

## COMMUNIST AREA

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0974

USSR: Party

14 April 1971

TOWARD THE LAST CIRCLE: SHOLOKHOV AND CHAKOVSKY  
SPEAK AT THE 24TH CPSU CONGRESS

Summary: Two representatives of the official Soviet literary community, Mikhail Sholokhov and Aleksander Chakovsky, were among the delegates to the 24th CPSU Congress. The views which they express concerning literature and the arts are distinctly conservative in nature, favoring subordination of artist to Party, literature to ideology and artistic license to discipline. The re-election of Sholokhov to full membership and the election of Chakovsky to candidate membership in the Central Committee is a strong indication that such views are official regime policy.

Following Brezhnev's lead, delegates to the 24th CPSU Congress expressed comments on literature and cultural affairs in general, that are distinctly conservative in nature. Primary emphasis is devoted to subordinating the creative intelligentsia to the will of the Party, reducing the purpose of their creation to that of an ideological weapon, eliminating the possibility of compromise with or toleration of proscribed ideas, and suggesting that disobedience results in punitive action.

It is appropriate that Mikhail Sholokhov and Aleksander Chakovsky, the only two writers to speak at the congress and both representatives of the conservative point of view amongst the official literary community, were chosen to convey this message.

Both have traditionally been leading critics against liberal writers and have been among the most outspoken supporters of the regime. At the time of the trial of the writers Andrei Sinyavsky and Yuli Daniel -- the first major attempt by the Brezhnev-Kosygin regime to suppress attempts at freedom of expression -- Sholokhov, several weeks after the trial, implied that execution without trial would be an appropriate fate for the defendants, (1) while Chakovsky called for a "more severe punishment" than the total of twelve years in concentration camps meted out to the two writers. (2) Moreover, Chakovsky, as editor of the All-Union Writers Union weekly -- Literaturnaia Gazeta -- is ultimately responsible for the numerous articles that have appeared in the newspaper attacking Sinyavsky and Daniel, other dissident elements and, very recently, Alexander Solzhenitsyn.

#### The Pre-eminence of the Party over the Artist

Both Chakovsky and Sholokhov, each in their own way, reinforce the conservative view that the Party is the decisive authority in literary affairs, superceding the role of the writer, and attempt to dispel any notion that literature in the Soviet Union can exist independent of Party control. Sholokhov even goes so far as to entirely eclipse the contribution of the writer and gives sole credit to the Party not only for the achievements of Soviet literature but for its very existence.

If it were not for the Party, which assembled us at this congress, our literature would not have had any successes, there would not be a Soviet literature. (3)

Chakovsky employs a different tack, although the message is the same. Adopting the role of an apologist for the regime, he recapitulates the formative period of the present regime's cultural policy, provides an interpretation that is heavily weighed in favor of firm Party control over literature and warmly approves the conservative policies adopted. Without mentioning Khrushchev by name or elaborating the preliminary steps in the direction of de-Stalinization taken during his rule, he points to the unsettling effect of the "thaw" on

Party functionaries and conservative stalwarts who, rigidly bound to the totalitarian system formed under Stalin's rule and associated with his name, were unable to cope with the erosion of that system.

...in the years prior to the 23rd Congress of our Party [i.e. prior to March, 1966] ... we, writers-communists, non-Party literateurs, ... very much wanted clarification in several important ideological questions, consistency, the liquidation of that voluntarist turbulence of which we had had our fill and of which we, frankly speaking, had become thoroughly tired during those years. (4)

Instead of describing the acute crisis of conscience and the search for a reappraisal of values that was characteristic of such writers as Pasternak, Solzhenitsyn, Paustovsky and Tvardovsky, Chakovsky adopts the conservative position that writers sought ideological guidance rather than critical self-examination. Justifying the increase in Party control over the arts that has continued to be the present regime's policy for the last six years, he states approvingly that

The 23rd [Party] Congress and subsequent Party documents concerning ideological questions introduced this so-indispensable clarity.

It should be noted that the "clarity" introduced under the new regime at the 23rd Congress took the form of an endorsement of the punishment levied against the writers Sinyavsky and Daniel, an attack against Alexander Solzhenitsyn's A Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich, heavy criticism against the liberal journals Novy Mir and Yunost' and a clear indication that criticism of the "personality cult" was to be restricted. The essence of subsequent policy has been selective repression against uncompromising members of the intelligentsia and a quarantine on the Stalin issue imposed by a Central Committee plenum in April 1968 which declared the "consequences of the personality cult" officially liquidated. Arguing in the spirit of this trend, Chakovsky repeats criticism of "persons and works that bear the influence of bourgeois ideology, that distort Soviet reality and lasciviously flirt with our class enemies," dogmatically asserts that the decisions of the Party and its Central Committee on the manner in which the state is to be ruled are "the only correct method!" and repeats Brezhnev's stricture against tampering with the subject of Stalinism. By depicting Party decisions under the present leadership as consistently correct while pointing to grievous errors of



judgement committed by members of the creative intelligentsia, Chakovsky conveys the impression that the Party alone is indispensable and infallible and that the development of literature in the Soviet Union is possible only under the direction of the Party. Sholokhov succinctly expresses this view when he says:

Only our Party and the most noble ideas which guide it are capable of fusing into one the thousands of creative lives, beginning with Maxim Gorky and ending with the present-day thriving, young writers, and placing them at the service of the people, at the service of their interests.

### Literature as an Ideological Weapon

In addition to this insistence on a guardian-ward relationship between the Party and the artist, both speakers further limit the confines within which a writer in the Soviet Union can exercise his talent. Frequently using military metaphors, they depict the writer as a soldier engaged in mortal combat with the ideological enemy and reduce the function of literature to that of a weapon. The mobilization of culture in para-military fashion quickly dispels the idea that the function of art is to provide an aesthetic rather than a propagandistic purpose. Indeed, according to Sholokhov, the quality of literature is to be measured by the purity and quantity of its ideological content. He proudly asserts:

It is generally recognized, that our literature -- is the most ideological literature. Name one country whose literature can compete with ours in this regard!! One can boldly assert that there is no such country in the world and there is no such literature!

While the utilitarian concept of aesthetics is routine Soviet fare, Chakovsky adds the more extreme touch that a reconciliation of views, ostensibly between the socialist and capitalist worlds but also including nonconformist members of other communist parties ("renegades and revisionists of all shades" says Sholokhov), is impossible.

Since it would be inconvenient to admit that non-conformist views also spring from domestic sources, Chakovsky points to external sources such as foreign newspapers and radio stations. Yet at least one other delegate strongly implies that incorrect

views, in particular nationalistic sentiments, are not only persistent, but are home-grown as well. I.I. Bodyul, the Moldavian Party First Secretary admitted that:

...there is still a penetration into literature and art of works that reflect socialist reality in a distorted manner, and that are far-removed from the vital problems that concern Soviet people. One cannot, for example, consider normal the enthusiasm of some workers in the field of art for the archaic past, for the glorification and poetization in their works of customs and traditions that are long since obsolete, for contrasting them to our present-day, which they not infrequently depict in a prejudiced manner recognizing only the negative aspects of it. Gambling on the respectful attitude of the people for the past, on the feeling of national distinctiveness, the authors of such works in essence propagate the idea of a non-class, uncritical perception of the past and in so doing create the conditions for the activization of harmful remnants, especially amongst the youth, lay the soil for the penetration of points of view and attitudes alien to us into the consciousness of the people. (5)

[Emphasis supplied].

Still concentrating on the foreign enemy, however, Chakovsky projects the vision of a mortal foe, and warns that the struggle will not cease

...while two antagonistic social systems exist, while the ideological battles thunder and the possibility of the penetration of bourgeois ideology into our sphere is not excluded.

The debilitating effect on the quality of literature under such a policy becomes apparent when he describes the type of books he considers suitable for emulation:

...books, infused with the spirit of militant party-mindedness, distinguished by high artistic merit.... books, that are a doubtless contribution to the literary Leniniana, novels, tales and poems in which the popular roots of the Great October [revolution] are portrayed. These are works that comprise the artistic chronicle of the revolutionary transformation of the

country in the 1920s and heroic 1930s, books dedicated to the great strides of the party and the people during the Fatherland War and reflecting the glorious achievements that call forth the admiration of all civilized humanity.

The heavy emphasis on self-congratulation to the exclusion of everything else is reminiscent of the sterility imposed on literature during the heyday of "socialist realism."

### Critics Discouraged

Faced with intransigent writers and dissidents of various, but unacceptable, points of view, the regime has taken sundry measures to decrease the incidence of non-conformity. On the eve of the 24th Congress, moral blackmail was again employed against Alexander Solzhenitsyn, (6) while writer and dissident Vladimir Bukovsky was arrested the day before the congress and faces the prospect of several years incarceration in prison or concentration camp. (7) Doubtlessly eager to silence critics, both Sholokhov and Chakovsky choose disparagement and social ostracism as their means of castigation. Although they refrain from identifying the object of their attacks by name, the former, repeating Brezhnev's phraseology, critically refers to writers "who deserve public scorn" while Chakovsky, in a thinly-veiled attack on Solzhenitsyn, criticizes "those few renegades who exchanged the dignity of a Soviet citizen for cheap popularity in the camp of our class enemies," and raises the spectre of the ubiquitous enemy as a rationale for suppressing all criticism:

...at writers' congresses, at joint plenums of creative societies, at numerous meetings with toilers which were especially frequent prior to the 24th Party Congress, literateurs and artists...[know] that they will be heard not only by their friends but also by foreign enemies who follow their every word in the hope of "profit"...

A strong indication that the conservative views expressed by Sholokhov and Chakovsky are favored by the regime is the re-election of the former as a full member of the Central Committee and the elevation of Chakovsky from an ordinary Party member to that of a candidate member of the Central Committee.



It appears that "public scorn" and the brand of a traitor are the semantic limitations of these two prominent delegates. Yet the real threat of an intensification of physical punishment against non-conformist elements -- be they writers or no -- is not far removed. A provincial Party secretary from the Caucasus, also a delegate at the congress, expresses an intolerant attitude toward "drifters," "drunks," "speculators," thieves," "parasites" and "hooligans" (accusations which are not infrequently used by officials to arrest and silence lesser-known dissidents), (8) criticized "instances of indulgence and liberalism" in the treatment of such types, and rejected out-of-hand any potential arguments for clemency that might be founded on principle or humanitarian grounds:

...one must not be afraid that someone will accuse us of being undemocratic or of inhumaneness. Self-discipline and discipline in our society are the highest category of socialist humanism. (9)

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- (1) At the 23rd CPSU Congress, Sholokhov lamented their lenient punishment, but in doing so also shed interesting light on the quality of Soviet justice in the 1920s:

If these crafty lads with black consciences were around during the memorable 1920s, when people were tried not on the basis of the strictly demarcated articles of the Criminal Code but "guided by a revolutionary sense of justice," oh!, these turncoats would have received a different kind of punishment. (XXIII S"ezd Kommunisticheskoi Partii Sovetskogo Soyuza, Moscow, 1966, p. 358.

- (2) The English translation of Chakovsky's comments in Literaturnaia Gazeta in the spring of 1968 is in Abraham Brumberg (ed.), In Quest of Justice, London, 1970, pp. 379-384.
- (3) Pravda, 4 April 1971.

- (4) Pravda, 6 April 1971.
- (5) Pravda, 4 April 1971.
- (6) The monthly of the RSFSR Writers' Union is reported to have accused him of being an "internal emigre in the service of slippery and unpraiseworthy anti-Sovietism." (UPI, 31 March 1971)
- (7) For reports on his arrest and speculation on his fate, see UPI, AFP, 2 April and the Washington Post, 3 April 1971.
- (8) It should be recalled that the writer Andrei Amalrik was sentenced to 2 1/2 years exile in Siberia with obligatory physical labor in 1964 on the charge of being a "parasite." See "Andrei Amalrik: An Individualist on Trial," CAA, 11 November 1970, by GVD. A similar charge, with a sentence of five years hard labor, was levelled against the poet Yosif Brodsky in 1964.
- (9) Pravda, 2 April 1971.