

ABSTRACT

The Commissariat of Education under Lunacharsky (1917-1921)

This thesis describes the establishment of the Commissariat of Education (Narkompros), the formation of its policies and their implementation. The study has two purposes. The first is to present an institutional history of the formation of a Soviet commissariat. The second is to examine the policies and organizational approaches of Narkompros towards education and the arts, as a major factor in the establishment of relations between the Soviet government and the Russian intelligentsia.

The original materials on which the thesis is based are the Narkompros files of the Central State Archives (TSGAOR and TSGA RSFSR) in Moscow. These consist largely of minutes and protocols of the collegium of Narkompros and some of its subordinate departments. From these materials, it is possible to reconstruct both the internal workings of Narkompros - its organizational complexity and confusion, its financial difficulties, the relations between its members - and, to a considerable extent, its relations with other government and Party institutions.

One of the problems interesting the author is the relationship of Narkompros with its superiors (VTSIK, Sovnarkom, the Central Committee, the Politburo), and the way in which these bodies influenced its policies and activities. It appears that interference from above was slight, except in times of crisis; and that at all times the proliferation of

'higher instances' made it relatively easy to evade unwelcome instructions from any one of them. In its relations with other commissariats and Vesenkha, Narkompros engaged in a series of demarcation disputes. These were often won on paper and according to the decision of Sovnarkom, but lost in practice because of Narkompros' weak economic position and lack of political influence.

None of the leaders of Narkompros - Lunacharsky, Pokrovsky, Krupskaya and later Litkens - held influential positions in the Party. Narkompros' greatest political asset was Lenin's support, which (except on some artistic questions) was almost always given. The interest of other Party leaders in education and Narkompros was intermittent and, as regards Narkompros, not usually benevolent. Zinoviev, Kamenev, Stalin and Preobrazhensky all, on occasion, attacked or opposed Narkompros - a relevant factor in the case of Zinoviev and Kamenev being that both had wives working in Narkompros (Lilina and Kameneva) who were at odds with the Narkompros leadership. Dzerzhinsky made one major intervention in educational affairs, when he removed a whole sphere of Narkompros activity (child welfare) to the effective control of the GPU.

VTSIK, of which Lunacharsky was a member throughout this period, was normally sympathetic to Narkompros; but its support of Narkompros projects rarely yielded substantial results, because other bodies disregarded its recommendations. The same was true, although to a lesser extent, of Sovnarkom resolutions on Narkompros' behalf. The Central Committee of the Party considered educational questions less frequently

than VTSIK or Sovnarkom, and intervened usually to chastise Narkompros.

Narkompros was in name, and indeed in fact, the commissariat of enlightenment. Its educational policies were solidly based on the most enlightened and progressive educational theories of the time. But the execution of these policies was enormously hindered by the hostility of the intelligentsia and the ignorance of the masses. They foundered in the confusion of the Civil War and economic crisis. The leaders of Narkompros believed in encouraging local, popular initiative in the organization of education. They made little attempt to create a strong centralized administration of education. For this reason, among others, few of Narkompros' educational policies were satisfactorily realized in practice.

In dealing with cultural and educational institutions - the universities, the Academy of Sciences, the theatres, Proletkult - Narkompros found itself in something of a dilemma of principle. It was ready to give independence and administrative autonomy, but only in return for some show of cooperation and sympathy with the Soviet government. The universities, though very anxious for autonomy, were overtly hostile to Narkompros and the government. The Academy of Sciences approached Narkompros courteously (although without any declarations of political loyalty), and retained a degree of autonomy which the universities were denied. Proletkult was at first allowed both autonomy and government subsidy by Narkompros; but, in 1920, Lunacharsky was rebuked for overlooking

the political dangers of Proletkult's independence. Lunacharsky was always insensitive to nuances of political relations between revolutionary socialist groups, and this brought him into conflict with Lenin on the Proletkult issue.

In the sphere of literature and the arts, Narkompros - and Lunacharsky in particular - acted as intermediary between the government and the intelligentsia. It was an ungrateful task. Narkompros and Lunacharsky were frequently criticized in government and Party circles for 'softness' towards the intelligentsia. They approached the intelligentsia in a conciliatory spirit which was rarely reciprocated: the organized intelligentsia in the universities, Union of the arts and Teachers' Union responded belligerently, and with a certain undertone of contempt.

In spite of this, Lunacharsky had some success in opening channels of communication between the arts and the government. This, rather than the organization of an 'administration' of the arts, - involving subordination to government control of persons and institutions which had been or wished to be independent of it - was his intention. His policy towards the arts was to tolerate and subsidize all groups showing a minimum of cooperation with Narkompros, and to avoid at all costs sponsoring any sort of artistic monopoly or 'official' art. This was a policy which would have appealed to the artistic left in the 1930s, but in this period it was greatly resented. The futurists and 'proletarian' artists, particularly those who were Communists or Communist sympathizers (including Mayakovsky and Meyerhold), did not want toleration but monopoly,

and loudly reproached Lunacharsky for withholding it from them. Lunacharsky defended the principle of individual creative freedom; one of his opponents on the left (Kerzhentsev) suggested in reply that Communist writers and artists should be brought under 'Party discipline' in their work.

In 1920-21, the leaders and policies of Narkompros suffered heavy criticism and were partially discredited. By the end of 1921, the achievements of Narkompros in the educational sphere had been largely destroyed by the economic crisis and by the New Economic Policy, which removed the greater part of educational financing from the central budget. This double defeat of Narkompros raises the question of whether its policies and ideals were fundamentally incompatible with the general policies of the Party and the institutions of Soviet government.

The thesis concludes that the economic situation contributed overwhelmingly to Narkompros' defeat; and that the educational system which Narkompros had tried to create was beyond the financial and organizational capacity of the Soviet republic to sustain. The political explanation of Narkompros' defeat is accepted in part. On the one hand, many influential members of the Party and government regarded the leaders of Narkompros with suspicion as, in Stalin's phrase, 'old literati' of the revolution. Narkompros remained civilian in outlook and permissively democratic in method, resistant to the enthusiasm for strict centralization and military discipline which had been generated by the Civil War. For this reason, its policies were unlikely to be given the

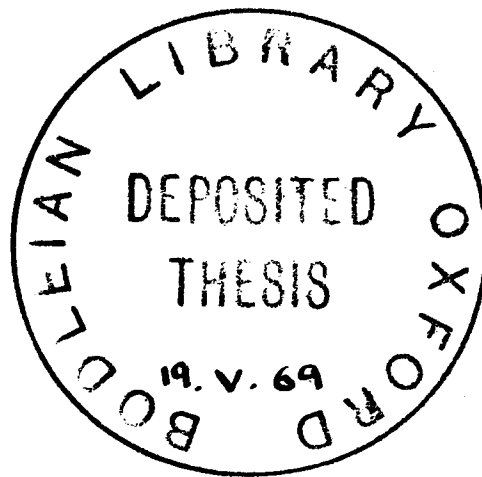
energetic support of most Party members either at central or local level.

But, on the other hand, these policies were supported by Lenin. Lenin's wife, Krupskaya, - whom Lunacharsky once described as 'the soul of Narkompros' - was the most vehement of Narkompros' leaders in opposition to 'military' methods and the imposition of organizational forms from above. Her aim was not just to avoid 'bureaucratic' organization by departments and appointed officials (which Narkompros was forced to adopt, in spite of her objections), but to create a working participant democracy in the educational field through the organization of local, popularly-elected, educational soviets. Lenin's speeches on education and political education developed the same theme, and applied it to the whole sphere of local organization.

It is therefore suggested that Narkompros had a view of enlightenment which was shared by Lenin and was not foreign to the traditions of the Bolshevik Party; and that the achievements and aspirations of Narkompros under Lunacharsky were the legitimate, though not the only, offspring of the Party in power.

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THE COMMISSARIAT OF EDUCATION UNDER LUNACHARSKY
(1917-1921)



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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS CONTAINED IN TEXT

TSGAOR Tsentralny gosudarstvennyy arkhiv oktyabrskoi revolyutsii i sotsialisticheskogo stroitelstva, Moscow.

TSGA RSFSR Tsentralny gosudarstvennyy arkhiv RSFSR, Moscow.

(Note: in citation of archives, the name is followed by number of fond/opis/edinita khraneniya)

M.F.Andreeva Maria Fedorovna Andreeva. Perepiska. Vospominaniya. Statyi. Dokumenty. Vospominaniya o M.F.Andreevoi, Moscow, 1961.

Direktivy VKP(b) Direktivy VKP(b) i postanovleniya sovetского pravitelstva o narodnom obrazovanii za 1917-1947 gg., Moscow-Leningrad, 1947.

Krupskaya, Ped.soch. N.K.Krupskaya, Pedagogicheskie sochineniya v 10-i tomakh, Moscow, 1957-62, plus v.11, 1963.

Lenin, Pol.sob.soch. V.I.Lenin, Polnoe sobranie sochinenii(5th ed.), 55 vols., Moscow, 1958-65.

Lunacharsky, Sob.soch. A.V.Lunacharsky, Sobranie sochinenii v 8-i tomakh, Moscow, 1963-7.

Lunacharsky, Vosp.i vpech. A.V.Lunacharsky, Vospominaniya i vpechatleniya, ed. N.A.Trifonov, Moscow, 1968.

Nar.pros. monthly Narodnoe prosveshchenie, fortnightly organ of State Education Commission, Petrograd, then monthly organ of Narkompros, Moscow.

Nar.pros. weekly Narodnoe prosveshchenie, weekly organ of Narkompros, Moscow.

S.U. Sobranie uzakonenii i rasporyazhenii rabocheho i krestyanskogo pravitelstva, Moscow.

Vestnik nar.pros.SKSO Vestnik narodnogo prosveshcheniya soyuz kommun severnoi oblasti, organ of Petrograd Narkompros.

Chapter 1 ORGANIZATION AND FINANCE

i) The establishment of Narkompros

The members of the first Council of People's Commissars¹ were announced by Kamenev, on behalf of the Bolshevik Central Committee, to the Second Congress of Soviets in Petrograd on October 26, 1917.² Lunacharsky, who was well known as a political orator and journalist, was appointed Commissar of Education. His name was one of those greeted 'with loud applause'.³

Anatoly Vasilevich Lunacharsky, born in 1875 in the family of a state councillor, had been a social-democrat since 1892, and a Bolshevik from 1904 to 1909, and again from July 1917. In 1909, he and A.A.Bogdanov (Malinovsky) were expelled from the Bolshevik fraction and founded the 'inter-fractional' group Vpered. Bogdanov had political and philosophical differences with Lenin. Lunacharsky's differences were largely philosophical: he at this time shared with the writer Maxim Gorky a view of socialism as a religion without God, and with Bogdanov an admiration for the contemporary 'empiriocritical' philosophers Ernst Mach and Richard Avenarius.

Lunacharsky remained in emigration until May 1917, when he returned to Russia in the second 'sealed train' through Germany.⁴ In Petrograd he joined Gorky's social-democratic internationalist paper Novaya zhizn and, until July, headed

1. Sovet Narodnykh Komissarov (Sovnarkom)

2. All dates until 14 February 1918 are given in the old style.

3. Nik.Sukhanov, Zapiski o revolyutsii, Berlin-Petersburg-Moscow, v.7, 1923, p.262.

4. The best source on Lunacharsky's pre-revolutionary biography is A.V.Lunacharsky, Vospominaniya i vpechatleniya, ed.N.A. Trifonov, Moscow, 1968. There is also an unreliable biography by A.Elkin, Lunacharsky, Moscow, 1967.

the cultural-education section of the Petrograd City Duma.¹ He was arrested during the July Days. While in prison, he was readmitted to the Bolshevik Party and, after his release, stood as a Bolshevik candidate and was elected deputy to the mayor of Petrograd.²

Lunacharsky's jurisdiction as Commissar of Education covered the former Ministry of Public Education,³ the State Education Committee⁴ created by the Provisional Government, and the former Palace Ministry, which controlled the imperial theatres, the Academy of Arts and the royal palaces.

Lunacharsky's first and characteristic action as commissar was to negotiate the release of the former Minister of Education, the Social-Revolutionary Salazkin, from the Petropavlovskaya fortress where he had been imprisoned with other members of the Provisional Government.⁵

In the first weeks, the new commissars were given few instructions and left largely to their own devices in the choice of colleagues. Lenin, meeting Lunacharsky by chance in the corridors of the Smolny Institute, suggested that he seek the cooperation of Krupskaya on educational reform and of the historian Pokrovsky - then in Moscow - on higher education.⁶

The group which Lunacharsky gathered around him consisted

1. F.F.Korolev, Ocherki po istorii sovetskoi shkoly i pedagogiki 1917-1920, Moscow, 1958, p.84.

2. ibid.

3. Ministerstvo Narodnogo Prosveshcheniya. The title of the new commissariat was Narodny Komissariat Prosveshcheniya (also rendered po Prosveshcheniyu), commonly Narkompros.

4. Gosudarstvennyy Komitet po Narodnomu Obrazovaniyu.

5. Novaya zhizn, 1917 no.165, 28 Oct.

6. A.V.Lunacharsky, 'From recollections of October', in O narodnom obrazovanii, Moscow, 1958, pp.17-18.

in the first instance of colleagues from the cultural-education sections of the Petrograd Duma and the Bolshevik Party.

'I created a collegium and took it through Sovnarkom soon after I was appointed to Narkompros,' Lunacharsky wrote.¹

'L.R. and V.R.Menzhinskaya, N.K.Krupskaya, P.I.Lebedev-Polyansky, comrade Pozner, the late Kalinin, comrade Lazurkina, the late V.M.Bonch-Bruevich and Rogalsky joined the collegium... The secretary was an old Party member, my old friend D.I. Leshchenko.' Of these, the Menzhinskayas (sisters of Vyacheslav Rudolfovich Menzhinsky), Krupskaya (Lenin's wife), Viktor Markovich Pozner, Dora Abramovna Lazurkina and Dmitri Ilyich Leshchenko had worked in the Duma or Bolshevik cultural-education sections. Fedor Ivanovich Kalinin (not related to Mikhail Ivanovich) and Lebedev-Polyansky (Pavel Ivanovich Lebedev, who used the pseudonym Valerian Polyansky) had been associated with Lunacharsky first in Vpered during the years of emigration, and in 1917 as co-organizers with him of the Petrograd Proletkult. Vera Mikhailovna Bonch-Bruevich (Velichkina) was the wife of Vladimir Dmitrievich Bonch-Bruevich, and a doctor by profession.

For the first six months after the October revolution the main policy-making, and to some extent executive, organ in education was the State Education Commission,² established by Sovnarkom decree on November 9, 1917.³ The proper working of the commissariat (Narkompros) was hindered by difficulty in taking over the old Ministry in Petrograd, and then by the

1. 'How we occupied the Ministry of Public Education', Vosp. i vpech., pp.180-81.

2. Gosudarstvennaya Komissiya po Narodnomu Prosveshcheniyu.

3. Direktivy VKP(b) i postanovleniya sovetского pravitelstva o narodnom obrazovanii za 1917-1947 gg., Moscow-Leningrad, 1947, pp.14-16.

transfer of the government to Moscow in March, 1918.

Lunacharsky was slow to embark on what might have seemed his first task: the occupation of the old Ministry on Chernyshev bridge. Other commissars attempted to occupy their respective ministries, and met with severe rebuffs. Trotsky and Uritsky went to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on October 27, and were locked out by its officials while the former deputy Minister escaped through a back door with the Secret Treaties.¹ Shlyapnikov went to the Ministry of Labour a day later: none of the officials would tell him which was the Minister's office.² Lunacharsky's appointee to the former Palace Ministry (Yury Flakserman, then aged 22) had the humiliating experience of being described as 'a tall child in a soldier's greatcoat' and ignored:³

'All the officials of that great organization were still at their posts. There was sabotage of all the ministries, banks and other institutions, and most of their officials and employees did not turn up to work. But in the Palace Ministry there was complete order; everyone came punctually to work and scribbled away as if nothing had happened.'

A non-Bolshevik paper reported with enjoyment that the Bolshevik commissars to the War Ministry⁴

'went to the Petropavlovskaya fortress and appealed in great distress to General Manikovsky to join the administration of the War Ministry, in view of the fact that they did not know how to cope with supply, which had become completely disorganized. They stated that they would accept any conditions ...'

1. John Reed, Ten days that shook the world, New York, 1926, p.262.

2. ibid.

3. Yu.Flakserman, Vospominaniya (unpublished ms.in possession of its author).

4. Rabochaya gazeta 1917 no.199, 29 Oct., p.3.

On November 8, Lunacharsky told VTSIK that 'he could give no comforting news' about the position in the Ministry of Education. The officials of the Ministry were on strike, as were the State Education Committee and the Teachers' Union (VUS). Lunacharsky had no illusions that agreement could be quickly reached because, he said, 'it has been observed that an empty-headed clerk will soon come to us, but all the intellectual [ideinye] workers stubbornly insist on their opinion that we have usurped power.' He added that 'it will be much easier to build everything afresh than to take account of old and decayed institutions.'¹

For the time being the old officials, refusing all contact with the Bolsheviki, remained in possession of the building of the Ministry, and Lunacharsky continued to work in offices in the Winter Palace and the Petrograd Duma.

It is probable that Lunacharsky was an advocate of coalition with other socialist parties: he is quoted as telling the Petrograd Bolshevik Committee on November 1 that²

'Here we have been 8 days in power, but we do not know whether the people know of our decree on peace ... Who is responsible? Technical staff, who are bourgeois or petty-bourgeois. They are sabotaging us ... We ourselves can cope with nothing ... Of course we can take the terrorist path, but why? What for? ... I consider that in the face of all these difficulties, agreement is desirable. No proofs of yours about the Mensheviks will convince the masses. I know very well that to work as we are now is impossible.'

1. Novaya zhizn 1917 no.176, 9 Nov. p.3.

2. Protocols of this meeting have been published only by Trotsky in his Stalinskaya shkola falsifikatsii, Berlin 1932, pp.116-131. Leonard Schapiro, having compared the type with that of protocols published in Soviet editions, believes them to be genuine. (Schapiro, Origin of the Communist autocracy, London 1955, p.74, note)

Lunacharsky did not resign on the coalition issue with the Bolshevik 'right' - Kamenev, Zinoviev, Rykov, Nogin, Milyutin, Teodorovich - on November 4. He had already resigned on November 2 on the false report of the destruction of St.Basil's Cathedral in Moscow during the fighting. On November 4, finding this report to be false, he withdrew his resignation.

But the protocols of the meeting of the Petrograd Bolshevik Committee published by Trotsky show that 'the question of the expulsion of A.V.Lunacharsky from the Party' was raised on November 1, but rejected by the meeting. Trotsky suggests that the move to expel Lunacharsky was made 'on the initiative of Lenin' because of Lunacharsky's advocacy of coalition.¹

On November 1, Lunacharsky may have heard rumours of the destruction of St.Basil's, but he said nothing of it either to the Petrograd Committee or the Bolshevik Central Committee, whose meeting he attended (though not a member) on the evening of the same day.² Telephone communication with Moscow had broken down on October 31.³ On November 1, Sovetskaya pravda reported that 'Skobelevskaya square [in the Kremlin] has been turned into a military camp.'⁴ Novaya zhizn reported the next day⁵ that 'they are bringing horrifying news from Moscow ... In the Kremlin ... cannons roar, shells fly,

1. Stalinskaya shkola falsifikatsii, p.116 and note.

2. Protokoly TSK RSDRP(b) avg.1917 - fev.1918, Moscow, 1958 (protocol No.31, 1 Nov.1917), pp.124-30.

3. Novaya zhizn 1917, no.169, 1 Nov.

4. Sovetskaya pravda, 1917, no.66, 1 Nov.

5. Novaya zhizn 1917, no.170, 2 Nov. article by P.Surozhky.

innocent blood flows ... If even one of the great historical monuments falls to the hands of vandals, blinded by malice, there will be no forgiveness for them, either from us or from those who come after ...'

On the same day, Lunacharsky is reported to have burst into tears at a meeting of Sovnarkom and rushed from the room crying 'I cannot stand it! I cannot bear the monstrous destruction of beauty and tradition!'¹

Lunacharsky's resignation was published in the social-revolutionary Delo naroda and in Novaya zhizn on November 3.²

'I have just heard, from eye-witnesses, what happened in Moscow.

St.Basil's and the Uspensky Cathedral are being destroyed. The Kremlin, where the most important artistic treasures of Petrograd and Moscow are collected, is being bombarded.

There are thousands of victims.

What will happen next? What more can happen?

I cannot bear it. My cup is full. I am powerless to stop this awfulness.

It is impossible to work under the pressure of thoughts which are driving me mad.

That is why I am resigning from Sovnarkom.

I understand the full gravity of this decision. But I can no more.' (Signed) A.V.Lunacharsky,
November 2, 1917.

The resignation was withdrawn the next day. In a statement dated November 3,³ Lunacharsky wrote:

'It is impossible to remain at a post where you are powerless. Therefore I handed in my resignation.

But my comrades, the People's Commissars, considered resignation impermissible.

I remain at my post, until your will may find a worthier representative ...'

1. John Reed, Ten days that shook the world, p.245.

2. text from Novaya zhizn 1917 no.171, 3 Nov., p.1.

3. Novaya zhizn 1917 no.172, 4 Nov., p.1.

and artistic heritage.

In the same number of Novaya zhizn a reader applauded Lunacharsky's action in resigning:¹

'You were not alone in your feelings, your suffering. With you were all those who see in socialism the bearer of a renewed mankind, purified of seeking bloody solutions to its problems. Your voice did not go out in vain ...'

On November 3 at the meeting of the Petrograd Soviet, Trotsky explained²

'that Lunacharsky is not a militant politician; and news of the events in Moscow upset him so much that he said it was impossible to work. But then he withdrew his resignation.'

The occupation of the Ministry of Education took place a fortnight later, on November 18.³ Lunacharsky's friend and colleague Leshchenko had found an intermediary, the left SR Bakrylov, who reported that the officials of the Ministry would leave the moment Lunacharsky appeared, but that the technical staff was prepared to remain. To Lunacharsky, 'the prospect of being left with my comrades of the collegium, surrounded by a rather large number of messengers, stokers and doormen, was not attractive.'⁴ The Bolshevik group set out in several cars, without military escort which, Lunacharsky wrote, 'I flatly refused'. There was no resistance at the

1. Novaya zhizn 1917 no.172, 4 Nov., p.2 (Z.Shapurskaya)

2. ibid., p.3.

3. The date is established by an unsigned report in Novaya zhizn 1917 no.185, 19 Nov., p.3. On stylistic evidence, and the resemblance of this report to Lunacharsky's account written in 1927 (see note 4), the author was Lunacharsky.

4. 'How we occupied the Ministry of Public Education,' Vosp.i vpech. pp.180-184.

Ministry. A group of about 50 technical staff of the Ministry were waiting at the entrance 'and welcomed the People's Commissar and his colleagues with a loud "hurrah".' Speeches were made. A representative of the technical staff of the Ministry said that the staff felt itself part of the proletariat and was eager to serve the workers' government.

'During our humble celebration, a young man with a thick beard came unexpectedly into the room, not taking off his coat ... This young man turned out to have been sent by the absconding officials to inform me and my colleagues that they were very indignant with us, that they considered us to be the destroyers of the glorious February Revolution; and to say how grieved they were that the administration of education was now ruined. All the time he₁ was talking, Bakrylov kept wanting to arrest him ...'¹

On November 28 it was noticed that the departing officials had taken with them 93,000 roubles belonging to the teachers' pension fund.²

Narkompros issued an appeal to former officials of the Ministry to appear at the Ministry at 12 noon on November 27 for the transfer of business and the return of office keys.³ Nobody came. Some of the senior officials 'created an organization, and entered into correspondence with various institutions in the name of the "Ministry of Public Education".'⁴ This organization continued for some months to conduct examinations, award diplomas and instruct officials in the provinces. The Tsarist portraits in the ministerial building, including

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1. 'How we occupied the Ministry of Public Education', Vosp. i vpech., p.183.
 2. see this chapter, pp.22-3.
 3. quoted Korolev, Ocherki po istorii sovetskoi shkoly i pedagogiki, p.92.
 4. V.Polyansky, 'How the Commissariat of Education started work', Proletarskaya revolyutsiya 1926 no.49(2), p.57.

a more than life-size Alexander I in the Minister's study, were still on the walls when the commissariat moved to Moscow.¹

The left SRs joined the government in December, 1917, and were given eight major offices including the Commissariat of Property of the Republic² which went to Karelin. This new commissariat was based on the old Palace Ministry, but control of state theatres and museums remained with Narkompros.² Flakserman, appointed by Lunacharsky, became Karelin's deputy: according to his account, Karelin took little interest in the commissariat, and soon resigned from the government over the Brest peace.³ After his resignation, Narkompros agitated for the return of the Commissariat of Property of the Republic; and in August 1918 Sovnarkom decided that it should be absorbed into Narkompros.⁴ It later became the Museum Department of Narkompros under Natalya Ivanovna Trotskaya.

On December 9, 1917, Sovnarkom appointed the left SR G.D.Zaks as assistant to the commissar of education. Polyansky wrote that 'the SRs in the commissariat insisted that comrade Zaks should be present at the commissar's receptions "to know what he was saying".'⁵ Zaks was not only assistant to Lunacharsky but deputy head of Vecheka. He was one of the leaders of the left SR revolt in June 1918⁶, survived the affair, and in November 1918 joined the Bolsheviks. He did not return to Narkompros.

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1. V.Polyansky, 'How the Commissariat of Education started work', Proletarskaya revolyutsiya 1926 no.49(2), pp.56-7.
 2. I.S.Smirnov, Lenin i sovetskaya kultura, Moscow, 1960, p.340.
 3. Yu.Flakserman, Vospominaniya (ms.)
 4. I.S.Smirnov, Lenin i sovetskaya kultura, pp.240, 344.
 5. V.Polyansky, 'How the Commissariat of Education started work', loc.cit., p.51.
 6. V.I.Lenin, Polnoe sobranie sochinenii, 5th ed. Moscow, v.50, p.370.

In March 1918, Narkompros was evacuated with the rest of the government to Moscow. Lunacharsky remained in Petrograd, combining the functions of Commissar of Education of the Republic, Commissar of Education of the Northern District, and deputy head of the Council of Commissars of the Union of Communes of the Northern District under Zinoviev.¹ A number of departments of Narkompros remained in Petrograd with Lunacharsky, including the arts department (IZO), part of the theatre department and the teachers' pension fund.² 'Not one People's Commissar was placed in such a disadvantageous position as I,' Lunacharsky wrote,³ 'because in my administrative and political work I had to tear myself in two ...' The Central Committee of the Party had wanted him to spend three weeks of the month in Moscow and one week in Petrograd, but finally allowed him to spend two weeks in each.⁴ In fact Lunacharsky spent only ten weeks in Moscow between April and December 1918.⁵ N.A.Trifonov suggests that Lunacharsky's desire to stay in Petrograd was an emotional one: 'I am now so bound to this great and tragic Petrograd,' Lunacharsky wrote to his wife before the October Revolution, 'that I will not be able to tear myself away from it for long.'⁶ He moved to Moscow only at the beginning of 1919, 'on Sverdlov's insistence'.⁷

Narkompros began work in Moscow on March 28, in the building of a former lycee at Ostozhenka 53. In Lunacharsky's

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1. N.A.Trifonov, 'Lunacharsky in the city of Lenin', Zvezda 1965 no.11, p.187.
 2. Izvestiya VTSIK (Moscow), 1918 no.57, 26 March, p.4.
 3. quoted Korolev, Ocherki po istorii sovetskoi shkoly i pedagogiki 1917-1920, p.153, note 3.
 4. ibid.
 5. from information in TSGAOR 2306/1/36 and TSGAOR 2306/1/40 (meetings of State Education Commission and collegium of Narkompros, 1918)
 6. Trifonov, 'Lunacharsky in the city of Lenin' loc.cit. p.187.
 7. ibid. p.187.

absence Krupskaya and later M.N.Pokrovsky took charge.¹

The State Education Commission - which at this time performed the functions later belonging to the collegium of Narkompros - moved with Narkompros to Moscow. Most of the Petrograd members of the Commission, except Lunacharsky and the Menzhinskayas, moved with it, and were joined in Moscow by a group of Bolsheviks and a smaller group of left SRs. The most prominent of the new Bolshevik members were Panteleimon Nikolaevich Lepeshinsky (a companion of Lenin's Geneva exile), Pavel Karlovich Shternberg (professor of astronomy at Moscow University and one of the organizers of the Moscow uprising), Olga Davydovna Kameneva (wife of L.B.Kamenev, sister of Trotsky, and later something of a thorn in Narkompros flesh), L.G.Shapiro (a former Bundist and Menshevik who joined the Bolsheviks in 1918) and Mikhail Nikolaevich Pokrovsky (historian, ex-member of the Vpered group, president of the Moscow district Sovnarkom dissolved by Lenin in March 1918²). Of the left SRs the most regular attenders were Sofia Vasilevna Azanchevskaya (an acquaintance of Lenin's in emigration, a querulous participant in Narkompros debates), Dora Yulevna Elkina (still in her '20s with the face of a Turgenev heroine³, a staunch defender of left SR prerogatives in the Commission) and A.Baryshnikov. Less regular attenders at the Commission's meetings included the Bolsheviks E.A.Preobrazhensky and Ryazanov, the artist David Petrovich Shterenberg (a left Bundist), the composer

1. On May 22 1918, Krupskaya resigned as deputy and was replaced by Pokrovsky (TSGAOR 2306/1/36, State Education Commission, 22 May 1918).

2. V.D.Bonch-Bruevich, Vospominaniya o Lenine, Moscow, 1965, pp.208-9, 464.

3. Elkina's photograph appears in V.A.Kumanev, Sotsializm i vsenarodnaya gramotnost, Moscow, 1967, p.61.

Artur Lourie and the social-democratic internationalist Kirik Nikitich Levin.¹

All the members of the Commission were socialist intellectuals, many of them professional revolutionaries who had lived for many years in emigration, few of them with any professional experience except journalism or (to a lesser extent) teaching. Wives and sisters of leading Bolshevik politicians formed a sizeable group even in 1918: in later years Narkompros gained Trotsky's wife, Zinoviev's wife (Lilina), the wives of Dzerzhinsky and Krzhizhanovsky and Lenin's sister (Anna Elizarova).

The serious business of building a commissariat began only after the move to Moscow. But it was conducted informally, so that for some years Narkompros was not in a position to say exactly how many people it employed, and could only with difficulty compile a list of its departments. Lunacharsky, who could never believe that Narkompros could be the worse for gaining a man of goodwill, or the wife of a comrade, or the destitute grand-daughter of a distinguished writer, had the habit of recruiting staff on a personal basis and directing them with letters of introduction to the head of one of the Narkompros departments. But Narkompros continued to suffer from a chronic shortage both of qualified workers and reliable Party members.

At the end of 1918, when meetings of sub-sections were called for the purpose of preparing budgetary estimates, the protocols of Narkompros record 42 separate meetings of departments, sub-departments, committees, sub-sections and

1. information on attendance at meetings of the State Education Commission, April-July 1918, in TSGAOR 2306/1/36, passim.

commissions.¹ These included the substantial departments of the United Labour School, higher schools, Proletkult, teacher-training, music, building, supply, kindergartens, museums, theatre, scientific and extramural departments, cinema committee and chief archive administration. But the list also included a bureau for the organization of school excursions of the sub-department of visual aids (but no sub-department of visual aids), an historical sub-section, a scientific commission on tuberculosis, a sub-section on defective children, a committee on literacy, and a statistical department for research into the conditions for universal primary education.

In January 1919 it was decided that 'all departmental collegiums must be endorsed by the collegium of Narkompros, and that all unendorsed members of collegiums must be submitted for endorsement within a week.'² A few months later, 'in accordance with the decision of the Council of Worker-Peasant Defence'³, Narkompros prepared a scheme of reduction of staff from an estimated 3,062 to 2,265 persons.⁴ The biggest single departments registered were supply and museums, each with 345 employees. The schools department was large (283), but not in comparison with the combined strengths of music, cinema, theatre and fine arts which came to nearly 600. Professional-technical education employed only 64, higher education 40, and teacher-training - a most urgent task - 30 people.⁵

In the year following this decision, there was a drastic

1. TSGAOR 2306/1/40, November meetings of the collegium, 1918.

2. TSGAOR 2306/1/180, 21 Jan.1919, meeting of the collegium.

3. later the Council of Labour and Defence (STO).

4. TSGAOR 2306/1/213, 5 May 1919, commission on current business of Narkompros.

5. ibid.

reduction of staff, not through the efforts of Narkompros but as a result of mobilization and famine. This contraction in numbers no doubt lightened the task of V.A. Markus, secretary to the collegium, when in January 1920 he set out a plan for 'simplification of the structure of Narkompros'.¹ His plan, which was approved by the collegium, was as follows:

1. Organizational sector i. supply department ii. department of congresses iii. finance department (accounts, budget) iv. economic department (building, transport, buying and selling).
2. Extramural sector i. extramural department (adult schools, narodnye doma [People's Houses], lectures, libraries, work with adolescents etc.) ii. ROSTA (telegraphic agency) iii. Proletkult.
3. Scientific sector i. high education department ii. library department iii. scientific department.
4. Arts sector i. theatre department ii. music department iii. department of fine arts iv. photo and cinema department v. architecture department.

Outside the sectors i. secretariat [upravlenie delami] ii. chief archive administration. iii. department of education of national minorities. iv. State Publishing House [Gosizdat] .

By an omission difficult to explain, Markus' scheme made no provision for administration of the ordinary school system.

One of the perpetual problems of Narkompros was discipline and organization of its staff. In September 1918 the secretariat

1. TSGAOR 2306/1/320, 21 Jan. 1920, collegium of Narkompros.

of Narkompros circularized the departments on their disciplinary sins:¹

'The secretariat has many times had to observe, and to hear the reproaches of other Soviet institutions' responsible workers, that Narkompros employees are quite often late for work or absent; that they stroll round the corridors needlessly; and that they refuse on some excuse or other to perform the work delegated to them... We must insist once and for all that work delegated to employees, of whatever character, must be performed without qualifications and delays, even if they do not like this work, because idlers and saboteurs cannot be tolerated in the service of the Workers' and Peasants' Government ...'

Krupskaya, commenting in general on the malfunctioning of Soviet institutions, must have drawn on her experience of Narkompros when she wrote:²

'Take the work of the commissariats ... Very often there is no distinction between business entrusted to the commissar, the collegium and the departments. This is usually worked out on the spot. The functions of various sub-departments are not always clearly delineated. Lists of staff exist, but in the majority of cases these lists are very approximate. There is absolutely no differentiation of function between individual workers. This is what causes the overpopulation of these institutions. You have an institution of, say, 10 people, whose functions are not clearly defined. 8 of them are quite redundant, and the other 2 are impossibly overworked. The work goes badly. The head of the department thinks there are not enough people - he gets 10 more, but the work still goes badly. Why? Because the work is not divided up properly and the employees do not know what they have to do. The inflation of the commissariats is a continual, observable process. But does the work go better for it?'

But it would be wrong to think of Narkompros simply in terms of organizational incompetence, or to see Lunacharsky in

1. TSGAOR 2306/1/3272, Instruction no.6132, 18 Sept.1918.

2. 'Taylor's system and the organization of labour in Soviet institutions,' Krasnaya nov, 1921, no.1.

1918 as the poetic nonentity of the Stalinist history-books. In October 1917, the Second Congress of Soviets applauded the names of Lenin, Trotsky and Lunacharsky. The Soviet State Archive contains a file of telegrams sent from the provinces in 1918 to the People's Commissar of Education: they address him as 'nash vozhd Lunacharsky', 'slavny vozhd russkoi shkoly Anatoly Vasilevich Lunacharsky', 'ideiny vozhd'.¹ Other telegrams of greeting to the Bolshevik government are addressed to Lenin, Trotsky and Lunacharsky (a recurrent form); Lenin, Lunacharsky and Gorky; 'Lenin, Trotsky, Zinoviev, Lunacharsky, Liebknecht, Adler and all fighters for freedom'; 'our leader Lenin and his colleagues Zinoviev and Lunacharsky'.²

From Raskolnikov and Larisa Reisner came a long and exalted message on the first anniversary of the revolution, addressed to Sverdlov, the Socialist Academy, the editors of Izvestiya, Pravda and Bednota, Lunacharsky and Zinoviev. The Voronezh conservatorium, 'dedicating itself to the people's culture on the day of its birth', greeted in Lunacharsky's person 'the spiritual dictatorship of the proletariat'. The Novoladozhsky district educational congress sent 'warm greetings to comrade Lunacharsky as a true apostle and forerunner of enlightenment ... Hail to the sun, and may darkness vanish!'.³

1. 'Our leader Lunacharsky', 'glorious leader of the Russian school Anatoly Vasilevich Lunacharsky', 'intellectual leader'. TSGAOR 2306/1/152. Telegrams, Feb.-Dec.1918.

2. ibid.

3. ibid.

ii) The finances of Narkompros

The years of 'War Communism' were years of financial improvisation and economic crisis for Narkompros. Yet they had the advantage over later years that Narkompros was master of its own house: the central government on principle accepted responsibility for maintaining all cultural and educational institutions, both local and central, and their financing was conducted directly through Narkompros. Local departments of education, although subordinate to the local Soviets of Deputies as well as to Narkompros were financed largely from the centre by Narkompros.¹

This was the principle, although it was by no means realized in practice. As the real value of the rouble declined, central financing was replaced by central allocation of food rations and essential commodities. Because its priority during the civil war was low, Narkompros never received sufficient food and commodity rations to support all its institutions and employees. As a service commissariat, it had no goods to barter with the productive commissariats. But in spite of its temporary disadvantages, Narkompros expected that when the war was over its priority would rise, and it would be able to give adequate support to all its institutions.

Narkompros began its financial life in innocence and expectation of abundance. There was no financial or economic specialist among the small group which occupied the Ministry of Education in November 1917. I.B.Rogalsky, who had no

1. see Narkompros statement in Narodnoe prosveshchenie weekly, 1919 no.26-28, 18 Jan.p.220.

special qualifications,¹ was put in charge of finance. 'I remember,' Lunacharsky later wrote,² 'that Rogalsky's face always bore the mark of the deepest astonishment when he brought us money from the bank. It still seemed to him that the Revolution and the organization of the new power were a sort of magical play, and that in a magical play it is impossible to receive real money.'

Immediately after Narkompros moved to Moscow, it faced the problem of drawing up a budget for presentation to Sovnarkom. On March 30, 1918, Krupskaya informed the State Education Commission that the question of Narkompros estimates had been raised in Sovnarkom the previous day, but had had to be deferred because of Rogalsky's absence. She urged that an 'informed person' should be present at the next meeting of Sovnarkom.³ Lebedev-Polyansky, then in charge of the literary-publishing department of Narkompros, was sent.⁴

'There was some kind of meeting for consideration of the estimate. Nobody knew what the institution was or who the people were. We looked at them - neat, clean-shaven, in their starched collars. We whispered to each other: "They look like old chinovniki. Why should we listen to them?" ... They tried to talk of concrete possibilities, of norms, of statistical inaccuracies, but in vain. We argued passionately, not conceding a single rouble ... as if our estimate was really considered and well-founded ...

Then the estimate had to be defended in a special commission of Sovnarkom ... It was evening. Shlyapnikov presided. There was endless noise and shouting ...

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1. stated at meeting of State Education Commission, 8 May 1918, TSGAOR 2306/1/36.
 2. 'How we occupied the Ministry of Public Education', Vosp. i vpech. p.183.
 3. TSGAOR 2306/1/36, 30 March 1918.
 4. ibid. The quotation that follows is from V. Polyansky, 'How the People's Commissariat of Education started work', Proletarskaya revolyutsiya, 1926 no.49(2), pp.59-60.

"You want children's toys. Well, we can't run to toys now," announced comrade Shlyapnikov.

"How can extramural work go on without them?" retorted comrade Lazurkina in defence.

"And publishing, that has to be halved as well."

More noise. The Narkompros representatives hotly announced: "We will leave the meeting if you mean to cut our estimates like this, not accepting any of our conclusions." And so it went on over every clause ...

In two hours the estimate was approved. Tired but satisfied of victory - although irritated with comrade Shlyapnikov - we went home.

Of course comrade Shlyapnikov, like us, was not prepared for such work. He knew only one thing: to reduce to a half, a third, a quarter. That is what he did.'

The Narkompros budget was composed, according to Lunacharsky, on the basis of the 1917 budget, adding 30%.¹ But Pozner claimed that 'the estimate was composed not according to 1917 but to 1918. He [Pozner] saw Kerensky's estimate for the first half of 1918 and used it.'² It seems to have been the work of many hands. Rogalsky was blamed by the Treasury for making mistakes of 3 million roubles, apparently in the arithmetic of the estimates,³ and one of his colleagues drew attention to their formal deficiencies, which included failure to indicate paragraphs, clauses and sub-clauses, reference to non-existent clauses, absence of conclusions or comparisons with previous estimates, and absence of motivation for separate estimates.⁴ The last criticism was also made by Maly Sovnarkom.⁵

1. TSGAOR 2306/1/36, 31 May 1918.

2. *ibid.*

3. TSGAOR 2306/1/36, 8 May 1918 (statement of Azanchevskaya).

4. TSGAOR 2306/1/36, 11 May 1918 (statement of I.M.Alter).

5. TSGAOR 2306/1/36, 31 May 1918 (statement of Azanchevskaya).

Maly Sovnarkom was an office of Sovnarkom for preliminary review of business.

The Narkompros estimates were nevertheless approved by Sovnarkom on April 5 at the sum of 511,285,100 roubles.¹

After the acceptance of the budget, Rogalsky and his deputy Azanchevskaya went to Petrograd to negotiate with the Treasury. The occasion was marred by disputes between Rogalsky and Azanchevskaya; and Azanchevskaya, accusing Rogalsky of incompetence, forced him to resign after their return.² The treasury officials were uncooperative. There was a 'sabotaging element in the Treasury,' Rogalsky claimed.³ But the problems were compounded by Narkompros' financial ineptitude. 'The financial position is bad,' Lunacharsky reported on May 31.⁴

'...We are besieged with questions about money, but there are no allocations ... We must find out what the Treasury wants from us, so that we can distribute the budget we have been given ... A large part of the Arts department was left completely without a budget ... The Finance department avoids spending the money it has, and has a lot left over. Gosizdat has its own funds, but all the other departments are complaining of the absence of funds ...'

Narkompros had claims to money outside its budgetary allocation, but found it hard to realize them. Rogalsky and Azanchevskaya were 'informed in the Treasury of a sum remaining from 1917, as much as 40,000,000 roubles; what part of this sum will be made available to Narkompros was still not clear',⁵ Azanchevskaya reported.

The imperial theatres in Petrograd seized the 160,000

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1. 'Lenin documents on education,' Sovetskaya pedagogika, 1966 no.4, p.120.
 2. TSGAOR 2306/1/36, 8 May 1918.
 3. ibid.
 4. TSGAOR 2306/1/36, 31 May 1918.
 5. TSGAOR 2306/1/36, 8 May 1918.

roubles in their treasury and 'illegally distributed that sum to the artists and employees of the theatres, so that the money would not reach the Bolsheviks'.¹

A more notorious case - although the sum involved was smaller - was the removal of 93,000 roubles of the teachers' pension fund from the Ministry of Education by Countess Sofia Vladimirovna Panina, former deputy to the Minister.² According to Yakov Yakovlevich Gurevich, one of the leaders of the Petrograd Teachers' Union and counsel for Panina at her trial, the money was removed on Panina's instructions and put in a bank just before Lunacharsky's occupation of the Ministry, and Panina was arrested on the basis of a report by Rogalsky on November 28.³ The case came before the Revolutionary Tribunal on December 10, 1917. Panina admitted responsibility but denied guilt, stating that she would return the money only to a legitimate authority - the Constituent Assembly. Novaya zhizn, in a front-page report, warmly supported her stand.⁴ The Revolutionary Tribunal - perhaps

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1. V.Polyansky, 'How the People's Commissariat of Education started work,' Proletarskaya revolyutsiya 1926, no.49(2), pp.57-8.
 2. The case is described by John Reed in Ten days that shook the world (p.233 and note); but Reed - probably following the Novaya zhizn report (1917 no.198, 10 Dec.) - thought that the money came from the Ministry of Social Security. The mistake probably arose from the fact that Panina, before becoming to deputy to the Minister of Education in August 1917, was deputy to the Minister of Social Security (May to July, 1917)
 3. 'The case of Countess S.V.Panina at the Revolutionary Tribunal,' Russkoe bogatstvo, 1917, no.11-12.
 4. Novaya zhizn, 1917 no.200, 13 Dec. p.1.

because of her past services to popular education, perhaps unwilling to make a political martyr - did not deal harshly with her. Their verdict was¹

'to leave citizeness S.V.Panina in prison until the return of the people's money, taken by her, to the treasury of the Commissariat of Public Education [sic].

The Revolutionary Tribunal considers citizeness S.V.Panina guilty of opposition to the people's government but, taking into account the past of the accused, limits itself to consigning citizeness Panina to the contempt of society [obshchestvennoe poritsanie].

Panina was prepared to remain in prison until her release by the Constituent Assembly. True to her past, she was busy organizing cultural activities for her fellow-prisoners.² But her friends were less optimistic of the future, and a subscription was raised among the Petrograd intelligentsia to buy her out. 92,802 roubles and 72 kopeks were brought to Narkompros by Professor Grevs,³ and on December 19 Panina was freed.

Narkompros was anxious to distribute credits to local education departments, but met difficulties on every side. Treasury officials in Petrograd promised Rogalsky and Azanchevskaya to give 'telegraphic instructions to the provinces about the opening of credits with the Treasury',⁴ but at the end of May it was discovered that the telegrams had not been sent because of the Treasury's unwillingness to pay the bill. 'The Treasury is sabotaging us, exploiting

1. quoted Gurevich, 'The case of Countess S.V.Panina at the Revolutionary Tribunal,' loc.cit.

2. Gurevich, op.cit.

3. Izvestiya TSIK (Petrograd), 1917 no.256, 20 Dec., p.5.

4. TSGAOR 2306/1/36, 8 May 1918 (statement of Azanchevskaya).

the ignorance of many of us,' Azanchevskaya told the State Education Commission.¹ An unreliable Narkompros report² estimated 'grants for the maintenance of local institutions' for the first half of 1918 at the insignificant sum of 3,714 roubles - the same estimate for the second half of 1918 was 65,544 roubles, the largest single item of expenditure on the Narkompros budget. Even so, it seems that not all the money sent by Narkompros to the provinces reached its destination, for according to Pokrovsky there were 'cases in the provinces when the local Soviet of Deputies requisitioned educational credits'.³ Early in 1919 the collegium of Narkompros admitted that it was impossible to make up the deficiencies of payment from 1918, 'since neither Narkompros nor provincial education departments have any data at all from which it would be possible to estimate the amount of the debts ...'⁴

There was panic in Narkompros in March 1919 when it was reported that there had been no response from provincial education departments to telegrams informing them of the allocation of credits.⁵ The collegium decided that the Commissariat of Posts and Telegraph must be at fault, but resolved in any case to ask the Treasury to send out reply-paid telegrams to the provinces - 'indicating that in case of necessity Narkompros will pay for the telegrams.'⁶ But as it turned out, the fault lay mainly with the provincial education

1. TSGAOR 2306/1/36, 38 May 1918.

2. A. Aktov, 'Budget of the People's Commissariat of Education,' Narodnoe prosveshchenie weekly, 1918 no.19, 16 Nov.

3. speaking to State Education Commission, 5 Oct.1918, in Narodnoe prosveshchenie monthly, 1919 no.6-7, p.173.

4. TSGAOR 2306/1/180, 11 Feb.1919.

5. TSGAOR 2306/1/180, 21 March 1919.

6. ibid.

departments. The telegrams, sent out at the end of January 1919, were received on the average in mid-February. But of 35 local authorities to whom telegrams were sent only 5 replied by telegram, 23 by letter, 1 orally and 6 not at all.¹

It was felt in Narkompros that the more money spent on education and culture, the more credit to the Soviet government. The Narkompros budgetary report of 1918 pointed out with pleasure (though without allowing for inflation of the rouble) that educational spending in 1918 was almost double the 1917 figure, and applauded Narkompros initiative in finding new categories like publishing and the arts to spend money on, since 'nothing which enriches mankind, adorns life, gives it new joy and new meaning, can be forgotten by a government which has set itself the aim of struggle for a new life, free from slavery and want.'²

Lunacharsky - who protested against use of the 'bureaucratic' word 'estimate' - seems to have assumed in 1918 that Narkompros would be financed on demand. Pokrovsky described the whole Narkompros budget as an exercise in propaganda: 'It is the most enormous budget for education which Russia has ever had,' he said on presenting the estimates for the second half of 1918;³ and added that although the estimates had been criticized by short-sighted technical personnel he was confident that, because of their 'agitational significance', they would be accepted by the 'more political people in Sovnarkom'. Perhaps, Pokrovsky said, it would be difficult to spend all the money

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1. Narodnoe prosveshchenie weekly, 1919 no.33, 3 May ('information on credits')
 2. A. Aktov, 'Budget of the People's Commissariat of Education,' Nar. pros. mweekly, 1918, no.19, 16 Nov.
 3. minutes of State Education Commission, 5 Oct.1918, in Nar. pros. monthly, 1919 no.6-7, pp.172-3.

asked for within the next three months, but

'this fact is absolutely harmless. The money will be spent, if not in December then in January; if not in January then in March. If it is three months later, that is a matter of absolute indifference to the public and cannot have any importance.'

Pozner suggested that the budget should be widely distributed not only in Russia but abroad, because of its 'instructive significance' [prosvetitelnoe znachenie] for international public opinion.¹

Pokrovsky was not deceived by his own propaganda, for he quickly pointed out to the Commission that because of inflation and the inclusion of new categories within the educational budget, the impression of drastic increase in spending was 'a complete illusion'; and demonstrated (by a rather unconvincing mathematical process) that 'we are costing the public not more but less than the old central administration'.²

There was some justification for Pokrovsky's view of the budget as an instrument of propaganda, since the bulk of government financing, to Narkompros at any rate, had become extra-budgetary. In 1919 Sovnarkom made at least 43 extra-budgetary allocations to Narkompros, totalling almost 4,000 million roubles.³ The allocations were made both to Narkompros and to its separate departments, and even on occasion to local education departments and institutions appealing directly to Sovnarkom. The allocations varied in

1. minutes of State Education Commission, 5 Oct.1918, Nar. pros. monthly, 1919 no.6-7, p.175.

2. ibid. p.172.

3. figures are abstracted from 'Lenin documents on education', Sovetskaya pedagogika, 1966 no.6, pp.109-117. The documents include only those meetings of Sovnarkom attended by Lenin, and are therefore not exhaustive.

size from 193,473 roubles 64 kopeks (allocation to the Voronezh guberniya education department, February 7) to 1,100 million roubles (supplement to Narkompros budget for the first half of 1919, June 20). At least 8 times Sovnarkom voted supplementary allocations specifically for payment of salaries, but salaries remained in arrears, and Lunacharsky complained of 'the intolerable delay in payment ... which is putting the teachers in a tragic position.'¹

In the first three quarters of 1919 money allocations to Narkompros rose from an index of 1 in the first quarter to 25.8 in the second quarter, but fell again to 17.5 in the third quarter.² This fall coincided with an attempt by the commissariats of finance and state control³ to order Narkompros finances. In spite of the abandonment of the budgetary system by the government as a whole,⁴ Narkompros was required to submit a budgetary estimate which was discussed with representatives of Narkomfin and Narkomgoskontrol in September.⁵ At the beginning of November, the Narkompros budget was still under consideration, and Pokrovsky was asked to make a personal appeal to the Finance Commissar.⁶ The budget was finally approved by Sovnarkom on December 14,

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1. TSGAOR 2306/1/182, 18 Sept.1919, meeting of collegium.
 2. abstracted from 'Lenin documents on education' loc.cit.
The figures are 83 million (January - March); 2,146 million (April - June); 1,455 million (July - September).
 3. Narkomgoskontrol - a predecessor of Rabkrin, supervising the work of government departments.
 4. see E.H.Carr, The Bolshevik Revolution 1917-1923, London, 1952, v.2, pp.249-50.
 5. TSGAOR 2306/1/182, 18 Sept.1919, meeting of collegium.
 6. TSGAOR 2306/1/182, 1 Nov.1919.

1919, as a separate item on the agenda, at the sum of 410,628,557 roubles for the second half of 1919.¹ This was less than a quarter of the total sum of extra-budgetary allocations to Narkompros over the same period.² But it appears that Narkomfin, which was responsible for the actual issue of funds allocated by Sovnarkom, withheld them from Narkompros while the budget was under consideration,³ and Narkompros may never have received them.

The December budget had less significance as an economic fact than as an expression of distrust or hostility to Narkompros from other government organs. The economic facts of 1919-20 were not monetary but concerned with food, firewood, housing, shoes, clothes and (for Narkompros) paper, pencils, pens and ink. Whereas in 1918 Narkompros had wrestled with general educational principles on a national scale, in 1919 the agenda of the collegium was taken up with questions of local, physical survival, like the acquisition of firewood and the upkeep of the building of the commissariat at Ostozhenka 53.

Ostozhenka 53 was not only the administrative centre of Narkompros and some of its departments, but also living

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1. 'Lenin documents on education,' Sovetskaya pedagogika, 1966 no.6, p.117.
 2. ibid., passim. The sum was 1,737 million roubles.
 3. In September 1919, Lunacharsky asked Narkomfin and Narkomgoskontrol for advances to local and central departments while the budget was under consideration (TSGAOR 2306/1/182, 18 Sept.1919, collegium). But in the previous week, Narkompros had received 3 allocations to particular departments and a lump sum of 40 million roubles from Sovnarkom ('Lenin documents on education,' loc.cit.). Had the money been received, Lunacharsky would hardly have asked for advances within a week.

accommodation for homeless members of its staff. The latter function developed spontaneously, and first came to the notice of the collegium when V.M.Pozner (one of the inhabitants) complained of unauthorized persons living in the building. He named Azanchevskaya, who had been dismissed from her position in the Finance department in 1918.¹ Following his complaint, three inhabitants of the building, including Azanchevskaya, were evicted; and it was decided to 'empty the rooms occupied by workers who have left for the front, setting aside two rooms in case of their return.'² A month later, there was a report of cases of typhoid among inhabitants of the basement of the commissariat.³

Welfare of individual employees occupied a roughly equal proportion of the collegium's meetings to the state of the building at Ostozhenka 53. Distribution of firewood among staff was discussed, special allowances being made to the old scholar K.A.Timiryazev⁴, and to Lebedev-Polyansky, in view of his wife's serious illness and 'the impossibility of recovery with the temperature at 1 degree above freezing'.⁵ A.I.Yuzhin, head of the Maly Theatre in Moscow, and Alexandrov, of the professional education section of Narkompros, were given orders for allocation of fur coats by the Moscow Consumers' Society to replace those 'stolen from them in the execution of their official duties'.⁶ (Yuzhin's order was for

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1. TSGAOR 2306/1/180, 1 Feb.1919.
 2. TSGAOR 2306/1/180, 7 Feb.1919.
 3. TSGAOR 2306/1/180, 5 March 1919.
 4. TSGAOR 2306/1/182, 4 Nov.1919.
 5. TSGAOR 2306/1/320, 27 Jan.1920.
 6. TSGAOR 2306/1/182, 27 Dec.1919.

18,000 roubles, Alexandrov's for less than half that amount).

Narkompros complained of discrimination against it in the official supply of food rations and fuel,¹ and stated that because of this it was impossible to recruit staff or to keep them - 'not a day passes without responsible workers ... coming to one of the heads of department to announce that they are moving to another government department where they will get rations, where it is warm ...' The dining-room of Ostozhenka 53, where food rations were issued to employees of Narkompros, belonged to a low ration category and was supplied from the Khamovnichesky raion; in December 1919 its situation was described as 'catastrophic', and it was decided to petition the Moscow Consumers' Society for immediate transfer to a higher category and central supply, in view of 'the impossibility of maintaining a minimum of labour discipline among employees with such incredibly meagre nourishment.'² There were reports of 'death from exhaustion, on a basis of under-nourishment' among Narkompros staff.³ According to V.N.Shulgin's recollections,⁴ only a small proportion of the staff of the central commissariat received a food ration.

Unofficial sources of supply existed, but Narkompros had little success in tapping them. Moscow University was very much better heated than Narkompros, which tried in vain

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1. TSGAOR 2306/1/320, 26 Feb.1920 (resolution of collegium)
 2. TSGAOR 2306/1/182, 27 Dec.1919.
 3. TSGAOR 2306/1/320, 24 Jan.1920.
 4. V.N.Shulgin, Pamyatnye vstrechi, Moscow, 1958, p.15.

to find out how the University got its fuel. (In fact its supplies were organized by a member of the Moscow merchant family Azarkh, through private negotiation with villages around Moscow.)¹ In December 1919, the collegium of Narkompros discussed the catastrophic position arising from 'the impossibility of transporting loads [of firewood] belonging to Narkompros from the railway stations' for lack of a suitable vehicle.²

Narkompros sent agents to the provinces for fuel³ and supplies, but on at least two occasions its agents disappeared - one acquiring 'cattle for children's colonies' in the Belebei uezd,⁴ another 'buying unrationed products for the employees of Narkompros'.⁵

Some categories of persons under Narkompros jurisdiction received privileged rations: senior workers in the central commissariat, scholars and some artists, children and some students. But teachers, who were the largest single group under Narkompros, had no privileged ration, and most of them received no ration from Narkompros at all.

'The teachers ... are without clothes and without shoes, and all reproaches on the ground of sabotage are a bitter mockery of their position; because to work lacking food and provision of the most necessary requirements is something nobody, not even a hero, could do... The peasants give nothing for money, and except for money the teachers have nothing left. Terrible cases of poverty among teachers, suicide from want, have been reported ...'⁶

1. M.M.Novikov, 'Moscow University in the first period of the Bolshevik regime,' Moskovsky universitet 1755-1930, Paris, 1930, pp.167-8.

2. TSGAOR 2306/1/182, 13 Dec.1919.

3. TSGAOR 2306/1/182, 13 Nov.1919.

4. 'Lenin documents on education,' Sovetskaya pedagogika, 1966 no.10, p.102.

5. TSGAOR 2306/1/320, 18 Oct.1920.

6. TSGAOR 2306/1/320, 26 Feb.1920 (resolution of collegium).

In February and April 1920, Narkompros asked for special rations for teachers,¹ but without success. Stories of privation and misery among teachers continued to reach Narkompros. 'Who goes along the village roads without a cap, in a torn jacket and cotton trousers, with sandals on his bare feet? The teacher.'² In the autumn of 1921 (before the educational NEP), the Gâmel area reported begging, prostitution, madness and death from starvation among its teachers, one of whom wrote to Narkompros:³

'Comrade, dear friend, help, save us! Already there is no school. No new school, no old school, nothing.

I have taught for twenty years and I cannot take it in, I cannot understand it.

For we can only build the future on the education of the people. What will an illiterate generation say to us?'

Children had ration priority, and the schools were supposed to feed and clothe them free of charge. Despite repeated legislation,⁴ little was achieved, mainly because Narkompros was unable to obtain supplies from the economic commissariats. In 1920 Narkompros requested, for example, 9,298,725 pairs of shoes, was promised 550,000 pairs and received 250,000. The corresponding figures for children's socks were 5,632,000 requested, 385,000 promised, none received.⁵ Narkompros agents in the provinces were 'authorized' by the Food commissariat to see that the schools received

1. TSGAOR 2306/1/320, 26 Feb. and 3 April 1920.

2. B.Kr., 'Local improvisation. Dante's Hell,' Nar.pros. weekly, 1921 no.89-90, 7 Nov., p.10.

3. ibid.(quoted)

4. See Sovnarkom decrees of M7 May, 12 June, 28 August, 24 Sept. of 1919; 31 March, 15 June of 1920; 8 Feb., 22 Feb., 22 July of 1921 in 'Lenin documents on education,' Sovetskaya pedagogika, 1966 nos.6, 10,11, passim.

5. Narodny komissariat po prosveshcheniyu, 1917 - oktyabr - 1920 (kratky otchet), Moscow, 1920, p.99.

food rations; but Narkompros' annual report suggests that these agents could do little but confront local authorities with their reproachful presence:¹

'The very fact of the presence of these agents in the provinces fixes the attention of the food authorities on the position of children, and thus achieves an improvement of food and supply.'

In the capitals, Narkompros supply to children was supplemented, from 1921, by the American Relief Association (ARA).²

The policy of labour conscription, introduced by Trotsky at the beginning of 1920,² put a number of technical and higher schools under 'study conscription', which meant that students should receive privileged rations and study under a quasi-military discipline. Medical faculties were in the best position, having been 'mobilized' by decree of the Council of Labour and Defence (STO)³, which promised issue of rations comparable with the issue to military schools, and provision of uniform, shoes and linen from central supply. Students of the chemical department of the workers' faculty of Moscow University also did well, receiving 'rear Army rations'.⁴ But although all higher technical schools had been placed under study conscription by Sovnarkom decree,⁵ special rations were in fact issued only to a minority of schools receiving priority [udarnost] classification. Students of workers' faculties were placed under study conscription: Narkompros, which drafted the decree, included a guarantee of rear Army rations to students which Sovnarkom omitted in the

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1. Nar.kom.po pros., 1917 - oktyabr - 1920 (kratky otchet), p.102
 2. see chapter 2, p.77.
 3. 23 July 1920, pub. Izvestiya VTSIK 1920 no.186, 24 Aug., p.2.
 4. Nar.pros.weekly, 1920 no.74-75, 1 Dec., p.8.
 5. 4 June 1920, pub. Izvestiya VTSIK 1920, 9 June, no.123, p.3.

final version.¹

Rations to students were issued according to a criterion of urgency of need - medical students coming first, students of the humanities last. No such criterion was applied to scholars, nor could their privileged rations be justified as a reward for supporting Soviet power, since most of them had opposed and many continued to do so. The introduction of the 'academic' ration was not popular in the street or in the Party:

'It needed the limitless authority of Lenin and the enormous popularity of Gorky to carry off the issue of the "academic" ration. For this exceptional ration was created before the eyes of the hungry masses who had set themselves² the task of destroying all privileges and hierarchies.

Narkompros was not among the initiators of the 'academic' ration. It was on the suggestion of V.D.Bonch-Bruevich, secretary [upravlyayushchi delami] to Sovnarkom, that the first 'Sovnarkom' ration was issued to scholars, literary men and artists in Moscow and Petrograd in the spring of 1919.³ But in practice the 'Sovnarkom' ration did not reach Petrograd because the Zinoviev administration disapproved of it.⁴ In July 1919, Gorky came from Petrograd to discuss the organization of an official body for the protection of scholars with Lenin.⁵ His project was passed on to Narkompros

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1. TSGAOR 2306/1/320, 2 Sept.1920 (draft); Sovnarkom decree of 17 Sept.1920 published in 'Lenin documents on education,' Sovetskaya pedagogika 1966 no.6, pp.120-1.
 2. S.F.Oldenburg, 'Maxim Gorky and scholars,' in Gorky i nauka, Moscow, 1964, p.245.
 3. V.D.Bonch-Bruevich, 'Gorky and the organization of TSEKUBU' in Gorky i nauka, pp.222-3.
 4. ibid., p.224.
 5. V.I.Lenin, Polnoe sobranie sochinenii, (5th ed.) v.39, p. 586.

which, in December 1919, proposed to establish a 'Commission for improving the life of scholars'¹ under the presidency of Pokrovsky and with Gorky as a member.² A new 'academic' ration was proposed, not by Narkompros, but by Lenin, 'in connection with Narkompros' consideration of the question of the improvement of the life of scholars.'³

A resolution 'On the improvement of the life of scientific specialists' was passed by Sovnarkom on December 23.⁴ The number of rations made available to scholars was 1,800, later increased to 2,000.⁵

The collegium of Narkompros was encouraged by the establishment of the 'academic' ration to petition Sovnarkom for 'material help to specialists in the cultural field' and for 'help to young talent' in the arts.⁶ These petitions were successful: some 'specialists in the cultural field' subsequently received 'academic' rations, distributed for Narkompros by the union of art-workers (Rabis),⁷ and Sovnarkom authorized the creation of a fund to help young artistic talent under Narkompros.⁸ But when in April Narkompros

1. komissiya po uluchsheniyu byta uchenykh (KUBU)

2. TSGAOR 2306/1/182, 13 Dec.1919.

3. V.I.Lenin, Pol.sob.soch. (5th ed.) v.40, p.461.

4. Gorky i nauka, p.110, note.

5. Letters of Gorky to Lenin (29 April 1920) and Sovnarkom (17 Aug.1920), Gorky i nauka, pp.114-5.

6. TSGAOR 2306/1/182, 30 Dec.1919 (proposals of Lunacharsky)

7. see S.Savshinsky, 'The past does not die,' Sovetskaya muzyka, 1967 no.1, p.75 on distribution of these rations.

8. on 21 Jan.1920. 'Lenin documents on education,' Sovetskaya pedagogika, 1966 no.10, p.101.

decided to petition Sovnarkom for 2,000 rations for teachers,¹ the request was refused.

In 1920 and 1921, Narkompros found the difficulty of obtaining manufactured good from the producers so great that it repeatedly asked permission to produce its own - 'we have to recognize that it is completely hopeless to try to get anything within the limits of other government departments,' said E.A.Litkens of Narkompros.² At the beginning of 1920, the collegium had resolved to ask for the transfer of certain pencil- and ink-manufacturing enterprises to Narkompros.³ Later in the year, the Chief Committee of professional-technical education of Narkompros (Glavprofobr) decided to petition for the right to produce equipment needed by its schools.⁴ Neither request was granted, and Lunacharsky raised the question again at a session of VTSIK⁵ in September 1920: after describing Narkompros' failure to obtain cloth, shoes, pencils and so on for its schools, he said:⁶

'You yourselves understand that Narkompros can do nothing. We say "Give us the right to produce all this ..." They say to us that the Council of the National Economy produces it. That means that they do not produce anything. Centralism says "Don't you do it, I will do it for you," but in fact does nothing. Perhaps we need to do some decentralizing. Then you can consciously and ruthlessly beat me and every other People's Commissar, if you will only give us the right to produce things ourselves. Do not give us any money or resources. Just give us the right to begin production of this equipment ...'

1. TSGAOR 2306/1/320, 3 April 1920.

2. 'Narkompros supply', Nar.pros.weekly, 1921 no.87-88, p.6.

3. TSGAOR 2306/1/320, 29 Jan.1920.

4. TSGA RSFSR 1565/1/22, 28 July 1920 (collegium of Glavprofobr)

5. All-Russian Central Executive Committee of the Soviets.

6. Lunacharsky, O narodnom obrazovanii, p.139.

But VTSIK, instead of giving Narkompros the right to undertake its own manufacture or deal directly with the factories, left the onus of supplying Narkompros on the Supreme Council of the National Economy (Vesenkha), the Commission for Workers' Supply (Komrabsnabzh) and the Food Commissariat: it resolved 'to oblige Vesenkha to increase the production of educational equipment, teaching aids and essential goods for school children', 'to oblige Komrabsnabzh to work out concrete plans by agreement with Narkompros for the improvement of the feeding and supply of educational workers' and 'to oblige the Food Commissariat to renew the issue of manufactured goods for the preparation of work-clothes [prododezhdy] for educational workers'.¹

VTSIK's instructions were not binding. Vesenkha remained unresponsive to Narkompros requests. Narkompros introduced a project in Maly Sovnarkom 'to give Narkompros all the manufactured products of the former Balkashin glass factory, whose work should be conducted according to Narkompros specifications; to transfer the former Zalesskaya globe factory into the control of Narkompros, instructing Vesenkha to supply it with all necessary materials ... to suggest that Vesenkha urgently undertake mass production of slates and slate-pencils ...'.² This project was on the agenda of Maly Sovnarkom 9 times in the first 10 weeks of 1921, and was 8 times postponed because Vesenkha failed to present its report. At the 9th attempt, on March 10, the Vesenkha report was read, and Maly Sovnarkom decided that VTSIK's instructions in regard

1. resolution of VTSIK n.d. (Sept.1920), published Izvestiya VTSIK 1920 no.226, 10 Oct.,p.2.

2. 'In performance of the resolutions of the 3rd session of VTSIK, 1920', Nar.pros. weekly, 1921 no.80, 20 March, p.9.

to Narkompros had been satisfactorily implemented. The Narkompros resolution was shelved, and Vesenkha was asked only to take 'more energetic measures' to provide Narkompros with stationary requirements, and to report to Sovnarkom on the situation once a month.¹

The Soviet teachers' union claimed early in 1921 that 'not one resolution on concrete measures for the feeding and supply of educational workers had been carried out.'² A.B.Khalatov, of the Food Commissariat, counter-charged that Narkompros had failed to supply the Commission for Workers' Supply with the data necessary to carry out VTSIK's instructions. But in any case, he wrote, the Commission had decided against taking further measures to improve supply to educational workers, as recommended by VTSIK, because of the general food crisis in the country and the Commission's earlier measures to improve rations to students under study conscription. Although Sovnarkom, in accordance with the VTSIK resolution, had moved a number of categories of educational workers and institutions into a high-priority group for rations,³ this had been nullified, in the opinion of the Food Commissariat, by later decisions of Sovnarkom forbidding the rationing of state employees at a higher level than manual workers.⁴

This illustrates the pitfalls of priority financing for a commissariat of small influence like Narkompros: no sooner

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1. 'In performance of the resolutions of the 3rd session of VTSIK, 1920,' commentary by F.Zimovsky, Nar.pros. weekly, 1921 no.80, 20 March, p.9.
 2. 'To the attention of the Presidium of VTSIK,' Izvestiya VTSIK 1921 no.31, 12 Feb., p.4.
 3. resolution of 6 November 1920.
 4. Art.Khalatov, 'Educational workers and the Food Commissariat,' Izvestiya VTSIK 1921 no.40, 23 Feb., p.2.

was a priority [udarnost] classification won than it was liable to be superseded. E.Litkens of Narkompros wrote in 1921:¹

'If we say that this or that work has high priority, we decide in advance that almost all resources will go to it, and everything else will remain without resources and be put out to grass. As a result, government departments are endlessly fighting among themselves for priority classification. For Narkompros, preparation of specialists and political-enlightenment work had high priority, but all the same this ... gave very little indeed to Narkompros as a whole.'

There was no formal state budget in 1920 and the first half of 1921, so it is difficult to estimate Narkompros' share of total state expenditure. I.I.Khodorovsky, deputy commissar of education in 1923 but a newcomer to Narkompros, quoted the unlikely figure of 10.4% for 1920,² but he may have relied on the retrospective budget concocted in 1921. Lunacharsky put it at 3% - 'an undoubted scandal for a civilised state'.³ Whatever the true position, Narkompros believed that its share of total state expenditure during the civil war was low, and entered the period of peaceful reconstruction with the conviction that its economic position could only improve.

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1. 'Narkompros supply,' Nar.pros. weekly 1921 no.87-88, p.5.
 2. 'Public education at the Tenth Congress of Soviets,' Nar.pros.monthly 1923 no.2, p.6.
 3. 'Public education in danger,' Izvestiya VTSIK 1921 no.214, 25 Sept. p.1.

Chapter 2 EDUCATION

i) Schools and teachers

'The labouring masses ... thirst after education. The government cannot give it to them, nor the intelligentsia, nor any force outside themselves. Schools, books, theatres, museums and so on can only be aids. The people themselves, consciously or unconsciously, must evolve their own culture ... The State Education Commission is certainly not a central power directing educational institutions. On the contrary, all school affairs must be handed over to the organs of local self-government. The independent action of .. workers', soldiers' and peasants' cultural-educational organizations must achieve full autonomy, both in relation to₁ the central government and to the municipal centres...'

Lunacharsky's first declaration as commissar of education was published on October 29, 1917. It announced that the Soviet education system was to rest on popular initiative, and seemed to anticipate a very modest role for the central commissariat. The State Education Commission decided that popular initiative was to be organized through 'educational soviets', which would be elected by the population at volost, uezd, guberniya and oblast levels and would be entrusted with the administration of education within their areas. The educational soviets were to be controlled 'in political respects' by the local Soviet of Deputies, but would otherwise be responsible 'only to their own organs in the order of hierarchy: volost to uezd, uezd to guberniya, guberniya and city to oblast, oblast to Narkompros.'²

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1. 'Address of the People's Commissar of Education', Direktivy VKP(b) i postanovleniya sovetskogo pravitelstva o narodnom obrazovanii za 1917-1947 gg. Moscow-Leningrad 1947, p.11.
 2. Lunacharsky, speech to cultural-educational section of 3rd Congress of Soviets, 16 Jan.1918, quoted F.F.Korolev, Ocherki po istorii sovetskoi shkoly i pedagogiki 1917-1920, p.96.

At the beginning of 1918, the general administrative structure of the Soviet Republic was still under discussion. Narkompros' plan for educational soviets was at odds with the general administrative plan devised by the Commissariat of Internal affairs (NKVD), which proposed to establish departments of each People's Commissariat at uezd, guberniya and oblast levels. The members of these departments would be not elected, but appointed by the executive committees of the local Soviets of Deputies. Each department would be jointly subordinate to the local Soviet and its central People's Commissariat.¹

The Narkompros and NKVD plans were published almost simultaneously.² Narkompros published on its own initiative, with the introductory remark that³

'in view of the fact that this project is the logical culmination of all that has been done up to this time by the State Commission on the reform of education, the Commissariat of Education considers itself bound to call attention to the necessity of the most immediate realization of the project.'

Although the Narkompros project had been approved by the cultural-educational section of the 3rd Congress of Soviets in January, it had not been formally sanctioned by the Congress as a whole. Nevertheless, as a result of its publication, it 'was looked on in a number of places as having the force of law'.⁴

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1. Korolev, Ocherki po istorii sovetskoi shkoly i pedagogiki, 98.
 2. ibid. The NKVD plan was published as an instruction 'On the organization of the Soviets of workers' and soldiers' deputies'.
 3. Pravda 1918 no.46, 10 March, p.3.
 4. Korolev, op.cit. p.97.

Narkompros neither wished to withdraw its plan nor to enter into discussions with NKVD. Lebedev-Polyansky thought that 'the instructions of NKVD cannot have any significance' for Narkompros, which should keep to its original plan.¹ But this was impossible even in the anarchic days of 1918. Narkompros was forced to adopt what Lunacharsky called 'the bureaucratic procedure' of creating education departments.² But the idea of educational soviets was not abandoned. It was decided that they should co-exist with education departments, having advisory functions to the departments - but, Lunacharsky said hopefully, 'they may also perform executive functions'.³ Only Krupskaya was concerned at the practical confusion this might cause. She pointed out that some cooperation with NKVD was desirable because without it 'the [administrative] areas established by Narkompros may not correspond with the areas established by NKVD.'⁴ Nobody else thought this mattered.

But Krupskaya was, of all the leaders of Narkompros, the most ardent defender of the educational soviet. Its opponents, she thought,⁵

'still cannot throw off the old view of the mass as an object of the intelligentsia's care, like a small and unreasonable child ... We were not afraid to organize a revolution. Let us not be afraid of the people, let us not be afraid that they will elect the wrong sort of representatives, bring in the priests. We want the people to direct the country and be their own masters ... We are

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1. TSGAOR 2306/1/36, 10 April 1918. (State Education Commission)
 2. TSGAOR 2306/1/36, 5 April 1918.
 3. TSGAOR 2306/1/36, 9 April 1918.
 4. TSGAOR 2306/1/36, 10 April 1918.
 5. 'On educational soviets' (1918), in N.K.Krupskaya, Pedagogicheskie sochineniya v 10-i tomakh, Moscow, 1957-62, v.2, p.76.

'always thinking in old terms, that if we do not spare ourselves and work day and night in the people's cause, that is enough. But it is nothing. Our job is to help the people in fact to take their fate into their own hands!

Because she was concerned above all with democratic participation, Krupskaya always insisted that administration should begin at the volost level and not with the larger unit of the uezd. NKVD did not share this view, and in 1919 tried to disband the volost education departments established by Narkompros; but Krupskaya protested and the attempt was abandoned.¹

In June 1918, Narkompros published a 'Statement on the organization of education in the Russian Republic',² which established the educational soviet as a 'controlling advisory' [kontrolno-soveshchatelny] body under the education department. The soviet was to consist of representatives of all organizations represented in the Soviet of Deputies, in the same proportion, together with representatives of teachers, pupils and 'informed persons'. The soviet was 'to listen to the reports of the education department ... and consider the plan of work in education proposed by the department'.

The Statement followed NKVD prescriptions in making the education department a body appointed by the executive committee of the local Soviet of Deputies and financed by the central commissariat. It was to hold the executive power in local educational administration. But Narkompros, unlike

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1. see Krupskaya's 'Diary of a journey on the steamboat Krasnaya Zvezda' (1920) in Ped.soch. v.11 (supplementary volume, 1963), p.742; and Krupskaya, 'Educational soviets, the teaching body and volost education departments,' Nar.pros. weekly, 1919 no.56-58, 25 Oct., p.8.
 2. Direktivy VKP(b)... pp.21-26.

NKVD in its March instruction, took the departments down to volost level.

Narkompros' concern for local initiative and autonomy did not exclude a central educational policy. This policy was argued in the State Education Commission during the spring and summer of 1918. There were two schools of thought on educational policy in Narkompros - the 'Petrograd' and the 'Moscow'. The Petrograd school, led by Lunacharsky and Ludmila Menzhinskaya, held educational views which, as such, should not have been unacceptable to progressive educationists in the anti-Bolshevik teachers' union VUS,¹ or, for that matter, in Europe and America. The Petrograders believed in an anti-authoritarian, non-scholastic education which would encourage full development of the child's individuality, using the methods of Dewey's 'activity school'. All education was to be 'polytechnical', which meant giving a basic acquaintance with a number of technical skills without specializing in any one of them: the Petrograders derived this idea both from Marx and from contemporary (non-Marxist) progressive educational thought. The Petrograd branch of Narkompros published a selective bibliography for its teachers on 'the labour school', including August Lay's Die Tatschüle, works by John Dewey, Kerschensteiner (on the Arbeiterschüle), Ferrière, Montessori and the Russian progressive educationalist K.N.Ventsel.² Petrograd VUS - no friend of Narkompros - simultaneously published an almost identical bibliography

1. Vserossiisky Uchitelsky Soyuz.

2. Vestnik narodnogo prosveshcheniya soyuza kommun severnoi oblasti, 1918 no.1, August, p.40.

on the labour school, citing the same authorities but adding Tolstoy, S.T.Shatsky (a follower of Tolstoy who worked in Narkompros from 1919), Kropotkin and Ushinsky.¹

The Moscow group, headed by V.M.Pozner and P.N.Lepeshinsky, was also for the non-scholastic and polytechnical school. But the Muscovites liked to talk of the school as a 'school-commune' [shkola-kommuna], which would form the child's total environment. Labour skills would not be taught in a school workshop, as the Petrograders suggested, but by 'life itself' - that is, through the practical experience of running the school-commune. In many ways the Muscovites were precursors of the later famous Ukrainian educationalist Makarenko. The basic conditions of school reform, according to theses of Lepeshinsky,² were that school activity should continue for the whole year and for 7 days in the week, that teaching should be not in classes but in groups, that programmes issued by central or local authorities were not obligatory for teachers, that the system of teaching by subjects [predmetnaya sistema] should be abandoned, and that no textbooks should be used ('It is necessary to have reference books, and to hold discussions with the pupils').

Both Moscow and Petrograd groups drew up statements of educational policy. They were debated in the State Education

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1. Petrogradsky uchitel 1918 no.19-20, 7 August, p.15.
It should not be assumed that Narkompros was necessarily hostile to the educational theorists omitted from its bibliography. Krupskaya recommended publication of Kropotkin on education (Ped.soch. v.10, pp.14-15) and was a friend of the Tolstoyan I.I.Gorbunov-Posadov, whose journal Svobodnoe vospitanie published her articles before the Revolution.
 2. quoted Korolev, Ocherki istorii sovetskoi shkoly i pedagogiki p.155.

Commission in August, at the First All-Russian Congress on Education in August*September, and again in the State Education Commission in September. The opening of the school year had to be postponed from the normal September 1 to October 1.¹

The documents under discussion were the 'Declaration on the United Labour School' presented by Lunacharsky, and the 'Statement on the United Labour School' presented by Pozner. Pozner and the Moscow group had the support of the majority of the First All-Russian Congress on Education and of the Moscow Education Department (MONO). The Petrograd group gained the advantage of having Lunacharsky's Declaration considered, on Pokrovsky's suggestion, 'as a literary document, not subject to alteration'.²

Pozner's Statement was worked on by a joint Moscow-Petrograd commission appointed by the State Education Commission. The main stumbling block to agreement proved to be Moscow's position on school holidays, which it wished to abolish completely. This question was referred back to the State Education Commission where, to the great indignation of the Petrograders' opponents, Petrograd won on a 6 to 5 vote.³ MONO's representatives, who were present at the meeting without voting rights, lodged a formal protest claiming that their programme in its entirety was already successfully practised by Moscow education departments. To this Lunacharsky tolerantly replied that 'Moscow could try working 12 months in the year and Petrograd 9, and we could draw conclusions

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1. Vestnik nar.pros.SKSO 1918 no.2-3, September, p.5.
 2. TSGA RSFSR 2306/1/132, 10 Aug.1918 (State Education Commiss.)
 3. Nar.pros. monthly, 1919 no.6-7, p.124.

from the results'.¹ Nevertheless, it was decided that the opinions of absent members of the Commission should be sought. When this was done, Petrograd won a clear majority of 19 votes to 10 - although its supporters included the non-educationalists Tatlin, Lourie, Bryusov and Enukidze. Krupskaya voted with the Moscow group.²

The Petrograd Declaration, almost in its original form, and the amended Moscow Statement were jointly presented by Pokrovsky to VTSIK on September 30, 1918, the day before the delayed beginning of the school year. VTSIK was not struck by any incompatibility of the two documents, and indeed decided to accept them without discussion in view of their 'completely uncontroversial nature'.³ They were published in Izvestiya VTSIK on October 16.⁴

The Declaration defined the 'united school' [edinaya shkola] as 'the whole system of normal school from kindergarten to university ... a single, unbroken staircase... All children must enter the same type of school and begin their education alike, and all have the right to go up the ladder to its highest rungs.' The labour [trudovoi]⁵ principle meant, first, 'an active, mobile and creative acquaintance with the world', and second, 'the direct wish to acquaint pupils with what will

1. Nar.pros. monthly, 1919 no.6-7, p.124.

2. TSGA RSFSR 2306/1/132, 12 Sept.1918 (State Commission)

3. Protokoly VTSIK 5 sozyva, Moscow 1919, p.231.

4. Izvestiya VTSIK 1918 no.225, 'Statement on United Labour School' pp.5-6 (4 full cols.), 'Basic principles of United Labour School'[Declaration], p.6 (6 full cols.) Text of Statement in Direktivy VKP(b) ... pp.120-27. Text of Declaration in Lunacharsky, O narodnom obrazovanii 522-538.

5. trudovaya shkola may translate either Dewey's 'activity school' or Kerschensteiner's 'Arbeiterschule'. The alternative version of 'activity school' - 'shkola deistviya' - was rarely used in Narkompros.

be most necessary to them in life ... with agricultural and industrial labour in all its variety'.

The Declaration recommended that junior classes of the United Labour School [edinaya trudovaya shkola] be taught 'an encyclopedia of culture centred on labour processes'. In the higher classes this became 'a course of sociology on the basis of the evolution of labour'. Labour processes are to be taught in the school workshop, on the school farm, and 'partly in factories etc.' Balancing uneasily between Moscow and Petrograd, the Declaration stated that 'labour must be real productive labour' although 'it never loses its pedagogical character'.

Conventional school subjects - Russian language, mathematics, geography, history, biology, physics, chemistry and modern languages - are to be taught by activity methods: 'walking, making collections, drawing, photography, modelling, and ... observing and looking after plants and animals.' Aesthetic education, including 'mass rhythmic gymnastics', is recommended for 'the systematic development of the organs of perception'.

The school is to be self-administered, and the children are free to organize all kinds of societies. Schools and teachers will receive a minimum of outside supervision and control: 'The central commissariat lays down some conditions whose fulfilment is considered absolutely obligatory, but at the same time envisages a wide field for independent initiative.'

The Declaration, a long document, weighed and discussed the theories of Dewey, Ferrière, Dalcroze and others, and

identified its position in relation to the practice of progressive education in America. 'Our declaration will be held as an educational classic,' Lunacharsky told VTSIK in 1920.¹

The Statement on the United Labour School was more specific. It provided for free, compulsory, co-educational and secular education for all children from 8 to 17 years of age. The school year was to run for September 1 to June 1, with an additional month of open-air instruction until July 1. The school would function 7 days a week, with 1 and a half days devoted to excursions and clubs. Free hot breakfasts were to be provided by the school. Homework, punishment and examinations were abolished. Schools were to be self-administering through a school soviet consisting of teachers, representatives of the working population of the area and of senior pupils in the school, together with one representative of the local education department. Teachers were to be subject to election.

In the Statement, as in the Declaration, the labour principle is a compromise between the Petrograd and Moscow positions; but in the Statement the compromise leans towards Moscow:

'Productive labour must serve as the basis of school life, not as a means of paying for the maintenance of the child, and not only as a method of teaching, but as socially-necessary, productive labour ... The school is a school-commune, closely and organically linked through labour process with its environment.'

Instruction throughout the school was to have a 'polytechnical nature'.

The possibility of schools arising on private initiative was not excluded either by the Declaration or the Statement. According to the Declaration, 'a wide field will .. be left for private initiative' (Potemkin of MONO had objected to this phrase in the debates before publication because 'it will arouse vain hopes among private proprietors'¹). The Statement 'was to be circulated among all schools arising from private initiative', and such schools 'may be given state support if the local education department recognizes the value of the given school'. But since, as Lunacharsky wrote, 'abolition of all payment for the right of learning has made the private school in Russia impossible',² the school which the Statement envisaged as arising on private initiative must have been of purely altruistic or experimental motive - like, for example, the village school organized by Leo Tolstoy, or S.T.Shatsky's pre-Revolutionary 'Settlement'.

The implementation of the proposals of the Declaration and Statement required intensive retraining of teachers as well as generous financing and cooperation with local authorities to provide hot meals, clothing, and the technical equipment necessary for the polytechnical school. It also required a complicated reallocation of existing school premises, since according to the Statement the United Labour School was to have a 5-year junior school and 4-year senior school. Existing elementary schools were of 3 or sometimes 4 years. Narkompros apparently hoped³ that by prolonging the first stage of school

1. Nar.pros. monthly, 1919 no.6-7, p.114.

2. 'Education in Soviet Russia' Kommunistichesky internatsional, 1919 no.2, p.218.

3. see V.Orlov, 'Two or three stages', Nar.pros. monthly 1918 no.4-5.

it would break the ingrained popular habit of removing children after 3 years. But this meant that two extra classes had to be added to the existing elementary schools; and the existing 'higher elementary' and trade schools (providing a further 3 years of education after elementary school) had to lose a junior class and gain a senior one in order to become secondary United Labour Schools.

The most immediate problem for Narkompros was to find the teachers for its United Labour Schools. Of the small proportion of Russia's teachers capable of fully understanding the Declaration on the United Labour School, almost all were hostile to the Bolshevik government. Lunacharsky had hoped that the teachers' élite - the intellectuals of the capitals who dominated VUS and the State Education Committee set up by the Provisional Government - would cooperate with Narkompros because of sympathy with its education programme. But within a week of the October revolution, the Petrograd branch of VUS had resolved 'not to perform the instructions of the self-styled power'.¹ Lunacharsky wrote:²

'Alas, qualified personnel did not come our way. I made a special appeal ... to the State Education Committee... I thought that at least some of those radical and liberal educationalists might agree to work with us. But that did not happen. At a personal meeting, the president of that Committee³ (now a humble but respected worker in Narkompros) refused to shake hands with me as an enemy of the motherland ...'

The State Education Committee, like VUS, passed a resolution

1. 29 Oct.1917. Petrogradsky uchitel 1918 no.1, 6 Jan., p.2.

2. 'How we occupied the Ministry of Public Education' (1927) Vosp. i vpech. p.181.

3. V.I.Charnolussky (possible a relative of Lunacharsky, as Lunacharsky's father was the illegitimate son of a Charnolussky).

calling on its members to take no part in educational work under the Soviet government, and to enter into no relations with it; and on November 20, VTSIK decreed that the Committee be dissolved.¹

The Moscow branch of VUS, with an enrolment of 4,000 members, almost unanimously joined the strike of Moscow municipal employees and remained on strike until March 11, 1918.² It was alleged that the teachers were supported during the strike by the merchant banking family of Ryabushinsky.³ In Petrograd, the teachers' strike lasted until January 6, 1918.⁴

Narkompros was outraged by this response from the teachers. Lunacharsky wrote:⁵

'We are obliged to dismiss for ever from school activity these honourable gentlemen who, in spite of our appeal, prefer to continue in the role of political matadors rather than the role of teachers.

I do not know with what quantity of repentant tears the individual teacher may, in the eyes of the people, wash away the black letters which he himself has painted on his forehead: "In December 1917, in the hour of the people's terrible struggle against the exploiters, I refused to teach the children and received money for this from the exploiters' funds". '

A minority of teachers dissociated itself from the strikes. In November, Petrograd VUS expelled P.V.Dashkevich and Vera and Ludmila Menzhinskaya for working with the

1. I.S.Smirnov, Lenin i sovetskaya kultura, Moscow 1960, p.200.

2. Smirnov, op.cit. p.215, and Korolev, Ocherki po istorii sovetskoi shkoly i pedagogiki, p.125.

3. statement of Potemkin, quoted Korolev, op.cit. p.125.

4. Petrogradsky uchitel 1918 no.1, 6 Jan.p.1.

5. 'On the school strike' Izvestiya TSIK (Petrograd) 1917 no.256, 20 Dec. p.8.

Bolsheviks. 59 others, including V.M.Pozner and Evgeny Poletaev (head of the department of middle schools in Petrograd Narkompros, 1918), left the union in protest against its policy.¹

Narkompros threatened to dismiss teachers taking part in the strike, but it was in no position to do so, for it had no replacements. 'Better educationalists will come from the people,'² Lunacharsky said, but this offered no immediate solution. In February it was announced that all teachers must submit their names to 'the educational soviet or, where there is none, to the Soviet [of Deputies]'³ for confirmation in their positions by election. The teachers interpreted this as a punitive response to the strike. In fact they were subjected to forms of re-election which were more offensive to them than Narkompros had intended. Very few educational soviets were in operation, and so the re-election was usually conducted by the local Soviets of Deputies, who often took the opportunity to present the teachers with, in effect, a loyalty oath to the Soviet government. According to provincial reports gathered by Narkompros, in Smolensk 'pedagogues were allowed to perform teachers' duties only after filling in a questionnaire containing a statement of the ~~candidates~~ candidates' political and educational views'; in one uezd of the Orlovskaya guberniya, teachers were re-admitted to the schools only on condition of ideological sympathy with Soviet power, 'non-membership of the exploiting classes'

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1. Petrogradsky uchitel 1918 no.1, 6 Jan., pp.2 and 4.
 2. in an attack on VUS at the First All-Russian Congress of Teachers, reported Izvestiya VTSIK, 1918, education supplement no.8, n.d. [July]
 3. quoted Korolev, Ocherki po istorii sovetskoi shkoly i pedagogiki, p.142.

or 'documentary proof of revolutionary activity';¹ in an uezd in Yaroslavl the local education department 'demand a statement of resignation from VUS as a necessary condition of confirmation of a teacher's appointment'; and in Tverskaya guberniya 'the Education Commissar ... demanded that candidates should submit a statement of sympathy with the Soviet government'.² A few cases of lenient implementation of the decree were reported: in a Penza uezd re-election was conducted by the educational soviet, and only 2 teachers were rejected;³ in Olonets, re-election was regarded as 'a formality' and a purely educational criterion was used.⁴

Krupskaya and Ludmila Menzhinskaya were particularly critical of the way the decree had been carried out. It was 'a most unjust form of the principle of local re-election of teachers,' Krupskaya told the State Education Commission in May.⁵ 'The teachers are being cross-examined about their beliefs in the most detailed way, which is an inadmissible violation of freedom of conscience.' Ludmila Menzhinskaya pointed out that 're-election of teachers - undertaken only in relation to that category of employed person and no other - put the teachers in a humiliating position.'⁶ Lunacharsky commented that the teaching profession saw in the decree 'a wish to demoralize the teachers by individual submission of petitions to Sovnarkom'[sic].⁷

1. Nar.pros. monthly, 1919 no.9-10, p.94.

2. quoted Korolev, Ocherki po istorii sovetskoi shkoly i pedagogiki, p.142.

3. Nar.pros. monthly, 1919 no.13-14, p.141.

4. Nar.pros. monthly 1919 no.11-12, p.112.

5. TSGAOR 2306/1/36, 23 May 1918.

6. ibid.

7. TSGAOR 2306/1/36, 25 May 1918.

VUS was of course violently opposed to the decree, and would have opposed it no less if it had been carried out, as Narkompros intended, as form of popular re-election rather than official re-appointment. The bureau of the northern oblast branch of VUS resolved that¹

'Lunacharsky's decrees, violating the basic principles of the autonomy of the school, giving the school into the power of authorities outside the school and framed without regard for the elementary bases of democratic law ... are on principle unacceptable to VUS.'

Narkompros was divided in its attitude to VUS. A splinter union, composed by ex-members of VUS, was organized by Pozner of Narkompros under the name of Union of Teacher-Internationalists. Pozner, putting the case against VUS to the State Education Commission, said that VUS had opposed the Soviet government in every way, and its leaders had joined the counter-revolutionary Committee for the Salvation of the Motherland and the Revolution. Then, losing hope of a quick defeat of the Soviet government, VUS had begun to negotiate with it, 'but only on the understanding that no mention is made of recognizing Soviet power'. VUS was now exploiting its negotiations with Narkompros for agitational purposes in anti-Bolshevik publications like Novaya zhizn.² Pozner's conclusion was that the union of teacher-internationalists should be recognized as the only legitimate teachers' union.

Lunacharsky gave Pozner qualified support, expressing

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1. resolution read by Ya.Ya.Gurevich at meeting of teachers reported Novaya zhizn 1918 no.75, 24 April, p.4.
 2. TSGAOR 2306/1/36, 23 May 1918. (Novaya zhizn had published some particularly unflattering remarks about Pozner and misspelt his name)

suspicion of VUS' intentions in negotiating with Narkompros and pointing to 'an attempt at the present time to take the school into [VUS'] hands without consideration of Narkompros' plans, but using its funds'. He thought that the internationalists were 'the only group on which Narkompros can rely'.¹ But Krupskaya and Ludmila Menzhinskaya were critical of the internationalists. 'VUS cannot be annihilated,' said Krupskaya; and Menzhinskaya though the activity of the internationalists in Petrograd harmful 'because it sets the democracy against the teachers'.² In June, Krupskaya published her views on VUS and the internationalists:³

'I, like comrades Pozner and Lepeshinsky, wanted to tear VUS from the influence of its present leaders, but I am an old splitter [raskolnitsa], and thought it more appropriate to break up VUS from within. In my opinion it was necessary to persuade all teachers supporting Soviet power ... not to leave VUS, but to attend its Congress as delegates, and there form a compact group and develop their programme to the full. Then it would have been clear what the real strength of the internationalists was ...'

In the debate on May 23, on the eve of the Moscow conference of the union of teacher-internationalists, the State Education Commission made a resolution in Pozner's favour, recommending the 'closest cooperation with the union of teacher-internationalists as the nucleus of the new teaching body' and stating that 'the State Commission rejects any kind of agreement with VUS as an organization, and will

1. TSGAOR 2306/1/36, 23 May 1918.

2. ibid.

3. 'Strange psychology', Izvestiya VTSIK, 1918, education supplement no.5 n.d.[June], and in Ped.soch. v.2, p.63.

appeal to teachers leaving it to create teachers' union on new foundations, parallel with the trade unions and in association with them.'¹

The disadvantage of the teacher-internationalists from a government point of view was their sectarian tendency and their unpopularity with other teachers. This sectarianism was unfavourably noted by Lenin, in an otherwise sympathetic speech delivered to the Conference of teacher-internationalists on June 5, 1918.² The union, Lenin said, 'must not close in on itself, ... must not be afraid that undesirable elements are agitating in its midst; it must go forth with propaganda to the mass of teachers, being convinced that this mass will soon stand on the side of Soviet power.'

After Lenin's speech, the balance of opinion in the State Education Commission moved against Pozner and the internationalists. On the eve of the Moscow conference of VUS, attended by 2,000 delegates,³ Pozner prepared a root and branch attack on VUS to be published in Izvestiya VTSIK. Krupskaya protested against the article. It was only the leadership of VUS, she said, that was actively hostile to the Soviet government: 'the village teachers are petty-bourgeois, close to the people, and fertile soil for socialist propaganda ... It is a mistake to put the teacher-internationalists in a privileged position. It provokes a hostile reaction to them, and will induce reactionaries to join them hypocritically and out of calculation. We ought to recognize the professional teachers' union[VUS], which is changing

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1. TSGAOR 2306/1/36, 23 May 1918. The substance of the resolution was published Izvestiya VTSIK, 1918 no.106, 28 May, p.7.
 2. Pol.sob.soch. (5th ed.), v.36, pp.420-21.
 3. TSGAOR 2306/1/36, 8 June 1918 (statement of Krupskaya).

from a militant to an organizational union.'¹ On this occasion the Commission supported Krupskaya, and resolved that although VUS' tactics were to be condemned, the mass of its members were 'fertile soil for internationalist propaganda'. The internationalists were instructed that their union 'must not organizationally oppose itself to the professional union, but must be its ideological nucleus around which the progressive elements will group'.²

The ideological battle between Narkompros and the leadership of VUS continued at the First All-Russian Teachers' Congress held in Moscow in July. Representatives of VUS made vigorous attacks on Narkompros policy. Bogachev said:³

'They have put the schools under the systematic surveillance of the Soviets. They have conducted re-elections of teachers ... It means that even in the distant future there will be no autonomy. Freedom of education will perish.'

It was not until December 1918 that Narkompros decided that VUS must be disbanded.⁴ The question came before VTSIK on December 23, with Pozner and Pokrovsky representing Narkompros. The feeling of the meeting was strongly critical of Narkompros for so long tolerating the existence of VUS. 'Better let the school be temporarily closed,' said Yaroslavsky, 'than that they were stuffing the children's heads with nonsense.'⁵ Tomsky of VTSSPS (the central council of trade unions) said that the unions disclaimed all connection with

1. TSGAOR 2306/1/36, 8 June 1918.

2. ibid.

3. reported in Izvestiya VTSIK 1918, education supplement no.8.

4. TSGAOR 2306/1/40, 16 Dec.1918 (collegium of Narkompros).

5. Nar.pros. monthly 1919 no.6-7, stenogram of debate, p.183.

VUS and supported its dissolution.¹ There was a heated exchange between Pokrovsky, giving a sarcastic and rather eccentric defence of Narkompros policy which failed to win the sympathy of his audience, and Mezhlauk, War Commissar for Kazan, where VUS had recently and notoriously supported the Czech insurgents. 'Comrades!' Pokrovsky said.²

'I am afraid of disappointing those people who may think they are killing a dragon. That union is made of paper, does not present any real danger, and could not organize anything serious ... The psychological moment has come when it is necessary, not to kill it, - because essentially it is not alive and has no power of action - but to drive an aspen stake into its grave ... If we had done this a year ago, when all the intelligentsia took an anti-Soviet stand, we should have added an extra martyr against us. But now these people are long dead and ought to be buried - I mean, of course, politically. We must put an end to their political existence out of psychological considerations, so that this spectre stops disturbing the peace of the living.'

Mezhlauk rejected these 'psychological considerations':³

'There is no doubt that this union should have been dissolved long ago, and we are going to dissolve it now. Narkompros vainly argues that it is driving an aspen stake in to kill a paper dragon. No, it is driving a paper stake into a real dragon. That is a mistake. We must wage determined war, we must go into real attack against that union, and not think that we have already dealt with it ... In this respect things in Narkompros are far from healthy ...'

VTSIK resolved to dissolve VUS, but stated that its members 'will not be subject to any victimization or restriction for membership of the union'.⁴ On March 26,

1. Nar.pros. monthly, 1919 no.6-7, p.181.

2. ibid., pp.182-3.

3. ibid., p.184.

4. Nar.pros. weekly, 1918 no.23-25, 28 Dec., p.22.

1919, the collegium of Narkompros decided that the property and funds of the union should go to S.T.Shatsky's colony 'Children's Labour and Rest'.¹ The property of local branches was given to the local education departments 'for the professional and educational needs of the teaching profession'.² None of the property of VUS went to the union of teacher-internationalists.

The internationalists strongly urged their claim to be the nucleus of a new Soviet teachers' union. But Narkompros reported of the union that 'everywhere its small numbers are noted. Teachers who join the union of teacher-internationalists also join the Communist Party.'³ Moreover the internationalists had so far failed to gain acceptance by the central council of trade unions.⁴

In Narkompros, Pozner and Lepeshinsky argued the case for the internationalists. L.G.Shapiro, Ludmila Menzhinskaya and Pokrovsky opposed it.⁵

In January 1919, the internationalists organized a meeting of Communist representatives⁶ which declared itself

1. TSGAOR 2306/1/180, 26 March 1919 (collegium of Narkompros)

2. TSGAOR 2306/1/180, 28 March 1919.

3. Nar.pros. monthly, 1919 no.15, p.90.

4. Nar.pros. monthly, 1919 no.6-7, p.185 (statement by Pozner)

5. TSGAOR 2306/1/180, 9 Jan.1919. Krupskaya was absent.

6. joint meeting of the communist fraction of the Congress of guberniya education departments and the 2nd Congress of the union of teacher-internationalists, with representatives of the communist fractions of VTSSPS, Proletkult, VTSIK, the War Commissariat, Narkompros, the union of communist youth of secondary schools and the union of communist students, and of the Central Committee of the Party. (Nar.pros. monthly, 1919 no.6-7, p.112)

the constituent assembly of a new Soviet teachers' union which would be exclusively Communist. This meant, in effect, that the basis of the new union would be the union of teacher-internationalists. Pozner, who made the key speech, took the occasion to express his lack of sympathy with the union movement as a whole, as insufficiently committed to the Communist Party and the Soviet government: 'the professional workers' movement, of course, is not acceptable to us - revolutionary marxists - in all its forms,' he said. 'The new educational union must be so composed that it 'can be transformed not only into an organ of social life, but of State power.' ¹

After Lunacharsky's intervention on January 14, the Congress of teacher-internationalists, continuing in session, was persuaded to modify its position and admit that although 'the urgent task is self-organization of Communist workers', this was only a precondition for the necessary creation of a broad professional union. ²

But VTSSPS remained suspicious of the new union - understandably in view of Pozner's attitude - and objected to its affiliation because of its explicit political allegiance and intentions. The conflict with VTSSPS was described by Lunacharsky as follows: ³

'The trade unions in Soviet Russia are regarded as non-party organizations. As well, however, there is a paragraph in their constitution emphasizing that only workers

1. Nar.pros. monthly, 1919 no.6-7, p.26.

2. ibid. p.26 (resolution of the Congress)

3. 'Education in Soviet Russia' Kommunistichesky internatsional 1919 no.6, pp.870-71.

'recognizing the dictatorship of the proletariat as a necessary means of achieving socialism may be members of a trade union.

The worker-comrades pointed out that a teacher's acceptance of this paragraph was quite sufficient to count him as a worthy participant of revolutionary work in the school.

The worker-unionists were even against the name we suggested - "Union of workers in education and socialist culture".

They wanted to throw out the word "socialist" as a political word. However they agreed in the end that, under the circumstances, it was useful to keep it ...'

The Union of workers in education and socialist culture was finally constituted in the summer of 1919, electing an entirely communist central committee. By October 1919 it had already enrolled 70,000 teachers,¹ and was thus well on the way to becoming a mass union (VUS at the time of its dissolution had 50,000 members). Ludmila Menzhinskaya, a supporter of the broad union, was first president. By the autumn of 1920, the enrolment of the union was 250,000.²

Lunacharsky, in describing the formation of the new union, touched on another of Narkompros' difficulties: control of subordinate departments. He wrote:³

'... In some Soviet circles impatience was expressed at the slow rebirth of the secondary school. This impatience showed itself on various occasions in the attempt to put extra pressure ... on the teaching personnel (mainly in Petrograd) or, on the contrary, by a sharp lowering of our demands on the teachers and by the attempt to come to terms with the backward teaching profession (this tendency was noticeable in Moscow).'

1. Lunacharsky, 'Education in Soviet Russia', Kommunistichesky internatsional, 1919 no.6, p.871.

2. Lunacharsky to VTSIK, Sept.1920, O narodnom obrazovanii p.140

3. 'Education in Soviet Russia' loc.cit. p.871.

Relations with Petrograd became difficult after Lunacharsky left at the beginning of 1919. Until then, Lunacharsky himself had headed the Petrograd commissariat, supported by Z.G.Grinberg, Vera Menzhinskaya, D.I.Leshchenko, Evgeny Poletaev and others.¹ Towards the end of 1918, 'with the transfer of central institutions to Moscow', a district [oblastnoi] commissariat of education had been organized in Petrograd under the engineer Fedor Fedorovich Shu.² Shu did not accept Narkompros' concept of the United Labour School, and put forward his own programme for the United Technical School, in which specialized professional training would begin at secondary level.³

It was no doubt this threat which led Narkompros - in the absence of any representative of the oblastnoi commissariat - to consider the question of relations between Moscow and Petrograd.⁴ It was decided to organize a Petrograd okruzhnoi commissariat to serve the city of Petrograd and the guberniyas of Petrograd, Novgorod, Cherepovets, Pskov, Olonets and Petrozavodsk. Its collegium of Lunacharsky, Z.G.Grinberg, Vera and Ludmila Menzhinskaya, D.I.Leshchenko, G.S.Yatmanov and I.V.Kimmel was in effect a continuation of the 1918 collegium of the Petrograd Narkompros. It was to hold a joint meeting with the Moscow collegium once a month.

Only one joint meeting had been held⁵ when Narkompros

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1. mentioned as 'commissars' or heads of departments in Vestnik nar.pros.SKSO 1918, nos.1, 2-3, 6-8 passim.
 2. Vestnik nar.pros.SKSO 1918 no.6-8, pp.15, 67.
 3. Severnaya kommuna 1919 no.23, 31 Jan., p.3.
 4. TSGAOR 2306/1/180, 28 March 1919 (Moscow collegium)
 5. TSGAOR 2306/1/181, 7 May 1919.

was informed that the establishment of the Petrograd okruzhnoi commissariat had been countermanded by VTSIK.¹ Dismayed but resolute, Narkompros made a second attempt to maintain a bridgehead in Petrograd by establishing a 'filial' organization which, it argued, was necessary because of 'the presence in Petrograd of a huge number of all kinds of cultural, educational, scientific and artistic institutions of a general state character'.² But this attempt came to nothing.

The weak position in which Narkompros found itself was partly of its own making. In its original formulations of the relationship of the central commissariat with local organs it had made almost no provision for inspection, control or even central representation in local organs. In 1918, Narkompros had thought in terms of educational soviets expressing the will of the local population and deserving the broadest autonomy and scope for initiative. In 1919 the educational soviets had collapsed. In their place, Narkompros was dealing with education departments, appointed and often strictly controlled by a competing authority - the executive committee of the local Soviet of Deputies. The absence of central control had not led to the encouragement of local popular initiative but to the assumption of control by the local political administrations.

The executive committee of the Petrograd Soviet, headed by Zinoviev, appointed a Petrograd education department in

1. TSGAOR 2306/1/181, 23 May 1919.

2. TSGAOR 2306/1/181, 2 August 1919.

September 1919 under Ya.Zelikson.¹ The dominating figure in the collegium was not Zelikson but Zlota Ionovna Lilina, Zinoviev's wife. Maria Fedorovna Andreeva - Gorky's wife, Petrograd Commissar of theatres and spectacles - referred to Lilina, in a letter to Lunacharsky, as 'our "conqueror"'.² Petrograd did not abandon the Narkompros policy of the United Labour (polytechnical) School; but F.F.Shu nevertheless remained in charge of professional and technical education. Indeed the pressure of the Petrograd technical education lobby on Narkompros³ seems to have been more effective than any pressure Narkompros was able to put on the Petrograd education department, in spite of the appointment of Z.G.Grinberg as Narkompros 'plenipotentiary' [upolnomochenny] to the department in 1920.⁴

MONO, the Moscow education department, had taken a radical position in the debates on educational policy in 1918, but later moved to a position which Narkompros regarded as reactionary. Its programme for the 1919-20 school year was described by the Narkompros collegium as 'a deviation from the principles of the Labour School' containing 'completely inadmissible concessions to the reactionary teaching body'.⁵ Narkompros tried without success to put a notice of its differences with MONO in Pravda and Izvestiya VTSIK;⁶ and

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1. Vestnik prosveshcheniya (Petrograd) 1919 no.4-6(12-14), p.64.
 2. letter of February 1920, in M.F.Andreeva. Perepiska.Vospominaniya. Statyi. Dokumenty. Vospominaniya o M.F.Andreevoi, Moscow, 1961, p.273.
 3. see below, pp.75-80.
 4. TSGAOR 2306/1/320, 21 Jan.1920. Narkompros had declared its right to send representatives with voting rights to local departments in 1919 (TSGAOR 2306/1/182, 6 Aug.1919).
 5. TSGAOR 2306/1/182, 20 Sept.1919.
 6. TSGAOR 2306/1/182, 23 Sept.1919.

finally decided to circularize all departments subordinate to MONO on the errors of MONO's policy.¹

The same trouble recurred in the summer of 1920, when MONO published theses 'On school policy in coming years'.² The theses had been approved by the presidium of Moscow Soviet but not by Narkompros. They recommended increased discipline in schools, re-establishment of individual instead of collegiate control, employment of experienced teachers 'not only as consultants, as has been the case until now, but as organizers of affairs in responsible posts' who were to be paid as highly qualified specialists. The schools were no longer to have the right to appoint or dismiss staff without the approval of MONO.

Narkompros, not having been consulted, reacted strongly against the theses, 'giving extraordinary political significance to MONO's action in abandoning the communist line in education' and threatening to take the matter to higher authorities.³ But after consultation with the new head of MONO, P.G.Smidovich,⁴ Narkompros' indignation with MONO subsided, and the collegium resolved that 'disagreements on principle [with MONO] do not exist' and invited Smidovich to attend its meetings as an advisory member.⁵ There was no public announcement of revision of MONO's programme, and

1. TSGAOR 2306/1/182, 30 Sept.1919.

2. Kommunistichesky trud, 1920 no.70, 16 June, p.4.

3. TSGAOR 2306/1/320, 19 June 1920.

4. Petr Germagenovich Smidovich, b.1874, an old friend of Lunacharsky, married to the widow of his brother Platon Lunacharsky. Smidovich's appointment to MONO was noted in Kommunistichesky trud, 1920 no.70, 16 June, p.4.

5. TSGAOR 2306/1/320, 6 July 1920.

probably no such revision took place.

If Narkompros clashed most frequently with the education departments of Moscow and Petrograd, this was largely the result of its being better informed of their activities and policies than of those of provincial departments, and because the Moscow and Petrograd departments had the size and influence to usurp Narkompros' authority in the capitals. But Narkompros remained permissive in principle, and even more in practice, in its attitude to teachers and education departments in Russia as a whole. Only the kindergarten department seems to have issued a substantial body of programmes, instructions on teaching methods and lists of necessary equipment. The department of the United Labour School did not issue instructions, but instead sent an extraordinary enquiry to teachers:¹

'Comrades, we would like to know what innovations you have managed to bring into the school.

1. Does life there go on just as it used to? Are the same subjects taught in the school?
2. Are the children as strictly divided into groups (classes)? Or has something new perhaps come into your life? Is new work being done? (but what kind of work?)...
4. Perhaps the lessons themselves are conducted differently ... perhaps all kinds of work are concentrated around labour processes - but what kind of work exactly, and how do you organize it? ... Perhaps [the school], like a single collective, works on its own Soviet or private economic enterprise: has it perhaps taken on other responsibilities (sawing and carrying wood, clearing snow from bridges and roofs, organizing a Library Week, a Hygiene Week etc?... What are your plans for the future?'

No wonder that the majority of schools, through lack of instruction, hostility, inertia and the disruption of civil war, made little attempt to put Narkompros' educational

1. RSFSR, Narodny komissariat po prosveshcheniyu, Otdel edinoi trudovoi shkoly, Pismo k shkolnym rabotnikam, Moscow 1919.

policy into effect. But there were exceptions. The publication of the Declaration and Statement on the United Labour School in 1918 aroused lively discussion in a number of provincial schools and education departments. In Trubchevsk, a small town near Bryansk, the Statement on the United Labour School was on the whole approved by the teachers, except for the 'pedagogically-unacceptable principle' of the school-commune, and the abolition of homework and punishments, which was doubted as giving ammunition to sceptics ('of whom there were not few' in Trubchevsk); while elementary school teachers complained that they could not understand what was meant by the 'children's encyclopedia ... centred on labour processes' recommended by the Declaration.¹ In Karelin, the education department argued 'whether punishment is compatible with the idea of the free school, ... whether pupils must stand up when answering the teacher, ... whether [the textbook] should be kept, or thrown out as an attribute of the old school'; one teacher suggested that 'the history of Tsars and military commanders be replaced by a history of the people, a history of labour and culture'; and another - a former handicraft teacher - 'spoke on the Labour School, dreaming of school-palaces where labour was on the boil from morning to night'.²

Narkompros had its own network of children's colonies and experimental schools, including the 'First experimental station in education' ('The Good Life'³) run by S.T.Shatsky, and the Marfino colony organized by Lunacharsky's wife Anna

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1. A.N.Volkovsky, 'Formation of a Soviet pedagogue in the first years after October', Sovetskaya pedagogika 1957 no.11, p.106.
 2. N.Kuchepatov, 'From a teacher's recollections', Sovetskaya pedagogika, 1957 no.4, p.78.
 3. formerly 'Children's Colony of Labour and Rest' - see S.T.Shatsky, Pedagogicheskie sochineniya v 4-kh tomakh, Moscow v.1, 1963, pp.25-7.

Aleksandrovna.¹ Other colonies and experimental schools arose on local initiative, like the Smolensk colony organized by one of Shatsky's pupils and admired by Lunacharsky in 1919,² and the Znamenskaya school-commune, organized by the teachers themselves under the influence of Narkompros declarations and progressive educational theory, and giving special emphasis to aesthetic education.³ In the capitals, kindergartens and playgrounds were established which were for Narkompros 'corners full of joy, full of the morning light portending future socialism; light grains of the future for which we struggle against the twilit, cruelly battle-coloured backdrop of our suffering land'.⁴

But elsewhere the principles of the United Labour School suffered curious mutations. In some places, school children were recruited by local authorities as an auxiliary labour force. In others the principle of 'self-service' [samoobsluzhivanie] meant that the children did all the cleaning, cooking and necessary manual work in the school:⁵

'They made the little children wash their own linen, clean rooms, carry buckets of soup through the frost and so on, and naturally the children were not really helping or doing "productive labour" but getting themselves dirty through being in unsanitary conditions.'

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1. see S.Savshinsky, 'The past does not die', Sovetskaya muzyka, 1967 no.1, p.66.
 2. Lunacharsky, 'Children's colonies in Smolensk', Nar.pros. weekly, 1919 no.53-55, 4 Oct., pp.1-2.
 3. A.I.Kondakov, 'Experiment in aesthetic education in the Znamenskaya school-commune (1918-1925)', Sovetskaya pedagogika, 1958 no.11.
 4. TSGAOR 2306/1/320, 17 June 1920. Resolution proposed by Lazurkina, but later published in Nar.pros. weekly, 1920 no.69-70, under Lunacharsky's signature (Declaration on kindergarten education).
 5. V.Polyansky, 'How the People's Commissariat of Education started work', Proletarskaya revolyutsia 1926 no.49(2), p.58.

Krupskaya, during her trip on the Volga in the summer of 1919,¹ noticed that 'self-service' left no time for school-work, and 'because of this, many parents are taking their children away from school'.² But Lepeshinsky, on the other hand, considered that economic disruption had played a positive role in school reform, and that 'self-service' dictated by economic necessity provided 'the circumstances for the psychological rebirth of the children ... Social labour and communal conditions of life are doing their great educational work ...'.³

'All my impressions lead to the conclusion that we are unforgiveably alienated from provincial work,' wrote Krupskaya from the Volga. 'We must devote more attention to the provinces and more power, not being afraid of interfering ...'.⁴ She found that the absence of central instructions left schools and local education departments either bewildered or subject to the dictation of guberniya education departments: 'the guberniyas instruct the uezds very insistently, and because of these instructions, the good work that is done in the uezds is destroyed, all initiative is destroyed.'⁵

Krupskaya found various forms of realization of the 'labour principle', most of which she disliked, but this was not the basis of her main criticism of the results of school reform: her objection was that reform had been carried out

1. 'Diary of a journey on the steamboat "Krasnaya zvezda"' (1920), Ped.soch. v.11, p.729 ff.

2. ibid. p.738.

3. 'The school question in the circumstances of the social revolution', Nar.pros. monthly, 1919 mo.16-17, p.16.

4. letter to Z.Krzhizhanovskaya, 17 July 1919, in Ped.soch. v.11, p.190.

5. letter to Z.Krzhizhanovskaya, 17 July 1919, ibid.

without the participation of the local population. 'Literally nothing is coming from the United Labour School,' she wrote,¹

'it is all rubbish. They [the teachers] understand "democratization" as parents' committees and the independence of the teaching profession from the Soviet ... The basic principles of the United Labour School - that it must take into account local conditions and be built by the teachers together with the population - are completely ignored. The teachers do not even suspect that there is such a principle ...'

Krupskaya was particularly disappointed to find no educational soviets in operation, widespread resentment among teachers at the dissolution of VUS, and only one working branch of the new Union of workers in education and socialist culture. She found local authorities unsympathetic to education - 'the Party people think it below their dignity to be concerned with education'² - and local education departments alienated from the population and unresponsive to its wishes.

In 1919, probably after Krupskaya's return from the Volga, she and Pokrovsky addressed a letter to the Central Committee of the Party 'On the strengthening of local educational organs with communists'³, stating that 'local Party comrades, not receiving any directives from the Central Committee of the Party, consider the work of the People's Commissariat of Education of secondary importance and therefore will not undertake it', and asking the Central Committee to direct Party workers into the education departments and especially into extramural education.

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1. letter to Z.Krzhizhanovskaya, 29 July 1919, Ped.soch. v.11, pp192-3.
 2. letter to Krzhizhanovskaya, 17 July 1919, Ped.soch. v.11, p.190.
 3. 'Letters of N.K.Krupskaya', published by V.S.Dridzo in Sovetskaya pedagogika, 1961 no.11, p.138.

By the middle of 1920, there was considerable pressure on Narkompros, and within it, to make radical changes in its educational policy. The new Chief Committee of professional-technical education under Narkompros (Glavprofobr) was unsympathetic to the polytechnical principle of the United Labour School and, like F.F.Shu in Petrograd, wanted the secondary school to provide training in specific technical skills. MONO,¹ and within the collegium of Narkompros Pokrovsky,² called for more instruction, supervision and support for teachers, and more encouragement to the old teaching profession to return to the schools. Krupskaya was not unsympathetic to Pokrovsky's position, but she still believed that the solution to Russia's educational problems was to draw the population into participation in educational affairs - 'and here I go back on my hobbyhorse, educational soviets,' she wrote to Pokrovsky.³ 'They are the best means of drawing the masses into the problems of building the labour school, making it clear and comprehensible to them.'

In spite of pressure to change, Narkompros decided to reissue the 1918 Declaration on the United Labour School, adding only a 'circumstantial introduction' to be written by Lunacharsky, Pokrovsky and Ludmila Menzhinskaya, which 'must again emphasize the principle of the United Labour School and suggest that, in principle, a concrete plan for the actual realization of the school revolution within a specified time should be prepared.' (my emphasis)

1. see this chapter, p.66.

2. see theses presented to the collegium of Narkompros by Pokrovsky, 30 June 1920, quoted in Krupskaya, Ped.soch. v.10, p.738.

3. letter of June 1920, Ped.soch. v.10, p.47.

4. TSGAOR 2306/1/320, 30 June 1920, resolution on theses on United Labour School by Pokrovsky and L.Menzhinskaya.

The resolution was passed in the collegium of Narkompros by 4 votes to 2,¹ those against being probably O.Yu.Schmidt and F.V.Lengnik of Glavprofobr.

In September 1920, Lunacharsky admitted that Narkompros had been stronger in the formulation of educational policy than in its implementation. He said:²

'Narkompros ... made a mistake which continued for perhaps a year, a completely natural mistake, but one which we acknowledge. We worked out a declaration and said - "Look, that is your school and this is ours." And we proved to everyone with a living heart and mind that our school is of a higher type ... But the department of the United Labour School mistakenly thought that this declaration would be realized by "life itself". And by life they meant youth with its Komsomol, the proletariat which would help us, the teachers who would search out new paths, and the local education departments. But it turned out that "life itself" accomplished nothing. We have had to start to demonstrate the steps towards the realization of our ideal in practical terms ...'

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1. TSGAOR 2306/1/320, 30 June 1920. Those present were Lunacharsky, Z.G.Gringer, L.Menzhinskaya, Pokrovsky, O.Yu.Schmidt, F.V.Lengnik.
 2. speech to VTSIK, 26 Sept.1920, in Lunacharsky, O narodnom obrazovanii, pp.127-8.

ii) Professional and technical education

The policy of the United Labour School theoretically excluded the possibility of specialized technical training for school-age children. 'This circle of hell for the children of the poor must be destroyed once and for all,' Narkompros announced on the question of trade schools. But it added that so long as a popular demand for trade schools persisted, 'we are obliged to maintain [the trade school] where it exists; and where it does not, create it.'¹

The policy of the Narkompros department of the United Labour School was more straightforward: 'Close the professional schools and use their equipment for the creation of the Labour School.'²

Before 1917, the majority of technical schools and institutes had arisen under the patronage of interested ministries - Industry and Trade, Finance, Communications etc. - and were not under the control of the Ministry of Public Education. After the revolution, these technical institutions were inherited by the corresponding commissariats. Narkompros claimed them, on the argument that all educational institutions should be collected under a single commissariat and administered according to a single policy - that of Narkompros. Sovnarkom supported this claim, and in May and June of 1918 decreed

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1. Narkompros statement 'On the tasks of professional-technical education in Russia', Nar.pros. weekly, 1919 no.34, 10 May, pp.1-4.
 2. quoted by Lunacharsky, speech to VTSIK, 26 Sept.1920, in O narodnom obrazovanii, pp.128-9.

transfer of all educational institutions (except naval and military training schools) with their buildings and equipment to Narkompros.¹ But in September a MONO representative told Narkompros that the list of technical institutions which the Commissariat of Trade and Industry was transferring to Narkompros included 'not one substantial commercial school in Moscow. They are giving us 10 to 15 of the most insignificant educational institutions to get rid of us.' Lunacharsky called it 'sabotage on the part of the Commissariat of Trade and Industry'.²

In Petrograd, on the initiative of F.F.Shu, an oblast department of technical and professional education was set up;³ and the Commissariat of education of the northern commune directed that no professional or technical schools should be reorganized into United Labour Schools without the consent of the oblast department.⁴ As a result of the efforts of his department, Shu wrote in 1919,⁵ 'there was no need for especial concern about the fate of the professional-technical educational institutions in the oblast'.

Early in 1919 Petrograd, the unions, and the new department of professional-technical education under F.V.Lengnik in Moscow joined forces to urge the collegium of Narkompros to maintain and strengthen the technical schools. It was reported to the collegium that 'the Presidium of VTSSPS [Central council of trade unions] was considering the question

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1. Dekrety sovetskoi vlasti, Moscow, v.2, 1959, pp.357-9 and 487-8.
 2. Nar.pros. monthly, 1919 no.6-7, p.131.
 3. Vestnik nar.pros.SKS0, 1918 no.6-8, p.67.
 4. Nov.1918. Vestnik prosveshcheniya, 1919 no.1-3 (9-11)pp123-4.
 5. 'On professional technical education', Vestnik prosveshcheniya 1919 no.4-6 (12-14), p.8.

of a Committee on Professional Education without informing Narkompros'.¹ It was rumoured that the technical education lobby wanted to create an independent commissariat of technical education.² Shu's aims went beyond the mere preservation of technical schools: he wished to transform the whole educational system into a technical rather than a polytechnical one. In January 1919 he presented to a general meeting on technical education in Petrograd 'a general plan ... for the establishment of a United Technical School, which must be divided into three consecutive stages: lower, middle and higher. The lower stage must have a general educational character; in the middle stage there will already be a division into specialist studies; and the higher stage ... will consist of the existing higher specialist technical educational institutions.'³

Under this pressure, Narkompros projected a decree and a statement on professional education, giving them for revision to a commission of Pokrovsky, Lengnik, Pozner (for the department of the United Labour School) and Shu;⁴ and appointed Lengnik (who worked both in Vesenkha and in Narkompros) president of the section of professional-technical education of Narkompros. The decree and statement revised by the Narkompros commission were issued by Sovnarkom in June.⁵ The section of professional-technical education of Narkompros was to have a collegium of 11 members, 6 of them including the president from Narkompros, 2 from VTSSPS, and 1 each from Vesenkha, the Commissariat of Agriculture and the

1. TSGAOR 2306/1/180, 17 Feb.1919 (information from L.G.Shapiro)

2. F.Shu, 'On professional-technical education', Vestnik prosveshcheniya, 1919 no.4-6 (12-14), p.8.

3. Severnaya kommuna, 1919 no.23, 31 Jan.p.3.

4. TSGAOR 2306/1/181, 17 May 1919.

5. Izvestiya VTSIK, 1919 no.135, 24 June, p.2.

Commissariat of Communications. The decree reiterated Sovnarkom's earlier instructions that all technical institutions should be transferred to Narkompros; and that, other than in 'exceptional cases', all commissariats should liquidate their education committees. This represented a victory for Narkompros over the technical lobby, since Narkompros retained control over technical education without amending its general educational policy. Shu was disappointed.¹

In this period of Narkompros' activity, according to a union spokesman, 'more than 200 well-equipped technical schools were closed and destroyed'.²

At the end of 1919 the technical educationalists gained powerful allies - Trotsky and the commission on labour conscription. The commission was established by resolution of Sovnarkom on December 27 1919 to plan the mobilization of labour as a quasi-military operation to cope with the urgent problems of industrial collapse.³ Among its tasks was the formulation of 'immediate practical measures designed to ensure the production of qualified workers (appropriate professional schools etc.)'.⁴ The commission was created at the highest level: its members were Trotsky (president and War Commissar), the commissars of labour, internal affairs, food, agriculture and communications, and the presidents of Vesenkha and VTSSPS.⁵ Narkompros was represented neither on

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1. F.Shu, 'On professional-technical education', Vestnik prosveshcheniya, 1919 no.4-6 (12-14), p.8.
 2. B.Kozelev, 'Polytechnical or technical education', Rabotnik prosveshcheniya, 1921 no.2-3, p.20.
 3. Pravda 1920 no.2, 3 Jan.p.2 (announcement by Trotsky).
 4. ibid.
 5. ibid.

Trotsky's commission, nor on its sub-commission delegated to work on the problem of professional education.¹

When the collegium of Narkompros heard from Lengnik of the activity of the sub-commission, its first reaction was to condemn it out of hand as 'a rebirth of narrow professionalism and departmentalism [which] Narkompros considers a great step backward', and an attempt 'to re-establish the undesirable aspects of professional education under the old regime'.² It seems clear that Narkompros, still lacking official information from the sub-commission, believed that its purpose was to remove technical education from the competence of Narkompros. But after an exchange of telegrams between Trotsky and Lunacharsky the position cleared, and Lunacharsky told the collegium that the theses accepted by Trotsky's commission, on the recommendation of its sub-commission on technical education, were 'completely acceptable'.³

As published a few days later,⁴ the thesis of Trotsky's commission on technical education was that

'measures for the professional training of the young generation, starting at the age of 14, must be undertaken on a large scale, so as to secure the necessary production of qualified labour forces. To this end

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1. TSGAOR 2306/1/320, 17 Jan.1920 (protest signed Lunacharsky at non-representation. Lengnik was said to be a member of the sub-commission acting 'in a personal capacity and not on the instructions of Narkompros'. Shu was probably also a member).
 2. TSGAOR 2306/1/320, 17 Jan.1920 (resolution of collegium)
 3. TSGAOR 2306/1/320, 21 Jan.1920.
 4. Point 8 of the commission's theses, as approved by the Central Committee of the Party. Pravda 1920 no.14, 22 Jan. p.1.

'a sufficiently strong and powerful organ, including representatives of all interested departments and institutions, must be created under Narkompros.'

This thesis conflicted with Narkompros policy of making general education compulsory until the age of 17, but it conceded the point, evidently crucial to Narkompros, that technical education should remain under Narkompros control.

Shu's hour had come. It was he who presented the project of a decree establishing the 'strong and powerful organ' recommended by Trotsky's commission to the collegium of Narkompros.¹ According to Shu's project, in the form approved by the collegium,² the Narkompros section of professional-technical education was to become a Sector of Narkompros, to be headed by the Commissar of Education. The Sector was to have the 'full powers [polnomochie] of military and security organizations' and to receive full cooperation and material support from all institutions of the RSFSR. Individuals and institutions not providing this cooperation and support 'will be punished with all the severity of the law of a military-revolutionary period'. The Sector was to be given a yearly fund of one milliard roubles, over and above its normal budget. A permanent assembly representing 'interested departments and trade unions' was to be set up under the collegium of the Sector.

The collegium made no statement on the minimum age of transfer from general to specialized education, or on the

1. TSGAOR 2306/1/320, 21 Jan. 1920.

2. Shu's original project is not included in the minutes for the meeting of 21 Jan.

organization of technical schools under commissariats other than Narkompros. But concessions had implicitly been made on both points. On the second point, Lunacharsky informed the collegium at the end of January that Lenin 'had instructed Narkompros urgently to formulate regulations for the opening of professional-technical schools by other authorities'.¹

Shu's project was issued as a decree by Sovnarkom,² losing some of its militance in the process. Sovnarkom made no mention of punishment 'with all the severity of the law of a military-revolutionary period', nor of the ambiguous 'full powers of military and security organizations'. On the other hand, the Sector was upgraded to a 'Chief Committee of professional-technical education' which was no longer 'under' [pri] Narkompros, but 'within its structure' [v sostave] and possessed its own budget and independence in financial and administrative direction. The Commissar of Education was still president of the Chief Committee, but his deputy was to be appointed directly by Sovnarkom and to take an ex officio place in the collegium of Narkompros.

The collegium of the Chief Committee (Glavprofobr) was announced in February.³ Lunacharsky was president, Otto Yulevich Schmidt⁴ deputy president, and members Olga Grigorevna Anikst (a foundation member of Narkompros), F.V.Lengnik, B.G.Kozelev (VTSSPS) and A.V.Skvortsov.

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1. TSGAOR 2306/1/320, 31 Jan.1920.
 2. decree of 29 Jan.1920, pub.Izvestiya VTSIK 1920 no.26, 6 Feb.
 3. Sovnarkom resolution of 10 Feb., pub.Izvestiya VTSIK 1920 no.31, 12 Feb., p.2.
 4. b.1891, mathematician formerly of Kiev University, former left Menshevik, joining Communist Party 1918. Mbr. collegium Food Commissariat 1918-1920. In early 1930s led Chelyushkin Polar expedition.

The first meeting of the collegium of Glavprofobr was held, with Lunacharsky as chairman, on February 14, 1920.¹

The task of Glavprofobr, as formulated by Trotsky's commission, was to undertake large-scale reform of professional training from the age of 14 in order to increase the output of qualified labour. This implied both reform of higher technical education² and the introduction of specialized professional training in the secondary school.

However, the secondary school was not under the control of Glavprofobr but of the Narkompros department of the United Labour School which, with the support of the majority of the collegium of Narkompros, remained opposed to 'professionalization'.

In the collegium of Glavprofobr, the deputy president O.Yu.Schmidt and the union representative, Kozelev, supported professionalization. But Shu, who had been its most energetic advocate, was not appointed to the collegium. He attended its first meetings, clashed with the Muscovites on the question of the relationship of his Petrograd department to the Moscow collegium,³ and was passed over for the presidency of the Petrograd branch of Glavprofobr in favour of A.A.Sotnikov, who was nominated by Schmidt.⁴

Lunacharsky was against professionalization. In 1920

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1. TSGA RSFSR 1565/1/22, 14 Feb.1920 (collegium of Glavprofobr)
 2. see below, pp.100-101.
 3. TSGA RSFSR 1565/1/22, 14 Feb.1920 (paper by Shu) and 3 March 1920 (paper by Shu and Zelikson).
 4. TSGA RSFSR 1565/1/22, 14 April 1920.

he was, as he wrote to M.F.Andreeva,¹ under pressure from Party circles to work mainly in Glavprofobr and not, as he himself wished, in theatrical administration. He regularly attended one of the two weekly meetings of Glavprofobr² and held a weekly reception at its premises at Povarskaya 14.³

The professionalization policy, since Lunacharsky opposed it, does not seem to have been formally adopted by the collegium of Glavprofobr in 1920. In April, when Kozelev of Glavprofobr presented theses on the professionalization of the secondary school to the 3rd All-Russian Congress of trade unions, the collegium of Narkompros sent Krupskaya and Ludmila Menzhinskaya (head of the department of the United Labour School) to oppose them, and at the same time resolved to ask for clarification of the attitude of Glavprofobr to the United Labour School.⁴ Krupskaya said at the Congress:⁵

'From our point of view, professional education must not cripple a man by making him a narrow specialist from an early age, must not narrow his horizon, but must help all aspects of his whole development. And professional education must now prepare not only the executant, the mechanical worker - it must also prepare the worker to become the master [khozyain] of industry ...

The main weakness of comrade Kozelev's theses is that their approach to questions of professional education coincides with the approach of the specialist, who is only interested in industry and not at all interested in the worker ...

Comrade Kozelev proposes putting all general education on the lowest priority and giving all attention to

1. letter of an unknown correspondent [on internal evidence, Lunacharsky] to M.F.Andreeva, 19 April 1920, M.F.Andreeva p.280.

2. TSGA RSFSR 1565/1/22, passim.

3. Izvestiya VTSIK, 1920, no.205, 16 Sept. p.2.

4. TSGAOR 2306/1/320, 8 April 1920.

5. 'On Kozelev's theses', Ped.soch. v.10, pp.44-6.

'professional-technical education. However he forgets that professional-technical education at any depth requires a certain general educational preparation on the part of the student: students must be properly literate, know at least elementary mathematics, and have a more or less basic knowledge of history and geography.'

According to the Sovnarkom decree, Glavprofobr had a permanent council of representatives of interested institutions and unions. The tasks of the council, as elaborated by Schmidt,¹ were to work out the 'general direction' of professional-technical education, to consider legislative projects and to co-ordinate the activity of government organs and trade unions. The council was to meet not less than once every two months. Narkompros was in a minority in the council: it had the right to send 5 representatives, as against 8 from Vesenkha and 10 from the unions.²

At the October meeting of the council, Lunacharsky spoke - as reported,³ in guarded and somewhat ambiguous terms - of the dangers of radical professionalization of the secondary school. He suggested that delegates should turn their attention from the reorganization of the United Labour School to the problems of adult education and the raising of worker's technical qualifications. But the meeting allied itself 'wholly with the point of view of Glavprofobr as expressed in the theses of O.Yu.Schmidt', and resolved to ask the collegium of Narkompros 'to review the question of the United

1. TSGAOR 2306/1/320, 13 March 1920 (Statement on the council of professional-technical education under Glavprofobr, presented to the collegium of Narkompros by O.Yu.Schmidt).

2. ibid.

3. Izvestiya VTSIK, 1920 no.240, 27 Oct., p.2.

School and the place of professional education in the general system of education'.¹ Having gained the support of the council, Schmidt told the collegium of Glavprofobr that one of its current tasks was 'to work out [technical] biases² for the United School (plans and programmes)'.³ But in 1920 the plans for the reform of secondary education were not put into practice, and all secondary schools remained in the charge of the department of the United Labour School of Narkompros.

Lunacharsky described the conflict over the professionalization of education in the following terms:⁴

'We understand that the ruined Russian economy needs specialists ...[But] we, as socialists who defended the rights of the worker's personality against the factors which tried to stifle it under capitalism cannot help protesting when we see that the new Communist factory is showing, in these hard years, the same tendency.

So it is inevitable that there should be a kind of struggle between those Marxists who understand all the difficulties of the present time, the necessity of straining all our forces, of retreating from our ideals in the face of present demands, - and those other Marxists who, in spite of everything, cannot let this hard time trample the flowers of the first hopes of the proletariat and proletarian youth, their first chance of many-sided human development ...'

1. Izvestiya VTSIK, 1920 no.240, 27 Oct., p.2.

2. uklony.

3. TSGA RSFSR 1565/1/22, 3 Nov.1920.

4. 'The United Labour School and technical education'(1920), O narodnom obrazovanii, p.159.

iii) The Academy of Sciences and the universities

'There was nowhere that the reforming work of Narkompros met such a thick wall of inertia and "tradition" as in the academic world, and especially in the universities,' Narkompros reported in 1919.¹ 'And on the other hand, in no sphere of Narkompros reform was so much caution and care for autonomy shown, so many concessions made from the original plan of educational reform, as in relation to the higher school.'

In dealing with the academic world, Narkompros found the intelligentsia at its most entrenched and most militant. Academic institutions were prepared to accept nothing less than full autonomy, and were not prepared to cooperate with Narkompros on any plan of internal reform. Narkompros was prepared to meet these conditions in dealing with the Academy of Sciences, but not with the universities. The distinction was made both on principle and in response to circumstance. On principle, Narkompros respected the independence of scholarship but wished to limit the influence of anti-Bolshevik and non-Marxist professors on students of the universities. In practice it found the Academy of Sciences more willing to enter into negotiations than the universities.

Correspondence with the Academy began as early as January 1918, when the greater part of the intelligentsia were still refusing any contact with Soviet institutions.

1. Nar.pros. monthly, 1919 no.9-10, p.79.

In the second half of January L.G.Shapiro, of the scientific department of Narkompros, wrote to Sergei Fedorovich Oldenburg, the permanent secretary of the Academy, proposing that the Academy should take the leading part in mobilizing Russia's scientific forces, registering and classifying scientific personnel and institutions, and continuing the investigation of Russia's natural and productive resources begun during the war by a commission of the Academy, KEPS.¹ Shapiro also suggested that the Academy should 'investigate separate themes which may urgently arise', having in mind the establishment of special commission of enquiry into particular industries or branches of agriculture.²

These proposals were considered by a special commission of the Academy headed by Oldenburg. A reply to Narkompros, drafted by the commission, was approved by a general meeting of the Academy on February 20: it stated that the Academy 'is always prepared, on the demand of life and the state, to undertake energetic scientific and theoretical investigation of scientific problems put forward by the needs of national development', and affirmed the Academy's role as 'organizational centre and centre for recruitment of the country's scholarly forces'.³ Academician Fersman, secretary of KEPS, added a note⁴ with the comment that research into 'separate questions

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1. Komissiya po izucheniyu estestvennykh i proizvoditelnykh sil Rossii, established under the Academy in 1915.
 2. 'Memorandum of L.G.Shapiro, given personally to the Permanent Secretary', Izvestiya rossiiskoi akademii nauk, 6th series, v.12, 1918, no.14, 15 Oct., pp.1391-2.
 3. quoted I.S.Smirnov, Lenin i sovetskaya kultura, p.247.
 4. 'Memorandum of A.E.Fersman to the academic commission', Izvestiya rossiiskoi akademii nauk, 6th series, v.12, 1918, no.14, 15 Oct., pp.1392-3.

and branches of industrial life', as suggested by Shapiro, lay outside the scope of the Academy and would be 'difficult to realize within its walls'.

This was an agreement to cooperate with Narkompros, provided there was no attempt to convert the Academy from an independent research institution choosing its own fields of investigation into a government industrial research body. Narkompros was happy to accept it as such. 'Perhaps only the Academy of Sciences, with its traditions of pure and independent science, could succeed in overcoming all difficulties,' Lunacharsky wrote to Karpinsky, president of the Academy.¹

The Soviet historian I.S.Smirnov has pointed out that the Academy responded to Narkompros approaches with less than the enthusiasm it had shown to the Provisional Government when, in March 1917, it had unanimously resolved 'to offer its knowledge and abilities to serve Russia to the government enjoying the trust of the nation'.² The Academy did not begin negotiations with the Bolsheviks out of political sympathy. Indeed the architect of the agreement, the orientalist S.F.Oldenburger, was a former member of the Cadet central committee. The Academy's concern was to protect Russian science from what Karpinsky called 'those explosions which are the misfortune of Russian life',³ and to preserve its own position as Russia's leading scientific and academic institution.

1. Lunacharsky to A.P.Karpinsky, 5 March 1918, Izvestiya rossiiskoi akademii nauk, 6th series, v.12, 1918, no.14, 15 Oct., pp.1387-1391.

2. Smirnov, Lenin i sovetskaya kultura, p.238.

3. A.P.Karpinsky to Lunacharsky, 24 March 1918, Izvestiya VTSIK 1918 no.72, 12 April, p.3.

Early in April, Lunacharsky and a group of academicians led by Oldenburg¹ went to Moscow to formalize the agreement. Izvestiya VTSIK published the news on April 5;² on April 11 Lunacharsky announced it to VTSIK;³ and on April 12 to Sovnarkom:⁴

'The meeting ... heard a report from Narkompros on the offer by the Academy of Sciences to give academic service to Soviet power through research into the natural riches of the country. It was resolved to welcome this offer; to recognize in principle the necessity of financing such work; and to indicate to the Academy as a particularly urgent and important task the solution of the problems of correct distribution of industry in the country and the most rational use of its economic resources.'

The Academy submitted its first financial estimates to Sovnarkom, bypassing Narkompros. Karpinsky explained that 'the Academy thought ... that it was important to keep the right, which it has had since its establishment almost 200 years ago, to appeal in especially important cases directly to the highest organ of the government.'⁵ The estimates were forwarded to the Council of the National Economy. Lunacharsky deplored this because it raised the possibility that the Academy would come under the competence of the Council of the National Economy instead of that of Narkompros. 'It would be desirable,' he told the State Education Commission,⁶

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1. The academicians had an interview with Lenin in Moscow early in April. Lenin, Pol.sob.soch. (5th ed.), v.36, p.690.
 2. 'Conversation with comrade Lunacharsky', Izvestiya VTSIK, 1918 no.66, 5 April, pp.1-2.
 3. Protokoly zasedanii VTSIK 4 sozyva, Moscow, 1920, p.90.
 4. Izvestiya VTSIK, 1918 no.77, 17 April, p.5.
 5. quoted Smirnov, Lenin i sovetskaya kultura, p.273.
 6. TSGAOR 2306/1/36, 5 April 1918.

'that all mobilization of scientific skill should go exclusively through Narkompros and not through the Council of the National Economy ... Lunacharsky again points out the pressing necessity of taking all work of a scientific character from the Council of the National Economy and, in justification of this intention, points out the Council's extremely uneconomic expenditure of money which could be ruinous for Soviet power.'

Narkompros won its point in regard to the Academy, and presented the Academy's estimates to Sovnarkom in May and June 1918.¹ But its claim that all scientific work should come under the auspices of Narkompros was not accepted by Lenin, who drafted a plan for cooperation between scientists and the Council of the National Economy,² and Sovnarkom: Smirnov estimates that in the first six months of 1918 Sovnarkom allocated 10 million roubles to scientific research under the auspices of various government bodies, of which less than 3 million (including the 2.2 million allocation to the Academy of Sciences) went through Narkompros.³

An implicit condition of the agreement with the Academy was that it should not be subject to administration interference or reorganization by Narkompros. Nevertheless, the scientific department of Narkompros appointed a commission of Pokrovsky, P.K.Shternberg, V.T.Ter-Oganesov and L.G.Shapiro to elaborate a plan for the reorganization of the Academy into an Association of Sciences, with the incorporation of other scientific societies and institutes.⁴ The original plan

1. Smirnov, Lenin i sovetskaya kultura, p.274.

2. 'Draft of a plan of scientific-technical work' (April 1918), Lenin, Pol.sob.soch. (5th ed.) v.36, pp.228-231.

3. Smirnov, Lenin i sovetskaya kultura, p.274.

4. ibid. p.266.

has been variously attributed to Pokrovsky,¹ L.G.Shapiro,² and P.K.Shternberg.³ The preliminary condition of the plan, Lunacharsky wrote, 'was, of course, to pull down the existing building [of the Academy] to build a model academic city'.⁴

Nothing came of the plan because Lenin, as well as Lunacharsky, opposed it. Lunacharsky later recalled that Lenin 'warned me in so many words that there should be no "mischief-making" around the Academy', insisted on the need for caution and tact in dealing with the Academy, and added that 'if some brave fellow turns up in your establishment, jumps onto the Academy and breaks a lot of china, then you will have to pay dearly for it.'⁵ The Academy remained unreformed and autonomous until 1929.

The formidable esprit de corps of Moscow University seems to have so intimidated Narkompros that it made almost no approach to the university until the middle of 1918. The Moscow academic world, like that of Petrograd, was dominated by liberal professors, many of whom had been prominent members of the Čadet party. But the Moscow liberal scholars were less disposed to compromise or negotiate with Narkompros than the Petrograd academicians. Moscow University was dominated by the group which had resigned from the university in protest against the repressive policies of Kasso, then Minister of Public Education, in 1911 and returned in triumph after the February Revolution of 1917. The few

1. Smirnov, Lenin i sovetskaya kultura, p.266.

2. M.N.Pokrovsky, 'Organization of scientific activity in Soviet Russia', Nar.pros. weekly, 1920 no.89-90, 7 Nov., p.18.

3. Lunacharsky, 'For the 200th anniversary of the All-union Academy of Sciences', Novy mir, 1925 no.10, p.110.

4. ibid.

5. ibid.

Bolshevik sympathizers among the Moscow professors - Shternberg, the veteran biologist Kliment Arkadevich Timiryazev - were ostracized by their colleagues. The students were, for the most part, no less hostile than the professors. 'How sad and terrible it was,' Lunacharsky wrote,¹

'for us, builders of the new Russia, to go into a lecture-room and see the young student faces indifferent, blank, reserved, hostile, ready to break into furious grimaces; and to feel as if young Russia was against us and we had no roots.'

In the early months of 1918 various projects for the radical reform of the universities were considered in Narkompros. This was a time, as Pokrovsky later recalled,² when Lenin's advice to 'break less' in reforming higher education sounded 'quite old-fashioned, and conservative to the point of indecency'. Even Lunacharsky, who had approached the Academy of Sciences with such caution and respect, saw little worth preserving in the old university. 'Our higher school needs a complete reform,' he told an Education Congress in April.³ '... The university as it has been up to this time does not exist as a learned institution. It is a "diploma factory", necessary for the careers of future state chinovniki who are educated there.' When a plan of moderate university reform was proposed to Narkompros by the Petrograd chemist Chugaev, Lunacharsky rejected it at once as 'a quite moderate and opportunist plan on the whole, infinitely surpassed by

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1. 'The student body and the revolution', Prosveshchenie i revolyutsiya, Moscow, 1924.
 2. 'What Lenin was for our higher schools', Pravda, 1924 no.22, 27 Jan., p.4.
 3. Izvestiya VTSIK, 1918 no.71, 11 April, p.4.

our plan of reform'.¹

The Narkompros plan was presented by Lunacharsky, Pokrovsky, Shternberg and M.A.Reisner² to an Assembly on university reform held at Moscow University in July, 1918.³ It proposed a university consisting of three free associations for scientific research, undergraduate teaching, and popular enlightenment. Professors were to be elected for a term of 7 years, with no minimum academic requirement. Education in the university was to be free. Students were to be admitted without examination or minimum educational requirement, and degrees would no longer be awarded. The university was to be administered by a 'university soviet' combining staff of the three associations and students; but above this was projected a higher authority, the 'People's soviet' [narodny soviet], consisting of representatives of all organizations represented in the local Soviet of Deputies, political parties, trade unions, co-operative societies, 5 representatives of the local education department and 25 representatives of the guberniya Soviet of Deputies. In the social sciences, study plans were to be revised 'to accord with the principles of the United Labour School'.⁴

The proposal for the division of the university into three associations was rejected outright by the Assembly. 'What turned out impossible to bear,' Pokrovsky wrote unkindly,

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1. quoted E.N.Gorodetsky, 'Soviet reform of the higher school of 1918 and Moscow University', Vestnik moskovskogo universiteta, social science series, 1954 no.1, p.125.
 2. b.1868, professor of law, declared his support for the Bolsheviks in Izvestiya TSIK (Petrograd), 1917 no.257, 21 Dec., p.13. Father of Larisa Reisner.
 3. F.Korolev, 'The great October Revolution and the higher school, 1917-1920', Sovetskaya pedagogika 1957 no.11, p.78.
 4. ibid. pp.78-9.

'was the creation of a special scholarly association in the university, where the professors would not be occupied with lecturing ... but with independent scientific work... - that was too much for the unburied corpses of official [kazennaya] science. Well, really! To force a man to show that he is working every 10 years, or perhaps every 7! [a reference to the shortening of tenure] To stop him sleeping quietly with his head on the doctoral dissertation he wrote 20 years₁ ago! It will be the death of Russian universities ...'

The Assembly criticized a number of other proposals, but did not formally reject the plan as a whole. A commission of 17 was elected to review the plan: 6 representatives of Narkompros (including Pokrovsky, Shternberg, Reisner and D.N.Artemev), 6 professors (including D.S.Zernov, A.N.Savin, Tur and Orlov), 6 student representatives (3 each from the 'majority' and 'minority' groups, including among the 'minority' representatives D.V.Kandelaki of the Shanyavsky People's University who later became People's Commissar of Education in Georgia) and 1 representative of the technical staff of the university.²

The commission reached agreement on some issues, notably the principle of university entrance without examination provided that the faculties retained the right to limit enrolment in special class and for laboratory work.³ But it failed to agree on an overall plan; and finally two separate projects were drafted by the Narkompros group and the

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1. Domov (Pokrovsky), 'Reform of the higher schools', Nar.pros. monthly, 1918 no.4-5, p.32.
 2. E.N.Gorodetsky, 'Soviet reform of the higher school of 1918 and Moscow University', Vestnik moskovskogo universiteta 1954 no.1, p.128; and Vyssshaya shkola, 1919 no.1, Jan., p.12.
 3. Gorodetsky, op.cit. pp.128-9.

professors. These projects were circulated to all Russian universities in preparation for a second Assembly on university reform to be held in Moscow in September.¹

K.A.Timiryazev, who was not present at the meeting in July, was one of the few professors who welcomed the Narkompros plan, including its most radical proposals for the three associations and the People's Soviet. In support of the idea of a People's Soviet he quoted the example of Switzerland, where representatives of the cantons had power of inspection and financial control over the universities. He anticipated that this idea would be bitterly attacked by the defenders of 'academic freedom' but, he wrote, he rarely used this term himself 'because experience has taught me how often in our universities it is translated into "self-administration", where either the whole body of the university or, worse, a distinct pre-arranged handful takes control'.²

Before the September Assembly met, Sovnarkom introduced the principle of university entrance without examination. The decree³ stated that the universities were opened to 'any person, regardless of citizenship or sex, attaining the age of 16'. University fees, entrance examinations and minimum educational requirements for university entrance were abolished.

Publication of the decree was followed by a dramatic increase in enrolments at Moscow University. Before the decree,

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1. Korolev, 'The great October Revolution and the higher school, 1917-1920', Sovetskaya pedagogika, 1957 no.11, p.82.
 2. K.A.Timiryazev, 'Democratic reform of the higher school' (1918), Nauka i demokratiya, Moscow 1963, p.420.
 3. 'On the rules of admittance to higher educational institutions', 2 Aug.1918. Text in 'Lenin documents on education', Sovetskaya pedagogika, 1966 no.4, p.129.

the university had received 2,632 applications for entry from graduates of secondary schools. After the decree it received 5,892 applications, mainly from persons without full secondary education.¹ But the majority of these new students were not proletarian. 'The proletarian masses did not come to us, it was the intelligentsia that came,' said Professor Reisner.² The typical new applicant seems to have been a junior employee in a Soviet government department. Most of the enrolments were in the medical and physical-mathematical faculties where, according to M.A.Menzbir, Rector of Moscow University in 1918, '9 times as many applications have been made to us as are permitted by the university constitution'.³

Professor A.A.Kizevetter suggested to the Moscow University Council that the September Assembly on university reform should be boycotted in protest against the August decree. But a majority of the Council voted against the proposal. Menzbir said that the August decree was acceptable to the university, on the condition established by the commission of the July Assembly: 'to admit everyone to lectures, but to admit to laboratory work only such students as have received adequate preparation'.⁴

The September Assembly turned out far more hostile to Narkompros than the July Assembly had been. 'The whole business had the character of sabotage,' Pokrovsky said.

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1. Gorodetsky, 'Soviet reform of the higher school of 1918 and Moscow University', Vestnik moskovskogo universiteta, 1954 no.1, p.131.
 2. meeting of State Education Commission, 21 Sept.1918, Nar.pros. monthly, 1919 no.6-7, p.142.
 3. Gorodetsky, op.cit. p.131.
 4. Gorodetsky, op.cit. p.133.

'Systematic opposition to government projects was shown, and there was a clear wish to bring about the failure of the projects and make their realization morally impossible.'¹ The more radical proposals, like the People's Soviet, were not even raised at the meeting 'because it was clear that nothing would come of it'.²

Pokrovsky thought that, in spite of the professors' hostility, the Narkompros reform plan could be implemented: 'We have heard the opinion of that Assembly and now, it seems to me, we can do what we like.'³ But it was generally admitted in the State Education Commission that Narkompros had suffered a defeat, implementation of the proposals as a whole had become 'morally impossible', as the professors had intended, and the plan to publish a general 'Statement on Russian universities' would have to be abandoned. The only course left open to Narkompros - other than a show of force against the universities, which Narkompros was not prepared to use - was 'to put through some of the basic and most important points in separate preliminary decrees'.⁴

According to this new strategy of piecemeal reform, two decrees were issued by Sovnarkom in October. The first declared all chairs occupied by professors for more than 10 years vacant, and to be filled by election in the faculty concerned. The second gave lecturers the status and title of professor. It was hoped in this way to exploit the ambitions of junior faculty members, but these hopes 'were

1. meeting of State Education Commission, 21 Sept.1918, Nar.pros. monthly, 1919 no.6-7, p.137.

2. ibid.(Pokrovsky), p.136.

3. ibid. p.136.

4. ibid. (M.A.Reisner), p.134.

realized in the minimum degree ... The scholar-adjutants did not decide to stand against their generals, and the "lords of the kafedra" almost all stayed in their places.'¹ Elections were held in Moscow and (perhaps) the provinces. The Petrograd professors 'found it necessary to badger a special exemption from the decree' from Lunacharsky.² Unhappily for Narkompros, in the re-election of 90 professors at Moscow University, one of the very few incumbents to be defeated was P.K.Shternberg, a member of the collegium of Narkompros. (He died at the front in 1920 without returning to the university.) K.A.Timiryazev was re-elected with 'a very insignificant majority'.³

The law faculty and the historical section of the historical-philological faculty of Moscow University were closed at the end of 1918. It had been decided to create a faculty of social sciences (FON) in their place. A pitched battle began between the Dean of the law faculty, S.N.Prokopovich, who insisted that all members of the law faculty be transferred to FON, and Narkompros, proposing its own candidates for the new faculty, including Bukharin, as an economist, and Yu.Steklov (editor of Izvestiya) as a historian. 'I know of no such economist,' Prokopovich announced of Bukharin. 'Please name his scholarly works.'⁴ The battle ended in a compromise: 'not all of the former members of the law faculty entered FON, and up to 50% of FON's members were

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1. 'Scientific report on the activity of the department of higher education for the past 2 years', Nar.pros. monthly, 1920 no.18-19-20, p.91.
 2. ibid. p.91.
 3. V.I.Bessonova, 'Moscow university in the first years of Soviet power', Voprosy istorii, 1955 no.5, p.57.
 4. M.M.Novikov, 'Moscow university in the first period of the Bolshevik regime', Moskovsky universitet 1755-1930, Paris 1930, p.173.

persons without qualifications, for whom only the revolution could open the way to a professional position.'¹ All the communists appointed to FON had other work and little time to devote to the university. The old professors and the students seem to have regarded FON without enthusiasm.

'In the days when Denikin was advancing on Moscow and Yudenich on Petrograd, the students were afraid of enrolling in the "seditious" faculty, and the professors were expecting Orders of the Red Banner for giving lectures in it ...'²

The decree of August 1918 had opened the universities to all applicants, but it had not removed the basic disadvantages of the newcomers: their lack of educational preparation, and their estrangement from the rest of the students. To solve these problems, the 'workers' faculty' (rabfak) was devised as a means of bringing worker-students up to the normal standard of university entrance.

The first of the rabfaks opened at the Zamoskvoretsky Commercial Institute on February 2, 1919.³ It originally offered courses including accounting, physics, economic geography and commercial law; but found that its students needed more basic training, and changed to teaching Russian language, arithmetic, nature study, geography of the USSR, elements of politics [politgramota], writing and drawing. Later, the normal entrance requirements to rabfaks came to be the ability to read and write fluently, knowledge of the 4 basic arithmetical processes, and an elementary knowledge

1. 'Scientific report ...', Nar.pros. monthly, 1920 no.18-19-20, p.92.

2. Nar.kom. po pros., 1917 - oktyabr - 1920 (kratky otchet), Moscow 1920, pp.62-3.

3. V.I.Bessonova, 'Creation and development of workers' faculties', Iz istorii velikoi oktyabrskoi sotsialisticheskoi revolyutsii, Moscow 1957, p.154.

of society and politics.¹ The student usually spent three to four years in the rabfak before entering the university or institute proper.

Moscow University opened a rabfak on October 8, 1919.² Its establishment, and particularly its physical presence in the university, was greatly resented by staff and students. A.Ya.Vyshinsky, a teacher at the rabfak, later recalled the humiliations of its early days:³

'How much condescension, contempt and mocking disregard the rabfaks met from some of the professors and the old student body! It was a time when there were many cases of "shortage" of lecture-rooms for the rabfak students, of tables, benches, electric light globes, chalk for the blackboard ...'

In reply to this treatment, the soviet of the Moscow University rabfak (of which Vyshinsky was a member) developed a theory of the rabfak as the basis of a future workers' university which would completely replace the old university. The soviet recommended that the process of replacement should begin from the 1920-21 academic year.⁴ There were also suggestions that bourgeois students should be completely excluded from the university by making rabfak graduation a condition of university entrance.⁵ The rabfak students 'regard the professors unfavourably and without the slightest

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1. V.I.Bessonova, 'Creation and development of workers' faculties', Iz istorii velikoi okt.sots.revol'yutsii, p.169.
 2. Istoriya moskovskogo universiteta, Moscow 1955, v.2, p.39.
 3. written 1929, quoted Bessonova, 'Creation and development of workers' faculties', loc.cit. p.163.
 4. Bessonova, 'Moscow university in the first years of Soviet power', Voprosy istorii, 1955 no.5, p.61.
 5. reported by Pokrovsky (who disagreed) in 'Tasks of the higher school at the present moment', Nar.pros. monthly, 1920 no.18-19-20, p.7.

confidence, as if to say: "Go on, lie. We know you - you are a bourgeois agent", 'Lunacharsky wrote.¹

Following the recommendations of Trotsky's labour conscription commission at the beginning of 1920, there were moves to increase the efficiency of higher technical institutions, which were transferred from the competence of Narkompros to that of Glavprofobr. (The universities remained for the duration of 1920 under the department of higher schools and State Academic Council² of Narkompros.)

On March 19, 1920, Glavprofobr established a commission for the reform of the higher technical school, headed by O.Yu.Schmidt, and including F.V.Lengnik of Glavprofobr and Professors A.D.Arkhangel'sky and Dima among its members.³ The reforms proposed by the commission were the elimination of 'general educational' subjects which Narkompros had introduced into the curriculum of the higher technical schools; drastic reduction of vacations ('We suggest that vacations for their own sake or because they are traditional cannot exist now; that it is necessary to establish the minimum of free time which is essential and recognize that as the maximum that can be given,' said Schmidt); the introduction of extensive periods of practical work for students in factories, both at labour and managerial level; and government financial maintenance of students, who were to be considered as in government employment and subject to penalties for absenteeism or unsatisfactory performance.⁴

1. 'Significance of the Soviet Party schools and their place in the system of education' (1923), Prosveshchenie i revolyutsiya, Moscow, 1926, p.78.

2. Gosudarstvenny Ucheny Sovet (GUS)

3. Korolev, 'The great October revolution and the higher school 1917-1920', Sovetskaya pedagogika, 1957 no.11, p.87.

4. ibid.

The proposals were approved by Glavprofobr and GUS, and by the first session of the Glavprofobr Council of professional-technical education in April 1920.¹ In June, Sovnarkom issued a decree on higher technical schools² based on the proposals accepted by Glavprofobr and its Council. The decree stated that 'all teaching in higher technical institutions must strictly correspond with the present needs of the RSFSR'; that instruction must be based on practical study of industrial processes and organization; that the course of instruction should be three years; that students of higher technical schools 'are counted as being in government service and under study conscription [uchebnaya povinnost]'; and that they are to receive the same rations as pupils of military schools and may be deprived of rations for absenteeism.

In August, the medical faculties of all universities were 'mobilized'.³ This meant that not only were students under study conscription, but that former students who had not completed their studies were ordered to return to the universities from all civil organizations and (with some exceptions) the Red Army. Medical students were not only to receive rations equal to those of military schools but were also to be issued with uniforms, shoes and linen from central supply.

The rabfaks were placed under study conscription in September.⁴ Student rations, although implied by the policy

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1. Korolev, 'The great October Revolution and the higher school, 1917-1920', Sovetskaya pedagogika, p.87.
 2. Decree of 4 June 1920, published Izvestiya VTSIK 1920, 9 June.
 3. Resolution of STO, published Izvestiya VTSIK 1920 no.186, 24 Aug.
 4. Sovnarkom decree of 17 Sept.1920. Text in 'Lenin documents on education', Sovetskaya pedagogika, 1966 no.6, pp.120-1.

of study conscription, were not guaranteed.¹ The decree almost excluded the possibility of free individual entrance to the rabfak - although the rabfaks had originally been established to secure the right of free, individual entrance to universities of all those who wished to enter but had not completed secondary education. In future, students were to be delegated to rabfaks by unions, factory committees, and local soviet and party organizations; and voluntary individual applicants were to be accepted only 'on condition that they are recommended by a central commissariat or local department of a commissariat or one of the organizations listed above'.

In the wake of study conscription, and as a consequence of the stricter discipline of students which it demanded, Narkompros in September 1920 announced a reorganization of university administration: it was the long-expected rape of university autonomy.

Up to this time, 'the principle of university autonomy in its very essence remained untouched' in the opinion of the Rector of Moscow University in 1920, M.M. Novikov.² 'And more than that,' Novikov wrote, 'the boundaries of independence on the university's side were widened, in the sense that neither elections, nor new professors, nor members of the [university] presidium were sent to the commissariat for confirmation.' Except perhaps for Pokrovsky, the leaders of Narkompros had been disinclined to force

1. see chapter 1, pp.33-4.

2. Ot Moskvy do Nyu-yorka, New York, 1952, p.120.

a confrontation with Moscow University or to impose Narkompros policy by administrative measures. This disinclination was still evident in Lunacharsky's comments to VTSIK in September 1920 on the impending university reorganization - even though the reorganization, like the dissolution of VUS eighteen months earlier, must have been welcomed by many members of VTSIK as long overdue. 'Indeed there was a time when we ourselves, being students, fought for the autonomy of the higher school,' Lunacharsky said.¹ 'It would have been hard to send a commissar to act just as Bogolepov and Magnitsky² used once to do ...'

Certainly Pokrovsky - the only member of the Narkompros collegium, since Shternberg's death, to have taught in a pre-revolutionary university, and the most belligerent towards the academic world - took a sterner attitude. He had anticipated administrative reorganization and even 'militarization' of the universities since the introduction of labour conscription at the beginning of 1920. He then wrote:³

'In the present circumstances a military type of control may be necessary - that is, the replacement of collegiate organs ... with one-man administration by a person temporarily entrusted with military powers: the political commissar of the given higher school. Of course this commissar put in charge of the higher school must not be a professor or a student. He will probably be one of the responsible Communist workers from the front.'

The reorganization of university administration at first applied only to Moscow, and was announced in a statement

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1. speech to VTSIK, 26 Sept. 1920, *O narodnom obrazovanii*, p. 133.
 2. N.P. Bogolepov (1846-1901) and M.L. Magnitsky (1778-1855) - both carried out repressive policies towards universities.
 3. 'Present tasks of the higher school', *Nar. pros.* monthly, 1920 no. 18-19-20, p. 7.

'On the temporary presidium of Moscow State University' signed by Pokrovsky (head of GUS) on September 29, 1920.¹ The temporary presidium, replacing the old university council, consisted of 3 representatives of university staff including 1 from the rabfak, 3 representatives of students including 1 from the rabfak, 1 representative of non-academic staff, the 'military commissar of the faculties'² and 3 representatives of Narkompros. The president of the presidium (Rector of the university) must be approved by Narkompros, and was given extensive powers. Decisions of all faculty boards, except for the 'militarization commission' of the medical faculty, had to be approved by the president of the presidium before being implemented, and the president was responsible to Narkompros for the proper conduct of the whole university.

Together with this statement, Narkompros issued a statement 'On scientific workers of the university'.³ Professors, previously elected by the faculties, were to be appointed by GUS. Other teaching staff were to be appointed by the temporary presidium.

M.M.Novikov, as incumbent Rector, led a deputation of protest to Narkompros.

'We were received by Lunacharsky in the presence of some members of Narkompros including the deputy commissar, M.N.Pokrovsky. I was asked to speak ... The character of my speech was quiet, objective and strictly business-like. But, remembering the insistence of my companions that I should abandon the mildness which was (so they said)

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1. Sobranie zakonov i rasporyazhenii rabocheho i krestyan-skogo pravitelstva, Moscow, 1920 no.82, art.395.
 2. evidently the military commissar of the medical faculty, appointed to implement the 'mobilization' of the faculty.
 3. S.U., 1920 no.82, art.396.

my innate quality and speak sharply and decidedly, I ended my speech with the following statement:

"If, in spite of our arguments, the new Statement is nevertheless put into effect, I fear that history will have to record that the destruction of the higher school which was not achieved by Pobedonostsev and Kasso¹ was achieved by Lunacharsky and Pokrovsky.

I had scarcely finished when Pokrovsky, as if losing all self-possession, jumped from his place and, without asking permission of Lunacharsky, who was in the chair, began to shout that he would not tolerate Cadet speeches² and that my reliance on the safety of the building of the commissariat might turn out to be mistaken ...

In his concluding remarks, Lunacharsky stated that the disagreements on principle existing between the commissariat and the Rector could not be reconciled by any compromise, and that the commissariat would continue to hold its point of view.'³

A new Rector was elected by the temporary presidium in November. By unfortunate coincidence he, like Nicholas II's Minister of Public Education assassinated in 1901, was a Bogolepov - Dmitri Petrovich Bogolepov, Party member since 1907 and lecturer in financial law at Moscow University. Like his namesake, he made himself extremely unpopular, but was removed from his position without bloodshed in May, 1921.⁴

Moscow University was outraged but not subdued by its

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1. K.P.Pobedonostsev (1827-1907), Chief Procurator of the Holy Synod under Alexander III and Nicholas II.
L.A.Kasso (1865-1914), Minister of Public Education 1910-14.
 2. Novikov had been an active Cadet, and although by his own account not politically active after the October revolution, he was arrested by the Cheka in the summer of 1920, and expelled from Russia in 1922.
 3. 'Moscow University in the first years of the Bolshevik regime', Moskovsky universitet 1755-1930, pp.190-1.
 4. N.L.Safryazan, 'From the history of Moscow University in the first years of the reconstruction period 1921-25', Iz istorii moskovskogo universiteta, Moscow 1955, pp.90-91.

reorganization which, as soon became clear, was not harsh enough to give Narkompros effective control. The temporary presidium of 11 members contained only 4 totally reliable votes for Narkompros (its 3 appointed members and the military commissar), although the 2 representatives of the rabfak were no doubt intended to make up a majority. In fact, 'as a result of the strong opposition of the representatives of the reactionary part of the student body and the professoriate, the Communists did not always manage to collect the necessary majority',¹ and Bogolepov was driven to the tactical mistake of creating a 'small presidium' of 3 persons to replace the presidium of 11. But this step caused such great resentment that it had to be abandoned. At the end of 1920, the membership of the presidium was increased to 12: 7, as before, elected by professors, students and non-academic staff of the university, and 5 appointed by the scientific sector of Narkompros.²

In defiance of the Narkompros statement 'on scientific workers of the university',

'the reactionary elite of the physical-mathematical, philological and in part the medical faculties continued to conduct elections for the posts of professors and teachers in faculty meetings, to award degrees, which had been abolished by Soviet power, and so on...' ³

Decisions of the presidium were ignored in the faculties and the deans' offices [dekanaty] of the university. The presidium

1. Safryazan, 'From the history of Moscow University in the first years of the reconstruction period 1921-25', Iz istorii moskovskogo universiteta, p.88.

2. Nar.kom.po pros., 1917 - oktyabr - 1920 (kratky otchet), p.66.

3. Safryazan, op.cit., p.87.

was not strong enough to protect its main ally, the rabfak, from reactionary reprisals: 'the presidium had continually to assert the right of the rabfak to use university lecture-halls, study-rooms and so on'.¹ The communist Olga Borisovna Lepeshinskaya² was appointed to the medical faculty by the presidium, but for many months was unable to take up the position because of the opposition of the faculty.³

A new concept of the university as primarily a professional training institution was gaining ground. Rabkrin⁴ conducted an investigation of the social science faculty of Moscow University, and recommended that new courses be introduced⁵

'establishing a much closer correspondence between the new study plans of the departments of the faculties and the functions of those commissariats for which they were providing specialists. For this purpose, the university had to circulate the new programmes to interested commissariats, who were obliged to give Narkompros their conclusions ...'

Lunacharsky had said in 1918:⁶

'The university, as it has been up to this time, does not exist as a learned institutions. It is a "diploma factory", necessary for the careers of the future chinovniki who are educated there ... The university must lose its professional significance ... The universities must have a purely scientific significance.'

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1. Safryazan, 'From the history of Moscow University in the first years of the reconstruction period 1921-25', Iz istorii moskovskogo universiteta, p.89.
 2. wife of Panteleimon Nikolaevich Lepeshinsky, former member of collegium of Narkompros; became, under Stalin, a great power in the scientific world. The medical faculty regarded her as unqualified. Safryazan (op.cit. p.89) says she worked for 2 years as assistent in the hystology kafedra at M.U. before the revolution, and in 1920 was member of the medical faculty of Tashkent University.
 3. Safryazan, op.cit. p.88.
 4. narodny komissariat raboche-krestyanskoi inspektsii
 5. quoted Istoriya moskovskogo universiteta v.2, p.59.
 6. Izvestiya VTSIK 1918 no.71, 11 April, p.4.

But in November 1920, he wrote of a three-tiered university incorporating the rabfak as the lowest level, 'a school preparing scholars and professors' as the highest level, and in between¹

'we want to build a higher school like a factory turning out socialists on the orders of separate government departments'.

This idea was developed in the Narkompros report at the end of 1920, in a statement on the projected future of the university:²

'The rabfaks are the foundation, giving a 2-year course of general education and the technical skills necessary for following courses in the higher school. The higher school itself is divided into two: a school for the preparation of mass specialists for Soviet construction, subdivided into departments or faculties corresponding to the divisions of the organs of Soviet construction (departments of applied economics, corresponding to Vesenkha and the commissariats of food and labour, statistics, external trade and diplomacy; an administrative department, training workers for the commissariat of internal affairs; an institute of modern European languages etc.) and a school for the preparation of highly-qualified specialists (teachers for higher schools, workers in scientific institutions etc.) divided into institutes according to scientific speciality (chemical, statistical, historical institutes, institute of Soviet law etc.) ...'

At the end of 1920, after some months of inconclusive struggle with Moscow University over its administrative reorganization, Narkompros was still uncertain whether the 'temporary presidium' was to become a permanent instrument

1. 'Revolutionary education', Izvestiya VTSIK, 1920 no.249, 6 Nov., p.2.

2. Nar.kom.po pros., 1917 - oktyabr - 1920 (kratky otchet), p.66.

of Soviet control over the university. Both alternatives - university autonomy and control by People's Soviet - were felt to have been discredited; the latter on the basis of experience in the provinces, where¹

'the local working masses revealed an enormous and touching naivete in the university question. Each big workers' centre wanted to have its own university, inviting indiscriminately professors of theological academies, secondary school teachers, local semi-Cadet journalists - in a word, all sorts of people, alike only in that none of them possessed genuine scientific or minimum political qualifications ...'²

The only question which remained, Narkompros thought, was³ 'whether it was necessary to proceed directly to a system of one-man administration through the appointment of deans and rectors, or whether, in the early period, it was possible to confine ourselves to introducing the more Soviet type of collegiate administration ...'

The appointment of the presidium of Moscow University was again described, as in the September statement, as a temporary measure. 'The future will show whether this system turns out to be a workable one.'⁴

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1. M.N.Pokrovsky, 'Present tasks of the higher school', Nar.pros. monthly, 1920 no.18-19-20, p.7.
 2. In Smolensk University, established in January 1919, among the first professors were 'a landlord of Smolensk guberniya, exiled by the Soviet government from his estate; a former chief of police under the Kerensky government; a kulak who has kept his household up to this time, has been sentenced several times for the exploitation of hired labourers of minor age, etc.' Report of Professor Roginsky, quoted Merle Fainsod, Smolensk under Soviet rule, London 1958, p.343.
 3. Nar.kom.po pros., 1917 - oktyabr - 1920 (kratky otchet), p.66.
 4. ibid.

Chapter 3 PROLETKULT

Lunacharsky's first declaration as commissar of education contained what was almost an abdication of the powers of Soviet government institutions in the direction of cultural affairs:¹

'The people themselves, consciously or unconsciously, must evolve their own culture ... The independent action of .. workers', soldiers' and peasants' cultural-educational organizations must achieve full autonomy, both in relation to the central government and to the municipal centres.'

This perhaps came oddly from the head of a Soviet commissariat, but on October 29 1917 Lunacharsky had been a Soviet commissar for 3 days and a participant of the proletarian culture movement for nearly a decade. He was expressing the premises, developed in a pre-revolutionary situation, of the organization later known as Proletkult which, in September 1917, he helped to found.

Enthusiasm for the development of proletarian culture was not uncommon in European social-democratic circles before 1917, but it was particularly prominent in the platform of the Russian social-democratic group Vpered,² founded by the former Bolsheviks A.A.Bogdanov and Lunacharsky in 1909. By 1915, when the Vpered group had lost whatever political coherence it had originally had, the journal Vpered

1. 'Address of the People's Commissar of Education', 29 Oct. 1917, Direktivy VKP(b) i postanovleniya sovetского pravitelstva o narodnom obrazovanii za 1917-1947 gg. p.11.

2. see statement on proletarian culture from Vpered platform, quoted N.Voitinsky, 'On the Vpered group (1909-1917)', Proletarskaya revolyutsiya, 1929 no.12, pp.77-8.

announced that 'the idea of proletarian culture has become the distinctive trait of vperedism'.¹

Bogdanov believed that the spheres of politics, economics and culture were autonomous, and that in each sphere the proletariat must struggle for its own identity and mastery. The importance of proletarian culture was as a force for the organization of proletarian consciousness and emotion.²

Lunacharsky was mainly concerned with the development of this theory in the sphere of proletarian culture. Proletarian culture, he wrote, contributed to the 'emotional self-definition [samoopredelenie]' of the proletariat as a class.³ It could be created not only by workers, but by intellectuals sympathetic to the proletarian struggle who succeeded in awakening the appropriate emotional response in the proletariat. It would be characterized by a militant romanticism, reflecting the economic and political struggle of the proletariat, and having some kinship with the romanticism of the bourgeoisie in the period of its struggle for political and economic supremacy.

The Vpered group, in association with Gorky, organized the first 'Party school' for workers on Capri in 1909.⁴

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1. Vpered(Geneva), 1915 no.1, quoted N.Voitinsky, 'On the Vpered group (1909-1917)', Proletarskaya revolyutsiya, 1929 no.12, p.78.
 2. Bogdanov's views on proletarian culture may be found in his articles in Obrazovanie (St.Petersburg, 1902-6) and in Proletarskaya kultura (Moscow, 1918-20).
 3. 'Letters on proletarian culture'(1914) in Lunacharsky, Sobranie sochinenii v vosmi tomakh, Moscow, 1963-7, v.7,p.169.
 4. see S.Lifshits, 'The Capri party school (1909)', Proletarskaya revolyutsiya, 1924 no.6.

The school offered lectures by Bogdanov, Lunacharsky, Gorky, V.A.Stroev-Desnitsky (an editor of Novaya zhizn in 1918), Pokrovsky and others on historical, political and cultural subjects. Lenin, who saw the school as a political threat, succeeded in alienating 5 of the 13 Russian worker-students (1 of the 5 was a police spy), and subsequently in separating Gorky from Bogdanov and Lunacharsky. Gorky did not participate in the second Party school, held at Bologna in 1910-11.¹ Lenin and Plekhanov were both invited to lecture, in an attempt to make the school 'inter-fractional', but refused.

After the collapse of the Party schools and the partial disintegration of Vpered as a group, Lunacharsky established a circle of proletarian culture in Paris, where he lived from 1911 to 1915. Its members included the proletarian writers Pavel Bessalko and Fedor Kalinin, the poet Gerasimov and the poet and theoretician of proletarian culture (later head of the Central Institute of Labour, TSIT, and at odds with Lunacharsky on the theory of proletarian culture) A.K.Gastev.²

This circle, reassembling in Petrograd in 1917, was one of the cells which united to form Petrograd Proletkult in September, when the first conference of proletarian cultural organizations was held. The organizers were Lunacharsky, Fedor Kalinin, Bessalko and the Geneva Vperedist Lebedev-Polyansky, together with the Bolshevik Platon Mikhailovich Kerzhentsev, the proletarian writers A.I.Mashirov-Samobytnik

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1. Bolshaya sovetskaya entsiklopediya (1st ed.), Moscow, v.6 (1927), 'Bologna Party school' by S.Lifshits.
 2. Lunacharsky, 'Recollections from the revolutionary past' (1925), Vosp.i vpech. p.49.

and I.I.Nikitin, and Vasily Ignatov, described by Lunacharsky as 'half-proletarian, half-actor'.¹ Gorky and Stroev-Desnitsky, who were in Petrograd, took no part. Bogdanov and Pokrovsky were in Moscow. More than a hundred people attended the conference. According to Lunacharsky, three-quarters of them were workers, either Bolsheviks or Bolshevik sympathizers, but there were some Mensheviks among the intellectuals.²

Since the intelligentsia boycotted the Bolsheviks after October, Petrograd Proletkult was the first and for some time the only cultural organization to ally itself with the new government. When the former officials were finally evicted from the Ministry of Public Education on Chernyshev bridge, the Bureau of the Central Committee of Petrograd Proletkult (secretary V.Ignatov) was established beside Narkompros in the building.³ But the Proletkultists were jealous of their autonomy, and although some argued that Proletkult should submit itself to Party directives, all were agreed on the necessity of independence from Soviet government institutions. There was no question of Proletkult itself becoming a department of Narkompros, and indeed it would have gained nothing by doing so, since Narkompros was anxious to subsidize it in any case.

In November 1917, the State Education Commission was established, with subordinate departments including a 'department of aid to independent class enlightenment

1. Lunacharsky, 'Ideology on the eve of October' (1922), Vosp. i vpech. p.166.

2. ibid. p.167.

3. Izvestiya TSIK (Petrograd), 1917 no.237, 27 November, p.12.

organizations'.¹ This was in fact formed at the beginning of 1918 under the name of 'department of aid to independent proletarian cultural-educational organizations', headed by F.I.Kalinin. It was announced that the department would work 'in full contact with the Central Committee of Proletkult'.² In March the department moved with Narkompros, but without Lunacharsky, to Moscow.³

By this time Moscow also had its Proletkult, whose central figure was Bogdanov. Bogdanov, unlike Lunacharsky, Pokrovsky and Lebedev-Polyansky, had not rejoined the Bolshevik Party. But there seems no evidence to suggest that the Moscow Proletkult had a smaller proportion of Bolshevik members than the Petrograd one. The first Moscow conference was held in February 1918, and mustered 288 delegates, the largest groups coming from factory committees and trade unions. The conference, like the Petrograd one, declared itself to be an independent mass class organization with full autonomy (citing Lunacharsky's declaration of October 29 1917 and the Sovnarkom decree of November 9 1917), 'on an equal footing with other forms of the workers' movement - the political and economic'. Separation from Soviet cultural-educational organizations was justified by the claim that they 'do not completely reflect the class point of view of the proletariat'.⁴

1. Direktivy VKP(b)... p.15.

2. Nar,pros. fortnightly, Petrograd, 1918 no.1-2, p.22.

3. Izvestiya VTSIK, 1918 no.57, 26 March, p.4.

4. Moskovsky Proletkult, Pervaya moskovskaya obshchegorodskaya konferentsiya proletarskikh kulturno-prosvetitelnykh organizatsii, Moscow, 1918.

In Petrograd, the germ of future disagreement had been evident even at the first conference, when it was argued by some¹

'that all culture of the past might be called bourgeois, that within it - except for natural science and technical skills (and even there with qualifications) there was nothing worthy of life, and that the proletariat would begin the work of destroying the old culture and creating the new immediately after the revolution.'

The adherents of this point of view were opposed to all cooperation with 'bourgeois specialists' in the cultural field.

Early in 1918, members of Petrograd Proletkult refused to participate in a 'theatrical soviet' including bourgeois specialists organized by Lunacharsky. At a meeting held to discuss the issue, the head of Petrograd Proletkult, Lebedev-Polyansky, claimed that since the State Education Commission invited invited the participation of bourgeois specialists and was therefore not representative of proletarian interests, 'full power in cultural questions' should be transferred to Proletkult. It was decided to ask Lunacharsky to prepare a paper on his views on proletarian cultural organization and, if they were found not to correspond with the aims of the Petrograd proletariat, 'the Central Committee of Proletkult would raise the question of a break with Lunacharsky'. Lunacharsky left the meeting abruptly without waiting for the end.²

1. Lunacharsky, 'Ideology on the eve of October', Vosp.i vpech. p.167.

2. Novaya zhizn, 1918 no.74, 23 April, p.3.

Petrograd Proletkult also refused to take part in a conference proposed by the Narkompros department of extramural education in Petrograd. Reporting this to the State Education Commission in Moscow, Krupskaya said: 'in regard to Proletkult, there has been a definite decision in Petrograd: it must not exist as an autonomous organization'.¹ The decision must have been Lunacharsky's. He was on principle a supporter of Proletkult autonomy, but Petrograd Proletkult had done more than claim autonomy: it had claimed 'full power' for itself in the cultural field, which amounted to a bid for organizational monopoly at the expense of Narkompros. At the same time it had tried to sabotage the weak and newly-established departments of Narkompros in Petrograd. 'Because of Proletkult's opposition,' Lunacharsky explained to the State Education Commission, 'the attempt [by the Petrograd extramural department] to find grassroots support did not succeed. Proletkult thought there was an intention to disband it. In fact there was an attempt to unite its work with the work of the extramural department.'²

In April, still resentful of Petrograd Proletkult's attitude to Narkompros, Lunacharsky expressed 'a doubt that Proletkult is a real manifestation of spontaneous proletarian activity', since 'the enrolment of intellectuals deprives [the Proletkults] of a purely class character'. The work of Narkompros departments and Proletkult was parallel, and he 'found it inappropriate that two competing organizations should exist'. He suggested that Proletkult should be

1. TSGAOR 2306/1/36, 31 March, 1918.

2. TSGAOR 2306/1/36, 22 May, 1918.

subordinated both to Narkompros, the organ of the Soviet government, and to the Communist Party: 'Proletkults, as organs for the elaboration of a strictly class ideology and purely proletarian culture, must be accountable to the Central Committee of the Communist Party ... The sole bearer of proletarian culture can be the Communist Party, which stands on the position of class-war.'¹

Lebedev-Polyansky accepted the idea of Proletkult's accountability to the Communist Party, but not to Narkompros, whose proper relation to Proletkult he compared with the relation of the commissariat of labour to the trade unions. Fedor Kalinin said that although the Soviet government 'is no less democratic than Proletkult ... it is not in a position to work out the problems of proletarian ideology, since it cannot refuse to educate the bourgeoisie.'²

Krupskaya was firmly on the side of subordination of Proletkult to Narkompros. She thought that Proletkult had set itself up as an opposition centre to Soviet power for Soviet intellectuals - 'if you don't work with the Soviets, you go and work for Proletkult'.³ Lunacharsky added that to admit any special claims of Proletkult to speak for the proletariat 'means to lose faith in Soviet power and recognize its bureaucratic character'.⁴

1. TSGAOR 2306/1/36, 8 April 1918. Minutes of the meeting have been published by I. Smirnov, 'Towards the history of Proletkult', Voprosy literatury, 1968 no.1, pp.119-122; and by A. Ermakov, 'Lunacharsky and Proletkult', Druzhba narodov, 1968 no.1, pp.243-4.

2. ibid.

3. TSGAOR 2306/1/36, 13 April 1918. Minutes pub. I. Smirnov, op. cit. pp.122-4, and by A. Ermakov, op. cit. pp.245-6.

4. ibid.

But in spite of the arguments of Krupskaya and Lunacharsky, the State Commission did not decide to subordinate Proletkult either to Narkompros or to the Party. Instead, it tried to separate the spheres of activity of Narkompros and Proletkult, giving Narkompros the educative and Proletkult the creative function.¹ There was no mention of subordination to the Party in the resolution, probably because of the objections of the left SRs, expressed by Dora Elkina at the meeting of April 8.²

The view that Proletkult should be subordinated to Narkompros and its local organs was held by the Moscow education department (MONO) and by Izvestiya VTSIK.³ MONO was probably the more resentful of Moscow Proletkult because, unlike other local Proletkult organizations, it was not financed through the local education department but directly by Narkompros.⁴

Pravda, on the other hand, was sympathetic to Proletkult and Proletkult autonomy. Bukharin, reviewing the first number of the journal Proletarskaya kultura,⁵ wrote that the journal 'makes an extraordinarily favourable impression', praising articles by Bogdanov (although commenting on 'exaggerations

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1. 'The State Commission, considering the question of the Proletkults, states its opinion that these organizations must exist in the future as strictly class organizations, giving all their strength exclusively to the business of developing purely proletarian, socialist culture on completely autonomous bases. Soviet power takes on itself the business of broadly acquainting the proletariat, together with the whole working population, with the conquests of culture, giving itself the task of further developing them in a socialist spirit.' Proletarskaya kultura, 1919 no.9-10, p.63.
 2. TSGAOR 2306/1/36, 8 April 1918, and in Smirnov, op.cit. pp.121-2, and Ermakov, op.cit. pp.244-5.
 3. Izvestiya VTSIK, 1918 no.172, 13 August, p.8-'Proletarian culture (conversation with comrade Piskunov)', and ed.note.
 4. TSGAOR 2306/17/8 n.d.[1918] - budget of Moscow Proletkult.
 5. Pravda, 1918 no.152, 23 July, p.4.

and deviations characteristic of A.Bogdanov' noticeable elsewhere in the journal), Kerzhentsev and I.I.Nikitin. Bukharin welcomed the idea of Proletkult as 'a laboratory of pure proletarian ideology', and thought that its independence of Soviet government organs was on principle permissible, although the case for autonomy was too strongly put by Lebedev-Polyansky.

The first All-russian conference of proletarian cultural-educational organizations met in Moscow on September 15, 1918.¹ In the realm of ideas, the conference was eclectic. Many of the delegates showed impatience with claims that the proletariat needed to master the heritage of bourgeois science and culture in order to create its own. 'We are entering the new life with a load of proletarian consciousness,' cried one speaker from the floor. 'They want to load us with another excessive burden - the achievements of bourgeois culture. In that case we will be like an overloaded camel, unable to go any further. Let us throw away bourgeois culture entirely as old rubbish.' (Kalinin immediately rebuked the speaker for expressing 'anarcho-individualist' concepts.)²

Suspicion of Narkompros was frequently expressed by delegates, especially on the point of its class allegiance. Some, like K.A.Ozol, of Petrograd Proletkult, were anxious to sever connections with Narkompros and government organs, while at the same time strengthening relations with the Communist Party - Ozol in fact called for an exclusively

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1. Protokoly pervoi vserossiiskoi konferentsii proletarskikh kulturno-prosvetitelnykh organizatsii 15-20 sentyabrya 1918 g. Moscow, 1918.
 2. ibid. p.30.

communist membership of Proletkult.¹ The concepts of Proletkult as a 'laboratory of proletarian ideology', and Proletkult as a mass educational organization were freely used without regard to their seeming incompatibility. Thus Lebedev-Polyansky described Proletkult as 'a laboratory in a well-equipped factory [Narkompros], conducting energetic, intensive, creative work to improve the organization of production', but added that 'proletarian culture must be worked out in the process of independent activity at the grassroots, among the working masses'.²

Bogdanov spoke on the 'Workers' University', with reference to the experience of the Capri and Bologna Party schools, and the 'Workers' Encyclopedia'. It was no use, he said, simply sending proletarian students to bourgeois universities, as Pokrovsky intended to do, since they would succumb to the bourgeois ideology of the university. The proletarian university must be an institution sui generis, instilling proletarian consciousness into the worker-student, enabling him to acquire the methods of scientific research, and offering 'comradeship, cooperation, vital collective work illumined by the spirit of free critical thought'. The body of knowledge accumulated by the bourgeoisie was useful to the proletariat only when reformulated in proletarian terms as the basis of a monistic, all-embracing 'organizational science'. 'History shows that each great class created its encyclopedia' - that is, reinterpreted knowledge in the light

1. Protokoly pervoi vserossiiskoi konferentsii ... , pp.24-5.

2. ibid., pp.20-21.

of its own class consciousness. The Workers' University must do for the proletariat what Diderot and the encyclopedistes had done for the French bourgeoisie in the eighteenth century. 'Our general slogan in the philosophical field,' Bogdanov concluded, 'is the socialization of science. Our scientific-organizational slogans: a Workers' University, a Workers' Encyclopedia.'¹

Kerzhentsev spoke on proletarian theatre which, he said, demanded a new repertoire and new companies of non-professional proletarian actors. Existing theatres must be nationalized and handed over to proletarian companies. Bourgeois theatre companies must be broken up and their members redistributed to serve the needs of the whole population, especially the provinces.²

Although Pokrovsky and Krupskaya spoke at the conference, and Lenin sent a greeting on being elected honorary president, their opinions on the cultural and educational tasks of Proletkult clearly had less support among Proletkultists than those of Bogdanov, Lebedev-Polyansky and Kerzhentsev. Lenin thought the most useful work Proletkult could do was to help bring the proletariat into participation in government;³ but although the conference was delighted to receive his greeting, its substance was completely ignored in the debates. Participant political democracy was not a matter of great interest to Proletkultists, who had their own cultural revolution to achieve.

1. Protokoly pervoi vserossiiskoi konferentsii ..., pp.31-36.

2. ibid., pp.121-3.

3. ibid., p.3.

Pokrovsky made what seemed, as he said himself, an old-fashioned suggestion 'that the first step in the creation of proletarian culture is the complete conquest of that culture which has already been created, at least in its technical aspect'.¹ But this would have come as no surprise to Proletkult, which did not regard him as one of its supporters:²

'As is well known, there are two different views on proletarian culture among our educational leaders. Some, including the People's Commissar of Education, A.V.Lunacharsky, think with us that the proletariat must create its own culture, qualitatively different from the former bourgeois culture, in the fields of science, art and environment [byt]. Others, like M.N.Pokrovsky, deny this; allowing, for example, a special proletarian view in science only in the field of the social sciences (and there only in part, with the exclusion of all the formal side) and for the rest recognize only culture and science outside class ...'

Lunacharsky was to have attended the conference and spoken on 'The proletariat and art', but at the last minute was called to Petrograd.³ Although he did believe that the proletariat would create its own₄ culture, especially in the arts, the theses he had prepared were directed primarily against proletarian iconoclasm. The best art of all classes and periods, Lunacharsky argued in the theses, is part of the 'human treasury' of art; art is moulded by its class origin, but a single class may produce different types of art mirroring its rise and fall in artistic terms; the

1. Protokoly pervoi vserossiiskoi konferentsii ..., p.11.

2. Proletarskaya kultura, 1918 no.3, August, pp.35-6.

3. Protokoly pervoi vserossiiskoi konferentsii ..., statement of Pokrovsky, p.9.

4. Published Proletarskaya kultura, 1918 no.2, July, p.23.

intelligentsia may play a part in the development of proletarian culture; and the proletariat must draw on the art of the past.

Lunacharsky's theses were not discussed at the conference. Kerzhentsev's paper on proletarian theatre was in the spirit of proletarian iconoclasm which Lunacharsky strove to combat. Lebedev-Polyansky implicitly denied Lunacharsky's theses on the intelligentsia when he said that only the proletariat could participate in the creation of proletarian culture.¹ In Lunacharsky's absence, Bogdanov presented his own theses on proletarian art, which were accepted by the conference:²

'The treasury of old art must not be taken passively ... The proletariat must take the treasury of old art in the light of its own critical analysis, in its own new interpretation, uncovering their [sic] hidden collectivist bases and organizational sense. Then they will be a valuable heritage for the proletariat, a weapon in its battle against the same old world which created [these works of art]...'

The conference elected Lebedev-Polyansky president of the Central Committee of the Council of Proletkults, with F.I. Kalinin and Mashirov-Samobytnik as deputy presidents and V. Ignatov secretary. It also took the unusual step of electing the members of Narkompros' department of aid to proletarian cultural organizations (confirming Kalinin as its head). Bogdanov was elected a member of the Central Committee and of the editorial board of the journal Proletarskaya kultura (with Kerzhentsev, Kalinin, Lebedev-Polyansky and Mashirov-Samobytnik).³

1. Protokoly pervoi vserossiiskoi konferentsii ..., p.20.

2. ibid., pp.79-80.

3. ibid., p.55.

The activities and organizational forms of the Proletkults over the next two years were very varied. The city Proletkults organized clubs in the raions and in factories - 'Proletkult has its cells in every factory,' wrote a correspondent from Ivanovo-Vosnesensk.¹ The Moscow Proletkult was divided into departments for administrative purposes - literary-publishing, theatrical, musical, fine arts, clubs and economic.²

The basic unit of Proletkult work was the studio, where workers learnt and practised the arts. Lunacharsky urged that Proletkult³

'should concentrate all its attention on studio work, on the discovery and encouragement of original talent among the workers, on the creation of circles of writers, artists and all kinds of young scholars from the working class, on the creation of various kinds of studios and vital organizations in all fields of physical and spiritual culture.'

The studios of necessity employed 'bourgeois specialists' as instructors. In Petrograd, Gorky was one of the lecturers of the literary studio;⁴ in Moscow - Vladislav Khodasevich and Andrei Bely.⁵

The Proletkults sponsored amateur theatrical and musical activities of all kinds. Applications for the

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1. TSGAOR 2306/17/8, department of aid to independent proletarian cultural organizations [1919].
 2. Gorn (organ of Moscow Proletkult), 1920 no.5, p.85.
 3. 'Once again on Proletkult and Soviet cultural organizations', Izvestiya VTSIK, 1919 no.80, 13 April, p.2.
 4. Proletarskaya kultura, 1920 no.13-14, p.87.
 5. V.Khodasevich, Literaturnye statyi i vospominaniya, New York, 1954, pp.325-6. Gorn published articles by Bely ('On artistic prose', 1919 no.2-3, 'On rhythm', 1920 no.5) and Khodasevich ('Verse technique of M.Gerasimov', 1920 no.5).

Proletkult choir in Petrograd were invited from persons 'with Party recommendations'.¹ The Tula guberniya Proletkult commissioned the composition of proletarian marches, and ran a symphony orchestra, a brass band, an 'orchestra of chromatic harmonies' and an orchestra of folk instruments.²

In 1918, Lenin attended a concert organized by Moscow Proletkult for the first anniversary of the revolution. The choir sang the Internationale, there were performances of two scenes adapted from Verhaeren ('Rebellion' and 'Uprising'), recitation of verse by Demyan Bedny and Brutus' speech from Julius Caesar, and workers 'from the factory bench' gave choreographic representations of 'Darkness', 'Outburst' and 'Marseillaise'.³

The artistic influences on Proletkult were as varied as its activities. In literature, Bogdanov recommended that models be sought not in 'the reklamist Mayakovsky' nor in the decadents Severyanin, Andreev, Balmont and Blok, but in the 'simplicity, clarity and purity of forms' of the Russian classics - Pushkin, Lermontov, Gogol, Nekrasov and Tolstoy.⁴ But Lebedev-Polyansky noted the attraction of the Poets' Cafe - frequented by Shershenévich, Balmont and Mayakovsky - for proletarian poets;⁵ and according to Khodasevich, Andrei Bely's lectures were especially popular with the proletarian writers

1. Severnaya kommuna, 1919 no.32, 11 Feb., p.4.

2. Proletarskaya kultura, 1919 no.9-10, pp.61-62.

3. Izvestiya VTSIK, 1918 no.244, 9 Nov., p.5; and Gorn, 1919 no.2-3, p.125.

4. 'Our criticism. Criticism of proletarian art', Proletarskaya kultura, 1918 no.3, p.19.

5. 'Independence or in the paths of bourgeois culture', Proletarskaya kultura, 1920 no.15-16, p.48.

of Moscow Proletkult.¹

'We were never disciples of the block of leftists,' Bessalko wrote in an article on 'Futurism and proletarian culture',² 'still less advocates of union with those who, in our opinion, are to the left of common sense.' Yet there was a great deal in futurism and constructivism to attract the Proletkultists - iconoclasm, revolutionary fervour, enthusiasm for technology and the images (or myths) of the mechanized collective life of the contemporary city. A.K.Gastev, arguing against Bogdanov's recommendation of the classical artistic model, wrote: 'We do not wish to be prophets, but in any case we must bind the stunning revolution of artistic methods with proletarian art.'³ And even Bogdanov seemed to give some encouragement to proletarian admirers of Rodchenko or Tatlin when he advocated the use of new techniques in proletarian art - 'photography, stereography, cinematography, spectral colours, recording etc.'⁴

The futurist influence, according to Lunacharsky, was increasingly felt in Proletkult, especially in the visual arts and the theatre. He explained this by 'the great readiness of the futurists to work hand in hand with the workers, the absence of a like readiness on the part of the "realists", and the influence of a few more or less outstanding Proletkult workers: Mgebrov, Smyshlyaev⁵ and others.'⁶

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1. Literaturnye statyi i vospominaniya, p.326.
 2. Gryadushchee no.10, quoted O.M.Brik, 'Attack on futurism', Iskusstvo kommuny, 1919 no.10, 9 Feb., p.3.
 3. 'On the tendencies of proletarian culture', Proletarskaya kultura, 1919 no.9-10, p.45.
 4. 'Paths of proletarian creativity (These\$)', Proletarskaya kultura, 1920 no.15-16, p.50.
 5. A.A.Mgebrov and V.S.Smyshlyaev - leading directors of Proletkult theatre in Petrograd and Moscow respectively.
 6. 'Ideology on the eve of October', Vosp.i vpech., p.63.

In Petrograd, the influence of the futurists on Proletkult appears to have attracted the critical attention of Zinoviev himself, who wrote in greeting to a conference of proletarian writers meeting in Petrograd in the autumn of 1919:¹

'At one time we allowed the most nonsensical futurism to get a reputation almost as the official school of communist art. We let doubtful elements attach themselves to our Proletkults. It is time to put an end to this. We must give the promising worker-writer the chance to study in earnest. Dear comrades, my wishes to you are that we should bring more proletarian simplicity into our art.'

According to the State Education Commission's resolution of April 13, 1918, Proletkult's sphere was that of proletarian creativity, while education belonged to Narkompros. This demarcation of spheres was confirmed in a resolution of the conference of Moscow Proletkults in March 1919, but with the qualification that 'Proletkult tries to exert its ideological influence also on [educational] work'.²

In 1919, seemingly in contradiction to these resolutions, a Proletarian University was established in Moscow on the initiative of Proletkult.³ The ceremonial opening of the Proletarian University - 'the new temple of proletarian science',

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1. quoted from the SR paper Volya, which was in turn quoting Krasnaya gazeta, in N.Chuzhak, K dialektike iskusstva, Chita, 1921, p.77. Chuzhak, a Proletkult futurist, was shocked by Zinoviev's philistinism.
2. Pravda, 1919 no.62, 22 March, p.4.
3. An earlier Proletarian University was founded by the Moscow Commissariat of Education under Paushkin in 1918. It collapsed after a triangular battle for control between the Moscow Commissariat, the extramural dept. of Moscow Soviet, and the Narkompros Proletkult dept. TSGAOR 2306/17/1, Narkompros Proletkult dept., 13 June and 27 July meetings, 1918.

as Izvestiya called it - took place in March 1919. Lebedev-Polyansky presided, Pokrovsky represented Narkompros, and Bukharin the Eighth Party Congress which was then in session.¹

Bogdanov, reporting on the Proletarian University to the Congress on extramural education in May 1919, said:²

'The Proletarian University dedicates itself completely to the working out and development of proletarian science, and its work has partly the character of laboratory experiment.

All work is conducted on a basis of practical work, seminars and excursions. Lectures serve as an introduction to practical work.

There are 450 delegates [students] at the university, mainly from Soviet institutions, and primarily coming from the working class and the peasantry, with an insignificant number from the working intelligentsia.'

The president of the Proletarian University, N.V. Rogozinsky,³ seemed less optimistic of the university's prospects than Bogdanov. 'It is in embryo the form of a genuine proletarian university,' he said,⁴ 'but because of its short courses, its well-known emphasis on practice [praktitsizm] and its one-sided approach, the basic idea of the proletarian university does not find its necessary development.' He praised, apparently in contrast, the proletarian essence of the Central School of Soviet and Party work.⁵

1. Izvestiya VTSIK, 1919 no.64, 25 March, p.3.

2. Izvestiya VTSIK, 1919 no.105, 17 May, p.3.

3. Rogozinsky was head of the subdepartment of schools for adults and adolescents under the extramural department of Narkompros (Nar.pros. weekly, 1918 no.22, 7 Dec.)

4. Izvestiya VTSIK, 1919 no.105, 17 May, p.3.

5. The Central School of Soviet and Party work, also known as 'Courses for agitators under VTSIK', was established on Sverdlov's initiative in 1918.

In fact plans were already under consideration for the reorganization of the Central School of Soviet and Party work and its merging with the Proletarian University. In March 1919 the Presidium of VTSIK had recommended the building of a 'Palace of the October Revolution and Sverdlov Proletarian University' to Narkompros.¹ In the summer of 1919 Rogozinsky - without, it was claimed, consulting staff or students of the Proletarian University - submitted a plan for the merging of the Central School of Soviet and Party work with the Proletarian University to the Central Committee of the Party.² According to his plan, the new institution was to be known as the Sverdlov Communist University, and to be under the administrative control of Narkompros and the political control of the Party.

When this reorganization became known to the Proletarian University, it of course protested, and made a strong appeal for a 'general-scientific' faculty to be added to the faculties of Soviet and Party work incorporated in Rogozinsky's plan. Here Proletkult's academic and philosophical bias was at odds with the Party's more practical and utilitarian intentions; and furthermore, the Bogdanovist nature of its philosophical bias was unacceptable to the Party Central Committee. The Central Committee wanted to train agitators, propagandists and local organizers. Proletkult wanted to use the Proletarian University for 'laboratory' research and the compilation of the Workers' Encyclopedia.

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1. TSGAOR 2306/1/180, 4 April, 1919 (extract from protocols of Presidium of VTSIK, read at meeting of the collegium).
 2. 'On the closing of the Proletarian University' (unsigned), Proletarskaya kultura, 1919 no.9-10, pp.56-9.

The request for a 'general-scientific' faculty was refused. On July 17, Izvestiya published an article contrasting the principles of a 'proletarian' and 'communist' university.¹ The proletarian university could only teach a 'marxist-revolutionary outlook', whereas the communist university taught its students to be marxist revolutionaries in practice. A professor of the Proletarian University sent a reply,² which Izvestiya did not publish, pointing out that the proletariat needed not only local organizers [vozhaki] but real leaders [vozhdi] with a thorough grasp of marxist revolutionary ideology. It is perhaps not surprising, if this was the Proletarian University's view of its function, that the vozhdi of the Communist Party regarded it with suspicion.

The question of the merger was raised again in the Central Committee on July 3, and the previous resolution confirmed.³ Bukharin, who was both a Professor of the Proletarian University and a member of the Central Committee, claimed that the decision did not involve a rejection of the principle of the proletarian university, but was motivated only by the urgent immediate demand for trained party and soviet workers.⁴ But his was not an impartial judgment.

The collegium of Narkompros seems to have been sympathetic to the Proletarian University. In February, it had decided to convert the Ekaterinsky Institute for the use of the university.⁵

1. article by S. Novikov, quoted in 'On the closing of the Proletarian University', Proletarskaya kultura, 1919 no. 9-10, p. 58.

2. article by M. N. Smit, quoted in ibid., p. 59.

3. ibid., p. 59.

4. quoted ibid., p. 59.

5. TSGAOR 2306/1/180, 19 Feb., 1919. (motion of M. N. Pokrovsky)

At the beginning of September, the collegium noted the decision of the Central Committee (dated as August 5) that the Proletarian University be closed 'from the present moment', but made no resolution to act on it.¹ The speakers were Z.P.Krzhizhanovskaya of the extramural department, and M.N.Smit, of the Proletarian University. At the beginning of October, Smit again addressed the collegium on the Proletarian University, and it was decided that, pending 'a final clarification of the question of principle' of the existence of the Proletarian University, it should be transferred to the control of Proletkult.² However, the Proletarian University was not saved, although its life may have been slightly prolonged by Narkompros' disinclination to close it. The Sverdlov Communist University seems to have come into operation early in 1920.

Moscow Proletkult continued under attack from MONO. S.I.Mitskevich, for MONO, suggested that Moscow Proletkult should be merged with the extramural department of MONO at the March (1919) conference of Moscow Proletkults. He won the support of some raion delegates, but not of the conference as a whole.³ 'All [Proletkult's] work is parallel with the work of the education departments,' Mitskevich wrote in Izvestiya.⁴ 'It disperses our forces, which are small enough anyway, and spends public money received from the same source - that is, from Narkompros - and for the same purposes as

1. TSGAOR 2306/1/182, 4 Sept.1919.

2. TSGAOR 2306/1/182, 2 Oct.1919.

3. Izvestiya VTSIK, 1919 no.63, 23 March, p.5.

4. 'On the question of Proletkult', Izvestiya VTSIK, 1919 no.62, 22 March, p.1.

the education departments.' MONO had the support of Moscow Soviet, but this was cancelled out by the successful appeal of Moscow Proletkult to the Moscow Committee of the Communist Party, which decided that 'at the present moment it is inappropriate to merge Proletkult with the extramural department of MONO'.¹

As usual Pravda, under Bukharin's editorship, was sympathetic to Proletkult. In April, it published a defence of Proletkult as an independent laboratory of proletarian culture.² But not all Proletkultists were prepared to accept this defence: Kerzhentsev, for example, doubted the 'laboratory' justification of Proletkult, and suggested that it should rather extend the scope of its work among the masses.³ Lunacharsky, who deplored the attempt to 'destroy' Moscow Proletkult, nevertheless urged Proletkult 'to concentrate all its attention on studio work';⁴ and Izvestiya, a declared partisan of MONO and the Moscow Soviet on this question, conceded that if Proletkult 'would limit its activities to the "studio" boundaries which comrade Lunacharsky suggests, and not try to change and impede the work of Soviet organs, which it has neither strength nor wit to do,' its independence might be tolerated.⁵

Krupskaya, like Mitskevich, saw Proletkult as a mass organization in direct competition with the extramural depart-

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1. quoted Proletarskaya kultura, 1919 no.7-8, April-May, p.72.
 2. N.Antonov, 'Attack on Proletkult', Pravda, 1919 no.81, 15 April, p.2.
 3. 'Proletkult's methods of work', Proletarskaya kultura, 1919 no.6, February, pp.18-22.
 4. 'Once again on Proletkult and Soviet cultural organizations', Izvestiya VTSIK, 1919 no.80, 13 April, p.2.
 5. ibid. (editor's note)

ment of Narkompros:¹

'In so far as Proletkult could not isolate itself from the surrounding environment, it could not sustain its laboratory character ... But, turning into an organization working among the masses, Proletkult was not in a position to protect itself from the wave of intellectual and petty-bourgeois elements, calling themselves bearers of proletarian culture.

And Proletkult turned into the most ordinary educational [prosvetitel'naya] organization, little differing either in method of work or class composition from the organizations of Narkompros ... The laboratory turned into a factory competing with the factory of Narkompros ... - everyone knows from experience that nine-tenths of Proletkult institutions do not have a laboratory character.'

This was also the conclusion of a rank-and-file member of Proletkult who supported its subordination to Narkompros:²

'Not only are the aims and tasks of the extramural department and Proletkult the same, but they operate with the same forces in practice. That is known to anyone who has worked in these organizations ... [Proletkult] played its role, and in a certain sense quite successfully, only it was not as a laboratory, but as a fighting force thrown up by the time. Its direct aim at the beginning was political struggle and not laboratory work.'

The status of Proletkult was argued at length at the First All-Russian Congress on extramural education, opening on May 6, 1919. On the evidence of a questionnaire circulated among delegates at the beginning of the congress, there were 576 voting delegates, of whom 156 were Communists, 70 Communist

1. 'A few words about Proletkult' (1920), Ped.soch. v.7, p.60.

2. TSGAOR 2306/17/8. 'Information relating to the activities of Proletkult and associated organizations for the second half of May [1919]'.

sympathizers, 200 non-party and the rest (150!) 'anarchists, SRs, Bundists, Independents, left SRs, Maximalists etc.'¹ This estimate was later amended to give 229 Communists and 189 Communist sympathizers.² 'The representation should have been bigger, but the mobilization of Communists did not give the chance to realize it fully,' Krupskaya wrote later.³ Even on the revised estimate, the percentage of Communists at this Congress compared poorly with the March conference of Moscow Proletkults, where 55% of delegates were Communists and 30% Communist sympathizers.⁴

After the opening speech by the president of the Congress, Lunacharsky,⁵ Lenin made a short speech. His main themes were the inadequacies of library work and the campaign against illiteracy, but he made a passing thrust at 'the abundance of escapees from the bourgeois intelligentsia, who often looked on the newly-created workers' and peasants' educational institutions as the most convenient field for their own personal fantasies in the sphere of philosophy or culture,... and smuggled in something supernatural and foolish under the guise of purely proletarian art and proletarian culture'.⁶

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1. Izvestiya VTSIK, 1919 no.97, 8 May, p.2.
 2. Izvestiya VTSIK, 1919 no.101, 13 May, p.4. The most likely basis of the revision is a transfer of the 70 Communist sympathizers of the first estimate into the 'Communist' category, and a corresponding widening of the category of 'sympathizer'. The first estimate gives 350 non-party and other delegates; in the second estimate, this number drops to 176.
 3. 'On the results of the Congress' (1919), Ped.soch. v.7, p.39.
 4. Proletarskaya kultura, 1919, no.7-8, p.71.
 5. Lunacharsky attended only the first meetings: he was absent from Moscow from 7 May (TSGAOR 2306/1/181 passim - records of attendance at meetings of the collegium).
 6. Lenin, Pol.sob.soch. (5th ed.), v.38, p.330.

On the morning of May 8, Lebedev-Polyansky spoke for Proletkult. He 'agreed that where the work was being done on a government scale and was serving the interests of the whole population, it was necessary that organizational plans [of Proletkult and Narkompros extramural department] should coincide.' But, he said, 'where strict creative work - laboratory work - is going on, there cannot be strict definition and regulation of work. Proletkult organizations must have great freedom and great independence.'¹

After the opening speeches, the Congress divided into various sections and commissions, two of which met jointly to discuss 'the creation of a basic state system of extramural education and Proletkult'. Bogdanov, Kerzhentsev and Lebedev-Polyansky were spokesmen for Proletkult. The opponents were Krupskaya, Ludmila Menzhinskaya, Rogozinsky and P.G.Smidovich (of Moscow Soviet). A resolution that 'the Congress finds that Proletkult work must be a part of Narkompros and be closely tied to the work of the extramural department, entering it as one section of the central and local apparat' was put forward by the Communist fraction, and carried by the meeting - 166 for, 36 against, and 26 abstaining.²

This was, of course, a victory for the extramural department of Narkompros and a defeat for Proletkult. But on two other questions, the Congress supported the Proletkult point of view: first on the question of the Proletarian University,³ and secondly on the theatre, where the Congress

1. Izvestiya VTSIK, 1919 no.99, 10 May, p.2.

2. Izvestiya VTSIK, 1919 no.101, 13 May, p.4.

3. see resolution, in spirit of Bogdanov's paper rather than Rogozinsky's, in Izvestiya VTSIK, 1919 no.105, 17 May, p.3.

passed a resolution (probably proposed by Kerzhentsev) that the audience must be encouraged to participate in theatrical productions so as to create 'the theatre of collective action which the proletariat are waiting for', and that 'the repertoire of this new theatre will be the result of the creation of plays by a process of collective improvisation'.¹

On the last day of the Congress, Lenin made a second, unscheduled speech: 'On the deception of the people by slogans of freedom and equality'.² The speech, lasting an hour and a half, was an attack on the anti-Communism of the socialist and liberal intelligentsia; and presumably Lenin chose to speak on this theme to the Congress because of the large numbers of SRs, anarchists, Bundists and non-Communists who were present. Lenin also used the occasion to comment unfavourably (but only in passing) on Proletkult:³

'I have shown you that the dictatorship of the proletariat is inevitable, necessary and undoubtedly obligatory in order to escape from capitalism. Dictatorship means not only force - though it is impossible without force - but also a higher level of labour organization than before. That is why, in my short welcoming speech, I underlined that basic, elementary and most simple task of organization; and that is why I regard all intellectual fantasies of "proletarian culture" with such ruthless hostility. To these fantasies I oppose the ABC of organization. The task of proletarian discipline is to distribute bread and coal in such a way that there is a careful attitude to each unit of coal and each unit of bread ... If we solve this very simple, elementary problem, we shall win... The basic task of "proletarian culture" is proletarian organization.'

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1. quoted T.Knyazhevskaya, Yuzhin-Sumbatov i sovetsky teatr, Moscow 1966, pp.98-99.
 2. Both Pravda and Izvestiya were taken by surprise and had no room to print Lenin's speech. Both promised to print it in full later, but never did so. It was published as a pamphlet by Gosizdat in 1919.
 3. Lenin, Pol.sob.soch. (5th ed.), v.38, pp.368-9.

After the Congress on extramural education (but not before Lunacharsky's return to Moscow), Lebedev-Polyansky presented a report on the relationship of Proletkult and Narkompros to the collegium of Narkompros.¹ On the basis of this report, the collegium passed a resolution that Proletkult, both in the centre and locally, was to be regarded as one of the sections of the Narkompros department of extramural education, but that it 'conducts its work independently, with its own separate budget'.² This last phrase made the Narkompros resolution significantly weaker than the resolution on the same question of the Congress on extramural education. This may be attributed to the influence of Lunacharsky, who had been absent from the debates of the Congress on Proletkult and the extramural department. The resolution was given to the press with the signatures of Lunacharsky (Commissar of Education), Krupskaya (head of the extramural department of Narkompros) and Lebedev-Polyansky (president of the Central Committee of the Council of Proletkult).

Publication of the resolution of the Congress on extramural education convinced many local Proletkultists that Proletkult had finally lost its independence. 'We - proletarians, factory workers - are thunderstruck by this decision... To us, the truest explanation seems that those at the Congress were chiefly heads of education departments, their deputies and instructors - people who are far from being proletarian elements,' wrote a Proletkultist from Ivanovo-

1. TSGAOR 2306/1/181, 6 June, 1919. This meeting was the first attended by Lunacharsky after his return to Moscow.

2. ibid. (text included in minutes of the meeting).

Voznesensk.¹ 'Who can object on principle to the existence of a creative laboratory of proletarian art, which Proletkult must essentially be [?]' wrote a Proletkultist from Smolensk. 'In any case, not us.'² It was reported that in Smolensk the supporters of Proletkult autonomy 'evidently confuse the organ of proletarian power - Narkompros - with Kolchak', and that relations between Proletkult and the extramural department of Narkompros were bad.³

The journal Proletarskaya kultura tried to reassure its readers by publishing the resolution of the collegium of Narkompros, which gave the extramural department only the most nominal control over Proletkult.⁴ It added a comforting quotation from an article written by Lunacharsky just before the May Congress on extramural education:⁵

'...Perhaps the Proletkults have not always clearly understood their tasks, perhaps they sometimes conducted work parallel with the work of Soviet organs. But what of it? All the Soviet organs get entangled with each other, and it is impossible to avoid interdepartmental friction. But no-one thinks that it follows that when two institutions - for example, Sovnarkhoz [Council of the National Economy] and Komprod [Food Commissariat] - clash, that one of them should be abolished. There is a quite unique place for Proletkult. I completely support Proletkult's right to its separate existence and to broad state subsidy.'

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1. TSGAOR 2306/17/8: 'Information relating to the activities of Proletkults and associated organizations for the 2nd half of May [1919]'.
 2. ibid.
 3. ibid.
 4. Proletarskaya kultura, 1919 no.9-10, June-July, p.63.
 5. ibid., quoted from 'leading article' in Nar.pros.(monthly) 1919 no.9-10, April-May.

Chapter 4 THE ARTS

i) The establishment of Narkompros in the arts

In dealing with the arts, Narkompros was confronted with a world which was not only hostile but amorphous. Writers, actors, artists and musicians were determined to have no dealings with the Bolsheviks, and there were few institutional channels by which they could be approached.

Those artistic institutions which had formerly been administered by the Palace Ministry were transferred to Narkompros in December 1917 when the Commissariat of Property of the Republic became a separate entity.¹ They were then still virtually untouched by Soviet power. The administrators and commissions of reform established by the Provisional Government continued work.

There were few strikes in the artistic world. Some theatres stopped work after the October coup, but all had resumed normal activity by the end of November.² The hostility of the literary and artistic intelligentsia was expressed most characteristically in polemical journalism against the Bolsheviks. The anti-Bolshevik press treated Narkompros with the hostility due to it as a Soviet government organ, and also with a marked disrespect, because of its conciliatory

1. Sovnarkom decree of 9 Dec.1917 (I.Smirnov, Lenin i sovetskaya kultura, p.340).

2. In Petrograd, the Aleksandrinsky, Nezlobin, 'Krivoe zerkalo' and 'Passazh' theatres went on strike. A.Gozenpud, Russky sovetsky operny teatr (1917-1941), Leningrad, 1963, p.17; and Istoriya sovetskoi dramaticheskoi teatra v shesti tomakh, v.1, Moscow, 1966, p.70, note.

intentions.

The hostility which touched Lunacharsky most personally was that of Gorky's social-democratic internationalist journal Novaya zhizn. He was on friendly terms with its editors - Gorky, N.N.Sukhanov, V.A.Stroev-Desnitsky and A.N.Tikhonov (Serebrov) - and with the staff of its literary and artistic departments, which included V.Bazarov, A.Benois, the artists Petrov-Vodkin and Natan Altman, and Mayakovsky.¹ Lunacharsky himself had headed the cultural department of Novaya zhizn; and had protested against the Bolshevik Central Committee's instruction to Bolsheviks to leave the journal in August,² and again early in October, when he had submitted a statement to the Central Committee explaining his unwillingness to abandon the work because 'a number of the staff of the cultural department of Novaya zhizn intended to leave if Lunacharsky gave up the editing of the department'.³

But after October, Lunacharsky found his friends hostile to the revolution and contemptuous of himself. In the pages of Novaya zhizn, Gorky described Lunacharsky as 'lyrically-minded, but muddle-headed',⁴ 'Emil Krotky' published a satirical poem on the brief resignation of 'our soft-hearted Anatoly',⁵ and Stroev-Desnitsky made an entirely negative

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1. V.D.Zeldovich, 'First meeting of Lunacharsky with Mayakovsky in 1917', Literaturnoe nasledstvo, v.65: Novoe o Mayakovskom, Moscow 1958, p.571.
 2. Lunacharsky, Vosp.i vpech., p.357.
 3. Protokoly TsK RSDRP(b) avg.1917-fev.1918, p.36.
 4. quoted N.Trifonov, 'Brothers-in-arms', Russkaya literatura, 1968 no.1, p.27.
 5. Novaya zhizn, 1918 no.55, 30 March, p.2.

assessment of the achievements of his commissariat.¹ At the same time, Novaya zhizn gave thorough and sympathetic coverage to the activities of VUS, the Arts' union,² Countess Panina and other of Narkompros' opponents.

In October 1917, Lunacharsky - who had never lived for long in Petersburg before 1917 and had returned from a decade of emigration less than six months before - had only a slight acquaintance with the Petrograd artistic world. He had had one meeting with leading figures of the Petrograd theatre in August or September, when Yu.M.Yuryev (an actor of the Petrograd imperial theatres and friend of Gorky and M.F.Andreeva, through whom Lunacharsky probably met him) had unexpectedly invited him to debate with the Cadet leader Nabokov on cultural policy - 'I am convinced,' Yuryev said,³ 'that we theatrical workers will find ourselves under the leadership of one or other of you in the near future.' Lunacharsky knew few of those present at the debate. 'At that time, I ... had no direct connection with the theatre,' he wrote. 'I was very little acquainted with the then leading circle in the theatre.'⁴

In Petrograd, the bases for Bolshevik organization in the arts were almost non-existent; and Narkompros in any case wanted to exert influence rather than to set up a government administration of cultural affairs. The nucleus of the Bolshevik educational administration had been formed in the Petrograd municipal organizations. But the Petrograd Bolsheviks had no equivalent foothold in the arts, once

1. 'Forgotten "department"', Novaya zhizn 1918 no.22, 30 Jan., p.1.

2. soyuz deyatelei iskusstv.

3. Lunacharsky, 'On Soviet rails' (1931), Vosp.i vpech., p.277.

4. ibid.

they were opposed by Gorky and his wife Maria Fedorovna Andreeva, who headed the administration of Petrograd municipal theatres under the city Duma.¹ The only artistic organization to which Lunacharsky could turn was the newly-formed Petrograd Proletkult. But the Proletkultists had no influence or standing among the Petrograd intelligentsia.

Until the government moved to Moscow in March 1918, Moscow was effectively outside the scope of the central commissariats. But in relation to organization of the arts, the Bolsheviks were initially in a better position in Moscow than in Petrograd. In April 1917, the Moscow Soviet had formed an artistic-educational commission (later department) in which the Bolsheviks Pavel Petrovich Malinovsky and his wife Elena Konstantinovna Malinovskaya were the leading figures.² The Malinovskys had long been party members active in the cultural field: Pavel Petrovich was an architect, and Elena Konstantinovna had been concerned with the organization of popular theatres. Before October, E.K.Malinovskaya had already established a working relationship with leading figures of the Moscow theatre like A.Ya.Tairov and F.F.Komissarzhevsky. After October, Lunacharsky delegated control of the state (formerly imperial) theatres in Moscow to Malinovskaya, who continued to work in the artistic-educational department of the Soviet.³ P.P.Malinovsky became head

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1. E.Kuznetsov, 'Commissar of the theatres', M.F.Andreeva, p.413.
 2. E.M.Bebutova, 'Recollections', Iz istorii stroitelstva sovetsoi kultury. Moskva 1917-1918 gg., Moscow 1964, p.283.
 3. Novaya zhizn, 1918 no.21, 28 Jan., p.4 (statement by Lunacharsky).

of the Commission for the preservation of artistic and ancient monuments in Moscow, and Civil Commissar of the Kremlin. At the very beginning of 1918 - before any agreement had been reached with artists in Petrograd - Malinovsky persuaded the Moscow artists' union Izograf, representing mainly the older generation of realist artists, to cooperate with his Commission in 'the protection of artistic monuments and ... the working out and consideration of all questions of artistic life in Moscow'.¹

The arts were, of course, a secondary problem for Narkompros. It was immediately concerned only with the institutions formerly administered by the Palace Ministry - the imperial theatres (Aleksandrinsky, Mariinsky and Mikhailovsky in Petrograd, Bolshoi and Maly in Moscow), the Academy of arts² in Petrograd and Moscow, and the imperial palaces - and with the protection of art collections and historical monuments.

It was suggested that a separate Commissariat of the Arts should be established outside the Commissariat of Education, with Lunacharsky heading both commissariats, P.P.Malinovsky deputy commissar of the arts and M.N.Pokrovsky deputy commissar of education.³ Narkompros was opposed to the idea. 'A Ministry of the Arts is an inheritance from a purely despotic regime,' Lunacharsky said, 'a survival of

1. E.V.Oranovsky, 'Kremlin-Acropolis', Iz istorii stroitelstva sovetskoi kultury. Moskva 1917-1918 gg., pp.326-7.

2. Akademiya khudozhestv.

3. unsigned memorandum to Sovnarkom, probably by P.P.Malinovsky and E.V.Oranovsky, Iz istorii stroitelstva sovetskoi kultury Moskva 1917-1918 gg., pp.76-79.

the time when art was completely under the control of the Palace.'¹ Olga Kameneva, head of the theatre section of Narkompros in Moscow, denied rumours that a separate Commissariat of the Arts was to be established. A separate commissariat, she said, would mean that the Soviet government intended to direct [rukovodit'] art and creative work, which was inadmissible. 'While art is in the Commissariat of Education, the government has one aim - an educative one, to demonstrate and explain. Russia is in the stage of development when it has to be educated in art.'²

The artistic world, especially in Petrograd, was bent on autonomy, and took little account of the actual intentions of the Soviet government towards art. For artists, as for universities, the February Revolution had removed controls and for the first time created the possibility of autonomous corporative organization. The Petrograd state theatres wanted to become self-administering on an autonomous basis. The Arts' union wanted to reform the Academy of arts and assume sole responsibility for all artistic institutions.

Lunacharsky described these aspirations as 'syndicalist' and - especially in regard to the theatre - impracticable because of the need for state subsidy.³ The Arts' union decided in November 1917 to appeal to the Constituent Assembly for funds to support artistic schools, state theatres and museums, and declared itself 'the only organ which has the

1. TSGAOR 2306/1/36, 5 April 1918 (State Education Commission).

2. Izvestiya TSIK, 1918 no.67, 6 April, p.4.

3. 'On the tasks of the state theatres', Nar.pros. fortnightly, Petrograd, 1918 no.1-2, January, pp.23-4.

right to direct the artistic life of the country'.¹ (This claim was in evident conflict with the state theatres' intention to administer themselves.) 'It is necessary to separate [art] from the state,' the poet F.Sologub told the Arts' union. 'Our attitude to Golovin [head of the Palace Ministry under the Provisional Government] and to Lunacharsky is identical.'²

The Arts' union, founded in May 1917, was informally divided into three groups - the 'left', including V.V.Mayakovsky, O.M.Brik and N.N.Punin; the 'non-party centre'; and the right or delovoi blok, led by F.Sologub.³ The left group was the least hostile to the Bolsheviks in politics, but for the time being the most violent in the defence of the autonomy of art.

On November 12, 1917, N.N.Punin informed the union of Lunacharsky's proposal for the establishment of a State soviet on art affairs, half of whose members would represent the arts and half the Soviets of workers', soldiers' and peasants' deputies.⁴ The union rejected the proposal unanimously - even Punin, Lunacharsky's intermediary, voted against it. The union objected both to the intrusion of the commissar in its affairs, and to the suggestion that non-artistic representatives (from the Soviets of deputies) should have a voice in the organization of artistic life.⁵ This closely

1. quoted E.A.Dinershtein, 'Mayakovsky in February-October 1917', Literaturnoe nasledstvo, v.65 (Novoe o Mayakovskom), p.564.

2. ibid., p.566.

3. ibid., p.564.

4. ibid., p.564.

5. O.Brik, 'Mayakovsky - editor and organizer', Literaturny kritik, 1936 no.4, p.116.

resembled the reaction of the professors of Moscow University to Narkompros' plan for university reform in July and September 1918.

After the rejection of his first approach to the Arts' union, Lunacharsky made a second, more limited, proposal for cooperation between the union and Narkompros in the protection of art treasures. This also was rejected, 68 voting against and 2 abstaining.¹ One of those who abstained did so out of concern for art treasures; the other, Mayakovsky, for political reasons (in March 1917 he had criticized Gorky and A.Benois for compromising their artistic independence by working on a state commission for the protection of art treasures, a task he thought easily accomplished by the stationing of a few units of soldiers around the imperial palaces²).

In April 1918, when the Academy of arts was liquidated by decree,³ Lunacharsky had still reached no accommodation with the Arts' union. The union had its own commission for the reform of the Academy of arts, established under the Provisional Government, and now protested because the reorganization of the Academy into 'free artistic studios' was entrusted to Punin, and not to the union's candidate, Tamanov.⁴ By this time Mayakovsky, Punin and the left wing of the Arts' union had broken away. The dominating figure

1. E.A.Dinershtein, 'Mayakovsky in February-October 1917', Literaturnoe nasledstvo, v.65, pp.565-6.

2. ibid., p.544.

3. Sovnarkom decree of 12 April 1918, signed Lenin, Lunacharsky, Stalin, Chicherin. Sobranie uzakonenii, 1918 no.31, art.417.

4. N.Punin, 'In the days of Red October', Zhizn iskusstva, 1921 no.816, 8 Nov., p.1.

remaining in the union was Sologub.

On April 19, 1918, Lunacharsky addressed a meeting of the Arts' union. Novaya zhizn, in a fairly unsympathetic report of his speech, noted that it was of interest as having the character of 'a government declaration'.¹ The government, Lunacharsky said, stood for the complete separation of art from the state, for complete liquidation of all diplomas, privileges, honours and titles; and opposed state support of any single artistic group or organization because this would hinder the development of other groups. The Academy of arts had been abolished because to support it was equivalent to giving state support on privileged terms to one artistic group.² (This argument was not entirely convincing, since the state theatres had not been disestablished.)

Members of the union criticized various actions of 'irresponsible' commissars, whose crimes Sologub listed as 'liquidation of the Academy, juggling of votes and "searches" at the meeting of the conference of artistic institutions, police attacks on freedom of assembly itself (the Karev incident), the barbarian and illiterate decree on the taking down of monuments'.³

'All this, in the opinion of F.Sologub, is in direct contradiction with the assurances which Lunacharsky gave in his time, and can be explained only by Lunacharsky's lack of knowledge of what his subordinate commissars are doing. In the opinion of the Executive Committee [of the Arts' union] there can be only one way

1. Novaya zhizn, 1918 no.73, 21 April, p.4.

2. ibid.

3. ibid. The decree 'On the taking down of monuments raised in honour of the Tsars and their servants' was issued by Sovnarkom on 12 April, 1918, signed Lenin, Lunacharsky and Stalin. Sobranie uzakonenii, 1918 no.31, art.416.

out of the impasse - the resignation of the existing government "collegium on art affairs" and the transfer of control of art affairs to the hands of the Executive Committee of the Arts' union ...'

Lunacharsky, for his part, was 'astonished that the union, ... which stands for the principle of the autonomy of art, can pretend to the conquest of government power'. He admitted that the government had failed to come to terms with the greater part of the artistic intelligentsia but, he said, 'we are not the first to go against the democracy', and the experience of Europe and America had shown that the majority was bourgeois. 'We stand for the policy of the active minority, and in art, for union with separate outstanding talents'. The Constituent Assembly of artists proposed by the union would be nothing other than a congregation of the untalented. After finishing his speech, Lunacharsky at once left the hall, accompanied by sharp protests from the assembled artists at his remarks.¹

After this meeting, the Arts' union resolved to break off all relations with Lunacharsky.²

Before October the Petrograd state theatres were administered by the liberal professor Fedor Dmitrievich Batyushkov, appointed by the Provisional Government. Under Batyushkov, a project of self-administration for the state theatres had been introduced;³ and, as in the Arts' union,

1. Novaya zhizn, 1918 no.73, 21 April, p.4.

2. Novaya zhizn, 1918 no.74, 23 April, p.4.

3. N.Gorchakov, The theatre in Soviet Russia, New York-London, 1957, pp.101-2.

the feeling in the theatres for corporative autonomy was running high. Lunacharsky's statement on the state theatres¹ dismissed the plan of full independence for the state theatres as 'hopeless, because the theatres cannot manage without their losses being covered by the Republic ...[and] harmful, because it amounts to an attempt to leave the theatre unchanged, continuing to find its support among the same bourgeois public, ... in a completely changed country.'² The plan which Lunacharsky offered provided for the administration of the state theatres through a State soviet of theatre and government representatives, which would issue general instructions on membership of companies, repertoire and so on. Within the framework of these general instructions, the company of each theatre had 'full autonomy': 'it works out its own internal constitution, elects a directorate, and manages the artistic side of affairs'.³

Early in December, Lunacharsky complained that the artists of the Aleksandrinsky theatre had 'so far not regulated their relations with me'.⁴ On December 10, he wrote to Batyushkov requiring him 'to regulate the relations of the democracy and the theatres of the Republic'.⁵ Batyushkov

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1. 'On the tasks of the state theatres', pub. Nar.pros. fortnightly, 1918 no.1-2, pp.22-25; and in Izvestiya TSIK (P'grad) 1917 no.250, 13 Dec., pp.10-11; no.252, 15 Dec., pp.10-11; and no.254, 17 Dec., pp.14-15.
 2. ibid., Nar.pros. 1918 no.1-2, p.23.
 3. ibid., p.24.
 4. Izvestiya TSIK, 1917 no.249, 12 Dec., p.8. The occasion of Lunacharsky's letter was a clash between theatre workers and Bolsheviks on 8 Dec., when a big Bolshevik meeting was held in the Aleksandrinsky theatre, without prior consultation either with the theatre or Lunacharsky.
 5. 'First measures of Narkompros in the administration of the theatres', publication of V.D.Zeldovich, Istorichesky arkhiv 1959 no.1, p.53.

refused, pointing out that he had the almost unanimous support of the theatre companies, whose artists 'insist on the independence of art from political parties and the recognition of the administrative autonomy of artistic collectives'.¹ Lunacharsky then dismissed him.² 'It is sad,' he wrote to Batyushkov,³ 'that so many socialists including you, Fedor Dmitrievich, so definitely turned out on the opposite side of the barricades from the people.' Lunacharsky considered that Batyushkov, as a state-appointed official, was in no position to pose as a defender of artistic autonomy, and that the demand for autonomy was in itself a partisan political act on his part. 'Perhaps a demand from the popularly-established government to a person bearing the title of representative of the Provisional Government constitutes political interference in the life of the theatre,' Lunacharsky asked, 'while the appointment of such a representative by Golovin and Kerensky is an act of defence of theatrical autonomy?'⁴

Since Batyushkov did not recognize the Bolshevik government, he did not recognize his dismissal. Instead, he instructed that the 160,000 roubles remaining in the treasury of the state theatres should be distributed among actors and employees of the theatres. Lunacharsky, exceedingly indignant, wrote that until the money was returned to the state, the

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1. 'First measures of Narkompros in the administration of the theatres', Istorichesky arkhiv, 1959 no.1, pp.53-4.
 2. ibid., p.56, (dismissal dated 12 Dec. and signed Lunacharsky). The dismissal, with signatures of Lenin and Lunacharsky, was published Izvestiya TSIK, 1917 no.250, 13 Dec., p.6.
 3. 'First measures of Narkompros in the administration of the theatres', Istorichesky arkhiv, 1959 no.1, pp.54-55.
 4. ibid., p.54.

theatres would receive no state subsidy, and threatened 'the person giving contrary instructions' with the Revolutionary Tribunal.¹ Batyushkov, who was no less indignant, then invited Lunacharsky to arrest him.²

However it was not Batyushkov who was arrested, but the pianist A.Ziloti, administrator of the Mariinsky theatre appointed by the Provisional Government. Ziloti refused to hand over the keys of the imperial box in the Mariinsky theatre, was at once arrested, to the outrage of the theatrical world, cross-examined by Dzerzhinsky himself, and released after a few days with a fine.³

Batyushkov and Ziloti had the sympathy of most of the artists of the Aleksandrinsky and Mariinsky theatres. 'If the People's Commissar Lunacharsky enters the Mariinsky theatre during a performance,' the conductor Albert Coates announced, 'I will immediately put down my baton and stop work.'⁴ There was an attempt to sabotage the work of the Aleksandrinsky theatre by offering all its artists employment in the café-chantant 'Aquarium' for 30,000 roubles a month. Most of the company accepted this offer, but performed both at the 'Aquarium' and the Aleksandrinsky - enriching themselves, but at the same time, V.D.Zeldovich points out, 'upsetting the plans of the counter-revolutionaries'.⁵

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1. 'To all artists and employees of the Petrograd state theatres', Izvestiya VTSIK, 1917 no.258, 22 Dec., p.4.
 2. 'First measures of Narkompros in the administration of the theatres', Istorichesky arkhiv, 1959 no.1, p.60.
 3. Lunacharsky, 'On Soviet rails', Vosp.i vpech., p.279, and Yu.Flakserman, Vospominaniya.
 4. Lunacharsky, 'On Soviet rails', Vosp.i vpech., p.279.
 5. 'First measures of Narkompros in the administration of the theatres', loc.cit., p.53.

On December 23, Lunacharsky wrote to his wife that the position in Petrograd was improving:¹ 'The Narodny dom,² Mikhailovsky theatre,³ the technical personnel of the state theatres⁴ and the soloists of the Mariinsky theatre⁵ have recognized me.' But this still left the Aleksandrinsky theatre and most of the Mariinsky company outside the sphere of Soviet influence. In this crisis, as in the occupation of the Ministry of Public Education a month earlier, Lunacharsky turned to the young left SR Bakrylov, whom he appointed commissar of state theatres in Petrograd. 'His firm hand,' wrote Lunacharsky, 'even though it pressed rather painfully at certain points, turned out - at least in the initial period - to be appropriate.'⁶

Lunacharsky had told the Arts' union that the policy of the government in the arts was 'union with separate outstanding talents'. This, of course, was a policy faute de mieux. But among the very few members of the intelligentsia

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1. 'First measures of Narkompros in the administration of the theatres', Istorichesky arkhiv, 1959 no.1, p.52.
 2. The reference is to the theatre of the Petrograd Narodny dom (People's house), under the municipal administration.
 3. The Mikhailovsky was the smallest of the state theatres in Petrograd. At the time of the October revolution a visiting French company was performing there. Its contract was not renewed by Lunacharsky, since the French language was inaccessible to the people. (Novaya zhizn, 1917 no.211, 28 Dec.)
 4. Technical personnel agreed to cooperate with Lunacharsky on a non-political basis, and for increased wages, on 8 Dec. (Izvestiya TSIK, 1917 no.249, 12 Dec., p.9)
 5. A group of Mariinsky soloists invited Lunacharsky to meet them for discussions on 18 Dec. (Izvestiya TSIK, 1917 no.260, 24 Dec., p.8).
 6. 'On Soviet rails', Vosp.i vpech., p.281.

who offered their cooperation to the Soviet government in the first months after October were three men of outstanding talent - the poets Mayakovsky and Blok, and the producer Meyerhold.¹

In December, the poet Rurik Ivnev (not a man of outstanding talent, but a friend of Sergei Esenin's) had the idea of organizing a pro-Bolshevik rally of the intelligentsia, and invited Lunacharsky, Kollontai, Blok, Meyerhold, Esenin, Petrov-Vodkin and others to speak.² Blok accepted 'at once without any hesitation' according to Ivnev's account. The meeting apparently went off reasonably well, although in the midst of a snowstorm and transport failure which caused Ivnev himself to arrive more than an hour late. Most of the audience (whose size is not indicated by Ivnev or the contemporary Izvestiya report³) were sympathetic, although there was a

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1. There are many accounts of a meeting of the intelligentsia called by Lunacharsky shortly after October, and attended by only a handful of people, including Mayakovsky, Blok and Meyerhold. B.F.Malkin recalled a meeting, arranged by TSIK and not by Lunacharsky, to which only 5 to 7 people came, including Mayakovsky, Blok, Meyerhold and Larisa Reisner (V.Mayakovsky v vospominaniyakh sovremennikov, Moscow 1963, p.635). Marc Slonim names Blok, Meyerhold and Mayakovsky (Russian theatre from the empire to the Soviets, London 1963, p.229); Juri Jelagin lists Blok, Mayakovsky, Meyerhold, Rurik Ivnev and Natan Altman (Temny geni, New York, 1955, p.209). I have found no documentation of this meeting, and the Soviet historian E.Dinershtein reports a similarly unsuccessful search ('Mayakovsky in February-October 1917', Literaturnoe nasledstvo, v.65, p.563).
 2. R.Ivnev, 'Recollections of the first days and months of Soviet power', Prometei, Moscow, 1967, no.4, p. 246. Lunacharsky wrote to his wife on 18 Dec. of a meeting planned by Blok, Meyerhold, Petrov-Vodkin and Ivnev on the theme 'People's Commissars are representatives of the real masses. Intelligentsia, return to the service of the people'. Quoted in A.Elkin, Lunacharsky, pp.123-4.
 3. Izvestiya TSIK, 1917 no.261, 28 Dec., p.1.

small group of hecklers. Izvestiya reported that Lunacharsky, Kollontai, Blok and Petrov-Vodkin spoke; and hailed the meeting as an important sign that part of the intelligentsia had decided 'on the necessity of working under the direction of Soviet power'.¹

Ivnev, piqued at being ignored by Izvestiya's report of the meeting, wrote a letter to the editor pointing out, first, that he was the initiator of the meeting, and second, that he and those like him had no intention of recognizing 'artistic direction' from the government. 'If poets and artists recognize any sort of "direction",' Ivnev wrote, 'it is only the direction of their own poetic and artistic taste. Art, from my point of view, is free and cannot "serve anything earthly and transient".' His motive in organizing the meeting had been his 'deep conviction that now, this minute, it is necessary to force the broad circles of the intelligentsia out of that inert condition in which they find themselves ...'.²

Among individuals who offered their support to the Soviet government, those of outstanding talent (who included, as well as those already mentioned, the ancient and distinguished literary historian A.F.Koni³) were at least balanced by others who were ridiculous or disreputable in the eyes of the intelligentsia. In this second category were the writer

1. Izvestiya TSIK, 1917 no.261, 28 Dec., p.1.

2. Izvestiya TSIK, 1918 no.2, 4 Jan., p.4.

3. See Lunacharsky, 'Three meetings', Vosp.i vpech., p.301: 'I know no-one, almost literally no-one of your people, even by repute or from articles,' Koni told Lunacharsky, 'but I feel the presence of a really strong power in the air.'

Ieronim Yasinsky, who visited Lunacharsky in the Winter Palace and read him his poems on Nietzsche;¹ Ivan Rukavishnikov, organizer of the 'Palace of arts';² and perhaps Ivnev himself.³

The first artistic group to come over to the Bolsheviks was the futurist group, left wing of the Arts' union. Mayakovsky described his decision very simply:⁴

'October. To accept or not to accept? For me (and for other Moscow futurists) such a question did not exist. My revolution. Went to Smolny.'

In fact Mayakovsky's attitude was more complicated and his behaviour more cautious. In November Lunacharsky, writing to his wife of the people around him, mentioned O.M.Brik and Mayakovsky with approval.⁵ But in the same month Mayakovsky told the Arts' union during the debate on Lunacharsky's proposals that he agreed with Sologub's opinion that 'Lunacharsky is not the people, but only a "gentleman in a jacket" from whom it is necessary to protect art, the property of the whole people'. He differed from Sologub only in thinking that the best way to protect the people's property was 'to turn to the government, to welcome the new

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1. Lunacharsky reported this enthusiastically in Izvestiya TSIK, 1917 no.228, 17 Nov., p.3. He was mocked for this by Korolenko in Russkie vedomosti and Gorky in Novaya zhizn. (N.Trifonov, 'Brothers-in-arms', Russkaya literatura, 1968 no.1, p.27).
 2. see V.Khodasevich, Literaturnye statyi i vospominaniya, pp.245-375, passim.
 3. see G.Ivanov, Peterburgskie zimy, New York 1952, pp.221-2.
 4. 'I myself' (1922.1928), Sovetskie pisateli. Avtobiografii v dvukh tomakh, Moscow 1959, v.2, p.72.
 5. 'First meeting of Lunacharsky with Mayakovsky in 1917', Literaturnoe nasledstvo, v.65, p.572.

power'.¹

Brik, who was the intermediary in presenting Lunacharsky's second proposal to the Arts' union,² voted against the proposal. Mayakovsky abstained rather than voting for it. The conflict for Mayakovsky seems to have been between the principle of the complete autonomy of art, which he had warmly advocated since the February revolution, and the practical advantages of securing government support for left art. He did publicly associate himself with the Soviet government in Petrograd. But then, instead of going to work in a Soviet institution or joining the Party ('they would have sent me to catch fish in Astrakhan'³), he went to Moscow and spent six months reciting his poems in the Poets' Cafe and working for the private film company 'Neptune'.⁴ It was only in the autumn of 1918 that, 'finally understanding that the struggle for the new art could only be waged within Soviet organizational forms',⁵ that he returned to Petrograd and began work in the art department (IZO) of Narkompros.⁶ He then, Brik suggested later, 'saw in the Soviet government the strength that could and must break the power of the "old aesthetic junk" [esteticheskoe staryo]'.⁷

Nikolai Punin, like Brik, had been an intermediary in

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1. E.Dinershtein, 'Mayakovsky in February-October 1917', Literaturnoe nasledstvo, v.65, p.566.
 2. ibid., p.565.
 3. 'I myself', Sovetskie pisateli. Avtobiografii, v.2, p.73.
 4. ibid., p.72; and Dinershtein, op.cit., p.563.
 5. O.Brik, 'Mayakovsky - editor and organizer', Literaturny kritik, 1936 no.4, p.119.
 6. 'From Mayakovsky's speeches 1918-1925' (publication of A.Fevralsky), Literaturnoe nasledstvo, v.65, p.577.
 7. O.Brik, 'Mayakovsky - editor and organizer', Literaturny kritik, p.116.

bringing Lunacharsky's proposals to the Arts' union, although he himself voted against them. He also belonged to the left, both in the political and the artistic sense. He was an art critic on the journal Apollon. The political views which led him to sympathize with the Bolsheviks were anti-liberal, and might in retrospect be described as proto-fascist. In 1918, he and Evgeny Poletaev (first head of the Narkompros department of secondary schools in Petrograd) published Protiv tsivilizatsii, a celebration of the virtues of 'discipline, mass character, harshness, scientific regulation and mechanization of life'¹, and the 'will to grandeur and power over dry chaos' embodied in contemporary German 'state capitalism'. These were the qualities which Punin and Poletaev recommended to Russian communism, and partly observed in it. Lunacharsky gave the book a cautious preface - he was surprised, but on the whole not displeased, to find 'typical intellectuals' advocating order instead of anarchy.

Punin must have met Lunacharsky in November, but his recollections put the first significant meeting in December, when Punin and the avantgarde composer Artur Lourie went to the Winter Palace to ask Lunacharsky's permission to stage Khlebnikov's play Oshibka smerti in the Hermitage theatre.² Punin was much struck by the isolation and powerlessness of the commissars at this time (probably in fact November and not December), when the state apparatus was still controlled

1. E.Poletaev and N.Punin, Protiv tsivilizatsii, Petrograd 1918 (from preface by Lunacharsky).

2. 'In the days of Red October', Zhizn iskusstva, 1921 no.816, 8 Nov., p.1.

by hostile officials and the intelligentsia was boycotting the new government - 'There are few people who knew and felt the loneliness of the Bolsheviki in the first few months,' Punin wrote. Lunacharsky greeted Punin and Lourie enthusiastically, and 'willingly and at length talked to us of art, of the tasks of the Communist Party and the position of the intelligentsia. Soon our little project of staging in the Hermitage theatre was left far behind. The question under discussion was of the organization of a new administrative apparatus in all fields of art.'¹

Punin joined the Petrograd collegium of IZO;² and Artur Lourie became a member of the music department of Narkompros (MUZO)³ and later its head.

The dominance of the artistic left, which became characteristic of the arts departments of Narkompros, was particularly marked in IZO [otdel izobrazitelnykh iskusstv]. The Moscow branch was headed by the constructivist V.E.Tatlin.⁴ The head of IZO and of its Petrograd branch was D.P.Shterenberg.⁵ Lunacharsky had first met Shterenberg and admired his painting in Paris in 1914.⁶ When Shterenberg returned from emigration after the October revolution, Lunacharsky saw him as the ideal head of IZO, both because

1. 'In the days of Red October', Zhizn iskusstva, 1921 no.816, 8 Nov., p.1.

2. ibid.

3. Izvestiya TSIK, 1918 no.37, 1 March, p.4.

4. 'From Mayakovsky's speeches 1918-1925' (publication of Fevralsky), Literaturnoe nasledstvo, v.65, p.578.

5. ibid.

6. Lunacharsky, 'Young Russia in Paris', Ob izobrazitelnom iskusstve, Moscow 1967, v.1, pp.408-11.

of his distinction as a painter and his sympathy with the Bolsheviki - Shterenberg was a left Bundist, 'undoubtedly devoted to Soviet power,' Lunacharsky wrote in 1920,¹ 'and only refraining from joining the Communist Party because it somehow sickened him to join it in the hour of its victory.' Punin, when he met Shterenberg, was also impressed: 'I went to see him, cautiously began to talk about young Russian art and so-called futurism, and was taken aback when Shterenberg pulled out photographs of his work and began to talk about Picasso and Picabia and the new French masters ...'²

By the end of December 1917, the futurists' adherence to Narkompros was sufficiently well known to provoke cautionary comment in the Soviet press. Zalevsky wrote in Izvestiya:³

'The stronger the new socio-political structure in Russia becomes, the greater will be the number of intellectuals who try to fasten on to the proletariat. An especially abundant stream is expected from the ranks of artists. The proletariat should distinguish its own categories among those ranks ... The futurists, penetrating into the proletarian milieu, could bring the putrid poison of the decaying bourgeois organism into the healthy spirit of the proletariat.'

The art needed by the proletariat, Zalevsky wrote, was one in which 'beautiful form will be the reflection of rich content'. The proletariat must defend its artistic purity

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1. 'From the literary heritage of A.V.Lunacharsky' (publication of A.Ermakov), Novy mir, 1966 no.9, p.237.
 2. 'In the days of Red October', Zhizn iskusstva, 1921 no.816, 8 November, p.1.
 3. K.Zalevsky, 'On the question of new art', Izvestiya TSIK, 1917 no.262, 29 Dec., pp.1-2. D.P.Shterenberg replied with a defence of new art in Izvestiya TSIK, 1918 no.2, 5 Jan., p.2 (signed 'artist-painter', not head of IZO).

against 'uninvited "friends"'. .

The IZO futurists were an aggressive group. In the Soviet camp their main opponents were the Proletkultists, whose connections with Narkompros were slightly older than their own, and whom they accused of monopolizing art. Shterenberg wrote:¹

'You shout about proletarian culture. You have taken a monopoly on yourselves. But what have you done for all this time, when you had every chance to act?... Nothing.

You are an empty place.

And if we, a group of young artists, created schools in which each proletarian could receive technical skill and show his face, we have the right to say we have done something.

If we, destroying old forms of human culture, created new forms appropriate to new content, we have the right to state that we are doing great revolutionary work.

And you?

You are pouring new wine into old, tattered wine-skins ...'

Outside the Soviet camp, the futurists attacked the artists of 'Mir iskusstvo' - in effect the centre group in the artistic world - and the conservative academic artists with equal energy. They equated revolutionary art with revolutionary politics, and traditional art with reactionary politics. 'It is extraordinary,' Punin wrote,² 'that this division [between the left, 'Mir iskusstva' and the conservative artists] corresponded on the whole and with rare individual

1. 'To the critics from Proletkult', Iskusstvo kommuny (organ of Petrograd IZO), 1919 no.10, 9 Feb., p.3. The same issue carried an article by Brik against the Proletkultists.

2. 'In the days of Red October', Zhizn iskusstva, 1921 no.816, 8 Nov., p.1.

exceptions with the political division of the philistine environment of those days ...' In the autumn of 1918, Petrograd IZO addressed the following militant statement to traditional artists:¹

'... Now, when the victory of the working class is clear as the day, many of the artists who a year ago grumblingly and maliciously croaked the swift collapse of communism have come to apologize. Now they are ready to serve the "socialist fatherland" on an equal footing with everyone else. Good luck, belated comrades! We will work. But before we start, let us come to an agreement ...

Those who come after eight months of sabotage are now shouting about the non-party nature of art, as if art could not be either reactionary or revolutionary. Only old monarchists are now non-party; only the sick intelligentsia is neither reactionary or revolutionary. We must speak directly: he who is not with us is against us. Our art is revolutionary, like almost everything now. Let non-revolutionary art perish! ... Protect our revolutionary art. Protect yourselves from the old, the dead, the bourgeois. Let only those who break and destroy forms in order to create new ones be with us, because they and we have a single thought - Revolution. Long live the proletariat! Long live the revolution in art!'

What was Lunacharsky's attitude to futurism? 'I never was a futurist, am not a futurist, and will not be a futurist,' he told VTSIK in 1920.² Indeed his own taste was for 'high seriousness' in art. Formal experimentation interested him comparatively little. But he was tolerant of it. He liked explain and understand it. He was sometimes touched by the

1. 'To workers and artists', Vestnik nar.pros. SKSO, 1918 no.4-5, Sept.-Oct., p.14.

2. 'Activity of Narkompros in the art field' (extract from speech to VTSIK of 26 Sept. 1920), Vestnik teatra, 1920 no.71, 22 Oct., p.13.

futurists' enthusiasm. In a preface to a futurist publication, Rzhanoe slovo,¹ he wrote:

'The book is written by futurists. People have various attitudes to them, and there is much that can be said in criticism of them. But they are young, and youth is revolutionary ...'

V.N.Shulgin's opinion, although he perhaps overemphasizes Lunacharsky's liking for modern art, is worth quoting:²

'The new which was being born filled [Lunacharsky] with ungovernable joy. But it was another joy that that which was aroused by great works of art of the past. The latter he wanted to preserve, not only because without them it was impossible to build our proletarian culture, but because they had long ago entered his life, become a part of him, and without them life would have been boring, empty, out of joint. In the new that was being born he saw another source of pleasure - it opened up tomorrow, continued life ...

There was nothing monolithic in his world-view. He was excited by Levitan and Tatlin, Picasso and the peredvizhniki, the circus and Tchaikovsky.

"But it is art all the same," Anatoly Vasilevich said, looking at a canvas in whose centre was poked a needle with a piece of material hanging from it.

"Art?"

"Yes, new art. You have to be able to understand it. I understand it." '

In December 1918, Petrograd IZO began publication of the journal Iskusstvo kommuny. Among its contributors were Mayakovsky, Shterenberg, Natan Altman, Punin, Mark Chagal and K.S.Malevich. Its tone was enthusiastic, revolutionary and iconoclastic. In the first issue, Mayakovsky published

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1. Rzhanoe slovo. Revolyutsionnaya khrestomatiya futuristov. Preface by Lunacharsky. Petrograd, 1918.
 2. Pamyatnye vstrechi, p.66.

his poem 'Priказ po armii iskusstva';¹ in the second, the poem 'Radovatsya rano',² with the famous lines

'And why
not attack Pushkin
and other
generals of the classics?'

By the fourth issue, Lunacharsky felt that he must intervene - urged on, he explained, by colleagues who did not understand why Narkompros should on the one hand take great pains to preserve and protect Russia's cultural heritage, and on the other allow an official organ of Narkompros 'to describe all artistic work from Adam to Mayakovsky as a heap of rubbish which ought to be destroyed.' 'I confess,' Lunacharsky wrote, 'I am embarrassed.'³

Lunacharsky himself thought that Narkompros was capable of defending Pushkin from Mayakovsky, but he was disturbed by the futurists' intolerance of other artistic schools, and by their monopolistic claims.

'Tens of time I have stated that the Commissariat of Education must be impartial in its attitude to separate trends in artistic life. As for questions of form - the taste of the People's Commissar or of any government representative cannot be taken into account. To offer free development to all artists and artistic groups. Not to allow one trend, armed either with acquired traditional fame or with fashionable success, to stifle another ...

It would be misfortune indeed if the artistic innovators finally imagined themselves to be a state artistic school, to be official exponents of an art which, although revolutionary, was dictated from above ...'⁴

1. Iskusstvo kommuny, 1918 no.1, 7 Dec., p.1.

2. Iskusstvo kommuny, 1918 no.2, 15 Dec., p.1.

3. 'A spoonful of antidote', Iskusstvo kommuny, 1918 no.4, 29 Dec., p.1.

4. ibid.

The editors of Iskusstvo kommuny published Lunacharsky's reprimand with a note that the 'destructive inclination' had been present only in Mayakovsky's poems, and that the editors supposed 'that one of the firmest cultural achievements of European literature in recent times is the liberation of poetic works from literal interpretation'. The journal was prepared to publish works representative of all artistic groups, 'but at the same time, the editors cannot but point out the profound passivity shown by those few genuinely talented leaders of the so-called "rights" and other trends.'¹

Lunacharsky was widely criticized for allowing the futurists to decorate the capitals for revolutionary festivals in 1918, and to design monuments to revolutionary heroes of the past. Lenin disliked the cubist and futurists monuments, thought them 'straight-out mockery and distortion' of the original concept of celebrating the revolutionary tradition,² and held Lunacharsky partly to blame. Lenin was also very irritated when some futurists painted the trees in the Aleksandrovsky garden outside the Kremlin in bright colours for the Mayday holiday, especially when the paint turned out almost impossible to remove.³

Lunacharsky himself thought most of the revolutionary monuments unsuccessful. But he does not seem to have felt indignant about them. In 1924 he recalled with some amusement that the sculptor Merkurov had devised a project for a statue of 'Karl Marx, standing on four elephants'; and another

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1. Iskusstvo kommuny, 1918 no.4, 29 December, p.1.
 2. V.Bonch-Bruевич, 'Vladimir Ilyich and the decoration of the Red Capital', Vospominaniya o Lenine, p.380.
 3. ibid., p.381.

monument, which was actually built in Moscow, represented Marx and Engels together 'in a kind of swimming-pool' and was nicknamed by Muscovites 'the bearded bathers'.¹ Chukovsky reports that, catching sight of one of the Petrograd monuments, Lunacharsky remarked that fortunately, being made of clay, it was already disintegrating.²

Lunacharsky saw futurism as an offspring of the decay of capitalism, an artistic phenomenon parallel to the political phenomenon on imperialism. Even in 1919, he was doubtful that futurism would develop into a proletarian art form:³

'The dynamism and methods of collective creative work which are so characteristic of futurist art certainly stand in some sort of relationship to what the proletariat may create in the artistic field. If we cannot speak of futurism as a whole as proletarian art, we can talk of individual artists of futurist persuasion as artists close to the proletariat. And we already see that this young art is winning its place in the proletarian artistic ideology....'

A year later he wrote that the futurists had proved 'unacceptable to the masses, although they showed much initiative during popular festivals, good humour and capacity for work of which the "old artists" would have been absolutely incapable'.⁴

But the main reason for Lunacharsky's patronage of the futurists was that they were the first artistic group to

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1. Lunacharsky, 'Lenin and art (recollections)', Ob izobrazitel'nom iskusstve, v.2, pp.7-9. Lunacharsky referred to the sculptor Merkurov as 'M.' He is identified by the editor, I.A.Sats, note, p.277.
 2. K.Chukovsky, 'Lunacharsky', Sovremenniki, Moscow 1963, pp.419-20.
 3. Ob izobrazitel'nom iskusstve, v.2, pp.301-2.
 4. 'From the literary heritage of A.V.Lunacharsky', Novy mir, 1966 no.9, p.239.

offer their cooperation to Narkompros, and they sympathized with the revolution. Lunacharsky explained this to foreign delegates to the Comintern in 1922 as follows:¹

'In Russian bourgeois society [the futurists] were to some extent persecuted and considered themselves revolutionaries in artistic technique. It was natural that they soon felt some sympathy for the revolution, and were attracted to it when it extended a hand to them...

It must be confessed that, above all, it was my hand. I extended it not because I admired their experiments, ...[but] because in the general policy of Narkompros we needed to depend on a serious collective of creative artistic forces. I found it almost exclusively there, among the so-called "left" artists. Indeed this was repeated in Hungary; it also took place in Germany...

Yes, I extended a hand to the "leftists", but the proletariat and peasantry did not extend a hand to them...'

At the opposite extreme to the futurists stood individual members of the artistic intelligentsia who cooperated with Narkompros in the protection of art treasures, historical monuments and museums. In November 1917, Lunacharsky invited the Arts' union to do this. The union refused. But a number of persons outside the union accepted. Their cooperation was in almost every case expedient and unrelated to their political beliefs; and it was not accompanied by declarations of loyalty or artistic manifestos. The preservationists were anathema to the futurists, who were shocked that Lunacharsky should pay any attention to them. Brik wrote:²

'It was not only the "leftists" who began to work under the direction of the Soviets. There were also A. Benois and Count V.P. Zubov, who saw in the Soviet government

1. 'Art in Moscow', Ob izobrazitelnom iskusstve, v.2, pp.115-6.

2. 'Mayakovsky - editor and organizer', Literaturny kritik, 1936 no.4, p.116.

a "firm power" which could preserve objects of cultural value and monuments of the art of the past. The meeting of Mayakovsky with his traditional "enemies" in the office of the revolutionary People's Commissar threw Mayakovsky into complete bewilderment. His passionate futurist suggestions met a sharp rebuff from the side of the "preservers of old junk". And, strange as it may seem, the revolutionary People's Commissar Lunacharsky listened more carefully to Benois' advice on the organization of museums than to the "archrevolutionary" attacks of Mayakovsky.'

Count Valentin Platonovich Zubov was one of the first to cooperate with Lunacharsky, without the slightest trace of political sympathy. 'I personally considered that once I had worked with the Provisional Government, nothing hindered me from working with the Bolsheviki,' Zubov wrote in his memoirs.¹ In October 1917, Zubov was in Gatchina, charged by the Provisional Government with the evacuation of its art treasures before the German advance. He almost immediately reached an agreement with Lunacharsky that he should continue the evacuation, now under Bolshevik sponsorship. Zubov found Lunacharsky kind-hearted but open to manipulation by those who, like himself, had the wit to manipulate. He was concerned not only with the Gatchina treasures, but with the fate of his Institute of the history of art on Isaakievskaya square, Petrograd. So, when breakfasting with Lunacharsky at the Winter Palace, he took some official paper, wrote an order protecting the building from confiscation, and obtained Lunacharsky's signature.² But Zubov had some difficulty in persuading the professors of

1. Stradnye gody Rossii (Vospominaniya o Revolyutsii 1917-1925), Munich, 1968, p.37.

2. ibid., p.93.

the institute not to participate in the intelligentsia's boycott of the Bolsheviks:¹

'As for me, I recognized the new government both in the capacity of Director of the Gatchina Palace, and in the capacity of Rector of the Institute. In respect of the latter, I acted on my own initiative. When I called a meeting of professors, among whom there were not only museum workers (who behaved as I did) but other persons, and suggested that we should officially enter into contact with the new power, I met opposition... I managed to obtain my colleagues' agreement that the Institute would remain neutral. However, I did not take any notice of this platonic resolution, and continued to act as sole representative of the institute in negotiations with the Commissariat of Education ...'

Zubov found this a very favourable period for government subsidies, and for acquisitions:²

'I would buy very valuable libraries, which was at the same time doing a good deed for the people who could only live on the sale of their own property. I achieved the transfer to me of libraries which had already been confiscated, often after making preliminary arrangements with the former owners, who thus knew that their books were being looked after ...'

Aleksandr Nikolaevich Benois, who was also on good personal terms with Lunacharsky and worked with him on the building up of the Hermitage collection, remained hostile to the Bolshevik government. He opposed the nationalization of private art collections, and reproached his friend I.E. Grabar, director of the Tretyakov Gallery in Moscow, for condoning it. 'I cannot believe that you took an active part in taking Princess Meshcherskaya's Botticelli away from her,' he wrote to Grabar. 'Or have you been infected with

1. Stradnye gody Rossii, pp.97-8.

2. ibid., p.98.

the general psychosis which has grown out of the ruins of war and utter turmoil?'¹

Grabar cooperated with I.V.Kimmel and G.S.Yatmanov, members of Narkompros sent by Lunacharsky from Petrograd, in the organization of a museum department of Narkompros in Moscow early in 1918.² But later in the year he clashed with P.P.Malinovsky's Commission for the protection of artistic and ancient monuments when the Commission decided to abolish the office of director in all museums, and create an administration by 'artistic soviet' of the museum staff.³ Grabar resisted and, probably with the help of Narkompros, kept effective control of the Tretyakov Gallery. In 1922, perhaps remembering Benois' reproaches, Grabar used his position to return property confiscated from private collectors and held in the Tretyakov Gallery to its former owners.⁴

For Lunacharsky, the central figure of the Russian intelligentsia and the one whose cooperation he most desired was Gorky. Lunacharsky's relationship with Gorky between 1917 and 1921 was a paradigm of his relationship with the old intelligentsia - half lover and half commissar. Gorky disapproved of the October revolution, and for some months he and Lunacharsky were estranged. But in April 1918 Gorky

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1. unpublished letter of 12 June, 1918, quoted A. Elkin, Lunacharsky, p.161.
 2. Lunacharsky, 'I.E.Grabar - for the 40th anniversary of his artistic activity', Ob izobrazitel'nom iskusstve, v.2, p.250.
 3. Iz istorii stroitelstva sovetskoi kultury. Moskva 1917-1918 gg., p.126, note.
 4. 'Letters of A.V.Lunacharsky' (publication of I.S.Smirnov), Novy mir, 1965 no.4, p.252.

was reported to be a frequent visitor at Lunacharsky's office at the Winter Palace,¹ and in May he made his first formal offer of cooperation with Narkompros in its dealings with the scientific world.² In September, after the attack on Lenin's life, Lunacharsky announced to the press that Gorky intended to enter into close cooperation with the Soviet government, and that an agreement had been signed by himself and Gorky on the establishment of a publishing house, Vsemirnaya literatura [World literature], which Gorky was to organize as an autonomous department of Narkompros.³

From the moment when Gorky entered into cooperation with the Soviet government, he occupied a liaison position between the Bolsheviks and the intelligentsia, as Lunacharsky did, and became a patron and protector of the intelligentsia and a channel for the expression of its grievances. But where Lunacharsky saw his first loyalty to the Bolsheviks and to the Soviet government, Gorky's first loyalty went to the intelligentsia. This fine distinction between Lunacharsky's position and Gorky's was not always recognized. Lunacharsky was offended when, at a meeting in Gorky's flat in 1918, it was suggested that members of the intelligentsia would agree to work for him personally, but not for his colleagues: it would have made him, he thought, 'a peculiar kind of hard skin or, more exactly, a tortoiseshell, behind which art was intending to sit out the unpleasantnesses threatened by the "barbarous revolution".'⁴ On another occasion,

1. S.S.Prokofyev, 'Autobiography', S.S.Prokofyev. Materialy, dokumenty, vospominaniya, Moscow 1961, p.161.

2. TSGAOR 2306/1/36, 22 May 1918 (statement of Lunacharsky).

3. Izvestiya VTSIK, 1918 no.195, 10 Sept., p.3.

4. 'From the literary heritage of A.V.Lunacharsky', Novy mir, 1966 no.9, p.237.

a gathering of the intelligentsia acclaimed Lunacharsky as being not like a commissar but a true intelligent, and were astonished when he rose 'without his usual smile' and declaimed:¹

'Net, ya ne s vami. Svoim naprasno
I litsemerno menya zovyote.'

(No, I am not with you. You call me your own in vain and hypocritically.)

Gorky's patronage of the intelligentsia was later criticized by Lunacharsky when they were again estranged by Gorky's emigration. Gorky, Lunacharsky wrote, 'turned out completely in the camp of the intelligentsia, ... siding with the intelligentsia in its grumbling, lack of faith and terror at the prospect of the destruction of valuables under the blows of the Revolution.'² In his play Osvobozhdeniy Don-Kikhot, Lunacharsky depicted a character derived in part from V.G.Korolenko and Romain Rolland, but largely from Gorky³ in his relations with Lunacharsky and Lenin between 1917 and 1921. Gorky, Lunacharsky and Lenin are presented in the characters of Don Quixote, Don Balthazar and Don Rodrigo. Don Balthazar speaks these parting words to Don Quixote:⁴

'If we had not broken the plots in the rear, we would have led our army to ruin. Ah, Don Quixote! I do not wish to aggravate your blame, but here you played your fatal role. I will not hide the fact that it came into

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1. K.Chukovsky, 'Lunacharsky', Sovremenniki, pp.424-5.
 2. article pub.Komsomolskaya pravda, 1926 no.222, quoted P.A.Bugaenko,Lunacharsky i literaturnoe dvizhenie 20-kh godov, Saratov 1967, p.151.
 3. 'The idea of contemporary Don-Quixotism arose especially clearly when I was present at conversations between V.I.Lenin and Gorky' (Lunacharsky, 'A new play of R.Rolland', Sob.soch., v.4, p.438).
 4. Lunacharsky, Pyesy, Moscow 1963, p.519.

stern Rodrigo's head to bring down the threatening hand of the law on you, as a lesson to all the soft-hearted people who thrust themselves and their philanthropy into life, which is stern and complicated and full of responsibility ... I restrained him from that ...'

Yet Lunacharsky - 'our soft-hearted Anatoly' as he was called in Novaya zhizn¹ - was himself a philanthropist. For Vyacheslav Ivanov, he suggested that the collegium of Narkompros finance a trip abroad on grounds of Ivanov's ill-health;² and later that Narkompros should finance a trip to the Northern Caucasus for Ivanov to work with unspecified local cultural authorities, petition the Health Commissariat to allocate places in a sanatorium for the sick members of Ivanov's family and ask MUZO to give paid work to his daughter, a musician.³ For Konstantin Balmont, Lunacharsky urged Vorovsky (head of Gosizdat) to publish a book of his poems with payment in advance ('It seems to me that Balmont, who has written a series of fine works, has at least deserved to have a crust of bread for his child');⁴ and he suggested to the collegium that Balmont and the musician S.Kusevitsky should be commissioned by Narkompros to work abroad, keeping their salaries.⁵ When Kusevitsky's exit visa was held up by the Special Department of the Cheka, the collegium empowered Lunacharsky to negotiate with the Cheka on Kusevitsky's behalf.⁶ For Stanislavsky, Lunacharsky wrote to Lenin to appeal against

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1. Novaya zhizn, 1918 no.55, 30 March, p.2 (satirical poem).
 2. TSGAOR 2306/1/320, 11 March 1920 (collegium of Narkompros).
 3. TSGAOR 2306/1/320, 12 August 1920.
 4. letter of 1919, pub. N.Piyashev, 'A.V.Lunacharsky on Balmont', Russkaya literatura, 1966 no.1.
 5. TSGAOR 2306/1/320, 17 April 1920.
 6. TSGAOR 2306/1/320, 29 April 1920.

Stanislavsky's eviction from his flat.¹ For V.I.Nemirovich-Danchenko, Lunacharsky suggested a trip abroad to finish his book Narodnye tribuny i mucheniki revolyutsii [People's tribunes and martyrs of the revolution];² and for the Petrograd publisher 'Alkonost', he urged Gosizdat to facilitate printing of the series Zapiski mechtatelei [Dreamers' notes].³

For Count Zubov, Lunacharsky had the Petrograd Institute of the history of art removed from the jurisdiction of the Petrograd education department to that of Narkompros.⁴ He even raised the possibility of government subsidy for Ivanov-Razumnik's Free Philosophical Academy [Volfila] - 'the last surviving free-thought society,' wrote Victor Serge, '[of which] in all probability I was the only Communist member'⁵ - on condition the name was changed from 'academy' to 'society'.⁶

'Vsemirnaya literatura' was established by agreement between Gorky and Lunacharsky on September 4, 1918, for the purpose of publishing 'selected works of foreign artistic

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1. 'Letters of A.V.Lunacharsky', Novy mir, 1965 no.4, pp.244-5 (letter of July 1920).
 2. TSGAOR 2306/1/320, 15 July 1920 (suggestion approved), 20 July 1920 (suggestion rejected).
 3. TSGAOR 2306/1/181, 4 August 1919. 'Alkonost' was organized by S.M.Alyansky with the support of A.Blok in 1918, and published the first edition of Blok's Dvenadtsat (see S.M.Alyansky, 'Meetings with Blok', Novy mir, 1967 no.6). Zapiski mechtatelei included works of Blok, Andrei Bely and E.Zamyatin.
 4. TSGAOR 2306/1/320, 21 February 1920.
 5. V.Serge, Memoirs of a revolutionary 1901-1941, trans. P.Sedgwick, London 1963, p.151.
 6. TSGAOR 2306/1/180, 24 January 1919.

literature of the late 18th and 19th century'.¹ It inherited the premises and many of the contributors of the journal Novaya zhizn,² which had been closed down in July. Gorky almost certainly intended 'Vsemirnaya literatura' to provide a refuge for the literary intelligentsia, which is what in practice it did. Victor Serge, who was offered employment there, refused because 'the only people I met there were ageing or embittered intellectuals trying to escape from the present'.³ The office of 'Vsemirnaya literatura' was hung with paintings by Levitan, Benois, Kustodiev, Sudeikin, Boris Grigoryev and others from the collection of Z.I.Grzhebin (who worked for 'Vsemirnaya literatura' as well as running his own independent publishing house), and tea was drunk from eighteenth-century china.⁴ Academicians Oldenburg, Krachkovsky, Alekseev and Vladimirtsev worked on translations from the Indian, Arabic, Chinese and Mongol; Blok worked in the German section; N.Gumilev and A.Levinson in the French; Akim Volynsky in the Italian; Chukovsky and Zamyatin in the Anglo-American;⁵ and Professor Batyushkov, whom Lunacharsky had dismissed from the directorship of Petrograd state theatres, advised on technique of translation.⁶

The weakness of 'Vsemirnaya literatura' from the point of view of the literary intelligentsia was its restriction

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1. P.A.Bugaenko, A.V.Lunacharsky i literaturnoe dvizhenie 20-kh godov, p.134.
 2. Chukovsky, 'Gorky', Sovremenniki, p.323.
 3. Memoirs of a revolutionary 1901-1941, p.76.
 4. B.Raikov, 'My meetings with Gorky', Gorky i nauka, p.258.
 5. Chukovsky, 'Gorky', Sovremenniki, pp.323-4.
 6. ibid., p.337.

to the publication of foreign literature in translation.

'Vsemirnaya literatura' could not publish the original work of the writers it employed,¹ nor was there any department of Narkompros working effectively for this purpose.²

Narkompros, like 'Vsemirnaya literatura', employed a number of writers in occupations other than writing - Mayakovsky and Brik worked in IZO, Balmont, Bryusov, Khodasevich, Pasternak, Baltrushaitis, Georgy Chulkov, Ivan Novikov, V.Volkenshtein and Vyacheslav Ivanov in TEO,³ the theatrical department of Narkompros.

Lunacharsky believed that it was Narkompros' responsibility to arrange the publication of works of all literary schools. He wrote in 1918:⁴

'Now the workers' and peasants' state must to an ever-increasing extent take on itself the publication of literary works by all available means - directly through the state publishing house, or through Soviet publishers, or by subsidy [to private publishers].

And of course the state must make it a rule to give the mass reader access to all that is new and fresh. It is better to make a mistake and offer the people something which is not now capable of arousing their sympathy than to leave a work which is rich with future possibilities hidden, because it is not to somebody's taste ...

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1. In July 1919 'Vsemirnaya literatura' applied for the right to publish 'Russian artistic literature', but after opposition from Gosizdat Narkompros rejected the application (TSGAOR 2306/1/181, 10 July 1919).
 2. Gosizdat was established in May 1919 as an autonomous body within Narkompros. Until then Narkompros had only a small and apparently inactive 'literary-publishing' department headed by Lebedev-Polyansky.
 3. V.Khodasevich, Literaturnye statyi i vospominaniya pp.347,357.
 4. Preface to Rzhanoe slovo, Petrograd 1918.

Let the worker hear and evaluate everything, the old and the new. We will not impose anything on him; we will show him everything.'

In order to facilitate the publication of literary works (before the organization of Gosizdat), Lunacharsky tried to establish a literary department of Narkompros. The attempt failed because 'after a few discussions [with writers], it became clear to me that a constituent-democratic tendency¹ was emerging: we will organize, they said, and you give us part of the power and the money.'²

When, early in 1919, Lunacharsky made a second attempt to organize a literary department, he was at once accused of trying to turn the old anti-Soviet intelligentsia into a new bureaucracy, and of giving Gorky, Andrei Bely and Georgy Chulkov the power to suppress proletarian culture.³ Lunacharsky replied sharply. Despite the fact that 'only educated people can educate', he wrote,⁴ Narkompros had consistently resisted pressure from its non-party specialists to put them in charge of its departments. He was not intending to put 'highly-respected comrade Gorky' in charge of literature, still less of proletarian literature.

'The business is very simple. Private publishers cannot now exist without subsidy; [they receive] paper only

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1. uchredilovsko-demokraticeskaya tendentsiya - a reference to the Arts' union's attempt to establish a 'Constituent assembly of the arts' independent of government control.
 2. Lunacharsky, 'The commissariat of public education[sic] and the writers', Izvestiya VTSIK, 1919 no.27, 6 Feb., p.1.
 3. N.Ustinov, 'Against the current', Izvestiya VTSIK, 1919 no.24, 2 Feb., p.2.
 4. 'The commissariat of public education and the writers', Izvestiya VTSIK, 1919 no.27, 6 Feb., p.1.

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For writers, this is the end. Surely comrade Ustinov does not think that we can simply stop all literature,... [and] that in that Russian literature on which Russian society lived until the revolution there was nothing valuable and nothing promising. We need to take care of it, and we need to act so that even under the paper and typographical shortage those works which are most valuable from the purely artistic point of view find fulfilment.

For this it is necessary to create a special literary department from among the writers themselves ... At the head of the literary department, I wished to see M.Gorky.'

Lunacharsky hoped that the establishment of Gosizdat would solve the writers' problems and render a literary department of Narkompros unnecessary. But by the end of 1919 he had changed his mind and, on the third attempt, a literary department was created under Narkompros.¹ The president of the department (LITO) was Lunacharsky; deputy president - Valery Bryusov; members - A.Serafimovich, Vyacheslav Ivanov, M.Gorky, A. Blok, Yu.Baltrushaitis and M.Gerasimov or V.Kirillov (representing Proletkult); candidate members - O.Brik, P.N.Sakulin, Yu.Aikhenvald, M.O.Gershenzon and I.Rukavishnikov.² The function of LITO was not to control or direct literary life, but to act as a liaison between the government and the literary world, give support to literary groups, establish norms of payment to writers for publications of their work, and to cooperate with Gosizdat in allocating paper and typographical resources for the publication of artistic literature.³

1. TSGAOR 2306/1/182, 11 December 1919. The proposal was introduced by D.Maryamov, who was appointed learned secretary to the collegium of LITO.

2. ibid.

3. ibid.

Krupskaya, who was not present at the meeting establishing LITO, found both the notion of a 'literary department' and its proposed membership unsatisfactory. She wrote:¹

'The form of organization suggested by the writers is hardly appropriate from the point of view of the broad masses as readers. It is inappropriate because it gives great power into the hands of a group of people, power to strengthen their own literary trend ... That would be permissible if the nine men were non-controversial - if in respect of talent, literary affiliation and conscientious attitude to novice writers the nine were beyond doubt.

But where at the moment will you find a committee of nine which is not just nominal but capable of working? Where are those generally-recognized names?

Gorky? Perhaps Serafimovich? Perhaps they are proletarian writers? But who can determine that, and who can select the nine?

The mass reader might be able to determine it. He has made his attitude to Gorky quite clear, but to the rest? ... Only the reader can determine the significance of a writer. That is how it must be...

The new life will probably give birth to new writers, a new and vitally infectious trend in literature. And the nine will only involuntarily put brakes on that new literary trend. Organization is necessary, so let there be a [collegium] of nine, but let them have fewer powers. They must not take unions, associations, clubs and circles under their monopolistic control. All these organizations must have the right to find their own identity, the right to choose whatever literary trend they like. It is also necessary to think how to give the broad masses the chance to show their attitude to proposed literary works before the size of the edition is determined. And we need other means to decide the minimum standard of literary achievement which would give each writer the right to publish his works, even if only in an edition of 1,000 ...'

1. TSGAOR 2306/1/182, 11 December 1919. Undated letter appended to minutes.

The functions and membership of LITO remained as they had been decided, in spite of Krupskaya's objections. Neither her fears of monopolistic control nor Lunacharsky's hopes of facilitating literary publication were realized to any extent, for LITO turned out one of the least active and influential of Narkompros' cultural departments. Its achievements were limited perhaps by Gosizdat, but above all by the increasing paper shortage and typographical crisis.

LITO, being predominantly representative of the old literary intelligentsia (and of the symbolists in particular), was in many ways a Moscow counterpart to the Petrograd 'Vsemirnaya literatura'; but of the two 'Vsemirnaya literatura', with Gorky and Grzhebin in charge, made the greater impact. In the Narkompros file for 1920,¹ LITO appears only twice: in July, when A.M. Rossky of Rabkrin replaced Maryamov as learned secretary to the collegium;² and in August, when LITO's request for a grant for medical treatment for Andrei Bely was approved from 'the special fund at the disposal of the commissar, A.V. Lunacharsky'.³

In dealing with literature, Lunacharsky never went so far as to set up parallel collegiums representative of different literary groups - although in fact the literary left congregated around IZO, ROSTA (the news agency, which was incorporated into Narkompros in 1919) and Proletkult.

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1. TSGAOR 2306/1/320. This is the file of minutes of meetings of the collegium of Narkompros, with some other material included. The Gosizdat file for 1920, which was not available to me, would of course contain relevant material on LITO.
 2. TSGAOR 2306/1/320, 24 July 1920 (collegium of Narkompros).
 3. TSGAOR 2306/1/320, 16 Aug. 1920 (commission on current business).

But from the very beginning parallel collegiums were established for art (IZO and the department of museum affairs under Natalya Ivanovna Trotskaya) and the theatre (TEO and the department of state theatres). IZO and TEO attracted the artistic left, while the departments of museum affairs and state theatres worked with the preservationists and traditionalists.

O.D.Kameneva was appointed head of TEO in Moscow early in 1918,¹ but the state theatres remained outside her jurisdiction.² In June 1918, in Lunacharsky's absence from Moscow, Kameneva tried to have the state theatres incorporated in TEO, pointing out their 'tendency to isolate themselves from the democracy', but her proposal was not accepted by the State Education Commission.³

The Moscow state theatres remained in the charge of Lunacharsky himself and E.K.Malinovskaya. One of Lunacharsky's notable successes in 1918-19 was to win the confidence of the grand old men of the Moscow theatre - Stanislavsky, Nemirovich-Danchenko and Yuzhin-Sumbatov. To Kameneva and others, it seemed that the theatrical establishment was in fact using Lunacharsky as a 'tortoiseshell' to shield them from the barbarous revolution. During the debates on nationalization of the theatres in 1919, A.I.Yuzhin - a public opponent of nationalization - wrote privately to Lunacharsky that if the theatres must be nationalized,

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1. appointment confirmed by Sovnarkom on 12 April 1918 (I.S.Smirnov, Lenin i sovetskaya kultura, p.412.)
 2. The Moscow state theatres were under E.K.Malinovskaya of Moscow Soviet (see p.142). In 1919 Malinovskaya became head of the Narkompros department of state theatres.
 3. TSGAOR 2306/1/36, 17 June 1918.

'above all, only you must keep the highest government authority over the real artistic theatres for yourself personally, and widen the extent of that authority'.¹
The wily Stanislavsky expressed the same thought at the end of 1919:²

'To understand art means to feel it.

This capacity is by no means given to all.

To the great good fortune of the Russian theatre, it is possessed by our leader, Anatoly Vasilevich Lunacharsky.

Anatoly Vasilevich understands ... that it is necessary to give time to artists and the old art to be reborn and create new forms, to penetrate deeply into the essence of great events ...

Finally, our leader understands that the plane of our art is the aesthetic plane; and it is impossible with impunity to transfer art into the other plane of politics or practical life which is alien to it by nature, exactly as it is impossible to transfer politics into the plane of pure aesthetics ...'

A.I.Yuzhin (Prince Sumbatov) was director of the Moscow Maly theatre. Before the revolution, he had begun the preparation of a project for 'autonomy', or self-administration, of the Maly theatre. The Maly, under his guidance, did not join the boycott of the intelligentsia against the Bolsheviks or go on strike because, 'as an institution serving the eternal tasks of public enlightenment', its activity 'must continue irrespective of political upheavals and changes of state power'.³ Early in 1918 Yuzhin, armed with this project, met Lunacharsky for the first time.

1. quoted T.Knyazhevskaya, Yuzhin-Sumbatov i sovetsky teatr, p.36.

2. letter read to meeting of art-workers, 22 Dec., 1919, pub. Vestnik teatra, 1920 no.48, 13-19 January.

3. resolution of 20 Nov.1917, quoted Knyazhevskaya, op.cit. p.26.

He behaved, Lunacharsky recalled affectionately,¹

'with all his superficial cunning ... One felt in him a genuine Oriental [Yuzhin was born in Tiflis]; he was improbably cautious, as if treading on ice, suspecting an underhand trick in almost every paragraph. He kept thinking that he was going to be tricked into some sort of condition which he himself would sign and which must then be sacredly observed, but which would destroy the theatre and permit it to be put to some use that was base - that is, anti-artistic, - in Yuzhin's eyes.'

Lunacharsky had 'nothing against a measure of autonomy in the theatres'.² In Petrograd the commissar in charge of state theatres, Bakrylov, was soon replaced by a director, Ivan Vasilevich Ekskuzovich of the Mariinsky theatre; and Lunacharsky and Ekskuzovich worked hard to find some formula for granting limited administrative autonomy without abdicating all control over the theatre companies, which remained aggressively hostile to the Soviet government.³ In Moscow, finding Yuzhin more cooperative, Lunacharsky was ready to grant administrative autonomy. He presented Yuzhin's project, with only slight amendment, to Sovnarkom; and in May 1918 Sovnarkom approved it.⁴

In 1919 the short-lived revolutionary government of the Hungarian Soviet Republic nationalized the theatres on the day after taking power, before the nationalization of industry. Lenin thought this odd, and asked a Hungarian Comintern delegate whether they had no more important business

1. 'Three meetings', Vosp.i vpech., p.304.

2. Lunacharsky, 'On Soviet rails', Vosp.i vpech., p.282.

3. see Lunacharsky, 'On Soviet rails', Vosp.i vpech., pp.275-286, passim.

4. Knyazhevskaya, Yuzhin-Sumbatov i sovetsky teatr, p.33.

to attend to.¹ In Russia, however, no move was made to nationalize the theatres until more than a year after the revolution, and even then Lenin thought it premature.

The supporters of nationalization - A.V.Galkin, president of Maly Sovnarkom, S.I.Kanatchikov of Maly Sovnarkom, O.D.Kameneva, P.M.Kerzhentsev and others - were anxious to 'proletarianize' the theatres and reverse Lunacharsky's policy of protecting the state theatres and the theatrical tradition. In 1919 Galkin called for an end to subsidization of the state theatres in their present form, saying that 'it would be better to use the stage of the Bolshoi theatre for agitation and propaganda'.² Galkin and Kanatchikov proposed a resolution to Maly Sovnarkom obliging Moscow theatres to include plays 'of revolutionary content' in their repertoire.³ In both cases, Lenin intervened against the radicals and the proposals were rejected. A project for the nationalization of the theatres was twice accepted by Maly Sovnarkom in 1919 and rejected, on Lenin's initiative, by Bolshoi Sovnarkom:⁴ its author was evidently Kameneva.⁵

The theatres themselves were bitterly opposed to nationalization. In June 1919, at a meeting held to discuss the nationalization project, only Yu.Slavinsky (president of

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1. A.Yufit, 'Facts, documents, history', Teatr, 1966 no.6, p.43.
 2. E.K.Malinovskaya, 'I consult Ilyich', Izvestiya 1963 no.77, 31 March, p.5 - first (posthumous) publication.
 3. A.Yufit, 'Facts, documents, history', Teatr, 1966 no.6, p.39.
 4. ibid., p.38.
 5. It was Kameneva, head of TEO, who informed the collegium of Narkompros on the progress of the nationalization project (TSGAOR 2306/1/181, 19 May 1919), and her subsequent removal from TEO appears to have been connected with the substantive revision of the project after its rejection.

the union of art-workers¹) spoke in favour of nationalization because, he said, it 'has already been realized in various distorted forms by local Soviets'. Yuzhin, 'in a pathetic speech, demanded absolute freedom for the theatre'. Another speaker 'permitted himself to make coarse and incorrect attacks against TEO of Narkompros and its leaders', after which the Communists present left in protest.²

In July Yuzhin, Stanislavsky, Nemirovich-Danchenko, Tairov and E.M. Novomirsky issued a statement on behalf of the state theatres and the Kamerny and Moscow Arts' theatres associated with them claiming that nationalization was both impracticable and 'irreconcilable with the principle of freedom of creative work'.³

In the same month, Kameneva left TEO and was succeeded at its head by Lunacharsky.⁴ The supporters of nationalization had carried their case to the point where nationalization became inevitable: it was Lunacharsky's task to formulate it in terms which would be acceptable to the theatres and would preserve a measure of autonomy for the theatres with strong artistic traditions.

At the beginning of August, Lunacharsky called a meeting to announce his project for nationalization - or, as

1. soyuz rabotnikov iskusstv, known as rabis or vserabis.

2. Izvestiya VTSIK, 1919 no.129, 17 June, p.4.

3. quoted Knyazhevskaya, Yuzhin-Sumbatov i sovetsky teatr, pp.36-7.

4. In July Lunacharsky referred to himself as Kameneva's successor at TEO (Izvestiya VTSIK, 1919 no.164, 27 July, p.4). On August 4, the staff of TEO gave Kameneva a farewell party, Vyacheslav Ivanov reciting a poem written in her honour (Izvestiya VTSIK, 1919 no.175, 7 August, p.4).

he called it, 'concentration'¹ - of the theatres, and for the creation of a central organ for the direction of theatres, Tsentroteatr.² According to his project, theatrical property (buildings and inventory) was to become the property of the state, to be put at the disposal of theatre companies and associations on conditions to be determined by Tsentroteatr. Theatres were to submit financial estimates and would be financed in various categories by the state; but 'theatres able to exist on their own resources, and not regarded as harmful, may be left completely outside the attention of the state'. Theatres under reliable direction, 'whose cultural value is recognized as incontrovertible' would be 'recognized as autonomous', although Tsentroteatr reserved the right to make certain demands on them in respect of repertoire and 'in the direction of bringing the theatre closer to the popular masses [and] to the socialist ideal'. Private theatres would have the use of theatrical property, on condition that their administrative boards included representatives of Tsentroteatr or the local education department; but they would not be regarded as possessing autonomy. Tsentroteatr, being anxious to encourage the growth of independent artistic activity, would transfer 'all theatres whose artistic collective is sufficiently strong' to the category of autonomous theatres.

There was to be no change in the administration of the state theatres, Lunacharsky's project continued, but both TEO and the department of state theatres were to be subordinate

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1. TSGAOR 2306/1/181, 2 Aug.1919 - Lunacharsky, 'Project of a decree on the concentration of theatrical affairs'.
 2. project reported in Izvestiya VTSIK, 1919 no.170, 3 Aug.,p.4.

to Tsentrteatr and would function as its technical apparatus. Tsentrteatr's jurisdiction included state, municipal and private theatres. Its president would be the People's Commissar of Education (Lunacharsky), and the deputy president would be appointed by Narkompros. The collegium of Tsentrteatr would have 7 members, 4 of them appointed by Narkompros and 3 by the union of art-workers.

The first notable feature of Lunacharsky's project was that it maintained the status quo in the administration of the state theatres, and gave other theatres - like the Moscow Arts' and Kamerny theatres - the chance to achieve the same privileged status and administrative autonomy. The second feature of the project was that it put Tsentrteatr, as well as TEO, under Lunacharsky's personal control, and that the collegium of Tsentrteatr was so composed as to exclude persons not acceptable either to Narkompros or to the art-workers' union. Lunacharsky described the project as 'a grandiose and careful experiment of uniting reasonable autonomy of artists with firm leadership by the dictator class through its state apparatus'.¹

The project apparently made such a favourable impression on the theatrical world that Lunacharsky almost immediately found it necessary to correct the illusion that he was offering autonomy plus subsidy to one and all. Apart from the state theatres and the Moscow Arts' theatre, he thought it probable that in fact only two Moscow theatres would initially qualify for autonomous status.²

1. 'Theatrical questions. The project of concentration of theatrical affairs, and speculators of the theatrical arts', Izvestiya VTSIK, 1919 no.173, 7 August, p.4.

2. ibid.

Lunacharsky's project was passed by Sovnarkom on August 26¹ with only one substantial amendment - the collegium of Tsentrteatr was to have 10 members instead of 7, of whom 7 were to be appointed by Narkompros and 3 from the council of trade unions (VTSSPS). The union of art-workers thus lost its exclusive claim to the places on the collegium of Tsentrteatr not filled by Narkompros. The Sovnarkom decree also gave Moscow and Petrograd Soviets the right to send voting representatives to Tsentrteatr.

The acceptance of Lunacharsky's project was a victory both for him and for the state theatres, and a great disappointment to the theatrical left. K.N.Malinin, who was sympathetic to the state theatres,² was appointed deputy president of Tsentrteatr. The first Narkompros appointees were D.I.Leshchenko, P.M.Kerzhentsev, Vyacheslav Ivanov, Ekskuzovich, Malinovskaya, the musician L.L.Obolensky and A.I.Yuzhin, Nemirovich-Danchenko having the right to deputize for Ekskuzovich.³ Of these, only Kerzhentsev was of the theatrical left, which meant that regardless of the affiliations of the VTSSPS delegates, the upholders of the theatrical tradition had a clear majority in Tsentrteatr.

In December, in token of their role as repositories and teachers of theatrical art invulnerable to revolutionary attack, the state theatres and the Moscow Arts' theatre were given the title of 'academic' theatres.⁴

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1. 'Decree on the unification of theatrical affairs', Izvestiya VTSIK, 1919 no.199, 9 Sept., p.4.
 2. see his criticism of Kerzhentsev's proposals on the theatre in Protokoly pervoi vserossiiskoi konferentsii proletarskikh kulturno-prosvetitelnykh organizatsii 15-20 sent.1918g.p.124.
 3. TSGAOR 2306/1/182, 16 Aug. and 19 Nov.1919.
 4. Knyazhevskaya, Yuzhin-Sumbatov i sovetsky teatr, pp.97,194.

The establishment of Narkompros in the arts was not, in the normal sense, the establishment of an administration, but of a framework of cooperation with disparate and mutually intolerant groups. Lunacharsky's policy was to open channels of communication with the literary and artistic intelligentsia, to encourage all groups which could be regarded as sympathetic or accommodating in their attitude to the Soviet government, and to outmanoeuvre those which showed it blatant hostility.

The organizational framework devised for this purpose was administratively irrational to a high degree. It was wasteful of manpower and resources at a time when both were scarce.

But the objections most commonly raised to Narkompros' organization in the arts were not to its irrationality but to its impartiality, and came not from outside the artistic world but from within. Almost every literary and artistic group regarded itself as having overriding and even exclusive claims on Narkompros' goodwill. The most aggressive claimants were communist members of the artistic left. The first calls for a tendentious administration of the arts, an end to the weak-kneed policy of cooperation, came not from the Party or the government but from among the artists themselves.

ii) Lunacharsky and 'Theatrical October'

The theatre was the field of the most spectacular battle between the left and the traditionalists. As commissar, Lunacharsky's position in the battle was neutral. As playwright and philosopher of the drama, he was much closer to the traditionalists than to the left - giving the left a polemical weapon which it did not hesitate to use.

The left believed, as Lunacharsky did not, that the political revolution demanded a formal revolution in the arts which it was the duty of the revolutionary government to foster and ultimately to impose. There were various theories on the nature of the formal revolution in the theatre. For some, it meant the complete abandonment of the professional theatre in favour of collective amateur improvisation or organized mass spectacles with thousands of participants under professional direction. Others wanted to retain the conventions of the stage play with individual professional actors but to revolutionize stage design, acting technique and the relationship of actor and audience. Others intended to make the stage play a medium for propaganda and to rewrite the classical repertoire in contemporary terms.

As commissar, Lunacharsky permitted and subsidized these experiments without accepting the basic premise of the left or its monopolistic claims. He found some of the left experiments in the theatre successful, some promising and others misguided; but his judgments as a critic were, as he thought they should be, distinct from his actions as commissar.

As critic, Lunacharsky wrote enthusiastically about the potentialities of the mass spectacle.¹ He praised Mayakovsky's satirical play Misteriya-buff,² and helped to find a theatre for its production (by Meyerhold, with designs by Malevich) in Petrograd in 1918, in spite of M.F.Andreeva's opposition.³ On the artistic level, he had some sympathy with the politically disastrous production of Verhaeren's Les aubes [Zori] by Meyerhold in 1920.⁴

But as a philosopher of the drama, Lunacharsky was on the side of the traditionalists in that he advocated the use of wholly traditional forms for the expression of revolutionary ideas. He thought that formal experimentation was liable to interfere with the communication of ideas, and also demanded a degree of artistic sophistication which was beyond a popular audience. Following Romain Rolland,⁵ Lunacharsky saw melodrama - the drama of high passions - as the only medium through which the writer could speak directly to a broad public. Melodrama, Lunacharsky wrote, 'will not be a simplified, coarsened and degraded form, as aesthetes think, but will be a transformation from our capricious, refined, hyper-cultural experiments ...

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1. see 'Revolution and art', Kommunisticheskoe prosveshchenie, 1920 no.1, p.26.
 2. Lunacharsky, 'Communist spectacle', Sob.soch. v.3, pp.39-40, and 'Theatre of the RSFSR', Sob.soch.v.3, p.123.
 3. Mayakovsky wrote of the production that 'Andreeva did everything possible. To hinder ...' (Sovetskie pisateli. Avtobiografii, v.2, p.73). On Lunacharsky's help, see Istoriya sovetskogo dramaticheskogo teatra, v.1, p.176.
 4. see his speech in the debate on Zori, 22 Nov.1920, reported Vestnik teatra, 1920 no.75, p.14.
 5. R.Rolland, Theatre du peuple, first pub. in Russian as Narodny teatr, 'Znanie', St.P., 1910; and in new trans. by Vyach.Ivanov, TEO Narkompros, Moscow, 1919.

to a form that recommends itself to healthy, monumental, simple, clear and strong taste ...'¹

Gorky shared Lunacharsky's views on melodrama, and in 1918 he was one of a group (with M.F.Andreeva, A. Blok, Yu.M.Yuryev and others) responsible, with Lunacharsky's support,² for the organization of the Petrograd Bolshoi dramaticheskyy teatr³ - a theatre of tragedy, romantic drama and high comedy or, in effect, a theatre of melodrama as Lunacharsky and Gorky understood it. A competition for the writing of melodrama was announced by Lunacharsky and M.F.Andreeva (as commissar of theatres and spectacles of the Northern Commune): the melodramas were to be in 4 acts, 'with choice of nation and epoch left to the author', and the announcement explained that⁴

'since melodrama is built on psychological primitivism, on the simplification of the feelings and inter-relation of the dramatis personae, it is desirable that the authors should clearly and definitely underline their sympathies and antipathies towards the various heroes. It is also desirable that choral songs, couplets, duets etc. should be introduced into the text of the melodrama.'

Gorky was secretary of the jury, whose other members were Lunacharsky, Chaliapin, the actor Monakhov and Yu.M.Yuryev.

In the winter of 1919-20, Lunacharsky was under persistent attack from the left for his defence of the traditional theatre. His chief opponents in the debate were P.M.Kerzhentsev

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1. 'What kind of melodrama do we need?' (1919), Sob.soch.v.2, p.21.
 2. see Andreeva's official letter to Lunacharsky, 16 Dec.1918, and his reply in M.F.Andreeva, pp.259-60.
 3. on the establishment of the theatre, see Yu.M.Yuryev, Zapiski, Leningrad-Moscow, 1963, v.2, p.374.
 4. Zhizn iskusstva, 1919 no.88, 28 Feb., p.2.

and Bukharin. Kerzhentsev saw Lunacharsky as in sinister alliance with the reactionaries of the theatre, Yuzhin (of the Maly theatre) and Tairov (of the Kamerny theatre).¹ He claimed that proletarian theatre would be created through rejection of the past and not - as Lunacharsky thought - through mastery of the theatrical culture of the past. The bourgeois theatres should be kept only as museums, 'which will protect the monuments of the past for us and keep them from dust and decomposition - but nobody would claim that art is created in the quiet of museums'.² There could be no compromise with the ideological enemy in the theatre, Kerzhentsev wrote, because 'the present is not a period of peaceful construction in any field, including the theatre, but a period of cruel struggle, of bloody struggle'.³

Lunacharsky, replying to Kerzhentsev 'in the name of the proletariat',⁴ argued that the proletariat actually preferred the classical theatre to the 'revolutionary'. This fact, he wrote, was more important than the ideas 'of any intellectual publicist, even if he is a member of the Party':

'And imagine, comrade Kerzhentsev, I have not only seen how bored the proletariat was at the production of a few 'revolutionary' plays, but have even read the statement

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1. Kerzhentsev, 'The bourgeois heritage', Vestnik teatra, 1920 no.51, 5-8 Feb., pp.2-3.
 2. Kerzhentsev, 'Theatrical museum', Vestnik teatra, 1920 no.48, ;3-;9 Jan., pp.4-5.
 3. Kerzhentsev, 'The bourgeois heritage', Vestnik teatra, 1920 no.51, 5-8 Feb., pp.2-3.
 4. Lunacharsky, 'In the name of the proletariat', Vestnik teatra, 1920 no.51, 5-8 Feb., pp.3-4.

of sailors and workers asking that these revolutionary spectacles be discontinued and replaced by performances of Gogol and Ostrovsky!'¹

Lunacharsky also rebuked Kerzhentsev, who was a most active trouble-maker, of stirring up antagonism between proletarian and peasant playwrights at a recent conference on the worker-peasant theatre, and thus ignoring the Party line on the relations of proletarian and peasant classes.

The first of Bukharin's attacks appeared in Pravda, of which he was editor, in October 1919.² He criticized 'the production of pure tedium' at state expense in the traditional theatres, and the neglect of Proletkult, 'which cannot get a decent theatrical building for the production of a militant play'.

'In the days of the greatest revolution, to enjoy The cherry orchard (not even The cherry factory) is the most supernatural stupidity; it is just barbarianism, which becomes simply sad and ridiculous. The working-class public, which comes to such plays and yawns from boredom, ... steels itself to 'understand' all the 'value' of these nice things - that is, to adapt his militant psychology to the psychology of our grandmothers. The remnants of slavish respect for aristocratic culture are deepened by the preaching of some of our ideologists who support this corruption of the proletariat.'

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1. Vestnik teatra, 1920 no.51, 5-8 Feb., pp.3-4. The 'statement' was mentioned several times by Lunacharsky. It came from the Kronstadt sailors who 'during the defence of the fortress, in their rare moments of leisure, asked us to send good actors, anything but the revolutionary theatre'. (speech of Nov.1920, Bulleten vserossiiskogo soveshchaniya politprosvetov, 1-8 Nov.1920, Moscow, p.3). The play sent was Gogol's Revizor.
 2. N.Bukharin, 'Struggle with the whites in the theatre (a business proposition)', Pravda, 1919 no.231, 16 Oct., p.1.

The specific occasion of Bukharin's article was a Proletkult studio production of the play Krasnaya pravda, written by a Red Army commander, A.A.Vermyshev, and - rather ironically - submitted to the competition for the best original melodrama organized by Gorky and Lunacharsky in 1919.¹ Bukharin admitted that the play was crude (although he put the word in inverted commas), but said that it suited the militant psychology of Red Army soldiers:

'It will make them tremble with excitement, and it is useful. And that is all that art can do.'

Bukharin struck again in December,² this time in connection with the play Mstitel, adapted by the Proletkultist V.F.Pletnev from a story by Claudel on the last days of the Paris Commune. It was again a Proletkult production, playing in a hall accommodating 300-400 people. Why, Bukharin asked, was it not playing to audiences of thousands? 'Because the leaders of our theatres are in the captivity of bourgeois ideologists.' Writing of the traditional theatres, Bukharin allowed that 'flowers may grow even on a corpse. But these are not the flowers which the proletariat needs.' The audience reaction to Mstitel had been overwhelming, Bukharin wrote. Everyone present had shared a collective emotional experience:

'Comrades came up to me one after the other, and each said in the same words: "I am shaking from head to foot"...
We must smash the old theatre. The person who does not understand that understands nothing.'

1. Lunacharsky, Sob.soch. v.3, p.542. Gorky's comment was that the play was 'not a melodrama, but a topical agitational play on a contemporary theme'.

2. Bukharin, 'Mstitel', Pravda, 1919 no.282, 16 Dec., p.1.

Lunacharsky's quarrel with Bukharin was not provoked by Bukharin's praise of proletarian melodrama (Mstitel) or proletarian agitational drama (Krasnaya pravda), for on principle Lunacharsky supported both genres. But he was infuriated that Bukharin, a prominent politician, should throw his weight against the traditional theatres in a way that was perhaps 'suitable for a journalist, but scarcely appropriate from the state point of view'.¹

Lunacharsky replied to Bukharin's second article not in Pravda but at length in Vestnik teatra, sending copies to government and Party leaders.² He was an older supporter of proletarian culture, he wrote, than Bukharin, and he was not prepared to see its future compromised by exaggeration of its present achievements. Proletarian plays were not popular with a broad public, nor even with a proletarian public; and for the time being their proper environment was the studio and the small theatre.

'To put on Mstitel in front of 300 comrades of definite sympathies, using amateur artists who put not much artistry but a great deal of revolutionary élan and sincerity into the play is a fine thing. But it is another thing to put it on as a finished production with professional actors who are ill-disposed to it, in a theatre which must attract 2,000 people as audience every day ...

So long as I remain People's Commissar of Education this business - the introduction of the proletariat to the mastery of all human culture - will remain my first concern. No primitive ABC of communism [azbuchno primitivny kommunizm] will swerve me personally from that path ... If the leading circles of the Russian revolution

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1. Lunacharsky, letter to the editor, Pravda, 1919 no.242, 29 Oct., p.2. (Reply to Bukharin's article in no.231).
 2. 'Revolutionary theatre (answer to comrade Bukharin)', Vestnik teatra, 1919 no.47, 23-28 Dec., and in Lunacharsky, Sob.soch. v.3, pp.100-105.

wished to take another path, they would have to appoint another People's Commissar, who would be able to ride off on a white - sorry, red - horse and liquidate the universities, and silence the unfortunate bourgeois Beethoven, Schubert and Tchaikovsky at all concerts - ordering them to play only one "hymn" (not, of course, "God save the Tsar" but the "Internationale"), albeit with variations.'

There the debate rested until the autumn of 1920. The administration of theatrical affairs remained, sometimes precariously, in the hands of the traditionalists. Lunacharsky was head of Tsentrteatr and, until February 1920, also head of TEO in Moscow: his policy was not hostile to the left, except in so far as the left attacked the state theatres, but this was enough for the left to consider him as an opponent. His successor, Vera Rudolfovna Menzhinskaya,¹ a school-teacher by profession, was new to theatrical affairs and had little authority.

O.D.Kameneva, formerly head of TEO, became head of the arts sub-department of MONO. She probably resented her demotion, was reported to be on bad terms with the most aggressive of the traditionalists, M.F.Andreeva,² and - perhaps more by the logic of interdepartmental warfare than from conviction - patronized the left.

In 1919, Petrograd had two theatrical administrations: TEO, under Meyerhold,³ and the department of theatres and spectacles of the Northern Commune, headed by M.F.Andreeva. In January 1919, Lunacharsky nominated Andreeva as his deputy

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1. appointed head of TEO in February (TSGAOR 2306/1/320, 10 Feb.1920).
 2. Khodasevich bears witness to the hostility between Kameneva and Andreeva, and writes that Kameneva 'called Meyerhold to her aid' in self-defence (Literaturnye statyi i vospominaniya, p.369).
 - 3.. J.Jelagin, Temny geni, p.211.

as head of the arts sector [khudozhestvenny sektor] of Narkompros in Petrograd.¹ This nomination should have both consolidated Andreeva's authority and - after Meyerhold's departure for the south in May 1919² - made it possible to unify the theatrical administration in Petrograd. But although Andreeva's authority had originally come from the Zinoviev administration in Petrograd³ and not from Narkompros, she was no longer persona grata to the Petrograd Soviet, which refused to confirm her appointment to the arts sector and, early in 1920, attempted to appoint another candidate.⁴ The attempt was defeated, and Andreeva appointed head of the arts sector in Petrograd, only after Lenin's intervention on her behalf.⁵

Hostility to Andreeva appears to have led not only Kameneva but Zinoviev and his wife Lilina to give some support to her enemies of the artistic left. Zinoviev was no friend of the futurists,⁶ but when they complained to him of Andreeva's 'administrative suppression' of their right to 'free creative labour', Zinoviev promised his support.⁷ In 1920, Andreeva told Lenin that Lilina - the effective head of the Petrograd education department - was

1. TSGAOR 2306/1/180, 24 January 1919.

2. J.Jelagin, Temny geni, p.218.

3. In 1918, Zinoviev headed the government of the Union of communes of the northern oblast which appointed Andreeva commissar of theatres and spectacles. After its dissolution at the beginning of 1919, Zinoviev headed both the Petrograd Party organization and the executive committee of the Petrograd Soviet, which refused confirmation of Andreeva's appointment as deputy head of the arts sector.

4. M.F.Andreeva, p.273.

5. ibid., p.656. The appointment was made on 30 April 1920.

6. see chapter 3, p.127.

7. E.Kuznetsov, 'Commissar of the theatres', M.F.Andreeva, p.416.

encouraging the amateur theatre at the expense of the professional out of malice towards herself, and that Lilina despised the classical repertoire.¹

It seems that in the spring of 1920, Lunacharsky considered offering Andreeva the position of head of Moscow TEO in order to save the traditional theatre from the attacks of Kerzhentsev and the left.² But nothing came of this, and pressure from the left on Tsentrteatr and on TEO under Vera Menzhinskaya increased. In the second half of August, Lunacharsky was sent to the Kuban on the agitation train 'October Revolution'.³ In Rostov he found Meyerhold, recently released from imprisonment by the Whites and a candidate for Communist Party membership,⁴ brought him back to Moscow,⁵ and announced his appointment as head of TEO.⁶

Lunacharsky's intentions and expectations in making this appointment are not clear, but it was greeted with joy by the theatrical left as a sign of imminent revolution in the theatre. Lunacharsky may have hoped otherwise. In 1918-19 Meyerhold - unlike Mayakovsky - had not been a polemicist of the left, and his decade of service in the Petrograd imperial theatres may have led Lunacharsky to think that he would respect the traditions of the state theatres.

But Meyerhold had returned from the south 'possessed,'

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1. letter of March-April 1920, in M.F.Andreeva, pp.278-9.
 2. letter from 'an unknown correspondent', apparently Lunacharsky, to Andreeva, 19 April 1920, in M.F.Andreeva, pp.279-81.
 3. A.Elkin, Lunacharsky, p.174.
 4. J.Jelagin, Temny geni, p.222.
 5. ibid., p.225.
 6. TSGAOR 2306/1/320, 16 Sept.1920 (collegium of Narkompros).

Ehrenburg writes, 'by the spirit of iconoclasm.'¹ In October, against Lunacharsky's wishes,² he liquidated the State model theatre [pokazatelny teatr] and gave its premises to Proletkult.³ Then, in association with Kameneva, he announced the revolution in the theatre under the slogan of 'Theatrical October'.⁴

'Theatrical October' meant full nationalization of theatres, the liquidation of the autonomy of the state theatres, the introduction of revolutionary repertoire according to the directives of a general repertoire plan, struggle against false ideology in the theatre, and the development of formal theatrical mastery.⁵ Its artistic imperatives were 'the abandonment of literature, psychology and representational realism' in the theatre; and the use of cubist, futurist and suprematist techniques to give the audience 'the feeling of materials in the interplay of their surfaces and volumes'.⁶

Leaving aside the artistic programme of 'Theatrical October', its slogans were wholly unacceptable to Lunacharsky because they were destructive of the theatrical administration he had created and the theatrical tradition he had tried to protect, and because they were intolerant of the continued

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1. I. Ehrenburg, First years of Revolution 1918-21 (2nd vol. of autobiography Men, years - life), London 1962, p.129. Ehrenburg worked under Meyerhold in TEO at this time.
 2. see Lunacharsky, 'Our tasks in the field of artistic life' (1920), Sob.soch. v.7, p.255.
 3. Pravda, 1920 no.234, 20 Oct., p.2.
 4. Izvestiya VTSIK, 1920 no.240, 27 Oct., p.2; and no.242, 29 Oct., p.2 (report of theses of Meyerhold and Kameneva on 'Theatrical October', accepted by meeting of the union of art-workers).
 5. Izvestiya VTSIK, 1920 no.240, 27 Oct., p.2.
 6. Knyazhevskaya, Yuzhin-Sumbatov i sovetsky teatr, pp.105,108.

existence of different theatrical trends. 'Theatrical October' was an unqualified bid for a theatrical monopoly of the left.

In November, a supporter of 'Theatrical October' claimed that Sovnarkom was about to grant this monopoly by reorganizing Tsentreteatr, introducing full nationalization and abolishing the autonomous and semi-autonomous status of individual theatres approved by Tsentreteatr.¹ Whether or not this was the case, Lunacharsky found the situation serious enough to declare the limits of the theatrical revolution. He announced that the state theatres (Aleksandrinsky, Mikhailovsky, Mariinsky, Bolshoi and Maly) and the theatres 'entering their association' (Moscow Arts' and its first and second studios, Kamerny and the new Children's theatre) were and would remain outside the sphere of TEO and 'Theatrical October'.²

As far as the state theatres were concerned, Lunacharsky's announcement was only confirmation of the administrative division which had existed since 1918. To argue that because TEO existed all theatres should be subordinate to it was, Lunacharsky wrote,³ 'a childish and childishly bureaucratic objection'. The exemption of the Moscow Arts' and Kamerny theatres from TEO's jurisdiction could also be justified in the terms of the 1919 decree 'On the unification of theatrical affairs'. But it was very hard to justify the exemption of the Children's theatre - whose organizer,

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1. Ya. Shapirshtein (Lers), 'On the fate of theatrical October', Vestnik teatra, 1920 no.75, 30 Nov., p.2.
 2. 'From the People's Commissar of Education', Vestnik teatra, 1920 no.74, 20 Nov., p.16.
 3. 'On the question of theatrical policy', Vestnik teatra, 1920 no.74, 20 Nov., pp.2-3.

Natalya Ilyinichna Sats,¹ was 17 years old - except as Lunacharsky ingenuously did:²

'Comrade Meyerhold does not like the direction of the [Children's] theatre, but I like it ... How can that theatre stay under the control of comrade Meyerhold when, according to his own conscience, he cannot answer for it?'

Lunacharsky's position was that the theatrical revolution should be conducted only in the 'revolutionary' theatres and in those of the traditional theatres whose artistic value was small.

At the height of the dispute between Lunacharsky and Meyerhold on the fate of the traditional theatres, Kerzhentsev attacked from the left and Krupskaya from the right. Kerzhentsev attacked the playwright Lunacharsky on political grounds, in an article published in Pravda under the neutral heading of 'Bibliography'.³ He wrote as follows:

'In recent months, Gosizdat has published three plays by A.V.Lunacharsky.

What is their content?

Oliver Cromwell is an historical play. The author praises the Danton of the English revolution - Oliver Cromwell - and condemns its Marats - the Levellers (see especially the 6th scene). It is a real hymn to political compromise and a stern [dismissal] of the communist aspirations of the epoch.

Magi is a mystical and philosophical play. Under the occult and mystical veneer, its essence appears to be an affirmation that "everything in the world is one", that God and the Devil are equal, that high and low are the same. If we decipher its symbolism, we find a typical petty-bourgeois anarchist philosophy which is

1. niece of Natalya Aleksandrovna Rozenel (née Sats), who became Lunacharsky's second wife in 1922.

2. 'To my opponents', Vestnik teatra, 1920 no.76-77, 14 Dec., pp.4-5.

3. Pravda, 1920 no.261, 20 Nov., p.2.

ready to accept the whole world, and to praise equally the right and the left, Communism and the Whiteguards, Lenin and Wrangel.

Ivan goes to heaven is a religious play. In it Jehovah and Christ, angels and archangels, hell and heaven, are introduced as living, genuine reality. Its content is that under the influence of the Bolshevik propaganda of Ivan, who has landed up in heaven, the revered Jehovah and Christ themselves repent their sins and renounce their divine power in favour of the people. The heavenly king was ashamed of his mistakes and kindly gives the people a constitution.

It is strange that the People's Commissar in charge of the Communist education of Soviet Russia can preach reactionary ideas in poetic form, and that these plays were published by Gosizdat and are not passed round in manuscript form as material for entertaining reading.

But the most interesting thing is that A.V. Lunacharsky states that the ideas which he preaches in his plays are not often elements of his world-view (see the preface to Magi). This is a really sensational discovery! It turns out that A.V. Lunacharsky considers it necessary to be faithful to communist ideas so long as he is acting as a politician; but finds it quite permissible to preach completely contradictory ideas as soon as he picks up his pen as a dramatist. Here you have a typical model of disorganized individual creative work. I think that if before publishing his plays comrade Lunacharsky had sought the advice not of his friends (who, he writes, like Magi very much) but of a genuine proletarian audience, he would have heard bold and sharp criticism, which might have been able to direct even his poetic inspiration into the communist and not the present individualist and [hazardous] channel.

It has long been time to bring the fantasy of a few of our communist poets into the strict but necessary limits of Party discipline.'

Krupskaya, also writing in Pravda,¹ attacked Meyerhold's production of an adapted version of Verhaeren's Les aubes [Zori].

1. Pravda, 1920 no.252, 10 Nov., p.2.

She disliked both the futurist decorations and the modernization of the play to fit the circumstances of the Russian revolution ('The Russian proletariat in the role of the Shakespearian crowd, which any self-important fool leads wherever he likes, is an insult,' Krupskaya wrote).

Unlike Kerzhentsev, who threatened Lunacharsky with Party discipline, Krupskaya made no threats and did not accuse Meyerhold of alien ideology. But, since Krupskaya was Lenin's wife, her article was treated by the theatrical left as an authoritative political challenge and a sign that futurism was on political trial. The theatrical left and Lunacharsky both prepared to defend themselves from political attack.

Lunacharsky was in the unhappy position of being assailed from the left for his support of the state theatres, from the right for his tolerance of the futurists, and from Pravda for the ideology of his plays. It was he who had appointed Meyerhold to TEO and allowed him to organize Teatr RSFSR I, where Zori was staged; and he had introduced the première of Zori with the statement that he in principle approved 'the reworking of plays and their adaptation to our revolutionary reality'.¹ Because of this, Krupskaya reproached him in the collegium of Narkompros for protecting Meyerhold and his artistic theories.²

But in the opinion of the left, Lunacharsky's 'protection' was completely inadequate. Although Lunacharsky, unlike

1. Vestnik teatra, 1920 no.74, 20 Nov., p.10.

2. Lunacharsky, O teatre i dramaturgii, Moscow 1958, v.1, p.789 (note by editor A. Deich).

Krupskaya, had not been upset by the Meyerhold production of Zori - which combined what he regarded as positive and negative elements in much the proportion he had expected - he took the occasion of the subsequent debate on the production to deny the correlation of revolutionary art and revolutionary politics which was the basic premise of the left. Futurism, he said, was already old-fashioned:¹

'Futurism has dropped behind, it already stinks. I agree that it has been only three days in the grave, but it already stinks, and there is no need to look for any Picasso for the proletariat. You say that they [the proletariat] are the captives of the old theatre, but really they have seen little of it. It is you who are captives of the Paris cafes.'

This provoked Mayakovsky, one of the most active defenders of the left, to publish an 'Open letter to A.V. Lunacharsky'² suggesting that Lunacharsky was now retreating from an earlier position of support for the left. Mayakovsky recalled Lunacharsky's praise of his own Misteriya-buff, pointed out that Lunacharsky had appointed left artists as heads of TEO (Meyerhold), MUZO (A.Lourie) and IZO (D.Shterenberg), and - for polemical purposes - claimed that Lunacharsky's play Ivan goes to heaven was itself a work of left art.³ 'Won't you find it rather awkward to "explain away" so much that is compromising?' Mayakovsky asked.

The ironical reference to Ivan goes to heaven was characteristic of comment from the left on Lunacharsky's plays.

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1. Vestnik teatra, 1920 no.75, 30 Nov., p.14 (report of debate on Zori held 22 Nov. in Teatr RSFSR I).
 2. Vestnik teatra, 1920 no.75, 30 Nov., pp.2-3.
 3. The play Ivan v rayu is somewhat in the style of Maeterlinck. Mayakovsky referred to the 'abstruse language of twisted minds'.

Nobody on the left was eager to defend the plays, but few openly endorsed Kerzhentsev's particular line of attack. On November 26, a confrontation between Lunacharsky and Kerzhentsev was arranged at the Dom pechati [House of the press].¹ Mayakovsky and Viktor Shklovsky strongly criticized Lunacharsky's plays and his 'persecution of futurism', but did not explicitly associate themselves with Kerzhentsev. The editors of Vestnik teatra (the organ of TEO and, at this time, of the left) declared themselves on Lunacharsky's side.²

Lunacharsky chose to defend his plays in this debate on the principle of individual creative freedom. Kerzhentsev rejected this principle. Other speakers from the left ignored it. In 1920, the principles of creative freedom and mutual tolerance in the arts were defended only by artistic traditionalists and 'reactionaries', and by Lunacharsky; and were attacked only by members of the artistic left, and not by official spokesmen of the government or the Party.³ 'It must be said,' writes a Soviet historian,⁴ 'that the demand to annihilate the opponent and wipe him from the face of the earth, the appeals to the government to deprive that opponent of the possibility of creative work and even to apply to him measures of a repressive character, came only

1. Vestnik teatra, 1920 no.76-77, 14 Dec., pp.16-19 (report of the debate).

2. ibid., p.16.

3. Kerzhentsev, although an old Bolshevik, was not influential in the Party. Pravda published his article, but inconspicuously and without editorial support; and published no further comment on 'Party discipline' in the arts. In the absence of authoritative contradiction, the government spokesman on the arts was Lunacharsky.

4. Knyazhevskaya, Yuzhin-Sumbatov i sovetsky teatra, p.108.

from the camp of the "leftists".'

Of the three plays which Kerzhentsev attacked, the 'historical melodrama' Oliver Cromwell was the best, and the least difficult to defend. Lunacharsky had written it with the conscious intention of producing a 'revolutionary' play which would be acceptable to the traditional theatres and to professional actors,¹ and at the same time comprehensible to a broad public. Yuzhin accepted the play for production by the Maly theatre, as its first piece of revolutionary repertoire;² and the Maly thus became the first of the Moscow state theatres to take a revolutionary play (or even a play written since the revolution) into its repertoire.³ In the event, perhaps as a result of the controversy stirred up by Kerzhentsev, the Maly produced Oliver Cromwell (with Yuzhin in the leading role) less as a play of ideas than as a costume drama.⁴ But Lunacharsky had written it as an examination of the type of the victorious revolutionary leader, exemplified in the 17th century by Cromwell and in the 20th century by Lenin.

In Cromwell, as in Lenin, Lunacharsky was impressed above all by 'the particular quality of his attitude to the masses, to actuality, and to the inward idea'.⁵ In his defence of the play, Lunacharsky compared the confidence which Cromwell derived from Biblical inspiration to the

1. see Lunacharsky, 'Theatre and revolution', Sob.soch. v.3 p.104

2. Knyazhevskaya, Yuzhin-Sumbatov i sovetsky teatr, p.127.

3. cf Moscow Arts' theatre, which took no contemporary play into its repertoire until 1925-6 (Moskovsky khudozhestvenny teatr v sovetskuyu epokhu, Moscow 1962, p.494).

4. Knyazhevskaya, Yuzhin-Sumbatov i sovetsky teatr, p.167.

5. speech of 26 Nov., Vestnik teatra, 1920 no.76-77, 14 Dec., p.17.

confidence derived by Marx and Lenin from their scientific (but also moral) premises.¹ He discussed the nature of opportunism in a great leader, explaining it not as lack of principle but as 'a great sense of actuality', and used as example Lenin's attitude to peace negotiations with the Germans and to concessions.² The Levellers, whom Kerzhentsev admired, were dismissed by Lunacharsky as comparable with the anarchists of the 20th-century Russian revolution.³

The defence of Magi and Ivan goes to heaven presented greater problems. The plays had been written in 1918 and 1919 respectively, at night, as a form of relaxation from Lunacharsky's political and organizational duties. 'I simply wanted to forget myself and go away into the kingdom of pure images and pure ideas,' Lunacharsky wrote.⁴ The images which arose in Lunacharsky's mind in these curious waking dreams came from the sphere of religion and myth to which he had always been attracted; they did not, as he explained, 'reflect my own beliefs'.⁵ The plays were not only an escape from his working life. They were also comforters, attempts to put the immediate horrors of the revolution into a more distant philosophical and historical perspective.

In Magi, the philosophical concept is the eternal statement and resolution of conflict; the play is a pantheistic 'justification of the struggle, the blood,.. by the consciousness of the inner unity of all life'.⁶ The historical perspective is that of Marxist relativism: 'the noble and

1. Vestnik teatra, 1920 no.76-77, 14 Dec., p.17.

2. ibid. (there are no references to Lenin in the play itself).

3. Lunacharsky, letter to the editor, Pravda, 1920 no.268, 28 Nov., p.3.

4. Lunacharsky, Magi, Moscow 1919, preface, p.1.

5. ibid.

6. Pravda, 1920, no.268, 28 Nov., p.3.

correct idea', as Lunacharsky described it,¹ that men are opposed to each other by inescapable historical circumstance, and that the Marxist fights his enemy not with hatred but with the understanding that their battle is historically necessary.

In the preface to Magi, Lunacharsky claimed the right of the poet 'to put forward any hypothesis and dress it in the most poetic colours, because one of the tasks [of poetry] is the limitless widening of human perceptions and ideas.'² In his reply to Kerzhentsev in Pravda,³ he restated this idea, and announced his opposition to those Communists who for political reasons wished to discipline, and thus to diminish, creativity in the arts:

'Comrade Kerzhentsev considers himself called on to defend Party discipline in the field of poetic creativity. I consider that one of my own functions, on the basis of the office which I hold, is the defence of the rights of free culture against Red sycophancy ...

Comrade Bukharin holds the opinion that we are threatened not only with economic collapse but with a great cultural relapse. I fight against that relapse with all my strength.'

When Mayakovsky, during the debate in Dom pechaty, accused Lunacharsky of persecuting the futurists, he replied:⁴

'I, as People's Commissar, have forbidden nothing to the futurists: I say that there must be freedom in the cultural field. Other Communists wrongly imagine that we are censors, police. No. We are obliged not to permit freedom of the press because we are in the midst of civil war; we are also limiting printing because we have no paper.'

1. Vestnik teatra, 1920 no.76-77, 14 Dec., p.18.

2. Lunacharsky, Magi, preface, p.1.

3. Pravda, 1920 no.268, 28 Nov., p.3.

4. Vestnik teatra, 1920 no.76-77, 14 Dec., p.19.

Kerzhentsev knows that we are establishing a state dictatorship so as to send the state itself to the devil. So we should not get carried away by police activities [politseishchina], and I will fight their excesses in every way.'

Lunacharsky wrote of the philosophical concept of Magi that 'I would never have decided to put it forward as a theoretical argument, as a philosophy which I would defend theoretically'.¹ But he was prepared to defend the political implications of the philosophy, which he might well have denied. Kerzhentsev accused him of equating Lenin and Wrangel. Lunacharsky rejected this in his letter to Pravda,² but returned to the point in debate:³

'The comrade criticizing me has claimed that I virtually consider Wrangel and Lenin as one and the same ... We have terrible ruin, colossal mutual destruction. Well, are all of those whom we ruthlessly destroy really necessarily scoundrels? ... In the first place, they are not all scoundrels, and in the second place, the scoundrel is not to blame for being a scoundrel ... We know and everybody knows that they kill a commander not because he is not good, but because he is in the way. We will say: "He is a fine man, we justify him, but he is a Whiteguard hero" - and we shoot him. Do we really regard the oppressors with "hatred"? We state [only] the historical fact ...'

Lunacharsky quoted Gorky as saying, after reading Magi, 'I consider it necessary to publish it, because this play

1. Magi, preface, p.1.

2. Pravda, 1920 no.268, 28 Nov., p.3. In this letter, Lunacharsky ridiculed the political equation Lenin = Wrangel which Kerzhentsev deduced from his philosophical play. The deduction was in fact both crude and intelligent. The play uses a symbolism of philosophical conflict, without overt political implications.

3. Vestnik teatra, 1920 no.76-77, 14 Dec., pp.17-18.

was written at a time of intensive terror by a member of the Soviet government.'¹

Kerzhentsev, restating his attack in debate,² said that Lunacharsky's psychology was that of 'the wavering Communist needing special comfort'. He added that 'neither in his plays nor in his political life does Anatoly Vasilevich wish to wage ruthless war for the creation of the new. He follows the line of least resistance, which produces an opportunism in which there are Communist elements, but also many bourgeois cultural elements.' Lunacharsky was unmoved. 'Perhaps I have sinned,' he said in conclusion, 'but I stubbornly will not repent.'³

Within a week of the debate on Lunacharsky's plays, Lunacharsky and the left were the joint victims of a letter 'On the Proletkults' published by the Central Committee on December 1,⁴ condemning futurism and criticizing Narkompros for tolerating it. After the publication of this letter, according to Lunacharsky, some of the futurists appealed to him against this unwarranted external interference and asked 'if it was not possible to preserve the autonomy of art'. 'They were the very same comrades,' Lunacharsky commented wryly, 'who were extraordinarily indignant at all shades of autonomy in relation to those big historic institutions [the state theatres] which have justified themselves from the artistic point of view.'⁵

1. Vestnik teatra, 1920 no.76-77, 14 Dec., p.17.

2. ibid., pp.18-19.

3. ibid., p.18.

4. Pravda, 1920 no.270, 1 Dec., p.1. See

5. 'To my opponents', Vestnik teatra, 1920 no.76-77, 14 Dec., p.4.

Meyerhold himself was not yet discouraged. 'To the attack, dear comrades!' he wrote after the publication of the Central Committee's letter. 'And Lunacharsky with us!'¹ Announcing that 'the left group of Communists active in the arts does not think of abandoning its position', Meyerhold looked forward to the establishment of 'the first general principles on art' by a conference of responsible Party workers in the arts, and the incorporation of these principles into the Party programme.²

This conference - the All-Russian conference of heads of sub-departments of the arts - opened in Moscow on December 19.³ The two questions before the conference were the creation of a separate Commissariat of the Arts (otherwise described as a separate chief committee, or glavk, of equal status with Glavprofobr), and Meyerhold's proposed reform of the state academic theatres.

The creation of a separate commissariat was supported by delegates of the left and the right, and especially by delegates from the provinces. Among those who spoke for it were Yu.Slavinsky, of the union of art-workers, the artist Kandinsky, the composer M.F.Gnesin and Lunacharsky's friend D.I.Leshchenko, of Narkompros. Gnesin, representing the Donskaya oblast, expressed an opinion generally held when he said:⁵

'In the local education departments sit people who are alien or hostile to art, and to whom it is impossible

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1. Meyerhold, 'J'accuse!' Vestnik teatra, 1920 no.76-77, 14 Dec.p.5.
 2. quoted Knyazhevskaya, Yuzhin-Sumbatov i sovetsky teatr, p.109.
 3. Vestnik teatra, 1921, no.78-9, 4 Jan., p.6.
 4. Vestnik teatra, 1921, no.80-81, 27 Jan., p.10.
 5. ibid.

to entrust our work. We strongly insist on the independence of the central arts sector and its local organs.'

Lunacharsky was not reported as expressing an opinion on the creation of a separate commissariat, but the conference, warmly welcoming him as 'the leader of Communist culture and art', hoped that he would remain at its head.¹ The resolution on the creation of a Commissariat of the Arts was taken without a dissenting voice.²

Papers on the reform of the state and academic theatres were read by Meyerhold and his supporter V.M.Bebutov. The conference resolved accordingly that³

'the bourgeois association of academic and state theatres under Narkompros has turned out incapable of coping with its tasks and ought to be abolished. All its administrative apparatus, and the working studios of the academic and state theatres, must immediately be transferred to the control of TEO ...'

But it was already too late for the realization of the conference's resolutions. The crucial decision against the theatrical left had been taken by the Central Committee of the Party. Narkompros, almost equally in disfavour, was about to undergo a radical reorganization which was intended not to increase but to reduce the powers and independence of its arts departments.

1. Vestnik teatra, 1921 no.80-81, 27 Jan., p.11.

2. ibid., p.11.

3. ibid., p.12.

Chapter 5 REORGANIZATION OF NARKOMPROS

i) Outside investigations of Narkompros in 1920

'Sometime - I am almost sure that it was on the eve of the October revolution, and in any case not later than the evening of the first day - someone said: "But Narkompros is doing nothing." And to this very day, whenever one of our journalist comrades picks up his pen to write a few lines about education in Soviet Russia, ... he simply remembers this axiom, with which Soviet geometry on the Narkompros problem begins. Narkompros is doing nothing - thus spake our forefathers, who were wiser than we ...' (M.N.Pokrovsky¹)

The first major outside investigation of Narkompros began in February 1920, near the end of the second winter of cold, hunger and mobilization. It was undertaken by a commission of VTSIK. Pravda reported that 'on the motion of comrade Kiselev, speaking in the name of the Communist fraction [of VTSIK], the plenum instructed the presidium to set up special commissions of 5 persons for the investigation of Narkomput [Commissariat of Communications] and Narkompros'.² The same issue of Pravda reported on the activities of a VTSIK commission for the reorganization of the Food commissariat. Thus Narkompros was not singled out for investigation, but was one of several commissariats believed to be working inefficiently. The investigating commission was led by V.I.Nevsky and N.V.Krylenko.³

1. 'Old news of Narkompros', Pravda, 1920 no.150, 10 July, p.1.

2. Pravda, 1920 no.28, 8 Feb.

3. Pravda, 1920 no.215, 28 Sept., p.2. Nevsky was a Marxist philosopher and Party historian, appointed commissar for rabfaks under Narkompros in June 1920. Krylenko was a lawyer, well known as a Bolshevik agitator before 1917; later to become People's Commissar of Justice and Chief Public Prosecutor.

Its report was to be submitted at the next session of VTSIK, in the summer of 1920.

A fortnight after the establishment of the investigating commission, the collegium of Narkompros resolved 'urgently to call the attention of VTSIK, Sovnarkom and the Central Committee of the Party to the grave material position of educational workers which, if Soviet power does not take extra measures for the improvement of the position of educational workers, for the return of mobilized workers to educational work etc., threatens a cultural collapse.'¹ A document setting forth the grievances of Narkompros was signed by Lunacharsky, Pokrovsky, F.V.Lengnik, Z.G.Grinberg and Ludmila Menzhinskaya (for the Union of workers in education and socialist culture).²

The document described Narkompros' difficulty in keeping staff because of the inadequate heating of its buildings and the poor rations available, the poverty of teachers and the collapse of schools after the mobilization of their staff. 'At the present time,' the document stated,³

'not a day goes past without the commissar of education being obliged to give an interview to some foreign journalist. Europe sends its observers, and Narkomindel [commissariat of foreign affairs] immediately sends such people - as it will send the official commission of the League of Nations - to Narkompros, to show what great work is being done in the field of education. That work really was done. We can normally show a few model colonies, a few model children's homes built -

1. TSGAOR 2306/1/320, 26 Feb.1920.

2. ibid. (document appended to minutes). All those present at the meeting signed except O.Yu.Schmidt, newly appointed head of Glavprofobr. Krupskaya was absent.

3. ibid. This paragraph, and perhaps the whole document, must have been written by Lunacharsky.

even if approximately - according to the enlightened type devised by Soviet educationalists. We can show a few deeply comforting figures, but we know perfectly well that behind all that gapes the abyss of destruction, and that a deeper and careful insight into educational affairs in Russia would make it clear to each foreigner what essentially needs to be done for education - not by Narkompros, but by the central government ...'

The document concluded with the statement that the collegium of Narkompros, supported by the Union of workers in education and socialist culture and by MONO, and 'in full agreement' with the presidium of the Moscow Soviet,

'is obliged to state that if the demands of real life set out above cannot be met by the Soviet government to any significant degree, the collegium is obliged to shed all responsibility for the progress of education in Soviet Russia; and at best will be able, by desperate struggle for the survival of education, to preserve its weak remnants until better times.'

The response to this cri de coeur was small. VTSIK, no doubt feeling that it had done its duty by Narkompros in establishing an investigating commission, did nothing. The Politburo of the Central Committee heard 'a statement by Narkompros on the necessity for taking measures towards improving the position of educational workers' on April 14 1920,¹ but did nothing. The question of education was not put on the agenda of the forthcoming Ninth Party Congress. Sovnarkom issued instructions for improving the supply of rations to educational workers,² which were well-intentioned but apparently ineffective.

1. V.I.Lenin, Pol.sob.soch. (5th ed.), v.40, p.445.

2. TSGAOR 2306/1/320, 27 March 1920 (reported to collegium by Lunacharsky).

Lunacharsky was not a delegate to the Ninth Party Congress which met in Moscow in April. But he was in Moscow at the time, and lobbied unsuccessfully to have education put on the agenda of the congress.¹ He was given permission only to hold a meeting on education immediately after the congress, in the hope of attracting a substantial number of its delegates. The meeting was announced by Lunacharsky on the front page of Izvestiya,² and took place on April 6.³

Although Lunacharsky had hoped that 50-60% of the delegates to the congress would attend the educational meeting, it seems likely that the number who did so was small. The report of the meeting⁴ suggests that it turned out to be not a meeting of delegates to the Ninth Party Congress, but a meeting of Moscow educational workers. For what they were worth, the meeting's resolutions were sympathetic to Narkompros: it was resolved that all educational work conducted by other (including military) authorities should be transferred to Narkompros; that an 'Education week' should be organized in the near future; and that 'a number of measures concerning food, finance and other things necessary for the fruitful work of Narkompros, proposed by comrade Lunacharsky, should be conveyed to the Central Committee.'⁵

Lunacharsky's attitude to the outside investigations of Narkompros was ambivalent: on the one hand, he thought

1. see Lunacharsky, 'A few words on the forgotten front', Izvestiya VTSIK, 1920 no.75, 6 April, p.1.

2. ibid.

3. Izvestiya VTSIK, 1920 no.76, 7 April, p.2.

4. ibid.

5. ibid.

the revival of interest in Narkompros salutary but, on the other, suspected that the investigators and Narkompros might differ in their diagnoses. 'A few articles devoted to Narkompros have appeared in the Party press¹,' he wrote,²

'and Narkompros is naturally beginning to attract some attention to itself. This is indicated by the establishment of the VTSIK revisory commission, by questions raised at the last plenum [of VTSIK], and by the demands of some of the delegates to the Party congress to put the question of education on the agenda ...

Of course this interest may at first be manifest only in a certain feeling of pain, both for the whole Soviet organism and for a neglected organ such as Narkompros ...'

The VTSIK commission on Narkompros was to have reported in the summer, but the report, although prepared, was not presented. It was argued, according to Lunacharsky, that 'all criticism of Narkompros' activity would be fruitless because, notwithstanding the many deficiencies in its work, its needs cannot be satisfied while we are still in the throes of military activity and while the Soviet government has almost no chance to strengthen the extremely inadequate resources at the disposal of Narkompros.'³

The VTSIK investigation was followed by a number of smaller investigations by Rabkrin. It is possible that Narkompros welcomed the VTSIK investigation, even if it did inflict, in Lunacharsky's words, 'a certain pain'. But the attention of Rabkrin was unlikely to offer any future

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1. V.Lukin published an article 'The forgotten front' in Pravda, 1920 no.73, 3 April, p.1, pointing out the weakness of Narkompros and its local departments and the small number of Communists working there.
 2. 'A few words on the forgotten front', Izvestiya VTSIK, 1920 no.75, 6 April, p.1.
 3. speech to VTSIK, 26 Sept. 1920, O narodnom obrazovanii, p.119.

benefit to compensate for the immediate discomfort. The only one of Rabkrin's investigations discussed in the collegium of Narkompros in 1920 was that of MUZO whose head, A. Lourie, was answering charges before the Revolutionary Tribunal at the time of Rabkrin's investigation.¹ But according to Rabkrin's annual report,² its activities in the educational and cultural fields had extended to Moscow primary schools, kindergartens, the organization of summer amusements, Gosizdat, Tsentropechat (the agency for the distribution of books and printed matter), ROSTA, the Moscow Pokazatelny teatr, and the Narkompros departments of MUZO and FOTO-KINO: it was noted that 'especially great results were obtained through the revisory supervision of MUZO and FOTO-KINO, where significant reform was undertaken on the initiative of Rabkrin'.

In July, the collegium of Narkompros agreed to the presence of a Rabkrin representative with advisory voice at its meetings 'on condition that it leads to the prevention of all kinds of misunderstandings between the two institutions and makes it easier for Narkompros to undertake a preliminary reform'.³ A.M. Rossky, representing Rabkrin, attended meetings of the collegium from July 24.⁴

In September, with the next session of VTSIK approaching, Narkompros became anxious lest Rabkrin was intending to present a companion report to that of the VTSIK commission.

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1. TSGAOR 2306/1/320, 2 Sept., 16(18) Sept., and 1 Nov., 1920.
 2. Izvestiya VTSIK, 1920 no.250, 7 Nov., p.2.
 3. TSGAOR 2306/1/320, 20 July 1920.
 4. TSGAOR 2306/1/320, 24 July 1920 and following.

If Rabkrin presented a report, Narkompros assumed that it would be severely critical; and an extraordinary meeting of the collegium was held, in which it was resolved to make an urgent appeal to VTSIK for advance copies of any Rabkrin report 'so that Narkompros will have the opportunity of giving sufficiently exhaustive explanation'.¹

This fear was not realized for, as it turned out, there was only one report on Narkompros on the agenda of the September session of VTSIK - that of the VTSIK commission headed by V.I.Nevsky.

Lunacharsky, who was the first speaker on the Narkompros question, had the difficult task of defending Narkompros from criticism which had not yet been made. He told the meeting that²

'without a change in the position of education in the purely economic sense, no internal measures can in any way move us from the miserable condition in which we find ourselves ...

I gratefully accept critical comments made by competent comrades on our blunders and shortcomings. But even if these blunders and shortcomings remained uncorrected we might - with proper supply, more Communists participating in our work, better feeding of children and teachers, more school buildings - immediately show results which could be counted among the objects of our justified pride before Europe ...'

Lunacharsky referred more than once - perhaps disingenuously, in view of Narkompros' earlier remarks on dealings with foreign journalists³ - to the admiration for Narkompros and its educational policy expressed by foreign observers.

1. TSGAOR 2306/1/320, 14 Sept. 1920.

2. speech to VTSIK of 26 Sept. 1920, 0 narodnom obrazovanii, p.120.

3. see above, p.214.

But, he said,¹

'we do not have administrative scope ...'² My insistent request is that Narkompros should be strengthened with administrators ... Without such people in the collegium of Narkompros, we cannot sustain our own existence. We have nobody of pure working-class origin in our collegium ... When the late F.I.Kalinin [d.February 1920] was in the collegium of Narkompros, we felt how he grew in that environment. We would welcome in his place even the most powerful worker-organizer [samy krupny rabochi-praktik] in our midst at Narkompros ...'

Krupskaya, addressing VTSIK the next day, repeated Lunacharsky's claim that with greater economic support and an influx of Communist workers the situation in education would improve of itself.³ V.I.Nevsky, himself a member of Narkompros since his appointment as commissar of rabfaks in June,⁴ gave a fairly sympathetic report on Narkompros, although including detailed criticisms of the 'shadowy side' of its work. Krylenko, also a member of the investigating commission, criticized Narkompros' failure to issue practical instructions to local departments and teachers. Other speakers made criticisms of the administration of higher education which were indignantly rebutted by Pokrovsky.⁵

Following the discussion, VTSIK instructed a commission of Lunacharsky, Nevsky and Krylenko to prepare a final formulation of the resolution on education proposed by Lunacharsky.⁶

1. O narodnom obrazovanii, p.141.

2. Here the omission is from O narodnom obrazovanii, which contains the only published stenogram of the speech.

3. Pravda, 1920 no.215, 28 Sept., p.2.

4. TSGAOR 2306/1/320, 3 June 1920.

5. Pravda, 1920 no.215, 28 Sept., p.2.

6. ibid.

The resolution which emerged from this commission was a triumph for Narkompros and, in particular, for Lunacharsky. It contained no censure of Narkompros, but listed the respects in which its material position must be improved: provision of experienced administrators for the central apparatus, improvement of food supply to children, priority for Narkompros in the supply of necessary materials, return of requisitioned buildings, return of mobilized educational workers and former workers currently employed in other government departments, and improvement in teachers' rations.¹ It promised, in effect, satisfaction of all the grievances set out by the collegium of Narkompros in February.

Lunacharsky was justifiably proud. The day after delivering his speech to VTSIK, already convinced of a happy outcome of the debate on education, he gave an exuberant reading of his latest play to the company of the Nezlobin theatre; and, when the actors complimented him on his theatrical talent and invited him to join their company, cheerfully declined with the remark that 'judging by the victory I have just won at the plenum of VTSIK, it seems that I am also in the right job as People's Commissar of education'.²

By misfortune, or the normal apathy of the press in reporting educational questions, VTSIK's resolution was not immediately published either in Pravda or Izvestiya. Ten days after the debate, Lunacharsky pointed this out to the collegium

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1. Izvestiya VTSIK, 1920 no.226, 10 Oct. (resolution signed by M.Kalinin, president of VTSIK, and A.Enukidze, secretary)
 2. reported by M.Zagorsky, 'On new plays', Vestnik teatra, 1920 no.70, 9-17 Oct., p.6.

of Narkompros, which instructed him to make representations to the editors.¹ The resolution was published (but only in Izvestiya) a few days later.²

There was a further flaw in Lunacharsky's victory. VTSIK's resolution outlined the measures necessary for the improvement of the material position of Narkompros, and recommended that they be implemented by various authorities (Vesenkha, NKVD,³ PUR⁴ etc.) or, in some cases, given legislative form by Sovnarkom. The crucial point was whether VTSIK's instructions would be followed: they were not.

'VTSIK promised Narkompros many fine things,' wrote a member of Narkompros later.⁵ 'We were overjoyed and began to wait. We are still waiting. In spite of frequent prompting and reminders we actually got nothing or almost nothing. Often they simply wave us away like troublesome flies.' This failure was noted even by Pravda, in an article by V. Esipov headed 'And this front is still forgotten'.⁶ When VTSIK, as Esipov put it, 'finally turned its benevolent attention' to education and passed a resolution,

'that resolution did not improve matters and gave no results because it was not put into practice ... Already two months have passed since the day of publication of the VTSIK resolution, and there has not been one decree to carry it out. Sovnarkom and other institutions evidently obey VTSIK's instructions poorly ...'

1. TSGAOR 2306/1/320, 7 Oct. 1920.

2. Izvestiya VTSIK, 1920 no. 226, 10 Oct., p. 2.

3. commissariat of internal affairs.

4. politicheskoe upravlenie revvoensoveta, the political department of the army, whose responsibilities included agitation, propaganda and political education in the army.

5. V. Plyusnin-Kronin, 'Narkompros - a productive commissariat', Pravda, 1921 no. 50, 6 March, p. 2.

6. Pravda, 1921 no. 5, 11 Jan., p. 1.

Esipov also found weaknesses in the substance of the VTSIK resolution:¹

'It says - "return all qualified workers of Narkompros to educational activity", but the qualification follows "if they are not irreplaceable". That qualification brings the whole resolution to nothing.

You find cases when, for example, a former educational worker has a job somewhere in a food committee or a forest committee. But they will not get him out, because his institution, considering him irreplaceable, will not let him go, and he himself will resist moving because in the food committee and the forest committee he gets a ration ...'

Of the clause in the resolution giving teachers priority in accommodation equal to that of doctors and engineers, Esipov remarked tersely: 'That resolution might be carried out only on the moon.'

Sovnarkom was not completely unresponsive to the VTSIK resolution on education. On November 6, it resolved to move a number of categories of educational workers into a higher ration group,² but the Food Commissariat decided not to do so.³ In March 1921, Narkompros reported the following measures taken in accordance with the VTSIK resolution:⁴ a Sovnarkom decree 'On the improvement of the position of aged and invalid pedagogues' (January 27 1921), a Sovnarkom decree on food supply to hospitals and children's institutions (February 8 1921), a Sovnarkom instruction on the organization of food supply to rural schools, a Sovnarkom resolution on the

1. Pravda, 1921 no.5, 11 Jan., p.1.

2. reported by A. Khalatov, 'Educational workers and the Food Commissariat', Izvestiya VTSIK, 1921 no.40, 23 Feb., p.2.

3. see chapter 2, p.38.

4. 'In performance of the resolution of the 3rd session of VTSIK 1920', Nar.pros. weekly, 1921 no.80, 20 March, pp.7-9.

improvement of the position of rabfaks (dependent on the goodwill of NKVD in arranging accommodation) and a resolution of Maly Sovnarkom 'On the provision of premises for cultural-educational institutions'.

But at the same time Narkompros reported that Vesenkha had blocked a proposal in Maly Sovnarkom to increase the supply of stationery requirements to Narkompros;¹ and that the project of a resolution to return educational workers to schools had been passed from STO (Council of Labour and Defence) to Maly Sovnarkom to the War Council, so far with no result.²

In July 1921 Narkompros was able to report that, six months after the passing of the VTSIK resolution, two further decrees had been issued by Sovnarkom: the first, on the return of educational workers, had reached the War Council in March and subsequently passed back to Maly Sovnarkom and through a commission of Bolshoi Sovnarkom before emerging as a decree on May 9; the second, 'On the provision of premises for cultural-educational and training institutions', was approved on May 13.³

In terms of material gain, the victory of the VTSIK resolution was illusory. But in one respect it was a real victory for Narkompros, for VTSIK recognized that the basic weakness of the commissariat was economic and not of its own

1. see chapter 2, pp.37-8.

2. 'In performance of the resolution of the 3rd session of VTSIK 1920', Nar.pros. weekly, 1921 no.80, 20 March, pp.7-9.

3. 'In performance of the resolutions of VTSIK', Nar.pros. weekly, 1921 no.83, 20 July, pp.5-7.

making. VTSIK did not recommend - as Narkompros had feared it would - either internal reform or changes in educational and cultural policy. It accepted a resolution drafted by Lunacharsky. Momentarily, at the end of September 1920, Narkompros was absolved of blame for its 'blunders and shortcomings' and promised better times ahead.

ii) Proletkult and the creation of Glavpolitprosvet

The VTSIK resolution on education was published on October 10. Three days before its publication, Lunacharsky committed a quickly notorious indiscretion. The occasion was a conference of Proletkult. Lenin had instructed Lunacharsky to tell the conference that Proletkult must lose its autonomy: Lunacharsky announced that it must keep it. This event stirred the Party as no stories of the poverty of provincial teachers could do. For four months, Narkompros was repeatedly discussed in the Politburo and the Central Committee, and the creation of Glavpolitprosvet from its extramural department was put on the agenda of the Tenth Party Congress. Narkompros had earlier complained of neglect. Now it had publicity, but it was publicity of the wrong kind, for the discussion was not of its economic difficulties but of its 'bureaucratic character' and the political irresponsibility of its leaders. The moral advantage which Narkompros should have gained from the VTSIK resolution was swamped in a high tide of Party indignation and the cross-currents of political manoeuvre.

Three problems involving Narkompros occupied the attention of the Central Committee at the end of 1920: the subordination of Proletkult to Narkompros, the conversion of Narkompros' extramural department into Glavpolitprosvet and the administrative reorganization of the whole commissariat. Had the first issue not arisen in acute form, it seems likely that the second would have interested the Party less, and the third perhaps not at all. The tolerance Narkompros

had shown towards Proletkult was seen to be characteristic of its policies, and a number of Party leaders were confirmed in their suspicions that Narkompros was politically unreliable, administratively disorganized and intimidated by the non-party intelligentsia.

Lenin had become to pay attention to Proletkult in the late spring of 1920. In May, he re-read Bogdanov's Kratky kurs ekonomicheskoi nauka, which had just been issued in a second edition by Gosizdat, and noted its 'serious deficiencies', which he pointed out to the Politburo.¹ In August, he wrote to Pokrovsky asking for information about the status of Proletkult. Pokrovsky replied that it was 'an autonomous organization working under the control of Narkompros and subsidized by Narkompros'.² In September, Lenin told Bonch-Bruевич of his intention to put out a new edition of his philosophical work Materializm i empirio-krititsizm³, and 'emphasized that this was especially necessary in connection with the strengthening of propaganda of A.A.Bogdanov's anti-marxist views under the guise of "proletarian culture".'⁴

The reorganization of the extramural department was proposed in the summer of 1920. Sergei Ivanovich Mitskevich, an old opponent of Proletkult⁵ recently appointed second deputy head of the extramural department⁶, raised the question

1. Lenin, Pol.sob.soch. (5th ed.), v.41, p.621.

2. Leninski sbornik v.35, Moscow, 1945, p.148.

3. an attack on Bogdanov and empiriocritical philosophy, first published 1908, shortly before the formation of the Vpered group.

4. Lenin, Pol.sob.soch. (5th ed.), p.662.

5. see chapter 3, pp.131-2.

6. TSGAOR 2306/1/320, 20 June 1920.

in the collegium of Narkompros, which on principle agreed that the extramural department should be reorganized 'for the unification and systematic coordination in one centre of all political-educational work among adults in the Republic',¹ and renamed the 'political-educational' [politprosvetitelny] sector of Narkompros. Mitskevich then proposed a Chief Committee of political-educational work [Glavpolitprosvet] which, on the pattern of Glavprofobr, would be a part of Narkompros having a separate budget and distributing its own credits.² The proposal was accepted, and in August Mitskevich proposed a collegium of Glavpolitprosvet consisting of Lunacharsky (president), Krupskaya (deputy president), Mitskevich (deputy to Krupskaya), P.M.Kerzhentsev, D.I.Leshchenko, L.G.Shapiro and I.P.Brikhnichev.³

Mitskevich's reorganization of the extramural department was a domestic one: no outside authority was involved and no outside appointments made to the collegium (Mitskevich himself was from MONO, Brikhnichev from the Gornel education department, Kerzhentsev represented ROSTA, Leshchenko and Shapiro were foundation members of Narkompros).⁴

In September, the VTSIK resolution on education approved the formation of Glavpolitprosvet, and proposed that it should absorb the political-education apparatus of PUR, except for political-educational work among soldiers at the front.⁵

1. TSGAOR 2306/1/320, 13 July 1920.

2. TSGAOR 2306/1/320, 24 July 1920.

3. TSGAOR 2306/1/320, 13 August 1920.

4. The only untoward feature of the reorganization of the extramural dept. was Krupskaya's absence from the meetings of July 13 and 24, and the non-appointment of her deputy and friend Z.Krzhizhanovskaya to the Glavpolitprosvet collegium.

5. Izvestiya VTSIK, 1920 no.226, 10 Oct., p.2.

In September, no agreement had yet been made with Proletkult about its relation to Glavpolitprosvet but, since Glavpolitprosvet claimed wider powers than the old extramural department, the question of subordination of Proletkult was bound to be raised again. On October 5, the First All-Russian Congress of Proletkult opened in Moscow.¹ Lunacharsky was scheduled to speak on October 7. According to Lunacharsky's later recollection, already 'measures were being taken to pull [Proletkult] towards the Party', and Lenin had decided that at the same time Proletkult must be pulled 'towards the state'. He therefore instructed Lunacharsky to go the congress 'and say definitely that Proletkult must be under the control of Narkompros [and] must regard itself as an organ of Narkompros'.²

Lunacharsky spoke on October 7 as President of the International Bureau of Proletkult, which had been formed on his own initiative after the Second Congress of the Comintern.³ 'I phrased the speech I made .. in a fairly evasive and conciliatory way,' Lunacharsky wrote. 'It seemed to me wrong to launch into some sort of attack and disappoint the assembled comrades.'⁴

Izvestiya reported the speech as follows:⁵

'Touching the relations of Narkompros and Proletkult, comrade Lunacharsky said that Proletkult must be given a special position, the fullest autonomy ...

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1. Izvestiya VTSIK, 1920 no.222, 6 Oct., p.2.
 2. 'Lenin and art. Recollections' (1924), Sob.soch., v.7, p.405.
 3. Members of the Bureau included Harry Quelch, J.Humbert-Droz, John Reed, R.Lefebvre, Lebedev-Polyansky (secretary) and Lunacharsky (president). Izvestiya VTSIK, 1920 no.179, 14 Aug.
 4. 'Lenin and art. Recollections', Sob.soch., v.7, p.405.
 5. Izvestiya VTSIK, 1920 no.224, 8 Oct., p.3.

The spheres of Narkompros and Proletkult must be distinguished with profound attention to the problems of each. Educational affairs and, for the most part, the education of working youth is in the hand of Narkompros, the affairs of proletarian culture with Proletkult. Both the extramural department and Proletkult organize their own clubs, and there must be no friction except competition. There must be a Proletkult representative in Glavpolitprosvet ...

In conclusion comrade Lunacharsky again emphasized that Proletkult must keep its character of autonomous activity, and congratulated the congress on the broadening of Proletkult's work to world scale.

Now, concluded comrade Lunacharsky, even the sceptics are convinced that the good seed of proletarian culture has been sown in endlessly favourable soil.'

On October 8, Lenin read the Izvestiya report and noted indignantly that 'comrade Lunacharsky said exactly the opposite of what I arranged with him yesterday'.¹ Lenin 'sent for me and scolded me', Lunacharsky wrote later.² Lunacharsky replied that his speech had been misreported,³ and even wrote to Izvestiya explaining what he thought he had really said:⁴

'I said that Narkompros had finally begun to give proletarian (communist) tasks in school and extramural affairs first priority,...[and that since] Proletkult had grown numerically into a significant cultural force, it was necessary to have a formal rapprochement. To this end I suggested that the president and a representative of Proletkult be included in Glavpolitprosvet and

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1. 'On proletarian culture' (8 Oct. 1920), Pol.sob.soch. (5th ed.) v.41, p.336.
 2. 'Lenin and art. Recollections', Sob.soch., v.7, p.406.
 3. Lenin, 'On proletarian culture', Pol.sob.soch., v.41, p.337.
 4. Izvestiya did not print the letter, which was discovered in the archives and first published by P.Bugaenko, 'A.V.Lunacharsky and Proletkult', Problemy razvitiya sovetskoi literatury 20-kh godov, Saratov 1963, p.23.

in the artistic sector, so that Proletkult should be coordinated as a whole with the work of government organs without losing its creative autonomy ...'

However, the reports of his speech in Kommunistichesky trud¹ and Proletarskaya kultura² correspond quite closely with the report in Izvestiya.

Lunacharsky was aware that Lenin's views on Proletkult did not exactly correspond with his own. In the first place, Lenin thought Proletkult misdirected its own energy and that of its pupils by theorizing about the creation of 'proletarian science' and 'proletarian culture' instead of facing the urgent problems of educating a semi-literate people and organizing a working democracy. 'He was very much afraid that Proletkult intended to occupy itself .. with the elaboration of proletarian science and, in general, with the whole volume of proletarian culture,' Lunacharsky wrote.³ 'Firstly that seemed to him premature and a task beyond its strength. Secondly he thought that the proletariat shut itself off from study and from the assimilation of the already existing elements of science and culture by such fantasies, which were naturally for the time being precocious.'

Lenin's second objection to Proletkult was political: 'Vladimir Ilyich was evidently rather afraid that some sort of political heresy was nesting in Proletkult. He had quite a hostile attitude, for example, to the large part which A.A.Bogdanov then played in Proletkult.'⁴ Lunacharsky left

1. Kommunistichesky trud, 1920 no.165, 8 Oct., p.2.

2. Proletarskaya kultura, 1920 no.17-19, August-December, p.78.

3. 'Lenin and art. Recollections', Sob.soch., v.7, p.405.

4. ibid.

his own opinion on this point unexplained, but as he would certainly have acted differently had he believed that Proletkult was harbouring serious 'political heresy', he presumably thought that Lenin was misled by the memory of his bitter political conflict with Bogdanov in emigration.

On October 8, immediately after reading the report of Lunacharsky's speech to Proletkult, Lenin decided that a resolution subordinating Proletkult to Narkompros must be put through the Central Committee, sent to Narkompros, and presented to the Proletkult congress for confirmation before the end of its session. He himself drafted the resolution, which stated that¹

'... The All-Russian Congress of Proletkult most definitely rejects as theoretically incorrect and practically harmful all attempts to think up its own special culture, to shut itself up in its own isolated organizations, to draw boundaries between the spheres of work of Narkompros and Proletkult or to establish the 'autonomy' of Proletkult inside the institutions of Narkompros .. On the contrary, the congress charges all organizations of Proletkult with their undoubted obligation of regarding themselves as subsidiary organs of the network of institutions of Narkompros, and performing their tasks, as part of the tasks of the proletarian dictatorship, under the general leadership of Soviet power (especially Narkompros) and the Russian Communist Party.'

The Politburo discussed the question of Proletkult on October 9, 11 and 14 in the presence of Krupskaya and E.A. Litkens (representing Glavpolitprosvet) but not of Lunacharsky.² The most frequent speakers were Lenin and Stalin.³ Bukharin

1. 'On proletarian culture', Pol.sob.soch. (5th ed.), v.41, p.337.

2. V.V. Gorbunov, 'V.I. Lenin's struggle with the separatist aspirations of Proletkult', Voprosy istorii KPSS, 1958 no.1, p.33.

3. ibid. Stalin's interest is unclear. He was at the time both a member of the Party secretariat and commissar of Rabkrin.

seems to have championed Proletkult.¹

Narkompros received Lenin's resolution on Proletkult on October 8, the day it was written, and passed it on to the Communist fraction of the Proletkult congress without comment.² Three days later, after 'heated debates', the fraction accordingly resolved that Proletkult should enter Narkompros as a department and submit itself to Narkompros' direction.³ This resolution was then put to the final plenary meeting of the Proletkult congress where, as Izvestiya reported,⁴

'a resolution was taken on the entry of Proletkult into Narkompros as a department preserving its existing organization. In the near future, concrete forms of organization will be worked out. Until that time, so that the reorganization may be conducted painlessly, Proletkult exists on its former basis, of which local departments have been informed.'

After the Proletkult affair, the plans for Glavpolitprosvet ceased to be a domestic concern of Narkompros and became a concern of the Party. A new project for a Sovnarkom resolution on Glavpolitprosvet was presented to the collegium of Narkompros by Evgraf Aleksandrovich Litkens,⁵ who had not formerly been

1. V.V.Gorbunov, op.cit., p.33.

2. TSGAOR 2306/1/320, 8 Oct.1920. This item (motion and resolution) was included in the typed minutes, and later crossed out in ink.

3. Gorbunov, op.cit., pp.34-5.

4. Izvestiya VTSIK, 1920 no.232, 17 Oct.,p.2.

5. Litkens, b.1888, Party member since 1919, had previously worked in the extramural dept.of MONO, with the 5th Army and as NKVD upolnomochenny in the Crimea. He had contacts with Trotsky and E.A.Preobrazhensky, who was a childhood friend. His first appearance in the minutes of Narkompros collegium was as member of a liaison commission between Glavpolitprosvet and PUR headed by N.I.Trotskaya (TSGAOR 2306/1/320, 8 Oct. 1920).

a member of the Glavpolitprosvet collegium.¹ The scope of Litkens' project was much broader than Mitskevich's. Glavpolitprosvet was to contain, as institutions 'retaining their administrative identity but implementing the instructions of Glavpolitprosvet', Proletkult, the arts sector of Narkompros, Gosizdat, Tsentropechat, the circus and the political education apparatus of PUR. This was remarkable enough, but even more striking was the inclusion, as an institution 'completely subordinate' to Glavpolitprosvet with the transfer to Glavpolitprosvet of all staff and equipment, of the agitprop department of the Central Committee of the Party.² Transfer of the agitprop department, according to the project, was to be arranged by negotiation with the Central Committee. The project was accepted by the collegium.

The collegium of Narkompros, in accepting Litkens' proposal, put itself in the curious position of laying claim to the Party's organ of agitation and propaganda immediately after the exposure of Narkompros' lack of Party vigilance in controlling Proletkult.

Narkompros' previous relations with the Central Committee had been neither close nor cordial. No member of the collegium belonged to the Central Committee. The Central Committee (except for Lenin) had shown little interest in educational questions. The agitprop department of the Central Committee had never sent a representative to the collegium of Narkompros, nor invited a representative of Narkompros to its own meetings. Its dealings with Narkompros appear to have been limited to

1. TSGAOR 2306/1/320, 24 Oct.1920.

2. ibid.

a request for 2 million roubles 'for cultural-educational purposes' in January 1919, which Narkompros supplied out of the Proletkult budget.¹

This was also the only recorded case of the Narkompros collegium meeting a specific request from the Central Committee without protest. Twice in 1920 Narkompros refused with hauteur to send a consultant [instruktor] on a Central Committee mission,² explaining to the Orgburo on the second occasion 'that the Central Committee's systematic refusal to return mobilized workers to Narkompros or to send the local workers needed by Narkompros to the centre has created conditions for Narkompros under which it is completely impossible to prepare any number of qualified educational consultants.'³ On both occasions, Narkompros had to back down,⁴ having 'succeeded, although with the greatest difficulty' in finding a suitable candidate.⁵ The Central Committee, for its part, placed at the disposal of Narkompros only 45 graduates of the Sverdlov Communist University instead of the 240 demanded by Narkompros.⁶

At a local level, the relations between education officials and Party workers were no better than at the centre. This was noted by Krupskaya and Pokrovsky in 1919, when they requested the Central Committee to instruct local Party

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1. TSGAOR 2306/1/180, 31 Jan. 1919.
 2. TSGAOR 2306/1/320, 23 March and 6 June 1920.
 3. TSGAOR 2306/1/320, 6 June 1920.
 4. TSGAOR 2306/1/320, 1 April and 8 June 1920.
 5. TSGAOR 2306/1/320, 8 June 1920.
 6. TSGAOR 2306/1/320, 26 August and 13 September 1920.

workers to cooperate with Narkompros, and particularly its extramural departments.¹ Later in the year, Krupskaya complained again of the lack of coordination between Party cells and education departments in rural areas, and argued the need for one basic instrument of rural educational [pros-vetitelnaya] work. She felt strongly that the reading-rooms [izby-chitalni] sponsored by Narkompros were deprived of resources and support, while²

'the Party cell sets up its own library, which has all the latest pamphlets and a fair collection of political literature. The library is used by 5 to 10 people - and the countryside, thirsting for literature and in terrible need of it, cannot even use one book. A Party club is set up (even with a dining-room, to the general irritation of non-communists) where members of the Party amuse themselves; but the mass of the population remains outside the influence of the Communists, who have isolated themselves in the club ...'

The proposal that Glavpolitprosvet should take over the agitprop department of the Central Committee came from Litkens, but Lunacharsky - who on most issues was not an ally of Litkens - adopted it with enthusiasm. The task of the Party, as Lunacharsky saw it, was the enlightenment of the people. Party propaganda was propaganda of enlightenment. 'Were we, Communist propagandists, ever really concerned with anything other than the education of the people?' Lunacharsky asked.³ In 1923, he reminded students of the Soviet Party schools that before the revolution those who joined the Party did so sacrificing all thought of careers

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1. 'Letters of N.K.Krupskaya', Sovetskaya pedagogika, 1961 no.11, p.138.
 2. TSGAOR 2306/1/182. 'On work in the countryside in the field of extramural education', filed after meeting of 15 Nov.1919.
 3. 'Communist propaganda and education' (c.1921), Prosveshchenie i revolyutsiya, Moscow, 1926, p.84.

in order to further the work of enlightenment, and that their work among the masses had traditionally been above all educational [nauchno-prosvetitelnaya] work. 'For us, the political propaganda of our Party was in no way distinct from the general work of raising the cultural level of the whole country.'¹

Given this view of Party propaganda, it would have been difficult to argue against the closest coordination of the work of Narkompros and Party agitprop, although some doubt might remain whether the senior position in this partnership should go to Narkompros or to the Party.

Lunacharsky took the view that 'the Party must be everywhere, like the Biblical spirit of God'², but that organizational and administrative direction properly belonged to the organs of the Soviet government. In November 1920, he told a meeting of political-education departments that the VTSIK resolution on education 'does not embrace the question fully':³

'The business of the near future is the prohibition of cultural-educational work to all bodies except Narkompros, and the more definite attack on the problem of uniting the work of Narkompros and the Party ...

Our political education must become all-embracing, saturated with the spirit of the most militant direction of the creative will. As long as the proletariat of Russia trusts the Communist Party, only the Party will direct education. Thus the question of the rapprochement of Narkompros and the Party becomes acute. The Party is

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1. 'The significance of Soviet Party schools and their place in the system of education', Prosveshchenie i revolyutsiya (1926), p.73.
 2. Desyatyy syezd RKP(b). Mart 1921 g. Stenografichesky otchet., Moscow 1963, p.154.
 3. Bulleten vserossiiskogo soveshchaniya politprosvetov (1-8 noyabrya 1920 g.), pp.2-3.

giving the greater part of its work and strength in the educational field to Glavpolitprosvet. Such is the will of the Party. Perhaps such a definite communist character will frighten many people, but we must state that, at the present time, even the bystanders must march with us [dazhe te, kto ne nazvalsya gruzdem, dolzhny lezt v nash kuzov].

The same anticipation of a forthcoming agreement between the Party and Narkompros was expressed by the political-education department (formerly the extramural department) of Narkompros in September 1920. Under the heading 'Experience of cooperation (Party and Narkompros)', the department stated that 'the Party is moving towards wide use of government organs in its agitprop work. The government organs will stand more and more clearly on the path of self-transformation into organs of communist propaganda.'¹ The examples of cooperation already achieved between the Party and Narkompros were the campaign on the Polish front, and the food campaign:²

'In connection with the bad harvest predicted to the political-education departments, Narkompros at the beginning of August approached the Central Committee of the Party with the suggestion that a big agitational food campaign should be organized among the peasantry. This proposal, supported by the Food Commissariat, was accepted by the Central Committee.'

Litkens' project for Glavpolitprosvet was put before the Politburo on October 28 1920.³ The Politburo met its proposal for the unification of agitprop and Glavpolitprosvet with reserve. Lenin drafted a resolution stating that⁴

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1. Otchet o rabote politprosveta Narkomprosa, Moscow 1920, p.13. (Report to VTSIK, 23 Sept.1920)
 2. ibid., pp.15-16.
 3. Lenin, Pol.sob.soch. (5th ed.), v.41, p.542.
 4. ibid., p.397.

'the exact formulation of the VTSIK resolution speaks of "uniting all political-educational work" in the RSFSR. The Politburo, completely acknowledging the need for such unification, states first of all that this resolution may be understood only in the sense of preservation, strengthening and broadening not only of the independence of Party organizations, but of their directing, leading and pre-eminent position in relation to all spheres of Narkompros work without exception.'

Bukharin and E.A.Preobrazhensky were delegated to prepare a project on Glavpolitprosvet, paying particular attention to 'the organizational interrelations of the agitprop institutions of the Party and the educational institutions of Narkompros subordinate to their direction'.¹ Bukharin opposed the idea of transferring Party agitprop to Narkompros: he was afraid, Lunacharsky wrote, 'that I wanted to dissipate the Party in Soviet anarchy [razboltat partiyu v sovetskoi stikhii]'.² Lenin, according to Lunacharsky, took a milder view: 'Vladimir Ilyich laughed that, as he said, Bukharin had taken fright in case Narkompros should eat up the Party.'³

The Sovnarkom decree, based on Bukharin and Preobrazhensky's revision of the Glavpolitprosvet project, omitted any mention of inclusion of the Party agitprop apparatus in Glavpolitprosvet.⁴

The collegium of Glavpolitprosvet held its first

1. Lenin, Pol.sob.soch. (5th ed.), v.41, p.397.

2. 'Questions of public education', Prosveshchenie i revolyutsiya (1926), p.418.

3. ibid.

4. published Izvestiya VTSIK, 1920 no.263, 23 Nov., p.3.

meeting on November 11, 1920, under the presidency of E.A.Preobrazhensky.¹ Those present at the first meeting were Preobrazhensky, Krupskaya, Litkens and V.I.Solovyev.² The second meeting was also attended by Lunacharsky and L.G.Shapiro³ who, with Krupskaya, was the only survivor of the collegium which had originally been proposed by Mitskevich in August.⁴

The position of Proletkult in Glavpolitprosvet according to the Sovnarkom decree was, as it had been in Litkens' original project, that of an institution retaining its separate administrative identity but acting on the instructions and plans of Glavpolitprosvet.⁵ But Lenin's attitude to Proletkult had become less belligerent in the month following the Proletkult congress. On November 10, the plenum of the Central Committee considered an instruction prepared by Glavpolitprosvet on the status of Proletkult and recommended, on Lenin's suggestion, that it should undergo final revision by the Politburo⁶

'for a more exact expression of the important point that Proletkult's work in the field of scientific and political education is merged with the work of the guberniya education departments and Narkompros, [but] remains autonomous in the artistic field (music, theatre, art, literature); and the leading role of the organs of

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1. TSGA RSFSR 2313/1/1, 11 Nov.1920 (collegium of Glavpolitprosvet). Preobrazhensky, a member of the Central Committee, the Orgburo and the Party secretariat, was charged with the establishment of Glavpolitprosvet on its new bases.
 2. Solovyev, b.1890 and Party member since 1913, was deputy head of PUR.
 3. TSGA RSFSR 2313/1/1, 16 Nov.1920.
 4. see above, p.228.
 5. Izvestiya VTSIK, 1920 no.263, 23 Nov., p.3.
 6. Lenin, Pol.sob.soch. (5th ed.), v.42, p.12.

Narkompros, closely scrutinized by the Russian Communist Party, is retained only for the struggle against clearly bourgeois deviations.'

The Central Committee's letter 'On the Proletkults' was published on December 1.¹ It is clear from its wording (and its length) that the Central Committee was anxious to conciliate the proletarian followers of Proletkult and convince them that they had unwittingly been exposed to the pernicious influence of certain bourgeois intellectuals. The letter stressed that, although Proletkult was to be subordinated to the organs of Narkompros, nevertheless 'full autonomy of the reorganized workers' Proletkults in the field of artistic creativity has been assured', and the Central Committee wished only to encourage proletarian activity in the arts.

On the other hand, both futurism² and 'non-marxist' ideologies of proletarian culture were condemned in the strongest terms. The claims of 'futurists, decadents, supporters of idealistic philosophy hostile to Marxism and ... mere idlers, renegades from the ranks of bourgeois publicists and philosophers' to determine the nature and direction of proletarian culture were rejected. It was explained that the years of reaction between 1905 and 1917 had given birth to various perversions of Marxism, notably 'Machism', the empiriocritical philosophy attacked by Lenin in Materialism

1. Pravda, 1920 no.270, 1 Dec., p.1.

2. The letter's attack on futurism was attributed by N.Chuzhak to Zinoviev (K dialektike iskusstva, pp.98-99). According to a document quoted, in an unpublished Moscow thesis, from the Central Party Archives, the Central Committee entrusted the drafting of the whole letter to Zinoviev on 10 Nov.1920.

i empiriokrititsizm, and Lunacharsky's socialist religion of humanity, 'bogostroitelstvo'.¹

Since the revolution, decadent tendencies had reappeared not only in Proletkult but in Narkompros:

'The Central Committee ... recognizes that up to the present time Narkompros itself, in the artistic sphere, displays these same intellectual trends which have been the corrupting element in Proletkult. The Central Committee is managing to get rid of these bourgeois tendencies in Narkompros as well ...'

It is clear that 'On the Proletkults' was intended as an attack not only on Bogdanov and the futurists but on Lunacharsky. Lunacharsky's responsibility was more than that of a commissar under whose jurisdiction abuses had flourished. As a former Machist, creator of the philosophy of bogostroitelstvo, head of the arts sector of Narkompros and protector of futurists, founder of Proletkult and recent defender of its autonomy in defiance of Lenin's instructions, Lunacharsky came near to personifying the evils which the Central Committee proposed to purge. The inference which might well have been drawn from the Central Committee's letter was that among the bourgeois elements to be removed from Narkompros was the commissar himself.

1. lit. 'Godbuilding'.

iii) Plans for the reorganization of Narkompros

A definite decision to reorganize Narkompros seems to have been taken after the Proletkult congress in October and during the discussion on the future form of Glavpolitprosvet. On November 9, 1920, a joint meeting of the collegium of Narkompros and 'responsible Communist workers' was held, and a commission of 5 persons elected to prepare a plan for the reorganization of the whole commissariat.¹ The main speaker at the meeting was I. Brikhnichev,² who, with Litkens, was evidently a member of the commission on reorganization.

On November 24, the work of this commission was broken off by the establishment on resolution of the Politburo of a new commission with similar functions, whose members were to be Lunacharsky (replaceable by Pokrovsky), Litkens and N.P. Gorbunov (replaceable by V.I. Solovyev).³ In fact neither Lunacharsky, Pokrovsky nor Gorbunov seem to have taken any part in the preparation of the project of reorganization. The materials of the first commission were handed over to Litkens and Solovyev, who completed the drafting of the project on the basis of principles already established by the first commission.⁴

A project, signed by Litkens, was presented to Lenin on November 26, criticized by Lenin, resubmitted almost unchanged

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1. Nar.kom.po pros., K IX vserossiiskomu syezdu sovetov, p.4.
 2. I.S. Smirnov, 'V.I. Lenin and the direction of educational affairs (On the history of the reorganization of Narkompros in 1920-21)', Sovetskaya pedagogika, 1958 no.4, p.48.
 3. Nar.kom.po pros., K IX vserossiiskomu syezdu sovetov, p.4.
 4. ibid.

over the signature of Solovyev, and criticized again.¹

The principles of the reorganization of Narkompros - as established by the first commission and accepted by Litkens and Solovyev - were that its work should be divided between three 'basic administrations' dealing with technical and higher education, school education and political education respectively; that unity of policy should be maintained by an 'Academic centre' directing 'theoretical, scientific and aesthetic' work throughout Narkompros; and that unity of organization should be maintained by an 'Organizational centre' dealing with supply, finance and information throughout Narkompros.²

Two of the three 'basic administrations' - Glavprofobr and Glavpolitprosvet - already existed in Narkompros. Glavprofobr, which according to the commission's plans was to absorb the Narkompros department of higher educational institutions, was now described as an administration for 'the preparation of workers, and higher educational institutions'. The third basic administration, taking over the function of the department of the United Labour School, was described as an administration for 'social education and the polytechnical education of children', and was later known as Glavsotsvos.³

The plans made no provision for an arts sector in Narkompros. The Academic centre, which was responsible for the making of policy throughout Narkompros, had no executive

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1. Smirnov, 'V.I.Lenin and the direction of educational affairs', Sovetskaya pedagogika, 1958 no.4, p.49.
 2. Nar.kom.po pros., K IX vserossiiskomu syezdu sovetov, p.4.
 3. Glavny komitet sotsialnogo vospitaniya.

power. The incorporation of universities as well as higher technical schools in Glavprofobr suggested that the technical lobby was in the ascendant, and that a policy of professionalization of higher education was to be pursued. But secondary education, remaining outside Glavprofobr, was still classified as 'polytechnical' and thus non-professional.

In December, Litkens explained his concept of the purposes of the reorganization as follows:¹

'The basic task before any administrator is the organic unification of the parts of Narkompros, which must become a single organism with a single head and a single will ...

In order to create intellectual unity, it is necessary to unite all theoretical work in a few cells, and subordinate them to a general centre ... The creation of a powerful academic centre of this sort is one of the basic proposition of the reorganization project ... Another of Narkompros' sins - its uneconomic and lifeless administration - must be abolished by ordering and centralizing its organization, administration and economic-supply functions. To that end a single organizational centre is created.

The third task of the reorganization project is equalization and structuring according to a single principle of all administrative organs of Narkompros (e.g. departments, sectors).'

At this point, Litkens has an imaginary interlocutor ask:

'But will not such a structuring, in its practical application, produce a split between theoretical and practical work?'

'On the contrary,' Litkens replies,

'the administrative organs are not completely deprived of their theoretical and organizational cells. Each

1. 'On the reorganization of Narkompros', published in the daily Byulleten VIII syezda sovetov, Moscow, 1920 no.7, 27 Dec., p.1.

chief administration (Glavprofobr, Glavsotsvos, Glavpolitprosvet) must have its own theoretical and practical organs, but these organs will owe a double obedience - to their chief administration, and to their directing centres.

By this means the important goal of unified intellectual leadership and a unified plan of work will be attained.'

Krupskaya found Litkens' project 'completely unacceptable'. 'It is not a plan of reorganization of the existing Narkompros but a bare scheme, a construction on the empty place of a commissariat.'¹

One of Krupskaya's main objections to the project was probably the objection of Litkens' interlocutor to the separation of policy-making and executive functions. In 1918, when a project of reorganization making this separation was put forward by I.M.Alter, Krupskaya wrote:²

'According to [Alter's] plan, members of the collegium cease to be heads of departments closely associated with current work. They only administer, and administer in the old way. Other people do everything for them...

Living work is converted into bureaucracy, with a nachalstvo [commanding body] signing papers and executive officials being given, in Alter's words, "tasks and instructions". Why go to such trouble to take power and destroy the old bureaucratic apparatus in order to create another, point for point the same!'

Lenin shared Krupskaya's dislike of Litkens' project, and for the same reason. 'In my opinion, his and comrade Solovyev's projects are artificial,' Lenin wrote to Lunacharsky.³ The only one of Litkens' innovations which Lenin accepted

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1. quoted Smirnov, 'V.I.Lenin and the direction of educational affairs', Sovetskaya pedagogika, 1958 no.4, p.49.
 2. 'On the question of the organizational policy of Narkompros', Izvestiya VTSIK, 1918, educational supplement no.6, n.d.
 3. Lenin, Pol.sob.soch. (5th ed.), v.52, pp.21-22. Copies were sent to Litkens, Solovyev and Krestinsky (mbr.Orgburo and Party secretariat).

without qualification was the 'Organizational centre', although under the name of 'Organizational sector'. He rejected the 'Academic centre' as coordinator and maker of policy, and proposed instead the revival of GUS (the state academic council), as a body consisting of 'all members of the collegium [of Narkompros] + the best specialists, even if bourgeois'. He rejected the plan for division of work among three 'basic administrations', suggesting instead that the existing glavki (Glavprofobr and Glavpolitprosvet) be dissolved, and the work of Narkompros be conducted by six sectors: pre-school, primary school, secondary school (incorporating Glavprofobr), extramural (Glavpolitprosvet), higher school and artistic.¹

Lenin's proposals were not only formally incompatible with Litkens' project but opposed to it on matters of substance. The arts sector, which Litkens intended to abolish, reappeared in Lenin's proposal 'to leave the arts sector as a single sector, placing "politicians" from among the Communists in all leading organs of this sector'. The technical lobby of Glavprofobr was encouraged by Litkens' project, which put the universities under Glavprofobr control. Lenin proposed to liquidate Glavprofobr and merge it with the secondary school sector, on condition that this did not mean the professionalization of the secondary school, that existing professional-technical schools were converted to polytechnicalism, and that 'the general educational and polytechnical subjects in the secondary school are increased'.

1. Lenin, letter to Lunacharsky of 29 Nov.1920, Pol.sob.soch. (5th ed.), v.52, pp.21-22.

Among Lenin's suggestions for the reorganization of Narkompros was 'to create the office of pomnarkom,¹ giving the pomnarkom all administrative work'.² But the original idea of this office seems to have come not from Lenin, but from Litkens or the Central Committee. It may have emerged as a compromise between Lenin, wanting to keep Lunacharsky as commissar, and the majority of the Central Committee (including Zinoviev and Preobrazhensky), wanting to get rid of him. The pomnarkom was to have powers overriding those of the commissar and his deputy in all matters relating to the organization and administration of Narkompros. The Central Committee's candidate for the office was Litkens.

On December 8, in the presence of Lunacharsky, Pokrovsky and Litkens, the plenum of the Central Committee considered the question of the reorganization of Narkompros, failed to reach a decision on Litkens' project as a whole, but recommended the appointment of Litkens as pomnarkom.³ The Orgburo was instructed to satisfy Glavpolitprosvet's demands for Communist workers with all possible speed; and a final decision on the reorganization of Narkompros was left to a Party meeting on education, which was to follow the session of the Eighth Congress of Soviets later in December.⁴

The resolution of December 8 was drafted by Lenin, but the Central Committee added one clause on the office of

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1. pomoshchnik narodnogo komissara (commissar's assistant).
 2. Lenin, letter to Lunacharsky of 29 Nov.1920, Pol.sob.soch., v.52, p.21.
 3. Smirnov, 'V.I.Lenin and the direction of educational affairs', Sovetskaya pedagogika, 1958 no.4, p.50.
 4. Lenin, project of resolution on the reorganization of Narkompros, Pol.sob.soch.(5th ed.), v.42, p.87.

pomnarkom. Lenin's project proposed 'to create the office of pomnarkom in Narkompros, concentrating all administrative work in its entirety in the hands of the pomnarkom'.¹ The Central Committee resolution added that²

'direction of the work of Narkompros in the organizational-administrative sphere, both on the national scale and within the apparatus of Narkompros itself, is to be realized by the commissar only through his assistant.'

This last ominous clause was communicated by Lunacharsky to the collegium of Narkompros on December 9, together with news of the candidature of Litkens for pomnarkom and information that on December 11 Sovnarkom was to be asked to authorize the creation of the office of pomnarkom.³

Sovnarkom was indeed asked to authorize the office, but declined to do so. On January 25, 1921, Goikhbarg (deputy president of Maly Sovnarkom) wrote to the Central Committee pointing out that 'it is impossible to authorize this decision through Soviet channels since, according to the constitution, commissars occupy a position sharply at variance with the position which the Commissar of Education would occupy according to this resolution'.⁴

The Soviet historian Smirnov writes that 'for V.I.Lenin, A.G.Goikhbarg's arguments were completely convincing'.⁵ Lenin, by virtue of his position as president of Sovnarkom,

1. Lenin, project of resolution on the reorganization of Narkompros, Pol.sob.soch.(5th ed.), v.42, p.87.

2. Lenin, Pol.sob.soch.(5th ed.), v.42, p.463.

3. TSGAOR 2306/1/320, 9 Dec.1920.

4. quoted Smirnov, 'V.I.Lenin and the direction of educational affairs', Sovetskaya pedagogika, 1958 no.4, p.50.

5. ibid.

was a member of Maly Sovnarkom; and he was the only one of its members who belonged to the Central Committee. Thus it seems possible that Lenin was all the more convinced by Goikhbarg's arguments for having helped to frame them.

On January 31, 1921, Sovnarkom appointed Litkens second deputy commissar of Narkompros.¹

The Party meeting on education, which met from December 31, 1920, to January 4, 1921, was organized by Litkens.² The meeting consisted of 134 voting delegates³ representing the unions (VTSSPS, the Union of workers in education and socialist culture, and the Union of art-workers), the Komsomol, the Russian Narkompros, the Ukrainian Narkompros, and such heads of provincial education departments as had attended the Eighth Congress of Soviets. The presidium of the meeting consisted of Zinoviev (for the Central Committee), Kozelev (VTSSPS), G.F.Grinko (Commissar of Education for the Ukraine), Lunacharsky and Lilina (Petrograd education department).⁴

Krupskaya later claimed that the Party meeting was unrepresentative, being overweighted with supporters of technical education from the unions, the Ukraine and Glavprofobr and lacking an adequate representation of the Central Committee⁵ - 'it was supposed to be a meeting of the Ukrainian and Russian commissariats of education with the Central

1. Izvestiya VTSIK, 1921 no.31, 12 Feb.

2. Byulleten VIII syezda sovetov, 1920 no.6, 26 Dec., p.16.

3. Nar.kom.po pros., K IX vserossiiskomu syezdu sovetov, p.5.

4. Pravda, 1921 no.3, 5 Jan., p.3.

5. 'Reform of the school system', Pravda, 1921 no.40, 23 Feb., p.1.

Committee ...[But] the Central Committee's part in the meeting was quite weak: it was limited only to Zinoviev's introductory speech and the presence of Preobrazhensky at one of the meetings.'

It was certainly true that the technical lobby was very strongly represented at the Party meeting. Lunacharsky tried to convince the delegates that the educational principles which Narkompros had followed since 1918 were still valid, although inadequately realized. But the meeting was inclined to repudiate all that had been done by the Russian Narkompros in the past, and to approve instead the policies of the Ukrainian Narkompros which were outlined by the Ukrainian commissar, Grinko.

Grinko explained that in March 1920, on his initiative and against 'sharp protests' from the Russian Narkompros, the Ukrainian Narkompros had adopted new policies.¹ Work had been divided between the department of social training [sotsialnogo vospitaniya], Glavprofobr and the political education department (later Glavpolitprosvet). The department of social training had taken the children's home [detsky dom] instead of the school as its basic educational unit in order to counteract the corrupting influence of the family, and conducted the education of children up to 15 years 'according to the labour principle'. Glavprofobr was responsible for professional training from the age of 15. It rejected the old-fashioned concept of the single university in favour of

1. Prilozhenie k byulletenyu VIII syezdu sovetov, posvyashchaemoe partiinomu sobraniyu po voprosam narodnogo obrazovaniya, Moscow, 10 Jan.1921, p.7.

separate specialized institutes, strictly organized for the rapid production of specialists needed by the state.

The political education department had from the beginning incorporated all work in the arts.¹

In contrast to the purposeful technical orientation of the Ukrainian Narkompros, the Russian Narkompros had, in Litkens' words, 'drowned completely in general cultural enterprises, utterly failing to set itself the task of giving practical service to Soviet construction'.² The commissariat as a whole had failed to learn the lessons of the Civil War. 'Military practice,' Litkens said, 'has put forward completely new methods of approach to cultural-educational work among the masses ... Military practice has taught us how to plan the work.'³ Only Glavprofobr, which had tried to meet the demands of the economic commissariats for trained specialists, had been responsive to the need of the state for disciplined and planned productive work - indeed 'the rebirth of Narkompros began ... from the moment of the organization of Glavprofobr'.⁴ The arts had been allowed to develop in an anarchic manner, giving birth to 'ugly forms of artistic activity and artistic propaganda' which had been properly condemned by the Central Committee's letter. The present task in the arts was 'the subordination of all artistic work to the practical problems of education [prosveshchenie]'.⁵ In the universities, a 'woolly-liberal

1. Prilozhenie k byulletenyu VIII syezda sovetov ..., p.3.

2. ibid., p.2.

3. ibid., p.2.

4. ibid., p.3.

5. ibid., p.3.

[rasplyvchato-liberalny]' kind of work had been tolerated, but would be no longer: 'With the transfer to Glavprofobr, higher educational institutions are regarded exclusively as institutions preparing highly qualified workers necessary to the state.'¹

O.Yu.Schmidt, speaking for Glavprofobr, supported Litkens' criticisms of Narkompros. It had been justly reproached with excessive theorizing, he said, and 'in three years the slogan of the polytechnical school put forward by the commissariat has not in the slightest degree been transformed from a cloudy ideal into concrete reality'.² The present secondary school - 'in my view an extremely artificial and pedagogically irrational form' - must be destroyed; the two junior years of the secondary school being added to the primary (or 'social-training') school, and the two senior years being converted into technicums. The lowering of the age for the beginning of professional education from 17 to 15 years was dictated not only by the economic needs of the state but by 'a series of pedagogical and sociological considerations' including the possibility of enrolling adolescent workers, who now remain outside the labour school, in technicums,³ and the enthusiasm of 15- and 16-year-olds for practical work.⁴ In its policy towards higher schools, Schmidt said, Glavprofobr 'unmasks the false pretensions of the former universities to give a pure scientific education' when in fact the majority of their graduates become teachers

1. Prilozhenie k byulletenyu VIII syezda sovetov ..., p.3.

2. ibid., p.4.

3. ibid., p.4.

4. ibid., p.10.

or take up some other profession for which they have no practical training.¹

With the exception of two clauses, Litkens' project on the reorganization of Narkompros - unchanged, in spite of Lenin's disapproval - was accepted almost without debate by the meeting. The controversial issues were the office of pomnarkom and the future of the arts sector of Narkompros. The meeting decided that a second deputy commissar should be appointed to Narkompros instead of a pomnarkom.² One deputy commissar would have charge of the Academic Centre, the other of the Organizational Centre. 'Leadership of the work of Narkompros in the theoretical and political field is conducted directly by the People's Commissar³', but work 'in the field of organization and administrative management' at all levels may be conducted by him only through the second deputy commissar.⁴

The arts question provided the liveliest debate of the meeting:⁵

'Not one of the points of the reorganization of Narkompros called forth such sharp and stubborn objections as the question of the abolition of the independent arts sector ... The representatives of Vserabis [Union of art-workers] directly accused the reformers of wanting to slaughter all art, of spitting on art, so to speak, because when their projects were put into practice art would immediately die a sudden death.'

The Vserabis representatives, supported by members of the arts

1. Prilozhenie k byulletenyu VIII syezda sovetov..., p.5.

2. ibid., p.15.

3. 'komissariat' instead of 'komissar' appears in the text, but it is clear from the sense of the passage that it is a misprint.

4. Prilozhenie k byulletenyu VIII syezda sovetov..., p.16.

5. B.Plyusnin-Kronin, 'On the formation of the Chief Artistic Committee', Nar.pros.weekly, 1921 no.80, 20 March, p.6.

sector of Narkompros, demanded the creation of a separate commissariat or a separate chief administration of the arts, 'but none of the other participants of the conference shared this point of view'.¹ The meeting decided that 'art, like science, must be subordinated to the general tasks of the state',² and accepted Litkens' statement that 'the whole active mass of artistic work must be organically bound to Glavpolitprosvet'.³ The only concession to the arts was that a Chief Artistic Committee [glavny khudozhestvennyy komitet] was to be established in the Academic Centre.⁴ There was no discussion of the functions of the committee.

The question of the relations of Narkompros and the Party was raised in general terms by Lunacharsky and, more specifically but briefly, by Litkens. Lunacharsky said:⁵

'Narkompros is above all a laboratory which works out and organizes the whole system of beliefs which, as Lenin has said, is the basis on which the enforcement of proletarian dictatorship rests. Narkompros is the organ of the Party ...

So far the Party has concentrated propaganda and agitation in Party organs, but now it is laying them on Soviet organs, that is, on the organs of Narkompros.'

This seemed to imply, rather oddly, that Narkompros should be responsible for formulating Party propaganda rather than carrying it out. Litkens' statement was odder still: he suggested that the organs of Glavpolitprosvet should be responsible for 'all theoretical organization of the business,

1. Prilozhenie k byulletenyu VIII syezda sovetov..., p.12.

2. ibid., p.15.

3. ibid., p.6 (there was no resolution on Glavpolitprosvet).

4. ibid., p.16.

5. Petrogradskaya pravda, 1921 no.3, 5 Jan., p.3.

leaving the general directing and leading role to the agit-prop departments of the guberniya Party committees'.¹

Grinko's defence of the detsky dom as 'the institution most fully embracing the life of the child and capable of counteracting the harmful influence of the family, which is disintegrating in the process of social revolution',² was strongly opposed by Lilina, for the Petrograd education department.³ Lunacharsky took a rather ambiguous position between the two.⁴ The meeting, in its final resolution, expressed its approval of the institution of the detsky dom, but stated that for the time being there was no possibility of its replacing the school as the basic educational unit in Russia.⁵

The issue of professionalization of education occupied most of the attention of the meeting. The two Central Committee representatives, Zinoviev and Preobrazhensky, seemed to differ in their interpretation of the Central Committee's position on this issue. 'Zinoviev, speaking of the principled point of view of the Central Committee,... noted that as before the task of creating a labour polytechnical school stands before the educational authorities.'⁶ (Zinoviev's wife Lilina was also a supporter of the polytechnical school: during the session of the Party meeting, she published a series of articles in Petrograd⁷ endorsing

1. Prilozhenie k byulletenyu VIII syezda sovetov..., p.6.

2. ibid., p.9.

3. ibid., p.10.

4. ibid., p.9.

5. ibid., p.12.

6. Pravda, 1921 no.3, 5 Jan., p.3.

7. see Petrogradskaya pravda, 1920 no.296, 31 Dec., p.2; 1921 no.1, 1 Jan., p.4; 1921 no.7, 13 Jan., p.1.

Lunacharsky's polytechnical policy and criticizing the Glavprofobr professionalists, Schmidt and Kozelev.) But Preobrazhensky, also speaking as a member of the Central Committee, appeared to support the professionalists:

'Preobrazhensky confirmed the Central Committee's attitude on the necessity of emphasizing professional-technical education in the senior classes of the United Labour School.'¹

The debate on professionalization and its outcome were described by Narkompros in the following terms:²

'From the very beginning two lines could be ascertained. Narkompros RSFSR championed ideas of the polytechnical school according to the basic principles of the Declaration on the United Labour School. Representatives of the trade unions sharply criticized the very idea of polytechnicalism, and put forward instead monotecnicalism, in the form of the introduction of the teaching of definite trades in secondary schools.

The unionists' point of view did not win the majority, but all the same the meeting came to the conclusion that it was necessary to reorganize the secondary school, temporarily lowering the level of general education and considering it possible as a temporary measure, in connection with the extreme shortage of qualified workers, to transfer to professional education not at 17 years but at 15 years of age.³ Thus the United School is reduced from 9 years to 7 years ... The two senior classes of the secondary school must be converted into the professional type of school, but with the proviso that general training is not discontinued in the first two years [of the professional school].'

1. Izvestiya VTSIK, 1921 no.4, 6 Jan., p.3.

2. Nar.kom.po pros., K IX vserossiiskomu syezdu sovetov, p.6.

3. The temporary nature of the change from 17 to 15 years was not stressed in the meeting's resolutions. The 7-year school was described as 'general-educational, labour and polytechnical ..., preparing [children] for special education'. (Prilozhenie k byulletenyu VIII syezda sovetov ..., p.12).

Early in December, Lenin had agreed to the conversion of the two senior classes of secondary schools into technicums giving specialized professional training, with the rider that conversion was to be delayed until facilities for practical polytechnical work could be made available to secondary schools and polytechnicalism given a fair trial.¹ By the end of December, he had abandoned the qualification - which, if literally followed, would have put off professionalization of the senior classes almost indefinitely - and agreed that professionalization was 'urgently and immediately' necessary because of the extremely grave economic position of the country.²

Krupskaya's theses³ for the Party meeting on polytechnical education approved, as a temporary measure, the professionalization of education from 15 years. But the meeting was inclined to regard this not as a temporary measure, but as something desirable in itself.

The Party meeting left both sides dissatisfied. The unionists (with Glavprofobr and the Ukrainian representatives) were disappointed at the small representation of the Central Committee at the meeting and the fact that professionalization had not been accepted as a principle to be applied throughout the education system. Lenin and Narkompros were dismayed at the strength of feeling against Narkompros and the polytechnical principle, and disappointed that Litkens' project for

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1. 'On the reorganization of Narkompros' (8 Dec.), Pol.sob.soch. (5th ed.), v.42, p.87.
 2. 'On polytechnical education' (annotations to Krupskaya's theses), Pol.sob.soch., v.42, pp.228-30.
 3. Krupskaya was unable to attend the Party meeting through illness. Her theses were presented by Lunacharsky.

the reorganization of Narkompros had been accepted by the meeting almost without discussion or modification.

The unionists 'considered the defeat of their position as something accidental, the result of the improper composition of the meeting'.¹ On the suggestion of VTSSPS, the meeting announced that its decisions should be regarded as preliminary, and resolved²

'to create a commission of representatives of Narkompros, VTSSPS and the economic commissariats for the calling (with the permission of the Central Committee of the Russian Communist Party) of an All-Russian Party Conference, which would finally work out the questions of principle touched on by the meeting for the [consideration of] the Tenth [Party] Congress.'

The unionists, communicating this to Lenin on January 14, 1921,³ gave him the opportunity to correct what he (though not the unionists) thought to be the inadequacies of the Party meeting's decisions. He immediately instructed Narkompros that the resolutions of the Party meeting - 'resolutions concerning the reform of the commissariat' - should not be put into effect until they had been further considered by the Central Committee.⁴

On January 26, Lenin presented a project of a 'Statement on the reorganization of Narkompros' to the plenum of the Central Committee. The Central Committee appointed a commission, headed by Lenin, to elaborate the project.⁵

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1. Nar.kom.po pros., K IX vserossiiskomu syezdu sovetov, p.6.
 2. Prilozhenie k byulletenyu VIII syezda sovetov ..., p.11.
 3. I.Smirnov, 'V.I.Lenin and the direction of educational affairs', Sovetskaya pedagogika, 1958 no.4, p.51.
 4. Lenin, Pol.sob.soch.(5th ed.), v.52, p.48.
 5. I.Smirnov, op.cit., p.51.

The commission began work on January 29, and considered projects and suggestions from Lunacharsky, Pokrovsky, Krupskaya, Litkens and Schmidt of Narkompros; Kozelev and Isaev of VTSSPS; and Slavinsky, of the Union of art-workers.¹ On February 2, Lenin obtained the approval of the Politburo for his suggestion that the commission be empowered to issue 'Directives to Communist workers in Narkompros' in the name of the Central Committee.²

The 'Directives' were published in Pravda on February 5.³ As Narkompros noted with satisfaction, they 'put an end to the unionists' petitions'⁴ by reaffirming the principle of polytechnical education without qualification, and acknowledging the introduction of professional education at the age of 15 instead of 17 to be 'a temporary practical necessity'. The 'Directives' further emphasized the need to attract specialists to work in Narkompros, although under the direction of Communist educational workers; the undesirability of 'abstract slogans' (as put forward both by Narkompros in the past and by the Party meeting on education) in place of concrete plans; and the necessity of introducing efficient forms of accountability of workers and checks on their performance into Narkompros.

But no victory of Narkompros was ever complete, and the restatement of the polytechnical principle by the 'Directives' was no exception. Both Pravda and Petrogradskaya pravda⁵

1. Smirnov, 'V.I.Lenin and the direction of educational affairs', Sovetskaya pedagogika, 1958 no.4, p.52.

2. ibid.

3. Pravda, 1921 no.25, 5 Feb., p.3.

4. Nar.kom.po pros., K IX vserossiiskomu syezdu sovetov, p.6.

5. Petrogradskaya pravda, 1921 no.26, 6 Feb., p.2.

published the 'Directives' with a persistent typographical error - the substitution of 'politicheskoe' for 'politekh-nicheskoe obrazovanie'. Since the value of political education was not in dispute, the impact of the 'Directives' on current controversy was much reduced.

Lenin, greatly irritated, wrote a long letter to Pravda pointing out the error, and attacking the anti-polytechnical group in unambiguous terms.¹ He criticized the Party meeting for having discussed the issue of polytechnical education at all, since the principle was written into the Party programme. The argument on 'polytechnical versus monotekhnical education' was not only misconceived but 'for a Communist directly inadmissible'.

Lenin went on to attack the tendency of Communists working in education to regard themselves as specialists instead of administrators directing the work of specialists. At the same time, he tried to divert the Communist attack on Lunacharsky and Pokrovsky as leaders of Narkompros:

'There are two - and only two - comrades with tasks of an exceptional nature in the commissariat. These are the commissar, Lunacharsky, who provides general leadership, and his deputy Pokrovsky, who is in the first place the commissar's deputy and in the second place a necessary advisor (and leader) on scientific questions and on questions of Marxism in general. The whole Party, being well acquainted with comrade Lunacharsky and comrade Pokrovsky, cannot of course doubt that they are both in their own way, in the respects indicated, "specialists" in Narkompros. The rest of the workers cannot have this sort of

1. 'On the work of Narkompros', Pravda, 1921 no.28, 9 Feb., pp.2-3.

"speciality". The "speciality" for all the rest of the workers must be the ability to facilitate the recruitment of educational specialists, to manage the work correctly and systematically make use of the data of practical experience....

At the meeting of Party workers there was no such taking account of practical work, no interpretations of the findings of educationalists. Instead there were fruitless attempts at "general consideration" and evaluation of "abstract slogans"....'

With this snub to Litkens and the Party meeting, Lunacharsky and the old guard of Narkompros were to some extent compensated for the earlier attacks on themselves. Narkompros now had three leaders - Lunacharsky, Pokrovsky and Litkens - with Schmidt at Glavprofobr also in a position of influence, and a vacant place at the head of Glavpolitprosvet.¹ All of them had been somewhat discredited in the last months, but not totally. The antagonism of the old guard to the new was strong, but their forces were in equilibrium. In this ambiguous situation, Narkompros entered the new era of unified leadership and rational administration which the Party had recommended to it.

1. Krupskaya was head of Glavpolitprosvet, but for reasons of temperament and ill-health did not assert herself as a political leader in Narkompros. The vacant place was that of deputy head of Glavpolitprosvet.

iv) Reorganization of Narkompros under Litkens

Lenin to Litkens (March 27, 1921): 'Do not break away from organizational-administrative work. Soon (in two or three months) we will severely question you and only you, and the results must be serious - that is, efficient accountability, checks on the work of 400,000 teachers, on their degree of organization and their move in the new direction. This will be asked of you and only of you. All attention on that.'¹

Litkens began work on the reorganization of Narkompros in December 1920, using the title of pomnarkom. 'The reorganization of Narkompros,' he informed the commissariat,² 'will proceed in an organized manner through the instructions of the pomnarkom.' Lunacharsky was not empowered to issue instructions to Narkompros without Litkens' counter-signature: the few instructions he did issue (with Litkens' imprimatur) in 1921 were concerned with the arts.³

Sovnarkom's appointment of Litkens as second deputy commissar instead of pomnarkom put him in an awkward position. The normal powers of a second deputy commissar were much narrower than those the Central Committee had intended for Litkens and he himself expected. His activities were at once supported and circumscribed by Lenin, who kept a careful watch on the reorganization: 'almost every day,' according to a contemporary observer in Narkompros,⁴ 'he [Lenin] asked the late E.A.Litkens⁵ for reports on the progress of the

1. Lenin, Pol.sob.soch. (5th ed.), v.52, p.112.

2. TSGAOR 2308/1/21, instruction no.6, 16 Dec.1920.

3. TSGAOR 2308/1/21, passim.

4. B.Plyusnin-Kronin, 'V.I.Lenin and our tasks', Nar.pros. monthly, 1924 no.2 (11), p.1.

5. d.April, 1922.

reorganization and on the principles which the Litkens commission had laid down as the basis of the building of the new structure of Narkompros.'

In June 1921, Lenin suggested that Litkens should be appointed administrator [upravlyayushchi] of Narkompros, for¹ 'without this there will be chaos without end - Litkens will feel himself "harrassed" - we (the Central Committee, the government) will not know whether Litkens has passed the examination or not. Because so far he has not been given exact rights.'

But the appointment was not made. Litkens himself was against it, evidently thinking that it diminished his status rather than increased it.

Lenin was anxious that Litkens' powers in the administrative field should be respected. When Lunacharsky contested Litkens' exclusive right to decide on the issue of special rations, Lenin supported Litkens, informing the Politburo that²

'on the question of Lunacharsky's statement which was sent to me, I find that he is undoubtedly incorrect. Administrative-organizational affairs (undoubtedly including rations) cannot be conducted by him without Litkens; and Lunacharsky's instructions cannot be considered binding on Litkens. If the members of the Central Committee do not agree on this matter, then I ask that the question be put on the agenda of the Politburo next week in my presence.'³

Litkens' project for the reorganization of Narkompros turned out to have one grave disadvantage for himself. This

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1. Lenin to Preobrazhensky, 5 June 1921, Pol.sob.soch.v.52, p.256.
 2. Lenin to Molotov, for members of the Politburo, 7 Sept.1921, Pol.sob.soch., v.53, pp.179-80.
 3. The Politburo at first rejected Lenin's formulation of the rights of Litkens and Lunacharsky because of Stalin's (unexplained) opposition, but accepted it on 8 Sept.1921. Lenin, Pol.sob.soch., v.53, p.413.

was the distribution of power within the commissariat produced by its division into three chief administrations. In spite of the constitutional weakness of Litkens' position as second deputy commissar, he had some success in asserting himself against Lunacharsky and Pokrovsky, since in this he had the backing of the Central Committee. But there was no Central Committee ruling on Litkens' relations with the heads of the chief administrations; and from the time of Preobrazhensky's appointment to Glavprofobr¹ this problem became acute. Litkens owed his authority entirely to the terms of his appointment. Preobrazhensky - although no longer member of the Central Committee, the Party Secretariat and the Orgburo as he had been in 1920 - was still a powerful figure in his own right. In spite of their earlier connection, Litkens and Preobrazhensky were soon, almost inevitably, at odds.

Lenin attempted to mediate between them.² But, in proposing Litkens' appointment as administrator of Narkompros, he would not allow him the right to overrule the heads of the chief administrations as, on organizational questions, he could overrule the commissar:³

'The administrator deals with everything concerned with the chief administrations (Glavprofobr, Glavpolitprosvet, Glavsotsvos) by agreement with the 'chief administrators' - that is, not on his own: of course he has the right to take questions to the collegium of the commissariat...'⁴

1. March 1921.

2. see his letter to Preobrazhensky, 5 June 1921, and letter to Litkens, 14 July 1921. Pol.sob.soch. (5th ed.), v.52, pp.255-6, 274-5.

3. letter to Litkens, 14 July 1921, Pol.sob.soch., v.52, pp.274-5.

4. But the heads of the chief administrations were ex officio members of the collegium of Narkompros.

In February 1921, Sovnarkom issued a 'Statement on Narkompros',¹ on the lines Litkens had proposed and the Party meeting approved. The commissar 'directs the work of Narkompros on the general bases established by the constitution of the RSFSR'; his first deputy is head of the Academic Centre and his second deputy head of the Organizational Centre. Gosizdat received the formal status of a chief administration, the other three being Glavsotsvos ('social training and polytechnical education to 15 years'), Glavprofobr ('professional polytechnical schools from 15 years and higher schools') and Glavpolitprosvet. The Academic Centre consists of a scientific section (GUS) and an artistic section (Chief Artistic Committee), together with the museum administration (Glavmuzei) and the archive administration (Glavarkhiv).

This was a success for Litkens, since Lenin had always been doubtful of his plan, and Lunacharsky, Pokrovsky and Krupskaya disliked it. But serious problems remained for Litkens, and above all the problem of personnel. Most of the old staff of Narkompros regarded Litkens with hostility, but it was almost impossible to replace them. As before, in spite of numerous protests from Narkompros, Communists were available for educational work only in insignificant numbers, and those Narkompros had remained liable to Party mobilization to other duties.² V.I. Solovyev, Litkens' associate in framing the project on reorganization of Narkompros and briefly deputy president of Glavpolitprosvet, stayed

1. Izvestiya VTSIK, 1921 no.33, 15 Feb., p.3.

2. TSGAOR 2306/1/634, 13 June 1921 (protest of Narkompros collegium against mobilization of 2 Communist workers).

at Narkompros only a few months; and, apart from him, Litkens seems to have brought no supporters into Narkompros at the top level. Even his deputy at the Organizational Centre, Z.G.Grinberg, was one of the Narkompros old guard.

If it was difficult to obtain responsible workers for Narkompros, it was no easier to dismiss them. Litkens tried to remove L.G.Shapiro from the collegium of Glavpolitprosvet, but Lenin (on Krupskaya's advice) intervened on Shapiro's behalf.¹ He tried to dismiss N.N.Glebov-Putilovsky, head of Petrograd FOTO-KINO; but although on this occasion he had the support of the whole collegium of Narkompros, the dismissal was countermanded by the Orgburo.²

Glavpolitprosvet suffered particularly from the shortage of responsible workers. In its first months it appealed repeatedly for more Communists - to the Central Committee for P.M.Kerzhentsev, L.S.Sosnovsky (of Pravda and Bednota), V.N.Maksimovsky and N.S.Angarsky in November 1920;³ to the Central Committee for 500 Communists and to the Orgburo for Sosnovsky, N.I.Smirnov and V.I.Nevsky in December;⁴ to the

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1. Lenin to Litkens, 27 March 1921, Pol.sob.soch. v.52, p.112.
 2. TSGAOR 2306/1/634, 18 July, 25 August and 5 Sept.1921 (closed meetings of the collegium of Narkompros); TSGA RSFSR 2313/1/1, report of head of FOTO-KINO P.Voevodin, 1 June 1921. Glebov-Putilovsky, who seems to have been a protege of Zinoviev, was accused of disrupting the work of Voevodin's FOTO-KINO in recording the 3rd Congress of the Comintern in Petrograd, and refusing to obey Voevodin's instructions. Narkompros collegium decided that 'Glebov cannot be left to work in any Narkompros organ after what happened' (18 July). The Orgburo appointed a commission of enquiry, including Dvoretzky of the Cheka, which recommended against dismissal.
 3. TSGA RSFSR 2313/1/1, 11 Nov.1920 (collegium of Glavpolitprosvet).
 4. TSGA RSFSR 2313/1/1, 4 and 18 Dec.1920.

Central Committee for Maksimovsky and Ya.A.Yakovlev (of the Press Department of Moscow Soviet) in January 1921.¹

Glavpolitprosvet had peculiar difficulty in appointing a deputy president to Krupskaya. The first deputy president was Litkens,² but he had to retire after his appointment to Narkompros. Two candidates - V.N.Maksimovsky³ and V.I.Solovyev⁴ - were proposed to succeed him. Both of them were still occupied with other duties, although Solovyev attended meetings of Glavpolitprosvet from November 1920 and Maksimovsky from February 1921. After Maksimovsky's arrival, sometimes he and sometimes Solovyev acted as chairman of the meetings.⁵ In March, Litkens announced the temporary collegium of Glavpolitprosvet as Krupskaya (president), Solovyev (deputy president), Maksimovsky, Shapiro, Ya.A.Yakovlev and Preobrazhensky.⁶ But the representative of Glavpolitprosvet in the collegium of Narkompros (making his first appearance only after complaints at his absence) was Maksimovsky.⁷

In April, Sovnarkom announced the collegium of Glavpolitprosvet with the same members, except for the replacement of Preobrazhensky (now head of Glavprofobr) by

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1. TSGA RSFSR 2313/1/1, 30 Jan.1921.
 2. TSGAOR 2306/1/320, 6 Dec.1920 (statement of Lunacharsky)
 3. TSGA RSFSR 2313/1/1, 30 Jan.1921 (nomination of Maksimovsky). Maksimovsky was a Party member since 1903, left Communist in 1918, 'Democratic Centralist' in 1920-21, signatory of Platform of 46 in 1923. He had worked in the Moscow oblast bureau of the Party and the collegium of NKVD.
 4. TSGA RSFSR 2313/1/1, 5 Jan.1921.(nomination, as temporary deputy president, of Solovyev).
 5. TSGA RSFSR 2313/1/1 and 2313/1/4, passim.
 6. TSGAOR 2308/1/21, instruction no.108, 7 March 1921.
 7. TSGAOR 2306/1/634, 17 March 1921.

Emilian Yaroslavsky (member of the Secretariat and the Orgburo). But instead of Solovyev, Maksimovsky was named as deputy president.¹

Three weeks passed before the publication of the Sovnarkom decision. Meanwhile a VTSIK commission for the review of the collegiums of all commissariats confirmed the collegium of Glavpolitprosvet independently of Sovnarkom and apparently without consultation with it - Maksimovsky remained deputy president, but M.M.Isaev of VTSSPS and S.I.Gusev of PUR were added to the collegium and Solovyev dropped.² Solovyev attended his last meeting of Glavpolitprosvet on May 6.³

The VTSIK commission (on which Pokrovsky represented Narkompros⁴) recommended a number of changes in the membership of Narkompros' departmental collegiums. Almost all of the departments concerned protested, and an appeal was made to the commission to review its decisions.⁵

In October, VTSIK appointed another commission to review the membership of the commissariats, headed by Yu.M.Larin.⁶ The commission was, in Larin's words, 'to launch a Tartar

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1. Resolution of 26 April 1921, published Izvestiya VTSIK, 1921 no.166, 18 May, p.2.
 2. TSGAOR 2306/1/634, 12 May 1921.
 3. Solovyev's next appointments were to the Central Committee agitprop department and as Soviet counsellor in Afghanistan (Lenin, Pol.sob.soch., v.52, p.563).
 4. TSGAOR 2306/1/634, 23 April 1921.
 5. TSGAOR 2306/1/634, 25 May 1921.
 6. 'On the question of the review of staffs and institutions (interview with comrade Larin)', Izvestiya VTSIK, 1921 no.243, 29 Oct., p.1. Members of the commission were Larin, D.I.Kursky, L.S.Sosnovsky, V.A.Avanesov and Antipov.

attack [mamaevo nashestvie] on Soviet institutions, to conduct ... a pogrom,' the purpose of which was to save money on the payment of official salaries and give the state 'the chance to offer workers in heavy industry more money and more food'.¹

The first Soviet institution that came to mind in this if no other context was Narkompros. Larin said that a preliminary investigation of Narkompros had already been made:²

'My impression ... is that a number of organs and institutions [of Narkompros] will be immediately dissolved because they are clearly unnecessary, or to eliminate parallelism, or because in present circumstances it is possible to do without them. Altogether 1,200,000 persons are receiving salaries from Narkompros ... The commission is thinking of reducing this number to 400,000 or slightly more.'

Asked which departments of Narkompros would be dissolved, Larin answered that in his opinion Tsentropechat, Glavmuzei, Gokhkom,³ Nachuchupr⁴ and Aktsentr⁵ - 'organs with names and functions mysterious to the uninitiated, but disclosed to the commission' - would have to go, as would most of the expenditure on the arts, possibly including the subsidy of state academic theatres which, to Larin's indignation, were taking up 5% of the whole Narkompros budget.

Lunacharsky and Pokrovsky were both deeply affected by the proposed economies - Lunacharsky because of the renewed

1. 'On the question of the review of staffs and institutions', Izvestiya VTSIK, 1921 no.243, 29 Oct., p.1.

2. ibid.

3. usually called Glakhkom - the Chief Artistic Committee.

4. defined by Larin as the administration of scientific and scientific-artistic institutions. Pokrovsky denied the existence of such a body (Izvestiya VTSIK, 1921 no.244, 30 Oct., p.2)

5. Academic Centre.

attack on the arts, and Pokrovsky because of the attack on scientific administration. Pokrovsky made the first protest in an angry letter to Izvestiya after the publication of the interview with Larin, accusing Larin of inadequate knowledge of Narkompros.¹ Two days later, the collegium of Narkompros resolved that Lunacharsky should inform the presidium of VTSIK that 'Narkompros considers it necessary to present its own project for the simplification of its apparatus, which will be worked out within a fortnight'.²

In this situation - which affected Litkens, as architect of the reorganized Narkompros, as much as Lunacharsky and Pokrovsky - Litkens was at a loss. He was not a member of VTSIK and, although he attended one meeting of the Larin commission,³ was unable to divert its attack. Lunacharsky, who was a member of VTSIK, was forced to take the initiative in defending Narkompros on a strictly organizational question. The Larin commission finally reached an agreement with Narkompros which undid almost all the work of Litkens' reorganization. It was decided that theoretical and practical leadership should be united in each chief administration and the Academic Centre abolished. Its functions in the direction of scientific and artistic work were transferred to a new organ, Glavnauka, which received the status of a chief administration. The commission agreed to 'retention and consolidation [uplotnenie]' of all arts departments in Narkompros.⁴ The academic theatres were

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1. Izvestiya VTSIK, 1921 no.244, 30 Oct., p.2 (letter to editor).
 2. TSGAOR 2306/1/634, 3 Nov.1921.
 3. 'On the question of the review of staffs and institutions', Izvestiya VTSIK, 1921 no.243, 29 Oct., p.1.
 4. TSGA RSFSR 2313/1/1, 8 Nov.1921 (meeting of Larin commission with representatives of Narkompros).

transferred to Glavnauka, except for the Bolshoi theatre, which was to be closed.¹ Tsentropechat was abolished.²

Thus almost nothing remained of Litkens' reorganization but Litkens himself - and that not for long, since he fell ill in February 1922, went to recuperate in the Crimea, and was killed by bandits two months later.³

On the recommendation of the Larin commission, the number of salaried employees of Narkompros was fixed at 513,100.⁴ This reduction, though great, was not disproportionate to the overall reduction in numbers of state employees. At the beginning of 1922, Larin stated that their number was reduced by 60%; and, according to his figures,⁵ both Vesenkha and the Commissariat of Internal Affairs suffered proportionally more than Narkompros.⁶ Narkompros was still, post-Larin, the third largest state employer - below the Commissariat of Communications (including watchmen) and Vesenkha, but well above the Commissariats of Health, Internal Affairs (including police), Agriculture and Justice (including the GPU).⁷

At the end of 1920, the administrative deficiencies

1. see chapter 7, pp.354-5.

2. TSGA RSFSR 2313/1/1, 8 Nov.1921.

3. see obituary in Nar.pros. weekly, 1922 no.101, 3 May, p.3.

4. TSGAOR 2306/1/634, 9 Dec.1921.

5. The figures include central, guberniya and uezd officials, but not employees of enterprises, institutions and volost and village departments of the commissariats.

6. Yu.Larin, 'Too many bosses', Pravda, 1922 no.2, 3 Jan., p.1.

7. Yu.Larin, 'State workers and salaries', Pravda, 1922 no.39, 18 Feb., p.2.

of Narkompros were so clear to outside observers that it was assumed that the introduction of rational administrative practices must have swift and remarkable results.

But the results of Litkens' reforms were negligible. His administrative system was rational but, as Krupskaya pointed out, it was a construction on 'the empty place of a commissariat'. It proved almost impossible to abolish entrenched institutions: they simply reappeared under different names or under the protection of another chief administration of Narkompros. It was impossible to purge the staff because of the lack of suitable replacements and the large number of outside persons and authorities to whom appeal might successfully be made.

The multiplicity of instructions coming from VTSIK, Sovnarkom, Maly Sovnarkom, the Central Committee, the Orgburo, the Politburo and the Council of Labour and Defence meant that Narkompros had innumerable methods of defence against instructions it did not wish to follow. Narkompros was only weak in that it could not organize positive action on its behalf: it could resist almost anything.

The notion that with 'better administrators' Narkompros could be made efficient was, in the circumstances of 1921, fallacious. It might have been changed (though perhaps not for the better) by the appointment of, for example, Preobrazhensky as commissar - on the almost impossible condition that Preobrazhensky had continued to hold the influence he had in 1920, while at the same time resigning

from active work in the Orgburo, the Secretariat and the Finance Commissariat and devoting himself exclusively to Narkompros. Some people thought that the solution was to make Trotsky commissar of education: in 1922 a delegation of the Union of educational workers approached him with the suggestion that he should take over Narkompros for a year, and reorganize it as he had reorganized transport. He refused, justly pointing out the difficulty of coping with the administrative apparatus.¹

Litkens, who was no Trotsky, failed to 'pass the examination' which Lenin and the Central Committee had set him - and this in spite of persistent coaching from Lenin himself. The goal of rational administration, in a climate of political confusion and economic collapse, turned out to be a mirage.

1. L. Trotsky, 'My life. The rise and fall of a dictator', London, 1930, p.408.

Chapter 6 NARKOMPROS AFTER REORGANIZATION

i) Education

The Party meeting on education did not in so many words repudiate the United Labour School but, as if by common consent, no speaker referred to it by name and a number attacked its basic principle of polytechnicalism. Ludmila Menzhinskaya resigned from her position as head of the department of the United Labour School immediately after the meeting.¹

On the last day of the Party meeting, Pravda published an article on the failure of Narkompros' school policy:²

'The two-year experience of Narkompros has shown that transition from the old school to the ideal labour school is impossible for a whole series of reasons, the chief of which are the abnormal circumstances of life at a time of acute civil war and the absence of an adequate body of teachers prepared to implement the ideal type of the labour school in practice. Furthermore, a complete synthesis of science and labour could not, of course, be found theoretically in such a comparatively short time ... At the present moment it is necessary to strive towards the creation of a school of a transitional type, from which the ideal labour school will grow in the future.'

The teaching programmes of Narkompros were, in the author's opinion, permeated with populist idealism. A recent programme on natural science was criticized as instilling no more than a 'love of nature':

'The education of sentimental "nature-lovers" ... could not have corresponded better to the tastes and ideals of the provincial petty-bourgeoisie [meshchanstvo].

1. TSGAOR 2308/1/21, instruction no.34, 6 Jan., 1921.

2. N.Baturin, 'Pedagogical futurism and the tasks of the Soviet school', Pravda, 1921 no.2, 4 Jan., p.1.

But it is quite obvious that it has nothing in common with the comprehension of nature lying at the basis of the flourishing of heavy capitalistic industry.'

Under Litkens' reorganization, the department of the United Labour School became Glavsotsvos, and was for some months after Menzhinskaya's resignation without a head. In this period, the polytechnical school (now referred to as the 'labour polytechnical school' instead of the 'United Labour School') was most vigorously defended against Glavprofobr, Litkens and the unionists by Lenin and Krupskaya.

In February, O.Yu.Schmidt, head of Glavprofobr, addressed a meeting of primary and secondary school teachers. Exactly what he said is a matter of dispute. He may, as he later claimed, have spoken only of the conversion of the two senior classes of the secondary schools into technicums, in accordance with the decisions of the Central Committee and the Party meeting. But a hostile observer - Ya.D.Linnik, of the Moscow guberniya education department - reported him as saying that there had been a 'complete collapse of the polytechnical school in Russia', and conveying to his audience that the whole principle of polytechnical education had been discredited.¹

The confusion of the teachers on present educational policy was well illustrated by a conversation overheard by Linnik at the teachers' meeting while the audience waited for Schmidt (who arrived an hour late):²

1. Ya.Linnik, 'The new system of education (impressions)', *Pravda*, 1921 no.34, 16 Feb., pp.1-2.

2. ibid.

"But are they intending to turn our school into some sort of technicum?" "Good heavens, we have such pitiful equipment even for the present school - but they say that the social-economic technicum does not need equipment." "Forgive my ignorance, but what is a social-economic technicum? I must have unconsciously fallen behind." "No, I am not clear about it myself: the question of new trends in education is not dealt with by the press, and nobody assembles us for papers, discussion and so on. I was told that the social-economic technicum is just the old Commercial School..."

After the publication of Linnik's article (which Pravda labelled 'for discussion'), the collegium of Narkompros met in closed session to consider its implications.¹ The question was whether Schmidt had or had not deviated from the line of the Party and Narkompros. Three of those attending the meeting (Lunacharsky, Pokrovsky and Z.G.Gringer) were Schmidt's probable opponents; five (Schmidt himself, Litkens and three union representatives, admitted to the collegium on the recommendation of the Party meeting) were his supporters. In Krupskaya's absence and with no representative of Glav-sotsvos, Schmidt's supporters were in the majority. The meeting decided that Schmidt had been misrepresented: a rider was added that 'the collegium finds it necessary to call the attention of Pravda's editors to their systematic publication of articles against Narkompros without preliminary verification, together with an almost complete refusal to publish material supplied to the paper by Narkompros itself'.²

Schmidt, with the approval of the collegium, wrote a reply to Linnik.³ He was now anxious to repudiate anti-

1. TSGAOR 2306/1/634, 18 Feb.1921.

2. ibid. (resolution)

3. 'Reform of the school system', Pravda 1921 no.38, 21 Feb., p.1.

polytechnical views which Lenin - writing after the date of Schmidt's speech to the teachers - had declared to be 'for a Communist directly inadmissible'.¹ Schmidt therefore explained that he had not attacked the polytechnical principle, but had simply discussed the formation of technicums on the basis of the two senior classes of the secondary school. All he had said was that labour and polytechnical principles, no doubt admirable in themselves, had been distorted in practice. The labour principle, which in purer form was incorporated in the Party programme, had attracted Tolstoyan idealists into Narkompros' work:

'The principle of the labour school, in the absence of Communist teachers, fell on receptive soil only among anarchist educationalists and narodnik intellectuals. In both cases labour, instead of being a means towards the conquest of nature and the increase of human power, became an end in itself, an ethical principle ...'

Linnik's version of his speech, Schmidt claimed, was 'malicious, slanderous fantasy'.²

Krupskaya entered the controversy indignantly confirming Linnik's account of Schmidt's anti-polytechnical views because, she wrote, she had so often had to listen to such remarks from Schmidt in the past.³ Even Schmidt's reply to Linnik was offensive to Krupskaya, because Schmidt

'tries to prove that the labour polytechnical school is quite suitable for adorning the Party programme, but

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1. Lenin, 'On the work of Narkompros', Pravda, 1921 no.28, 9 Feb., pp.2-3.
 2. Schmidt, 'Reform of the school system', Pravda, 1921 no.38, 21 Feb., p.1.
 3. Krupskaya, 'Reform of the school system', Pravda, 1921 no.40, 23 Feb., p.1.

cannot be put into practice and ought to be decently buried. A strange attitude to the Party programme! The programme is one thing, life is another.'

Schmidt had invoked the authority of the Party meeting on education. Krupskaya denied it, and cited instead the decisions of Lenin's commission,¹ 'which confirmed the Party programme in the part concerning education, and only reduced the duration of the labour polytechnical school from 9 years to 7 in view of our poverty'.² Krupskaya added in parenthesis that since compulsory secondary education scarcely existed in practice, 'that resolution has no particular significance': the real problem was to bring even the 7-year school into being.

Krupskaya dealt very summarily with Schmidt's lack of historical and international perspective: he claimed, she wrote, that in the interests of the national economy it was necessary to produce technicians in the shortest possible time, but

'it is in the interests of the national economy that there should be the greatest possible number of capable people and the smallest number of people imagining themselves to be specialists and not able to take a single step. If O.Schmidt even slightly interested himself in questions of the history of the labour school, he would know that the labour school has proved in practice that it raises the general work-capability of pupils, and thanks to it the leading industrial countries have begun to compete among themselves on this common ground. But what has that to do with O.Schmidt! '

1. see chapter 5, pp.259-60.

2. Krupskaya, 'Reform of the school system', Pravda, 1921 no.40, 23 Feb., p.1.

Krupskaya pointed out that Schmidt's technicums were still wholly speculative. Why should the technicums be able to arrange practical work in factories and obtain necessary equipment, when this had proved impossible for the labour school? 'For schools receiving the name of technicums and coming under the control of O.Schmidt absolutely the same obstacles will exist as for the polytechnical schools.'

Before Schmidt could reply, the Central Committee dismissed him from Glavprofobr on February 25.¹ His reply to Krupskaya when it came was sharply polemical.² He accused her of abusing her senior Party position to attack a junior Party member, and of denying the authority of the Party meeting on education for no other reason than the fact that she did not agree with its decisions. This was clearly not only an attack on Krupskaya but an attack on Lenin. There had been protests from 'responsible workers' in Narkompros at Schmidt's dismissal,³ and the question was due for reconsideration by the Central Committee on March 7.⁴ Schmidt was presumably trying to muster an 'anti-authoritarian' vote against Lenin in the Central Committee.

In his article, Schmidt again defended the authority of the Party meeting, 'which comrade Krupskaya tries in every way to discredit'. He reflected that 'even the most authoritative Party comrades are at the present time abusing one

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1. I.Smirnov, 'V.I.Lenin and the direction of educational affairs', Sovetskaya pedagogika, 1958 no.4, p.55.
 2. 'What is the essence?' Pravda, 1921 no.48, 4 March, p.1.
 3. Smirnov, op.cit., p.55. The 'responsible workers' almost certainly included Litkens.
 4. ibid.

polemical convention - the masking of lack of effective arguments by harshness of personal attack. Evidently a more junior member of the Party is left with only one thing to do: not to imitate them in this respect.'

Schmidt kept his shrewdest blow for the last paragraph: 'Surely the point is really that the resolution of the Party meeting and the Central Committee was welcomed by members of Narkompros, including myself, as a benevolent and rational measure, but that comrade Krupskaya does not on her own account accept these resolutions?¹ If that is so, let comrade Krupskaya acknowledge this openly, and not come out as the defender of the Party line against heretics in Narkompros.'

On March 7, Schmidt's dismissal was confirmed by the Central Committee.² Krupskaya's reply, published on the following day, was curt:³

'Did comrade Schmidt have the right to speak at the meeting of teachers of the city of Moscow - mainly non-party - against the labour and polytechnical school, after the resolutions of the commission?⁴

As a Party member and a member of the collegium of Narkompros, he did not have that right.'

Neither Pravda nor Izvestiya published an announcement of Schmidt's dismissal, nor of the appointment by the Central Committee of his successor - E.A.Preobrazhensky.

It is unlikely that Lenin, having as it appears arranged

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1. Both Schmidt and Krupskaya suggested that the Party meeting had passed definite resolutions on the radical professionalization of the school, but this was not so. See chapter 5, p.257.
 2. I.Smirnov, 'V.I.Lenin and the direction of educational affairs', Sovetskaya pedagogika, 1958 no.4, p.55.
 3. 'The school system in the Soviet republic', Pravda 1921 no.51, 8 March, p.2.
 4. i.e. Lenin's commission, which in fact published its 'Directives' on February 5, the day after Schmidt's speech.

Schmidt's dismissal, would have chosen Preobrazhensky to succeed him. Preobrazhensky's views on education were even more unpalatable to Lenin, Krupskaya, Lunacharsky and Pokrovsky than Schmidt's had been. Not only was he an opponent of the polytechnical school but also, under present circumstances, of the higher school - which he regarded, together with non-professional secondary education, politprosvet and the arts, as a luxury which the Soviet state could not for the time being afford.

Preobrazhensky, who was a member of the collegium of the Finance Commissariat and continued to work there after his appointment to Glavprofobr, saw education as a whole as an area of low financial priority; but he believed that the greater part of the money available for education should go to technical and professional training of adolescents and adult workers. The great need of the Russian economy, Preobrazhensky thought, was not for highly qualified technicians, but for technicians of middle qualifications and for skilled workmen.

These views were clearly stated in a paragraph of a long article on economic reform published by Preobrazhensky in July, 1921:¹

'Now about Narkompros. There is no need to speak of the use of enlightenment. But it must be remembered that enlightenment exists on the basis of a definite surplus product of society. Where that product is small, then the "fruits of enlightenment" will inevitably also be

1. 'What needs to be said', Pravda, 1921 no.154, 16 July, p.2.

small. It is improper, above all for our socialist state, to imitate the ruined aristocrat who refuses to mend the roof so as to buy a valuable painting or an expensive library. Only that part of the national income can be spent on enlightenment which corresponds to the given level of development of socialist production. And that part which is spent must be distributed according to the importance of this or that branch of enlightenment for the whole economy of the country in general. In any case, higher education must be hugely diminished in favour of lower; and in lower education, the general branch must be enormously diminished in favour of what is urgently important for industry and agriculture.'

Preobrazhensky's bias against higher and general secondary education was reinforced by the conviction that they remained areas of bourgeois predominance.

In Narkompros, Preobrazhensky plunged into immediate conflict with Glavsotsvos and Glavpolitprosvet, as well as organizational conflict with Litkens. From March to October, 1921, Glavsotsvos was headed by Vladimir Alekseevich Nevsky.¹ In October Nevsky was replaced by the 'bourgeois specialist' - a former member of the State Education Committee under the Provisional Government - Nikolai Nikolaevich Iordansky.² Throughout 1921, Glavsotsvos was the weakest of the chief administrations of Narkompros in internal political terms. But even under strong leadership, Preobrazhensky and the economic crisis would have made 1921 a dismal year for school administrators.

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1. appointed to collegium of Narkompros by Sovnarkom, 22 March 1921 (Izvestiya VTSIK, 1921 no.65, 26 March, p.3); announced as head of Glavsotsvos by Litkens, 23 March (TSGAOR 2308/1/21, instruction no.122, 23 March 1921). Not to be confused with V.I.Nevsky (Krivobokov), formerly commissar for rabfaks.
 2. TSGAOR 2308/1/21, instruction no.352, 25 Oct.1921. Not to be confused with the Bolshevik N.I.Iordansky, who later worked in Gosizdat.

Before Preobrazhensky's first appearance in the collegium as representative of Glavprofobr,¹ Narkompros considered the question of distribution of educational work among adolescents between Glavsotsvos, Glavpolitprosvet, Glavprofobr and the Komsomol.² It was decided that the work should be unified under Glavsotsvos, with the cooperation of the Komsomol. The speakers were V.A.Nevsky and Dunaevsky of the Komsomol, who declared his intention of complaining against the decision to Maly Sovnarkom.³

Preobrazhensky, finding a controversy already in full swing, went one better than a complaint to Maly Sovnarkom, and complained against the decision, on behalf of Glavprofobr, to the Orgburo. On April 11, the collegium was informed of the Orgburo's decision to transfer all work among adolescents to Glavprofobr.⁴ A complaint by Narkompros, on behalf of Glavsotsvos, was lodged with the Politburo,⁵ evidently without result.

In July, Narkompros tackled the problem of the reorganization of the two senior classes of the secondary school into technicums.⁶ Litkens, Preobrazhensky and V.A.Nevsky spoke. It was resolved that the 7-year school was to be divided into a primary stage of 3 years and a secondary stage of 4 years. This meant that primary education was cut back to its pre-revolutionary norm of 3 years, instead of the 5 years envisaged by the United Labour School.⁷

1. 31 March 1921 (TSGAOR 2306/1/634).

2. TSGAOR 2306/1/634, 22 March 1921.

3. *ibid.*

4. TSGAOR 2306/1/634, 11 April 1921.

5. *ibid.* (resolution).

6. TSGAOR 2306/1/634, 4 July 1921.

7. see chapter 2, pp.50-51.

It was decided initially not to build new premises for the technicums. Some of the existing secondary-school buildings were to remain secondary schools for the 11-15 age group; others were to become technicums for adolescents from 15 to 19 years. It was resolved that 'with the beginning of the 1921-22 school year, from 30% to 50% of all secondary schools possessing 3rd and 4th classes are to be closed for reorganization into technicums'.¹

Since few secondary schools in fact possessed 3rd and 4th classes (the 8th and 9th years of the 9-year school), it might seem that few schools were affected. But it was further resolved that

'in each separate guberniya, the buildings, equipment and teaching personnel of the secondary schools are to be divided between the guberniya departments of Glavprofobr and Glavsotsvos ... so that the number of general educational schools with complete 7-year courses is in a ratio of 3 to 2 with technicums in the guberniya.'

This meant that regardless of the existence of 3rd and 4th classes, a substantial proportion of secondary schools were to be closed for reorganization into technicums.

The debate was not and never had been really concerned with the fate of the 3rd and 4th classes of the secondary school. It was in fact a debate about whether the Soviet state could afford to offer general secondary education to the population as a whole, or whether education above primary level (formerly 5 years, now 3) should be predominantly professional. The July resolution was a preliminary victory

1. TSGAOR 2306/1/634, 4 July 1921.

for the advocates of complete professionalization of secondary education.

Shortly after this resolution and the publication of Preobrazhensky's ominous statement on 'the uses of enlightenment',¹ Lunacharsky declared war. His attack on Preobrazhensky, published not in the national press but in the Narkompros journal,² began with the elaborate courtesies which are not intended to conciliate an opponent. Lunacharsky dealt first of all with the educational issue. Preobrazhensky, quite unwittingly in Lunacharsky's opinion, had given the impression that

'middle and higher education are some sort of luxury, that these are in some way "class" schools,...attentive to the interests of the governing classes [sic], and need to be revived in socialist society only when there is money available to do so ...

Someone who took comrade Preobrazhensky literally would find himself not at all defending the policy of transitional communism but, so to speak, the peasant-artisan policy, the kind of policy that a clever peasant or clever artisan might perhaps put forward ...

I remember that comrade Preobrazhensky once argued at a meeting of the collegium that the number of specialists graduating from our educational institutions is too high, or at least high enough, which completely astonished me ... Let us say directly that not only is it not necessary to cut down the numbers of our higher educational institutions, but we must tackle the problem of expanding their work ...'

Lunacharsky went on to discuss Preobrazhensky's view of enlightenment in general, and the necessity of art in particular:

1. see above, pp.282-3.

2. 'Economics and culture', Nar.pros. weekly, 1921 no.84, 10 August, p.2.

'It seems - this is what his article says - that we should not follow the policy of a ruined landowner who, selling some farm or cutting down his last forests, buys a fine painting for his gallery. And it is true that we should not do this ... But we do not need to deviate into that sort of puritanism which announces the principle that "man lives by bread alone". And in this respect if, for example, we came to the conclusion that it was necessary to sell our whole museum collection abroad, exchanging it for the appropriate quantity of flour¹, or to stop all artistic education or all artistic life in the country completely, we would hardly be acting rationally ...

Because joyless life, deprived of all culture,... is a hard-labour sentence [zhizn katorzhnaya] ... I already see a sceptical smile on many lips - fables do not feed nightingales, it is true, but since we can scarcely feed the nightingale well even if we put a gag on all recitation of fables,... the question is, are even hungry and poor people to have the great comfort of art or are they not?'

Preobrazhensky had the advantage of Lunacharsky in being able to publish his reply both in the Narkompros journal and the national press.² The strongest part of his case - which Lunacharsky, in his anxiety for the arts and the universities, almost overlooked - rested on the existing disproportion in the output of highly qualified technicians and skilled workers. The number of students enrolled in technicums and technical courses, Preobrazhensky stated, was two-thirds the number enrolled in higher schools, and only a quarter of the pre-war figure. Workers with middle

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1. This example, of course, was not hypothetical. Russia was already exporting artistic treasures in quantity (M.F. Andreeva, lately of Narkompros, was arranging their sale in Berlin), and there was sharp controversy within the government on how far this process should go.
 2. 'On professional-technical education', Pravda, 1921 no.201, p.2; and Nar.pros. weekly, 1921 no.85, 24 Sept., pp.6-7.

qualifications were urgently needed in agriculture, especially in machine-building and peat-extraction, electrical engineering and school teaching. Preobrazhensky thought it would shortly be necessary 'to convert the majority of our present secondary schools'¹ into pedagogical technicums for the training of primary school teachers.

Preobrazhensky considered that there was no need for more universities, and their number could even be diminished. Because of the lack of competent professors, even the medical faculties should not be expanded. The higher technical schools already in existence could accomodate more students. Vesenkha, the main employer of graduates of higher technical schools,

'offered us a demand for 4,000 engineers of various specialities in the coming year. We consider that figure exaggerated and inadequately based, taking into account the general contraction of our industry except for some individual branches.'

The question of higher versus middle technical education was, in Preobrazhensky's opinion, an issue of class versus class:

'The bourgeois and intellectual strata of the population are frantically trying to maintain themselves and their children at the level of education and social position reached in the pre-revolutionary period. This, of course, is quite understandable. But the proletarian state will never allow the parents and children of the former privileged classes to decide the question of the numbers and social origins of the future specialists we train in our schools. At the present moment there is a genuine class war at the doors of the higher school between the worker-peasant majority of the country, which wants to have specialists from among its own kin in its own state,

1. Preobrazhensky adds the obligatory qualification - 'the two senior classes, from 15 to 17 years'.

and the governing classes and strata linked with them. The proletarian state openly takes the side of its own people.'

His conclusion was that it was necessary to limit the number of enrolments in the higher school as much on ideological as economic grounds.

Under Litkens' reorganization of Narkompros, higher schools came under the administrative control of Glavprofobr, with GUS retaining only supervision of policy. The tough line which Narkompros had adopted towards Moscow University in the autumn of 1920 was regarded as an experiment, although for Glavprofobr - especially under Preobrazhensky - it was clearly the only conceivable policy.

Bogolepov, the appointed Rector of Moscow University, stood for unequivocal toughness. This meant in effect strengthening the rabfak to the point where it could destroy the remnants of the bourgeois university. Neither GUS, under Pokrovsky, nor Glavprofobr, under Schmidt, were in total sympathy with Bogolepov. Nor was Lenin, who was firmly convinced of the necessity of using bourgeois specialists in all fields:¹

'With the thriftiness of a good manager [khozyain] which was characteristic of him, Vladimir Ilyich did not in the least intend to part forever with the old and vital apparatus of Russian universities. Even in the faculty of social sciences he saw the chance of using the old teaching personnel, not to mention in the higher technical school, where the slogan "break less" [lomaite pomenshe] remained in force in 1920 ...'

1. Pokrovsky, 'What Lenin was for our higher school', Pravda 1924 no.22, 27 Jan., p.2.

Early in 1921, Bogolepov published a belligerent article arguing that 'only Communist "spetsy" can put the economy of the country on other rails and build life anew', and that in three years of Soviet power the only gain for communism in the universities had been the creation of the rabfak. It was necessary, he wrote, 'to put an end in the most definite way to every kind of university autonomy and freedom of teaching, and not give the professoriate any greater rights than other Soviet employees'.¹

Bogolepov found Schmidt too ready to make concessions to the professors, and not sympathetic enough to the rabfak. Schmidt, in Bogolepov's view, allowed too much weight to the professors in the university administration, and relied too much on students as a balancing force, although 'experience shows that students are too inexperienced in the struggle with the well-organized class enemy, and lightly abandon their positions'. Bogolepov's suggestion was that the representation of the rabfak 'which the old professors hate so much' in the university administration should be increased.²

Pokrovsky, although the creator of the rabfak, took up the argument in support of Schmidt.³ He used the typically oblique argument that students, since they were shortly to become members of a trade union, could not be denied

1. Bogolepov, 'The higher school and communism', Pravda, 1921 no.44, 27 Feb., p.1.

2. ibid.

3. Pokrovsky, 'The higher school and the student body', Pravda 1921 no.45, 1 March, p.1.

representative rights in the management of their own 'enterprise'. He thought that the rabfak teachers were as a whole no more politically reliable than any other group of the intelligentsia, and so the rabfak 'as an institution' should not be given special representation and privileges.

With Schmidt's dismissal in March and Bogolepov's in May,¹ the roles of Glavprofobr and the Moscow University Rector were reversed. Vyacheslav Petrovich Volgin,² who succeeded Bogolepov, was relatively conciliatory towards the old professors, while Preobrazhensky took over the tough line. Immediately on taking office, Preobrazhensky appointed a new administration at the Moscow Higher Technical Institute which was unacceptable to the staff. The institute went on strike. After the intervention of the Politburo to reverse Glavprofobr's decision on the administration of the institute in April, a statement was issued over the signatures of Lunacharsky, for Narkompros, and Molotov, for the Central Committee, (but not Preobrazhensky) instructing Communist students of the institute to behave less militantly towards the professors and the non-party students.³

This was a snub to Preobrazhensky, who had encouraged student militancy, and he protested against the Politburo's

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1. N.L.Safryazan, 'From the history of Moscow University in the first years of the reconstruction period 1921-25', Iz istorii moskovskogo universiteta, pp.90-91.
 2. Volgin, a marxist historian, was a former Menshevik who joined the Communist Party in 1920. He had been a member of GUS since 1919.
 3. Lenin, Pol.sob.soch. (5th ed.), v.52, p.388.

decision.¹ Lenin read him a lecture on the proper treatment of bourgeois specialists: reactionaries, he wrote, ought to be exposed, but²

'they must be exposed in another way. And on concrete grounds,... on the exact fact, action, statement. Then we can imprison them for a month or a year. It will be a good lesson.'

Lenin found fault with both the stern and the permissive attitudes to specialists which were to be found in Narkompros; he suggested that Narkompros had something to learn from the Red Army, which had learnt how to catch the old specialists in anti-Soviet acts, punish them, release them and re-employ them. The trouble with Lunacharsky and Pokrovsky, Lenin wrote, was that they 'do not know how to "catch" their specialists'. Preobrazhensky, on the other hand, did not know how to use them.³

Lenin had had earlier trouble with Glavprofobr on the employment of specialists. At the time of Schmidt's polemic with Krupskaya, Lenin had asked Narkompros to provide him immediately with a list of educationalists with 'solid practical experience' both in the field of general and professional education.⁴ In answer to this, Schmidt produced a memorandum to show that not only did Glavprofobr employ specialists, but the members of its collegium were specialists themselves⁵ - a point of view which Lenin had already

1. see Lenin's letter to Preobrazhensky, 19 April 1921, Pol.sob.soch. (5th ed.), v.52, p.155.

2. ibid.

3. ibid.

4. TSGAOR 2306/1/634, 14 Feb.1921 (letter read by Lunacharsky).

5. TSGAOR 2306/1/634, 14 Feb.1921 (memo. filed with minutes).

vigourously denied,¹ as Schmidt acknowledged in a reference to 'the opinion, recently expressed without proof in the press, that Narkompros does not employ specialists'.²

Preobrazhensky was no more amenable than Schmidt to suggestions that he needed professional advisors. In June, Lenin wrote to him:³

'Recommendation and advancement of specialists in Glavprofobr must be put formally: 100-200 people must at once be taken on to the staff and put on rations.'

In December he wrote again, this time to Pokrovsky: 'I am very much afraid that the absence of a major specialist as deputy head of Glavprofobr is wrong.'⁴ Nevertheless another Communist non-specialist - Varvara Nikolaevna Yakovleva⁵ - was appointed deputy early in 1922;⁶ and when she took over the presidency of Glavprofobr, the post of deputy passed to the Communist Rector of Moscow University, V.P.Volgin.⁷

Although it was common ground in Narkompros that the universities should submit themselves to Soviet discipline and 'proletarianization', there was no agreement about the methods of achieving this. The bourgeois specialists of the academic world were approached in bewildering succession

1. see chapter 5, pp.261-2.

2. TSGAOR 2306/1/634, 14 Feb.1921 (memorandum).

3. letter of 5 June 1921, Pol.sob.soch.(5th ed.), v.52, p.256.

4. letter of 6 Dec.1921, Pol.sob.soch.(5th ed.), v.54, p.66.

5. a Bolshevik from 1904, widow of P.K.Shternberg, wife of I.N.Smirnov, later deputy commissar of Narkompros.

6. TSGAOR 2306/1/1199a, 2 Feb.1922 (collegium of Narkompros).

7. TSGAOR 2306/1/2102, 22 March 1922 (presidium of Narkompros).

by Preobrazhensky with threats of liquidation, Pokrovsky with idiosyncratic logic, and Lunacharsky with a soft answer attempting to turn away wrath.

In June 1921 a meeting was held to approve the new university constitution, which tried to combine the elective principle with the principle of Narkompros appointment to the governing body of the university.¹ Preobrazhensky was wisely absent. Lunacharsky spoke in a conciliatory tone:²

'We do not deny freedom of science or freedom of teaching, but we cannot now allow full freedom. It is a hard time, chains have to be borne, and for the time being we are bearing these chains. Youth is our future, and we cannot allow counter-revolutionary propaganda among our youth. The smallest weight might tip the scales against us, and therefore with a heavy heart we take on the role of censor. However there have to be strong arguments for this, and censorship can only be allowed in so far as it is absolutely necessary. In the social sciences, we want the voice of marxist science to be heard. In the sphere of the exact sciences, ... there are not these restrictions.'

On the question of university administration, Lunacharsky said that complete self-administration was impossible:

'The internal life of the [higher] school must be open to the government, and then it is possible to establish cooperation. There is a practical consideration: on

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1. The governing body was to consist of 3 to 5 members, appointed by Narkompros from candidates nominated by university staff, students, unions and local government authorities. Professors were to be appointed by GUS, on the nomination of specialist commissions. Nar.pros. weekly, 1921 no.82, 20 May, pp.7-9 (the issue must have been pre-dated, as the meeting was from 27 June to 2 July 1921).
 2. Nar.pros. weekly, 1921 no.83, 20 July, pp.1-2.

being introduced into the general system of Soviet administration, the higher school finds in that system its protector ...'

The meeting voted the Narkompros Statement on university administration clause by clause: it was accepted by a majority ranging from 160 to 180 on separate clauses, with a minority of 45 to 56 against.¹ But the professors present claimed that the meeting did not adequately represent the higher school², and protested to Lenin after the event that the decisions were invalid.³ The Statement nevertheless became law on September 2, 1921.⁴

At the beginning of the 1921-22 academic year, Preobrazhensky came into his own with a list of universities and higher technical schools which were to be closed.⁵ There were some signs of discontent in the collegium of Narkompros, although it was admitted that a number of these institutions scarcely existed except on paper. Volgin made a statement on the impossibility of closing all the listed institutions by September 1;⁶ and the collegium ruled that those offering general educational courses should be transferred to Glavpolitprosvet for use as people's [narodnye] universities.⁷ But Preobrazhensky's list was approved.

1. Nar.pros. weekly, 1921 no.82, 20 May, pp.7-9.

2. 43 rectors, 46 professors, 71 govt. and Narkompros reps. and 136 students were present. 165 out of the total 296 were Communists. Nar.pros. weekly, 1921 no.82, 20 May, pp.7-9.

3. Lenin forwarded the protest to Litkens on 6 Aug. Pol.sob. soch. (5th ed.), v.53, p.398.

4. Istoriya moskovskogo universiteta, v.2, p.85.

5. TSGAOR 2306/1/634, 18 Aug. and 19 Sept.1921.

6. TSGAOR 2306/1/634, 18 Aug.1921.

7. TSGAOR 2306/1/634, 19 Sept.1921.

In December, Narkompros began an internal and external struggle over the budget, the tightest it had ever experienced. Larin's commission had allowed Narkompros 513,100 employees, and of these the collegium allotted 60,000 to Glavprofobr and 76,450 to Glavpolitprosvet.¹ Preobrazhensky told the collegium that if no further allocation for Glavprofobr was forthcoming from Narkompros, he would be obliged to protest at the budgetary meeting of VTSIK.² He did so, and as a result 10,000 of Glavpolitprosvet's allocation was transferred to Glavprofobr.³

The budget season led directly to the season of strikes. The pattern of the previous year was repeated, except that in 1922 not only the Moscow Higher Technical Institute went on strike but also the physical-mathematical faculty of Moscow University⁴ and professors of the universities of Petrograd, Kazan and other cities.⁵ The strikes were directed against the new university constitution (which came into force in Moscow in November-December); against the rabfaks, which the professors wanted abolished; and against the economic circumstances of the higher schools. Preobrazhensky has been accused by Soviet historians of Trotskyite provocation in delaying the payment of salaries to the staff of Moscow higher schools.⁶

1. TSGAOR 2306/1/634, 9 Dec.1921.

2. TSGAOR 2306/1/634, 30 Dec.1921.

3. TSGAOR 2306/1/1199a, 16 March 1922.

4. V.Stratonov gives a participant's account in 'Moscow University's loss of freedom', Moskovsky universitet 1755-1930.

5. Odinnadtsaty syezd RKP(b). Mart-aprel 1922 g. Stenografichesky otchet, Moscow 1961, p.777 (note).

6. Istoriya moskovskogo universiteta, v.2, pp.88-9.

Preobrazhensky's response to the strikes was to undertake a policy of 'repression',¹ enlisting the support of rabfak and Communist students against the professors. The Central Committee intervened, and set up a commission under Lunacharsky to review the economic position of the higher school.² Work in the physical-mathematical faculty of Moscow University began again early in February.³

As well as Lunacharsky's commission, the Central Committee set up an investigating commission of which Stalin was a member. The conclusions of this commission led to Preobrazhensky's dismissal from Glavprofobr.⁴

But Preobrazhensky, unlike Schmidt, was too big a figure to be dismissed for reasons of purely educational policy. In fact he was currently conducting a spirited attack on the New Economic Policy towards the countryside. His theses on economic policy were repudiated by Lenin in March 1922,⁵ but the controversy surrounding them was one of the main topics of debate at the Eleventh Party Congress.

In the debates at the congress both Preobrazhensky and Lenin touched on educational questions, although they were ignored by most other speakers. Preobrazhensky's comment on

1. Istoriya moskovskogo universiteta, v.2, p.88.

2. The work of this commission is somewhat contemptuously described by Stratonov in 'Moscow University's loss of freedom', Moskovsky universitet 1755-1930.

3. Istoriya moskovskogo universiteta, v.2, p.88.

4. ibid. No date is given. Preobrazhensky ceased to attend meetings of the collegium of Narkompros from the end of December 1921. Yakovleva attended as Glavprofobr representative from 9 March 1922 (TSGAOR 2306/1/1199a).

5. Odinnadtsaty syezd RKP(b), pp.xii-xiii.

the professors' strike was:¹

'The Central Committee of the Party has violated our Party programme ... There is a point in our programme where it says that we must attract [bourgeois specialists] into comradely relations, give them the best material support etc. But there is another point that the Party must not make any political concessions to that stratum, and it is put even more strongly. In relation to the professoriate, in whose hands lies the fate of our worker youth, the Central Committee allowed a political retreat at a moment when that retreat was not necessary, when it injured us and put the proletarians of our rabfaks in a bad position ...'

His only supporter on this point was S.S.Ioffe, representing the Communist students of Moscow rabfaks at the Party congress. Ioffe was dismayed by the concessions made to the professors: 'Where, we ask, must this retreat which Narkompros has begun and continues end?'²

Lenin insisted that the line of the Communist students and rabfaks against the professors had been too strong - 'It is true that the Communist cells and fine cells and the rabfaks are fine rabfaks, but they are not insured against mistakes, they are not sacred.' He criticized Preobrazhensky's repressive policies towards the higher school:³

'If the Party is directed like this, it would really lead to ruin. Not because comrade Preobrazhensky incorrectly understands politics in general, but because he approaches everything ...[as] a theoretician, looking for definite, usual and accustomed limits, a propagandist, who works with various measures directed towards propaganda. Everyone knows and values his strong side, but when he comes up with a political and administrative point of view, something monstrous comes out.'

1. Odinnadtsaty syezd RKP(b), pp.85-6.

2. ibid., p.95.

3. ibid., p.142.

In 1922 an impartial observer of Russian universities¹ noted that they were still a refuge for the liberal middle-class, and had this to say on their treatment by the Soviet government:²

'[The government] goes ahead methodically with the conversion and conquest of the universities, but without the high-handedness with which it treated other professional classes. It has thereby shown its respect for facts in the intellectual sphere. Most of the professors whose subjects were of political significance have had very unpleasant experiences, have suffered and are still suffering from unfair treatment, and have lain in prison. But in this the principal part has been played by the Tcheka (Extraordinary Commission) and not the governmental authorities. It must be remembered that the professors, especially the liberals, were always very keen politicians, and had a large part in the appointment of Ministers in the first revolution ...

But no-one can conceal from himself the possibility that the Communist State, though it does not destroy the leaders of bourgeois intellectual life in Russia, may let them die out and fill their places with politically reliable but intellectually inadequate successors...'

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1. Paul Scheffer, correspondent of the Berliner Tageblatt.
 2. Scheffer, 'University life and the press in revolutionary Russia', Manchester Guardian Commercial, series ed. J.M.Keynes, Reconstruction of Europe, section 4, 6 July 1922, pp.243-4.

ii) Child welfare

From 1918, Narkompros had claimed that everything relating to the welfare of children - nurseries, kindergartens, children's homes, education of handicapped and delinquent children, feeding and clothing of children of school age - should be in its hands. This claim brought it into conflict with the health and social security authorities. Control of the children's home [detsky dom] was particularly hotly contested by Narkompros and the Commissariat of Social Security,¹ which had inherited the orphanages formerly under the administration of the Ministry of Welfare.²

The very concept of an orphanage was anathema to Narkompros which, from the beginning, regarded the detsky dom as at least a potential alternative to the school, having the advantage of separating children from the bourgeois influence of the family and developing the habits of communal life. After inspecting the former orphanages (now 'children's colonies') of the department of social security in the Smolensk district, Lunacharsky reported that 'all the staff and all the children without exception are longing to enter the education department'.³ The leaders of the Commissariat of Social Security, especially Lenin's sister Anna Elizarova, resisted the transfer of its children's institutions to Narkompros, but, Lunacharsky wrote, 'let them not exaggerate the potentialities of the old "welfare" personnel ... There

1. Narodny komissariat sotsialnogo obespecheniya

2. Ministerstvo prizreniya

3. 'Children's colonies near Smolensk', Nar.pros. weekly, 1919 no.53-55, 4 Oct., p.2.

is no doubt at all that the new people whom Narkompros at once invites to work are on an incomparably higher level.'¹

In 1919, after repeated consideration of the question in Sovnarkom,² the administration of children's homes was transferred to Narkompros - it was one of the few departmental battles in which Narkompros had an opponent its own size or smaller. Anna Elizarova, head of the department of child welfare, moved to Narkompros with extreme reluctance;³ and in 1920 the collegium of Narkompros was repeatedly called on to adjudicate disputes between her department and its own Council for the Defence of Children.⁴

Narkompros policy on the detsky dom was formulated early in 1919 as follows:⁵

'Children's labour communes must serve as the instrument of destruction of the institution of the bourgeois family. Organizing life on communist bases, they not only prepare future communist citizens, but ... serve as hearths [ochagi] of communism, stimulants and guarantees of the reconstruction of adult society on new foundations.'

The basic type of the Narkompros detsky dom was a children's commune, having its own school, club and workshops and managing its own domestic economy.⁶

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1. 'Children's colonies near Smolensk', Nar.pros. weekly, 1919 no.53-55, 4 Oct., p.2.
 2. on 19 Nov.1918; 2 Jan., 20 Feb., 14 July, 14 Oct.1919. See 'Lenin documents on education', Sovetskaya pedagogika, 1966 no.4 and no.6, passim.
 3. see A.I.Elizarova, 'Pages of reminiscences of Vladimir Ilyich in Sovnarkom', Proletarskaya revolyutsiya, 1929 no.11.
 4. TSGAOR 2306/1/320, passim. The Council was established by Sovnarkom on 4 Feb.1919.
 5. Bolshaya sovetskaya entsiklopediya (1st ed.), v.21 (1931), 'Detsky dom', p.619.
 6. ibid., p.620.

In 1920, the chief function of the Council for the Defence of Children was provision of food, clothing and accommodation - a task which, in spite of support from Sovnarkom, proved to be beyond its strength.¹ It had more success in the field of policy, as was true of most of the institutions of Narkompros, although on one remarkable occasion it achieved a practical success in rescuing a group of Petrograd 'child-colonists' abducted (in Narkompros' view) from Siberia by the American Red Cross.²

The Council was enlightened in its attitude to juvenile delinquency:³

'We do not recognize juvenile crime. We know only sick children, spoilt by an ugly environment and education.'

Its policy was given legislative form by Sovnarkom in the decree 'On minors accused of socially dangerous acts',⁴ which forbade trial and imprisonment of children under 18 and directed that delinquent children be sent to reform schools under Narkompros.

It was the misfortune of Narkompros that its enlightened policy towards juvenile offenders was introduced at the beginning of a period of unprecedented juvenile delinquency and homelessness [besprizornost]. The gulf between the policies of Narkompros and the everyday experience of local authorities was almost unbridgeable. Moreover the children's homes themselves presented a security problem: there were

1. see chapter 1, pp.32-3.

2. TSGAOR 2306/1/320, 25 March, 3 Sept., 19 Nov.1920.

3. Nar.kom.po pros., 1917 - oktyabr - 1920 (kratky otchet), p.70.

4. decree of 4 March 1920, text in 'Lenin documents on education' Sovetskaya pedagogika, 1966 no.6, pp.119-120.

cases of indiscipline and delinquency among the children, even in the experimental school of the Institute of School Instructors of Physical Labour in Moscow in which members of the collegium of Narkompros took a personal interest;¹ and, it was claimed, cases of counter-revolutionary activity among the teachers and administrators of the children's homes. H.G.Wells, visiting Russia in September 1920, noticed that 'many men and women politically suspects or openly discontented with the existing political conditions, and yet with a desire to serve Russia, have found in these places work that they can do with a good conscience'.² Early in 1920, members of Narkompros' Committee on Minors were arrested. Lunacharsky protested to Lenin, who passed the protest on to Dzerzhinsky, head of the Cheka; Dzerzhinsky replied that there was 'serious evidence' of 'monstrous plundering, abuse and Whiteguardism'.³

Towards the end of 1920 A.D.Kalinina, a Narkompros worker, toured the south-eastern regions of European Russia for the Council for the Defence of Children. She found that local officials had cordoned off the Caucasus and Don region and were not letting children through. Inside the cordon, hordes of children were running wild, starving, and terrorizing the population: some of them were armed. Kalinina made her report both to the Council and to Dzerzhinsky of the Cheka.⁴

1. TSGAOR 2306/1/320, 18 Feb.1920. Theft, speculation and card-playing were mentioned. A child accused of theft and boycotted by his fellows committed suicide:Lunacharsky recalled with distress that this child had once brought a message to him in the Kremlin.

2. Russia in the shadows, London 1920, p.107.

3. Lenin, Pol.sob.soch.(5th ed.), v.51, pp.121 and 405.

4. S.S.Dzerzhinskaya, V gody velikikh boev, Moscow 1965, pp.342-3.

In September 1920, after hearing a report from G.F.Grinko on the position of education in the Ukraine, Narkompros decided to follow the Ukrainian example in reorganizing the Council for the Defence of Children as an interdepartmental organ of 'highly authoritative' membership coordinating the work of the commissariats of education, health, food, labour and Rabkrin.¹ The project was finalized in December.² The new Council (now 'State Council') was to be under VTSIK, with the president of VTSIK, M.I.Kalinin, at its head, Lunacharsky as his deputy, and representatives of the commissariats listed above together with the commissariats of war and justice. Its functions were to be coordination of help to children suffering 'extraordinary need' and publicity for the plight of Russia's children throughout the world. The Council was to work through existing authorities, temporarily organizing its own apparatus only in exceptional cases.

But before Narkompros had formally put its project to VTSIK, Dzerzhinsky intervened. After reading A.D.Kalinina's report and consulting with Lenin,³ he telephoned Lunacharsky saying that he had important business to discuss. Lunacharsky reported the conversation thus:⁴

'The questions on which our lines of work crossed were very few, and I could not at once guess what the creator and leader of the terrible Cheka wanted to discuss with me ... "I want to put a part of my personal energy and,

1. TSGAOR 2306/1/320, 27 and 28 Sept.1920.

2. TSGAOR 2306/1/320, 13 Dec.1920.

3. Dzerzhinskaya, V gody velikikh boev, p.343.

4. 'F.E.Dzerzhinsky in Narkompros', Pravda, 1926 no.168, 22 July p.2. Also in Rytsar revolyutsii (vospominaniya o Dzerzhinskom), Moscow 1967, pp.278-9.

more important, the energy of the Cheka into the struggle with besprizornost," Dzerzhinsky told me, and in his eyes at once burned that rather feverish flame of excited energy familiar to us all ... "In this matter we must rush directly to help, as if we saw children drowning, Narkompros alone has not the strength to cope. It needs the broad help of all Soviet society. A broad commission under VTSIK - of course with the closest participation of Narkompros - must be created, including all institutions and organizations which can be useful. I have already said something of this to a few people. I would like to stand at the head of that commission, and I want to include the Cheka apparatus directly in the work ... I think that our apparatus is one of those which works most efficiently. Its branches are everywhere. People take notice of it. They are rather afraid of it..."

I could not find words to answer ...'

Dzerzhinsky had his way, though certainly not with Lunacharsky's wholehearted support, and early in 1921 VTSIK established a Commission for the Improvement of the Life of Children.¹ Its members were announced in February as Dzerzhinsky (president), Kornev of the Cheka (deputy), Vetoshkin of Rabkrin, representatives of the commissariats of health, food and education (yet to be appointed) and VTSSPS.²

The announcement of the creation of the VTSIK commission under Dzerzhinsky caused a sensation. Even the Narkompros journal, in an article largely devoted to calming its readers,³ admitted that 'the fact that the business had been personally

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1. 27 Jan.1921.(S.Dzerzhinskaya, V gody velikikh boev, p.343) Komissiya po uluchsheniyu zhizni detei.
 2. Izvestiya VTSIK, 1921 no.35, 17 Feb., p.2.
 3. 'Educational questions in the press', Nar.pros. weekly, 1921 no.80, 20 March, p.13.

entrusted to the head of the Cheka created some panic in pedagogical circles, and it was necessary to establish exactly what were the commission's methods of work and its approach to children's institutions'.

An exchange of articles in Izvestiya between Lunacharsky and Vetoshkin, Rabkrin's representative on the commission, did not do a great deal to clarify the position. Lunacharsky gave only his own view of the commission's tasks, although claiming optimistically that this view 'will meet full sympathy in the commission'.¹ The Cheka's function, he wrote, would be to discipline government supply organs, and not at all to intimidate administrators and teachers in children's homes or the children themselves.

'The point was not to frighten the teacher with a new Egyptian plague, to put him under extraordinary control or to hound him for his blunders, ... but to give him material help. If Narkompros and its local organs get more food, clothing, bedding and school equipment, then it will be able to cope with everything else.'

Vetoshkin, in an article published next day,² reassured readers that there were no differences of opinion between Lunacharsky and the commission, making it painfully clear that there were. He agreed with Lunacharsky that there was no question of intimidation of teachers and children, because

'it is quite obvious that if the VTSIK commission headed by comrade Dzerzhinsky thought of introducing specifically "Chekist" methods into its work, that would be worth

1. 'The defence of children', Izvestiya VTSIK, 1921 no.41, 24 Feb., p.2.

2. 'Once again on the defence of children', Izvestiya VTSIK, 1921 no.42, 25 Feb., p.1.

little and be of too little use to the children ... The tasks of the commission are to bring everything possible to the help of children, using both the energy of the Cheka apparatus and the authority of the supreme legislative organ of the republic [VTSIK] and the local executive committees.'

Vetoshkin said nothing of the leading role of Narkompros.

Dzerzhinsky's instructions to the Cheka on 'urgent measures for the improvement of the life of children'¹ directed that work should be conducted 'in the closest contact and in agreement' with the government organs of supply and protection of children - that is, with local branches of the Food Commissariat and Narkompros. But his formulation of the tasks of the commission made it plain that disciplinary or 'Chekist' measures were also necessary: the commission would²

'investigate the position and number of homeless children in the relevant guberniyas and the condition of all children's homes; ensure that decrees on the supply and feeding of children were exactly implemented; give continual help to the Soviet institutions of the guberniya in the business of children's feeding and supply; ensure that children's institutions are provided with appropriate premises, an adequate amount of fuel and equipment; uncover every kind of squandering, abuse, cases of criminal attitude to children and slipshodness, and bring the guilty to trial before the Revolutionary Tribunal and the People's Courts.'

The commission formally endorsed the position of Sovnarkom and Narkompros on the treatment of juvenile offenders, reminding its agents that 'for children in Soviet Russia there are no trials and no imprisonment',³ and instructing

1. Dzerzhinskaya, *V gody velikikh boev*, p.345.

2. *ibid.*, p.345 (paraphrased by Dzerzhinskaya).

3. *ibid.*, p.346.

local executive committees immediately to set up commissions on the affairs of minors where these did not already exist, and to organize children's homes.

The GPU in fact maintained its own network of children's homes for juvenile offenders, parallel with those of Narkompros, throughout the 1920s.¹

In spite of the close contact which Lunacharsky had predicted between Narkompros and Dzerzhinsky's commission, Narkompros did not send an influential spokesman to the commission's meetings and seemed to have difficulty any representative there at all. Its original representative - the last member of the commission to be appointed - was apparently nominated by Vetoshkin of Rabkrin.² Three weeks later he was replaced, on Litkens' suggestion, by Z.G.Grinner of the Organizational Centre.³ Grinner later passed the job on to V.A.Nevsky of Glavsotsvos.⁴ But in October, Kornev - a member of the Cheka and deputy president of the commission - attended a meeting of the collegium of Narkompros in the course of which Nevsky offered his resignation from the commission.⁵ His successor was a fairly obscure member of the Organizational Centre.⁶

In July 1921, at the height of the famine in the Volga region, two bodies were set up to organize famine relief:

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1. The 'Shkola im.Dostoevskogo' described in the novel by G.Belykh and A. Panteleev, Respublika Shkid (Moscow 1927) was run by the GPU. So, after an early period under the Ukrainian Narkompros, were Makarenko's children's colonies.
 2. M.I.Vasilyev. TSGAOR 2306/1/634, 17 Feb.1921.
 3. TSGAOR 2306/1/634, 7 March 1921.
 4. TSGAOR 2306/1/634, 23 April and 12 May 1921.
 5. TSGAOR 2306/1/634, 10 Oct.1921.
 6. M.I.Kalashnikov. ibid.

a non-political 'All-Russian Committee of aid to the starving' and a 'Commission of aid to the starving population' under VTSIK. The non-political Committee was, in Soviet context, a most unusual body. Besides the Communists Kamenev, Lunacharsky, Krasin and Smidovich and the acceptable non-communists Gorky and Yuzhin-Sumbatov, it included Vera Figner and the former Cadets Prokopovich, Kuskova and Kishkin.¹ The Committee was intended to work with the Red Cross and attract international aid for the famine victims; and it did, in its brief existence, obtain a promise of support from the Hoover Famine Relief organization.² But the Committee was disbanded by the Cheka at its third meeting, and a number of its non-communist members were arrested.³ Prokopovich, Kuskova and Kishkin were, according to a Soviet historian,⁴ using the Committee as a base for international intrigue against the Soviet government. Some leading Communists protested against the dissolution of the Committee and the arrest of its members, but Lenin supported the action of the Cheka.⁵

The VTSIK Commission was headed by M.I.Kalinin, and included Kamenev, Smidovich and Rykov.⁶ Lunacharsky was not originally a member, but attended meetings from July 22⁷,

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1. Izvestiya VTSIK, 1921 no.158, 21 July, p.2.
 2. On 23 July 1921, Hoover answered a personal appeal from Gorky, writing as a member of the Committee. His letter is reproduced in Bertram D.Wolfe, The bridge and the abyss. The troubled friendship of Maxim Gorky and V.I.Lenin, London, 1967, plate XVII.
 3. Wolfe, The bridge and the abyss, pp.114-5.
 4. E.Drabkina, 'Winter crossing', Novy mir, 1968 no.10, p.60.
 5. see letter of Lenin, quoted Drabkina, op.cit., p.62.
 6. Izvestiya VTSIK, 1921 no.158, 21 July, p.2.
 7. Izvestiya VTSIK, 1921 no.162, 26 July, p.1.

and was accepted as a member on July 28.¹

Lunacharsky evidently thought this - in spite of the dissolution of the non-political Committee - an appropriate moment to move against the Dzerzhinsky commission and try to set up a non-Chekist organization of child welfare. On July 21, the collegium of Narkompros on his suggestion passed a resolution 'to empower the commissar, Lunacharsky, to suggest to the Commission of aid to the starving population in the name of Narkompros that all questions of help to starving children ... be taken out of the competence of the VTSIK Commission for the improvement of the life of children [Dzerzhinsky's commission] ... and that the members of the VTSIK Commission of aid to the starving population should create a special sub-commission of aid to the juvenile population'.² The president of the sub-commission would be Lunacharsky, and it would use the apparatus of Narkompros.

The next day, Lunacharsky made this suggestion to the Kalinin Commission of aid to the starving population; and the Commission accordingly resolved to form 'a special section of aid to starving children'.³ But within a few days this decision was reversed. The presidium of the Kalinin Commission 'decided after an exchange of opinions not to organize a new commission, but to conduct work on aid to children of the famine region through the VTSIK Commission on the improvement of the life of children' under Dzerzhinsky.⁴

1. Izvestiya VTSIK, 1921 no.167, 31 July, p.1.

2. TSGAOR 2306/1/634, 21 July 1921.

3. Izvestiya VTSIK, 1921 no.162, 26 July, p.1.

4. Izvestiya VTSIK, 1921 no.164, 28 July, p.1.

On July 27 Kornev, deputy president of the Dzerzhinsky Commission, was coopted as a member of the Commission of aid to the starving population.¹

Shortly after Lunacharsky's unsuccessful attempt to dislodge the Dzerzhinsky Commission, the Commission began compulsory evacuation of children from the famine districts of the Volga. In November the Commission, together with Narkompros, approved a project for the evacuation of children (first 600, then a further 1,000) to Czechoslovakia through the Czech Red Cross.² Neither of these measures was entirely happy in its effects. Moscow became flooded with child evacuees whom neither Narkompros nor the GPU could accomodate. Distressing reports that Soviet children evacuated to Czechoslovakia were being indoctrinated by Russian emigre teachers were received by Narkompros.³ In the autumn of 1922, the Dzerzhinsky Commission began to return evacuated children to the Volga region: 'this was necessary because many children had begun on their own initiative to return to their homes.'⁴

The Dzerzhinsky Commission survived another political challenge in March 1922 when, on the suggestion of a Sovnarkom commission under G.M.Leplevsky,⁵ president of Maly Sovnarkom,

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1. Izvestiya VTSIK, 1921 no.165, 29 July, p.1.
 2. TSGA RSFSR 2313/1/1, 9 Nov.1921 (Glavpolitprosvet file on work of Kompomgol).
 3. Lunacharsky, 'Wrangelites are educating our children', Izvestiya VTSIK, 1922 no.25, 2 Feb., p.1.
 4. Dzerzhinskaya, V gody velikikh boev, p.351.
 5. Leplevsky's unpublished memoirs on the 1921 debate on the legality of actions of the Cheka are quoted in E.Drabkina, 'Winter crossing', Novy mir, 1968 no.10, p.82 ff.

the presidium of VTSIK decided to disband it. 'Dzerzhinsky was informed of this,' writes his widow Sofia Sigismundovna Dzerzhinskaya,¹ 'and on March 24 sent the president of VTSIK, M.I.Kalinin, a letter of protest against the decision to liquidate the Children's Commission [detkomissiya]. In his letter he said: "...I make a categorical protest against such a resolution, and consider that no other institution is in a condition to cope with such aid to children as the VTSIK Commission has given up to now ..."'

Dzerzhinsky's protest was successful, and in the following years Narkompros continued to play a secondary and subordinate role to the GPU in the field of child welfare.

1. Dzerzhinskaya, V gody velikikh boev, p.348.

iii) The arts and Proletkult

The Party meeting on education decided to abolish the arts sector of Narkompros, of which Lunacharsky was president,¹ and transfer the greater part of its work to Glavpolitprosvet. Narkompros itself kept only a Chief Artistic Committee, Glakhkom, to direct theoretical work in the arts.² Like GUS, its counterpart in the field of research and higher education, Glakhkom was a part of the new Academic Centre of Narkompros. Lunacharsky was not a member of Glakhkom. Its organizer and first president was A.M. Rossky of Rabkrin,³ formerly learned secretary to the collegium of LITO. He was succeeded in May 1921 by the literary scholar Petr Semenovitch Kogan.⁴

Litkens and the Party meeting intended Glavpolitprosvet to become the highest authority in the organization of the arts. In February 1921, the Glavpolitprosvet collegium gave itself the 'right of veto from the political point of view' of all current work in the arts and sciences.⁵ Glakhkom was to have no veto, although it might query any decision by Glavpolitprosvet in the collegium of Narkompros.

Glavpolitprosvet did not find it easy to form an arts administration. Its first choice for the head of the Glavpolitprosvet arts sector - Davydov of the Moscow Council of trade

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1. His deputies were N.I. Trotskaya (Moscow) and M.F. Andreeva (Petrograd).
 2. TSGAOR 2306/1/634, 13 Jan. 1921 (resolution on Academic Centre)
 3. TSGAOR 2308/1/21, instruction no. 49, signed Litkens, 25 Jan. 1921.
 4. TSGAOR 2306/1/634, 26 May 1921 (collegium of Narkompros).
 5. TSGA RSFSR 2313/1/4, 26 Feb. 1921.

unions - was not available.¹ In February, Glavpolitprosvet requested Narkompros not to 'force the pace of transfer' of arts departments.² With the exception of P.Voevodin of FOTO-KINO, none of the former heads of the Narkompros arts departments moved to Glavpolitprosvet. David Shterenberg of IZO remained for a time in the Academic Centre, and then became head of the IZO department of Glavprofobr.³ Glavpolitprosvet put forward an obscure candidate, Kiselis, for its own IZO, and insisted on his appointment in spite of the objections of Glakhkom.⁴ Like Shterenberg Valery Bryusov, formerly head of LITO, moved to Glavprofobr;⁵ Glavpolitprosvet appointed A.Serafimovich.⁶ Natalya Bryusova (sister of Valery and an experienced worker in the musical field) was invited to become head of Glavpolitprosvet MUZO, but preferred to remain at her present job in MONO.⁷ Vsevolod Meyerhold, formerly head of Narkompros TEO, was appointed deputy to Kozyrev (a Communist from the Commissariat of Agriculture) at Glavpolitprosvet TEO, but almost immediately resigned.⁸

The experience and artistic standing of the heads of Glavpolitprosvet's arts departments compared poorly either with Glakhkom and the Academic Centre - which employed the

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1. TSGA RSFSR 2313/1/1, 31 Jan.1921.
 - 2.. TSGA RSFSR 2313/1/1, 5 Feb.1921.
 3. TSGAOR 2306/1/634, 31 March 1921.
 4. TSGA RSFSR 2313/1/4, 26 Feb. and 6 April 1921; and TSGAOR 2306/1/634, 23 June 1921.
 5. TSGAOR 2308/1/21, instruction no.49, 25 Jan.1921.
 6. TSGA RSFSR 2313/1/4, 26 Feb.1921.
 - 7.. TSGA RSFSR 2313/1/4, 26 Feb. and 5 March 1921.
 8. TSGA RSFSR 2313/1/4, 26 Feb. and 6 April 1921.

artist Natan Altman,¹ the composer Nikolai Yakovlevich Myaskovsky,² P.S.Kogan and E.K.Malinovskaya³ - or the arts departments of Glavprofobr - with Shterenberg, Bryusov and the music theorist Boleslav Leopoldovich Yavorsky.⁴ Litkens' plan had, of course, not provided that Glavprofobr should have arts departments as well as Glavpolitprosvet and the Academic Centre: they were formed, almost certainly on the initiative of Lunacharsky as president of Glavprofobr, early in 1921.⁵ Glavpolitprosvet's arts departments suffered from absenteeism, which was partly the result of appointing Communists mainly employed elsewhere as heads of departments. Kozyrev, head of Glavpolitprosvet TEO, was not only concurrently working in the Commissariat of Agriculture but was frequently out of Moscow. At the end of 1921 Kozyrev's deputy - the theatrical 'specialist' V.V.Tikhonovich - offered his resignation, claiming that as a result of Kozyrev's absence the department was unrepresented on all important theatrical commissions, and 'theatrical policy is made everywhere and by everyone except in TEO, which is turned into a purely executive apparatus'.⁶

One of the purposes of the reorganization of the arts was, in the spirit of the Central Committee's letter 'On the

1. TSGAOR 2306/1/634, 31 March 1921.

2. TSGAOR 2306/1/634, 23 April 1921.

3. Zhizn iskusstva, 1921 no.669-71, 8 Feb., p.1.

4. Savshinsky, 'The past does not die', Sovetskaya muzyka, 1967 no.1, p.73.

5. But in 1920 Glavprofobr already had dealings with IZO, and created its own dept. of 'artistic-industrial education' (TSGA RSFSR 1565/1/22, 3 March 1920).

6. TSGA RSFSR 2313/1/1, statement of V.V.Tikhonovich to the president of Glavpolitprosvet, 14 Nov.1921.

Proletkults', to remove Bogdanovists, futurists and cultural iconoclasts from Narkompros and Proletkult. But its achievement was seriously compromised by the difficulty of finding replacements for the former leaders who were not themselves Bogdanovists, futurists or cultural iconoclasts. For in fact both in Narkompros, under Lunacharsky, and Proletkult, under Lebedev-Polyansky, the former leaders were closer to the Central Committee's position on the arts than were their subordinates.

Lebedev-Polyansky, president of Proletkult until December 1920, had been a member of Vpered before the revolution but was 'neither a philosophical nor a political disciple of A.Bogdanov'.¹ He supported Proletkult autonomy, but had worked in Narkompros and in cooperation with Lunacharsky. He was not a cultural iconoclast, and opposed futurist influences in Proletkult:²

'Dissatisfied writers claim that Proletkult "polemicizes with comfuturists and imaginists" and even forbids [proletarian writers] to perform at the bourgeois Poets' Cafe ... Yes, Proletkult struggles both with futurism and imaginism, and sees the influence of the dying bourgeoisie with its perverted tastes even in the Communist futurists ...'

The successor to Lebedev-Polyansky, appointed by the plenum of the Central Committee of Proletkult on the nomination of its Communist fraction, was Valerian Fedorovich Pletnev.³ Pletnev represented a more radical and intransigent

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1. Literaturnaya entsiklopediya, v.9 (1935), article by N.Belchikov on Valerian Polyansky, p.126.
 2. V.Polyansky, 'Independence or in the paths of bourgeois culture', Proletarskaya kultura, 1920 no.15-16, p.48.
 3. Proletarskaya kultura, 1921 no.20-21, p.33 (session of C.C. of Proletkult of 16-20 Dec.1920).

wing of Proletkult than Lebedev-Polyansky - and, unlike Polyansky, did not end his life as an Academician. The Central Committee's letter 'On the Proletkults' was not published in the following issue of Proletarskaya kultura (which appeared after Pletnev's election to the presidency of Proletkult) and was mentioned only obliquely.¹ But the latest in a series of articles by Bogdanov on organizational science appeared as usual in a prominent position and without editorial criticism.² This was the last issue of the journal. But Proletkult subsequently put out a special publication containing Bogdanov's theses on organizational science, Pletnev's theses on the arts, and statements in favour of the autonomy of Proletkult.³

Pletnev was the author of the play Mstitel (after Claudel) which Bukharin had praised in 1919.⁴ Earlier in the same year, Pravda had published Pletnev's article 'On the professionalism of the proletarian artist';⁵ and in 1922 published a general statement by Pletnev on proletarian culture⁶ which seemed to Lenin to epitomize the Proletkult

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1. 'Declaration taken by the plenum of the All-Russian Central Committee of Proletkult, 19 Dec.1920', Proletarskaya kultura, 1921 no.20-21, pp.1-3.
 2. A.Bogdanov, 'Essays of organizational science', Proletarskaya kultura, 1921 no.20-21, pp.3-19.
 3. Rezolyutsii Vserossiiskikh soveshchani Proletkulta po voprosam teatra, literatury i izobrazitelnykh iskusstv, Rostov on Don, 1921, quoted P.A.Bugaenko, A.V.Lunacharsky i literaturnoe dvizhenie 20-kh godov, p.45.
 4. see chapter 4, p.194.
 5. Pravda, 1919 no.79, 12 April, pp.1-2.
 6. Pletnev, 'On the ideological front', Pravda, 1922, no.217, 27 Sept., pp.2-3.

spirit of ignorant cultural iconoclasm. Lenin commissioned Ya.A.Yakovlev, then working in the Central Committee agitprop department, to write an attack on Pletnev for publication in Pravda; but Bukharin took this as an attack on his own views, and threatened to reply 'with all severity' if Lenin insisted on his publishing Yakovlev's article in its original form.¹ The article, according to Bukharin, was revised, and Pravda duly published it.²

Lunacharsky wrote of Pletnev as one of those people 'full of revolutionary enthusiasm' who looked forward to 'a cultural October':³

'They imagined that there would be ... a taking of the Academy of Sciences or the Bolshoi Theatre by assault, like the taking of the Winter Palace, and new people would be established there, as far as possible of proletarian origins, or at any rate smiling kindly on the proletariat ...'

Pletnev was of the theatrical left, attacked the concept of professionalism in the theatre on the grounds that it alienated the proletarian artist from his industrial environment,⁴ and was increasingly influenced by futurism. His play Mstitel was produced in 1919 in wholly traditional style, according to the critic of Vestnik teatra;⁵ but in 1921 the Proletkult studio gave futurist productions to his plays

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1. N.Bukharin, 'The proletariat and questions of artistic policy', Krasnaya nov, 1925 no.4, p.265.
 2. Ya.Yakovlev, 'On "proletarian culture" and Proletkult', Pravda, 1922 no.240, 24 Oct.pp2-3 and no.241, 25 Oct.,pp.3-4.
 3. Lunacharsky, 'Again on the question of culture', Izvestiya VTSIK, 1922 no.249, 3 Nov.p.2.(on the Pletnev/Yakovlev debate).
 4. Pletnev, 'On professionalism', Proletarskaya kultura, 1919 no.7-8, pp.31-7.
 5. Vestnik teatra, 1920 no.50, 29 Jan.-4 Feb., pp.5-6.

Meksikanets and Lena (S.M.Eisenstein, pupil of Meyerhold and later film director, was involved in both productions¹); and Lunacharsky, after seeing Lena, wrote - 'Alas, .. futurism is flowing into Proletkult in great waves.'²

For the proletarians, futurism denoted a group and not an artistic style. Their response to the Central Committee's criticism of futurism was to call for a purge of 'persons calling themselves futurists or comfuturists' from all Proletkult organizations.³ However the influence of futurism as an artistic style did not decline in Proletkult after the Central Committee's letter but increased. Proletkult's cultural iconoclasm also increased, being no longer restrained by the literary intellectuals 'of pre-revolutionary formation' Lunacharsky, Lebedev-Polyansky and Bogdanov.

Bogdanov took no active part in Proletkult after December 1920, but this did not remove the danger of Bogdanovist philosophical and political heresy among Proletkult members. An anonymous pamphlet entitled 'We are collectivists' ['My - kollektivisty'] was circulated at the second Congress of Proletkult in November 1921. It is said to have attacked Communist policies, cast doubt on the socialist character of the October revolution, defended Machist and Bogdanovist philosophy and declared political support for the 'Workers' opposition' group.⁴

1. Lunacharsky, Sob.soch., v.3, p.541.

2. 'Theatre and revolution', Sob.soch., v.3, pp.126-7.

3. Proletarskaya kultura, 1921 no.20-21, p.33.

4. see L.N.Suvorov, 'From the history of the struggle of V.I.Lenin and the Bolshevik Party against Bogdanovist "organizational science"', Filosofskie nauki, 1966 no.3; and Lenin, Pol.sob.soch. (5th ed.), v.54, pp.23, 561.

The collectivist manifesto was attacked by Bukharin in Pravda¹ and by Pokrovsky at the Proletkult congress; and the Communist fraction of the congress passed a resolution declaring the formation of the 'collectivist' group within the Communist Party to be 'a most harmful disorganizing step in the objective circumstances of the given moment'.² But there was no open attack on Proletkult - 'I do not know into whose head the fantasy of disbanding the Proletkults could come,' Pokrovsky told the congress³ - and the organization continued under Pletnev's presidency.

The influence and scope of Proletkult declined very sharply from the second half of 1921, but the main causes seem to have been economic. In November 1921, it was reported that, in the general collapse of politprosvet, 'there are no Proletkults left'.⁴ Proletkult lost its subsidy from Narkompros early in 1922, receiving the 'Hermitage' theatre and grounds as a parting endowment.⁵ Narkompros admitted this to be inadequate, but said it could afford no more.⁶ Within a few months, Proletkult lost the 'Hermitage' theatre as well, through the action of Moscow Soviet;⁷ but was later supported by VTSSPS.

Given that Pletnev was a cultural iconoclast, a semi-futurist and probably also a semi-Bogdanovist, it might have

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1. 'Towards the Proletkult Congress', Pravda, 1921 no.263, 22 Nov., pp.1-2.
 2. Pravda, 1921 no.267, 26 Nov., p.2.
 3. Pravda, 1921 no.263, 22 Nov., p.4.
 4. R.F.Pelshe, 'Political education work in danger', Izvestiya VTSIK, 1921 no.259, 18 Nov., p.1.
 5. Byulleten ofitsialnykh rasporyazhenii i soobshchenii Narodnogo Komissariata Prosveshcheniya, 1922 (1st series) no.69, 15 Feb.
 6. TSGAOR 2306/1/1199a, 9 Feb.1922.
 7. see chapter 7, p.355.

been expected that Glavpolitprosvet would keep Proletkult under particularly close supervision in order to counteract the influences declared by the Central Committee to be harmful. But it did nothing of the kind. Instead, Pletnev himself was appointed head of the arts sector of Glavpolitprosvet.¹

Pletnev's appointment illustrates the gulf between policy decisions on paper and the realities of departmental life. Nobody could have been less sympathetic to cultural radicalism than Krupskaya, president of Glavpolitprosvet. But she put forward no alternative candidate. In fact it was almost inevitable that once the organization of the arts was taken from Lunacharsky it would pass to a cultural iconoclast - if Kerzhentsev had not accepted the appointment as Soviet ambassador to Sweden in 1921, he would almost certainly have been appointed to Glavpolitprosvet - for want of an alternative candidate. Lunacharsky was the only prominent Communist active in the organization of the arts who was not sympathetic to the artistic left. The collegium of Glavpolitprosvet, asking the Central Committee for the second time to send Pletnev to the arts sector, described him as 'a very valuable worker in political education'.²

But Pletnev's radicalism was, in practice, uncongenial to the collegium of Glavpolitprosvet and so, having secured his appointment, Glavpolitprosvet tended to frustrate his plans. When Pletnev put forward theses on the principles of

1. TSGA RSFSR 2313/1/4, 26 Feb.1921.

2. TSGA RSFSR 2313/1/1, 18 Dec.1920.

theatrical policy, the collegium of Glavpolitprosvet removed their more radical elements, deleting the point 'denying all significance for the theatres except that of the school and the tribune' and weakening Pletnev's call for an entirely new theatrical repertoire by 'recognizing the necessity of cooperating with AkTEO [the theatre department under the Academic Centre of Narkompros], in the sense of using the classical repertoire ...'¹

Because Glavpolitprosvet was doubtful of Pletnev's theatrical policy and Glavpolitprosvet TEO lacked active leadership, the administration of theatres tended more and more to revert to Lunacharsky. This meant the defeat of another of the purposes of the reorganization of Narkompros, which was to take the arts out of Lunacharsky's control. The list of theatres to receive state subsidy was prepared in September 1921 by a commission of Lunacharsky, Litkens, Pletnev and Malinovskaya (head of AkTEO), in consultation with Avanesov, deputy commissar of Rabkrin.² Most of the commission's work seems to have been done by Lunacharsky. All the subsidized theatres came under the control of the Academic Centre of Narkompros, which - as Meyerhold had complained in 1920 - left Glavpolitprosvet TEO with very few theatres of importance and no financial control over the theatre at all. Early in 1922, 'in view of the critical position of [state] theatres both in the administrative and

1. TSGA RSFSR 2313/1/4, 10 June 1921.

2. 'Letters of A.V. Lunacharsky' (publication of I. Smirnov), Novy mir, 1965 no.4, p.251.

the artistic respect', Lunacharsky took the administration of state theatres 'out of the competence of any intermediate organs whatsoever, putting them directly in dependence on me personally'.¹

A sour but justified comment on the reorganization of the arts departments of Narkompros came from the dispossessed - Meyerhold and his supporters Bebutov and Konstantin Derzhavin:²

'The Soviet bourgeois [sovbury] of the capitals are bustling around enthusiastically fulfilling the plan from above, burrowing in the labyrinthine corridors of the reorganized Narkompros.

So many chief administrations! So many centres! Before there was only one of TEO, MUZO, IZO, LITO and KINO, but now there are as many as there are chief administrations, as many as there are centres. Before, as the People's Commissar said, for him to go round his domain cost great labour in finding out the addresses of all the departments and sub-departments. But now the provincial who comes on business to the capital must spend half a year or more in the corridors of this man-made labyrinth, looking for one of the missing employees to tell him the address of the institution to which he has been sent from the provinces ...'

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1. Byulleten ofitsialnykh rasporyazhenii i soobshchenii Narodnogo Komissariata Prosveshcheniya, 1922 (1st series), no.71, dated 14 Feb., signed Lunacharsky (Litkens was on leave).
 2. Meyerhold, Bebutov and Derzhavin, 'Theatrical pages', Vestnik teatra, 1921 no.87-88, 5 April, p.2.

iv) Glavpolitprosvet

Glavpolitprosvet began well, with the support of the Central Committee of the Party and the promise of cooperation from local Party committees. Preobrazhensky assisted at its birth, and presented theses on Glavpolitprosvet at the Tenth Party Congress in March 1921. This was the first time that any aspect of Narkompros' work had been on the agenda of a Party congress.

The future of Glavpolitprosvet depended partly on its success in unifying the political education networks of various authorities under its own control. The largest networks had been established by the political administrations of the army (PUR) and transport (Glavpolitput). The political education apparatus of PUR was to enter Glavpolitprosvet, except for 'organizationally isolated political departments of the army of the fronts and the reserves'.¹ The conditions of transfer, under this rather ambiguous instruction, were being negotiated by a commission headed, on Narkompros' side, by N.I. Trotskaya.²

The situation was easier in relation to Glavpolitput. In November Sovnarkom approved its absorption by Glavpolitprosvet,³ and in December - in connection with the attacks on Trotsky's quasi-military organization of transport - it was dissolved by decision of the Eighth Party Conference.⁴

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1. Sovnarkom decree on Glavpolitprosvet, n.d., Izvestiya VTSIK, 1920 no.263, 23 Nov., p.3.
 2. TSGAOR 2306/1/320, 8 Oct.1920.
 3. Decree on Glavpolitprosvet, Izvestiya VTSIK, 1920 no.263, 23 Nov., p.3.
 4. Desyatye syezd RKP(b), p.884 (note).

It had been decided by Sovnarkom and the Central Committee that the Party's agitprop organs would remain separate from Glavpolitprosvet.¹ This decision was endorsed by Preobrazhensky in his theses to the Tenth Party Congress. Lenin, Krupskaya and the great majority of delegates at the congress agreed. The only speaker to question the decision was Lunacharsky.

Lunacharsky explained that what he had in mind was not a transfer of control over agitprop from the Central Committee to Narkompros, but the transformation of Narkompros as a whole into an apparatus working directly under the Central Committee of the Party. The Central Committee, Lunacharsky said,²

'cannot refrain from dominating that work, .. must undertake it and conquer the whole educational apparatus ... Comrades, there are often confusions here which arise from a Soviet/Party dualism - as if state and Party work must be marked out as if on a map; as if the boundaries where the Party fully transfers work to the state apparatus must be shown. That is wrong. The Party must be everywhere, like the Biblical spirit of God ... We must act through the Soviet apparatus, which is the organ of the dictatorship of the Communist Party.'

The organizational precedent for Narkompros' absorption of Party agitprop was PUR - a non-Party organization headed by a member of the Central Committee, whose Party cells were directly responsible to PUR and not to the Central Committee. Lunacharsky argued that the Party agitprop departments could be absorbed in Glavpolitprosvet like Party cells in PUR, owing a direct subordination to the head of Glavpolitprosvet

1. see chapter 5, p.239.

2. Desyaty syezd RKP(b), p.154.

or Narkompros. 'A comrade from the Central Committee must head Glavpolitprosvet or head Narkompros,' Lunacharsky said.¹ 'If you find a comrade in the next Central Committee who can cope with this work, then I will be the first happily to submit to the direct leadership of a member of the Central Committee, so as to conduct this purely Party work in Communist education in the country.'

Lunacharsky claimed that there had been spontaneous local movements to merge politprosvet and agitprop departments, but the movements had been opposed at the centre because of incorrect understanding of the local situation.

All the speakers in the Glavpolitprosvet debate opposed Lunacharsky on this issue, some violently. Krupskaya made the comparatively mild comment that Lunacharsky's proposals were premature: 'When Glavpolitprosvet is penetrated with the Communist spirit, then will be the time to pose the question of whether it may be transformed into an organ of the Party,' she said.² Preobrazhensky, also opposing, conveyed that there were particularly delicate areas of Party work which could not conceivably be transferred to a government organ: for example, agitation among worker threatening to strike ('Can we in .. such critical moments transfer direct action among the masses to Glavpolitprosvet?'), and control of Party cells among students ('Glavpolitprosvet cannot direct these cells because they are Party cells, ... because their propagandist work is bound up with organizational work, and

1. Desyaty syezd RKP(b), p.155.

2. ibid., p.165.

in that sphere the cells can in no case and to no extent accept the direction of Glavpolitprosvet').¹ It was agreed even by Lunacharsky that the Party's propaganda work among its own members could not be transferred to Glavpolitprosvet.

A number of delegates expressed the empirical view that the less work given to Narkompros and its organs the better, because Narkompros was an inefficient and bureaucratic institution.

At this time Narkompros seems almost to have been the bureaucratic model in the minds of Party members. In 1919, when Lunacharsky intervened in a debate between Zinoviev and N. Osinsky at the Eighth Party Congress in support of Zinoviev,² Osinsky turned on him with the remark that 'we are developing a bureaucracy, and these sneers obviously come from comrades who have turned into Soviet chinovniki'.³ This rebuke partly explains the tortuous form which Lunacharsky used at the Tenth Party Congress to express his belief that the Party should work through the executive apparatus of Soviet organs, and not construct its own competing apparatus.

Preobrazhensky referred to the common opinion among Party members that transfer of political education work from the Party to Glavpolitprosvet would be harmful because the work would lose its vital character.⁴ He denied this, saying that a limited transfer of work among the non-party masses

1. Desyaty syezd RKP(b), pp.143-44.

2. The subject of debate was whether Sovnarkom should be revitalized by an injection of Central Committee members, Osinsky taking the affirmative position.

3. Vosmoi syezd RKP(b). Mart 1919 g. Stenografichesky otchet., Moscow 1959, p.287.

4. Desyaty syezd RKP(b), p.146.

to Glavpolitprosvet was part of the process of 'Communization' of the Soviet apparatus. But in his concluding remarks, Preobrazhensky himself charged Narkompros with bureaucratism and bureaucratic empire-building:¹

'Comrades, this "simplicity" which comrade Lunacharsky promises is "worse than theft", because it ends by stealing from the Party the most important part of its work. From this point of view, I ask you not to be led astray by what Lunacharsky suggests, because on this question he stands, if you will forgive the expression, on a position of departmental imperialism.'

Another speaker, sympathetically reporting the hostility towards Narkompros felt by local Party workers, added that²

'if agitation and propaganda are now taken out of the control of vital organs and given to Narkompros - an institution which has yet far from purged itself of bureaucratism - we may destroy and weaken that work.'

Lunacharsky proposed, as an amendment to Preobrazhensky's theses on Glavpolitprosvet, 'to merge the agitation departments of Party committees with the guberniya political education departments, and to transform Glavpolitprosvet into an organ fulfilling the functions of the agitprop department of the Central Committee'.³ The amendment was discussed in a commission composed of volunteers from the congress delegates, and defeated by 8 votes to 4. Lunacharsky claimed (although voices from the floor contradicted him) that his supporters came from the provinces and his opponents - out of touch with the realities of local administration - from Moscow.⁴

1. Desyaty syezd RKP(b), p.481.

2. ibid., p.169 (I.A.Ivanov).

3. ibid., p.480.

4. ibid., p.479.

Preobrazhensky commented that the very fact that Lunacharsky had introduced such an amendment 'shows that recently he has been cut off from Party work'.¹

Although Krupskaya did not support Lunacharsky's amendment, her views on the ideal relationship of Party agitprop and Glavpolitprosvet were not substantially different from his. She thought that Glavpolitprosvet should work directly under the control of the Central Committee, and its local departments should work under the control of local Party committees. The Party's agitprop apparatus was, in Krupskaya's opinion, necessarily small. Political education of the whole population demanded a huge and complex machinery, which must be organized by the government. 'The creation of such an apparatus within the Party itself would mean the unavoidable conversion of the Party into a part of the state machinery,' Krupskaya said, and this was out of the question.²

Just after the Tenth Party Congress, Krupskaya wrote to the Georgian Communist Party urging it to support political education work, and describing the relationship of the Russian Party and Glavpolitprosvet in the most optimistic terms:³

'Here in the RSFSR, Glavpolitprosvet conducts its work with the support of the Central Committee. Three members of the collegium of the agitprop departments are at the same time members of the collegium of Glavpolitprosvet.'⁴

It would have been very difficult for us to wage the struggle if the Central Committee had not supported us. When necessary, it supports our circulars with its

1. Desyaty syezd RKP(b), p.482.

2. 'Relations between Party committees and political education departments' (1921), Ped.soch., v.7, p.96.

3. letter of April 1921, Ped.soch., v.11, p.212.

4. probably Yaroslavsky, Yakovlev and Solovyev.

own authority, and supports us in the financial sense. The Politburo of the Central Committee decided to give Glavpolitprosvet a million in gold over and above the sum which Narkompros gave it. And not long ago, with the support of comrade Lenin, the Politburo resolved to make the liquidation of illiteracy one of the chief Mayday slogans, and gave Glavpolitprosvet another extra sum for the liquidation of illiteracy.'

But this, of course, was not the whole picture, and the instances Krupskaya cited represented not so much the goodwill of the Party as the personal goodwill of Lenin towards Glavpolitprosvet. It had been pointed out by delegates to the Tenth Party Congress that local Party committees and agitprop workers were hostile to Narkompros politprosvet. In July 1921, the Party held an agitprop conference and refused Glavpolitprosvet's request to make it a combined meeting of agitprop and politprosvet.¹ Speakers at the conference reported that 'provincial political education departments do not enjoy the confidence of provincial Party committees, because they work among the petty bourgeoisie, leaving the workers on one side'.² In spite of the presence of Yaroslavsky and Preobrazhensky, Krupskaya seems to have found herself alone in defending politprosvet. She tried to refute the opinion held by many Communists, as she admitted, that the decision of the Party Congress on Glavpolitprosvet had been a mistake, since its departments only interfered with local Party agitprop work, and politprosvet should revert

1. Krupskaya, 'Do political education departments need to exist?' (1921), Ped.soch., v.7, p.100.

2. Izvestiya VTSIK, 1921 no.149, 10 July, p.2.

to the humbler status of 'extramural' work of Narkompros.¹

After the agitprop conference, the Penza agitprop department decided that all political work should be removed from the competence of the Penza department of politprosvet, which was henceforth to be an extramural education department conducting non-political work like the campaign against illiteracy and the maintenance of libraries and reading-rooms. This was a decision on principle, and the Penza Communists produced a pamphlet justifying it. According to Krupskaya, they interpreted the New Economic Policy as a general contraction of government activity implying a withdrawal of government organs from the field of propaganda and political education. Politics, the Penza Communists considered, was the province of the Party; culture could be handled by 'apolitical' organizations. Krupskaya was dismayed that, in November 1921, 'the agitprop department of the Central Committee, which possesses the Penza pamphlet, has not yet expressed its opinion of the "Penza theory".'²

The central Party press was unresponsive to Glavpolitprosvet's needs. Pravda was repeatedly asked to introduce a 'Politprosvet worker's page' to publicize Glavpolitprosvet's activity and 'put an end to the sheer ignorance in this field which rules among Party workers at the centre', and always refused.³ There was no refutation of the 'Penza theory' in

1. 'Relations between Party committees and political education departments', Ped.soch., v.7, p.93.

2. 'Do political education departments need to exist?', Ped.soch., v.7, p.103.

3. ibid., p.100.

the press, although¹

'it seems to Glavpolitprosvet basically contradictory to a Communist understanding of NEP. There must be complete clarity on this question. Then articles will not appear in Pravda with baseless assertions that the creation of political education departments was "premature" !! (the Penza people are pleased); and there will not be preaching in the pages of Izvestiya on the necessity of transferring the "apolitical" part of the work₂ of the political education departments to cooperatives.²'

In such an atmosphere of doubt whether Glavpolitprosvet, in Krupskaya's words, 'needed to exist', it is not surprising that its early territorial gains turned out to be illusory. S.I.Gusev, who succeeded Ivan Smilga at the head of PUR in March 1921,³ was opposed to the idea of transferring any of PUR's work to Glavpolitprosvet, and said as much at the Tenth Party Congress.⁴ Political education of transport workers reverted formally to Tsektran (the Joint Central Transport Committee) in July 1921.⁵ In February 1922, Glavpolitprosvet even lost control of work in prisons to the Commissariat of Justice.⁶

An attempt was made to stem the tide against Glavpolitprosvet in October 1921, when Glavpolitprosvet held its Second All-Russian Congress of political education departments

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1. Krupskaya, 'Do political education departments need to exist?', Ped.soch., v.7, p.103.
 2. The reference is to S.Agronsky, 'Cooperation and enlightenment', Izvestiya VTSIK, 1921 no.265, 25 Nov., p.1.
 3. J.Erickson, The Soviet High Command, London 1962, p.129.
 4. Desyaty syezd RKP(b), p.178.
 5. TSGAOR 2306/1/634, 18 July 1921.
 6. TSGAOR 2306/1/1199a, 9 Feb.1922.

in Moscow. The congress, with Lunacharsky, Krupskaya and V.N.Maksimovsky as the main speakers from Narkompros and Glavpolitprosvet, would have passed almost unnoticed but for the fact that Lenin and - less characteristically - Trotsky took the opportunity to make major policy speeches: Lenin on NEP and Trotsky on the Red Army. Both were published in full in Izvestiya.¹

Lenin believed that the main task of all educational workers, including workers in Glavpolitprosvet and Proletkult, was to raise both the literacy and the civic literacy of the population. This had been the substance of his appeal to Proletkult in 1919,² and to political education workers at their first congress at the end of 1920. 'How are we to understand politics?' he asked in 1920.³ '... Our chief politics now must be the economic building of the state in order to get an extra pound of bread and an extra pound of coal and to decide how best to use these pounds of bread and coal so that nobody will go hungry - that is what our politics are now.' Political education, in Lenin's view, was no longer a matter of publicizing the Bolshevik platform and the Bolshevik Party and refuting the claims of other political groups. It consisted of training the people in organizational and economic skills. He had opposed the renaming of 'extramural' work as

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1. The congress itself had small notices in Izvestiya VTSIK on October 15, 19 and 23; Lenin's speech was published in the issues of Oct.19, 21 and 22; Trotsky's speech in the issues of Oct.25,26,27 and 28 1921.
 2. see chapter 3, p.136.
 3. speech to First All-Russian meeting of political education departments, 3 Nov.1920, Pol.sob.soch. (5th ed.), v.41,p.406.

'politprosvet' because of the misleading political overtones of the new name.¹

In October 1921, Lenin returned once again to the theme of civic literacy:²

'The time when it was necessary to draw the political outlines of great tasks has passed, and the time has come when we have to put them into practice. Now we have cultural tasks ahead of us, the tasks of digesting political experience which must and will be put into practice. It is either the ruin of all the political conquests of Soviet power, or the establishment of an economic fundament beneath us ... We must fight illiteracy, but literacy alone is not enough. What is also necessary is that culture which teaches us how to fight red-tape and bribery ...

We - and, let us hope, you too - are conducting propaganda against barbarism and such evils as bribery, but political education is not exhausted by such propaganda. It needs to show people ... how they - as ordinary citizens, more politically educated than others, not as members of the ispolkom - can not only curse all kinds of red-tape (that is common among us), but how in fact they can overcome it.

In my opinion there are three main enemies which now stand before us, regardless of our professional roles; problems which stand before the political education workers if they are Communists, as the majority are. The three main enemies which stand before us are Communist conceit, illiteracy and bribes.'

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1. 'At first I regarded the change of name of your organization with extreme disfavour. In my opinion, the task of Narkompros is to help people to learn and to teach others ... In the course of my Soviet experience, I have got used to regarding various names as children's jokes; indeed every name is a kind of joke. Now the new name is already confirmed - Glavpolitprosvet.' Lenin, speech of 3 Nov.1920, Pol.sob.soch.(5th ed.), v.41, p.398.
 2. Izvestiya VTSIK, 1921 no.237, 22 Oct., p.2 (full report).

Trotsky spoke only of political education in the army, which he represented in more conventionally ideological terms. He thought it necessary to teach soldiers how to behave to the civilian population, but put most emphasis on doctrinal training - although doctrine, he suggested, should not be taught in generalizations, because the soldier 'does not keep general phrases about imperialism in his head ... It is necessary to acquaint him with the reality of what exists on earth, beginning with Rumania and Poland.'¹ He also suggested the circulation of extracts from the writings of the smenovekhovtsy², because he hoped that these would help strengthen the position of the professional officer corps.

Trotsky doubted that Glavpolitprosvet had a major role to play in educating the Red Army, since this could most successfully be done from within. He referred to the collapse of political education work in the army when it became known that it was to be transferred from PUR to Glavpolitprosvet,³ and the danger of such collapse during demobilization and reorganization of the army on a peace-time basis. Glavpolitprosvet, he said, must prove its ability to coordinate civil and military political education; and the military leaders, including Trotsky, would be its severe critics and taskmasters.⁴

1. Izvestiya VTSIK, 1921 no.240, 26 Oct., p.2.

2. from Smena vekh, the title of a collection of essays by N.V.Ustryalov and other emigre intellectuals, published July 1921, advocating reappraisal of the Bolshevik government.

3. cf Krupskaya: 'The whole organization [of PUR] expects to be united with politprosvet, and so many workers are moving on various pretexts to other military jobs...' (Desyatye syezd RKP(b), p.166).

4. Izvestiya VTSIK, 1921 no.242, 28 Oct., p.2.

Although the October congress did something to restore Glavpolitprosvet's prestige, nothing could save it from the devastating impact of the New Economic Policy, by which the greater part of all educational work was transferred from central to local finance.¹ Already, in the summer of 1921, political education work had been almost discontinued in the Volga provinces affected by the famine.² From November, when politprosvet became a charge on local authorities, it began to disintegrate in the rest of Russia: local authorities almost invariably gave it lowest priority among educational needs. 'The provincial politprosvet is in a pathetic and at the same time terrible condition,' Pelshe reported in November.³ Krupskaya wrote: 'Desperate telegrams and letters poured into Glavpolitprosvet. In the provinces, the restriction of credits led to an almost epidemic closing of clubs, schools and reading-rooms - as if the wind had blown them away.'⁴

Even Glavpolitprosvet's 'Extraordinary Commission for the liquidation of illiteracy' [Cheka likbez] came close to disaster. First there were suggestions that it should be separated from Narkompros.⁵ Then, early in 1922, Rabkrin proposed that it should be abolished altogether.⁶ Narkompros

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1. see chapter 7,
 2. TSGAOR 2306/1/634, 21 July 1921 (circular letter of Glavpolitprosvet dated 15 July, filed after minutes).
 3. 'Political education work in danger', Izvestiya VTSIK, 1921 no.259, 18 Nov., p.1.
 4. 'Perspectives of political education work' (1922), Ped.soch. v.7, p.106.
 5. see Lenin's speech to October congress of political education depts., Izvestiya VTSIK, 1921, no.237, 22 Oct., p.2.
 6. TSGAOR 2306/1/1199a, 2 March 1922 (statement of Krupskaya).

protested, reminding Rabkrin of the recent increase of interest in the problem of illiteracy on the part of the War Commissariat and the Communist Party, and affirmed 'the necessity of continuing the work of the Cheka likbez in its former volume at least' and, as before, as a department of Glavpolitprosvet.¹ Lenin, a reliable supporter of the campaign against illiteracy even in an institutional form which he disliked,² probably intervened to rescue the Cheka likbez for Glavpolitprosvet; for Rabkrin dropped its proposal from the agenda of Sovnarkom a week later.³

One delegate to the Eleventh Party Congress (March-April 1922) raised the question of Glavpolitprosvet, which he described as 'in a condition of awful crisis, unparalleled even by the present condition of the national economy',⁴ but the issue was not taken up: most of the Party delegates were not interested in the problems of Glavpolitprosvet; and even at the Tenth Party Congress, when Glavpolitprosvet was on the agenda, discussion had been cut short by the anxiety of the meeting to move on to the next paper.⁵

Krupskaya showed some resilience in meeting the crisis of politprosvet. She had evidently not been happy with the style of work in Glavpolitprosvet during its brief heyday.

1. TSGAOR 2306/1/1199a, 2 March 1922 (resolution).

2. Lenin thought the campaign should be conducted through the schools: 'God forbid that we should part with old policies, if [otherwise] we have to liquidate illiteracy with extraordinary measures,' he told the October politprosvet congress. (*Izvestiya VTSIK*, 1921 no.237, 22 Oct., p.2.)

3. TSGAOR 2306/1/1199a, 9 March 1922 (statement of Rabkrin rep.)

4. Odinnadtsaty syezd RKP(b), p.454 (R.V.Pikel).

5. Desyaty syezd RKP(b), p.179.

Her dissatisfaction, hinted at in 1922,¹ was expressed outright in a letter complaining of the Party's attitude to politprosvet six years later.² Chistov of the agitprop department, to whom the letter was addressed, had evidently reproached Glavpolitprosvet with over-emphasis on general educational work. Krupskaya replied:

'Comrade Chistov, it seems to me that you do not evaluate political education work quite correctly.

In the first place, political education workers were never on the side of "general enlightenment". On the contrary, the danger was always on the side of agitation. Even reading, the teaching of reading, was distorted into agitational chatter [agitboltovnnya]. This was a terrible nuisance in the work.

At first they used to link the work closely with the independence of the masses and with propaganda. The Party gave this line, especially Vladimir Ilyich, who placed enormous emphasis on the independence of the masses, dreaming of the broad development of libraries, of bringing the whole population to study, to reading aloud. The business began to develop broadly, but the Civil War forced us to pay more attention to agitation, particularly artistic agitation. When the Civil War began to come to an end, an enormous number of military workers poured into politprosvet, bringing all the methods of the front into its work. The independence of the population, all forms of deepening the work, were brought to nothing ...'

The 'agitational' style of banners, music, speeches and parades which the Civil War brought into politprosvet was so far from Krupskaya's ideal that she greeted the collapse

1. see 'Perspectives of political education work', Ped.soch., v.7, p.105.

2. 'Letters of N.K.Krupskaya', Sovetskaya pedagogika, 1961 no.11, pp.143-5.

almost, it seems, with relief. Politprosvet without a popular basis did not, in Krupskaya's view, deserve to exist:¹

'The inadequate links between the political [sic] institutions and the population were especially sharply shown here. The government has not enough roubles - so the political institutions cease to exist. It is clear that they did not put down roots among the masses, but were imposed from above.'

Krupskaya already knew that what should replace the vanished Glavpolitprosvet apparatus was local initiative and the educational soviet. She was convinced that the thirst for knowledge was strong enough among the population to support libraries, reading-rooms and clubs organized by the people themselves. If their growth was spontaneous and irregular, there was no harm done so long as they grew.

'What is there to say about it! All that needs to be put into the educational soviets is time and energy.'² Krupskaya's attitude in 1922 (and in 1928) was the same as it had been in 1918, when she first advocated educational soviets and participant democracy:³

'We were not afraid to organize a revolution. Let us not be afraid of the people, let us not be afraid that they will elect the wrong sort of representatives, bring in the priests. We want the people to direct the country and be their own masters ... We are always thinking in old terms, that if we do not spare ourselves and work day and night in the people's cause, that is enough. But it is nothing. Our job is to help the people in fact to take their fate into their own hands!'

1. 'Perspectives of political education work', Ped.soch., v.7, p.107.

2. ibid.

3. 'On educational soviets' (1918), Ped.soch., v.2, p.76.

Chapter 7 NARKOMPROS AND THE NEW ECONOMIC POLICY

No new economic policy was devised for education until the summer of 1921. During the first months of the year, Narkompros was preoccupied with problems of administrative reorganization, and there was almost no discussion of financial problems in the collegium. The financial policy in fact being practised was one of unwilling retrenchment. Narkompros was forbidden by Sovnarkom to employ new staff (other than replacements) in its central administration;¹ the collegium, on Litkens' proposal, instructed central and local departments not to open new institutions;² and projects involving the temporary closing of many secondary schools³ and the permanent closing of a number of higher educational institutions⁴ were accepted by the collegium. But in spite of these efforts to retrench, by the end of the summer of 1921 Narkompros owed teachers tens of millions of roubles in salaries⁵ and had no prospect of finding the money to pay them.

It was only in retrospect that NEP appeared as an overall policy for the whole national economy. In 1921 it was a series of measures more or less logically following a change of government policy towards agriculture: the replacement of requisition of grain surpluses by a tax in kind which left

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1. resolution of 16 Feb. 1921. 'Lenin documents on education', Sovetskaya pedagogika, 1966 no. 11, p. 87.
 2. TSGAOR 2306/1/634, 23 May 1921.
 3. see chapter 6, pp. 284-5.
 4. see chapter 6, p. 295.
 5. Lunacharsky, 'Education in danger', Izvestiya VTSIK, 1921 no. 214, 25 Sept., p. 1.

the peasants with a surplus to trade. This meant, on the one hand, the revival of the free market and private trade; and, on the other, a sudden drop in government income and consequent contraction of the sphere of government enterprise and subsidy. As part of this contraction, the number of government employees - including employees of Narkompros - was greatly reduced;¹ and a large number of enterprises were transferred to a self-supporting basis (khozraschet)² or let to private entrepreneurs. In Narkompros, khozraschet was applied to Gosizdat, FOTO-KINO and some theatres. Other theatres failed on khozraschet and were let to private managements.

Under NEP, private enterprise was permitted and even encouraged in many areas of the economy. Narkompros welcomed it in publishing, tolerated it in the theatre, and forbade it in educational affairs.

The implications of NEP for education were not immediately clear. Even in 1922 it was possible for Lunacharsky to argue - perhaps without very much conviction - that NEP might mean state financing of the service commissariats, including Narkompros, at the expense of the industrial commissariats:³

'The economic commissariats will be cut out of the state budget altogether, and the inheritors will be the commissariats which do not produce anything except the very important specialists and educated people without whom the economic commissariats would very quickly cease to exist.'

1. This was the task of the Larin Commission - see chapter 5, pp.269-70.

2. khozyaistvenny raschet = non-financing by the state, cost accounting.

3. Nar.pros. weekly, 1922 no.99-100, 10 April, p.21.

But in fact the government's return to orthodox financial practice meant that it was necessary to stabilize the currency and balance the budget, and consequently for the state to spend very little money on anything. Health, education and social security were all largely disclaimed by the central budget in 1921-22. Schools and hospitals became the responsibility of local authorities. Social security was put on an insurance basis with a minimum of state contribution;¹ and later, except for an inspectorate maintained by the state, had to support itself.²

Charges were formally introduced on almost all public services provided by the state. The only exceptions were schools and hospitals, where charges were introduced spontaneously and illegally. Sovnarkom reimposed payment for use of 'water supply, sewerage, electricity, gas, railways and other communal means of transport, public baths, laundries, repair shops and chimney-cleaning services',³ medical supplies⁴ and

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1. 'On social insurance of persons working as hired labour', Sovnarkom, 15 Nov.1921, Sobranie uzakonenii, 1921 no.76, art.627; and 'On the improvement of the state of social security of workers, peasants and families of Red Army men', Sovnarkom, 14 May 1921, S.U., 1921 no.48, art.236.
 2. 'On the transfer of the Central Administration of the Commissariat of Social Security to self-supporting bases [nachala samookupaemosti]', Sovnarkom, 6 June 1922, S.U., 1922 no.39, art. 459.
 3. 'On the taking of payment for services rendered by enterprises of a communal nature', 25 Aug.1921, S.U., 1921 no.62, art. 445.
 4. except on prescription for hospital patients. 'On the procedure of taking payment for the issue of medical supplies from chemist shops', 19 Dec.1921, S.U., 1922 no.1, art.16.

newspapers.¹ The opening of private medical establishments and chemist shops was permitted,² although the opening of private schools was not. Izvestiya VTSIK published advertisements from November 23, 1921. In 1922, the government considered leasing Moscow academic theatres on a 25-year contract to foreign capitalists.³

The slogan of the day, enrichissez-vous, led Narkompros to examine its own potentialities as a profit-making organization. A list of 'possible income from institutions and enterprises of Narkompros in 1922'⁴ was drawn up for Glavsotsvos, Glavprofobr, Glavpolitprosvet, Gosizdat, the Academic Centre and even the administration of supply under the Organizational Centre. Of these, only Gosizdat seemed to have a real potential source of income from the sale of books, pamphlets and newspapers. Glavpolitprosvet and the Academic Centre were to share the profits from entrance charges to concerts, theatrical performances and art exhibitions - but against this, although not mentioned in the list of 'possible income', was the fact that Glavpolitprosvet now had to pay for books and newspapers for its reading-rooms and clubs⁵ and that the academic theatres continued to make heavy losses. Other chief administrations and departments of Narkompros had

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1. Sovnarkom decrees of 28 Nov. and 14 Dec. 1921, S.U., 1921 no. 77, art. 648, and no. 80, art. 692.
 2. Sovnarkom, 9 Jan. 1922, S.U., 1922 no. 6, art. 58.
 3. see Izvestiya VTSIK, 1922 no. 99, 6 May, p. 4. The suggestion was finally rejected.
 4. TSGAOR 2306/1/634, 6 Oct. 1921. Published Nar. pros. weekly, 1921 no. 87-88, p. 26.
 5. 'On the introduction of payment for newspapers', 28 Nov. 1921, S.U., 1921 no. 77, art. 648.

to put forward pitiful expedients for making money. Glavsotsvos looked to an income - admitted to be 'of insignificant proportions' - from profits of concerts arranged in aid of children, and the sale of produce from school vegetable gardens and objects made in school workshops. Glavprofobr listed 'income from workshops, laboratories, clinics and experimental stations' and 'consultations and enquiries'; but it was to have a competitor in the Academic Centre, which proposed to earn an income from providing meteorological and hydrological information, scientific reviews and consultations, analyses and expertise, and preparation of scientific instruments. The Academic Centre also proposed to conduct excursions and sell artistic reproductions, catalogues, guides and sheet-music. Narkompros' central administration of supply was to be given the profits from the sale of educational and artistic equipment - which, it must be said, Narkompros had not so far managed to obtain for its own institutions - and 'a percentage charge on goods not of state manufacture'.

Narkompros' list did not include educational fees of any kind and, as if to underline the strength of its principles and weakness of its commercial instincts, noted that Narkompros retained the right to suspend any of the itemized charges at its own discretion.

The one sphere in which Narkompros was able to welcome NEP was in publishing. Private book publishing had not been forbidden either by the 1918 restriction on freedom of the press or by the establishment of Gosizdat in May 1919, although the decree on Gosizdat put private publishers under its

control and provided that their publications should be authorized by Gosizdat. But even these regulations were not strictly observed because of the laxness of Vesenkha's polygraphic department: no author or publisher was ever prosecuted for illegal publication.¹ In 1920 there were instances of Gosizdat forbidding the publication of works submitted for authorization by private publishers, but 'this policy was mainly dictated by the typographical and paper crises, which had reached an extreme point'.² Private publishers issued 289 books in 1919, 122 in 1920 and 23 in the period January - August 1921.³

Among the private publishers which continued in operation during the Civil War were 'Petropolis', 'Ogni', 'Kolos', 'Gelikon', 'Zadruga', 'Alkonost' and M. & S. Sabashnikov;⁴ as well as the anomalous 'Vsemirnaya literatura' run by Gorky and Z.I. Grzhebin as an autonomous department of Gosizdat,⁵ and Grzhebin's private publishing house. The collegium of Narkompros had given some support to private publishers: Lunacharsky supported the Petrograd 'Alkonost' in 1919;⁶ and in the same year Gorbunov-Posadov's 'Posrednik' was given a subsidy of 2,600,000 roubles⁷ and Sabashnikov was allocated

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1. M. Shchelkunov, 'Legislation on printing over 5 years', Pechat i revolyutsiya, 1922 no.6, July-August, p.183.
 2. ibid.
 3. Pechat i revolyutsiya, 1921 no.2, August-October, p.236.
 4. Books issued in Moscow and Petrograd by these publishers are reviewed in Pechat i revolyutsiya, 1921 no.1, May-July.
 5. see chapter 4, pp.173-5.
 6. see chapter 4, p.173.
 7. TSGAOR 2306/1/180, 15 Jan.1919.

one million roubles to publish books for Narkompros.¹

Even the private periodical press had not been entirely eliminated during the Civil War, being 'represented in Moscow by the following rarely-appearing journals: the left SR Znamya, the minority SR Narod, the Maximalists' Maksimalist, the anarchists' Universalist and I.I.Lazarevsky's Sredi kollektionerov ...'²

In 1919-20, two private bookshops survived in Moscow, run by the Union of Writers and the Union of Poets, and two in Petrograd - Khovin's 'Book corner' and 'Book point' under the Dom iskusstva [House of Art].³

The paper and printing crises which came near to putting private publishing out of business was also crippling for the state publisher, Gosizdat. I.I.Skvortsov-Stepanov of Gosizdat reported in August 1921 that⁴

'in the current year, and in particular in the middle of the summer, in connection with changes in forms of payment and the enormous deficiencies in the introduction of collective supply, there was a sharp fall in the productivity of the printing-presses ... Their work actually stopped for weeks on end. A few printing-presses, where the customers had found special funds and entered into separate agreements with the workers to secure the quick completion of particular commissions, were partially operative ...'

1. TSGAOR 2306/1/180, 24 Jan.1919.

2. Pechat i revolyutsiya, 1921 no.3, November-December, p.310.

3. ibid.

4. speech to congress of heads of guberniya education departments, Pechat i revolyutsiya, 1921 no.2, August - October, pp.102-4.

Skvortsov-Stepanov proposed, with certain reservations, the stimulation of private enterprise in publishing:¹

'It is necessary to attract private enterprise ... as long as it is capable of increasing the fund of paper and printing resources at the disposal of the RSFSR without drawing on general state resources ...'

On a basis of Skvortsov-Stepanov's report,² Narkompros issued a resolution on private publishing calling for its revival but limiting its access to state paper supplies.³ At the same time, the presidium of Moscow Soviet made the more concrete decision to allow private and cooperative publishers 'to sell the books which they publish freely at market prices without subsidy from the government'.⁴

In October a congress of Gosizdat approved a project of a Sovnarkom decree 'to introduce payment for all printed works including newspapers from November 1'.⁵ The congress decided that Tsentropechat, which had been responsible for the free distribution of Gosizdat publications and widely abused for its inefficiency, should be abolished.

In a statement issued in November 1921, Narkompros declared Gosizdat to be 'simultaneously the chief administration of publishing affairs and the state publishing enterprise'.⁶

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1. Pechat i revolyutsiya, 1921 no.2, Aug.-Oct., p.104.
 2. Skvortsov-Stepanov's report was made before the congress to Narkompros. TSGAOR 2306/1/634, 18 Aug.1921.
 3. Pechat i revolyutsiya, 1921 no.2, Aug.-Oct., p.235.
 4. ibid.
 5. Pechat i revolyutsiya, 1921 no.3, Nov.-Dec., p.140. Sovnarkom subsequently issued decrees 'On payment for the works of the non-periodic press' and 'On payment for newspapers', S.U., 1921 no.77, arts. 647 and 648.
 6. Pechat i revolyutsiya, 1922 no.1, Jan.-March, p.329.

In the second capacity, it was put on khozraschet. Narkompros claimed - although the claim may be doubted - that Gosizdat was successfully working on khozraschet by the end of 1921.¹ In 1922, as a result of Lenin's concern that the high prices of Gosizdat publications were limiting their circulation, Sovnarkom decided to give Gosizdat a subsidy to enable it to lower the prices of essential publications.²

Some gloomy remarks on the achievements of the revived private publishers came from Gosizdat in 1922. Gosizdat had hoped that private publishers would help with the publication of work 'which at the present time is of the least interest to the Soviet government, or which Gosizdat finds hard to cope with', instancing belle-lettres, children's books, and technical literature. But³

'with the exception of a few private publishers, the majority appear to be extremely frivolous, ephemeral and even speculative enterprises. For the most part they publish thin volumes of poetry ... There was a strong inclination towards the publication of theatrical journals of a trashy [bulvarny] type.'

By May 1922, 220 private publishers had registered with Gosizdat in Moscow and 99 in Petrograd. There were almost none in the provinces. Of those in Moscow, only 133 had submitted manuscripts for publication, and fewer had actually published.⁴

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1. P.Z., 'Towards the Narkompros budget for 1922', Nar.pros. weekly, 1921 no.94, 30 Dec., p.3.
 2. Lenin, Pol.sob.soch. (5th ed.), v.54, pp.417 and
 3. N.L.Meshcheryakov, 'On the work of the state publishing house in new conditions', Pechat i revolyutsiya, 1922 no.1, Jan.-March, p.167.
 4. N.L.Meshcheryakov, 'On private publishers', Pechat i revolyutsiya, 1922 no.6, July-August, p.130.

But some private publishers - 'Granat', Knebel, Sabashnikov and 'Mir' - were said to be working in cooperation with Gosizdat.¹

The chronicle of the journal Pechat i revolyutsiya described the growth of private publishing with more satisfaction. 'There are now at least 30 bookshops in Moscow, as well as the bazaar trade in books. Only one of them is Soviet (the bookshop of the Moscow Soviet) and the rest are mainly run by writers or cooperatives; ... old book publishers have come to life - 'Severnii dni', the Writers' publishing house, Sakharov and Leman, Vasilyev, Sabashnikov, 'Tvorchestvo' - and new ones are springing up ...'² New periodicals had begun publication: in Moscow alone before the end of 1921 there were Teatralnaya Moskva (edited by E. Beskin), Ekran, Teatralnoe obozrenie, Iskusstvo i trud, Torgovo-promyshlenny vestnik, Zhizn iskusstva³.

The introduction of NEP into the theatre was a more painful business. The theatre had suffered less than publishing during the Civil War, having received comparatively generous subsidies whose continuation was threatened by NEP. The crucial issue for the theatres in 1921 was not freedom but finance. Private capital was not yet in a position to replace state subsidy; and private theatres without state protection

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1. N.L. Meshcheryakov, 'On private publishers', Pechat i revolyutsiya, 1922 no. 6, July-August, p. 132.
 2. Pechat i revolyutsiya, 1921 no. 3, Nov.-Dec., pp. 310-11.
 3. ibid., p. 310. The Moscow Zhizn iskusstva, ed. R.M. Olkhovsky, pub. 'Arion' 1921-22, is not to be confused with the Petrograd weekly of the same name, ed. Gaik Adonts, founded by Petrograd TEO in 1918 and continued under private ownership throughout the '20s.

were liable to crippling taxation by local authorities in search of funds. 'The most experienced entrepreneurs, who were overjoyed at the birth of the free theatres, fell on their knees, so to speak, when they heard the conditions, and began to beg for finance,' wrote Lunacharsky. 'Those who miss this boat will drown in the ocean depths.'¹

Theatre subscriptions, 'which were sold mainly to bourgeois and petty-bourgeois audiences', had been abolished during the 1919-20 season,² but most theatres continued to charge for admission. Cheap tickets were distributed among unions, Red Army units, schools and institutes, whose members also had first right of purchase of dearer tickets when they came on sale.³ But this system worked poorly in practice. Lunacharsky, answering a complaint about theatre prices and the number of bourgeois speculators to be seen in the audience at theatres,⁴ described what happened to the cheap tickets distributed by Narkompros:⁵

'When we send out whole bunches of tickets, ... those tickets by some curious fate once again fall into the hands of various well-dressed youths and young ladies [baryshni]. They say that these are Soviet employees of the appropriate government departments, who have filched the tickets for themselves. They say worse: that the Red Army and worker comrades receiving free tickets sell them again at considerably dearer prices....'

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1. letter to I.F.Popov, Aug.1921, 'Letters of A.V.Lunacharsky', Novy mir, 1965 no.4, p.249.
 2. E.K.Malinovskaya, 'I consult Ilyich', Izvestiya 1963 no.77, 31 March, p.5.
 3. ibid.
 4. R.Arsky, letter to editor, Izvestiya VTSIK, 1919 no.205, 16 Sept., p.2.
 5. letter to editor, Izvestiya VTSIK, 1919 no.206, 17 Sept., p.2.

Admission charges may have been less general in Petrograd before NEP. In July 1921, Petrograd TEO, with the approval of the Petrograd Soviet, announced that in view of the financial crisis 'TEO had had to recognize the necessity of payment for spectacles and charges for admission and places'.¹

The implication of NEP for the theatre was that individual theatres should pay their own way; and some people thought this was possible by making entrance charges universal. One opponent of the revival of private enterprise in the theatre argued:²

'It would be much simpler to establish the principle of paying for spectacles, and to put all the money obtained from them into a special reserved fund. That fund would not only cover the upkeep of the theatres necessary to the Republic, but would give a solid surplus which would guarantee both the appropriate artistic quality of the theatre and its ideological value.'

But the experience of the state theatres, which had always charged entrance fees for the majority of places as well as receiving state subsidies, suggested the contrary. In September 1921, VTSIK instructed the Bolshoi Theatre - which had previously distributed 25% of places free to unions and the Red Army - to distribute only 15% of places at half the normal price, at the same time raising prices of seats in the rest of the house.³ But the Bolshoi continued to run at a heavy loss.

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1. Zhizn iskusstva (Petrograd), 1921 no.773-5, 11 July, p.1.
 2. Unsigned article, Vestnik teatra, 1921 no.93-4, 15 Aug., p.15.
 3. 'On taking as guidance the norms and establishments worked out for the commissariats and institutions subordinate to them by the VTSIK Commission', 23 Aug.1921, S.U., 1921 no.53, art.675.

Narkompros' administration of theatrical affairs was the subject of a commission of enquiry set up by Maly Sovnarkom under the presidency of Kiselev in June and July 1921.¹ The commission, which consisted of representatives of Rabkrin, the Finance Commissariat and the Union of artworkers, had no representative of Narkompros. Lunacharsky, who had been out of Moscow at the time of the commission's establishment,² made a very belated complaint that Narkompros had not been consulted, but the complaint was dismissed.³

One of the questions interesting the commission was the possibility of renting theatres to private entrepreneurs, and thus lightening the burden of state subsidy. L.S.Sosnovsky wrote in Pravda:⁴

'I have heard that the question of the theatres is being considered from the point of view of commercial profitability in the highest Soviet organs - which theatres to leave dependent on the state, and which to give up to the merchant Epishkin ...'

There were familiar rumblings of discontent at the amount spent by Narkompros on the theatres. The Finance Commissariat complained to Lenin that⁵

'artists and workers in Soviet theatres are not being paid according to the tariff scale but with bonuses which are many times larger than the tariffs; and the Narkompros budget lists expenses on the maintenance of the theatres at 29 milliard roubles, as against 17 milliard on higher educational institutions.'

1. Lenin, Pol.sob.soch. (5th ed.), v.53, p.395.

2. 22 June 1921. Lunacharsky was away from 16 June to 18 July (TSGAOR 2306/1/634, passim).

3. letter of Lenin to Lunacharsky, 3 Aug.1921, Pol.sob.soch., v.53, pp.91-2.

4. 'On profits and losses', Pravda, 1921 no.168, 20 July, p.1.

5. Lenin, Pol.sob.soch., v.53, pp.157-8.

Lenin, who was particularly anxious about the financing of education and politprosvet and no great lover of the theatre, scribbled on the margin: 'BEZOBRAZIE !!' [Disgraceful!]

During August and September, question of theatrical finance were hotly argued in Narkompros, Sovnarkom, VTSIK, the Politburo and Moscow Soviet. At an early stage of the discussion, Moscow Soviet seems to have been prepared to finance the major Moscow theatres through the Moscow Theatre Administration.¹ VTSIK approved an allocation of one milliard roubles for maintenance of the theatres. The allocation was evidently made to the Moscow Soviet, for Lenin protested that Narkompros had been bypassed, and this was unconstitutional.² Then in September the presidium of Moscow Soviet repudiated its undertaking to maintain the major Moscow theatres, and announced that with the exception of agitational and children's theatres all Moscow theatres were to be taken off the state budget and let out to rent. Applications were invited from 'collectives and cooperatives of stage-workers already in existence, newly-organized collectives and private entrepreneurs'.³

But Narkompros, which was independently negotiating a list of theatres to remain on state subsidy directly from its own Academic Centre, salvaged a nucleus of Moscow theatres on the Narkompros budget: the tentative list agreed

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1. 'Letters of A.V.Lunacharsky', Novy mir, 1965 no.4, p.249 (note by I.Smirnov).
 2. 4 Sept.1921. Lenin, Pol.sob.soch. (5th ed.), v.53, pp.170, 410.
 3. Izvestiya VTSIK, 1921 no.199, 8 Sept., p.3.

in September included the Bolshoi, Maly, Children's and Moscow Arts' theatres, together with the Chekhov, Gorky and Moscow Arts' studios.¹ A strong lobby for the inclusion of Tairov's Kamerny theatre came from the president of VTSIK, M.I.Kalinin, who even stated that if Narkompros refused finance, 'then the presidium of VTSIK will find some sort of funds for it ...'²

The Larin commission for the review of staff and institutions of the commissariats³ agreed to let Narkompros keep the academic theatres on its budget, except for the Bolshoi theatre which, 'in view of its insignificant artistic value and the huge sums of money demanded for it', should be closed.⁴ Lunacharsky said that Narkompros would protest to VTSIK against the closing of the Bolshoi; but of the other members of Narkompros present at the meeting,⁵ V.N.Maksimovsky spoke for the closing and a majority must have voted for it.

In the same week, Izvestiya published a report that the Moscow council of trade unions was considering closing the Bolshoi.⁶ Lunacharsky replied indignantly that only Narkompros had the right to decide such a question, and it saw no reason to decide against the Bolshoi.⁷

1. Lunacharsky to Litkens, 20 Sept.1921, 'Letters of A.V.Lunacharsky', Novy mir, 1965 no.4, p.251.

2. ibid.

3. see chapter 5, p.269 ff.

4. TSGA RSFSR 2313/1/1, 8 Nov.1921 (meeting of Larin commission with Narkompros).

5. Those present were Lunacharsky, Pokrovsky, Litkens, Maksimovsky, P.S.Kogan and Kozelev of Narkompros; Slavinsky (Union of art-workers), Boguslavsky (MONO), Khlopyankin (Maly Sov-narkom); and Larin, Kursky and Khorobin of the commission.

6. Izvestiya VTSIK, 1921 no.249, 5 Nov., p.2.

7. letter to editor, Izvestiya VTSIK, 1921 no.252, 10 Nov., p.2.

At the beginning of 1922, Lunacharsky won the support of Sovnarkom for the retention of the Bolshoi on state subsidy. Lenin made a strong protest, and the Politburo instructed the presidium of VTSIK to reverse the Sovnarkom decision. But VTSIK found that the closing of the Bolshoi was 'economically inexpedient'¹ - probably partly convinced by Lunacharsky's argument that the building of the Bolshoi had in any case to be kept in working order because it was used for meetings of VTSIK, congresses and state functions. Lenin pursued the question no further, and the Bolshoi survived.

The Proletkult theatre in the old 'Hermitage' (on Karetny ryad) was less fortunate. Proletkult had had the use of the theatre since the end of 1920.² In January 1922, when Proletkult lost its subsidy from Narkompros, it was given the theatre and grounds as basic capital and instructed to support itself.³ Some months later, a private offer was made for the 'Hermitage' and accepted; and it was rented to the Moscow Theatrical Association under the presidency of M.A.Razumny.⁴ 'It is a disgrace,' Lunacharsky wrote, 'and I fully accept my share of the blame ... We - the Soviet government and the Moscow Soviet - drove Proletkult out of its premises ...'⁵

Moscow Soviet may have been the more willing to let the

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1. Lenin to Molotov for the Politburo, 12 Jan.1922, Pol.sob. soch. (5th ed.), v.54, p.110 and notes p.593.
 2. Proletarskaya kultura, 1920 no.17-19, Aug.-Dec., p.88.
 3. Byulleten ofitsialnykh rasporyazhenii i soobshchenii Narodnogo Komissariata Prosveshcheniya, 1922 (1st series), no.69, p.2. (30 Jan.1922).
 4. Izvestiya VTSIK, 1922 no.112, 20 May, p.4. Razumny had been a producer at the avantgarde Terevsat, closed 1922.
 5. 'Theatre of the RSFSR', Pechat i revolyutsiya, 1922 no.7, p.90.

'Hermitage' because private offers for the theatres at first came in slowly. In the summer of 1922, only the new 'Hermitage' theatre (which began operation on May 13, 1922¹) was advertising in Izvestiya; although there was news of a Guignol theatre opening in Petrograd,² and a theatre of 'artistic miniatures' in the Ars cinema on Tverskaya.³ The most promising offers, which finally had to be refused, were those from the foreign capitalists seeking 'concessions' on the Moscow academic theatres.⁴

In the following years, private enterprise in the theatre notoriously produced 'an abundance of all kinds of little theatres of the cabaret and farce type, whose "light" repertoire and frivolous manner of presentation were specially designed for Nepmen [the NEP bourgeoisie]'.⁵ However, it is worth pointing out that this was not characteristic of NEP alone. In the winter of 1919-20, when theatres were unheated and almost unlit and the trams had stopped running, cabarets and 'theatres of miniatures' were reported to be 'growing like mushrooms after a good rain' in Moscow.⁶

Lunacharsky observed the onset of NEP in the theatre and the arts with dismay, and thought it a prelude to a general corruption of taste.⁷

'Where is the private market now? Who has the money to

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1. advertisement in Izvestiya VTSIK, 1922 no.102, 10 May, p.6.
 2. Izvestiya VTSIK, 1922 no.102, 10 May, p.4.
 3. Izvestiya VTSIK, 1922 no.100, 7 May, p.4.
 4. Izvestiya VTSIK, 1922 no.99, 6 May, p.4.
 5. Istoriya sovetskogo dramaticheskogo teatra, v.2, p.85.
 6. quoted from Vestnik teatra, 1919 no.43, 25-30 Nov., by T.Knyazhevskaya, Yuzhin-Sumbatov i sovetsky teatr, p.85.
 7. 'The coming year', Nar.pros. weekly, 1922 no.95, 20 Jan., pp.7-8.

buy art? Almost nobody but the speculator. That means that so-called free art will go into dependence on the speculator. He is a neo-bourgeois, tasteless, and thirsting to enjoy himself on his newly-won money. The danger is of an outpouring of filth, which may splash outside its own channels and dirty the completely health sections of the population ...'

The sphere in which NEP brought unmitigated disaster to Narkompros was education, and school education above all. In the summer of 1921, as a result of the famine and the financial crisis, the schools were already in such a desperate condition that it seemed (wrongly) that no lower point could be reached. The chronic delays in Narkompros' payment of teachers' salaries were now so great that the schools were in practice no longer maintained by the state. In some cases schools were reported to be maintained by the collective efforts of the local population: by 'amateur and disorganized measures of self-taxation in rural districts', as Narkompros described it.¹ Elsewhere it was said that the teachers were begging for alms.² In some areas, including the Crimea, 'local education departments themselves transferred their institutions to private hands, establishing fees for schooling, and introduced a general tax on parents'.³ By the autumn, Litkens could make the generalization that 'our rural education workers directly and unequivocally depend on the most prosperous peasants, on the kulaks'.⁴ 'An enormous confusion close to

1. Nar.kom.po pros., K IX vserossiiskomu syezdu sovetov, p.11.

2. B.Kr., 'Local improvisation. Dante's hell', Nar.pros. weekly, 1921 no.89-90, 7 Nov., p.10.

3. Nar.kom.po pros., K IX vserossiiskomu syezdu sovetov, p.11.

4. 'New economic policy and Narkompros', Nar.pros. weekly, 1921 no.87-88, 25 Oct., p.4.

panic reigned in the provinces,' Narkompros reported, 'since the position both of education workers and school maintenance was continually worsening.'¹

As the beginning of the school year approached, demands for a radical change in methods of school finance reached Narkompros from the provinces.

'The final drop overflowing the cup and giving the coup de grace to the last four or five months of Narkompros' work was a telegram from Kursk. This, like a number of other telegrams, gave notice that the teachers themselves in the provinces had been raising the question of seeking out local funds for the maintenance of the school and for its heating and repair, and also for the payment of teachers through a voluntary tax₂ on the local population for the needs of Enlightenment.'²

Litkens read the Kursk telegram to the collegium of Narkompros, which decided to organize a meeting of local educational administrators.³ The meeting took place on the 14th and 15th of July. It concluded ⁴

'that it was necessary to attract local funds to supplement state funds, but only under the necessary condition that education remained free and accessible to the possessing and non-possessing classes on an equal basis, and that leadership should remain with the state organs. The new economic policy had called to life a petty-bourgeois element which was sufficiently powerful economically to permit a significant share of public educational expenses to be laid on it. In the field of educational economics, we must find support in

1. Nar.kom.po pros., K IX vserossiiskomu syezdu sovetov, p.11.

2. ibid., p.10.

3. TSGAOR 2306/1/634, 4 July 1921.

4. Nar.kom.po pros., K IX vserossiiskomu syezdu sovetov, p.10.

private initiative, but on condition that this help should be sufficiently impersonal, so that the helper is not helping his own school and his own teacher, but the state school and the state educational worker, without having any "owner's" pretensions to intellectual leadership of educational institutions just because he helps them.'

In short, it was hoped that marxist laws on ownership and control would be briefly suspended on behalf of the local education departments.

Litkens brought these resolutions back to the collegium of Narkompros, and a commission of Litkens, V.A.Nevsky and M.M.Isaev was appointed to prepare a final version.¹ There was apparently no dissension in the collegium on the general nature of the resolution,² which was subsequently passed to Sovnarkom, approved by other commissariats and VTSSPS, and issued as a Sovnarkom decree 'On measures towards the improvement of supply to schools and other educational institutions' on September 15.³

All the evidence suggests that this decree, which was in fact the application of NEP to the educational system, was the product of local initiative and the experience of local education departments, primarily in rural areas. It was not imposed on Narkompros by higher government authorities, nor thought up by the Narkompros collegium as a theoretical

1. TSGAOR 2306/1/634, 21 July 1921.

2. Those present were Litkens, Lunacharsky, Pokrovsky, Krupskaya, Grinberg and V.A.Nevsky. The collegium, apart from Litkens, may not have read the resolutions in advance, since it was resolved that all members should do so within two days and present their conclusions.

3. S.U., 1921 no.64, art.482. The date is sometimes wrongly given in Narkompros publications as 16 Sept.

response to NEP or solution of educational problems.

The central point of the decree of September 15 was local self-taxation [samooblozhenie] for educational purposes. The unit of taxation was the volost. Litkens explained that to take a higher unit - the uezd - was impossible, for¹

'as soon as we make an uezd tax, that tax is at once converted in the psychology of the peasantry into a state food tax [prodnalog]. If it is put down to the village level, then it may easily go the path of direct feeding of the teacher by the parents of the pupils themselves - producing, that is, a direct dependence on the prosperous stratum of the village by the teacher, which has to be avoided ...'

Taxation was in kind, in the form of food for the teaching staff, fuel for the schools, and labour obligation for the maintenance of school buildings. The method of collection of the tax in kind was not specified by the decree: Litkens told a congress of local educational administrators in September that²

'we are taking care that the resources of self-taxation for educational needs do not fall into the hands of the Food Commissariat, and we are trying to organize ... collection with the help of the cooperatives.'

A detailed instruction on methods of collection was not issued until the end of October.³

The application of 'self-taxation' in urban areas presented greater problems. It was impossible to impose a

1. 'New economic policy and Narkompros', Nar.pros. weekly, 1921 no.87-88, 25 Oct., p.4.

2. ibid.

3. published with the signatures of Litkens and Frumkin (Food Commissariat) in Prodovolstvennaya gazeta, 29 Oct.1921, and Nar.pros., weekly, 1921 no.89-90, 7 Nov.

tax in kind, so the tax was to be in money. But the mechanism of local money taxation in general had yet to be decided.¹ Litkens thought the establishment of a regular money tax, administered by the Finance Commissariat but used directly for educational purposes, was quite probable, but not before 1922.² Lunacharsky more soberly described it as 'a thing of the not very near future'.³

In the meantime, the collection of the urban tax for educational purposes had to be improvised. The decree of September 15 suggested the establishment of 'school-economic soviets',⁴ whose functions were to organize 'every kind of voluntary contribution' and to introduce 'self-taxation of the parents of pupils, users of libraries, members of clubs etc.' Self-taxation of parents had the obvious danger of reintroducing school fees under another name: the difference, in Narkompros' view, was that self-taxation was voluntary. 'The principle of the free [besplatnaya] school must remain untouched at any cost,' Lunacharsky wrote.⁵

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1. Local Soviets had hitherto received a percentage from central taxes. A resolution 'On local money funds' of 22 Aug. (S.U. 1921 no.62, art.446) established the principle of local taxation; but its forms were not announced until 9 Dec. (S.U. 1921 no.80, art.693).
 2. Nar.pros. weekly, 1921 no.87-88, p.5.
 3. Izvestiya VTSIK, 1921 no.214, 25 Sept., p.1.
 4. This creature of bureaucratic fantasy was to consist of representatives of local Soviet, education dept., trade union organization, union of educational workers, factories, teachers, parents and non-teaching school staff. ('Position on district school-economic soviets ...', Nar.pros. weekly, 1921 no.87-88, 25 Oct.)
 5. Izvestiya VTSIK, 1921 no.214, 25 Sept., p.1.

Urban self-taxation, according to Litkens,¹ was only a palliative measure; and until the introduction of a regular money tax it would be necessary to keep urban schools on the state budget. He added, however, that the state could not support the schools. This threw the burden back onto the 'school-economic soviets', to whom Litkens gave the almost impossible task of organizing voluntary self-taxation of parents in such a way that it was 'not converted into charges which would deprive workers of access'.

The other provisions of the decree - which for some reason preceded the points on self-taxation - gave Narkompros and its departments greater scope for economic activity, and attempted to move some educational expenses from them to other authorities. Schools attached to factories were to be supplied with premises, heating, lighting and food rations for teachers equal to workers' rations by the factories themselves. Local Soviets were instructed to put aside a proportion of their income for educational needs, but the proportion 'was to be determined by themselves'.² Paragraph 1 of the decree provided that³

'Narkompros and local education departments are given the right to organize their own productive enterprises, sewing-shops, repair-shops and agricultural farms for the exploitation of the same both by pupils and teachers themselves, and on a contractual basis by cooperatives, artels and private persons ...'

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1. 'New economic policy and Narkompros', Nar.pros. weekly, 1921 no.87-88, p.5.
 2. S.U. 1921 no.64, art.482.
 3. ibid.

According to paragraph 6 of the decree, materials supplied to local education departments by the state might, if the departments had no direct use for them, be exchanged for other products on the free market.¹

In government and Party circles, the decree seems to have had more opponents than defenders. Zinoviev criticized it for the introduction of 'commercial principles'² and the Petrograd Soviet failed to implement it.³ Kamenev also criticized it⁴ and the Moscow Soviet repudiated it as capitulation to the class enemy.⁵ The Ukrainian Narkompros and Ukrainian Communist Party objected to the decree as weakening central control and the control of local Soviets over education.⁶

Lenin supported the decree and signed it as president of Sovnarkom because of the urgency of giving some relief to teachers and schools from their present misery, and on the principle that 'more and more must be taken from the peasants for the maintenance of local schools'.⁷ In his reply

1. S.U. 1921 no.64, art.482.

2. see Lenin, Pol.sob.soch. (5th ed.), v.54, p.287.

3. Guberniya education departments were instructed to present a resolution, prepared by Narkompros in the spirit of the decree of 15 September, for ratification by the local Soviet executive committee. According to Narkompros' information up to 30 Nov.1921 'nothing had been done and no resolution had been passed' in Petrograd. (Nar.kom.po pros., K IX vserossiiskomu syezdu sovetov, p.16)

4. see Lenin, Pol.sob.soch., v.53, p.188.

5. see below,

6. TSGAOR 2306/1/1199a, 11 April 1922 (statement of Ukrainian representative to collegium of Narkompros).

7. letter to Zinoviev, 8 Sept.1921, Pol.sob.soch., v.54, p.287.

to Zinoviev's criticisms, he conceded that¹

'one can find something like the commercial principle, specifically the right to organize and rent enterprises for the supply of Narkompros institutions. But I also consider that project ... to be completely correct, since without such measures it is impossible to improve school maintenance and lessen the starvation of teachers.'

He expressed concern only on two points: the possibility that charges for clubs and libraries might discourage their use; and that the right of education departments to exchange materials supplied by the state on the free market was liable to abuse.²

The points raised by Lenin and Zinoviev seem in retrospect peripheral to the substance of the decree, which was the introduction of local self-taxation for educational purposes. At a time when the structure of local finance was still under discussion, the imposition of an irregular local tax irregularly collected was in itself a very doubtful procedure which the Food and Finance Commissariats were bound to disapprove. In fact the Food Commissariat later tried to suspend the education tax during the period of consolidation of the local budget.³

The glaring practical weakness of local self-taxation was that it was virtually impossible to implement in urban areas except as a de facto introduction of school fees.

1. Pol.sob.soch. (5th ed.), v.54, p.287.

2. Pol.sob.soch. (5th ed.), v.53, p.303. Lenin reminded Narkompros of the necessity in the second case of 'full accountability within a given time; detailed rules; otherwise - prison for theft'.

3. TSGAOR 2306/1/1199a, 13 July 1922 (reported by Maksimovsky).

Only a fortnight after the promulgation of the decree, Lunacharsky reported that 'unsettling rumours' of the introduction of school fees were reaching him from many quarters:¹

'It has been officially brought to my attention by organs of the Cheka that in the Kursk guberniya fees have been introduced for the right of schooling almost without exception. At the Komsomol Congress notes were handed to me testifying that administrative activity in the Crimea had gone so far in this regard as to establish immoderately high fees with expulsion of those unable to pay ... Now I have before me an official statement from Rabkrin to the collegium of Narkompros on a whole series of cases of the same nature. One of the schools of the City raion [Moscow] is charging 40,000 roubles per child for the right to attend school, and 30,000 roubles for heating; and then barefacedly - I cannot find another word - states that those who cannot produce 70,000 roubles can look for another school.'

This situation was particularly embarrassing to Narkompros since it had not yet issued instructions on the collection of the tax in urban areas. Lunacharsky promised that the instruction would appear 'in the next few days' and would 'explain exactly what form - at any rate more or less socialist in character, and far from being payment for the right of schooling - the taxation of parents may take'. The instruction was not in fact issued for three weeks.²

A series of threats and legislative warnings were published in the vain hope of discouraging schools and local education departments from introducing school fees. Lunacharsky announced that there would be a most definite prohibition

1. 'The free school [besplatnaya shkola]', Izvestiya VTSIK, 1921 no.220, 2 Oct., p.1.

2. Instruction no.346, 22 Oct., Nar.pros. weekly, 1921 no.87-88, 25 Oct.

from Narkompros 'in the near future', and warned that 'if, after that prohibition, I personally come to know of such a thing, I will immediately start criminal proceedings against the guilty persons'.¹ In fact Litkens - for once moving more quickly than Lunacharsky expected - published this prohibition on the same day in the same paper, also threatening legal proceedings against violators of the decree.² This was reinforced at the end of October by a resolution from VTSIK forbidding any sort of fee-charging or any discrimination between parents contributing voluntary payments and others; and announcing that any official or teacher condoning or practising fee-charging or discrimination of this kind would answer for it before the law.³

But there could scarcely be a question of prosecution when so many were guilty; and the authority of the decree of September 15 was greatly undermined when Moscow Soviet, unrebuked, announced its refusal to observe it on the front page of Pravda.⁴ Boguslavsky, spokesman for the Soviet, reported that it had 'decided that self-taxation is not the proper way to finance the school'⁵ and resolved 'to request Sovnarkom not to publish the corresponding point of the decree in the Moscow guberniya'.⁶ Self-taxation, Boguslavsky

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1. 'The free school', Izvestiya VTSIK, 1921 no.220, 2 Oct., p.1.
 2. 'Art and culture. For the information of all workers of the RSFSR', Izvestiya VTSIK, 1921 no.220, 2 Oct., p.2.
 3. 'On the prohibition of compulsory taking of payment in any Soviet educational institutions', 27 Oct., S.U. 1921 no.74, art.605.
 4. M.Boguslavsky, 'The policy of not making losses [bezubytochnost]', Pravda, 1921 no.224, 6 Oct., p.1.
 5. ibid.
 6. M.Boguslavsky, 'To the aid of the school', Pravda, 1921 no.263, 22 Nov., p.2.

wrote, was another form of fee-charging;¹ and he gave a harrowing picture of its exploitation by a resurgent capitalist class:²

'The scenes being played out at the "self-taxation" meetings are almost identical. A "parent" (almost always one of the "red merchant" type) comes in and "explains" that the chief thing in life is science, and suggests that in view of the powerlessness of the state to educate children at its own expense the parents should "tax themselves". The extent of the tax is already worked out, and varies from 10,000 to 80,000 a month per child. "Self-taxation" is implemented with a "stern hand", and complaints are not taken into account.

The reader will understand how a worker may react to the barefacedness of these shameless sukharevtsy³, who already see themselves as masters of the school. As well as the threat that this method of "self-taxation" may reflect on the [social] composition of the student body, there is also the danger of corruption of the pedagogical personnel, who will be completely dependent on their "protectors"....'

Moscow Soviet believed that schools, like the Commissariat of Foreign Affairs, must remain wholly state-financed and state-controlled. In place of self-taxation, the Soviet suggested a 'general tax' for educational purposes, evidently to be collected by the central government. All other cultural enterprises should be sacrificed in favour of the schools. Boguslavsky even implied that Narkompros had resources which would be available to the schools if 'futurists, imaginists and other hangers-on [who] had found shelter in great numbers under the warm roof of Narkompros' were evicted.⁴

1. Boguslavsky, 'To the aid of the school', Pravda, 1921 no.263, 22 Nov., p.2.

2. Boguslavsky, 'The policy of not making losses', Pravda, 1921 no.224, 6 Oct., p.1.

3. = merchants (from the Moscow market Sukharevka).

4. 'The policy of not making losses', loc.cit.

Moscow had 5,000 schools and children's homes and 40,000 pupils to be supported, and at the beginning of October the presidium of Moscow Soviet announced this as its current 'urgent task' [boevaya zadacha]. The daily allocation of funds to MONO was tripled, and teachers in the Moscow guberniya received 4 milliard roubles in back pay (350,000 to 750,000 each). Support for MONO was mobilized from other departments of the Soviet, which contributed food, firewood, shoes and clothing. A week of 'aid to the school' was announced.¹

Moscow also did its best to extract money from Narkompros, petitioning in October for an extraordinary allocation of 5 milliard roubles.² Narkompros refused. 'The guberniya Soviets, even the Moscow one,' Lunacharsky wrote,³ 'thought that in refusing this resource [local self-taxation] they could replace it with some sort of extra subsidy from the completely empty treasury of Narkompros.'

Lunacharsky perhaps exaggerated in calling the treasury of Narkompros 'completely empty'. In December, Moscow Soviet ceased to receive a direct allocation on the budget of the central government, and its departments became entirely dependent on their allocations from the appropriate commissariats. The commissariats failed to respond, and by the second half of December Moscow Soviet was penniless.³ The offending

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1. M. Boguslavsky, 'To the aid of the school', Pravda, 1921 no. 263, 22 Nov., p. 2.
 2. TSGAOR 2306/1/634, 22 Oct. 1921. MONO's request was transmitted by Litkens, without the presence of a representative from MONO, suggesting that Moscow had little hope of success.
 3. Ekonomicheskaya zhizn, 1922 no. 10, 14 Jan., p. 2.

commissariats were called before the Finance Commissariat and ordered to pay up. Vesenkha was found to be the worst offender, and ordered to pay 30 milliard roubles to its Moscow department. The Commissariat of Agriculture also had to pay. The Health Commissariat was found to be as unmoneyed as its Moscow department, and was issued 8 milliard roubles from reserve funds.¹

Narkompros was not found to be in so desperate a position as the Health Commissariat, and the meeting was of the opinion that it had paid MONO less than was due. But Narkompros put up a fight:²

'The greatest difficulties at the meeting arose between representatives of Narkompros and MONO, since Narkompros, which had received 170 milliard roubles in December and spent 60 milliard of them on expenses of the central apparatus, allocated only 7½ milliard to MONO, although according to the number of pupils in educational institutions supported by MONO it should have got 15% of the Narkompros budget.'

The Finance Commissariat decided that Narkompros should pay MONO 2½ milliard of the 5½ milliard roubles remaining in its treasury, together with a further 7½ milliard to be issued from reserve funds.³ Thus Narkompros seems to have emerged from the struggle rather better than MONO, in that it paid from its own funds only 10 milliard of the 25½ milliard roubles to which MONO - on the estimate of the Finance Commissariat - was entitled. On the other hand, Narkompros itself was left with only 3 milliard roubles in hand, and without the goodwill

1. Ekonomicheskaya zhizn, 1922 no.10, 14 Jan., p.2.

2. ibid.

3. ibid.

of the Finance Commissariat.

'The new economic policy,' wrote Krupskaya in October,¹
'does not mean a repudiation of our programme ... The introduction of school fees, library fees, private schools and so on is a vulgar retreat from the Party programme, and if Communists take part in it we will have to raise the question of their Party orthodoxy [partiinnost] and send them to Party school.'

But this 'vulgar retreat' could not be checked by exhortation, but only by the successful implementation of local self-taxation, or generous allocations from local Soviet budgets, or an increase in the central budget of Narkompros. Lunacharsky acknowledged early in 1922 that self-taxation had been killed by 'the absence of a proper taxation structure [and] the direct refusal of some, even guberniya, soviets to conduct this special tax'.² Allocations from local budgets in 1921 were negligible: most local Soviets were indifferent to educational problems, and even Moscow Soviet - which was exceptional in this regard - had to drop its campaign in aid of the school after a few months because of the catastrophic situation of its own finances.

There remained the theoretical possibility in the increase of the central educational budget. At the time of the September decree, it was believed in Narkompros that local self-taxation would not replace but supplement the central financing of education; and that the educational budget would at worst remain constant and probably rise. Lunacharsky wrote in

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1. 'New economic policy in the field of education', quoted from Agitrosta no.23 in Nar.pros.weekly 1921, no.87-88, 25 Oct., p.8.
 2. 'Strengthening of the material base of school affairs in Russia', Nar.pros. weekly 1922 no.97, 20 Feb., p.2.

September that¹

'Up to this time in the field of finance Narkompros had at its disposal 3% of the state issue, which is an undoubted scandal for a civilized state. At the present time there is some sort of brightening in this respect. Bolshoi Sovnarkom, on the 20th [of September], put serious consideration of the raising of Narkompros resources to 8% of monthly state expenditure on the agenda'

A few weeks later, Lunacharsky told a congress of educational workers that 'for the month of October Narkompros will have nine times the resources it has had up to now'.² In November, still optimistic, he reported that³

'the State now has available rather more funds for cultural needs, and so the times when the percentage of the state budget fell below 5% may be considered past. It has already significantly risen, and from January Narkompros' share will be fixed as 10% of the budget.'

In December N.Osinsky, complaining of the 8% of the budget allotted to his own commissariat (agriculture), stated that 'ahead of it stand the budgets of Vesenkha, the War Commissariat, Communications, Food and Education'.⁴

Litkens saw the situation in a less favourable light. He pointed out that whereas on paper Narkompros received 8.9% of the 1921 budget, in terms of actual issue of money by the Finance Commissariat it received only 3%. This he explained as 'the result of the absence of the appropriate prerequisites which would have made it possible to put

1. 'Education in danger', Izvestiya VTSIK, 1921 no.214, 25 Sept., p.1.

2. Izvestiya VTSIK, 1921 no.221, 4 Oct., p.2.

3. 'To the aid of the school', Nar.pros.weekly 1921 no.91, 25 Nov., p.1.

4. speech to IX Congress of Soviets, Pravda, 1921 no.293, 27 Dec., p.3.

pressure on all the other state organs'.¹

The basis of the Narkompros budget for 1922 was the figure of 513,100 employees on state supply laid down by the Larin commission. Of these 2,700 were employees of the central apparatus (compared with the actual 1921 figure of around 9,000), 37,000 employees of local education departments (compared with an estimated 100,000 in 1921) and 323,000 teachers and staff of schools and children's homes (compared with an estimated 501,000 in 1921).² Even among the privileged 513,100 receiving central finance, only 250-260,000 were to receive food rations as well: 'the rest have to be provided with food rations by the local Soviet executive committees through local arrangements'.³

The Larin commission had acted on the assumption that the central government could provide finance for a part of almost all Narkompros' activities and the whole of none. It had thus made no categorical division between the financial responsibilities of central and local authorities. The budget-makers evidently believed that local authorities should seek out the gaps in central financing of education and culture, filling them to the best of their ability wherever they might be found. The gaps, according to Litkens at the end of the year,⁴ would probably amount to 40-50% of all educational expenses. Narkompros made an effort to distinguish

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1. 'Narkompros supply', Nar.pros.weekly 1921 no.87-88, p.5.
 2. Nar.kom.po pros., K IX vserossiiskomu syezdu sovetov, pp.17-18.
 3. ibid., p.19.
 4. 'Narkompros budget for 1922 and the tasks of local education departments', Nar.pros. weekly 1921 no.93, Dec.23, pp.1-2.

areas of central and local financing but, given the structure of the central educational budget, this was an almost impossible task: the only areas which could be clearly distinguished were those which had been dropped from the central budget altogether.¹

Preparation of the budget was further complicated by the fact that there was a ceiling not only on the number of employees on central supply but on the amount to be spent on them. The ceiling was 32 million roubles in money 'and not a kopek more', and 88 million roubles' worth of rations and goods, with a possible variation of no more than 10%.²

Early in 1922, the Union of educational workers put forward a claim for higher pay for teachers. Narkompros regarded this as 'a natural demand to raise the salaries of educational workers at least to the norm of payment for workers of other government departments', and agreed.³ There was already a discrepancy between the ceiling of numbers of employees and the ceiling of total expenditure. The salary increases for teachers meant that Narkompros would spend its entire 9-month allocation under the 1922 budget in 3 or 4 months.⁴

As soon as negotiations on the 1922 budget got under way, it became clear that all hopes of improvement in the

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1. see 'Lists of Narkompros' needs of local significance', Nar.pros. weekly, 1921 no.92, 10 Dec., p.16.
 2. Nar.kom.po pros., K IX vserossiiskomu syezdu sovetov, p.26. Russia had not yet made a full return to a money economy, and therefore calculated its budget in terms of monetary [pryamye] and non-monetary [oborotnye] payments.
 3. Nar.kom.po pros., K IX vserossiiskomu syezdu sovetov, p.19.
 4. Izvestiya VTSIK, 1922 no.45, 25 Feb., p.3 (statement of Korablev)

central financing of Narkompros were illusory. In February 1922, Lunacharsky admitted as much:¹

'So far Narkompros has existed on a purely fortuitous and fantastic budget. With the transfer to a state plan, it might have been possible to win a proper place in that plan. But when they worked out how much money was needed to put our teachers in a barely tolerable position - not to speak of school repairs - the figure turned out to be immense. The gloomy picture that emerged was that instead of an increase in resources by 600-700%, we were faced with a 300% reduction.'

In March 1922, the total number of Narkompros employees on central supply was dropped from 513,100 to 420,000.² In April the whole state budget was contracted, and Narkompros, learning that its share was to fall from 120 million roubles³ to 102 million, hopelessly recorded its opinion that the sum was, in the first place, 'quite inadequate for any sort of satisfactory financing of education', and in the second place, 'that even if the sum is increased as far as is possible for the Republic - which we must insist on - satisfactory financing is impossible'.⁴

In February and March, months of acute economic crisis,⁵

1. Pravda, 1922 no.44, 24 Feb., p.3.

2. TSGAOR 2306/1/1199a, 16 March 1922. Maksimovsky said he had already protested to the Larin commission. It was decided to protest 'right up to the presidium of VTSIK'.

3. = 32 million monetary and 88 million non-monetary roubles.

4. TSGAOR 2306/1/2102, 25 April 1922 (presidium of Narkompros).

5. see Pravda, 1922 no.40, 19 Feb., p.2 on removal of Moscow and Petrograd state employees from state supply during February because of the food crisis; repeated reports of non-payment of salaries and rations to various categories of workers and employees in February and following months in Ekonomicheskaya zhizn, 1922, Feb.-May, passim.

Narkompros received only 36% of its promised allocation; and the collegium reported 'complete panic among the local leadership, indiscriminate flight of education workers, poverty of the starving teachers - who in despair decided on a strike which has been staved off for the time being only by promises - and general outcry from the provinces at the absence of credits and the complete disruption of work in education'.¹

The number of teachers receiving salaries or rations from the central government - or at least entitled to receive them - fell sharply. In January 1922, according to the original recommendation of the Larin commission, Glavsotsvos had 324,500 employees (including teachers) on its books.² By the end of April this figure had been so much reduced that Narkompros was petitioning for 'a minimum of 100,000' salary units for Glavsotsvos;³ but in vain, for the number fell to 45,000 in May.⁴ At this point Lenin forwarded a protest by Krupskaya to Sovnarkom,⁵ and as a result the number was pushed up to 103,800 in June on the revised budget.⁶

The June revision left Narkompros as a whole with 201,000 employees on central supply⁷ - rather less than half the figure established by the Larin commission six months earlier. In August, VTSIK published a revised recommendation

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1. TSGAOR 2306/1/1199a, 27 April 1922.
 2. report on Glavsotsvos, Nar.pros. monthly, 1923 no.1, p.17.
 3. TSGAOR 2306/1/1199a, 27 April 1922.
 4. report on Glavsotsvos, Nar.pros. monthly, 1923 no.1, p.17.
 5. Lenin, Pol.sob.soch. (5th ed.), v.54, pp.250, 641.
 6. report on Glavsotsvos, Nar.pros. monthly, 1923 no.1, p.17.
 7. TSGAOR 2306/1/2102, 21 July 1922 (presidium of Narkompros).

of the Larin commission allowing for state maintenance of 365,000 employees under Narkompros, including 160,000 primary school teachers.¹ But this recommendation was remote from the real situation. Two weeks after its publication, Sovnarkom struck all primary school teachers off the central budget.²

In these circumstances, Narkompros had inevitably to review its attitude to payment of school fees and to private schools. The first sign of a retreat came in February 1922, when Lunacharsky wrote that it might become necessary to introduce fees in secondary and higher schools, but on no account in primary schools. He then thought that private specialized schools teaching art and commercial skills might be permitted: indeed Narkompros 'had already allowed ... the establishment of private paying schools'.³ But a congress of local education departments in the same month found the introduction of fees even in secondary schools 'inexpedient'; and resolved that 'the existence of schools maintained by private funds is inadmissible' - adding, however, that under present circumstances private funds might be accepted if this involved no surrender of organizational rights.⁴

The local education departments had changed their attitude by October. On being informed by Lunacharsky that

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1. 'On taking as guidance the norms and establishments worked out for the commissariats and institutions subordinate to them by the VTSIK commission', 23 Aug.1921, S.U. 1921 no.53, art.675.
 2. TSGAOR 2306/1/2102, 7 Sept.1922 (reported by Maksimovsky).
 3. 'Strengthening the material base of school affairs in Russia', Nar.pros. weekly, 1922 no.97, 22 Feb., p.3.
 4. Kommunisticheskoe prosveshchenie, 1922 no.2, p.151.

'in view of the fact that payment for the right of schooling has already been introduced in the great majority of guberniyas, we intend to suggest the introduction of school fees in secondary schools',¹ the congress went further, and resolved that 'as a palliative and temporary measure', payment might be introduced in both primary and secondary schools.² The congress also cautiously endorsed a Narkompros proposal 'to permit not only labour associations but associations of all types to open schools, on condition that the private school is under the same control by local education departments as the state school maintained on soviet funds'.³

By the last months of 1922, the battle against the introduction of school fees was already over. In November, instructions went out on the procedure for collecting fees in higher educational institutions.⁴ School fees were reported to have been introduced without Narkompros sanction in all but 7 of the 31 guberniyas from which Narkompros had information. On average, 20-25% of places remained free and were reserved for children of invalids, soldiers, teachers, unemployed and low wage-earners.⁵ In most guberniyas, Lunacharsky said in December 1922, the executive committees of the Soviets had decided to introduce school fees without

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1. Izvestiya VTSIK, 1922 no.231, 13 Oct., p.4.
 2. Kommunisticheskoe prosveshchenie, 1922 no.4-5, p.175.
 3. speech of Lunacharsky, reported Izvestiya VTSIK, 1922 no.231, 23 Oct., p.4.
 4. 11 Nov. 1922, signed V.N.Yakovleva of Glavprofobr. Byulleten ofitsialnykh rasporyazhenii i soobshchenii Narodnogo Komissariata Prosveshcheniya, 1922 (2nd series) no.2, 9 Dec.pp.3-4.
 5. Byulleten ofitsialnykh rasporyazhenii i soobshchenii Nar. Kom.Prosveshcheniya, 1922 (2nd series), no.4, 23 Dec., p.7.

asking Narkompros, but where they had refused to do this 'the schools themselves had introduced school fees without asking the guberniya executive committees'.¹

It remained only to legalize the existing situation. This was done at the Tenth Congress of Soviets in December 1922. Lunacharsky recommended the formal introduction of school fees because they already existed in fact, but proposed to exempt a number of categories of the population from payment. He estimated that, with these exemptions, income from fees would at best cover 15% of total educational costs; and asked for an increase in the central educational budget, and for a minimum of 30% of the budgets of local soviets to be devoted to educational needs.²

The congress accepted Lunacharsky's recommendations on the introduction of school fees, resolved that the central educational budget should be increased, and instructed local soviets to devote 'the maximum possible percentage' of their income to education. The congress declared itself 'categorically against the admittance of any form of private school, and for the maintenance of the school system as a whole in the hands of the Soviet government'.³

Early in 1923, the introduction of fees at all levels of the educational system, with exemption for certain categories of the population, was sanctioned by Sovnarkom.⁴

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1. speech to Tenth Congress of Soviets, 24 Dec.1922, Izvestiya VTSIK, 1922 no.293, 26 Dec., p.2.
 2. Izvestiya VTSIK, 1922 no.293, 26 Dec., pp.2-3.
 3. Pravda, 1922 no.295, 28 Dec., p.3.
 4. 'On the procedure for taking payment for study in institutions of Narkompros', 23 March. S.U., 1923 no.24, art.279.

This was the culmination of a progression of defeat for Narkompros and its educational ideals. The defeat was caused less by the New Economic Policy than by new economic realities. In so far as NEP had an author, it was Lenin. But Lenin had tried repeatedly to save Narkompros from the consequences of the economic (and indeed the political) situation. If Lenin had not been ill, Krupskaya thought, the resolution of the Tenth Congress of Soviets on the introduction of school fees 'would probably not have passed'.¹ But Lenin, even in health, had been defeated on earlier educational issues by indifference of Party and government organs towards education, hostility towards Narkompros, inertia of institutions and, above all, by the poverty of the Soviet Republic.

Four stages might be noted in a progressive retreat from the programme announced by Narkompros in 1918. The first was the failure to organize education on a basis of popular participation and local initiative by means of the educational soviet. Krupskaya, in particular, never admitted final defeat on this question, and continued to regard popular participation and initiative as an essential basis of all Soviet administration. Lenin, to judge by his statements on extramural education and politprosvet,² shared this belief.

The second stage was the questioning and partial abandonment of the policy of polytechnical education in 1920 and 1921.

1. letter to Z.G.Grinberg, 9 Jan.1923, Ped.soch., v.11, p.224.
 2. see chapter 6, pp.333-4.

The policy was compromised and its application restricted, but it was not repudiated until 1929.¹

The third stage was the withdrawal of the central government from overall financial responsibility for the educational system in the autumn of 1921. This meant that there could no longer be, in the full sense, an educational policy formulated by Narkompros and carried out - however imperfectly - by its local departments. The loss of financial control meant loss of the possibility of effective control of policy. 'How is the leadership of Narkompros over local departments to be exercised?' asked one Narkompros worker plaintively at the end of 1921. 'By the sending of circulars?'²

The fourth and last stage was the defeat, or temporary defeat (as Lunacharsky always insisted), of the policy of free and compulsory education of the whole population, with the de facto and later de jure introduction of school fees at all levels of the educational system.

Against these defeats suffered must be set the defeats which Narkompros escaped. It maintained its policy of tolerance in the arts, and resisted pressure to conduct a 'cultural October', to give any artistic group a monopoly and license to suppress other groups, or to take this license for itself. In dealing with scientific research and higher education, Narkompros to a considerable degree resisted pressure to

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1. In 1929 Lunacharsky resigned from Narkompros after being defeated on this issue by the Politburo under Stalin and Vesenkha under Kuibyshev.
 2. Ya.Volk, 'Organizational problems', Nar.pros. weekly, 1921 no.92, 10 Dec., pp.3-5.

interfere and to intimidate, and maintained its policy of respecting the independence of science. The Academy of Sciences, which Narkompros had brought into cooperation with the Soviet government, remained - again, until 1929, - autonomous.

But in 1922 Lunacharsky looked at the situation in education and felt that Narkompros had lost everything:¹

'Our comrades, Communist journalists abroad, inform us with great concern that there is a whole campaign exposing our "barbarianism", and that there is nothing they can reply. They appeal to me to give them some sort of defensive weapon, but I, looking around, find almost no such weapon ... I have already long ago lost that more or less tranquil tone in which I used to talk to foreign interviewers, showing them some of our contemporary achievements in the cultural field ... NEP completely destroyed those gains.'

'Were we, Communist propagandists, ever really concerned with anything other than the education of the people?' Lunacharsky asked.² Litkens, a Communist of a later generation, thought Lunacharsky's concept of enlightenment outmoded - a relic of pre-revolutionary, pre-Civil War idealism. Narkompros, Litkens thought, had 'drowned itself completely completely in general cultural enterprises, utterly failing to set itself the task of giving practical service to Soviet construction ... Military practice has put forward completely new methods of approach to cultural-educational work among the masses.'³ Preobrazhensky added that Lunacharsky was out of

1. speech to congress of local education departments, Nar.pros. weekly, 1922 no.98, 12 March, p.2.

2. see chapter 5, p.236.

3. see chapter 5, p.252.

touch with contemporary Party work.¹

The Civil War put the Party into uniform, but Narkompros remained unalterably civilian - Krupskaya no less than Lunacharsky and, indeed, Lenin no less than Krupskaya. The character and policies of Narkompros were formed under the influence of Lenin and Krupskaya as well as Lunacharsky; and the old-fashioned preoccupation with enlightenment belonged to Lenin as well as Narkompros.

Lenin was not an admirer of Lunacharsky's plays, and probably would not have agreed with Gorky's comment that Magi deserved publication 'because this play was written at a time of intensive terror by a member of the Soviet government'.² But it might be said of Narkompros in the same spirit that, however its policies had been compromised or defeated by the end of 1921, it was left with one singular achievement, for which Lenin as well as Narkompros deserved credit: that these policies were formulated and partly put into practice during a period of terror, Civil War and economic collapse by a commissariat of the Soviet government.

1. see chapter 6, p.329.

2. see chapter 4, pp.209-10.

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Note: During 1967-8, the Narkompros archive for 1918-1925 was moved from TSGAOR to TSGA RSFSR and partially reclassified. I have given the references as I found them in 1967 and 1968.

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