

League of Socialist Artists



Essays
on

ART and IMPERIALISM -



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(Based on lectures given in the 1972
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programme by Maureen Scott and Mike Baker)

Introduction

In the conditions of heightened imperialist development in which we live, when state monopoly capitalism is moving rapidly towards its final and culminative stage at the basis of which lies the transformation of the traditional superstructure of reformist "parliamentary democracy" into the corporate state, state monopoly capitalism stands iron-clad astride a world in which poverty, war and misery on a mass scale form the backcloth of development for the many races of humanity. As progressive artists and art-workers, we witness the expression of this bare class conflict in the sharp division of artists into one or the other opposing camp as a mirror of the struggle between these forces in the wider political and social arena. For in the era of advanced imperialism, moving into corporatism, capitalist art as a whole comes most fully and irreconcilably into conflict with the economic base of capitalism - the alienated relationship of the producer to the object of his labour which finds its most characteristic expression in money. Art, consequently, comes to serve this god also, as a mere currency in the hands of the decaying capitalist class. But the opposite social force, the working class, at the head of the oppressed classes and strata, is at the same time thrusting forward towards its goal.

Thus our analysis of the main outlines in the art of the capitalist era must of necessity deal with all that is reactionary, anti-humanist, subservient to capital; and, conversely, all that which represents the progressive and ultimately revolutionary movement of workers and dispossessed peasants towards socialism, an art borne out of the conditions of deprivation and struggle and moulded in forms capable of expressing the dawning consciousness of class struggle for a new, rationally planned and structured social order, socialism, which brings art back to the mass of the people in preparation for the genuine right to art of all mankind in a future socialist world.*

In evaluating the art products of capitalism we take the Marxist-Leninist theses of A. Zhdanov as our guide:

"The proletariat is the sole heir... in the treasure house of world literature, as in other spheres of material and spiritual culture. The bourgeoisie has squandered the literary heritage and we must bring it together again carefully, study it and then, having critically assimilated it, move forward." (A. Zhdanov: "On Literature", Speech at the First All-Union Congress of Soviet Writers in 1934).

* In structuring this lecture it was necessary to concentrate on the reactionary trends opposed to progressive trends in the first part, and to extend the study of progressive, socialist art in the second part. There is, in this scheme, some repetition in the references to Courbet, Van Gogh, etc. for which we apologise.

The Visual Arts on the Eve of Imperialism - Realism versus Impressionism

The first great rise of working-class forces within the womb of capitalism took place in 1871, the year of the Paris Commune. It was Courbet, the first artist to proclaim realism, who strove to render man and nature in an assertive realist style, to capture in tangible plastic terms the heavy harshness of reality. As Millet painted peasants and thus represented the consciousness of the peasant as a social force, Courbet's subject matter was reflective of the working people, the Stonebreaker typifying this. Courbet was able to fulfil this role because he took a political stand with the developing socialist movement, and was thus representing the new forces within society. His political commitment extended to participation in the Commune, for which act he paid by a long exile from France. It was Courbet who taught and influenced the painters who were later to develop into the Impressionist school, and their subsequent degenerative development from realism to naturalism gives a clear example of dialectics of the relationship between content and form in art.

For whilst Courbet's realism reflected and served the developing working class and its embryo revolutionary movement, even though the sensitivity and flexibility of its formal means and style were limited and still largely influenced by the naturalism of the David and Gericault school, impressionism on the other hand represented simultaneously a degeneration into and a refinement of naturalism.

It was concerned not so much with the richer and more varied depiction of reality, as expressed artistically in the dynamic of real spatial and visual elements embraced in a more-or-less dramatically conceived composition and heightened by its appropriate colour structure, but with the merely poetic and lyrical representation of the surface of reality as it is seen in the instant of its registration on the retina of the eye, with a dreamworld seen through the romantic gauze created by the refraction of light.

This preoccupation with the mainly sensuous effect of light as reflected on and refracted through objects, so as to give them the appearance of vagueness and unreality, nevertheless also reflected the preoccupation of the bourgeoisie with the laws of nature. Thus the impressionists' search for "truth beneath light" had its objective origins in the tremendous development of the physical sciences, including light and optics, which was taking place at that time, just as the dreamlike quality of its style formed the subjective response of the bourgeois artist to the impact made upon his senses by the surface of nature and the interplay of natural forces.

The researches of the impressionists led them to pursue "an understanding of nature", to delve into the study of light and shadow according to the passage of the sun, to research the colours of ripples on water, the reflected light of human flesh, the colour of flowers, the haze of cloud effects. Their adoration of nature was so great that they refused to compose their paintings, saying that nature

itself was well composed. They thereby automatically restricted the role of conscious content to that of merely "selecting" the segment of nature the surface impression of which they wished to portray (putting a frame around an arbitrary scene) and then painting the sensuous surface of that scene as faithfully and as naturalistically as they could.

But the trend "back to an understanding of nature" was in itself a backward step. Far from reflecting the turbulent development of the productive forces in the 1870s, the impressionists were to make poetic but empty renderings of the particular optical form of the smoke and vapour belching forth from powerful steam engines which were, according to any scientific assessment, the real miracles of the time. They were a classic case of mistaking the superficial for the real, ignoring the great motive force of development and trying instead to capture the essence of the fleeting natural world which, with the pounding of canons on Paris, the massacre of the Communards and the grinding reality of two basic classes locked in bitter struggle, had receded far into the historical past. They thus reflected a typical bourgeois reaction to the feared "death of beauty" in the fierce struggle between working class and capitalist class, and were objectively bemoaning the fate of their privileges before the tramp of the "ragged mob". The delicate prettiness of Renoir thus became a valuable tool in creating the image of a well-fed, sparkling, loving and complacent population allegedly created by capitalist "prosperity". But it was a picture according to bourgeois lights and standards, turning away from the sufferings of the time. Living at the same time as Zola, the social critic, we find no shred of social consciousness in Renoir.

The Neo-Impressionist Decline

The impressionist school, thoroughly bourgeois even within - and perhaps because of - its success in overthrowing the dark classical canons of early bourgeois art and the stereotypes appended to it, was thus to tail out in the innocuous work of Bonnard and Vuillard, who did no more than create a record of the placid life of the decaying aristocrats, rendering into history the play of light on a silver fruit bowl, a garden party, a lady's toilet, as if it really nattered to the rising 20th century that these relics should be remembered.

Symbolism, pointillism, and in its narrow sense cubism, were further stages in this breakdown, turning from the search for a whole view of life through art towards a mere formal specialisation in a given medium. The neo-impressionism of Signac and Seurat is clearly seen as the aristocratic birthplace of the Cap des Alpes Maritimes painters whose spiritual inheritor was Winston Churchill, dabbling away in spotted colours to the sound of casino chips and the waves lapping on private beaches.

Two artists arising out of the impressionist school were, however, to find it necessary to search for a content, reflecting in their different ways the increasing pressures on the petty bourgeoisie before the rise of imperialism.

These artists were Cezanne and Van Gogh.

Cezanne

Cezanne rejected the formlessness of impressionism and sought to apply a more structured formal discipline in his art. Despite his beginnings in a dark and violent romanticism, he sublimated his passions and all the human sympathies that went with them through his intellectual striving for mastery over the forces of nature. He thus reflected social man's need to dominate and subjugate nature, but in his work this is expressed only in a spontaneous, semi-conscious form and is completely divorced from any consideration of man's social reality. Indeed, Cezanne became a morosely reclusive personality whose portrait studies and few life studies were carried on from the remotest distance, both geographically and spiritually. His artistic contribution was so to simplify spatial forms and achieve depth by colour that he made it possible to dispense with the formal requirements of perspective and return to the ancient mode of representation of visual reality through a flat surface as it is seen directly by the sensuous eye itself rather than the way it is conceived and consciously apprehended by the intellect - a method in art which creates through perspective an imitation of the surface of nature and, developing out of that perspectivalised impression of distance, conjures up that very illusion of atmosphere, air and light which was to reach its simultaneous culmination and dissolution with impressionism.

Perspective had been perhaps the prime achievement of bourgeois art during its long development from its beginnings with the Florentine and Venetian schools in the period of early mercantilism, and the beginning of its demise with Cezanne marked likewise the dichotomy between intellectual enquiry on the one hand - the foundation of an outward-turning, world-changing spirit - and mere contemplative sensuous response to the surface of reality on the other. This latter, indeed, constitutes a prime feature of the decline of the bourgeoisie from a progressive to a reactionary class, and its first manifestation in art with Cezanne marks the birth of formalism - that expression in art of the flight from the ugly reality of social life under capitalism the social and ideological basis of which lies in the sundering from one another of the intellectual faculty from its essential reflex in sensuous-emotional response - a sundering which results on the one hand in a quite useless and fetishistic, because materially and socially unrelated, preoccupation with form and formal structure as such as "things in themselves", divorced from the emotional and sensuous connotations evoked by reality itself in all its richness, and therefore associated ineradicably with the characterisation of reality in art; and, on the other hand, with the purely sensuous element as manifested in formal schemes which become elevated to the level of arbiters and determinants of the entire scope and quality of the work as a whole. This dichotomy, which reaches its highest point of expression in abstract art, in "stream of consciousness" literature and in dodecaphonic music, had its first origins as far as visual art was concerned, in the cubist formalism of

Cezanne.

Bourgeois critics rightly see Cezanne as the father of all they hold dear in formalist art. It is, of course, hardly fair to lay this wholly at Cezanne's door, for he was no doubt unaware, from his lonely painting activity in Aix en Provence, of the powers he was to release from Pandora's box. But in his divorce from the power of art to express and spiritualise man's relationships with his fellow men Cezanne took a step into the oblivion of the formalist scheme which on and mass production has ended in the total fetishism, mechanical dehumanisation and mass production of art as a commodity.

Fortunately, however, his work triggered the perception and development of the young German artist Paula Modersohn-Becker, who was to stay firmly on the path towards realism and to pioneer a course towards critical realism, a precursor of the socialist realist art of the stage of socialism* - and so achieve a place in art above that we are dealing with here. Her importance is fully dealt with elsewhere, so we will not repeat it here.

Van Gogh

Van Gogh, the other figure of importance, represents a different problem. He stands at the apex of the development of the individual within capitalist society, firmly in the humanist tradition and to that extent a continuer of Courbet's work. Van Gogh was a petty-bourgeois whose attempt to reform the evils of capitalism by good intent and without a scientific understanding failed tragically; in the mines of the Borinage he was taken for a crank; his religious work directed at the poor and suffering isolated rather than socialised him; his dream of a unified artists collective was spurned. These rebuffs forced this magnificent human being, whose spiritual creed was service to others, down into the very core of his own personality, turning that art which, in a riper age, would have been a force making for the realist art of the socialist future, into the highly individualised expressive art of one man whose strength and conviction alone became the symbol of the strengths he looked for and hoped for in others. It is no wonder that this noble soul, who recognised well before his contemporary painters the inherent strength and nobility of the then begrimed and depressed working class, eventually lost his grip on the external world of human intercourse and found a haven away from society and through his painting. In a poignant letter he expressed the dilemma of the petty-bourgeoisie of his time, born before the action of capital had made the petty-bourgeois an obvious ally of the working class, rendering him instead a person whose education was distrusted by workers:

"There is a fire in my hearth, but no-one stops to warm himself. They see the smoke rising from the chimney, and pass on by."

The foundations of Van Gogh's art lie in that profound intensification and purification of form which arises from the sense of poignant loneliness and isolation experienced by the petty-bourgeois artist in

* See: "Paula Modersohn-Becker", League of Socialist Artists, 1975

his subjection to the process of class polarisation - a process which has been so fundamental a factor in the development of bourgeois art throughout the epoch of transition from "free enterprise" industrial capitalism to imperialism. This, indeed, is the formative factor compelling the artist either to criticise in and through his art capitalist relations and the class culture which arises on that basis - critical realism - or else to seek to make his peace with that society by allowing himself to be turned into a paid hack of monopoly capital.

One of the most profound and basic factors in this development is the polarisation between realism and formalism - a process of polarisation which in its turn arises as the reflection, the precise and specific expression and outcome in art, of the process of class polarisation between proletariat and bourgeoisie taking place in society at large. These are the important social and class factors underlying the development both of Van Gogh himself as a human being and great humanist artist, and of his art as such. For it is in his art that we find one of the first instances in the history of the visual arts of the method of dramatic selection and emphasis which is so essential a feature of all realist art, including bourgeois critical realism. Van Gogh's formal method is to strive after the strongest and most expressive delineation possible of the spatial elements making up his composition. This he achieved by two interlinked and inter-dependent means: firstly, by emphasising, indeed exaggerating, the contrast of colour and tone differentiating one spatial surface from the one next to it - the quantitative element; and secondly, by making the closest, most perceptive and finely gradated use of line as the delineation of the differences in tone and colour between two or more spatial elements - more precisely the moment of qualitative change between one spatial surface element with its particular tonal and colour values, and those of the one next and juxtaposed to it - the qualitative element.

Thus at the very heart of Van Gogh's art, the profound source of its dramatic and expressive power, lies the dialectic of the contradiction between space and line as a unity of opposites making up the essence, the basic structural element in a composition. Van Gogh's method in form is to push forward and intensify that contradiction to the uttermost, giving it added emphasis and clarity by means of strongly contrasted colours and tonal schemes in juxtaposition - his colour-orchestration, so to speak, so fundamentally akin to that of Gustav Mahler a decade or so later, the founder of critical realism in music - and thereby to purge all inessential naturalistic detail from the composition. This is how Van Gogh's art makes a beginning towards obtaining that refinement and intensification of the formal elements in a work of art as is necessary to enable form to attain to the complete and many-sided realist typicalisation of the effective content it is seeking to express. It is this which is Van Gogh's greatest achievement, and which makes him at one and the same time a giant amongst men - a towering humanist whose passion for life and the truth was so fierce and all-consuming that in the end he himself was burnt up in its fires - and one of the first and most formative

artists in the history of realism. Van Gogh, like Courbet, belongs firmly in the stream of development leading towards a socialist-realist art.

Formalism serves Reaction

The organic cubism of Cezanne created the first pre-conditions in the development of form for the later degeneration of bourgeois art into formalism. Although cubism is not yet formalism in any complete or hypertrophied sense, and can indeed be seen to serve a real artistic purpose in strengthening the differentiation between line and mass in the spatial relationships making up a composition whilst simultaneously destroying the unifying role between line and mass hitherto played by the laws of perspective - the very foundation of naturalism - it nevertheless represented the beginnings of formalism. For the first time in the history of the visual arts, a formal structure is separated off from the effective content (depiction and characterisation of the subject matter) and elevated to the role of an emotional-sensory lever of sensation in its own right, So long as this serves to accentuate and deepen the effective content it is seeking to express, it is artistically justified - more, it represents a positive step forward towards realism, "the heightened characterisation of reality in all its richness and variety".

Thus both formalism and realism have a common origin in the self-conscious projection of form as a dichotomised structural element in a work of art, a distillation of the effective content as a concentrated expressive essence which at one and the same time embodies that content and in turn serves it, and which is concentrated in a formal structure capable of transforming the merely sensuous significance of the form itself into a powerful and complex emotional-intellectual lever or affect. But whereas, in realism, form is first of all distilled from its parent, content (leap from quantity to quality) only to be unified with that content again on a higher expressive plane (synthesis of the new quality), with formalism such re-unification does not take place; only a greater quantitative degree of separation of formal elements and their accentuation as purely sensuous affects in their own right, divorced from and independent of content, takes place - the levers of pure sensation which find their highest expression in abstract art. This purely "sensational" art is then sought to be clothed in "intellectual" significance by associating it purely mechanically with some a priori concept or system of concepts. Thus dadaism is related superficially to the reactionary psychology of the Freud-Jung school, futurism is related to the atavistic philosophy of violence" developed by D'Annunzio, the ideological foundation of fascism, whilst surrealism lends a pseudo-artistic garb to the "freely ordered" world of the bourgeois or petty-bourgeois anarchist, the lawless world free of objective laws of development, the play thing of the "freethinking idea spinner" who likes to suck world-changing ideas from his fingertips.

Thus, from Cezanne onwards, the dominant monopoly capitalist stratum which had by the turn of the century crystallised within the bourgeoisie sought consciously to sponsor these formalist trends in

art as the most potent means of obscuring the terrible, bloody reality of its pitiless rule and to place empty sensuous forms, emptied of all emotive or intellectual meaning, in place of its former "high moral judgments", thus hoping to confuse the trail leading with a blood-stained finger to the era of "imperialist wars and proletarian revolutions". Although this sponsorship is undertaken in a more-or-less conscious and cynical way, it nevertheless rests upon an objective material foundation inherent in the capitalist mode of production and which is independent of the will of the finance capitalists - a material foundation which reaches its most extreme, polarised form under the conditions of advanced monopoly capitalism; the fetishism of commodities together with its essential component, the divorce of the producer from the enjoyment of the product of his labour. It is this divorce which gives rise objectively both to formalism in art and to the potential begetter and spectator of that art, the atrophied bourgeois or petty bourgeois intellectual of advanced monopoly capitalism, the epitome of the divorce of mental from manual labour.

Once it has arisen in this way, the formalist art of the imperialist era becomes heavily sponsored. It is then foisted upon working people and developed as an important factor in the many-sided attempts of monopoly capital to corrupt and stupefy them and to blunt their class consciousness. Indeed, in the conditions of developed imperialism, the polarisation between progressive and reactionary art, between formalism and aridism on the one hand and realism on the other, becomes an important facet in the growing antagonism between capital and labour which forms its material social base. In this struggle, formalism may seem sophisticated and self-confident at any given moment, but it is with realism that the future of art lies, because it is the art form of the class which holds the future in its hands. This movement of progressive - developing into revolutionary - art receives a tremendous forward impetus as the capitalist-imperialist system enters into the stage of its final crisis of absolute retraction and the working class, the vast majority of the population, is brought face to face with the material causes of that social misery, degradation and barbarism which are the hallmark of capitalism on the eve of its collapse and destruction at the hands of the revolutionary proletariat. It is for this reason quite incorrect for Marxist-Leninists, or dialectical materialists, to speak of the alleged degeneration of spiritual values amongst the mass of working people within capitalist society in a mechanical, undifferentiated way, as do the trotskyites, revisionists, liberals and maoists. Formalism and aridism are the art forms expressing the world-weariness, the rootlessness and ultimately the desperation and hopelessness of a tiny handful of top finance capitalists whom the development of the class struggle increasingly exposes as an effete class which no longer fulfils any useful social function, but which, because it holds state power, is able to impose its rotten, decaying culture upon the working people, the vast majority of society.

The Art of Nihilism and War

Speaking of the effete and parasitism of the Russian aristocracy, Lenin once said that its inherent rottenness must ultimately reach such a peak that one single push on the part of the revolutionary forces would suffice to topple the entire crumbling edifice - provided always that that push was administered by a revolutionary movement which had been united in world outlook, politics and organisation and given a single, irresistible direction and force aimed at the very heart of the Tsarist system itself - the Tsarist state, the "prison-house of nations" - through leadership by a Marxist-Leninist vanguard party. The latter part of this characterisation, that concerning the unifying, integrating and guiding role of the scientific vanguard party, applies with tenfold force and relevancy to the societies of the monopoly-capitalist heartlands, the ruling classes of which are now preparing to organise for the total negation of all art and culture in that new and infinitely more oppressive - because more widespread, all-pervading and highly organised - "prison-house of nations" which is the corporate state. For, unlike Tsarism, the imperialist system - even imperialism in the throes of the crisis of absolute retraction now setting in all over the world, to which the corporate state is monopoly capital's answer - in quite obviously not yet crumbling, not yet capable of being toppled by one single well-directed blow.

Tsarism was relatively weak because it formed a backward sector of the world capitalist system, a sector which had grown, not out of feudalism, as had been the case with the developed capitalist countries of Western Europe, but out of oriental despotism - the last, most advanced and decaying segment of Asiatic society onto which had been grafted some of the social and political features of feudalism. In this meeting-place of capitalism and pro-capitalist social formations, of despotism and the market economy, of "East and West", all the contradictions of the capitalist world system were concentrated at the commencement of the imperialist era.

Today, the potentially even more intense and antagonistic contradictions of imperialist capitalism on the eve of the crisis of absolute retraction have yet to reach fruition - hence imperialism today appears strong, because it can still draw upon the wealth of entire nations and peoples which it seeks to suck into its world-wide apparatus of exploitation, the basic function of which is to channel super-profits into the metropolitan heartlands.

These fundamental social processes characteristic of imperialism are reflected in the art of the imperialist era. Thus the art of imperialism reveals its kinship with all other aspects of the imperialist system - the wars of genocide and mass extermination, the murder and torture of women, children and patriots, the merciless destruction of the treasures and heritages of entire nations. The negation of all art and culture and its transformation into the total destruction of all social values is typified in the "Final Solution" to the "Jewish Question", German monopoly capital's answer to its insoluble crisis during the Second World War. It is this extreme and final outcome of the divorce of creative social production through

labour from the ownership of the means of production which reached its most developed form in the fascist systems which sought to transform the very blood and bones of enslaved humanity into the raw material of its war industries. It is this kinship which provides the answer to the questions "Why is imperialist art totally lacking in content, why is it abstract? It is because it does not dare to express its content, the content of a class that trades in lies and murder, and so must concentrate on the refinement of form in the abstract in the hope of erecting a protective shield around capitalism, an "Emperor's new clothes", confusing masses of people and thus helping to extend the life of capitalism into yet more grisly decades.

Thus the period leading up to and embracing the First World War was a great watershed in the decadence of capitalist art, as artists who were still basically in agreement with capitalism engaged in acrobatic distortions in an attempt to cover up for the grisly war machine now swinging into action to destroy human creativity and aspirations in the charnel house of the largest mass murder in history. The First World War thus gave a reflection of the increasing instability and crisis of the time. Dadaism, surrealism, constructivism, suprematism, futurism, vorticism and the beginnings of abstract painting, as the general backcloth to this dehumanised alienated commodity art, reflect this crisis.

Futurism was one of the first of these reactionary trends, dating around 1909-1910.

It arose first in Italy, one of its manifestos setting out

"To destroy the cult of the past, the obsession of the antique... exalt every kind of originality, boldness, extreme violence... we want to approach pure sensation, namely to create the form of plastic intuition, to create the duration of apparition, to bring to life the object in its own manifestations."

The very depths of human degradation were to be reached in its eulogy of war:

"For the past seventy years we futurists have opposed the view that war is anti-aesthetic. In this respect we have shown... that war is beautiful, because, thanks to the gas-mask, the fear-inciting megaphone, the flame-thrower and the armoured car, it asserts the domination of men over the enslaved machine. War is beautiful because it inaugurates the long-dreamed of clothing of the human form in metal. War is beautiful because it beautifies a blossoming meadow with the fiery orchids of mortar shells. War is beautiful because it unifies the rifle fire, the artillery bombardments, the lulls in firing, the perfumes and odours of decay and corruption into a single symphony. War is beautiful because it creates a new architecture like that of the phalanxes of tanks, the geometrical formations of the fighter aircraft, the spirals of smoke rising from burning villages, and much else... Poets and artists of futurism... remember these, the fundamental principles of an aesthetic of war, in order that your struggles for a new poetry and a new sculpture will be illuminated by them." (Quoted in W. Benjamin: Das

Kunstwerk").

They were fascinated with the "4th dimension, the future", and sought to put this "future" on the canvas according to various "scientific" tricks, i.e. the slow motion superimposition of one form on another, as in the cinema. This obsession with the technological aspect of speed and motion, a view commonly held by constructivists, vorticists and futurists, purported to reflect the machine age in a revolutionary way. The contrary, of course, was the case. For, by their turn away from any vestiges of humanism to a glorifying of the powers of destruction during the carnage of the first imperialist world war, these painters were to speak clearly on behalf of those advocates of "man is mere flesh and subordinate to divine will and power" and glorifiers of the terror of capital and its machines of destruction, and were subsequently to line up with the black-shirted hordes of Mussolini in their search for a "super technological revolution" based on the "supermen" of the "master race".

Futurism, as the most politically developed of all the artistic creeds of imperialism, deserves our attention insofar as it had its reflection within the art of the new Soviet Republic, temporarily obstructing the path of Soviet art towards socialist realism. In Russia the futurists were a powerful influence before the revolution and, with their formalised abstractions, they could not hope to achieve anything remotely resembling a socialist art reflective of the most significant event in human history. And, indeed, they did not do so. The greatest revolution to take place in history since the dawn of time - and Lissitsky expressed this through circles and straight lines! Something must be wrong when the form insults the content. As against this, a Soviet painting of Lenin addressing the workers of the Putilov factory (shown on our cover), reveals the sweat of the human brow, the link between hand and brain, the creativity and strength of workers' and artists' labour. In the crude, pared symbols of Lissitsky we see only an insult to the creativity of workers' labour, an insult only the bourgeoisie, who do not work, are capable of perpetrating. For these reasons Marxist-Leninists view the period of striving towards socialist realist art in the Soviet Union, with all its imperfections, as an important bedrock on which to build the art of the future socialist society.

Most of the avant garde futurists deserted the Soviet Republic and became in exile the advance guard of abstract painting, those who remained behind adapting their work to the requirements of Soviet culture as developed under Stalin and Zhdanov and rejecting the futurist legacy. However, the theses of Zhdanov will be considered in more detail in our second discussion. All that we must say here is that a spurious brand of "Marxism" considers that futurism in Russia was genuine socialist art whilst socialist realism was reactionary. As futurism was clearly a reactionary trend dredged out of the swamp of fascism and nihilism, we must treat these ludicrous claims of the sham "Marxist" defenders of culture-reaction with the contempt they deserve.

In the case of Vorticism, the English variant of futurism which arose

during World War One, the political requirements of the time did not inspire its development into a fully-fledged fascist creed and it did, in fact, split into pro-war and anti-war sections.

Dada, arising in 1916, was another ridiculous and completely anti-humanist creed linked with surrealism - both trends being characterised by their completely disruptive, nihilistic philosophy, their anarchic super-representation of distorted dichotomised images, the last word in reaction. Again, their irresponsibility during a period of great crisis in human history speaks for itself.

Suprematism and Constructivism

Suprematism and constructivism constituted similar formalist trends which laid the ground for abstract painting. The fact that they were developed in Russia by the aristocratic painters who were to flee before the march of proletarian revolution firmly places their artistic and social origins, Malevitch painted the ludicrous landmark in decadence, the painting "White on White", in Russia in 1914) and when Rodchenko answered this with his own work "Black on Black" in 1918, this proved the unstable nature of the intellectuals who had wormed their way into the heart of the Soviet state as an advance guard of reaction. As soon as the White Terror and civil war permitted, this anti-humanist rubbish was firmly dealt with and it was the great service of Zhdanov and Stalin to socialist culture to have destroyed the privilege and practice of these reactionary artists. These decadent artists then fled to their natural hunting grounds, the monopoly capitalist heartlands of France and America, where constructivism was already highly sponsored and provided the "spiritual" basis of modern abstract art.

Thus the Russian October and its artistic consolidation in the form of socialist realism was to push capitalist art over the brink. All of capitalist art, from the committed fascist to the dilettante liberal, formed a solid flank against Soviet art, raging at the "lack of freedom of expression" in socialist-realism and attempting, by sheer mass production of formalist and abstract art, to swamp the dangerous socialist germ and so prevent its growth.

Expressionism

One other school was to arise out of these late bourgeois forms - one which was to become a precursor of the art of the socialist revolutionary future. This was Expressionism, which arose in Germany precisely as a reflection of rising class conflict in the build up towards the First World War and its revolutionary aftermath, a socially committed movement of commentary on the crises of our time as reflected in the feelings of the artist. Expressionist qualities are present in Van Gogh and other powerful humanist artists, dating back as far as Grünewald. In the 20th Century, however, the expressionist stress on human feelings cut it off from the other reactionary forms and rendered it able to reflect the great movements of humanity then taking place.

It was alone, outside of socialist-realism, in having a valid content.

Most of its adherents considered themselves socialists and were allied with the socialist movement in Germany, although their degree of understanding of this commitment is debatable. However, the following declaration of Pechstein is fairly typical of the feelings of these artists, who numbered among their ranks Kokoschka, Meidner, Dix, Grosz, and Beckman:

"We painters and poets are bound to the poor in sacred solidarity. Many of us have known the misery and humiliation of hunger. We feel most secure in a proletarian society.... We must be true socialists, we must arouse the highest socialist virtue... the brotherhood of man...."

The harsh struggles against fascist reaction were to divide the German expressionist forces and cast them into exile in all the continents of the world but the intensity and richness of artistic development at this centre of world contradiction, polarising inevitably into progress and reaction, is one of the highest peaks of struggle reached in the art of the imperialist era.

The Current Face of Reaction in Art

The debased and corrupt character of capitalist art has today been revealed in all its nakedness by its service to the capitalist commodity market. Searching frantically for ever new avenues of scandal potential to father a cult and stimulate new investment on the big art stock exchanges of imperialism, we have seen the bubbles of "pop art", "happenings", anti-art, conceptual art, etc. Pop art, which copies the crude advertising of capitalism down to the last brushstroke and calls it "art", has triggered off a whole playworld of abstruse decadence for the rich and idle to play with, even to the extent of creating "mobiles", such obvious toys, and "live-in environments". Pop art in particular was welcomed by the pseudo-revolutionary fringe as a "progressive form." But the [illegible] character of these capitalist wares is increasingly revealed in the fact that many of the "artists" responsible for designing the shapeless lumps of plastic or laying out designs of mathematical precision in plastic strips, or placing lumps of iron and clay on walls and ceilings, employ teams of lowly paid labourers to carry out their grand designs. They then market the wares under the brand name of the artist on the conveyor belt of international art trade fairs. These farces have emblazoned hypocritically on their banners "For the freedom of the artist".

The Production Line

Bridget Riley typifies the classical capitalist production process of abstract art. The following sycophantic lunacy appeared in a "Times" review?

"Cantus Firmus of 1972... has vertical stripes, with six big black bands making out the intervals. Within these intervals there is a progression of greys getting lighter towards the centre and interspersed within thin stripes of green, pink, blue and white. Described like this it may sound like some exotic mattress ticking

(sic! - Ed.), particularly given its precise technique. But, in fact, its control and its effects are very complex and not easy to define....

Perhaps... this is the result of the impeccable technique.... The early black and white paintings have a touching, hand-made quality about them. That is not evident in reproductions and is altogether lacking in her later work. There is something detached and impersonal about using skilled assistants, though the results are no doubt more successful. The system does also overcome the old problem of one artist trying to cope with too many ideas. It is a modern sentimental notion to expect the master to do all his own hack-work..." (Eric Rowan: Bridget Riley, The Times, January 17, 1974).

The critics would have us believe Riley is a "master of sensitive paint technique". She is, of course, no such thing. She is the owner of a factory for producing abstract paintings, where technicians manufacture her pictures, and she markets the goods and pockets the profits.

The critics would have us believe Riley is a "master of sensitive paint technique". She is, of course, no such thing. She is the owner of a factory for producing abstract paintings, where technicians manufacture her pictures, and she markets the goods and pockets the profits.

The critics who sell their services as ad-men to create the markets and the buyers for these otherwise quite uncommercial projects excel in stringing out reams of nonsense, week after week, year after year, in the "culture" columns of reactionary journalism. A piece taken at random (and the reference lost, but it doesn't really matter - any Sunday paper arts review over the last ten years will throw up the same) proves the point:

"The commercial galleries in London are busting out all over this month... I can do no more than indicate roughly what pleasures await which palettes, and where....

An exhibition by... Barry le Va.. consists materially of no more than a scatter of doorstops across the floor. The rest of the exhibition has to be filled in by the visitor... At another gallery... the same artist has laid out a lively white landscape of chalk ridges formed by artificial air-currents."

This is plainly not the sort of 'art' to hang over the fireplaces... I see them myself as clues in a still unfolding mystery thriller, or as phantoms of the future manifestations which are revealed through a prickling of the inner scalp."

Nevertheless, so decadent has this monopoly capitalist plaything, the "art world", become that even some of the paid hacks are fast reaching a point where they shrink from the ultimate prostitution of revealing themselves as critics fit only for the madhouse. The rare critic faced with a lavish exhibition of Andy Warhol's arrant and expensive photographic rehashes of Hollywoodana has been forced to admit that something is seriously wrong when a blown up photograph is

placed on the altar of bourgeois culture and sold for a fantastic sum. It is even more lunatic, however, when this trivia is reproduced lavishly in "art books" costing up to £50 a copy.

The New Art Schools of Reaction

In order to supply a constant stream of ideological corrupters of the type of Riley, the monopoly capitalists have found it necessary to uproot and overturn those relatively liberal attitudes towards art teaching current until the '60s, and to streamline and conveyorise art schools into training centres for technical specialists in commodity trivia. It is here, in the art schools now openly organised and backed by monopoly capitalist industrial grants (of which the Royal College of Art, with its "think-tank" of pseudo-marxists and its armoury of expensive tools of culture-reaction, is the model to be followed nationally), that the new generation of servants of culture-reaction is being trained.

The introduction of virtually compulsory abstract "art training" has so depressed artistic standards as to have completely negated art schools as centres of any learning, and as anyone who can talk loudly enough about his need to paint with tar or excreta can be taken for a genius, there exists no plumbline against which genuine endeavour and ability can be measured. The fact that bourgeois art in degeneration has been compelled to attempt the concealment of its own artistic barrenness and futility by increasing resort to the pseudo-theoretical tract, in practice the vehicle of a rabble-rousing demagoguery as intellectually impotent as it is emotively chaotic and undirected, is itself a potent indicator of the now total and complete divorce of bourgeois "art and culture" - as of bourgeois science likewise - from any objectively valid role whatsoever in extending the scope and quality of social man's insight into and mastery over the laws of motion either of nature or of his own social organisation. Even that proud pearl of contemporary bourgeois art scholarship, the much-vaunted "teacher-student interaction", is revealed in practice not to have any real connection with progressive reform, but to serve the devious purposes of ideological, political manipulation and control. Indeed, this concession exists precisely in order to introduce into art schools the necessary ideological training in pseudo-left art "theory" which is administered by liberal sociologists "advising" on how best to bamboozle the masses into accepting the increasingly empty and hopeless life conditions imposed by late capitalism, and how the art student can best be trained for a sinecure in the ideological-cultural apparatus of the system when he graduates.

The "Left" Promotes Reaction

Thus we arrive at the final - and perhaps the most obnoxious and distasteful - exhibit in our Museum of Degenerate Bourgeois "Art and Culture". Wherever open, undisguised reaction in the arts is threatened with exposure, we find that latter-day protege of imperialist culture-reaction, the "New Left" stepping in to fill the breach. Here we find the main defenders of pop art and its offshoots, claiming that "they are progressive and attack capitalism in a

revolutionary way" - this being an extension of the even more ridiculous theory that "pop" idols axe progressive because they show workers how to take a ride on the capitalist charabanc at capital's expense. This "New Left" scorns socialist realism as "dry Stalinist dictatorship in the Arts", and only regards as "modern and revolutionary" the most enervating and worthless excrescences of capitalism's "art" factories where the means for the cultural stupefaction of the working class are manufactured: pop art, anti-art, a blown-up cartoon strip, a trail of junk, a crude advertisement, a splodge of excreta smeared on a canvas!

In keeping with this world view the "New Left" produced a paper in the recent past called "7 Days". It was an attempt at a "News of the World" for the socialist movement, sporting the garb of gambling, pornography, sex, violence, exactly in the mantle of its Fleet Street Big Brothers (it carried these vices boldly inscribed on its masthead). The "New Left" was capable of producing such a journal because it was and remains under the gross misapprehension that the working class is corrupt and degenerate, and thus, if it wants to make a success (profit-wise) of its culture-reaction ventures, it must give the workers what it believes they want. The arts section of this moronic exercise pandered to the lowest level (although it boasted among its sponsors the "high-brow" John Berger), and the whole lavish display was fortunately around for only a very brief time. Because, of course, no-one with any self-respect at all, let alone a socialist, would want to read such a scurrilous sheet.

Aridism

The latest nihilistic and disruptive exercise of the "Now Lefts" is anti-art. The working class movement was recently treated, via the columns of Tribune and the Morning Star, to a sob-story about one Conrad Atkinson, a fashionable and "profoundly sensitive" artist "struggling the hard way" at the Institute of Contemporary Arts to put over his purportedly "socialist" art. To much propaganda and ballyhoo he placed a strip of wage packets and ticker tape, a few inches wide, around an otherwise empty room, encouraged along in this banal absurdity by the vast grants he received from the Arts Council, channelled via the various regional arts associations. At the sane tine as this ballyhoo was being whipped up Atkinson and his sycophants were trying to ignore the very important exhibition of realist art in solidarity with the miners' strike action taking place at the same time, an exhibition entitled "United We Stand", which brought together the finest representations in art of the miner and his life and work. Needless to say, Tribune and the Morning Star, who have everything to gain by confusing the artistic field in this way, gave Atkinson extensive coverage. This particular aridist excrescence is yet one more weed which must be cleared away if the corporate culture of reaction is to be stopped in its plans. It is clear that monopoly capitalism is viewing the sponsoring of "anti-art", with lavish funds channelled via key individuals serving the various arts associations, as a means of creating a developed and diversified pseudo-culture as a major plank in its cultural attacks upon working people, who are faced

with falling living standards and real poverty and hardship whilst these aridist insults to culture are kept thriving. The "Eyesites" television money, recently haggled over by scores of East London "social workers" who double up as "cultural promoters", is further proof of this. One thing is clear; aridism has nothing whatsoever to do with the culture of working people or, indeed, with genuine art of any kind.

The theoretical bases for certain broadly trotskyite "New Left" art views are that modern trends in capitalist art are the future socialist art forms in embryo, and that the working class is unable to produce a culture of its own. They relate back to the original art debate in the Soviet Union, supporting Mayakovsky, the artist who misguidedly took futurism as his artistic staff and was unable to fuse his thought and feeling with the aims of the revolutionary proletariat alone (an act requiring a break with bourgeois tradition) and who gave up in despair, blaming his own weakness on the "ignorance of the working class". For futurism, especially of the early Soviet variety, in common with pop art, borrowed from capitalism in an attempt to stage an "attack" on capitalism and allegedly further the cause of working people. However, Mayakovsky was an artist of principle who acted according to his mistaken class beliefs. The shoddy fakes who use him as a cover do not merely lack faith in the working people, they consciously set out to destroy all respect for their abilities.

Conclusion

One final aspect, so crucial to an understanding of the cesspool of art in the late imperialist era is the function of this "art" as a repository for capital. The ridiculously inflated prices, deliberately invoked through price fixing and rigging on international art markets, are a useful form of currency in international dealings which will survive even the ravages of war and all considerations of morality providing only that the war baron or oil sheik concerned has the assets to possess them. We may, therefore, look upon the board and polyfilla of a given abstract painting, worth perhaps £5 and marketing at £20,000, as one looks on the value of the paper in a banknote.

To conclude; the art of a decaying class can bear forth from its class ranks no art of value. Such an understanding of imperialist "art" is essential to any striving towards & socialist art consciousness.

It is in struggle against all forms of imperialist culture-reaction that the LEAGUE OF SOCIALIST ARTISTS will be built. WE CALL UPON ALL PROGRESSIVE ARTISTS TO JOIN WITH US AND PLACE THEIR ART AT THE SERVICE OF THE WORKING CLASS.

ART AND REVOLUTIONARY CONSCIOUSNESS

(Based on lectures given in the 1972
League of Socialist Artists lecture
programme by Maureen Scott and Mike Baker)

Imperialism, as we have already seen in the previous lecture, produced an anti-humanist, fetishistic art, the art of that inverted consciousness engendered by commodity production and the domination of man the producer by the machine - itself the product of his creativity in its peculiar form manifested in the industrial division of labour. But the classes in conflict with monopoly capitalism have been represented in the struggle to maintain the human being and his social experience as the basis for art. The stirrings of the early proletariat and peasantry in the bourgeois-democratic struggles of the 1850s are reflected in the works of Millet and Courbet, who complement the political roles of Rousseau and Proudhon. Courbet was the first artist to fuse his artistic role with the struggles of the proletariat, find in this way out an honourable tradition which since then has been followed by the finest artists adopting the cause of the exploited people.

Van Gogh, the clearest example of the potty-bourgeois attempt to rid the world of the evils of capitalism without any understanding or awareness of the role of scientific theory, was driven by the sheer weight of his task to a breakdown. However, he reached a high-point in the development of individual expression which will be of immense value as a complement to the fully socialised and socially conscious art of the future - an art which, the basic class antagonisms underlying a society founded on the private ownership of the means of production having been overcome, can turn to a consideration of the individual human being in all his fullness.

Picasso, an individual response to capitalism coming later in the decline of the system, failed completely in his search for a genuinely individual and aesthetically valid artistic expression because he failed to recognise, at least in his art, that the individual and his expression are both continually threatened and under attack at the very sources of the capitalist mode of production through the alienation of individual human characteristics and their eclipse by the fetishism of the commodity - fundamental attributes of capitalism which are engendered and spawned in the very soil of its production relations, in wage slavery and the divorce of the producer from control over the product of his labour. Instead, Picasso sought to achieve individuality through a search, not for a socialist content, not for a more profound and organically unified artistic means of expression adequate to serve the struggle for the liberation of mankind from the shackles of class society, but for a false and ephemeral novelty of merely formal styles and stylistic devices which become the more frenzied and despairing the more their essential impotence and superficiality are exposed.

The highest and most contradiction-ridden outcome of capitalist development is in the era of imperialism, of imperialist wars and

proletarian revolutions, and it is from the beginning of this era that we take up the thread of development of the politically committed artist from the first magnificent example given by Courbet and so trace the path of development of proletarian-realist artists who mirror, comment upon, emotionally project and finally achieve scientific mastery over the laws of motion of human society in and through the medium of their art, expressing in terms of human emotion and conflict the fundamental contradictions which form the motive force of their age.

The achievements upon which we must concentrate our attention, and which have already been touched upon in our previous lecture, are those which constitute the powerful artistic heritage of three great realist schools which arose out of and served three of the most decisive and formative revolutionary movements of the imperialist era: Germany throughout the revolutionary period from 1918 through to the final stages of the struggle against the fascist counter-revolutionary pre-emptive blow; Mexico during the national-revolution of 1911 and thereafter; and Russia prior to the October Revolution and through to the development of socialist realism.

Germany - Expressionism and the Proletarian-Socialist Revolution

Germany, as the storm centre of the revolutionary movement which was already spreading across Russia, was acutely affected by the revolutionary process as a result of its position as a developed capitalist country, the very heart and soul of European culture and the most advanced and contradiction-ridden of all the bourgeois-democratic capitalist states. Expressionism arose from the concentrated class struggles in Germany which took place at the turn of the century, and had already reflected the growing stern signals of revolution before the need for a scientific proletarian stand was placed on the historical agenda by the revolutionary tide of 1918. The Expressionist movement was split by those events into siding either with reaction or with progress. Most, and the finest, took the latter course: Pechstein, Meidner, Kollwitz, Nagel, the Grundigs, Heartfield and Grosz. These and numerous unidentified artists who, persecuted and terrorised, gave their art to the proletarian cause, to the Red Front and its vanguard, the Communist Party of Germany, formed the progressive wing of expressionism.

Of all the currents of art which arose during the imperialist era, expressionism is the one which bears the most potential for future development. As an aesthetic method, expressionism is based on the organisation of the formal components in a work of art in such a way as to emphasise the dramatic character and quality inherent in the contradictory and conflicting elements which make up its content, and in so doing to dispense with and refine out of the work any extraneous, i.e. merely decorative or sensuous, elements. It represents the highest point of spontaneous expression achieved by the individual petty-bourgeois who is subject to the inherent processes of social alienation which are so fundamental a feature of capitalist relations.

However, this is only a general guide. The tendency towards formalist abstraction evinced by some painters of both the German and Paris schools, for instance, soon revealed itself as a serious weakness, increasingly sapping the vital streams of social observation and life-experience of the aspiring revolutionary artist and debilitating the realist aesthetic power of the art works so produced. The so-called "right-wing" of expressionism, the tendency which did not commit itself firmly to the proletarian cause, soon proved itself incapable of expressing the profound and many-sided content of the fast-developing German revolution. This wing was most typically represented, amongst others, by Franz Marc and Paul Klee, the former a leading exponent of the "Blaue Reiter", the latter associated with "Die Brücke", the two most important and influential of the formalist groups.

At the level of the psychological processes at work within the personality of those artists undergoing class polarisation who develop into reactionary formalism and abstract art, it is the divorce of the emotional-sensuous element in the artistic personality from the faculty of intellectual insight and awareness which forms so distinctive and typical a feature of the bourgeois or potty-bourgeois artist under the general conditions of advanced, decaying capitalism at the stage of its world crisis of retraction, when it is increasingly threatened by the developing proletarian-socialist revolution. It is on this basis that these two fundamental attributes of human personality, which in the crucible of interaction between human thought and human practice exist in an inseparable unit of opposites, are separated off from one another and assume a synthetically polarised and hypertrophied state in which they exist only in and for themselves and become their own justification and focus of consciousness.

Thus, for the formalist-abstractionist artist, the intellectual faculty is concentrated and focused, not upon the achievement of a deeper insight and probing into the objective reality comprising the effective content of his work of art, but purely one-sidedly upon the artificially intellectualised activity, synthetically dichotomised from the emotional sensibility and the imaginative faculty associated with the working up of formal means of expression in a genuine work of art, of devising and constructing "from out of the pure and untrammelled imagination", new and novel formal schemes and techniques, the last yet more startling and sensational than its predecessors and designed primarily to shock and stun the sensibilities of the spectator, which then becomes a kind of aesthetic "things in themselves", the foundation of "art for art's sake".

Conversely, the emotional-sensuous imagination is separated off in an exactly similar and complementary way from the capacity for intellectual insight and comprehension and focused, not upon the working up of over richer, more organically unified and intensely expressive formal structures and means of expression, the criterion for which, from the standpoint of the role and function of form as the unifying factor in a genuine work of art, is the objective one of

providing an adequate emotional-sensuous vehicle through which the effective content is realised in artistic terms - in fact, through which it becomes art - but upon the purely subjective, contemplative function of assessing, evaluating and balancing in purely sensuous terms the sensory elements - colour, tonal values, the geometrical arrangement of shapes in an abstract composition, etc. - which in a genuine work of art exist in organic and inseparable unity with the effective content, but which in the case of formalism and abstract art are synthetically dichotomised from the intellectual tasks associated with the distillation and clarification of the effective content of the work of art from out of the life experience of the artist.

In this way so the fetishism and inverted consciousness engendered by the highest form of class society based on commodity production, capitalism, find their highest and most concentrated expression in the inverted art consciousness of formalism and abstract art. The reactionary outcome of the "right-wing" of expressionism - in the form, for instance, of the influences leading to American abstract expressionism or those of the Bauhaus on functionalist architecture - was destined to become another important cultural-ideological tool of monopoly capitalism, developed out of its experience in combating the German revolutionary wave, and which monopoly capital was later to use in order to re-stock its arsenal of worldwide culture-reaction.

In order to create an artistic force capable of opposing and stemming the tendency towards formalist and abstractionist degeneration, there had first to be developed that fusion of the expressionist formal method as such - the highest pinnacle achieved by bourgeois critical realist art - with an ever richer and more varied, terse and economical realist depiction of social types and individual characters, such as would achieve a dramatically penetrating and emotionally arousing projection of the basic class conflicts and antagonisms which ultimately influence and mould the development of the individual in capitalist society. This fusion, the very womb of socialist realism, was born out of the innermost need of the revolutionary proletariat to forge an art weapon adequate to its complex struggle, and grew to strength in the very fires of the class struggle itself, behind the barricades...of Wedding and Neukölln, in the hastily improvised studios and print-shops of Revolutionary Hamburg. This development, the road of transition from bourgeois critical-realism into proletarian-socialist realism, was attempted and pioneered by such leading expressionist artists as Dix, Pechstein, Meidner - and, of course, Kollwitz.

This was seen in the developing world view of a number of artists a growing proletarian-realist art consciousness and sensibility. As these qualities gained in strength and conviction, they came into fructifying conflict with the powerful - and sometimes spontaneously pessimistic - emotional currents typical of the petty-bourgeois artist who, willy-nilly, reflects in his art the fundamental processes of class polarisation and alienation of the individual - either the petty bourgeois individual as such or the newly-proletarianised white-collar worker who has but recently been precipitated into the ranks of the

proletariat through the process of class polarisation. For the artist thus either threatened with proletarianisation or already proletarianised, monopoly capitalism in crisis has already drawn the very framework of his existence, economically, intellectually and artistically, from under his feet - and inevitably this crisis, at one and the same time many-sided and total, is reflected in his art.

In this way expressionism reflects in terms of art consciousness the most profound and inexorable contradictions at work within the capitalist mode of production at the onset of its advanced, moribund stage of development, the era of monopoly capitalism and imperialism, the eve of the proletarian-socialist revolution. At least as far as its progressive, revolutionary-optimist "left-wing" was concerned expressionism was the art form of the newly-proletarianised petty-bourgeois artist who overcomes alienation and finds himself - and his true artistic individuality through service to the revolutionary proletariat. It is the bridge leading from bourgeois critical realism to fully developed proletarian-socialist realism,

In this fundamental process of division within the expressionist movement as a whole between the road to proletarian-socialist realism and the path towards formalism and abstractionism, the clearest example of the dividing line which separates the committed artist, devoted to the proletarian cause, and those who, having lost faith in the bulwark of classical bourgeois humanism, were incapable of moving forward into the camp of the socialist revolution and so could only degenerate into an anti-humanism which was as reactionary and politically cynical as it was essentially posed, empty and impotent, is provided on the revolutionary side by Meidner and Kollwitz - in artistic terms respectively the very brain and the conscience of the German Revolution - and on the reactionary side by Marc and Klee.

In the powerful graphic art of Kathe Kollwitz are found piercing renderings of the social life of Germany and heart-aching portrayals of the Berlin proletariat and its grinding poverty and suffering under the scourge of unemployment, disease and premature death. She sought for a bourgeois-liberal "Brotherhood of Man" to solve "the problem of human misery". Meidner, on the other hand, echoing and paralleling the fascination felt by the Mexican Siqueiros for the dynamic technology of the productive forces bursting to break free from the fetters of capitalism, reflected an embrace with the city and a fascination for man's role within it:

"We must eventually begin to paint our home, the big city, which we love so completely. On countless canvases, large as frescoes, our trembling hands should splash down all the marvellous and strange, monstrous and dramatic aspects of the avenues, stations, factories and towers. We remember individual pictures from the 70s and 80s which show city streets. They were painted by Pissarro and Claude Monet, two lyricists who came from meadow, bush and tree. The sweetness and blossoming of their agricultural landscapes is also there in their cityscapes. Can you really paint monster houses softly and transparently like you paint brooks, can you paint boulevards like turnips?"

He expressed his political position as follows:

"It can no longer be permitted that a powerful majority must live in the most shameful dishonourable and inhuman conditions, while a tiny minority gorges itself from an overfilled table. We must choose socialism, choose the general and complete socialisation of the means of production, which afford every person work, spirit, bread, a home and the sense of a higher objective in life.... We painters and poets join with the poor in a holy alliance."

Meidner (who nevertheless subsequently degenerated into extreme subjectivism bordering on the psychologically disturbed) and Siqueiros were communists with a revolutionary outlook. In contradistinction to the futurist obsession with power for its own sake set in the modern urban scene without reference to the human forces of production which are alienated from the city, the works of the communist artists reveal man bound up with the fate of the proletarian city, the future powerhouses of socialism. They describe the relationship of the productive forces to production relations, without which no change can occur in the relations between men.

However, following the nazi repressions in the 30s, most of the expressionist artists were driven to seek refuge in the western capitalist countries, the price of their refuge invariably entailing the abandonment of their former socialist convictions. This is most clearly illustrated in the case of the most powerful and insightful member of the leftwing of expressionism, George Grosz, who was to come to accept hack work designing covers for the reactionary news magazine "Time" during his exile in the USA. Some, like Heartfield, Lea Grundig and Otto Nagel, were to remain true to their socialist aims, and Heartfield continued to develop his expressionism based on social reality and using photomontage techniques in a new and revolutionary way. Other communist and socialist artists, as victims of fascist persecution, remain unnamed, but in the record of the political literature of the time their contributions are recorded as proof of their final sacrifice, giving their creative lives to take up arms as soldiers in the vanguard against fascism.

Revolutionary Murals in Mexico

The other main source of revolutionary art in this period was in Mexico. Here the challenge of political activity took precedence over the development of culture for its own sake, and a school of painting was created in an around the political movement of the struggle for national liberation in Mexico.

Called into being in the service of a progressive government faced with whelming difficulties in implementing its reform programme in the face of war, destruction, poverty and illiteracy, the young Mexican art students rose to the challenge of art in the service of the working people and peasantry, and carried the message of the national-democratic movement to the walls of Mexico, depicting the Mexican people's history and future and propagating basic social needs and improvements. They created thereby the greatest art movement (in terms of popular scope and sheer size) since the Renaissance bore forth

Michaelangelo.

In 1922 they formed the nucleus of the Syndicate of Painters and Sculpture, dedicated to the "creation of a new world, the socialisation of art and to the materialisation of a vigorous aesthetic expression for the people":

"The Syndicate of Revolutionary Painters, Sculptors and Engravers of Mexico considers that, in the present epoch of exasperated class struggle, of imperialism oppressing our people, our native races and peasants, there exists, for intellectual producers, and for workers in the painting craft conscious of the historical moment, no other way but to affiliate with each other in a manner disciplined by the struggles of the revolutionary proletariat. Their contributions to the movement are to be works of revolutionary art....

In concrete terms, the Syndicate of Revolutionary Printers, Sculptors and Engravers of Mexico means to do work useful to Mexico's popular classes in their struggle, meanwhile producing an art aesthetically and technically great. To blend these two values in the essence of its doctrine....

The Syndicate of Revolutionary Painters, Sculptors and Engravers of Mexico is in favour of collective work. It desires to destroy all egocentrism, replacing it by disciplined group work, the great collective workshops of ancient times to serve as models."

This organisation became a leading propaganda organ in the service of the revolution, its posters, broadsheets, paper murals, journals and massive murals serving no other end but that of revolutionary propaganda in the progressive cause, and it simultaneously became a centre to which revolutionary artists from all over the world were encouraged to go in the spirit of proletarian internationalism. This growth into a world force, as opposed to a specifically Mexican one, was marked in the 1930s by the formation of the League of Revolutionary Writers and Artists dedicated to the fight against fascism.

The three major artists involved in the Mexican mural movement were Rivera, Orozco and Siqueiros. All these artists were affected by Paris influence in the 20s, but Siqueiros and Orozco came to reject the entire bourgeois current which led only to the death of art, and to embrace the revolutionary fusion of art and politics. Rivera's traditional bourgeois training was to hamper him in placing his art at the service of the revolutionary movement. Indeed, from the very beginning his relationship to that movement was that of a "prima donna", revealing all the privilege of an artist devoid from social life. With such a background Rivera soon revealed the limited extent of his political understanding, his behaviour that of the flamboyant, self-centred prodigy, subordinating all and everyone to the demands of his own career, ruthlessly exploiting politics as advertising matter for his own work. His use of Mexican peasant lore as a means of creating a sentimental bourgeois glorification of poverty (avidly bought up by his US capitalist patrons) was strongly condensed by

Orozco and the other Mexican artists. It was these fundamental ideological which made of Rivera a ready tool in the anti-Soviet machinations of Trotsky and Malraux and all those desperate to discredit the achievements of Soviet and international proletarian-realist art.

Orozco, the second of the trinity, was perhaps the most sensitive and creative of the three painters. But a series of reactionary attacks on his work led him to become disillusioned about the prospects and promises of some of the revolutionary leaders. Lacking a scientific view of life, he degenerated spiritually beneath the tidal waves of human misery and suffering that capitalism wears as its birthmark and turned his vengeance at this state of affairs upon politicians of any colouring, and equally upon the shoulders of those active proletarian fighters whose task it was to change this reality. It could nevertheless be said by a perceptive admirer of his work, the Guatemalan poet Luis Cardoza y Aragon, that "His art possesses the dignity of his life; it is built not on motives of today, but on those of eternity."

The third painter, Siqueiros, was the real instigator and leader of the Mexican movement. Like Meidner, he was to stand for the development of the productive forces of our age:

"We must live cur marvellous dynamic age, love the modern machine, dispenser of unexpected plastic emotions, the contemporary aspects of our daily life, our cities in the process of construction, the sober and practical engineering of our modern buildings stripped of architectural complexities.... Above all, we must remain firmly convinced that the art of the future is bound to be, barring unavoidable transitory decadence, ascendingly superior." ("Three Appeals").

His life, which stands as a fine example for revolutionary artists, gave art and politics their equal functional roles. His art signified that "service to the cause of the people" which was embodied in the manifesto of the Syndicate of Revolutionary Artists that he founded. It is, of course, a major criticism of him levelled by bourgeois ideologues that he sacrificed his art to his politics, and was thus a dilettante who had little to say in paint, otherwise he would have made it his business to concentrate on this to the exclusion of all else. In such thinking is revealed the essence of bourgeois preciousness. For in the period of revolutions, of transition from capitalism to socialism and communism, when the working man is forced, first by necessity and later by conviction, to overthrow capitalism in order to eat and live, it is not possible for artists of this class, or who have become of this class by adopting its world view, to exist in isolation, miraculously to conjure up enough bread to eat and means of life to sustain then in their refined spiritual researches into the "meaning of socialism". On the contrary, it is from the midst of this struggle that the worker-artist distils, out of the bitter and the sweet of defeat and victory in the experience of countless class engagements, large and small, the raw material of the revolutionary proletarian-socialist art of his class, the art which reveals and

expresses in living emotive images the scientific truth about history, society, the class struggle and the historical mission of the working class as the initiating and founding force for socialism. In this way the proletarian-realist artist reflects the movement of the vast tide of humanity about him. In this period the artist surrenders his right to individual consideration to the needs of the entire proletariat, the largest class in history.

In this respect Siqueiros sets a worthy example. That he may not have produced the quantity of work that otherwise would have been possible had he chosen not to go to jail, not to struggle, not to risk his life in the service of a wider aim, is rather a typical bourgeois moan. For he would then have become one of them, a producer of commodities for a market. When the capitalist class threatens to destroy all art and the mankind from which that art flows, it is the clear duty of everyone who wishes to live with his conscience to join the army of revolutionary justice. In decades to come, when history is written, it will make no mention of the state of the studios in Chelsea, in Greenwich Village, or the art markets of the monopoly tycoons. It will speak of man's struggle for socialism, and of those artists who took their place in the artists' corps of the vanguard army.

Assessing comparatively the art produced during the German revolutionary period and that produced in Mexico, we would assert that, whilst the ideas of Kathe Kollwitz, as expressed in the following text, truthfully reflect the view of the enlightened progressive petty bourgeois artist of the life of the working class as one of unremitting struggle, harsh, relentless and unrelieved by the vision of final victory, since the emergence of the revolutionary theory of Marxism-Leninism that unrelieved despair has given way to a scientifically founded certainty in the final achievement of a just and harmonious society and to a simultaneous unfolding of the power of the working class:

"When I read them (Wedekind's dramas - Ed,) now I once more recover the sensation I used to get from them, namely that life in its violence, burdensomeness and inexorability is almost unbearable. The naked quality of his writings, the brutal nakedness, the passionate magnification, the crudeness - I used to try for the same things in my work, but with a different slant."

Our task, therefore, is to mirror in our art both of those complementary aspects of the complex and many-sided life and struggles of the working class and to bring about a situation in which the confident, forward looking wing of proletarian-realist art exercises the predominant influence.

The Mexican mural movement came close to this optimistic revolutionary outlook, and we would endorse most of its achievements. But it was in the two closely inter-linked and inter-related areas forming the central core and nodal point of the world proletarian-socialist revolution, in the young Soviet Union and the Germany of the Weimar Republic, that the greatest and most intense application of socialist-

realist art forms and the most clear-sighted and comprehensive development of scientific socialist-realist art theory took place, as a reflection, in the sphere of the art and culture superstructure, of the ferocious struggles pursued by the working classes of these two nodally crucial countries - the one the first democratic dictatorship of the proletariat, the first socialist state in history, locked in struggle and desperately battling for survival in a bitterly hostile capitalist world; the other the most developed, antagonistic and crisis-ridden of all advanced capitalist countries, polarised by the most intense and pitiless class battles known to history, the working class forces and revolutionary vanguard of which were striving to realise the first victorious socialist revolution in the conditions of a developed capitalist country. It was here that the elaboration of socialist-realist art forms adequate to express the many-sided richness and complexity of the struggle, to carry through and consolidate the first baselands and offensive forward positions of the world proletarian-socialist revolution reached their highest peak of development. Since the significance of revolutionary proletarian-realist art in Germany has already been briefly discussed, it is now necessary to consider the most salient and important features of the art of the young Soviet Republic.

Soviet Socialist Realism

We have already seen that the young Soviet Republic inherited the abstract, constructivist and futurist schools of Russian art direct from the art palaces of Tsardom, and it was some time before these indigenous roots were either pulled up or decayed of their own accord, seeking new decadent soil in Paris and New York. Some of the constructivist artists remained behind, and their dehumanising influence in poster design, in architecture, in domestic decor and in a whole number of other fields of applied art was to remain until the consolidation of a socialist-realist direction removed the theoretical and practical basis of constructivism and futurism.

But the art forms in which the Russian tradition had reached its highest peak of expressive achievement, both in content and in form, had been in the fields of literature and music. Indeed, the Russian school of critical realist novelists of the 19th century, including such masters of social realism as Turgenev, Gogol and Saltykov-Shchedrin, had brought the form to its highest point of development up to that time, before it was taken up once again by the great German critical-realist novelists of the 20th century, among them Thomas and Heinrich Mann and Stefan Zweig.

Thus it was in the field of literature, in the form of the novel, that the socialist-realist movement in the Soviet Union received its first impetus and found the richest soil. Its true founder was Maxim Gorky, whose magnificent art, at once so powerful in its simplicity, yet so subtle and so richly varied, was firmly based on the primacy of man and his capacity to change the world and himself through the creative processes of labour;

"For me there are no ideas beyond man; for me, man and only man is the

miracle worker and the future master of all forces of nature. The most beautiful things in this our world are the things made by labour, made by skilled human hands, and all our ideas are born out of the process of labour." (M. Gorky "On Literature and Art").

The greatest strides towards elaborating the theoretical foundations of Soviet socialist-realist art were made by Andrei Zhdanov, who continued and enriched the work of Lenin and Stalin - refining, intensifying and rendering both more subtle and more varied the arts of the Soviet Republic, striving to perfect the unity of form and content on the basis of the primacy of content. The theoretical principles of socialist realism were defined as follows:

"Comrade Stalin has called our writers 'Engineers of the human soul'. What does this mean? What obligation does such an appellation put upon you?

It means, in the first place, that you must know life to be able to depict it truthfully, in artistic creations, to depict it neither 'scholastically' nor lifelessly, nor simply as 'objective reality', but rather as reality in its revolutionary development. The truthfulness and historical exactitude of the artistic image must be linked with the task of ideological transformation, of the education of the working people in the spirit of socialism. This method in fiction and literary criticism is what we call the method of socialist realism.

To be an engineer of the human soul is to stand four square on real life. And this in turn means a break with old-style romanticism, with the romanticism which depicted a non-existent life and non-existent heroes, drawing the reader away from the contradictions and shackles of life into an unrealisable and utopian world. Romanticism is not alien to our literature, a literature standing firmly on a materialist basis, but ours is a romanticism of a new type, revolutionary romanticism.

We say that socialist realism is the fundamental method of Soviet fiction and literary criticism, and this implies that revolutionary romanticism will appear as an integral part of any literary creation, since the whole life of our party, of the working class and its struggle, is a fusion of the hardest, most matter-of-fact practical work, with the greatest heroism and the vastest perspectives. The strength of our party has always lain in the fact that it has united and unites efficiency and practicality with broad vision, with an incessant forward striving and the struggle to build a communist society.

Soviet literature must be able to portray our heroes and to see our tomorrow. This will not be utopian since our tomorrow is being prepared by planned and conscious work today....

Soviet literature has every opportunity of using all these weapons (genres, styles, forms and methods of literary creation) in all their variety and fullness, in seeking to make use of all the finest that has been created in this sphere by all previous epochs. From

this standpoint, mastery of technique and critical assimilation of the literary heritage of every epoch are tasks that must be executed if you are to become engineers of the human soul." (A. Zhdanov: "On Literature").

Zhdanov's brilliant and insightful exposition of the theoretical principles of socialist realism helps us to understand why it was that the art of the young, embattled and furiously struggling Soviet Union could not only make little use of the merely sensuous and sensationalised formalist and abstract art of decaying imperialism, but was compelled to go further than this and make a clear, principled and finally decisive break with it and all it stood for. Throughout a relatively long period of experimentation and testing, during which the aesthetics of formalism as enunciated by the constructivist, suprematist and futurist schools represented by such artists as Lissitsky, Malevitch and Goncharova, were put to the test and found wanting, the young Soviet culture steadily and through a process of fearless criticism and self-criticism forged a rich heritage and experience in realist expression which was to lay the basis during the years immediately following the revolution and throughout the 20s and early 30s, for the later qualitative flowering of critical social realism into developed socialist realism.

Thus there is born through hard, uncompromising struggle the art of the newly-emerged socialist society, the economic foundations of which had, by 1935-6 been laid with the successful completion of the First Five Year Plan. This is also the art of the revolutionary proletariat which has become fully culturally conscious - an art which, in spite of its immaturity, its tendency to caricature and its at times too stereotyped delineation of characters and social processes, its too obvious didacticism and the many other faults which can be levelled against it, nevertheless proclaimed in triumphant and reverberating prose, in music at times as harsh and strident as the steely rhythms of the rolling mills and smelting ovens of the steel-city, Magnitogorsk, the miracle of creativity and resource achieved by the new socialist production relations and the new socialist man. At other times, the themes of this art are as stark and uncompromising as the hard virgin soil turned over by the newly-forged ploughs of the collective farms, singing of the undreamed-of heroisms and sacrifices of socialist construction, of untold feats of miraculous courage and endurance fulfilled by countless heroes of labour through whose mighty arms the young Soviet republic had literally to pull itself up into the ranks of the industrialised nations of the world by its own economic boot-straps.

This is not a perfect art. It is not even a fully developed or intellectually sophisticated art. Far more, it is an art which is developing in subtlety and richness of expression, an art moving forward and striving to keep pace in the development of its means of expression with the tremendous rate of economic and social progress.

Any socialist worthy of his salt can see from the passage quoted above that Zhdanov has given generalised theoretical expression to principles which are completely correct for the art and culture of a

socialist society, for leadership and guidance in questions of art and culture by a revolutionary proletarian party whose guide to action is the scientific world view of Marxism-Leninism. Had these subjective factors of correct scientific ideas, guidance and leadership in the field of art theory been the only factors to have been relevant to the development of art and culture in the Soviet Union, all would have been well; the young Soviet art would have had a firm foundation on which to grow.

Unfortunately, however, the fundamental economic and social terrain within which the construction of the first socialist society in history had been attempted was too unripe to maintain itself. Objectively, the balance of class forces in the Soviet Union proved too unfavourable to the interests of the working class for the dictatorship of the proletariat - the indispensable political foundation for the construction of socialism and for the development of socialist society in general, which must be maintained right up to the moment of its transition to a fully developed communist society - to hold itself in power indefinitely. Under the combined weight of the intrinsic and spontaneous tendency for capitalist relations to be spawned from the social base represented by a numerically still preponderant rural petty bourgeoisie and the external pressure exercised continuously and unremittingly by the imperialist encirclement of the socialist camp of nations which emerged after World War Two, the social fabric of Soviet socialist society - which, it must be remembered, was still by the early 1950s only at a relatively early stage of its development - finally succumbed to the tremendous forces impelling it towards the counter-revolutionary overthrow of the dictatorship of the proletariat and the restoration of capitalist relations in the form of bureaucratic-comprador state capitalism. The political fruit of this was Soviet modern revisionism, represented at first by the Khrushchev and later by the Brezhnev-Kosygin leadership, which finally succeeded in overthrowing the hitherto predominant role of the Marxist-Leninists in the Soviet party and state after the death of Stalin in 1953. After this, Soviet socialist culture, along with everything else in the Soviet Union which had been socialist and had been developing towards the communist society, rapidly withered away, until today nothing is left of a once-promising socialist-realist tradition - a tradition which for a time produced such raw yet noble essays in paint describing the new Soviet man, such eager if somewhat naive visual poems expressing the zestful enthusiasm for the creative tasks of changing the world towards socialism and communism uttered by the individual creator of cultural and artistic values, the artist, who is and feels himself to be at one with the masses in and through whom the labour of changing the world is realised. Characteristic of the socialist-realist painters who laid the first traditions of the Soviet school in the early years of the Soviet Union was Alexander Deineka, the son of a railway worker from Kursk who rose to become the foremost exponent of the new and historically most important development of realism in painting.

The outcome of the process of degeneration into revisionism in the Soviet Union was that, as far as the artistic and cultural life of the

first socialist state in history was concerned, those who had expounded and developed the principles of socialist realism were also removed from all part in social and artistic life along with other Marxist-Leninists when Khrushchev, the notable art critic whose perception once led him to make such a penetrating remark as "This is painted with an asses' tail", spearheaded the counter-revolutionary offensive mounted by modern revisionism against the dictatorship of the proletariat and the vanguard Marxist-Leninist party in the Soviet Union. An integral part of this offensive was the complete abandonment of revolutionary socialist-realist art and the steps taken to dismantle the entire socialist culture which had arisen on that basis. Western abstract art, which the Soviet modern revisionists hastily imported in order to begin the task of corrupting young Soviet intellectuals, was projected and described in terms designed to give credence to the myth that art and culture in the established imperialist countries were thriving and developing and had the same fundamentally humanist outlook as the art of the classical bourgeois era. The criticism of the art and culture of imperialism developed by the Marxist-Leninists within the Soviet party and state, a criticism which approached such art from the viewpoint of revolutionary dialectical materialism and showed it to be the art of a dying class and a dying culture, the "literature of the graveyard", was condemned as "dogmatic", "schematic" and "sectarian". Recently published Soviet works on "Socialist Realism" omit any reference to Stalin and Zhdanov, the great exponents and developers of the theory of socialist realism.

Thus the development of art and culture in the Soviet Union, during the period dating from the rise of modern revisionism, can be divided into two broad periods: the first period, following immediately after the death of Stalin and extending up to the removal of N. Khrushchev from office by the representatives of the new bureaucratic state capitalist ruling class; the second period under Brezhnev and Kosygin to the present day, marking the restoration of some of the trappings of "socialism" and with it the re-appearance of a vulgarised "socialist" art and culture. The first period was one which saw the open encouragement and dissemination of reactionary formalist and abstract art imported from the established imperialist heartlands, a cultural policy serving the openly counter-revolutionary role in support of US imperialism fulfilled by N. Khrushchev and his supporters.

In the second period of false "socialism", as part of the facade disguising the reality of a capitalist restoration in the first land of socialism, attempts have been made to reinstate a suitably bowdlerised and vulgarised "socialist realism" as the dominant trend in art. Lacking any real or organic connection with the reality of social life in present day Soviet society, such art and painting tries to lend itself an aura of "revolutionary" fervour and social humanist feeling by leaning heavily upon the revolutionary realist art of past decades and sentimentalising over it. All this relates, of course, to the art and culture of the Soviet Union and those countries under revisionist domination in Eastern Europe, the neo-colonies of Soviet neo-imperialism which follow its example.

A somewhat different state of affairs applies in those other East European countries, the state-capitalist ruling classes of which are attempting to break free from subservience to Soviet neo-imperialism, typical amongst which is Rumania. In such cases, a policy resembling in certain respects that of the former Khrushchev leadership in the Soviet Union is being pursued, and open encouragement is given to degenerate abstract and formalist art from the established imperialist countries. Indeed the art of the ultra-revisionist countries goes so far as to compete with the most corrupting and enervating products of "the art and culture of the graveyard", producing works of a pronouncedly pornographic and sadistic character - the ultimate fulfilment of counter-revolutionary betrayal in the arts.

In the case of the German Democratic Republic, a somewhat different situation prevails. Here, a sufficient afterglow of communist principle derived from the glorious heritage of struggle created by the German working class and the Communist Party of Germany during the period of the Weimar Republic remains extant, and this is capable of acting as a powerful emotive driving force enabling the revisionist leadership of party and state in the GDR to mount a seemingly impressive display of genuine art works and artistic talent. The vast majority of these works, however, relate to past historical periods, and amongst the resources available to the GDR revisionist leaders - whose art policies remain in all important respects the same as those of their mentors in the Soviet Union and are thus directed towards maintaining a facade of false "socialism" - are a number of leading exponents of genuine socialist-realist art still living on from the period of the Weimar Republic as residents on GDR territory. Although many of these formative and once highly important figures are too advanced in years to be able to continue creative work as such, many of them are still active in determining revisionist art and cultural policy and appear as spokesmen and figureheads at conferences and congresses - features which are also true to a certain extent of Soviet revisionist practice. In this way, the genuine prestige and well-earned artistic renown of many of these artists - figures like the novelist Anna Seghers or the painter Lea Grundig - are abused into playing a role in disguising the counter-revolutionary betrayal of everything that their life's work has stood for, and they themselves are turned into tragic figures trapped in a situation in which their art can no longer realise its revolutionary potential or serve the vital interests of the working class.

A revealing parallel may be drawn here between these unfortunate victims of the demagogy and deceit of modern revisionism and those equally unfortunate artists and intellectuals from an earlier historical period whose level of understanding of the laws of social development was insufficient to prevent them from being drawn by the lure of emotive Nazi demagogy into lending their art for the foul cause of German fascism. That such a fate should, even temporarily, befall progressive or even revolutionary artists - the cases of Emil Nolde or Richard Strauss spring instantly to mind - is brought under objective scientific scrutiny by reference to the fact that, even in the case of socialist-realist artists who are active members of a

developed revolutionary Marxist-Leninist party, the contradiction between thought and feeling, between intellect and emotion has not, under the conditions of a developed capitalist society, been overcome, and can indeed only reach its synthesis in a developed communist society. From the point of view of objective scientific understanding of the processes underlying the degeneration from scientific thought and practice into irrational or mystical ideology, these sad instances of the degeneration of artistic personalities who have previously played a magnificent progressive or even revolutionary role bears striking witness to the enduring and spontaneous power of bourgeois ideology - a force which, when supported by the oppressive weight of powerful state organs inherited from the former dictatorship of the proletariat, as in the case of the international apparatus of modern revisionism, can serve to destroy the revolutionary integrity and proletarian class outlook of even the staunchest of socialist-realist artists.

A further means at the disposal of the modern revisionists enabling them to strengthen the prestige and demagogic credibility of their political and cultural frameworks is embodied in the fact that, in many or even the vast majority of such cases, progressive or revolutionary artists or intellectuals from the lands where open counter-revolutionary violence has either long reigned or has been recently unleashed are faced with the alternative but to accept revisionist hospitality or be hounded, persecuted and perhaps done to death at the hands of butchers. It was in this way, for instance, that the poet Nazim Hikmet was trapped into spending his last years in the neo-imperialist Soviet Union.

The Art of Painting Today

In the objective social conditions prevailing throughout the epoch of imperialism, all those works of art and the schools of thought and expression associated with them which possess any insight whatsoever into the truth and reality of the human condition, or any real artistic and aesthetic value, have been works and art trends born on the tide of the world proletarian-socialist revolution.

The finest of these works, such as the novels of Maxim Gorky or Anna Seghers, the poems of Nazim Hikmet, the films of Eisenstein or Pudovkin, or the paintings of Deineka and Siqueiros, give a profoundly moving insight into the life and struggles, the historic revolutionary mission of the proletariat of all lands, and are imbued with deep revolutionary humanist significance.

However, because the leadership of the International Communist Movement gave up its revolutionary role and embraced modern revisionism in one or other of the many complex forms in which it has arisen since the 7th World Congress of the Communist International in 1935, artists and art-workers generally have been and still are left to founder in a morass of opportunism, the prey to facile sensationalism and fetishism of every kind in the arts. This conclusion is, of course, only intended as a rough guide and should not be applied or interpreted mechanically. Furthermore, it is a guide

which is applicable primarily to the situation amongst progressive or would-be revolutionary artists in the developed capitalist countries - in the case of the Soviet Union, as we have seen, the degeneration into bourgeois formalism and modernism did not, as a general rule, begin until after the triumph of Khrushchevite modern revisionism in 1953, although certain indications of complacency and dogmatism - especially in the visual arts and the film - became apparent after 1945. Furthermore, as we have seen, the more extreme manifestations of Khrushchev's flirtation with openly bourgeois formalist and modernist trends have since been halted by the false "socialist-realist" art policies of the Brezhnev-Kosygin leadership. The tiny remnant of socialist-realist artists still working and struggling in the major developed imperialist countries is seeking to develop a means of expression adequate to the vast revolutionary content of our age. This is the handful of artists which is totally committed in service to the great revolutionary tasks of the proletariat, and in particular to creating a new, regenerated and even more powerful and insightful socialist-realist art from out of the very fire of experience of the working class in struggle and from out of the entire worldwide scope of liberation wars which form the most typical aspect of the overall process of transition from capitalism to socialism in the contemporary era.

Nevertheless, even this nucleus of revolutionary socialist-realist artists and art-workers is compelled, in the absence of a Marxist-Leninist vanguard party capable of providing the framework of collective discussion and decision-making, to pursue its work within relatively small collectives and with meagre material and technical resources. That it is upon the reconstruction of the international vanguard of the proletariat, the unity and revolutionary discipline of which will have been forged anew on the basis of applying the fundamental principles of Marxism-Leninism to the new features in the development of capitalism and the new revolutionary tasks of the proletariat which have emerged since the end of World War Two, that the solution of these problems depends, is clear. It is these new features in the development of capitalism which can now be seen to constitute the onset of a new stage in the development of the capitalist system, a new period of revolutionary offensive on the part of the world proletarian forces and a consequent upsurge in the development of proletarian-socialist-realist art and culture.

However, pending the building of such a vanguard and a Marxist-Leninist International, it is a major problem for the tiny nucleus of a developing revolutionary socialist art movement that socialist-realist artists, at their various stages of development short of a mature mastery of form and technique, may be attracted by the considerably greater resources and opportunities afforded by the various parties of modern revisionism in different lands and their "cultural" ancillaries. Invariably these parties, and the cultural frameworks which they control, are used in order to squander the promise and potential of any artistic talent which comes their way and to pervert them into the service of either the social-reformist labour movements (now rapidly developing into corporatism and the corporate

state) in the established imperialist countries, or the state-capitalist structures and their international appendages in the revisionist-dominated countries.

A typical example of how modern revisionism squanders the artistic potential of the world proletarian revolutionary forces is offered by the infant mural movement in Cuba. The victory of the Cuban national-democratic revolution in 1959 clearly offered the possibility that a promising revival of revolutionary mural art might grow on the model of the Mexican mural movement some decades earlier. Indeed, a small beginning was made when the Chilean muralist Venturelli was invited to Cuba to paint the history of the Cuban revolution. However, as the integration of Cuba with the Soviet neo-imperialist system on a neo-colonial basis became more and more developed and entrenched, the creative revolutionary initiative and enthusiasm spontaneously generated by even a national-democratic revolution like that of Cuba began increasingly to be frustrated and aborted. The Castro leadership was compelled to accept the degenerate products of Czech and Polish avant-garde "culture" as the necessary accompaniment to package deals for Czech capital equipment and finished goods, for Polish manufactured goods and for the products of Soviet heavy industry. Any attempt to pursue the founding of genuine revolutionary socialist-realist art has now degenerated to the role of a major trend-setter for "New Left" pop art circles in the established imperialist countries.

The Italian artist Guttuso offers a further example of the revisionist distortion of socialist-realist art. He is praised by the modern revisionist art critics as a prime example of "20th century realism", when in reality his work bears all the hallmarks of that distorted realism* which forms one of the major vehicles for expressing the crude values, the brutality and inhumanity of late capitalism. From this tawdry base Guttuso attempts to create "realism" - that brand of realism which is capable of revealing only the surface froth and scum of capitalism's seedier backwaters and which is isolated and brought out for emphasis in Guttuso's art for purposes of sensationalising the "evils of capitalism", precisely in order thereby to mesmerise those inexperienced petty-bourgeois intellectuals who have been newly recruited to the revisionist organisations into a sense of helplessness and awe before the magnitude and supposed unattainability of the task of destroying capitalism and of inspiring in them a feeling of total subservience to the facile reformist perspectives ("structural reforms", etc.) which, as in the case of other revisionist parties, informs the "art and culture" policy of the C.P.I. The bathing beach nudes and other caricatures of social types by means of which Guttuso seeks to lend to his paintings an air of social insight are in reality taken straight from the most vulgar cinema posters and are as far removed from an art expressing the life of working people, based on their rich experiences of struggle, as is capitalist "pop art", with its open adulation of degenerate bourgeois

* See "Manifesto and Theses on Art", League of Socialist Artists

values.

Such influences cannot help aspiring socialist-realist artists to bring out the essential strength, nobility and creativeness of the working class, those very qualities which cause monopoly capital to blanch with fear whenever and wherever they appear. Thus Guttuso finds his link with the latest wave of filth and degradation spewed up by the modernist movement in Italy, as in all lands of advanced capitalism, where the revisionist party forms one of the trends and influences helping to produce such figures as Bertolucci and Pasolini, cultural-reactionaries who have played a leading role in transforming the Italian cinematic tradition into a purveyor of international pornography on a mass scale.

Our Tasks

It follows from our critical assessment of the art of the contemporary epoch, the main content of which is the transition from capitalism to socialism, that as yet a great deal of work needs to be done to ensure that the battle for an art and culture capable of expressing the vast content of our age, that of the world proletarian-socialist revolution, is created. In the search for a socialist-realist art we face many problems: the content of that art must be socialist and revolutionary in character, must be capable of arousing, inspiring and guiding the working masses in struggle; our formal means of expression must be meaningful to revolutionary fighters, yet be also rich, complex and aesthetically satisfying, and finally, we must act as a theoretically clear and developed collective of revolutionary art workers putting forward a general line of work and struggle in the field of art and culture which couples onto all the varied levels of consciousness and understanding amongst artists and art-workers at any given stage of development both of the movement as a whole and of themselves as individuals. At the same time, our command of formal means of expression and of the various techniques which serve those means must reflect the most subtle and sensitive of emotive inspirations as well as the most complex and insightful of objectively based intellectual thought-concepts embodied in the effective contents of works of art.

As far as our mass work is concerned, we must see in the relationship between artistic expression and the class struggle, between art-work as such and the life and struggles of the working class, the very mainspring and primal source of all the varied art forms and art media which we must develop and produce. We must initiate and develop a style of work which has its roots in the very seed-bed of the class struggle itself and which draws the intellectual and emotional wellsprings of its content from the life and struggles of the revolutionary proletariat - struggles which will inevitably arise and grow from strength to strength in the coming period of resurgence of the proletarian-socialist revolution in the developed heartlands of capitalism. We must channel that development so that overall guidance in the field of revolutionary socialist-realist art and culture is placed firmly under the overall control of the Marxist-Leninist vanguard party as this is progressively built, so as to be able to

provide that party with the various art-forms and media which will be needed in order to educate, instruct and arouse the working masses at every level for pursuit of the class struggle; in order to accumulate the tremendous energies generated by class struggle into a broad river of revolutionary consciousness; and, finally, for concentrating and focussing that consciousness as an overwhelmingly powerful force unleashed for the tremendous historical task of smashing capitalism and building the truly democratic society of the dictatorship of the proletariat and socialism, the rule of the working class and working people, the formerly oppressed and exploited who will then have constituted themselves into the ruling class. In short, the rich arsenal of socialist-realist art which we must create in and through our organisation of revolutionary socialist artists must play the most formative and leading role in the field of the arts, in arming the revolutionary proletariat and its allies with all those art-forms and art works they will need in order to inspire, arouse and guide them to victory in the coming socialist revolution.

We appeal to all artists with a socialist orientation who wish to devote their art to the historic cause of the working class to join in the widest front of artistic endeavour to create a richly varied, powerful and moving socialist-realist art and to assist the League of Socialist Artists in its theoretical, propagandists and agitational tasks.

Literature from the League of Socialist Artists

AN IMPORTANT WORK ON THE GERMAN WOMAN PAINTER PAULA MODERSOHN-BECKER

The only comprehensive essay on this artist in English, and an important contribution to the evaluation of bourgeois critical realism, giving to the artist the rightful place she should hold in the art of the early 20th century, a role as important as that of Van Gogh.

CLASS WAR IN THE ARTS - THE LEAGUE OF SOCIALIST ARTISTS V.
THE "ARTS" AGENCIES OF MONOPOLY CAPITAL " *

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