SOVIET AUTHOR'S PROBLEM NUMBER ONE

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In a previous article ("Stalin the Historian") we showed that a study of modern Soviet historiography can yield valuable inside information about the laboratory of Bolshevist ideology. The same is true of modern Soviet literature. The following article is based on more than 50 Soviet novels and plays published in Moscow since the outbreak of war, most of them in 1943 and 1944.

SOVIET authors are faced at present with one paramount task. Numerous critical articles in leading literary and even political periodicals and dailies of the Soviet Union leave no doubt as to what this task is: it is to create the *Homo Sovieticus* in literary form. To what extent have Soviet authors been able to cope with this task? In the following we shall first briefly describe some of the principal characters of the latest Soviet literature as they appear in those works which have been most widely read and discussed in the USSR. Needless to say, the authors have endowed them with all the most wonderful qualities they could think of.

THE COMMISSAR

In the opinion of Soviet critics, Commissar Bogaryov in Vasily Grossman's novel *The People Is Immortal* is the outstanding character in the literature dealing with the first period of the war. Published in 1943, its story takes place in the autumn of 1941. The author describes Bogaryov as follows:

> Before the war, Bogaryov was Professor of Marxism-Leninism at one of the Moscow universities. He was especially fond of research and always intent on having as few lecture hours as possible. Bogaryov's chief interest was centered on a work of research which he had begun two years earlier. When he came home in the evening from his work and sat down to his supper, he took the manuscript out of his brief case and read. His wife used to ask him whether he liked the food, whether there was enough salt in the scrambled eggs. He would make some absent-minded reply; she would be annoyed and laugh. But he would say to her: "You know, Lisa, I had a real treat today—I read some letters by Marx to Lafargue. They were recently dug up from an old archive." She used to listen and, in spite of herself, enjoy his pleasure and excitement. She loved him and was proud of him—she knew how highly his colleagues thought of him.

After the outbreak of the war, Bogaryov is made political commissar in the Army and goes to the front. Bogaryov is thus well suited to be the central figure of a Soviet novel: the wholehearted Marxist-Leninist in a soldier's uniform. His experiences at the front, especially his actions during the time in which his battalion is surrounded by the enemy before it is able to fight its way back to the main front of the Reds, form the contents of the novel. It is not necessary to relate the details of this story. This novel as well as the other war novels we shall mention here are essentially war descriptions held together by one or more characters and without a plot in the true sense of the word. Bogaryov's activity as a commissar has, however, two culminating points.

The regiment to which Bogaryov is attached and which is led by a colonel has been successful. The colonel is satisfied with this result and expects to be decorated for it. Bogaryov, however, reproaches him, for the Germans have succeeded in withdrawing without appreciable losses. He says:

> "The battalions acted each for themselves. . . . In the regiment there is not the necessary co-ordination. . . . You are a brave man who does not spare his life, but you command your regiment poorly . . . . I do not want you to think that everything is in order and that there is nothing more to be learned."

Bogaryov also blames the colonel for having run ahead of his troops with a rifle in his hands at a critical moment of the battle instead of "thinking till he perspired and making quick, clear decisions."

Bogaryov's second outstanding achievement is his influence on the cut-off troops, especially on the entirely apathetic company under a demoralized lieutenant. When he discovers that the lieutenant has taken off his officer's insignia so that the Germans may not recognize him as an officer in case he should be taken prisoner, he shouts at him:

> "Attention! What is the matter with you? How are you appearing before your superior? Get yourself and your men fixed up immediately. Not a single man unshaved and not a single man in a torn uniform! Put on your insignia again. Have your company parade in twenty minutes!"

The commissar's disciplinary efforts bear fruit, and the encircled troops are freed.

THE PARTISAN

Not all the central figures of modern Soviet literature are professors of Marxism-Leninism. But many of them are in the Party.

Stepan Yatsenko, the hero of Boris Gorbatov's new novel *The Unbowed*, is also a Party man.

The book appeared in 1943 in a first edition of half a million copies and immediately met with considerable interest. The Soviets have had it translated into French, Polish, Rumanian, and Chinese, obviously because they regard it as particularly effective for foreign consumption, too.

The novel describes the life of Soviet people living in those parts of the Soviet Union which are occupied by the German armies, and the story centers around the family of Taras Yatsenko, an old laborer. Taras himself doubts the effectiveness of any anti-German activity behind the front. His faith in the Red Army has been sorely shaken by the speed of the German advance. Nor is he able to find anyone capable of engaging in an organized, serious fight. When one of his three sons, Andrei, who had been taken prisoner by the Germans, is released under circumstances his father cannot comprehend and returns home, old Taras becomes even more pessimistic. In his despair, he decides to leave. Having loaded up his wheelbarrow, he starts off. On this difficult trek he meets quite unexpectedly with his son Stepan, whom the Party has sent into the occupied territory to organize resistance and sabotage.

> And none of the men employed by Stepan asked him or themselves by what right this bearded fellow looking like a tramp ordered them around. They knew what stood behind him: their country? No, their country stood behind them all, but only behind him stood the Party. The Party had given him power over their souls. . . . When he introduced Stepan, the chairman of the secret meeting said: "This man was sent to us by the Party." And they all raised their eyes to Stepan.

THE SAILOR

In L. Solovyov's book *Ivan Nikulin—a Russian Sailor* the role of the Party and particularly of Stalin is even more emphasized. Twenty-five sailors meet on their return from leave and decide to travel to the front together in a box car hung onto the end of a goods train. The Germans are advancing. The train is stopped by a German patrol, and the book goes on to describe the ensuing adventures of the sailors and their endeavors to fight their way through enemy-occupied territory to the Red Army. Gradually the group is joined by others. They are led by Ivan Nikulin, a simple sailor. The more dangerous the route becomes, the more does his responsibility weigh on him, the more does he have to fight against attacks of despondency. His thoughts turn more and more frequently to Stalin, and so intensely do they rule his mind that he has an encouraging vision of Stalin in a dream.

So Nikulin continues on his way, until finally he dies in action.

THE CAPTAIN

The description of the life and feelings of a Red Army unit in the days of Stalingrad forms the contents of the novel *Days and Nights* by Konstantin Simonov, one of the leading younger Soviet authors. Its hero is Captain Saburov. There is even less of a plot in this work than in the other. It is more of a chronicle of the seventy days of fighting of a battalion in Stalingrad. It contains a dialogue between the captain and Vanin, commissar of the battalion. This time it is the officer who tells off the commissar.

> "We can never get used to the idea, Captain, that the battalion is no longer a battalion. We still speak of companies, platoons, groups. All together we have long been no more than a company, but we cannot get used to it," complained the commissar.
>
> "We don't have to, either," said Saburov. "My dear fellow, if we got used to the idea that we are not a battalion but only a company, we should have to evacuate two of three buildings, for with a company we cannot defend three buildings. We can only defend them with a battalion. We need only imagine that we are a company for our strength to fail us"
>
> "Even so it sometimes fails us."
>
> "You seem to have succumbed to pessimism."
>
> "A bit. So what? Is that against the rules?"
>
> "Yes, that's against the rules."

There is also a love affair between Saburov and a nurse.

NAVAL OFFICER, SOLDIER, GIRL

While Simonov describes the life and the fighting of a battalion on land, Y. German takes the life and the fighting of a warship and its commander, Lieutenant Commander Ladynin, for the subject of his book, *The Cold Sea*.

Vasily Tyorkin, a lengthy poem by A. Tvardovsky, is a glorification of the simple soldier of the Red Army; and *Zoya*, by Margarita Aliger, the most famous epic in the Soviet literature of the last few years, is a panegyric on an eighteen-year-old Comsomol girl, a Moscow student who joined the partisans behind the German lines.

"HERO OF OUR TIME"

Let us imagine that these books were translated and read, say, in America. One can hardly imagine that American critics would have much to object to their main characters. But how were they received by Soviet critics? The answer to this question provides us with the most interesting part of our study. The opinion of Soviet critics—surprising as it may seem—is unfavorable, although the authors have certainly spared neither color nor imagination to make the heroes of their novels shine. Here are a few examples.

> Our authors have not yet created the typical figure of the "hero of our time." (*Bolshevik*, 1944, No. 10/11, p. 48.)
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> Among the large number of our books of the war which have long and justifiably enjoyed general popularity, there is not yet a single one in which the young type of the Stalin epoch . . . has found his true, complete portrait. . . . By the name of which hero in our literature will the people of the future indicate the forties of the twentieth century? . . . . So far we do not yet have any books on the younger generation which are artistically fully valid. ("Where Is the Literary Hero of Our Times?," *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, 13.5.44.)
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> The heroic epic of the war years is "aheroic". . . . The Soviet authors have so far failed to produce a heroic figure. (*Znamya*, 1943, No. 9, p. 295.)

Almost exactly a hundred years ago, in 1840, the Russian author Lermontov completed his novel *A Hero of Our Time*, one of the greatest works of Russian literature. This hero, Pechorin by name, has played an important role in Russia's history. For not only did he typify Lermontov's time: by taking hold of the imagination of the Russians, he contributed toward shaping the Russian type. Pechorin was filled with so much individuality that he lived on and influenced the ideas of several generations. Russia's literature later produced a few more "heroes of our time," for example the nihilist Bazarov in Turgenyev's *Fathers and Sons*. Hence when the Soviet critics demand "heroes of our time" from their authors, they have definite prototypes in mind.

What is it that the Soviet critics dislike in the case of the characters we described above? We shall again let the critics speak for themselves.

CRITICS' OBJECTIONS

About Bogaryov we read:

> In the novel *The People Is Immortal* there are excellent lyrical passages, an interesting subject, an outstanding theme, but no hero. . . . Throughout the novel Bogaryov utters many a correct word. His speeches are clever and full of significance, full of ideals and principles. His actions are irreproachable . . . . But a genuine portrait of Bogaryov, an explanation of his character, is completely lacking in the novel. He is "certified" by the author in his capacity of commissar and does all to fulfill his obligations in the plot. (*Oktyabr*, 1943, No. 6/7, p. 193.)

Concerning Gorbatov's *The Unbowed*, the critics have the following to say:

> Gorbatov merely acquaints us with . . . the noble motives of a magnificent representative of our younger generation. But he does not provide him with a face of his own, with an individual destiny. . . . Some of Boris Gorbatov's heroes have no actual individual fate no actual individual character. He presents examples taken from the life of various categories of people under the Germans. . . and by attaching his material to the corresponding heroes, he disregards the fact that we must know not only the example but also the person. (*Znamya*, 1944, No. 3, p. 159.)

Simonov's hero, too, lacks individuality, according to the critics:

> Simonov succeeds in everything connected with the characterization of the actions of his hero, Captain Saburov, with his behavior in various circumstances of war life, in everything that provides, so to speak, the outline of the drawing. . . . But what is lacking in Saburov's portrait is detail, individuality. The reserved, almost niggardly description of Saburov, the hero's taciturnity, sometimes even poverty of speech, makes his portrait weak. . . . In the novel, Saburov's love is presented as something lying beyond time and space and is in no way connected with the events preceding it in the novel. The war does not stamp the feelings of the lovers. . . . Saburov's feelings in his love are presented as so joylessly monumental, without gaiety or tender humanity, that they are sometimes simply unbelievable. (*Literatura i Iskustvo*, 1944, No. 42.)

Nor does Y. German fare any better:

> Alexander Ladynin might actually serve as an example for the Soviet citizen and warrior. . . . But the war has imparted nothing new to Ladynin's inner world. The war is for him only an opportunity to apply the principles he already preached in his youth. . . . He is portrayed as "complete" and makes the impression of an automaton . . . . One cannot help asking whether perhaps Ladynin is not taciturn because he simply has nothing to say? (*Literatura i Iskustvo*, 1944, No. 24)

Even the widely-printed narrative poem *Zoya*, which was, after all, written about a person who actually existed and for that reason alone should merit special treatment on the part of the critics, has not produced the "hero of our time":

> Doubtless the weakness of the epic *Zoya* is to be found in the fact that its author, too, did not succeed in shaping the living human portrait in which the traits of the century, of the Soviet epoch, the traits of the nation and the unique individual traits of the personality are blended. . . . To that which is individual, personal, unique in the character and conduct in the biography of Zoya comparatively little space has been granted. (*Znamya*, 1943, No. 9/10, pp. 296, 297.)

APPREHENSION

Theater Manager: "Why don't you turn out your next play?"

Author: "Because I'm afraid *I'll* be turned out."

(*Crocodile*, Moscow, 1944, No. 26/27)

AND BEHIND THE FRONT?

We have quoted so many of the leading critics to show that the disfavor met with by the characters produced by modern Soviet literature cannot be blamed on this or that critic happening to have been in a bad temper or on the failure of one or the other author. Indeed, we have not seen a single Soviet review of any of the new war books in which the critic said: Here is the "hero of our time."

Before we study the reasons for this attitude on the part of the critics we must turn to the second great group of themes of present-day Soviet literature. For, after all, the soldiers at the front and the partisans behind the German lines are only a part, by far the smaller part of the Soviet population. The majority of the people are in the interior of the country. Although the actual experience of war is of the greatest significance to every human being, the possibility remains that the Soviet authors might perhaps have found it easier to discover

the "hero of our time" in the more stable conditions of the interior and been better able to portray him artistically. What, then, has Soviet literature produced in important works on the people behind the front? Literary critics and the Party have only one reply to this question: very little.

In the days of the war the Soviet people behind the front are very poorly represented in our literature. (*Propagandist*, 1944, No. 6, p. 25.)

The country in the rear has obviously had no luck. Many authors have been living for a long time deep in the interior, yet they have written nothing or almost nothing about the people behind the front. (N. Tikhonov, Chairman of the All-Soviet Writers' Association, in *Bolshevik*, 1944, No. 3/4, p. 36.)

In order fully to appreciate the significance of these sweeping condemnations we must bear in mind what this region behind the front represents. There are well over 100 million people there who have spent all or a large part of their life under the conditions of the Soviet state, who are products of Bolshevism, and who were not torn in so radical a manner from their customary environment as the soldiers at the front and the partisans. Hence the slogans and promises of the Soviet system should be embodied in the interior not less but more than at the front. Comrade Tikhonov, it is true, exaggerates when he claims that "nothing or almost nothing" has been written about the people behind the front. On the contrary, some of the best-known Soviet authors such as Simonov, Katayev, Karavayeva, and Gladkov, have dealt with this theme. What are the central figures we find there?

"WAIT FOR ME"

A young Soviet officer leaves for the front and, on departing, begs his wife: *Wait For Me*. In the third line of the play, before he has even left, his best friends are already saying to him: "Are you really so sure that she will be faithful to you? Have you not noticed that she is already behaving rather strangely?" And after the officer's departure his wife is actually tempted all the time; if, in contrast to her best friend, who succumbs to temptation, she remains faithful to her husband after all, he as well as the reader feel this to have been more a question of luck than anything else.

The problem of the Soviet family . . . has been turned upside down by Simonov in his play *Wait For Me*. . . . Simonov actually tries to represent conjugal loyalty toward a beloved person as a heroic deed which is supposed to fill one with admiration. (*Novy Mir*, 1943, No. 4, p. 122.)

"THE WIFE"

Possibly under the impression of the unfavorable criticism of Simonov's play, the Soviet author V. Katayev has sought to set a better monument to the officer's wife in his story *The Wife*. By chance a war correspondent meets a young woman somewhere near the front who tells him the story of her life and her marriage, baring her soul to him. She tells him how before the war she met her husband, a young flying officer, in a health resort in the Crimea and fell in love with him, how happily they were married, how the war destroyed their happiness and finally snatched away her husband's life. Now she is on the way to the front to visit her husband's grave. She describes herself as follows:

"I have been told that I have an open, uncomplicated nature. That is true. During that wonderful, unforgettable time I was a very sociable, cheerful Comsomol girl. I had lots of friends or, rather, everyone was my friend. I loved them all and they all loved me."

The Soviet critics are not satisfied with this description of a Soviet heroine:

That is all we have in the way of description of the character of the heroine of the story, a leading Comsomol member. It is hard to believe that such a thoughtless little lamb grew up in our reality. (*Znamya*, 1944, No. 4, p. 148.)

Nor have the critics a much better opinion of the young husband, the much-decorated major of the air force. During a walk in the Crimea, he shows his future wife the ancient monument of a Roman who was buried there in the days of the Roman Empire. He says:

"Italy has a wonderful climate. It is warm. There are bread, wine, cheese, butter, oranges, grapes, in plenty. He should have stayed at home, plowing his fields, reading Vergil, begetting children, and creating wonderful works of art from his native marble. Not bad, eh? Would you have any objection to such an idyllic life?"

The critics cannot let such an attitude pass by uncensured:

What we Bolsheviks mean by happiness has nothing in common with this ideal of an easy, agreeably idyllic vegetating, the untroubled tranquillity of a plantlike existence. (*Znamya*, 1944, No. 4, p. 148.)

"FIRES"

The books dealing in most detail with life and work in the interior are the last two of the novels we shall describe here. Anna Karavayeva depicts in her novel *Fires* the merging of two industrial works—an old Ural plant and a new plant evacuated from the Ukraine to the Urals. The theme of the novel is the conflict between the Ural people and the evacuees, a conflict which is shown to exist at various levels: between the managers of the works, the foremen, the workers, their wives. There are particularly vehement disputes between the general manager of the Ural plant, who represents the old school of native Ural workers, and the general manager of the evacuated plant, a pushing engineer of the new school, who introduces modern methods in the factory. One is touchy and jealous, the other tactless.

The situation leads to a flare-up of passions. Not even Plastunov, the Party organizer, is able to adjust the differences. A real *deus ex machina* is needed: Stalin himself. The Ural manager hears a speech of Stalin on the anniversary of the Revolution and, under its influence, decides to overcome

his hatred for his rival. But he does not succeed completely in his noble intention until — his rival is transferred to Moscow. Only now that he has got rid of him does he readily acknowledge his good sides.

About this book, one of the critics writes:

Instead of conflicts founded in the pathos of the present struggle and producing new forms of human relations and characters, we find in this novel phantoms of the long-dead past. . . . The characters spend all their time proving and explaining to each other and the reader that twice two is four, that mathematics are a useful science, that it is bad to be an individualist, that one should not take a hostile attitude toward what is new, etc., etc. (*Literatura i Iskustvo*, 1944, No. 34.)

There is also a love story included in the novel. An air-force officer on leave falls in love with Tanya, the daughter of an old family of Ural workers. In the author's opinion, the young couple are excellent representatives of the younger Soviet generation. But the critics are not satisfied in this respect either:

Wherever the necessity arises of explaining the character of the heroes, the author takes recourse to various phrases, catchwords, pleasing or touching platitudes.

So we find that the figures of modern Soviet literature appear pale even in the description of their love life. This is true of Captain Saburov and his nurse, of Katayev's "Wife" and her Andrei, of Tanya and her flying officer in *Fires*.

"THE OATH"

In the summer of 1944 a new book appeared whose hero, Sharonov, finally found favor in the eyes of a Soviet critic:

The poetic pathos permeating Sharonov's work is the *Weltanschauung* of a new human being which differentiates him basically from the people of former times. . . . The author actually generalizes a new phenomenon existing only in our country, a phenomenon which arose in the character of people who have grown up on new, Soviet soil. (*Oktyabr*, 1944, No. 5/6, p. 148.)

Although it is not said expressly that Sharonov is the "hero of our time," he is designated as a new, basically different type of man. Knowing that the Soviet critics have searched so long for the new type of man in modern Soviet literature, we turn with curiosity toward the novel in question. It is *The Oath* by Fyodr Gladkov.

Gladkov's new book bears the subtitle "Diary of the Metal Worker Nikolai Sharonov" and describes the experiences and emotions of a qualified worker of Leningrad who was evacuated with his factory to the Urals in 1941 while his wife and child remained in Leningrad. Sharonov characterizes himself as follows:

I have been standing at a machine for eighteen years, that is half my life. Without interrupting my work at the factory I completed a course at the Workers' Evening School and attended lectures at the Institute for Literature and Languages. I have tried my hand at writing verse and stories, but nothing came of it. Incidentally the reports and lectures I gave on literary themes were not bad. Ever since I was a child I have had a passion for books, and this passion will continue to burn in me until the end of my days. . . . I love my machine. I love to produce good work, so that my products sparkle in my hand, are happy, live, like works of art. Sometimes I have experienced actual excitement when I picked up a part of machinery I had produced. I felt pleased at its shape and the gleam of its steel. For me there is no greater pleasure than the knowledge that these things I have turned out are not simply pieces of metal mechanically finished by the machine but part of my soul.

When Sharonov enters the machine hall:

Immediately I feel a connection with my machine. I see it from afar and it greets me like a living thing with its flashing brightness and a somehow special warmth. It seems to me as if my soul, my nature, my spiritual restlessness have been living in it for a long time.

We also learn that Sharonov, inspired by the thought of his family in Leningrad, which city has meanwhile been encircled by the Germans, and of his brother, who is an aviator at the front, has thought out several technical improvements for his machine as the result of which he raises his daily production to seventeen and later even forty times the ordinary standard. He helps other workers to increase their output and contributes toward catching a saboteur who has blown up the gasoline tanks of the factory. This, then, is the new type of man who, to use the words of the critic, is basically different from the man of former times and could only grow from the soil of the Soviet Union.

Let us accept Sharonov as he is portrayed by the author with all his excellent points, and let us ask ourselves whether this type of man was really not to be found before or elsewhere. As we have seen, Sharonov's chief characteristic is that he loves his work, that he identifies himself with it and with the product of his work. Those who have met the workers of other countries know that there has always been this type of man everywhere. In the early thirties I once worked for six months in a mine of the Ruhr district. There were dozens of Sharonovs there, men who loved their work and felt one with their machines. And the stonemasons who created the medieval cathedrals, were they not also Sharonovs? The only difference between them and Sharonov is that their attitude was taken as a matter of course and that they were not praised as heroes of a new age and examples for suffering humanity. Their intellectual interests were equally natural to them.

Incidentally, in Gladkov's story there appears a representative of the old guard, Tikhon, a Ural worker who grew up under the Tsarist regime.

Tikhon spoke of steel as of a living creature, as if he were telling a fairy tale: "Bad is the steelmaster who has no feeling for the soul of the metal. He must know how to catch the tiny second when the casting is ripe and free the metal at the right moment . . . . We Ural people have it in the blood!"

Thus we see that what *Oktyabr* regards as something outstandingly new in Sharonov is already in the blood of old Russian workmen from the Tsarist times. And if Sharonov reacts

to Tikhon's Ural patriotism with the words: "Sometimes this Ural self-praise irritated me. They acted as if the Ural people were a special people, some sort of an exclusive race possessing special attributes and talents," then how is the foreigner to react to the Soviet's self-glorification?

ONCE MORE: PECHORIN

We have presented the principal characters of more than half a score of Soviet works to our readers. We have seen that the heroes of all but one of these books found no favor with Soviet critics. The only one to be acknowledged by these critics as an ideal representative of the new age could not be accepted by us as such, as the traits he showed were neither new nor specifically Soviet. It might be objected that there is nothing new under the sun and that it is a matter of nuances. But not even in his nuances is Sharonov a new type of man or a new example for humanity.

We must now look for the reasons which have prevented Soviet literature from creating the "hero of our time" in spite of the ceaseless urging on the part of the Party and its mouthpiece, the Soviet critics. It does not often happen that the Soviets so openly admit the nonachievement of a goal set up by them and so close to their hearts. Hence it is of more than literary interest to seek for the reasons of their failure.

Let us turn back once more to Lermontov, the father of that classical "hero of our time." The difference between him and the Soviet authors is that Lermontov tried to create not an ideal type but a hero of his time; in doing so, he could just as well have put the word "hero" in quotation marks. In Pechorin, Lermontov set up not an ideal but a mirror to his time. He painted him with all his strong points and his weaknesses and, seen on the whole, his weaknesses prevailed: all Pechorin's charming traits pale in the summing up of his personality before the fact that he is a useless parasite who wastes all his admirable talents to bring about his own and other people's misfortune. It was because Russian society of the forties of the last century recognized itself in this mirror that Pechorin had so great an effect upon it. If Lermontov had, at Tsarist orders, undertaken to publish a panegyric on his Russian contemporaries, his book would not have been a work of art and would have long sunk into the oblivion it would have deserved.

CONFLICTS

What is it that makes a hero in a novel or play? Is it not his standing the test of conflicts? In a primitive literature, these conflicts are usually of a purely physical nature: combats with dragons, etc. The Soviet authors have, of course, tried to represent Germany as a monster and put it in the place of the mythical dragon. But this method is too primitive.

Could not then the Soviet novels show conflicts between their chief characters and their own countrymen? The authors are extremely limited in this possibility; for they would then have to explain how, after twenty-five years of Soviet regime, there could still be human beings so opposed to each other in Russia as to provide serious conflicts. According to the Marxist ideology, real conflicts can only arise from economic antagonism, and the Bolsheviks are very proud of having done away with all such antagonism. As a matter of fact, certain conflicts no longer exist in the Soviet state, for instance, that between capital and labor. But they have been replaced by others. Instead of the conflict between labor and the individual in possession of some of the means of production, there is in Soviet economics the conflict between the individual laborer and the state, which owns all the means of production. Of course, the Bolsheviks do not admit this, so that this conflict does not appear in Soviet literature. But instead of that we meet with another.

In an article appearing in a previous issue of this magazine ("Behind Soviet Production," November 1944) the "socialist competitions" were described, by which the Soviet workers are unremittingly driven to increased production. The latest Soviet novels show with surprising clarity how much material for conflict is contained in these competitions. Two competing capitalists could not oppose each other with more bitter ill will, with more envy, than the Soviet citizens in their "socialist competitions." It is amazing to see how much pain the Soviet people inflict upon each other in the course of these competitions, for instance, in *Fires*. The author of this novel praises it as a rare and heroic occurrence when a worker who is far ahead in a competition gives other workers tips on how they can increase their output, although he thereby endangers his own lead. She shows that it is really only the pressure of war which makes this worker decide on such unusual generosity. There is bitter rivalry not only between native inhabitants and evacuees but also among the native inhabitants themselves. The author describes a Ural foreman who has first to go through a violent mental struggle before he is prepared to give a fifteen-year-old apprentice, the son of his own old friend, a really good training—he cannot help sensing a future competitor in him. The effects of the socialist competitions cause misfortune and tears even to the individual family, indeed, bring it to the verge of divorce as, for instance, in *Fires*, the family of a blacksmith. In order not to let the conflict between him and his competitor end in a fight, the author could find no other way out than to let both come out equal in the competition.

ALIBIS OF EVIL

Soviet authors are, of course, aware of the fact that these "conflicts" do not exactly show up the Soviet Union in a good light. But what are they to do? Without conflicts between human beings, neither novels nor plays can be written. What other conflicts can they turn to? The conflict between good and evil is quite out of the question, for how could there be evil Soviet citizens? The Soviet authors of the first few years after the Revolution were in an enviable position in this respect. At that time, there still existed class enemies of countless nuances: the kulak, the bourgeois, the former officer, the priest, the Ukrainian nationalist. Nowadays, however, there can at most be good people and not quite so good people who may err temporarily as, for instance, the colonel in *The People Is Immortal*, who is led back to the right path by a single short conversation with the commissar.

Hence the unfortunate Soviet authors of recent years must resort to all kinds of subterfuges to introduce evil characters into their works. In *The People Is Immortal* there is—aside from the Germans, of course—only a single evil character, a kulak who has somehow escaped liquidation, hates the Soviet regime, and is looking forward to the advent of the Germans. In *The Conquest of Velikoshumsk* by Leonid Leonov, an evil character seduces the wife of a soldier at the front. Who could be such a scoundrel? Not a Russian? Certainly not: "He was evacuated from the Baltic regions and speaks poor Russian."

Karavayeva, in her novel *Fires*, makes an important machine supplied before the war by a German firm her emanation of evil, as it breaks down at a crucial moment. An even more original way out of this dilemma was found by Gladkov in *The Oath*. Instead of racking his brains as to how to explain the presence in the remote Urals of a man who blows up the gasoline tanks of a factory, he simply says about the miscreant: "His face was dry and long. His hooked, narrow, sharp nose pointed somehow brazenly at me. . . . I sensed something foreign and hostile in him." We are never told who this mysterious criminal really is.

Thus we see how limited Soviet authors are in their choice of evil characters with which to oppose their heroes. The longer Bolshevism is at the helm, the more unseemly is it for Bolshevist writers to speak of evil characters in the Soviet Union.

PERMITTED CONFLICTS

Even the last possibility of creating conflicts for the hero, that of conflicts within his own soul, is accorded the Soviet author only in a limited form. For in that case he would have to attribute sufficient negative factors to his characters to justify serious spiritual conflicts. The result is that all these modern Soviet figures either live entirely without problems and conflicts and hence do not appear to us as heroes or are troubled with conflicts so petty and irrelevant in comparison to the great events taking place all around us that they cannot be taken seriously. The "dramatic conflict" which, for example, threads its way through Sharonov's diary and the overcoming of which is supposed to make him out to be heroic, is the problem whether he should fetch his wife from threatened Leningrad to the peaceful Urals or not. (Incidentally, we discover in the end that even this conflict is entirely illusory, as Mrs. Sharonova for her part is determined to remain in Leningrad.)

Or let us look at the spiritual conflicts with which the characters in *Fires* occupy themselves. We find the following conversation between a foreman evacuated from the Ukraine to the Urals and his friend:

> "I myself don't feel any too cheerful, and besides, my wife seems almost to have gone off her head: from morning till night she is miserable and won't stop crying."
>
> "Why? She's young and healthy, isn't she?"
>
> "She simply doesn't like it in the Urals: the sun isn't as nice here, and it's windy and one doesn't see any little gardens, and people seem less friendly . . . . She's gone crazy and cries all the time."

Or we are told about the marriage of the leading designer of the factory who is busy constructing a new tank:

> By chance he happened to hear of his wife's unfaithfulness. He was seized by such despair and rage that he would have killed his beautiful wife if his mother had not interceded and struck the revolver from his hand.

A Soviet literary magazine recently printed a translation of J. B. Priestley's novel *Daylight on Saturday*, which describes war-time life in England. In comparison to this novel—and even more so to the conditions under which Germany's industry was working in the sixth year of war — the Soviet critic cannot but realize that the problems occurring in the factory in the quiet security of the Ural Mountains are insignificant.

> And what is the worst: out of all this they make serious conflicts, problems, torment themselves, and get excited. (*Literatura i Iskustvo*, 1944, No. 34.)

SILENCE IS GOLDEN

The absence of real conflicts is responsible for the fact that the heroes of the novels we have discussed were characterized by almost all Soviet critics as lacking in individuality and personality. This is also the reason for so many of them being taciturn. Ladynin is taciturn; Captain Saburov is taciturn; Commissar Bogaryov, although eloquent, is inwardly reserved. The authors know, or at least they feel instinctively, why they let their figures appear taciturn. For as soon as they begin to speak and attempt to uncover their inner world, they give the impression of being automatons, as the Soviet

critics have so aptly put it, and are psychologically unconvincing and lifeless.

For decades the Bolsheviks have praised the collective and demanded that the individual submerge himself in it. Until a few months ago, the whole Soviet Union repudiated the hero in the words of its national anthem, the *International*; and the Communist Party in the Soviet Union as well as in other countries still sings this line. Again and again the Soviets have heaped scorn on the "hero cult" in National-Socialist Germany. Is it astonishing then that Soviet authors find it difficult to produce personalities and heroes? If finally they manage by hook or by crook to create a hero and represent him according to orders as the personification of the Soviet idea, he turns out to be a phantom, not a living personality.

PREREVOLUTIONARY STUFF

The magazine *Literatura i Iskustvo* gives authors the wise counsel :

> Lead the reader to the generalizations of ideas not only via the creation of typical situations, the description of living conditions, and the portrayal of people's actions in battle: open up more widely their moral and ethical driving forces, the avenues of their thoughts, the movement of their emotions, their spiritual life!

Although it is easy theoretically to raise this demand in a literary article, it is very difficult to fulfill it in a novel or play. After all, the very difficulty the Soviet author is faced with is that he is supposed not to theorize but portray living personalities. But when an author succeeds in creating a more or less credible human character, then it is, alas, not the new Soviet but the old prerevolutionary perspective that opens up before us.

Novy Mir (1944, No. 1/2, p. 209) accuses the Soviet authors as follows: "The psychology of the contemporary Red Army man is in several cases identical with the psychology of the soldier of the old army." And the critic A. Lavretsky writes about the soldier Vasily Tyorkin :

> In this figure there are doubtless more characteristics which arose in our former warriors than those produced in the present time. (*Znamya*, 1943, No. 11/12, p. 270.)

This must actually be the case, for three months after Lavretsky another critic, A. Yegolin, says literally the same :

> In *Vasily Tyorkin* there are more characteristics which arose in the past than those produced by the present. (*Bolshevik*, 1944, No. 10/11, p. 48.)

This consensus of opinion is indicative. Two different critics express at different times in different publications literally the same thought. We need not fear that Comrade Yegolin copied from Comrade Lavretsky. They both simply happen to be carrying out the same "social task." The Party sees to it not only in historiography (see "Stalin the Historian," October 1944) but in literary criticism as well that everybody knows exactly not only what to say on all important questions but also how to say it.

PARTY MEN

Perhaps you will ask now: Why do the Soviet authors in describing their figures endow them only with such traits of character as are to be found either in prerevolutionary Russia or also in the rest of the world? Of course, we can understand that Stalin himself is not suited for a literary hero. Soviet propaganda has transformed him into a demigod, while the "hero of our time" required by the Bolsheviks must be high yet not too high for enthusiastic emulation. But why do they not take the typical Party man? Does he not represent the leading element in the Soviet Union? Is he not most profoundly permeated with the materialistic ideology?

In the earliest of the better known war books, Commissar Bogaryov actually constituted such an attempt. But, as we have seen, that attempt was unsuccessful, even in the eyes of the Soviet critics. Since then it has rarely been repeated, and never on the same ambitious scale. Party functionaries—such as Vanin and Plastunov—were only given secondary roles in later novels or failed to appear at all. Are we to take this as a proof of counterrevolutionary sentiments or sabotage on the part of Soviet authors? Surely not. Both literature and the critics go to show that recently the writers were simply not told by the Party to represent the Party man as a symbol of the Soviet masses. How is this to be explained?

The answer to this question leads us to one of the most important manifestations of the present situation in the USSR. On January 2, 1945, a certain Morozov gave a lecture over Radio Khabarovsk on books written by Lenin and Stalin in the period from 1894 to 1908. The quotations chosen by Morozov as well as his own comments all served to put across a single idea :

> The socialist ideology does not simply arise on its own among the workers as a result of existing economic conditions: it must be developed by its advance guard—under present circumstances the Bolshevist Party—and then vigorously inoculated into the masses of workers. Party and workers are by no means always identical in their ideas. If these ideas diverge, it is up to the Party to combat this independent trend among the workers and to bring them back to the path recognized by the Party as the correct one, although the workers might perhaps not like this path.

Comrade Morozov's lecture is only the latest link in a chain of many, though cautiously worded hints from Moscow to the effect that the Soviet masses and the Party are not identical. So the Party is trying to explain the gulf between them by quotations from Lenin written *before* the Revolution of

1917, i.e., at a time when the Party was a tiny group which often stood in opposition to the workers, not to speak of the rest of the people.

If we take into account all the efforts made by the Party, especially during the war, to emphasize the unity of Party and people and even to praise the masses of the population not belonging to the Party as "non-Party Bolsheviks," we grasp the implications of this acknowledgment of a gulf between the Party and the people. The Party has clearly recognized that the war has created so many new situations, slogans, and symbols that a large part of the work of training before the war has been annulled and that people and Party have moved apart instead of being united by the war. The typical Party man is not suited for the role of a "hero of our time." The hero of our time, even if he were a member of the Party, must above all be a man of the people. It would almost appear as if the Party now classes the population of the USSR into two types: the actual Bolsheviks—a minority of special human beings—and the masses of the people. It is for the latter that the Soviet authors are to provide the heroic example.

EXPECTING TOO MUCH

Well then, why do they not describe those traits which distinguish the ordinary, non-Party Soviet citizen from other people and which might provide him with that individuality which the critics are always demanding? Why do they not draw the Soviet citizen as he is, the Soviet citizen who, as the entire Soviet propaganda proclaims daily to itself and the world, is the true "hero of our time," the example for humanity?

The Soviet critics seem to indicate that the fault lies with the authors, as if the authors simply lacked ability or did not try hard enough. But, after all, the authors we have mentioned are the stars among the Soviet writers and have been extolled in the USSR as new Tolstois, as ranking among the best in the world. If, according to the Soviet critics themselves, these authors have not been able to depict the desired hero, there remains only one possibility: they have failed because this ideal Soviet citizen does not exist. The Soviet author is confronted by the impossible task of portraying the psychological development of characters he has never seen. What the critics want him to do is to show, not what is, but what should be. And, no matter how hard he tries, the author is unable to do this. He should not be reprimanded so harshly for this as he is by the Soviet critics. One can expect a writer to depict the past and the present in an artistic form and to show in the figure of his hero that which is typical of the period and at the same time that which is unique in a personality; but he cannot be expected to typify a theoretical future.

Lermontov took his portraits from the people of his environment. Hence he was able to create the hero of his time. The Soviet author also studies the people of his environment; he is able to describe and typify them, although perhaps not with Lermontov's mastery. But as soon as he does this, the critics say: "Why, those are people of the past whom you are describing! Where is that which is new?" If, on the other hand, the Soviet author attempts to tackle the prescribed new type of man whom neither he nor anyone else has ever seen, the critics reproach him with justification for having created impersonal automatons.

The next question is: why has the problem of the "new type of man" in Soviet literature not become acute until now? Because the Bolsheviks were under the delusion before that the new type of man already existed in Soviet literature. Those who have read Bolshevist novels and plays written in the twenties and thirties will remember that they were simply overflowing with "new types of man": commune members, Party men in leather jackets, *kolkhoz* members, Red factory managers, factory workers in the role of civil-war leaders, people's commissars, etc. All these characters actually appeared to be new types of men, for they were living under conditions such as had never existed before. But as soon as the newness had worn off, it became apparent that not the people but only the conditions under which they lived were new.

WHY THEY NEED HIM

There still remains the last and most important question to be answered: why do the Bolsheviks require this hero of our time so urgently just now? Why do they press the Soviet author so vehemently to produce this hero, although they must be aware of the fact that this constant fruitless demand only serves to make his nonexistence all the more apparent? Is it for the sake of foreign consumption? Hardly. The Bolsheviks are clever psychologists and are likely to tell themselves that the restless, groping masses of Greece or France can hardly be inspired toward revolutionary action by a vision of the industrious mechanic Sharonov. As a matter of fact, the Bolshevist novels written thirty or twenty-five years ago which, to propagandize the Russian Revolution, were filled with revolutionary zeal, still are more suited for revolutionizing foreign countries than even a super-Sharonov could ever be.

It seems to us that the real reason for the Bolsheviks' quest for a hero is to be sought at home rather than abroad. Readers of the article "Stalin's Grandchildren" (July 1944) may recall what was said in it about the tremendous influence exerted by the war on the mentality of the younger Soviet generation:

"When you are lying at the front and waiting tensely every minute for what is going to happen, one possibility being that of your imminent death, then you re-think and re-feel many things which perhaps never occupied your mind in the years of peace . . . . *And everything appears different to you from the way it did before, even two years ago.*"

This was how one young Russian put it; and this opinion has since been repeated many times. Indeed, the war has caused millions of Soviet citizens to re-think and re-feel a great deal. This in turn has created a state of turmoil and uncertainty in their minds. And this again has caused their leaders to launch the violent ideological campaign described in our December issue. But the Bolsheviks have realized that the ideological crisis is too grave to be mastered by pep talks and the opening of "Marxist-Leninist Universities." It is one thing theoretically to expound the dogmas of Marx, and quite another to provide millions of people with a compelling example to capture their imagination, to inspire them with the desire to march in the direction prescribed by the Party. This is what the Soviet critics expect their authors to do and this is the true reason for their dissatisfaction with the heroes hitherto produced by them.

POSTSCRIPT

The above article had already been set in print when we received a novel published last winter in Moscow: *It Was in Leningrad* by A. Chakovsky. So far we have not seen any Soviet reviews of the book, nor do we know anything about the author. But in our opinion this novel finally contains the long-sought-after "hero of our time."

After various adventures, a war correspondent is sent by plane from the Volkhov front to Leningrad to report on conditions there. He is happy about the assignment, looking forward to seeing Lida again, the woman he loves, from whom he has not had any news for a long time. The main part of the novel describes his search for Lida—the focal point of all his thoughts, in whom he sees the meaning of his life and all his efforts—among the starving, fighting inhabitants of the besieged city. After much time and trouble he finds out that Lida is working as a nurse on frozen Lake Ladoga, across whose ice runs the only connection between the city and the outer world. When he reaches her field hospital, Lida has already left it because the chief surgeon has fallen in love with her. In the end, when the correspondent and Lida finally meet, their happiness is cut short: he receives orders to fly back.

We do not know how the Soviet critics will feel about this work. But the reproaches raised by them against the leading characters of all other novels reviewed by us are inappropriate in the case of Chakovsky's characters, for these are convincing, living human beings. How has it been possible for Chakovsky to succeed where some of the most famous Soviet authors have struggled in vain? The answer is—apart from Chakovsky's literary talent—quite simple: he has not bothered at all about politics. Of course, his characters live not in an abstract world but in the concrete environment of war, Leningrad, and Russian people. However, they are not puppets suspended on the ideological strings of the Party and speaking in editorials. The lieutenant dying in the field hospital does not give political pep talks; the starving citizens of Leningrad do not encourage each other with speeches about Stalin; and the correspondent leaves his Lida when he receives orders to do so without as much as muttering a Bolshevist slogan. In other words, Chakovsky's characters behave just as millions have behaved in other belligerent countries during the last few years, each in his own way living his own life and doing his duty toward his country.

We welcome the chance which has brought *It Was in Leningrad* into our hands just before the deadline of this issue. It is only in comparison to the living figures of Chakovsky that the artificiality of the heroes of the other works becomes fully apparent. While the authors of the latter have been unable, in spite of all the urging by their superiors, to bring the *Bolshevist* type of man to life in their novels and thus to solve their problem number one, Chakovsky has made the *human* type of man the convincing hero of his story. There is only one conclusion to be drawn from this: the Bolshevist type of man with the capital B, as the Soviets want their authors to depict him, does not exist; but in spite of all efforts to change the human type of man, *he* still exists, with all his human hopes, loves, fears, struggles, and sufferings, the human being who is the antipode of the Bolshevist goal, who believes not in matter or the constantly changing "laws of evolution," whether they are by Marx or Stalin, but in the age-old human values. This means that Bolshevism, in spite of its great military successes abroad, has suffered a defeat at home. Indeed, the war itself has, in spite of the vastly increased political pressure on the individual Soviet citizen, opened up new possibilities for him to reflect and to distinguish between true and artificial human values.

Of course, we realize that in the Red flood now pouring over Europe there are not very many people comparable to Chakovsky's figures. Twenty-eight years of Bolshevism, war, and suffering have turned the inhabitants of the Soviet Union into beings in whom the human characteristics described by Chakovsky lie deeply buried. But the mere fact that they still exist is important and justifies us in this time of horror and destruction to feel some hopes for the future. May the time arrive when men of the Chakovsky type will come to the fore not only as literary heroes.