

# The Characteristic of Family and (Re-)Education in the Communist Perspective

Martina Pavelková

The family is the most basic and stable human community. All political systems regard it as the basic unit. In the course of centuries supporters of various philosophical views have agreed on the main significance of family as the foundation of political order. But the characteristics of this basic institution have differed, so that the concept of family covered various forms of social groupings.<sup>1</sup> Most frequently basic family structure is constituted by so-called nuclear family, i.e., family composed of parents and their children. It holds that family is the first model of society the child encounters. The environment in which the child grows up predetermines her further personality development and relationships to other people. In the family an individual learns certain patterns of behaviour, value system and social skills without which she cannot get by as an adult. The family therefore fulfils an important function in socialization. Since antiquity up to the present several attempts to transfer parental care to other persons or groups of persons or institutions controlled by the state have been undertaken but have never met large-scale success.<sup>2</sup> From this it is evident that in a totalitarian regime the family constitutes a discrete isle of a kind and that every totalitarian regime will try to suppress the family and family ties. In our work we will focus on how family ties, parents' and children's rights were conceived in communist ideology trying to create a new society and a new human. We will first of all show what transformation the family and relationships among family members underwent in the period of communist totalitarianism in the Soviet Union.

## 1. Communist "new morality" and structural sin

To be able to speak of the conception of family in the communist era we must first outline the general goals communism pursued. At the same time it is necessary to say that the concept of communism is very hard to define. So-called ideal communism has never yet occurred in history. We could therefore define it according to the notion of what it might look like one day. Communists are convinced that their notions of the future will someday really come true and describe them as if they were in fact real. But communism never existed in the form which it pretended to be. That is why sometimes they speak not of communism but rather of real socialism or the stage of progressing towards communism. Communism aims at total transformation of the world. It tries to remove the old world and its old morality and strives to build a new, better world with a new morality. The goal of communist ideology is abolishing private property and reform of family. Thereby freedom as a fundamental human right is destroyed.<sup>3</sup> The most vicious thing about communism is that it presents crime as good. Words like justice, freedom, humanity, law, honour have totally different meanings in communist vocabulary than they do in the vocabulary of traditional Western democracies. They are mere homonyms which sound the same but have different meaning. Communist education is dangerous and

1 Cf. Jack GOODY, *Proměny rodiny v evropské historii*, Praha: Nakladatelství Lidové noviny, 2006. Further cf. Oldřich MATOUŠEK, *Rodina jako instituce a vztahová síť*, Praha: SLON, 2003, pp. 20–38.

2 Cf. Oldřich MATOUŠEK, *Rodina jako instituce a vztahová síť*, pp. 9–10.

3 Cf. Alain BESANÇON, *Le malheur du siècle. Sur le communisme, le nazisme et l'unicité de la Shoah*, Paris: Fayard, 1998, pp. 54–58.

deceptive because it represents the bad deeds it commits as good.<sup>4</sup> The communist legal system is dangerous because it creates laws which on the face of it try to meet the human desire for justice but in fact bring about political tyranny.<sup>5</sup>

Communism wants to create a new human, new attitude to work, new discipline, new morality. This new morality is necessary for building communism. What does it consist in? First of all it has a practical function – it is an instrument of the state. The new form of morality no longer rests on religious or traditional values. The new morality is determined by economic and social conditions and relations in society. According to Marx's theory morally bad and improper habits cannot be changed by preaching or moralizing, but only by changing the material conditions of society.<sup>6</sup> Morality is not valuable in itself, it is rather a means for attaining the goal, which is building the new world, reaching ideal communism, creating classless society. We can see that this conception of morality is really quite new and has nothing to do with the morality of the Western civilization so far, which is based on Christian values.<sup>7</sup> Communism totally changed the perception of good and evil. The criterion for judging good behaviour is no longer the individual's conscience. Within this new morality conscience is not something to be respected, it is merely to be formed. The one who forms the citizens' conscience is the communist party. It only is the donor and protector of new morality.<sup>8</sup> Morality has the task of strengthening the influence of the party in areas of private life, such as marriage, family and rearing children, i.e., areas that cannot be much regulated by laws. Morality becomes a form of social control and should replace the law.<sup>9</sup> It is desirable to reach the ideal state when it will no longer be necessary to use power to enforce proper behaviour because citizens will be so disciplined that there will be but minimum control over them.<sup>10</sup> But if morality is merely a means of social control, it is useless to think about the justification of moral judgments, about ethical reasoning, or analyse concepts such as guilt and the good. Morally good is what the party approves. But when the party becomes the conscience of people, the individual cannot be viewed as one who acts morally because she is not the master of her decisions. It is quite evident that this new morality, a communist invention, totally contradicts the natural law. It is significant that the very first to point out the danger and perversity of communist ideology was not a politician or an economist but Pope Leo XIII. Even before the Bolshevik revolution, which attempted to apply Marxist theory in practice, he predicted what would follow.<sup>11</sup> John Paul II writes about his predecessor's prediction: "Pope Leo XIII in a certain sense predicted the rise of communism for which humanity and Europe would pay dearly because the cure, as he wrote in 1891 in his encyclical, could be more dangerous than the disease! The Pope proclaimed this with the dignity and authority of the teaching Church."<sup>12</sup> Communist ideology as the greatest heresy became the following popes' target of criticism.<sup>13</sup> The French historian of ideas Alain

4 Cf. Alain BESANÇON, *Le malheur du siècle*, p. 63.

5 Cf. Harold J. BERMAN, Soviet Justice and Soviet Tyranny, *Columbia Law Review* 6/1955, pp. 795–807.

6 Cf. Richard T. De GEORGE, R. T. Soviet Ethics and Soviet Society, *Studies in East European Thought* 4/1964, p. 207.

7 Marxism-Leninism tried to attain some sort of salvation comparable to the Biblical prophecy. It wants to create a new human and a new world, achieve peace and justice in which there will be no more contradictions, and tries to achieve this state by political means. But what is the work of God cannot be attained by human powers. Cf. Alain BESANÇON, *Le malheur du siècle*, pp. 100–101.

8 Cf. Richard T. De GEORGE, Soviet Ethics and Soviet Society, p. 209.

9 There are cases in which use of the law is highly impractical or even impossible. Such instance is motivation to higher performance in work and exerting own initiative in collective. This is where appeal to communist new morality comes to play. In fact motivation and work discipline were the two most discussed topics in communist ethics. It was necessary to motivate workers to think of the good of the collective rather than their own and regarded as their duty to totally commit themselves to their work and hold it in esteem whatever it was like. Cf. Richard T. De GEORGE, Soviet Ethics and Soviet Society, p. 211.

10 Ibid.

11 In more detail cf. Christian WEISSMULLER, Le communisme: un échec annoncé par un pape, *Nouvelle revue théologique* 6/1995, pp. 874–884.

12 JAN PAVEL II., *Překročit práh naděje*, Praha: Tok, 1995, p. 124.

13 E.g. Pius XI called attention to the fact that communist morality denies freedom and human dignity to the human being. According to him

Besançon sees direct link between communist ideology and structural sin. According to him communist ideology creates structural sin in these steps:<sup>14</sup>

- 1) It denies that the world is good, as natural religions, philosophers of antiquity and biblical revelation agree.
- 2) It considers hatred to be a moral obligation. "The spirit of destruction is the same as the spirit of creation." (Bakunin)
- 3) It abolishes the commandments of natural morality and partially the second table of Mosaic Law. It is obligatory to kill, steal, lie – all according to the needs of class struggle.
- 4) It rejects God's concurrence with events in the world and at the same time thus denies all forms of providence. Responsibility is transferred to the Party, i.e., to a group of people who know the structure of the world and direction of its development.
- 5) Human beings are deprived of free judgment.

Therefore the social order communists try to create forces the human being to participate in evil. But this evil is represented by the communists as good. And the maliciousness and monstrosity of communist education consists precisely in this distortion or falsification of the good.<sup>15</sup>

## 2. View of human being and interpersonal relations in communist ideology

We have stated that together with new morality communists wanted to create a new human. Who was this "new human"? Answering this question is crucial for ethics and law. But at first no one knew what this new human was to be like.<sup>16</sup> According to Marxist doctrine there is no immutable substance of human, no nature humans have in the past, present and future. Marxism rejects both the Aristotelian conception of human as "rational animal" and the religious conception of human as unity of soul and body. All these efforts are condemned as metaphysical and as efforts to make that which is in fact dynamic, historic, developing and changeable into something static and immutable. According to Marxism-Leninism the concept of human is not abstract but concrete, not eternal but historical, not metaphysical but dialectic.<sup>17</sup> The Marxist-Leninist concept of human derives from Marx's thesis to Feuerbach according to which a human being is merely a "set of social relationships".<sup>18</sup> Biologically humans have evolved from apes but in the last stage of their biological development, when they attained their current physical appearance, social factors also come into play. Humans differ from apes by their ability to *work*. By working human beings create themselves and by work-

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communism is dangerous precisely in that it falsifies the good. It presents its perverse views in an attractive form, whereby it confuses many, even educated persons. Communism does not bring freedom but reduces people to slavery and strives to liquidate them. *Divini Redemptoris* 8-24.

14 Cf. Alain BESANÇON, Reconnaître le communisme comme structure de péché, in Joseph RATZINGER, *La vérité vous rendra libres. Hommage au Cardinal Georges Cottier*, Paris: Parole et Silence, 2004, p. 229.

15 In more detail cf. Alain BESANÇON, *La falsification du Bien: Soloviev et Orvell*, Paris: Julliard, 1985.

16 The Soviet theoretician of education Anton Makarenko, who pursued the question of how to create the "new human", confesses this bewilderment in his work *The Pedagogic Poem* when he writes that "the new human must be created in a new way... But nobody knows how..." Anton MAKARENKO, *Pedagogická poéma*, Praha: SPN, 1976, p. 5.

17 Cf. Richard T. De GEORGE, The Soviet Concept of Man, *Studies in East European Thought* 4/1964, pp. 261–262.

18 Karl MARX, *Spisy* 3, Praha: Státní nakladatelství politické literatury, 1958, p. 18.

ing they themselves gradually change. According to Marx humans create their own history and in this historical process create themselves.<sup>19</sup> By changing the external world around them humans at the same time change their nature. Humans only occur as humans in society. From this it follows that we can never conceive the human abstractly but always only as a particular individual: As relationships in society change, so does the nature of the human who is – as stated above with reference to Feuerbach – a set of social relations. That is why each epoch forms a different individual who has different emotions, thoughts and perception. The set of social relations comprises e.g. family, political, ideological and legal relations. But social relations change very slowly so that the change of the human is difficult to observe. This may lead to the erroneous view that human nature is eternal and immutable.<sup>20</sup>

### 3. Destroying the family as the path to new society – the practice of Soviet communism

The change in understanding the human being projected itself most into the concept of family. In accordance with communist propaganda children were to be much less bound to their parents and family environment. The central place in the lives of children was to be occupied by the collective where the child was to be re-educated and was to attain the proper ideological outlook.<sup>21</sup> The concept “re-education” is one of the major concepts of the communist propaganda. The human personality was to be “corrected” and directed in a desirable way.<sup>22</sup> Of the three main pillars of modern society – family, school, church<sup>23</sup> – only one was to remain. Communists wishing to create a new world try to eliminate family and church because these by their character maintain the tradition, for which there is no place in the new social order.<sup>24</sup> The institution of school is retained because it can be used as an instrument of cultural revolution.<sup>25</sup> The family, on the other hand, is perceived as a place of obscurantism and superstitions. Reactionary mothers are unable to educate their children in accordance with the new ideology. Educating children outside the family was to help children break their ties to the past and enable them to breathe the atmosphere of progress. Children will thus be able to get to know the new world communists are constructing for them.<sup>26</sup> Dignity of the woman became a much-cited concept after the October Revolution. As opposed to the patriarchal society of the past, the woman was to be emancipated from dependence on the man. With this goal canteens, sewing workshops, child-minding facilities, public laundries were established, which were to replace unpaid women’s housework. Women, liberated from household cares, could thus attain equality to men. Gradual disappearance of housework was viewed as a necessary phase of historical development. Care of the household has no place in the new world which will arise by socialist transformation.

19 Cf. Erich FROMM, *Obraz člověka u Marxe*, Brno: L. Marek, 2004, p. 18.

20 Cf. Richard T. De GEORGE, *The Soviet Concept of Man*, pp. 262–264.

21 In this spirit Makarenko writes: “The family has ceased being the father’s family. Our woman enjoys the same rights as the man, our mother has right equal to the rights of the father. Our family is not subject to the father’s autocracy but constitutes a soviet collective.” Anton MAKARENKO, *O výchově dětí v rodině*, Praha: SPN, 1957, p. 15.

22 Cf. Jindřich KABÁT, *Psychologie komunismu*, Praha: Práh, 2011, p. 402.

23 To these three basic pillars of socialization some sociologists at present add the media. Cf. Robert KUBEY, *Media Implications for the Quality of Family Life*, in: *Social Scientific, Psychodynamic, and Clinical Perspectives*, ed. Dolf ZILLMANN – Jennings BRYANT – Aletha C. HUSTON, Routledge, 1994, pp. 61–69.

24 Communists try to replace God and religious institutions. They create a kind of “secular religion” and employ religious elements – they deify their leaders, mass meetings are regarded as sacred events. According to Simone Weil “it is not surprising that Marxism always had a religious character. It has much in common precisely with those forms of religious life Marx most attacked, especially in that it is, in Marx’s own words, the opium of humanity. But it is religion without mysticism, in the proper sense of the word.” Cf. Simone WEIL, *Oppression et liberté*, Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1955, p. 152.

25 Cf. Nicholas S. TIMASHEFF, *The Attempt to Abolish the Family in Russia*, *Ecologist* 4/1974, p. 144.

26 Cf. Elizabeth WATERS, *The Bolsheviks and the Family*, *Contemporary European History* 3/1995, p. 280.



Shortly after the Bolsheviks seized power in Russia in 1917 the Soviet government published a number of new measures which were to change the structure and function of family. Since 1917 till 1945 several edicts regulating marriage, divorce and relationship of parents and children were published.<sup>27</sup> Immediately in the first ten years after the revolution the new Soviet government presented three proposals according to which the family was to be transformed in the period of transition from socialism to communism. According to the first proposal the family was to be abolished and replaced by collective education of children in state-run institutions and boarding schools. The proponents of such idea appealed to the fact that elimination of family is in accordance with Marxist ideology, since the family produces an improper kind of individuals, i.e., such that are unable to contribute to the collective because they are selfish individuals. This proposal reckoning with total abolition of family was alive especially in the first decade after the revolution but was never realized in practice. The second proposal built on the belief that it is not really possible to totally abolish the family and that the family can fulfil its function also in socialism. It is just necessary to intensively cooperate with parents and instruct them how to educate happy and healthy children. To this end various brochures, consulting centres and special courses helping mothers with educating children were to serve. The third proposal assumed that children themselves would be used as agents of revolutionary ideas in their own homes. To this purpose children would first be educated in special institutions and would then indoctrinate their parents at home. The natural desire of children for change and discovering the new was to be supported, so that on return to their families children would not return to the old, undesirable way of life.<sup>28</sup> Some authors refer to these changes in family law as to the Russian experiment leading to the destruction of family.<sup>29</sup> In the following pages we will show what particular means were used in the Soviet Russia for achieving the communist ideals of family and how the understanding of family there developed.

### 3.1 The first period: 1918–1926

Immediately after seizing power the Bolsheviks tried to distance themselves from the Tsarist society and as far as possible eliminate the influence of pre-revolution traditions and laws on the new society and new citizens which the Bolsheviks were trying to create. It was necessary to propose a legislative basis for constructing the communist society. Up to 1917 the woman was fully subordinate to her husband, adopted his name and shared his social status. Without his consent she could not get work or an education. The man also had control over his children. Only children born in marriage were considered legitimate. The Russian Orthodox Church regarded marriage as a sacrament and divorce was almost impossible. These old customs were to be regulated by a law valid since 1918. Even before that decrees weakening the marital relationship and making marriage easily separable were published. Traditional links between marriage and the church were broken – church marriages had no legal significance. Instead of a wedding in a church it was necessary to register the marriage at the local office established for this purpose (ZAGS)<sup>30</sup>. When contracting marriage the fiancés were not instructed what marriage in its essence means. Even grater changes occurred in the case of divorce. While according to earlier laws it was very difficult to divorce, according to the new code of law it was possible to divorce a marriage without citing a reason. The possibility of adoption was

27 Cf. Becky L. GLASS – Margaret K. STOLEE, *Family Law in Soviet Russia, 1917–1945*, *Journal of Marriage and Family* 4/1987, pp. 893–902.

28 Cf. Becky L. GLASS – Margaret K. STOLEE, *Family Law in Soviet Russia*, pp. 893–894.

29 Cf. e.g. Nicholas S. TIMASHEFF, *The Attempt to Abolish the Family in Russia*, pp. 144–148.

30 The abbreviation ZAGS means “Civil Registration Bureau”. These bureaus were established already in December 1917 and it was necessary to report events such as contracting marriage, birth of child, divorce, death to them. John Hazard calls these offices “humble guardians of routines” because no one could escape their attention. They literally “followed everyone’s footsteps from the cradle to the grave”. Cf. John HAZARD, *Humble Guardians of Routines (Notaries and ZAGS)*, in: Donald D. BARRY, *Soviet Law After Stalin: Soviet Institutions and the Administration of Law III*, Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1979, pp. 245–266.

abolished.<sup>31</sup> The fact that incest, bigamy and fornication ceased to be regarded as crimes also contributed to the disruption of the traditional family.<sup>32</sup> Abortion was permitted, even in case there was no medical indication.<sup>33</sup> Thus revolutionary visions of social relationships grounded in the equality of women and elimination of family were confirmed. The woman no longer needed her husband's consent to work. The author of the new code of law proclaimed that "the law prepares for the times when the bonds between man and woman are overcome".<sup>34</sup> The creators of this code of law were aware of the fact that it is merely transitory<sup>35</sup> and therefore chose expressions which would enable them to prepare a new one. E.g. they did not speak of extramarital children but of "children born to parents who are not in a registered marriage" in order to prepare the way for free, unregistered unions.<sup>36</sup> The family as the "terrible bastion of all immoralities of the old regime" was to be destroyed.<sup>37</sup> The law regulated relations between spouses but it was not clear what the family meant and what part it was to play in the future.

Soon the sinister consequences of this law began to appear. Easy availability of divorce (which was to bring women social independence) resulted in many deserted women and unprovided for children. The divorce rate in the Soviet Union rose sharply. After divorce it was very difficult for the woman to provide for herself because unemployment of women was very high in the 1920s. The economic situation in the Soviet Union in the 1920s did not enable the realization of all revolutionary changes. According to communist ideology, based on abolishing private property and cessation of social classes, human relations were to be liberated from economic factors. Marriage between man and woman was to be based on the equality of the two sexes. It seemed that this equality will be achieved by abolishing property. Economic underdevelopment was causing unexpected problems in realizing the communist concept of family. In theory equality between man and woman was to be achieved by liberating the woman from housework. Free educational institutions where mothers could place their children and cheap restaurants where family members could eat were to enable the woman to find work outside the home and liberate her from economic dependence on the man. But the state did not have the money to establish free educational institutions for children or finance other facilities which were to replace housework of women. And so due to high unemployment rate, easy availability of divorce and non-existence of free establishments for children the number of women who were left alone with child and without means after divorce was rising.<sup>38</sup>

31 Some later analysts regarded the abolition of adoption as one of the first steps leading up to abolishing the institute of family. John Hazard mentions three reasons for abolishing adoption: 1) Soviet lawgivers regarded adoption as a bourgeois residue; 2) it was expected that children would be collectively educated outside the family; 3) lawgivers wanted to prevent constitution of new families until the issue of inheritance were regulated by law. John HAZARD, *The Child under Soviet Law*, *University of Chicago Law Review* 5/1938, pp. 429-430.

32 Cf. Nicholas S. TIMASHEFF, *The Attempt to Abolish the Family in Russia*, p. 144.

33 Committees were established to assess the reasons for which women asked for abortion. The factor most commonly indicated by women was poverty. Although the law permitted abortion, women still resorted to illegal abortions carried out by midwives. The reasons varied - effort to avoid the pain in hospital (anaesthetics were not used in the procedure), unavailability of hospitals especially in the country, unwillingness to explain before a committee, effort to conceal the pregnancy or greater faith in midwives than doctors in hospitals. Exact statistics of illegal abortions is difficult to obtain because their number can only be deduced from cases of women who ended up in hospital due to health complications after an illegal abortion was carried out. In the country the number of illegal abortions was even higher than the number of legal ones. At the end of 1920s the number of illegal abortions decreased significantly. Cf. Wendy GOLDMAN, *Women, Abortion and the State, 1917-1936*, in: *Russia's Women: Accommodation, Resistance, Transformation*, ed. Barbara CLEMENTS - Barbara ENGEL - Christine WOROBEK, Berkeley: University of California Press, pp. 254-260.

34 Wendy Z. GOLDMAN, *Women, the State and Revolution: Soviet Family Policy and Social Life, 1917-1936*, Cambridge University Press, 1993, p. 1.

35 The law itself was written with the expectation that once it would be redundant. The author of this code of law, Alexander Goikhbarg, proclaimed: "The power of the proletariat creates all its laws dialectically, so that with each day of their existence the need for their existence decreases." Briefly said, the law was created in order to become redundant. Goikhbarg and other revolutionaries expected not only marriage and family to become redundant, but also the law and the state. Precisely according to Lenin's paper *The State and Revolution* which he had written a month before the Bolsheviks seized power. Cf. Wendy Z. GOLDMAN, *Women, the State and Revolution...*, pp. 1-2.

36 Cf. Wendy Z. GOLDMAN, *Women, the State and Revolution...*, pp. 54-55.

37 Nicholas S. TIMASHEFF, *The Attempt to Abolish the Family in Russia*, p. 144.

38 Cf. Michael D. BERGER, *Soviet Divorce Laws and the Role of the Russian Family*, *Brigham Young University Law Review* 3/1986, pp. 824-825.

The new law concerning the family came into effect in 1926. As compared to 1918 several changes occurred. The greatest change was the introduction of the institute of “unregistered marriage”, which was put on a par with legally contracted marriage. Unregistered marriage (sometimes the term marriage *de facto* is used) was understood to be any cohabitation of man and woman if at least one of these conditions was met: 1) permanent cohabitation; 2) shared living quarters; 3) admitting the relationship before a third party; 4) mutual support and shared rearing of children. Another peculiarity was that according to the law people were obliged to accept any work that was allotted to them. Not infrequently it happened that man and woman got work each in a different city, so that they were separated from each other. In such case divorce was recommended with the comment that they would certainly find new partners in the place of their employment.<sup>39</sup> Obtaining divorce was even simpler than before.<sup>40</sup> A marriage could be divorced even in case one of the spouses did not agree. It was enough for one of the partners to appear at the relevant authority, the other could be informed of the divorce by sending a postcard.<sup>41</sup> In order that the woman would not be left altogether without financial support after divorce the concept “common property of spouses” and equal division of this property in case of divorce was introduced. The law again transferred responsibility to family members to take care, especially financially, of those members of family who are unable to take care of themselves (minors, the handicapped, pregnant women and elders). Instead of state support there again came talk about traditional responsibility of family. New regulations were made concerning alimony payment in case of divorce. According to the preceding law of 1918 alimony was paid only in case of divorce of marriage contracted at the local authority, i.e., which was registered. If a couple who were living together without marriage registration broke up, no alimony obligation arose for anyone. According to the new code of law of 1926 the obligation to pay alimony arose also in case of divorce of so-called unregistered marriage.<sup>42</sup> The concept “collective fatherhood” was abolished. This concept had been used in case a woman who had several partners at the time of conception got pregnant. According to the old code of law all partners were obliged to share in care of the child equally. In practice such procedure turned out to be inconvenient for the child because the men were not only to provide financial resources, but were also to take part in important parental decisions and actively participate in the child’s education.<sup>43</sup> If the woman was not sure which of the men was the father of her child, the court designated one of the men who would financially support the child and participate in her education. One of the great problems of the 1920s was the great number of children wandering about cities and countryside because they had no home. They were so-called *besprizorniki*. The state did not have the money to take care of these children.<sup>44</sup> The crime rate of homeless youth rose sharply. The government therefore re-permitted adoption, enabling parents to take care of children without home. For adoption the following rules applied: Only children up to 18 years of age could be adopted, only with their parents’ consent, if these were still alive. If the child was more than ten years old, her consent was also required. The child

39 Cf. Nicholas S. TIMASHEFF, *The Attempt to Abolish the Family in Russia*, p. 145.

40 The jurist Rostovski, who wrote a popular brochure explicating family law, viewed divorce as “emancipation of the individual in general, and especially emancipation of the woman”. It was therefore desirable that divorce be obtained in the easiest way possible. Quoted according to Wendy Z. GOLDMAN, *Freedom and Its Consequences: The Debate on the Soviet Family Code of 1926*, *Russian History* 11/1984, p. 365.

41 This period is also called the time of “postcard divorces”. Cf. William MOSKOFF, *Divorce in the USSR*, *Journal of Marriage and Family* 2/1983, p. 420.

42 Cf. Beatrice B. FARNSWORTH, *Bolshevik Alternatives and the Soviet Family. The 1926 Marriage Law Debate*, in: *Women in Russia*, ed. Dorothy ATKINSON – Alexander DALLIN – Gail W. LAPIDUS, Sussex: Harvester Press, 1977, pp. 142–145.

43 Cf. Wendy Z. GOLDMAN, *Women, the State and Revolution...*, p. 207.

44 These *besprizorniki* were victims of evacuations during WWI and social and economic upheavals during the 1917 revolution, the bloody civil war and subsequent economic crisis. Destitute parents often deserted their children in the hope that they would find food somewhere alone or that they would die peacefully out of their sight. Among the *besprizorniki* there were also illegitimate children or children from broken marriages. Divorced women often sent their children to beg in the street. For more on the issue of these homeless children cf. Jennie A. STEVENS, *Children of the Revolution: Soviet Russia’s Homeless Children (Besprizorniki) in the 1920s*, *Russian History* 9/1982, pp. 242–264.

could be taken away from the parents if there were not conditions for her proper development in the family. An adopted child had all the rights and obligations of children born in the marriage, including the right to inheritance.<sup>45</sup>

The official propaganda kept repeating that children are only obliged to obey their parents in case the parents are loyal to the party and fulfil party ordinances with discipline. Parents therefore exposed themselves to great risk if they dared to disagree with Marxist doctrine, including the militant atheism with which their children were indoctrinated at school. Here children learned how to indoctrinate and re-educate their parents in the spirit of communism and report them to the party if they noticed some anti-communist attitudes in them.<sup>46</sup> It was therefore a clear goal of communism to reform the family according to their system, rid it of its autonomy, so that it would become a place of indoctrination with totalitarian ideology.<sup>47</sup> Politics divided families and turned the younger generation against the older. Young children, pioneers, were to become “eyes and ears of the party in the family”. All children were expected to denounce their parents.<sup>48</sup> Soviet citizens testified that in the 1930s, when terror reached its peak, it was very dangerous to discuss political questions in families because the youth were being continually prompted by the party to denounce their closest relatives.<sup>49</sup> In Soviet literature Pavlik Morozov was regarded as one of the greatest heroes. Morozov’s example was a symbol of the opposition of Christian morality (“honour your father and your mother”) and communist morality (“be vigilant and wary”). Throughout the era of communist regime he was officially presented as model to children in the Soviet Union as well as children in other communist satellites; his biography by Vitali Gubarev<sup>50</sup> was among compulsory school reading. The cases when children stood up against their parents were innumerate.

But the law of 1936 also soon brought along consequences which the communist experimenters had not expected. Due to easily obtainable divorce and legal abortions birth-rate decreased sharply. Diffusion of the marital union and weakening of the relationship between parents and children led to a weakening of relationships in society. Youth crime rate rose. The communists had achieved the disintegration of the institute of family, as they had intended, but the tax for this “success” was too high. The nation seemed to be weakened for the imminent war. The government could not but take such measures as would help stop this infelicitous development. In contradiction to what had been proclaimed earlier, young people were now advised to approach the institute of marriage responsibly. The family suddenly became an important part on the path to reaching communism.

### 3.2 Second period: 1936–1944

The new law of 1936 was to change the “frivolous attitude to family and family obligations”.<sup>51</sup> Compared to the previous legislation it meant a literally “shocking reversal”.<sup>52</sup> Experience had shown that the possibility of divorce did not lead to the liberation of women, as the communists had imagined in their theory. In the new law of 1936 the possibility of divorce was

45 Cf. John HAZARD, *The Child under Soviet Law*, pp. 430–431.

46 Cf. Nicholas S. TIMASHEFF, *The Attempt to Abolish the Family in Russia*, p. 145.

47 Carl J. FRIEDRICH – Zbigniew K. BRZEZINSKI, *Totalitarian Dictatorship and Autocracy*, New York: Praeger, 1965, p. 92.

48 “On the watchtowers of the Soviet Ukraine in summer 1933 there stood half a million adolescent boys and girls, who had been instructed to spy on the adults. All children were expected to inform.” Thomas SNYDER, *Krvavé země: Evropa mezi Hitlerem a Stalinem*, Praha-Litomyšl: Paseka; Praha: Prostor, 2013, p. 67.

49 Cf. Carl J. FRIEDRICH – Zbigniew K. BRZEZINSKI, *Totalitarian Dictatorship and Autocracy*, New York: Praeger, 1965, p. 295.

50 Czech translation: Vitalij GUBAREV, *Pavlik Morozov*, Praha: Otakar II., 2000.

51 Michael D. BERGER, *Soviet Divorce Laws and the Role of the Russian Family*, *Brigham Young University Law Review* 3/1986, p. 826.

52 Maurice HINDUS, *House Without a Roof*, New York: Doubleday, 1961, p. 139.



therefore made considerably more difficult. Both spouses were obliged to come to the office and had to pay for the dissolution of their marriage: first divorce 50 roubles, second divorce 150 roubles, third divorce 300 roubles. The minimum amount a man had to pay for his child in case of divorce was also stipulated: a third of his pay for one child, half his pay for two children and 60% of his pay for three and more children. In case the man refused to pay alimony for his children he was sent to prison for two years.<sup>53</sup> Due to the growing number of divorces and low birth-rate abortions were again prohibited by law. The positive results of the new law soon came. Already a month after the law had come into effect the number of divorces in Moscow decreased from 2214 to 215. Youth crime rate also decreased considerably.<sup>54</sup>

The Soviet government realized that their experiment leading to the disintegration of family in the spirit of revolutionary ideals was not successful. In 1938 the jurist Andrey Vyshinsky called the legal theories of the 1920s “exceedingly crude perversion”, contrived by a “group of pseudo Marxists” who “have spared no effort to litter our juridical literature with pseudo-scientific rubbish”.<sup>55</sup> Many jurists who had taken part in the preparation of older laws designed to destroy the institution of family were removed.

The new law of 1944 tried to reinforce the family even more. Idealist transformation of interpersonal relationships, so important in the post-revolution period, had to give way to economic interests. During WWII the Soviet Union went through a great demographic crisis. 27 million soldiers and civilians were killed in the war. In some rural areas the ratio of men and women of working age reached 19:100. A large part of the population lost their homes as a result of repeated mass mobilizations, evacuations and deportations. All this resulted in the break-up of many families. The majority of inhabitants also suffered of malnutrition. That is why on July 8<sup>th</sup>, 1944 the Presidium of the Highest Soviet of the USSR published a decree “concerning the support of pregnant women, mothers with several children and unwed mothers”. The honorary titles and decorations “Mother – Heroine”, “Maternal Glory” and “Medal of Motherhood” were created. If a mother bore three and more children she received special bonus payments. Reproduction was regarded as a civic duty. Who did not meet the obligatory quota of two children had to pay a fine or go to prison. Soldiers, students and persons who could not have children for health reasons were exempt from this obligation.<sup>56</sup>

Spouses asking for divorce had to appear before court and present their reasons which could and need not be found sufficient by the court. The law of 1944 further abolished the institute of “unregistered marriage”, which had been introduced in 1926. In law there reappeared the (formerly bourgeois) distinction between legitimate and illegitimate children.<sup>57</sup> In an effort to increase the number of marriages the possibility of contracting marriage in church was reintroduced, if the marriage had been contracted at a civil authority as well. The marriage ceremony became more festive, in Leningrad and Kiev so-called marriage palaces were built, whose ornamentation was to advert to the serious character of contracting marriage. The future spouses were to invite their friends and relatives to the ceremony to witness this unforgettable event. In an effort to reinforce the bonds between spouses even more the possibility of divorce became much more complicated as compared to the past. A two-level legal proceeding was introduced. Spouses asking for divorce had to appear before a court which tried to recon-

53 Cf. Wendy Z. GOLDMAN, *Women, the State and Revolution...*, p. 332.

54 Cf. Becky L. GLASS – Margaret K. STOLEE, *Family Law in Soviet Russia*, p. 899.

55 Cf. Wendy Z. GOLDMAN, *Women, the State and Revolution...*, p. 340.

56 Cf. Mie NAKACHI, N. S. Khrushchev and the 1944 Soviet Family Law: Politics, Reproduction, and Language, *East European Politics and Societies* 1/2006, pp. 48–50.

57 Cf. Lauren KAMINSKI, Utopian Visions of Family Life in the Stalin-Era Soviet Union, *Central European History* 1/2011, pp. 83–88.

cile them. If the spouses did not reconcile they had to appear before a higher court which after a lengthy hearing and discussion either permitted or declined the divorce. The spouses were obliged to publish their intention of divorce in print even before starting the legal procedures. Fees relating to divorce proceedings also increased as compared to the previous law. Already filing the divorce application cost 100 roubles, the divorce itself between 600 and 2 100 roubles. Reinforcement of family relationships was also the aim of a law regulating inheritance. A descendant could inherit property up to 10 000 roubles from his parents, in special cases even more. This law, which regulated inheritance and had undergone change after 1917, was now reintroduced in order to maintain continuity in family and to give legal support to good relationships of family members.<sup>58</sup>

### 3.3 Third period: 1953–1964

It must be mentioned that after Stalin's death in 1953 party leadership refrained from the repressive methods which had formerly been used to control the population. Shortly after the critique of the personality cult Khrushchev proposed a new model of social control in which the regime would make greater use of collective organizations, such as the Party and Youth Union. Each collective was to seek disruptors of social order in its midst and mobilize against them. The Party tried to ensure that the initiative came from below, encouraged members to discipline and mutual surveillance.<sup>59</sup> It was constantly being proclaimed that everyday life is not a private matter. All members of a collective – whether colleagues at work or neighbours – had the task of helping to educate other collective members, oversee that they lead an orderly personal life, become better husbands and wives. Particular cases in which various organizations intervened in marital matters prove that communist morality had successfully taken root.<sup>60</sup>

In the 1950s utopian ideas that the education of children could be fully taken over by the state disappeared for good and the opinion that parents are indispensable in educating children was widely accepted. Radical views of family reorganisation still appeared but never took root. State institutions did not have the goal of superseding parents any longer, they were merely to aid them in education. In order that the parents become more conscious of the social significance of their role the Soviet pedagogue and author Anton Makarenko compiled detailed materials providing instructions for educating children to be hard-working and conscious communists. Makarenko created an original system of collective education which was applied in the Soviet Union and its satellite states.<sup>61</sup> Makarenko was convinced that his pedagogy could solve the issue of education by detailed analysis of human behaviour: "It will investigate the mechanics of human effort, show what place in it is occupied by will, conceit, shame, inculcation, imitation, fear and competition and how all this combines with phenomena of pure consciousness, conviction and reason."<sup>62</sup>

58 Cf. Becky L. GLASS – Margaret K. STOLEE, *Family Law in Soviet Russia*, p. 899.

59 Cf. Edward D. COHN, *Sex and the Married Communist: Family Troubles, Marital Infidelity, and Party Discipline in the Postwar Ussr, 1945–64*, *Russian Review* 3/2009, pp. 430–431.

60 Cf. Deborah A. FIELD, *Irreconcilable Differences: Divorce and Conceptions of Private Life in the Khrushchev Era*, *Russian Review* 57/1998, pp. 610–611.

61 Makarenko is the only one of the early Soviet experimenters in education whose theories survived the ideological pressures of the 1930s. According to Makarenko the basic educational means was the collective. Human individuality was regarded as an obstacle to life in the collective. His educational system lacked inner logic but corresponded to the political needs of the time, which were building communism and the accompanying transformation of human. Cf. Bob CASKEY, *The Pedagogical Theories of A. S. Makarenko: A Comparative Analysis*, *Comparative Education* 3/1979, pp. 277–286; Deborah A. FIEL, *Private Life and Communist Morality in Khrushchev's Russia*, p. 83.

62 Anton MAKARENKO, *Pedagogická poéma*, p. 449.

### 3.4 Fourth period: 1965–1980

In the 1960s dissatisfaction arose with the complicated procedure it was necessary to go through in case of divorce. In 1965 the obligation to publically announce the intention to get divorced in print was abolished. The two-level judicial system was replaced by regional popular court, from which it was possible to appeal to provincial court. A further change was the fact that unions in which spouses mutually agreed on the divorce could be divorced also at the registration offices where they had been contracted (ZAGS). A three-month period between divorce application filing till divorce itself had to be observed. Divorce via court could in theory be done in a shorter time since there was no three-month period, but the court could ask for a six-month period in which the spouses still could reconcile. Fees were also radically lowered, oscillating between 50 kopeikas up to 200 roubles. The amount was determined according to how much the spouses were able to pay. In order to protect pregnant women and new mothers divorce was not permitted while the woman was pregnant and one year after childbirth.<sup>63</sup> The only reason sufficient for marriage dissolution was the impossibility of further life together or the case when preserving the family “contradicts the principles of communist morality”.<sup>64</sup> The highest court of the USSR at its plenary session in 1969 stipulated that “occasional arguments are not a valid reason for divorce”.<sup>65</sup> The most common reason indicated by divorcing partners was alcohol addiction and unfaithfulness. A valid reason for divorce was also the effort of one of the partners to educate the child in religious faith. The spouse who did not agree with the religious education was to be enabled to educate the children based on the principles of communist morality. In 1980 there came another change, which again made the possibility of divorce more difficult. The court was forced to investigate the reasons leading up to the divorce. It could also request the testimony of organizations in which the spouses were involved in order to be better able to contribute to mutual reconciliation.<sup>66</sup>

## Conclusion

In this paper we have tried to show what transformation the family and relationships between family members underwent in the period of communist totalitarianism. We have seen that since its accession in the Soviet Union the communist regime tried to break the traditional conception of family, i.e., weaken the mutual bonds between spouses and relationships between parents and children. We followed the dilemma of the post-revolution Soviet government which was obliged to deal with the tension between communist social theory and social stability. We have seen that the Soviet experiment striving to eliminate the family came to nought. In the 1920s and 1930s the Soviet “experiment” showed how important the role of family is in preventing crime. Soviet legislation oscillated between simplification of divorce procedures for ideological reasons in 1936 and 1968 and making divorce more difficult in 1944 and 1980. One of the most important communist slogans was re-educating the individual to a new human who would apply the new morality necessary for transition to ideal communism. In this conception human beings were rather puppets moving within boundaries delimited by the party. They are unable to do anything of their own initiative and bear personal responsibility for anything. With the help of totalitarian ideology they would be transformed to a particle of the mass for which it is very easy to succumb to propaganda.<sup>67</sup> The main educational method

63 Cf. Michael D. BERGER, *Soviet Divorce Laws and the Role of the Russian Family*, *Brigham Young University Law Review* 3/1986, p. 828.

64 Deborah A. FIELD, *Irreconcilable Differences*, p. 605.

65 Michael D. BERGER, *Soviet Divorce Laws and the Role of the Russian Family*, p. 829.

66 Cf. Michael D. BERGER, *Soviet Divorce Laws and the Role of the Russian Family*, p. 831.

67 As Hannah Arendt poignantly writes: “The goal of totalitarian education never was to inculcate a conviction, but to destroy the ability to form one.” Hannah ARENDTOVÁ, *Původ totalitarismu*, Praha: OIKOYMENH, 2013, p. 631.

was collective education which tried as far as possible to suppress the natural spontaneity of the individual. The state tried as far as possible to take over the role of the family, so that various collective facilities were established in which the individual spent (was forced to spend) more time than in her own family. Despite all effort of the state to oversee the education of individuals as much as possible, it turned out that the institute of family is necessary for the stability of every society.

### The Characteristic of Family and (Re-)Education in the Communist Perspective

**Abstract** The paper tries to characterize the transformation of conceiving the institution of family and interpersonal relationships in communist ideology. First the basic goals of communism are presented – creating a “new morality” which no longer rests on religious or traditional values and a “new human” who obtains her nature only by relationship to society. The new conception of human being was necessarily projected into the conception of family and relationships between spouses and between parents and children. The paper mentions four basic periods in which the conception of family in the Soviet Union developed. The family was first regarded as bourgeois residue and therefore condemned to extinction. But it gradually turned out that the family is a fundamental institution without which no political order can get by. So the communist regime at least tried to intervene in the privacy of individuals as far as possible throughout their lives.

**Keywords** family, marriage, communism, new human, ideology, Marxism-Leninism, interpersonal relationships