MAXIM GORKY: A POLITICAL HISTORY

by

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ABSTRACT.

Maxim Gorky was born in 1868. At nine he was thrown out into the world to fend for himself. Even as a boy he protested against the ugliness of life and refused to submit to the forces of circumstance. At sixteen he found himself in an intellectual and emotional quandry. He longed to activate leaden Russia and in desperation went to the University of Kazan. Unable to finance an education, he worked as a stevedore and experienced for the first time the joy of group labour. At Kazan he became involved in the incipient Populist movement and was excited by their determination to build a new life. At twenty-one he was arrested on suspicion of revolutionary activities. His first story was published in 1892. The first edition of his collected short stories appeared in 1898. The whole cycle of these early stories, written with a revolutionary purpose, revolved around the central ideal of personal liberty, exuberant strength and fierce rebellion. In this he announced a new attitude of energy and courage which won him universal acclaim. The young Marxists were quick to appreciate the revolutionary significance of Gorky's work and soon involved him actively in their movement. After 1898 he was forced to live under police surveillance. His significance both as a symbol and participant in the revolutionary movement increased rapidly. By 1902 he was a close collaborator of the Social Democratic Party and an important financial power behind the movement. After the split of 1903 he showed a decided preference for the Bolsheviks. In the revolution of 1905 he played a conspicuous role as a fund raiser and propagandist for the insurgents. In 1906 he went into exile. In 1907
he reached the peak of his efforts to put literature to work for the revolution with the publication of Mother. As the Bolsheviks' most fertile source of funds, he rendered an invaluable service to the Social Democratic Party Congress of 1907. During this period his acquaintance with Lenin deepened into a mature friendship, and he became a tireless exponent of democracy and unity within the warring Social Democratic Party. He also wrote essays on political and social consciousness. In 1909 he helped to organize a workers' school on Capri. In 1913 he returned to Russia, where he devoted himself increasingly to educative work. In 1914 he voiced his instinctive opposition to the war and sided with the Zimmerwald Left. Gorky was gloomy about the eventual outcome of the revolution in 1917, and played the role of a spectator rather than an actor. In the spring he founded a daily newspaper in which he campaigned against Bolshevik tactics and opposed Lenin's scheme for a rigorous proletarian dictatorship. He worked for the unity of the whole Social democracy. In August he became the leader of a small political party, the United-Internationalists. Foreseeing the eclipse of culture, he opposed the Bolshevik seizure of power in October and assailed Lenin with bitter invective. In 1919 he became reconciled to the Bolshevik order and concentrated his attention on salvaging and preserving Russian cultural values. In 1922 he went abroad. In 1929 he returned to the Soviet Union, where he was already applauded as its greatest moral and cultural authority. By this time he was convinced that the working class was one of the most vital forces in Russia and that the working class together with the socialist intelligentsia could and would create a new society based on justice and equality. He felt that it was his duty to
contribute to the building of the U.S.S.R. and gave unflagging public support to the regime. His great prestige, bolstered by his friendship with Stalin, made a powerful force of his capacity to mould public opinion. From 1930 to 1936, he gave his attention to reorganizing Soviet Literature and wittingly or unwittingly helped to turn literature into an instrument of state policy. Gorky died in 1936. The circumstances of his death were later used as a weapon in the inner-Party struggle for power.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHAPTER</th>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I Historical Background.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II Childhood, Adolescence and Youth</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III The Tyro</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV The Stormy Petrel</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V The Emigre</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VI In The Revolutionary Turmoil</td>
<td>118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VII The Last Phase</td>
<td>144</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VIII Conclusions</td>
<td>168</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bibliography</td>
<td>169</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
INTRODUCTION

This project started from a literary interest in the works of Maxim Gorky. The frequent mention of his name and the commanding position which he seemed to occupy in the history of Russian literature placed him near the top of the writer's reading list. In looking about for a suitable thesis topic, the treatment of an aspect of Gorky's work suggested itself as a promising subject for study. Preliminary investigation quickly revealed that Gorky's remarkable status was not due solely to literary merits. It was apparent that his life and personality, his political and cultural activities, and the part that he had played in the revolutionary movement had all contributed to his towering reputation. Closer examination revealed that Gorky had known intimately the outstanding leaders of the Russian Revolutionary Movement, and further, that his political biography seemed to be the history of his relations with the Communist Party. The question arose: "Would an examination of Gorky's political associations contribute to an understanding of Soviet Russian History?" The question was intriguing, and with further study the writer was able to formulate a number of basic hypotheses suitable for examination in a project of this kind.

The general hypothesis is that an examination of Gorky's political history will contribute to an understanding of Soviet political and cultural history. Specific hypotheses are: (1) that Gorky's political activities were of considerable importance; and further, that his
exceptional prestige was consistently exploited by the Communist Party to its political advantage; (2) that an examination of Gorky's political history will reveal a number of the key problems facing the Russian revolutionaries and hence contribute to an understanding of the character of Russian Communism; (3) that a study of his political associations will provide valuable insights into the respective characters of Lenin and Stalin, the key figures of Soviet Political History; and (4) that a knowledge of his political history is of crucial importance to an appreciation of his literary work.

In essence this thesis is an attempt to open a momentous historical theme by studying the political biography of a great man. In approaching this subject, the writer has applied the "historical method" as outlined by F.M. Fling in his short book *The Writing of History*, and has done all of his research in the University Library. He has been restricted to the use of English sources except in two very minor instances: (1) a brief biography of Gorky by I. Gruzdev; and (2) the Great Soviet Encyclopedia, second edition. The Library has an almost complete collection of Gorky's works, including his short stories, novels, plays, autobiographical works, reminiscences, and a selection of his political essays and pamphlets entitled *Culture and the People*, edited by International Publishers, 1939. The writer was able to augment this collection by the purchase of an English edition of Gorky's journalistic writings selected and edited in Moscow in 1952 under the title *Articles and Pamphlets*. The Library's resources of periodical literature are quite extensive, and the careful perusal of numerous articles by and about Gorky has yielded valuable historical material. Other references
used have been general histories of the Soviet Union and Russia, and biographies of Lenin, Stalin, Trotsky and, of course, Gorky. In this respect, the writer feels he should single out the biography of A.H. Kaun, *Gorky and His Russia*, which pays especial attention to the political and social aspects of Gorky's life. In addition, much useful material has been found in studies of contemporary Russian literature by such men as Gleb Struve, Marc Slonim, and Prince D.S. Mirsky. Further information on the materials consulted is contained in the Bibliography.

Lastly, the writer would like to thank the members of the Library staff for their kind assistance, and particularly Dr. Cyril Bryner for his patience and for his pertinent criticisms.
CHAPTER I

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The era in which Maxim Gorky played his role grew largely out of social, political, and economic alignments which developed in Russia between 1860-1900. These decades were roughly coincident with Gorky's formative years; although he took no active part in them they left their mark on his character, and set the stage for his exceptional performance. For this reason, there follows a survey of the salient features of that period.

The reign of Alexander II (1855-1881) is known to Russian History as the "Era of Great Reforms". This is because Alexander had the wit to perceive that the socio-political conditions existing at the time of his ascension to the throne demanded adjustment if tsardom was to endure. Although conservative by nature and conviction Alexander accepted the challenge and initiated a far reaching series of reforms. By and large the succeeding decades of the 19th century Russian History were convulsed by a struggle for the practical embodiment of these reforms.

Alexander faced his greatest challenge in the condition of serfdom, which had reached its peak during the reign of Catherine the Great (1762-1796). Since this problem absorbed the attention of all thinking men the government could not claim to be ignorant of the danger lurking within the state. Indeed, a constant stream of warnings had come from government officials to the effect that this iniquitous
condition must be abolished. However, it was not until the country was first shaken by insurrection and then badly mauled in the Crimean war that the government recognised the bankruptcy of its system. The revolution of 1848 had its distant echo in the hearts of the Russian peasant folk and from the year 1850 insurrections of revolted peasants began to assume serious proportions. When the Crimean war broke out and conscription was levied everywhere, these revolts spread with unprecedented violence. They became so serious that whole regiments, with their artillery, were sent to quell them. Again, in waging war this country which depended for its prestige at home and abroad on its military strength was fought to a standstill on its own territory. In general its services were grossly inadequate. Peculation in the rear and troublesome transport problems combined to produce acute shortages of essential military supplies and equipment at the front. Medical supplies and services were quite insufficient, and as a result disease was rampant. Above all it was shown conclusively that the Russian serf in arms, sapped of initiative and resource by his social status, was no match for the freeman of Western Europe.¹ This combination of circumstances made the abolition of serfdom imperative.

In the meantime the war dragged on. As neither side seemed able to win a decisive victory and as the enormous burdens of waging war made further conflict futile, peace negotiations were initiated. The rival powers, England, France and Russia reached agreement on terms

¹ Pares, Bernard, A History of Russia, Alfred A. Knopf, 1950, p.342. Pares is particularly thorough on this period by comparison with other available sources like Vernadsky and Kirchner. For this reason his work forms the backbone of this chapter.
formalized in the Treaty of Paris (March 30, 1856). Despite the terms of a humiliating agreement Alexander seems, in view of his larger problems, to have welcomed the peace settlement as a substantial achievement. At any rate he very quickly catered to the universal mood by taking the initiative in reform. About the time of the Paris agreement he called on the landowners to abolish serfdom in the interest of justice and mercy. Simultaneously he granted Russian citizens the right to travel abroad and abolished the obscurantist restrictions introduced in the universities since 1848. A new epoch began.

Alexander's intention that the initiative for emancipation should come from the nobility and serf-owners was received coldly, with the result that his work went slowly against determined opposition. It was 1858 before the government could either outline the premises upon which to base its program or create an official department for emancipation. When finally established, the new department worked from the general position that the peasants must be given both freedom and land, that they must retain the allotments they already occupied, that the gentry must be compensated for both land and labour losses, and that the state must bear the financial burden thus incurred. A year later (1859) a drafting committee was formed. Its work was finished in the early part of March 1861, and the momentous "Edict of Emancipation" was published and read out in all the churches of the Empire on March 17 of that year. Peter Kropotkin, who was in St. Petersburg, on that great day describes scenes of unrestrained enthusiasm and rejoicing. In the opera house where the Italian opera was appearing for the last performance of the season, the public went wild. "When it played the hymn 'God Save the Tsar'. . . the
band of the opera was drowned immediately in enthusiastic hurrahs coming from all parts of the hall. . . . I saw the fiddle-bows moving, the musicians blowing the brass instruments, but again the sound of voices overwhelmed the band. . . . and it was only by the end of the third repetition that isolated sounds of the brass instruments pierced through the clamour of human voices." In the streets enthusiastic crowds of peasants and educated men "... stood ... shouting hurrahs, and the Tsar could not appear without being followed by demonstrative crowds . . . ." However, Kropotkin finishes his short sketch on a prophetic note. "Herzen," he says, "was right when, two years later, . . . he wrote, 'Alexander Nikolaevich, why did you not die on that day? Your name would have been transmitted in history as that of a hero.'"

To appreciate the political atmosphere at the turn of the century when Maxim Gorky made his first appearance on the historical stage, we must examine some of the effects of emancipation and its accompanying reforms.

The land settlement was comprised of sixteen acts dealing, variously, with administrative, judicial and economic aspects of the whole. Under its terms the peasants were set entirely free, beginning February 19, 1863 - four years before the abolition of slavery in the United States. As a class, however, they still constituted a separate and distinct group.

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2 Kropotkin, P., Memoirs of a Revolutionist, New York, Houghton Mifflin, 1930, p. 135. Kropotkin was the Prince of Anarchists and his opinions must be treated circumspectly for their left-wing bias. At the same time he must be valued as an important primary source. In this chapter his work has been used to illustrate general conditions agreed upon by authorities.
in society. At the same time the peasant community, which had its roots in the distant past, was made a lower and in some respects autonomous unit of the administrative structure. It continued as was the custom to assign communal lands and to levy its own taxes and special rates for religious education and social needs. In addition the government increased the community's authority over the individual peasant by depositing with it certain elements of control formerly exercised by the Gentry. In future the community was responsible for local policing and was harnessed with certain obligations of service to the state. Such things as the repair and upkeep of roads, and the quartering of troops and officials were rendered to the state as duties - a form of taxation without remuneration. Additional government taxes were levied directly on the community and the peasants were held collectively responsible for their payment. The old passport system which made it impossible for the peasant to leave his village without the authority of its elders was retained. In effect these arrangements forged an unseverable link between the village community and the peasant. By the land distribution itself the peasants were given one-half of the cultivated land area, on condition that they redeem it over a period of forty-nine years by payments directly to the state. The injustice lay in the fact that the state guaranteed immediate compensation to the gentry for its losses and at the same time placed an impossible burden upon the peasantry.

Although the government's purpose in carrying out the emancipation was good, in practice its program served only to aggravate an already difficult situation. In effect the peasant emerged from emancipation with less land to cultivate than ever before. In many cases he
found himself with land of poorer quality, and often he was discriminated against by the situation of his land in relation to forest and stream, elements of vital importance to a peasant economy. To fill up his cup of woe the peasant found himself shouldered with exorbitant obligations, on the one hand to the state, and on the other to his traditional organization, the Commune, to which he was now bound more tightly than ever.  

It was some time, however, before the full implications of the land settlement became apparent. The final adjustment between the peasants and their squires required a succession of agrarian measures. The process of redemption by agreement moved very slowly. In 1881 still fifteen per cent of the peasantry remained outside the redemption scheme. By this time the situation had deteriorated considerably. On the one hand government bonds which had been issued to the gentry as an indemnity sank to seventy per cent of their par value; on the other, the peasants were found seldom able to make their down-payments which had been placed at one fifth of the redemption fee. There were as well inevitable conflicts over the accuracy of surveys. In an effort to end the mounting friction between peasant and squire, Alexander III effected a new series of adjustments. On December 28, 1881, he limited the amount of redemption payments and decreed the obligatory redemption of both homesteads and allotments. In addition he made the redemption of tenanted land compulsory for the crown peasants. In December, 1895, government action in

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the matter was completed by a law which made the sale or mortgage of land to anyone outside the village community illegal. At the same time, the community's authority was increased by making it an administrative unit of the Ministry of the Interior. The effect of this new legislation was to give the community "... an economic authority over each individual member which was in practice overwhelming." Again the peasant emerged shackled in onerous serfdom, a situation which boded ill for the future.

Looking back on 1861 and observing other consequences of the emancipation, we find that Alexander II's work had destroyed the base upon which the whole state structure was erected. Having gone so far, the regime had no alternative but to reconstruct its administrative system from the bottom. But the regime was already weary, it had come a long way since the Crimean war; and Alexander, a conservative and autocrat of deep conviction, was alarmed by the momentum which his program was gathering. To cap the situation, the Tsar was forced to proceed against hostile opposition in every quarter: no reform was big enough to pacify the exuberant radicals, while the gentry, whose deepest instincts had been offended by the abolition of serfdom, resisted at every turn. With no alternative, but with a flagging spirit, the bureaucracy proceeded

4 Pares, A History of Russia, p. 355.

5 Kropotkin mentions a conversation with Alexander at this time. When asked by the Tsar if he was afraid to go to Siberia as a military officer, Kropotkin warmly replied, "'No, I want to work. There must be so much to do in Siberia to apply the great reforms which are going to be made.' He looked straight at me; he became pensive; at last he said, 'Well, go; one can be useful everywhere;' and his face took on such an expression of fatigue, such a character of complete surrender, that I thought at once, 'He is a used-up man; he is going to give it all up.'" Kropotkin, Memoirs of a Revolutionist, p. 166.
with its reconstruction. Between the years 1861 and 1874 it introduced a number of important reforms.

One of these reforms, and one which gave rise to great hopes, was the experiment initiated by the Tsar in local self-government. The law introducing this new system was announced on January 13, 1864. From this date Zemstva councils were gradually organized in the purely Russian provinces of the Empire. The guiding genius of what became the Zemstvo system was Nicholas Milyutin, a man who had also performed an outstanding role in developing the emancipation program. Briefly, Milyutin believed that the class principal should be destroyed in local government and that the provincial committees which had assisted in the abolition of serfdom should be turned into effective government agencies in the country districts. He planned to replace broken gentry authority in this way. The bureaucracy accepted his opinion and acquiesced in the creation of representative councils at the district and provincial levels. (These councils represented the three separate estates (curiae) - landowners, village communities, and townspeople.) In operation the district councils elected permanent executive bodies and also representatives to a governing provincial council. The provincial Zemstvo was directly responsible to the senate, the highest legal organ in the country. Although representatives of the gentry presided over Zemstvo councils, they were not allowed to head the Zemstvo executives. These councils met in yearly sessions and their competence included the levying of rates for local needs, the administration of state laws, hospitals and food supply, education, medical aid, veterinary services, public welfare, the upkeep of roads, the levying of state and local taxes, and the collection of
The Zemstvo reform was important because it created a rallying point for the still infant forces of Liberalism. Russia had lived up to this time in an economic backwater. Much of her trade was run by foreigners, and her few industries were operated by the Tsar or other landlords. Russia's middle class was very slow in developing, its dealings were on a small scale and its political independence was nil so that Liberalism, the philosophy of the rising bourgeoisie in the West, had no social roots in Russia. The period of economic and political reforms of which the Zemstvo councils were a product gave the Bourgeoisie and Liberalism its first chance. Public-spirited men, whose only ambition was to serve, found here an opportunity for a constructive contribution to the general well-being. They regarded Zemstvo work as a high mission and prepared themselves for it by serious studies in economic and social problems. Fortunately the bureaucracy kept police and military control in its own hands, so that the Zemstva were spared the taint that usually accompanies the exercise of police power. Although the government was soon trying in every way to deprive the Zemstva of all meaning and vitality, they continued to grow in reputation and influence and eventually became the authorized spokesmen of public opinion. Through this program the Zemstva served as a school for future political leaders and as a training ground in responsible government. From the outset the Zemstvo

system stood as a counter-foil to the absolutist government at the centre, and although many were repelled by their first contact with the actual government machinery, it continued to serve as a rallying point for men of Liberal inclinations.

A third set of reforms was applied to the judiciary. The squire had formerly served on the local level as a magistrate. Now, he was replaced by a justice of the peace elected from the district Zemstvo. In future permanent judges were appointed to the national courts and guaranteed adequate remuneration. The law was placed above class distinctions and official interference in judicial agencies was drastically curtailed. Secret trials were abolished and a jury system based on the English model was introduced. The standards of justice established during this period continued to stand before the courts as a model of legality even during the period of reaction which followed the death of Alexander II (1881).

The strict conditions of censorship were reduced by a fourth reform. But the government was smarting under the stings of a too liberal press, and hesitated to give public opinion free play. When completed the press reform permitted the major papers of Petersburg and Moscow to publish material without undergoing preliminary censorship. The government, however, kept the whip in its hand by assuring itself unrestricted punitive power - papers towed the line or were shut down. By this device the press was effectively muzzled.

With the above reforms accomplished (1861-1865) the government's work of reconstruction was essentially over. Two other important changes were, however, completed during the period of reaction which set in after
the Apraxin fire and the Karakozov affair. The municipal reform of 1870 provided for a town administration modelled after the Zemstvo system. The mark of reaction is apparent in an election arrangement which gave a decisive majority to the wealthy classes. In the other case the situation was different. From the disasters of the Crimean war the government could have no doubt that a wholesale reconstruction of its armies was necessary. Needless to say, the army reform of 1874 was completed without compunction. Again class privilege was abolished so that service in the new army became the equal obligation of all. As in the past, the army was to be based on conscription, but the burdens of conscription were greatly reduced by cutting the years of compulsory service. One of the outstanding accomplishments of this reform was achieved by the complete reorganization of the army's training program. The new system was designed so that education would play an important part in the soldiers' training; as a necessary outcome, the reconstituted army did yeoman service in the struggle against illiteracy.

"The tragedy of Emancipation was that it came late..."

Of all the European states, Russia was economically and socially the most backward. Agriculture, and agriculture of an extremely primitive sort, dominated the country's economy. It was only natural that the great concern of Russia should be the peasant and his destiny. Yet the government made no real attempt to satisfy the needs of this great majority until the nation faced catastrophes. This official unconcern for a question of

7 Pares, op. cit., p. 366.
so vital importance to the nation's well-being had a profound effect upon
the growing Russian intelligentsia. Educated society, beginning with
the reign of Catherine II, had been steadily Europeanized from the top
downwards. During the dark years of Nicholas (1825-1855), influenced by
the impact of the French Revolution, this movement of thought and critic-
ism reached down to the embryonic middle class. More important, the
young men admitted to the universities began to chafe under the knowledge
that the cost of their education was borne entirely by the peasantry.
More and more the peasant question became the students' preoccupation.
It was clear that a new world must be created, and in the exceptional
circumstances of their era and environment, the students were quick to
form their own ideas of what that world should be. Faced by the momentous

8 Wolfe, Bertram D., Three Who Made a Revolution, New York, Dial Press,
1948, p. 35.

"The Russian intelligentsia is a specific formation of nine-
teenth century Russia, not to be identified with the "educated
and professional classes" of the Western lands, or with the
officials, technicians, and managers of present day Russia. It
was extruded out of a fixed society of medieval estates into
which it no longer fitted, and, ideological sign that that old
world of status had been outgrown. It was recruited simulta-
neously from the more generous sons of the nobility, and from
the plebeian youth; . . . Its members were held together. . .
by a common alienation from existing society, and a common be-
lief in the sovereign efficacy of ideas as shapers of life.
They lived precariously. . . . between an uncomprehending auto-
cratic monarchy above and an unenlightened mass below. . . .
They anticipated and oversupplied in advance the requirements
of a world that was too slow in coming into being and sought to
serve a folk that had no use for their services. In the decay-
ing feudal order they found neither scope nor promise; in the
gross timid, and backward mercantile bourgeoisie neither economic
support nor inspiration; in the slumbering people no echo to
their ardent cries. Even while they sought to serve the unre-
ceptive present, at heart they were the servants of the future.
With all their being they longed for its coming."

See also: Marie, Grand Duchess of Russia, Education of a Princess, "A
essentially the same thing.
issue of serfdom, their thought was concentrated on political and economic theory. The new generation of students after 1855 was unanimous in its demand for an era of wholesale political experiment. When the substructure of the state was destroyed by the emancipation, the field was open for discussion. The students were united in both their opposition to the government and their sympathies for the peasant. Repelled by bureaucratic tradition and uninfluenced by Slavophil or conservative opinion, their political problems revolved around a single issue - the choice between gradual and revolutionary change.

During these years there was an astonishing increase in the number of young thinkers who demanded that the whole existing system, together with its conventions of morality and religion be scrapped. The intrigues and delays which blocked the progress of emancipation had a decisive effect on young men like Chernyshevsky, Pisarev, and Dobrolyubov, who played a prominent role in the new radical movement. A government already alarmed by the demands of a liberal journalist and romantic, like Herzen, for civil equality, independent justice, police reform, ministerial responsibility, public controlled finance, public controlled legislation, free conscience, free press and free trade could not but see a great danger in the numbers and enthusiasm of these radicals. Fearfully it began to whittle away its concessions.

9 Pares, op. cit., p. 366.

10 Ibid., p. 356.
Kropotkin is of the opinion that the Polish insurrection of 1863 marks the "definitive close" of the reform period. He bases his argument on these facts: the Zemstvo law and the Judiciary reform, although promulgated in 1864 and 1866, were ready in 1862; N. Milyutin was dismissed as a "Red" and replaced by Valuev of the reactionary party; public opinion took a "sharp step backward"; and that Katkov, the leader of the serfdom party "carried with him" most of the St. Petersburg and Moscow society. "After that time those who dared to speak of reforms were at once classed by Katkov as 'Traitors to Russia.'" At any rate, the old nobility waxing stronger after emancipation concentrated its attention on obtaining a postponement of the reforms. The first committees, which had worked out the scheme of emancipation, were dismissed and new ones appointed to revise the whole work in the interest of the landowners - allotments were reduced - redemption payments increased, etc. They soon discovered an effective way to curtail the spread of learning and at the same time shore up the gentry classes' tottering authority. In 1864 classical and modern schools had been created and a regulation adopted which restricted university training to students graduated from the classical schools. The reactionary Count Dmitri Tolstoy, the new Minister of Education, was able to use this situation advantageously. In 1871 a law was introduced requiring the classical schools to devote forty-seven hours a week to Latin and thirty-six to Greek, with special attention devoted to grammar. The same law excluded natural science, history and geography from the curriculum of these

11 Kropotkin, op. cit., p. 179.
schools and reduced the study of foreign languages. The pernicious effect of this legislation was to stifle the growth of practical knowledge and to restrict university training to the gentry class. At the same time, strict school discipline was introduced and a severe system of student inspection was established. Although it provoked student disorders, Tolstoy's system of inspection was accomplished and eventually extended to include the primary schools. Not content with this, Tolstoy attempted to wrest the administration of schools from Zemstvo jurisdiction.

The reactionary forces were equally successful in their campaign to muzzle the press. The circulation of certain papers was restricted to regular subscribers, magazines were required to undergo preliminary censorship, and the Ministry of the Interior was empowered to forbid all discussion of controversial issues for a period of three months. The Zemstva too suffered. They were denied publicity and their funds were severely limited with the result that they could spend little on public welfare and education. Even the courts received their share of tampering. In this way the principal reforms of Alexander II's reign were either mutilated or destroyed.

The peasant's lot was deplorable and continued to deteriorate. Inequities were apparent on all sides. Including their many obligations to the Commune the peasantry bore an exclusive poll tax of 42 million roubles. The diabolical law of minimum, introduced when the serf-owners were allowed to revise the emancipation law, provoked new distress. The obligations of peasants formerly attached to the landowners were three times those of former crown peasants. Many families were without horses to till their fields, etc. It was evident, even at this time, that the
first serious crop failure in Middle-Russia would result in a terrible famine - and the famine came, in 1876, in 1884, in 1891, and once more in 1898. Again, no group was so much appalled by this ruinous condition as was the intelligentsia. Speaking collectively, it saw clearly that Alexander II's reform initiative was dead and turned its attention to organizing the socialistic and philosophic revolution, which had its climax in 1917. The object of its revolution was to liberate the muzhik (peasant). The peasant became the motive and focal point of its radical aspirations for justice and liberty - "Narodnichestvo, muzhikophilism, was characteristic of Russian socialism" during this period. It was not until some twenty years later that the proletariat and Marxism became important influences in the socialist movement.

In the summer of 1861 the first secret society of the new reign sprang up. Called the "Great Russian" society, it lasted only a few months, and did nothing but print and circulate a few inflammatory proclamations, however, it pointed the direction like a straw in the wind. Gradually small underground groups for self-education and self-improvement

12 After emancipation the Russian intelligentsia had begun to divide into two opposing groups. The Liberal wing was inclined to go slow, the reform movement having achieved so much. They sought employment in the Zemstvo system or drifted into union with the conservatives. "The split in the intelligentsia, . . . declared itself almost immediately after emancipation. . . ; from the summer of 1862 there was open and implacable warfare between the two parties."

began to crop up all over Russia.\textsuperscript{14} The members of these groups read and discussed endlessly the philosophers and economists for the sole purpose of finding how best to help the masses. Lavrov and Bakunin seem to have been their most outstanding teachers;\textsuperscript{15} Lavrov, the gradualist, who argued that the world could be changed by education and persuasion; and Bakunin, the revolutionist, who called for armed rebellion and the destruction of the state. At first the teachings of Lavrov prevailed and that great movement "to the people" began. Young men went into the villages as doctors, teachers, blacksmiths, clerks, farm laborers, and so on; young girls followed the same road, as nurses, midwives, teachers, - all with the same purpose, to help the people in their darkness and misery. For all their enthusiasm and devotion, the propagandists, for this is what the followers of Lavrov were called, failed miserably. The Bakuminists also went to the peasants, but with the intention of rousing them to rebellion. They were equally unsuccessful. Towards the end of the sixties, that is about the time of Gorky's birth, a significant split began to appear between these two groups. While the propagandists continued with their efforts to educate the peasantry to political action, the insurrectionists gravitated to the larger cities. Here they immersed

\textsuperscript{14} These were the years of the Nihilists - realists, opposed to all hypocrisy and sham. Exponents of social justice, who believed in the rights of the individual. Depicted most aptly in Chernyshevsky's "What is to be Done", and somewhat negatively in Turgenev's "Fathers and Sons." They were materialists by religion and revolutionaries by precept and practice.

\textsuperscript{15} Pares, \textit{op.cit.}, p. 372.
themselves in heated discussions over policies. Some were in favour of continuing to carry on radical and socialistic propaganda among the educated youth; others thought that their program should be to train cadres of activists capable of arousing the inert labouring masses, and that their main work should be among the peasants and workers of the towns. Gradually as their attention focused on the need for political action they began to organize themselves into close-knit revolutionary societies. The "Land and Liberty" organization and the "Chaikovsky" group are only two of many such societies. "Land and Liberty", which was particularly powerful, was founded in St. Petersburg for the express purpose of organizing a violent revolution. It managed to create a disciplined national organization with a Central Committee stationed in the capital, a unified program and a vigorous propaganda machine. Plekhanov and many others served their revolutionary noviciate with "Land and Liberty".

Just at this time, when the revolutionary movement was appearing with new strength and cohesion, the government suffered a major diplomatic and military defeat in the Balkans. Here, the government was defeated in a war which Russian public opinion regarded as a "... Slav crusade for the complete liberation. ..." of its Orthodox brethren.16 Alexander thus lost the support of the strong nationalist elements, particularly the Slavophils, his last support in public opinion, at a time when he most needed it. In these years the general disaffection

16 Pares, op. cit., p. 385.
reached alarming proportions. Among the revolutionaries, the extremist elements more and more insistently preached the efficacy of individual terrorist acts as a political weapon, and as public demands and personal liberties were consistently ignored by the government, events moved steadily to that end. On September 7, 1880, an extremist group calling itself "The People's Will" published the Tsar's death sentence, and tragically enough they succeeded in their mission. Alexander was assassinated on March 13, 1881.

The murder of the "Tsar Liberator" made a tremendous impression on autocratic Russia. Subsequent events were to reveal that the assassins struck a fatal blow at the cause of reform by their precipitous act. The political reaction was far reaching and decisive. Now thoroughly repelled by Liberal policies, the bureaucracy sought refuge in repression, which seemed in the circumstances to offer its only hope of salvation. The impact on dissentient opinion was equally momentous. The nationalist element epitomized by the Slavophils rallied to the throne, and the Liberals, themselves severely shaken by the outcome of a cause to which they had given their undivided support and in which they had viewed the Revolutionaries as their colleagues, reacted in a similar manner. The Radicals, on the other hand, were encouraged by their success to new acts of violence. It is not surprising that the new Tsar, Alexander III, who was a man of strong will but narrow outlook, should have based his policy on the absolute rights and power of autocracy. In this uncompromising mood the reforms projected by Alexander II during the last years of his
life in a desperate effort to pacify the country were rejected. Men of Liberal sympathies were replaced in all important posts by strong men of reaction. Some of the effects of this reactionary upswing have been noted in connection with the land program, some more of its important features are noted in the following paragraphs.

One of the government's first acts was to smooth out and strengthen its control in the country districts. In 1889 a revised Zemstvo law was issued to reestablish gentry class authority in the country. In 1890 a new system of peasant control was added. At the centre of this new system stood a government official called the "Land Captain". He was chosen by the government from the poorer gentry and functioned under the direct control of the Ministry of the Interior. He was empowered to supervise every detail of peasant life - he administered justice, collected redemption payments, interfered in local and communal affairs, etc. - an exceptional power which in appearance and practice suggested a revival of serfdom. Unsatisfied with its past efforts to prevent the spread of education and stifle the expression of public opinion in the press, the government embarked on a new round of repression in these fields. In 1884 the University Statute of Alexander II was replaced by another which took all autonomy from the Universities. In

17 Alexander (1879-80) placed General Loris-Melikov at the head of a supreme commission to draft a reform program which would rally dissentient opinion to the government's support. Melikov determined to cleanse the administration and to complete the reforms introduced at the beginning of Alexander's reign. Taking an unprecedented step, he prepared to use the advice of public representatives (Zemstva officials) to realize his purpose. On February 9, 1881, he presented a program to the Tsar incorporating and extending this very principle. It was a cruel blow to the cause of reform that the Tsar was killed on the very day or closely thereto that he accepted Melikov's program.
the same statute student clubs were forbidden, the children of the lower classes were excluded from the secondary schools, and it was established that in future bursaries would be awarded on the basis of political trustworthiness. It should be noted that while the government sought to regiment the universities and schools, it was forced by the modern development of trade and industry to establish experimental institutes for the study of medicine, pedagogy, forestry, agriculture, commerce, and industry. The press too was burdened by new controls. In 1882 extraordinary procedures were adopted which made it impossible for papers once suspended to resume publication again without first submitting to preliminary censorship. From this date the government could ruin a paper at will. Only a single paper, the European Messenger, was able to survive these years and give any real reflection of public opinion.

Looking, lastly, at the judiciary and the administration of justice, we find that the government steadily subverted the work of the law courts by the simple expedient of using exceptional laws. Indeed the government went so far as to codify its system of exceptional procedures during this period.

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18 Student disorders in rebellion against Tsarist oppression were a continuous occurrence during this period. In 1882 student troubles broke out at the Universities of Kazan and St. Petersburg, and in 1887 at those of Moscow, Odessa, Kharkov and Kazan. Gorky was at Kazan during this period and was acquainted with student circles. Troops were used to suppress them and exiles followed. In 1896 St. Petersburg students were forbidden to keep their usual anniversary, and those in Moscow, who came out to demonstrate their sympathy, were driven off the streets by armed cossacks. The students came out on the streets again on the next day and 400 of them were arrested, of these 150 were exiled and 26 expelled. In 1899, 13,000 students went out on strike in Moscow. In 1900 a meeting of 1000 students in Kiev was broken up by cossacks, 500 were arrested, of these 185 were sent to the army and the rest were expelled. In the same year there were troubles in Moscow, Kharkov and St. Petersburg. On February 27, 1901, Bogolepov, the reactionary Minister of Education, was assassinated by a revolutionary Karpovich, but more of this later.
period.

However, repressive autocracy on the side of government represents only one side of the picture. The country was growing up swiftly and its great area could no longer provide relief for the developing land pressure as in the past. The tremendous forces which had made serfdom obsolete continued to work beneath the surface of Russian society; the emancipation, itself, only served to accelerate the process of change. The peasant's urgent need for land had been the basic reason for his unrest and the land settlement, because it shouldered the peasant with heavy redemption payments and subjected him to the oppression of his historical community, only served to aggravate the situation. To satisfy his needs and to meet his obligations, the peasant was driven to acquire more and more land, and this he did through rent or purchase from the gentry. As a corollary to this, those members of the gentry who proved unable to operate their lands at a profit, mortgaged or sold them and settled in the towns. Obviously a system of government tutelage based on the privileges of the gentry class would soon be impossible if this process continued. The authorities tried in various ways to stop the movement, but only embittered the situation. The government, because it

19 Volkov-Muromcev, who was himself a noble, gives this general picture of the landowning class of about 1874; the nobles very rarely thought to train their sons in the techniques of modern agriculture. They cared nothing for new breeds of cattle or of agricultural machinery, etc. Their younger sons sought after careers in the government service rather than accept their responsibilities to the land. In the main the landlords were indolent. They lacked enterprise, will power, and energy — in short they neglected their duties to the land inherited from their fathers.

would not accept the idea of individual peasant property, would only permit the sale of gentry land to the peasant community. In this situation the individual peasant could only improve his lot by leasing land from the gentry, which meant an additional burden plus his obligation to the community. His other alternative was to flee from the land in search of another livelihood. As a result a steady movement from the land developed, some peasants moved southward and others moved into Siberia in search of land, and still others moved to the cities or towns in search of employment. But even in this the peasant was opposed by government law, for no individual could leave the community without its consent and this consent would not be given unless the individual guaranteed to pay his share of the village tax burden. Again we see the peasant hedged around by arbitrary restrictions which could only inflame his mind to revolt.

In the meantime, Russia had begun to be industrialized; and as in the case of England a century before the consequences were to have a profound effect on the organization of society. Because of her enormous unworked mineral resources, mining was destined to play an important role in the burgeoning development. The vast deposits of coal and iron found in the south of Russia, particularly in the Don Basin, begged to be exploited. After 1886 the output of pig-iron increased rapidly. Factories grew apace. Moscow was soon the centre of an important textile industry. North European Russia as quickly became the hub of a thriving flax industry. In 1850 there was hardly a private trading company in Russia; by 1873 there were 227. After 1892 new direction and impetus was given to the whole process of industrialization when Witte became the Minister
of Finance. He sponsored the growth of railways and in line with Tsarist financial policy created conditions which would encourage the largescale investment of foreign capital in Russia's industrial development.

One of the most important by-products of Russia's industrialization was the birth of a young and vigorous working-class. From the 1870's the workers began to organize themselves first on a professional and later on a political and ideological basis. The direction which this organization took is a logical development of certain national phenomena. The Russian proletariat was created from a largely illiterate and pauperized peasantry still bound in many cases to the village communities, a factor having important consequences for the future. Industrial development came late to Russia so that many industries moved from the handicraft to the factory stage at one leap. This rapid change offered exceptional opportunities for many rough and ready capitalists to exploit. As a result the peasant-worker was grossly underpaid and hurled into the factories and mines to labour under the most primitive industrial conditions. Witness: casualties each year were heavier than in the Russo-Turkish war of 1877-78; it was 1882 before children between the ages of twelve and fifteen were guaranteed an eight hour day; 1885 before night work was outlawed in the textile factories for children under seventeen and also for women; 1886 before inspectors were appointed to see that the regulations were carried out. Characteristically, the initiator of these regulations was driven from office on charges of Socialism in 1887. At the same time the employers, many of whom were foreign investors interested in quick returns, had the regulations destroyed and won a partial return to laissez-faire capitalism. The decisive result of the
rapid growth of industry and its concentration in particular areas was to throw great masses of workers together in conditions ideal for the creation of a mass revolutionary movement - there were massed numbers representing a single class (class-solidarity), there was an overwhelming sense of exploitation, and by this time there were organizers trained in the vital ideology of revolutionary Marxism at hand to capitalize on the situation. 20

As suggested above, the growth of Russian Capitalism and the appearance of an urban proletariat was accompanied by a growth in the influence of Western Socialism. The Russian intelligentsia had long been accustomed to supplement its native cultural tradition by studies in Germany so that it was only a short time before the Russian Socialists came under the influence of Karl Marx. The Russian Socialists were looking for a new philosophy and ethic and this they found in "Positivist Materialism and atheism (which) had as its ethical aim the creation of a new man, and as its political aim the bringing about of the social revolution, which should sweep away once and for all every form of injustice and inequality." 21 During the 1890's, "Marxism awakened and reinvigorated the Russian Intelligentsia." Firstly, it brought emancipation from the

20 "From its first beginnings the leaders of the working class movement in Russia assumed and rightly assumed, that a violent overthrow of the existing regime was a necessary preliminary to obtaining the reforms which they demanded. The words of the Communist Manifesto were almost literally true of the Russian factory workers: They had nothing to lose but their chains; they had a world to win." Hill, C., op. cit., p. 9.

21 Masaryk, op. cit., p. 288.
Romantic Narodnichestvo (Populist) tendencies characteristic of Russian Socialism during the 1870's and 1880's; and, secondly, it introduced a new note of realism into the revolutionary movement.22 "The cause of Revolution before Marx had been idealistic and romantic - a matter of intuitive and heroic impulse. Marx made it materialistic and scientific - a matter of deduction and cold reasoning. Marx substituted economics for metaphysics - the proletarian and the peasant for the philosopher and the poet. He brought to the theory of political evolution the same element of orderly inevitability which Darwin had introduced in biology."23 It was precisely as a "fundamentally scientific doctrine" that Marxism appealed to the Russian Intelligentsia - they were impressed by its "dialectical method" and by the conception of History as a process which obeyed fixed and immutable laws.24

The organized Marxian movement in Russia began with a split in "Land and Liberty" at the conference of Lipetsk (1879).25 At this conference George Plekhanov, who is known today as the "Father of Russian Marxism", led a revolt against "Land and Liberty" on the issue of


25 The more radical elements of "Land and Liberty" eventually organized themselves into the Socialist Revolutionary Party (S.R.'s). For some time they outnumbered the Marxists and were able to win support as the leaders of the peasant's revolutionary movement. Their socialism amounted to little more than an unsystematized advocacy of land for the peasants. Many served effectively as Zemstvo employees.
individual terrorism, which he rejected as futile and irrelevant. Plekhanov's break with the populists on the question of terrorism and the obvious bankruptcy of the Narodnik movement after 1882 lead him to question the basic Narodnik belief that the peasantry was the coming revolutionary force in Russia.\footnote{26} Beginning with a study of the economic situation in the early 1880's Plekhanov observed that Capitalism was developing in Russia at a rapid pace. On the basis of this observation, he was soon busy providing a Marxist foundation for the revolutionary movement in Russia. He argued that Capitalism as it developed would create a Russian proletariat, and that this proletariat and not the peasantry would provide the driving force and the ideological justification for the Russian revolution. "The Russian Revolution," said Plekhanov, "will triumph as a proletarian revolution, or it will not triumph at all."\footnote{27} After 1882 small Marxist study groups began to appear in the major centres. The new Marxists were soon engaged in a heated controversy with the Narodniki. On the basis of Plekhanov's brilliant conclusions, they argued that the Russian peasant was non-revolutionary, that the peasant Commune could only evolve into petty bourgeois capitalism, and that the revolution would culminate in a seizure of power by the industrial workers. However, the new ideas made slow progress and it was not until 1889 that the Marxists succeeded in interesting the factory workers. An interesting development occurred in 1891 when an attempt was made to combine the Liberal and Socialist movements. From the Marxist

\footnote{26}{Carr, Studies in Revolution, p. 106.}

\footnote{27}{Ibid., p. 125.}
point of view, there was a sound ideological basis for such a combination. Plekhanov and his cohorts believed in line with orthodox Marxism, that the Proletarian Revolution could only succeed in a Bourgeois Democracy. Thus their immediate revolutionary goal became the creation of a Bourgeois Democratic state in Russia. To this end they were prepared to cooperate with the middle-class in winning a democratic constitution—freedom of conscience, press, speech, and assembly. The attempt failed. By 1894 Russian Capitalism was growing by leaps and bounds. In this year the new Tsar Nickolas II took his stand by autocracy. In the same year Wladimir Lenin appeared on the scene with a vigorous polemic against the Narodniki. This was the period of Legal Marxism, when all but the most provocative Marxian publications were still permitted, a period, when the government, fearing most the Narodniki and the terrorists, fondly hoped to split the revolutionary movement by encouraging a new sect. The next significant development in the History of Russian Marxism occurred in 1898, the year in which Maxim Gorky rocketed to fame on the strength of a two volume edition of his collected short stories. In March of that year a congress of nine Marxists, representing local organizations of Petersburg, Moscow, Kiev, Ekaterinoslav, and the Jewish General Workers organization, the Bund, met in Minsk. This small congress founded the Russian Social-Democratic Party (ancestor of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolshevik)). The adoption of a name was the one concrete achievement of the congress. Before it could do more than elect a Central Committee, and authorize the publication of a Manifesto the police broke up the congress and effectively stifled the organization by arresting its principal delegates. Although a decision was made to issue a party
organ, this project was not taken up until three years later when a fresh attempt to coordinate Marxian activities was made by Lenin and his associates.

Despite the vigorous organizational activities of the Marxists, Liberalism seems to have been the prevailing tendency during this decade. Gut short by the death of Alexander II, Liberalism was already picking up the tangled threads of its work within the Zemstvo framework by the early 1890's. The years 1891-93 were marked by severe famines in the major grain producing areas of the Ukraine. As the stagnant government proved powerless to act in this moment of national calamity a great voluntary relief organization was formed from the Zemstvo and professional classes to fill the gap. From this date the Zemstvo work gathered new enthusiasm and energy. Despite strong government opposition the Zemstva went about the constructive work of bringing adequate school and hospital services to the under-equipped country. By the turn of the century Zemstvo work had become so important that its chairmen were being called to semi-official conferences in order to coordinate their common activities. As the best Zemstvo members were Liberals it was but a short step for them to move beyond the Zemstvo system to organize a full-fledged political party with a mild but definite program. Catching up the temper of the age the Liberals called attention to social inequalities, opposed arbitrary interference with the Zemstvo program, suggested a long overdue revision in financial policies, stressed the advantages of a free press, and unsuccessfully petitioned for a constitution.

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28 Pares, op. cit., p. 401.
The Ruling Class comprises the one influential sector of Russian society still to be examined. This select group, beginning with its political and spiritual head, the Tsar, was distinguished by a peculiar ineptitude reminiscent in many respects of the court circle of Louis XVI and his meddling wife Marie Antoinette. Tsardom received what proved to be a mortal blow in the death of Alexander III (1894). His masterful personality had served at least as a rallying point for conservative and autocratic opinion. His shoes were filled inadequately by his characterless son Nicholas II. The young Emperor, who has been likened to a weathercock, was woefully deficient in will. When he mounted the throne (1894) the Tsardom lost all semblance of purpose and rigidity at its very pivot. Nicholas had neither the character to embark upon a program of reform nor the determination, which, barring reform, could alone have maintained the ruling class in power. The Tsar's personality was an enigma to his courtly associates. They were appalled by his indifference to the possession of power, he made no effort to wield it himself nor would he tolerate the least infringement of his sovereignty. "He felt it a mystical and sacred duty to keep intact the heritage of autocracy handed down to him by his forbears." In the twentieth century his government was an anachronism, yet he continued to believe in the divine origin of his power and of his responsibility to God alone. Society and popular opinion meant nothing to him, indeed all opinion outside of his own milieu was irreverent, circumspect, and insupportable. Through generations of autocratic rule, the Tsar and his

administrators had become completely isolated from the country. They had a messianic conception of Russia as the bearer of pure and lofty ideals which the West could neither understand nor hope to attain. To their narrow minds Russia was superior even in her backwardness. The bourgeois world of the West was repulsive to them. Nicholas, even seems to have had a fanciful conception of the Russian muzhik as a primitive and undefiled repository of all Christian and Holy Russian virtues. All that Lenin called backward, Asiatic, Barbarous in Russia, was sacred to this Romantic on the throne. The "dark peasant" whose entry on the stage of history inspired terror in Plekhanov, Miliukov, Martov, even in Maxim Gorky, was to Nicholas the guarantor of the throne and the source of Russia's strength and peculiar mission.

All this was illusion, but Nicholas and the Ruling Class couldn't seem to rid themselves of the dream. In practice the authority of the Tsar was flimsy and insecure. The Tsar, himself, was incapable of giving leadership and constitutionally opposed to any kind of change. The additional fact that he was supported by a bureaucracy which could not bend or adapt itself guaranteed a collapse of the whole system of which he was the centre.

It was no accident that pushed Gorky forward as the "Stormy Messenger" of revolution. At the turn of the century Russia presented a forbidding picture. The peasant, despite his emancipation, was still

30 Wolfe, B.D., Three Who Made a Revolution, p. 352.

31 "The dependence of the internal policy upon the nobility was a fatal political error. The Russian nobility was politically dead after the reforms of Alexander II and the beginning of the democratization of Russian life." Vernadsky, George, History of Russia, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1951, p. 175.
shackled in chains reminiscent of his onerous serfdom. In his breast smouldered a grievous sense of wrong. The aristocracy was weary. It was a defunct class and had been since the emancipation had destroyed the basis of its power. It had proved unable to carry through the reform initiative of Alexander II, and held desperately to the seats of power by repression alone. The peasant question was a suppurating sore which focused the attention of Russia's unique intelligentsia on economic and political questions. This group was determined to create a new world of justice and equality and had aligned itself with two burgeoning political forces. On the one hand its gradualist wing had rallied around the new bourgeoisie. It sought reform through the Zemstvo system and was rapidly evolving a Russian Liberalism. On the other hand the revolutionary wing threw in its lot with the working class. Like the peasantry the working class suffered from an overwhelming sense of exploitation. Organized under the Marxist philosophy and concentrated in important industrial areas, it constituted a potent revolutionary force. As we shall see, Gorky linked his destiny with the fortunes of this latter group. In summing up, Russia was pregnant with revolution; on the throne was a weak, inconstant Tsar bent on repression; opposing him was a smouldering force of resentment and a determination for change which could be suppressed with only the most ruthless force.
CHAPTER II

CHILDHOOD, ADOLESCENCE AND YOUTH

The date most often given for the birth of Maxim Gorky (Alexey Maximovich Peshkov) is March 14, 1868, seven years after the Great Emancipation and two years before the birth of his famous contemporary Vladimir Lenin.1 There is a good deal of uncertainty about the exact day and year of Gorky's birth; he, himself, could not say definitely whether he was born in 1868 or 1869. Little is known about his family background. His paternal grandfather was a man of some ability or at least bravery, for despite his peasant birth he became an officer in the army of Nicholas I. He seems to have gone astray, however, for he was eventually exiled to Siberia for cruelty to his subordinates. Somewhere there he had a son Maxim. What with his mother's early death and his father's abuse, the boy had a difficult life. His father died when Maxim was a child of nine, so that the child was apprenticed to his godfather in the town of Perm (Molotov). Maxim seems to have been restless and unhappy for he soon ran away. At the age of sixteen he settled in Nizhni-Novgorod (Gorky), where he worked as a carpenter on the river steamers of a local shipper. By the age of twenty he was a qualified

1 A particular problem arises when treating contemporary Russian subjects because the Julian Calendar, which is thirteen days behind the Gregorian or Western Calendar, was used in Russia up until February 1/14, 1918. In this project everything occurring before this date is listed according to the Julian Calendar, and everything after according to the Gregorian. In Russia it is customary to make this distinction by the terms "old" and "new style."
cabinet-maker and upholsterer.

While working in Nizhni-Novgorod young Peshkov met and fell in love with Varvara Kashirina, the daughter of a successful dyer. The dyer had high ambitions for his daughter, however, and would not countenance her marriage to the lowly carpenter. As a result the young people eloped. With the helpful mediation of Mrs. Kashirin the old man was pacified and in a few weeks the newly-weds settled with their parents. Things did not go well from the outset, for the Kashirin sons, Yakov and Mikhail, saw in Peshkov a rival claim to a share in the parental estate. At the same time Peshkov was clean living, capable with his hands, sharp with his tongue, and clever as a practical joker. This very combination of qualities turned his brothers-in-law against him, and one day in the early winter they lured him to a neighbouring pond and pushed him through a hole in the ice. Peshkov survived the incident but it was not long before he moved with his young family—Alexey Maximovich Peshkov, the future Maxim Gorky, had been born by this time—to Astrakhan at the mouth of the Volga.

The Peshkov family had not lived in Astrakhan for more than four years when the baby, Alexey Maximovich, contracted cholera. Although the boy recovered, his father contracted the disease from him and died. Gorky begins his remarkable autobiographical trilogy with his recollections of this tragic event. The father's death at the hands of his son, as it were, turned the mother against the boy. As a result she could

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2 Gorky describes his mother as "... a stern woman, who wasted no words." *Childhood*, p. 11. *Childhood* is the first volume of Gorky's autobiography, written 1913-1914.
give her son little care and sympathy, and much less understanding in the trying years ahead. However, the family tragedy brought a new and beneficial influence into the boy's life; that of his grandmother, who was big, round, cheerful, and filled with boundless love and understanding. She hurried to Astrakhan to help and the five year old Alexey soon acquired an enduring attachment for her. It was not long before the grieving family left for Nizhni-Novgorod and residence with the Kashirins.

It demanded a goodly supply of fortitude for Alexey to endure the grim reality of his years in the typically lower middle class environment of the Kashirin household. Except for the golden personality of his grandmother there was little about these years that he could recall happily. Old Kashirin was approaching bankruptcy brought on by the infirmities of old age and the savage greed and stupidity of his sons. Young Alexey's childhood was replete with severe beatings and scenes of violence and brutality. But life with the Kashirins was not all bad; for it was here that Alexey received his only formal instruction - two years at the primary school. He was also introduced to the traditions of his people, for his grandmother had a vast store of folk-tales which she loved to narrate and to which Alexey would listen enthralled. Even the grandfather, who despite his tyrannical qualities, was a self-made man, gave the young boy some sound advice:

...learn to wait on yourself, and never let others make you wait on them. Behave yourself calm and quiet-like, but stick to your chosen path. Listen to everybody, but do what you yourself think best.\(^3\)

\(^3\) *Childhood*, p. 319.
The old man performed an equally great service by teaching the boy to read and write in Old Church Slavonic. His mother acquainted him with modern Russian by insisting that he learn to read poems and stories from the contemporary tradition. It was here too that Alexey made his first acquaintance with that breed of men that he would later call his nation's finest sons. This contact was made in the person of a chemist, who boarded for a while with the Kashirins. The chemist, who was usually shunned for his odd behavior and taste, was nicknamed "That's Fine" because he used the phrase repeatedly in his general conversation. "That's Fine" eventually befriended Alexey. He encouraged the boy to read carefully and to learn so that he could live effectively and better grasp life. But these were only the more constructive aspects of a generally degrading existence. By the time he was eight Alexey was busy supporting himself and his grandmother by scavenging around Nizhni and along the banks of the Volga. His childhood came to an abrupt end with the death of his mother. Alexey was now almost ten and his grandfather, thinking him big enough to fend for himself, sent him out "Into the World."  

It is not too much to say that the childhood Gorky essentially foreshadows the grown man. In the first instance he appears as a very active and sensitive observer of life. The whole of his autobiography bears testimony to the range and depth of his observations and the accuracy with which he recorded them in a copious memory. It is widely acknowledged that Gorky achieved his greatest artistic successes as a

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4 This is a literal translation of the title of the second volume of Gorky's autobiography. It also appears in English under the title "My Apprenticeship."
memoirist. Secondly, he reveals in everything a rebellious independence — he is self-assertive, pert, even cheeky, when he suspects that he is being abused; and the slow growth of his opinions and attitudes suggests the same pert non-conformity and independence. Witness the forceful rejection of his grandfather's self-righteous puritanism on the one hand and his grandmother's primitive fatalism on the other. With these qualities he seems to have combined a pugnacious heroism. He derives a secret glee from facing alone his numerically superior enemies and putting them to flight with a few well aimed stones, and when he discovers his step-father kicking at his mother's breast, he attacks him with a bread knife. Thirdly, he demonstrates a clear-sighted realism, quite unperverted by self-defeating pessimism — he is essentially an optimist. Paradoxically, he seems to unite a brooding disposition with a hopeful optimism. Undoubtedly it is this spirit which gave his early work its highly romantic character. Somehow he manages to maintain a belief in the goodness of life and the creative abilities of mankind. While he recognises his tawdry surroundings for what they are he is not blind to generosity and goodness where they exist; even his grandfather has amiable qualities and Gorky, noting them, is saved from patricidal hate. Indeed, his grandfather's sadism helps to inspire in him a broad sympathy for living things and a strong indignation against the least manifestation of cruelty to man and beast. Lastly, he is active in a constructive way and resourceful, qualities foreshadowing the grown man's participation in the

5 Childhood, pp. 146-161.

6 Ibid., p. 117 and p. 357.
affairs of his country. Some of the essentials of his character are reflected in the following quotation from his autobiography:

Our life is amazing not only for the vigorous scum of beastiality with which it is overgrown, but also for the bright and wholesome creative forces gleaming beneath and the influence of good is growing, giving promise that our people will at last awaken to a life full of beauty and bright humanity.  

As a last gesture Alexey's grandfather obtained a job for him as an apprentice — as "boy" in a stylish bootshop on the main street of Nizhni. Here he was to learn the shoe business and his first duty was to wait at the shop door stiff as a statue to welcome the customers. The essentials of the business were easy enough to grasp, but Alexey was soon disillusioned by the shop's seamy atmosphere. Mostly, he chafed in its air of saccharine hypocrisy. Having enjoyed a scavenger's freedom, he found the work a drudgery and resolved to flee at the earliest opportunity. His plight was eased by a fortunate accident. The day on which he planned to run away he overturned a pot of soup and burned his hands badly. He was sent to the hospital and although it was a dreadful experience it ended well for him. His grandmother was sent for and she tended his wounds and took him home again to live with her. Spring was approaching and Alexey was happy.

Alexey was not welcomed by his grandfather. Old Kashirin, now penniless and stingier than ever, balked at the prospect of feeding another mouth. He accepted the boy on condition that he support himself. Alexey was undismayed by the imposed conditions and resumed his old

7 Childhood, p. 354.
practice of gathering rags and bones and selling them for a few pennies. To this he added a new activity. The old folks were now living in a suburb of Nizhni and he and his grandmother spent a happy summer gathering herbs and berries, nuts and mushrooms in the nearby forest. The effect of forest and grandmother on the growing boy was altogether salutary. From the forest he gained strength and vigor and from his grandmother he learned the elements of woodlore and wisdom, such things as: "You have to learn everything for yourself. If you don't find out for yourself no one will help you."

This happy interlude came to an end in the fall when old Kashirin, calling the boy a "sponger", found him a job in the heart of Nizhni-Novgorod with a distant relative, the son-in-law of his grandmother's sister. With many misgivings Alexey began his "apprenticeship" with the draughtsman.

Things went badly from the start. With the freshness of the forest still in his nostrils, Alexey was overwhelmed by the drab reality of city life and his narrow servitude to the draughtsman. His training in a genteel profession was cut short by the machinations of a jealous mistress. Seeing in him a threat to her younger son's position in the business, she forestalled Alexey's training by loading him with all the duties of a housemaid. On Wednesdays he scrubbed the kitchen floor and shined the Samovar and the other brassware; on Saturdays he scrubbed all the floors and both stairways. He chopped and brought in wood for the stoves, washed dishes, cleaned vegetables, carried home the groceries.

and ran errands. Gorky says that he worked hard and willingly because it gave him pleasure to "whisk away dirt", but that he was intensely unhappy. Everywhere he saw:

... heartless mischief-making and filthy shamelessness - incomparably more than on the streets of Kunavino (suburb of Nizhni where he passed the summer), which had no lack of brothels and streetwalkers. Behind the filth and mischief in Kunavino one was aware of something explaining the inevitability of such filth and mischief: drudgery, and a miserable, half-starved existence. Here people lived in ease and comfort, and work was substituted by senseless commotion. And upon everything lay the shadow of an insidious, irritating boredom.9

Alexey showed his distaste by a characteristic impudence and he suffered the household's wrath as a consequence. Although there was little play (indeed, there was no time for that), Alexey had one diversion which gave him the respite formerly found in field and forest. His mistress insisted that he go to church on Saturdays and Sundays and from this he derived great pleasure. On Saturday evenings when it wasn't too cold he would skip vespers which he normally enjoyed and walk the streets to satisfy his passion for impressions. He observed closely the movement of life around him. He saw "... people praying, kissing, fighting, playing cards, carrying on serious soundless conversations. Before (his) eyes passed a mute fishlike panorama like those seen in the slot-machines."10

It was during this winter at the draughtsman's that Gorky first learned that there was such a thing as a forbidden book. This discovery came, oddly enough, through his passion for playing skittles.

9 My Apprenticeship, p. 111.

10 Ibid., p. 122.
When spring came, Sunday usually found him playing skittles in the street when he should have been at church. He invariably bet his collection money on the outcome and was not infrequently mortified at losing it. Blurring out the whole situation one day at confession, he was dumbfounded when the father asked him if he had ever read books by the underground press. The twelve year old Gorky did not understand the question but his curiosity had been pricked and henceforth he was on the alert for an answer. Alexey was "weighed down" by his "miserable, boring existence", and finding himself one day - it was spring and the air was warm and fresh - on the bank of the Volga with 20 kopeks in his hand he decided to leave his "mouse hole" for good.  

He hoboed along the river's bank for a few days and then found himself a job as a dishwasher on a river steamer, the "Dobry". As the steamer moved between Nizhni and Kazan the young Gorky continued his first-hand study of the Russian people and their native land. Again his hypersensitive eye distinguished between the tawdry, the sordid and the genuine. Already he was beginning to formulate questions on the basis of his observations. He "... wondered whether people were inherently good or bad, meek or menacing. Why they were so cruelly, ravenously vicious, and so shamefully servile." It is quite clear that his spontaneous idealism was repeatedly outraged by what he saw, but this fact is not relevant to the moment. A far more important experience developed in an unexpected quarter. The cook of the "Dobry" was a stern but good

11 My Apprenticeship, p. 136.  
12 Ibid., p. 173.
nated giant called Smury. This disillusioned ex-corporal of the guards gruffly introduced Gorky to reading and laid the foundations for his literary education. He had many books in his black trunk, mostly of an occult or technical nature which he insisted the boy read and reread to him. Smury seems to have had an unlettered belief in the secret creative power of books, for he believed that the right ones — books on black magic or like subjects — made men clever, and he insisted that they should be read over and over again until they were thoroughly understood. This dry pabulum seems to have bored even Smury after a time, for one day he turned up with Gogol's Fearful Vengeance. Although the two differed over Gogol's quality as an author, the event initiated an exciting period for them. In the next few weeks they read Gogol's Taras Bulba, Scott's Ivanhoe, and Fielding's Tom Jones. As the summer wore on Gorky says that he quite unconsciously formed the habit of reading; but, as yet, books only satisfied his yearning for romance and offered him an escape from reality. The fact that Smury's interest in reading also grew had an unfortunate consequence for Alexey. Smury began to call him away from his work to read and to push the extra burden onto the other kitchen helpers. It wasn't long before they got their revenge by framing Alexey for thieving. They succeeded in having him fired, and four months after beginning his adventure on the "Dobry" Alexey was again in Nizhni. His last recollection of the steamer was of the cook's parting admonishment "to read." 

13 My Apprenticeship, p. 153.
14 Ibid., p. 177.
Although there was very little change in colour or tone during the next four years of Gorky's life, they were years distinguished by two essential phenomena: (1) the persistence with which he continued his self-education through personal observation and analysis, and (2) the powerful impact that omnivorous reading made on his actively groping mind.

Gorky was soon back living with his grandparents. This time he supported himself by catching birds and selling them in the market. When winter came he returned, at his grandfather's behest, to the draughtsman's where he resumed his old labours. In this distressing household he found everything unchanged, with the sole exception that his work was heavier and more irksome. The smug complacency of his employers and the absurd monotony of words and events oppressed him with a "stupefying misery." He much preferred the company of washerwomen and soldiers to that of his relatives, who on top of everything else had an irrational hatred of books. They fought tooth and nail to prevent him from reading. Cajolery, beatings, and even attempts to inspire him with fear by telling him terrible tales about "readers" who tried to kill the tsar by blowing up trains, proved futile. The youngster continued despite insult and injury to indulge his newly acquired passion for reading. The dead of night would usually find him huddled over a smoky homemade candle pouring over the pages of illustrated magazines and journals. Out of his labours came an expanded view of the world and

15 My Apprenticeship, pp. 205-208.
16 Ibid., p. 227.
a higher conception of life. So too came a higher type of companionship. For instance, in an effort to find who or what the Huns were, he made the acquaintance of a well-educated chemist "... who knew the simple meanings of all the learned words." From the chemist he acquired a more serious attitude towards books. Then he found a friend in the tailor's wife who lived next door. Up to this point his reading had consisted mostly of magazines, journals, newspapers, and trashy Russian adventure stories - anything he could get his hands on. The "China Doll", as he called his new friend, introduced him to the novels of Duma "The Elder", Ponson du Terrail, Montepin, Zaccone, and so on, stories which made him happy but soon bored him for their monotonous similarity. Among the host of bad literature with which she supplied him, he came upon the odd story by first rate authors like Hugo, Scott, and Balzac. Balzac's Eugenie Grandet sent him into ecstasies - with this novel he felt that he had at last discovered the "right books." In stories of this

17 "Ever broader grew my view of the world, adorned with fabulous cities lofty mountains and beautiful seashores. Life became wonderfully expanded, and the earth waxed fairer as I was made aware of its multiplicity of towns and peoples and interests." My Apprenticeship, p. 242.

"They (books) showed me a different life, a life filled with great desires and emotions, leading people to crime or to heroism. I observed that the people about me were incapable of crime or heroism; they lived apart from all that the books wrote about, and it was difficult to discover anything interesting in their lives. One thing I knew I did not want to live as they did." Ibid., p. 245.

18 Ibid., p. 245.

19 Ibid., p. 256.
calibre he glimpsed the contours of a better life with a higher sense of values.  

In the meantime, events in the national life were moving rapidly toward a climax; but as political developments of national importance still revolved indistinctly around the edges of the boy's consciousness, the background developments—the setback to national ambitions in the Balkans, the reinationment of reactionary forces in government, the failure of the Narodniki to reach the people—which set the stage for the more spectacular assassination of Alexander II (March 13, 1881) passed unnoticed. But the event itself made a distinct impression on the boy's mind. Gorky describes how the cathedral bells began to ring late one night, the initial alarm, and then the dismay and the hushed guarded silence which accompanied the knowledge of what had happened. "For two days people continued to whisper and to go visiting and to receive visitors and to recount everything in detail." Alexey couldn't find out exactly what had happened and all his efforts to find out were cut short either by evasion or silence. The whole affair was

20 It is interesting to notice how these stories affected his moral and intellectual development. "Without preventing me from seeing the reality of life, and without lessening my desire to understand living people, the chaos of this book world formed a transparent but impenetrable veil protecting me from the poisonous filth and innumerable contagions lurking in the life about me. The books made me invulnerable to many things; a knowledge of how people loved made it impossible for me to enter a brothel. The cheapness of such debauchery roused my repugnance for it and contempt for those who found it sweet. Rocambole taught me to stoically resist the force of circumstances. Dumas' heroes filled me with the desire to dedicate myself to some great and significant cause." *My Apprenticeship*, pp. 321-322.

21 Ibid., p. 248.
soon forgotten under the pressure of daily life, and the most important object of his daily life at that moment was the search for books like Eugenie Grandet. What amounted to a dilemma was solved when the woman he calls "Queen Margot", named after the heroine of an historical romance, moved into a neighbouring flat. She proved to be the source of much encouragement and numerous good volumes. Firstly, she introduced him to the poetry of Pushkin, then urging him to know Russian literature and life well, she encouraged him to read Aksakov's Family Chronicle, and then his Notes of a Huntsman, and then several volumes of Grebenka and Sollogub, and the verse of Venevitinov, Odoysky, and Tyutchev. Gorky says that these books "purged" his soul and freed it from the "chaff of bitter, beggarly reality." They convinced him that good books were "essential" to him and perhaps, most important, they taught him that he was not the only person on earth and that he would surely be able "to make his way." 22

In the spring Alexey left the draughtsman's. After spending the summer on a Volga steamer, he returned to Nizhni-Novgorod where he apprenticed himself to an icon-maker. Here he came into contact for the first time with the peculiar Russian Merchant class "as autochthonous and Eurasian as the peasantry" itself. 23 At this time he was oppressed by the greed, the coarse stolidity, the deceitfulness, and the malicious

22 My Apprenticeship, p. 283.

cruelty which was so much a part of their lives. His attitude to the
icon-makers who inhabited the shop was entirely different, these crafts-
men won his respect because they maintained themselves with dignity
despite their wretched living conditions. Alexey enjoyed very pleasant
relations with them and even came to occupy a special position in their
favour as reader and storyteller. Through this pastime he discovered
just how provincial the majority of his countrymen were. He was dis-
turbed by their gullibility, and especially by their taste for the
fanciful in preference to the real. He found them unconcerned with
reality and he was amazed by this especially as he had such a "sharp
sense" of the difference between truth and fiction himself. A naively
humorous and interesting experience from the point of view of this pro-
ject grew from a reading of Lermontov's Demon. The poem made such a
profound impression that Zhikharev, the head icon-maker took Alexey
aside and warned him not to talk about that book because it was almost
certain to be a forbidden one. Alexey was overjoyed for a moment to
think that he had discovered one of those forbidden books which the
priest had asked him about in confession long ago.

24 Gorky the biographer asked himself why these people behaved as they
did and tried to explain their behavior as an attempt to escape life's
oppressive tedium. Alexander Kaun says that this is the typical Gorky
approach, to quote: "The observer depicts life's seamy side and is
followed at his heels by the ratiocinator who seeks to explain and
justify and rehabilitate life, in which evil is conditioned but not
intrinsic." Kaun comments that, "... the reader is more convinced by
the observation than by the explanation." Maxim Gorky and His Russia,
p. 105.

25 My Apprenticeship, p. 389.

26 Ibid., p. 394.
During these days he rejected out of hand his grandmother's attitude of patient endurance. He met her now and again, and his appreciation for her many sterling qualities continued to grow, but he began to feel that she lived in a dream world and was, as a result, blind to the bitter reality around her. When Alexey protested vehemently about the dreary ugliness of life and the suffering of people she could only beg him to endure it all patiently, and this Alexey could never do, as the grown man puts it "... nothing cripples a person so dreadfully as endurance, as a humble submission to the forces of circumstances." This episode reveals a good deal about the character of Gorky. He demonstrates, as in numerous other instances, a pugnacious independence of mind. He demonstrates his gloomy preoccupation with the material world and his categorical rejection of ugliness and filth as unbefitting the human personality. The episode foreshadows the meliorist and reveals him as an individual pledged to face issues actively and squarely.28

Life with the icon-makers was a melancholy affair despite the pleasant companionship; so that the lure of spring caught Alexey in a restive and fretful mood. In a desperate effort to escape, he projected a trip to Persia via Astrakhan, whither he could go easily on the river steamers. His plan didn't mature, however, as a chance meeting with the draughtsman offered him the prospect of a new job. The draughtsman had

27 My Apprenticeship, p. 430.

28 Gorky himself says that the icon-makers praised him for his straightforward attitude towards life. My Apprenticeship, p. 416. H.H. Erikson makes the following observation: "... Gorky had always been sensitive and impressionable, and his basic, sentimental sadness was counteracted only by his determination to "grasp" life almost to force it to give him faith." Childhood and Society, New York, W.W. Norton, 1950, p. 349.
made some big contracts at the Nizhni fairgrounds and needed a checker to supervise the arrival of material and prevent stealing. He offered the job to Alexey who was won over to the idea. For the next two winters and three summers, Alexey worked for the draughtsman, doing household chores through the winter and checking at the fairgrounds during the summer. These years, just like all the others since his entry "into the world", were important formative years for Alexey. During them his storehouse of impressions was augmented through daily intercourse with the peasants whose work he supervised. He saw them at work and play, joined them in their endless conversations, struck up friendships among them, and was in the end baffled by their changefulness. For a short period he spent hours in Millionaire Street, centre of the city slums, hob-nobbing with the prototypes of tramps and vagabonds, whom he describes so strikingly in *Ex-Men* and *Lower Depths*. In his spare time he continued his habit of voracious reading and even began to keep a notebook for verses and versifying. He especially enjoyed reading Russian books "... in them (he) always sensed something sad and familiar, as though the Lenten chimes were imprisoned within their ages, and one had only to open the covers to release the faint music." Gogol and Dostoevsky with their *Dead Souls* and *Notes from a Dead House*, however, created a vague antipathy in him. On the other hand, he was very fond of Dickens and Walter Scott whom he read two and three times over. He says that Scott reminded him of a "... holiday mass held in a splendid cathedral - a bit long and tiresome, but always festive." Dickens was an author

29 *My Apprenticeship*, p. 447.
whom he continued to admire as one who had "... attained mastery in that most difficult of arts - the art of loving people." 30 Another experience of his summer evenings was to gather with a student and his privileged young friends to discuss books and poetry. This experience was notable because it represented Gorky's first contact with the sons and daughters of Russian officials and wealthy middle-class merchants. 31 These experiences multiplied filled out the last years of Gorky's "Apprenticeship".

By the end of his third summer with the draughtsman - he was sixteen years old - Alexey found himself in an emotional and intellectual quandary, and the step which he took in a desperate effort to remedy the situation marks an important turning point in his career. In the first place, he found life "disjointed, incongruous - obviously senseless." As an example of this senselessness, he describes how the spring floods destroyed buildings and stalls on the fairgrounds causing enormous damage and how year after year the people rebuilt in exactly the same places. He asked himself "... how people could go on revolving round and round

30 My Apprenticeship, p. 447.

31 Gorky probably draws on this experience to create the boyhood of Klim Samghin. Samghin is the son of a wealthy middle-class merchant. Gorky uses him as the hero in his monumental effort to draw a comprehensive picture of pre-revolutionary Russia (1880-1917). See Klim Samghin, "Forty Years", tr. A Bakshy, New York, Jonathon Cape and Harrison Smith, and D. Appleton, 4 vol., 1926-1936 (still unfinished at his death).
in such a vicious circle." Secondly, he felt that he was lost in a "... labyrinth of the incomprehensible." He describes his mental state as follows:

... Life was like an autumn woods with the mushrooms gone, leaving me with nothing to do in an emptiness where every nook and cranny was only too familiar.

I did not drink vodka or court the girls - these two means of intoxicating the soul were substituted for me by books. But the more I read, the harder it became to go on living in the empty, senseless manner in which most people seemed to live.

... there were times when I felt old. My heart seemed to have grown swollen and heavy with all I had lived through, all I had read and pondered so distractedly. The reservoir of my impressions was like a dark lumber room stuffed with a multiplicity of things I had neither the strength nor the ability to sort.

And the weight of these impressions, despite their number, did not make me firm, but rocked and unsettled me like water in a shaky vessel.

I despised complaints, misery and unwholesomeness, while the sight of brutality - blood, blows, even oral abuse - aroused in me an instinctive repulsion. ... I would fight like a wild beast, ... to this very day I am overwhelmed by grief and shame on recalling these fits of despair born of impotence.

Two beings dwelt within me: one of them having seen too much of filth and loathsomeness, had become chastened. Life's dreadful humdrum had made him sceptical and suspicious, and he looked with helpless compassion upon all people, including himself. This individual longed to lead a quiet retired life away from cities and people. He dreamed of going to Persia, of entering a monastery, of living in a forester's hut or the

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32 My Universities, p. 537. Alexey posed this question and many like it to Ossip, a sharp-tongued old carpenter at the fairgrounds. Ossip apparently felt that Alexey's mind was full of brazen ideas for he began to tell the draughtsman about them. It is informative to record the answer he gave when Alexey asked him why he carried tales. Ossip answered, "So he'll know what harmful thoughts you have; it's up to him to teach you; who'll do it if your master don't? It's not out of malice I tell him, but out of pity for you. You're not a stupid lad, but there's a demon stirring things up in that head of yours. If you steal something I'll keep mum about it; if you go with the girls - still I'm mum; and I'll not say a word if you get drunk. But I'll always tell your master about those brazen ideas of yours, so you may as well know it." My Apprenticeship, p. 540.
lodge of a railway guard or becoming a night-watchman somewhere on the outskirts of town, the fewer the people and the more remote, the better.

The other individual, baptized by the holy spirit of wise, and truthful books, realized that life's dreadful humdrum exerted a ruthless power which might easily lop off his head or crush him under a grimy heel. And so he summoned all his strength in self-defence, baring his teeth, clenching his fists, ever ready for a fight or an argument. His love and his pity found expression in action, and, as became the gallant hero of a French novel, he would unsheathe his sword and strike a fighting pose at the slightest provocation.

Thirdly, his intuitive rebellion against misery and brutality provided a fertile ground for the idealistic conceptions conjured by his readings, which once planted ripened into an insistent hope that a better, more purposeful life was possible. Fundamentally active, he longed to give Russia, himself included, a good kick so that everything as he says, "... would spin about in a joyful whirl, in the rapturous dance of people who are in love with one another and with life, this life, conceived for the sake of another life, more honest, courageous and beautiful." Virtually overwhelmed, Alexey desperately concluded that he must do something or else he would be lost. In a mood of mixed determination and frenzy, like a lost man who plunges into the heart of the wood in a last frantic attempt to find his way, he set out for Kazan, hoping that he would find some way to study at the university there.

33 My Apprenticeship, p. 542.

34 Slonim, Marc, Modern Russian Literature, New York, Oxford University Press, 1955, p. 126. Slonim says that a sense of "... social and moral duty, was deeply rooted in Gorky the writer and Gorky the man. ... in rationalizing his emotional reactions, he aspired to deeds that would transform the world of cruelty, poverty, and ignorance he had to face daily."

35 My Apprenticeship, p. 558.
Alexey had already made passing acquaintance with Kazan while a dishwasher on the river steamers. His new home was a city of mixed Tartar and Russian culture. By virtue of its renowned theological academy, its museums, its university, and its other educational institutions, Kazan became the intellectual centre of Eastern Russia. For this reason alone it is not at all strange that Gorky should have looked to Kazan when he began to think of lifting himself from the surrounding morass. Things went against his plans from the very beginning. The illusion that a university education could be had for the asking was quickly shattered as the youth was forced to work long and hard just to keep from starving. For a while he kept himself by stevedoring on the wharves where he broadened his acquaintance with the outcasts who later became his stepping stones to celebrity. It was here that he experienced in a new way the joy and exhilaration of labour, which he romantically describes as a force "... which could work miracles upon the earth, could cover all the land overnight with wondrous palaces and cities, .. ." At the same time his acquaintanceship with the volatile gymnasia

36 Gorky takes this opportunity to reflect on a significant habit which he had already acquired and seems to have practiced throughout his life, to quote: "I had... learned to dream of strange adventures and prodigious deeds. This was a great help to me in life's hard days; and, hard days being many, I grew more and more proficient at such dreaming." Continuing, he says, "... That I looked for no outside assistance, and set no hopes on luck or chance. But I was gradually developing an unwavering obstinacy of will; and the more difficult life became, the stronger, even the wiser I felt myself to be. I realized in very early life that a man is made by the resistance he presents to his surroundings." My Universities, p. 13, the third volume of his autobiography written in 1925.

37 Ibid., p. 41.
students was growing and this led him into contact for the first time with the Narodnik and incipient Marxist movements. His first conspiratorial act was to deliver a message to a printer of the underground press and his second was to join a small study group. But without an adequate background, Alexey found the studies of John Stuart Mill and Chernyshevsky boring. His first thought was to get away "... and wander about the Tartar section." It was a beginning, however, and Alexey soon came under the influence of a professional Narodnik, Andrei Derenkov. Derenkov supported his anti-government activities by the income from a small grocery store. He also had Kazan's finest library of forbidden books which he distributed freely among the students and others of revolutionary bent. In the company of Derenkov and his associates Alexey discovered a spirit of solicitude and anxiety for the future of the Russian people which had a companion echo in his own heart. Although he was lost by the profusion of their words and arguments he was excited by their determination to build a new life. Alexey himself, was looked

38 See above, Chapter I, pp. 25-26. This was a time (1884) of stagnation and readjustment in the revolutionary movement. George Plekhanov was applying the Marxian theory to the Russian scene, thus setting the revolutionary movement on a practical scientific basis, and tying its hopes to the rising working class.

39 My Universities, p. 36.

40 Gorky describes some of these books as "... hand-written copies, in thick notebooks. Such were Lavrov's Historical Letters, Chernyshevsky's What is to be Done?, several articles by Pisarev, King Hunger, ... Intricate Writings. All these manuscript copies were crumpled and worn - read almost to tatters." My Universities, p. 44.

41 Ibid., p. 49. Cf. Chapter 1, pp. 11-12.
upon as a "native talent", a "man of the people", which is not at all strange when we consider that it was a characteristic of the Narodniki to bestow fulsome praise on anything of peasant origin. There was a sharp point of difference between Alexey and his mentors on this particular point. He had had too much experience of the people to see in them the embodiment of wisdom, justice, etc. In contrast, he saw what there was of truth and beauty in the Narodniki and their will, as he expresses it: "... to live, to build life freely in accordance with new canons of love for humanity."

During the next year Alexey obtained a job in a pretzel bakery where he worked fourteen hours a day. As a necessary consequence he had little time for reading and less for his circle. In the meanwhile, however, Derenkov was finding it difficult to finance his revolutionary enterprises on the small income from his grocery. In order to increase his funds he decided to establish a bake shop. Alexey, because of his bakery experience and genuine interest in the revolutionary movement fitted very nicely into Derenkov's plans, and was soon established in the new business as a baker's helper and policeman. One of his duties was to prevent the baker from pilfering flour, eggs, butter, etc.; another was to distribute books, revolutionary proclamations, and pamphlets.

42 Gorky says that they examined him like a "cabinetmaker" examines "a piece of wood," and showed him off with the same "pride with which a street urchin shows off to his comrades a copper coin found in the gutter." My Universities, p. 50.

43 Ibid., p. 54.
among the students while he was delivering buns and rolls.44

Although anything but dull, events in Alexey's life were rapidly precipitating a crisis. Despite his new environment and experiences, the combination of physical strain and mental anxiety which had prompted his flight from Nizhni-Novgorod continued unrelieved. He was particularly oppressed by the senseless contradictions between ideals and reality as he saw them. He observed that the Derenkov's bakery, which had been established, was being ruined by the carelessness and abuse of the students. He was not only disillusioned, but his work also became pointless. He was repelled by the fact that those very students who were most enthusiastic in their praise of him as "a native talent" were the quickest to scorn his opinions, as a result, he was without the friendship he craved. On the one hand he observed that compassion for humanity permeated everything that he read and heard, and on the other he saw that the life around him was full of bitterness, enmity, and cruelty. To complete the picture, he was baffled by the political developments taking shape around him. Oddly enough, Lenin was at the University of Kazan in that year (1887) and was expelled for his activities among the students. Alexey's life became more and more a vacuum. He could see the action but he couldn't understand the underlying motives, and he felt that he was being buffeted here and there powerless to control his fate. In December (1887) he resolved on suicide and, purchasing an old army revolver he put a bullet into his chest. By a quirk of fortune the bullet

44 This period of Gorky's life served as the inspiration for his short stories: "The Master", "Konovalov", and "Twenty-six and One". "Twenty-six and One" is, perhaps, his most powerful short story.
missed its mark and within a month Alexey had sheepishly resumed his work at the bakery. 45

The young Gorky seems to have been very fortunate in making the acquaintance of people capable and willing to help him at critical moments in his life. This moment was no exception. A shopkeeper from a small village on the Volga had become acquainted with Alexey through Derenkov, and when he saw the youth's dilemma he held out the hand of friendship to him. Romas, the shopkeeper, was a Narodnik. 46 His shop, like Derenkov's was no more than a blind for specific revolutionary aims. His immediate object was to encourage the growth of small buyer cooperatives among the poorer peasants. His ultimate object was one with which Alexey was already familiar - the awakening of the peasant mind; but, the shopkeeper's practical realism suffused the whole concept with a new significance. In him the romantic idealism and ardour of youth was tempered by sound common sense and the patience of long experience. 47 Alexey was invited to join him in the village and there he regained his balance - found again the joy of useful labour and the security of a solid friendship. Romas, also had a good library, and Alexey was once again able to indulge his passion for reading. He says that he was introduced, specifically, to Hobbes and Machiavelli: he lists as represented on the shelves some of the most outstanding thinkers of the age -

45 See pp. 132-143. Gorky has tried to describe the background to his attempted suicide in the short story "An Incident in the Life of Makar". In his opinion the story was a failure - it was clumsy and lacked internal truth. My Universities, p. 145.

46 Cf. Chapter I, pp. 16-17, 26.

47 My Universities, p. 155.
among the English were Buckle, Lyell, Lecky, Mill, Spencer and Darwin; among the Russian were Pisarev, Dobrolybov, and Chernyshevsky.  

However, his country sojourn did not last for more than seven months. Perhaps naturally, Romas had earned the enmity of his rivals in the village. In the early fall he was burned out, and was forced as a result to leave the community. Nothing remained for Alexey among the villagers with the shopkeeper gone, so he left, as usual in a depressed state of mind. He was burdened down by reflections about the peasants' capacity for malice, servility and elemental violence. Fortunately, he carried as well the shopkeeper's timely admonishment against the too hasty and blind condemnation of his fellows.  

So ended the youth of Maxim Gorky. His next stop was Samara.

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48 *My Universities*, p. 158.

CHAPTER III

THE TYRO

Alexey's stop in Samara was very brief. From there he slowly worked his way down the Volga to the Caspian Sea where he first joined an artel of fishermen. He then became a night-watchman on a branch line of the Volga railroad. In the spring of 1889 he was transferred to a small town on the Volga-Don line where he became a freightweigher. In May he set out on the long tramp back to Nizhni-Novgorod in order to report for his period of compulsory military service. Alexey's grandparents were both dead by this time so that when he arrived in Nizhni towards September he very willingly accepted the shelter of a former Kazan acquaintance who had just recently returned from a period of exile in Siberia. Here it was that Alexey had his first brush with the law, for his friend was arrested in October and Alexey was detained for questioning on the grounds of possible complicity. The police officer in charge of the investigation has left a very relevant comment on Alexey at that time. "In answer, to my inquiry," he says, "the Chief of the Kazan Gendarmerie has informed me concerning Peshkov's record in Kazan, supporting my long established opinion that Peshkov presents a

1 The bare outline for Gorky's activities during this period are taken from Kaun, Gorky and His Russia. His Biography contains by far the most detailed account available and its accuracy is substantiated in essentials by isolated facts gleaned from other sources. In most cases Kaun depends for his facts on autobiographical materials published by Gorky (about 1898). The originals are not available.
convenient soil for co-operation with the politically unsafe elements of
the population. I learned from that reply that at Kazan, Peshkov worked
in a bakery, set up for disloyal purposes. . ."2 It is significant that
Alexey was already under suspicion. As soon as he was released he stood
for his medical examination but failed to pass because of his perforated
lung and an extended vein in his left leg (he had apparently strained
himself stevedoring).

With the army closed to him Peshkov adjusted himself to life in
Nizhni, where he remained for the next year. Job followed job until he
finally obtained work in the office of A.I. Lanin, an attorney. Lanin
became a fast friend and proved his worth by helping Alexey to fill the
blanks in his schooling. Gorky placed Lanin high among those who had in­
fluenced his educational development. But now about a fact of equally
great importance to his future development: For some years past Alexey
had been keeping a copy-book for lyrics, notes and observations. One of
the book's latest additions was a long poem in prose and verse which he
called the "Song of an Old Oak". Into this poem he had squeezed the
essentials of his thought and experience to date. After much vacillation
he set out with his poem to visit Vladimir Korolenko (1855-1921), who was
then living in Nizhni-Novgorod. Korolenko, who was a famous Populist,
and one of the most talented authors of his day, had settled in Nizhni
(1885) after his return from a long period of exile to northeast Siberia.
Korolenko's influence on Russian letters was great and he was noted for

2 Quoted by Kaun from Police Records published in 1918 and 1921.
his interest in young authors, so that Alexey was probably hoping for advice and encouragement. He was pleasantly received by the famous man, but his poem which was weak in form and had many stylistic defects was criticised severely. The novice left in a dismal frame of mind. Discouraged by his apparent failure, he either hadn't the heart or refused to write another line for the balance of his stay in Nizhni.

It is significant that Alexey was caught up in the growing interest in Karl Marx which swept over Russia in the 1880's and 1890's. During this period he joined a small study group where Marx's theories were discussed. Despite the involvement, he continued to remain uncommitted between the Marxists and the Narodniki. There was much about his new intelligentsia companions that disturbed him, both in their behavior and attitudes. As at Kazan, he failed to resolve the contradiction between realities as he saw them and realities as they were expounded by them. It seems clear that he wasn't so much disturbed by points of theory as he was by the gulf which separated the intelligentsia from realities — in his opinion they were a foreign element in their own country. He was appalled because this particular group made light of their responsibilities and at the same time ridiculed what he called the "legatees of the heroic epoch" (Narodniki) whom he valued greatly as high-minded social idealists. In a gloomy and confused state of mind, he

3 Korolenko was a great humanitarian. He believed in human progress (evolution) and had a deep concern for Russian suffering and social injustice. His moral authority was great among Russian intellectuals. Gorky describes this incident in his reminiscences. Cf. Kaun, op. cit., pp. 200-201.

4 Kaun, op. cit., p. 205. Quoted from Gorky's autobiographical notes.
sought relief in flight. This time he began a long journey through Southern Russia. Starting at Nizhni-Novgorod, he moved slowly down the Volga to Tsaritsyn (Stalingrad), and then turned sharply to the west and wandered through the Ukraine to Bessarabia, from there he tramped through the Crimea to the North Caucasus, and finally, in the fall of 1891 arrived in Tiflis.

Here, he was employed as a clerk on the Tiflis railroad, a comparatively genteel work which allowed him to devote his leisure time to reading and discussion. The rather large basement flat where he lived with two others was turned into a "commune", a sort of study group, where Narodnik literature, mostly fiction, was studied. Although Marxian elements were present, the discussions were rarely of a social or political character. After a very short time the "commune" broke up and Alexey went to live with Alexander Kalushny, who had once been a member of the People's Will and was now living out an exile in Georgia. Kalushny was impressed by Alexey's narrative ability and urged him to write the tale of Gypsy love called Maker Chudra. The story was first published in a September (1892) issue of a local daily "The Kavkas (Caucasus)" under the pen-name Maxim Gorky (Maxim the Bitter). This event formally launched Alexey Peshkov, now twenty-four, on a literary career.

5 Gorky makes an observation about this habit of his in Konovalov, p. 398. In his opinion one had to be born in "Cultivated Society" to live in it without wanting to escape its "... oppressive conventions sanctioned by the small insidious lies that have become habitual. ..." Its "... vanities of vanities that dulls the senses and corrupts the mind." He says that he was born outside of it and could only take small doses of it at any one time.
In the winter of 1895 Gorky was back in Nizhni-Novgorod, working again in the office of Lanin and writing in all of his spare moments. His stories and sketches which began to appear in a Kazan daily, the "Valzhsky Vestnik (Volga Messenger)", soon attracted the attention of Valdimir Korolenko who contacted the young author and offered to tutor him. From now on Gorky's work appeared more and more frequently in the Volga newspapers. Their quality improved steadily and Korolenko was soon urging him to write a story for Russkoye Bogatstvo (Russian Wealth), a literary review edited jointly by Korolenko and Mikhailovsky. Since these two figures, particularly Mikhailovsky, dominated the literary world of the 1890's, Gorky's appearance in their review virtually assured his literary success. His famous Chelkash, written for Korolenko, was published in June 1895.

In the meantime, Gorky had become feuilletonist on the Samarskaya Gazeta (Samara Gazette) and was experiencing for the first time in his life the security of an adequate financial income. In his column "Among Other Things", he discussed local themes - accidents, brawls, public entertainments, the local administration, etc. At the same time he wrote numerous unsigned sketches and draughts. Gorky was not very well received in Samara. His lack of restraint and his far too bitter exposes of dishonest officialdom and economic exploitation turned

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6 Mikhailovsky (1842-1904) was a sociologist. He became the theoretician of Populism and after 1889 "the grand old man of Russian radicalism." He was a great journalist and critic. In the spirit of his times he judged a literary work by its "social message and its practical utility." He had an acute critical insight. See Mirsky, Contemporary Russian Literature, 1881-1925, London, George Routledge, 1953, p. 44.
influential opinion against him. As a result he was fired from the Gazette. 7

In May 1896 he moved back to his birth place to work on the Nizhegorodsky Listok (Nizhni-Novgorod Leaf), which had a reputation for being the most progressive paper on the Volga. It counted Korolenko and his group among its supporters and tried as a policy to stay within the limits of the ubiquitous censor. Gorky conducted a column "Rambling Notes" in which he was free to discuss questions of local and national importance. He campaigned against administrative abuses, smugness and complacency wherever he found it, campaigned against the rootless intelligentsia, championed the poor and urged the enlightenment of his ex-men (themes very close to his heart), and wrote much about art and literature.8

In the fall of 1896 Gorky fell ill from a combination of overwork and incipient tuberculosis. The disease was checked by rest and a trip to the Crimea in the early part of 1897. In the meantime, however, Gorky's work had caught the attention of a young Marxist, Vladimir Posse, who wrote what was the first note on Gorky in the Russian press. The

7 Ivan Bunin, a contemporary of Gorky's and a Nobel Prize winner for literature (1935) gives us the description of Gorky that circulated at that time: "A wonderfully picturesque figure: a great big hefty fellow with the widest cloak you can imagine, a hat with a brim as wide as this, and a huge knotted stick in his hand. . . ." Bunin, Ivan A., Memories and Portraits, New York, Doubleday, 1951, p. 70.

8 It is very difficult to fix Gorky's political attitude. Kaun hazards the opinion that in 1896 he supported Korolenko's view that autocracy was an old but still firm tooth and that many decades of legal action would be required to loosen it. Kaun, op. cit., p. 245.
Marxists were quick to appreciate the revolutionary significance of Gorky's stories and immediately began to negotiate for them. Gorky received their overtures coldly as he had some very definite reservations about Marxism. In an early letter to Posse he expresses the opinion that Marxism "lowered one's individuality", and concluded by urging Posse not to join the "counsel of the wicked." His reservations must have been allayed because his "Konovalov" soon appeared in the Marxist Journal Novaye Slovo (New Word) (1897) and when this journal was closed down in December he accepted a position on the editorial board of a new Marxist venture called Zhizn (Life). In the early part of 1898 Gorky's editorial companions prevailed upon him to publish a collected edition of his short stories and Posse was commissioned to find a publisher. In March a two volume edition of his Sketches and Stories appeared on the market and from that time his fame and influence increased at a phenomenal rate.

The appearance of these volumes won immediate recognition for their author and established his reputation as a writer of first rate importance. The substance of his stories and the spirit in which they were told give the clue to his career and deserve careful study on that account. While his sketches and stories present a fairly broad picture of Russian life during the 1890's, it is clear that Gorky's personal experience of peasants, tramps, sailors, fishermen and workers up until

9 Kaun, op. cit., p. 255.

10 New Word had been a journal of right Narodniki 1894-1897. It was taken over by the legal Marxists in April, 1897 but was banned in December. Gorky was listed as one of its contributors, along with Lenin, Martov, Struve, and Zasulich. See Hill, E. and Mudie, D., The Letters of Lenin, New York, Harcourt Brace, 1937, p. 31.
the publication of his first story Maker Chudra (1892) provides the focal point of his interests and the source of his inspiration and material. His treatment of subjects reveals an almost pathological preoccupation with the question of humanness - the nature of man, the purpose of man's life and the parallel question of how man can best fulfill himself in society. The strong note of sympathy which pervades his stories suggests that Gorky rated man's intrinsic worth very high, "... in the very act of describing a kind of fall from humanity (he) expresses a sense of the strangeness and essential value of the human being." All Hence, the moral outrage inspired in him by the tragic waste of human potentialities in his native Russia. Confronted on every hand by overwhelming evidence of stagnation, moral indifference, apathy, spiritual poverty and brutalized life, Gorky protested vigorously - it is this note of protest, combined with a firm conviction that man could and must be better, that gives Gorky's stories their peculiar flavour.

His first tales, of which Maker Chudra, the Song of the Falcon, and Old Woman Izergil provide excellent examples, are replete with the spirit of romantic heroism - the courageous man sacrifices himself for freedom and light. By 1895 his themes have broadened, the romantic element is greatly reduced, and a quiet note of realism pervades the whole. In his sketches he is very frank, but his tone is sympathetic and warm. In his stories, however, it is becoming clear that his favorite type is the type of the social rebel as represented by his "Chelkashes" and "Konovalovs". Through them he voices his protest against drabness

11 Chesterton, G.K., "Introduction" to Twenty-six and One, p. xi.
and injustice and their spirit and philosophy provide important clues to Gorky's own.\textsuperscript{12}

The whole cycle of these stories revolves around the central ideal of personal liberty, exuberant strength and fierce rebellion as embodied in types like Konovalov.\textsuperscript{13} Gorky's Konovalov is a fascinating personality, with anarchistic and rebellious tendencies which condemn him to a life of social vagabondage. Gorky seems to have been excited by the vitality, the spirit of self-reliance, the sense of personal responsibility, and the love of liberty and truth which were dominant characteristics of the tramps with whom he came in contact during his wanderings. At the same time he was intrigued by the deep spiritual unrest which he detected at the bottom of their vagabondage. Konovalov is a good example. He is a skilled tradesman, a baker, who will or cannot accept the yoke of permanent employment and refuses, with a defiant gesture, to become part of any order. At the bottom of his rebelliousness is an inner turmoil caused by an excessive preoccupation with the purpose and aims of life. Konovalov is an intellectual among his fellows, a searcher, and because he can find neither an inner line nor his place in life he must live in turmoil.\textsuperscript{14} It is clear that Gorky's hero sees to the root of his trouble,

\textsuperscript{12} Lavrin makes the following shrewd observation: "Untramelled by any taboos, traditions, and conventions he chose characters most likely to express the same attitude towards life: tramps and roamers whose only home was the endless expanse of the steppes. . . ." Lavrin, Janko, An Introduction to the Russian Novel, London, Methuen, 1947, p. 139.


\textsuperscript{14} Gorky, Maxim, "Konovalov", Selected Short Stories, 1892-1901, Moscow Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1954, p. 419.
Konovalov, for instance, "... did not blame fate or accuse others. He alone was to blame for the mess his life had become, and the harder (one) tried to prove... that he was 'a victim of circumstances and environment,' the stronger he insisted that he alone was to blame for his fate. ... He found pleasure in chastising himself; it was pleasure that gleamed in his eyes as he cried out in his resounding voice:

'Every man is his own master and nobody but me is responsible if I am a rascal!'"15

The exuberance and strength with which Konovalov defends his personal responsibility strikes that note of vitality which was another characteristic of Gorky's hero. By creating types who refused to whine and complain, Gorky brought a "... refreshing new attitude of energy and courage to Russian literature."16 By refusing to bow before fate or circumstances, they voiced a brave new demand for a higher type of action. "What's all this talk about fate?" Gorky makes Old Izergil say, "Everyone makes his own fate! I see all sorts of men - but the strong ones - where are they? There are fewer and fewer noble men!"17 Like their creator Gorky's heroes hunger after eternity.18 If they are unable to find this then they want nothing more than "to burn brightly" at least for the moment.19

18 Dillon, E.J., *op. cit.*, p. 244.
19 "Konovalov", p. 421.
There is little doubt that Gorky created his "Konovalovs" for a revolutionary purpose. It seems clear that his overriding ambition was to inspire in his compatriots the will and determination to build a re-modelled life abounding in beautiful and decent forms. One of the first clear statements that Gorky was ambitious to play an active part in Russia's reorganization is voiced in one of his early sketches called "Once in Autumn" (1894). "At this time I was already preparing myself to be a powerful and active force in society", he says, "I dreamed of political resolutions, and social reorganization." Thirty years later in an article on Lenin, Gorky says that he began his own career as an instigator of the revolutionary spirit with a hymn to the madness of brave men", an obvious reference to his "Song of the Falcon" (1894). That he continued to think in the same vein is clear from a letter written to Anton Chekhov (1900). Here he outlines the germ of his thinking (as an established author his approach is more directed and definite):

Truly, at this moment one feels the need of heroics: There is a common desire for stimulating brilliant things, for life, better, more beautiful. It is absolutely necessary for present-day literature to begin embellishing life a bit, and soon as it begins to do so, life will take on colour; I mean men will begin to live a quickened, a brighter life.

The fullest expression of this line of thought appears in a significant story called "The Reader" (1898). In this story Gorky reveals how deeply the spirit of the seeker and the reformer was imbedded in his personality. The scene is a winter night. After the reading of

21 Lavrin, op. cit., p. 140.
a highly successful story, Gorky in a jubilant mood is accosted in the street by his conscience. In the ensuing argument, or better, lecture delivered by his conscience Gorky reveals his social and literary aims. In essence he believed man had fallen from his high station on earth, and as a result the heart and form of contemporary life had turned to dry rot. Optimistically Gorky believed that man could rebuild life and through a sort of renaissance find his proper place. He was convinced that literature must play a big role in this reconstruction and rebirth, for it was the duty and obligation of literature to make men and society better. In his scheme the author was a teacher whose duty it was by means of his imagination to inspire in men the will to create new forms. It was at this point that his poise was shaken by a mighty doubt, for Gorky having defined his task could not find the unifying principle which would tie his whole system together. He was like his "Konovalovs" who could not find a constructive ideal, a faith, an inner line. "How could he teach without a message?" that was the question that perplexed him, and on this troubled note the story ends. Gorky continued to write despite his misgivings, and the fact that he had not yet found a unifying principle did not seriously affect his popularity for he had other characteristics which young Russia was eager to acclaim.

To a society fed on the spirit of "Chekhovian Gloom", a phrase used by the critics and historians to describe the despondence and stagnation of the 1880's and 1890's, the vitality, vividness, and power

22 In Russian tradition, literature was supposed to give leadership and guidance.
of Gorky's rhetoric came like a breath of fresh air. Russian life was in ferment; to recapitulate, the famine of 1890-1891 had roused the intelligentsia to a pressing realization of the country's backwardness, to the need for a dramatic change in the system of absolute autocracy. The rapid industrialization fostered by Serge Witte had given a tremendous new impetus to the revolutionary movement. The working class which had developed as an adjunct to industrialization constituted an energetic new force in Russian society with new aims and the ambition to play its part in the social and historical destinies of the country. The crisis in agriculture had produced a steady movement of peasant labour from the land to the cities where they helped to swell a vast floating population where students, tramps, and workers mingled freely. These people were cut off from established social canons and provided a fertile ground for revolutionary doctrines. This upsurge in revolutionism was accompanied by a violent polemical struggle between the Marxists, who wanted to create an organized class movement with the new proletariat as its base, and the Narodniki, who continued to pin their hopes on the peasantry. Gorky responded to the new moods, and his message seemed to please everybody. For the Marxists he was "... annihilating the peasant and singing hymns to the "Chelkashes" whom (they) in their revolutionary hopes and plans were so heavily backing." For the Narodniki his stories proved the degenerating influence of the city and once more enshrined peasant.

23 The conditions outlined here are taken from such diverse critics as Miliukov, Kropotkin, Dillon (assistant to Serge Witte), Ivan Bunin, and a number of other figures writing in reviews and journals of the time.

institutions. For the new intellectuals arising among the submerged elements, Gorky, who had come from among their ranks, could speak with the authority of a spokesman and little, by little, he became their champion and interpreter of their hopes. During this period of ferment even conservative opinion hailed Gorky’s first stories and went so far as to dub him the “intellectual leader of the era.” They praised him for having revealed the intellectual poverty and beastliness of the masses, thus sanctioning their policy of repression. The nation was attuned to Gorky’s note and devoured his sketches and stories with unprecedented enthusiasm. The applause of conservative opinion was only momentary, however, for Gorky soon left no doubt that he stood by rising Russia and it was among the revolutionaries that the real foundation for his reputation and influence was built. The following statement by one of his reviewers seems to sum up the situation fairly well—it contains the essential features of Gorky’s thought, and at the same time points out the reason for his popularity:

Gorky suffers miseries inherent in the mere fact of existence, but he has found no remedy; he looks for consolations in the cult of beauty, in the strength of free individuality, in the flight towards a superior ideal. But he does not know where to find this superior ideal, which vivifies everything.


But this enthusiasm for an ideal, vague as it is, this passionate appeal for energy in the struggle, has awakened powerful echoes in the hearts of the Russians, especially the younger of them. Gorky suddenly became their favorite author, and it is to this warm reception that he owes a great part of his renown. He has carried the young along with him, and they have put their ideals in the place which he had left empty.
CHAPTER IV

THE STORMY PETREL

While the public was busy devouring his stories, Gorky's private life was becoming more and more complicated by his political activities and the threat both imagined and real which the tsarist administration saw in them. In May, 1898 he was arrested in Nizhni-Novgorod and transported along with his correspondence to Tiflis. Here he was imprisoned in the Metekh Fortress and questioned rigorously about his political associations. Gorky had been arraigned because a former roommte of the "Commune" days had been arrested for carrying on seditious propaganda among the workers and Gorky's past acquaintances with the offender had been discovered. There must have been insufficient evidence to sustain a conviction for Gorky was very soon back in Nizhni-Novgorod, but the authorities were still suspicious and from that day on he was compelled to live under constant police surveillance.

Within the next year Gorky took a step which implicated him further in the revolutionary movement and placed a label on his politics. In early 1899 he paid his first visit to St. Petersburg where he was introduced to the intelligentsia of the capital, among them Merezhkovsky, a religious mystic and Paul Miliukov: an outstanding leader in the liberal movement. The real importance of his visit lies in the fact that

he at last accepted the patronage of the Marxists by becoming the literary editor of Zhizn (Life). It is not clear that he became or ever did become a strict party member but through his close association with Zhizn he made himself vulnerable to criticism. He gave his first novels, Foma Gordyeev (1900) and Three of Them (1901), to this journal for publication. His second important act was to join or become a shareholder in the co-operative publishing firm Zvaniye (Knowledge). Gorky's name and interest soon made this firm one of the most influential and popular publishing houses in the country.2

During the next five years Gorky's main activities centred around Nizhni-Novgorod where he continued to live. As time passed Gorky's significance both as a symbol and participant in the revolutionary movement increased and the police became correspondingly more zealous in their surveillance - his mail was intercepted, his movements were regulated, and his day to day activities carefully watched. But even so Gorky began to frequent the Somorvo district of Nizhni where the city's industries were concentrated. Soon he served as a focal point for the interests of revolutionary workers and students. He supplied funds, books, advice, and in March, 1901 took the risky step of purchasing a mimeograph machine so that the workers could publish their proclamations.3

In the meantime, however, more important events had occurred and

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Gorky was in the thick of them. Government educational policies had been under attack by the university students for some decades past and after 1899 student disorders increased very markedly. The government retaliated by sending cossacks among the students. Those captured were exiled, expelled or forced to endure compulsory military service. The so-called policy of the Nagaika (whip) culminated in the assassination of the Minister of Education, Bogolepov (February, 1901), and a few days later in the famous "Kazan Demonstration". On this fateful day thousands of men and women, principally students, gathered in front of the Kazan Cathedral in St. Petersburg to protest against government policies, particularly the compulsory military service. The demonstration was brutally suppressed by mounted cossacks and was followed by mass arrests and exiles. Gorky was a witness and responded emphatically. That he was outraged is clear from a letter written to Bruisov the symbolist poet:

My mood is that of a mad, whipped and chained dog. If you, sir, love men, you will, I believe understand me. You see, forcibly to recruit students as privates into the army is an abominable and heinous crime against personal liberty, an idiotic whim of scoundrels surfeited with power. My heart is boiling. . . .

In this mood he penned a bitter denunciation of the police and administration:

We assert . . . that the police and Cossacks had been secretly stationed since early morning in private courtyards and that Prefect Kleigels was planning a trap for the students. . . . That some of the young people were lured to the cathedral by leaflets emanating from the secret police. . . . We affirm that on the 4th of March the police and Cossacks were

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4 Holtzman, op. cit., p. 106.

5 Ibid., p. 107.
given vodka in order to arouse their hostility. . . .
We categorically declare. . . that the Cossacks and not the students began the scuffle. . . .
That the Cossacks grabbed women by their hair and beat them with their whips. . . split the skull of a woman student. . . and an old lady was trampled under the horses' hoofs. . . .
Society must protest. . . police terror and the murder of its children.

had it endorsed by forty-nine members of the "Writer's Union" and dispatched it to the Minister of the Interior. 6 He also tried to incite his influential friends and acquaintances to protest and addressed another letter of the same type to Russian newspapers and magazines. Under the influence of the same episode he wrote his famous poem Song of the Stormy Petrel with its patent prophecy of an impending revolutionary storm. When Zhizn was suspended for publishing it, the Song went into underground circulation and quickly became a slogan on everyone's lips. 7 Gorky's efforts served only to link his name with the revolutionary movement.

For Russia, 1901 marked the readoption of terrorism as a dominant political weapon. The assassination of Bogolepov was followed by that of Sipyagin, Minister of the Interior, in 1902, that of Plehve in 1904 and that of Grand Duke Sergius, the Tsar's uncle and Governor-General of Moscow, in 1905.

Gorky was back in Nizhni-Novgorod by the end of March. In the middle of April he was arrested and placed in a local jail. He was accused of buying a mimeograph for printing proclamations, of writing his "Denunciation" and of participating in the student revolutionary


7 Holtzman, op. cit., p. 126. Kaun, Maxim Gorky and His Russia, pp. 322-325.
movement. He was detained for one month and then released under strict domestic arrest. Gorky had already acquired a reputation which made it very difficult for the government to discipline him; he was popular with the students and the Sormovo workers, he had won the support and sympathies of some of Nizhni's most influential citizens, among them the millionaire Savva Morozov, and the sympathies of an outstanding national figure like Tolstoy, who personally interceded for him with important officials. The upshot of it all was that Gorky was compelled to live under rigid police supervision in the small district town of Arzamas near Nizhni-Novgorod, proof enough that Gorky had become one of the foremost figures in the Russian radical world.

Arzamas was quiet and isolated, congenial enough for the writer but not for the tubercular, and prison had undermined his health so he petitioned the Minister of the Interior for a sojourn in the Crimea. In answer to his request he was granted a six month stay (November, 1901 - April, 1902) provided he lived outside of Yalta, summer home of the Tsars. Gorky's departure became the pretext for political demonstrations along his route. In Nizhni a farewell banquet was enlivened by speeches bandying about his phrases and themes, i.e., "to the madness of the brave we sing a song", etc. His departure from the station was feted, songs were sung, slogans shouted, and pamphlets passed hailing Gorky as champion of

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8 See letter to Chekhov, Reminiscences, p. 111.

9 Correspondence quoted in Kaun, op. cit., p. 298, and Hültzman, op. cit., p. 195.

10 Nemirovich-Danchenko, V., My Life in the Russian Theatre, tr. John Cournos, London, Geoffrey Bles, 1937. Although Danchenko is a Soviet source he is not at all uncritical in his treatment of materials. This fact lends his work some credence.
"the brave." The police acted quickly to forestall further manifestations, Gorky's train was shunted to avoid stopping in the station at Moscow and his itinerary carefully controlled from there to the Crimea.

He took up residence near Yalta where Chekhov and Tolstoy were holidaying and during these five or six months they became the focal point of his interests. However, the real news came out of St. Petersburg. On February 8, 1902 an unprecedented event occurred in that the thirty-four year old Gorky, a political dissenter, was elected to the Imperial Academy of Sciences, a recognition saved for the most distinguished authors. Official circles were infuriated by the Academicians levity and direct government intervention forced the annulment of Gorky's election. Both Chekhov and Korolenko protested to the highest authorities and failing to right the action in that way they resigned from the Academy. As is usual with this type of action, the government only contributed to Gorky's notoriety and prestige.

To this sojourn, Gorky owes his first contact with the Moscow Art Theatre, headed by Nemirovich-Danchenko and Stanislavsky. These men were on the lookout for talented new dramatists and together with Chekhov they urged Gorky to write them a play about his tramps. Gorky was willing but the general mood was so saturated with politics and Gorky's reputation

11 Kaun, op. cit., p. 328.
such that every new book of his became a political event of importance. In the situation the project had to be approached very circumspectly and Gorky wrote his first play, Smug Citizens, as a blind. Its tone was purposely mild and Danchenko made every effort to assure the play a quiet reception. He describes how on several evenings before the first performance he climbed into the upper tiers of the theatre and pleaded with the students not to make any sort of demonstration. An orderly performance was necessary if Gorky was to continue writing for the theatre. The administration was very sceptical about letting a play by Gorky be produced and before they would pass it for public presentation Danchenko had to give it a full dress rehearsal. The special performance turned out to be a brilliant success attended by all the highest families, the diplomatic corps, etc., and with all, it was received very enthusiastically. As a result the play was permitted but under very close police supervision. The performance led Danchenko to an ironic reflection on the revolutionary content of art:

The public bedecked with gems, attired in furs and frockcoats, applauds the splendid spectacle; it is charmed by art and ignores the seed of revolution secreted in it. This was with particular palpableness, felt in St. Petersburg at the performance of Smug Citizens.

Gorky himself took little interest in the fate of his first

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13 Variously titled Philistines or Petty Bourgeois, the play mildly attacked the purposelessness of middle class life and its unhealthy concern for comfortable living. See Bakshy, A., Seven Plays of Maxim Gorky, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1945, p. 2.

14 Danchenko, op. cit., p. 255.

15 Ibid., p. 237.

16 Ibid., p. 236.
play for he was already busy with *Lower Depths* on which he lavished all his talents and in which his tramp heroes appeared for the last time. No doubt Gorky had begun to feel about them as Dmitri Samghin, that their anarchistic humanism was a bad sort of chemistry. There is good probability that the contemporary westerner is unable to catch the spirit and implications of Gorky's play, factors of time and distance being too great. Both Danchenko and Stanislavsky have stated what the play meant to them and to the Moscow Art Theatre. Their opinion of the production should help to put the play in focus:

> The militant tone, the whiplashing words, the fierce revolutionary undercurrent, found a powerful, persuasive, theatrical incarnation; while the audience, which for the most part consisted of the author's most malignant class enemies against whom the entire anger of the play was directed, responded with a unanimous, enthusiastic ovation. The insidiousness of art.

It is a moot point whether or not Gorky actually joined the inchoate Social Democratic Party in 1902, but is quite clear that he collaborated with the party in every way. Only the most scrupulous investigator would hesitate to call him a Social Democrat. In the first place Gorky was replete with hatred for cultured and aristocratic St.

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Petersburg. As time passed its "bourgeois philistinism" came more and more under his bitter attack. Indicative of his attitude is the remark he made when news was brought about the assassination of Sipyagin: "Even with pleasure I could poke a finger into this wound!" The remark is doubly significant because Gorky was known for his deep compassion. It seems evident that to St. Petersburg he was an unrelenting class enemy. Secondly Gorky had by now repudiated the old Populism. At the same time he scornfully spoke of the more liberal tendencies as represented by Peter Struve of the "Liberation" group. Having done this he had no alternative but closer association with the working class movement whose new doctrine was Marxism. Thirdly, Gorky's optimistic spirit, his attraction for muscular heroes and his firm belief in progressive evolutionism linked him at least emotionally with the Marxists. He gave practical expression of his sympathy for them by becoming a financial power behind the movement. By his own testimony he donated hundreds of thousands of roubles to the party between 1901 and 1917. His own contribution was substantial but small compared to what he funnelled into

20 Danchenko, op. cit., p. 235.

21 See Kaun, op. cit., p. 542. Peter Struve, at this time a legal Marxist, was publishing a journal called Liberation in Stuttgart and later in Paris. Legal Marxism evolved into Liberalism and Struve's journal became a rallying point for Liberal opinion in Russia.

22 ... "Gorky's sudden popularity proved that the public had accepted him as an interpreter of the new tendency which had emanated from Marx." Paul Miliukov, Outlines of Russian Culture, Part II, Literature, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1942, p. 64.

23 Holtzman, op. cit., p. 111.
the party coffers from wealthy bourgeoisie - Savva Morozov is perhaps the best known. In 1902 he pledged 5000 roubles annually to Lenin's Spark and complimented it for its solidity. His sympathy for the Social Democratic party shows up in his literary work through an enlargement of his themes and a deeper, more pointed criticism of society. This characteristic began to appear with his first full length novel Foma Gordyev (1900). Foma is a typical Gorkian hero but with a significant difference: he is the son of a wealthy merchant and has rebelled against bourgeois corruptibility and baseness. It is symptomatic of Gorky's development that the one bright spot in the novel describes a meeting between Foma and a group of workers. Foma describes his new acquaintances in glowing terms. They were "proud, fine fellows", he liked their "broad round faces" and the "breath of merriment and warmth wafted into him" by their company. In his second novel Three of Them (1901) he carries the same theme further. Ilia Lunev is the son of a peasant but he is driven from the village and grows up in a degrading atmosphere similar to that of Gorky's childhood. He is intelligent, honest, and industrious, but he falls because he seeks fulfillment in bourgeois respectability. What this means is depicted symbolically in Lunev's favorite picture "The Steps of

24 Danchenko, op. cit., p. 235. Gorky's admirers included . . . "not only the youth, his natural partisans, but also to speak precisely members of the higher bourgeoisie, his most rabid foes. The residue of the bourgeoisie, the object of the revolution, were interested in Gorky sought him out and were enchanted with him."

25 Kaun, op. cit., p. 342. The Spark was founded in 1901 by Lenin, Plekhanov and others to help in the organization of a strong revolutionary party having workers as its core.

The steps of man's life were arranged in the form of an arch, under which was represented Paradise; here the Almighty, surrounded with rays of light and flowers, talked with Adam and Eve. There were seventeen steps in all. On the first stood a child supported by his mother, and underneath in red letters: "The First Step". On the second the child was beating a drum, and the inscription ran: "Five years old - he plays." At seven years of age he began "to learn"; at ten, "goes to school"; at twenty-one he stood on the step with a rifle in his hand, and a smiling face, and underneath was written "Serves his time as a soldier." On the next step he is twenty-five, he is in evening dress, with an opera hat in one hand and a bouquet in the other - "he is a bridegroom." Then his beard is grown, he has a long coat and a red tie, and is standing near a stout lady in yellow, and pressing her hand. Next he is thirty-five; he stands with rolled-up shirt-sleeves by an anvil and hammers the iron. At the top of the arch he is sitting in a red chair reading the paper, his wife and four children are listening to him. He himself and all his family are well dressed, respectable, with healthy, happy faces. At this time he is fifty years old. But note how the steps begin to go down; the man's beard is already grey, he is clad in a long yellow coat, and in his hands he holds a bag of fish and a jar of some sort. This step is labelled "Household duties". On the following step the man is rocking the cradle of his grandson; lower down "He is led", being now eighty years old; and in the last - he is ninety-five - he is in a chair with his feet in a coffin, and behind the chair stands Death, with the scythe in his hand.

The contradictions between Lunev's dream and the realities of life lead him to madness: Again it is significant that the one creative power in this novel is represented by the working class, and that if Lunev cannot accept their salvation it is only because the contradictions in his own personality are rooted too deeply for him to overcome. As the revolution of 1905 approached Gorky's literary work became increasingly political, a fact which killed his reputation among the higher intelligentsia but

contributed immensely to his popularity among the working masses. His first dramas mark another step in his efforts to make literature work for society, beginning with Smug Citizens (1902) he attacked philistinism and he continued to develop this theme with little change except of intensity until 1906.

After Zhizn had been suspended for publishing The Stormy Petrel, Posse, its editor, left Russia on the assumption that Gorky would soon follow and help to reestablish the journal abroad. Gorky changed his mind, feeling that he could do more in Russia, he decided to stay at least until he was exiled - as things developed he stayed another four years. His next act of any political consequence was provoked by the Jewish massacres of Kishinev, Easter week 1903, in which the government which openly supported an anti-Jewish policy was very slow to intervene. The episode died quietly although Gorky's condemnation was printed in Struve's Liberation and widely distributed by hectographed copies.

Shortly thereafter the Social Democratic party held its Second Congress (July-August, 1903). The most important single development of the Second Congress derived from an irreconcilable difference of opinion within the party on the fundamental principles of organization and tactics. Although attempts were made during and after the Congress to prevent a breach, it soon became clear that henceforth Social Democratic opinion

28 See Mirsky, Contemporary Russian Literature, p. 110. Danchenko mentions a conversation he had with a girl student shortly after the Kazan Demonstration. The girl indicated clearly that political content took precedence to aesthetic appeal among the students, indications are strong that this was a general phenomenon. Danchenko, op. cit., p. 239.

29 Kaun, op. cit., p. 345.
would be represented by two parties. The dominant faction which became known as the Bolsheviks maintained that a decisive revolutionary change was possible and even imminent. Consequently they wanted to urge the masses towards an immediate struggle. To give leadership they advocated the building of a strong centralized party around a revolutionary elite so constituted that it would provide the framework for a future central government. The minority faction or Mensheviks (as they were called in future) wanted to create a much looser organization designed to concentrate revolutionary energies and to educate the masses to an understanding of socialist principles as a first step towards revolution. Even though the consequences of the split were not yet clear, Gorky gave some positive indication that he sided with Lenin's Bolshevik faction. In his obituary note on Leonid Krassin, an outstanding Bolshevik organizer, he mentions that he arranged a meeting between Krassin and Savva Morozov in 1905. Subsequently Morozov promised to give 2000roubles monthly to Lenin's faction. On the other hand, it is certainly clear that Lenin was anxious to maintain Gorky's sympathy and support.

The reign of Nicholas II began with the terrible Khodynka incident where over one thousand people were crushed to death during the coronation festivities in Khodynka Square, Moscow. Under this ominous shadow the ten years to 1905 were marked by a conspicuous decline in the


31 Kaun, op. cit., p. 361.

Tsar's prestige and an alarming increase in the number and frequency of worker demonstrations, peasant riots and student disorders. The internal situation in Russia was an incitement to revolution and where the Tsar could very readily have restored the situation by undertaking an energetic program of reform, he proved unequal to the task. Nicholas had nothing better to offer than a continuation "by inertia" of autocracy, in actual fact his policy meant expansion in the east and repression at home. This do-nothing policy provoked a new level of political action characterized by the creation of illegal political parties and the readoption of terroristic methods by the Socialist Revolutionaries. The expansionist policy resulted in a war with Japan (1904–1905) which the Tsarist administration welcomed on the grounds that a limited but successful war would rally public support around the throne. This belief proved to be a horrible delusion for the war was unpopular with the Russian people from the very beginning and the new burdens and the heavy defeats suffered by the regime on both land and sea had disastrous implications for a people already consumed by deep political and social dissatisfaction. Contrary to expectations, the adventure in the east provided the spark which was needed to ignite the First Revolution. On December 19, 1904, Port Arthur fell to the Japanese, with this development the regime was compelled to enter the revolutionary year of 1905 hated at home and badly defeated in war. As we will see, Gorky was an active participant in the

33 Vernadsky, George, History of Russia, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1951, p. 173.

34 Ibid., p. 184.
The first and certainly one of the most significant events of this year occurred on the ninth of January. Since 1902 the government had been trying with some success to organize the workers under police supervision. The ostensible reason for the government's program was to win economic gains for the workers - its actual purpose was to preserve the Tsar's monopoly of power by short circuiting their demands for political reforms.

The leader of the government-sponsored movement in St. Petersburg was Father Gapon, a man of unstable temperament. When a major strike began in the Putilov factory (January 6), Gapon hit upon the idea of marching to the Winter Palace and there to present the Tsar, himself, with a list of the worker's demands. The government had no program with which to face this emergency and brutally dispersed, with rifle fire, the workers who had come peacefully, bearing icons and singing hymns. Hundreds of men and women were killed and wounded, as with other tragic mistakes of the Tsar the main consequences of this act were far reaching, and as it proved in the event fatal to the regime. "Bloody Sunday" marked a decisive turning point in the history of the working class movement. It shattered the workers' faith in the Tsar as no other single event could have and drove them into immediate alliance with the socialists.

More generally, the mystical faith with which the masses

35 Gorky was also a very careful observer of the events of this momentous year and has left a very graphic account of them in The Magnet, Vol. II of Klim Samghin, pp. 603-839.

36 Vernadsky, op. cit., p. 186. Movement called Zubatovism after its police leader.

37 Ibid., p. 187.
had believed in the Tsar's benevolence was destroyed and henceforth the intelligentsia was able to assume the leadership in the mass's struggle for "freedom and Land." 38

Gorky, who had arrived in St. Petersburg a few days before the ninth of January, immediately became involved in the episode. Learning in a newspaper office about the proposed march, he suggested that a deputation of writers and workers be sent to the Minister of the Interior; to impress upon him that the workers marched with peaceful intentions; to urge the Tsar to meet the workers and to listen to their plea for just reforms; and to urge that army and police be restrained from interfering with the workers, in order that bloodshed and other grave consequences might be avoided. The deputation of which Gorky was a member was repulsed by the Minister. They then proceeded to the office of Witte and besought him to intercede with the Tsar on their behalf. Their plea went unanswered and after the bloody street episode Gorky penned a declaration for Russian and Western public opinion in which he outlined the event as he had seen and experienced it. He then denounced both the Minister of the Interior and the Tsar as murderers and called on the citizens of Russia to unite in a persistent struggle against autocracy. 39

Immediately after the procession had been dispersed, Gorky helped to conceal Father Gapon

38 Kohn, Hans, ed., The Mind of Modern Russia, New Jersey, Rutgers University Press, 1955, p. 276. "On the morning of January 9th the workers still believed that they could find protection in the Tsar, and they went to him with a petition in their hands. By noon of the same day they were looking for arms and, not finding any, they made shift with bricks and cobble stones."


and later accompanied him to a meeting of the Free Economic Society (on the evening of Bloody Sunday), where Gapon delivered a speech denouncing the Tsar and calling on the workmen to take up arms against him. Two days later Gorky was arrested and imprisoned in the Peter-Paul Fortress. The charges against him are undoubtedly exaggerated but they give a good idea of how gravely the government viewed his activities. He was accused of having participated in a provisional government which functioned on the eve of Red Sunday and subsequently agitated for armed uprising, and he was accused of delivering incendiary speeches during and after Red Sunday and of having signed a subversive proclamation printed by the Free Economic Society.

Gorky's arrest provoked world-wide demonstrations in his favour, demonstrations which were very likely instrumental in having him released from prison after only two months. He was released on bail and was shortly deported to Riga, ill and restless he took French leave and May

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40 See *The Magnet*, pp. 705-710 for a description of Gapon on the afternoon of January 9. Samghin, who actually mingled with the workers during the procession described the incident and gave his reflections on the implications of it to groups ranging from Socialist (Bolshevik) to Liberal after the ninth. There is good reason to believe that Gorky played the same role.

41 *Kaun, op. cit.*, p. 358.

42 We find the following comment in the *Bookman*, Vol. 21, March, 1905, p. 15. "Gorky should appreciate the tremendous outpouring of protest on his behalf from London, Paris, Berlin, Vienna, Rome, and the United States. . . ." We find the same sort of thing in the *North American Review*, Vol. 183, p. 1165, 1906. "When he was imprisoned in 1905, a protest, signed by the most distinguished names in Europe, was sent to the Russian government demanding his release. . . ."
found him trying to legalize a holiday in the Crimea. As for Gorky's opposition to the government there is little reason to doubt the opinion of an Englishman who interviewed Gorky when he was released from the Peter-Paul Fortress, that Gorky's hostility to the Tsarist regime stemmed from the conviction that it made progress, culture, and national unity impossible.43

News of Red Sunday spread very quickly, unwittingly aided by a foolish government decision to expel from St. Petersburg all those who had taken part in the procession. Everywhere the news was followed by strikes and demonstrations. The all but universal opposition to the government included every trade and profession and extended to embrace even school-boys. The assassination of Grand Duke Sergius, the Governor General of Moscow (February 3), made it clear that the government would have to adopt a more conciliatory policy. Towards the end of February, the Tsar issued a manifesto reasserting the rights of autocracy but hinting vaguely at public participation in government. His manifesto was interpreted by the public as an invitation to organize parties and draw up political programs. From this moment the Liberal movement seized the political initiative from the working class which had been largely intimidated by repressions and executions. The summer and fall were marked by a long series of conventions and congresses by Zemstvo and Town Council officials, professors, doctors, and teachers from which arose with new urgency the demand for constitutional government and basic reforms. In May the government was shaken by another disaster, the Russian fleet was destroyed in the Battle of

Tsushima making it clear that victory in the Japanese war was impossible. The government was forced to act immediately to save itself. In August the government granted a Duma. In the same month Witte contracted peace with Japan — from now on attention centred entirely on the home front. Events were moving rapidly towards a catastrophe and the symptoms of its approach were becoming more and more ominous. The most spectacular of these was the mutiny on the battleship Potempkin where the crew, after seizing the ship, terrorized the Black Sea and then sought internment in a Rumanian port. Late in the fall the initiative slipped back to the working class.

On October 7 news spread that the whole congress of the powerful railwayman's union had been arrested. Railway men throughout the country went out in a protest strike and in the electrical atmosphere of St. Petersburg the strike spread rapidly through the city and from St. Petersburg to the provinces, assuming the character of spontaneous general strike. From the outset it acquired a markedly political character — everywhere the workers clamoured for a constitutional assembly and universal suffrage. At one stroke their demands were linked with those of the liberals. In St. Petersburg a unique Soviet of Worker's Deputies sprang into existence (October 15) with the young Trotsky as its vice-president. It immediately gave direction and cohesion to the workers' activities. The Tsar was badly frightened by the general strike and hastily issued a manifesto granting a constitution, civil liberties, and universal suffrage. With this move the government successfully split the revolutionary movement and on December 3 was able to reassert its power by arresting the St. Petersburg Soviet. News of the arrest was followed by strikes
and ten days of street fighting in Moscow, but it was soon clear to all that the First Revolution had been defeated. In subsequent months the initiative was again to slip back to the liberals who won a majority in the Duma elections of March, 1906.

In everything that transpired after October Gorky played a conspicuous role. He had spent the summer in Finland and like other prominent revolutionaries he returned to St. Petersburg as the revolutionary tempo mounted towards October. There he founded a Bolshevik daily with the reminiscent title Novaya Zhizn (New Life). His common law wife, Maria Andreyeva, was the nominal publisher and after the sixth issue Lenin was the editor. Gorky was a contributor and during the five or six weeks in which the paper appeared wrote a series of articles under the title "Notes on Philistinism" - certainly not political in a pragmatic way. Novaya Zhizn was apparently less successful that Trotsky's Russkaya Gazeta (Russian Gazette) but both supported each other politically and backed the Soviet. During this year Gorky had written two plays, the first, Children of the Sun, was written in the Peter-Paul Fortress and the second, Barbarians (a crude reference to the ruling classes who were being popularly denounced as "Philistines of Culture"), had been written in Finland. The first, Children of the Sun, he read at public gatherings in order to collect funds for the purchase of arms, and of course he used his influential connections for the same purpose. During this crisis, as in

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44 The Bolshevik faction held the meetings of its Central Committee in the flat of Leonid Andreyev. M. Gorky, Reminiscences, p. 170.

45 Deutscher, Isaac, The Prophet, p. 139.

46 Kaun, op. cit., p. 372.
others, he served most effectively as a financier of revolution.

The same play was being prepared for staging, by the Moscow Art Theatre, during the month of October, and received its premiere shortly after the Manifesto of October 17. The funeral of Bauman, when Moscow witnessed for the first time a massive Red demonstration, had just occurred and it was rumoured that the Black Hundreds were going to attack the theatre during the performance of Gorky's play. The play became the scene of a political demonstration and so it went wherever the play was presented during these months.\(^47\) Gorky also did what he could to help in the Moscow rebellion which occurred during the last ten days of December, but as soon as it was evident that the First Revolution would be crushed he left Moscow for St. Petersburg. Soon after he went to Finland, having elected to support those who would continue their fight underground.

\(^{47}\) Gorky is described as irritable, as little interested in the theatre, as giving his time only grudgingly at rehearsals during these weeks. Danchenko, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 259.
On April 10, 1906 Gorky arrived in New York on a special mission for the Bolshevik faction. At that time the Tsar was in desperate financial straights and it was well known that he was negotiating through Witte for a massive loan from either the United States or France. A successful completion to these negotiations spelled disaster for the revolutionary parties and Leonid Krassin suggested that Gorky should go to America to campaign against the loans and to enlist American sympathies for the Russian Revolution. The idea was doubly appealing because Gorky could conduct a whirlwind fund raising campaign for the Bolsheviks at the same time.

Gorky had been given a manager and treasurer, Nicholas Burenin, who had connections in New York, so that by the time he arrived, on April 10, the preliminary arrangements for his tour had already been completed. His prospects appeared very bright. His name was still fresh in the American mind as the direct result of a long dramatic cable which he had sent to the Hearst Press describing the horrors of Red Sunday and announcing the revolution's beginning. The Russian cause was popular in America at that time and Gorky, here as elsewhere, had already become a symbol of

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1 Slonim, Marc, Modern Russian Literature, New York, Oxford University Press, 1955, p. 130.

the revolution. Mark Twain's support had been enlisted for Gorky: he was to chair a small dinner for a select company including William Dean Howells on April 11. Gaylord Wilshire, the socialist editor of Wilshire's Magazine, planned a special dinner meeting to be attended by H.G. Wells and John Spargo. Similar meetings had been arranged for Boston and even an audience with the president was rumoured. But Gorky had no sooner arrived than he scuttled the whole enterprise by a series of political gaucheries. Firstly, he insisted, even after having been warned by Wilshire and others, on landing in New York with his common-law wife, Andreyeva, and on living with her while there. Given the puritanical attitude of New York, 1906, he thus supplied the Russian embassy, which had already tried to have him barred from the United States, with an excellent opportunity to destroy his reputation through slander. Secondly, he antagonized his hosts by cabling a strongly worded message of encouragement to William Haywood and Charles Moyer, I.W.W. leaders who were under criminal indictment for the murder of Idaho's governor: "Greetings to you, my brother socialists," he wired, "Courage! the day of justice and deliverance for the oppressed of all the world is at hand!" In almost the same breath he announced that he would give assistance to the United Mine Workers who were then out on strike. Thirdly, he played favourites in the newspaper world by signing a contract to write only for the Hearst Press. Gorky's tactlessness cost him dearly. On April 14, barely four days after his excited arrival, the full story of his relations with Madame Andreyeva, accompanied by pictures,

3 Poole, "Maxim Gorky in New York", Slavonic Review, p. 78.
appeared in The New York World. This revelation struck New York like a bombshell. Gorky was instantly ostracized: even the hotels refused him accommodation. Worst of all his campaign collapsed like a punctured tire. Thrown on his own devices, a stranger in a foreign land, he willingly accepted the hospitality of an Englishman, John Martin, who kept a mansion on Staten Island. For the balance of his stay in America he lived with the Martins.

Gorky's impressions of New York reversed themselves completely in a matter of days. His wife unjustly maligned, his mission a dismal failure, and all his pleas and those of his friends for toleration and broad-mindedness proved futile, he gave vent to his spleen in a series of unbecoming articles about New York. The city which he had seen in glowing colors on his arrival became four days later a "City of the Yellow Devil" gold and the people its petty slaves. After giving full expression to his bitterness in this and an equally phlegmatic description of Coney Island he made a futile attempt to save his journey from utter

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4 Gorky married for the first time in 1896. He and his wife separated about 1901 by common agreement although they were never officially divorced. Both parties remarried and seem to have remained on good terms for the balance of their lives. As far as is known Gorky and Andreyeva lived together until Gorky's death in 1936.

5 "Maxim Gorky succeeded in 'queering himself' in the country with a rapidity and completeness that broke the record of the indiscretions of foreigners." Bookman (June 1906), p. 362.

6 The American attitude to things of this kind... "was quite unintelligible to the Russian mind." Mirsky, D.S., Contemporary Russian Literature, 1881-1925, London, George Routledge, 1933, p. 110.

bankruptcy by writing articles against the "Foreign Loans." But it was certainly beyond his power to accomplish anything now. When he learned in May that the Tsar had obtained two billion francs from the French government, he penned a virulent attack against France calling her "La Belle France, . . . once proud champion of liberty, . . . now disgraced through lust for gold and intercourse with bankers:"  

Thy venal hand has for a time barred the road of liberty and culture to a whole nation. And even if that time be only one day, thy crime will be none the less. But not for one day hast thou impeded the march towards liberty. By virtue of thy gold the blood of the Russian people will flow again. 

May that blood stain the decrepit cheeks of thy false face with the crimson blush of eternal shame!  

My beloved!  
I too spit a gout of blood and gall in they eyes!  

When a group of French journalists passed a wrathful comment about his ingratitude for the services they had rendered him during his imprisonment, he scornfully replied that to him . . . "a socialist the love of a bourgeois was profoundly offensive" and prophetically warned that these loans would not be repaid when the revolution was finally victorious.  

The balance of his stay in America was spent with the Martins, either on Staten Island or at their summer home in the Adirondacks. This period is noteworthy because Gorky wrote much of the manuscript for his revolutionary novel *Mother* during it. This novel marks a culmination of that movement foreshadowed in *The Reader* (1898) where Gorky determined to put literature to work as a weapon in the struggle against autocracy. As the revolutionary tempo rose his work became increasingly partisan and 

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8 Gorky, *Articles*, p. 139.  
propagandistic - the working class which appeared in the wings of Foma Gordyeev came to dominate the stage in Mother - through this metamorphosis his work became a patent glorification of the proletariat and its party the Social Democratic Party. It is not at all strange that Mother, the first proletarian novel in the Russian language, has become a classic in the USSR, for in it Gorky takes an unqualified stand as a revolutionary socialist, and himself presents a panoramic view of the socialist movement in Russia. In this novel he depicts the power of socialism to transform character on the one hand and society on the other. Because his heroes, who are modeled after Sormovo workers, become the spokesmen for his ideas the novel attains the highest polemical value. The speeches of "Pavel Vlasov" and his mother "Nilovna" which climax the novel are remarkable for their highly romantic and idealistic conception of Socialism and the ecstasy and fervour with which they are spoken. In essence they are an impassioned plea for truth and justice. Their programmatic content is definitely limited, but this factor is counterbalanced by a tremendous emotional appeal and it is in this characteristic that the novel achieves its real value - as a messenger of socialist ideals and as an impetus to organization it proved to be of first

10 Apart from illegal editions, the full text of Mother did not appear in Russia until after the revolution. The magazine in which the first part appeared was confiscated and destroyed and the second part was badly mutilated by the censor. Notes to American ed. of Mother, New York, Citadel Press, 1947, p. 405.


12 Gorky, Mother, pp. 365-366, 391-393.
rate importance.13

The Fifth Congress of the Russian Social Democratic Party met on May 1, 1907. This proved to be the last congress for the united Party and according to Trotsky was remarkable mainly for the number of delegates in attendance.14 The most distinguished revolutionaries of Russia were present - from the extreme right to the extreme left - Tsertelli, Plekhanov, Axelrod, Deutsch, Martov, Trotsky, and Lenin. Others, as yet relatively obscure like Zinoviev, Stalin, and Litvinov, who would play important roles in the future were also present. At this congress three hundred and fifty delegates representing a combined Party of approximately 150,000 members met in a Brotherhood Church in the suburbs of London. There was not yet a clear understanding among the delegates that the revolution had been defeated and in view of the large attendance the mood of the Congress was generally optimistic.15 Characteristically the Congress was thrown open to a prolonged and thorough discussion of the great issues facing the revolution.16 As a result the

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13 Mother. . . "reflected the psychology of those determined men and women who were ready to immolate themselves on the alter of their cause. Paul and his friends were proclaiming the communist mentality. . . the style of the novel, maintained on a high pitch from first to last is that of an adept of a new religion. . . ." Slonim, op. cit., p. 141.


16 "It was axiomatic to them (The Russian Revolutionaries) that all revolutionary activity must be preceded and guided by complete theoretical clarification. . . . The Congress resembled. . . a gathering of academicians, or a prolonged scientific debate." Balabanoff, A., My Life as a Rebel, London, Hamish Hamilton, 1930, p. 88.
practical political problems facing the delegates were obscured by the most abstruse theoretical wrangling over "class alignments", "historical perspectives", and "economic trends." For the moment it is important to note that this factor had important implications for a Party which was still very poor, because the cost of supporting so many delegates over a long period of time together with the cost of transporting them to and from Russia was enormous.

In the meantime, Gorky had returned to Europe and settled at Capri where the atmosphere was congenial to his health (October, 1906). As a sympathizer with the Bolsheviks and the most famous revolutionary novelist in the world, he decided to pay a visit to the Fifth Congress. He was welcome enough, although he took no active part in the debates. When it became clear, however, that the Party was short of funds, Gorky, who represented the Bolsheviks most fertile source of financial support, was called into service.17 He was appointed to a special fund-raising committee and successfully obtained a large loan for the Party from an English industrialist who was sympathetic to the Russian revolution—once again Gorky provided a valuable practical service to the revolutionary movement.18

While the Fifth Congress was grinding to a close, events within Russia were taking an ominous turn. Witte's loan from the French bourse

17 Balabanoff, op. cit., p. 89.

18 Before he could sign the note Gorky was called aside by the Bolsheviks and induced to hold off signing until an all Bolshevik central committee was assured by the congress. Ibid., p. 89.
had given the Tsarist government new financial independence. From that moment the government began a systematic attack against the Duma and all the other freedoms won by the revolution. The solid program of reforms put forward by the Cadets in the First Duma was rejected by the Tsar and the Duma itself was dissolved soon thereafter. The Second Duma, convoked in March, was dissolved in June, just a few weeks after the London Congress had ended. The summer months saw the rise of Stolypin and the beginnings of a drastic program of counter-revolutionary terror. Under this new prime minister all resistance to the government was brutally suppressed by hanging, thus began the era of "Stolypin's necktie."

During the new era, the revolutionary parties were again driven underground and their papers banned. Legal organizations like the Trade Unions were suppressed and the franchise was revoked or changed to insure an electoral majority to the gentry classes. As planned, the elections to the Third Duma in the fall of 1907 restored unlimited authority to the Tsar and his cohorts - a catastrophe which was followed throughout the country by disillusionment and despair. The work of reform was very slow to revive during the next few years.

The last months of 1907 saw a mass exodus of revolutionaries to the capitals of Europe - thus began one of the darkest epochs in Russian working class history. After the London Congress, Lenin returned to Kaukala where he had been publishing Proletariat, the central organ of the Bolshevik faction since 1906. As reaction gained sway in Russia, however, the Central Committee decided that their newspaper should be
transferred to a more secure spot. Consequently Lenin arrived in Geneva (January 7, 1908) and was soon joined by Bogdanov and Innokenty (Dubrovinsky), the other members of his editorial board. The end of February saw the first emigre edition of Proletariat off the presses. Despite the gloomy outlook before the Party, Lenin's paper began on an indomitable and optimistic note:

We were able to work for long years before the Revolution. It is not for nothing that it was said that we are as hard as granite. The Social-Democrats have built up a proletarian party that will not lose heart at the failure of the first military attack, will not lose its head and will not be drawn into adventurism. This Party is marching towards Socialism. . . . This proletarian Party is marching to victory.

In the meantime, Gorky had returned to Capri, where he continued to live for the next seven years. Although he lived in a world of culture, his life was not unmixed with a significant level of political activity. While each new year saw the publication of artistic works of ever-increasing value, it also saw the publication of essays on political and social questions and a growing involvement in the revolutionary movement. The latter fact is revealed in Lenin's correspondence with Gorky during the period 1908-1913. During this period the two men consolidated a friendship which had begun during the Fifth Congress.

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20 Lenin returned to Europe with the distinct impression that he was climbing into a 'coffin'. cf. Kamenev, op. cit., p. 7.


22 The whole of this correspondence is published in the German with an introduction and notes by L. Kamenev, cf. footnote 19. The most important letters are available in Hill, E., and Mudie, E., ed., The Letters of Lenin, New York, Harcourt Brace and Co., 1937. Kaun quotes extensively from these letters in his biography.
As soon as Gorky heard that Lenin was in Geneva, he wrote to the Bolshevik leader inviting him to spend a few days at Capri; but Lenin declined the invitation at least until the spring because of his work with *Proletariat*.\(^{23}\) His over-riding ambition at that time was to get his newspaper into circulation as soon as possible. His first letter to Gorky is bristling with instructions for Andreyeva, who had rendered valuable service to the Bolsheviks on previous occasions. Looking forward two or three weeks to the first publication of *Proletariat*, Lenin begged her to arrange through the secretary of some seaman's union for a weekly delivery to some port on the Black Sea coast, preferably Odessa. Lenin, himself, felt that this was the most promising way to win entry into Russia. It is not all together clear that Andreyeva completed the arrangements successfully.\(^{24}\) In a letter dated February 2, Lenin told Gorky that he had been listed as a contributor to *Proletariat* and asked him if he could prepare something like "Notes on Philistinism" for the first issue. It seems clear that Lenin, who was determinedly forging his party through these years, sensed Gorky's tremendous moral prestige among the working class and sought his active participation on behalf of the Bolshevik faction.\(^{25}\) Gorky for his part seemed more than willing to give his

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25 Gorky, as the Party began to split. . . "found himself heartily in accord with Lenin's platform of proletarian revolution free from opportunistic negotiations with bourgeois Liberals. He felt that the differences between the two factions were not merely theoretical, and with his sense of reality he followed the simple dynamics of Lenin rather than the doctrinaire casuistry of the brilliant Plekhanov." Kaun, *op. cit.*, p. 408.
assistance, on this occasion he wrote an article but it was never pub-
lished, indeed his well-meaning had serious implications for the Bolshevik
faction.

The years of the second emigration (1908-1917) were years of
dissension and turmoil within the Social Democratic Party. These were
years that called for determination and flexibility in the face of great
odds. The fact that the revolutionary struggle had entered a new phase
created a situation rich in opportunities for disagreement. Theory and
practice had to be consolidated for the next attack. The experience of
1905-1907 had to be summed up and evaluated. The opportunities for legal
work created by the new Duma had to be explored. Logically enough gloom
and pessimism rose to sharpen tempers and sap wills. Out of this fertile
ground came a period of intense factional warfare. In no time at all the
Social Democratic Party was represented by six groups, listed from right
to left: Liquidators, Martovists, Plekhanovites, Leninists, Otzovists,
and Ultimatists. Lenin's policy during the respite was to strengthen the
Party (deepen ideological roots – expand the illegal organization), and
at the same time to exploit every opportunity for legal work.

This dissension over political questions was carried into the
ideological sphere. Symptomatic was a widespread rejection of Marx as
the fountainhead of materialism. In the Bolshevik faction the movement

26 The first emigration occurred between 1901-1905.

27 Miliukov calls the trend away from Marx . . . "An attempt to recon-
cile materialism with critical philosophy." Miliukov, P., Outlines of
Russian Culture, Part 2, Literature, Philadelphia, University of
to revise Marx centered in the persons of Bogdanov, Lunacharsky and Bazarov. In developing their theories these men, who were collaborators with Lenin in Proletariat, rejected Marx in favour of the empirio-critics Avenarius and Mach.\footnote{Ernst Mach (1838-1916), an Austrian physicist and psychologist; Richard Avenarius (1845-1896), a German philosopher. Both men were exponents of Empirio-Criticism, a positivist philosophy beginning from "principle of economy of thinking," and opposed to all metaphysics.} By the early months of 1908, it was clear that a major split was developing within the Bolshevik faction over questions of philosophy. Lenin, to whom Marx's historical materialism, his dialectic and his economic determinism with its corollary the class struggle were inviolate, was at once appalled and infuriated by the danger in the revisionist tendencies. On these questions there could be no compromise and he vigorously attacked the validity of Avenarius and Mach by attempting to prove the logical identity of their philosophy with that of the idealist Berkley.\footnote{Cf., introduction to "Materialism and Empirio-criticism," Lenin's reply to the revisionists. First published May, 1909. According to Masaryk it is . . . "a smart defense" of Marxist orthodoxy, in which Lenin handles his philosophy "cleverly" but cuts no new ground after Engels. Masaryk, T.G., The Spirit of Russia, Vol. 2, tr. Eden and Cedar Paul, London, George Allen and Unwin, 1919, p. 351.} The movement away from Marx acquired a markedly religious tendency, particularly from the influence of Lunacharsky, and during the heated controversy Gorky, who was always sensitive to his surroundings, published a remarkable novel, A Confession, in which he extolled the divine creative powers of man with a capital M. This was all grist to Lenin's mill, who then accused the revisionists of bourgeois religious tendencies, and used Gorky's term "God-creation" as a cudgel to
The history of the Lenin-Bogdanov controversy is sketched out in Lenin's correspondence with Gorky. Already in January it was apparent that Gorky was more than willing to give practical services to Proletariat. At the same time it was clear that he had grave misgivings about Lenin's rigid organizational policies and was doing whatever he could to mitigate the situation. In the first place he voiced his principal criticisms openly—would not Lenin's policies lead to persecutions of the intelligentsia—would not this in turn wreak havoc on the working class movement? But Lenin was too concerned with practical matters to be disturbed by questions of this order, and besides, as he informed Gorky their differences of opinion were merely misunderstandings which would be cleared up through work. Since they could not meet to resolve their difficulties, he urged that they should work together in the meantime and let the misunderstandings take care of themselves.

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30 In Lenin's view..."philosophical idealism, always, in one way or another, amounts to an advocacy or support of religion." Lenin, Selected Works, Moscow, Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1947, Vol. 1, p. 60. Lenin's view, according to Masaryk, is in the best traditions of Russian philosophy where idealism signifies religion and materialism irreligion or anti-religion. Masaryk, op. cit., p. 354.

Gorky published his novel, A Confession, in the later part of 1908. The mystical mood was strong in Russia after the first revolution and this novel is in part Gorky's response to it. His hero, Matvey, is a "God-seeker" who after searching all over Russia finally finds him in the "People", more particularly, in their "great creative power." This power makes them the creators of all Gods and Gorky assumes an attitude of prayer and invocation when he speaks of it. Cf. A Confession, tr. William Frederick Harvey, Everett, 1910, p. 320.


33 Loc. cit.
second place, Gorky did what he could to create greater unity within the Party. Early in 1908 he tried to reconcile Lenin and Trotsky, but Lenin informed him that nothing could be achieved in this direction, as the editorial board of *Proletariat* had already asked Trotsky to write for them. Trotsky, who Lenin calls a "poseur", declined on the grounds that he was too busy. 34

As an exponent of democracy and unity within the Party, Gorky tried vainly to pacify the disputants when the Bogdanov controversy flared up. Very early in the controversy he tried to arrange a conference of the disputants at his villa on Capri but all his efforts failed. Then in February he unwittingly aggravated the situation by sending an article displaying revisionist tendencies to *Proletariat*. His article was very inopportune for it arrived at a moment when the differences of opinion among the Bolsheviks were becoming particularly acute. 35 Bogdanov and his friends had just published a volume of essays called *Studies in the Philosophy of Marxism*. The ideas expressed therein made Lenin furious and did much to sharpen the conflict. 36 Just at this moment Gorky's article arrived and the editorial board of *Proletariat* was immediately thrown into a wrangle over whether or not it should be published. 37 Lenin


insisted that the central organ should remain quite neutral in the im­
pending philosophical debate, above all it should avoid all Machist
tendencies. Of course Bogdanov took the opposite view. Lenin's will
prevailed. At that time Lenin, while admitting that a conflict over
philosophical questions was inevitable, still believed that a major split
within the Bolshevik faction could be avoided, especially as the faction
was united on general policy matters. To avoid a split he advised Gorky
to co-operate with Proletariat on neutral ground (literary criticism, etc.).
As for his article, everything of a Machist character would have to be cut
out of it or the article would have to be published somewhere else; other­
wise the day to day work of the Social Democratic Party would be seriously
weakened. Lenin advised that any other action on Gorky's part would be
harmful to both the Party and its central organ.

Gorky was not convinced by Lenin's arguments. He believed that
either a split or a quarrel within the Bolshevik faction could only bene­
fit the Mensheviks and continued to press for reconciliation. However,
the situation deteriorated very quickly; by the end of March Lenin was
convinced that the Machist philosophy was both "foolish" and "harmful",
and that it had to be resolutely opposed if the Bolsheviks were ever to
achieve victory. Although Lenin was convinced that reconciliation was
impossible he still hoped to save the faction. In his mind it was most

38 Hill and Mudie, op. cit., p. 265.
39 Ibid., p. 266.
40 Ibid., p. 269.
41 Ibid., p. 268.
important to prevent essential Party work from suffering during the philosophical debate and he again urged Gorky to help separate the quarrel from the faction. Up to this time Gorky had written as an outsider and Lenin urged him to continue this policy, as the one most likely to prevent a protracted split. Gorky for his part continued to press for reconciliation and again urged Lenin to come to Capri for discussions with Bogdanov and Lunacharsky. Lenin flatly refused, ... "it was stupid to strain the nerves unnecessarily". ... he could not and would not ... "talk with people who (had) begun to advocate combining scientific socialism with religion." Then he announced that he had already sent a "formal declaration of war" against Bogdanov, Bazarov, Lunacharsky, etc., to press and advised Gorky that "good diplomacy on your part, my dear A.M. (if you have not already begun to believe in a God) must consist in separating our mutual (that is including me) affairs from philosophy." But Gorky would not desist and again pressed Lenin to come for discussions. This time Lenin did yield but a few days spent with Gorky and Bogdanov in May failed to bring about a reconciliation. After Lenin's visit the Bolshevik faction split decisively. Gorky sided with Bogdanov and there followed a two year break in his relations with Lenin.

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42 Gorky had proposed the publication of a Bolshevik journal. Ostensibly Lenin was to come for discussions about this project.

43 Hill and Mudie, op. cit., p. 271

44 Lenin's declaration of war "Marxism and Revisionism" was published in a symposium In Memory of Karl Marx, St. Petersburg, April 16, 1908. Cf. Lenin, Selected Works, pp. 67-73.

45 Hill and Mudie, op. cit., p. 271.
The Bogdanov group stayed on at Capri and took steps to create their own faction. During that summer they began to publish their own central organ Forward and at the same time took steps to organize a Party School at Capri. As this group also comprised the Otzovists and the Ultimatists, who wanted to boycott the Duma, it looked for all the world like a new faction. The focal point of their activities was the home of Gorky, who although he might have differed about "Boycottism", gave his full moral and financial support to the work of organizing a Party School. The object of this undertaking was to train workers brought especially from Russia to be propagandists and agitators. These pupils were to receive a five months course, consisting of lectures in history, political economy, and Russian literature, together with special drills in revolutionary work. A number of the most outstanding revolutionaries in Europe including Kautsky, Plekhanov, Trotsky, and Lenin were invited to lecture at the school; but for various reasons these luminaries declined to come, and the lectures were given by Pokrovsky, Bogdanov, Lunacharsky, and Gorky. The first group, twenty men in all, arrived in the summer of 1909. 46

Lenin saw the Capri School as an attempt to create a rival faction and treated it with great suspicion and animosity. 47 Consequently he declined his invitation to lecture and looked closely for some means of wrecking the school. During the spring months he created an enlarged editorial board for his newspaper and called a special meeting of the new

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46 Kaun, Maxim Gorky and His Russia, p. 420. Pokrovsky was later the most prominent Soviet Historian.

47 Kamenev, Letters, p. 11.
board for June. At this meeting Bogdanov was expelled from the Bolshevik faction and the Capri School was roundly condemned. The resolutions of this meeting made it quite clear that the Bolsheviks would bear no responsibility for the School and would give it neither moral nor financial support.

Soon after the Capri School began the students extended to Lenin a special invitation to lecture. He categorically refused, and in his letters explained the factional character of the School and offered to give his own course of lectures if they would desert Capri and come to Paris. His intrigue was entirely successful for the School was soon convulsed by factional warfare and five students were expelled as a result. These five went to Paris and the remainder followed when the School ended in December. Lenin, now that he had the whole group assembled, gave a series of lectures on current topics, placing special emphasis on the Duma question and the agrarian problem.

Gorky, for his part, saw the Capri School as a genuine, but long overdue, attempt to bring culture and enlightenment to backward Russian workers. He suffered poignantly when the School's work was spoiled by

48 Materialism and Empirio-Criticism had appeared in May.

49 Kamenev, op. cit., p. 108.

50 Krupskaya, Memories, pp. 43-45.

51 "In revolution the principle of reason must organize the popular element. But Gorky's understanding the principle of reason was represented in Russia by a weak and timid intelligentsia, while the popular element was uncivilized and even barbarian, and at times he vacillated between the two, finally nevertheless showing preference for the popular element. To bridge the gap between these two forces was the principle aim of that school on the island of Capri to which Gorky gave his personal and financial support." Miliukov, op. cit., p. 70.
petty wrangling. Until the first pupils arrived from Capri, Lenin had looked upon Gorky as the staunch supporter of a new faction and had broken off all relations with him. But a few conversations with the former students of Gorky's School showed him his error, and he wrote a very moving letter to Gorky by way of apology. It was clear from these conversations that the School had drawn real talent from the Russian masses, and that Gorky had approached his work with the broadest possible view. Lenin thanked him effusively and did what he could to make amends:

... from the words of Mikhail I see, my dear Alexey Maximovich, how depressed you must feel. You have chanced to get a glimpse of the Labour movement and Social-Democracy from such an angle, in such manifestations and forms, which more than once in the history of Russia and Western Europe have reduced intellectual sceptics to despair concerning the Labour movement and Social-Democracy. I am certain that this will not happen to you, and after my talk with Mikhail I should like to grasp your hand firmly. With your gift of an artist you have so tremendously benefited the Labour movement in Russia - and not only in Russia, and you will so much benefit it in the future, that it is inadmissible for you to fall under the oppressive moods caused by episodes of our "campaign abroad", and splits, and quarrels, and fights of groups and circles. That is due not to the inner weakness of the Labour movement or to the inner errors of the Social-Democracy, but is due to the extreme variability and multifariousness of the elements, out of which the working class is obliged to forge its own party. Such a party they will manage to forge, in all events; they will forge a splendid Social-Democracy in Russia, they will forge it sooner than it may appear sometimes from the point of view of the thrice accursed emigre position, they will forge it more certainly than it would seem to those who judge by some external occurrences and single episodes.

The next years saw a number of dramatic changes. In Russia the assassination of Stolypin brought an end to the terror and provided great new opportunities for the Social-Democracy. Consequently the years 1911-

52 Krupskaya, op. cit., p. 44.

53 Kaun, Maxim Gorky and His Russia, p. 423.
1914 saw a swift revival of the labour and revolutionary movements and a comparatively widespread development of the labour press. On the international front the change was even more dramatic as war-clouds began to pile darkly overhead. This development made Gorky, who was still living in Italy, very uneasy about the future of Russia, for the people around him were convinced that an all-European war was inevitable and that such a war would be catastrophic for Russia. His own forebodings were fortified by his personal observation of something "morbidly obscure" lurking in the Russian character - a predilection for violence. But Gorky, like almost everyone else, was helpless in the tide.

His political activity during this period was inconsequential and comparatively colourless. He continued to give active support to the revolutionary movement, demonstrating as usual a partiality for the Bolsheviks - to them he gave money, articles, and advice. The first and the second were accepted willingly, the third was accepted but not often acted upon. Despite his partiality for the Bolsheviks he maintained his independence - his sympathies did not mean formal discipline. For example, when Lunacharsky attempted to revive the Capri School in Bologna, Gorky gave his support even though Lenin had established a rival school near Paris (Longjumeau). As on the previous occasion, Lenin succeeded in


55 Lenin didn't think highly of Gorky's political ability. "In proletarian art Gorky is 'without doubt an authority' an 'enormous plus', despite his sympathies for Machism and Otzovism. But the projection of his name on a political platform is 'a minus, because this platform endeavors to perpetuate and utilize the weak side of a great authority, the very thing that forms a negative quantity in the sum total of his beneficial work for the proletariat." Kaun, op. cit., p. 425.
drawing its pupils away and the Bologna School, like the one at Capri, collapsed. In giving his support to newspapers and periodicals, he trod the same independent path. Socialistic publications were hard to find during these days and this may account for his actions. He contributed to a politically unstable journal Sovremennik (Contemporary) and to certain Populist publications. When the Mensheviks began to publish their own newspaper Luch (The Ray) as a rival to the Bolshevik's Pravda (Truth) (winter, 1912), Gorky even contributed to that, much to Lenin's chagrin. At the same time, however, he gave his support to the Bolshevik publications, Mysl (Thought), Zvezda (Star) (1910), Pravda (Truth) (1912), and their journal Prosveshcheniye (Enlightenment) (1912), and it is clear from Lenin's correspondence that Gorky's support meant much greater circulation and influence for them. While carrying on his literary work, Gorky did what he could to pacify the factional struggle, but all his urgings fell on deaf ears. Perhaps his contributions to different factional papers was a personal way of stressing the importance of unity within the Social Democratic Party. His efforts met with little enthusiasm either among the Mensheviks, or the Bolsheviks, whose differences stemmed, as Lenin put it, from "deep ideological roots" and were "irreconcilable." When the factional struggle became particularly

56 To simplify his problem Gorky wanted to publish a daily newspaper and a journal with Lenin's support. He broached the subject in 1908, 1910, and 1913. Cf. Kamenev, op. cit., p. 118.

57 Slonim, Modern Russian Literature, p. 147.

58 Trotsky, Stalin, p. 144.


60 Ibid., p. 303.
acute in 1912, Gorky was sharply reproved by Lenin for his useless interference. On the other hand, the personal friendship between Gorky and Lenin seems to have flourished. Their correspondence was conducted with great candor and their exchange of views and strictures was extensive. Where Lenin appears as a self-assured and unyielding teacher, Gorky if not a teacher is certainly a self-willed and errant pupil.

In his journalistic writings for this period Gorky did everything he could to inspire the Russian people to a clear sighted frontal attack on their political and social problems. In 1910 the attempt to canonize the dead Leo Tolstoy provoked him to the following protest:

What I write is not what I want to say; I cannot express it properly. There is a dog howling in my soul, and I have a forboding of some misfortune. Yes, newspapers have just arrived and it is already clear: you at home are beginning to "create a legend"; idlers and good-for-nothings have gone on loving and have now produced a saint. Only think how pernicious it is for the country just at the moment, when the heads of disillusioned men are bowed down, the soul of the majority empty, and the soul of the best full of sorrow. Lacerated and starving they long for a legend. They long so much for alleviation of pain, for the soothing of torment. And they will create just what he desires, but what is not wanted - the life of a holy man and saint.

61 Talking about this episode, Trotsky calls Gorky a "sentimental semi-Bolshevik." Trotsky, Stalin, p. 131.


63 Towards the end of this period Gorky's approach to his art underwent a sharp change. He cut all propagandistic and didactic tendencies out of his artistic literature, to emerge as an objective realist of very high calibre. Cf. Autobiographical work, Reminiscence Artamanov's, Klim Samghin. From 1912 he made a clear distinction between his publicist and artistic work.

63 Gorky, Reminiscences, p. 37.
In 1912 he analysed the epidemic of suicides among Russian youths and concluded his analysis by attacking the fathers for having created conditions which drove their children to suicide. In 1913 when the Moscow Art Theatre presented Nicholas Stavrogin, a stage version of Dostoevsky's Demons, he protested against the presentation of such a play during a period of national crisis:

I know the frailty of the Russian character, I know the compassionate wavering of the Russian soul and its tendency, in its torment, weariness and despair, toward all contagions. . . . Not Stavrogsins should be shown it now, but something quite different. It should be exhorted to boldness, spiritual health, activity, and not introspection; it should be exhorted to return to the source of energy - to democracy, to the people, to sociableness and to science.

In these writings Gorky tried to educate his countrymen to a sense of political personality, to bridge the gap between the intelligentsia and the illiterate peasantry.

Gorky's period of exile from Russia came to an end soon after February 13, 1913. On this date the Tsar granted a limited amnesty to political offenders in commemoration of the tri-centenary of Romanov rule. Under its terms anyone guilty of libellous offences against the state could return to Russia. Gorky, accepting the view of Lenin that a revolutionary could do more within Russia than without, made up his mind to accept the amnesty and arrived in St. Petersburg in time to greet the new year, 1914.

64 Masaryk, The Spirit of Russia, p. 362.
66 Hill and Mudie, op. cit., p. 316.
CHAPTER VI

IN THE REVOLUTIONARY TURMOIL:

The All-European war which Gorky had feared and had looked towards with so much foreboding began in the summer of 1914. Gorky, whose opposition to the war was instinctive voiced his concern during its early months by signing the appeal of a number of Russian Artists and Writers against German atrocities. This to Lenin was the disgraceful act of a spineless Liberal,¹ but to Gorky with his deeply rooted aversion for violence his was a natural and obligatory action. The incompatibility of these two men over the single question of atrocities reflects in a small way the chaos which rift socialist opinion over the war. Broadly speaking, moderate socialists rallied to the support of their governments on purely nationalistic grounds. Radical socialists, on the other hand, voiced strong opposition on the grounds that it was an "Imperialist War", i.e., a struggle for world markets,² and should be unalterably opposed by the working classes of all nations. This point of view was formulated at a general international conference of socialists, opposed to the war, at Zimmerwald in September, 1915. Put succinctly by Trotsky the Zimmerwaldites sought... "peace without indemnities and annexations, peace

without victors and vanquished. "3 Lenin, who represented the Zimmerwald Left, repudiated the majority position. He wanted to end the war with a socialist revolution throughout Europe and the World. To this end he urged the international proletariat to precipitate national defeat and civil war. 4 Lenin's policy was generally unacceptable, he could not even count on the whole-hearted support of Russian Bolsheviks until 1916. 5 Gorky rallied to the internationalist position of the Zimmerwaldites and even seems to have accepted the defeatist or antidefensist position of Lenin. 6

After his return Gorky refrained from incriminating political activities. He held himself aloof from Party organizations, indeed these circles soon accused him of becoming "bourgeois." All in all his glamour as a Social-Democrat began to fade, and his vacillations and incurable conciliatory policy did much to dampen the Bolshevik Party's faith and

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3 Shub, David, Lenin, ed. D.P. Geddes, New York, Mentor Books, New American Library, 1950. Trotsky's slogan sums up the position of the Zimmerwald majority, of which Martov was a prominent member.


5 Ibid., p. 565.

6 Cf. Gorky, Articles and Pamphlets, p. 150. Sukhanov says that, ... "during the war I was one of the two or three writers who managed to advocate the anti-defensist Zimmerwald position in the legal press. And in particular during the first days of the war, when patriotic enthusiasm seemed universal and people with a correct estimate of the meaning of the war and Tsarist Russia's place in it were absolutely impossible to find even amongst the socialists then in Russia (Gorky was an exception)."
confidence in him. However, he still helped the Party to publish its literature, and we see that Lenin, himself, wrote a personal letter to Gorky in January, 1916, asking him to publish his latest pamphlet on the "Development of Capitalism in Agriculture." The big monthly review Letopis (Annals) which Gorky founded during the winter of 1915, although "anti-war", "anti-imperialist", and "anti-bourgeois", kept studiously within the censorship. In his own articles Gorky avoided political themes, leaving this aspect of the review's work to N.N. Himmer (Sukhanov), now famous for his Notes on the Revolution. Gorky, for his part, concentrated his attention more and more intensely on "... the cultural backwardness of the people, and the urgency of waging war against this 'inner enemy.'" It was this need of the Russian workers for enlightenment that had sparked Gorky's interest in the Capri School, this was the object which he pursued during the war years and as we shall see the one which he pursued most diligently during and after the revolution of 1917. A pointer to the direction which Gorky's efforts took

7 Kaun, A., Maxim Gorky and His Russia, New York, Jonathan Cape and Harrison Smith, 1951, p. 401. Kaun quotes police records and the secret correspondence between Russia and the Foreign Bureaus of the Bolshevik Central Committee.

8 Hill and Mudie, op. cit., p. 384.


10 Sukhanov, N.N., The Russian Revolution, London, Oxford University Press, 1955, p. vi, and p. 3. Sukhanov, a Social-Democrat, was a well known political and economic journalist, and an authority on agricultural questions. He had many connections among socialists and played an important role during the formation of the first revolutionary government. During the revolution he edited Gorky's newspaper Novaya Zhizn (New Life).

11 Kaun, op. cit., p. 442.
is found in the work which he did to encourage young writers emerging from peasant and working class backgrounds. To this new phenomenon in Russia's "hard life" he attached great importance, and already in 1914 he was actively associated with a new magazine Proletarian Writers devoted exclusively to the literary efforts of working men. Among those who received Gorky's tutelage during these years were Isaac Babel and Vsevolod Ivanov, two future standouts in Soviet Literature. Another pointer is found in The Shield, a volume of articles directed against anti-semitism and published by Gorky, Andreyev, and Sologub in 1916. These two episodes point directly to the central theme underlying Gorky's life. His educational activities were the logical outcome of his conviction that humanity could redeem itself and that "beauty", "sympathy", and "enlightenment" were the principal forces of its redemption. This is the theme which underlies his autobiographical series, the first two volumes of which appeared during this period, it is the thread which binds together his whole life activities.

In the meantime, however, Russia was disintegrating under the impact of war. Causes aggravating the situation are easy to find. The land question still remained unsolved; as a consequence peasant unrest mounted hourly. Russia's transportation system was disrupted due to the loss of her western provinces, a factor which aggravated an already acute


food shortage. Industrial conditions were such as to provoke the gravest concern and in the nation at large signs of worker disaffection were a continuous phenomenon. Worst of all, the national crisis was deepened by a total collapse of the Tsar's authority due to the machinations of Rasputin. After the assassination of this evil genius on December 17, 1916, the whole Romanov structure began to topple with bewildering speed. A scant two months later the food crisis culminated in bread riots in Petrograd. The first shots of the Great Russian Revolution were fired by policemen attempting to suppress these riots.

The political changes of what is today called the February Revolution were a direct outcome of these riots. It is significant that none of the revolutionary leaders anticipated or had any control over them. As was to be expected, the Tsar made feeble but insufficient efforts to restore order. His obvious impotency made imperative his abdication, March 2, 1917. In the circumstances, effective initiative passed swiftly to the Duma which was fortuitously in session. Here the Liberals or champions of European Constitutionalism formed a Provisional Government. Kerensky was the only non-Liberal in this new government. He was a Trudovik and became the Minister of Justice. The other significant development of this period was the formation of a Soviet of Workers and Soldiers Deputies, reminiscent of the St. Petersburg Soviet of 1905. Composed of elected delegates from factories and regiments the Soviet proved unwieldy but had real strength because of its popular support.

15 St. Petersburg became Petrograd in 1914.

16 The Peasant Party (Populist) was very close to the Socialist Revolutionaries, but unlike this group they refused to "Boycott" the Duma.
These two bodies, the Provisional Government and the Petrograd Soviet, were to constitute the real organs of political power in the months ahead.

For all Russians the revolution was a far greater event than the war itself. For the revolutionaries it was the beginning of a new life, in the words of a chronicler. . . "Russia was free - there was no autocracy, there was no Peter-Paul Fortress, there was no secret police, there was no underground, there was nothing old left: ahead everything was completely different, unknown, wonderful." But Gorky, bowed under a cloud of apprehension for years past, could not share the unqualified enthusiasm of his brothers in arms. As the revolution mounted, accompanied on every hand by chaos, vulgarity, excesses and ignorance of all kinds, his gloom was intensified. Even before the abdication of Nicholas he was forecasting a ruinous collapse for the whole movement.

A glance at some of Gorky's activities during the first days of the revolution indicate that he played a minor role in political developments and exercised a correspondingly small influence over the direction which succeeding developments would take. From the earliest days of the revolution, he took more interest in the actual course of events than in the political tasks confronting the organization of a revolutionary government. Having contacts all over the capital he was admirably situated to keep his finger on its pulse, for this reason his apartment attracted many diverse elements connected with the movement and became a centre for

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17 Sukhanov, op. cit., p. 95.
18 Ibid., pp. 78, 95.
19 Ibid., p. 23.
the exchange of information. His apartment never became any more than this. The real direction and motivation for events came from other centres. Another of Gorky's activities was to wander about the city absorbing its breath and spirit. One of the places in which he stopped was the Tauride Palace where the Soviet and its Executive Committee had established its headquarters. It was characteristic of his general mood that he should have stood about "morosely demonstrating his displeasure" with everything he saw; as for the deliberations of the Soviet, he refused to take any part regardless of what significance his participation might have had. His more concrete acts demonstrate even more clearly his dissociation from the hurly-burly of political action. One of his first tasks for the revolution was to write a Manifesto from revolutionary Russia "To the People of the World." To Chkheidze, leader of the Soviet, Gorky's "Manifesto" was superfluous. To Sukhanov it was "a superbly written dissertation," but quite unacceptable, for on the crucial issues it was silent. "Gorky's text didn't contain a scrap of any sort of politics. The revolution was considered exclusively on the level of culture and of world cultural prospects: he paid practically no attention either to our reborn society or to the problem of war." In his other actions too Gorky continued to demonstrate his fixation with cultural problems. In his one appearance before the Executive Committee, he presented a special appeal for the artists of Petrograd about the

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20 Sukhanov, op. cit., p. 23.
21 Ibid., p. 78.
22 Ibid., p. 203.
preservation of historical monuments. He also made an appearance before the Soviet but only to suggest a change in the place of burial for victims of the February Revolution. Equally representative were his attempts to organize an "Academy of Free Sciences" and a "Society of Culture and Liberty."

During the early days of the revolution, left wing newspapers were scarce. Gorky and the "Letopisites" had their review, of course, but events were rushing on so quickly that its value had already been superseded by mid-March. To meet the emergency Gorky, together with the small group of intellectuals who supported "Letopis", worked at full speed to revive the old daily Novaya Zhizn. Assisted over a difficult financial hurdle by a wealthy Moscow Industrialist, the first issue of Novaya Zhizn appeared April 19, 1917. Often referred to as "Gorky's paper", Novaya Zhizn was founded as an "independent", "non-party" newspaper dedicated to the services of the revolution and the new Russian

23 The proclamation read: "Citizens! The old masters have gone away, and a great heritage is left behind. Now it belongs to the whole people. 'Citizens, take care of this heritage, take care of the palaces - they will become palaces of your national art; take care of the pictures, the statues, the buildings - they are the embodiment of the spiritual power of yourselves and of your forefathers. 'Art is the beauty which talented people were able to create even under despotic oppression, and which bears witness to the power and beauty of the human soul. 'Citizens, do not touch one stone; preserve the monuments, the buildings, the old things, the documents - all this is your history; your pride. Remember that this is the soil from which will grow your new national art." Sukhanov, op. cit., p. 208.


25 Sukhanov, op. cit., p. 313.
Democratic State. Like Letopis it was internationalist in the Zimmerwald sense and stood by the theory of the proletarian class-struggle. It opposed Bolshevik tactics, however, and did not support the idea of a proletarian-dictatorship as expounded by the Bolsheviks. The need for unity within the Social-Democratic Party was one of the strongest planks in Novaya Zhizn's platform but faced by the momentous events of a revolution and the opposition of political irreconcilables like Lenin and Plekhanov, its platform proved superfluous. The paper's one great asset was its independent voice. Freedom from the government, freedom from the mob, freedom from the constraints of a party program, these things insured it of wide circulation and considerable influence. It also guaranteed controversy and throughout its short history Novaya Zhizn endured heavy criticism from all quarters. Despite good circulation and solid journalistic merits, Novaya Zhizn remained an indecisive influence, the reason being, that it had no serious contact with the organizations that really mattered in revolutionary Petrograd, but more of this later.

In the light of future developments, certainly the most important political event of April was Lenin's arrival in Petrograd. Even though fresh from nine years of exile, mostly in Switzerland, and only sketchily briefed on present conditions in the Capital, Lenin carried a bomb in

29 Loc. cit.
30 Deutscher, Trotsky, p. 259.
his pocket. Up until the moment of his arrival, Bolshevik cadres under the direction of Kamenev and Stalin had championed a conciliatory policy towards both Provisional Government and Soviet. Lenin with his bomb sowed chaos. Wasting no time he rejected their conciliationism for the most militant revolutionism. Within a week his policy was outlined in his famous April These, the general content of which is contained in the following phrases:

... peace at any price, opposition to the growth of bourgeois parliamentary democracy, no support for the Provisional Government, for the creation of a socialist republic governed by Soviets of Workers' and Peasants' Deputies, direct seizure of land and factories by peasants and workers, support for the Zimmerwald Left, denunciation of the Social-Democratic Party for its betrayal of the International-Proletariat, and a new name 'Communist' for the Bolshevik Party. 31

Succinctly phrased in pithy slogans - "All Power to the Soviets", "Down with the War", "Down with the Ten Capitalist Ministers" - and tirelessly propagated by a disciplined organization Lenin's program made great headway. Its significance was immense: "Politically, it meant an attempt to bridge the gap between autocracy and socialist democracy without the long experience and training in citizenship which bourgeois democracy... had afforded in the west. Economically, it meant the creation of a socialist economy in a country which had never possessed the resources in capital equipment and trained workers proper to a developed capitalist order." 32

Opposition to Lenin's Theses was at first strenuous even within the Party, but the master's overpowering logic and towering prestige as


32 Carr, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 100.
the undisputed leader of Bolshevism soon brought his followers to heel. In non-Party circles he was denounced roundly, hardly a soul believing that he could win even the Bolsheviks to his program, that the masses would rally to it seemed preposterous. One consequence of Lenin's Theses was to aggravate existing tensions between the different Social-Democratic factions. Symptomatic was the flight of a number of old Bolsheviks to the Menshevik camp or the intermediate camp which had gathered around Gorky's paper. In the crisis, Novaya Zhizn redoubled its efforts to unite the Social-Democracy, but in the Bolshevik quarter, the only one that mattered, its efforts were coldly rebuffed. What Gorky's attitude to Lenin's program was is not clear, it is certain, however, that his intimates regarded it as the ravings of a lunatic.

About the same time another important event occurred, for Trotsky arrived in Petrograd during the first week of May. Now the roster of figures destined to lead the October revolution was complete. By this time, the political programs of both Lenin and Trotsky were in very close agreement. Consequently, Lenin hastened to win the adherence of Trotsky and his friends to the Bolshevik Party. He attached no conditions to his proposal that they join the Bolshevik Party and even offered them positions on the editorial staff of Pravda and on the Party's Central Committee. Trotsky hesitated. For the moment he preferred to reconnoitre, plumbing


34 Sukhanov, op. cit., pp. 286-287.

35 Deutscher, Trotsky, pp. 255-258. "Trotsky would have had to be much more free of pride than he was to accept Lenin's proposals immediately."
the mood of workers, soldiers, and intellectuals, feeling, as he expresses it "... a need for direct orientation in the fundamental forces of the revolution." On May 25 he stopped at the editorial offices of Novaya Zhizn, where he met a mixed reception. Gorky was anxious for Trotsky's collaboration, hoping that he would try, as in the past, to conciliate socialist opinion. Sukhanov, the chief power in Novaya Zhizn, was very hesitant about combining Trotsky, fearing as it was rumoured, that he was worse than Lenin. Sukhanov definitely believed that Trotsky wanted an alliance with Novaya Zhizn and had looked with misgivings towards their meetings for some time past. His fears had been groundless, however, for the mutual sounding out which began with a discussion of immediate political perspectives revealed a significant difference of opinion, Trotsky believing like Lenin, that all power should pass to the Soviets at once, and Sukhanov believing that the time was still not ripe for so decisive a step towards Socialist Democracy. This fact alone was enough to make future collaboration impossible and negotiations collapsed, apparently without regret on either hand. Trotsky expresses himself very scornfully on the subject: "A short conversation convinced me of the complete hopelessness of this circle of literary wiseacres for whom revolution reduced itself to the problem of the leading editorial." The "July Days"

37 Deutscher, Trotsky, p. 259.
40 Trotsky, op. cit., p. 487.
which followed soon after would find Trotsky in Lenin's camp.

Sometime earlier, Kerensky, in response to strong pressure from the allies, had begun to whip up popular support for an offensive on the western front. From the very first Novaya Zhizn campaigned against the offensive, and well it might, for any attempt to launch a major military operation with Russia's broken and demoralised armies smacked of lunacy. In this Novaya Zhizn echoed the Bolsheviks, who denounced the projected offensive as a "war against the Revolution", and refused to take any responsibility for the inevitable disaster.¹¹ Novaya Zhizn's warning went unheeded and the Russian armies, freshly harangued by Kerensky, but unenthused, went into the attack on June 18. As was predicted, the offensive collapsed in the rout of Kerensky's armies. Unlike the Bolsheviks, Gorky rallied to Kerensky's support after the offensive had begun, hoping to stave off defeat by strengthening the armies' morale at the last minute. This burst of patriotism marked a breaking point between Gorky and Lenin's followers.⁴²

Kerensky's defeat coincided with serious armed demonstrations in Petrograd, July 3 and 4. It was widely believed that the appearance of armed workers and soldiers in the streets marked the beginning of a serious Bolshevik attempt to seize power. This was not the case, Party leaders insisted, even at that time, that the uprising was a spontaneous demonstration which they were powerless to stop and which they had

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⁴¹ Nation, vol. 107, p. 642.
⁴² Loc. cit.
struggled to control. Lenin himself was opposed to an uprising at that time and was actually out of the city when it began. Gorky accepted the majority view and from the outset lashed out at the Bolsheviks for their attempt to build a Soviet Democracy by force of arms. His reaction marked the culmination of a trend, for Gorky believed that after February there was no longer any place for violence in the contest for power. He was convinced that Russia could be saved and the gains of the revolution consolidated only by a united socialist government. He supported the Bolshevik demand that all power pass to the Soviet, but when the Bolsheviks began to imply by their slogan opposition to both the bourgeoisie and the moderate socialists of the Soviet he was compelled to protest. The Bolshevik uprising of July 3 was the last straw.

Government leaders interpreted the July demonstrations in the same way and after a brief period of vacillation drafted the Preobrazhensky Regiment to the Capital to restore order. One of the Government's first acts was to suppress Pravda. A second was to order the arrest of Kamenev, Zinoviev, and Lenin, Lenin having arrived in Petrograd on the fifth. Despite its show of firmness, the Government's reaction proved feeble and half-hearted, and though the moment was propitious it failed to establish or reinforce its authority. For one reason, the first coalition government had collapsed on July 3, and its successor, presided over by Kerensky.


and a socialist majority, was perceptibly more left. As a result, Kamenev and Trotsky were arrested, but only temporarily, Lenin and Zinoviev were able to continue their work from the semi-underground, and Stalin was allowed to remain at large. Far from being destroyed, the Bolshevik Party was encouraged in its organizational work, and redoubled its efforts to infiltrate Soviet and Military Committees.\footnote{Committees created in the army by a Soviet order of March 1. Designed to wreck the authority of the officers, it contributed greatly to the dissolution of the army.}

The Government held its trump card in documents purporting to prove that Lenin was a German agent. Although this information scarcely found credence among those who knew of Lenin's "iron fanaticism" and "personal incorruptibility" it made a transitory impact on the masses, making it possible for the Government to achieve temporary successes against the Bolsheviks.\footnote{Chamberlain, op. cit., vol. 1, pp. 179-181.} The use of Red-Bating by Kerensky in order to suppress Pravda and arrest Lenin provoked a strangely ambivalent reaction from Gorky. Although the editorial offices of Novaya Zhizn were seized July 4, the paper was back in operation the next day, the first day of the official reaction.\footnote{Sukhanov, op. cit., p. 459.} As the reaction mounted, Gorky decided to throw the pages of Novaya Zhizn open to the Bolsheviks. Lenin soon availed himself of the privilege, for on July 11, he used its columns to repudiate the charges against him.\footnote{Chamberlain, op. cit., p. 181.} Trotsky also used the pages of Novaya Zhizn...
to refute similar charges by men like Miliukov. Gorky's assistance ended here, for he behaved vaguely as regards Lenin's defense, and continued to oppose him on essential issues.

Throughout July and August the revolution deepened perceptibly. In the country the land hunger grew more acute and peasant disorders and the ransacking of estates more frequent. At the front, dissaffections increased and in the cities anarchy and chaos mounted. As successive coalition governments failed to measure up to the situation, the struggle between conflicting parties assumed a more obviously class nature. By the end of August, a marked bipolarization had occurred between the right and the left, with aristocratic and bourgeois elements grouping their forces around a reactionary general, Kornilov, and the workers and peasants grouping around the banner of Lenin. As the summer advanced the alternatives facing the Russian people narrowed themselves to a choice between the military dictatorship of Kornilov and the Bolshevik dictatorship of Lenin.

The anticipated "coup" from the right began on August 25 but miscarried ignominiously. At the moment of crisis all of the socialist groups hastened to the support of Kerensky, who as nominal head of the Government, assumed full command. Kornilov's defeat was inevitable: he had no popular support - railroad workers refused to transport his soldiers, telegraph operators refused to transmit his orders, and agitators undermined his troops. At the height of his success, Kerensky who

50 Deutscher, Trotsky, p. 275.
51 Ibid., p. 277.
owed much of his victory over Kornilov to Bolshevik support disassociated himself from them by attempting to suppress their new central organ Rabochii (The Worker). It is significant that an attempt was made to close down Novaya Zhizn under the same edict. Kerensky's act reveals how right and moderate left wing opinion was disposed towards Gorky's paper. It should be noted that Novaya Zhizn regularly charged Kerensky with prostituting the revolution to foreign powers by his determination to wage war in the allied cause. On the other hand, Novaya Zhizn's reputation among the Bolsheviks was scarcely better, for just about this time Lenin published an article in Rabochii denouncing Sukhanov as one of the "best representatives of the petty-bourgeois democracy."

After the Kornilov affair the Bolshevik star began to rise rapidly; by the middle of September they had positive majorities in both the Petrograd and Moscow Soviets, and were beginning to plan a final assault on the summit of power. But more important to the Novaya Zhizn people, who by this time formed the core of a small group calling itself the United-Internationalist, the Kornilov "debacle" was followed by a general movement of Mensheviks to the left. Officially the Menshevik

52 Cf. Sukhanov, op. cit., p. 515.


54 Kerensky was powerless to enforce his commands at this juncture. All it took to ensure the appearance of Rabochii was an armed detachment of Kronstadt sailors to stand by the presses. Novaya Zhizn applied the same technique and also appeared without interruption.

55 Cf. Sukhanov, op. cit., pp. 523-524. The United-Internationalist were "a little group of intellectuals with a small following among the working class except the personal following of Maxim Gorky, its leader." Reed, John, Ten Days That Shook the World, p. xvi.
Party believed that society should evolve towards socialism, as a group they were essentially non-revolutionary and nationalistic. Up to this moment Menshevik leaders had dominated the Executive Committee of the Petrograd Soviet, but after Kornilov their policies became repugnant to solid working class opinion and a mass exodus from the Party began. In this the trend of April was reversed for key Mensheviks and workers now joined Bolshevik cadres. The Novaya Zhiznites stood between the two major Parties along with another small group, the Martovites or Menshevik-Internationalists. Essentially there was little to distinguish between these two groups even though they preferred to maintain their separateness. Politically they supported the Bolshevik program. What kept them out of Lenin's camp was their desire to unite the whole Social-Democracy and their revulsion against Bolshevik methods. This strange split between support in theory and opposition in practice stemmed from their natural rebellion against the violent face of Bolshevism. The important thing is that the crisis of Menshevism provided recruits for the United-Internationalists. Under the impact of a growing membership, the editorial board of Novaya Zhizn began to intensify its party activities, even projecting an All-Russian Conference of Novaya Zhiznites. Elections to the Executive Committee of the Petrograd Soviet brought their plans to an abrupt end. In these elections, which were conducted on a proportional basis, the United-Internationalists and the Martovites combined failed to win a single seat, clear indication that they had no strength in the

56 Reed, Ten Days that Shook the World, p. xvi.

Soviet. This was a shattering blow to the Party and by the end of September it had almost ceased to exist. In seeking the basic cause for the Novaya Zhiznites' failure to make a political impact, one need hardly go further than Sukhanov; apart, that is, from noting that they lacked organizational vigor. Sukhanov concluded that their "... position, at least in its positive part, was superfluous to the masses. In its negative critical part we ... were in accord with the Bolsheviks. In the arena of the struggle going on at that time against the coalition and the bourgeoisie we stood at their side."

While the Party of the Novaya Zhiznites disintegrated, the Bolshevik Party continued its march to power. On September 23, the Petrograd Soviet elected Trotsky President. This very organization now became the centre of Bolshevik militancy; and active preparations for the revolution were pressed forward here. In the Party Central Committee, Lenin began to agitate for an armed seizure of power, now being convinced that the time was ripe. But on this issue the Central Committee was


59 Sukhanov, op. cit., p. 550. On this score Trotsky was in complete agreement. "The contributors of Novaya Zhizn were an extremely honest lot, who sincerely wished to carry on 'revolutionary' and 'Left' politics, but of their own brand, that is, that which emanated from their literary schemes and not what grew out of the objective conditions of society and its revolutionary crisis. In order to put into practice the revolutionary 'cultural', 'rationally' socialistic, and similar policies of Gorky, Sukhanov, and their brethren, it would have been necessary as a preliminary step to prepare in retorts and cucurbits the kind of proletariat, and in fact of all other social classes, that would fit such policies. Since that had not been done, 'Novaya Zhizn' remained a smart, or rather smartish, uselessness. ..."

split and Lenin had to press his demands against a determined opposition led by Kamenev and Zinoviev. These two men saw nothing ahead but "debacle."

During these critical days everyone expected a Bolshevik "coup" and discussions about its propriety and possible consequences raged hot on every hand. In its columns Novaya Zhizn echoed the waverings of Kamenev and Zinoviev: that reactionary forces were attempting to destroy the revolution was patent; that they must be opposed by force of arms if necessary was clear; but that the Bolsheviks could do this unsupported by the whole revolutionary democracy was preposterous: "As long as the democracy has not organized its principal forces, so long as the resistance to its influence is still strong, there is no advantage in passing to the attack. But if the hostile elements appeal to force then the revolutionary democracy should enter the battle to seize the power, and it will be sustained by the most profound strata of the people... an insurrection, however, would prepare the way for a new Kornilov." All of

60 The Grand Duchess Marie seems to make a just statement of the situation. "The Bolshevik 'coup d'etat' was expected any moment. As far as I could see everyone was ready to welcome it; no one believed any longer in the Provisional government. Kerensky had become odious by his continual speech-making, his mania for grandeur, his posturing towards the Radical elements, his falseness. Moreover, no one ever thought that the Bolsheviki could keep the reins for more than two or three months; their rule would arouse, it was believed, a powerful reaction; and after that the least that could happen would be a dictatorship." Marie, Education of a Princess, New York, Viking Press, 1931, p. 352.

61 Reed, John, "Novaya Zhizn", Ten Days That Shook the World, p. 35. Cf. Kaun, Maxim Gorky and His Russia, p. 458. "... the editorial policy of 'Novaya Zhizn' was formulated as favouring 'the transfer of all power into the hands of the democracy, and at the same time warning the Left portion of the democracy against isolated action.'... The frantic refrain of the editorials was: 'Democracy must consolidate its forces!'"
these arguments made little impact on Lenin. On October 9 the Party leadership took its historic decision to prepare for an armed uprising, tentatively setting the date for October 20. Far from diminishing opposition within the Central Committee mounted. Kamenev and Zinoviev resigned from the Central Committee on October 16 in a vigorous attempt to frustrate the proposed uprising. Two days later they carried their opposition into the open by publishing in Novaya Zhizn a declaration that they and other "practical comrades" were against "an armed uprising which would be fatal for the Party, the Proletariat, and the Revolution."62 Alarmed at the prospect of bloodshed, like thousands of other radical intellectuals, Gorky came out in the same issue with an article pleading for sanity and denouncing the projected uprising. In this article he prophesied the collapse of the revolution and the eclipse of culture. "In brief, there will be repeated that bloody, senseless, slaughter, which we have already witnessed, and which has undermined through our whole land the moral importance of the revolution, and has shaken its cultural meaning."63 On the same day Sukhanov approached the Soviet on a special mission, for Gorky's twenty-fifth anniversary as a writer was just four days away. Sukhanov felt that the Soviet should send him greetings but when it came time to approach Trotsky with his motion, Sukhanov quailed, knowing full well that the Bolsheviks would not distinguish between the "artistic ideologist of the proletariat and their political antagonist on

63 "One Must Not be Silent", Gorky, Kaun, op. cit., pp. 460-461.
a current question of tactics." How right he was, if one may judge from Stalin's cold, fatalistic response to Gorky's protests — what a grim commentary on future events.

As for the neurasthenics of 'Novaya Zhizn', we don't understand exactly what they want of us... perhaps they cannot 'keep silent' because a general croaking has now started in the marsh of our bewildered intellectuals? Does that not explain Gorky's 'I cannot keep silent'? It is incredible, but a fact. They stood aside and kept silent when the landlords and their henchmen drove the peasants to desperation and hunger 'riots'. They stood aside and kept silent when the capitalists and their servitors were plotting a countrywide lockout of the workers and unemployment. They could keep silent when the counter-revolutionaries were attempting to surrender the capital and withdraw the army from it. But these individuals, it appears, 'cannot keep silent' when the vanguard of the revolution, the Petrograd Soviet, has risen in defence of the hoodwinked workers and peasants! And the first word that comes from their lips is a rebuke levelled — not against the counter-revolution, oh! no! — but against the very revolution about which they gushed with enthusiasm at the tea table, but from which, at the most crucial moment, they are fleeing as if from the plague! Is this not 'strange'?

The Russian revolution has overthrown many a reputation. Its might lies, among other things, in the fact that it has not cringed before celebrities, but has taken them into its service, or, if they refused to learn from it, has consigned them to oblivion. There is a whole string of such 'celebrities' whom the revolution has rejected — Plekhanov, Kropotkin, Breshkovskaya, Zasulich and all those old revolutionaries in general who are noteworthy only for being 'old'. We fear that Gorky is envious of the laurels of these 'pillars'. We fear that Gorky feels a 'mortal' urge to follow after them — into the museum of antiquities. Well, every man to his own fancy... The revolution is not disposed either to pity or bury its dead.

Gorky's fears and protests notwithstanding, the revolution began during the early morning of October 25, 1917. Key points of the city were occupied almost without incident and a remarkably short time later the Bolshevik seizure of power was consummated. At that time very

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64 Sukhanov, op. cit., pp. 579-580.

few believed they would be able to hold power for more than two or three weeks. But the Bolsheviks disappointed their detractors, they proved determined, flexible, resilient, and gradually consolidated and extended their power.

Non-Bolshevik newspapers, suppressed one day and reappearing the next, assailed the usurpers with bitter invective. Novaya Zhizn took its place among the first of these, characterizing the new regime as "...a combination of demagoguery and impotence." As for Gorky, he was not to be outdone. On November 7, eleven days after the revolution, he was already characterizing Lenin and Trotsky as men "poisoned by the corruptive virus of power." He saw them now, and continued to see them for some time to come, as "blind fanatics" and "unconscionable adventurers" rushing headlong down the road to anarchy and destruction, dragging behind them the proletariat and the revolution. Chagrined by the abuses of those very freedoms for which the revolution had been fought, Gorky heaped scorn on the Bolsheviks and begged "sensible" elements of the democracy to rethink the situation, decide again whether the road of "conspirators" and "anarchists" was their road. This is the substance of the mordant campaign which Gorky waged against the new regime until Novaya Zhizn died in the summer of 1918.

The demise of Novaya Zhizn marks a turning point in the life of Gorky and offers a good opportunity to dot some of the -i's in his political career. Firstly, while admitting that government repression was not

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66 Reed, John, op. cit., p. 264.

67 Kaun, op. cit., pp. 470-471.
the least of those forces making for Novaya Zhizn's death, it should be noted that it was not the only one. Threatened reprisals by workers, sailors, and even typesetters, if Gorky continued in his attacks on the government also played their part. What a graphic illustration of how far the political pendulum had swung to the left - Gorky the radical threatened as a right-winger. Then there was the general deterioration which set in with the revolution and the outbreak of civil war - shortages of paper, electricity, etc. Then certainly Gorky helped to provoke the inevitable by his vehement attacks on Lenin and company during this furious period. Yet Gorky supported the general program of Lenin and it speaks unfavourably for his political perspicacity that he failed to foresee the consequences of that program. A dictatorship is a dictatorship and whether it be "proletarian" or "capitalist" is of no consequence beside the basic fact. Lenin didn't make the same mistake, he knew that "... no dictatorship of the proletariat (could be) thought of without terror and violence." In this regard we have already seen that Lenin, Trotsky, and even Sukhanov, had little respect for Gorky's political acumen. Gorky himself claimed an organic disgust for politics and was irked by the large doses he had to take of it as the editor of a daily newspaper. Then, too, he was sensitive to abuse and found it hard to brazen through the scorn heaped on him from all quarters. He was also

68 Reed, op. cit., p. 11.

69 Kaun, op. cit., pp. 479-481.

70 Vernadsky, G., History of Russia, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1951, p. 259.

given to vacillation and found it difficult to formulate and stick to policy during Novaya Zhizn's short life. These things considered, it is not at all unlikely that he was relieved to see Novaya Zhizn draw its last breath. What glimpses we have seen of Gorky's work in Novaya Zhizn provide a meaningful comment on his political disposition and capacity, for during this period of momentous political and social upheaval he ignored the political problems facing the establishment of a revolutionary government and devoted himself almost exclusively to defending culture. Where this was not the case he tried, by passionately defending liberty and opposing violence, to direct the revolution towards humane ends. From this it seems clear that Gorky's approach was essentially non-political, one can hardly imagine Lenin or Stalin devoting themselves to like themes at that particular moment. What then were the essential features of Gorky's political philosophy? Gorky was a Social-Democrat, he had considered himself one since 1900 and had already served the Party well. He was, however, a bad one, and this he freely admitted on one of the many occasions when Lenin reproached him for his political errors. He even prided himself on being a heretic, a quality unsupportable in a Marxist, at least of the Lenin variety, and if there were contradictions in his political opinions he made no attempt to reconcile them, arguing that they were good for his soul. Gorky believed, like all Marxists, that capitalism was the great evil which had to be destroyed if man was to

72 Kaun, op. cit., p. 447-449.
73 Ibid., "Lenin of Gorky", p. 443.
74 Ibid., "Gorky's Reply to Rech (Speech)", p. 454.
achieve victory over himself and nature, but he did not believe, at least not without reservations, in the proletariat's historical mission. In his opinion, the most precious force that Russia owned, the only force capable of carrying through a social-revolution, was her combined socialist and scientific-technical intelligentsia. He would later claim that it was his fear that a dictatorship of the proletariat would destroy this vital force that led him to oppose the Bolsheviks in 1917.

From this it seems clear that Gorky placed much greater emphasis on the role of the intelligentsia than was customary among Marxists, believing that "... a dictatorship of the politically educated workmen in close union with the intelligentsia was the only way..." that Russia could overcome her difficulties. Where the Marxists stressed the great importance of an economic transformation, Gorky saw the central task of the revolution in "... the creation of conditions which would foster the growth of the country's cultural forces." In balance it would appear that Gorky's emphasis on culture tempered his whole political philosophy, where his sympathies went naturally to the vigorous, practical, forward-looking mentality of Lenin and his followers, his own refinement led him to shun violence and oppose rigidity.


76 Gorky, "White Emigre Literature", Culture and the People, p. 34. Gorky distinguished between the "old" intelligentsia, the specific socialist intelligentsia and the scientific-technical intelligentsia. He felt that the latter group, "the qualified and specialized", was revolutionary in its essence.

77 Loc. cit.

78 Kaun, op. cit., p. 504.

79 Loc. cit.
CHAPTER VII

THE LAST PHASE

Within a few months of Novaya Zhizn's death, another phase of Gorky's life began; the essential outlines of which remained unchanged until his death in 1936. The basic fact of this final period is that Gorky gave unflagging public support to the Bolsheviks. Difficult though it is to say the last word on so complex a question, his public writings, at least, denote a striking continuity and singleness of purpose.

Gorky's shift from opposition to support for the Bolshevik government was dramatically announced by the publication of a militant appeal, "Follow Us", addressed to the world's proletarian and intellectual toilers, January 1919. The issues as Gorky saw them are clearly set out: "Every day that passes the cynicism of the inhuman policy of the Imperialists becomes steadily plainer and appears more and more clearly to threaten the people of Europe with new wars and new bloodshed," said Gorky. "President Wilson, who yesterday was an eloquent defender of the freedom of peoples and the rights of democracy, to-day equips a powerful army 'for the restoration of order' in revolutionary Russia, where the people already realize their lawful rights, have taken the power into their own hands, and, according to their capacity are striving to lay the foundations of a new structure of state."1 This fact, that the Russian

people had entered on the phase of their regeneration and were being frustrated by the Imperialists of Europe was of cardinal importance to Gorky. Any group which could give leadership in restoring the nation's cultural and productive forces and at the same time frustrate the Imperialists' designs on Russia was certain of his support. By this time it was clear that there was no force in Russia except the Bolsheviks capable of assuming authority, and inspiring the exhausted country. Although he had been an opponent of the government and was "still in disagreement with its methods of work," although "the work of building up had been followed by often unnecessary work of pulling down," and, "great mistakes had been made in Russia, perhaps superfluous cruelty... practised," this was of little importance "compared with the frightful crimes of the cruel war, which was provoked by the English and German Imperialists," against Revolutionary Russia. For Gorky this act of aggression proved Capitalism's worthlessness, and impelled him to defend the Bolsheviks. Although Gorky loathed cruelty and bloodshed, he believed there were historical periods when these things were inevitable and even necessary. When the release of repression swept all before it and destroyed everything that smacked of the old order, Gorky was not

4 Gorky, "Lenin", p. 72. "My correspondents ought to understand that they are living in years of war and that it is hypocritical and stupid to demand "mercy" on the battlefield during the fighting." Gorky, "On the 'Good Life'", Culture and the People, New York, Internation Publishers, 1929, p. 86.
disillusioned and despairing. Although he was often disgusted with actual events, he was able to adjust himself. What really matters is that Gorky fully realised the impact that the Russian revolution would make on Russian and world history and threw in his lot with the revolutionary forces. This is not to say that there were not squabbles and misunderstandings. Undoubtedly Gorky had asked himself the question which he put to the workers and intellectuals of the world:

... which is better for you: the defenders of the ancient order, representatives of the system of minority government over majority, out of date, impossible for the future, and destructive of culture, or the leader and teacher of the new social ideals and sentiments, which embody all the workers' beautiful thought of the happiness of free labor and brotherhood of the people.

To Gorky who had begun his revolutionary career by singing the glory of madly brave men there could be only one answer:

Come and go with us towards the new life, whose creation we work for without sparing anybody or any thing! Erring and suffering in the great joy of labour and in the burning hope of progress we leave to the honest judgement of history all our deeds. Come with us to the battle against the ancient order, to work for new forms of life! Forth to life's freedom and beauty!

Once again an appraisal of Gorky's activities reveals that he was hardly a political force, except, perhaps, as his word carried weight at home and abroad. He came as close as he was to come to an active political role on December 19, 1918, when as an international figure of the left, he chaired a preliminary organizational meeting of the Third


6 Loc. cit.
International. This was shortly before his public adherence to Lenin's regime. Zinoviev gave the keynote address and there is no evidence that Gorky's influence was great. Soon after this, his relations with Lenin were restored after a severance of five years, but their relations were at times strained and Gorky remarks in his obituary note on Lenin that it could hardly have been otherwise, for: "Lenin was a politician. He was in full possession of that artificially but precisely mastered rectilinearity of vision, which is indispensable for the helmsman of such an enormous, heavy ship as is the leaden peasant Russia." Against this quality Gorky posed "... an organic disgust for politics; and ... a rather doubtful Marxism, because (he) had little faith in the wisdom of masses in general and of the peasant mass, in particular." Gorky was never able to reconcile himself to Bolshevik ruthlessness and made use of his friendship with Lenin to intercede personally on behalf of countless individuals needlessly persecuted by the regime. In this respect he occupied a privileged position, as a former Bolshevik he had access to the Party's top leadership and their not unsympathetic ear. He took advantage of this position to point out the great gulf between the Bolsheviks' starting practices and their theory. The Bolshevik leaders, for their part, exploited the fact that they had Gorky's support, with gusto. Lenin, himself, repeatedly stressed the importance of making the

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8 Kaun, A., Maxim Gorky and His Russia, New York, Jonathan Cape and Harrison Smith, 1951, pp. 503-504.

most effective use of Gorky as a propagandist. Gory of talent he was especially solicitous of Gorky. As an example, we note his instructions to Krupskaya in a letter dated May 16, 1919: "... would it be possible to give Gorky a cabin on the Krasnaya Zvezda (Red Star)." (Propaganda steamer on the Volga and Kama rivers.) "He is arriving here tomorrow and I would very much like to get him out of Petrograd where his nerves have gone to pieces and he is depressed."

In his political writings, Gorky appeared again in defense of culture and civilization, he tried once more to inculcate a higher, more humane consciousness in his fellow Russians by reiterating his pet ideas - the supreme value of science, knowledge, creative labour, equality and freedom, in short the superiority of the west over the east. Two of his political writings attracted particular attention: one was an article on Lenin written for the official organ of the Third International (1920); and the other was an article on the Russian peasantry (1922). To Lenin he paid high praise as the courageous initiator of a European social revolution, and that in backward, indolent Russia. The article is

10 Kaun, op. cit., p. 512.
   "Gorky on Russian Labour", Littell's Living Age, vol. 310, 1921, p. 65.
perhaps more important for what Gorky says about Lenin's madness after three years of revolution and civil war: ". . . there was a moment when my natural pity for the people of Russia made me consider this madness as almost a crime. But now I see that the people can suffer patiently much better than it can work conscientiously and honestly. So again I sing the glory of the sacred madness of the brave."§ In the second article he denounced the peasantry with "unusual bitterness." Gorky had long ago rejected the Narodniks' illusion of intrinsic peasant nobility. From first hand experience he knew well the village with its ". . . vulgar sorrows and joys. . . its intellectual blindness, and its psychic cruelty." It was, in fact, one of Gorky's convictions that the village was the basic obstacle standing in the way of a Europeanized and cultured Russia.

When Gorky announced that he would give his support to the regime, he claimed to have been greatly influenced by the energy and scope of its cultural work. Despite the most difficult conditions, he felt that it was making a magnificent contribution. In 1919 he joined Lenin's cabinet in order to help the program along. Chiefly he worked to help

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15 Mirsky, op. cit., p. 111.


17 Kaun, op. cit., p. 504.


Russia's intellectuals through shortages and famine. The bulk of the Russian intelligentsia failed to adjust to the new situation, they refused to take part in revolutionary work, and even refused to assist the government's cultural program. As a consequence, in part, of their maladjustment they suffered dire privations. In order to involve some at least of these people in useful work and at the same time save them from starvation Gorky pioneered in the editing of a huge series of the world's classics. To carry out the scheme, a system of centralized publishing houses was established and hundreds of writers and scholars were employed as translators, researchers, and editors. He also founded the House of Art and the House of the Scholars, institutions which gave shelter to hundreds of intellectuals in Petrograd. Later, when he was already in Germany, he tried to collect funds for the intellectuals of Russia, writing as a part of his efforts an "Appeal to the Generous Heart of America."20 When Marxian critics demanded that a communist culture should be developed that would reflect the political, social, and economic ideals of the new society, Gorky gave his support to the idea and helped to encourage young writers from among the workers. At the same time, he tried to prevent the movement from becoming narrowly sectarian by advocating the creative assimilation of the best elements of the old intelligentsia culture by the new proletarian culture.21 In all these things the great writer exercised a beneficial influence. Mirsky maintains that Gorky's work


during this period was "most salutary" and earned him the lasting debt of Russian civilization.\(^{22}\)

These years of hardship and overwork took their toll of Gorky's health. A sufferer from chronic tuberculosis, his situation had become so serious by the fall of 1921 that he was forced to undertake a cure abroad. He settled first in Germany and later in southern Italy.

A year after his departure from Russia, Gorky was still living in a sanatorium near Berlin. While here he kept the press at arms length. In these circles it was rumoured that he was dying. It was known that he refused to talk for publication and what is more, refused to talk about politics.\(^{23}\) With those he knew a little better he was not so reticent. Although he was still bitter about Bolshevik brutality he refused to condemn them, not even the imprisonments, the banishments and the terror.\(^{24}\) About the future of Russia he was not too optimistic, and in conversation with Barrett H. Clark expressed the opinion that revolutions only aggravate a bad situation - they substitute one set of chains for another. In Russia he felt the situation was particularly bad because the workmen were so lazy.\(^{25}\) All this raises the question of why Gorky left Russia. Was it because of his health, or was it, as the emigres insisted and Soviet detractors still insist, because he could not live and work there?

\(^{22}\) Mirsky, *op. cit.*, p. 111.

\(^{23}\) Clark, *Intimate Portraits*, p. 3.


\(^{25}\) Clark, *op. cit.*, p. 18.
The official version is that Lenin urged Gorky to go abroad for reasons of health. Excerpts from this correspondence are published by Kaun, and the fact that Gorky refused to condemn the regime either publicly or privately lends credence to this version. Some people, like Marc Slonim, who met Gorky in Europe express the view that he found the political atmosphere in his homeland too oppressive, and that this factor together with his bad health led to his departure. In their company he expressed concern about the lack of freedom in Russia, and never concealed his aversion for the censorship.

When Gorky's health improved to the point where he could live without his doctors, he moved to southern Italy where he lived until 1929. It was during this period that Lenin died (January 21, 1924), and that Gorky wrote his sympathetic and laudatory reminiscences of him. It was during this period also that Russia, after 1922 the Soviet Union, staged a remarkable recovery and the Bolshevik government extended its roots deeper into the nation. During the same years Gorky's prestige continued to grow and by 1928 he was looked upon as the greatest moral and cultural force in the Soviet Union. In Italy, as in Germany, Gorky devoted himself exclusively to literary work, and these years saw the production of some of his maturest work. On political questions he kept relative silence. At the same time he carried on a vast correspondence

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26 Kaun, op. cit., p. 514.


with writers and readers in the Soviet Union, some of whom came on pilgrimages to see him. In this way he maintained contact with the new generation and its best creative forces.

During these years the emigre press waged a ceaseless campaign of vilification and slander against the regime, and against Gorky personally. The emigres hated him because of his friendship with the Soviet leaders, and even more for his acceptance of the revolution, and his apparent determination to live with it. They found it impossible to forgive him for always emphasizing its positive features and publicly ignoring the despotism, the imprisonments, the censorship, etc. But to Gorky the atrocities of the old regime and the appalling shortsightedness and inflexibility of the emigres was even more execrable. The tremendous upsurge in all branches of the national life, the cultural progress, and, particularly the tremendous strides made in removing the blight of mass illiteracy, far outweighed all these shortcomings. In brief, the workers of the Soviet Union were building a new society based on reason, equality, and justice and Gorky's sympathies were in full accord with the effort:

"My joy and my pride is the new Russian man, the builder of the new state." By 1927 he had become definitely reconciled to the regime, and as if to announce his allegiance, he broke a longstanding silence to denounce the emigres in a contemptuously worded article, "On the

29 Kaun, "Mikhail Osorgin's Letter to Kauh", Maxim Gorky and His Russia, p. 557.

From this time on, Gorky, both in his speeches and public writings, gave unconditional support to the new order. The growth of Gorky's moral authority and prestige in the Soviet Union was accompanied by an insistent pressure for his return.

"By 1928 the Russians had already gone far toward making a legend of him. He was one of their evidences of intellectual respectability; he was a link with the past; he was the symbol of genius now completely committed to the communist cause." Now that he had broken a long silence to make his position towards the new state clear, he was treated with unrivalled applause. In March, 1928, his birthday was celebrated as a national event, honours were heaped upon him, with the inevitable result, that Gorky returned to Russia in May. Both there and on his return to Italy in the fall, he spoke enthusiastically about the rejuvenated Russia and in the following year he returned for good. The ovation he received was as great as the one accorded him on the year before.

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32 Slonim, op. cit., p. 150. Consult also the collected editions of Gorky's articles listed in the bibliography.


34 Chaliapin, an old friend of Gorky's, stresses the importance that love of Russia played in Gorky's decision. "Gorky felt deeply that we all belonged to our country, to our people, and that we must be with them not only morally — but also physically — with all our scars, all our wounds, all our disfigurements." Chaliapin, F., "My Friend Gorky", Littell's Living Age, vol. 351 (1936-1957), p. 45.

Gorky's return initiated what Kaun called "... the most exuberant phase of his life." Be that as it may, it is clear that Gorky felt it was his duty to contribute to the building of the U.S.S.R. and gave himself unspARINGLY to the task, and even cautioned against inordinate criticism of the regime because of the "lascivious" way in which hostile elements pounced on the facts and distorted them to suit their advantage. The next eight years were packed with activity. He wrote his own fiction and drama, critical essays and comments. He was the active editor of numerous publications, literary and historical. He carried on an active correspondence and responded to countless public demands. In addition, he gave hours of time to the instruction and encouragement of Soviet literature. In his political writings, many of which were angry polemics written in a popular, journalistic style, he revealed himself as an uncompromising anti-capitalist. The ravishment of war, the impoverishment of the workers and the peoples of the world, debauchery and licence of all kinds he laid at capital's door. His influence, particularly in matters of literary policy, bolstered by his


37 Cf. Borland, H., "Gorky", Soviet Literary Theory and Practice During the First Five Year Plan, 1928-1932, New York, King's Crown Press, 1950, p. 26. "Are we... to sacrifice ourselves to the revolutionary demands of the epoch? Yes, we must re-educate ourselves so that serving the social revolution becomes at the same time a source of gratification to the individual."

personal friendship with Stalin, was very great.39

Almost coincident with Gorky's return, a number of developments occurred of paramount importance to Russia's future. Of chief importance was the emergence of Stalin as undisputed leader of the Communist Party, the one real force within the country. What Stalin did after the consolidation of his power is of the first importance, for Gorky's career because it conditioned the atmosphere of this whole period, for Russia because Stalin reshaped the whole course of her history. First, under the slogan "Catch up and Overtake the West", he undertook the rapid and complete industrialization of Russia. To achieve his purpose, he inaugurated the first Five-Year Plan (1928), which projected an organized program for the exploitation of Russia's immense resources.

In this tremendous drive for production, . . . Stalin anticipated and exceeded all that was later to be done by any country that valued its independence, he was attempting his greatest task: he was remoulding the character of the whole people and creating a new Russia — not of world dreamers, but of technicians, administrators, and men of business, and this has proved to be the most marked distinction between the old Russia and the new.40

Second, he launched a frontal attack on Russia's most challenging problem, the agricultural problem. Russia's agriculture was in desperate need of reorganization, what determined Stalin's approach was the basic fact that her agriculture was still organized on individualistic lines, a condition inimical to the whole idea of a socialist Russia. To right the situation Stalin declared a ruthless class war in the countryside during the course


of which the individual farmers were crushed and their small holdings collectivized. The result of Stalin's program was to throw the nation into a state of war in which her vast energies were concentrated on an internal revolution as far reaching in many respects as the revolution of 1917.41

When Stalin announced his first Five-Year Plan, he demanded enormous sacrifices of the nation. Since Marxist theory had consistently stressed the pedagogical usefulness and social responsibilities of literature, it was only natural that he should have demanded the assistance of writers and literature as well. What the government required of literature at that particular juncture were politically true documentaries of the new construction in factory and mine, effective agitation for the successful fulfilment of the Five-Year Plan, and a portrayal of the newly emerging man. 42 There was nothing repugnant about these demands to Gorky, he was ideologically and emotionally in accord with the government's program: "The cultural and educational importance of literature, its role as the travelling companion of history, and its critical attitude towards contemporary life are underestimated," said Gorky.43 During this period he pioneered in the organization of collective literary undertakings,

41 It is quite impossible to give a picture of all the forces at work during this momentous epoch in a few sentences. The aid of a good history is indispensable. Recommended are: Pares, A History of Russia, pp. 499-512; and Vernadsky, G., History of Russia, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1951, pp. 330-343.

42 Borland, op. cit., p. 43.

43 Ibid., p. 145. (Gorky, "On Literature").
notably "The History of the Civil War" and a "History of the Factories and Plants." As a part of the latter, appeared a volume describing the construction of the Stalin Canal linking the White Sea with the Baltic, and built with the forced-labour of common law criminals and political prisoners. Gorky's object in producing the books of this series was to provide a training ground for the new generation of worker-intellectuals, the future sociologists, writers, and historians; to give a political education to a new strata of the working class; to develop the revolutionary class-consciousness of the proletariat and mobilize the masses for a further struggle for socialism. He felt that workers' meetings dealing with the history of the factory would help them to assimilate Bolshevik traditions and revolutionary experience of the old workers. Finally, he felt that putting the vast material into literary form, brigades of young writers would learn the basic methods of literary work.\footnote{44} During the same period he also advocated the publication of yearly surveys of literature for the "pedagogical" purpose of keeping the public informed about the latest advances in literature.\footnote{45}

Generally the literary work of 1928-1932 played the political role demanded of it.\footnote{46} By 1932, however, the situation in literature proved unsatisfactory, discontent over the fact that planned endeavor had produced nothing of lasting significance, coupled with an impatience over shoddy literary qualities made reform imperative. The situation was

\footnote{44} Borland, op. cit., p. 69. Gorky, "On Literature".


\footnote{46} Borland, op. cit., p. 170.
made intolerable by the existence of the Russian Association of Proletarian Writers (RAPP), a clique of literary politicians who terrorized Soviet letters. Discontented writers, especially Gorky, felt the need for less regimentation, greater freedom of expression, and higher artistic achievements and worked actively for adjustments. Their case was won and a wholesale reorganization of Soviet literature was set under way April 25, 1932, when RAPP was abolished by a decree of the Central Committee of the Communist Party. In this reorganization Gorky played a leading role and from now on his voice carried particular weight in literary circles.47

Although on the surface the reforms gave the impression of liberalizing the whole field of literature, in practice this proved to be anything but the case. It seems clear that RAPP was abolished largely because it had outlived its usefulness, and that some kind of literary reorganization was necessary to ensure that it followed the Party line and at the same time retained high quality.48 From a practical point of view, the most important part of the 1932 resolution of the Central Committee was the creation of a single Union of Soviet Writers. Theoretically, the Union was a free association of writers who adhered to the political program of the Soviet government and supported the work of socialist construction. Of greater importance, the authors belonging to the Union were required to accept and practice the official literary method known as Socialist Realism. In practice this meant that the government had

48 Ibid., p. 237.
secured the political allegiance of writers and at the same time won their adherence to a definite literary school. Another creation of the reorganization was a Literary Institute to work as an adjunct of the Writer's Association, of this Gorky was a principal sponsor.

In big part as a result of Gorky's efforts, the first Congress of Soviet Writers took place in the summer of 1934. Andrey Zhdanov, a government spokesman, and not Gorky, gave the keynote address. Beginning with an optimistic, even laudatory, survey of Soviet developments, Zhdanov then informed the delegates that the strength and achievements of Soviet literature were to be found in the "...success of socialist construction." He then proceeded to outline the dominant characteristics of Soviet literature:

Our literature is the youngest of all literature of all peoples and countries...at the same time it is the richest in ideas, the most advanced and the most revolutionary literature. Never before has there been a literature which has organized the toilers and oppressed for the struggle to abolish once and for all every kind of exploitation and the yoke of wage slavery. Never before has there been a literature which has based the subject matter of its work on the life of the working class and peasantry and their fight for socialism. Nowhere, in no country in the world, has there been a literature which has defended and upheld the principle of equality for the toilers of all nations, the principle of equality for women. There is not, there cannot be in bourgeois countries a literature which consistently smashes every kind of absurantism, every kind of mysticism, priesthood and superstition.

Only Soviet literature, which is of one flesh and blood with Socialist construction, could become, and has indeed become, such a literature - so rich in ideas, so advanced and revolutionary.

49 Struve, op. cit., p. 238.

The Soviet writer derived his subject matter, and his images "... from the life and experience of the men and women of Dnieprostroy, of Magnitostroy. ... from the creative action that is seething in all corners of our country." The heroes of Soviet literature were "... the active builders of a new life — working men and women, men and women collective farmers, Party members, business managers, engineers, members of the Young Communist League, Pioneers."

The method of Socialist Realism, the scope, the aims and characteristics of which had been hotly debated by critics and literary men in the months preceding the congress was defined by Zhdanov, as follows:

Comrade Stalin has called our writers engineers of human souls. What does this mean? What duties does the title confer upon you?

In the first place, it means knowing life so as to be able to depict it truthfully in works of art, not to depict it in a dead, scholastic way, not simply as "objective reality," but to depict reality in its revolutionary development.

In addition to this, the truthfulness and historical concreteness of the artistic portrayal should be combined with the ideological remoulding and education of the toiling people in the spirit of socialism. This method in belles lettres and literary criticism is what we call the method of socialist realism.

... Soviet literature is tendentious, for in an epoch of class struggle there is not and cannot be a literature which is not class literature, not tendentious, allegedly non-political. ... the aim of our tendency is to liberate the toilers, to free all mankind from the yoke of capitalist slavery.

To be an engineer of human souls means standing with both feet firmly planted on the basis of real life. And this in its turn denotes a rupture with romanticism of the old type, which depicted a non-existent life and non-existent heroes, leading the reader away from the antagonisms and oppression of real life into a world of the impossible, into a world of utopian dreams. Our literature, which stands with both feet firmly planted on a materialist basis, cannot be hostile to romanticism, but it must be a romanticism of a new type, revolutionary romanticism. We
say that socialist realism is the basic method of Soviet belles lettres and literary criticism, and this presupposes that revolutionary romanticism should enter into literary creation as a component part, for the whole life of our Party, the whole life of the working class and its struggle consist in a combination of the most stern and sober practical work, with a supreme spirit of heroic deeds and magnificent future prospects. . . Soviet literature should be able to portray our heroes. . . glimpse our tomorrow.

In finishing up, Zhdanov laid stress on the importance of mastering literary technique and paid especial tribute to Gorky's work in raising the quality of Soviet Literature. As a parting admonishment, he urged the writers to critically assimilate the literary heritage of all epochs:

Comrades, the proletariat, just as in other provinces of material and spiritual culture, is the sole heir of all that is best in the treasury of world literature. . . it is our duty to gather it up carefully to study it and, having critically assimilated it, to advance further.

He then set out the tasks of Soviet literature, the political importance of which is manifest:

Organize the work of your congress and that of the Union of Soviet Writers in the future in such a way that the creative work of our writers may conform to the victories that socialism has won.

Create works of high attainment, of high ideological and artistic content.

Actively help to remould the mentality of people in the spirit of socialism.

Be in the front ranks of those who are fighting for a classless socialist society.

There is little doubt that Gorky was in general accord with Zhdanov's thesis and program.51 Indeed, Gorky played a leading role in

initiating and formulating the theory of Socialist Realism, imparting to it all of the high aims and purpose for which he had aspired all of his life. In his address to the congress, he expounded again the idea which we have come across so often and to which he clung so tenaciously from his earliest days:  

Life, as asserted by socialist realism, is deeds, creativeness, the aim of which is the uninterrupted development of the priceless individual faculties of man, with a view to his victory over the forces of nature, for the sake of his health and longevity, for the supreme joy of living on an earth which, in conformity with the steady growth of his requirements, he wishes to mould throughout into a beautiful dwelling place for mankind, united into a single family.

At the 1934 Congress, it was apparent that the Soviet regime and its aesthetics had won a broad measure of acceptance among the intellectuals. The Party's summation of the aims and characteristics of Soviet Literature was accepted overwhelmingly by a non-communist majority. The same thing was true for the method of Socialist Realism, but Slonim cautions the literary historian about being deceived by the apparent unanimity for Socialist Realism had many shades of meaning for the delegates, and its meaning has changed at least three times since. The theory has proved very flexible, changing its meaning to keep abreast of the social and political kaleidoscope. What is true of Socialist Realism, and of this at least two critics are in agreement, is that it is a device which ties literature and its practitioners to the service and command of the state - a condition incompatible with full artistic

53 Slonim, Modern Russian Literature, p. 407.
What Gorky's reaction to this development would have been had he lived is not altogether clear. It is known that he viewed the reforms of 1932 as a democratization of the whole atmosphere in literature and it is very unlikely that he would have accepted a new wave of regimentation passively. However, he complained loudly and bitterly over Bolshevik perversions of liberty and justice in the past, but always he returned to the Party. Given a writer with Gorky's temperament, the threat of a German invasion and the compulsion which it seems to have exercised on Soviet thinking during the period 1934-1941, it is not at all impossible that he would, once more, have adhered to the "Party Line." It was Gorky who wrote in 1930:

> From within the country, cunning enemies organized a shortage of food. The kulaks terrorise the collective farm peasants by murder, by arson, by all sorts of villainies; everything that has outlived the term set by history is against us, and this gives us the right to consider ourselves as being still in a state of civil-war. The natural conclusion which follows is: "If the enemy does not surrender, he must be destroyed."

No political history of Gorky could be complete without an examination of the influence of his vast moral authority on both official and public opinion. Some indication of how important a political force this was is given in the extravagant use that the Bolshevik's made of Gorky's support in 1919, and, particularly, during the 1930's, where they used him "... much as some ecclesiastical groups use a holy relic."

54 Slonim, op. cit., p. 435; and Struve, Soviet Literature, 1917-1932, p. 571.

55 Gorky, Culture and the People, p. 92.

56 Slonim, op. cit., p. 151.
In 1932 when his fortieth anniversary as a writer was celebrated, whole pages of the Moscow newspapers were devoted to praise of his art and especially to his support of the regime. Many were the honours bestowed upon him and to crown his acclaim the Moscow Art Theatre, his home town Nizhni-Novgorod, and Moscow's most famous street were named after him. We have seen that Lenin recognised in Gorky's moral support an advantage to be exploited and exerted himself to maintain it. Stalin was no less quick to seize an advantage, exploiting it to an abhorrent degree in the late thirties. The *Soviet Encyclopedia* stresses heavily the fact that Stalin and Gorky were "great friends", that Gorky became Stalin's "guide and moral support." Deutscher gives as the basic requirements of the leader in a revolutionary war, "... indomitable will, moral authority, political and strategic talents, tactical flexibility, and administrative capacity," all to an exceptional degree. Stalin unquestionably had each of these requirements with, perhaps, the single exception of moral authority. He must have felt a particular compulsion to strengthen this weakness during the ferment of the thirties. How better could he have achieved this end than by linking his name with that of the immensely popular Gorky. In the purge trials of 1938, it


60 Gorky left no portrait of Stalin as he did of Lenin, but he did leave a comment which seems to fit: "A superbly disciplined will, the mind of a great theoretician, the boldness of a talented administrator, the intuition of a true revolutionary, with a gift for perceiving the
was alleged by the government that Gorky had been murdered by the so-called "Trotskyite and Right-Opposition." The reason given for the crime was the "inflexible political support" which Gorky gave to Stalin.\textsuperscript{61} The anti-Stalinists, on the other hand, have alleged that Stalin engineered the murder of Gorky because "The old man" rebelled against the regime in 1935-1936 and constituted a serious menace because of his prestige.\textsuperscript{62} The central fact emerging from these allegations is that Gorky's capacity to mould public opinion was a force to be reckoned with. It is manifest that Gorky's immense prestige as a writer and revolutionary was a political asset of the first order for any side that could claim his allegiance.

Gorky's extraordinary career ended with his death, June 18, 1936. Venerated in the last years of his life as the Dean of Soviet

\textsuperscript{60} cont. the intricacies of human nature, for nurturing the finest qualities in a man and ruthlessly opposing any one who interferes with the fullest possible development of these qualities - these are the things that made Stalin successor to Lenin." Magil, A.B., "Stalin and Peace: Alternatives to Disaster", Masses and Mainstream, vol. 6 (April, 1953), p. 9.


\textsuperscript{62} Trotsky, L., Stalin, New York, Harper and Bros., 1946, p. 419. It is virtually impossible to see through the charges and counter charges surrounding this trial, especially from this distance. In view of the fact that Gorky was old and ailing, it is more than probable that he died a natural death. Poskrebshev, Stalin's chief secretary, in his reminiscences, intimates that this was actually the case. Cf. Deutscher, Isaac, Stalin: A Political Biography, London, Oxford University Press, 1949, p. 373, n. 1.
Letters, he received all the honours of a state funeral. As a final tribute, his ashes, borne by Stalin and the leaders of the state, were buried in the Kremlin wall, an honour reserved for the most illustrious heroes of the revolution.
CHAPTER VIII

CONCLUSIONS

The hypothesis on which this thesis began was the very general one, that a study of Gorky's political history would contribute to an understanding of Soviet political and cultural history. The materials adduced in the course of the exposition are sufficient to prove the validity of this hypothesis. It seems clear that the same materials, also, warrant a reiteration of the more specific hypotheses: (1) that Gorky's political activities were of considerable importance; and further, that his exceptional prestige was consistently exploited by the Communist Party; (2) that an examination of Gorky's political history will reveal a number of the key problems facing the Russian revolutionaries and hence contribute to an understanding of the character of Russian Communism; (3) that a study of his political associations will provide valuable insights into the respective characters of Lenin and Stalin, the key figures of Soviet political history; and (4) that a knowledge of his political history is of crucial importance to an appreciation of his literary work.
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