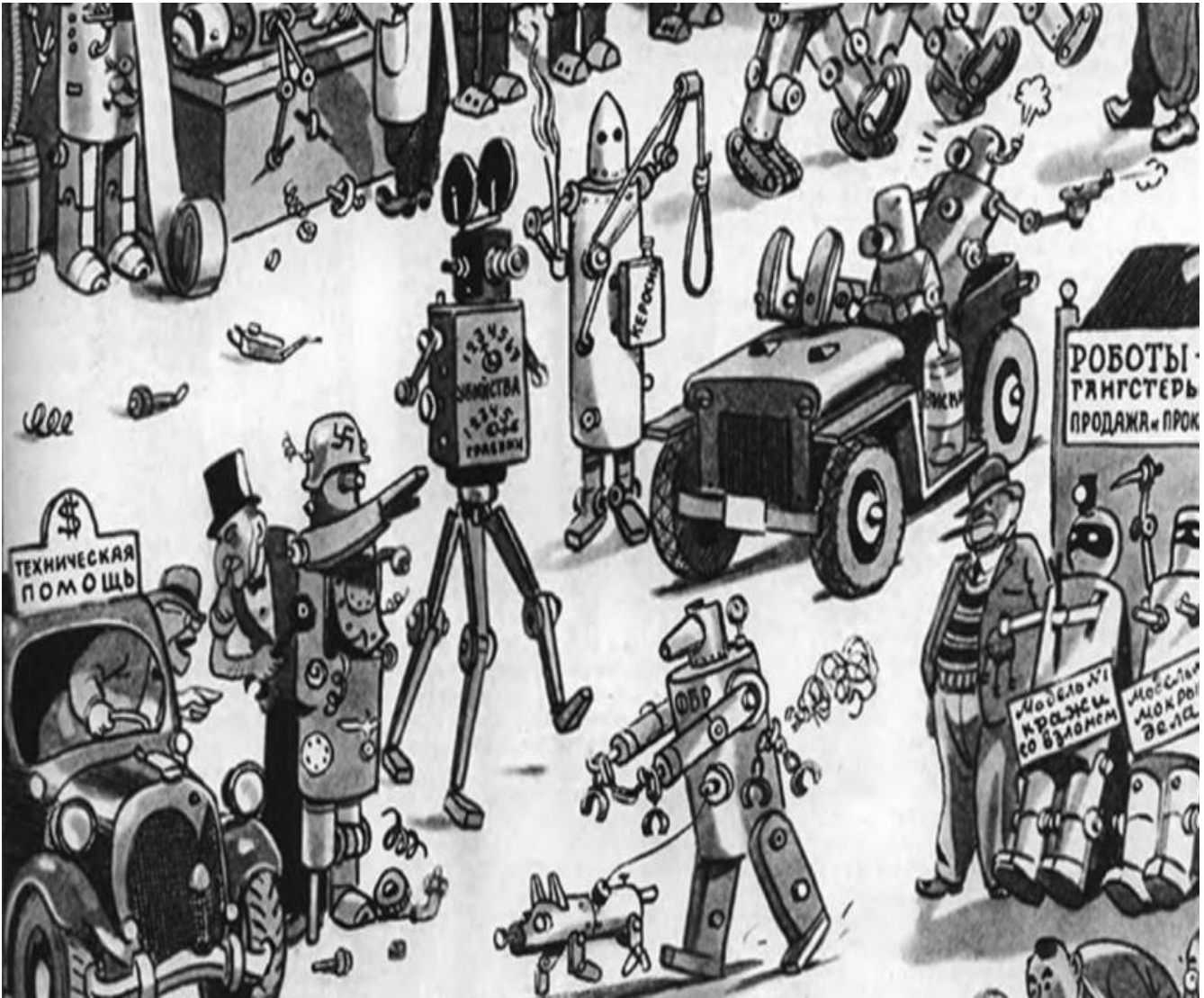


The computer, tool of capitalism



An unforced mistake of Stalin's Soviet Union: to condemn the computer as a capitalist tool and [pour scorn on "cybernetics"](#), dooming official work to the shadows.

Working with computers required special care: One had to avoid using any suspicious cybernetic terms. Even the phrase “logical operations” was risky, because it might be interpreted as implying that machines could think. Instead of “computer memory,” researchers used the more neutral, technical term, “storage.” “Information” was replaced by “data,” and “information theory” by the convoluted expression “the statistical theory of electrical signal transmission with noise.” A joke about Stalin’s henchman, Beria, who was responsible for the nuclear weapons program, became popular. Beria comes to his boss and asks permission to use the notorious field of cybernetics for military purposes. Stalin puffs on his pipe and says, “Okay, but just please make sure the other Politburo members don’t find out.”

Bonus: Now you know what the deal was with *Dune*. Despite Stalin's death improving matters for the thinking machines, everyday users in Russia were still puttering along on [rickety clones](#) 25 years later.