The book contains several cases of presumably inadvertent repetition (e.g., the 1960 CPSU Program Statement on republican boundaries losing significance [pp. 61 and 66], and the Georgian constitution’s failure to mention a republic language [pp. 75 and 84]). Some other seemingly minor details may trouble the reader: the extract of a speech which the text indicates was made at the Tenth Party Congress is supported in the notes with a reference to a speech at the Sixteenth Congress. Finally, Gleason might have provided a rationale for some decisions which otherwise seem quite arbitrary. Why, for example, does the chapter on “nationalism resurgent” omit the Slavic republics? Gleason’s interpretation of Soviet federalism merits serious attention. Unfortunately, taken together, such shortcomings as the above seem likely to reduce the number of readers who will take advantage of the insights he offers.

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Soviet censorship, so recently a topic crucial to the understanding of mass communications, science, and culture in the USSR, has suddenly become a matter of mainly historical interest. It is striking, therefore, that the participants in the 1983 conference upon which the present volume is based, were uniformly convinced that the system of censorship was a fixed and ineradicable feature of Soviet society. One of the conference contributors, Leonid Finkelstein, observes in the book that if censorship were to be eliminated from the Soviet system, it would no longer be the Soviet system. He may yet be proven right; yet the premise of the Gorbachev leadership is that politics and economics can be set right and socialism redeemed if censorship and the other administrative vestiges of Stalinism are dismantled and replaced by a free and consensual society. Alexander Gershkovich cites an aperçu from Il’f and Petrov to the effect that if sheep were given freedom of speech, they would still bleat all the same. Assessing the results of the changes in the system as of 1987, he concludes that although the country was enjoying a new thaw, it was only an Indian summer, and not the beginning of change in the political system.

Perhaps one reason for the almost unrelievedly gloomy, and wrong, perception of the Gorbachev era on the part of the conferees was the difficulty they had in coming to grips with the nature of the topic. Like many previous studies of Soviet censorship, the volume suffers from a certain ambiguity about what exactly is being discussed. Is censorship the sum of the administrative controls exercised under the auspices of Glavlit, as well as by editors and Party officials, and ultimately including the self-censorship of those who produce information and ideas for public dissemination? Or is it a relatively minor function of a larger system of ideological control over society, the main agency of which is the Communist Party? The individual contributions to the volume offer a number of interesting insights as well as a rich supply of illustrations and anecdotes; but few attempt to
systematize the findings or place them in a wider perspective. None of the contributions, indeed, discusses the Party and its political responsibilities for the defense and dissemination of doctrine. As a result, one finds it difficult to distinguish the ad hoc despotism of petty bureaucrats from decisions that faithfully reflect the general line. Indeed, Soviet censorship, to judge from the stories recounted here, resembles less an ideologically consistent "big brother" than the capricious, snoopy and inefficient control system of a vast and over centralized bureaucracy. Nor can one readily compare the goals, methods and nature of censorship in science with censorship in the theater, literature, newspapers, television or translation, since the volume comprises mainly personal accounts of individual experiences with censorship. To be sure, the secretiveness of the censorship process inhibits the effort to generalize, systematize, and compare across time periods or across domains. Yet the reader will find it hard to draw general conclusions about censorship based on the papers presented here.

Still, the volume has much to recommend it to students of the cultural life of the "era of stagnation." Marianna Tax Choldin draws some interesting comparisons between censorship of foreign publications in the tsarist and Soviet periods, while Yuri Yarim-Agaev presents some valuable observations on the system of "closed" scientific research. Distinguished writers such as Vassily Aksyonov, Vladimir Voinovich, and Andrei Sinyavsky make some penetrating comments. Voinovich notes that the power to administer restrictions over expression belongs to a far wider array of institutions than simply Glavlit; all bureaucratic authorities can censor by issuing "advisories" against the publication of this or that item whose subject lies in their jurisdiction. At a later point in the discussion, he points out that the whole system of Party control over society is censorship, and that while one or another leader may relax the controls in order to breathe fresh life into culture, the principle of control is itself essential to the Party's power. Sinyavsky remarks that censorship is really part of the regime's permanent state of war on society, and points out that language itself—the names of things, for example—is manipulated as part of an effort to change reality. The journalist Il'a Suslov, stressing the complicity of Soviet citizens in the censorship effort, remarks that "self-censorship is what has made Russia a state without a society."

A whiff of the cantankerousness and bitterness of émigré cultural life rises from the comments of Mariia Rozanova, who notes the continuing strength of the habit of ideological censorship in some of the émigré publications. Maurice Friedberg responds by citing Chekhov's comment about the effort needed to "squeeze out the slave drop by drop" and admonishes émigrés to stop leading Soviet lives. Yet in the end the emphasis given here to the acceptance of administrative controls over culture on the part of the general population is surely overdone, in view of the explosive quality of public life beginning in 1986-87 and gathering force in electoral campaigns, strike waves, and popular rallies in 1989 and 1990. A reader of the volume would not be prepared for the remarkably strong showing of groups such as "Democratic Russia" in the republican elections of 1990 and the overwhelming defeat suffered by the conservative nationalist bloc. The outpouring of self-scrutiny, self-criticism and radical reconceptualization of Soviet and Russian history that has characterized the years since 1986-87