The Politics of Soviet Literature Since Brezhnev

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THE POLITICS OF SOVIET LITERATURE SINCE BREZHNEV

Throughout the history of the Soviet Union, literature and the arts have played a significant role in the formation of Soviet citizens’ perceptions of their nation, their heritage, their leaders, and the world outside Soviet borders. Both Soviet and pre-revolutionary Russian political leaders have felt an overwhelming need to control dissent against their regimes. Because literature and freedom of speech have been vigilantly monitored, and often directly controlled, the written word in Russia has a significance and an immediacy which writing in the West has never acquired.

Since the early 1930s, when the Communist Party replaced the previously existing and relatively independent writers’ organizations VSP (All-Russian Union of Writers), RAPP (Russian Association of Proletarian Writers) and Left Front with its own Union of Soviet Writers, official writing and publication of Soviet literature have been in the secure grip of the Party.

Under Stalin, many free-thinking writers such as Pilniak, Babel, and Olesha, were conveniently disposed of in the gulag prison camps. Creativity in literature was brought to a virtual standstill in the second half of the 1930s, and until Stalin’s death in 1953, literary henchmen imposed upon all writers the confining standards of socialist realism. The Soviet reader was plied with saccharine stories of selfless cement workers and of hardy kolkhozniki (collective farmers) who loved their combines and tractors more than their spouses.

Khrushchev relaxed somewhat the Stalinist requirements governing the creative arts, and this "thaw" in literary policy allowed writers such as Solzhenitsyn and Tendryakov to be more critical of both the Soviet past and present. However, with the ascendance of Brezhnev and Kosygin in 1964, potentially negative criticism of the state, as well as literary innovation,
was forbidden. Many who dared challenge official regime ideology, as did authors Andrei Sinyavsky (Tertz) and Yuli Daniel (Arzhak) in the mid-1960s, were sentenced to long terms in prison camps, followed by internal exile. Despite such actions, the Brezhnev regime was not entirely able to control the written word; the dissident movement which gained momentum in the late 1960s and throughout the 1970s popularized and established the samizdat underground publishing network.

After Brezhnev's death, Andropov and Chernenko maintained fundamental constraints on literature and the arts. However, when Mikhail Gorbachev assumed the position of General Secretary of the Communist Party, he began to initiate reforms supporting openness and candor in literature and the arts. Gorbachev calls his new policy glasnost (usually translated as "openness, or "publicity") and intends to apply it not only to the creative arts, but to all sectors of the community and the polity of the Soviet Union. One Western observer believes that the recent relaxation of constraints on literature is due largely to the 1982 death of Mikhail Suslov, the Party's chief ideologue. Nicknamed "the grand inquisitor," Suslov was known for severe attempts to smother Soviet cultural and intellectual life. Despite Gorbachev's initiatives, many Soviet bureaucrats wish to return to the times of greater control when, because of the lack of criticism, their positions (or, for many, sinecures) were more secure, and their lack of innovation and efficiency was less noticeable. This new openness advocated by Gorbachev with regard to literature and writers is making progress, yet the traditions of past regimes still obstructs its development.

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The Writers' Union as an Interest Group

The Party wields control over literature and writers through the Union of Soviet Writers. (There are five other so-called "creative unions" for architects, composers, cinematographers, artists and journalists.) To publish broadly, one must be a member of the Writers' Union; thus, writers are dependent upon the Union for their income. 2 Membership in the Union is highly prestigious; a union card is the key to sundry perquisites such as better living quarters, access to special stores and preferential treatment by all sectors of society. As one can imagine, only the brave or the foolhardy dare risk their privileges by making waves with the Union.

The Writers' Union is headed by a committee of Party-appointed bureaucrats, who control the Union, and, consequently, what is and what is not published. Thus, through the Union, the Party can use literature to help further its goals. Nevertheless, the Writers' Union is not totally politicized; as a parapolitical organization the Writers' Union is a strong and influential interest group. With Gorbachev's new campaign of glasnost members of the Writers' Union have recently become quite bold in their pronouncements of which governmental actions are right and wrong. For example, a number of writers used the most recent Writers' Union Congress, held in July 1986, to voice their dismay at a project being planned by the Ministry of Land Reclamation and Water Resources. This ministry had proposed to divert the flow of a number of northern Siberian rivers into the Volga River, and from there some of the water was to be channeled to

2A handful of Soviet authors receive income from the sales of their books outside of the Soviet Union.
dry areas of Soviet Central Asia. At the Writers' Congress, Valentin Rasputin, a well-known Russian writer from Siberia, exclaimed:

Look how much we have talked about the problem of diverting the rivers, how much we have written about it, how our hearts have been wrenched, how many poems, novels and novellas we haven't written because of devoting our time and efforts to the defense of our native land—and all for naught: They listen to us and then do as they please!  

It is impossible to know precisely to what degree the opinions which the writers voiced at the Congress affected the plans to divert the water. Nevertheless, in August the Communist Party Central Committee and the Council of Ministers announced that the project was deferred indefinitely. As its reasons for doing so the Central Committee cited "the need, which has been expressed by broad sections of the public, for further study of the ecological aspects [of the problem.]"  

Here, it seems, is an example where the writers, as an interest group, influenced the regime to alter its policy.  

At this same Congress, other writers voiced their dismay at the destruction of architectural monuments (churches, most likely) in rural areas, and at the state’s construction of tasteless edifices to past glories. The popular writer Yuri Bondarev lamented:

3*Literaturnaya Gazeta*, 2 July 1986, p. 9. (Translated in *The Current Digest of the Soviet Press* [hereafter referred to as CDSP], 38[31]:8.)

4*Pravda*, 20 August 1986, p. 1. (CDSP, 38[33]:8.)
Can one deliver satisfactory words of praise...when hundreds of priceless historical monuments have been destroyed and architecture has come to be dominated by...the right angles of a styleless style that have disfigured our cities with standardized monstrosities, dissipated their warmth and spirit and history and, thereby, caused tremendous damage to the irreplaceable feeling of patriotism?  

The ultimate efficacy of these complaints remains to be seen; but the mere fact that they are being so earnestly expressed indicates that the writers expect them to have some effect upon the decision-making bodies of the Party and the government.

State Control of Literature

With control over what is published, the Party can use literature to articulate Party policy and decisions to ordinary citizens. Maurice Friedberg of the University of Illinois writes that "imaginative writing [literature] can suggest, directly or in an oblique manner, implications for day-to-day informal situations or current priorities and goals." It is typical for an author desiring publication to lace his work with subtle, and oftentimes blatant, pro-Soviet or pro-Party exhortations. Whether consciously or unconsciously included, these didactic elements seem designed to influence readers to subscribe to the goals of the Communist Party and the Soviet government. Authors often

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5 *Literaturnaya Gazeta*, 2 July 1986, p. 4. (CDSP, 38 [33]: 8.)

describe the ideal "Soviet man," a hard worker who unflaggingly fights bureaucratism and dangerous foreign ideologies. However, some authors, largely supported by their popularity and status, can write more freely than others. The degree to which an author may be critical of perceived problems or weaknesses in either Party or government policies depends on the current political atmosphere. Friedberg explains:

A Soviet author . . . attempts to strike a balance between the state's desires and those of the public. Complete disregard for either is impossible. There are times of 'liberalism,' when the state is not overly severe in enforcing its desires. There are also periods of 'freeze,' when its insistence on them is so strict that it ignores, in effect, the public's desires.7

Under Andropov, Party control over literature and the arts was insistent, despite occasional signs of liberalization: the ultimate goal of literature was to support the Party program. In a Central Committee plenary session in June 1983, Andropov asserted that Soviet writers were not allowed to deviate from "historical truth" when writing about Stalin's collectivization of agriculture. Religion and belief were also to be approached circumspectly; otherwise, "'God-seeking' motifs and idealization of the patriarchal order creep into [works of literature]."8 Andropov made it clear that governmental bodies dealing with literature were to dictate to the writers, and not the writers to the government: "The USSR Ministry of Culture, the USSR State Cinematography Committee and the USSR State

7 Ibid., p. 62.

8 Pravda, 15 June 1983. (CDSP, 35[24]:6-7.)
Committee for Publishing, Printing and the Book Trade must improve their guidance of the development of the spheres of society's spiritual life that are under their purview."

While Andropov was in power these same directives for literature were echoed by prominent literary figures. In the fall of 1983, Soviet literary critic Yuri Lukin wrote in Literaturnaya Gazeta, the literary weekly of the USSR Writer's Union, that "it is [important] to use all the ways and means of literature and art in molding clear-cut class positions and developing the political standards and world view of the Soviet people, above all of our young people." Dismayed at statements of religious faith expressed by a few young komsomoltsy, members of the state-sponsored Young Communist League, Lukin went on to say "some sort of supernatural force does exist," and "I believe for myself." Yet, Lukin attacked writers and poets who "are playing up to these sentiments and into the hands of quasi-scientific myths and a 'religious complex'." 10

Although the state retains firm control of the present literary scene, it can demonstrate its willingness to be flexible in the areas of literature and the arts by turning to the past—to past authors and works. For example, in June 1983, under Andropov there was published a new collection of short stories and essays by an author who had been anathematized by regimes of the 1950s and 1960s—Boris Pasternak. It is generally assumed that such shifts in Party policy and position require approval from the highest level. However, in very few instances are these swings in policy

9Ibid.

10Literaturnaya Gazeta, 2 November 1983, p. 2. (CDSP, 35 [52]:18.)
categorical. Here, the reviewer of the new book expresses reservations concerning the "development from the brilliant discoveries of Pasternak's youth [when he was more acceptable to the Soviet regime] to the 'unprecedented simplicity' of his mature years [an implied criticism of Doctor Zhivago]." Other writers of the past who refused to conform to the confines of socialist realism--many of whom died in Stalin's prison camps--have recently been rehabilitated. Some of the works of these writers have been made available, but only in small numbers, and generally only to scholars and tourists. During the summer of 1985 the hard-currency Beryozka shops in Moscow were well stocked with the collection of Pasternak's works, as well as a new collection of Boris Pilniak's short stories, novellas and travel notes. These same books could not be found in the ordinary bookstores open to Soviet citizens.

Nevertheless, the state clearly manipulates literature to communicate its policies and desires to the public; many critics and Writers' Union bureaucrats incessantly urge authors to portray more "positive heroes," worthy of emulation. During Chernenko's short time as the Kremlin's leader, this blatant use of literature as a political tool continued. In September 1984 Chernenko told a group of Soviet writers that at the center of Soviet literature is "the working man . . . an inquisitive, searching, active and vigorous builder of

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11 Novyi Mir, 6(June 1983):260-264. (CDSP, 35[40]:22.)

12 Pilniak died in one of Stalin's camps some time in the early 1940s. Until the past few years he was ignored by official literary historians and critics.
socialism." That literature was intended to be a source of didactic role models was never a secret kept within the Writers' Union. Chernenko himself stated:

The most precise criterion of the success of literature and art as a whole is the real degree of influence that they exert on the molding of the people's ideological and moral makeup. . . . Problems of artistic creativity do not exist outside of politics. For us, this is an obvious truth."  

Soviet literature has always been used as a clarion call for the Soviet citizen to work harder and to bravely build socialism at all costs; so it was in the early 1980s as well. In early 1984, a novel by the young writer Andrei Molchanov, New Year in October, was criticized in Pravda for its portrayal of a research institute filled with indolent, power-hungry scientists whose only concern is to keep research funds for themselves. The reviewer complains that Molchanov, a radiophysicist by training, should have known how to write accurately about life at a research facility, and concludes: "The novel lacks any sort of struggle of ideas over the kinds of problems that a major research institute should be dealing with." The implications of such criticism are made clear to those who may have read this book: no one should conduct their work as do the scientists in this novel. Instead, all should conscientiously work as they know they should.  

Under Chernenko, the regime apparently encouraged the Soviet citizen to see life as a clear-cut battle

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13 Pravda, 26 September 1984, p. 1. (CDSP, 36[39]:9.)

14 Ibid.

15 Pravda, 18 February 1984, p. 3. (CDSP, 36[7]:23.)
between right and wrong; if one simply viewed life in the ideological terms set by the Party and persevered to the end all would be well. One critic praised a work which emulated "the logic of our life, a logic which says that the good will inevitably triumph in the struggle against evil, no matter how hard the fight may be." In Pravda, during March 1984, one of the heads of the prominent Gorky Literary Institute lambasted a number of literary critics whose work was "still a long way from being purposeful, intensive work aimed at successfully accomplishing the tasks set in recent Party documents." This critic referred to a resolution from the June 1983 plenary session of the Communist Party Central Committee which attacked those critics who are "unable to handle complex materials and [who] display confusion in their world view and an inability to view social phenomena in historical perspective and from clear-cut class positions."  

Much as in Stalin's day, when history books were edited after the fall of each major political figure, the Soviet state of the 1980s also looks at history through modern socialist glasses. In the winter of 1983, a well-known Soviet critic, Feliks Kuznetsov, in the prestigious literary monthly Novyi Mir, attacked a then recently published historical novel on the life of the nineteenth century Russian writer, Nikolai Gogol. Kuznetsov berated this novel's "avoidance of concrete historicism and social analysis in dealing with the literary phenomena . . . of the past." Western literary cri-

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16 Literaturnaya Gazeta, 21 March 1984, p. 4. (CDSP, 36(16):18.)

17 Pravda, 19 March 1984, p. 3. (CDSP, 36(11):9.)

tists believe that Gogol was, essentially, a non-political writer who strove to reestablish faith in Russian messianism. However, in his review of the novel, Kuznetsov accused the author of showing "nothing whatsoever of the Gogol whose earlier works so effectively exposed the evils of autocracy and serfdom and originated the literary method of critical realism." Kuznetsov also blamed the author for failing to accurately portray one of Gogol's contemporaries, the literary critic and political activist, Vissarion Belinsky. A westernizer, Belinsky is described by the novel's author as one who has lost faith in Russia. Kuznetsov, however, asserted that "Belinsky's attitude of rejection [of Russia] was aimed only at the specific, unjust social institutions of his time and reflected his true love for Russia and its people. . . ." By assessing history on the basis of the socialist institutions of the present, the Party assures its citizens that the goals and approaches to life espoused by the Party have answered all problems of the past, and will solve all problems of the present and of the future.

Though the state maintained strict control over literature, the post-Brezhnev period was marked by some small degree of openness and ideological freedom to examine the purposes of literature and the arts. In early 1984, during Chernenko's short interregnum, a Soviet critic published in Literaturnaya Gazeta an article in support of "artistic truth" over other imperatives. This writer argued against the simple black-and-white ideology which he often detected in recent literature. He wrote:

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19Ibid.
We cannot get away from the complexity of life and the complexity of spiritual problems. Some people are inclined to mock the expression "look the truth in the eye," but the ability to do so can come in handy. This whole discussion raises anew important and complex theoretical questions concerning the nature of artistic truth and its relation to the truth of real life. 20

This is an inherent criticism of the Party's position as ultimate arbitrator and decision maker on how reality (or what is perceived as reality by the author) should be reflected in art and literature. Near the end of 1984 another critic published an article in Pravda in defense of ambiguity in literature. He defended works with ambiguous, inconclusive endings as "serious literature" which "demands a concentration of thought and feelings." 21

After Chernenko's death in March 1985, the new General Secretary, Mikhail Gorbachev, immediately called for glasnost in all areas of government and Party communication. In his first speech as the new head of state, Gorbachev explained: "The better people are informed, the more consciously they will act, the more actively they will support the party, its plans, and its programmatic goals." 22 This introduction of mild reform in the fields of communication still in no way eclipsed the Party's supremacy over all aspects of society, yet it contributed to the post-Brezhnevian

20 Literaturnaya Gazeta, 7 March 1984, p. 3. (CDSP, 36[21]: 14.)

21 Pravda, 12 December 1984, p. 3. (CDSP, 36[50]:8.)

loosening of ideological control over all areas of communication—a phenomenon which then began to leak into literature and the arts. The works of sovietologist Timothy Colton concerning current official Party policy can be applied equally well to literature.

As concerns policy advocacy, it is not so much that heterodox ideas are being vented for the first time, for qualified experts and consultants already had latitude under Brezhnev, as that the ideas can be put more argumentatively and with less recourse to aesopian language, and appear in the central press and not only in specialized journals.23

Soon writers began to reflect this new openness in their writings. Later in March 1985, in the newspaper Izvestiya, writer V. Kargalov, a Doctor of History, urged writers not to evaluate the past using modern constructs: "Historical merit is judged not in terms of what historical figures failed to give by present-day standards but by what they did give that was new in comparison with their predecessors."24 In July 1985, Literaturnaya Gazeta published an article which praised the new emphasis on openness and topicality in communication and the arts. Gorbachev’s glasnost clearly inspired these words:

It is natural that today literature, the arts, and the periodical press are required to show special sensitivity to the commands of the times...and keen powers of observation with respect both to what has outlived its time and to everything

23 Ibid.

24 Izvestia, 19 March 1984, p. 3, author's emphasis. (CDSP, 37[11]:22.)
that is new and progressive, and in the spirit of the processes under way in society.25

Yet it soon was clear that not all literary organizations and bureaucrats were ready to take Gorbachev's cue and gradually slacken literature's ideological reins. As shall be seen, this sort of reluctance to change has repeatedly made itself felt since Gorbachev's rise to power. Many seem eager and willing to rely upon these words of a Party literary bureaucrat, spoken upon the day Gorbachev became the new General Secretary: "The strategic line worked out at the 26th Congress and at subsequent plenary sessions of the Central Committee, with the active participation of Yuri Vladimirovich Andropov and Konstantin Ustinovich Chernenko, remains unchanged."26 Shortly after Gorbachev's rise to power the editorial board of Literaturnaya Gazeta reaffirmed the Party's firm control of literature:

The social value of the artist's labor is determined above all by the active ideological-political and philosophical position that he takes and affirms. The Party will always direct the development of literature so that it serves the interests of the people.27

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25 Literaturnaya Gazeta, 14 March 1985, p. 5. (CDSP, 37[12]:14.)

26 Ibid., emphasis added.

27 Literaturnaya Gazeta, 17 July 1985, p. 2. (CDSP, 37[12]: 24.)
Towards the end of 1985, the regime allowed a few liberties in the arts, indicating that a thaw in literary policy was in store. In December 1985, at the Congress for writers from the Russian Republic, the popular poet Yevgeny Yevtushenko made a strident plea for a relaxation of censorship. Apparently some did not welcome the possibility of such liberal steps by the state, because the published version of Yevtushenko’s speech which appeared in Literaturnaya Gazeta was heavily censored.28 At the same time, a number of daring new plays which explored negative aspects of Soviet society and history (one, Dictatorship of Conscience, was clearly anti-Stalinist) were presented in Moscow. Evidence of the thaw increased as government boards were established to examine the works of two artists previously ignored by the state. One, Osip Mandelshtam, a great poet of the 1930s, was lost in the whirlwind of Stalin’s camps; the other was Vladimir Vysotsky, the rough balladeer-poet whose honest and critical songs were heard in the 1970s in all parts of the Soviet Union through homemade magnetizdat recordings. Later in the year the Soviet journal Sobesednik discussed the popular pilgrimage to Vysotsky’s grave—a phenomenon which has existed since the singer’s death in 1980. The positive tone of the published comments indicated a shift in the official position towards an artist who achieved greatness without Party approval.29


29 Sobesednik, 31(July 1986):2. (CDSP, 38[32]:19-20.)
Writers’ Congresses as a Political Forum

Writers’ congresses such as the one mentioned earlier perhaps provide the best opportunities to examine the politics of Soviet literature. Representatives of the writers’ unions of the various republics, as well as Party and government bodies, speak at these formal meetings. At these congresses, the policies of the Party, the government, and the USSR Writers’ Union are both criticized and supported. Though the speeches range in tone from reactionary to liberal, rarely, if ever, does anyone openly take issue with established Party policy. The gray areas of policy, however, are widely discussed. For example, the issue of the diversion of the Siberian rivers mentioned earlier was one of the main topics of discussion at the December 1985 Congress of Russian writers. Not only critical, reformist voices were raised during the Congress, but conservative voices as well. One writer castigated those who desired to see the plans of the Ministry of Land Reclamation and Water Resources changed, calling such wishes out of harmony with "the language of the April and October [1985] plenary sessions of the CPSU [Communist Party of the Soviet Union] Central Committee."\(^{30}\)

At the 27th Party Congress held in late February of 1986, Gorbachev called for Soviet writers to discover "the truth of life, which had always been the essence of genuine art."\(^{31}\) He berated "not a few officials" who had "persecuted" literary critics. Colton writes that after the congress, Gorbachev passed mea-

\(^{30}\) Literaturnaya Gazeta, 18 December 1985, p. 10. (CDSP, 38[1]:10.)

\(^{31}\) Pravda, 26 February 1986. (CDSP, 38[8]:37.)
sures to insure that the critics would not be subject to pressure or punishment from their supervisors. However, as Colton notes, at the Party Congress Gorbachev diminished the impact of his own campaign of openness by not even mentioning the men whose policies he was revising—Khrushchev and Brezhnev.32

Following the Party Congress, Yegor Ligachev, the Politburo member in charge of ideology, gave guarded support for openness in literature in a meeting of actors, theatre directors, and Party secretaries. Ligachev asserted:

The Party calls on literature and art to reflect the truth and nothing but the truth . . . (which) is found in the people's achievements and the contradictions in society's development, in the heroism and daily routine of workdays, in victories and defeats . . . "33

On June 19, 1986, Gorbachev personally met with a number of prominent writers and asked them to join him in fulfilling his somewhat vague plans for reforms in Soviet society. He asked them to cooperate with his campaign of "profound and all-encompassing restructuring" of all spheres of Soviet life.34 Gorbachev emphasized his policy of "self-criticism, and of extensive openness [glasnost]." He called upon them to im-

32Colton, p. 162.

33Pravda, 20 April 1986, p. 2. (CDSP, 38[16]:23.)

34In his campaign to push both Soviet society and the Soviet economy forward, Gorbachev has popularized the word "restructuring" (Perestroika), a rather vague term which implies a more committed attitude towards work, and more efficient use of both technology and resources.
plement in their works a "psychological and moral re­
structuring" and to avoid stereotypes. Gorbachev con­
cluded his remarks with an attack on the artists' 
unions, and accused them of harboring "inertia, self­
satisfaction . . . [and] bureaucratism."

One participant told the Western press that the General Secretary criticized those not willing to change and to accept reform. Gorbachev reportedly said, "Mediocrity does not always welcome freedom. . . . It's easier for medi­
ocre people to live within the framework of control."

Gorbachev's reforms in literature and the arts have been warmly welcomed by most Soviet writers, if not by some bureaucrats. In May 1986, the well-re­
spected Belorussian writer, Vasil Bykov, said in an inter­
view published in Literaturnaya Gazeta, that the "incipient changes in the life of society" (initiated by Gorbachev) are what "the people waited for and are continuing to wait for." In the interview, Bykov himself seemed glad to discuss the "arbitrariness" and "vi­
olence" of the years of Stalin's collectivization which Bykov witnessed as a child. In particular, he said he was pleased that writers "are [now] finally beginning to take on the bureaucrats in earnest." Bykov ex­
pressed his dissatisfaction with Party hacks whose opinions shift depending upon who is in power:

I find it disturbing now that people who for years preached 
and inculcated their stagnant views, including in literature, 
after the April [1985] plenary session of the CPSU Central 
Committee and after the Party Congress [February 1986] im­
mediately began making statements about the need for re­

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structuring, pretending that that's all they were ever concerned about, that they thirsted for.37

In 1986, many writers expressed their pleasure that bureaucratic rigidity and inertia were being eliminated. A showdown of sorts between the conservative elements of the literary establishment (usually bureaucrats) and those pushing for reform took place in late July 1986 at the eighth USSR Writers’ Congress. The world-famous poets Andrei Vosnesensky and Yevgeny Yevtushenko were the most vocal liberals. Vosnesensky called for a restructuring of the publication process so that respected writers could help find publishers for exceptional works by lesser-known writers which otherwise might not be published. He also criticized the construction of an expensive, ungainly victory monument in Moscow.38 Yevtushenko attempted to further the rehabilitation of Boris Pasternak, proposing that the author’s home be converted into a museum, and he also called for the "development of democracy, openness and social justice."39 The Party’s representatives to the Congress sat calmly through each session and did not interrupt the speakers. This in itself was a departure from past Writers’ Union Congresses, where Party leaders would cut off an overly critical speaker to voice their rebuttal.


38*Literaturnaya Gazeta*, 2 July 1986, p. 6. (CDSP, 38[28]: 1.)

39Ibid., p. 7. (CDSP, 3, 15.)
Furthermore, the writer Dmitry Likhachev called for more extensive publication of the writings of the Orthodox Old Believer priest Avvakum, as well as the works of Andrei Bely (an early Soviet writer who wrote with an imaginative, non-conformist style very different from socialist realism), Anna Akhmatova (whose son and husband were sent to Stalin's camps), the poet Nikolai Gumilev (who was killed in the early 1920s by Lenin's Chekists, the predecessors of today's KGB) and Fyodor Sologub. Likhachev also expressed dismay that the complete works of Pasternak had not yet been published in the USSR. Likhachev justified his recommendations with an emotional appeal to remember the past: "Memory needs a refuge; it cannot be homeless. If we do not genuinely honor the memory of our spiritual forebears, we ourselves will be forgotten."40 Until recently, such an appeal to the preservation of literature, with no mention of the Party or of Soviet history, would have been impossible until recently.

The Estonian writer Vladimir Beekman at the same Congress accused Moscow literary bureaucrats of wielding too much control over affairs in the Soviet republics. This writer was exceptionally bold in his criticism, which extends outside the sphere of literature: "To think that on any and every question things are always seen better from Moscow seems to me to be a form of scarcely warranted presumption."41

Amid these liberal opinions and appeals, the voices of a few conservatives who wished to maintain

40 Literaturnaya Gazeta, 14 May 1986, pp. 7-8. (CDSP, 38 [32]:9.)

41 Literaturnaya Gazeta, 2 July 1986, p. 1. (CDSP, 38[26]:2.)
strict Party control over literature were still heard. The writer Vitaly Ozerov affirmed his faith in Party ideology as the guide for literature: "The realist artist should identify and depict the social forces and ideological and moral principles that collide in our society and convey the people’s faith in the triumph of the Party’s policy." The main conservative at the congress was Georgy Markov, the First Secretary of the Board of the Writers’ Union, and the Party’s top literary bureaucrat. Markov affirmed that "the Party guides the literary-artistic process with the help of the creative unions," but then apologetically enumerated problems in the Writers’ Union bureaucracy—problems for which he as the Union’s First Secretary was most likely to blame:

It must be said that during the report period the work of the Secretariat of the Board of the USSR Writer’s Union was also characterized by important shortcomings. We did not pay sufficient attention to improving the organization of our work. . . . We have limited ourselves to hearing an official report on the question and adopting the latest in a series . . . of documents.43

Markov went on to describe how Soviet literature should extol the Soviet hero—the "collectivist man, the man who fights for communism."44 At the end of the Writers’ Union Congress, the conservative Markov, who had headed the Writers’ Union since 1956, was replaced

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42 Ibid., p. 14. (CDSP, 38[37]:13.)


44 Ibid. (CDSP, 5.)
by a man with a more liberal orientation, Vladimir Karpov, and a number of prominent writers (instead of Party bureaucrats) were included in the Union’s leadership.45

At this most recent Congress of the Writers’ Union, more liberal opinions were expressed and more calls made for reform--not only in the sphere of literature, but in many sectors of Soviet society--than in any other official meeting since Khrushchev. Of course, it remains to be seen to what degree Gorbachev will continue to loosen the bureaucratic and ideological restraints upon literature and the arts, but since last year’s Writers’ Congress positive signs have been observed. In August 1986 Izvestiya announced the opening of a museum to the poet Marina Tsvetaeva, who stubbornly opposed Stalin’s regime until her suicide in 1941.46 Also in 1986, Sergei Zalygin, who is not a member of the Communist Party, was made editor of Novyi Mir. (In the past, most, if not all, editors were high-ranking Party members.) Zalygin was the first Soviet writer to treat Stalin’s brutal collectivization of peasants in the early 1930s, and 1985 marked the publication of his novel, Posle buri (After the Storm), which treats the now controversial New Economic Policy (NEP) of the 1920s--a period when private enterprise was allowed to coexist within an otherwise centralized economy. In 1986, Grigory Baklanov, the first Soviet writer to honestly and realistically portray the first months of World War II, which were so disastrous for the unprepared Soviet Union, was appointed editor of the literary journal Znamya.

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45Colton, p. 164.

46Izvestia, 27 August 1986, p. 3. (CDSP, 38[34]:20.) Her husband, also a poet, died in one of Stalin’s prison camps.
As a result of the attention given to Pasternak at the 1986 Writers' Union Congress, at the end of the year a commission was established to commemorate the officially maligned author. Andrei Vosnesensky, who heads the commission, believes that Pasternak's masterpiece, *Doctor Zhivago*, will in 1987 finally be published in the Soviet Union.\(^{47}\) In addition, the plays of Mikhail Shatrov, who calls for a more realistic view of history, have recently received approval from high Party officials. Two of the characters in his newest play, which is to open this year, are Leon Trotsky and Nikolai Bukharin, Lenin's co-revolutionaries who were killed by Stalin and subsequently erased from official Soviet history.\(^{48}\)

It is highly likely that Gorbachev himself approved the publication of a number of controversial literary works which appeared in Soviet literary journals in 1986. In the spring the literary journal *Druzhba Narodov* published Victor Astafeyev's novel, *The Sad Detective (Pechal'nyi detekiv)*, which takes an uncompromising look at corruption and inefficiency in high places. Also in 1986 *Novyi Mir* published Chingiz Aitmatov's novel, *The Executioner's Block (Plakha)*, which tells the story of a young man in a Christian seminary, and also discusses the sensitive topic of drug abuse. *The Executioner's Block* is the first officially approved Soviet novel since Bulgakov's *The Master and Margarita* to examine Christianity and the image of Christ in a positive light. Aitmatov is one of the most popular of Soviet writers and can even include Gor-

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\(^{48}\) Ibid., p. 32.
bachev among his readers. In the fall of 1986 Druzhba Narvodov announced that the "highest levels of the Kremlin" had approved the publication of a new novel by Anatoly Rybakov, The Children of the Arbat, which is to be a detailed portrayal of Stalin. In the author’s own words, the novel "creates a full portrait of the man, multifaceted as he was, including his merits as a politician, his ambitions. Never was such a Stalin shown in literature." Many believe that this work, scheduled to be published this year, will be highly critical of Stalin, demonstrating Gorbachev’s determination to loosen up the controls and taboos of Soviet literature.

The bureaucratism and tolerance of inefficiency which marked the Brezhnev regime will likely continue to restrain Gorbachev’s reforms in literature and the arts. Gorbachev realizes that he must proceed cautiously so as not to jeopardize his own power base by overly annoying the layers of Party and government bureaucracies which support the state’s power structure. Nevertheless, it appears that the General Secretary is determined to expand not only the Soviet citizen’s intellectual horizons, but also his awareness of the possibilities for a happier, more productive life. Gorbachev hopes to accomplish this by encouraging writers, and all Soviet citizens, to examine honestly and openly the Soviet Union’s past as well as its present condition.

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49 Ibid.