

## BUKHARIN AND THE ORIGINS OF THE 'PROLETARIAN CULTURE' DEBATE

By JOHN BIGGART

ON 31 August 1922 the Politbureau of the Russian Communist Party resolved to open a debate in the columns of *Pravda* on the question of 'proletarian culture'.<sup>1</sup> During the next few years this debate, which had to do not only with the narrow question of whether a proletariat exercising a monopoly of political and economic power could be considered to possess a 'culture' specific to itself, but raised the broader issue of redefining socialist revolution in cultural terms, engaged the attention of the leading theoreticians of the Communist Party. As we shall see, this debate provided the context in which Lenin produced his last writings and other prominent Marxists (Bukharin, Pletnev, Trotsky, Lunacharsky, Krupskaya, Skvortsov-Stepanov, Yakovlev and Bogdanov) also contributed. The theoretical debate was taken up in a variety of disciplines, notably in literature and the arts, where it has been most fully studied by Western scholars.<sup>2</sup> During the 1920s arguments in the debate over 'cultural revolution' provided factions within state and party institutions with political weapons and it was not until this bureaucratic power struggle was resolved that the debate itself was brought to a close, with the adoption by the régime of what one might describe as a 'civic' as opposed to class-based policy of socialist cultural transformation.<sup>3</sup>

Western historians, other than literary historians, have not yet done justice to the importance of this debate in the history of Soviet political and social thought. It is usually considered to have originated with the publication in *Pravda* on 27 September 1922 of an article by Valerian Pletnev, Chairman of the Proletcult, 'On the ideological front', while Lenin's response, through the intermediary of the Deputy-Head of the *Agitprop* Department of the Communist Party Ya. Yakovlev, in articles published in *Pravda* on 24 and 25 October, is usually interpreted as an episode in Lenin's long running philosophical dispute with the progenitor of the Proletcult, Alexander Bogdanov.<sup>4</sup> In this article, however, I shall argue that the debate over 'proletarian culture' had more complex origins: in the rivalry between Lenin and Bogdanov certainly; but also in the social and political crisis of the first NEP years when the creation of an ideological orthodoxy became expedient for purposes of political control; in a perceived threat of 'bourgeois restoration'; and in the preoccupation of Lenin in his declining years with the problem of succession, when his criticism of the ideas of Nikolai Bukharin clearly reflected a concern at the extent of the influence upon Bukharin of Bogdanov.

*Lenin and the 'Bogdanovism' of Bukharin*

Though Bukharin was formally only a candidate member of the Politbureau in the period 1919–24, his status as the Bolsheviks' leading theoretician, at least as far as Lenin was concerned, was not in doubt, and Lenin would acknowledge as much in his 'testament' of 25 December 1922.<sup>5</sup> Since before the revolution, however, Bukharin had indeed been influenced by the writings of Alexander Bogdanov. In an autobiography written for the encyclopedia *Granat* he was to confess that at the time of the struggle between the Leninist and Bogdanovist sub-factions of the RSDRP he had 'felt a certain heretical [*sic*] attraction towards Empiriocriticism which led me to read everything that had appeared on the subject in Russian'.<sup>6</sup> This 'attraction' was not uncritical: in a review published in *Kommunist* in 1918 of Bogdanov's *Voprosy Sotsializma* of the same year Bukharin had acknowledged Bogdanov's importance as a Marxist, noting that a number of his theories, in particular his views on the origin of religion, had been confirmed by historians and ethnographers. At the same time he had defended the orthodox Russian Marxist view that political revolution was a necessary precondition of socialism (Bogdanov had described this position as 'Maximalist') and had denounced Bogdanov's own interpretation of the construction of socialism as one of 'opportunistic culturalism' (*opportunisticheskoe kul'turnichestvo*).<sup>7</sup>

For the idea that the proletariat should develop its own specific culture, however, and for the Proletcult as an institution, Bukharin had considerable sympathy. In 1918 he had welcomed the foundation of the Proletcult as a 'laboratory for the creation of a purely proletarian culture'<sup>8</sup> and in 1919 he had, moreover, enthusiastically endorsed the cultural iconoclasm of the more radical members of the Proletcult.<sup>9</sup> While rejecting what he understood to be the Proletcult's bid for complete autonomy from the state<sup>10</sup> he did his best to defend it against the encroachment of the state centralisers of the Moscow soviet and of the Commissariat of Education, and it seems likely that he took a benign view of efforts to set up an International Proletcult or '*Kul'tintern*' within the Communist International.<sup>11</sup> In 1924 Trotsky would describe Bukharin as having been the Proletcult's 'protector';<sup>12</sup> and as late as February 1925 Bukharin was still prepared to defend the notion of 'proletarian culture' before a party forum.<sup>13</sup>

Until 1920 Bukharin's 'Bogdanovism' had no effect upon his relations with Lenin. But since May 1919 Lenin had been participating in a campaign against Bogdanov and the Proletcult.<sup>14</sup> On 6 May 1919, at the First Congress on Extra-Mural Education, Lenin had displayed the extent of his concern that Bogdanovist ideas might acquire influence among the left-intelligentsia, castigating 'bourgeois intellectuals who very often regard the new type of workers' and peasants' educational institutions as the most convenient field for testing their individual theories in philosophy and culture and in which, very often, the most absurd ideas were hailed as something new, and the supernatural and incongruous were offered as purely proletarian art and proletarian culture'. On 19 May he had excoriated 'those who are now shouting about "consumers" or "soldiers" communism, who look down upon others with contempt and

imagine that they are superior to the Bolshevik Communists'. Counterposing his own economic conception of revolution to that of Bogdanov (the interpretation of the revolution which had aroused his ire was indeed that of Bogdanov and the Proletcult), and borrowing a term from Bogdanov's own intellectual arsenal, he stressed the importance which he attached to the 'fundamental, elementary, and extremely simple task of organization; and that is why I am so strongly opposed to all these intellectual fads and "proletarian cultures". As opposed to these fads I advocate the ABC of organization. Distribute grain and coal in such a way as to take care of every *pod*—this is the object of proletarian discipline . . . the fundamental task of proletarian culture, of proletarian organization'.<sup>15</sup>

At the Third All-Russian Conference on Extra-Mural Education which opened on 25 February 1920 Lenin had again disparaged efforts being made to foster a proletarian culture, this time classifying such efforts as a variety of 'infantile disorder', a subject to which he was to devote a full-length pamphlet in April–May of that year.<sup>16</sup> At times, indeed, it must have seemed to Lenin that he would never be rid of Bogdanov: by 1920, as the émigré historian Joshua Yakhot has pointed out, the Bolsheviks found themselves facing the dilemma of being unable wholeheartedly to publish the works of one of the most prolific and influential Russian Marxists, Georgii Plekhanov, because of the latter's support for the Mensheviks during 1917.<sup>17</sup> By contrast, the works of Plekhanov's (and Lenin's) philosophical adversary, Bogdanov, were regularly being published. Unless an 'orthodox' version of Marxism could be made available to the educated public it would be the 'heretical' Marxism of Bogdanov which would influence the minds of the builders of the new régime.<sup>18</sup> Indeed, the dissemination of Bogdanov's ideas was considered of sufficient importance to merit discussion in the Politbureau where, on 6 May 1920, Lenin circulated an indignant note on the proposed publication of a tenth edition of Bogdanov's *Short Course in Economic Science*: 'It would appear that there is no mention here of the "Dictatorship of the proletariat"?!?!? And this is to be published by the State Publishing House?'<sup>19</sup> It was only after V. V. Vorovsky had reported on the matter on 11 May that Bogdanov's book appeared in an edition supplemented by M. Dvolaisky.<sup>20</sup> A further Politbureau decision was needed on 22 May 1920 before Bogdanov was allowed to deliver a series of lectures on the economic history of the pre-revolutionary period.<sup>21</sup>

It was at this very moment, in the spring of 1920, that the publication of Bukharin's *Economics of the Transition Period* under the auspices of the recently founded Communist Academy resulted in his being drawn into the controversy surrounding Bogdanov and the Proletcult.<sup>22</sup> On 31 May 1920 Lenin wrote a review of Bukharin's book and, although his overall assessment of the work was favourable, he expressed concern that the Bolsheviks' foremost theoretician should employ concepts derived from the writings of Bogdanov. Specifically Lenin objected to Bukharin's use of Bogdanov's organization theory and of the 'equilibrium model' of social change (all of which he describes as '*Begriffscholastik*') in preference to Hegelian dialectics. In his conclusion he criticized Bukharin for forgetting that the concepts which he had 'naively'

borrowed from Bogdanov actually reflected a 'philosophy of idealism and eclecticism', and suggested that a future edition should be purged of these 'scholastic' errors.<sup>23</sup>

Lenin's anxieties concerning Bogdanov can only have been enhanced by the announcement in *Izvestiya* on 14 August 1920 that two days previously, at a post-congress meeting of delegates to the Second Congress of the Comintern, a Provisional International Bureau of the Proletcult had been formed under the Presidency of Lunacharsky and Secretaryship-General of Valerian Lebedev-Polyansky. There was much in the report to alarm him: the Russian Proletcult now claimed no fewer than 400,000 members, of whom 80,000 were said to be actively participating in studio work; sixteen journals were being distributed.<sup>24</sup> On 17 August Lenin enquired of the Deputy Commissar for Education M. N. Pokrovsky, during a meeting of *Sovnarkom*: '(1) What is the legal status of the Proletcult? (2) Who is in charge of it? and (3) How are they appointed? (4) What else is there of importance to be known about the status and role of the Proletcult and the results of its work?'<sup>25</sup>

Lenin's enquiry produced the first of a series of reports which were to be written on the Proletcult during its brief and troubled existence.<sup>26</sup> For the time being it survived, but Lenin took immediate steps on the eve of the First All-Russian Congress of the Proletcult, scheduled for 5–12 October 1920, to stem the advance of Bogdanov's movement and to make clear his reasons for believing that Bogdanov's ideas ran counter to Marxism. Some time before 2 September 1920 he announced to his former associate V. D. Bonch-Bruевич, who would have been well aware of his motives, that he proposed to publish a second edition of his anti-Bogdanovist tract *Materialism and Empiriocriticism*.<sup>27</sup> In order that the contemporary relevance of the work should be made clear Lenin invited the veteran Bolshevik V. I. Nevsky to write a new introduction which duly appeared under the title 'Dialectical materialism and the philosophy of sterile reaction' ('*Dialekticheskii materializm i filosofiya mertvoi reaktsii*').<sup>28</sup> No sooner had the second edition appeared than Lenin wrote to Bukharin inviting him to comment.<sup>29</sup> Bukharin, however, declined to be convinced of the pernicious nature of Bogdanov's ideas and retorted that in repeating the charge that Bogdanov's empiriomonism was a form of idealism Lenin and Nevsky were barking up the wrong tree, for Bogdanov had long ago set epistemology to one side and was now more concerned with the general laws of systems, offering his 'Tektology' as a general organizational science. Lenin, as he had admitted in his foreword to the new edition, was not familiar with Bogdanov's recent work and so Bukharin was well placed to argue that if one wished to take issue with Bogdanov one was bound to take account of his current thinking.<sup>30</sup>

This exchange between Lenin and Bukharin took place one month before the opening of the First All-Russian Congress of the Proletcult. On 2 October, on the eve of the Proletcult Congress, Lenin renewed his criticism of it in a speech delivered to the Third Congress of the Komsomol, concentrating this time upon the alleged iconoclasm of the movement.

Only a precise knowledge and transformation of the culture created by the entire development of mankind will enable us to create a proletarian culture. The latter is not

clutched out of thin air; it is not an invention of those who call themselves experts in proletarian culture. This is all nonsense. Proletarian culture must be the logical development of the store of knowledge mankind has accumulated under the yoke of capitalist, landowner and bureaucratic society.<sup>31</sup>

This speech was published in *Pravda* on 5 October, the opening day of the Proletcult Congress and served Lenin's purposes with regard to that institution; but his point would not have been lost on the chief editor of *Pravda*, Bukharin, whose position on the culture of the past, as we have seen, was close to that of the 'iconoclasts'.

Lenin's next *démarche* in relation to the Proletcult was to instruct its principal patron in the government, the Education Commissar Anatolii Lunacharsky, to inform the Proletcult Congress that Proletcult must be subordinated to *Narkompros*. This was the relationship which a faction of 'state centralizers' in *Narkompros*, led by Krupskaya, had been attempting to bring about for over two years,<sup>32</sup> and Lenin made no attempt to conceal his exasperation when Lunacharsky went before the Congress and proposed instead an institutional 'convergence' ('*sblizhenie*') which would have left the autonomy of the Proletcult, in its creative work at least, intact.<sup>33</sup> Furious, Lenin proposed on 8 October that the central Committee of the *RKP(b)* should submit a policy resolution for adoption by the Collegium of *Narkompros* and by the Proletcult Congress, and in order to expedite matters he produced his own draft resolution in five points.<sup>34</sup> Lenin's resolution provided the basis of discussions at the Politbureau meetings of 9, 11 and 14 October 1920 in the course of which it emerged that there were two contentious issues: the place to be occupied by the Proletcult in the Soviet system of institutions; and the nature of cultural change under the 'dictatorship of the proletariat'. Lenin and Bukharin were to clash over both of these and on the institutional question Lenin would eventually prevail; but on the second, with which we are principally concerned here, Bukharin was to obtain an effective adjournment which, in the event, would last for two years.<sup>35</sup>

In points (3) and (4) of his draft resolution Lenin had touched upon two controversial aspects of the theory of proletarian culture, concerning the relationship in which it stood to Marxism and the relationship in which it stood to the achievements of past cultures: 'The Marxist world outlook', he had written, 'is the only true expression of the interests, the viewpoint, and the culture of the revolutionary proletariat'. Further, far from rejecting the most valuable achievements of the bourgeois epoch, [the proletariat] has, on the contrary, assimilated and re-fashioned everything of value in the more than two thousand years of development of human thought and culture'.<sup>36</sup> In a summary of his draft resolution which he seems to have written during the meeting of 9 October, Lenin re-iterated these essential points:

- (1) Not special ideas but Marxism.
- (2) Not the invention of a new proletarian culture, but the development of the best models, traditions and results of the existing culture from the point of view of the Marxist world outlook and the conditions of life and struggle of the proletariat in the period of its dictatorship.<sup>37</sup>

Bukharin, at the meeting on 9 October, criticized not only Lenin's proposals, made in point (5) of his draft resolution, concerning the institutional status of the Proletcult but also his attitude, as expressed in point (4), towards the culture of the past. On point (4) he transmitted a note to Lenin in the course of these meetings:

I personally consider that to "conquer" bourgeois culture in its entirety, without destroying it, is as impossible as "conquering" the bourgeois state. What takes place in culture is what takes place with the state. Some of its constituent elements are assimilated (*usvaivayutsya*) by the proletariat into its own ideology. The practical difference, however, is that if one aims at total assimilation, then, for example, the *old* theatres and so on are allowed to flourish, whereas nothing is done to promote the new, which are considered "vulgar" (there is an analogy in the economic sphere with the fear of "destroying the old apparatus", and so forth).<sup>38</sup>

Between 9 and 11 October, when the Politbureau reconsidered this matter, a working party of Litkens, Pokrovsky and Bukharin produced a revision of Lenin's draft resolution which now contained a reformulation by Bukharin of Lenin's point (4).<sup>39</sup> The Politbureau on 11 October adopted the resolution as amended, but it was clear that for Bukharin at least the resolution even in its amended form begged a number of important theoretical questions and when Lenin, in a transparent attempt to impose a loyalty test upon him, proposed that he, Bukharin, should present the resolution of the Politbureau to the Proletcult Congress, he declined, giving his reasons in a note to Lenin of 11 October:

I have definite opinions on the following: (1) the definition of "culture" (2) the definition of communist culture ("proletarian culture") (3) the nature of the "transformation process" in this domain. I have not had the opportunity of discussing these matters in any detail either with you or with any other member of the Central Committee. If I have to speak I shall naturally say what I think and what I am theoretically convinced of. But, for all I know, perhaps you will denounce me as a heretic? See, for example, my amendment to point (4) of your resolution. The fact is we have not discussed this. But they know this subject like the back of their hands (*'oni sobaku s'eli'*). All of this has to be taken into account.<sup>40</sup>

Lenin's reply, in its insistence upon party hegemony in the cultural sphere, and in its identification of party with class and of working class culture with Communism, provides some measure of the difference in outlook which separated him from both Bogdanov and Bukharin: 'Why *now* dwell on the differences between us (perhaps possible ones), if it suffices to state (and prove) *on behalf of the Central Committee as a whole*: (1) proletarian culture=communism (2) it is carried out by the RCP (3) the proletarian class=RCP=Soviet power. We are all agreed on this aren't we?'<sup>41</sup>

Bukharin, however, was convinced that the Party was not yet prepared to cross swords with the Proletcult on theoretical questions. In his note of reply he wrote:

Yes, we are agreed on all of this. But if I go they will ask for detailed "theoretical justification", that is, they will drag the matter out. This is the problem. They will not insist on an explanation of the elementary truths, which they accept. What they will do

is raise a host of other questions in all their ramifications. It will be impossible to avoid a discussion. We cannot have it both ways: either the matter is dealt with in its organizational aspects, in which case Krestinsky should go; or else there will have to be a "general debate". In my view the latter would be premature.<sup>42</sup>

In the event, the Politbureau endorsed Bukharin's proposal. The party refrained from taking issue with the Proletcult on theoretical matters for the time being; Krestinsky and not Bukharin addressed the full Congress; and Bukharin, in deference to the policy of the Politbureau on the organizational question, agreed to present this policy to the Communist fraction of the Congress.<sup>43</sup> However, Bukharin's equivocation in this matter resulted in his exclusion (Lunacharsky was also deliberately excluded) from a commission set up by the Politbureau one month later, on 10 November 1920, under the chairmanship of Zinoviev, to provide guidelines for the party rank-and-file in its dealings with the Proletcult. This commission produced the now notorious party circular of 1 December 1920, 'On the Proletcults'.<sup>44</sup>

### *The spectre of bourgeois restoration*

The purposes of the circular of 1 December were twofold: first, to make it clear that it was party policy that the Proletcult should be incorporated into *Narkompros*; and, second, to warn party members that the Proletcult was serving as a haven for elements who were socially and ideologically alien to the Soviet régime. Lenin's contention that 'Bogdanovism' was a Marxist heresy is upheld in this document, but it is also here that we encounter for the first time an apprehension that the values of the old régime might succeed in penetrating Soviet institutions, and in the long term bring about a form of 'cultural restoration'. The party was alerted to the presence of 'petty-bourgeois elements' who had in some instances gained control of the Proletcults: workers were being offered 'bourgeois ideas' in philosophy; 'bourgeois influences' were also at work with *Narkompros*.<sup>45</sup> During 1921 and 1922, following the introduction of the New Economic Policy at the X Congress in March 1921, fears of a possible bourgeois cultural 'counter-revolution' increased: it was now realised that the growth in capitalist relations permitted under the NEP could not but be accompanied by a growth in the ideological influence of the bourgeoisie, whilst the results of a membership purge decreed by the X Congress indicated that the party was ill-equipped to cope with such a threat.<sup>46</sup>

It was in these circumstances that the Communist Party decided upon a programme of intensified political education for members in order to ensure that new recruits fully understood the purposes of the régime which they served and in order to create the kind of internal party cohesion which would be needed if bourgeois influences were to be repelled. A necessary precondition of such a campaign for political education was a systematization of Marxist ideology and amongst the first victims of this drive for ideological orthodoxy were Bogdanov and Bukharin.

Soon after the X Congress the need for a review of theoretical positions had been proclaimed by the veteran Bolshevik and Chairman of the Council of the

Institute of Party History (*Istpart*), Martin Ol'minsky.<sup>47</sup> By April 1921 Ol'minsky had drafted an article on Bukharin's *Economics of the Transition Period* which was published in the year's first issue of *Krasnaya Nov'*, and a letter to the Central Committee of the *RKP(b)*.

The RKP—Ol'minsky wrote in his letter—is going through a difficult period as regards the preservation of the purity of its principles, in view of its rapid growth which has involved an influx of members with a petty-bourgeois psychology and of individuals who are only at the beginning of their political careers, to say nothing of those who have come over from other, predominantly petty-bourgeois parties. The danger . . . is all the greater given the fact that some old members of the party have been unable to adjust to the fact that the party is now in power. Such members are given to an hypertrophied conception of the role of non-economic determinants and to an extreme underestimation of the importance of economic factors. Such notions give rise to efforts to liquidate Marxism, especially on the part of individuals who deviated from Marxism in the past in the direction of idealism, from *partiinost'* in the direction of adventurism (*Otzovism*, etc.). This tendency to liquidate Marxism is especially marked amongst the Bukharinists (*v Bukharinstve*).<sup>48</sup>

The warning to Bukharin that ideological 'unorthodoxy' was tantamount to political opposition was re-iterated in an article published later in 1921 in *Narodnoe khozyaistvo* by Lenin's sister Anna Ul'yanova-Elizarova in which, criticizing Bukharin for the use of concepts and terminology drawn, she alleged, from Bogdanov's *Universal Organizational Science* and from his writings on proletarian culture, she reminded him that dabbling with the ideas of Mach and Avenarius had led Bogdanov to break with the Bolsheviks.<sup>49</sup>

How far the articles of Ol'minsky and Ul'yanova-Elizarova influenced Bukharin's decision made later in 1921 politically to distance himself from Bogdanov is impossible to say. Placing the most favourable construction upon what was to be a virulent personal attack we may attribute it to the Bolsheviks' chronic sense of insecurity in 1921. What is certain is that Bukharin's equation of Marxist non-conformity with political opposition and of this, in turn, with counter-revolution not only contributed to the rise of dogmatism in Soviet Marxism, it also helped to legitimize within the party the methods of factional struggle which were later used against the Left and Right 'Oppositions', and against Bukharin himself. The occasion for Bukharin's repudiation of Bogdanov was provided by the anonymous publication, on the eve of the Second All-Russian Congress of the Proletcult of 17–21 November 1921, of a manifesto entitled 'We are the Collectivists' (*My – Kollektivisty*) by a party faction which professed allegiance to the political and philosophical ideas of Bogdanov. The Collectivists' manifesto, which is held in the Central Party Archive of the Institute for Marxism–Leninism in Moscow, has never been published, and its authors, if they are known, have never been identified. No Soviet source has alleged that Bogdanov either drafted the manifesto or personally caused it to be produced.<sup>50</sup> However obscure the Collectivists may have been, however, for Lenin the very existence within the Communist Party of a faction inspired by his former rival provided sufficient cause for alarm. On 22 November the Politbureau passed a five-point resolution in which it re-directed the allegations



of political deviation and ideological unorthodoxy made in the circular 'On the Proletcults' towards the Collectivists and called upon loyal Communists working in the Proletcult to give a 'principled rebuff to every attempt to replace a materialist world-view with the surrogates of bourgeois-idealist philosophy (Bogdanov *et al.*).'<sup>51</sup> On the same day *Pravda* published an article by Bukharin in which he expressed approval of the cultural activities of the Proletcult but denounced the Collectivists for their espousal of Bogdanov's ideas and accused Bogdanov of 'culturalism', political bankruptcy, and of a Menshevism indistinguishable from that of Maslov or Plekhanov.<sup>52</sup>

The matter did not end there. On 24 November 1921 the Politbureau instructed the Secretariat 'further to investigate the origins of the platform of the Collectivists' and to 'conduct an enquiry into the Proletcult and make proposals to the Politbureau'.<sup>53</sup> This report was presented to the Politbureau on 16 February 1922 but in the meantime Lenin, in one of his final exhortations to the Politbureau before resuming his sick-leave, called for the publication of a brochure 'in 2,000–3,000 copies' containing the Collectivists' manifesto, Bukharin's article of 22 November, further articles analysing the manifesto, and an exposure of Bogdanov's political stance during 1917.<sup>54</sup> This brochure was never published, but it was probably in partial fulfilment of Lenin's wishes that Bukharin on 13 December 1921 published in *Pravda* another broadside in which he accused the Collectivists of pessimism and quietism, and denounced Bogdanov and Martov as latter-day Menshevik 'liquidators'. In distinctly menacing tones he called for the 'rooting out of the nest of Collectivists which has established itself amongst us'.<sup>55</sup>

In the platform of the Collectivists denounced by Bukharin there were two propositions to which he took particular exception. These were, first, that the regeneration of capitalism within Soviet society was already well established; and, second, that in the coalition of workers, peasants and intelligentsia upon which the Soviet state and Communist Party rested it was the intelligentsia which would eventually prevail.<sup>56</sup> By the XI Congress of March–April 1922, while the danger of a restoration of capitalism in the short term was being discounted in leading party circles, the more insidious cultural challenge being posed by other classes was not. On the contrary, signs of an ideological counterrevolution were being detected in several spheres: in the increasing representation within the Communist Party of the non-proletarian classes; in the attitudes of Soviet state administrators; and, most alarmingly, in the emergence of a nationalist movement of the Russian intelligentsia known as *Smenovekhovstvo*.<sup>57</sup>

These problems were raised in a keynote speech delivered to the Congress by Lenin on behalf of the Central Committee, in the reports of Zinoviev and Yakovlev on the state of the party, and in the ensuing Congress debates. On 27 March 1922 Lenin admitted that *Smenovekhovstvo* 'expresses the mood of thousands and tens of thousands of bourgeois of all sorts and Soviet officials who participate in our New Economic Policy'. Deploring the low cultural level of the party-bureaucratic élite of Moscow, he warned that in the history of civilizations it was not always the case that a conquering nation imposed its culture upon the vanquished; sometimes, if it possessed a superior culture, the conquered nation

would impose its culture upon the conquerors. 'I think that this is the political lesson of the past year', he went on, 'and it is around this that the struggle will rage in 1922.'<sup>58</sup>

The theme of bourgeois restoration also figured in the theses 'On the strengthening of the party and on its new tasks' prepared for the Congress by the Central Committee and presented to the Congress by Zinoviev: there were special problems, the theses declared, associated with coming to power in a country in which the proletariat was not in a majority. One of these was a tendency for the ruling party, especially when it was the only legal party, to attract alien class elements who would otherwise have organized outside it. Even when they sincerely considered themselves to be Communists, such elements were often the bearers of the values of the old régime.<sup>59</sup> Reporting an influx of the petty-bourgeoisie into party membership, Zinoviev complained of the difficulty of doing anything about this infiltration at a time when the working class had undergone a serious 'de-proletarianization'.<sup>60</sup>

Finally, in the course of debate, Antonov-Ovseenko invoked no less an authority than Engels in order to voice the fears of the left wing of the party. Engels it was who had warned that 'the worst thing that can befall a leader of an extreme party is to be compelled to take over a government at a time when society is not yet ripe for the domination of the class he represents . . . He is compelled to represent not his party or his class, but the class for whose domination the movement is then ripe. . .'. Milyukov and Ustryalov, he argued, were taking precisely this view of the Soviet régime, considering that it was 'evolving', and that the historic function of the Bolsheviks had been to prepare the bourgeois democratic revolution.<sup>61</sup>

These, then, were the reasons why the XI Congress adopted a policy of pre-empting the bourgeois cultural revolution and entrusted the implementation of this policy to the *Agitprop* Department of the Central Committee.<sup>62</sup> Understandably, *Agitprop* considered the public denunciation of bourgeois ideology to be an essential part of its task and so between the XI Congress in March and the XII Party Conference of 4-7 August 1922 a series of articles warning of the counterrevolutionary potential of *Smenovekhovstvo* appeared in the press, culminating in the publication in *Pravda* at the end of July of an article on the 'Rebirth of bourgeois ideology' by the head of *Agitprop*, A. Bubnov.<sup>63</sup> This was also the theme of the speech by Zinoviev at the XII Party Conference, preliminary to the adoption of a resolution 'On Anti-Soviet Parties and Tendencies' in which the positive part which *Smenovekhovstvo* could play in reconciling the technical intelligentsia with the Soviet régime was acknowledged but in which party members were reminded of the 'strong bourgeois restorationist' aspirations which it was said to share with the Mensheviks and SRs.<sup>64</sup>

However, in its efforts to halt the advance of bourgeois culture *Agitprop* did not intend to rely upon criticism alone. At the XI Congress the deputy-head of *Agitprop*, Ya. Yakovlev, had underlined the need for the party to improve its own publishing and educational activities: 'In this field the party must greatly expand its work, bring new forces to bear and justify its role as the herald and creator of the new proletarian culture which will replace the culture of the

degenerate bourgeoisie'.<sup>65</sup> Now it appeared that a reconstructed Proletcult could be harnessed to the party's own efforts to provide an alternative to bourgeois culture. In a report on the Proletcult submitted to the Politbureau on 16 February 1922 (this was the report which had been commissioned on 24 November 1921) *Agitprop* had already made a distinction (as had the circular of 1 December 1920) between the sound and the malign aspects of the Proletcult movement: 'Bogdanovism', certainly, was attempting to make use of the Proletcults and had inspired the Collectivists' platform, but that platform did not reflect the views of the mass membership. 'The idea of the Proletcult', the report declared, 'rests upon the healthy protest of the working class against the age-old intellectual and cultural oppression of the bourgeoisie. The Proletcults could play an important part in the cultural revolution provided they were taken under the wing of the party.'<sup>66</sup>

### *The opening of the theoretical debate*

It was, therefore, the concern of the Bolshevik Party, and in particular of *Agitprop*, with the problem of bourgeois cultural restoration which explains the decision of the Politbureau on 31 August 1922 to revive the debate on 'proletarian culture' which had been in abeyance since October 1920.<sup>67</sup> Soviet and Western accounts of this debate have usually maintained that it began with the publication in *Pravda* of 27 September 1922 of the article by Valerian Pletnev, Chairman of the Proletcult, 'On the ideological front'.<sup>68</sup> It has also been assumed that in asking the deputy-head of *Agitprop*, Ya. Yakovlev, to reply to Pletnev, Lenin was essentially continuing his long running polemic with Bogdanov. It is certainly the case that Pletnev's article, which was written as part of the counter-offensive against the bourgeoisie ('The existence of a bourgeois-capitalist ideological front', he wrote in his introduction, 'is apparent to all'), employs Bogdanovist arguments throughout; but, as we shall see, this article in itself was not sufficient to provoke Lenin to respond.<sup>69</sup> Furthermore, an examination of the evidence suggests that the opening contribution to the 'proletarian culture' debate was made not by Pletnev but by Bukharin in his article 'Bourgeois revolution and proletarian revolution' published in *Pod Znamenem Marksizma*. No. 7/8 for July–August 1922. Lenin, in elaborating his own theory of cultural revolution during 1922 and 1923, both in the articles 'ghosted' by Yakovlev and in his last works, would appear to have been conducting a polemic not with Pletnev but, primarily, with Bukharin.<sup>70</sup>

Owing to illness Lenin had not attended either the XII Party Conference of 4–7 August or the Politbureau meeting of 31 August, when Bukharin would have stood in for him.<sup>71</sup> According to Lenin's biographers, he read and annotated Bukharin's article 'no earlier than August 1922' and so we cannot be sure that he read it before Pletnev's article appeared in *Pravda*. It is a safe assumption, however, that he had this article by Bukharin, among others, in mind when he formulated his own views on cultural revolution during 1922 and 1923.<sup>72</sup> What we do know is that on the day Pletnev's article appeared Lenin wrote to Bukharin as editor of *Pravda* upbraiding him for publishing such a

'falsification of historical materialism'.<sup>73</sup> He gave no indication in this letter, however, that he wished to publish a reply to Pletnev either personally or through the intermediary of Yakovlev, and had he merely been concerned that there should be a reply he might well have been satisfied with Krupskaya's 'Proletarian ideology and the Proletcult' which appeared on 8 October.<sup>74</sup>

What considerations intervened, therefore, between 27 September and 24 and 25 October 1922, when Yakovlev's 'On proletarian culture and the Proletcult' appeared in *Pravda* in two parts, the articles which, all commentators agree, contain a summary of Lenin's views?<sup>75</sup> Lenin, as we have seen, was not at this time attending meetings of the Politbureau but he was being kept informed of business that came before it, and on 11 October he had a meeting with the deputy-head of *Agitprop*, Yakovlev, and with the head of its Propaganda Section, K. A. Popov.<sup>76</sup> At this meeting two matters were discussed: first, on 6 October, *Agitprop*, in the course of yet another review of the activities of the Proletcult, had once again condemned manifestations of '*Bogdanovshchina*' within it. The matter had been referred to the Politbureau by the Central Committee on 7 October.<sup>77</sup> This development alone might well have resulted in the publication of the 'Yakovlev' articles two weeks later, but it is more likely that it was Bukharin's continuing articulation of his own views which precipitated matters. On 9 October Bukharin had addressed a meeting of activists of the Moscow Party Organization on 'The problem of culture in the epoch of the workers' revolution' and on 11 October a summary of his speech was published in *Pravda*.<sup>78</sup> This summary was presented to Lenin during his meeting with Yakovlev and Popov and he attached sufficient importance to it to annotate his copy: 'For the archive (will be needed shortly)'. By the end of the meeting Lenin had instructed Yakovlev to 'ghost' for him a substantive article on the question of 'proletarian culture'.<sup>79</sup>

That Lenin and Bukharin were in substantial disagreement over the question of 'cultural revolution' in 1922 and that the articles of Yakovlev were written as much against Bukharin as against Pletnev or Bogdanov was revealed by Bukharin himself in an account which he gave of this episode to a literary conference convened by the Central Committee in February 1925:

Now, I have to confess that Vladimir Il'ich disagreed with my conception of proletarian culture. . . I cannot deny that he took issue with it, and I defended against him then the position which I uphold at present . . . I can confirm that Vladimir Il'ich criticized my conception of things in many conversations which I had with him. He sent me memoranda and even enlisted the aid of Yakovlev. Yakovlev acted on direct instructions issued by Vladimir Il'ich who read his article in advance. Comrade Vardin! I discussed the matter with Lenin. I issued an ultimatum to the effect that if he insisted on the first draft of Yakovlev's article I would myself publish the sharpest possible reply. Vladimir Il'ich then persuaded Yakovlev to remove a whole series of comments. This was a lengthy battle. . .<sup>80</sup>

One can only speculate as to what it was that Bukharin objected to in the first draft of the Lenin/Yakovlev article. In the circumstances, it seems likely either that Lenin criticized the theory of proletarian culture (Bukharin's 'conception of things') in such an offensive way that Bukharin felt called upon to come to

Pletnev's aid, or that the first draft in some way mentioned Bukharin by name, associating him with the theories of Bogdanov.<sup>81</sup> What is clear is the determination of Lenin that the launching of the debate on cultural revolution should in no way provide the occasion for a revival of 'Bogdanovism'. In the first months of 1923 Yakovlev and Krupskaya were again enlisted in Lenin's campaign to discredit his old rival<sup>82</sup> and between December 1922 and March 1923 Lenin composed his last works manifestly in an attempt to provide an alternative theory of 'cultural revolution' to that of Bogdanov.<sup>83</sup> It was hardly fortuitous that one of the last collections of Lenin's writings to be published before his death (it appeared before 1 August 1923) was an anthology of works by himself and Plekhanov which appeared under the title *Against A. Bogdanov*.<sup>84</sup>

Undeterred by his conflict with Lenin in October, Bukharin continued to expound his own theories. He and Yakovlev defended their respective positions in a discussion before the Moscow Party organization on 16 December 1922<sup>85</sup> and on 5 February 1923 Bukharin delivered a lengthy discourse in Petrograd on the theme of 'Proletarian Revolution and Culture', publishing his speech in book form later that year.<sup>86</sup> As late as February 1925 Bukharin still insisted that there were 'two questions out of all of those upon which Vladimir Il'ich and I disagreed and on which I remain in disagreement with him: these are the questions of proletarian culture and of state capitalism'.<sup>87</sup> The debate over proletarian culture and the nature of the socialist cultural revolution was to continue, however, during the later 1920s and by the end of the decade Bukharin's ideas had significantly changed.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> V. I. Lenin, *Polnoe Sobranie Sochinenii* (hereafter PSS), vol. 54, p. 659; V. V. Gorbunov, *V. I. Lenin i Proletkul't* (Moscow, 1974), p. 191.

<sup>2</sup> In the English language alone we may note H. Ermolaev, *Soviet literary theories 1917-1934: the genesis of socialist realism* (Berkeley, 1965); and E. Brown, *The proletarian episode in Russian literature 1928-1932* (N.Y., 1971); and James C McClelland, 'Utopianism versus Revolutionary Heroism in Bolshevik Policy: The Proletarian Culture Debate', *Slavic Review*, 39, No 3 (September 1980), pp. 403-25.

<sup>3</sup> The factional struggles over 'cultural revolution' have been comprehensively studied in the works of Sheila Fitzpatrick. See in particular: 'The soft line in culture and its enemies 1922-1927', *Slavic Review*, 33, No. 2 (June 1974), pp. 267-87; 'Cultural revolution in Russia 1928-1932', *Journal of Contemporary History*, IX, No. 1 (1974), pp. 33-52; 'Stalin and the making of a new élite', *Slavic Review*, 38, No. 3 (September 1979), pp. 377-402; and, as editor, *The cultural revolution in Russia 1928-1931* (Bloomington, 1978).

<sup>4</sup> The best known contributions to the debate are those of Lenin (see footnote 83 below), and of Trotsky, excerpts from whose articles in *Pravda* appeared in book form and are well known in translation. See, for example, *Literature and revolution* (Ann Arbor, 1960) and *Problems of everyday life and other writings on culture and science* (New York, 1973).

<sup>5</sup> See V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works* (hereafter CW), vol. 36 (Moscow, 1966), pp. 594-5; and S. Cohen, *Bukharin and the Bolshevik Revolution* (New York, 1973), pp. 150-1.

<sup>6</sup> Autobiographical sketch of 1927-29, translated in G. Haupt and J. J. Marie, *Makers of the Russian Revolution* (London, 1973), p. 33. That Bukharin should by the end of the 1920s describe empiriocriticism as 'heretical' is a measure of the extent to which he had by this time submitted to the notion of 'orthodoxy' in epistemology.

<sup>7</sup> *Kommunist*, 1918, No. 3, pp. 19-20.

<sup>8</sup> Bukharin, reviewing the first issue of *Proletarskaya kul'tura* in *Pravda*, 23 July 1918.

<sup>9</sup> Bukharin, reviewing Pletnev's production of Léon Cladel's *Le Bouscassié ou L'Enfant Sauvage* (1881) (in Russian: *Mstisl'*) in *Pravda*, 16 December 1919. Neither Bogdanov nor Lunacharsky advocated the suppression of 'bourgeois' culture and Lunacharsky replied to Bukharin in *Vestnik teatra*, 1919, No. 47.

<sup>10</sup> *Pravda*, 23 July 1918. Disagreements between the Bolshevik leadership and the Proletcult over the degree of independence to which the Proletcult was entitled were only ever resolved by the imposition of party controls upon the latter. Bukharin considered that since the Soviet state was 'proletarian' there was no case for autonomy. As the Proletcult made clear in a reply to Bukharin published in *Proletarskaya kul'tura*, 1918, No. 3, its case for autonomy assumed a 'class-coalition' to be the basis of the Soviet state.

<sup>11</sup> See the claim of Lunacharsky on 31 August 1920 that 'The Third International looks favourably upon the work of the Proletcult' and that of the Moscow Bolshevik Dodonova in June 1921 that the 'hostile' attitude of the Moscow soviet had changed completely thanks to support received from the Moscow committee of the *RKP(b)*. A. Ermakov, 'Lunacharskii i Proletkul't', *Druzhba narodov*, 1968, No. 1; and, for Dodonova, *IMLI*, f.1230.1.1302.

<sup>12</sup> Protocols of a meeting convened by the Press Department of the Central Committee of the *RKP(b)*, 9 May 1924, in: *Voprosy kul'tury pri diktature proletariata* (Moscow/Leningrad, 1925), p. 101.

<sup>13</sup> Bukharin, 'Proletariat i voprosy khudozhestvennoi politiki', speech delivered to a literary conference convened by the Central Committee of the *RKP(b)*, February 1925, *Krasnaya nov'*, 1925, No. 4 (May), p. 263.

<sup>14</sup> On this episode see my paper 'The founding of the Proletcult', Conference on the Early Months of Bolshevik Rule. University of Essex, 25–27 May 1984.

<sup>15</sup> Lenin, *CW*, vol. 29 (Moscow, 1965), pp. 335–8.

<sup>16</sup> Lenin, *CW*, vol. 30 (Moscow, 1965), pp. 374–9. Lenin's *Left-wing communism—an infantile disorder* was written between April and May 1920 and published in June of that year. See *CW*, vol. 31 (Moscow, 1966), pp. 17–104. In this pamphlet Lenin does not explicitly designate the Proletcultists as 'Left-Communists', but he does invoke the division within Bolshevism of 1906–9 when 'Left' and 'Centrist' factions formed around Bogdanov and Lenin respectively. On this episode see my article '“Anti-Leninist Bolshevism”'; the *Forward* group of the *RSDRP*', *Canadian Slavonic Papers*, XXIII, No. 2 (June 1981), pp. 134–53.

<sup>17</sup> I. Yakhot, 'Gibel' tekhnologii Bogdanova—predshestvennitsy kibernetiki i sistemnoi teorii', *Vnutrennie protivorechiya*, 1982, No. 3, p. 239. Plekhanov had died in Finland on 31 May 1918 and was buried in Petrograd. An edition of his works, edited by D. Ryazanov, began to appear in 1922. See G. V. Plekhanov, *Sochineniya* (26 vols., Moscow, 1922–27).

<sup>18</sup> The bibliography of Bogdanov's works compiled by A. Yassour lists 7 titles published by Bogdanov in 1917, 6 titles for 1918, 1 title for 1919 and 7 titles for 1920. A. Yassour, 'Bogdanov et son oeuvre', *Cahiers du Monde Russe et Soviétique*, X (July–December 1969), pp. 546–84). On the influence of Bogdanov upon Soviet economists of the 1920s see: G. G. Bogomazov, *Marksizm-Leninizm i problemy tovarno-denezhnykh otnošenii v periode stroitel'stva sotsializma v SSSR* (Leningrad 1974), pp. 29–30, 61.

<sup>19</sup> See V. I. Lenin, *Biograficheskaya Khronika*, vol. 8 (Moscow, 1978), p. 529; and *Bol'shevik*, 1936, No. 2, p. 78.

<sup>20</sup> V. I. Lenin, *Biograficheskaya Khronika*, vol. 8, p. 545; A. Bogdanov, *Kratkii kurs ekonomicheskoi nauki* (Moscow, Gosizdat, 1920).

<sup>21</sup> V. I. Lenin, *Biograficheskaya Khronika*, vol. 8, p. 581.

<sup>22</sup> N. Bukharin, *Ekonomika perekhodnogo perioda, chast' I: Obshchaya teoriya transformatsionnogo protsesssa*, (Moscow, 1920). The second part of this work was never published. For a translation which contains Lenin's comments, see N. I. Bukharin, *Economics of the Transformation Period* (Bergman Publishers, New York, 1971).

<sup>23</sup> Lenin's annotation of Bukharin's work and his general review written on 31 May 1920 for the Communist Academy, of which Bukharin's book was the first publication, were first published by the Lenin Institute in *Leninskii sbornik*, t.XI (1929) as part of Stalin's campaign to discredit Bukharin. Bukharin seems not to have challenged the authenticity of Lenin's notes. For a translation, see *Economics of the Transformation Period*, pp. 211–14.

<sup>24</sup> *Izvestiya*, 14 August 1920. See also footnote 26 below.

<sup>25</sup> I. S. Smirnov, 'Leninskaya kontseptsiya kul'turnoi revolyutsii i kritika Proletkul'ta', in: *Istoricheskaya nauka i nekotorye problemy sovremennosti* (Moscow, 1969), p. 71. In: Lenin, *PSS*, vol. 51, p. 265 and V. I. Lenin: *Biograficheskaya Khronika*, vol. 9 (Moscow, 1978), p. 190 the date of this document is given as 'no later than 20 August'.

<sup>26</sup> On 24 August Pokrovsky produced for Lenin a report on the Proletcult (and on the International Bureau) and materials prepared by the Secretary of the Proletcult V. P. Faidysh. Against Pokrovsky's point that the Proletcult functioned as an autonomous institution under the 'control' of *Narkompros* Lenin annotated 'How can this (control) be made effective?'. See I. S. Smirnov, 'Leninskaya kontseptsiya . . .', p. 72, citing *Leninskii sbornik*, vol. XXXV,; and V. V. Gorbunov, *V. I. Lenin i Proletkul't*, p. 111–12.

<sup>27</sup> V. I. Lenin, *Biograficheskaya Khronika*, vol. 9, p. 236.

<sup>28</sup> V. I. Lenin, *Biograficheskaya Khronika*, vol. 9, p. 236. V. I. Nevsky had been a founder member of the Bolshevik fraction in 1904. Having worked on the editorial staff of *Pravda* and *Zvezda* before 1917 he would have been familiar with Lenin's antipathy for Bogdanov. Best known for his roles in the Bolshevik Military Organization and in the Military Revolutionary Committee in 1917, Nevsky had in 1919 been appointed Rector of the Sverdlov Communist University (of which Bukharin was a 'professor') and he had presided over this institution's absorption of the Bogdanovists' 'Proletarian University'. In the summer of 1920 he had chaired a commission of enquiry of *VTsIK* into *Narkompros*, dealing, *inter alia*, with the relationship between *Narkompros* and Proletcult. In December 1920 he was to be appointed to the governing board of the Commission for the Study of the History of the October Revolution (*Istpart*). See J. L. Wiczynski, ed. *Modern Encyclopedia of Russian and Soviet History*, vol. 24 (Gulf Breeze, 1981).

<sup>29</sup> Lenin, *PSS*, vol. 51, p. 291; V. I. Lenin, *Biograficheskaya Khronika*, vol. 9, p. 240.

<sup>30</sup> For Bukharin's reply see *Leninskii sbornik*, vol. 12 (Moscow/Leningrad, 1930). For Lenin's foreword see Lenin, *PSS*, vol. 18, p. 12.

<sup>31</sup> Lenin, *CW*, vol. 31 (Moscow, 1966), p. 287.

<sup>32</sup> On this aspect of the history of the Proletcult see S. Fitzpatrick, *The Commissariat of Enlightenment* (Cambridge, 1970), ch. 5 and my conference paper cited above.

<sup>33</sup> For Lunacharsky's account of this episode, in which he virtually admits his duplicity (at the time he claimed that he had been misreported) see his 'Lenin i iskusstvo', *Khudozhnik i zritel'*, 1924, No. 2/3. For related documentation see *Literaturnoe nasledstvo*, vol. 80 (Moscow, 1971), pp. 220–1.

<sup>34</sup> Lenin, 'On proletarian culture', *CW*, vol. 31, p. 316. It appears that Lenin asked Lunacharsky to request of the chairman of the Proletcult Congress a postponement of voting on Congress resolutions and on 8 October Lunacharsky informed the Politbureau that this had been agreed. See *Literaturnoe nasledstvo*, vol. 80, p. 220 (footnote) and p. 222.

<sup>35</sup> If the matter lay fallow for two years this was presumably because Lenin considered practical control over the Proletcult to be more important than the elucidation of a point of theory upon which his mind was already made up. As we shall see, new circumstances prompted Bukharin to revive this issue in 1922.

<sup>36</sup> Lenin, *CW*, vol. 31, pp. 316–17.

<sup>37</sup> Lenin, 'Rough draft of a resolution on proletarian culture', 9 October 1920, *CW*, vol. 42 (Moscow, 1969), p. 217.

<sup>38</sup> V. V. Gorbunov, 'Kritika V. I. Leninyam teorii Proletkul'ta ob otnoshenii k kul'turnomu naslediyu', *Voprosy istorii KPSS*, 1968, No. 5, p. 91.

<sup>39</sup> *Literaturnoe nasledstvo*, vol. 80 (Moscow, 1971), p. 222. E. A. Litkens was the deputy chairman of *Glavpolitprosvet*. Bukharin's revision, which emphasised the 'reconstruction' of past culture rather than its 'assimilation' read as follows: 'Marxism has won its historic significance as the ideology of the revolutionary proletariat because, far from rejecting wholesale all the achievements of human (including bourgeois) thought, it has, on the contrary, made use of and refashioned them and transformed them into a new harmonious system. Only more work on this basis and in this direction, inspired by the practical experience . . .'. The paragraph was to continue as in Lenin's draft. See Smirnov, 'Leninskaya kontseptsiya . . .', p. 77.

<sup>40</sup> Smirnov, 'Leninskaya kontseptsiya . . .', p. 79.

<sup>41</sup> Lenin, *CW*, vol. 44, (Moscow, 1970), p. 445.

<sup>42</sup> Smirnov, 'Leninskaya kontseptsiya . . .', p. 80.

<sup>43</sup> *Literaturnoe nasledstvo*, vol. 44 (Moscow, 1970), p. 445. The resolution was later reproduced in the circular of the Central Committee of 1 December 1920 'On the Proletcult'. V. V. Gorbunov has cited an unpublished excerpt from the memoirs of the Moscow Bolshevik and Proletcultist, Dodonova, to the effect that Bukharin's presentation was 'unenthusiastic'. See his *V. I. Lenin i Proletkul't* (Moscow, 1974), p. 150.

<sup>44</sup> See 'O proletkul'takh', *KPSS v Rezolyutsiyakh . . .*, vol. 2 (Moscow, 1970), pp. 197–200. For the relevant excerpt from the resolution of 10 November 1920 see *V. I. Lenin o literature i iskusstve* (Moscow, 1967), p. 594. On the exclusion of Bukharin, see V. V. Gorbunov, 'Kritika . . .', p. 92. Lunacharsky was also excluded (see his 'Lenin i iskusstvo', cited above). By contrast, Lenin was

co-opted to assist in the editing of the final draft. See *V. I. Lenin: Biograficheskaya khronika*, vol. 9, p. 508.

<sup>45</sup> 'O proletkul'takh', *KPSS v Rezolyutsiyakh* . . . , pp. 197–200.

<sup>46</sup> A report on the purge presented to the XI All-Russian Conference of the RKP of 19–22 December 1921 had identified three categories of deficiency which were undermining the solidarity of the Communist Party. These were: 'a) deficiencies associated with an incorrect organization of the Party apparatus or with incorrect methods of work in the apparatus; b) deficiencies associated with a weakness of ideological formation and of comradely relations amongst, in the main, a significant number of new members recruited after the revolution; and c) deficiencies deriving from the mixed social composition of the party, which in the conditions of the NEP required particular attention'. In the course of the purge 20–75% of the membership was expelled and 3·1% resigned. See *Odinadtsatyi S'ezd RKP(b) Mart-Aprel' 1922 goda: Stenograficheskii Otchet* (Moscow 1961), pp. 554–5 and 743.

<sup>47</sup> Mikhail Stepanovich Aleksandrov (Ol'minsky) (1863–1933) had been a founder member of the Bolshevik fraction in Geneva in 1904 and an editor of the St. Petersburg *Pravda* before 1917. He had been in close touch with Lenin since August 1920 over the foundation of *Ispart* where he had surrounded himself with a number of 'Geneva' and 'Pravda' Bolsheviks, including Lenin's elder sister Anna Ul'yanova-Elizarova, P. N. Lepeshinsky, and Ts. S. Bobrovskaya. Though the hypothesis is not implausible, there is no evidence to suggest that Ol'minsky's letter was inspired by Lenin, and it is more likely that he was expressing the views of a Leninist group of Old Bolsheviks within *Ispart*. It is fair to say that although Ol'minsky had proposed the founding of a Lenin Museum under *Ispart* as early as October 1920 he subsequently opposed any 'cult of Lenin' in the writing of party history, as developed in Kamenev's Lenin Institute after 1923. See Larry E. Holmes and William Burgess, 'Scholarly Voice or Political Echo?: Soviet Party History in the 1920s', *Russian History*, 9, No. 2–3 (1982), pp. 378–98.

<sup>48</sup> Ol'minsky's article was: 'O knige t. N. Bukharina', *Krasnaya nov'*, 1921, No. 1. He had discussed the text of this article, in which he accuses Bukharin of 'left-revisionism', with Ul'yanova-Elizarova and had sent drafts to the Central Committee, to the Secretaries Stalin, Molotov and Yaroslavsky, and to Kalinin, Bonch-Bruевич and Baturin. There is some doubt as to whether the letter to the Central Committee was ever sent. See E. B. Genkina, *Gosudarstvennaya deyatel'nost' V. I. Lenina 1921–1923* (Moscow, 1969), p. 140; and O. A. Lezhava & N. V. Nelidov., *M. S. Ol'minsky, Zhizn' i Deyatel'nost'* (Moscow, 1962), p. 225. Bukharin dismissed Ol'minsky's criticisms in 'Kavaleriiskii reid i tyazhelaya artilleriya', in the same issue of *Krasnaya nov'*.

<sup>49</sup> A. I. Ul'yanova-Elizarova, 'Nechto otositel'no ekonomiki i psikhiki perekhodnogo perioda (po povodu knigi Bukharina *Ekonomika perekhodnogo perioda i vyzannoi eyu polemiki*)', *Narodnoe khozyaistvo*, 1921, No. 8/9, as cited in I. A. Gladkov, 'O stat'e A. I. Ul'yanovoi s kritikoi knigi Bukharina *Ekonomika perekhodnogo perioda*', *Voprosy istorii KPSS*, 1972, No. 1, p. 122.

<sup>50</sup> On the Collectivists' manifesto see L. N. Suvorov, 'Iz istorii bor'by V. I. Lenina, partii Bol'shevikov protiv Bogdanovskoi "Organizatsionnoi Nauki"', *Nauchnye doklady vysshei shkoly: Filosofskie nauki*, 1966, No. 3; and V. V. Gorbunov, *Lenin i Proletkul't*, p. 172 *passim*.

<sup>51</sup> For this resolution see V. V. Gorbunov, 'Bor'ba V. I. Lenina s separatistskimi ustremleniyami Proletkul'ta', *Voprosy Istorii KPSS*, 1958, No. 1, p. 38.

<sup>52</sup> N. Bukharin, 'K s'ezdu Proletkul'ta', *Pravda*, 22 November 1921.

<sup>53</sup> Excerpt from Protocol No. 79 of this meeting, in: *V. I. Lenin o literature i iskusstve*, pp. 597–8.

<sup>54</sup> Lenin, 'To members of the Politbureau of the RCP(b) CC', 2 December 1921, *CW*, vol. 45 (Moscow, 1970), pp. 392–3.

<sup>55</sup> N. Bukharin, 'Kollektivisticheskoe Likvidatorstvo', *Pravda*, 13 December 1921. The gravity of Bukharin's attack should not be underestimated: at the X Congress in 1921 Lenin had already expressed the view that 'The place for Mensheviks and Socialist Revolutionaries, avowed or in non-party guise . . . is in prison', and at the XI Congress the following year he insisted that Mensheviks and SRs who offered their services to the régime on the grounds that their views had been vindicated by the introduction of NEP should be treated as counterrevolutionaries. See Lenin, 'The tax in kind', *CW* vol. 32 (Moscow 1965), pp. 362, 365; and 'Political report of the Central Committee to the Eleventh Congress of the RCP(b)', 27 March 1922, *CW*, vol. 33 (Moscow, 1966), p. 288–99.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>57</sup> Since 1920 Nikolai Vasil'evich Ustryalov (1890–1938), former Professor of Law at the Universities of Moscow and Perm, leading member of the Cadet Party and participant in the government of Kolchak, had been calling for a reconciliation with the Soviet régime for reasons of Russian nationalism but also on the grounds that the Soviet régime must inevitably evolve in the direction of capitalism. Similar ideas were propounded during 1921 in the newspapers *Poslednie*



*novosti* in Paris and *Slavyanskaya zarya* in Prague. The publication in Prague in July 1921 of the anthology *Smena Vekh* marked the formation of a new political grouping which viewed the 'Nepmen', kulaks, and intelligentsia 'specialists' as the leading forces in Soviet society and called upon them to collaborate with the Soviet régime while preparing to assume political power. This message was conveyed by *Smena Vekh* spokesmen Yu. V. Klyuchnikov and Yu. N. Potekhin in an interview published in *Izvestiya* on 9 June 1922 and in lectures delivered in Moscow, Petrograd, Khar'kov, Poltava and Kiev that same summer. See I. Ya. Trifonov, 'Iz istorii bor'by Kommunisticheskoi Partii protiv Smenovekhovstva', *Istoriya SSSR*, 1959, No. 3; and *Ocherki istorii klassovoi bor'by v SSSR v gody NEPa (1921–1937)* (Moscow, 1960), pp. 96–100. On Ustryalov, see J. L. Wiczynski, ed. *MERSH*, vol. 41 (1986).

<sup>58</sup> Lenin, Political report of the Central Committee to the Eleventh Congress of the RCP(b), 27 March 1922, *CW*, vol. 33 (Moscow, 1966), p. 288–99.

<sup>59</sup> For the theses see *Odinadtsati S'ezd . . .* pp. 680–91.

<sup>60</sup> For Zinov'ev's speech see *Odinadtsati S'ezd . . .* pp. 380–410.

<sup>61</sup> *Odinadtsati S'ezd . . .*, pp. 77–8. Antonov-Ovseenko here paraphrases a passage from Friedrich Engels, *The peasant war in Germany* (1850). I have quoted the relevant excerpt from the second revised English language edition of Progress Publishers (Moscow, 1977), p. 115.

<sup>62</sup> For the relevant resolutions of the Congress see *Odinadtsati S'ezd . . .*, pp. 545–54 and 569–74.

<sup>63</sup> The articles 'Reaktsiya', 'Tikhaya sapa', and 'Novoe tyapkin-lyapkinstvo' in *Petrogradskaya Pravda*, 6, 9 and 23 April 1922 and 'Russkaya intelligentsiya, emigratsiya i "Smena vekh"', in *Izvestiya VTsIK*, 29 June 1922. Bubnov's article was reprinted in his *Burzhuaznoe restavratsorstvo na vtorem godu NEPa* (Petersburg, 1923). Other contributions to this ideological counter-offensive included V. Nevsky, 'Restavratsiya idealizma i bor'ba s "novoi burzhuaziei"', *Pod Znamenem Marksizma*, 1922, No. 7/8; and V. Meshcheryakov, 'Mechty smenovekhovstva i ikh sud'by', in: *Na ideologicheskome fronte bor'by s kontrrevolyutsiei* (Moscow, 1923). See I. Ya. Trifonov, 'Iz istorii . . .' and *Ocherki . . .*

<sup>64</sup> For Zinov'ev's speech see 'Vozrozhdenie burzhuaznoi ideologii i zadachi partii', *Gorn*, 1922, No. 2 (7), pp. 47–69 and the Conference resolution 'Ob antisovetskikh partiyakh i techeniyakh', par. 7, in: *KPSS v Rezolyutsiyakh i Resheniyakh S'ezdov, Konferentsii i Plenumov TsK*, vol. 2, (Moscow, 1970), p. 390–6. The Conference was followed by a series of guberniya party conferences which were devoted to the task of combatting bourgeois ideology. See I. Trifonov, *Ocherki . . .*, pp. 96–100.

<sup>65</sup> At the Congress, Ya. Yakovlev had, on behalf of *Agitprop*, introduced an amendment to the theses of the Central Committee under the title 'O pechati i propagande'. The amendment, which was carried, made specific proposals for the improvement of party publishing and political education in the struggle against bourgeois ideology. These included a strengthening of the system of party schools and of the Institute of Red Professors, the Socialist Academy and the Sverdlov and Zinov'ev universities. For the amendment see *Odinadtsati S'ezd . . .*, pp. 691–4 and for Yakovlev's supplementary report, pp. 417–26.

<sup>66</sup> N. I. Demidov, 'Iz istorii bor'by Kommunisticheskoi Partii za chistotu sotsialisticheskoi ideologii v periode NEPa (1921–1925 gg.)', *Trudy Moskovskogo Ordena Trudovogo Krasnogo Znameni Inzhinerno-Stroitel'nogo Instituta imeni V. V. Kuibysheva* (Moscow, 1960), p. 11.

<sup>67</sup> Lenin, *PSS*, vol. 54, p. 659; V. V. Gorbunov, *Lenin i Proletkul't*, p. 191.

<sup>68</sup> Valerian Fedorovich Pletnev (1886–1942) had joined the RSDRP in 1904. Born into a working class family, and a carpenter by trade, Pletnev had made his début as a literary critic before 1917, notably with a contribution to the 'proletarian culture' debate in *Nasha zarya* in 1913. By 1922 he was the author of a number of plays and short stories on working class life and on the revolutionary movement. In 1921 he had replaced Pavel Lebedev-Polyansky as head of the Proletcult when the former resigned in protest over the party's assertion of its authority over the Proletcult. Although willing to accept party authority, Pletnev remained in other respects a 'Bogdanovist' and in his article he stressed the need to understand socialism as a change in workers' consciousness and not only as a modernization of the forces of production.

<sup>69</sup> For Pletnev's article and Lenin's annotation, see *V. I. Lenin o literature i iskusstve*, pp. 457–66.

<sup>70</sup> N. Bukharin, 'Burzhuaznaya revolyutsiya i revolyutsiya proletarskaya', *Krasnaya nov'*, 1922, No. 7/8. It can hardly have been fortuitous that Bukharin's article was immediately followed in the same issue by an article by A. Udaltsov entitled 'K kritike teorii klassov A. A. Bogdanova'.

<sup>71</sup> *V. I. Lenin: Biograficheskaya Khronika*, vol. 12 (Moscow, 1982), p. 367.

<sup>72</sup> See below in text and footnote 84.

<sup>73</sup> Lenin, *CW*, vol. 35 (Moscow, 1966), p. 554.

<sup>74</sup> N. Krupskaya, 'Proletarskaya ideologiya i Proletkul't', *Pravda*, 8 October 1922.

<sup>75</sup> See Ya. Yakovlev, 'O proletarskoi kul'ture i Proletkul'te', *Pravda*, 24 and 25 October 1923. Ya. A. Yakovlev (Epstein) (1896–1939) was born in Grodno, the son of a teacher. He had entered the Shipbuilding Faculty of St. Petersburg Polytechnical Institute in 1913, in which year he also joined the Bolsheviks. During 1917 he was secretary of the Ekaterinoslav party committee, and a delegate to the VI Congress and the Second Congress of Soviets. During the Civil War Yakovlev, together with E. I. Kvirring, led the Leninist, 'Muscovite' faction against the autonomism of the Left Communists in the Ukraine. In 1920 Yakovlev had been appointed to *Glavpolitprosvet* in Moscow and in 1922 to *Agitprop*, within which he was to become head of the Press Department in 1923. On 4 October 1921 Yakovlev had presented a signed copy of his first book, *Russkii anarkhizm v Velikoi Russkoi Revolyutsii* (Khar'kov, 1921) to his 'teacher' Lenin and it was clearly as an intellectual disciple rather than as an expert on cultural matters that he was invited to reply to Pletnev in 1922. Yakovlev made further 'Leninist' interventions in the debate over cultural revolution (see footnotes 81, 82, 85 below) but it was as the author of books on the peasantry that he earned his later reputation and he was to play an important administrative role in the collectivisation of agriculture. See Robert Daniels, *The Conscience of the Revolution. Communist Opposition in Soviet Russia* (Cambridge, Mass., 1960), pp. 99–100; and Yu. A. Polyakov, "'Rabota, po mysl'i Il'icha sdelannaya"', *Voprosy istorii*, 1975, No. 5.

<sup>76</sup> V. I. Lenin: *Biograficheskaya Khronika*, vol. 12, p. 410.

<sup>77</sup> V. V. Gorbunov, *Lenin i Proletkul't*, pp. 191–2.

<sup>78</sup> N. Bukharin, 'Problema kul'tury v epokhu rabochei revolyutsii', *Pravda*, 11 October 1922.

<sup>79</sup> V. I. Lenin: *Biograficheskaya Khronika*, vol. 12, pp. 410–11.

<sup>80</sup> N. Bukharin, 'Proletariat i voprosy khudozhestvennoi politiki', *Krasnaya nov'*, 1925, No. 4 (May).

<sup>81</sup> We know that it was on 18 or 19 October that Yakovlev submitted to Lenin his first draft and that, as Yakovlev later recalled, he discussed the contents with Lenin 'about five times'. Amendments, Bukharin has told us, were eventually made, but a further meeting was needed, on 23 October, attended this time by Lenin, Yakovlev, Bukharin, and (as arbitrator?) by the Secretary of the Central Committee, Stalin, before a final version could be agreed. The Lenin/Yakovlev article appeared in *Pravda* the following day. See Ya. Yakovlev, contribution to a conference convened by the Press Department of the Central Committee of the RKP(b) on 9 May 1924, in: *Voprosy kul'tury pri diktature proletariata*, p. 135. On the meeting of 23 October see V. I. Lenin: *Biograficheskaya Khronika*, vol. 12, p. 430.

<sup>82</sup> Yakovlev published a venomous article, 'Menshevizm v Proletkul'tovskom odezhd'e', in *Pravda*, 4 January 1923. Krupskaya, in 'Baza kul'tury', *Pravda*, 25 March 1923, argued that heated debates over bourgeois and proletarian culture should give way to practical measures to eradicate illiteracy. The article was written on Lenin's suggestion. See N. K. Krupskaya, *Pedagogicheskoe Sochineniye*, vol. 9 (Moscow, 1960), pp. 110–11, 789; and V. I. Lenin: *Biograficheskaya Khronika*, vol. 12, p. 591.

<sup>83</sup> Lenin was prevented from writing by a stroke suffered on 22 December 1922. He dictated his last works, on the structure of government, the political succession, and the future of socialism in Russia between December 1922 and March 1923. The works which deal most directly with the question of cultural revolution, all of which were published in *Pravda* between January and May 1923 are, by date of composition: 'Pages from a diary' (2 January 1923); 'On cooperation' (4–6 January 1923); 'Our revolution: à propos of the notes of N. Sukhanov' (16–17 January 1923); and 'Better fewer but better' (2 March 1923). See *CW*, vol. 33 (Moscow, 1966). In the last of these works Lenin would have taken into account V. S. Rizhitsyn, *Novaya nauka i Marksizm* (Khar'kov, 1922) which he read in February 1923 and which deals with the question of cultural revolution in Russia. See V. I. Lenin: *Biograficheskaya Khronika*, vol. 12, p. 546; and A. G. Chernykh, *V. I. Lenin—istorik proletarskoi revolyutsii v Rossii* (Moscow, 1969), p. 261.

<sup>84</sup> V. I. Lenin & G. V. Plekhanov, *Protiv A. Bogdanova* (Moscow, *Krasnaya nov'*, 1923), 169 pp. For publication details see V. I. Lenin: *Biograficheskaya Khronika*, vol. 12, p. 623.

<sup>85</sup> See 'Diskussiya po voprosu o postanovke kul'turnoi problemy', *Sputnik Kommunist*, 1923, No. 19.

<sup>86</sup> N. Bukharin, *Proletarskaya revolyutsiya i kul'tura* (Moscow, *Priboi*, 1923).

<sup>87</sup> Bukharin, speech to the Literary Conference convened by the Central Committee of the RKP(b) in February 1925, *Krasnaya nov'*, 1925, No. 4.

<sup>88</sup> The development of Bukharin's theory of cultural revolution, a hitherto neglected aspect of his thought, will be the subject of a future article.