

the Sukharevka market bustled with trade to the dismay of the more ascetic Communists. To its shoppers it was a veritable feast for the eyes, as a visitor reported:

Everywhere you look is an agitated, noisy human crowd, buying and selling. The various types of trade are grouped together. Here currencies are bought and sold, there the food products; further along, textiles, tobacco, cafes and restaurants, booksellers, dishes, finished dresses, all sorts of old junk, and so on.... Urchins scurry all about with kvass [a beer-like drink made from bread]—huge bottles of red, yellow, or green liquid in which float a few slices of lemon. One million rubles a glass [this at a time of runaway inflation]. Everyone drinks this poison from the same glass.

The tide turned again in 1927 when state regulation on private trade increased. With the swing in 1928–29 toward collectivization of agriculture and a planned economy, the state cracked down hard on the private traders. The government raised taxes, confiscated the goods of the Nepmen, and closed their shops. The merchants were driven from state housing and their children expelled from schools of higher learning. By 1930 even private medical and dental clinics and barbershops were forbidden. Private trade was condemned as “speculation,” a crime that by 1932 could result in five to ten years in a labor camp and loss of property.

THE RED ARMY

Millions of people, mostly peasants, had gone into the Red Army during the civil war. Their hardening in battle was also a kind of political education. At one point half the Communist Party served in the army, and over two hundred thousand party members died in the fighting. When the war ended, some 5 million Red Army men and women were demobilized and had to be absorbed into civilian society. Some found work in the state and party apparatus, about 562,000 remained in the small central standing army, and another million and a half participated in regional militias, but millions returned to their villages, where they became an important link between Soviet power and the peasantry. Here they found work as local police officers, soviet officials, village correspondents, or reintegrated into local life as library workers, administrators, and activist peasants.

At the war's end the old socialist suspicions of standing armies resurfaced. Some Communists, like Nikolai Podvoiskii, wanted to resurrect the idea of a people's militia, but the army commanders, most importantly Commissar of War Frunze, defended the need for a regular army by raising the specter of a possible attack on the Soviet republics from the capitalist West. The army was preserved but not without significant reforms. In 1923–24 the government worked with top officers to increase discipline and morale among the ranks, reduce the power of political commissars and “military specialists” in the army, and improve the living standards of officers. The army once again became a respectable career for many upwardly mobile young men.

The army was more than just the military force defending the country against its enemies. It was a school for socialism in the countryside. The largest state institution, the army of peasants in uniform that had brought the Bolsheviks to power and defended the “workers’ state” in the civil war became in the 1920s one of the state's principal links to the rest of the population. The Red Army was a huge welfare agency for its soldiers and their families. Not only did it provide health benefits and housing credits, it also carried out a vast educational effort to turn hundreds of thousands of soldiers into literate, cultured citizens. The army, thus, worked to create a large group of loyal supporters with a sense of patriotic duty and dedication to the new socialist order. In this way it was also a school for nationalism, at least for the particular Soviet variant of nonethnic supranational patriotism.

The army was one of the institutions of the Soviet state that reached farthest into the countryside. Disturbed by its lack of authority in the villages, where many local soviets were run by peasants who disregarded the policies of the central state, the government put forth former soldiers in the local elections in 1926 and won half the seats in the district executive committees, one-third in the rural soviets, and more than one-half of the chairmanships of those soviets. These new officials had all gone through a common experience and education in the military, and their mentality as well as their careers were tied to the further development of the Soviet system. The army, as the long arm of the state, would be powerfully flexed at the end of the 1920s when tens of thousands of soldiers were mobilized to drive the peasants into the collective farms.

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THE NEW SOVIET MAN AND WOMAN

Part of the appeal of Marxism came from its utopianism, its vision that under communism a new society without violence and class conflict would be built and within it a new human being would be created. The most extravagant statement of that hope was expressed by Trotsky in an elegant passage at the end of his *Literature and Revolution* (1924), where he described life under the highest stage of communism:

Man will become immeasurably stronger, wiser and subtler; his body will become more harmonized, his movements more rhythmic, his voice more musical. The forms of life will be dynamically dramatic. The average human type will rise to the heights of an Aristotle, a Goethe, or a Marx. And above this ridge new peaks will rise.

The achievement of a more just, egalitarian, nonexploitative society was based on the prior achievement of material abundance. The abolition of competition and greed, the elevation of cooperation, was contingent on the end of shortages. Yet the first self-proclaimed socialist government came to power in one of the most backward parts of Europe, in a country beset by hunger, disease, and poverty. The material base for the vision did not exist, but that did not stop the most radical

elements in the party and intelligentsia from pursuing their dreams of democracy and egalitarianism.

The tension between the utopia of freedom and justice and the reality of backwardness and poverty was most evident in the policies and practices of the Soviet party-state that affected women, private life, and the family. Here a small group of activist Communists attempted to institute a radical transformation of the subordinate position of women. Marxists began with a belief in the historical mutability of human nature and the family. Not completely consistently, Marxists believed that the family was both a natural and a social relationship. Marx had written that the first division of labor was in the family, between men and women. Women's maternal function, the reproduction of the species, created the conditions for women's oppression, and only the communal organization of domestic chores would liberate women from their burdens within the home. In his famous work *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State* (1884), Engels concluded that the nuclear family with its male dominance was not natural and necessary, that communal marriages had preceded nuclear families, and that monogamy was based "on the subjugation of one sex by the other." Capitalism had transformed the family, bringing women into the world of wage labor. Though its effects on family life were destructive, the economic fruits of capitalism, nevertheless, made possible the liberation of women. Under socialism housework would be turned into social work.

The most influential Marxist writer on gender questions was the German worker-socialist August Bebel, who in 1879 published *Women and Socialism*. He proposed that sexuality was a natural impulse, like hunger or thirst, and should not be treated as moral or immoral. "What I eat and drink, how I sleep and dress is my private affair, and my private affair also is my intercourse with a person of the opposite sex." Under capitalism sexuality had been distorted, and marriage had become a "forced relationship." Socialism would change that and permit a "free union of love." Among Russian socialists the "women's question" was usually subordinated to other issues, as in Nadezhda Krupskaya's essay "The Woman Worker," where she argued that female liberation depended on the liberation of all workers from the oppression of capitalism and autocracy. In general Marxists were more concerned about production than reproduction. Production was public, but reproduction was private, in the home, a female issue that was neglected in favor of matters considered more important.

A singular exception to the neglect of gender issues among Russian Marxists was the work of Aleksandra Kollontai (1872–1952), who had been inspired by the oppression of women to join the Social Democratic movement. Kollontai abandoned her husband and small son to become a full-time revolutionary and organize women workers. Constantly coming up against the indifference or even hostility of male socialists, Kollontai grafted the sexually libertarian ideas of the Russian radical intelligentsia onto the sparse references to sexuality found in Western Marxist literature. All the male writers on this topic, from Marx and Engels to Bebel and Karl Kautsky, were firm monogamists. They wanted marriages

based on love rather than compulsion, but they remained committed, at least publicly, to marriage. Kollontai proposed a new "proletarian morality" in place of "bourgeois marriage." By this she meant that sexual union based on love could exist outside marriage, though she was careful to warn against promiscuity. Socialism alone could bring full freedom to women, for it could make them economically independent and politically equal and give them state and social support for raising children. Sex would be better under socialism! Kollontai was not a political feminist who saw women's issues separate from the socialist movement in general. Women, like men, were in her view divided by class, and she was hostile to middle-class feminists who ignored social questions like the dependency of working-class women.

The Russian Revolution opened opportunities for a new agenda for women. After February the Provisional Government granted women the vote for the first time, and after October the Soviet government steadily dismantled the whole edifice of tsarist family law. Under the old regime marriage and divorce had been left to the churches. A wife was obligated to obey her husband, to live with him, take his name, and assume his social status. Up to 1914 a woman could not take a job or enroll for further education without her husband's consent. The husband was obligated to support his wife according to his status and abilities. A father had almost unlimited power over his children for life, and parental consent was required before a child could marry. Divorce was almost impossible according to the teachings of the Orthodox Church. Only in cases of impotence, prolonged absence, or adultery witnessed by two or more people would the Church allow divorce. A woman had only a few rights. She could control her dowry, special purchases, and gifts and hold property separately from her husband. But an illegitimate child had no legal rights and up to 1902 could not be adopted or recognized without explicit imperial consent.

The early record of the Soviet state in the area of female liberation was mixed. The intentions and legislative record were the most progressive of any major country, but their actual effects on the position and power of women were meager. Lenin became the first head of state to address a woman's congress, at which delegates cheered the suggestion that the derogatory Russian word for a woman, *baba*, be outlawed. Already, in December 1917, the state had mandated the principle of equal pay for equal work and granted paid maternity leaves for women workers. Marriage was secularized, and common-law marriages were legally recognized. The language of submission and dominance in the marriage ceremony was eliminated, and spouses were free to choose either the name of the wife or the husband or a combination of the two. Soon "Red weddings" replaced church weddings for dedicated Communists. Complete sexual equality in marriage was declared the law of the land. The first Soviet constitution, in July 1918, declared men and women equal, and the soviets adopted a new code of family laws. Divorce was simplified to the point that mutual consent meant immediate divorce. If only one party wanted divorce, a brief court hearing was held. No grounds for divorce had to be stated, no evidence presented, and no witnesses heard. The courts then decided

matters of property and children. Alimony was granted to either party if he or she was needy. No distinctions were made between children born in or out of wedlock. The whole concept of “illegitimate children” was eliminated. This most radical family law in Europe was extended in 1920 when abortion was legalized—fifty-three years before *Roe v. Wade* in the United States—and the costs of abortion were borne by the state.

Yet women did not reach positions of power in either the state or the party. Women Bolsheviks organized the Women’s Section of the party (Zhenotdel) in 1919 with the Franco-Russian socialist Inessa Armand as its first director. The party saw Zhenotdel as the representative of the party among women, but Kollontai and others saw it as the representative of women’s interests within the party and state. Well over seventy thousand women fought for the Reds in the civil war, though few held high rank. The political commissar Zemliachka, however, cut her hair short, wore boots, pants, and leather coat and proved to be as tough in meting out punishment as the men with whom she worked. Kollontai became the first female people’s commissar (of public welfare) and later the first female ambassador in history (to Norway). Still, women were less likely to be admitted to the Communist Party than men. Since the party recruited the more skilled and literate workers and women fell heavily in the less-skilled category, admission to the party simply reproduced the inequities within society. Only seven women, among them Kollontai and Krupskaya, sat on the Central Committee in the years before World War II. In the 1930s women held only one-sixth of the administrative posts in the party, mostly at the lower levels. In 1932 just over 16 percent of party members were female. Female delegates to party congresses until 1939 never reached 10 percent of the total.

Even more telling was the failure to implement the Marxist social program so essential to the emancipation of women. Lenin polemicized against housework as “petty and containing nothing that can in any way further the development of women.” He called for the creation of daycare centers, communal kitchens, and other institutions to free women from compulsory labor in the home. Bukharin spoke of the family as “the most conservative stronghold of all the squalors of the old regime,” and Kollontai declared, “The family ceases to be necessary.” Society was to take over the bringing up of children. During the civil war labor shortages drew millions of women into the workforce, but the social services needed to provide for home and children were woefully inadequate.

The social disruptions of the world war, revolution, civil war, and postwar famines that had left 16 million people in the Soviet world dead hit women and children hardest. Besides homelessness and unemployment, poverty and economic dislocation led to the growth of prostitution. The immensity of these problems undermined the position of those who advocated the weakening of the family. Many poorer working-class and peasant women were unhappy with the easy divorce rules and the loose marriage practices of the early 1920s, and peasants in particular spoke out against marriages unsanctioned by church or ceremony. A few party leaders, such as Mikhail Kalinin, pulled back from the radicalism of

the early years and argued that law should not move too far ahead of the mass of the people.

In 1926 a new Family Law Code was issued. Personal relations were freed as much as possible from legal interference. The new law code made divorce even easier. Either party could simply declare a divorce and notify the other by postcard. As a result, divorce doubled in 1927. The law recognized extramarital sex as legitimate and in no way punishable, and extended alimony to wives of common-law marriages. Particularly controversial was the extension of all legal rights to de facto unregistered marriages. One activist woman complained, “Some men have twenty wives; they live with one for a week, another for two, and leave each one with a child!” The divorce rate in Russia was fast becoming the highest in Europe, three times above that of Germany and twenty-six times higher than in England and Wales. In Moscow one out of every two marriages ended in divorce.

With all the rights they had received in law, women were not doing well in the years of the NEP. Divorced and single women were often left with children. Men often failed to pay child support. Unemployment remained high for women, and women’s pay was only about 65 percent of that of men in the mid-1920s. Officials repeatedly delayed the building of childcare centers or socialized dining halls and gave little attention or support to the development of contraception. In Muslim areas Communist activists used women as a “surrogate proletariat” to pry apart the patriarchal society, which the party sought to dismantle. In the steppes of Central Asia and the mountains of Caucasia women wore the veil or the *chadra*, a full covering from head to toe, were kept from public activity, and denied education. The party enrolled activist women to lead the way in unveiling Muslim women and to explain elementary ideas of cleanliness, contraception, and childcare. The campaign opened new opportunities for women of the East, and the first female brigade leaders and tractor drivers were celebrated in stories and films. But more traditional Central Asian and Caucasian men turned on the Bolshevik women. Azerbaijani men attacked a Zhenotdel meeting in Baku with wild dogs and boiling water. In Central Asia a twenty-year-old woman who had dared wear a bathing suit was sliced to pieces by her father and brothers. By the early 1930s the Communists pulled back from this frontal attack on Muslim practices and took a more gradualist approach through education and persuasion.

The attempts to liberate women were heroic. Largely carried out by women themselves, they often found little support from male party members. Sadly, the utopian plans for rapid emancipation withered before a harsh reality. The society and state were too poor to realize fully their ambitious plans, and resistance from patriarchal peasants who clung to traditional family patterns overwhelmed the urban radicals. With tens of thousands of orphans roaming the streets and roads, the idea of weakening the family unit further or collectivizing childrearing on a mass scale seemed perverse. Ordinary women and the peasants in general pushed for limiting divorce, fighting male promiscuity, and enforcing the laws on alimony. In the next decade many of their demands would be reflected in the family policies of the Stalinist regime that reversed the radical legislation of the 1920s.

RELIGIOUS WARS

Atheism had long been part of the Russian revolutionary movement, as it had been for international Marxism. From the time of Marx, Social Democrats opposed religion as the “opiate of the people,” a form of deception and false consciousness, from which people had to be liberated. Marxism was defiantly a secular humanism dedicated to the full realization of human potential on Earth. Atheism and antireligious feeling were compounded by anticlericalism, opposition to the official church and its priests, which grew in intensity during the revolution and civil war. At the time of the revolution the Russian Orthodox church had almost 55,000 churches, 57,000 priests and deacons, 1,500 monasteries with almost ninety-five thousand monks, nuns, and novices. With the abdication of the last tsar, the church convened an all-Russian council, the Sobor, to restore the patriarchate that had been abolished two hundred years earlier by Peter the Great. The newly elected patriarch, Metropolitan Tikhon of Moscow, proved to be an implacable enemy of the Soviet state, and in January 1918 he anathematized the Bolsheviks, calling them “outcasts of the human race.” The Soviets replied by disestablishing the church, that is, ending its privileged connection to the state, and eliminating religious instruction from schools.

Church and state were henceforth to be separate, and the Soviet Constitution of 1918 declared that there would be freedom of both religious and antireligious propaganda. A year later the party program warned that insulting religious believers would only lead to greater religious fanaticism. Many Communists, however, were anticlerical zealots, and while the fierce battles of the civil war raged, some turned their anger against priests and monks. Most priests favored the Whites over the Reds, and a few even fought against the Bolsheviks. Trotsky spoke of religion as “the principal moral arm of the bourgeoisie,” and antagonizing or harming priests, called “priest-eating,” remained popular with many party members. Church lands were seized, monasteries ransacked, and members of the clergy murdered. It was estimated that by 1923 twenty-eight bishops and more than a thousand priests had been killed.

Soviet policy toward the church vacillated between harsh opposition and halfhearted efforts at conciliation. In June 1921 the state declared that no religious instruction was permitted to groups of people over eighteen years of age. In March 1922 the government, desperately in need of money to aid the economic recovery and alleviate famine, demanded that gold, silver, and other precious objects be handed over by the church. The patriarch ordered resistance, and a virtual war broke out between the party and the church. When the Politburo decided to delay confiscations, Lenin urged using firing squads against the religious rebels. Priests and laypersons were tried for counterrevolution, and some were executed. The patriarch himself was put under house arrest. A number of priests opposed the hard line taken by the church hierarchy toward the state, broke with Tikhon, and formed the “Living Church,” which supported the October Revolution and began to reap the benefits of state backing. Trotsky called the new church



Figure 7.3 Removing the bells from the Cathedral of Christ Our Savior, 1930. A year later Stalin demolished the cathedral (RIA Novosti).

“an ecclesiastical NEP.” The state turned churches over to the insurgents, who soon controlled almost two-thirds of the parishes in Russia. But fearful of the effects on the peasants of the hostility between the church and the government, the Communists soon backed down. When the patriarch confessed to “hostility to the Soviet authorities and anti-Soviet acts,” he was released from arrest and fully reinstated. The state in turn lessened its support for the Living Church, which soon withered. Tikhon died in 1925, and Metropolitan Sergei of Moscow attempted a reconciliation with the Soviets. In 1927 he proclaimed:

We wish to be Orthodox and at the same time to claim the Soviet Union as our civil motherland, the joys and successes of which are our joys and successes, the misfortunes of which are our misfortunes. . . . Remaining Orthodox, we remember our duty to be citizens of the Union “not from fear, but from conscience,” as the Apostle has taught us (Romans 13:5).

Sergei's accommodation with the state was widely rejected by the faithful. Ninety percent of the churches refused to disseminate his proclamation, and the government was forced to publish it in *Izvestiia*. A new schism loomed when dissident priests formed an oppositional group of believers known as the Tikhonites. The Soviets now supported the official Orthodox Church against the more conservative dissidents.

But the Communists never gave up their efforts to rid the "new Soviet man and woman" of religion. Museums of atheism were opened, and Red weddings and christenings were organized to substitute for religious rituals. In 1925 the Bolshevik Emelian Iaroslavskii, who had been publishing an atheist newspaper, *The Godless*, for three years founded the League of the Godless. The Godless opposed aggressive action against believers or harsh treatment of priests. Instead they advocated education, agitation, propaganda, and even mockery. With the launching of the First Five-Year Plan at the end of the 1920s, the party once again became more aggressive in its anticlerical efforts. Peasant resistance to collectivization appeared to be supported by parish priests, and the party launched antireligious campaigns to break the back of the opposition. Antireligious instruction was introduced into schools, and thousands of churches were closed. By the end of 1930, it is estimated, four-fifths of all village churches were no longer operating.

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BUILDING LEGITIMATE AUTHORITY

The paradox of the October Revolution was that the Bolsheviks possessed the physical power to overthrow the Provisional Government and disband the Constituent Assembly but did not yet have either a popular mandate to rule all of Russia (let alone the non-Russian peripheries) or an unassailable legitimizing myth to sanction their claim to govern. Even as they successfully built a new state during the years of civil war, the Bolsheviks were (as Lenin usually admitted) a minority party that needed to justify its hold on power. But unlike many other political parties, the Bolsheviks required more than passive acquiescence in the new order; they wanted active support that could be mobilized toward heroic goals. One of the central problems of the Communists in the first two decades of their rule was how to move from exercising power through force toward persuading people to accept their right to rule. The Bolsheviks had to supplement their coercive power with discursive power.

Whatever benefits military victory, the practice of state terror, or the repression of opposition might bring a regime in the short term, authority-building, as political scientist George Breslauer has noted, "is necessary to protect and expand one's base of political support." "Authority is legitimized power," and Soviet leaders had to legitimize their power and policies by demonstrating their competence or indispensability as rulers. In their own search for legal authority in the 1920s, the Bolsheviks could rely neither on tradition (associated with the *ancien régime*) nor religious faith, and they chose not to exploit Russian nationalism either. They had to create their own hegemonic culture that would bind the people to the new order.

In the post-October scramble to hold on to the reins of government, Lenin and the Bolsheviks had justified their actions by reference to a variety of historic claims: that they represented the vanguard of the proletariat organized in the soviets, that they were the only party able to bring peace and order to the country and willing to give the land to the peasants, and that the transition to socialism was at hand and the weakest link in the capitalist chain had been broken. Russia's second revolution would receive its ultimate sanction in the rising of the European working class, and all talk of the prematurity of the Bolshevik seizure of power would cease. But that did not happen.

The civil war provided a new justification for holding power: the fight against enemies domestic and foreign was directed toward the preservation of the victories of 1917 and the prevention of a restoration. Both of these goals had considerable popular support, especially among workers and peasants. As unpopular as the Communists were in many parts of the country, they were accepted as the lesser evil, and acquiescence to, if not positive acceptance of, Lenin's government spread through different social strata and groups: workers, many peasants, intellectuals, and certain nationalities, like the Jews, who were particular victims of White anti-Semitism.

With NEP and Stalin's notion of "socialism in one country," the Soviet leadership substituted pragmatism and domestic development for the flights of revolutionary imagination and international aid to the suffering masses abroad. The symbols of the revolution were reemployed to justify the new order as it existed as well as what it would become in time. The iconoclasm of early Bolshevik political culture changed into a quasi-religious faith in the icons of Soviet power. The most powerful official image was that of Lenin, the nearly deified leader of the revolution, untimely ripped from life by an early death. Though Lenin himself was a modest man who shunned publicity, his comrades began to create a cult around his name and deeds soon after they came to power. The first manifestation came in September 1918 after a would-be assassin wounded Lenin. Zinoviev praised Lenin as "the chosen one of millions . . . , the leader by the grace of God . . . , the authentic figure of a leader such as is born once in five hundred years in the life of mankind." Such idolatry was uncharacteristic of the Social Democratic movement, which had mourned its martyrs but had not usually spent much energy on living individuals. Indeed, Marxist historical theory tended to play down the importance of heroes in history and to emphasize instead great and impersonal economic, social, and political forces. Lenin survived the assassination attempt, which helped his political popularity and inspired expressions of extreme affection. Trotsky proclaimed, "When you think that Lenin may die, all our lives seem useless and you stop wanting to live."

Lenin discouraged the growing cult, but on his fiftieth birthday, April 22, 1920, the press celebrated the occasion with poems and eulogies. The revolutionary poet Vladimir Maiakovskii wrote:

I know it is not the hero who precipitates the flow of revolution. The story of heroes is the nonsense of the intelligentsia! But who can restrain himself and not

sing of the glory of Ilich? . . . Kindling the lands with fire everywhere where people are imprisoned, like a bomb the name explodes: Lenin! Lenin! Lenin!

Ordinary people had quite different views of the leaders of the republic. In a village near Moscow in 1922, a peasant told a visitor: "Lenin is a Russian man; he respects the peasants and does not allow them to be robbed, driven into village communes; whereas that other ruler—Trotsky—is a Jew; he does not know their work and life and does not value them and does not care to know them." As they sacralized Lenin party leaders took serious note of popular attitudes. They were distressed a few years later to discover that Lenin had a Jewish grandparent and suppressed that information, against the advice of Lenin's sister, for fear of arousing the anti-Semitic prejudices of the peasants. About the same time a Moscow cab driver told an American journalist about two giant portraits of Marx and Lenin: Comrade Marx was "the chief Bolshevik of the world, the little one with the beard was Lenin, the Bolshevik tsar of Russia." Pointing with his whip toward the Kremlin, he added, "The two of them live over there."

The Lenin cult began in earnest after Lenin's major stroke in March 1923 and then accelerated after his death on January 21, 1924. Not only was Petrograd renamed Leningrad and a "Lenin Enrollment" organized to bring workers into the party, but Lenin institutes and museums were built all over the country. A Lenin corner could be found in many workers' clubs and public halls in imitation of the corner in religious homes where icons were hung. Demobilized soldiers carried back to their villages special booklets, called *pamiatki*, filled with Lenin's pictures and words. Just as people made the pilgrimage to Lenin's mausoleum in Red Square to show their socialist piety, so party leaders claimed authority by reference to their faithfulness to the dead leader and his ideas. A new political formulation, Leninism (later Marxism-Leninism), was created as the emerging canon of sacred Leninist ideas.

The official character of the Lenin cult contrasted with earlier Bolshevik and revolutionary rituals. During the revolution and civil war, a carnival spirit had prevailed in which public festivals and mass demonstrations celebrated the new freedom and hope associated with the revolution. But by the 1920s many of these mass celebrations had been tamed by the authorities, regularized and ritualized, losing their spontaneity and emotional appeal. Official holidays, like May Day and the anniversary of the revolution (November 7), remained important for mobilizing public support for the regime, but they were no longer generated from below by ordinary people and activists but from above by state organizations and institutions. This trend toward state-initiated festivities grew stronger through the 1920s and developed into the highly orchestrated mass celebrations of the Stalinist period. Though they were no longer genuine, spontaneous expressions of enthusiasm, they became rituals that attempted to maintain the new status quo. Though Soviet culture was hardly dominant in all parts of Soviet society—certainly not among the peasants—it found its adherents among many young people, much of the urban population, and those who had moved up into the new elites thanks to the Soviet system.

The Soviet Union was for many of its supporters at home and abroad a dream world, a vision of the future in the present. The building of a new society with a new culture was a utopian effort attempted under the most difficult social and material conditions. The most fantastic plans were made, most of them never realized. "Utopias," wrote the philosopher Aleksandr Bogdanov, "are an expression of aspirations that cannot be realized, of efforts that are not equal to the resistance they encounter." But at the same time more mundane but equally impressive achievements were made. By the end of the 1920s the Soviet people enjoyed greater security, better health care, higher literacy, better nutrition, greater social mobility, and more social equality than most of them had ever experienced. Not surprisingly, looking forward from the civil war years and back from the Stalinist decades, NEP retains a brighter glow than many other periods of Soviet history. For the Bolsheviks it was a retreat, a detour, but for millions of Soviet citizens it was a time of relative peace and steady improvement in their lives.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING

For overviews of NEP society, see Sheila Fitzpatrick, Alexander Rabinowitch, and Richard Stites (eds.), *Russia in the Era of NEP* (Bloomington, IN, 1991); Sheila Fitzpatrick, *The Russian Revolution* (New York, 1982, 1994); Roger Pethybridge, *One Step Backward, Two Steps Forward: Soviet Society and Politics in the NEP* (New York, 1990); as well as Lewis H. Siegelbaum, *Soviet State and Society Between Revolutions, 1918–1929* (New York, 1992). A classic work that covers the entire interwar period is Moshe Lewin, *The Making of the Soviet System: Essays in the Social History of Interwar Russia* (New York, 1985). A volume of additional essays by Lewin was published as *Russia/USSR/Russia: The Drive and Drift of a Superstate* (New York, 1995).

On the utopian plans for transforming society and relations between men and women and in the family, see Richard Stites, *Revolutionary Dreams: Utopian Vision and Experimental Life in the Russian Revolution* (New York, 1989); and his *The Women's Liberation Movement in Russia: Feminism, Nihilism, and Bolshevism, 1860–1930* (Princeton, NJ, 1978); Wendy Z. Goldman, *Women, the State, and Revolution: Soviet Family Policy and Social Life, 1917–1936* (New York, 1993); Barbara Clements, *Bolshevik Feminist: The Life of Aleksandra Kollontai* (Bloomington, IN, 1979); Beatrice Farnsworth, *Alexandra Kollontai. Socialism, Feminism, and the Bolshevik Revolution* (Stanford, CA, 1980); Vladimir Shlapentokh, *Love, Marriage, and Friendship in the Soviet Union: Ideals and Practices* (New York, 1984); Dorothy Atkinson, Alexander Dallin, and Gail Lapidus (eds.), *Women in Russia* (Sussex, UK, 1978); and Elizabeth Wood, *The Baba and the Comrade: Gender and Politics in Revolutionary Russia* (Bloomington, IN, 1997). On the problem of orphaned children, see Alan M. Ball, *And Now My Soul Is Hardened: Abandoned Children in Soviet Russia, 1918–1930* (Berkeley, CA, 1994).

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CHAPTER 8



Culture Wars

START READING HERE AGAIN

INTELLIGENTSIA AND REVOLUTION

When the Bolsheviks took power in October 1917, the vast majority of the old intelligentsia, everyone from renowned artists to local schoolteachers, opposed the new regime. Officials and clerks from the former government either refused to come into work or sat on their hands. Early in November, the new Soviet authorities sent out a call to intellectuals urging them to attend a meeting to show their support for Soviet power. The only noteworthy intellectual to show up at the meeting was the Futurist poet Vladimir Maiakovskii. Especially bitter for the regime was the open hostility of Maxim Gorky, Russia's most famous living writer and a personal friend of Lenin's. Almost unanimously the old writers and artists, and the university professors and other professionals, considered any collaboration with the Bolshevik "usurpers" to be a betrayal of intelligentsia traditions. Yet Lenin remained hopeful that eventually the "intelligentsia will have to arrive at the position of helping the workers precisely on a Soviet platform."

The prerevolutionary Russian intelligentsia did not survive the revolution and civil war intact but divided into four major communities: those who stayed in Russia and supported the Bolsheviks, those "internal émigrés" who stayed but had little sympathy for the Bolsheviks, those who temporarily emigrated (or were deported) only to return when the Soviet system stabilized, and those who left and never returned from exile. In the early years the Soviet government allowed intellectuals who opposed the regime to emigrate. Besides thousands of political émigrés, the permanent cultural émigrés included the philosopher Nikolai Berdiaev, pianist Vladimir Horowitz, painter Marc Chagall, composer Igor Stravinsky, and some of the most talented poets and writers that prerevolutionary Russia had produced, including short-story master Ivan Bunin, who, along with another émigré, Vladimir Nabokov, would later win the Nobel Prize for Literature. The Bolsheviks, who feared that the struggle between the few Marxist intellectuals and the rest of the intelligentsia was an uneven fight, expelled 160 liberal intellectuals from the country in 1922. This "group of ideologists of the 'new' bourgeoisie," it was claimed, was responsible for "the growing influence of a revitalized bourgeois ideology in the young Soviet Republic."

Temporary émigrés included short-story writer Aleksandr Kuprin, poet Maria Tsvetaeva, journalist and novelist Ilia Ehrenburg, novelist Count Aleksei Tolstoi, literary critic Prince Dmitrii Mirskii, composer Sergei Prokofiev, and Maxim Gorky. Once the USSR was established and signs of social and economic progress were evident, a significant number of intellectuals sought reconciliation with the regime that had driven them from their homeland. Among those who remained in Soviet Russia in an uneasy armistice with the party-state were the prose writers Konstantin Fedin and Mikhail Zoshchenko and the poets Valerii Briusov and Nikolai Gumilev (who was shot by the Cheka in 1921), and his wife Anna Akhmatova. More enthusiastic in their support of the revolution were filmmaker Sergei Esenin and the poets Maiakovskii, Demian Bednyi, and Aleksandr Blok.

For a century before the revolution Russia's intelligentsia had its own clear sense of itself as a voice of culture and progress; it was ready to sacrifice itself for the good of the people. But its writers and philosophers were split between those who gauged their activities by a criterion of social utility and those who claimed that their value stemmed from the individual's inner life. The utilitarian view of art, held by the realist critics of the 1840s to the 1860s and by Gorky in the immediate prerevolutionary period, asserted that art should be produced that would serve the liberation of the people. Art was needed by the revolutionary cause. But at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth, many artists reacted against this utilitarian view and insisted on the primary value of artistic form over content, of subjectivity and experimentation. This new attitude was worn like a badge of honor by the Russian Symbolists, whose main aim was self-development of the individual in whatever direction that individual desired. Life was identified with art, instead of the other way around. For the Symbolists, and followers of other avant-garde schools such as Acmeism, Futurism, and Formalism, individual, personal experience was the ultimate value, no matter how strange that experience might seem to the ordinary citizen.

Among the most individualist of prerevolutionary artists to remain in Russia was the young poet Aleksandr Blok (1880–1921), an aristocratic eccentric already well known by 1905 for his Symbolist lyrics. Blok vacillated between reveling in his splendid poetic isolation and a desire to connect with the society in which he lived. Briefly in 1905 he flirted with politics, but then he decided to build a bridge to society through the theater, linking up with the famous avant-garde director Vyacheslav Meyerhold. Blok wrote, "More than any other art, the theater gives the lie to the blasphemous abstraction of the formula 'art for art's sake.' For the theater is the very flesh of art—that lofty sphere wherein 'the word is made flesh.'"

When other prominent intellectuals recoiled at the Bolshevik victory, Blok declared to a friend:

A revolution, like a violent whirlwind or snowstorm, always brings new and unexpected things and cruelly disappoints many people. Its whirlpools devour the good and save the worthless, but that is in the nature of revolutions and changes neither the total direction of the current nor the terrible deafening tumult which accompanies it. The roaring noise is an expression of its sublimity.

With an almost erotic approach to revolution, Blok submitted to the whirlwind around him. This was the same man who five years earlier had written, "The sinking of the Titanic yesterday has given me unspeakable joy—there is still an ocean!" In the first winter of Soviet power Blok wrote two of his greatest poems, "The Twelve" and "The Scythians." In these the revolution was pictured as an elemental, irresistible movement destroying the old civilization of Europe. At the head of the Red Army Blok put the figure of Jesus Christ. With Blok a leading artist in the revolutionary camp, poetry and theater became the emblematic forms of literature in the civil war years. Sadly, Blok himself did not survive the revolution by very much, dying in 1921.

Most Bolsheviks were not particularly enthusiastic about the avant-garde poets and artists who supported the revolution in the early years, but they were very pleased with the decision of the realist writer Gorky to collaborate with the Soviet government in late 1918. Describing himself as a "heretic everywhere," Gorky had taken upon himself the role of the conscience of the revolution and in late 1917 and early 1918 published critical articles in his own newspaper attacking Bolshevik repression. In July 1918 the government, with Lenin's personal approval, closed it down. Gorky sought to use his influence to protect the intelligentsia during the "time of troubles" of the civil war and to appeal to the Americans for food relief during the famine of 1921. He was angered and frustrated by Soviet censorship and acted as a one-man loyal opposition. On Lenin's urging, a sick Gorky left for Europe in 1921. He remained abroad until he made several triumphal trips to the USSR in 1928 and 1929 in an attempt to bridge the growing distance between the Soviet Union and the Russian emigration. Only in 1933, after being courted by the Stalinists, did he return to Russia for good.

The state agency that dealt most directly with the intelligentsia was the People's Commissariat of Enlightenment, or Narkompros, headed for its first twelve years by Anatolii Lunacharskii (1875–1933), a cultured man of broad tastes. Lunacharskii had nearly impeccable revolutionary credentials. He had adhered to the Bolshevik faction almost from its inception, though he was a member of a dissident group between 1905 and 1917, when he and his brother-in-law, Aleksandr Bogdanov (1873–1928), developed the heretical view that Marxist materialism was a kind of metaphysics, since the real world is knowable only through one's perceptions. Along with Gorky, Lunacharskii held that Marxism was a new scientific, godless religion. This somewhat unorthodox Bolshevik, who wept openly when he heard of art treasures being damaged by revolutionary fighting, was a major player in formulating Soviet policy toward culture and the intelligentsia. His first official declaration was to end the tutelary relationship between the government and institutions of culture and to proclaim that "the people themselves, consciously or unconsciously, must evolve their own culture."

Desperate for support from the intelligentsia, Lunacharskii promoted the fortunes of a group of radical intellectuals who advocated the development of a proletarian culture. Influenced by Bogdanov, who held that art was the product not only of social environment but of a particular class, they called themselves

Proletkult and were soon a semiofficial arm of Narkompros. For them art was “a most powerful weapon for the organization of collective forces, and in a class society, of class forces.” The proletariat had to have its own class art “to organize its own forces in social labor, struggle, and construction.” Even art from the past might be useful, but instead of the bourgeois principle of individualism, proletarian class culture would adopt collectivism as its touchstone. The more militant members of Proletkult denounced all bourgeois culture as “old rubbish” and called for workers’ universities, a workers’ encyclopedia, and a proletarian theater with an entirely new repertoire.

As its critics often noted, Proletkult leaders were not themselves proletarians, but Proletkult responded by claiming that real proletarian culture did not have to emanate from actual proletarians but from people with a “proletarian orientation.” Both Lenin and Trotsky spoke out against Proletkult’s attempts to dominate the cultural scene. Lenin called them “escapees from the bourgeois intelligentsia, who often looked on the newly created workers’ and peasants’ educational institutions as the most convenient field for their own personal fantasies in the sphere of philosophy or culture.” Proletkult offended Lenin, who was a cultural conservative who preferred the Russian classics and traditional representational painting to modernist avant-garde experiments. In 1920 he pushed for Proletkult to be subordinated more directly to the Commissariat of Enlightenment. Gradually the organization lost its autonomy. But the greatest blow against its efforts came with the introduction of the New Economic Policy, when state subsidies ceased and the proletarian culturalists were forced to adapt to market conditions.

Soviet writers and artists in the 1920s, even those committed to the socialist project, were very contentious and continually formed small groups to promote their own view of the new culture. As Proletkult attempted to mobilize people in the creation of a workers’ art, a small group of writers split off in 1919 to found a magazine called *Smithy* and celebrate machines, factories, and labor in their poetry. A year later, in October 1920, writers with a prolabor orientation formed the All-Russian Association of Proletarian Writers (VAPP). Writers divided into those more concerned with professional literary matters, like some of those connected with *Smithy*, and others dedicated to the organization of literature among the masses, like those affiliated with the journal *October*. The *October* group soon controlled VAPP and petitioned the party to recognize it as the exclusive voice of the Communist Party in literary affairs.

The party, however, declined to sanction one literary faction over another. In the early years of Soviet power the government gave artists a degree of autonomy while policing the boundaries of what was permissible. Censorship against political enemies was practiced by the Bolshevik government from its first days, but only occasionally was it extended to literature and the arts. Rather than state persecution, writers during the civil war suffered from lack of paper, the breakdown of printing presses, and the collapse of the book market. In conditions of desperate shortages the Soviet government promoted the free distribution of

printed matter and thus determined what might appear. Private publishing barely survived during the civil war and revived only with the advent of NEP.

For the Bolsheviks art was a means to securing support for their new order as well as transforming the backward peoples of the Soviet land into conscious proletarians. Besides the printed word, those means included mass spectacles, public readings and lectures, the visual arts, theater performances, and films. Almost immediately after the revolution, interest in theater exploded. Thousands of people formed dramatic groups; three thousand theaters performed in the Russian Republic alone, and the Red Army and Fleet operated over a thousand theaters. Artistic enthusiasts organized street festivals and mass spectacles to displace religious festivals and processions. Great artists participated, such as Marc Chagall, who painted murals in his native Vitebsk, and Natan Altman and K. S. Petrov-Vodkin, who redecorated the Palace Square in Petrograd. Thousands of participants reenacted the storming of the Winter Palace on its third anniversary. In these public presentations the chaos and confusion of revolution and civil war were given clear meaning. History was retold in the Bolshevik interpretation. Not only did audiences discover what October was about, but the makers of October found out what they had done. Bolshevism was now imagined as the end result of a long and inevitable social evolution, and this imagined march through time toward a brilliant future gave the Soviet state a precarious legitimacy that it worked constantly to prop up.

Wild experiments in theatrical form competed with the more traditional theaters of Konstantin Stanislavskii and Aleksandr Tairov. The poet Maiakovskii’s play *Mystery Bouffe*, a fantastic allegory of the struggle of good and evil, was designed by the Suprematist artist Kazimir Malevich and staged by the avant-garde director Meyerhold on the first anniversary of the revolution. The play so confused its audiences that it lasted only one performance. But the revolutionary temper of the times encouraged experiment, and even a sober revolutionary like Bukharin was moved to chastise the producers of Chekhov’s *The Cherry Orchard* for not staging *The Cherry Factory* instead.

FELLOW-TRAVELERS AND PROLETARIAN WRITERS

NEP turned out to be one of the most experimental and creative periods in Russian and Soviet literature, though it was rivaled by the explosion of literary modernism in the West that produced James Joyce, Marcel Proust, Thomas Mann, T. S. Eliot, and William Butler Yeats. The New Economic Policy created a new relationship between the state and the intelligentsia as it eased up on artists and writers by the authorities. This “soft line on culture,” in the words of historian Sheila Fitzpatrick, “rested on the premise that the Soviet state needed the services of bourgeois specialists and would have to pay for them.” From the expulsion of intellectuals from Soviet Russia in 1922 until the turn toward ideological militancy in 1928, the Soviet government was extraordinarily accommodating and tolerant toward the intelligentsia. The party stood aside from literary squabbles, except to encourage

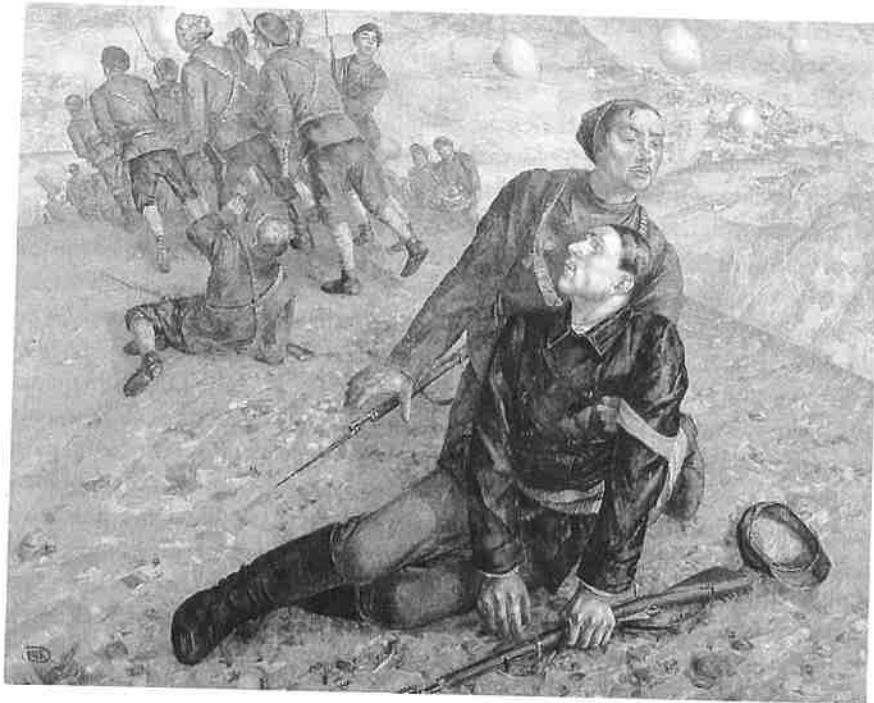


Figure 8.1 *Death of the Commissar*. Painting by Kuzma Petrov-Vodkin (RIA Novosti).

a variety of views and prevent a monopoly of any one group. As Zinoviev put it, both sides understood the need to work together and “we will no longer remember the past.” He even invited scholars to return from abroad to celebrate Soviet power. While censorship continued and works deemed to be counterrevolutionary were proscribed, the party broadened its tolerance for non-Communist literature. For six years the living conditions and salaries of academics improved, job security became a reality for professors, and intellectuals managed their own institutions with relatively little interference from the state or party. In the universities the system of favoring the admission of workers was replaced in 1926 by an open competition with entrance examinations that, in effect, favored the children of the intelligentsia.

The chasm separating the Soviet authorities and the intelligentsia remained deep, however. Many intellectuals who had chosen to stay in the Soviet republic were, in Trotsky’s words, “not artists of the proletarian revolution but its artistic fellow-travelers.” Typical of the attitude of many intellectuals was a group of twelve exceptionally talented young writers known as the Serapion Brothers, who proclaimed the inviolability of independent artistic creation. They included Fedin and Vsevolod Ivanov, the satirist Zoshchenko, and the Formalist critic, Viktor Shklovskii. They rejected the experimentalism of radicals like Maiakovskii and used traditional forms to express their ambivalent attitude toward the revolution.

In a sense, they were the literary NEP—half bourgeois, half accepting of the revolution as the condition under which they had to work. Fedin, for example, in his 1924 novel *Cities and Years* dealt with the adaptation of a middle-class youth to the revolution. Or, in the words of the writer Boris Pilniak:

In so far as I want to follow ... Russia’s historic destinies, I am with the Communists—that is, in so far as the Communists are with Russia, I am with them. ... I acknowledge that the destinies of the RKP are far less interesting to me than the destinies of Russia.

The national patriotic strain expressed by the fellow-travelers within the Soviet Union was also deeply felt by certain émigré intellectuals. In July 1921 a group of Russian expatriates in Prague published a volume called *The Changing of Signposts*, which argued for reconciliation with the Soviet regime. Russia was now ruled by the Communists and this harsh fact had to be accepted. In any case, they argued, Russia is greater than Bolshevism and irresistible forces were compelling the Reds toward a more conservative policy. These artists and intellectuals were “national Bolsheviks,” neo-Slavophiles, who were prepared to accept the Russian Revolution as the national destiny of their beloved homeland. The Changing Signposts movement found an enthusiastic response within the Soviet republic, and Lenin himself believed that these reconciled patriots “express the mood of thousands and tens of thousands of bourgeois of all sorts and Soviet officials who participate in our New Economic Policy.”

In the tolerant atmosphere of the early and mid-1920s the leading voice for literature was the journal *Red Virgin Soil*, edited by the Marxist critic Aleksandr Voronskii. Often in trouble with the party leadership because of his association with the Trotskyist opposition, Voronskii was most eloquent in his support of the fellow-travelers. He believed that art was one of the means by which people obtain knowledge of the external world. Like science, art must provide knowledge, “cognition of life” and an understanding of reality. But whereas science analyzes, art synthesizes; whereas science is abstract, art is concrete. Science is aimed at people’s minds and apprehends life by means of concepts, while art is directed at their sensuous nature and illuminates life through images. By means of intuition, rather than reason alone, artists uncover the real world, seeing beyond appearances to the underlying reality. For Voronskii beauty, rather than utility, was the key to art’s purpose. “Art,” he wrote, “has always sought and must seek to recover, restore, and reveal the world, which is beautiful in itself, to represent it in the purest and most direct impressions.” Voronskii took aesthetics seriously, equating it with a kind of objectivity and truth. For him, great literature, no matter what its class origin or nature, was a revelation of the world and had a value for the proletariat.

Voronskii’s views, which were shared by Trotsky and Lunacharskii, were consonant with the soft line on culture. In a series of literary essays Trotsky criticized the proletarian writers who treated literature as propaganda and defended the fellow-travelers who believed in the unique and irreducible qualities of literature.

In May 1924 a party conference on literature resolved that “no single movement, school or group can or should act in the name of the party.” Early the next year the party rejected VAPP’s call for “a seizure of power by the proletariat in the field of art.” The decisive voice in the debate was that of Bukharin, then at the height of his power. He believed that in the long, gradual transition to socialism tolerance for a broad range of cultural activities was necessary. “It seems to me,” he wrote, “the best way to destroy proletarian literature is to reject the principle of free and anarchic competition.” On July 1, 1925, the Central Committee echoed Bukharin’s approach and resolved that “as the class war in general has not ended, neither has it ended on the literary front.” Though at some time in the future the proletariat would conquer positions in the field of belles-lettres, “the hegemony of proletarian literature does not yet exist, and the party should help these writers earn for themselves the historic right to that hegemony.” But fellow-travelers must be tolerated. “Communist conceit” must be combated, and “Marxist criticism should have as its slogan ‘to learn.’”

The literary radicals, like Maiakovskii and the Futurists gathered around the journal *Left*, were appalled by the fellow-travelers’ dominance of the literary scene in the early NEP years. The militant literary critical journal *On Duty* declared that “all ideological doubts are absolutely *inadmissible*.” Young Communists in the Komsomol (Communist Youth League), Red Army veterans, and literary politicians, such as Leopold Averbakh, the editor of the Komsomol journal *Young Guard*, all polemicized against the fellow-travelers. But a wide public appreciated the more classical styles of writing of the moderates, and influential party leaders, weary of the formalistic and often inaccessible work of the avant-garde, cultivated them.

Bolshevik-minded proletarian writers produced their own literature, soon to become part of the official canon of Soviet reading, primarily in the form of novels about the civil war and the construction of socialism. Dmitrii Furmanov, who had been a political commissar at the front during the civil war, wrote a semiautobiographical account of his experiences with the raw-boned partisan leader Chapaev that later was turned into a popular film. Written in the realist style with romantic heroes that would in the 1930s be enshrined in the Socialist Realism school, *Chapaev* (1923) was a model work that contrasted what is with what ought to be. Chapaev, the rough-hewed partisan chief, who is all impulse, spontaneity, and courage, meets up with Klychkov (Furmanov in real life), the disciplined, sober, intellectual party man, who ultimately brings the necessary political consciousness to the partisans. Aleksandr Fadeev’s *The Rout* (1925), Fedor Gladkov’s *Cement* (1926), and Mikhail Sholokhov’s novel about the Don Cossacks, *Quiet Flows the Don* (1928), also borrowed the realist style and psychological characterization of classic writers like Tolstoy to promote the values of the Bolshevik revolution and the party. Whereas earlier in the decade the stylistic inventions of the avant-garde had been associated with the revolution, increasingly realism was adopted as the proper literary expression of the proletarian writers. At least in form and style, if not content and political commitment, the Communist writers approached the traditionalists among the fellow-travelers.

Two poets were emblematic of Russian literature in the 1920s: Sergei Esenin (1895–1925) and Vladimir Maiakovskii (1893–1930). Esenin was the golden-haired youth of Soviet poetry, an immensely popular platform artist who inspired a cult following with his melodic poems about lost village life. Born in Riazan and continually invoking his peasant roots, he fell in love with and married the American modern dancer Isadora Duncan. But when he traveled with her to the United States, he was repelled by modern urban life. In one poem he proclaimed, “My mother, homeland, I am a Bolshevik!” His life as well as his poems celebrated rebellion, both personal and social, and he found unbearable the deceptions and constraints imposed by officialdom. “I am not your tame canary!” he exclaimed, “I am a poet!” Alcoholic and depressed, he hanged himself in the Angleterre hotel in Leningrad at age 30, leaving behind a poem written in his own blood: “Dying is nothing new in this life / But then, living is nothing new either.” A rash of suicides of young people followed. Maiakovskii, who hated Esenin for his popularity, his poetry, and his pessimism, wrote a bitter reply: “Maybe / if there’d been ink / in that room in the ‘Angleterre,’ / You wouldn’t have had to / cut open your veins . . . Dying/ in this life / is not hard. / Making life / is much harder.”

Maiakovskii’s was a thundering, self-confident voice, and he posed as the champion of the October Revolution as he toured factories reading his opaque Futurist poems to workers. Along with the painter Malevich and others, he called for the death of the old art: “It’s time / for bullets / to pepper museums.” His iconoclasm and youthful bravado antagonized more conventional writers and even the cultural commissars. Lunacharskii considered him an adolescent whose boyhood had continued too long. Maiakovskii wrote frankly propagandistic poems, like *150,000,000* (1919) and *Vladimir Ilich Lenin* (1924), but ironically Lenin himself despised much of Maiakovskii’s work and called it “nonsense, stupidity, double-dyed stupidity, and pretentiousness!” Maiakovskii’s efforts to link the Futurists with the Soviet state failed repeatedly. Discomforted by the retreats of NEP, the poet wrote “About Scum” (1921):

The storms of revolutionary depths are stilled.
The Soviet brew is overgrown with slime.
And from behind the back of R.S.F.S.R.
Peers out
The snout
Of the philistine.

His brash criticisms of Communist pretensions found more sympathy with Lenin, who told a meeting of metalworkers that he did not know if it was good poetry, “but I guarantee you it’s absolutely right from a political point of view.” Maiakovskii also experimented with the theater, first in *Mystery Bouffe* (1918), which mystified audiences, then in *The Bedbug* (1928), his greatest success, and finally in *The Bathhouse* (1930), which flopped badly. In these works he caricatured Soviet bureaucrats, whose revenge after his death would be to remove his plays from the Soviet repertoire for decades. Maiakovskii’s bohemian lifestyle,



Figure 8.2 Vladimir Tatlin's monument to the Third International (Bildarchiv Preussischer Kulturbesitz).

his challenges to those in authority, and his alienation from many other writers led him into social and political isolation. Depressed by the constant attacks on his work by critics and his inability to convince his greatest love, the married Lily Brik, to marry him, Maiakovskii shot himself in the heart on April 14, 1930. He ended his suicide note by addressing his "comrades of the Proletarian Literary Organization:" "Don't think me a coward. Really, it couldn't be helped." Briefly after his death, Maiakovskii faded into a shadowy disgrace, but he soon was elevated to the highest ranks of officially sanctioned Soviet literature. Once Stalin uttered his judgment—"Indifference to his memory and his works is a crime"—Maiakovskii officially became "the poet of the revolution."

FILM AND POPULAR CULTURE

The power of poetry in the 1920s came from its public performances. Public art, like theater and film, were the most appropriate media for expressing the

revolution to a multinational country in which the great majority of the people outside of towns were illiterate. Lenin was particularly enthusiastic about the development of a Soviet film industry. He is reported to have said, "Of all the arts, for us the cinema is the most important." Its purpose would be education, propaganda, selling the values of socialism to the masses. As film critic Dwight MacDonald put it, "Propaganda, instead of being the fatal weakness of the Soviet cinema, is, philosophically and historically considered, its greatest source of strength." The Soviet film industry was not to be based, as was the capitalist cinema, on making money by appealing to the immediate interests and appetites of ordinary people. Rather, Lunacharskii declared:

The moving picture will be used to the fullest extent for amusement and education. The story of humanity will be told in pictures, and heroic deeds recorded. There will, however, be no glorification of bloodshed and violence; no appeal to race or religious bigotry and hatred: the cinema will be used to teach citizenship and love of humanity.

Early Soviet filmmakers were inspired by the first hit movie in Soviet Russia, the American film *Intolerance*, written and directed by D. W. Griffith. Like Griffith, they had their own epic moral vision and wanted to affect their audiences more than simply please them. Experimenting with new techniques to stimulate reactions from the audience, Soviet directors developed a complex editing form called montage, in which frames of film were rhythmically arranged to convey specific effects. Unexpectedly, the fledgling film industry in Russia produced an extraordinary group of young directors, including Sergei Eisenstein, Vsevolod Pudovkin, Lev Kuleshov, Aleksandr Dovzhenko, and Dzigha Vertov. Film production extended to most of the Soviet republics. Revolutionary messages were combined with folkloric evocations of an exotic past. In Azerbaijan an early film, *Legend of the Maiden Tower* (1924), was filled with images of a colorful and cruel Orient ruled by an evil khan, played by an Armenian actor. Though Soviet films were not as popular with Soviet audiences as American thrillers, Tarzan movies, or German horror films, they won international critical acclaim with such works as Eisenstein's *Strike* (1924), *Battleship Potemkin* (1925), and *October, or Ten Days That Shook the World* (1927), Pudovkin's *Mother* (1926) and *End of Saint Petersburg* (1927), and Dovzhenko's *Arsenal* (1929) and *Earth* (1930). In the evolving Soviet film style a wholesomeness and humanism infused the heroes and heroines, and through struggle and sacrifice the carriers of socialist values ultimately overcame enemies of the revolution. Optimism and hope infused the films, anticipating what would become the officially sanctioned style a decade later.

Just as the interests of party authorities conflicted with the artists who produced the high culture of the early Soviet years, so the party's ambition to create a new Soviet man and woman ran into problems when it met the counter-attractions of popular culture. The public wanted to be entertained much more than it wanted to be educated, and many of the more politically correct novels and plays of socialist writers were far less attractive to readers than detective thrillers

or imaginative science fiction. Politically savvy but commercially astute writers and filmmakers tried to combine what was popular with socialist themes. One of the most successive novelists was a young Armenian woman, Marietta Shaginian, who in 1923 turned out a popular adventure novel with revolutionary values, *Mess-Mend*, written under the pseudonym Jim Dollar. This story of an evil capitalist plot to subvert the Soviets that is foiled by heroic American workers became a popular Soviet movie three years later. But beyond the popular art manufactured by professionals, a huge realm of popular cultural expression existed in the cafes and bars, on the streets, in music halls, and around kitchen tables. Here people shared rude jokes and irreverent poems and sang gypsy romances or the sad ballads of prisoners. A popular joke of the time tells of an old man on a trolley car, upset by the conditions of his life, sighing, "Oi." His wife quickly hushes him with a warning, "Fool, don't talk counterrevolution in public." A guitar or balalaika, a few glasses of vodka, followed by bits of potato, bread, or pickle, was enough to carry a gathering of friends through an evening. The songs might include "Little Buns," the sad tale of a poor peddler of hot buns whose father drinks too much and sister walks the street. The song was too dark and pessimistic for the authorities, and eventually it was banned from public performance, but around the table at night it could still be heard.

STOP HERE

SOVIET SCHOOL DAYS

At the turn of the century Russian educators, like their counterparts in the West, were engaged in a search for new and more relevant forms of educating young people. Convinced that proper education was essential for developing citizenship in the modern world, many reformers sought to link the schoolroom with the real workaday world, while others optimistically argued that schools and scientific knowledge could play a transformative social role. Many leading figures, particularly among university professors, adopted liberal attitudes favoring autonomy for intellectual institutions, the spread of knowledge throughout the population, and guarantees for the free development of the individual. Briefly, during the eight months of the Provisional Government, censorship had been largely eliminated, and academics enjoyed an unusual degree of power and influence within the state. They used this fleeting opportunity to enact a liberal program that abolished quotas on Jewish admission to institutions of higher education, empowered faculty and students within universities, and expanded the autonomy of higher education from state control. A few reforms in elementary and secondary education aimed at local community control of schools. But when the Bolsheviks came to power, scholars and scientists feared a reassertion of state control to the detriment of learning.

Somewhere buried in his writings Marx had noted, "On the one hand, a change of social circumstances is required to establish a proper system of education. On the other hand, a proper system of education is required to bring about a change of social circumstances." Soviet educators believed that they were

halfway out of this dialectical dilemma: the revolution had changed social circumstances, and now it was up them to create the educational system that would produce a new understanding and psychology among Soviet citizens. As one of the leading figures in Soviet education, Nadezhda Krupskaya, wrote, "Socialism will be possible only when the psychology of people is radically changed. To change it is the task standing before us." Immediately after the Bolsheviks came to power, the government handed all educational institutions to Lunacharskii and Narkompros, and the People's Commissar of Enlightenment immediately opened the schools to all and abolished fees and entrance requirements. Though the resources were unavailable for quality mass education, and the teaching personnel was resistant to the Bolshevik reforms, Narkompros worked out a plan to create a United Labor School, a single coeducational school system combining vocational and academic education without regard to the class origins of the pupils. Its goal was compulsory universal education available at no cost to all children.

The early Bolshevik reforms met resistance from teachers who resented the new curriculum with its emphasis on labor, and parents who opposed efforts to take religion out of the schools and introduce new pedagogies. Yet another major obstacle was the lack of material resources. Schools were unable to take on the utopian goal of reshaping mentalities when Narkompros could supply only one pencil for every sixty pupils, one quill pen for every twenty-five, a fountain pen for every ten, and a notebook for every two. Given the multinationality of Soviet Russia, the government planned to have education available in dozens of non-Russian languages, but it found that textbooks and materials in those languages simply did not exist. The grandiosity of Narkompros's vision met up with a harsh reality, and Lenin and other more pragmatic leaders demanded that more practical measures be taken. By 1921 Narkompros compromised its notion of a single school for all and gave in to pressure to set up special vocational and technical schools for workers to produce the skilled hands that the economy desperately needed.

During the civil war the hostility of the intelligentsia toward the regime was most clear among university professors. Some served the Whites as government ministers, and others worked secretly against the Bolsheviks, but the majority bided their time, hoping for a more liberal government. The Bolsheviks were divided between those who tweaked and provoked the academic intelligentsia and those who tried to win them over to the new order. The Bolshevik historian Mikhail Pokrovskii, now in a position of power in the Narkompros, threatened his former colleagues with arrest, while his superior Lunacharskii, was far more tactful. But all in the government hoped to squeeze "bourgeois" social science out over time and replace it with Marxism. Lenin suggested to Pokrovskii that the old professors might be forced to teach about colonialism and, thus, despite their liberalism they would be obliged to inform their students about the dark side of capitalism.

At first the Soviet government allowed universities to remain autonomous, though they ordered that they be open to all. Since poorer people were less prepared for higher learning, special departments for workers were opened for