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Utopianism versus Revolutionary Heroism in Bolshevik Policy: The Proletarian Culture Debate

Art . . . is a most powerful weapon for the organization of collective forces and, in a class society, of class forces.

A. A. BOGDANOV

The place of art is in the rear of the historic advance.

L. D. TROTSKY

The statements in the epigraph reflect contrasting attitudes toward the question of the possibility, desirability, and urgency of creating a "proletarian culture" during the years immediately following the Bolshevik seizure of power. Even more, they reflect basically opposing priorities concerning the most important and immediate steps to be taken in order to promote the revolutionary transformation of Soviet society as a whole.

Neither the desperate nature of the civil war nor continuing expectations of world revolution dampened the desire of many enthusiastic Bolsheviks to chart and immediately embark upon programs of radical reform in Russia. Sharp disagreements soon erupted among them, however, as it became apparent that many of their programs were in conflict with one another. These disagreements were due both to the inherently diverse background, outlook, and values that characterized early bolshevism, and to the fundamental dilemma in which all of them, as Marxists, found themselves. Unlike the expectations of most turn-of-the-century Marxists, the first successful and avowedly proletarian revolution had occurred not in one of the most advanced capitalist countries, but in a state characterized by an unevenly developed, war-ravaged economy, and by a pervasive backwardness in the cultural and social development of the mass of the population. What, then, was the fastest and most reliable route to a truly socialist society?

The twofold purpose of this article is to present a new framework for analyzing early Bolshevik disagreements on this broad question and to illustrate the general framework with respect to the specific debate on the nature of proletarian culture. It will be helpful first to review some of the ways in which previous Western historians have approached the more general issue of ideological diversity within post-Revolutionary bolshevism.

One of the most ambitious efforts to come to grips with this problem is Robert V. Daniels's *The Conscience of the Revolution*.¹ Daniels perceives two essential currents in early bolshevism—"Leninist" and "Leftist"—and argues persuasively that, rather than occupying opposite ends of a one-dimensional scale, they were each concerned with basically different questions. Leninism

1. Robert V. Daniels, *The Conscience of the Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass., 1960).

stressed the importance of methods and tactics, and represented the hard extreme on a hard-soft scale. Leftism was concerned with program and willingness to undertake socioeconomic change, and, on a left-right scale, it represented utopianism, idealism, and boldness, as opposed to caution, moderation, and willingness to compromise with the status quo.² By going beyond the typical unidimensional left-right spectrum, Daniels has made an important contribution to the understanding of early Bolshevik thought. Less successful, however, are the five specific positions which he utilizes throughout the text: "Ultra-Left," "moderate Left," "Ultra-Right," "moderate Right," and "Leninist." In particular, this schema helps to obscure the major thesis of the present article: that there were *two* Bolshevik positions which were *equally* leftist, idealistic, and bold, but which were diametrically opposed to each other in the content of their programs as well as in their methods.

S. V. Utechin has described an ideological spectrum that includes Leninism and Bogdanovism plus eight other distinct positions.³ Strong points of Utechin's approach are its elevation of Bogdanovism to an important position within Bolshevik thought and its emphasis on the rich diversity of ideas that were influential in the early Soviet period. Weaknesses include failure to specify a distinct position for Trotsky, or for the policies of either war communism or the New Economic Policy in general, and his practice of merely listing the various ideological positions side by side rather than attempting to analyze the dynamic interactions among them.

Richard Lowenthal and Stephen F. Cohen have each presented dualistic theories of early bolshevism which, though differing in important respects, nonetheless bear certain similarities. Lowenthal portrays the history of the Soviet Union—and indeed, that of most Communist countries—as experiencing alternating periods of utopianism, in which the overriding goal has been the achievement of a classless society, and then development, in which the improvement of the industrial economy has been the dominant concern. Lowenthal regards the years 1918–21 and 1928–31 as periods of utopianism characterized by reliance on a combination of ideological exhortation and physical coercion to mobilize the population, by a drastic lowering of wage differentials, and by increased reliance on workers themselves within the industrial sphere rather than on managers or "bourgeois experts." He views the 1920s and in part the 1930s as periods during which these priorities were replaced by a renewed reliance on material incentives and traditional norms of authority and expertise, measures deemed essential to the effective economic development of the country.⁴

Cohen utilizes the same periodization (1917–21, 1921–28, 1928–31), but conceptualizes the dominant motifs of each period somewhat differently. The two poles of his dualism are the "revolutionary heroic tradition," born in 1917–21, revived in 1928–31, and symbolized above all by Trotsky, and the "evolutionary reformist tradition," enunciated by Lenin in the first years of NEP and sub-

2. *Ibid.*, pp. 3–8, and appendix 3, pp. 434–38.

3. S. V. Utechin, "Bolsheviks and Their Allies after 1917: The Ideological Pattern," *Soviet Studies*, 10, no. 2 (October 1958): 113–35.

4. Richard Lowenthal, "Development vs. Utopia in Communist Policy," in Chalmers Johnson, ed., *Change in Communist Systems* (Stanford, 1970), pp. 33–116, especially pp. 54–60, 73–78.

sequently adopted and elaborated by Bukharin, the chief protagonist of Cohen's study.⁵

It is significant that Lowenthal and Cohen have singled out for emphasis very different aspects of the 1917–21 period. For Lowenthal, it was the drive to introduce a classless society, the determination to bring the immediate benefits of socialism to the proletarian masses. For Cohen, it was the fiercely militaristic and totally uncompromising approach to the colossal problems of political revolution, civil war, and economic reconstruction. Each author has thus selected an extremely important aspect of early Bolshevik thought and policy, but by focusing on one to the exclusion of the other, each has presented the reader with a one-sided interpretation of the period as a whole.

In fact, between 1917 and 1921, there was not one visionary trend in policy but two. Both were clearly "leftist" in the radical nature of the changes they sought to make in the status quo, the boldness with which they undertook changes, and the visionary quality which underlay their entire approach to the problems of revolution and socioeconomic change. Both approaches contrasted sharply with the much more pragmatic, cautious, and moderate policies that were occasionally advocated in the early years but which found their fullest embodiment in the NEP. Both were in hazy agreement concerning the major outlines of the utopian society each took as the objective.

Where they differed was not in the nature of their anticipated utopias, but in the routes they proposed to travel in order to reach them. One approach, which (following Lowenthal) I shall label simply "utopianism," argued for immediate and drastic changes in the existing culture and social structure on the premise that socialism could be built only after the masses, through widespread autonomy and crash educational and cultural programs, had acquired a truly proletarian class consciousness. Adherents of this position supported the idea of a proletarian culture, advocated a greatly expanded educational system based on the principles of general rather than vocational education, and urged radical improvements in the lot of those, such as industrial workers and women, whom they considered to have been greatly exploited under capitalism. The second and very different position, the "revolutionary heroic outlook," was forged during the civil war and maintained that, after the war, a massive build-up of the economy, rather than psychological transformation of the masses, was the most urgent prerequisite for the construction of socialism. Adherents of this view proposed and implemented the highly centralized and coercive aspects of war communism, sought to increase industrial productivity by drastic crash programs without regard for worker welfare, saw the main purpose of the educational system as the training of specialists needed for the economy, and either dismissed the idea of proletarian culture altogether or regarded it as something to be achieved only following the successful transformation of the economy.⁶ The programs of the two camps were therefore not merely different. In many instances they were diametrically opposed.

5. Stephen F. Cohen, *Bukharin and the Bolshevik Revolution: A Political Biography, 1888–1938* (New York, 1973), especially pp. 129–32.

6. Although in a general sense my use of the terms "utopianism" and "revolutionary heroism" follows that of Lowenthal and Cohen, respectively, I have endowed each term with additional specific content for which Lowenthal and Cohen are not responsible.

The utopians are so named because they believed that the adoption of their policies would produce immediate benefits for the masses. They were the most authentic representatives of what Daniels calls "the conscience of the Revolution," idealists who were unwilling to countenance, even in the short run, an increase in hardship for the masses in whose name the Revolution had been fought. Many, such as Bogdanov, justified their policies by the argument that a cultural and social transformation was a prerequisite for further economic development. They disliked terror and coercion, and much of the urgency with which they advocated their cause stemmed from their belief that the development of a proletarian class consciousness among the population was necessary in order to create a consensus and thereby to eliminate the need for dictatorship and force.

Bearers of the revolutionary heroic tradition advocated centralized control of the economy and crash industrialization as the means to the promised land, arguing that economic development had to precede, not follow or accompany, social and cultural change. In no sense should their position be confused with that of the true pragmatists, the proponents of NEP who considered it necessary to move slowly and cautiously toward revolutionary goals while making steady progress toward economic development and political consolidation. Those in the revolutionary heroic camp were closely identified with the policies of war communism, and after 1921, generally opposed the moderation of NEP from the ranks of the Left Opposition. Their policies were more frequently the product of zealotry and ideology than of economic necessity: the extreme nationalization of industry, forced requisition of grain, and attempted militarization of labor served to accentuate rather than alleviate the economic chaos of 1918–21. Although Trotsky was sufficiently practical to urge the utilization of "bourgeois experts" and "capitalist" techniques in the army and industry—policies for which he was sharply condemned by utopians and others—and in the 1920s Preobrazhenskii elaborated an economic program of considerable sophistication, these policies and programs were deeply embedded in a world view that was visionary in its goals, militant in its rhetoric, and revolutionary in its methods.⁷

I do not claim that the categories of utopianism and revolutionary heroism adequately define all of the contending views, outlooks, and policies concerning internal affairs during the years 1917–21. Some prominent individuals do not clearly fit in either of the categories. Some inconsistently displayed an undifferentiated radicalism which would place them in both categories simultaneously. Others sharply changed their positions over time. The categories themselves are broad enough to embrace individuals and groups who, while sharing basic assumptions, often disagreed sharply with respect to specific policies. What I do claim is that the categories highlight a crucial, but generally unrecognized,

7. In a preface to his major economic treatise, Preobrazhenskii wrote, "not to see the tenseness of the entire situation and the never-ending struggle of one system against the other means in fact to lull the vigilance of . . . the working class, . . . means to weaken its will with Potemkin villages of childish optimism at the very time when it is necessary to continue the heroic struggle of October . . . on the economic front, under the slogan of the crash industrialization of the country" (E. A. Preobrazhenskii, *Novaia ekonomika*, 2nd ed. [Moscow, 1926], pp. 45–46). See also L. D. Trotskii, *Sochineniia*, 21 vols. (Moscow, 1924–27), 15:10–14; E. H. Carr, *The Bolshevik Revolution, 1917–1923*, 3 vols. (Baltimore, 1966), 2:213–18; and L. D. Trotsky, *Literature and Revolution* (Ann Arbor, 1960), pp. 249–56.

fact: post-Revolutionary Bolshevik enthusiasts were divided into two major camps concerning the fundamental issue of whether first priority should go to meeting the needs of culture and the development of proletarian consciousness, or to the presumed needs of rapid industrialization and economic recovery. This issue runs like a thread through the debates on education,⁸ the role of the trade unions, and the woman question. But it was particularly focused, and most directly related to basic philosophical differences, in the debate concerning the concept of proletarian culture.

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The most profound theorist of proletarian culture was Alexander A. Bogdanov (pseudonym of A. A. Malinovskii).⁹ As a medical student in the 1890s, Bogdanov became a Social Democrat, conducted propaganda circles among workers, and served time in prison and exile. In 1897, he published his first major work, a treatise on political economy which was well received by Lenin and many others. In 1904, he emigrated to Switzerland where he joined Lenin and became, until their break in 1909, the second most prominent figure in the small Bolshevik faction. His growing disagreements with Lenin during this period were both philosophical and tactical. Bogdanov was the principal target of Lenin's major philosophical treatise, *Materialism and Empiriocriticism* (1909). He adopted a more ardently revolutionary stance than Lenin by demanding a Social Democratic boycott of the Third Duma.

In 1909, together with Lunacharskii, Pokrovskii, and others, Bogdanov formed an independent Social Democratic faction called *Vpered* which, in association with Gorky, organized special schools for Russian workers on Capri (1909) and in Bologna (1910). It was at this time that the concept of proletarian culture, which became part of the *Vpered* program, was born.¹⁰ Soon, however,

8. For an analysis of the two positions as they related to the question of higher education, see James C. McClelland, "Bolshevik Approaches to Higher Education, 1917-1921," *Slavic Review*, 30, no. 4 (December 1971): 818-31.

9. There is a small but growing Western literature on Bogdanov: Dietrich Grille, *Lenins Rivale: Bogdanov und seine Philosophie* (Cologne, 1966); Avraham Yassour, "Bogdanov et son oeuvre: Bibliographie," *Cahiers du monde russe et soviétique*, 10, no. 3-4 (July-December 1969): 546-84; Alexander Vucinich, *Social Thought in Tsarist Russia: The Quest for a General Science of Society, 1861-1917* (Chicago and London, 1976), pp. 206-30; Karl G. Ballestrem, "Lenin and Bogdanov," *Studies in Soviet Thought*, 9, no. 4 (December 1969): 283-310; S. V. Utechin, "Philosophy and Society: Alexander Bogdanov," in Leopold Labedz, ed., *Revisionism: Essays on the History of Marxist Ideas* (New York, 1962), pp. 117-25; Kendall E. Bailes, "Lenin and Bogdanov: The End of an Alliance," in Andrew Cordier, ed., *Columbia Essays in International Affairs*, vol. 2 (New York, 1967), pp. 107-33. For biographical data, see "Deiateli SSSR i Oktiabr'skoi revoliutsii," in Granat, *Entsiklopedicheskii slovar' Russkogo bibliograficheskogo instituta Granat*, 7th ed., 58 vols. (Moscow, 1910-48), 41:1, columns 29-33. K. M. Jensen, *Beyond Marx and Mach: Aleksandr Bogdanov's "Philosophy of Living Experience"* (Dordrecht, 1978), came to my attention after this article was completed.

10. On Bogdanov's expulsion from the Bolshevik Center in 1909, see "Iz neizdannyykh protokolov rasshirennoi redaktsii 'Proletariia' (Bor'ba Lenina s bogostroitel'stvom)," *Literaturnoe nasledstvo*, no. 1 (Moscow, 1931), pp. 17-38; and the more complete *Protokoly soveshchaniia rasshirenoi redaktsii "Proletariia" iun' 1909 g.* (Moscow, 1934). For the *Vpered* program, see *Sovremennoe polozhenie i zadachi partii: Platforma vyrabotanniaia gruppoi bol'shevikov* (Paris, 1910).

the *Vpered* group drifted apart, and it appears that at this point Bogdanov lost much of his former interest in politics. Unlike most other former *Vperedists*, he did not rejoin the Bolshevik Party in 1917. After the October Revolution, he restricted his activities to cultural and scientific pursuits. He became a member of the newly established Socialist Academy of Sciences and was a guiding force behind the organization known as Proletkul't, which was dedicated to promoting the development of proletarian culture. In 1920, Lenin, increasingly critical of Bogdanov and his role in Proletkul't, brought out a new edition of *Materialism and Empiriocriticism* and insisted on the curtailment of Proletkul't's autonomy.¹¹ Shortly thereafter, Bogdanov ceased his Proletkul't activity, although he remained an active member of the Socialist (later Communist) Academy until his death in 1928.

In considering Bogdanov's ideas, it is important to note at the outset that his attitude toward culture differed in important respects from that of more typical Marxist thinkers, who generally regarded cultural phenomena as part of a superstructure derived from the socioeconomic base of a given society. For Bogdanov, science, art, and ideology did not merely *reflect* the socioeconomic structure, but played a crucial role in *organizing* and therefore *creating* that structure. Although other Bolshevik utopians were not always as theoretically explicit as Bogdanov on this point, their implicit acceptance of it provides the primary justification for the priority they all placed on cultural, as opposed to economic, tasks.

In major philosophical works published during the years 1902–6, Bogdanov set forth epistemological principles which greatly influenced his view of the role of culture in social change, and which were quickly attacked by both Plekhanov and Lenin as deviations from Marxism. Based on the empiricist tradition, and in particular on the neopositivism of Ernst Mach and Richard Avenarius, Bogdanov's system denied the existence of a physical reality independent of the mind of man or the experience of mankind. Rather, he regarded the physical world as nothing more than "socially organized experience," by which he meant propositions that could be agreed upon or shared by a group of individuals.¹² Not only was knowledge socially derived, but reality was itself derived from socially determined knowledge. While praising Marx, Bogdanov criticized his famous formula, "social being determines social consciousness," on the grounds that it failed to clarify the function of ideology or the nature of its relation to the economy. His views went well beyond the position, readily granted by Engels, that the superstructure could, on occasion, have a reciprocal impact on the economic base. Bogdanov called into question the very distinction between base and superstructure, at one point asserting that "social existence and social consciousness in the exact meaning of these words are identical."¹³

This conclusion had important implications for Bogdanov's views concerning the laws of historical development. First, he regarded knowledge, especially

11. V. I. Lenin, "O proletarskoi kul'ture" (1920), in V. I. Lenin, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, 5th ed., 55 vols. (Moscow, 1958–65), 41:336–37 (hereafter cited as *PSS*).

12. A. A. Bogdanov, *Empiriomonizm*, 3 vols. (St. Petersburg, 1904–6), 3:xxxii.

13. A. A. Bogdanov, *Iz psikhologii obshchestva (Stat'i, 1901–1904 g.)* (St. Petersburg, 1904), pp. 36–37, 51. For Lenin's sharp criticism of this formulation, see Lenin, *Materializm i empiriokrititsizm* (1909), *PSS*, 18:342–46. Plekhanov's major work against Bogdanov is "Materialismus militans (Otvét g. Bogdanovu)" (1908, 1910), reprinted in G. V. Plekhanov, *Izbrannye filosofskie proizvedeniia*, 5 vols. (Moscow, 1956–58), 3:202–301.

technology (which he viewed not as technical equipment but as the organization and utilization of knowledge related to external nature), as the moving force of history.¹⁴ Second, he differentiated social classes not by their relationship to the means of production, but by the possession of knowledge, that is, their own organizing experience, and by the formation of their own corresponding ideology. Political power passed from the hands of an old dominant class to a new one only after the latter had developed organizing abilities and an ideology better suited to the continuing development of technology than those of the former class.¹⁵ The European bourgeoisie had, over a period of centuries, developed its own organizing principles—an exchange economy, individualist norms of behavior, modern science, and a host of competing philosophical schools—and, consequently, was prepared at the time of the French Revolution to replace the feudal nobility as the dominant class.¹⁶

It followed from these principles that the proletariat would have to develop and master its own culture *before* it could be expected to conquer and wield political power.¹⁷ It was doubtless this conclusion that eventually led Bogdanov to rethink his ultrarevolutionary stance of 1905–9, to greet without enthusiasm the Bolshevik seizure of power of 1917, and subsequently to caution against unrealistic expectations concerning the speed with which socialism could be implemented.¹⁸ Thus, Bogdanov arrived at the conclusion that cultural tasks must take priority not only over economic development, but over political revolution as well (a conclusion that must have further confirmed in Lenin's mind all his worst fears that philosophical revisionism would inevitably lead to the abandonment of revolutionary activism). Bogdanov's new-found moderation was shared neither by his colleagues in Proletkul't nor by other utopians, however.

Nonetheless, initially Lunacharskii and, until late 1920, Proletkul't fully accepted the related proposition that, under post-1917 conditions, the spheres of politics, economics, and culture should be autonomous, and that Proletkul't, as the "cultural-creative" arm of the proletariat, should be completely independent of the state apparatus. The reasoning, as editorially explained in the leading Proletkul't journal, was that, since the government had of necessity to enter into political alliances with other classes, such as the peasantry and petite bourgeoisie, it did not constitute a pure dictatorship of the proletariat and consequently could not be allowed to control the creation of a proletarian culture.¹⁹

Since Bogdanov concentrated primarily on science and scholarship (which are combined in the Russian word "*nauka*" and will hereafter be referred to jointly by the single English word "science") rather than art, this area will serve as the focus of my analysis of his views concerning the class nature of

14. Vucinich, *Social Thought in Tsarist Russia*, pp. 212 and 217.

15. Bogdanov, *Empiriomomizm*, 3:85–89.

16. *Ibid.*, 3:119–28; Utechin, "Philosophy and Society," p. 122.

17. A. A. Bogdanov, *O proletarskoi kul'ture, 1904–1924* (Moscow-Leningrad, 1924), p. 208.

18. Utechin, "Philosophy and Society," p. 124, citing Bogdanov, *Voprosy sotsializma* (Moscow, 1918).

19. *Proletarskaia kul'tura*, no. 3 (August 1918), p. 36 (hereafter cited as *PK*). See also *PK*, no. 1 (July 1918), p. 27; and *PK*, no. 6 (February 1919), p. 26.

culture. Bogdanov regarded science as “the organized collective experience of people, which serves as a tool for the organization of the life of society.”²⁰ Since in a class society “organized experience” is differentiated according to social class, science is a tool for the domination of one class over others. But this does not mean that science merely defends the interest of a given class. Indeed, Bogdanov believed that vulgarized academic efforts to do so do not constitute genuine science. Nor does it mean that the social sciences have a higher “class” content than the natural and exact sciences. Bogdanov insisted that even the seemingly most abstruse sciences such as mathematics, logic, and astronomy were *klassovoi* in nature, and that the class nature was expressed in the very origins and methods of the disciplines, rather than just in their content or experimental results.²¹ He illustrated his point by reference to the development of astronomy, which he thought was motivated at every step by the practical demands of organizing work within a given society. Knowledge of the heavenly bodies was developed and used by primitive hunters to avoid getting lost, by farmers to predict the seasons, by the Egyptians and Mesopotamians to regulate river flooding and irrigation, and by ocean-going navigators to expand commerce. Astronomy, in short, provided the best way to measure both time and space, and consequently, such knowledge was essential to the class responsible for organizing economic activities.²²

Just as the bourgeoisie had developed and utilized science in its struggle against feudalism, so must the proletariat assimilate and transform bourgeois science in its effort to establish socialism. This task, which Bogdanov termed the “socialization of science,” was further described in his resolution which was adopted by the first Proletkul't conference, held in Moscow in September 1918:

The first All-Russian Conference of Proletarian Cultural-Enlightenment Organizations, regarding science as an instrument for the organization of social labor, which in the hands of the dominating classes has served up to now also as an instrument of domination, but in the hands of the working class must serve as an instrument of its social struggle, victory, and construction, views the basic task in the scientific area to be the socialization of science, that is:

- (1) the systematic survey of scientific material from a collective labor point of view;
- (2) its systematic expression in a way applicable to the conditions and demands of both the everyday and revolutionary work of the proletariat;
- (3) the mass diffusion of the scientific knowledge which has been reformulated in this way.²³

The resolution concluded by calling for two new organizational forms to carry out the task: a “Workers’ University,” understood as a network of educational

20. *Protokoly pervoi Vserossiiskoi konferentsii proletarskikh kul'turno-prosvetitel'nykh organizatsii 15–20 sentiabria 1918 g.* (Moscow, 1918), p. 31.

21. *Ibid.*

22. Bogdanov, *O proletarskoi kul'ture*, pp. 200–204.

23. *Protokoly pervoi Vserossiiskoi konferentsii*, p. 42.

and scientific institutions including several individual “proletarian” universities; and, in apparent imitation of Diderot, a “Workers’ Encyclopedia,” which would “simply and clearly explain the methods and achievements of science from the proletarian point of view.”²⁴

Bogdanov went out of his way to assert that the need for the proletariat to create its own culture does not mean that it can afford to reject or ignore the “bourgeois” culture of the past, whether this culture was expressed in artistic or scientific form. He subjected to severe criticism the flaming lines of the proletarian poet V. Kirilov: “In the name of our tomorrow—we shall burn Raphael, / Destroy the museums, crush the flowers of art.”²⁵ Rather than indulging in the expression of their personal feelings, Bogdanov argued, proletarian artists must remember their social role and bear in mind that the proletariat is the heir to the cultural as well as the material wealth of the old world. Consequently, artists must examine the entire cultural heritage in order to retain what is valuable while rejecting only what is harmful. This consideration applied all the more strongly to the area of science. Bogdanov pointed to the example of Marx as a scholar who utilized the latest results of bourgeois science (especially political economy) in the creation of his own more progressive theories.²⁶ Perhaps the most conservative formulation of the concept of proletarian science came from Bogdanov’s follower, Maria N. Smith (Smit), who defined it as “a new systematization of the entire cognitive experience of the past.”²⁷

What, then, will be new or different about proletarian science? Opponents of Proletkul’t never tired of ridiculing its alleged efforts to establish a “proletarian geometry” or “proletarian chemistry.” Such comments, retorted Smith, are deliberately malicious, for no one has alleged that the rules of arithmetic will need to be changed before a proletarian science can be created. What *will* change, she asserted, is that all the sciences, previously isolated from one another, will be integrated into a new, harmonious whole.²⁸

Bogdanov himself provided two main reasons why a newly developed unity of the sciences would become a hallmark of proletarian culture. First, he believed that an integrated approach to scientific questions, while alien to the bourgeois spirit of anarchic individualism, was most naturally suited to the psychology of the typical proletarian. Bogdanov (like Lenin, the son of a schoolteacher and inspector) related that he first made this discovery while conducting a propaganda circle for young workers in the 1890s. He found them to be most interested not in the specialized character of separate subjects, but in the mutual ties that bound together the various disciplines. They were, in Bogdanov’s terminology, unconsciously “striving after monism.”²⁹ Other Proletkul’t enthusiasts viewed the proletariat as inherently thinking in terms of the collective “we” rather than

24. Ibid. See also pp. 34–36.

25. Quoted in A. A. Bogdanov, “Nasha kritika: Kritika proletarskogo iskusstva,” *PK*, no. 3 (August 1918), p. 21.

26. A. A. Bogdanov, “Nasha kritika: O khudozhestvennom nasledstve,” *PK*, no. 2 (July 1918), pp. 4–13. See also Bogdanov’s editorial in the first issue of *PK*, reprinted in Bogdanov, *O proletarskoi kul’ture*, pp. 100–103.

27. M. N. Smit, “Blizhaishie etapy proletarizatsii nauki,” *PK*, no. 17–19 (August–December 1920), p. 32.

28. M. N. Smit, “Proletarizatsiia nauki,” *PK*, no. 11–12 (December 1919), pp. 31–32.

29. A. A. Bogdanov, “Proletarskii universitet,” *PK*, no. 5 (November 1918), pp. 10–11.

the individualistic "I" and viewing technical problems in a broad social context rather than from the exclusive viewpoint of one narrow specialty.³⁰

Second, Bogdanov believed that the development of machine-age technology was itself pointing in the direction of integration and unity. At first, industrialization had led to increased specialization of work tasks and greater fragmentation of knowledge—processes which he believed corresponded closely to the individualism extolled by the bourgeoisie. But Bogdanov maintained that modern industrial production has reversed this process, emphasizing "knowledge of general methods" rather than "familiarity with infinite details."³¹ Fragmented work assignments will gradually give way to automation and increased emphasis on general organizational rather than specialized manual skills. Bogdanov thought this trend coincided with an inherent collectivism in the proletariat and conflicted with the individualism of the bourgeoisie. He envisioned socialism as based on the "planned, worldwide organization of things, people, and ideas into a single, harmonious system." This goal could be achieved, he wrote, only through the development of proletarian science, which he termed the "science of universal organization,"³² and the basic principles of which he endeavored to set forth in a magnum opus entitled *Tectology*.³³

After Bogdanov, the most important contributor to the theory of proletarian culture was Anatolii V. Lunacharskii, the first commissar of enlightenment in the young Soviet state. Despite his enthusiasm for proletarian culture, Lunacharskii was even more insistent than Bogdanov on the necessity of preserving and learning from the cultural traditions of the past, a position that brought him into sharp conflict with more radical and iconoclastic elements that arose within Proletkul't and elsewhere. Nonetheless, he is correctly classified with the utopians during this period, because he continuously insisted not merely on the possibility but the absolute necessity of the development of a distinctively proletarian culture, placed much greater urgency on the tasks of enlightening the population than on those of economic development, and, at least in the first years of the revolution, enthusiastically strove to implement rapid and radical changes in the social consciousness of the masses.³⁴

30. V. F. Pletnev, "Na ideologicheskome fronte," *Pravda*, no. 217 (September 27, 1922), pp. 2-3.

31. Quoted by Vucinich, *Social Thought in Tsarist Russia*, p. 224.

32. Bogdanov, *O proletarskoi kul'ture*, pp. 215-16. See also A. A. Bogdanov, *Elementy proletarskoi kul'tury v razvitiu rabocheho klassa* (Moscow, 1920), pp. 29-31, 83-88; and Bogdanov, *Empiriomonizm*, 3:140.

33. A. A. Bogdanov, *Tektologiia: Vseobshchaia organizatsionnaia nauka* (Berlin, St. Petersburg, Moscow, 1922). The first part was originally published in St. Petersburg in 1913; additional chapters appeared in *Proletarskaia kul'tura* in 1919-20. Recent commentators have noted that in this work, Bogdanov anticipated many of the principles of cybernetics and general systems theory (see Vucinich, *Social Thought in Tsarist Russia*, pp. 229-30; and Utechin, "Philosophy and Society," p. 122).

34. For a different view emphasizing Lunacharskii's cautious moderation, see V. T. Ermakov, "'Voennyi kommunizm' i kul'turnoe stroitel'stvo vo vtoroi polovine 1918-nachale 1921 goda," *Istoriia SSSR*, 1974, no. 6, pp. 136-49; and V. T. Ermakov, "Ideinaia bor'ba na kul'turnom fronte v pervye gody Sovetskoi vlasti," *Voprosy istorii*, 1971, no. 11, pp. 16-31. On Lunacharskii, see Sheila Fitzpatrick, *The Commissariat of Enlightenment: Soviet Organization of Education and the Arts under Lunacharsky* (Cambridge, 1970); Sheila Fitzpatrick, "A. V. Lunacharsky: Recent Soviet Interpretations and Republications," *Soviet*

Although the pre-Revolutionary intellectual development of Bogdanov and Lunacharskii had many points in common, each man pursued an essentially independent path. In addition to extensive work in the areas of political economy and sociology, Bogdanov devoted himself primarily to philosophical and scientific problems. Lunacharskii, not as rigorous a philosopher as Bogdanov, was primarily concerned with developing the emotional component of Marxist thought and concentrated on questions of ethics, aesthetics, and literary criticism. Indeed, Lunacharskii regarded his chief task to be the restoration of values to what he considered to be their rightful position as an important subject of study within the Marxist intellectual tradition. Marx had understandably devoted himself to analyzing the development of human knowledge rather than human values, wrote Lunacharskii, but now it is time to correct this imbalance. Man is both a knowing *and* a valuing being, he insisted, and can act only through a combination of knowledge *and* values. Consequently, he devoted his pre-Revolutionary magnum opus, *Religion and Socialism*, to a study of the development of human values through history.³⁵

But *Religion and Socialism* went well beyond its announced goal of describing the historical development of values. It was an audacious attempt to explain religion as fulfilling a psychologically necessary need in mankind and to demonstrate that Marxism itself was a religion in this sense, and indeed was destined to become *the* religion of the future. Only the main points in the progression of his argument can be summarized here. Like Bogdanov, Lunacharskii regarded all human knowledge, including the observed laws of nature and history, as relative. This interpretation allowed for no inevitability and no guarantee that society would automatically progress to the stage of socialism. Nor were there values inherent in the natural world. Man, to be sure, had his hopes, values, and aspirations, but there was nothing in common between the ideals of man and the physical laws of the world. Lunacharskii echoed Nietzsche's statement, "Man! Your business is not to find meaning in the world, but to give meaning to the world!"³⁶

The act of imbuing the world with meaning constituted Lunacharskii's definition of religion as "that way of thought about the world and that world feeling which psychologically resolves the contrast between the laws of life and the laws of nature."³⁷ Lunacharskii argued that in no sense does religion thus defined require belief in a supernatural being, although such has been the main form of religion in the past. Instead, the proletariat would embrace socialism as a new religion, one that would resolve the contrast between the laws of life and the laws of nature by offering a goal, which was attainable but not inevitable, toward which all humanity could strive:

Studies, 18, no. 3 (January 1967): 267-89; Sheila Fitzpatrick, "Lunacharsky," *Soviet Studies*, 20, no. 4 (April 1969): 527-35; Howard R. Holter, "The Legacy of Lunacharsky and Artistic Freedom in the USSR," *Slavic Review*, 29, no. 2 (June 1970): 262-82; Robert C. Williams, *Artists in Revolution: Portraits of the Russian Avant-garde, 1905-1925* (Bloomington, Ind. and London, 1977), pp. 23-58; and Kendall E. Bailes, "Sur la 'Théorie des Valeurs' de A. V. Lunačarskij," *Cahiers du monde russe et soviétique*, 8 (1967): 223-43.

35. A. V. Lunacharskii, *Religiia i sotsializm*, 2 vols. (St. Petersburg, 1908, 1911), 1:10.

36. *Ibid.*, pp. 46-47.

37. *Ibid.*, p. 40.

Socialism is the organized struggle of mankind with nature for the complete subjection of it to reason; in the hope of victory, in the aspiration, in the exertion of strength, is the new religion.³⁸

. . . the very recognition of scientific socialism as the light of lights, the flaming focus of human hopes, the greatest poetry, the greatest enthusiasm, and the greatest religion is for me strict realism, in the words of Lassalle, *expressing that which is*.³⁹

Lunacharskii was thus an activist and an enthusiast. One of his main targets was the philosophy of Plekhanov, with its alleged pedantry and emphasis on the inevitability of historical laws. Lunacharskii believed that Plekhanov and, to a lesser extent, Engels had omitted or distorted some of Marx's key precepts, especially his stress on practice. He regarded Bogdanov's philosophy—as well as his own—as marking a return to the genuine, “unvulgarized, un-Plekhanovized” Marx.⁴⁰

It cannot be said, however, that *Religion and Socialism* was a success, even within the limited circle of Russian Social Democracy. Even Bogdanov explicitly repudiated Lunacharskii's religious terminology.⁴¹ Lenin's attitude was one of withering scorn.⁴² Lunacharskii himself subsequently played down his novel religious ideas, especially after rejoining the Bolsheviks in 1917.

But in abandoning religious terminology, Lunacharskii did not alter his more fundamental belief that the struggle for socialism would be successful only if it inspired and engaged an emotional adherence to the cause on the part of the masses of workers. In the years following 1909, Lunacharskii assisted Bogdanov and other *Vperedists* in formulating the principles of the concept of proletarian culture, which Lunacharskii came to view as fulfilling functions very similar to those he had imparted to religion. Whereas Bogdanov viewed proletarian culture primarily as a new system of organizing principles that would help to establish the socioeconomic forms of the future, Lunacharskii regarded it mainly as a vehicle which, like his concept of religion, could help to create and marshal an enthusiasm for socialism on the part of the masses. In 1914, Lunacharskii described proletarian literature as that which reflects the feelings, emotions, and aspirations of the proletarian class. Responding to the charge by A. N. Potresov and other Social Democrats that proletarian literature was either an impossibility or an extravagance under the conditions of the time, Lunacharskii insisted that it was tremendously important for the class struggle. “Proletarian art,” he asserted, “cannot fail to be profoundly active and penetrated with a militant idealism. . . . Art is a weapon, and a weapon of enormous value.”⁴³

Lunacharskii developed more fully his concept of proletarian culture in 1917 and in the following years. In an effort to restrain the cultural zealots to his

38. *Ibid.*, pp. 48–49.

39. *Ibid.*, 2:395.

40. *Ibid.*, pp. 324–26, 348–50, 371.

41. “Iz neizdannykh protokolov,” pp. 28–30.

42. V. I. Lenin, “A. M. Gor'komu” (1913), *PSS*, 48:226–29.

43. A. V. Lunacharskii, “Pis'ma o proletarskoi literature,” in A. V. Lunacharskii, *Sobranie sochinenii v vos'mi tomakh: Literaturovedenie, kritika, estetika* (Moscow, 1963–67), 7:169–71, quotation on p. 171 (hereafter cited as *SS*).

left, he insisted that while a class analysis of art is by far the most fruitful approach, it must not be conducted in a simplistic manner. In addition to class components, great art contains universal [*obshchechelovecheskie*] elements that can be treasured by all mankind, art can sometimes express the interwoven influence of several classes, and the art of a single given class can pass through several very different stages. Despite these qualifications, however, he did not hesitate to speak in general terms of “feudal,” “bourgeois,” as well as “proletarian” culture, and indeed, he went beyond Bogdanov and added another category, that of “socialist” culture. Whereas proletarian culture was a class culture that had its origins under capitalism and would reach its fullest development under the dictatorship of the proletariat, socialist culture would be a classless, universal culture ushered in by the final abolition of classes under socialism.⁴⁴ By this formulation, Lunacharskii further highlighted a basic premise of utopian thought: that proletarian culture was not a luxury that could be shelved until the economic bases of socialism had been laid, but was an essential component of the *process* of building the foundations of a socialist society.

Lunacharskii endeavored to accomplish his cultural goals in several ways. He was a founder of Proletkul't and a leading governmental defender of its autonomy.⁴⁵ As commissar of enlightenment he sought to expand the educational network at all levels, to implement a broad, polytechnical curriculum rather than narrow, vocational training, and to encourage independent mass cultural activity throughout the war-ravaged countryside. Throughout his career as commissar (which lasted until 1929), he continued to emphasize two major points: that the culture of the past must be critically assimilated rather than rejected, but that it should serve as the basis for a new and essentially different proletarian culture rather than be accepted and utilized without change.

In time, however, Lunacharskii gradually lost most of his radicalness, as he slowly but perceptibly modified his early beliefs concerning the speed with which his cultural tasks could be achieved. There were several reasons for this shift. Confrontation with the stark realities of a war-torn, impoverished, and largely illiterate population was in itself a sobering experience. The introduction of the New Economic Policy, with its severe curtailment of central budgetary allocations for culture and education, dealt another blow to his hopes. Nor did the activities of Proletkul't live up to his expectations. Even though during the civil war it attracted an impressive number of workers—Lunacharskii claimed half a million—he was forced to admit in early 1922 that it had not yet produced

44. A. V. Lunacharskii, “Kul'turnye zadachi rabochego klassa” (1917), in A. V. Lunacharskii, *Idealizm i materializm—kul'tura burzhuaizma, perekhodnaia, i sotsialisticheskaia*, 2nd ed. (Moscow-Leningrad, 1924), pp. 86–102; A. V. Lunacharskii, “O proletarskoi kul'ture” (1918), in A. V. Lunacharskii, *Tretii front: Sbornik statei* (Moscow, 1925), pp. 83–89; A. V. Lunacharskii, “Proletariat i iskusstvo” (1918), in *SS*, 7:201; A. V. Lunacharskii, “Problemy sotsialisticheskoi kul'tury” (1919), in *Idealizm i materializm*, pp. 113–18; A. V. Lunacharskii, “Proletarskaia kul'tura,” in *Idealizm i materializm*, pp. 119–23. Bogdanov believed that proletarian culture comprised values that were basically universal, and that the full flowering of proletarian culture would itself be the socialist ideal (Bogdanov, *Elementy proletarskoi kul'tury*, pp. 89–91).

45. A. V. Lunacharskii, “Eshche o proletkul'te i sovetskoi kul'turnoi rabote,” *Izvestiia*, no. 80 (632) (April 13, 1919), p. 2. Indeed, Lunacharskii temporarily disobeyed Lenin's explicit orders by defending continued Proletkul't autonomy in the fall of 1920 (see the account of his speech and the editors' notes in Lunacharskii, *SS*, 7:233–35, 655–59).

any truly significant works of art or literature.⁴⁶ Its organizational strength had been sapped by internal dissension and fragmentation (a group of proletarian poets had seceded in late 1919 to establish a separate organization known as *Kuznitsa*), by the curtailment of its autonomy, and by the budgetary stringencies of NEP. And although Lunacharskii never completely shed his independence of mind, it is more than likely that Lenin's increasingly hostile attitude toward Proletkul't had some impact on his views.

Probably the chief reason for the increasingly conservative tone of Lunacharskii's cultural pronouncements was the persistence and arrogance of the voices of cultural iconoclasm. These individuals proved deaf to Lunacharskii's strictures on the need for continuity as well as innovation. Many of them quickly reversed the early Proletkul't demand for autonomy, calling instead for the party to support them and suppress their cultural enemies. Lunacharskii generally opposed such monopolistic ambitions, and in 1922 he castigated "false Octobrists," who dispensed "cheap wares" under the pretense of proletarian culture. A political revolution can be carried out quickly, he wrote at that time, but it is folly to believe that either a new culture or a new socioeconomic order can be established in a similarly rapid fashion. While continuing to defend the concept of proletarian culture and the Proletkul't organization, he now insisted that the accomplishment of the cultural goals of the proletariat could only be achieved by means of a slow and patient evolutionary process.⁴⁷

Who were those "ultrautopians" who exasperated both Lunacharskii and Bogdanov by their vehement rejection of bourgeois culture and their insistence that only workers themselves, as distinct from a sympathetic socialist intelligentsia, could play a direct role in the creation of their own culture? Strident voices of cultural iconoclasm were frequently heard in the aftermath of the Revolution, as Futurist poets and artists mingled with Bolshevik extremists in denouncing the old while proclaiming the new. Although Proletkul'tists tended to reject the Futurists, whom they regarded as representatives of the final stages of a decadent bourgeoisie, many nonetheless shared similarly negative views concerning the culture of the past. Among the prominent Proletkul't spokesmen for this position were P. I. Lebedev-Polianskii (real name P. I. Lebedev) and P. M. Kerzhentsev (real name P. M. Lebedev, no relation). As a young Bolshevik in 1908 Lebedev-Polianskii had written a draft article which attacked Tolstoy as an ideologue of the landowning class and irreconcilable enemy of the proletarian revolutionary movement. Lenin rejected the article on the grounds that Tolstoy should be regarded not as a mere publicist but as an artist from whom even proletarian writers could learn.⁴⁸ Lebedev-Polianskii thereafter joined Bogdanov's *Vpered* group. Both Kerzhentsev and Lebedev-Polianskii helped Lunacharskii to establish the Proletkul't organization in Petrograd during the waning days of the Kerensky government (Bogdanov was in Moscow at the time).

46. A. V. Lunacharskii, "Sovetskoe gosudarstvo i iskusstvo" (1922), *SS*, 7:268.

47. A. V. Lunacharskii, "Eshche k voprosu o kul'ture" (1922), in *ibid.*, pp. 288-90. For an article which gives even more than his usual emphasis to the need to borrow from bourgeois culture, see A. V. Lunacharskii, "V. I. Lenin o nauke i iskusstve," in *Narodnoe prosveshchenie*, 1925, no. 1, pp. 13-32.

48. I. Chernoutsan, "Zaveshchano Leninyim," *Voprosy literatury*, 1975, no. 1, pp. 21-22.

At the founding conference a division was already evident between those regarding all of the old culture as "bourgeois" and worthy only of destruction and those regarding it as a necessary basis for the subsequent building of a proletarian culture. The rift intensified after the October Revolution, when the more radical position became particularly prominent in the Petrograd branch of Proletkul't, headed by Lebedev-Polianskii.⁴⁹ At the All-Russian Proletkul't Conference held in Moscow in September 1918, Kerzhentsev urged that existing theaters be handed over to proletarian companies, while Lebedev-Polianskii, despite his own nonproletarian origin, criticized theses written by Lunacharskii on the grounds that they assigned too large a role to the intelligentsia in the creation of proletarian culture.⁵⁰ Although these radical views never completely dominated the Proletkul't organization as a whole, Lebedev-Polianskii nonetheless served as chairman of the organization's central committee from 1918 to 1920, and both he and Kerzhentsev were named to the editorial board of *Proletarskaia kul'tura*.⁵¹

Another center of extreme cultural radicalism was the Scientific Department (*Nauchnyi otdel*) of the short-lived autonomous Commissariat of Enlightenment centered in Petrograd. This commissariat came into being shortly after the move of the central government from Petrograd to Moscow in March 1918, at which point the local soviets of Petrograd, Novgorod, and other nearby regions voted to establish a regional governing body known as the Union of Communes of the Northern Region (*Soiuz kommun severnoi oblasti*) with its own Council of Commissars. Lunacharskii became head of the regional Commissariat of Enlightenment in Petrograd as well as of the central one in Moscow. But he proved unable to control Petrograd's Scientific Department, about which he complained in correspondence as early as June 1918.⁵² In November of that year the department presented a set of theses and a hazy plan for reforming the scientific and higher educational institutions within its jurisdiction. The theses called for "revolutionizing" science, a phrase significantly different from Bogdanov's formula of the "socialization" of science and which highlighted the view of science as a revolutionary weapon in the hands of the proletariat. Although this view was implicit in Bogdanov's ideas, nowhere was it carried to such excessive lengths as here:

Fetishism, linked with the idea of "pure science," is stronger than class, moral, and religious fetishes and until now has been the most important stronghold of bourgeois counteractivity and sabotage. . . . It is necessary, therefore, to adopt the most radical measures in this direction, not fearing the traditional cries of vandalism, violence to free creativity, the destruction of culture, and so forth. "All means of battle must serve the revolution"—this is the only slogan which can and must guide the

49. A. V. Lunacharskii, "Ideologiia nakanune Oktiabria" (1922), in A. V. Lunacharskii, *Vospominaniia i vpechatleniia* (Moscow, 1968), pp. 167-68.

50. A. V. Lunacharskii, *SS*, 7:648. For Lunacharskii's theses, see *ibid.*, p. 201.

51. On Lebedev-Polianskii, see "Deiateli SSSR i Oktiabr'skoi revoliutsii," 41:1, columns 285-89. On Kerzhentsev, see *ibid.*, columns 185-86. See also Fitzpatrick, *The Commissariat of Enlightenment*, pp. 95-98.

52. *Literaturnoe nasledstvo*, no. 80: *V. I. Lenin i A. V. Lunacharskii: Perepiska, doklady, dokumenty* (Moscow, 1971), pp. 60 and 72.

people's power in its enactments. In the proletarian republic there *must* be proletarian science; in the period of revolution science must aid the victory with all available means. These are the basic theses of the present reform.⁵³

The reform plan called for the unification of all research institutes, universities, and technical institutes into one general type of institution, thereby abolishing the distinctions among them. It insisted that the reform be carried out completely, "without wavering or half-measures," that opposing elements be eliminated, and that unnecessary institutions be liquidated or reformed according to completely new principles.⁵⁴ Explicitly listed as ripe for liquidation was the proud Imperial Academy of Sciences,⁵⁵ which had crowned Russia's scientific establishment since its founding by Peter the Great two centuries before.

Such fire-breathing rhetoric was opposed by Lunacharskii and was absolutely anathema to Lenin, who repeatedly cautioned that great care be taken in reforming higher educational and scientific institutions, in particular the Academy of Sciences. Although news of the plan succeeded in thoroughly alarming the academicians and professoriate, it had no practical effect.⁵⁶ In May 1919, the Union of Communes of the Northern Region was abolished, and administration of its scientific and educational affairs was transferred to regional subordinate organs of the central Commissariat of Enlightenment (Narkompros).⁵⁷

The most prominent party leader to endorse radical cultural policies was Nikolai Bukharin. One of bolshevism's leading theorists, Bukharin respected and at times defended Bogdanov,⁵⁸ but, aside from a common stress on the concept of social equilibrium and deemphasis on the dialectic as an intellectual tool, their philosophical views did not coincide. Nor had Bukharin been associated with the *Vpered* group before the Revolution. Nonetheless, after 1917, Bukharin completely endorsed the concept of proletarian culture, provided important, if conditional, support for Proletkul't, and implicitly criticized Lunacharskii's Narkompros for an indulgence toward the bourgeois culture of the past. "The old theater must be smashed!" rang out the conclusion of one of his *Pravda* articles, while in another he eagerly welcomed a short story by a Red Army soldier as a "first swallow" of a new revolutionary art.⁵⁹

As a leading architect of the policy of war communism and a close collaborator of Trotsky in defending the need for the mobilization of labor and the "statification" of trade unions, Bukharin was one of the few individuals to embrace the principles of both the revolutionary heroic outlook and utopianism during the period 1918–21. After 1921 he, like Lunacharskii, moved to the right, arguing that change should be more gradual and less radical. But while decisively

53. *Tsentral'nyi gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Oktiabr'skoi Revoliutsii*, fond 2306, opis' 18, edimitsa khraneniia 24, pp. 48–49.

54. *Ibid.*, pp. 59–59rev. See also the vague but stern call for reform of higher education in the official newspaper of the union, *Severnaia kommuna*, no. 178 (December 13, 1918), p. 1.

55. A. V. Kol'tsov, *Lenin i stanovlenie Akademii nauk kak tsentra sovetskoi nauki* (Leningrad, 1959), p. 61.

56. *Ibid.*, pp. 61–63.

57. *Literaturnoe nasledstvo*, no. 80: *V. I. Lenin i A. V. Lunacharskii*, p. 60.

58. For Bukharin's objection to what he considered to be ignorant and ill-informed criticism of Bogdanov's views, see *Leninskii sbornik*, 36 vols. (Moscow, 1924–59), 12:384–85.

59. Nikolai Bukharin, "Mstitel'," *Pravda*, no. 282 (December 16, 1919), p. 1; Nikolai Bukharin, "Pervaia lastochka," *Pravda*, no. 7 (January 12, 1923), p. 1.

parting company with the principles of revolutionary heroism which Trotsky was soon to resurrect, Bukharin retained in modified form two important axioms of utopianism. In 1922, he argued that the resolution of cultural and educational problems, as opposed, implicitly, to economic demands, was the most urgent, life-or-death task for the revolution at the moment.⁶⁰ And although he became much more tolerant toward the continuation of older cultural forms, throughout the 1920s he continued to view the creation of a genuinely proletarian culture as one of the main tasks on the agenda.⁶¹

A final figure to be considered in the utopian group is Alexandra Kollontai.⁶² Although she had relatively little to say about proletarian culture in the sense of art or science, and was closely associated neither with Proletkul't nor Narkompros, she merits attention because her views on the subjects that interested her most—the condition in Soviet society of women and of rank-and-file industrial workers—show strong similarities to basic Bogdanovist principles. When compared with those of Trotsky, Kollontai's views provide a striking illustration of the differences in outlook between the utopians and the bearers of the revolutionary heroic tradition.

During the first years after the Revolution, Kollontai was an energetic if unsuccessful proponent of immediate and far-reaching changes in the prevailing patterns of family life, sexual relations, and morality. These changes, which she felt could only be brought about by “a radical reeducation of our psychology,”⁶³ would be primarily ideological and hence located in the area which Marxists traditionally labeled the superstructure of society. But like Bogdanov and Lunacharskii, she heatedly denied that changes in this area could occur only after the economic base had been rebuilt. Rather, she saw the formation of a new ideology as part and parcel of the rebuilding process itself:

It is an old truth that every new rising class, brought into being by a material culture which is distinct from that of the previous level of economic development, enriches all mankind with a new ideology. . . . A sexual code of morality is an integral part of the ideology. However, one has only to begin to speak of “proletarian ethics” and of “proletarian sexual morality” in order to encounter the stereotyped objection: proletarian sexual morality is no more than a “superstructure” which will have no place until the entire economic base has been changed. As though the ideology of any class

60. Nikolai Bukharin, “Problema kul'tury v epokhu proletarskoi revoliutsii,” *Izvestiia*, October 15, 1922, p. 3.

61. See the 1925 Central Committee resolution on literary policy, of which Bukharin was the main author, in *Pravda*, July 1, 1925, reprinted in Edward J. Brown, *The Proletarian Episode in Russian Literature, 1925–1932* (New York, 1953), pp. 235–40. For useful discussions of party debates concerning the concept of proletarian literature, see Herman Ermolaev, *Soviet Literary Theories, 1917–1934: The Genesis of Socialist Realism* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1963), especially pp. 27–54; and Brown, *The Proletarian Episode in Russian Literature*. For Bukharin's relations with Bogdanov and attitudes toward proletarian culture, see Cohen, *Bukharin and the Bolshevik Revolution*, pp. 14–15, 205–6.

62. For recent Western scholarship on Kollontai, see Barbara Evans Clements, *Bolshevik Feminist: The Life of Aleksandra Kollontai* (Bloomington, Ind., 1979); and Beatrice Brodsky Farnsworth, “Bolshevism, the Woman Question, and Aleksandra Kollontai,” *American Historical Review*, 81, no. 2 (April 1976): 292–316.

63. A. M. Kollontai, *Novaia moral' i rabochii klass* (Moscow, 1919), p. 57.

is formed only when the sudden change in socioeconomic relations which guarantees the domination of a given class has already occurred! All the experience of history teaches us that the elaboration of the ideology of a social group, and consequently of sexual morality, is accomplished in the very process of the highly difficult struggle of this group with hostile social forces.⁶⁴

In early 1921, Kollontai assumed the leadership of the Workers' Opposition, a small group that was becoming alarmed both by the increasing bureaucratization within the party and by the government's domination of the trade unions. In a manifesto which she prepared for the Tenth Party Congress, Kollontai stressed two major themes strongly reminiscent of Proletkul't principles. First, she emphasized that neither the Soviet government nor the Communist Party was purely proletarian in nature, since each had to mediate among the contending influences of the peasantry and the petite bourgeoisie as well as the proletariat. In order to compensate for this undesirable, if inevitable, situation, trade unions should be autonomous from both state and party so that rank-and-file workers would have complete control over at least those areas that were of most vital concern to them.⁶⁵ Indeed, A. G. Shliapnikov, Kollontai's paramour and coleader of the Workers' Opposition, had tried unsuccessfully to raise the issues of trade union autonomy and hegemony in the economic sphere at the Ninth Party Congress in 1920.⁶⁶

Second, Kollontai argued that workers themselves, not former capitalists or bourgeois specialists, should have control over the production process. She believed that industrial production would be substantially different under communism than under capitalism, that immediate and drastic departures from capitalist practice had to be introduced to prepare the way for communist-style production, but that bourgeois specialists would inevitably resist the necessary changes. Only workers themselves, acting spontaneously and autonomously, she wrote, could create the new types of incentives and other innovative aspects that would characterize the truly communist industrial system of the future.⁶⁷ Like other utopians, Kollontai regarded proletarian consciousness, whether in the sphere of morality or industrial production, as the driving force in the establishment of the economic foundations of communism.

* * * * *

The revolutionary heroic tradition was dominated by one overwhelming personality, Leon Trotsky, best known for his leading role during the October seizure of power and for his great success in creating and commanding the Red Army during the civil war. Once the worst part of the war was over, however, he turned his attention to the economic front, where he attempted to implement a far-reaching plan for the "militarization of labor"—an effort to restore the economy by draconian means of centralized control over the labor

64. *Ibid.*, p. 60.

65. A. M. Kollontai, *Rabochaia oppositsiia* (Moscow, 1921), pp. 10–22.

66. Carr, *The Bolshevik Revolution*, 2:215; Daniels, *Conscience of the Revolution*, pp. 125–26.

67. Kollontai, *Rabochaia oppositsiia*, pp. 22–35, especially p. 33.

force.⁶⁸ One of its by-products was the creation, in January 1920, of the Main Committee for Vocational-Technical Education (Glavprofobr), which, as a result of its attempts to mobilize the educational system vocationally, came into direct conflict with Lunacharskii and other Narkompros leaders during the course of 1920.⁶⁹ Trotsky's industrial policies upheld the authority of managers and bourgeois specialists and called for state control of the labor unions. The theses which he and Bukharin presented in the trade union debate of late 1920 and early 1921 were diametrically opposed to the platform drawn up by Kollontai for the Workers' Opposition.

Writing in exile during the 1930s, Trotsky provided a characteristic analysis of the problems that had confronted the Soviet economy since the Revolution. While he regarded the "socialization of production" as a major advance over capitalism, he stated that, in the final analysis, the strength of the Soviet system could only be measured by its labor productivity. And it was precisely here, in "technique, organization, and labor skill," that he found capitalism, "notwithstanding its condition of stagnation and rot," to be far superior.⁷⁰ The contrast with Kollontai was fundamental. Whereas she believed that existing capitalist practices must be repudiated in favor of yet-to-be devised socialist methods, Trotsky insisted that only after the most advanced capitalist techniques and levels of labor productivity had been achieved would there be any chance of a genuine establishment of socialism.⁷¹

Trotsky's attitude toward the concept of proletarian culture followed from these basic premises. Unlike some opponents of Proletkul't, Trotsky certainly did not consider cultural matters uninteresting or unimportant. Indeed, in 1922-24, a time of crucial political clashes within the Politburo, he found time to write *Literature and Revolution*, a work which remains one of the leading essays in Marxist literary criticism. Nonetheless, he did not let his genuine enthusiasm and empathy for cultural values determine his basic priorities. His outlook was revealed as early as 1909, when he declined to participate in Bogdanov's Capri School, arguing that the curriculum of such a short-term course should be concentrated on political economy rather than literature, art, and morality.⁷² In the introduction to *Literature and Revolution* he made his point with unmistakable clarity:

If the dictatorship of the proletariat should prove incapable, in the next few years, of organizing its economic life and of securing at least a living minimum of material comforts for its population, then the proletarian regime will inevitably turn to dust. *The economic problem at present is the problem above all problems.*⁷³

68. Trotskii, *Sochineniia*, 15:10-14. For a discussion of the labor armies that resulted, see Carr, *Bolshevik Revolution*, 2:213-18.

69. McClelland, "Bolshevik Approaches to Higher Education," pp. 826-28.

70. L. D. Trotsky, *The Revolution Betrayed*, trans. Max Eastman (New York, 1970), p. 10.

71. Trotsky was sympathetic to Kollontai's hopes concerning the woman question. But here too he thought that little could really be achieved until an expanded economy would be able to create the resources needed for communal housekeeping and child care (see *ibid.*, pp. 144-58).

72. Bailes, "Lenin and Bogdanov," pp. 127-28.

73. Trotsky, *Literature and Revolution*, p. 9; emphasis added.

Thus, while Bukharin was coming to the conclusion that cultural and educational tasks were the most immediate ones facing the regime (a conviction that Lunacharskii and Bogdanov had always shared), Trotsky was forthrightly reasserting the primacy of economics. It was the urgent need to develop the economy, together with the military and political demands of the seizure of power, that constituted the main forces of the revolutionary period, forces which "shoved into the background" or "cruelly trampled under foot" any extraneous considerations.⁷⁴ Far from being ahead of, or even in step with, revolutionary developments, "the place of art is in the rear of the historic advance."⁷⁵

Trotsky flatly rejected the concept of proletarian culture. "It is fundamentally incorrect," he wrote, "to contrast bourgeois culture and bourgeois art with proletarian culture and proletarian art. The latter will never exist."⁷⁶ Whereas the bourgeoisie had considerable time and resources to develop its own culture before it assumed power, the proletariat had no such advantages or possibilities. Nor would it have much opportunity for doing so during its period of class rule, the dictatorship of the proletariat, since Trotsky saw little scope for cultural activity during this revolutionary period. Furthermore, whereas in the past the time needed to create a new class culture had involved centuries, the dictatorship of the proletariat would, in the foreseeable future, give way to the classless society of socialism. At this point, Trotsky, like Lunacharskii, thought that a new classless, universal, socialist culture would be created. But unlike the adherents of Proletkul't, Trotsky did not believe that there would be time—between the collapse of capitalism and its own dissolution as a class with the advent of socialism—for the proletariat to create its own distinctive class culture.⁷⁷

Although Trotsky welcomed some of the recent efforts by proletarian poets and writers, he did not consider their work to be sufficient in either quality or quantity to constitute the beginnings of a genuine class culture. Furthermore, he insisted that the first task of any artist or writer from the working class should be to master bourgeois technique. He regarded the main cultural tasks of the proletariat to be assimilation and mastery of the most essential elements of bourgeois culture. Proletkul't, for example, should strive not to create a new literature, but to raise the literary level of the working class.⁷⁸

But if, as Trotsky granted, the bourgeoisie had placed its strong class imprint on all aspects of its culture, would not the proletariat imbibe alien class influences if it simply assimilated uncritically the inherited bourgeois culture? Trotsky tried to respond to this criticism, with particular reference to science, in the following passage:

All science, in greater or lesser degree, unquestionably reflects the tendencies of the ruling class. . . . But it would be naive to think that the proletariat must revamp critically all science inherited from the bourgeoisie, before

74. *Ibid.*, pp. 189–90.

75. *Ibid.*, p. 236.

76. *Ibid.*, p. 14.

77. *Ibid.*, pp. 184–86.

78. *Ibid.*, pp. 191–93, 200–205.

applying it to Socialist reconstruction. . . . As a matter of fact, the proletariat will reconstruct ethics as well as science radically, but he [*sic*] will do so after he [*sic*] will have constructed a new society, even though in the rough. But are we not traveling in a vicious circle? How is one to build a new society with the aid of the old science and the old morals? Here we must bring in a little dialectics. . . . The proletariat rejects what is clearly unnecessary, false and reactionary, and in the various fields of its reconstruction makes use of the methods and conclusions of present-day science, taking them necessarily with the percentage of reactionary class-alloy which is contained in them. . . . At any rate, the proletariat will have to carry its Socialist reconstruction to quite a high degree, that is, provide for real material security and for the satisfaction of society culturally before it will be able to carry out a general purification of science from top to bottom.⁷⁹

It would be misleading to label Trotsky less “left” than, say, Bogdanov or Kollontai, if “leftness” is defined as the desire for radical and rapid transformation of the status quo. Daniels’s categorization of Trotsky as “moderate Left” and Kollontai, among others, as “Ultra-Left” is unpersuasive.⁸⁰ Trotsky’s vision of a totally liberating and transformed society was no less Promethean, no less explicitly stated, and no less urgently desired than that of the utopians.⁸¹ The difference lay neither in the nature of the ultimate goal nor in the degree of boldness with which both groups were willing to seek it, but rather in the route they thought necessary to reach it. And on this point their disagreement was absolutely fundamental, not just a matter of degree.

* * * * *

What was the fate of these two visions of radical change for Russia? How did Lenin and then Stalin react to them? Such questions are important, but can only be treated briefly. Lenin, especially during the 1917–21 period, endorsed some of the principles of both utopianism and the revolutionary heroic outlook, but he never completely associated himself with either position. After 1921, he became increasingly critical of both.

Unlike Trotsky, Lenin did not explicitly reject the concept of proletarian culture. He even used the term himself on occasion, although he never systematically explained what he meant by it.⁸² Lenin attacked Bogdanov and his followers because he thought they were falsely labeling as proletarian culture a philosophy (Machism) which he considered reactionary, not because he believed that the very idea of proletarian culture was theoretically erroneous.

79. *Ibid.*, pp. 197–99.

80. Daniels, *Conscience of the Revolution*, pp. 5–7, 138–43. Daniels shows quite effectively, however, that Lenin occupied a position that was essentially distinct from both.

81. For Trotsky’s Promethean view of the future socialist culture, see Trotsky, *Literature and Revolution*, pp. 249–56.

82. V. I. Lenin, “Zametki publitsista” (1910), *PSS*, 19:249–52; V. I. Lenin, “Zadachi soiuzov molodezhi” (1920), *PSS*, 41:304–5. See also the Central Committee resolution, “O proletkul’takh” (December 1, 1920), approved, though not written, by Lenin, in *Direktsivny VKP(b) po voprosam prosveshcheniia*, 2nd ed. (Moscow-Leningrad, 1930), pp. 251–52. In “Kriticheskie zametki po natsional'nomu voprosu” (1913), Lenin stated that there were two cultures within every national culture, but was imprecise concerning the class nature of the two cultures (see Lenin, *PSS*, 24:113–50).

Although frequently stressing the need to assimilate the culture of the past, he also saw the need for class struggle against the bourgeoisie in the cultural field, and occasionally ranted about the “bourgeois junk” with which bourgeois scholars and scientists corrupted the young in the nation’s institutions of higher education.⁸³ In the first years after the Revolution, he supported most of Lunacharskii’s efforts to expand opportunities for education in its broadest sense, and he had harsh words for the vocationalist enthusiasts of Glavprofobr, even while adopting some of their policies.⁸⁴

On the other hand, Lenin’s hostility to Bogdanov and his philosophy remained unswerving. Furthermore, his support of party work among women seems to have been motivated at least as much by a desire to gain the political support of women as to improve their status.⁸⁵ He strongly and effectively attacked Kollontai and the Workers’ Opposition at the Tenth Party Congress. Above all, his negative attitude toward the efforts of Proletkul’t to create a proletarian culture became increasingly harsh and intolerant with the passage of time.⁸⁶

Concerning the revolutionary heroic outlook, Lenin fully supported the radical and centralizing measures of war communism, including Trotsky’s short-lived experiment in the militarization of labor. But his position in the trade union debate of late 1920 and early 1921 was less radical than either the extreme of state control put forth by Trotsky and Bukharin, or that of worker control espoused by Kollontai and Shliapnikov.⁸⁷ And it was at Lenin’s initiative that the retreat known as the New Economic Policy was put into practice in March 1921. Although it is impossible to state with any certainty how he would have reacted to the problems of the mid or late 1920s, one of his last published works stressed the importance of a gradual approach in both cultural and economic development in order to win the political loyalty of the peasantry.⁸⁸

Despite Lenin’s increasingly critical attitude toward both programs during 1921–23, neither utopianism nor the revolutionary heroic tradition died out during the 1920s. They soon underwent distortions, however, as they became detached from their original sponsors, were embraced uncritically by young and half-educated zealots, and were used as weapons in the intraparty factional struggle. It was Stalin who proved best able to capitalize on this situation. Trotsky’s Left Opposition was formally defeated in 1927, but the following year many of its economic policies, previously attacked as “superindustrialism,” were adopted in cruder form by V. V. Kuibyshev, whom Stalin had appointed head of the Su-

83. V. I. Lenin, “O proletarskoi kul'ture” (1920), *PSS*, 41:336–37; V. I. Lenin, “Pre-dislovie k knige I. I. Stepanova” (1922), *PSS*, 45:51–52; and V. I. Lenin, “O znachenie voinstvuiushchego materializma” (1922), *PSS*, 45:33.

84. V. I. Lenin, “O politekhnicheskome obrazovanii” (1920), *PSS*, 42:228–30.

85. Farnsworth, “Bolshevism, the Woman Question, and Aleksandra Kollontai,” pp. 295–96.

86. V. I. Lenin, “Privetstvennaia rech'” and “Rech' ob obmane naroda lozungami svobody i ravenstva” (1919), *PSS*, 38:330 and 368; V. I. Lenin, “Rech' na III Vserossiiskom soveshchaniu zaveduiushchikh vneshkol'nymi podotdelami” (1920), *PSS*, 40:164; V. I. Lenin, “N. I. Bukharinu” (1922), *PSS*, 54:291; V. I. Lenin, “Stranichki iz dnevnika” (1923), *PSS*, 45:363–64; and V. I. Lenin, “Luchshe men'she, da luchshe” (1923), *PSS*, 45:398.

87. Leonard Schapiro, *The Origin of the Communist Autocracy* (London, 1955), pp. 253–313; Isaac Deutscher, *Soviet Trade Unions* (London, 1950), pp. 42–52.

88. V. I. Lenin, “O kooperatsii” (1923), *PSS*, 45:369–77.

preme Economic Council (Vesenkha). It was with Vesenkha's impossible production targets and the revolutionary heroic slogan, "There are no fortresses that Bolsheviks cannot storm!" that the regime, Stalin at the helm, plunged into the First Five-Year Plan in 1929.

Although Proletkul't rapidly lost influence after 1920, other groups continued to proclaim the need for a proletarian culture in general and proletarian literature in particular. By 1923, the most important group, "October," gained control of the All-Russian Association of Proletarian Writers (VAPP, later RAPP). Although retaining Bogdanov's view of art as an organizing tool with regard to society, the "October" group claimed somewhat inconsistently to be based philosophically on Plekhanov and eagerly sought favors and authority from the party. Stalin, who (at least according to Trotsky) had never given a thought to such problems before 1925,⁸⁹ also began to dabble in this area. In a speech in May 1925, Stalin stated that a proletarian culture was in the process of being built,⁹⁰ and, under his leadership, beginning in 1928, the party sought to utilize RAPP as its instrument in promulgating a drastic cultural revolution.

Whereas Lenin tried to put a damper on the radical visions of both utopianism and revolutionary heroism, Stalin sought to revitalize and co-opt them. Reasons are not hard to find. In the late 1920s Stalin was in the process of unleashing a new revolution. During times of intense revolution, radical visions—no matter how inconsistent, impractical, or unrealistic—are essential to the mobilization of popular support. And so it was that, under Stalin's taciturn patronage, vulgarized versions of both visions were simultaneously encouraged during the stormy years of 1928–31, before, having achieved their purpose, they were muffled for good in the purge-stricken atmosphere of the 1930s.

89. Trotsky, *The Revolution Betrayed*, p. 179.

90. I. V. Stalin, "Tovarishch Stalin o politicheskikh zadachakh universiteta narodov vostoka," *Pravda*, no. 115 (May 22, 1925), pp. 2–3.