

STATE SOCIALISM WAS MORE THAN A POLITICAL
RELATIONSHIP OF RULERS AND SUBJECTS

Some remarks on a theoretical deficiency of the concept of totalitarianism

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The author advocates that social and political history join forces in attempting to undertake research into state socialist systems. His central point is that focusing solely on the relationship between rulers and subjects, as has been typical for the

classical concept of totalitarianism, hides reasons for both stability and change in state socialist systems. In order to understand these phenomena, one has to comprehend which societal groups viewed their interests as protected by the socialist order. The fact that socialist systems could not exist without being considered legitimate by relevant parts of society is proven, among other things, by attempts at reform that were inspired both "from above" and by parts of the critical, but loyal intelligentsia. Last but not least, the continuity of élites after 1989 demonstrates the importance of taking into account a societal reality which might very well deviate from the relationships of power being proclaimed: In the late period of state socialism, informal relationships of power and property had long since been established, which could easily be transposed into the period following the turnover.