The ToC of Cahiers du Monde russe last issue "The Apogee of the Soviet Experience: Culture and Society in the Brezhnev Years" in two volumes (54/1-2 - 54/3-4)

The Apogee of the Soviet Experience: Culture and Society in the Brezhnev Years

Volume I : Real Socialism in Three Dimensions : Past, Future, Abroad
Volume II : En deçà du contrôle idéologique : Déploiement des subjectivités et prise en compte des publics

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A decade ago, it was still possible to be surprised by historians’ lack of interest in late Socialism. Since then, the world of historiography has greatly changed. That period is the object of a frenzy of research, with frequent seminars and edited volumes. As happened with the Khrushchev Thaw in the early 2000s, the Brezhnev years have become a happy hunting ground for researchers. The twenty years (1964-1985) between the Thaw and perestroika were a formative period for the “last Soviet generation,” which is still a sizeable proportion of the current population of the former republics of the USSR. The predominantly positive image of the Soviet past as a whole is largely based on people’s memories of their youth. A golden age for many citizens in the ex-Soviet republics, the period is less well known among historians: they find it hard to find a name for it, because its image is only revealed in contrast to the two periods of radical political change that came before and after it. “Stagnation,” Gorbachev’s term, has long been rejected; “developed” or “real socialism,” the regime’s own favoured label, can only now be used with scare quotes. The idea of applying the period names and concepts used in Western Europe and North America — the Sixties and Seventies — not only fails to reflect the wholeness of the Brezhnev period, but, not least, for all their practical use, these terms rapidly come up against limitations: Brezhnev’s Sixties were a continuation of the reforming optimism of the Soviet Fifties, rather than belonging to the triumph of consumer society as paraded by the market-economy countries. The reason the 1970s are seen as the beginning of a new era in the capitalist countries is that the oil crisis and the labour and ecological movements forced the economic model to adapt, while in the USSR, the Fordist production model was not changed until after 1986. In other words, the divisions of time habitually used for the history of the United States and Western Europe do not really fit the history of late Socialism. This issue of Cahiers joins the recent boom in studies of the Brezhnev years with a series of 22 articles in two parts debating trends in current historiography.

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