1 *Art and the People*

SOCIALIST REALISM, described by Soviet critics as an 'artistic method', is supported by a corpus of highly complicated theory which, though it receives little attention in Western commentaries, is the subject of voluminous writing inside the USSR. It embraces a number of important questions: the evolution of art – the organic relationship between the art of the past and the art of the present and future; the class nature of art – its objective reflection of social relations; and the function of art in society – the obligations of the artist to the society in which he works, and hence the relationship between the artist and the politician. Moreover it considers the didactic potential of art and its relationship in this sense with the mass communication media in a modern, industrialised society. It therefore concerns every aspect of intellectual life, and it seems not unreasonable to suggest that it is the essential key to an understanding of the artistic life of the Soviet Union today. In particular it is the natural basis for a discussion of literature and politics.

But a necessary preliminary to such a discussion is a clarification of terms, especially since many of them will be new to the Western reader. We shall consequently begin our discussion of Socialist Realism by examining three basic principles of Soviet aesthetics – *naródnost'* (literally people-ness) – the relationship between art and the masses, *klássovost'* (class-ness) – the class characteristics of art, and *partíinost'* (party-ness) – the identification of the artist with the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU). These are awkward terms to translate, and we have not thought it necessary to do so, especially as two of them are based on familiar borrowings.

The three principles, though stemming ultimately from Marxist theory, are essentially Leninist, and it is important to stress at the very outset of our discussion that here, as perhaps in Marxism-Leninism in general, it is the latter element that is dominant. It was in the glosses that he insisted on putting on the words of Marx and Engels that Lénin differed from his Marxist contemporaries who, especially Plekhánov, were certainly of no lesser stature as political philosophers than he was.

This need not necessarily lead us to conclude that it was Lénin's personal and somewhat conservative tastes that determined the course of development of Soviet arts. It seems unlikely that even Lénin (who in his day was hardly less powerful than Stálin was later to become) could have inflicted his own views on so many of the party intellectuals if they had not in fact been already quite closely in tune. Certainly such cultured and influential figures as Lunachársky had strong and sophisticated attitudes which, though they might occasionally have been upset by some modish fancy or have differed from Lénin's on matters of detail (and we shall mention more than one such occasion in the course of our investigation), coincided nevertheless with his on the one important point – their evaluation of the cultural heritage of the pre-revolutionary era.

This was the crucial point. It may seem paradoxical that the revolutionary leaders who seemed intent on sweeping the old order off the face of the globe and transforming 'reality' in its entirety should have been so adamant in protecting the cultural heritage from their own followers, inisisting (as indeed they may ultimately be seen to have done in many other spheres) on the essential continuity of artistic traditions. Yet this was the keystone of the policy that emerged in the 1920s, and this is what gives Socialist Realism its paradoxical but inescapable air of *déjà vu*.

The policy rests, in the first instance, on the principles of *naródnost'* and *klássovost'*, and in the following paragraphs we have attempted to present the sort of explanation of them that a Soviet critic himself makes. It is perhaps not surprising that except for certain points of detailed interpretation, there is little disagreement amongst orthodox Soviet theoreticians.[1] Nevertheless it seemed wise to select one authority for the exposition of the Soviet view, remembering that since our object is to examine that view, such an authority becomes in fact a primary source. Readers familiar with Soviet criticism will appreciate the problem involved in reducing lengthy and often convoluted arguments into brief and clear statements; such, however, is the object of this chapter.

The authority selected is *Bases of Marxist-Leninist Aesthetics* (*Osnóvy marksístsko-léninskoi estétiki*), 1960 edition, published by the State Publishers of Political Literature, Moscow, Institutes of Philosophy and History of Art of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR and edited by A. Sutyágin. This publication is intended for home consumption, and an important part of the argument is the evidence adduced from the Marxist classics. Such references are therefore reproduced here, though much abbreviated. The date of the edition is significant, since it marked a high point of the Khrushchëv era, when the process of de-Stalinisation was

leading to a re-examination and restatement of attitudes. Other useful sources are the series of textbooks published by various Soviet universities, both for their own students and for foreigners, especially from the 'third world'. Unfortunately there are no such publications in English, since the language of instruction is Russian. It is therefore hoped that the following pages will represent a faithful summary of the argument and will go some way to make up for the lack. To distinguish the summary from the rest of my text, the relevant paragraphs are set in smaller print and preceded by an asterisk.

I

* A central position in Marxist-Leninist aesthetics is occupied by the problem of *naródnost'*, which is described as the meeting point of artistic quality, ideological content and social function. It is the point of intersection of a number of forces which characterise the position of art in pre-class, class and classless society. 'It is through *naródnost'* that the significance of art for the whole of mankind becomes especially apparent.' [2]

* Works of art which may be categorised as 'popular' (*naródny*) [3] are those which give strong expression to the highest level of social awareness attained in a given epoch, that is, works which are a compound of the thought, feelings and social moods of the epoch, a reflection of true social conditions and of man's most humane aspirations in his struggle for a more dignified mode of existence. Thus *naródnost'* is the quality that determines the relationship between art and the epoch.

* However, not all the features that relate art to a given epoch are genuinely 'popular'. Thus quantitative features, such as the degree to which certain artistic phenomena are widespread at a given moment do not guarantee a genuinely 'popular' nature.[4] In both social content and artistic form, works become 'popular' only when the social and aesthetic ideals upon which they rest are expressions of the most progressive tendencies of the times. Truly 'popular' works may even appear ahead of their time, for they include elements which, though born of a given epoch, contain the essence of what must develop in the future.

* Thus works that embody the highest degree of *naródnost'* for their times acquire an aspect of transferability and preserve their worth for subsequent epochs. In this sense, art constitutes a material monument to man's persistent aspiration toward a higher stage of development for both himself and society. The great art of past times enriches all men, losing its parochial nature and becoming universal. By virtue of its 'popular' aspect, the art of one people may become part of the heritage of others, who therefore become aware of the universal significance of the most advanced ideals for the whole of mankind.

* All great art is handed down from one generation to another as part of the cultural heritage. Architectural monuments become part of the life of later epochs and exert a formative influence on artistic taste;[5] folk music

retains a peculiar emotional impact throughout the history of a people; myths and legends become part of the popular consciousness. All these contribute to a people's cultural development and are a constant source of aesthetic pleasure. But it is not only collective culture that may become universal; the works of individual artists may also acquire universality by virtue of their *naródnost'*. However, no degree of talent will produce a genuine work of art unless the artist is guided by what is vital to society, that is, unless his work is rooted in the life of the people.

* *Naródnost'* may manifest itself in different ways and in different forms, depending on conditions in the development of the culture of the times. The plays of Aeschylus, Gothic architecture, the works of Goethe and Púshkin, Daumier and Répin, Mayakóvsky and Shólokhov all share the quality of *naródnost'*, though in different ways. To clarify these differences, we must refine the concept of *naródnost'* in the context of class society.

* The most important factor is the relationship between a work of art and the society in which it is produced. The complex and contradictory ways in which *naródnost'* appears result from the contradictions inherent in society, for no society is homogeneous; all societies are composed of classes.

* In very primitive societies this was not so, and in such societies art had a genuinely 'popular' character. But the rise of capitalism and consequent development of classes led to a rift between spiritual and physical activities and hence between the masses and art. Whereas in feudal society 'medieval craftsmen still had a certain interest in their work and in skill in performing it, and this interest could rise to the level of primitive artistic taste',[6] men working under duress in a capitalist system find their work a sheer burden, and hence lose any interest in art. 'Deprived of the possibility of doing anything independently or appropriate to his natural gifts, the labourer in a manufacturing job develops his productive activity merely as an appendage of the capitalist's workshop.'[7] The division of labour destroys the organic unity of spiritual and material activities of primitive society, resulting in a divorce of art from the masses and of the masses from art.

* In such circumstances art develops along two distinct lines. On the one hand folk art lives on in songs, dances and decorative skills. On the other hand there is a development of professional, individual art in all its riches, but this is accessible to only a limited section of society, in general to the ruling classes. However, this does not mean that professional art is devoid of *naródnost'*. It is even possible that it is the most progressive representatives of such art that convey the fullest reflection of the life and fundamental interests of the people. This was true of Russian democratic culture in the nineteenth century, as witnessed in the works of Chernyshévsky and Nekrásov in literature and Répin and Súrikov in painting. Therefore the *naródnost'* of individual art, though it develops in a context of the contradictions engendered by class society, may nevertheless be the most important artistic vehicle by which the ideals of the people are expressed.

* Bourgeois society engenders 'art for art's sake', that is, art for artists. Bourgeois ideologists consider this to be inevitable and proper; for them, good art is always intelligible only to an elite. But progressive ideologists have always held that art has point only when it is accessible to the people,

both by its content and in its aesthetic value. Art that is not accessible to the masses is bad art.

* This problem was correctly defined in the eighteenth century by Jean-Jacques Rousseau, but he, like Tolstóy in the nineteenth century, was unable to postulate the correct solution. By denying the aesthetic worth of elitist art he displayed his inability to see that in a society riven with class antagonisms progressive art is nevertheless 'popular', since it ultimately represents the interests of the working masses. Rousseau's influence is clearly visible in German idealist aesthetics, especially of Schiller and Hegel; but whereas Rousseau, in the interests of equality, wished to sacrifice the benefits of elitist art, Schiller's aim was to elevate mankind as a whole to a level at which they could be appreciated, though his approach was too idealistic and far removed from reality. Hegel, in his 'Aesthetics', raised a whole series of problems related to *naródnost'* and stated quite categorically that 'art does not exist for a small, exclusive circle, a restricted group of highly educated men; it exists entirely for the whole people.'[8] But he, too, was unable to see the development of universal art in correct perspective.

* To a certain extent Rousseau's ideas were adopted by the romantic movement, but the more reactionary romantics developed them in quite a different way. In the early stages of the movement the ideology of the romantics was a reaction against the French revolution and the Enlightenment. But whereas for the latter the principle of *naródnost'* was related to the general aims of the bourgeois democratic movement of the epoch, the romantics looked for their ideal toward the feudal society of the Middle Ages. Realising the incompatibility of capitalism with beauty, they turned to the religion of the Catholic Church (Chateaubriand) or idealised the Age of Chivalry (Schlegel). Their concept of *naródnost'* was therefore reactionary, and this is reflected also in their aesthetic ideals. The revolutionary romantics, on the other hand, looked toward the republicanism of antiquity for their ideal, so for them *naródnost'* demanded civic equality and social liberty. The revolutionary *naródnost'* of their utopian socialism found its most vivid expression in Shelley's 'The Defence of Poetry'.

* Thus in eighteenth and nineteenth century thought great progress was made towards revealing the contradictions in the development of art in a class society and the central problem was that of the accessibility of art to the masses. Even so there was a failure to penetrate to the essence of the contradictions and to comprehend the way in which progressive art in a capitalist society may nevertheless be 'popular'. The Russian revolutionary democrats moved a long way along this path, but only Marxism could provide the explanation of the *naródnost'* of progressive art by linking it with the theory of socialist revolution, which resolves, in particular, the problem of the rift between the masses and art.

* Marx and Engels showed that the creation of a social system in which the masses would be able to develop their spiritual and artistic faculties to the full necessitated the complete transformation of society through socialism. Only a socialist system could provide the conditions in which 'everyone in whom a Raphael lies hidden must have the opportunity of untrammelled development'.[9] In such a society the development of advanced industrial

techniques would not operate, as the romantics had suggested, against the interests of art; on the contrary, it would afford every member of society ample leisure and facilities for the development and enjoyment of the arts.[10]

In nineteenth century Russia, the critic Dobrolyúbov demonstrated that the precious 'popular' elements in the works of the great prose writers of the times were essentially inaccessible to the masses,[11] and the poet Nekrásov dreamed of the time when the peasant would return from the market with the works of Belínsky and Gógol in his bag.[12] In the twentieth century Lénin took up the theme, laying the foundations of subsequent Soviet policy: '... Art must have its deepest roots in the very depths of the broad masses of the workers. It must be understood by those masses and loved by them. It must unite the feelings, thoughts and will of the masses and raise them up. It must arouse the artists among them and develop them.[13]

2

We have seen that in a class society art develops along two distinct lines, reflecting the dichotomy in the society itself. Folk art continues to develop amongst the masses, but the ruling classes develop professional, individual or academic art which is to varying degrees inaccessible to those masses. We must now define what role is played by *naródnost'* in each of these two kinds of art and the relationship between them.

* This question was much discussed amongst the ideologists of the Enlightenment, who represented two rather conflicting points of view. Proceeding from the general proposition that art should develop on the basis of the ideas and forms worked out in the popular consciousness, Lessing nevertheless did not consider that this meant a return to primitive forms. For him, the artist should combine elements of folk art with the most progressive ideas and in his working out of popular subjects and themes he should make use of the entire battery of artistic techniques evolved throughout the ages. By so doing he carries *naródnost'* on to a higher plane. Rousseau, on the other hand, thought it necessary to return to the primitive art forms preserved in the masses. Thus folk poetry was superior to the work of individual poets, who should therefore adopt the folk forms. This belief did in fact exert a partly beneficial influence in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, but it remains untrue that only the traditional folk arts may be termed 'popular'.

* The nineteenth century Russian revolutionary democrats analysed the problem of *naródnost'* in great detail, demonstrating, in particular, the role it plays in art that does not proceed directly from the masses. Of especial importance in this context is the work of V. G. Belínsky (1811–48), the first great theorist of Russian realism.

* Belínsky defined two distinct periods in the history of every people – an early, instinctive period and a later, conscious period. In the first the national peculiarities of the people are more sharply expressed and its poetry is therefore highly individual to it and consequently inaccessible to other peoples.

Hence, for example, the sharp emotional impact of Russian folk songs on Russians and the difficulty of conveying this impact to non-Russians. But in the second period poetry attains a higher level of sophistication, becomes less accessible to the masses, but is proportionately more accessible to other peoples.[14] This second kind of poetry is always superior to the first, which is the 'childish prattle' of an as yet inarticulate people. The poetry of the second period is articulate and refined and achieves a balance between form and content by evolving forms appropriate to the ideas embodied in them. The highest degree of *naródnost'* is found in art that reflects the basic interests of the masses and develops the most progressive ideas of the epoch. 'Popular' art is art which facilitates the progress of society along the path to freedom.

* Belínsky's assessment of Púshkin is a good example of his approach; Púshkin understood the impossibility of resorting to slavish imitation of folk poetry in academic art, but he nevertheless enriched his own poetry from that source, and by his link with the revolutionary movement of the epoch he exerted a great influence on progressive thought. Such an appraisal does not in any way imply denigration of folk poetry, which possesses a quality 'that cannot be replaced by academic poetry'.[15]

* An essential aspect of Belínsky's two periods is that the second is an organic development of the first. Thus academic poetry embodies elements of folk poetry, with its own overlay. It is a conscious development of earlier forms which, though the period in which they arose may be long since past, still continue to provide aesthetic pleasure.

* While largely sharing Belínsky's attitude to folk art, Marx offered a different solution of the problem of *naródnost'* by considering it on a socio-historical basis within the framework of the development of class society. By destroying the feudal basis of society, he said, the bourgeoisie also condemned to extinction the art forms associated with it. But the revolutionary element in the exploited class of the new, bourgeois society begins to produce its own, new 'popular' art and it is to this that Marx and Engels turned their attention. They cited, for example, the 'Song of the Weavers' [16] of the Silesian workers. They were not unaware of the limitations of such phenomena but they saw in them evidence of both the ability and the desire of the workers to create their own art. This argument was taken further by Lénin in a number of articles and in the Soviet Union such forms of new 'popular' art are actively encouraged and subsidised.[17]

* However, a socialist society not only preserves the best in folk or 'popular' art; it instils new ideas into them, leading to a fusion of traditional forms with the finest achievements of academic art. Universal education and the consequent raising of the cultural level of the entire people, with improved living standards and ample leisure, will then give rise to the 'new, great Communist art' [18] that Lénin predicted.

3

From even such a brief exposition it becomes clear that *naródnost'* in the arts does not simply pertain to accessibility to the masses in the sense of

simplicity of form. Art, if it is to be 'popular', must not only be intelligible to the masses, it must spring from them. The link between the masses and folk art, whether traditional or new, is clear; the link with the 'popular' elements in academic art is more complex. We shall now examine this further by reference to a second major principle of Marxist-Leninist aesthetic theory, the principle of the *klássovost'* – the class nature – of art.

* For most of its history, human society has been divided into classes, and this has led to a clash of ideologies between them. This is inevitably reflected in art, though in complicated and sometimes oblique fashion.

* All great works of art reflect, to some extent, the class ideology of the artists who created them, but this does not mean that they do not contain 'popular' elements. Even folk art reflects class differences; peasant art, for instance, has a different ideological content from proletarian art.* Moreover in a capitalist society the ideology of the ruling class is partly echoed in the art of the masses. (In a socialist society, these elements of ruling-class ideology, 'survivals of capitalism', must be isolated and expunged.) And within the ruling class certain ideological differences may develop, though these are quickly reconciled in the face of a common threat.[19]

* The content of a work of art is not entirely determined by the ideology of the artist himself, since every genuine artist is a reflection to some degree of the reality of his epoch. His subject is life in all its basic aspects, and the major importance of his work lies in its objective content, even though this may be obscured or even contradicted by his own subjective views, dictated by the form of the society in which he works.

* At some stage each rising class, moving towards the status of ruling class, embodies progressive, social-evolutionary tendencies and therefore represents the interests of the majority, including the exploited class. Hence the necessity in every case to determine the concrete historical conditions in which the class nature of any work of art is manifested. In every society, as Lénin indicated, there are two cultures – the culture of the exploiter and the culture of the exploited,[20] So when considering a given epoch it is essential to decide what is reactionary and what is genuinely 'popular', avoiding the errors resulting from the automatic application of 'vulgar sociological' criteria.

* By revealing the immorality of the clergy in the *Decameron*, Boccaccio displayed his opposition to feudalism; by describing his *Utopia*, in which private property did not exist, Thomas More took up an anti-bourgeois position; and by portraying the miserable consequence of an unhappy marriage in *Anna Karénina*, Tolstóy condemned the values of the society of his day. No matter what sphere of human life the artist portrays, he reveals his attitude to society and consequently the ideology of the classes within that society and their relationship with the masses.

* Likewise in the visual arts, in which, as in literature, the choice of subject

* Though Soviet society is said to be classless in the conventional sense, it nevertheless admits of two major classes – the peasants and the industrial proletariat – and a stratum (*proslóika*) of intelligentsia.

or hero may betray class attitudes. This may be explicit, as in Venetsiánov's choice of peasant life as the subject of his painting instead of the traditional portraits of the nobility. Or it may be more subtle: the art and sculpture of the Middle Ages, under the influence of religious faith, emphasised man's spiritual aspect, whereas the masters of Renaissance art – Raphael, Michelangelo, Leonardo da Vinci – aspired to portray the harmony between his spiritual and physical attributes.

4

These examples illustrate the widely different ways in which class attitudes may be seen in works of art. Marxist analysis sets out to show that art has profound social significance even when it has no obvious or direct concern with social problems. In this argument an especially important and difficult question is that of the philosophy (world-view) of the individual artist, for the artist's own philosophy is also inseparable from his art.

* Genuine art cannot flourish on the basis of a false philosophy: underlying all great art are ideals of humanism, belief in life and in man, faith in the capacity of the human mind to comprehend reality, indignation at social evil and a vision of the perfect conditions for the development of the human personality. But if the work of an individual artist betrays conservative or reactionary views, this does not necessarily mean that his entire philosophy is false. Balzac was a legitimist, but this does not detract from his condemnation of bourgeois greed. Similarly Tolstóy's principle of non-violent resistance to evil was misguided but it was not central to his work which, in the main evinced a correct understanding of his times. An artist's philosophy embraces the whole of life and must not be judged on the basis of isolated false or erroneous ideas conditioned by the society in which he lives.

* Marxism reveals that art always bears traces of class interests and has always participated in the class struggle, though this is most clearly visible at times of social upheaval. Thus in the period preceding the French revolution the arts played an important role in ideological preparation for that event and in nineteenth century Russia the poetry of Púshkin, Lérmontov and Nekrásov; the writings of Gógol, Turgénev, Chernyshévsky and Tolstóy; the plays of Ostróvsky; the paintings of Kramskóy, Súrikov and Répin; and the music of Glínka, Chaikóvsky, Borodín, Dargomýzhsky and Rímsky-Kórsakov all played an enormous part in awakening social consciousness and protest. Similarly during the Revolution and Civil War artists took an active part in the struggle – Mayakóvsky with his verse, Demyán Bédny with his satire, and Móor and Dení with their posters. But a scientific application of the principle of *klássovost'* in an examination of ideological matters requires careful study of all aspects if the errors of 'vulgar sociology', already mentioned, are to be avoided.

* They have not always been avoided, and in the early stages of the development of Soviet literary studies certain erroneous ideas gained great

popularity. Attempts were made to relate the progress of art too directly to the technical-economic base of society (e.g. to relate statistics concerning the import–export of corn in the early nineteentth century directly to Púshkin's poetry!), even though Marx had warned against this.[21] The 'popular' quality of artistic works will guarantee their survival long after the society that gave them birth has receded into past history and this contributes to the complex nature of the relationship between art and society.

* A similar error lay at the root of the Proletkult [22] desire to renounce all bourgeois art – all the art of the pre-revolutionary era. The members of this movement did not realise that by renouncing bourgeois art they were cutting themselves off from the genuinely 'popular' elements that it contained.

Lénin's opposition to the Proletkult,[23] which is sometimes presented as merely the Communist Party's opposition to any kind of rivalry, may therefore be seen to have had a deep ideological cause, and this is a valuable lesson in the correct understanding of the meaning of *naródnost'*. We shall return to this topic in our discussion of policy in the 1920s.

* The Proletkult was not alone in vulgarising Marxist principles. Both Engels [24] and Marx [25] had already had occasion to comment on the over-simplification that underlay the tendency to relate artistic and aesthetic phenomena too closely to the economic base of society. The same class phenomenon may acquire different traits, depending on concrete historical conditions. To label a work of art 'bourgeois' and therefore automatically attribute to it all the worst features of the bourgeoisie is a gross over-simplification. Not all writers of the bourgeois period were themselves conscious protagonists of bourgeois ideology, though their horizons were of necessity restricted. Moreover, the bourgeoisie was in its day the most progressive section of society. This theme was also taken up by Lénin;[26] in the 'vulgar sociological' view the artist is a selfish protagonist of his own class interests and embodies this attitude in his art, but to the Marxist-Leninist it is important to define in art, as in social consciousness in general, the degree to which objective reality is consciously reflected. Since art, as a form of social consciousness, is able to reflect objective reality, this quality must be visible in the work of the individual artists. It was in such a context that Lénin could discuss Tolstóy as the mirror of the Russian revolution.[27]

* All genuine art contains an objective reflection of at least some basic aspects of the life of the society of the times, and this is the criterion of its realism and its social significance. The *klássovost'* of a work of art is expressed in the manner, extent and profundity of its conscious reflection of reality, and especially of the contradictions in society. In other words, the social significance of a work of art is directly related to its realism, that is, to its objective reflection of reality.

* By their truthful and broad grasp of reality, depth of penetration into the essence of social relations and accurate depiction of the personal life and experience of individual characters in the context of society as a whole major works of art acquire a 'popular' nature, since accurate depiction of reality is always a spur to progress. The artist may bear the imprint of

class, but by producing an objective reflection of life and the laws that govern its development he creates a work of art that transcends the bounds of class ideology. Though Plekhánov saw Tolstóy as merely a representative of the 'conscience-stricken nobility', Lénin was able to show that the basis of his philosophy was the ideology of the masses of the peasantry. And Dostoyévsky, though in later works such as the novel *Devils* (*Bésy*) a frank proponent of reaction, has nevertheless great social significance because of the depth of his psychological analysis and of the themes and conflicts portrayed in his writing. Concerning such authors as Dostoyévsky the question that must be put is not a dogmatic – 'Was he a "popular" artist or not?', but a dialectic – 'What elements in his work have an essentially "popular" nature?' All artists are conditioned by the class structure of the society in which they live, but by their reflection of objective reality, their realism, their works assume a genuinely 'popular' aspect even though the artists may appear as protagonists of reaction or of illusory solutions to the problems of society.

* All art is class art. The class nature of art is visible even in socialist societies; wherever class antagonisms exist, they are reflected in art. The Soviet Union, being a classless society in the sense of having no class antagonisms within it, is nevertheless almost unique and alone in a predominantly capitalist world, and in such a context all Soviet art is also class art. But Soviet society is monolithic, hence the *naródnost'* and *klássovost'* of Soviet art coincides. And since Soviet society is united behind the Communist Party, the *naródnost'* and *klássovost'* of Soviet art find their expression in *partiinost'* – the third major tenet of Marxist-Leninist aesthetics.

5

The principle of *partiinost'*, perhaps the most individual and certainly the most controversial Leninist gloss on Marxist aesthetics, arouses passions both inside and outside the Soviet Union. In a sense it is the professional, practical revolutionary's logical, if extreme, development of the early Marxist theoretician's principle of tendentiousness in art. Extrapolated from one single article [28] it gives Soviet aesthetics their unique flavour, though it traces its antecedents back, in particular, to the works and activities of the founders of Marxism.

* Discussing the artists of the Renaissance, Engels commented that what was especially characteristic of them was that they nearly all 'participated in the practical struggle, taking one side or another – some fighting with word and pen, some with the sword, some with both . . .[29] In the same way Milton became the poet of the English bourgeois revolution in the seventeenth century, and in France the 'encyclopaedia' of Diderot and D'Alembert was the focal point around which the ideological battle was fought, David was a Jacobin, Delacroix – by his painting 'Liberty Leading the People' – is in-

separably linked with the revolution of 1830 and Courbet is rightly considered the artist of the Paris Commune.

* Engels called this identification with a political or social cause 'tendentiousness' and saw it most clearly at times of heightened class antagonism. But the degree of social awareness of such artists was clearly restricted by their lack of understanding of *klássovost'*; hence a clear distinction must be drawn between *tendentiousness* – the artist's desire to take up a political stance, and *partiinost'* – a fully articulated awareness of the political function of art. These are two closely related concepts, sometimes even indistinguishable from one another, but they must not be considered identical.

* The founders of Marxism appreciated the problem of consolidating artistic forces around the proletarian revolutionary movement and making the most talented artists conscious partisans of the working class cause, though they did not see this in terms of allegiance to a political party. Their task was essentially an educative one, as witnessed by their correspondence about Herwegh and Freilingrath,[30] their critical analysis of Lasalle's drama *Franz von Sickingen*,[31] and Engels's mentorship of Margaret Harkness [32] and Minna Kautsky. Writing to the last named in Paris in November 1885, on the subject of her novel *Old Ones and the New*, Engels stated: 'Thus the socialist problem novel... fully carries out its mission if by a faithful portrayal of the real relations it dispels the dominant conventional illusions concerning those relations... without itself offering a direct solution of the problem involved...'[33]

* The crucial moment in the evolution of the principle of *partiinost'* was the publication in Górky's journal *Novaya Zhizn'* (*The New Life*) of Lénin's article on 'Party Organisation and Party Literature' in 1905, at a time when publication of the party 'press' had become legal for the first time. This article is of fundamental importance to an understanding of subsequent developments, for despite allegations that it was dictated simply by the temporary political requirements of the times, it has in fact been vitally influential in determining party policy toward the arts ever since it first appeared.[34]

* 'Emerging from the captivity of feudal censorship', Lénin wrote, 'we have no desire to become, and we shall not become, prisoners of bourgeois--shopkeeper literary relations.' Then follows one of the most significant statements: 'We want to establish, and we shall establish, a free press, free not simply from the police, but also from capital, from careerism and, what is more, free from bourgeois-anarchist individualism.'

* This definition of freedom is central to Lénin's argument, for the freedom of the artist as he envisaged it is vastly different from the 'bourgeois freedom' he attacked. In a bourgeois society, art serves only the 'upper ten thousand', and this in itself imposes obvious limitations on the freedom of the artist. Bourgeois freedom is in fact illusory, depending ultimately on the purse. Art may be genuinely free only when it is released from all hindrance in the fulfilment of its true social function, which is to serve the interests of the masses, 'the millions and tens of millions of working people – the flower of the country, its strength and its future'. Thus Lénin relates the freedom of the arts to their *naródnost'*, contrasting the 'hypocritically free literature,

which is in reality linked with the bourgeoisie, with a really free one that will be *openly* linked with the proletariat'. It will be free because it will not feed on 'greed or careerism' but on 'the idea of socialism and sympathy with the working people', serving the interests of the masses and enriching revolutionary thought with the practical experience of the socialist proletariat. 'In this way it will bring about a 'permanent interaction between the experience of the past (scientific socialism . . .) and the experience of the present . . .'

* The essence of *partiinost'* is the open allegiance of art to the cause of the working class, a conscious decision on the part of the artist to dedicate his work to the furtherance of socialism. It is not inimicable to freedom; on the contrary, it affords the artist the optimum conditions for the development of his ideological aspirations, guaranteeing him an organic link with the people and a place within its ranks. Literature therefore becomes '*part* of the common cause of the proletariat', part of 'one single, great Social-Democratic mechanism set in motion by the entire politically-conscious vanguard of the entire working class'. It becomes an organic element in the struggle for socialism and an active weapon in that process.

* From this it follows that Party guidance is essential if art is to escape from 'bourgeois-anarchic individualism', with its damaging effect on the relationship between the artist and the masses and hence on art itself. The 'organised socialist proletariat' must supervise it from beginning to end and 'infuse into it the life-stream of the living proletarian cause', putting an end to the traditional situation in which 'the writer does the writing, the reader does the reading'. The reader must have a hand in the writing, too.

* Lénin acknowledges that literature lends itself least of all to 'mechanical adjustment or levelling', and that 'in this field greater scope must undoubtedly be allowed for personal initiative, individual inclination, thought and fantasy, form and content'. But all this means is that allowance must be made for the specific features of literature in a purely technical sense: 'This, however, does not in the least refute the proposition, alien and strange to the bourgeoisie and bourgeois democracy, that literature must . . . become an element of Social-Democratic work, inseparably bound up with the other elements.'

* * *

From such a source the principle of *partiinost'* has evolved into the most important, single guiding factor in Soviet policy toward the arts, providing the unifying element that draws together the several strands in Marxist-Leninist aesthetics that we have examined. It embodies, or 'demands from the artist', a threefold, conscious decision: (1) art must fulfil a specific social function; (2) that function is to further the interests of the masses; (3) to further the interests of the masses, art must become part of the activity of the Communist Party.

Although the argument continues about what precisely Lénin meant

in his article – it raged particularly fiercely inside the Soviet Union during the period following Stálin's death – there is no doubt of the importance attached to that article, and its interpretation, in present-day Soviet aesthetics: 'Exclusion of the principle of *partíinost'* not only impoverishes the principle but gives grounds to our ideological enemies for placing a distorted interpretation on it – grounds of which they frequently take advantage.' [35]

In the introduction to this book it was pointed out that one of the most outstanding Soviet writers, Mikhaíl Shólokhov, is often quoted by Western commentators as having been unable to explain what Socialist Realism is. On the other hand, Soviet critics would themselves quote a passage from Shólokhov's speech at the Second Writers' Congress (1954) on the subject of *partíinost'*: 'Our furious enemies in other countries say that we Soviet authors write according to the dictates of the Party. But the fact of the matter is a little different. Each of us writes according to the dictates of his heart, but all our hearts belong to the Party and to the people, whom we serve with our art.' [36]

Socialist Realism, it must be stressed in conclusion, is the 'artistic method' whereby the artist fulfils the demands put upon him by the Communist Party. It should therefore be carefully distinguished from that *social realism* which, in the parlance of Western critics, may be taken to refer to the artist's concern with social themes, not with a political programme. In a Russian context such social realism was very much a nineteenth century phenomenon, whereas Socialist Realism is a twentieth century development. The relationship between the two is the theme of our second chapter.