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12 NOVEMBER 1957

RFE NEWS & INFORMATION SERVICE - EVALUATION & RESEARCH SECTION

FULL TRANSLATION OF REVAI ARTICLE ON SOVIET CULTURE

This is a complete translation of the article by Jozsef REVAI entitled: "Comments on the World Significance of Soviet Culture," published in the Hungarian Party daily "Nepszabadsag" of 7 November 1957. Cf. REVAI's article "Ideological Purity" in "Nepszabadsag" of 7 March 1957, full translation of which was published by the Evaluation & Research Section on March 14, also Background Report on REVAI, published March 15.

One cannot emphasize sufficiently and often enough that the theoretical and practical starting-point of Soviet culture, of the flourishing of new Soviet culture was and has remained the raising of the cultural level of the widest working masses.

In the course of a conversation with Klara Zetkin on new socialist art, Lenin stated: "It is of no importance what art gives to a few hundreds or even thousands of the whole mass of the population numbering several millions. Art belongs to the people, its roots have to be supplanted among the thicket of the wide working masses. Art has to become intelligible and likeable to these masses, it has to intertwine the feelings, thoughts and will of these masses and lift them. Art has to awaken and develop the artist in them. Do we have to serve tasty, sweet biscuits to a dwarf minority while the worker and peasant masses are vegetating on black bread? I mean this not only in the actual sense of the word but also figuratively: we always have to keep the workers and peasants in mind. We have to learn to cope and to render account for their sake. This also applies to art and culture. In order that art should become near to the people and the people to art we must, first of all, raise the standard of general culture and the universal cultural standard."

Already, several decades earlier, in 1905, Lenin had expounded the same ideas in his programmatic article entitled "Party Organization and Party literature". In it he contrasts "literature attached to the bourgeoisie" with "really free literature which openly attaches itself to the proletariat". He says: "This will be a free literature because socialist ideals and sympathy with the workers recruit new forces into its ranks and not opportunism and careerism. Further, it will be a free literature because it will not serve a heroine tired of life, the "upper ten thousand", bored and suffering from corpulence, but the millions and tens of millions of workers who are the flower, strength and future of the country."

The world significance of Soviet culture lies in the fact that it is founded on this Leninist idea, according to which culture (including art) should serve the millions and tens of millions of workers and not the upper ten thousand. What the USSR has done during the past 40 years to put the Leninist idea into effect and to ensure that the flourishing of culture (including art) should take place on the basis of a general rise of the cultural standard of the huge masses is well known. It became evident and has been proved during the past four decades that there is a way out of "the crisis of culture" about which representatives of the Western bourgeois intelligentsia — and not the worst of them — have been complaining for several decades, and this is the sole way out: to re-unite culture and the people, the roads of which, with the formation of class society and the development of the social division of labor — which in turn implied the separation of physical and intellectual work — parted many thousands of years ago. The whole socialist cultural policy of the USSR has served this re-union, from the liquidation of illiteracy to the ten years' of compulsory school education, also from the introduction of technical high-school training to a degree of development of training engineers and scientists with which



not even the most highly developed capitalist countries (Great Britain and the US) can catch up, and which is the basis of Soviet technical and scientific results admired all over the world.

The fundamental reason and explanation of the development of Soviet culture and science lie in the fact that the selection of the creators and developers of culture and science is carried out in the USSR on a very wide basis; they are chosen from among the hundreds of thousands of talents and creators emerging from the masses of the people, for which there is no means and endeavor in any of the capitalist countries. The secret of the results and of the increasing supremacy of the new socialist culture is the inexhaustible people's reservoir from which the State draws the creators and the replacements of the new culture.

In Hungary a considerable part of the intelligentsia, particularly the literary and artistic intelligentsia, has been brought up in the spirit of the so-called "popular trend". The "Popular ideology" was able to gain power over the way of thought of many well-intentioned people among the intelligentsia, who sincerely wished to serve the cause of progress, because the road of the "popular trend" appeared to be a kind of middle way, a "third Road", on which it seemed possible to oppose both the old capitalist system of landowners and the new socialist system. We do not wish at present to criticize every aspect of the "third road" ideology, we merely wish to stress its inconsistency toward its own ideals. What kind of "popular trend" is it which shuts its eyes before the sensational process of the socialist rebirth and flourishing of culture which the whole world has been witnessing for 40 years and which is taking place in the USSR under the leadership of the revolutionary workers' class and its Marxist-Leninist Party on a really "popular" basis. To talk about a "popular trend" and to ignore the really "popular" bases of socialist, Soviet culture is equivalent to being blind and cowardly.

Speaking about the world significance of culture, one has to point out the novelty which Soviet literature and art has contributed to the development of literature and art, i.e. socialist realism. Socialist realism in our country, before and during the October counter-revolution, came under the "critical" cross-fire of counter-revolutionary reaction and revisionism. There have been, and probably still are, writers, critics and aesthetes, calling themselves Communists, who reject socialist realism and merely consider it a temporary slogan which arose accidentally and which was invented by comrade Zhdanov on the occasion of the first congress of Soviet writers in 1934. We must state at long last with complete firmness and without ambiguity that revisionist and other reactionary attacks against "Zhdanovism" were not directed against Zhdanov or the ideas expounded by him but against the fundamental Leninist ideas applied to literature and art. The principle of socialist realism was laid down for the first time by Lenin in 1905 and not by Zhdanov in 1934. The epoch-making article, entitled "Party Organization and Party Literature", in which Lenin explains for the first time the principle of literary Party-mindedness, in the essentials laid down the fundamental principles of socialist realism.

According to Lenin, really free literature which is closely and strongly linked with the revolutionary workers' movement

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and the workers' Party "has to tear itself away within bourgeois society from bourgeois slavery and has to become united with the progressive and revolutionary class". This literature, Lenin maintains, does not only and primarily become free by taking a share in the organized, planned and homogeneous work of the revolutionary workers' Party, but by "rendering the recent results of the revolutionary ideas of humanity fruitful with the experience and active work of the socialist proletariat. This establishes a permanent reciprocal effect between past and present experiences".

By Party literature, i.e. free literature, Lenin meant a literature which not only gets rid of the police censorship of Czarism but also of capitalist dependence and which turns against "bourgeois-intellectual individualism". Lenin's repeated references to the fact that socialist Party literature has to detach itself from and turn against bourgeois-anarchistic individualism cannot be regarded accidental. These references prove that Lenin wanted to show, in a general outline, at least one essential characteristic of socialist literature, or in other words, socialist realism as opposed to bourgeois literature (including bourgeois realism.) Lenin's views about Party literature prove that he did not regard socialist literature, i.e. socialist realism, simply as the continuation or development of bourgeois realism or even of critical realism, but — in the sense of turning against bourgeois individualism — as a break with and to a certain extent a breaking away from bourgeois (including critical) realism.

In our country it has been a habit and fashionable for a time to forget, under the effect of the ideological pressure of counter-revolutionary revisionism, this characteristic of socialist realism; those concerned mainly emphasized the issues which were common in socialist and literary realism, forgetting and keeping silent about the issues in which socialist realism differs from every bourgeois-type realism. Yet it is evident that at present, when merely the nursing and support of the first steps of the new socialist literary culture, the first buds of socialist realism, are at stake, the chief task is to emphasize the divergences from and not the similarities with bourgeois realism, i.e. to stress the novelty which socialist realism represents against every old literary trend.

It is high time now, on the 40th anniversary of the October revolution, to recall that this is the issue in which we have so far repelled and exposed the mendacious views of revisionism with least success and in which we have least defended the fundamental principles of socialist realism, elaborated for the first time by Lenin and not Zhdanov. It is not accidental that our literary and aesthetic revisionists, when attacking "Zhdanovism", guard against trying to rely on the aesthetic views of Maxim Gorky, the greatest figure and founder of socialist realism, in order to prove their reactionary standpoints. For Gorky does not bear testimony on their side but on that of the Leninist literary principles of socialist realism, which the revisionists call "Zhdanovism". At the first congress of Soviet writers in 1934 Gorky was, besides and with Zhdanov, the chief defender and propagator of socialist realism. Similar to and in the wake of Lenin Gorky also analyzes the new socialist literature by setting it against bourgeois realism and by stating the differences existing between the two. He does not only set socialist realism

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against bourgeois realism in general but also against critical realism, the merits and relative historical significance of which he acknowledges and greatly appreciates.

It has turned out, Gorky declared at the first congress of Soviet writers, that the human being, whatever queer ideas he has of himself, is a social being and not cosmic, like a satellite. And then it turned out that individualism, which has developed into egocentrism, creates "superfluous people". On critical realism Gorky said: "The chief topic of European and Soviet literature of the 19th century has been the individual opposed to society, State and nature... It has rarely happened that the revolting individual has criticized the existing regime because he has rightly and deeply understood the significance of economic and social reasons; for the most part his criticism of the existing order has been called forth by having realized the hopelessness of his existence in the narrow cage of capitalism, or by wanting to avenge the failure of his life, his humiliation... The fundamental and chief topic of the pre-revolutionary literature was the drama of man who has found life too confined, feels himself superfluous in society, tries but fails to find his place in it, suffers and perishes...."

Gorky explained point-blank why critical realism is unsuitable to illustrate socialist reality and the new man building socialism. "We have to understand that critical realism has come about as the individual creation of the "superfluous men". These men have been unable to struggle for life, they have not found a place for themselves in it.

"We do not deny at all that critical realism has carried out a great and extensive task... We have to understand that we absolutely need this realism in throwing light on the remnants of the past, in fighting and eliminating them.

"Yet this form of realism does not and cannot serve for the education of the socialist individual as it criticizes everything and does not approve of anything, or -- worse -- it returns to the affirmation of what it has denied."

I think it is timely to recall that it would be useful to return both in our literary creative and directing work to these simple and yet clear fundamental principles of socialist realism, revealed by Lenin and put into a positive form by Gorky. We, who by remedying the numerous mistakes and inflexibilities of the cultural (and literary) policy of the past, must endeavor, through re-uniting the broken threads, to give fresh incentive to the development of the socialist-realist Hungarian literature which illustrates our new socialist reality and which educates (or is destined to educate) the new socialist man, must give heed to the question-posing of Gorky, who, while criticizing bourgeois literature and expounding the tasks of socialist-realist literature, raised not accidentally, but by exposing the essence of the issue, the problem of the various literary hero-types -- the individualist "superfluous man" opposing society, and the critic in revolt -- and the fact that in order to help to educate the new man, who is being formed in life and in the work of socialist construction, socialist realism has to seize and illustrate the new hero-type of life and of the new reality.

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Finally the world significance of Soviet culture lies in the fact -- whatever revisionists wishing to return to bourgeois culture may say against socialist realism -- that it sets as an example to decent and thinking men, seeking to free themselves of the contradictions and ideological misery of the old world, of its crises and blind-alleys, the new socialist man who, by getting assimilated with the socialist community and working for its good, is at the same time the builder of his own happiness and harmonious life.

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It is not only literature which is at stake here but also the position and future of the intellectual in the transitory period between capitalism and socialism and in the socialist future. For behind the difference existing between the creative principles and hero-types of bourgeois and socialist realism lies, in the final analysis, the problem of the relationship of the working people and the intelligentsia -- as shown by Gorky. The process of the formation of the "superfluous man" started with the separation of physical and intellectual work.

"The process of social and cultural development," says Gorky, "makes normal progress only when first the hand is teaching the head, followed by the instructed head teaching the hand and then the skilful hand again and more powerfully promoting the development of the brain. This normal process of the cultural development of human work was already interrupted in the primitive age. The head became detached from the hand, the thought from the earth". Consequently head and hand have to be brought together again, thought and work have to be re-united. This old Marxist idea contains the final solution to the contradictions of intellectual existence. Socialism will for once and all put an end to the tormenting isolation of the intellectual and will resolve the contradictions existing between the intelligentsia and the working people. The thinking and honest part of the intelligentsia has always felt the tormenting contradiction which has been its lot within capitalist society: in its efforts and ideals it wanted to serve all the people, the whole nation, the whole of mankind, yet in fact it was the means of capitalist exploitation and of oppressing the people.

Intellectual individualism, which comprises breaking away from the people and opposition to class society, is strictly speaking the futile defense of the individual who is reduced to himself against force. At the same time intellectual individualism is another bar set up by the intelligentsia between itself and the people. Free development of the individual and the unlimited development of his capabilities have been the baits with which the bourgeoisie has cajoled the intelligentsia to its side, to make it support bourgeois society, and with which it wanted (not without success) to build a dividing wall between the people and the intelligentsia.



It turned out long ago that ideals of the unlimited development of the individual cannot be realized in a bourgeois society, on the contrary, the reverse is true. Soviet men and with them the self-conscious workers of the world (and last but not least the best intellectuals) realize that the bourgeoisie has shamefully betrayed the ideal of the unlimited development of the individual. This, at the beginning of bourgeois development, still idealistic individualism, turned into brutal selfishness: the merciless restriction and oppression of the personality and putting the majority of the people into fetters.

The new socialist man fights against the brutal individualism of the bourgeoisie yet does not deny, on the contrary, understands the justification of that individualism which voluntarily and readily joins in with the community. Soviet culture is the culture of this new, socialist individualism. This culture is a single, great appeal and message to the intelligentsia of the whole world: that it should join the forces which we building the new world as only in this way can it save what it loses and compromises bourgeois society, i.e. free human personality which obtains the conditions of its unlimited development and of the development of its many-sided capabilities in the service of the community. Forty years of Soviet development show that for the elimination of differences between the intelligentsia and the people it is not necessary to await the complete and final demolition of the dividing wall between physical and intellectual work. These differences can become smaller, the intelligentsia can become more and more united with the people if it helps in the latter's gigantic work of building a new world.

End.