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TVARDOVSKY UNDER PRESSURE

(See end for summary)

Over the weekend the news from Moscow looked almost as depressing as the news from Prague. It is reliably reported by Agence France Presse, U.P.I. and Reuter that Aleksandr Tvardovsky has been asked to resign from the post of Editor-in-Chief of Novy Mir, and that Yevgeny Yevtushenko, Vasily Aksionov and Viktor Rozov have all been dropped from the editorial board of Yunost. Novy Mir is the most influential revisionist literary magazine in the USSR, and in recent years Yunost has also earned a considerable reputation for liberalism under the able leadership of Boris Polevoi. Le Monde (28 May 1969), however, credibly asserts that Tvardovsky has so far refused to comply.

Evidently the neo-Stalinist writers and apparatchiki have launched a major offensive against the liberal intellectuals, which was carefully timed to coincide with a period of large-scale repression in Prague and with the climate of conformity which the Party would like to bring about in order to face the Czechoslovak-Yugoslav-Rumanian-Italian ideological challenge in the West and the militant, as well as military, threats from China in the East.

Since Tvardovsky is already almost 60 (he was born in 1910) and since he is known to have had a recurrent health problem for two years past, it is quite possible that he eventually will be forced to accept the request for his resignation, which is said to have come from the Secretariat of the Writers' Union. What is not yet known is whether his successor, in that event, would be the Deputy Chief Editor (A.I. Kondratovich), in which case the line of the magazine might well not change appreciably, or whether he

is scheduled to be replaced by a neo-Stalinist, in which case a totally new situation, unprecedented in the past sixteen years, would be brought about. After all Tvardovsky has been fired from his post before, in 1954, as a result of Pomerantsev's trail-blazing revisionist article "On Sincerity in Literature." (1)

On that occasion Konstantin Simonov replaced him, in a similar climate of orthodox attempts to stifle the truth, and of neo-Stalinism in general -- the only course by which the collective leadership then thought that it could remain in power. But Simonov proved to be a tougher supporter of the Novy Mir liberal line than most neo-Stalinists and even most experts in the West had expected. It was he who published Dudintsev's novel "Not by Bread Alone" in Novy Mir in the autumn of 1956. That was the beginning of the discussion of concentration camps, prisons etc. of which Solzhenitsyn is today the leading practitioner.

In late 1956 and early 1957, Simonov was under severe criticism, together with Dudintsev, Granin, and Berggolts. He was compelled to make a sweeping self-criticism (2) in May 1957, and in the following year he was duly replaced as Editor-in-Chief, by none other than Tvardovsky. What seems to have happened is that the liberal tendencies of the majority of the magazine's editorial board and of a section of the Kremlin leadership triumphed over the neo-Stalinist ambitions of the agitprop men who had originally brought about Tvardovsky's first dismissal.

History does not usually repeat itself, but the lesson in this case is too recent and too well-known in the USSR for there to be no attempt at a revival of the anti-dogmatic trends which asserted themselves after the Pomerantsev affair of 1953-54, and culminated in the welcome return of Tvardovsky to his former post.

On the other hand, if a neo-Stalinist is eventually to be forced upon Novy Mir despite the strong liberal tendencies of some of its editors such as Lakshin and Dorosh, one must expect that their resignations too would be submitted soon after the retirement of Tvardovsky. If that were to happen, it would constitute a further success for the Oktyabr group around Kochetov, and might well lead to a complete change in the nature of Novy Mir.

The present board of Novy Mir comprises Tvardovsky, Kondratovich, Khitrov (the executive secretary), Aitmatov,

(1) Novy Mir, December, 1953.

(2) Literary Gazette, 21 May 1967.

Vinogradov, Gamzatov, Dorosh, Kuleshov, Lakshin, Saryamov, Sats, and K.A. Fedin.

It would probably require the replacement of at least three of these men, perhaps more, before the liberal image of Novy Mir could be seriously altered for the worse.

Yunost

For neo-Stalinists Yunost is at least as intractable a problem as Novy Mir. In 1963 its circulation was only 600,000 a month, whereas today it is 2,100,000 a month (cf that of Oktyabr, about 130,000 a month). This astonishing boom has been brought about largely by Boris Polevoi, its Chief Editor, who has been repeatedly criticized in the orthodox press ever since 1963. (3) But it is also due to the liberalizing influence exerted by Rozov, Yevtushenko and Aksionov, who in 1963 was sent out to a construction project in Siberia "to get closer to life," while Yevtushenko was dispatched at about the same time to Archangel. (4) In 1963 it was partly the demands of peaceful coexistence and partly the exigencies of the Sino-Soviet quarrel which led, in a remarkably short space of time, to the return of Yevtushenko to acceptance by the Party establishment.

The orthodox view of Yunost's literary line is worse than bleak. It was summed up by Komsomolskaya Pravda (5) as follows:

The editorial board greatly likes the adventures of notorious "lads" who, when they make an impression on the reader, do so primarily by their tough stilyagi slang, their predilection for cognac, and their cowboy flamboyance in matters of sex.

For seven long years, Yevtushenko, Aksionov, and Polevoi have succeeded in maintaining this reputation for Yunost, and they have raised its circulation in that period to ten times that of the Komsomol literary periodical, Molodaya Gvardiya (now running at 220,000 copies a month). Hence the Oktyabr group and the board of Molodaya Gvardiya have every reason to be seriously alarmed, because their

- (3) E.g. Izvestia, 6 February 1963.
- (4) Literaturnaya Rossiya, 2 August 1963.
- (5) 22 March 1963.

own inability to attract the bulk of the young readership in the USSR is being dramatically demonstrated with every passing month.

Unita has suggested that one of the replacements for the Yevtushenko-Aksionov-Rozov trio may prove to be Robert Rozhdestvensky. He is now only about 36 years old, but as long ago as 1963 he appeared to be defending Yevtushenko in his poetry. (6) The party's literary experts are believed to regard him as being more orthodox and less independent than Yevtushenko, but their memories should recall that they also held that opinion about Simonov when they selected him to replace Tvardovsky in 1954.

Khrushchev himself has commented on the defects in Rozhdestvensky's ideological reliability:

We have heard the poet Rozhdestvensky speak here and argue against the poem "No, Boys!" by Gribachev. (7) Comrade Rozhdestvensky's speech was imbued with the thought that the feelings of our youth are expressed solely by a group of young authors, and that they are the mentors of our youth. That is certainly mistaken. Our Soviet youth has been brought up by our party, it follows the party and sees in the Party its teacher and leader. (8)

Aleksandr Prokofiev, a member of the dogmatic wing who is also on the Board of the Union of Writers, betrayed his dislike and jealousy of Rozhdestvensky when he criticized the latter as being part of the Yevtushenko-Voznesensky group:

.... Mountains of paper are devoted to the works of Yevtushenko and Voznesensky -- a group of four or five people. There has not been a single magazine, a single newspaper, not a single publication which did not eulogize anything concerning Yevtushenko, Voznesensky, Akhmadullina, and Rozhdestvensky...." (9)

(6) See Pravda, 26 March 1963, and Yunost, No. 3, 1963.

(7) One of the worst of the orthodox writers. (8)

(8) Pravda, 10 March 1963.

(9) Literary Gazette, 28 March 1963.

Hence if the cultural apparatchiki think that much will change as a result of replacing any one of the departing trio by Rozhdestvensky, they may soon be sadly disillusioned. The board of Yunost was in April 1969 composed as follows:

Chief Editor: B.N. Polevoi

First Deputy Chief Editor: S.N. Preobrazhensky

Editorial Board: V.P. Aksionov, E.B. Vishnyakov, V.I. Voronov (deputy chief editor), V.N. Gorayev, Ye. A. Yevtushenko, L.A. Zheleznov

(executive secretary), G.A. Medynsky, M.P. Prilezhayeva, V.S. Rozov.

Just as the change from, let us say, Yevtushenko to Rozhdestvensky would not be tantamount to a major alteration of outlook, so it is equally possible that the replacements for the other two men might turn out to be men of the Rozhdestvensky type. It will be early enough to examine that question when it is known who they are, but as in the case of Novy Mir, it might well require the infiltration of about three neo-Stalinists on to the board before a significant shift towards conservatism could be forced upon Yunost. An attempt of that sort would not be easy in the face of the probable opposition of Polevoi and his liberal-oriented colleagues who, whatever misgivings they may entertain about the capacity of Yevtushenko and Aksionov for desk work, are not likely to be willing to sacrifice the influence and prestige of Yunost's vast circulation to the orthodox ambitions of the neo-Stalinists.

The conclusion would seem to be that as long as Tvardovsky is in his present post and unless and until it can be shown that his eventual successor is not another Simonov, it is premature to proclaim any major victory for the dogmatic wing of the writers. As for Yunost, the difference between a Yevtushenko and a Rozhdestvensky might easily prove to be less than is thought in the West. The future policy of the magazine would only be seriously affected by more numerous and more drastic editorial changes than this, probably involving the enforced resignation of Boris Polevoi. At present there is little indication that any such major change is in the offing, although there is every reason to believe that it is what Kochetov would seek to achieve. In practice, Soviet

literary policy is usually far more centralist, depending on a balance of forces between the dogmatists and the revisionists, than it appears to be on the surface. Yunost seems to have been forced to take three strides towards orthodoxy, but of the new editors Rozhdestvensky is an improbable supporter of neo-Stalinist policies, while the successors for the other two are still unknown quantities.

Chief Editor: E.N. Polevoi

Summary: Reports from Moscow claim that the resignation of Tvardovsky, editor of Novy Mir, has been demanded by the Secretariat of the Soviet Union of Writers. Le Monde, however, asserts that Tvardovsky has refused to comply. This paper recalls the history of the last occasion on which Tvardovsky was fired (1954), an operation which conspicuously failed to change the liberal posture of Novy Mir. The same story may be about to be repeated. The paper also discusses the removal of three liberals from the board of Yunost (Yevtushenko, Rozov and Aksionov), but points out that the only reported replacement (Rozhdestvensky) is a man of a distinctly non-dogmatic frame of mind. Until the names of the other two new editors for Yunost are known, it is far too soon to assume that a drastic change of line must be anticipated in the near future. Before that happens Polevoi would probably have to be forced to resign.

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