

## Culture Foundation wars against West

by Rachel Douglas and Luba George

Commissioned by Politburo resolution in March 1986, announced in August and inaugurated in November, the Soviet Culture Foundation has plunged into its assignments: to war against Western culture inside the Soviet Union and to spread Soviet, especially Russian, culture abroad. The titular head of the organization is Academician Dmitri S. Likhachov, 80, long-time propagandist of the superior virtues of Ancient Rus. On its board sits Raisa Gorbachova, wife of the communist party chief, the reputed behind-the-scenes mover of the cultural "thaw" and the Culture Foundation project.

The organization is supposed "to unite the efforts of our major cultural centers in various areas," so as "to elevate . . . the responsibility of every Soviet citizen for the preservation of the riches of culture," according to a Sept. 5 *Izvestia* interview with board member Boris Ugarov, president of the Soviet Academy of Arts. But Ugarov also showed, that the old Russia is the kernel of the new culture policy.

The Culture Foundation's fund-raising, Ugarov revealed, is a project of the elite—not only the higher-ups of the *nomenklatura*, like Gorbachova, but the old Russian families! "It's only human," said *Izvestia*, "to understand, with what great effort and tears families part with a favorite painting or relic, which they have kept for many generations." Ugarov replied: "I have had occasion to marvel at masterpieces, worth an entire fortune, and not a small one, and their owners say, 'Let everybody see this beauty. . . .' Precisely such people are the bulwark of our foundation."

From the West, the old Trust operative, Odessa-born Armand Hammer, became the first big contributor to the CF, bestowing on it a Russian painting and \$100,000 cash.

At the CF's inaugural conference, Politburo member Pyotr Demichev declared that Soviet "cultural and spiritual richness" must set "new cultural standards" for the world. In *Sovetskaya Kultura* of Sept. 20, Likhachov called the CF a "counter-measure to American demagogy."

Likhachov, who today gets a big press in the U.S.S.R. as the popularizer of ancient Russian poetry, architecture,

and mores, himself goes back to the early stages of The Trust's Russian project. "My parents' love for the Mariinsky Ballet played an important part in my life," Likhachov told *Ogonyok* last year; this was the same Petersburg institution, where the Eurasian Karsavin's father was a ballet-master. Although Likhachov says he hardly noticed the revolutions of 1917, he was soon in the thick of their cultural aftermath; a 1981 *samizdat* collection describes Likhachov's participation in a Leningrad study circle, the "Cosmic Academy of Sciences," which met regularly to read scholarly papers on Russia's religious and historical past. In 1928, with others of this circle, Dmitri Likhachov was arrested on charges of "nostalgia for the pre-revolutionary past" (which was temporarily out-of-favor, under Stalin).

### What *glasnost* revealed

Leaders of the CF are tending to the Dostoevskian revival in every field. A first turning point, reached before the inauguration of the CF itself, was the 8th Congress of the U.S.S.R. Writers Union, held in June 1986. The free-for-all atmosphere was symbolized during the keynote: Long-time first secretary of the Writers Union, G.M. Markov, fainted while reading his speech and could not finish. Later speakers—all luminaries in Raisa's orbit—tore his report to shreds. Markov resigned.

"Spiritual progress," said the poet Yevgeni Yevtushenko, who came to prominence during the "thaw" of the 1950s, means "to attack the new Soviet bureaucracy and communist arrogance. . . . For us, mankind begins with the Motherland." His contemporary, Andrei Voznesensky: "Spiritual aridity besets culture. People here have spoken passionately about the crime of diverting the northern rivers and the devastation of nature. . . . But now culture has become so twisted, that it is running dry like the rivers!"

Praise for the "rural prose" school of writers, such as Valentin Rasputin, Sergei Zalygin, and Chinghiz Aitmatov, dominated the 8th Congress. The "rural prose" authors, especially Zalygin, and also Likhachov are often referred to by younger Soviet writers as the fathers of *novoye myshleniye* (new thinking) in Soviet literature. The "rural" school members are something of a modern version of the *raskolniki* (Old Believers)—so dear to Dostoevsky—with their glorification of the Russian countryside as a repository of raw spiritual values.

Back in January 1986, Rasputin explained himself: "For us there is no destiny, no word, except Russia. . . . The 'rural' prose of the sixties and seventies repaid an essential debt to our parents' Russia. . . . through living, grateful memory, and showed how the national soul was strengthened and what it has carried from the depths of history. . . ." In the Spanish paper *El País*, after the 8th Congress, Rasputin went on: "I believe that it is better to return to the caves than to build nuclear power plants in such a way that our earth continues to be destroyed."

Zalygin was named to an eight-man secretariat of the Writers Union and, shortly after the congress, also took over the monthly thick journal, *Novy Mir* (*New World*), which under Andrei Tvardovsky's editorship had been at the forefront Khrushchov's thaw. The writer whom Aleksandr Solzhenitzyn placed second on his list of "true Russian writers," Zalygin has been credited by Likhachov with having single-handedly "saved the Ob" (River) with his campaign to stop the huge river-diversion project of the last Brezhnev years. He also started lobbying for resurrection of the New Economic Policy of the 1920s, which he called "not a tactic, but a strategy of socialism." In May 1986, *Pravda* endorsed this, saying in a review of Zalygin's novel *Posle Buri* (*After the Storm*), "Zalygin has taken it upon himself to explore on a fundamentally new artistic level a phenomenon, the essence of which . . . was conceived by Lenin. The NEP was not simply an economic measure. The experience of the NEP also provided special conditions for the social and spiritual transformation of man."

After the 8th Congress, the pace of rehabilitations of writers from the NEP years picked up. "Nowadays there are fewer and fewer *lacunae* in culture," Voznesensky said at the congress. He welcomed the publication (in *Ogonyok*, April 1986) of poems by Nikolai Gumilyov. "It is time to publish [Yevgeni] Zamyatin," he added, ". . . and the complete [Boris] Pasternak." The best people to oversee this work, Voznesensky proposed, would include Likhachov, Aitmatov, Zalygin, and Rasputin.

Within the month, Soviet television revealed that a Pasternak museum would be set up in Peredelkino, where the writer died. Rasputin told *El País* that Zamyatin (author of the 1920s' novel, *We*, a forerunner of Orwell's *1984*, in which noble savages are oppressed by overlords from a city run on electricity) would soon be published, as would the emigré Russian novelist Vladimir Nabokov and an array of other suppressed writers.

In September, *Ogonyok* printed a seven-page sketch of Gumilyov (founder of the Acmeist movement in Russian poetry, a split-off from the Symbolist current of Aleksandr Blok et al.), who was executed in 1921 for his part in the so-called Taganets monarchist plot. (The Taganets circle also happens to have been penetrated and partially run by agents of Dzerzhinsky's Trust!) The author was no less than the new head of the Writers Union, Vladimir Karpov, Zalygin's predecessor at *Novy Mir*. Gumilyov may have been a monarchist, wrote Karpov, but he acted with the honor of a Russian officer, and so, even if Gumilyov was guilty as charged, "then the Motherland can pardon him—there is such a form of forgiveness, even for an already committed crime."

The Soviet film world was turned upside down, with the election of the long-censored director Elem Klimov, another charter member of the CF, as head of the U.S.S.R. Filmmakers Union. His first act was to invite the self-exiled Dostoevskian movie director Andrei Tarkovsky (films *Nostalgia* and

*Andrei Rublyov*) back to the Motherland. Tarkovsky died in Paris before he could accept.

## The Eurasian theme

By the end of the year, Zalygin's *Novy Mir* had revealed the impending publication of Pasternak's *Dr. Zhivago*—a typical work for the culture that is being revived in Gorbachov's U.S.S.R. Pasternak originally had the novel published abroad in 1957, by the Trust-linked Italian publisher Feltrinelli. Although known to the non-reading American public in the gooey film version, of love crushed by the Bolshevik Revolution, *Dr. Zhivago* has been convincingly analyzed by Prof. R.E. Steussy (*Russian Review*, July 1959) as a Eurasian tract! The Westernized intellectual, Zhivago (in Russian, "the living"), dies, but his poetry and his daughter are looked after by his half-brother, Yevgraf, offspring of Zhivago's father and a mysterious, part-Italian countess who lives in Siberia. Yevgraf (cf. Russian for Eurasian, *yevraziiskiy*) is described always as an Asian type, with "narrow Kirghiz eyes"; he is a Soviet major-general.

The Eurasian theme is also alive thanks to Chinghiz Aitmatov, a unique and very important figure in both the CF and the Writers Union. A Kirghiz who writes in Russian—and doesn't hesitate to denounce the over-Russification of language in Kirghizia, Aitmatov has traveled in "New Age" circles for years. In 1975, he appeared as Walter Cronkite's TV guest to provide cosmic commentary, along with Kurt Vonnegut, on the Soyuz-Apollo mission. Michael Murphy of the Esalen Institute named as "Aitmatov" the hero of his scenario book, *An End to Ordinary History*, a peace-loving KGB agent whose father was a Russian purged when Stalin smashed The Trust and whose maternal grandfather was an adept in a Sufi cell in Central Asia. Of a mystical bent himself, the real Aitmatov wrote his autobiography "in co-authorship with the earth and the water."

After over a decade of seeming to skirt the edges of dissidence, Aitmatov has come into his own, with the new "thaw." His 1986 novel, *Plakha* (*The Executioner's Block*) unleashed a storm of controversy and excitement. One of its heroes, Avdi Kallistratov, is a seminary drop-out who tries to save young drug addicts in Soviet Central Asia. "Yes, Avdi is a Russian," Aitmatov told *Literaturnaya Gazeta*, "but I look at him more broadly, as a Christian. . . . I tried to take the path through religion—to man. Not to God, but to man! Of all the lines in the novel, the most important for me is Avdi—his searching. . . . The Islamic religion, in which I am included by my extraction, does not have such a figure: Mohammed is not a martyr. . . . Jesus Christ gives me the pretext to say something profound to the modern person. Therefore I, an atheist, met him on my creative path. This explains my choice of the main hero, and why Avdi Kallistratov is just such as he is." The *Literaturnaya Gazeta* interviewer pressed the point: "Reading *Plakha*, you can't help turning to Dostoevsky."