orthodoxy, which developed a keen sense of the trials and tribulations before the end time, including sustained reflections on the Antichrist. In the key section of the second letter, the author tackles directly the claim that the day had

²Paul had already sought to dampen such an approach in 1 Corinthians, where the problems seem to have been both 'freedom' (or licence) and asceticism by the 'strong ones', who believed the end had already come (Koester 2000, 126–131).

come (2 Thess 2:1–2).³ Not so, argues the author, for prior conditions must be met in what becomes an eschatological timetable: apostasy and rebellion; appearance of the ‘man of lawlessness’ (anti-Christ); appearance of the ‘one who restrains’ and then his removal. Only then will Christ come and inaugurate the end by slaying the lawless one. Throughout, the letter emphasises the length of time between the present and the end (Ehrman 2000, 344–346), couching eschatological doctrines in mythological language, as much a mystery to present readers as it perhaps was to its initial recipients. In Eastern Orthodox interpretation, the Antichrist—the man of lawlessness—is the key, for he will generate apostasy, resistance to God and try to pass himself off as God (Alfeyev 2008, 110). Indeed, Eastern Orthodox thinkers took the main point of 2 Thessalonians—these events have not happened yet, so the end is not on its way⁴—a step further: 2 Thessalonians indicates that the work of the Antichrist had begun already with Christ’s appearance and would be defeated only in the final struggle.

What happens in the meantime? The interim increasingly becomes the norm, in which tradition (2:15), perseverance in tribulation (1:4–12), steadfastness and hard work are the order of the day (3:6–13). How the interim is interpreted is crucial, for it reveals at another level what I have elsewhere called the political ambivalence that runs throughout Christianity (Boer 2014a, 125–206). Let me focus on a particular verse, which brings into relief this tension, now in terms of the class dynamics of interpretation: ‘anyone unwilling to work should not eat [*hoti ei tis ou thelei ergazesthai mēde esthietō*]’ (3:10). This slogan, presented as an instruction or command from ‘Paul’ when he was with the Thessalonians, is situated in the midst of admonitions to avoid disorder (*ataktōs*), to undertake appropriate labour so as not to burden others (3:6–15).⁵ Although the range of suggested interpretations may seem significant,⁶ I am interested in the class dynamics of such interpretation specifically in relation to work.⁷ Many are the commentators who would see in 2 Thess 3:10 a criticism of labourers and artisans shirking work. For example, they may be characterised as ‘idle beggars’ (as seen by outsiders) who took advantage of

³See the useful expositions of this key statement in Menken (1994, 98–101) and Nicholl (2004, 115–117).

⁴Other later texts also tackle such problems, such as Jude and 2 Peter (Holladay 2005, 735–742).

⁵A comparable concern, with a much lighter touch, may be found in 1 Thess 4:11, where members of the congregation are urged to work with their hands, and 5:14, where the *ataktōi* are to be admonished. If so, then the author of the second letter has picked up this hint and taken it in a new direction. The theme of receiving ‘reward’ for labour appears elsewhere in the gospels (Matt 10:5–10) and Paul’s epistles (1 Cor 9:1–14; 2 Cor 11:7–11). However, in these cases the reward in question is for the labour of the gospel rather than labour apart from activities to spread the new faith. In 1 and 2 Thessalonians the emphasis is on the latter and the need for the congregation to continue in labour.

⁶The best interpretation remains that of Bartlett (2012), from whom I have drawn much but with whom I disagree in some respects.

⁷It matters little in this respect whether the question is framed in eschatological or non-eschatological terms. The connection with eschatological concerns was first made by Johann Albrecht Bengel in his *Gnomon Novi Testamenti* from 1742, vol. 2, 501.

Christian ‘brotherly love’, or boisterous and rabble-rousing poor who remained dependent on their rich patrons, or greedy, lazy and undisciplined (*ataktoi*) unemployed manual labourers who were unwilling to work and looked to wealthy Christians to supply their wants as though the latter were new patrons, or even a congregation that was largely made up of manual labourers, some of whom shirked their responsibilities to the others in terms of working for the ‘welfare syndrome’ of the common meal in light of ‘transformative love-patriarchalism’ (Russell 1988; Winter 1989, 309, 1994, 42–60; Aune 1989, 87–90; Nicholl 2004, 166–175; Jewett 1993; Murphy-O’Connor 1996, 117; Gaventa 1998, 128; Weaver 2007).⁸ Class assumptions are difficult to miss. Perhaps Nicholl expresses such assumptions best: ‘It is not difficult to imagine that some from the manual labouring class would have exploited the opportunity to be indolent rather than return to a life of hard manual work’, being all too ready to engage in ‘leeching’ and ‘sponging’ (Nicholl 2004, 174, see also Thiselton 2011, 264).⁹ More generally, 2 Thess 3:10 and the epistle as a whole advocate accommodation with the world as it is, to become respected citizens in existing society.¹⁰ Often have theorists and defenders of capitalism taken up the verse with a similar agenda: those who do not work are the idle unemployed, the poor who are so due to their own laziness.¹¹ By contrast, a good citizen of the world has a job, pays taxes and is not a burden on society.

A very different interpretation is also possible: those who shirk honest labour are precisely the rich, members of the ruling classes who undertake no productive work. Instead, they rely on the labour of others in order to live in the way to which they had become accustomed. Difficult it is to find this interpretation in the early commentators or indeed recent critics, which may be read as an unwitting signal of class assumptions.¹² Perhaps the Bohemian reformer, Jan Hus (1371–1415), offers

⁸Some go so far as to argue that the reason for abandoning work was ‘honourable’—to preach the gospel (Barclay 1993; Burke 2003, 213–216).

⁹The *Apostolic Constitutions* (350–370 CE), a work about which little is known but which is full of practical advice, strikes a similar tone (Thiselton 2011, 266).

¹⁰Conzelmann (1982) famously argued that Luke-Acts had a similar agenda. For a recent rearticulation of this position, see Holladay (2005, 238–241).

¹¹I can give only a sample of the impressive range. Weber (1994, 159) sees it, through the influential Puritan Richard Baxter, as one of the cornerstones of Protestant asceticism and thus of early capitalism. James Smith, upon arriving at the Jamestown settlement in North America in 1908, invoked the verse in order to rectify the colony’s problems (Bartlett 2012, 37). William Graham Sumner (1840–1910), the erstwhile clergyman, anti-socialist and proponent of laissez-faire economics quoted the verse (Wilson-Reitz and McGinn 2014, 186). In our own time, ‘shock jocks’ such as Glenn Beck call upon the verse to challenge any form of welfare (Bartlett 2012, 37), as did Margaret Thatcher in her ‘Sermon on the Mound’ before the Church of Scotland General Assembly of 1988. She suggested that 2 Thess 3:10 provides the first biblical ‘principle’ for shaping social and economic life: ‘We are told we must work and use our talents to create wealth’.

¹²The only recent work I have been able to find suggests rather weakly that the *ataktoi* and *periergazomenoi* (busybodies) are ‘upwardly mobile social climbers’ and ‘ancient “yuppies”’ within a patronage system that despised labour (Wilson-Reitz and McGinn 2014). Bartlett’s otherwise excellent study falls away from such a position by arguing, following Jewett (1993), that

the first hint in this direction. In his *On Simony* of 1413, he attacks the medieval church practice of having many holdings so as to generate more income with no labour. Not only is this ‘trafficking in holy things’ contrary to scripture, but it also destroys the church: ‘Woe to the canons ... bishops ... and prelates who eat, gorge themselves, guzzle, and feast abundantly, but in spiritual matters amount to nothing’ (Hus 1953, 247).¹³ This hint would finally be taken up by none other than the Bolsheviks, especially Stalin.¹⁴ This text from 2 Thess 3:10 was already a slogan in 1918 and was highlighted in the ‘Stalin Constitution’ of 1936. Those who do not work are of course the capitalists, landlords and kulaks, whose relative wealth is extracted from others. I will have more to say concerning this biblical text later, for it is a key marker for the delay of communism. In doing so, Stalin and the Bolsheviks unwittingly drew upon a slogan from the midst of a key biblical text concerning the delay of the Parousia. The connection is not conscious, for Stalin would not have known of the theory of the Parousia’s delay. Yet this is precisely why the connection is all the more powerful: the delay of the Parousia is translatable with the delay of communism. The interim created by the delay, the time in between, was to be for those who put in an honest day’s work.

A couple of implications arise from these interpretations of 2 Thess 3:10. To begin with, the conservative reading, which identifies the ‘idle’ as lazy manual labourers who are unwilling to work and which reads the text as advocating accommodation with the world as it is, would open the door to Christianity becoming the religion of empire under Constantine. Many other texts could be marshalled to show how easily Christian hierarchs can slip into seats of power, sharing the space with petty despots and aspiring tyrants (whether collective or individual).¹⁵ But in this case I am interested in the way the political ambivalence of Christianity appears through the class dynamics of interpreting 2 Thess 3:10. If one

(Footnote 12 continued)

the early Christians in Thessalonica were all marginalized people in the ‘first phase of communism’, in which the difficulty of finding work meant that too many relied on the *agape* feast.

¹³See also Calvin (1851, 355–356), who writes of the monks and priests as ‘lazy drones’ whose ‘only religion is to be well stuffed, and to have exemption from all annoyance of labour’. Among the church ‘fathers’, only Tertullian and John Chrysostom threaten to come close. Tertullian writes: ‘Each one should work with his own hands for a living’. Indeed, ‘Let the Church stand open to *all* who are supported by their hands and by their own work’ (Roberts and Donaldson 1867–1873, vol. 3, 63; vol. 5, 63). As for Chrysostom, he observes in *Homily* 5, ‘To pray and fast, being idle, is not the work of the hands’ (1889, 394). Notably, Augustine tends to restrict such precepts to monks, especially in his *On the Work of Monks* (1886).

¹⁴It is not for nothing that Hus, the reformer before Luther, would become a pre-revolutionary hero in communist Czechoslovakia.

¹⁵For example, Lieu (1999a, b) argues that the gospel of Mark replicates the ‘might is right’ approach of colonial imperialism by proclaiming that Jesus Christ and not the Roman emperor is the highest authority. Moore (2006, 45–74) argues that the gospel of John is the gospel of the imperial status quo, intuiting that ‘Rome will eventually become Christianity and Christianity will eventually become Rome’.

identifies manual labourers and artisans as lazy, good-for-nothing sponges on the rich and on ‘hard-working’ members of the church and society, then it is a short step to valuing the rich, the ruling class and indeed the state they control as the way God ordained that the world should be.

The other implication follows on the heels of the radical interpretation of 2 Thess 3:10 and leads me—beyond an identification with those who labour and who are poor—to the fourth response to the delay of the Parousia: proleptic eschatology. In this respect, the present time of labour, steadfastness, perseverance through difficulties and comradely love—all emphasised by 2 Thessalonians—exists in light of the time to come. I mean not a goal to which one strives, but a sense of the future that is ‘creatively present to all the temporal things that precede this future’ (Pannenberg 1991–1993, vol. 3, 531). It is neither pushed into a distant future, nor is it realised fully in the present. Instead, the present is understood in terms of prolepsis, in which events happen ‘before their time’ (Pannenberg 1991–1993, vol. 3, 580–646; Moltmann 1965, 1999). In this sense, the interpretation of 2 Thess 3:10 finds continuity with Paul’s notion of Jesus’ resurrection being the ‘first fruits’ of what is to come (1 Cor 15:20–28).¹⁶ The eschatological future is ‘the basis for the lasting essence of each creature that finds its manifestation already in the allotted duration of its life and yet will achieve its full manifestation only in the eschatological future’. Although we are still on the way to becoming ourselves, we are ‘in some sense already the persons we shall be in the light of our eschatological future’ (Pannenberg 1991–1993, vol. 3, 603–604). Thus far, I have drawn on Protestant theologians to explicate proleptic eschatology, but I suggest that we find traces of such an approach in Eastern Orthodox theology. I do not mean the Trinitarian focus, according to which history itself is an unfolding of the eternity manifested in the three persons and economy of salvation, but rather the way the anticipated eschaton permeates in every way the time already begun with the coming and resurrection of the ‘last Adam’. This creative force is already apparent in the Church as the body of Christ on earth, in its liturgy which makes Christ and eschaton present, in the icon which uncovers already the transformation of the whole creation, and in the ‘spiritual way’, if not asceticism (Chrysavgis 2008), which is shaped by the eschatological perspective in the sense of appropriating the divine image and likeness of God on the path of salvation. Although this is often presented as an inaugurated eschatology (Stylianopoulos 2008, 21; Bobrinsky 2008, 50), in which Christ has begun the new age but awaits fulfilment in the glorification of the cosmos, I suggest that it has touches of a more proleptic vision. This appears, for instance, in the argument by Schmemmann (1985, 9–10, see also Stăniloae 2000, II: 61) that ‘the whole of Christian theology is eschatological’. We live in ‘time by that which is beyond time; living by that which is not yet come, but which we already

¹⁶In a different way, a similar perspective infuses 2 Peter, where one’s conduct in the present is determined by the future (Holladay 2005, 739).

know and possess'.¹⁷ Indeed, it is something we can 'taste here and now'—the leitmotiv being the Transfiguration of Christ (Mark 9). The Kingdom of Heaven is thus both at hand and awaiting fulfilment, so much so that history itself is created out of the delay of the Parousia.

To sum up, the delay was highly productive in terms of Christian thought, if not providing the very conditions for what we now know as theology. I have been particularly interested in how the delay produced two theoretical responses, one in terms of explaining the delay and the other in the eventual development of proleptic eschatology. On both counts, it turned out that Eastern Orthodoxy has been concerned with such matters, especially the eschatological 'timetable' of 2 Thessalonians and the potential for proleptic eschatology. I have of course emphasised these for a reason, since they will become important in my analysis of Stalin's theoretical reflections on the delay of communism.

2.2 The Delay of Communism and the Identification of Socialism

As for Stalin, I begin with the nature of the delay of communism, before considering the way the interim became the norm (via 2 Thessalonians), the dialectical implications thereof and then proleptic communism itself. Initially, Stalin shared the position of Lenin and other Bolsheviks: a European if not global revolution was imminent and the October Revolution was its precursor (Lenin 1917a, 74, 1917b, 272, 1918e, f, g, h, 1919g, 456, 1919h, 488, 1920a, 21–22, 1920b, 3–4; Lih 2011, 190). The long-term success of the latter relied on the former. He held to this position with the constitution of 1924, which stated that the formation of the USSR was the first step to a World Socialist Soviet Republic (Stalin 1923c, 404, 1923d, 395). The interim was to be brief, in which the transition from capitalism to socialism would set the stage for the realisation of global communism (Stalin 1924g, 414–420, 1924h, 395–401). Already a stages theory is implicit in these formulations, one that would eventuate in the distinction between socialism and communism, between the interim and its fulfilment. I will return to this distinction in a moment, but it first needs to be situated within a couple of theoretical and practical problems within Marxist thought: stages theory and the distinction between objective and subjective factors. The tendency towards historical analysis in terms of stages is endemic to Marxism, notably with regard to the narrative of modes of production and especially the path from capitalism to socialism. In this case, capitalism provides the necessary conditions for socialist revolution through tensions between the forces and relations of production and the sharpening of class conflict. In his earlier work, Stalin often invokes this version of the stages theory, at

¹⁷Florovsky (1975, 66) comes close with his observation that history is 'inwardly regulated and organized precisely by this super-historical and transcendent goal'.

times including the necessity of capitalism as a way of overcoming the remnants of feudalism (Stalin 1906a, 222, 1906b, 401–402, 1906e, 234–235, 1906f, 417–419, 1909a, 153, 1909b, 353, u, v).¹⁸ This preference for stages opens out into objective tendencies within Marxism. The objective forces of history—in terms of economic and social contradictions—produce the stages in question but also the internal tensions that lead to their undoing through revolutionary change. I do not intend to engage in the detailed philosophical discussion of this objective dimension (with its attendant “cold stream” of sober scientific analysis), save to note that it played a significant role among the various wings of the Russian Social-Democratic Party in the lead up to the October Revolution. Thus, a bourgeois revolution should be encouraged to mature so as to enable a socialist revolution out of the contradictions of the former. Many Mensheviks and a good number of Bolsheviks entertained such a position, even Lenin and Stalin from time to time. Yet, a revolution does not happen without subjective intervention, which changes what counts as objective. Lenin, especially in his ‘Letters from Afar’ and the ‘April Theses’, urged such an intervention, a veritable recreation of the world, upon his initially sceptical and reticent comrades—with the result being the October Revolution.¹⁹ Stalin seems to have had occasional doubts about Lenin’s new direction, exhibiting a distinct liking (as we will see in the discussion of language) for a stages theory.²⁰ But later he came to see the full role of subjective intervention, a ‘standing with’ rather than a ‘lying down on’ Marxism, which he characterises most fully as strategy and tactics (Stalin 1920g, 324, 1920h, 312, 1921m, n, 1923a, 1923b, 1927k, 101–103, 105, 1927l, 95–98, 99–100).

However, Stalin’s main and original contribution to this theoretical problem of Marxism was not to be in terms of subjective intervention, but rather in a dialectical engagement with the stages theory in which he opens up what I will call mythical and proleptic communism. In order to situate how he does so, I need first to trace how he gradually distinguishes between socialism and communism as two distinct stages, before stretching out the interim within the context of a stages theory.

Stalin’s earlier texts play a double game: he develops a preliminary stages theory while not distinguishing between socialism and communism (here he follows Marx’s own terminology). Thus, in ‘Anarchism or Socialism?’ from 1906 to 1907, he begins by outlining an ideal vision of communism in contrast to the crises of capitalism generated by scattered private enterprise designed to maximise profits. Under communism one will find no classes, exploitation, wage-labour, profits, state power and the private ownership of the means of production. On a positive register, it means collective labour, free workers, collective ownership of the instruments and means of production and the socialist organisation of society. In short, the main

¹⁸Stalin presents such an approach as a more mechanical version of dialectics: ‘we must never forget that everything changes, that everything has its time and place, and, consequently, we must also present questions in conformity with concrete circumstances’ (Stalin 1906e, 235, 1906f, 419).

¹⁹See my earlier detailed analysis of Lenin on this subject (Boer 2013, 103–133).

²⁰As a further example, he also argued for the proletarian leadership of the bourgeois revolution (Stalin 1906i, j, k, 254, 1906l, 4, 1907i, 2–3, 1907j, 264–265, 1907e, 61–69, 1907f, 88–95).

purpose of production will be to ‘satisfy the needs of society’ (Stalin 1906–1907a, 336, 1906–1907b, 160). He draws upon the old socialist slogan, ‘from each according to his ability, to each according to his needs’ (which, as we will see, is also a gloss on a biblical text, Acts 4:35). But now Stalin qualifies the different stages needed before achieving such a society. ‘In the *first* stage of socialism’, he writes, when those who ‘have not yet grown accustomed to work’ (note the allusion to 2 Thess 3:10) are becoming used to such work, and when productive forces still require further development so that ‘dirty’ and ‘clean’ work remain to be done, the principle of ‘to each according to his needs’, will ‘undoubtedly be greatly hindered and, as a consequence, society will be obliged *temporarily* to take some other path, a middle path [*srednii put'*]’ (Stalin 1906–1907a, 338, 1906–1907b, 162). This first stage or middle path is but a transition, for when the roots of capitalism have been destroyed, when the ‘savage’ sentiments and habits have been overcome in the new conditions, and when the future society ‘runs into its groove’, then the principle of abilities and needs is the only principle needed. At this early point, Stalin’s distinctions are still rather mild, for he speaks of a first stage and its aftermath, a middle path to finding the right track. The reason he does so is that he follows Marx’s ‘Critique of the Gotha Programme’, in which Marx speaks of a first and a higher phase of communist society—the latter being characterised by none other than ‘from each according to his abilities, to each according to his needs’ (Marx 1875a, 87, 1875b, 15). Marx may have written of the two phases of communist society, but for Stalin it was socialist society. They were one and the same.

So in 1906–1907 Stalin has distinguished a couple of stages but still sees the first stage as a relatively brief interim. However, by the tumultuous months between the February and October revolutions of 1917, it became clear that the Bolsheviks might well be able to lead a successful revolution. Thoughts turned to what would happen after the revolution and how the new world might be shaped. In this situation, we find Lenin, already in May of 1917, beginning to make the crucial distinction between socialism and communism. ‘From capitalism’, he writes, one ‘can pass directly only to socialism’, by which he means the social ownership of the means of production and the distribution to each according to work done. But this is only the first step, for ‘socialism must inevitably evolve gradually into communism’, which he characterises according to the well-known slogan concerning abilities and needs (Lenin 1917i, 84–85, 1917j, 179–180). Lenin has begun to reinterpret Marx’s distinction between two stages of communism, which becomes clearer a few months later in his explicit engagement, in *The State and Revolution*, with none other than the same text by Marx that Stalin had used, ‘Critique of the Gotha Programme’ (Lenin 1917g, 464–479, 1917h, 86–102).²¹ As his exegesis of Marx’s brief comments proceeds, Lenin points out that the ‘scientific distinction between socialism and communism is clear’. It may not be possible to discern such differences from before the revolution, but the theoretical distinction is important.

²¹Marcuse (1958, 20) observes that Marx’s late distinction between the two phases of communism is not an incidental correction, but ‘follows from the very principle of the dialectical method’.

Indeed, what ‘is usually called socialism was termed by Marx the “first”, or lower, phase of communist society’ (Lenin 1917g, 475, 1917h, 98). The distinction has now been made, with the interim clearly designated as socialism. A couple of years later, Lenin examines ‘in what way communism differs from socialism’. Socialism is the ‘first form of the new society’, growing out of capitalism, whereas communism is a ‘higher form of society, and can only develop when socialism has become fully established’ (Lenin 1919i, 284, 1919j, 33). Under communism people fall into the habit of performing social duties without any apparatus for coercion, so much so that unpaid work for the common good becomes the norm. Notably, in these works, socialism is not so much the transition from capitalism to communism. Instead, there are two transitions, one from capitalism to socialism and the other from socialism to communism (Lenin 1921a, 330–331, 335, 342, 1921b, 206–207, 212, 219). Socialism has become a distinct stage in its own right. The interim now has a name.

The paradox is that Lenin had not yet experienced the delay of communism. That would soon come, as the prospect for European and then global revolutions faded. In 1917 this was not yet so, which means that Lenin’s distinction is anticipatory in a way he did not imagine: it provided an initial theoretical framework for interpreting and explaining the delay of communism. Notably, Stalin took his time in taking up Lenin’s distinction. The earliest references after 1917 still use socialism and communism interchangeably, in which socialism includes the disappearance of classes and the state (Stalin 1918g, 81, 1918h, 79, 1918u, 91, 1918v, 89). The first implicit suggestion of the distinction between socialism and communism appears in 1924, well after Lenin’s proposal and when enough time had passed for the delay of communism to become apparent. In *The Foundations of Leninism*, Stalin begins by speaking of the ‘transition from capitalism to communism’, thereby still assuming that socialism is an in-between period. But then he observes that what might seem as a transitional phase is anything but, for it is ‘an entire historical era [*tseluiu istoricheskuiu epoxu*]’, full of conflicts, external threats, advances, defeats, re-education, and economic and cultural reconstruction (Stalin 1924e, 115, 1924f, 111–112, see also 1927k, 100, 1927l, 95). Yet in this text the distinction remains implicit, a feature of many of his works from the mid-1920s onwards (although by the 1930s and in the midst of the socialist offensive he tends to focus on the transition to socialism).²²

The first explicit statement and deployment of the distinction appears in 1927, in a reply to a question from the first American Labour Delegation (Stalin 1927k, 139–141, 1927l, 133–135). Asked about the nature of communist society, Stalin replies with the classic definition that he had already provided in 1906–1907 along with some additions: collective ownership of the means of production; free associations of workers rather than the state and classes; a planned high-technology economy;

²²As many texts from the 1920s indicate (Stalin 1924a, 261, 1924p, 249, 1925a¹, 127–128, 1925b¹, 125–126, 1925y, 161–164, 1925z, 158–163, 1925i, 317–318, 379, 1925j, 310–311, 369–370, 1926m, 227–228, 1926n, 216–217, 1928i, 236–237, 1928j, 227–228, 1929a, b, 1929e, 354, 1929f, 339, 1929i, 77, 1929j, 73, 1929q, r).

the end of antitheses between town and country and between agriculture and industry; the ability-needs slogan; the flowering of art and science; true individual freedom. But all this is still in the future, so what is needed now is that workers should ‘march towards socialism, and still more to communism’ (Stalin 1927k, 140, 1927l, 134).²³ Indeed, in an echo of his earlier observation concerning the ‘entire historical era’ of socialism, full of struggle and conflict, he mentions that the development of socialism in more and more countries will produce vigorous opposition, so that two global camps will form between socialism and capitalism.

The delay in Stalin’s full deployment of the distinction seems to echo the delay of communism itself. Only when the latter became apparent was he willing to make use of the distinction and designate socialism as a distinct stage. With this belated clarity concerning socialism, Stalin undertakes two theoretical developments. The first is to focus on the construction of socialism and define it further; the second is to push communism ever further into the future. I tackle the first development in what follows, after which I turn to the implications of an ever-delayed communism.

2.3 The Interim Becomes the Norm: Defining Socialism

How to define the interim that has become the norm? This was a gradual process, in which the various items of such a definition in turn shaped the nature of the interim. It may be surprising to some, but a key factor in this definition turned on some biblical texts. One is the same text we encountered earlier, 2 Thess 3:10—‘anyone unwilling to work should not eat’. It was soon drawn into contact with another, Acts 4:32 and 25: ‘Now the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common ... They laid it at the apostles’ feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need’. Let us see how the interaction worked itself out, in what may be called a creative exercise of Bolshevik biblical interpretation.

2.3.1 *He Who Does Not Work, Neither Shall He Eat*

Lenin was the first to use 2 Thessalonians in such a fashion. In his exegesis of Marx’s comments in ‘Critique of the Gotha Programme’, Lenin observes that in the stage of socialism ‘bourgeois law’²⁴ (Marx’s phrase) persists in terms of regulating the allocation of labour and products. In this context, the ‘socialist principle, “He

²³At the Seventeenth Party Congress in 1934, he speaks of ‘the first stage of communism, i.e., the socialist stage of development [*pervoi stadii kommunizma,—sotsialisticheskoi stadii razvitiia*]’ (Stalin 1934g, 349–350, 1934h, 343).

²⁴‘Bourgeois law’ is Marx’s phrase, which Lenin seeks to explicate. For Lenin, of course, full communism meant the withering away of the state (see Chap. 6), so the continued presence of

who does not work shall not eat [*kto ne rabotaet, tot ne dolzhen est*],” is already realised’. So too is another closely related socialist principle, ‘An equal amount of products for an equal amount of labour’ (Lenin 1917g, 472, 1917h, 94).²⁵ Soon afterwards, Lenin quotes this biblical text once again when addressing a crowd of workers in Petrograd. The context was the grain shortage of 1918, brought about by the destruction of the transport network by the First World War and the White Armies. Lenin accuses the bourgeoisie of disrupting the fixed prices, profiteering and resorting to bribery and corruption in order to undermine the power of the workers. By contrast, the ‘prime, basic and root principle of socialism’ is:

‘He who does not work, neither shall he eat [*kto ne rabotaet, tot da ne est*]. ‘He who does not work, neither shall he eat’ – every toiler understands that. Every worker, every poor and even middle peasant, everybody who has suffered need in his lifetime, everybody who has ever lived by his own labour, is in agreement with this. Nine-tenths of the population of Russia are in agreement with this truth. In this simple, elementary and perfectly obvious truth lies the basis of socialism, the indefeasible source of its strength, the indestructible pledge of its final victory (Lenin 1918c, 391–392, 1918d, 357–358).

This slogan was plastered throughout cities, towns, and villages during the dire situation of the ‘civil’ war and its food shortages. Interpreted in the immediate situation, it meant state control of grain supplies and an absolute ban on private hoarding and trading, strict registration of grain and efficient transport to deliver to places in need, and a ‘just and proper distribution of bread’ among all citizens and without favour to the rich (Lenin 1918c, 392, 1918d, 358). The last point in particular reinforces the point that the ones not working were the old capitalists and the bourgeoisie, for they engaged in no productive labour. It was high time they did so.²⁶ As I pointed out earlier, this distinctive interpretation may perhaps be seen in the early reformer, Jan Hus, but it is otherwise original to Lenin. Let me pick up Lenin’s comment that this biblical text embodies the ‘prime, basic and root principle of socialism [*pervoe, osnovnoe, korennoe nachalo sotsializma*]’. This is a rather stunning observation, basing the phase of socialism on a biblical principle. Yet I reiterate my earlier point: this phase was generated out of the delay of communism in a way that is curiously analogous to the way the biblical text was itself generated out of the delay of the Parousia for the early Christians. At the same

(Footnote 24 continued)

some forms of the state was seen as a bourgeois relic. Stalin would later begin to redefine the state itself under socialism.

²⁵The only analysis that connects Lenin’s interpretation with 2 Thessalonians is that of Bartlett (2012, 47–48). He notes that Lenin removes the important dimension of willingness (*thelei*) to work from 2 Thess 3:10, and he adds the obligatory *dolzhen*, must not or ought not (to eat).

²⁶The biblical text also featured in a famous debate between Anatoly Lunacharsky, the Commissar for Enlightenment, and Metropolitan Vvedensky, the leader of the Renovationist movement in the Russian Orthodox Church. Vvedensky observes (1985, 193): ‘When you say you are for the principle of work, I remind you of the slogan, “he who does not work shall not eat.” I have seen this in a number of different cities on revolutionary posters. I am just upset that there was no reference to the Apostle Paul in his Epistle to the Thessalonians, from where the slogan is taken’.

time, Lenin is quite clear concerning the nature of socialism: ‘But this is not yet communism’ (Lenin 1917g, 472, 1917h, 94).

Stalin would make much greater use of 2 Thess 3:10 for defining socialism.²⁷ Already in 1920 he connects the text with voting. Only working people should have the right to elect other workers to the Soviets, since they are, after all, Soviets of the working people: ‘We in Russia believe that he who does not work, neither shall he eat’. Even more: ‘You must declare that he who does not work, neither shall he vote’ (Stalin 1920c, 420, 1920d, 405).²⁸ Yet, the 1930s saw the greatest use of the text, especially in preparation for the ‘Stalin Constitution’ of 1936. It arose in the context of the socialist offensive, with its massive industrialisation and collectivisation drives, the realisation of the affirmative action program and the emerging Red Terror—all necessarily connected.²⁹ It was also the time when the claim was made repeatedly that socialism had been achieved in the Soviet Union (Stalin 1934g, 340, 1934h, 333, 1935c, 75, 1935d, 60, 1936e, 157–163, 1936f, 123–126, 1939a, 372–397, 1939b, 302–321).

Article 12 of the constitution reads: ‘In the U.S.S.R. work is a duty and a matter of honour for every able-bodied citizen, in accordance with the principle: “He who does not work, neither shall he eat [*kto ne rabotaet, tot ne est*]”’ (Stalin 1936a, article 12, 1936b, stat’ia 12). The text is a direct quotation from Lenin’s version of the saying, rather than the version that had appeared in the 1918 constitution of the RSFSR (1918a, article 18, 1918b, stat’ia 18). Since the biblical text is not given much interpretation in the constitution itself, I need to consider some writings published around the time of the constitution.

A significant step appears a few years earlier, in 1933 and as part of the lead-up to the constitution. Here Stalin seeks to answer the question: if we are living under socialism, why do we have to toil (*trudit’sia*)? In the catechetical style that he developed, he replies that such talk is fundamentally wrong. It is the ‘philosophy of loafers and not of honest working people’ (Stalin 1933g, 256, 1933h, 249). But

²⁷Few if any are the studies that recognise the importance of Lenin’s and Stalin’s engagements with this and other biblical texts. Menken (1994, 135–136) notes Stalin’s usage, but curiously suggests it is among a range of subsequent distortions of the text. Despite the plethora of Russian language texts that mention the text, very few note its biblical origins (Dubrovin 2015, 82). As for Soviet specialists, none realise the significance of Lenin’s and Stalin’s engagements with this text. Even Filtzer’s careful studies (1986, 2004) of labour fail to mention it. Guins, as well as Wilson-Reitz and McGinn, mention, with no further comment, its appearance in the 1918 and 1936 constitutions, Fitzpatrick mistakenly attributes it to Marx and Krausz calls it a simplified principle of ‘ethical socialism’ (Guins 1954, 150; Fitzpatrick 2000, 180; Krausz 2005, 239; Wilson-Reitz and McGinn 2014, 186). It is not uncommon to find treatments of the constitutions failing to discuss these biblical statements at all (Siegelbaum and Sokolov 2000, 158–206).

²⁸Indeed, in the 1920s, the term *netrudovoi element*, non-working element, was a neologism that entered popular parlance in the 1920s (Shternshis 2006, 203).

²⁹For a full elaboration of this point, see Chap. 4.

what does he mean by ‘loafers [*lodyreĩ*]’? The word evokes connotations of idlers, slackers and bums, with distinct echoes of *ataktōs* and *ataktōi*, living in a disorderly and idle fashion from 2 Thess 3:6–11.³⁰ They are—and he claims Lenin for such an interpretation—both the former exploiters and those who do not go along enthusiastically with the new socialist project. The former we have met, in terms of those who do not work for themselves but compel others to work for them. A little later, in the *Short Course*, Stalin would point out that this group had now been compelled to work, or at least those who become—willingly or otherwise—part of the socialist project (Stalin 1938a, 229, 1938b, 219). The latter, however, form a new category. They too ‘loaf and want to live at the expense of others’. They are the ones who drag their feet, who passively and actively resist the socialist offensive. They too do not want to work conscientiously (*trudilis’ chestno*), ‘for themselves, for the community’. These slackers are no better than the former exploiters and to them too the biblical slogan applies: ‘He who does not work, neither shall he eat [*kto ne truditsia, tot ne est*]’ (Stalin 1933g, 256, 1933h, 249). This new category was in many respects created by the intensity of the socialist offensive, which turned the Soviet Union into a modern economic superpower in a breathtakingly short period of time. Many were those who enthusiastically threw themselves into the new project, but many were those who did not, finding themselves left behind and opposing, passively or actively, the project itself. These are the ones Stalin has in mind with his second category of the ones who do not work.

One further point is worth noting concerning this text by Stalin. His use of *trudit’sia* may seem innocuous here, for it has largely the same meaning as Lenin’s use of *rabotaet* (*rabotat*). The semantic fields are close: the former means to toil over, labour and work, while the latter means to work, function, be open and operate. However, Stalin’s text is closer to the official Synodal version of the Bible from 1876, which he would have known from his time of theological study. It reads: ‘*esli kto ne khochet trudit’sia, tot i ne esh*’.³¹ While both *trudit’sia* and *rabotat*, along with their respective nouns and adjectives, were used in the Party literature and government announcements, *rabotat* was the favoured term, along with *rabotnik* (worker). Stalin’s slight shift here may well indicate a more biblical tenor to his use of the slogan, especially in light of the fact that he uses *trudit’sia* heavily in the lead-up to his quotation of the biblical verse (as I have indicated) and indeed prefers it for his later reflections.

The final point concerning the citations of 2 Thess 3:10 relates to its use to mark achieved socialism. This claim was already part of the constitution of 1936, but it also appears in his reflections on the constitution and in the famous *Short Course*

³⁰The Synodal version of the Russian Bible has the adverb *beschinno* for the Greek *ataktos*, which adheres to the strict sense of ‘disorderly’. However, the connotative connection or semantic overlap with *lodyr*, loafer or idler, is very close.

³¹And indeed closer to the 1918 Constitution of the RSFSR, which reads: ‘*Ne trudiashchīsia, da ne est*’ (1918b, stat’ia 18).

that appeared a couple of years later.³² In both cases, the biblical verse is cited in a list of the principles or pillars of socialism: common ownership of the instruments and means of production; abolition of exploiting classes and of the gap between rich and poor; full employment; rights to education, rest and leisure; and work as both an obligation and honourable duty: ‘He who does not work, neither shall he eat [*kto ne rabotaet, tot ne est*]’ (Stalin 1936e, 166, 1936f, 128, 1938a, 126, 229, 1938b, 122, 219). Above all, these mark a socialism that has been achieved, in which the ‘relations of production fully correspond to the state of productive forces, for the social character of the process of production is reinforced by the social ownership of the means of production’ (Stalin 1938a, 126, 1938b, 122). Not only had the interim—socialism—become the norm, but it had also been established. In this norm, 2 Thess 3:10 was now in effect.

2.3.2 *From Each According to His Ability, to Each According to His Work*

At the same time, the *Short Course* adds a crucial dimension to the slogan. Here Stalin makes a direct connection between working-eating and the point that the ‘goods produced are distributed according to labour performed’, indeed that ‘he who does not work, neither shall he eat’ provides the principle of such distribution according to labour (Stalin 1938a, 126, 1938b, 122). Why is this connection crucial? It alludes to a version of the well-known slogan, ‘from each according to ability, to each according to need’. In order to see the connection, I need to engage in some further exegesis. Let us return to the 1936 constitution, especially article 12, which I quoted earlier. However, I quoted only the first half, for its second part glosses another biblical text: ‘The principle applied in the U.S.S.R. is that of socialism: “From each according to his ability, to each according to his work [*ot kazhdogo po ego sposobnosti, kazhdomu—po ego trudu*]”’ (Stalin 1936a, article 12, 1936b, stat’ia 12).

I suggest that this principle is a reinterpretation of Acts 4:35 in light of 2 Thess 3:10. How so? The text of Acts reads: ‘They laid it at the apostles’ feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need’. The biblical context contains a brief account of early Christian communism, in which everything was held in common and no-one had private possessions (see also Acts 2:44–45).³³ Everyone would put whatever wealth they had into the common property and then it was distributed according to need. I do not wish to go into the long history of the various interpretations of this

³²Gusev’s Ph.D. thesis (2003) offers a detailed and careful study of the *Short Course*. To be avoided is Medvedev (2005).

³³The initial proposal for early Christian or ‘heterodox’ communism appears in the work of Karl Kautsky and Rosa Luxemburg, although they argue that it was a communism of consumption, not production, and thereby bound to fail (Kautsky 2007, 171–183, 1977, 347–373, 1895–1897, 25–49; Luxemburg 1970, 1982; Boer 2014a, 198–205).

passage, save to point out that Acts 4:35 eventually became a socialist slogan, ‘from each according to ability, to each according to need’—found in the writings of Marx and Engels, and frequently in Lenin and Stalin.³⁴

Yet, the Soviet Constitution of 1936 does not use this version of the slogan. Instead, it has ‘from each according to his ability, to each according to his *work* [*trudu*]’. The new version is crucial, for it marks the stage of socialism in contrast to communism, of recompense based on work in contrast to need. Stalin makes the distinction quite clear on a number of occasions: in a discussion with Emil Ludwig; an address to the first conference of Stakhanovites; in his report to the Seventeenth Congress; in an interview with Roy Howard; and in his extensive reflections on the constitution. In both socialism and communism one was to contribute according to ability, but under socialism one would receive articles for consumption ‘not according to his needs, but according to the work he performs for society [*obshchestvabe*]’. The reason is that the cultural and technical level of workers is not yet high enough and production is not yet sufficient for open distribution according to need. Even more, certain inequalities continue under socialism: not in terms of unemployment, exploitation and oppression of minorities, but in terms of what one receives in return for the quality and quantity of one’s labour. By contrast, when these factors have developed sufficiently and when wage differentiation has been overcome under communism, one receives items for consumption ‘not according to the work he performs, but according to his needs as a culturally developed individual’ (Stalin 1935j, 92, 1935k, 81, see also 1934g, 362, 1934h, 355, 1936c, 141–142, 1936d, 108–109, 1951–1952a, 272, 275, 1951–1952b, 202, 205).³⁵ However, note the two crucial qualifications: it is not to be any type of work but work for society or the community (*obshchestvabe*); and one’s needs are defined in terms of being the cultural needs for human development that one may have (*potrebnostiam kul'turno razvitogo cheloveka, kotorye u nego imeiutsia*).

For these reasons, the 1936 constitution was based on the socialist principle of work rather than need, for communism had not yet been achieved (Stalin 1936e, 164–165, 1936f, 127). Now we can see how the socialist principle of ‘to each according to work’ arose: it was the result of the conjunction of the biblical texts from 2 Thessalonians and Acts 4. The latter may speak of distribution according to need, but the former speaks of eating in recompense for work. So this text from 2 Thess 3:10—‘anyone unwilling to work shall not eat’—becomes the interpretive

³⁴The current form of the slogan appears first with Louis Blanc: ‘*de chacun selon ses facultés, à chacun selon ses besoins*’ (1851, 92), although the principle can be traced back through socialist circles in other forms (Bowie 1971, 82). I am not the first to make the connection with Acts 4 (Berman 2001, 151–152), but I go well beyond a brief acknowledgement to focus on the variation on the slogan for socialism. Biblical commentators typically water down the text of Acts 4:32–35, in terms of an idealised generalisation that may indicate some sharing in the context of social welfare arrangements, or as a benign ethos of community sharing that had much in common with its Hellenistic context (Esler 1987, 186; Barrett 1994, 251–256; Marguerat 1996, 165–166; Talbert 2005, 47–49).

³⁵The distinction first appears, albeit briefly, in the interview with Emil Ludwig (Stalin 1931g, 120, 1931h, 118).

frame through which Acts 4 is read. This connection was made explicit in the *Short Course* from 1938. Stalin invokes the biblical slogan from 2 Thess 3:10 as the principle of socialism in which the ‘goods produced are distributed according to labour performed’ (Stalin 1938a, 126, 1938b, 122). This is clearly an echo of the slogan, ‘from each according to his ability, to each according to his work’. Not only does one need to work in order to eat, but one also works according to ability and is recompensed in light of the work done. Thus arose the socialist slogan, ‘from each according to ability, to each according to work’. Not for nothing do the gloss on Acts 4:32 and 35 and text from 2 Thess 3:10 appear side by side in the constitution of 1936.

2.4 Dialectic of Mythical Communism

Defining socialism—after distinguishing it from a delayed communism—in terms of a creative conjunction of biblical texts may be a significant step, but Stalin was to go much, much further. At this point, my argument provides a very different angle on the much-debated question as to whether Stalin continued faithfully in the Marxist, if not Bolshevik, tradition or whether he broke with some or all of its major features. On the former, some argue for such continuity as a way to denigrate Marxism, assuming that Stalin realises the grave evil of Marxism itself (Kolakowski 1978–1981, 1–44, 91–105, 141–166; Walicki 1995, 398–424; Rees 1998b; Mawdsley 2003, 5–10). Others argue for continuity without such an agenda, simply pointing out that Stalin and indeed Bukharin were more orthodox (Burnham 1945; Akhminov 1970; Chalidze 1981; Meyer 1981; Von Laue 1981, 1983; Narayanswamy 1986; Lynch 1993; Van Ree 1998), even to the point of suggesting that the distinctly Russian ‘characteristics’ of Stalin’s thought can be found in that tradition (Van Ree 2005). As for breaking with the tradition, some suggest that on the matters I discuss below Stalin distorted or simply abandoned Marxism for various reasons, whether Russification, pragmatism, historical conditions, or lust for power (Wetter 1958, 228–268; Lowenthal 1960; Nove 1962; Deutscher 1967, 292–344; Trotsky 1972; Leonhard 1974, 95–125; Allworth 1980; Cohen 1977, 1985, 38–92; Golubović 1981; Tucker 1990; 50–58, 319–328, 479–486; Daniels 1993b, 1993a, xxxii, 190; Brandenburger and Dubrovsky 1998; Krausz 2005, 237, 239). By now it should be clear that my argument differs: of course, Stalin introduced significant theoretical developments in light of the actual experience of constructing socialism, but these developments were the product of the delay of communism. At the same time, the delay of communism is not merely a cause or an explanatory framework for understanding the Stalin’s theoretical innovations, for the delay is itself the main question. So I am interested in how a dialectical space opens up within socialism in the very act of pushing communism itself into a distant future. The latter provides the creative possibilities of the former, so I begin with what may be called mythical communism. This entails a pushing out of the stage of

communism into an ever more distant future, so much so that it gains near mythical status.

The first signal of this mythical communism appears in a fascinating discussion from 1929, in which the issue concerns nationalities and languages, specifically in regard to the eventual unity of many different peoples in a universal communist polity. Initially, Stalin adheres to Lenin's position concerning the stages that enable classless society and the integration of diverse nations within communism.³⁶ Each would require a preliminary stage characterised by diversity and emancipation rather than unity. As I will discuss in more detail in the following chapter, many socialists took this a step further and argued for a universal language. But the way Stalin interprets Lenin's text is intriguing: he initially discerns two stages on the path to global communism: (1) during the dictatorship of the proletariat and socialism in one country, we may expect a fluorescence of peoples, cultures and languages; (2) only under world-side communism does it become possible to consider overcoming divisions and explore what a global proletarian culture might be (Stalin 1929e, 357–360, 1929f, 341–345).³⁷

At the same time, Stalin begins to stretch out the interim, pushing the era of full communism further and further into the future. He emphasises Lenin's phrase concerning the 'very, very long time [*ochen' i ochen' dolgo*]' that it will take for global communism with its global language to arrive (Lenin 1920a, 92, 1920b, 77; Stalin 1929e, 361, 1929f, 346).³⁸ A couple of years earlier, in response to a question from the first labour delegation from the United States, Stalin comments laconically: 'Clearly, we are still a long way [*eshche daleko*] from such a society' (Stalin 1927k, 140, 1927l, 134).³⁹ The sense of delay increases in the 1930s, precisely in the context of the socialist offensive. For instance, in a speech to collective farm shock-brigaders in 1933, Stalin observes that a 'happy, socialist life is unquestionably a good thing'. 'But', he continues, 'all that is a matter of the future' (Stalin 1933g, 252, 1933h, 245). And in his report to the Seventeenth

³⁶The text reads: 'In the same way as mankind can arrive at the abolition of classes only through a transition period of the dictatorship of the oppressed class, it can arrive at the inevitable integration of nations only through a transition period of the complete emancipation of all oppressed nations, i.e., their freedom to secede' (Lenin 1916c, 147, 1916d, 256). The text is quoted by Stalin (1929e, 360–361, 1929f, 345). The following points also appear elsewhere (Stalin 1929e, f, see also 1930e, 372–383, 1930f, 362–372; Martin 2001a, 245–249).

³⁷Very similar arguments, deploying a theory of stages, appear in his speeches at the Sixteenth Congress in 1930 and in reply to a correspondent's question in relation to his essay on linguistics (Stalin 1930e, 378–379, 1930f, 367–368, 1930k, 3–8, 1930l, 3–7, 1950a, 179–181, 1950b, 136–137).

³⁸This crucial phrase is quoted on a number of occasions, first in 1927 (Stalin 1927k¹, 156, 1927l¹, 151, 1930e, 374, 1930f, 363).

³⁹We should understand his statement from 1925 in this light: Stalin asks whether Lenin's thesis concerning a new epoch of world revolution holds good any longer. 'Does it mean that the proletarian revolution in the West has been cancelled?' His answer: 'No, it does not' (Stalin 1925a¹, 91, 1925b¹, 91).

Congress in 1934, he speaks poetically of ‘the commune of the future’, which will be based on high technical achievements, abundance and collective living in all dimensions.⁴⁰ ‘When will that be?’ He asks in his typical catechetical style. ‘Not soon, of course [*Konechno, ne skoro*]’ (Stalin 1934g, 360, 1934h, 353). Yet the question remains: when? In his analysis of nationalities and cultures from 1929, Stalin adds yet more reasons for the delay of communism: a common and global socialist culture must arise from the processes of class solidarity rather than a decree from above; one must be infinitely patient, for peoples and languages are remarkably resilient (Stalin 1929e, 363, 1929f, 347). In fact, a universal culture and society will not happen even in the second stage that Stalin mentioned earlier—of the global victory of communism and the establishment of a universal dictatorship of the proletariat. This stage marks only the beginnings of communism, for which we now need a further and near mythical stage in which communism innate in the daily life of peoples (Stalin 1929e, 364, 1929f, 349). For this to happen, communism—in economics, politics and culture—must become second nature to human beings and the planet.

By now communism has been delayed into a far-distant and barely articulated third stage, taking on near mythical characteristics. Each time a delay was encountered, each time capitalism seemed to consolidate, each time a revolution elsewhere failed, the interim was extended yet again. As with the delay of the Parousia among the early Christians, what was initially seen as a brief and transitional period had become the ‘new normal’. Yet, the point is not that the determining instance never comes, but that its effect is profoundly dialectical. For Stalin, the same applied to the new normal, in at least four dimensions: language; class struggle; strengthening the state; and socialism in one country. At this point, my argument overlaps with a number of other themes that I will analyse in subsequent chapters—a situation that reveals the interrelatedness of these themes. Thus, the analysis of language in the following chapter indicates how this specific topic may be seen as a development in light of the delay of communism. The same applies to two other topics: the intensification (if not theology) of class struggle, which will appear in the fourth chapter, and strengthening the state, which I discuss in the final chapter. So I focus here on the question of socialism in one country, which provides an excellent example of a practical and theoretical development generated out of the delay of communism.

⁴⁰The poet of old returns in this wonderful description: ‘The future agricultural commune will arise when the fields and farms of the artel have an abundance of grain, cattle, poultry, vegetables, and all other produce; when the artels have mechanised laundries, modern kitchens and dining-rooms, mechanised bakeries, etc.; when the collective farmer sees that it is more to his advantage to get meat and milk from the collective farm’s meat and dairy department than to keep his own cow and small livestock; when the woman collective farmer sees that it is more to her advantage to take her meals in the dining-room, to get her bread from the public bakery, and to have her linen washed in the public laundry, than to do all these things herself’ (Stalin 1934g, 360, 1934h, 353).

The core idea of this doctrine is quite straightforward: socialism can be achieved in one country but it will never be complete and secure unless global socialism and indeed communism takes place.⁴¹ It is clearly a doctrine at the intersection between local and international concerns, with the two dimensions intimately connected (Lih 1995, 5–6, 27–36, 62). Now the distinction between socialism and communism gains another dimension, for socialism may be established in one or more countries, but communism can happen only on a world-wide scale.

The detail of this doctrine was first clearly articulated in a key document from 1925⁴² and then restated without significant development on a quite a number of occasions afterwards.⁴³ The doctrine turns on two contradictions, with the overcoming of one taking place in the context of the other. The first contradiction is internal, concerning the tensions between workers and peasants, between industry and agriculture. This contradiction, which runs back to pre-revolutionary activity, must be overcome if socialism is to be achieved in one country (Stalin 1925a¹, 110–

⁴¹Fitzpatrick (1994a, 114) calls it ‘good political strategy’ in light of circumstances. Given the clarity of this position, one wonders at why it has produced so much polemic. The most careful theoretical studies are by Van Ree (1998, 2002a, 84–95, 2010a, b, 2015), while the most comprehensive study remains E.H. Carr’s multi-volume work (1978), which covers the historical, legal, political and economic dimensions, albeit over-stressing what he sees as the distinctively Russian characteristics of the doctrine. While he treats the international dimension in terms of foreign relations, this is curiously divorced from the domestic situation. Many misread the doctrine by leaving out the crucial international component, with some suggesting that it was a significant departure from Marxist or indeed Leninist theory, a ‘figment’ of Stalin’s imagination, ‘sloppy reasoning’, ‘messianism’, a return of old-fashioned or perhaps a new form of nationalism based on class (Deutscher 1967, 292–293; Tucker 1973, 377–389, 1990, 28–32, 39–65; Daniels 1993a, xxix, 136; Mastny 1996, 149; Brandenburger and Dubrovsky 1998; Rappaport 1999, 246–247; Boobbyer 2000, 16–17; Duncan 2000, 54, 60; Brackman 2001, 166–167; Litvin and Keep 2005, 114; Wood 2005, 26–27; Szpakowski 2007). By contrast, the more insightful works never miss the complex interplay of the national and the international (Fischer 1932; Marcuse 1958, 80, 93–100; Das 1988; Clark 2011, 7).

⁴²This was the report on the results of the work of the fourteenth conference of the Communist Party (Stalin 1925a¹, 110–122, 1925b¹, 109–121). Stalin had initially proposed the idea the year before (although it had precursors), but this material does not offer a full articulation (Stalin 1924e, 109, 1924f, 106, 1924g, 414–420, 1924h, 395–401). Van Ree usefully identifies the origins of this position in the German Social Democratic Movement, especially Georg Vollmar, Karl Kautsky and others (Vollmar 1878; Kautsky 1910, 102–103, 1905, 117–118; Van Ree 2002a, 94, 2005, 167, 2010b).

⁴³In characteristic fashion, in nearly every engagement with the doctrine after its initial statement, Stalin not only reiterates the main points outlined here, but also justifies—in debate with Trotsky and various members of the ‘opposition’—the new interpretation by claiming faithfulness to Lenin’s texts and a pedigree for the doctrine than runs back to the early years of the twentieth century (Stalin 1925a¹, 110–122, 1925b¹, 109–121, 1925y, 205–207, 1925z, 202–204, 1926e, 64–80, 1926f, 60–75, 1926m, 227–232, 1926n, 216–221, 1926w, 292–299, 1926x, 279–286, 1926q, 326–347, 1926r, 312–332, 1926u, 30–40, 105–148, 1926v, 29–38, 100–144). See Van Ree’s (1998, 91–98, 2010a) careful explication of the development of Lenin’s thought on the question, in which he finally arrived at the position of the possibility of building socialism in one country, albeit in an incomplete form. Kolakowski (1978–1981, 21–25) intriguingly suggests that there was little difference between Stalin and Trotsky.

119, 1925b¹, 109–118, 1925y, 158–165, 202–204, 1925z, 156–164, 199–201). Here lies the initial theoretical justification for the socialist offensive of the late 1920s and 1930s, with its industrialisation and collectivisation drives. Yet this internal contradiction must be understood and is indeed enabled by another, between socialism in Russia and global capitalism, which cannot be resolved by internal dynamics alone.⁴⁴ Since a global socialist revolution will not take place soon, any country that has experienced a socialist revolution should not sit idly by but work to construct socialism as far as possible within the global framework of capitalism. However, such a country will never be entirely secure as long as capitalist states exist in the world. Security will come only with global socialism and then communism. In this definition we may see the distinction between socialism and communism in another form: socialism may be established in one country and perhaps a majority of countries, but communism can happen only on a worldwide scale.

Thus, Stalin warns his comrades that as long as capitalist encirclement exists, the danger of capitalist intervention and even restoration is always there. Much can be achieved in one country, such as driving away the landlords and capitalists, repelling imperialist attacks and beginning to construct a socialist economy, but this is not yet a ‘*complete* victory’ (Stalin 1925o, 16, 1925p, 16). The reason is that the main contradiction between local socialism and international capitalism cannot be fully overcome by one country, for it cannot provide a guarantee against the danger of intervention. ‘Hence’, writes Stalin, the final victory of socialism is ‘possible only on an international scale, only as a result of the joint efforts of the proletarians of a number of countries, or—still better—only as a result of the victory of the proletarians in a number of countries’. In other words, the victory of socialism is the ‘full guarantee against attempts at intervention, and hence against restoration, for any serious attempt at restoration can take place only with serious support from outside, only with the support of international capital’ (Stalin 1925a¹, 119–120, 1925b¹, 118–119).⁴⁵ All of which means that socialism in one country is possible and impossible: possible in terms of overcoming the tensions between industry and agriculture; impossible in terms of the completion of the socialist and indeed communist project without a favourable international context (Stalin 1926e, 69–71, 1926f, 65–66). The stage of socialism, at least in one country, is determined by such a contradiction and its risk.

⁴⁴Marcuse (1958, 93–100) and Sanchez-Sibony (2014a, b, 25–56) go too far in suggesting that the international contradictions forced either the continuation of internal contradictions or indeed the policies of socialism in one country as such. That is, they remove Soviet agency from the process.

⁴⁵This point is repeated on many occasions (Stalin 1925o, p, 1925y, 205–207, 1925z, 202–204, 1926e, 64–80, 1926f, 60–75, 1926m, 227–232, 1926n, 216–221, 1926o, p, 1926w, 292–299, 1926x, 279–286, 1926q, 326–347, 1926r, 312–332, 1926u, 30–40, 105–148, 1926v, 29–38, 100–144, 1927k, 100–101, 1927l, 95–96, 1938c, d).

2.5 Conclusion: Proleptic Communism

Socialism as an era in its own right now has a number of features, each of them emerging from specific practice and generating their own theoretical elaborations. Let me summarise the argument thus far in order to set up the conclusion. After tracking how Stalin distinguished socialism from communism, the rhythm of biblical themes began to pulse throughout my analysis in a way that translated the discussion of the delay of the Parousia. Thus, socialism may be defined in terms of 'anyone unwilling to work shall not eat' (2 Thess 3:10) and through a reinterpretation of Acts 4:35 in light of this verse: from each according to ability and to each according to work. Socialism is also marked by the dialectic of unity and diversity in relation to languages and cultures, the intensification of class struggle even in the context of achieved socialism, socialism in one country as never entirely secure in light of capitalist encirclement, and the strengthening of the state as the means of its withering away. At the same time, the era of socialism undergoes its own development, for it may well overcome class conflict through intensified struggle (the Red Terror), yet it remains socialism so long as capitalist encirclement exists. Or at least the reality of recompense in light of labour, socialism in one country and a strengthened proletarian state may do so. Mythical communism has indeed produced a rather dialectical understanding of socialism. But the question remains as to whether communism, as mythical, has become a well-nigh unattainable goal.

In my initial explication of the delay of Parousia, I elaborated upon the particular theological feature of proleptic eschatology. The future of God's rule functions in terms of a reverse causality, so much so that future events happen in the present. The present cannot be understood without such a creative force, which provides the basis for the anticipated future. Yet the eschatological future is not entirely manifest in the present, for it awaits the realisation of the fullness of time. So the final question I address is whether communism as conceived by Stalin is translatable in such terms? At one level, this has been the underlying burden of my study, for the delay of communism itself produced the dialectical formulations of the socialist stage. Yet this type of prolepsis presses more heavily on the delay rather than communism, in the sense that the delay is causative. But what of communism? Stalin seems to be of two minds, stressing at times what may more easily be seen as a proleptic position, in which communism transforms socialism, and at others distinguishing the two more sharply. Indeed, the need for new differences arises out of the increasing sense of the potential for socialism and communism to merge. Yet as he does so, he creates new ground for possible fusion. He cannot seem to escape the proleptic power of communism no matter which way he moves.

I begin with the tendency to fusion between the two stages by comparing some of Stalin's earlier depictions of a communism to come (see above) with his claims, beginning in the 1930s, concerning achieved socialism. Thus, he initially depicted communism in terms of free and collective labour, collective ownership of the means and instruments of production, socialist planning and organisation of society, a planned high-technology economy, harmony between town and country and

between agriculture and industry, material and cultural wellbeing, the flowering of arts and science, true individual freedom, withering away of the state and, of course, ‘from each according to ability, to each according to need’ (Stalin 1906–1907a, 336–337, 1906–1907b, 160–161, 1927k, 139–141, 1927l, 133–135). At the time, Stalin made it quite clear that such a society would not arrive soon, that it was very much a society of the distant future.

Nonetheless, in a few years he began to appropriate some of these features for socialism, especially in light of the claim that socialism had become ‘the sole system in the whole of the national economy’, that capitalism had been overcome in industry and agriculture, with a consequent improvement in material and cultural life (Stalin 1934g, 340, 1934h, 333, see also 1930a, 197, 1930b, 191, 1935c, 75, 1935d, 60, 1936e, 157–163, 1936f, 123–126, 1939a, 372–397, 1939b, 302–321). Feature by feature, socialism begins to resemble the former descriptions of communism. Now, he argues, labour has become free and collective, for the exploiters have been eradicated and the means and instruments of production are in the hands of workers and labouring peasants. Property is owned collectively, either by the state on behalf of workers or by collective farms. This has led to the end of unemployment in towns and of poverty in the countryside. The difference between town and country has begun to disappear, with modern apartments for workers and villages characterised by public farm buildings, with clubs, radio, cinemas, schools, libraries and crèches. Farmers increasingly work collectively on the best land, with the cooperative use of modern technology such as tractors, harvester combines, threshing machines and automobiles. Further, production in industry and agriculture has made the shift from the profit motive to planned guidance, with result of increasing material and cultural wellbeing.⁴⁶ Even national income has begun to focus on needs, being distributed for the purpose of raising material standards and increasing production (although he is careful to avoid a full invocation of the ability-needs slogan). All of this based on the fact that the workers and labouring peasants are masters of the country, working not for capitalists but for themselves and for society as a whole. As he adds yet more items to the description of socialism, he seeks to counter the impression that one may sit back and relax, for he urges his listeners and readers to continue to strengthen the system and overcome the myriad problems that remain (Stalin 1930e, 330–332, 1930f, 321–322, 1933g, 247, 250–256, 1933h, 241, 244–249, 1934g, 340–343, 1934h, 333–336, 1936a, articles 1–12, 1936b, stat’ia 1–12).⁴⁷

Not much seems to remain for communism, since most of the items listed above have now been appropriated for socialism (I speak theoretically, for the practical realisation remains open to debate). One way of interpreting such appropriation is that socialism was gradually drawing nearer to communism. Once the last items had

⁴⁶For details on material and cultural benefits, see the report to the Seventeenth Party Congress (Stalin 1934g, 343–346, 1934h, 336–339).

⁴⁷For more elaborate warnings, see the texts concerning ‘dizzy with success’ (Stalin 1930a, b, 1934g, 384–385, 1934h, 375–376, 1937g, 283–292, 1937h, 179–185).

become reality—such as global socialism, the withering away of the state and the principle of ability and needs—one would have communism in a type of evolutionary development based on reform. Indeed, in his report to the Eighteenth Congress of 1939 (see above), Stalin argues for a shift in phases within socialism. It had moved from internal class conflict, from a period of persistent struggle, conflict, setbacks and victories, to one in which class conflict had been eradicated. All that remained was vigilance against interference from the capitalist encirclement. Yet, this incremental reading is really a minimalist approach; I prefer a more robust interpretation in which socialism cannot avoid the creative power of communism, so much so that socialism was beginning to resemble communism in many ways. It was, as it were, being drawn into the present from its near mythical status in a distant future. Even more, communism takes on a causative role in the present, thereby establishing the groundwork for its full realisation.

The risk is that socialism becomes indistinguishable from communism the more features from the latter appear in the former. But this is not by any means the end of process: the more they seem to draw nigh to one another, the more Stalin seeks out other ways to distinguish them. He could fall back on the conventional stages theory of socialism-communism, but few categories remained to distinguish the two. Or he could introduce new qualifications to differentiate the two from one another and maintain communism in its role of the last instance that never comes. This is precisely what he does on at least two occasions, one concerning equality and the other commodities and value under socialism. In each case, the effort at distinction produces yet further ground for the proleptic power of communism upon socialism.

Already in the 1930s, Stalin attacked the assumption that socialism is at core a project of equalisation, ranging all the way from wages to wearing the same clothes and eating the same food in the same quantity. Not so, he says, for that is a petty-bourgeois assumption, or perhaps one worthy of simple peasant ‘communism’ or gatherings of ascetics. Instead, Marxism and Leninism acknowledge the reality of differences in wages depending upon skills and capabilities and the nature of the work performed. Only with such differences can one encourage workers to increase their skills and capabilities (Stalin 1931e, 57–62, 1931f, 55–60). Further, tastes and needs among human beings vary, so that equalisation in all realms of life is absurd. At heart is the tension between individual and collective. Stalin comes out strongly on the collective side, arguing that Marxism concerns freedom from exploitation, classes and private property (Stalin 1934g, 361–364, 1934h, 354–356, 1931g, 120–121, 1931h, 118–119). The individual, as determined by the collective in which true individuality arises,⁴⁸ is constituted by his or her differences. Throughout this

⁴⁸There is no, nor should there be, irreconcilable contrast between the individual and the collective, between the interests of the individual person and the interests of the collective. There should be no such contrast, because collectivism, socialism, does not deny, but combines individual interests with the interests of the collective. Socialism cannot abstract itself from individual interests. Socialist society alone can most fully satisfy these personal interests. More than that; socialist society alone can firmly safeguard the interests of the individual. In this sense there is no

argument, the underlying assumption is that the existence of differentiation is a feature of socialism. Yet on two occasions, Stalin opens up the possibility that it will continue in communism. He does so by broaching once again the persistent (and biblical) theme of work and needs, with the point that recompense for work entails differences between people. They are recompensed at different levels depending on skills and the quantity and quality of labour performed. Indeed, 'it is quite clear that people's needs vary and will continue to vary under socialism' (Stalin 1931g, 120, 1931h, 118, see also 1936c, 143, 1936d, 109–110). Only under communism will labour become voluntary work for society and people will be recompensed according to needs. Does this mean that communism will see the overcoming of differences and the achievement of equalisation? Not quite, for the very principle indicates otherwise: from each according to ability and to each according to need assumes differentiation in terms of both abilities and needs. If so, then socialism has drawn nigh to the proleptic power of communism, precisely at the moment that Stalin seeks to differentiate them.

The second and more extended example comes from the late work, 'Economic Problems of Socialism in the U.S.S.R.' (Stalin 1951–1952a, b). Along with his essay on linguistics, this work is part of an effort to argue for certain type of scientific stability in terms of 'laws', especially after the long decades of revolutionary upheaval and wars with foreign powers. The effect in this case is to indicate that socialism too has certain stable laws of political economy that cannot be changed on a whim. Of course, a crucial difference with the laws of nature and science is that economic laws are subject to historical periods, although this does not mean that the laws are annulled when a period passes, but rather that they become irrelevant within a new era that is usually inaugurated with much struggle. Socialism too has such laws,⁴⁹ but the question is what they might be. Here the central categories of Marxist economic theory provide the basis, such as the forces and relations of production as the two dimensions of social production, but Stalin develops specific features that are important for my argument.

Of these I focus on three: commodity production, the law of value and the continuation of contradictions between forces and relations of production (Stalin

(Footnote 48 continued)

irreconcilable contrast between "individualism" and socialism' (Stalin 1934c, 26–27, 1934d, 27–28, see also 1936c, 143–144, 1936d, 110).

⁴⁹ 'The laws of political economy under socialism are objective laws, which reflect the fact that the processes of economic life are law-governed and operate independently of our will' (Stalin 1951–1952a, 229, 1951–1952b, 159). Later, he proposes that the basic economic law of socialism is 'the securing of the maximum satisfaction of the constantly rising material and cultural requirements of the whole of society through the continuous expansion and perfection of socialist production on the basis of higher techniques' (Stalin 1951–1952a, 253, 1951–1952b, 182). Later, he clarifies by pointing out that basic law of socialism, which has the two parts of aims and means, is driven by focusing on the needs of human beings and not the production of surplus value (Stalin 1951–1952a, 281, 1951–1952b, 210–211).

1951–1952a, 230–241, 263–264, 273–274, 1951–1952b, 159–170, 192–193, 203–204).⁵⁰ Each of them provides a new way to distinguish the conventional stages of socialism and communism. To begin with, commodities (which exist in many forms outside capitalism) are very much present in the era of socialism, albeit in a rather different way. The reality is that two sectors exist, one run by the state the other by collective farms. The latter produce goods they need to sell to state-owned companies and individuals, for which in turn they receive commodities. All this happens in a way that harnesses commodity production for a very different purpose: socialist commodity production without capitalists. So too with the law of value, which exists under socialism as part of commodity production and consumption. Although Stalin sees a particular benefit, especially for the economic planners and directors who need to understand and act upon the law of value, he argues that it too is harnessed for a very different economic and social system from capitalism. In this case, the crucial factors are social ownership of the means of production and proportionate development of the economy, subject to the five year plans, in contrast to the anarchy and crises of capitalism in which value reigns supreme. In other words, like commodity production, the law of value is a servant of a socialist economy and not its master. The third item is perhaps the most telling, for it sums up the previous two. In a subsequent section of his study (in reply to Yaroshenko), Stalin argues that contradictions between the forces and relations of production continue under socialism, albeit in a new way. While the relations in question conform to productive forces, the very fact that the latter are growing means that contradictions are bound to emerge. As the forces leap ahead, the relations of production lag, especially in the commodity exchange between the state and collectively owned sectors. Indeed, they may hamper the growth of the production forces, so that it is necessary for planning bodies to act in order to prevent such tensions from becoming antagonistic. Ultimately, of course, the aim is to eliminate the tensions by carefully converting collective farm property into public property and replacing commodity exchange with products exchange.⁵¹

This final point indicates that Stalin is keen to maintain the differences between socialism and communism, although he has had to develop a number of new categories in order to do so. While socialism has tensions between the forces and relations of production, as well as commodity production and the law of value, under communism they will disappear. With commodities, he suggests that in the future era there will no longer be two sectors but one all-embracing and national sector in which commodities and its ‘money economy’ will disappear. Similarly, with the law of value, in communism the amount and distribution of labour will not

⁵⁰He also argues for the abolition of essential differences between town and country and between mental and physical, but the continuation of inessential differences. The core issue is antagonism and conflict between them, which Stalin suggests has been overcome. Yet, under socialism the realities of the state and collective sectors, as well as different levels of production and management, mean that inessential (that is, comradesly) differences continue (Stalin 1951–1952a, 241–245, 1951–1952b, 170–174).

⁵¹In other words, the process from socialism to communism is that of reform after the revolution.

be regulated in the roundabout way of value, but directly. Thus, production will be regulated by the needs of society and computing such needs will be the main task of planning bodies (Stalin 1951–1952a, 234–235, 239, 293–294, 1951–1952b, 164–165, 169, 221–222). Through these arguments a reformulation of the two principles of socialism and communism—ability-work and ability-needs—seeks to maintain the distinction.⁵² Indeed, for Stalin, the principle of recompense according to work entails the harnessing of commodity production and the law of value for the sake of different socio-economic formation; by contrast, recompense according to need means that both have become irrelevant under communism.

Throughout, Stalin always has his eye on what communism might be, in a way that betrays its proleptic role in the very act of distinguishing it from communism. This role emerges in the fascinating final couple of pages of the long study on economic problems, where he espies the first shoots of communism in terms of even these new categories (Stalin 1951–1952a, 294–295, 1951–1952b, 222–223). The topic concerns the transformation of collective farms into public property (for they were still the property of the collectives). As he had pointed out on a number of occasions, the existence of two sectors (state and collective) and the commodity relations between them would not remain under communism. How to achieve the transition? Already the land and means of production are public and labour is cooperative. So the only real property of the collective farms are the agricultural products and especially the surplus products that become commodities for exchange. Here may a transformation be effected: since such commodities are the greatest hindrance to collective farms becoming fully public, they need to be transformed into direct products exchange between state industry and collective farms. Actually, suggests Stalin, this is already happening through the ‘merchandising’ of produce such as cotton, flax and seed. Or rather, this should be called ‘products exchange’—precisely what is needed for communism. They are nothing less than *zachatki*, the first rudiments, beginnings, inception, or, most appropriately, a dawn of communism, already emerging within socialism. And they should be extended, without hurry but persistently and consistently, until the whole economy operates in such a fashion. In the process, the collective farms would also become public property.

The upshot is quite extraordinary, for communism is already dawning or being born within socialism. Or in the terms I have been using, the proleptic power of communism shows up once again even within his new categories of differentiation. Perhaps it is not for nothing that he tended to use socialism and communism interchangeably even in his later writings.

⁵²He mentions them explicitly later in his response to Yaroshenko (Stalin 1951–1952a, 272, 275, 1951–1952b, 202, 205).

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