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PARTIINOST' AND THE ORIGINS OF SOCIALIST REALISM

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The Bolshevik revolution of November 1917 inaugurated a period of great social change. The accepted values and beliefs of Russian culture underwent pervasive challenging from within; society was being reshaped; the former order's symbols and images were considered moribund; a perfect classless society, a millennial age, was being imagined by the revolutionary leaders after 1917. The famous lines of Mayakovsky rapturously embraced the new epoch:

> Citizens!/ Today the thousand year-old 'Yesterday' is collapsing. Today the foundations of the world are being re-examined. Today/we shall remake life all over again/Down to the last button on your clothes.[1]

But isolation from 'Yesterday,' the cultural heritage of the past, was impossible. Moreover, the Russian intelligentsia expressed conflicting attitudes toward its cultural heritage. Many advocated its eradication in accordance with Marx's belief: "The tradition of all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living."[2] Others, however, sought the preservation and infusion of the past into the new society. As we will see, the artistic method called socialist realism was the crystallization of those conflicting attitudes in the 1920's. To this turbulent period, socialist realism brought a culminating artistic order.

The 1920's were the crucible of socialist realism. For the intelligentsia and state leadership, the questions of

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[1] V.V. Mayakovsky, Sobranie Sochinenii, 8 vols. (Moscow: Pravda, 1968), 1:222.

[2] Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, Selected Works, (Moscow, 1958), p. 247.

this formative decade centered on the nature of the new proletarian culture. What was proletarian culture and how did it relate to the cultural heritage of the past? Who would control its development? Could there be divisions or plurality within the culture and, hence, competition with party authority? These questions, which confronted the intellectual elite and required party scrutiny and judgment, were resolved through the restrictive framework of socialist realism. While we may see the origins of socialist realism in the nineteenth-century works of Belinsky, Chernyshevsky and Dobrolyubov, with their aesthetic preference for useful and corrective art, it was in the 1920's that the method acquired its fundamental character. Seeking a culture reflective of their highest ideals, both the party and the dominant literary organizations turned toward Lenin's writings on literature as an important reference for cultural policy. Lenin's article "Party Organization and Party Literature" (1905) in particular was the first major step in the evolution of socialist realism.

In this paper, the role of partiinost' in the development of socialist realism will be examined. First elucidated by Lenin in his article "Party Organization and Party Literature," the principle of partiinost' has influenced directly and indirectly the basic character of post-revolutionary literature. While Soviet literary theoreticians agree that partiinost' is the foundation of socialist realism, "there exist as many definitions of the

notion of 'partiinost' of literature' as there are scholars writing on this topic," one Soviet critic conceded in 1970.[3] Lenin himself used the term to mean the obligation to adopt the point of view of a definite social group in any evaluation of facts. In Soviet arts, the principle of partiinost' has come to pervade each aspect of artistic and critical activity and demands "an open, consistent defense of party ideology."[4] We will examine partiinost' as it evolved up until the First Writers' Congress in 1934.

Since 1905 the principle of partiinost' as embodied in Lenin's "Party Organization and Party Literature" has taken on an almost messianic aura, an incontrovertible authority far beyond its original dimensions. The apotheosis of Lenin as a literary theoretician, despite the paucity of his comments on belles-lettres, is seen in the typical praise from a later Soviet writer that "there is no important problem in the historical development of Russian literature that was not dealt with in his writings."[5] According to this, literature imbued with Lenin's idea of partiinost' serves a social function, advances the interests of the masses, and actively seeks the party as its guide for action

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[3] I. Dzeverin quoted by N.N. Shneidman, "The Russian Classical Heritage and the Basic Concepts of Soviet Literary Education," Slavic Review 3 (September 1972): 635.

[4] G.I. Belen'ky quoted by N.N. Shneidman, "The Russian Classical Heritage and the Basic Concepts of Soviet Literary Education," Slavic Review 3 (September 1972): 636.

[5] Ernest J. Simmons, ed., Through the Glass of Soviet Literature, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1953), p. 12.

and its source of inspiration. Even a more recent Soviet critic has reemphasized partiinost' as the path to truth:

> The artist relying on this principle portrays reality more faithfully than the bourgeois objectivist, for he aspires to comprehend the laws of social development and does not shrink from taking part in social struggle. Such an artist defends the most progressive ideas and represents the most progressive class.[6]

Lenin's article, although considered a response to political exigencies of 1905, has had great significance in determining subsequent party policy toward literature and in creating socialist realism.[7]

Soviet literary tradition defines socialist realism as an 'artistic method.'[8] The method explains the nature, meaning and purpose of art. 'Socialist realism demands from the author a true and historically concrete depiction of reality in its revolutionary development,' Zhdanov stated in 1934 at the First Congress of Soviet Writers.[9] Unlike the various artistic methods of the West, Soviet socialist realism is deliberately bound to the political position of the Communist Party. What we will see in this paper is that it was the principle of partiinost' that has tended to emphasize art's service to the party.

For the first time in modern Russian history, tsarist censorship of political literature was abolished in 1905. At last the press was liberated from what Lenin called

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[6] A.I. Ovcharenko, Socialist Realism and the Modern Literary Process, (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1978) p. 256.

[7] C. Vaughan James, Soviet Socialist Realism, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1973), pp. 1-17.

[8] Ibid., p. 1.

[9] Andrei A. Zhdanov, Literature, Philosophy, and Music, (New York: International Publishers, 1950), p. 12.

"Aesopian language, literary bondage, slavish speech, and ideological serfdom!"[10] Although welcoming this sudden withdrawal of censorship, Lenin regarded such measures as false concessions. Genuine freedom would be attained only through the revolutionary transformation of society on the basis of socialism. Secondly, since the party had arisen from illegality and received new members from among the heterogeneous anti-tsarist opposition, Lenin feared the moderating effects inherent in diversification within the Bolshevik movement. These mercurial fellow travelers, as Trotsky would later categorize them, were accepted, but obedience to the party became compulsory. No independence or autonomy from the party, no tempering of Lenin's militancy could be allowed if the revolution was to be achieved. In Lenin's famous article "What Is to Be Done" (1902) he declared that there is no middle course or independent ideology and that "to belittle the socialist ideology in any way, to turn aside from it in the slightest degree means to strengthen bourgeois ideology."[11] Hence, in 1905 the astringent principle of partiinost' gave clarity to relations between and among party writers. Strict guidance by the party was the precondition for the successful development of literature. Lenin's conception of literature was stated in these absolute and rigid terms:

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[10] V.I. Lenin, Collected Works, (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1962), 10:44.

[11] V.I. Lenin, Collected Works, (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1961), 5:384.

> Today literature, even that published "legally" can be nine-tenths party literature. It must become party literature. In contradistinction to bourgeois customs, to the profit-making, commercialised bourgeois press, to bourgeois literary careerism and individualism, "aristocratic anarchism" and drive for profit, the socialist proletariat must put forward the principle of party literature, must develop this principle and put it into practice as fully as completely as possible.[12]

Uncommitted literature, that which was not consciously and explicitly devoted to the proletarian, was superfluous.

> What is the principle of party literature? It is not simply that, for the socialist proletariat, literature cannot be a means of enriching individuals or groups: it cannot, in fact, be an individual undertaking, independent of the common cause of the proletariat. Down with non-partisan writers! Down with literary supermen! Literature must become part of the common cause of the proletariat, "a cog and a screw" of one single great Social-Democratic mechanism set in motion by the entire politically-conscious vanguard of the entire working class. Literature must become a component of organized, planned and integrated Social-Democratic Party work.[13]

Aware that Bolshevik victory was not imminent in 1905 and, at the same time, unable to suppress Menshevik and dissident Bolshevik views, Lenin served notice in his article that such deviations ought to be periodically cleansed. As Lenin anticipated, the possibility of widespread literary controls angered the Russian intelligentsia. He sought to assuage this opposition:

> "All comparisons are lame," says a German proverb. So is my comparison of literature with a cog, of a living movement with a mechanism. And I daresay there will ever be hysterical intellectuals to raise a howl about such a comparison, which degrade, deadens, "bureaucratises" the free battle of ideas, freedom of criticism, freedom of literary creation, etc., etc.

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[12] V.I. Lenin, Collected Works, (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1962), 10:45.

[13] Ibid., p. 45.

> Such outcries, in point of fact, would be nothing more than an expression of bourgeois-intellectual individualism. There is no question that literature is least of all subject to mechanical adjustment or levelling, to the rule of the majority over the minority. There is no question, either, that in this field greater scope must undoubtedly be allowed for personal initiative, individual inclination, thought and fantasy, form and content. All this is undeniable...[14]

In the above passage, Lenin seems to have momentarily retreated from his original position. The supremacy of the party and literary servitude sound less limiting when Lenin extols "personal initiative, individual inclination, thought and fantasy, form and content" as a sacred part of the writers' artistry. Yet partiinost', the principle which came to underly the subordination of literature to the state, remains undiminished in Lenin's text. As he explained, "This, however, does not in the least refute the proposition, alien and strange to the bourgeoisie and bourgeois democracy, that literature must by all means and necessarily become an element of Social Democratic work, inseparably bound up with the other elements."[15] Thus, the control of literature by the party was central in Lenin's mind. Because Lenin's perception of literature was crucial to the development of socialist realism, it is important to continue examining his article "Party Organization and Party Literature" in further detail.

According to Lenin, freedom of creativity is a hollow aesthetic law, for the writer is dependent upon capitalism

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[14] V.I. Lenin, Collected Works, (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1962), 10:45-46.

[15] Ibid., p. 46.

and produces to satisfy the bored, 'upper ten thousand' and not the millions of workers. "The freedom of the bourgeois writer, artist or actress," he wrote, "is simply masked (or hypocritically masked) dependence on the money-bag, on corruption, on prostitution."[16] Tied to the bourgeoisie, the writer is tied to their parochial class orientation as well. Hence, literature in the bourgeois world reflects and affirms bourgeois interests: there is no artistic objectivity. We should understand, however, that while Lenin eschewed literary constraints in the form of censorship, government interference and dependency on the literary market, he did not favor absolute freedom, the absence of all controls and criteria. Again, freedom of creativity was impossible since in bourgeois society writers relied on the elite to finance them.

> ...We must say to you, bourgeois individualists, that your talk about absolute freedom is sheer hypocrisy. There can be no real and effective 'freedom' in a society based on the power of money, in a society in which the masses of working people live in poverty and the handful of rich live like parasites.[17]

Freedom for the writer is achieved not through imaginary isolation, nor by aloofness and disinterestedness, but by active participation within society. "Every artist, and everyone who considers himself such," Lenin proclaimed after the 1917 revolution, "has the right to create freely, to

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[16] V.I. Lenin, Collected Works, (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1962), 10:48.

[17] Ibid., p. 48.

follow his ideal regardless of everything."[18] Again, however, he added this severe qualification:

> But then we are Communists, and ought not to stand idly by and give chaos free rein to develop. We should steer this process according to a worked-out plan and must shape its results.[19]

Thus, the party must provide ideological guidance for the artist.

If the proletariat is the class destined by historical law to inaugurate the perfect society and, the Bolshevik Party, which alone possesses the true theory and practice, is to lead them into the millennial age, than the writer must also be inseparably bound to this utopian struggle. With its full understanding of truth and reality, based upon the scientific doctrine of Marxism, the party solely determines the character of man's artistic activities. In Lenin's view, allegiance to the party was the cardinal principle of literature from which there could be no deviation. Partiinost' represented the highest form of allegiance to the party and the people; bourgeois interests were antithetical to the advance of socialism. Thus, to gain authentic freedom, writers must subordinate their activities and enlist their craft in the interests of the party. Only by serving the proletariat would the writer's individual creativity truly be expressed and satisfied. The writers' supreme duty was to the people.

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[18] M. Parkhomenko and A. Myasnikov, eds., Socialist Realism in Literature and Art, (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1971), p. 29

[19] Ibid., p. 29.

> Art belongs to the people. Its roots should be deeply implanted in the very thick of the labouring masses. It should be understood and loved by these masses. It must unite and elevate their feelings, thoughts and will.[20]

A literature will be free, in Lenin's view, when it enhances and arouses the proletarian consciousness, when it supports completely the chosen class, and when its single motivation is the idea of communism and sympathy for the worker. "It will be free literature," he explained, "because it will serve, not some satiated heroine, not the bored 'upper ten thousand' suffering from fatty degeneration, but the millions and tens of million of working people--the flower of the country, its strength and its future."[21] Outside the party there is only bourgeois reality--isolated, false, narrow and transitory impressions that carry bourgeois-capitalist prejudice. Through partiinost', literature is in objective agreement with the party, the repository of the right outlook and right practice. Thus, in Lenin's adept configuration, partiinost' and freedom were reconcilable.[22]

According to Lenin, in the struggle for the creation of a socialist society, maximum unity of will provided the way to broader and more formidable consolidations of power. No social segment was exempt, not even the intelligentsia, from the mobilizing imperatives of the party. Lenin, of course,

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[20] M. Parkhomenko and A. Myasnikov, eds., Socialist Realism in Literature and Art, (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1971), p. 28.

[21] V.I. Lenin, Collected Works, (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1962), 10:49.

[22] Rufus A. Mathewson, The Positive Hero in Russian Literature, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1955), p. 444.

did not foresee in 1905 that his party would soon be in a position to suppress the opposition. His principle of partiinost', however, established the basis for an exclusive aesthetic system. While acknowledging the freedom of the press, he made it clear how little regard he had for the 'bourgeois' notion of free expression.

> Emerging from the captivity of the feudal censorship, we have no desire to become, and shall not become, prisoners of bourgeois-shopkeeper literary relations. We want to establish, a free press, free not simply from the police, but also from capital, from careerism, and what is more, free from bourgeois-anarchist individualism.[23]

The above passage demonstrates Lenin's antipathy for creative freedom in future socialist society. Through the subtle shift of the last sentence, Lenin reduces literary freedom into a contemptible and hedonistic value, making it impossible to avoid the conclusion that "free from bourgeois-anarchist individualism" means free from the artistic rights and practices almost universally pursued by writers. Bourgeois freedom is an illusion hindering the writer's full creative realization. Partiinost' which coincides with ideological orthodoxy is authentic freedom.

Lenin's position of anti-heterodoxy in literature was ineffectual and unrealistic in prerevolutionary Russia, but it did reinforce the trend within the party towards centralized control and, eventually, socialist realism. The prospect of gaining immediate political power, of contending with diverse literary organizations, was still remote in

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[23] V.I. Lenin, Collected Works, (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1962), 10:46-47.

1905. Lenin could tolerate a coexistence between the writer and the revolutionary:

> These last words may sound paradoxical, or an affront to the reader. What! some intellectual, an ardent champion of liberty, may shout. What, you want to impose collective control on such a delicate, individual matter as literary work! You want workmen to decide questions of science, philosophy, or aesthetics by a majority of votes! You deny the absolute freedom of absolutely individual ideological work!
> Calm yourselves, gentlemen! First of all, we are discussing party literature and its subordination to party control. Everyone is free to write and say whatever he likes, without any restrictions.[24]

In the next passage, he continues his devaluation of literary freedom; that this means the freedom to denigrate, to disrupt and to write irresponsibly:

> I am bound to accord you, in the name of free speech, the full right to shout, lie and write to your heart's content. But you are bound to grant men, in the name of freedom of association, the right to enter into, or withdraw from, association with people advocating this or that point of view. The party is a voluntary association, which would inevitably break up, first ideologically and then physically, if it did not cleanse itself of people advocating anti-party views.[25]

Freedom in literature, Lenin asserted, is circumscribed by the greater freedom of 'voluntary association.' Each association, including the party, has the right to expel and to ostracize those who voice anti-party sentiments. Thus, the freedom that would be granted to the dissident, non-party writer (if any) is marginal and very precarious.

The meaning of the term literatura, which incorporates both imaginative literature and party writings, has shrouded

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[24] V.I. Lenin, Collected Works, (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1962), 10:47.
[25] Ibid., p.47.

Lenin's article in a capacious ambiguity. Modern Soviet critics, of course, have resoundingly declared that partiinost' is the vital principle of all literature: "V.I. Lenin's article... is a theoretical document that has fundamental significance for the entire period of the socialist revolution and the building of communism."[26] Furthermore, Lenin's aversion to experimentation in literature and art may suggest that the rigorous application of partiinost' to imaginative literature would not have offended his sensibilities. "... I make bold to call myself a 'barbarian,'" he stated. "I fail to see in the works of expressionism, futurism, cubism and other 'ism's' the highest manifestations of artistic genius. I do not understand them. I experience no joy from them."[27] In this same vein, Lenin after the revolution criticized Lunacharsky, Commissar of Enlightenment, for supporting the publication of futurist poetry:

> Aren't you ashamed to vote for printing 5,000 copies of Mayakovsky's "150,000,000"?
> It is nonsense, stupidity, double-dyed stupidity and affectation.
> I believe such things should be published one in ten, and not more than 1,500 copies, for libraries and cranks.
> As for Lunacharsky, he should be flogged for his futurism.[28]

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[26] C. Vaughan James, Soviet Socialist Realism, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1973), p. 15.

[27] Ernest J. Simmons, ed., Continuity and Change In Russian and Soviet Thought, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1955), p. 444.

[28] V.I. Lenin, Collected Works, (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1960), 45:138-139.

But while initiating and supporting the party's absolute jurisdiction over literature, Lenin never sought to convert his conservative preferences into official policy. During his leadership, he never legislated measures that would have controlled the literary work of non-communist writers. At a later period, the ambiguousness of Lenin's "Party Organization and Party Literature" was reflected in the comments of the former Commissar of Enlightenment. In 1932 Lunacharsky asserted that "the motive for writing this article was the wish to organize the party's political literature, its publicism, its scientific publications..."[29] Lunacharsky offered the opinion, however, that the 1905 article's principle of partiinost' applied just as well to imaginative literature, and that, in 1932, the article included "administrative instructions" for party literary policy.[30] Whatever Lenin's intention, whether he would have accepted the severe elaboration of his article and welcomed socialist realism, is an issue for speculation. He died in 1924. Lenin's principle of partiinost', nevertheless, provided the logic for party control over literature.

"Proletarian culture" was another amorphous and important concept for the post-revolutionary generation. Although Marx and Engels wrote volumes on social, economic and political questions, they developed no comprehensive theories of culture. Beyond the two philosophers' almost

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[29] Ernest J. Simmons, ed., Continuity and Change In Russian and Soviet Thought, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1955) p. 444.

[30] Ibid., p. 444.

tangential comments and Lenin's expansive principle of partiinost', the concept of "proletarian culture" lacked clear definition and, most of all, reality. Proletkult (Proletarian Cultural and Educational Organization), founded on the eve of the October revolution (1917), attempted to be the vanguard of "proletarian culture." Describing their organization as "a laboratory of pure proletarian culture," Aleksander Bogdanov and his followers sought to jettison the heritage of the past, battling against residual bourgeois elements and demanding working-class hegemony throughout the new society.[31] Labor and industry were venerated as transcendent activities, as suggested by these evocative titles of Proletkult's journals: Gorn (The Furnace), Gudki (The Whistles) and Proletarskaya Kultura (The Proletarian Culture). The emergence of Proletkult signified the ongoing division in Soviet artistic circles between those who would conserve the Russian past and those who imagined a cultural tabula rasa on which to form a distinct and exclusive "proletarian culture."

A recurrent problem with the concept of "proletarian culture," however, was that most of its advocates during the 1920's were not themselves of proletarian origin. Real proletarian membership among the intelligentsia came much later as a result of the cultural revolution beginning in 1928. Intellectuals concerned about the creation of "proletarian culture" were either of upper-class or middle-

[31] Herman Ermolaev, Soviet Literary Theories, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1963), p. 11.

class background, certainly not factory workers or peasants. In this context, the term "proletarian," whether used to describe a particular culture, literary organization or writer, was often misapplied. The same must be said of the term "bourgeois," for during the early Soviet period, ownership of the means of production was transferred to the state, thus, abrogating the basis of that class. In actuality, both of these terms, so rampant in the literary debates, reflect conflicting interpretations about the nature and function of culture as formulated by and among intellectual elites.

During the early 1920's the literary intelligentsia was factional and chaotic, increasingly polarized between radical and conservative. New journals blossomed despite the nationalization of book supplies in 1919. Preoccupied with civil war, foreign intervention, devastation and recovery, the party remained aloof, preferring accommodation with these flourishing organizations rather than constraints and controls. The party, however, did eventually mediate among the warring factions, formulating through incremental stages its own policy on culture. It was the strained relationship between the party and Proletkult that generated these first interventions and explicit statements for the evolution of socialist realism.

The proletariat must create its own culture, declared Aleksander Bogdanov (1873-1928), main theoretician for the Proletkult movement. He considered the bourgeois cultural

past incompatible with the rising proletarian epoch. In the Savonarola-like words of Vladimir Kirillov, another leader of the movement:

> Let us set fire to Raphael in the name of our Tomorrow,/ Destroy the museums, trample underfoot the flowers of art.[32]

The famous poet Mayakovsky, although not a member of Proletkult, expressed similar disdain for the old culture as in "Too Soon To Rejoice" (1918):

> If you catch a White officer/to the wall with him. But have you forgotten Raphael? Have you forgotten Rastrelli?...And why/is Pushkin not attacked? And what about the other White generals among the classics? Quick! Over the Winter Palace-raise the smoke/ of a macaroni factory.[33]

A new class culture was essential, not only to embody the glorious proletarian ideals and aspirations, but also to organize and to mobilize the collective will of the workers towards specific goals. Bogdanov and his adherents believed that literature, which was still predominantly bourgeois, had to be transformed into a class art; new forms of proletarian expression had to be created in order for the proletarian consciousness to triumph. Hence, throughout the civil war, Proletkult founded networks of artist studios that would instill the proper proletarian view in literature. With just a few lessons the semi-literate worker, Bogdanov thought, could became an artist. The First

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[32] Boris Thomson, The Premature Revolution, (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1972), p. 82.

[33] V.V. Mayakovsky, Sobranie Sochinenii, 8 vols. (Moscow: 1968), 1:248-249.

All-Russian Conference of the Proletkult passed the following pedagogical resolution:

> a) In order to acquaint (the members) with the literary heritage of past epochs courses should be given in ancient and modern literature, Russian and foreign... and in the history of culture, and at the same time all these courses should be given from the viewpoint of the working class.
> b) ... The writer and working-class reader should become acquainted with the technique, with the practical skills and habits of literary creation, and for this purpose theoretical courses and practical exercises should be given in metrics, rhythm, and the general theory of versification, in the theory of dramaturgy, artistic prose, and criticism.[34]

Despite this, the tendency of Proletkult was to disregard the vast educational problems of the population and bestow upon a few the honorable title of 'proletarian,' the infallible artistic credential. Thousands of Proletkult followers--factory workers, soldiers, sailors and peasants--were nurturing the flower of "proletarian culture" when most of the country, Lenin reminded them, was still illiterate. (According to one recent study of this period, "two out of five adults in the newly established socialist state could be reached by the printed word."[35]) Writers who captured that supreme proletarian ethos were considered good; such was the idealization of labor. At the Second Congress of the Third International in 1920, a bureau of the International Proletkult was established and received members from most of the European countries and the United States. The Russian Proletkult claimed 400,000 members, 80,000 of

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[34] Edward J. Brown, Russian Literature Since the Revolution, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982), p. 107.

[35] Peter Kenez, The Birth of the Propaganda State, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p. 73.

whom were attending its artistic studios.[36] Enormous and self-assertive, Proletkult saw itself as the literary movement corresponding to the 'dictatorship of the proletariat.'

The foremost leaders of the party opposed the Proletkult movement. In Lenin's case, Proletkult undermined the principle of partiinost' and, therefore, hindered sovereignty over culture. Bogdanov's assertion that his organization would develop independent and autonomous of the political apparatus, with its own literary theories and methods, was antithetical to the supreme role of the party envisioned by Lenin himself. Moreover, Lenin favored selective assimilation of the cultural past, not the iconoclastic, if not vandalistic, destruction encouraged by the Proletkult movement. "Proletarian culture has not leaped into being from no-one knows where," Lenin believed, "nor is it the invention of people who call themselves specialists on proletarian culture."[37] He even equated the process of selective assimilation (cultural continuity) with the evolution of Marxism:

> Marxism has won its universal significance as the ideology of the proletariat by the fact, far from rejecting the most valuable conquests of the bourgeois epoch, it has acquired and reworked everything of value that has been evolved by human thought and culture over more than two thousand years. Only further work on this foundation and along the same lines, inspired by the practical experience of the dictatorship of the proletariat as the final stage of the struggle against

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[36] Robert A. Maguire, Red Virgin Soil: Soviet Literature In The 1920's, (Princeton: Princeton University Press), p. 157.

[37] V.I. Lenin, Sobranie Sochinenii, (Moscow, 1962), 40:304.

> all forms of exploitation, can be regarded as the development of a truly proletarian culture.[38]

Rather than consign bourgeois culture to the Proletkult fires, its finest aspects must be preserved and critically absorbed into the new Soviet society. "Proletarian culture must be the result of a natural development of the stores of knowledge which mankind has accumulated under the yoke of capitalist society, landlord society, and bureaucratic society," Lenin emphasized to the Third Congress of the Komsomol (Young Communist League) in October 1920.[39]

Also, in struggling to consolidate Bolshevik political power, Lenin recognized the tactical folly of opening up new fronts on the cultural battlefield. A policy of toleration and reconciliation that would at least contain the enthusiastic Proletkult movement was applied, but without much impact. Lastly, Lenin's objection to Proletkult concerned the prematurity of its arguments. The immediate need during the years 1917 through 1920 was the improvement of the mass cultural level, requiring the support of all, particularly the bourgeois specialists, to end illiteracy among the peasantry and ethnic minorities. "As long as there is such a thing in the country as illiteracy, it is rather hard to talk about political education," Lenin stated, candidly revealing his interest in education as a

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[38] Boris Thomson, Lot's Wife and the Venus of Milo, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), p. 60.

[39] Harriet Borland , Soviet Literary Theory and Practice during the First Five Year Plan, 1928-1932, (New York: Greenwood Press, 1969), p. 4.

method of political indoctrination.[40] "Every expert must be treasured as being the only vehicle of technology and culture," Lenin stated before the Congress of Water Transport Workers in 1920, "without whom there can be nothing, without whom there can be no communism."[41] Even if only of an expedient value, therefore, bourgeois specialists possessed essential skills and must be encouraged to work for the new Soviet state. Proletkult's effort to remove this important class from the cultural and political domains was, in Lenin's mind, putting the cart before the horse.

While Lenin acknowledged the eventual development of a "proletarian culture", Trotsky stated firmly that "there is no proletarian culture and that there never will be any and in fact there is no reason to regret this."[42] He emphasized the impermanent nature of the proletarian dictatorship, a transitional period in which "the energy of the proletariat itself will be spent mainly in conquering power, in retaining and strengthening it and in applying it to the most urgent needs of existence and of further struggle."[43] The tenure of the proletarian dictatorship would be brief and fiercely aggrandizing, hardly the ideal conditions for the maturation of a true "proletarian culture." "The proletariat acquires power for the purpose of doing away

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[40] Peter Kenez, The Birth of the Propaganda State, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p. 72.
[41] Carmen Claudin-Urondo, Lenin and the Cultural Revolution, (New Jersey: Humanities Press Limited, 1977) p. 32.
[42] Paul N. Siegel, ed., Leon Trotsky on Literature and Art, (New York: Pathfinder Press, INC., 1970), p. 42.
[43] Ibid., p. 42.

forever with class culture," Trotsky elaborated, "and to make way for human culture."[44] Unlike all other ruling classes in history, the proletariat would dissolve itself as a class during its transition phase, later metamorphosing into a socialist society. Another reason for Trotsky's rejection of "formless talk about proletarian culture" was his personal regard for the independent and supreme value of art in itself.[45] "A work of art should, in the first place, be judged by its own law, that is, by the law of art," he observed in his essay Literature and Revolution.[46] Thus, unlike Lenin and the Proletkult movement, Trotsky was able "to disengage literature's ideological content from its artistic value."[47] Authentic and honorable culture-building did not reside in the planned destruction of the inherited culture, nor in the creation of a specifically proletarian literature; the task was more complex:

> The main task of the proletarian intelligentsia in the immediate future is not the abstract formation of a new culture regardless of the absence of a basis for it, but definite cultural-bearing, that is, a systematic, planful and, of course, critical imparting to the backward masses of the essential elements of the culture which already exists.[48]

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[44] Paul N. Siegel, ed., Leon Trotsky on Literature and Art, (New Jersey: Humanities Press Limited, 1977), p. 42.
[45] Ibid., p. 42.
[46] Ibid., p. 37.
[47] Margaret M. Bullitt, "Toward a Marxist Theory of Aesthetics: The Development of Socialist Realism in the Soviet Union," The Russian Review 35 (January 1976): 62.
[48] Paul N. Siegel, ed., Leon Trotsky on Literature and Art, (New York: Pathfinder Press, INC., 1970), pp. 48-49.

"It is impossible to create a class culture," Trotsky later condemned Proletkult in 1923, "behind the backs of a class."[49]

The conflict between the party and Proletkult ended with Lenin's reassertion of the principle of partiinost'. In late 1920 a resolution (the rough draft of which had been written by Lenin) was approved demanding that "the All-Russia Proletkult Congress rejects in the most resolute manner, as theoretically unsound and practically harmful, all attempts to invent one's own particular brand of culture..."[50] The party, through the body of the People's Commissariat of Education, would control the development of culture. Furthermore, the resolution terminated Proletkult's claim that their literary activities be independent of the party: "...the Congress enjoins all Proletkult organizations to fully consider themselves in duty bound to act as auxiliary bodies of the network of establishments under the Peoples's Commissariat of Education, and to accomplish their tasks under the general guidance of the Soviet authorities..."[51] Not only was the organization subordinated to government authority, but also compelled to accept Lenin's thesis on the selective assimilation of the cultural heritage. Marxism achieved its 'historic significance' because it "assimilated and refashioned everything of value in the more than two

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[49] C Vaughan James, Soviet Socialist Realism, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1973), p. 49.
[50] Ibid., p. 113.
[51] Ibid., p. 113.

thousand years of the development of human thought and culture."[52] Selective appropriation and assimilation of the 'bourgeois culture,' according to this resolution, would enable "the development of a genuine proletarian culture."[53] Thus, this resolution, which echoes Lenin's "Party Organization and Party Literature" in its reverence for government authority, formed the basis for the Russian Communist Party's intervention and exercise of sovereignty over Proletkult. Already weakened by the defection of a group of proletarian poets in 1919, the Proletkult, renouncing its central principles and independence, existed only as a nominal literary group up until 1923.

The most experimental and factional period in Soviet literature was during the New Economic Policy, 1921-1928. What enabled this literary renaissance were the flexible measures enacted by Lenin at the tenth party Congress in March 1921. Peasant discontent with the program of confiscating surpluses, implemented during the Civil War in order to feed the starving cities, had been manifested at its most extreme in the Kronstadt sailors' revolt. Hence, Lenin was compelled to make concessions to the peasantry, such as the partial revival of free trade and the right to sell surplus products on the open market. Under NEP citizens were encouraged to resume their former occupations, industry and agriculture regained its output levels of 1913

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[52] C. Vaughan James, Soviet Socialist Realism, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1973), p. 113.
[53] Ibid., p. 113.

and an active petty bourgeoisie was clearly resurgent. Although fostering these indispensable domestic improvements and, thus, preserving Bolshevik rule, NEP was seen by some members of the intelligentsia as a retreat from total nationalization of the economy and, worse, a collaboration between the classes. In explaining the apparent relapse into capitalism, Lenin considered the moderate NEP period as a necessary prelude to the final transformation of society into socialism. The principles of NEP, however, were not confined to the economy, but, as the twenties progressed, expanded to include social and cultural policy. Thus, the sudden flexibility within the state and the atmosphere of excitement generated by both the romance and disillusionment of the revolutionary period produced a vibrant and factious literary revival.[54]

During the comparatively liberal years of NEP the confrontation between communist intellectuals and bourgeois specialists did not abate but intensified. The emergence of a Soviet bourgeoisie--bureaucrats, scientists, technicians, Nepmen, rich kulaks, and non-communist members of the literary and artistic intelligentsia--all symbolized the acceptance of privilege and inequality and, ultimately, the surrender of communist ideals. Genuine proletarian hegemony throughout the new state was retarded, many communists thought, by the party's dependency upon bourgeois

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[54] Marc Slonim, Soviet Russian Literature: Writers and Problems, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), pp. 41-52.

specialists, its policy of conciliation with non-communist writers (fellow travelers), and its tacit support of increased class gradations. One effect of NEP was to center hostility on the more educated and prosperous segment of the population, the specialists who had composed the old intelligentsia. As Sheila Fitzpatrick's detailed studies of this period have shown, members of the old intelligentsia were resilient enough to emerge later as the bourgeois specialists, entrusted with crucial responsibilities in the Soviet system.

> With some exceptions, the intelligentsia rose quickly from the poverty of the Civil War years. By the mid-twenties, the old intelligentsia of the capitals clearly constituted a privileged group that, in material terms, was part of an emerging "Soviet bourgeoisie." Specialists employed by government agencies earned very high salaries. Professors, despite their vociferous complaints of ill treatment, had high salaries and a number of special privileges in areas like housing priority and access to higher education for their children. White-collar workers as a group earned more than industrial workers, were less liable to unemployment, and were better housed.[55]

For many communists, especially those who were not benefiting as visibly as the specialists, NEP reconstruction caused acute bitterness and disappointment. The revolution that was supposed to create the communist society, they thought, was endangered by a protected and flourishing 'Soviet Bourgeoisie.'

Proletarian writers and fellow travelers continued to express diametrically opposed opinions on the nature,

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[55] Sheila Fitzpatrick, ed., Cultural Revolution in Russia: 1928-1931, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), pp. 19-20.

function and place of the new culture. Despite the party's attitude favoring nonantagonistic relations and free competition among its writers during NEP, each literary faction sought to undermine the other, each portraying itself as the single, true exponent of contemporary literature. While proletarian writers redoubled their struggle for proletarian dominance and exclusiveness in all cultural activities, fellow travelers and their supporters defended artistic sovereignty, that was, in the words of the Serapion Brothers, that "a work of art be organic and real, and that it live its own peculiar life."[56] Hence, in the extremely polarized environment of NEP, where narrow and passionate literary positions were common, if not obligatory, actual creative independence was very difficult. Few writers could isolate themselves from the omnipresent spirit of partisanship. Few cultivated their ideas free from the incessant rivalries between proletarian and non-communist writers.

Partiinost' was a central tenet of proletarian literary theory during NEP. As we have already seen, Lenin had simply asserted the need for writers to reflect the interests of the proletariat, and, if they were Bolshevik affiliated, to support the policies of the proletarian vanguard--the party. In the early 1920's, however, proletarian writers reacted to the advances of the bourgeoisie under NEP by formulating a more definite and

[56] George Reavey and Marc Slonim, Soviet Literature: An Anthology, (New York: Covici Friede, INC., 1934), p. 398.

militant concept of partiinost'. Now partiinost' was held to signify an obligation binding on all writers to create only proletarian literature. From Lenin's strident call for 'party literature' in 1905, proletarian writers elaborated the idea of a mandatory ideological and artistic platform. One literature, animated by partiinost', was propagated in the New Economic Policy era as the literary orthodoxy. The dogmatic application of partiinost' to all intellectual activities would later achieve preposterous dimensions:

> In every field, societies sprang up dedicated to spreading the influence of Marxism-Leninism. Some of this activity, it is true, verged on the absurd. Striving for "partiinost' in mathematics" or for "the purity of Marxist-Leninist theory in surgery", seeking to discern the dialectics of the internal combustion engine or venereology and dermatology or of the fishing industry, may have been novel but were not very profitable enterprises.[57]

Nevertheless, as proletarian writers campaigned against the opposition, they thought that their demand for the detailed partiinost' of literature would ensure the proletarian class character of literary organizations and replace tolerance of non-communist writers with an unequivocal commitment to proletarian supremacy in intellectual life. Neutrality and artistic autonomy ceased to be tenable positions once proletarian writers, claiming to apply Lenin's partiinost', insisted that one method of literature and criticism (party approved) be permissible--their own.

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[57] John Barber, "The Establishment of Intellectual Orthodoxy in the U.S.S.R. 1928-1934," Past and Present 83 (May 1979): 151.

Although partiinost' formed a cardinal precept of proletarian literary theory, we must consider the influence of extra-artistic circumstances to understand the proletarians' aspiration for centralized control over literature. In other words, while partiinost' implied centralized control and was the vital force of socialist realism, the progression towards a single method of literature resulted from actual proletarian literary practices in the 1920's. For example, the manifestos of October, the leading communist literary organization, reveal both direct continuity and radical extension of partiinost'. First, reiterating Lenin's evaluation of literature as a distinct class phenomenon, October declared:

> Today's literature is before everything else a field of fierce class battle. Writers are the conscious and unconscious warriors of various classes on the ideological front. The 'thick' journals are the fortresses and the beachheads of the class armies of literature.[58]

At the same time, however, October's leaders went on in the first issue of their journal 'On Guard' (1923) to bluntly call for a single artistic program: "We shall stand indefatigably on guard over a clear and firm communist ideology in proletarian literature."[59] And with a demagogy that would characterize their later statements, the October group vowed to oversee the proletarian writers' organization (VAPP), a powerful role that not even the party had

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[58] Robert A. Maguire, Red Virgin Soil: Soviet Literature In The 1920's, (Princeton: Princeton University Press), pp. 162-163.

[59] Herman Ermolaev, Soviet Literary Theories, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1963), p. 29.

explicitly claimed: "We shall also stand on guard over the organizational structure of the All-Russian Association of Proletarian Writers and fight for its unification and consolidation."[60] October's reaction, as we will see, to extra-artistic circumstances, particularly the NEP inspired petty-bourgeoisie resurgence, caused them to radicalize partiinost' and to enact a militant, 'hard line' strategy favoring exclusive communist control of literature.[61]

The most significant extra-artistic circumstance was the expansion into the literary field of the New Economic Policy. New publishing houses, private and official, blossomed until by 1925 there were 3 times as many operating as in 1923, with 220 in Moscow alone. New literary movements, schools, factions and groups formed, with their own manifestos, adherents and journals, such as the Smiths, Serapion Brothers, Futurists and October. Hence, far from being one-sided, with the proletarian writers dictating literary norms and practices, cultural policy allowed a middle-ground for the intelligentsia. Alarmed by the party's 'soft line' policy, which tolerated a diverse range of literary positions and, thus, undermined centralized proletarian control, October launched an offensive that would "strengthen the communist line in proletarian literature and strengthen organizationally the All-Russian

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[60] Herman Ermolaev, Soviet Literary Theories, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1963), p.29.

[61] Sheila Fitzpatrick, "The 'Soft' Line on Culture and Its Enemies: Soviet Cultural Policy, 1922-1927," Slavic Review 33 (June 1974): 267-287.

and Moscow Associations of Proletarian Writers."[62] Through such an offensive, communist writers saw themselves purifying and restoring original revolutionary ideals. Prominent fellow travelers, bourgeois specialists who dominated Soviet professions, and wealthy kulaks fattening themselves in the countryside all obstructed the true communist social structure. For many communist writers, therefore, only by opposing NEP would they enjoy their rightful proletarian dominance.

Hostility against NEP should also be attributed to another extra-artistic feature: the common desire of youth to supplant the older generation. Most of October's members were extremely young and had actively participated in the Civil War. Hence, October hoped to be rewarded with party mandates guaranteeing their hegemony during demobilization. As zealous defenders of the revolution, but also as arrogant and partially educated youths impatient with the old, October sought a policy that would elevate communist writers above the older and questionable fellow travelers.

> Their age-group was significant: they had no links with the pre-revolutionary tradition, and lacked the education and temperament to compete with fellow-travelling writers on equal terms. This made them the automatic proponents of a new social structure, on different lines, of which they expected to be the beneficiaries.[63]

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[62] Herman Ermolaev, Soviet Literary Theories, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1963), p. 27.

[63] A. Kemp-Welch, "New Economic Policy in Culture and its Enemies," Journal of Contemporary History 3 (July 1978): 459.

Aleksander Voronsky, editor of the 'thick' journal 'Red Virgin Soil,' has left this insightful portrait of October, his most implacable rival:

> They had passed through the cruel training of the civil war and had acquired wide knowledge from the rank and file of the Communist Party, but they had no solid bond with the life of the workmen... While the war was being waged they had no time to study Marxism seriously, but they are doing it now. This generation ... had borne arms, and from its midst came the politruks and regimental commanders; it fought the battles of Petersburg, Orel, and Rostov ... it led a camp and nomadic life... Now, however, instead of carrying a heavy rifle these youths handle a pen and paper. They are strong, hardy ... eager, mirthful, conceited, and resolutely self-reliant. They are accustomed to taking everything by storm; so give them Europe, give them schools, science, and art. They abound in youthful enthusiasm, and they are reluctant either to estimate their own strength soberly or to set themselves any limits. ... Rather unmannnerly, they step on your feet, they spit, and they talk arrogant nonsense.[64]

Disillusioned by the absence of explicit preferences in their favor and increasingly resentful of the older non-communist writers, October called for "the seizure of power by the proletariat in the field of art" and, as a necessary corollary, direct party intervention against fellow travelers.[65]

Further hastening October's campaign at this time were political developments within the party. The most important internal source of party support for the conciliatory, 'soft line' cultural policy ended with Lenin's death in 1924. Trotsky, who placed great merit on bourgeois culture and the skilled role of fellow travelers, was expelled from the

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[64] Edward J. Brown, The Proletarian Episode in Russian Literature, 1928-1932, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1953), p. 34.

[65] Ibid., p. 29.

Communist Party in 1927. Lunacharsky, himself a writer and consistent advocate of relatively free literary activity, grew less influential and less attuned to the party's changing attitude on literature. Between 1925 and 1928, therefore, we see proletarian hegemony becoming a basis of unity for October and the party. The middle ground of Soviet literature, which had precariously supported the fellow travelers during NEP, was gradually sinking.

The party's response to October's fierce campaign was expressed by Nicolai Bukharin in an ambiguous document entitled "On The Policy Of The Party In The Field Of Belles-Lettres" (1925). Each faction, whether proletarian or fellow traveler, was able to interpret the document as a defeat for the other. October's 'hard line' views were reflected throughout several sections of the document. First, the party proclaimed that in "a class society there is not, nor can there be, a neutral art..."[66] (This statement, of course, echoed Lenin's 1905 article "Party Organization and Party Literature" in its emphasis on the inherent class character of all literature.) Moreover, the party acknowledged a future proletarian dominance: "The hegemony of proletarian literature does not yet exist, and the party should help these writers to earn for themselves the historical right to that hegemony."[67] Once having acknowledged proletarian hegemony, the party promised to aid

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[66] Edward J. Brown, The Proletarian Episode in Russian Literature, 1928-1932, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1953), p. 236.

[67] Ibid., p. 237.

proletarian writers in their development. But party aid that even temporarily included NEP principles of tolerance and free competition was repugnant to October. Supporting the fellow travelers' position, the document stated:

> ... the party should declare itself in favor of the free competition of various groups and tendencies in this province. Any other solution of the problem would be an official, bureaucratic pseudo-resolution. In the same way it is inadmissible to legalize by a decree the monopoly of the literary printing business by any other group or literary organization. While morally and materiallly supporting proletarian and proletarian-peasant literature, and aiding fellow-travelers, the party cannot offer a monopoly to any of these groups, even the one most proletarian in its ideology.[68]

Fellow travelers could also delight in the party's implicit censure of October for its alienating 'communist conceit'. "Marxist criticism," the document stated, "should once and for all drive out of its midst all pretentious, half-literate, and self-satisfied communist conceit."[69] Thus, the party's arbitration of literary conflicts, which had been demanded by October, was unclear. Monopolistic control of literature was not endorsed and no competing faction was granted leadership authority, but the ideal of proletarian hegemony was affirmed, pursuant to further development under party guidance. Fellow travelers, protected by the revived principle of free competition, were given some breathing space, a new immunity against October's attacks.

The 1925 document was carefully constructed not to alienate any faction and, as such, appeared a continuation

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[68] Edward J. Brown, The Proletarian Episode in Russian Literature, 1928-1932, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1953), p. 239.

[69] Ibid., p. 238.

of NEP themes on culture. But despite its liberal facade as the "Magna Charta Libertatu" for all Soviet writers, the document specifically advanced the interests of October, already the controlling group of VAPP (All-Russian Association of Proletarian Writers).[70] Two fundamental objectives of October were fulfilled: the Central Committee recognized the principle of proletarian hegemony and, by virtue of its arbitration, reasserted the right of party interferrence in cultural matters. Leopold Averbakh, leading spokesman for October, did not exaggerate when he stated that only proletarian writers accepted the document completely. With proletarian hegemony enshrined and the party bound, at least in spirit, to communist literary movements, the very context of Soviet literature favored proletarian writers. The harm of proletarian dominance was obvious to fellow travelers and there is evidence that they were very disappointed by the document. According to one, Marietta Shaginyan, "a number of writers cherished hopes for freedom of the press."[71] Voronsky, who had been under attack by October for publishing the works of fellow travelers and for criticizing young proletarian writers, grew, in his own words, " as silent as a stone," seldom replying to October's insinuations and charges that he had

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[70] Marc Slonim, Soviet Russian Literature: Writers and Problems, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 50.

[71] Herman Ermolaev, Soviet Literary Theories, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1963), p. 49.

betrayed communism.[72] Hence, the position of fellow travelers could only weaken while October, galvanized by the 1925 document, strengthened their offensive.

Cultural policy during this period, it is important to reemphasize, was generated by both the party and the various literary movements. As Sheila Fitzpatrick's study has illuminated, neither the party nor the literary movements imposed doctrine upon one another, but rather, from above and below, these two interacted to produce the trend towards proletarian hegemony.[73] And although accelerated in 1925, proletarian hegemony should not be considered an inevitable development for Soviet literature because the concept still aroused opposition and the 'soft line' attitude on culture still persisted, albeit in more constrained forms. In less than three years, however, the 'soft line' would be canceled by a violent cultural revolution waged by the party on behalf of the proletariat. Using young communist writers as its weapon, the party sought to remove fellow travelers from literary activity. The class war in literature was mirrored in all areas of Soviet society. Condemned as official class enemies, the bourgeois intelligentsia were savagely attacked and purged. Voronsky, one of the first victims of these campaigns, wrote a despondent letter to the Central Committee press department: "You have unleashed the young

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[72] Herman Ermolaev, Soviet Literary Theories, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1963), p. 51

[73] Sheila Fitzpatrick, ed., Cultural Revolution in Russia: 1928-1931, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), pp. 8-40.

comrades, given them such rights and privileges that they have lost all sense of proportion, lost humility..."[74] Unleashing the cultural revolution, as Voronsky feared, would mean the death of fellow travelers and the birth of proletarian hegemony.

But if the cultural revolution transformed proletarian hegemony into reality, the trend, as we have seen, was already moving relentlessly in that direction. The social basis for complete proletarianization was being established through continued discrediting and harassment of the bourgeois intelligentsia, a task which October pursued with even greater zeal after the 1925 party document. Undaunted by the absence of explicit support from any major party member, including Trotsky, Kamenev, Stalin and Zinoviev, the October group pressed for communist control of all cultural institutions, demanding class war against the fellow travelers. Thus, at the time of the official cultural revolution in 1928, when an outright assault against the bourgeois intelligentsia was launched by the party, communist writers had, like shock troops, already been clearing the way for their own domination. The official construct of cultural revolution, therefore, was influenced by a pre-existing conflict between proletarian and bourgeois writers. Again, historian Sheila Fitzpatrick describes the origins of that struggle:

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[74] Sheila Fitzpatrick, ed., Cultural Revolution in Russia: 1928-1931, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), p. 30.

> The class-war concept of confrontation between proletariat and bourgeoisie reflected real social tensions between the materially disadvantaged and the privileged. The antibureaucratic drive of cultural revolution--often verging on an attack on established authority per se--reflected real grievances of the younger generation. Within the professions, Communists and Non-Communists tended to gather in potentially antagonistic camps: the appeal for "proletarian hegemony" in scholarship and the arts did not originally come from the party leadership, but from groups within the professions and scholarly institutions. The specific forms that cultural revolution took in different areas were largely determined by existing tensions and conflicts.[75]

The class war was very much a trend pushed from below and only fully supported by the party in 1928.

Proletarian hegemony was being encouraged before the 1928 upheavel in another important way. At the same time that the October group was assailing the 'soft line' in culture and demanding that one ideological program of literature be endorsed by the party, it also dealt with literature in a dictatorial and dogmatic manner. Calm and reasonable advancement of its position, an approach that never attracted October even during the permissiveness of NEP, was neither accepted nor practiced. October's mode of operation consisted of imposing its own literary orthodoxy and, hence, limiting the opportunities for dissident opinions. October also initiated the style, repeated by other proletraian groups, of supporting its doctrinal claims with statements from the party.[76] October's ritualistic

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[75] Sheila Fitzpatrick, ed., Cultural Revolution in Russia: 1928-1931, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), pp. 17-18.

[76] Herman Ermolaev, Soviet Literary Theories, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1963), pp. 33-36.

extolling of the party as the Delphic Oracle of literature further accustomed the party to both judicial and legislative roles in Soviet culture. The overall effect of October's dictatorial style was to delimit the context in which Soviet literature could develop and to make the party increasingly aware of its own greater capacity to dictate cultural policy. October's effort to reduce literature to one proletarian model foreshadowed in fundamental ways the socialist realist model of 1934.[77]

The official sponsorship of class-war cultural revolution in the Soviet Union began with the Shakhty trial (summer 1928). Fifty-five mining engineers and technicians in the Shakhty area of the Donbass were accused of sabotage, wrecking and of conspiring with former mine owners who lived abroad. All at once, the Shakhty incident unleashed militant communist hostility against the technical intelligentsia and, by implication, the entire bourgeois intelligentsia.. Krinitsky, director of the agitprop department of the Central Committee, described this class war as a proletarian battle "against bourgeois elements which are supported by the remnants and survivals of the influence, traditions and customs of the old society."[78] In the field of culture, bourgeois elements were plotting "to increase their share, fighting for their own school, their

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[77] Herman Ermolaev, Soviet Literary Theories, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1963), pp. 33-36.

[78] Sheila Fitzpatrick, ed., Cultural Revolution in Russia: 1928-1931, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), p. 10.

own art, their own theatre and cinema, trying to use the state apparatus for that purpose."[79] Thus, the Shakhty incident exemplified the danger of continuing a tolerant 'soft line' policy towards the intelligentsia. From that time, the Soviet government ended its reliance upon those whom it portrayed as duplicitous bourgeois specialists, calling for "vigilance in the face of the class enemy."[80] No longer allies, nor eventual converts to communism as Lunacharsky sympathetically saw them, the old intelligentsia had to be purged from the entire society and replaced by a new class of loyal 'red specialists.'

The ascendancy of the 'hard line' position in Soviet culture was a victory for Stalin. Those who had supported the NEP cultural policy, such key party rivals of Stalin as Trotsky, Bukharin, Rykov, and Tomskii, had also disagreed with aspects of his program of intensive industrialization and collectivization. Implication as a 'soft line' advocate, contrary evidence notwithstanding, was in this atmosphere of Shakhty-induced crisis and paranoia, where bourgeois wreckers and saboteurs conspired with encircling capitalist powers, the most effective method of discrediting party members. Stalin's role in initiating the class war cultural revolution is not clear, but he and his supporters did use the new policy to remove rivals associated with the

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[79] Sheila Fitzpatrick, ed., Cultural Revolution in Russia: 1928-31, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), p. 10.

[80] Sheila Fitzpatrick, "The 'Soft' Line on Culture and Its Enemies: Soviet Cultural Policy, 1922-1927," Slavic Review (June 1974): 270.

'soft line' and, hence, to solidify their control within the party. Was the cultural revolution a master plot orchestrated by Stalin as some Western historians have suggested?[81]

> The victory of the "hard" line of cultural class war over the "soft" line of conciliation coincided in time with Stalin's victory over his opponents in the party leadership. Should we conclude that the policy of class war was Stalin's own? I think not. There is no evidence to suggest that Stalin had any fixed opinions on cultural policy in the twenties, and his interventions in cultural or educational debates were remarkably few.[82]

What Professor Sheila Fitzpatrick has argued is that Stalin used these class war policies as a dual means of applying maximum force against his main party enemies and promoting a new class of cadres into industrial, government and cultural positions.[83] Embodied in the cultural revolution was the promise of mass worker promotion, the birth of real proletarian hegemony, long delayed by the aberrant New Economic Policy. Proletarian hegemony, the cry that mobilized support, was a convenient and popular weapon for buttressing Stalin's political objectives.

In 1928 at the All-Union Congress of Proletarian Writers, VAPP under the control of October's leadership, was reorganized and became RAPP (Russian Association of Proletarian Writers). Also during this Congress the

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[81] Gleb Struve, Russian Literature under Lenin and Stalin, 1917-1953, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1970), p. 221.

[82] Sheila Fitzpatrick, "The 'Soft' Line on Culture and Its Enemies: Soviet Cultural Policy, 1922-1927," Slavic Review (June 1974): 286.

[83] Sheila Fitzpatrick, "Stalin and the Making of a New Elite," Slavic Review (September 1979): 377-402.

proletarians received official approval with speeches from Lunacharsky, still Commissar for Enlightenment, Krinitsky and Lazian, secretary of the Moscow party Committee. Although the party's endorsement was not explicitly for RAPP, but again for the general concept of proletarian literature, RAPP's subsequent behavior suggests that it saw itself as the chief interpreter and instrument of party literary policy. Between the beginning of the First Five Year Plan in late 1928 and the creation of a Union of Soviet Writers in 1932, RAPP acted as the literary arm of the Communist Party. The relationship, while not always harmonious, represented an integral stage in the fulfillment of partiinost'. Lenin's principle that literature must be under centralized party control was being voluntarily accepted and promoted by RAPP.

As early as 1925, the poet Mayakovsky described his verse as an instrument of the Soviet state:

> I want/ the Gosplan to sweat while discussing the assignment of my year's tasks.... I want/ the pen to be put on the same footing with the bayonet. I want/ Stalin, in the name of the politburo, to present reports on the production of verse along with reports on pig iron and steel.[84]

With the announcement of the First Five-Year Plan in November 1928, Mayakovsky's belief that literary work (like industrial work) should be regulated by the party was being institutionalized. Averbakh, leader of RAPP, agitated for a

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[84] V.V. Mayakovsky, Sobranie Sochinenii, 8 vols. (Moscow: Pravda, 1968), 4:396.

"Five-Year Plan of Art."[85] "The Soviet Union," Averbakh stated, "has entered an epoch of constructive Socialism according to a definite plan, and it is advancing at a furious rate. Literature is lagging behind the general development of industry. It must now go forward at a faster rate and participate in the general movement."[86] "Literature Should Help the Five-Year Plan," trumpeted one party sponsored slogan.[87] Raising the mass consciousness and organizing the mass will, building the enthusiasm for industrialization, collectivization and war against the kulaks (middle peasants who employed others), and preparing, ultimately, for the heroic dawn of socialism were RAPP's goals. RAPP declared that "the depiction of the Five-Year Plan and the class war within its framework is the one and only problem of Soviet literature..."[88] "Having gained political power," Averbakh proclaimed, "we should 'conquer' and 'rule' in the realm of culture."[89]

> ... we must fight for proletarian hegemony in the cultural revolution. All of our socio-cultural measures have a class character. We must set the peasant masses on the tracks of proletarian ideology.[90]

To RAPP the Five-Year Plan was an exhilarating and glorious age when the utopian promise of the October Revolution would

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[85] Harriet Borland, Soviet Literary Theory and Practice during the First Five-Year Plan, 1928-32, (New York: Greenwood Press, 1969), p. 23.
[86] George Reavey and Marc Slonim, Soviet Literature: An Anthology, (New York: Covici INC., 1934), p. 43.
[87] Harriet Borland, Soviet Literary Theory and Practice during the First Five Year Plan, 1928-32, (Greenwood Press, 1969), p. 22.
[88] Ibid., p. 22.
[89] Ibid., p. 23.
[90] Ibid., pp. 23-24.

at last be put into effect. The death of capitalism and the birth of socialism would be, as the poet Semyon Kirsanov envisioned in "Pyatileka," the historic achievement of their generation.

> To Five-Year Plan forests/ go, peoples,/ with fires/ into depths/ of a thousand lands;/ in work,/ in stress,/ in smoke,/ in drone,/ out of NEP Russia--/ will come,/ Russia/ socialist.[91]

An intense campaign was implemented to mobilize literature for the success of the Five-Year Plan. After Lunacharsky's departure from the Commissariat of Enlightenment in the spring of 1929, that organization, repeatedly denounced by RAPP for its 'soft line' tendencies, lost its will and power to protect the non-party intelligentsia.[92] RAPP exercised an unofficial dictatorship over literature and criticism during this period. Non-party writers were often denied the right of publication. RAPP conducted the 'literary equivalent' of the Shakhty trial through the persecution of prominent writers Boris Pil'nak and Evgeni Zamyatin on false charges of collaboration with the foreign press. In propagandizing the Five-Year Plan, RAPP's grandiloquent slogans gave this period a fantastic quality: "For A Great Art of Bolshevism! Against the Varnishers of Reality! For the Hegemony of Proletarian

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[91] Harriet Borland, Soviet Literary Theory and Practice during the First Five-Year Plan, 1928-32, (New York: Greenwood Press, 1969), p. 113.

[92] Timothy E. O'Connor, The Politics of Soviet Culture: Anotolii Luncharskii, (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1983), pp. 87-99.

Literature! Liquidate Backwardness!"[93] "For Coal! For Iron! For Machines! Each Literary Group should Work For These."[94] Special 'literary shock-workers' and 'worker-correspondents' were assigned tasks of writing about factories, collectives and new construction sites such as Dnieprostroy and Magnitostroy, a journalistic mission that the Central Committee actively encouraged in Pravda:

> We must educate a type of literary man who can write for the newspapers, who can give vital, gripping descriptions of our socialist construction, of all its gigantic achievements, and all of its failings. We need a fighting literature on contemporary themes, one which will react to the burning questions of socialist construction and which will daily mobilize the masses around the task of carrying out the general line of the party.[95]

The social command method, that is assigning specific topics of contemporary relevance to its writers, was clearly RAPP's response to the need for generating faith and enthusiasm in socialist construction. In order to increase the number of these 'agit-prop' writers, thousands of workers and peasants, who had demonstrated some literary aptitude, were ushered into the ranks of RAPP, which also, supposedly endowed Five-Year Plan literature with a more authentic proletarian voice. Here, moreover, through mass induction

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[93] Edward J. Brown, The Proletarian Episode in Russian Literature, 1928-1932, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1953), p. 171.

[94] Katerina Clark, "Little Heroes and Big Deeds: Literature Responds to the First Five-Year Plan," Cultural Revolution in Russia, 1928-1931, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), p. 194.

[95] Edward J. Brown, The Proletarian Episode in Russian Literature, 1928-1932, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1953), p. 91.

of the worker-writers was the dramatic reality of "proletarianization."

Without an official mandate, but deemed closest to a central party line, RAPP mobilized literature for the great leap forward into industrialization and collectivization. Moreover, the party's call for 'consolidation of literary forces' in late 1929 encouraged competing groups to close ranks around RAPP. By crusading against opposition writers and absorbing communist literary organizations, RAPP emerged as a leader of the cultural revolution. Voronsky, who had asserted the independence of the writers' own 'cognition of life', was labelled a Trotskyite and removed as editor of "Red Virgin Soil." Even the very individualistic poet Mayakovsky had to come to terms with the power of RAPP, finally answering the call for 'consolidation of forces' and joining that group in February 1930. Unable to have his satirical plays produced, Bedbug (1928) and Bathhouse (1930), he acquiesced to the RAPP leadership: "Our opinions differ. You know me; I, you. I am joining you because I know that outside of your organization I cannot work further."[96] In March Mayakovsky read for the first time "At the Top of My Voice," the prelude to a poem on the Five-Year Plan, in which he declared:

> I'm fed/ to the teeth/ with agit-prop,/ I'd like/ to scribble for you/ love ballads,--/ they're charming/

[96] Harriet Borland, Soviet Literary Theory and Practice during the First Five-Year Plan, (New York: Greenwood Press, 1969), p. 121.

and pay quite a lot./ But I/ mastered myself,/ and crushed under foot/ the throat/ of my very own songs.[97]

On April 14, 1930 Mayakovsky shot himself through the heart.

What precipitated Mayakovsky's suicide will never be known, but undoubtedly his dismal experience with RAPP, to whom he enclosed cheerful greetings in his suicide note, was one source of severe innner turmoil. According to Professor Brown's biography: "From the moment of his entry until his suicide the "secretariat" of that organization occupied itself with 're-educating' him in the spirit of proletarian ideology and literature, a truly depressing experience. Some people recalled that on the eve of his suicide, already cut off from friends and collaborators of long standing, he was in a state of defenseless misery as a result of his sessions with the talentless dogmatists and petty literary tyrants whose organization he had joined."[98] Before Mayakovsky's death, RAPP had attacked him for inadequate closeness to the masses and demanded public disavowal of all former allegiances; and, afterwards, it prevented publication of his works, postponed the opening of his museum, and erased his name from the school curricula. (A casual remark, however, by Stalin in 1935 to the effect that Mayakovsky was 'the best and most talented poet of our Soviet epoch' resulted in a complete rehabilitation). Estranged from his previous literary group and isolated

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[97] V.V. Mayakovsky, Sobranie Sochinenii, 8 vols. (Moscow: Pravda, 1968), 8:186.

[98] Edward J. Brown, Mayakovsky: A Poet in the Revolution, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973), p. 367.

among the hostile RAPP community, who humiliated him as a defeated non-conformist, there may have been, as it must have seemed to Mayakovsky, 'no other way out.'

To the astonishment of its leaders, RAPP was liquidated by the party on April 23, 1932 and replaced by a single Union of Soviet Writers. The 'hard line' organization that had mobilized literature for the success of the First Five-Year Plan was abolished by the Central Committee in a brief document entitled "On the Reformation of Literary-Artistic Organizations." As in 1921 with the introduction of the New Economic Policy, in 1932 the party relaxed 'hard line' militancy. Incessant disputes and controversies, countless purges of the bourgeois and communist intelligentsia, had, by the end, a chaotic effect upon the existing literary structure. RAPP's hostility towards the neutral fellow travelers, tersely conveyed in their slogan 'Ally or Enemy', was becoming almost anachronistic by 1932. The old intelligentsia, as Stalin observed in his speech on June 23, 1931, was supporting the Soviet regime:

> About two years ago (mid-1929) things were going on with us in such a way that the most qualified part of the old technical intelligentsia was infected with the sickness of wrecking... That was a year or two ago. Can we say that we now have just exactly such conditions? No, this cannot be said. On the contray, we now have entirely different conditions.[99]

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[99] Harriet Borland, Soviet Literary Theory and Practice during the First Five-Year Plan, (New York: Greenwood Press, 1969), 135.

Moreover, wreckers, the omnipresent saboteurs of Five-Year Plan industrialization, were working along side the proletariat; with the redemptive consequence that

> it would be incorrect and undialectical to continue the old policy under new, changed conditions... Therefore to change our attitude towards the engineering-technical forces of the old school, to show them more attention and care, to attract them more boldly to work--such are the tasks.[100]

Although in Stalin's view the non-party intelligentsia was more cooperative, RAPP continued to promote its ultimatum: "With the agents of the bourgeoisie and of kulakdom in literature, or with proletarian literature--thus stands the question before each of today's fellow-travelers."[101] RAPP's persecution and exclusion of fellow travelers, during a time of renewed effort by the party to accommodate these writers, could only increase disaffection and was, according to Pravda, a 'leftist vulgarization and oversimplification' of official policy. Not only was RAPP's 'hard line' behavior detrimental to the rapproachment process, but obviously pointless given the non-party intelligentsia's change of heart. Worse still was RAPP'S tendency toward 'neo-proletkultism.' While acting as the indirect literary arm of the party, RAPP substituted its own particular interpretation of the nature and function of literature and, hence, undermined the party's sovereignty in that area. The time had come, therefore, to clear away all

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[100] Harriet Borland, Soviet Literary Theory and Practice during the First Five-Year Plan, 1928-32, (New York: Greenwood Press, 1969), p. 135.

[101] Ibid., p. 136.

obstacles to the new period, and RAPP, uncompromising and increasingly autnonomous, was one of the worst of them.

Another principal reason for the dissolution of RAPP, besides its outdated hostility against fellow travelers, was its 'erroneous' literary theories. According to RAPP, proletarian literature must be based upon profound psychological characterization and depict the whole "Living Man."[102] Only through truthful examination, expressed in its slogan "Tear Off the Masks", was the underlying reality discovered and the masked psychological vestiges of capitalism finally revealed and removed.[103] But whose masks would RAPP tear off? Such unspecified exposures disturbed Pavel Iudin, a Central Committee spokesman:

> In our condition what does the RAPP slogan "tear off the masks" mean? First of all, from whom? From the proletarian state? But our proletarian state does not conceal its class character... To bring out such a slogan without indicating from whom the masks are to be removed is inadmissible.[104]

According to Iudin, the proletarian state was in its very essence a class state. Why explore the self-evident character of the proletarian state when there was surely nothing masked, nothing false? Or was there? Again, the party in a Pravda editorial attributed the fall of RAPP to its erroneous concern for psychology:

> Among the most glaring mistakes of a literary character is the insistence on individual psychology. On the

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[102] Edward J. Brown, The Proletarian Episode in Russian Literature, 1928-1932, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1953), p. 208.
[103] Ibid., p. 207.
[104] Ibid., p. 207.

> basis of this was evolved the idealistic theory of the living man, more fully formulated in the thesis: "The world is man." The conclusion was closely bound up with the following methodogical formulation: "The analysis of individual psychology" (Averbakh, O Zadachakh Proletarskoi Literatury)...[105]

RAPP's literary method, based upon complex psychological portraiture and verisimiltude, was potentially counter-revolutionary. Would RAPP tear away the masks of both class enemies and Communists? Did the slogan "Against the Varnishers of Reality" mean that RAPP would show the negative, repellent features of Soviet society? The preference of the party, however, clearly articulated two years later, was for a positive, varnished reality in literature.

The decision to arrest the momentum of proletarian hegemony and cultural revolution opened the way for a period of liberalization. With the abolition of RAPP and the establishment of the Union of Soviet Writers' in 1932, the future promised more tolerance and literary variety. For many factions there was a general sense of emancipation after RAPP's demise. During the two years before the meeting of the First Congress of the Writers' Union, its Organizing Committee, composed of nine fellow travelers and nine former members of RAPP--not Averbakh's clique--, worked to create guide lines amenable to all factions in the new Union. It was in this climate that the method of socialist realism was introduced at the First Writers' Congress in

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[105] Lawrence H. Schwartz, Marxism and Culture, (New York: Kennikat Press Corp., 1980), p. 34.

August 1934. Socialist realism was expressed mainly as an abstract method that all writers, communist and fellow traveler, could accept. As Sheila Fitzpatrick explains:

> When the period of "proletarian hegemony" ended in 1932 with the dissolution of RAPP, a decision was made to organize an all-inclusive Union of Soviet writers in which literary factions would be dissolved and "bourgeois" non-Communists admitted on equal terms with the Communists. Even the bourgeois-avant-gardists, whose reputations as trouble-makers almost rivaled that of the proletarians, were admitted and for a few years not attacked. The formula of "socialist realism" which the Union adopted was not originally conceived as a "party line," anymore than the Union was conceived as an instrument of total control over literature. Both were initially intended to cancel out the old RAPP line of proletarian and communist exclusiveness and make room for literary diversity--their disciplinary uses came later, with the mounting political tension of 1935-36.[106]

The liberalization tendency of this period was further evident inside the First Writers' Congress where such non-conformist writers as Isaac Babel, Yuri Olesha and Boris Pasternak addressed 590 Soviet delegates and 40 foreign visitors. Each spoke guardedly about the importance of their own special artistic vision and welcomed the new tolerance.[107]

At the same time, however, Lenin's principle of partiinost' achieved its most successful development by 1934. No longer under the indirect authority of RAPP, all writers were placed under the direct control of the party founded Union of Soviet Writers. The many important

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[106] Sheila Fitzpatrick, "Culture and Politics under Stalin: A Reappraisal," Slavic Review 35 (June 1976):218.

[107] Rufus Mathewson, "The First Writers' Congress: A Second Look," Literature and Revolution in Soviet Russia, 1917-62, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1963), pp. 62-73.

literary factions who had established Soviet literature between 1917 and 1934 were united in one central administration. Party control from that point on was, of course, direct and immediate. Through this new structure, literature could become an effective "component of organized, planned and integrated" party work as Lenin had insisted in his 1905 article "Party Organization and Party Literature."[108]

Even more potentially constricting in 1934 was the method of socialist realism. Andrey Zhdanov, secretary of the Central Committee and Stalin's representative to the First Writers' Congress, defined the method in his opening speech. Soviet literature must be tendentious, optimistic, heroic and serve the cause of socialist construction. Only one method, he declared, can guide Soviet writers:

> We say that socialist realism is the basic method of Soviet literature and literary criticism, and this presupposes that revolutionary romanticism should enter into literary creation as a component part, for the whole life of our party, the whole life of the working class and its struggle consists in combination of the most stern and sober practical work with a supreme spirit of heroic deeds and magnificent future prospects. Our Communist Party has always been strong by virtue of the fact that it has united and continues to unite a throughly business and practical spirit with broad vision, with a constant urge forward, with a struggle for the building of communist society. Soviet literature should be able to portray our heroes; it should be able to glimpse our tomorrow. This will be no utopian dream, for our tomorrow is already being prepared today by conscious, planned work.[109]

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[108] V.I. Lenin, Collected Works, (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1962), 10:45.

[109] Andrey Zhdanov, Literature, Philosophy, and Music, (New York: International Publishers, 1950) p. 13.

Socialist realism was the depiction of reality in its revolutionary development. Moreover, the truthfulness and historical concreteness of its reality merged with the party imperative of "ideological remolding and education of the working class people in the spirit of socialism."[110] The educative role of socialist realism coincided with Lenin's belief that literature must be an instrument of political indoctrination and ultimately "must become party literature."[111]

But socialist realism went far beyond the perimeters of Lenin's article. The new method fused realism with revolutionary romanticism, reality as it existed with reality as it should be. Socialist realism demanded a reality that sustained the promise of the inevitable 'magnificent future.' "We represent life," the dissident Soviet writer Andrei Sinyavsky said, "as we would like it to be and is bound to become, when it bows to the logic of Marxism."[112] A completely politicized literature, with limited psychological portraiture and verisimiltude, based upon the glorification of the state, emerged as the official method by 1934.

Can we imagine the institution of socialist realism in 1934 without the principle of partiinost'? No. Lenin's legacy of literature's service to the party pervaded and

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[110] Andrey Zhdanov, Literature, Philosophy, and Music, (New York: International Publishers, 1950), p. 12.

[111] V.I. Lenin, Collected Works, (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1962), 10:45

[112] Andrei Sinyavsky, On Socialist Realism, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1960), pp. 76-77.

finally dominated Soviet literary thought and activity. What occurred between 1905 and 1934 was the institutionalization of partiinost'. After the partiinost' of literature was established, many of those who had opposed or defended partiinost'--Voronsky, Averbakh, Babel, Olesha, Pil'nak, Zamyatin, Kirillov and countless others--were swept away, either shot or left to die in prisons. Literary men and women of the Union of Soviet Writers, whose active approval of official policies and positions was expected, would learn over and over again the meaning of being "inseparably bound" to "party literature."[113]

[113] V.I. Lenin, Collected Works, (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1962), 10:45-46.

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