

Mikhail Gorbachov's stable of Great Russian racist writers

by Luba George

Our contemporary literature of the "village prose school" is extremely significant for understanding the idea of a "people" [*narod*]. The people, through our artists and thinkers, can critically judge ourselves, reproach ourselves, and portray our lives more severely than anyone else. Dostoevsky portrayed such images in his *Crime and Punishment*, in the *Possessed*. . . . Today [Viktor] Astafyev, and also [Valentin] Rasputin are doing the same, because today, as never before, the higher artistic ideal of the "people" and its earthly mission are in danger of disappearing.

—Sergei Zalygin, in "The National Roots of a Writer," in *Literaturnaya Gazeta*, March 18, 1987.

On May 6, over 400 members of a group called the "Pamyat Society" demonstrated near the Kremlin, with placards reading, "Down with the Enemies of *Perestroika*" (restructuring). The May 6 demonstration, covered in the Western press, brought this hitherto obscure group into the international limelight. What exactly is Pamyat?

Pamyat (the word means "memory") is a Great Russian racist society which propagates the idea that "World Zionism and Freemasonry" threaten *Matushka Rus* (Mother Russia). It calls for a "Russian national rebirth," based on a mixture of Russian Orthodoxy and a return to the old pre-Christian pagan beliefs—away from Christianity, branded "the Jewish religion."

An extremist fringe group in Russia? Hardly. The day after the May 6 Kremlin demonstration, on May 7, a Pamyat delegation was received by Soviet candidate Politburo member and Moscow city party boss Boris Yeltsin.

How is it possible that a group like Pamyat, with a program that is a bizarre mixture of environmentalism, Russian chauvinism, and anti-Semitism, finds support in high-level Communist Party circles?

This question, asked so often in the West after May 6-7, is just one more reflection of the abysmal lack of understanding of Russian culture in the West. The core of Pamyat's ideology is coherent with that of the ruling Russian *nomenklatura*. In point of fact, the leaders of Pamyat and the associated literary cultural milieu are the favorites of the Soviet leadership under Gorbachov.

Pamyat's leaders represent a virtual "who's who" of the

literary elite sponsored and feted by the state over recent decades. They include the Moscow photographer D. Vasilyev, a close collaborator of the popular Moscow artist and icon painter, Ilya Glazunov. Glazunov is a Dostoevskian mystic and one of the leading figures in the "Russian National Rebirth" occurring under Gorbachov's war-economy mobilization, called *perestroika*. The initiators of this chauvinist movement also include well-known Soviet writers, the *derevshchiki* (Village Prose) school of writers, the "men of the soil," such as Viktor Astafyev, Yevgenii Nosov, Vladimir Krupin, Chengiz Aitmatov, Yuri Bondaryov, Vasilii Belov, as well as the internationally known Siberian writer, Valentin Rasputin. Rasputin and Aitmatov are among the leaders of the Soviet Culture Fund, created in August 1986, under the direct patronage of Raisa Gorbachova.

It is noteworthy that West German President Richard von Weizsäcker, prior to his Moscow visit, explicitly asked that time be reserved for him to meet with Rasputin and other eminents of the Village Prose variety of Russian chauvinist author. Von Weizsäcker is not exactly a paragon of Western cultural values himself. He is known for propagating the myth of German "collective guilt" for the crimes of the Nazi leadership. We wonder if he knew that his Russian writer idols are, as Great Russian chauvinists, violently anti-Semitic—in fact, today's Nazis.

In an exchange of correspondence with the Jewish literary historian Nathan Eidelmann, recently made public in the Paris-based literary publication *Sintaxis* (Vol. 17, 1987), Village Prose writer Viktor Astafyev attacked Jews for claiming "a cultural monopoly." In defense of Russian "purity," Astafyev presents the Jews in Third Reich "enemy image" fashion.

"Every national re-awakening, and especially the Russian, must have enemies and opponents," he wrote. "In our renewal [i.e., *perestroika*], we could circle the world, singing our songs . . . write in our mother tongue . . . and ourselves comment on the diaries of Dostoevsky."

If that is less than clear, note that in Dostoevsky's *Diary of a Writer*, he explicitly spelled out his racialist theory that it is the "destiny" and "mission" of the "Great Russian race" to exercise world domination.

The Jewish writer Eidelmann, who was critical of the new Russian chauvinist cultural trends, was subjected to

personal abuse for allegedly exhibiting “not only evilness, but also the overboiling zeal of Jewish, high-brow intellectual arrogance.”

It would not be quite correct to say that Astafyev, like Pamyat “Führer” Vasilyev, has adopted an unabashed copy of classical fascist ideology. It is true that, for them, like Hitler, the “Russian race” is the “chosen people” of the “Great Aryan Race,” threatened by the “cultures” of “enemy,” “inferior” races. And it is true that, as in the writings of the Third Reich, the “enemies” are “Zionism” and “Freemasonry,” who want to destroy traditional Russian society, and the Russian Orthodox Church. But then, Hitler got those ideas originally from Russia, from the godfather of 20th-century fascism, Fyodor Dostoevsky.

Another “village” writer, Vasili Belov, in his book, *All Lies Before Us*, chose as the main character of his novel an evil genius with the Jewish name of “Brish,” who, out of pure malice, ruins a simple Russian family. In a review of the book in the Soviet Komsomol youth magazine, *Molodaya Gvardiya* (*Young Guard*, No. 3, 1987), the reviewer writes that Soviet Russians at the time of the book’s events lived under the spell of an “evil force” which disturbed their society and was responsible for their misfortunes. This “force” is referred to as “fascism” (Western fascism), “Zionism,” “Freemasonry,” and “Cosmopolitanism”—all labels frequently used to describe the Jews by Great Russian chauvinists.

These *derevenshchiki* form the core of the “new *pochvennichestvo* (*pochva* = soil) which could be translated as “back to roots” or “blood and soil” movement, a “fundamentalist” movement. The *derevenshchiki* are something of a modern version of the *raskolniki* (old believers) so dear to Dostoevsky, with their anti-Semitism, glorification of the Russian “village commune” (*mir*), and “collective soul” ideology. These were the repository of “raw spiritual values.” (The Russian word *mir* means “village,” but also, “world.” There is an old Russian saying: *Rossiya—eto mir*; Russia encompasses both Village and World.)

This current in Russian culture has a Khomeini-like hatred of Western European civilization, a hatred which has been the leading factor in Moscow’s policy toward the West for centuries.

Through their works of the 1970s, published in many of the semi-official and official publications like *Veche*, *Molodaya Gvardiya*, *Nash Sovremennik*, the Village Prose writers shaped the “new *pochvennichestvo*,” the movement which has become the cultural backbone in support of the *nomenklatura*’s “Russian Party.” These include Mikhail Gorbachov, and more important, his wife, Raisa. They include Marshal Nikolai Ogarkov. Hand-in-hand with this Soviet oligarchy’s preparation for the war build-up of the 1980s (*perestroika*), the Village Prose writers were greatly promoted. Many were awarded the State Prize for Literature—for example, Valentin Rasputin for his novel *Zhivi i*

ponmi (*Live and Remember*). Also given this highest literary prize were Chingiz Aitmatov (1977) and Vasili Belov (1981). In November 1984, Rasputin and others were honored with the Order of Lenin.

Today, these Russian Nazis—most in their 40s and 50s—adorn the board of Raisa Gorbachova’s Soviet Culture Fund.

Dostoevskian pagans

The head of the Soviet Culture Fund’s presidium, Dmitri S. Likhachov, 81, is an arch-Russian chauvinist and propagandist of the superior virtues of Old Russia. He was prominently featured in a 1981 Pamyat publication as the movement’s “spiritual father.” Likhachov, as a leading historian-ideologue of the Russian Party, understands that Marshal Ogarkov’s *perestroika* requires the enlistment of a “Great Russian” ideology among the population, if they are to make the sacrifices necessary for Soviet Russia to enter the Third Millennium ruling the world.

Village writer and editor-in-chief of the literary magazine *Novy Mir*, Sergei Zalygin, 73, has been credited by Likhachov with single-handedly “saving the Ob,” one of the major rivers of Siberia, with his campaign to stop a huge river-diversion project drawn up in the last years of the Brezhnev era. The project would have provided Siberian water to arid Central Asia—home of “inferior,” non-Russian Soviet peoples.

Under the aegis of these two gurus, Likhachov and Zalygin, a “Save Lake Baikal” (Siberia) campaign was also gotten under way, among other demands that *Matushka Rus* be protected from the ravages of pollution and mining. In June this year, Zalygin helped found (and subsequently has become the head of) a new environmental protection group, called, appropriately, Greenpeace, after the KGB-controlled group in the West. This Muscovite version of Greenpeace is now closely collaborating with the KGB front organization, the Soviet Peace Committee.

Do not think that this “environmentalism” is being used to cripple the Soviet economy, as it is the economies of the West. Great Russian chauvinist “environmentalism” is in *no way* comparable to the Green phenomena the KGB promotes in West Germany and other parts of the Western world. Rather, resources are being selectively diverted for Marshal Ogarkov’s *perestroika*. True, under cover of this “protect the environment of Mother Russia” campaign, all large-scale river diversion and canal construction has been stopped by the *nomenklatura*. The pollution of Siberia’s Lake Baikal, the largest repository of fresh water in the world, and of Lake Ladoga, the source of Leningrad’s water supply, has been brought under control, through the closing of pulp and paper plants, and the *modernization* of chemical and other industrial facilities.

The Russian Party’s environmentalist movement is run in strict conformity with *perestroika*’s industrial modernization. *It places major emphasis on nuclear power*, which is at

the core of Ogarkov/Gorbachov's pre-war war-economy mobilization.

Thus, the Russian Party "environmentalists" are only against pollution caused by *outmoded technology*. They want the fastest possible *replacement* of obsolete, polluting technology with the most modern plant and equipment possible. They are thus an integral part of *perestroika* and the "technological attrition" policy of Ogarkov's Soviet military high command.

The case of Valentin Rasputin

One of the most popular Village Prose propagandists for the "ecologist" point of view is the avowed Dostoevskian mystic, Valentin Rasputin. "The genius of Dostoevsky is unique in all of world literature. He realized a spiritual transformation, whose true significance possibly may first be fully understood only in the next century," wrote Rasputin in *Sowjetunion Heute*, (*Soviet Union Today*), the monthly magazine distributed by the Soviet embassy in Bonn.

Rasputin, at age 50, has refused to move from the "nature" of Siberia to Moscow, the bustling capital. His hut, his desk, stand on the very shore of Lake Baikal, the "clear eye of Russia," as he calls it, "gazing unblinking into eternity." Rasputin believes that the lake, to him literally a pagan god, gives him his artistic powers. Such commonplace and banal themes as people coming from the town to gather berries in the *taiga*, the endless marshy forest land south of the tundra, are elevated to high metaphysics by Rasputin's pen—in, for example, his *Vek zhivi—vek lyubi* (*Live Forever, Love Forever*).

Back in January 1986, Rasputin wrote: "For us there is no destiny, no word, except Russia. . . . The 'village' prose of the '60's and '70's repaid an essential debt to the Russia of our parents . . . through living, grateful memory, and showed how their national soul was strengthened and what it has carried from the depths of history. . . ."

In the Spanish paper, *El País*, after the Eighth Congress of Soviet Writers, Rasputin was quoted: "I believe that it is better to return to the caves than to build nuclear power plants in such a way that our earth continues to be destroyed." This, however, as the following quotes show, was an attack, *not* on nuclear power, but on outmoded, unsafe models.

In an interview with the West German conservative Christian weekly, *Rheinischer Merkur*, during his visit to Dortmund in March this year for the Oekologie-Symposium, Rasputin declared his total support for Gorbachov's *perestroika*, saying that the "changes this time will be borne from above and from below—which thus makes the prospects of success so realistic." Many Green faces in West Germany turned red when their invited guest, Rasputin, emphatically declared that the U.S.S.R. has not the least intention of giving up its nuclear power, "because there exists today no alternative."

Later, in an interview with *Der Spiegel*, April 1987,

Rasputin admitted:

"Without technology, forget about it. There is, of course, no going back to the old peasant Russia. . . . One should rather strive to safeguard the roots of the people in every nation, and in every person."

'Cruel imperial goals'

In his time, the exiled Alexander Solzhenitsyn wrote about the "unnatural merger of the 'Russian' and the 'Communist' "—this "cross-breed of a mongrel dog and a pig."

But it is precisely because this "hybrid" is not "unnatural," as political "communism" is only a continuation of the "collective soul" tradition of Byzantine Russia, that this "hybrid" has not only survived, but under Gorbachov, is displaying manifest determination to turn into an apocalyptic Dostoevskian beast.

On another point, Solzhenitsyn was insightfully on the mark when he warned America that the Soviet regime's definite intention is "to exploit Russian nationalist feelings, suppressed by [the regime] itself, *for the sake of a new war, for its own cruel imperialist goals*, and thus, the more convulsively and desperately it does so, the deeper communism will sink in ideologically, in order to gain from national feelings the physical and spiritual strength that it lacks. True, there is such a danger."

When a guy who runs guns to Khomeini looks downright patriotic compared to Congress and the media—you know America needs . . .



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