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JOHN HATCH (Irvine, Calif., U.S.A.)

THE POLITICS OF MASS CULTURE: WORKERS, COMMUNISTS, AND PROLETKULT IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF WORKERS' CLUBS, 1921-25

In August 1922, *Trud*, the trade union daily, ran a front page article defending the importance of extramural cultural work in the struggle against "bourgeois ideology."[1] Trade unions were urged to treat cultural work as a "first priority" despite severe shortages in financial and human resources. Opinions differed, however, over the ultimate aims of this work. As the main focus of trade union cultural work, were workers' clubs the "forges" of a new proletarian culture, as activists in the Proletkul't movement insisted, or were they "instruments" of the "communist education" of workers, as some Party, state, and trade union officials contended?[2]

By clarifying the role played by grass-roots institutions in mediating between popular and official culture and in articulating dissonant currents within Soviet culture, this article seeks to shed light on an important question hitherto ignored in Western historiography. In recent years, a number of noteworthy contributions to the historiography on the role of culture in Bolshevik thought and Soviet policy have been made by Western historians that have gone far in clarifying the historical origins and early impact of Soviet cultural policies. This historiography has been less useful in clarifying the strategies of mass culture. Instead, attention has focused on the origins and early history of the proletarian culture movement, the Commissariat of Enlightenment

1. *Trud*, 11 Aug. 1922.
2. *Pravda*, 6 and 16 Jan. 1923.

(Narkompros), and Soviet educational policies.[3] By means of an in-depth examination of the formative experience of workers' clubs in Moscow, this article will argue that the emergence of a "utilitarian" mass cultural policy was as much the product of compromise with the cultural needs and interest of workers as it was the result of ideological debate over the form and content of mass cultural work.

In 1921, with industry in a shambles and the trade union cultural apparat in complete disarray, only the utopian Proletkul't organization offered the expertise, program, and willingness to restore trade union cultural work. The tense political atmosphere and difficult economic situation of the early NEP, however, complicated all efforts to remedy the problems of low cultural levels and Party and trade union consciousness in broad strata of the urban working class. In particular, the disintegration of the industrial proletariat during the Civil War and the fragility of pro-Party sentiment among workers in 1921 raised disturbing questions about the stability of the Bolshevik dictatorship and fueled concerns about the political implications of Proletkul't's growing role in

3. On proletarian culture, see James C. McClelland, "Utopianism versus Revolutionary Heroism in Bolshevik Policy: the Proletarian Culture Debate," *Slavic Review*, 39, No. 3 (Sept. 1980), 389-402; Robert C. Williams, "Collective Immortality: The Syndicalist Origins of Proletarian Culture, 1905-1910," *Ibid.*, pp. 403-25; Sheila Fitzpatrick, *The Commissariat of Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1970); and Lynn Mally, "Blueprint for a New Culture: A Social History of the Proletkul't Organization, 1917-1922," unpub. Ph.D. dissertation, Univ. of California, Berkeley, 1984. On educational policies, see Kendall Bailes, *Technology and Society under Lenin and Stalin* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1978); Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Education and Social Mobility in the Soviet Union, 1921-1934* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1978) and "The 'Soft' Line on Culture and its Enemies: Soviet Cultural Policy, 1922-1927," *Slavic Review*, 33, No. 2 (June 1974), 267-87; James C. McClelland, "Proletarianizing the Student Body: The Soviet Experience During the New Economic Policy," *Science and Society*, No. 80 (Aug. 1978), pp. 122-46; and William Chase, "Moscow and Its Working Class, 1918-1928: A Social History," unpub. Ph.D. dissertation, Boston College, 1917, and *Workers, Society and the Soviet State: Labor and Life in Moscow, 1918-1928* Univ. of Illinois Press, (Urbana: 1987).

trade union cultural work. Beginning in 1923-24, this situation compelled the Party to strengthen its presence in the industrial working class. To this end, workers' clubs came under the Party's ideological and political hegemony, and their functions came to be defined largely by the necessity to inculcate in the working class a Party consciousness and productivist values. In examining how this triumph of what will be characterized as the "utilitarian" conception of mass cultural policy over Proletkul'ts "utopian" vision came about, some revisions in our understanding of the relations between industrial workers and Soviet institutions during the NEP will be suggested.

I. The Politics of Proletkul't: 1921-23

Workers' clubs first appeared in Moscow shortly after the suppression of the legal trade union movement in 1907. Although clubs were forbidden to engage in political activities, they played a key role in maintaining the continuity of the working class movement and in the incubation of a socialist working class cultural tradition. Pre-revolutionary clubs also served as important contact points between revolutionary intellectuals and worker activists. These activists tended to be educated skilled workers whose participation in the organized working class movement often dated back to the intelligentsia-led circles (*kruzhki*) of the late nineteenth century.[4] An efflorescence of organized cultural activities occurred after the February Revolution, revealing that "at every level of working class organization . . . the indispensibility of organized cultural activities were taken for granted."[5] The local soviets, trade unions and factory committees that undertook ambitious plans to meet workers' cultural needs soon found themselves unable to

4. Diane Koenker, *Moscow Workers and the 1917 Revolution* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1981), pp. 70 and 74; Victoria Bonnell, *Roots of Rebellion: Workers' Politics and Organizations in St. Petersburg and Moscow, 1900-1914* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1983), pp. 328-34.

5. Koenker, *Moscow Workers*, p. 160.

carry them out as, in what would become a familiar theme, activists and resources were diverted to more pressing tasks. The Civil War compounded these problems by seriously disrupting urban-industrial life. Already, in June 1919, Moscow Proletkul't was complaining that cultural work was not being carried out energetically by factory cultural commissions, and that clubs were being bureaucratized.[6]

By 1921, then, the extra-mural cultural work of the trade unions was in a sorry state indeed. In May, the Moscow Trade Union Soviet (MGSPS) was criticized for not presenting a "clear line" in cultural-educational work, and in September 1921, complaints were raised at the First Moscow Cultural Conference that the "cultural-educational front remained totally forgotten":
"The cultural department is not being supported by Narkompros or the trade unions [at any level]. The Conference takes note of the [MGSPS] Cultural Department's lack of close ties to lower bodies, which results in the absence of creative work on the part of cultural-educational commissions."[7] At least blame was being equally distributed! Things worsened in 1922, when financial stringencies joined forces with official neglect to reduce the wages of cultural workers to "crisis" levels, a development cultural officials were powerless to prevent. By 1923, *Pravda* could observe that clubs existed "almost nowhere in practice."[8] Efforts to rectify this situation by assigning trade unionists to club work often made matters worse: ". . . the selection of [club] workers was completely haphazard. . . Many of them find themselves in

6. *Gorn*, No. 5 (1920), pp. 73-78. *Gorn* was a Proletkul't periodical.

7. *Rezoliutsii i postanovleniia III-go s"ezda professional'nykh soiuzov Moskvy i Moskovskoi gubernii* (Moscow: Izd. MGSPS, 1921), p. 1, *Moskovskaia gubernskaia konferentsiia professional'nykh soiuzov (14-15 sent. 1921 g.)* (Moscow: Gosizdat, 1921), p. 63.

8. *Trud*, 12 May and 6 July 1922. On the inability of Narkompros to help out, see *Trud*, 23 June 1922. On trade union neglect, see *Trud*, 19 and 23 May and 15 June 1922. For *Pravda*'s reaction, see *Pravda*, 23 Feb. and 12 April 1923.

clubs, not understanding their problems."[9] Others fulfilled only administrative functions.[10]

Part of the problem was that workers were rapidly losing interest in and the energy for organized cultural activities, as Table 1 documents.

TABLE 1

NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS IN MASS CULTURAL ACTIVITIES PER 10,000 TRADE UNIONISTS, 1921-22, ALL-RUSSIAN

Activity	1921 Beg.	1921 Aver.	1921 End	1922 Beg.	1922 Aver.	1922 as % of 1921
Attended club	419	---	250	199	---	47%
Study circle	---	31	---	---	25	80%
General meeting	---	655	---	---	375	58%
Lecture	---	1,931	---	---	754	39%
Excursion	49	---	26	6	---	12%

Source: *Trud*, 22 Nov. 1922.

Worsening urban conditions and the industrial layoffs of 1922 undoubtedly had an adverse impact on worker participation. For the vast majority of unskilled and semi-skilled workers remaining in Moscow, leisure time was spent outside of the clubs drinking alcoholic beverages (male workers) or practicing religion (female workers).[11] All workers were caught up in a daily struggle of existence that left little time for official cultural activities.

9. *Otchet o deiatel'nosti Moskovskogo gubernskogo soveta professional'nykh soiuzov za 1922-1923* (Moscow: Izd. MGSPS, 1923), p. 120. See also Trotskii's remarks in *Problems in Everyday Life*, trans. Z. Vergerova (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1973), p. 299.

10. *Rabochaia Moskva*, 20 April 1922.

11. On the cultural values of unskilled and peasant workers, see Chase, "Moscow and Its Working Class," pp. 160-68.

High incidences of drunkeness, petty crime, prostitution, and hooliganism characterized the fringes of working class life. Sometimes, this behavior spilled over into the clubs: "Many clubs, especially those in outlying districts, complain that shady characters show-up during performances who conduct themselves in the most unseemly manner . . . hooligan catcalls are directed at the performers, foul language is used . . . Such conditions are poor reflections on our work. . ."[12] Another poor reflection on the work of trade unions was the popularity of dance halls and light entertainment, consisting mainly of potboilers (*khaltura*) performed by travelling theatrical groups: "This revelry of all possible kinds of coffee-house fare and light comedy occurs against the background of the extraordinarily weak activities of workers' clubs, libraries, and schools, and, therefore, represents a special danger."[13] These performances were often staged in clubs, causing the Second Moscow Cultural Conference in 1922 to set-up officially sanctioned theatrical troupes and to prohibit club performances by non-sanctioned troupes.[14]

Despite this grim picture, steps were being taken in 1921-23 to give some form and coherence to club activities. In theory, ideological leadership over extra-mural trade union cultural work was entrusted to the Main Committee on Political Education (Glavpolitprosvet), a subsidiary of Narkompros. The trade unions were supposed to provide the organizational resources for the realization of Glavpolitprosvet's programmatic directives. In practice, the relationship between the two organizations was rocky from the start. Early efforts to coordinate resources to assist in the revival of factory cultural commissions failed completely.[15] More typical was the

12. *Rabochaia Moskva*, 9 Feb. 1923.

13. *Trud*, 26 Dec. 1922. See also Ginzburg's ruminations in *Gorn*, No. 8 (1923), p. 203.

14. See, *Trud*, 12 May, 13 Nov., and 26 Dec. 1922, and 21 March 1923.

15. These efforts included the setting-up of "political-education sections" (*sekpolprora*) by the trade unions in 1921 and the establishment of *kul'tpunkty* by Glavpolitprosvet in 1922. See *Pravda*, 24 May 1921; *Otchet o deiatel'nosti Moskovskogo gubernskogo soveta professional'nykh soiuzov*,

open hostility of trade unionists to Glavpolitprosvet. At the Third Moscow Cultural Conference in May 1921, delegates asserted the independence of trade union cultural departments, as working class organizations, from state control.[16] One year later, Moscow Politprosvet was sharply criticized for "spoiling" matters in the struggle against "petty-bourgeois spontaneity" in club activities by taking an "administrative approach" to the problem.[17] By 1923, the trade unions were ignoring Glavpolitprosvet's plea that "the programmatic-methodological strength of Politprosvet [be joined] with the organizing and rallying energies of the trade union," and were boasting that "this year the unions . . . have taken over the direction [of political education] to the extent that district [branches of Politprosvet] became superfluous and were abolished."[18] In response to Krupskaia's recriminations over this process, Tomskii replied that the day-to-day funcioning of cultural-educational work was the "business of the trade unions."[19] As we have seen, however, the trade unions were doing an abysmal job, and one would think that any help, whatever its source, would have been welcome.

Actually, help from the Proletkul't organization was eagerly sought after and accepted by Moscow trade union cultural officials in 1921-22, and despite a sharp curtailment in the former's organizational network after 1920, its impact was substantial. To ascertain the extent to which the personnel of Moscow Proletkul't and the local trade union cultural apparatus overlapped is difficult. Certainly, the criticisms of Glavpolitprosvet made by the unions in 1921 bore a striking similarity to Proletkul't's hostility towards Narkompros, although we must keep in mind that prominent trade unionists like Tomskii and Seniushkin, the director of the All-Russian

gubotdelov, i uprofbiuro (mai-avgust 1921) (Moscow: Izd. MGSPS,1921), p. 59; and *Trud*, 21 Sept. 1922.

16. *Rezoliutsii i postanvoleniia III-go s"ezda*, p. 22.

17. *Trud*, 12 May 1922.

18. *Trud*, 26 Dec. 1922, and 31 Jan. 1923.

19. *Pravda*, 22 July 1923. See *Pravda*, 6 July 1923 for Krupskaia's remarks.

Trade Union Soviet (VTsSPS) Cultural Department, were also critical of Glavpolitprosvet yet had no affiliation with Proletkul't. It is safe to say, though, that the dominant sentiment towards Proletkul't in Moscow was sympathetic, if not for ideological reasons, then simply because it offered a viable approach to the restoration of workers' clubs.

Moscow Proletkul't was established in 1918 with the active support of A. Bogdanov, the chief theorist of proletarian culture.[20] From the start, it enjoyed close ties with local trade union cultural activists and was vigorous in defense of its organizational autonomy, even enlisting the support of the Moscow Party Committee in 1918 and 1919.[21] Proletkul't lost its formal independence in 1919 when it was subordinated to Narkompros, and in November 1920, it was attached to the newly created Glavpolitprosvet. Proletkul't continued to operate as it saw fit, however, and frequently provoked Lenin's ire. A Central Committee letter circulated in December 1920, sought to defuse matters by granting Proletkul't full autonomy in the sphere of artistic-creative activities.[22] This mandate, and the close connections Proletkul't maintained with the unions and factories, enabled it to assume an important role in trade union cultural work in 1921-22 and to lend to that work a strong utopian bias.

The basic premise behind the theory of proletarian culture was that "science, art, and ideology did not merely *reflect* the socioeconomic structure, but played a crucial role in *organizing* and therefore *creating* that structure." (emphasis in the original)[23] The revolutionary transformation of culture was, accordingly, as important a prerequisite for the building of socialism as the transformation of production relations. In Proletkul't's utopian vision, independent working class

20. Fitzpatrick, *Commissariat*, p. 91.

21. *Ibid.*, p. 104; V. V. Gorbunov, *V. I. Lenin i Proletkul't* (Moscow: Politizdat, 1974), p. 75; *Gudki*, No. 3 (1919), p. 12. *Gudki* was a Proletkul't journal.

22. V. I. Lenin, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, 55 vols. (Moscow: Gosizdat, 1958-65), XLII, 12.

23. McClelland, "Utopianism," p. 408.

cultural organizations were the vehicles through which workers' cultural levels could be raised and class awareness developed. This would be accomplished by fostering a distinctive "proletarian culture" that was free from and critical of bourgeois culture. For many Proletkul't activists, this meant an iconoclastic rejection of the achievements of bourgeois culture and hostility towards Narkompros because it was subject to bourgeois and petty-bourgeois cultural influences.

After 1918, Proletkul't attempted to bring proletarian culture into being. As we have seen, its spirited attempts to maintain its formal autonomy *vis-à-vis* Narkompros were unsuccessful. In practice, however, Narkompros' supervision was virtually non-existent.[24] In 1919-20, when it numbered 400,000 members, Proletkul't was a legitimate mass movement. About one-fifth of this total was enrolled in art, drama, or music workshops (*studiia*), and Proletkul't also published numerous literary journals, staged performances, organized lectures, entertained Red Army troops and established Proletkul't clubs. After 1920, however, Politburo hostility and financial cutbacks took a heavy toll on Proletkul't's organizational network. In 1920, it maintained 300 local coordinating units (*proletkul'tov*); by 1921, this number had shrunk to 54. The number of workshop members declined from 80,000 to 15,000.[25]

Economic necessity was an important glue binding Proletkul't to the unions after 1920, but its previous experience in factory cultural work made the transition a natural one. In 1919, Moscow Proletkul't supervised a network of six clubs, some of which were affiliated with individual factories; it also practiced fusing *studiia* to existing workers' clubs. Although Proletkul't clubs emphasized artistic-creative activities, they also carried out political-education work. At its All-Russian Conference in 1920, Proletkul't "considered it desirable to concentrate under [its] authority all clubs of the industrial proletariat."[26] It was natural, then, for delegates to the

24. See, Gorbunov, *V. I. Lenin*, pp. 111-17.
25. *Ibid.*, pp. 122-25.
26. *Proletarskaia kul'tura*, No. 17-19 (Aug.-Dec. 1919), p. 82.

First Moscow Cultural Conference (organized under the auspices of MGSPS) to turn to Proletkul't for help in restoring trade union cultural work. Noting the "degeneration" afflicting this work, the Conference resolved to strengthen trade union-Proletkul't ties and to implement the latter's ideological and practical leadership over clubs.[27]

The year 1922 was marked by wholesale reductions in industrial, administrative, and cultural staffs as the government responded to acute fiscal conditions. In its readjustment to the new austerity, Narkompros eliminated Proletkul't's state subsidy, an action Moscow Proletkul't survived only after absorbing drastic cutbacks in its operations. Proletkul't hoped to weather this storm with the aid of the trade unions, whose situation was not much better.[28] At its All-Russian Conference in February 1922, Proletkul't agreed to a fusion of its activities with those of the unions in return for financial support, a decision duly registered at the Fourth Moscow Proletkul't Conference in May.[29] These recommendations were approved by Moscow trade union officials, who were simultaneously fending off efforts within the unions by arch-centralizers seeking to do away with cultural departments by transferring their functions to the more powerful organizational and economic departments.[30] In August, the MK approved in principle the fusion of Proletkul't and the MGSPS Cultural Department, and in September, the Fourth Moscow Trade Union Congress officially ratified these plans, citing their necessity due to "the weakness of the working class."[31]

27. *Moskovskaia gubernskaia konferentsiia*, p. 67; *Kommunisticheskii Trud*, 10 Sept. 1921. Proletkul't's local organizations were given an additional boost when the Politburo instructed local Party units to assist them. See, Gorbunov, *V. I. Lenin*, p. 175.

28. Fitzpatrick, *Commissariat*, pp. 237-39; *Trud*, 19 April 1922; *Pravda*, 8 March and 20 Oct. 1922; *Gorn*, No. 1 (6) (1922), p. 157.

29. *Pravda*, 4, 5, and 8 Feb. and 8 March 1922; *Gorn*, No. 1 (6) (1922), p. 158. The director of the MGSPS Cultural Department responded favorably to Proletkul't's request for assistance. See, *Trud*, 22 Aug. 1922.

30. For the response of the Second Moscow Cultural Conference, see *Pravda*, 10 May 1922, and *Gorn*, No. 1 (6) (1922), p. 159.

31. *Pravda*, 5 Sept. 1922; Gorbunov, *V. I. Lenin* pp. 180-81.

Within a week of the Moscow Trade Union Congress, these plans suffered a setback. At the Fifth All-Russian Trade Union Congress in mid-September, Proletkul't was accused of going far beyond its assigned function by assuming "the role as the ideological center of trade union artisitc activities" and by attempting to determine the overall cultural program of the trade unions. Local trade union organizations, persumably including MGSPS, were criticized for adopting Proletkul't's methods in all spheres of cultural work. As a result of these policies, "undesirable" organizational deviations had arisen, including the introduction of democratic procedures and autonomous activities.[32]

Actually, Proletkul't had been coming under increasing scrutiny from the TsK ever since November 1921, when an official investigation of a "collectivist" group within Proletkul't's national leadership was launched.[33] Proletkul't claimed exoneration in this investigation at its February conference, but it made a point of defending itself against accusations that it had fallen under the influence of Mensheviks and SR's.[34] Meanwhile, that same month, a Central Committee circular criticized Proletkul't for emphasizing artistic-creative activities at the expense of production propaganda, and local Party organizations were instructed to exercise greater supervision over its activities.[35] Ideological controversy erupted in the press in the fall of 1922, after the president of Proletkul't, V. F. Pletnev, reiterated the fundamental theoretical propositions of proletarian culture. His viewpoint was attacked in a series of articles by Lunacharskii and Krupskaia (speaking for Narkompros and Glavpolitprosvet, respectively), and Ia. A. Iakovlev (assistant director of the Central Committee's

32. *Trud*, 29 Oct. 1922; *Stenograficheskii otchet piatogo vserossiiskogo s"ezda professional'nykh soiuzov* (Moscow: Gosizdat, 1922), p. 531.

33. Gorbunov, *V. I. Lenin*, p. 176.

34. *Pravda*, 4 Feb. 1922, and Fitzpatrick, *Commissariat*, pp. 237-39. In defense, Proletkul't cited its Party credentials, including the fact that 63 percent of the delegates to the February conference were Communists, as were thirteen of the sixteen members of its Central Committee.

35. Gorbunov, *V. I. Lenin*, pp. 175-76.

Agitprop Department) for its iconoclasm and for seeking to establish an autonomous cultural apparatus.[36]

This ideological debate was paralleled by friction growing out of local developments singled out at the Fifth Trade Union Congress. *Trud* expanded on these themes in March 1923, when it denounced organizational deviations that entailed "the setting-up . . . of cultural collegias or cultural commissions that were not accountable to provincial trade union soviets and [that] conducted their cultural work . . . frequently in disagreement with the general trade union line."[37] Another *Trud* article on the situation in Moscow complained that "in most cases theatrical circles shared a negative tendency towards isolation" from general club activities and decried an "art for art's sake" deviation.[38] G. N. Mel'nichanskii, the MGSPS Chairman, chimed in with his own complaint in March, when he observed that "there is hardly one circle, one course on the trade union movement; cultural work is not being directed towards emphasizing the education of workers in the essence of conscious trade union membership."[39] The separation of clubs from the "proletarian community" was viewed by one writer as "inexpedient from the point of view of the general class interest of the proletariat."[40] As if on cue, in the winter of 1922-23, the MGSPS Cultural Department began circumventing Prolekul't's role in workers' clubs.[41]

Proletkul't responded to this assault as best it could. Articles appeared in *Pravda* and *Trud* upholding utopian ideas, and warnings were voiced about the growing bourgeois influences in clubs that were entering via an increasing profile being taken by specialists in organized club activities. Such influences, one writer claimed, exposed the "soul and consciousness" of workers

36. *Pravda*, 27 Sept., 8 and 24 Oct. 1922; *Izvestiia*, 3 Nov. 1922.
37. *Trud*, 7 March 1923.
38. *Trud*, 16 Jan. 1923.
39. *Trud*, 2 March 1923.
40. *Trud*, 2 March 1923.
41. *Gorn*, No. 8 (1923), p. 259.

to a "philistine ideology."[42] R. Ginzburg, the Moscow Proletkul't official responsible for clubs, warned against the monopolization of club work by trade unions because "it might bring the same degeneracy and internal breakdown of clubs that occurred in previous years."[43] A conciliatory tact was taken by Pletnev, who advocated a broad-based approach to club work that incorporated political, trade union, production, and everyday life themes as well as artistic-creative activities.[44]

In no way can it be said that Moscow Proletkul't achieved a systematic hegemony over local trade union work; its depleted staff and the disorganization of the unions hindered such a development. By Ginzburg's estimate, Moscow Proletkul't led the work of little more than twenty clubs, although it may have been active in others.[45] Nevertheless, Proletkul't's impact on institutional relationships, political practices, and club activities was potentially far-reaching and therefore the cause of the concerns repeatedly voiced in the spring of 1923. In the light of these persistent utopian deviations, the MGSPS Cultural Department announced in March 1923, that henceforth all club workers would be subject to verification by a special commission composed of representatives from the Party, Glavpolitprosvet, and the trade unions with a mandate to purge clubs of "alien elements" and unqualified personnel. Simultaneously, the Tenth Moscow Party Conference called for a review of all Party members of factory cultural commissions to determine their "Party qualifications."[46]

The timing of these announcements suggests they were in part aimed at discouraging utopian activists. The verification commissions were also an important step in centralizing controls over clubs, indicating a renewed interest on the part of the authorities in their activities. Coming after years of neglect, this renewed interest was

42. *Trud*, 13 Nov. 1923. For other examples of the utopian position, see *Rabochaia Moskva*, 21 Feb. 1923, and *Pravda*, 16 Jan. 1923.

43. *Gorn*, No. 8 (1923), p. 203.

44. *Gorn*, No. 9 (1923), p. 147.

45. *Gorn*, No. 8 (1923), p. 259.

46. *Trud*, 21 March 1923, and Pravda, 22 June 1923.

only partly attributable to the long-standing ideological disagreements between Proletkul't and its critics. Also important were a number of factors stemming from the general field of Party-worker relations, which in 1923 were characterized chiefly by the Party's isolation from and weak ideological influence over workers. With the worst of the post-war economic crisis behind it, however, the Party could begin addressing cultural problems, and workers' clubs, for all their imperfections, were a ready-made factory-level institution for the extension of the Pary's ideological hegemony over the working class.

Not all local trade unions shared this renewed appreciation for workers' clubs. Some unions used the transfer of educational functions to Narkompros in 1923 as an excuse to implement "forced reductions" in cultural budgets, a practice criticized in *Trud*.[47] The movement of the MGSPS Cultural Department away from utopian and towards a more pragmatic approach in its work helped strengthen its position at the Fifth Moscow Trade Union Congress, where efforts to weaken cultural departments were opposed and the principle of factory clubs reaffirmed. In addition, the Congress approved a watered-down version of a resolution calling for club democracy that had been adopted at the preceeding Third Moscow Cultural Conference. At the same time, however, a 60 percent reduction in the number of clubs was announced, and the trade unions proved to be in no hurry to carry out club elections.[48]

By the end of 1923, then, an alternative, "utilitarian" approach to workers' clubs began to take shape. This approach sought to use clubs to instill Party and trade union consciousness in workers and to service their ev-

47. *Trud*, 13 April 1923. See also, Pravda, 10 Feb. 1923; and *5-i gubernskii s"ezd Moskovskikh profsoiuzov* (Moscow: Izd. MGSPS, 1923), p. 32. While 75 percent of the cultural budget of the trade unions had gone into functions transferred to Narkompros, there was a 90 percent reduction in the unions' cultural budgets. See *Trud*, 20 Feb. 1923.

48. *Trud*, 12 June 1923; and also, *5-i gubernskii s"ezd*, p. 32. Although it passed, the proposal to democratize the clubs met with opposition at the cultural conference. The Fifth Moscow Trade Union Congress also called for the direct assignment of unionists to club work in addition to democratization.

eryday needs. It also sought to attract wider clientele by catering to workers' leisure time interests. Some Proletkul't officials sought to adjust their methods to the new conditions. Others expressed regret over the lowering of club standards to attract more members instead of raising "backward elements" to club standards.[49] The appearance of utopian deviations in artistic-creative circles in late 1924 suggests that many utopian activists continued to work in clubs.[50]

Did the campaign against utopian "deviations" in 1923 have repercussions beyond the sphere of cultural politics? Insufficient evidence makes any answer to this question highly tentative. Proletkul't had a history of steering clear of inner-Party squabbles; despite ideological affinities with the Workers' Opposition, it avoided involvement in the 1921 Party discussions. In 1923, however, Proletkul't itself was the target of a campaign being waged against it. How did the lower level activists respond to the dismantling of cultural collegias and the imposition of verification commissions? Many continued to work in clubs. Were all activists, though, willing to adjust to the imposition of central controls?

In November 1923, *Sotsialisticheskii vestnik* noted the arrests in Moscow of 400 members of the Workers' Truth, a dissident Party faction consisting of factory committee members, rabfak students, Komsomolists, and Party intellectuals. Western historians have stressed this group's political critique of the Party's dictatorship, but its utopian cultural dimension should not be overlooked, for "they perceived their task in cultural work the enlightenment of the minds of workers."[51] Was it only coincidence that the timing of the Workers' Truth episode corresponded to the reversal experienced by utopian ac-

49. *Gorn*, No. 8 (1923), p. 203.

50. *Rabochii klub*, No. 9 (Sept.-Oct. 1924), p. 9. *Pravda*, 28 April 1925, announced that the cultural departments of MGSPS and individual trade unions had been instructed to verify the political reliability of art circle leaders.

51. *Sotsialisticheskii vestnik*, 23 Nov. 1923. See also the accounts in Jay Sorensen, *The Life and Death of Soviet Trade Unionism* (New York: Atherton Press, 1969), p. 177, and Leonard Schapiro, *The Communist Party of the Soviet Union* (New York: Vintage, 1971), pp. 280-81.

tivists in trade union cultural work in 1923? No direct linkages between Proletkul't and Workers' Truth have been uncovered beyond their common affiliation with Bogdanov's ideas, and the emigre report may exaggerate the numbers involved.[52] If the report is accurate in depicting Workers' Truth as a grassroots phenomenon, though, then a connection may have existed. Whatever the relationship, the issuance of pamphlets critical of the Party's dictatorship and a purported involvement in industrial disturbances in 1923 sealed the fate of the Workers' Truth, the last organized expression of an activist, factory-based utopian movement.

II. Workers, Clubs, and Communists, 1924-25

The sharp reductions in cultural budgets and the institutional confusion that marked 1923 magnified the basic problems that had been facing workers' clubs since 1921. Neglect and poor organization continued to characterize the clubs in 1924. "In 90 out of 100 cases," the Proletkul't journal *Rabochii klub* complained, club directors were absent from their duties. Numerous other reports commented on the poor quality of circle leaders.[53] Ineffectual leadership was cited as the main reason why "the majority of clubs" were empty, and, according to the MGSPS chairman, the "general feeling" in 1924 was that clubs were "very weak."[54] High turnover rates amongst club workers compounded problems in directing club activities on a consistent basis.

This leadership crisis was in part due to the removal of Proletkul't and exclusion of Glavpolitprosvet from direct influence over clubs. In part, it also reflected the inability and even unwillingness of the unions to pro-

52. Bogdanov was linked to the Workers' Truth by both *Sotsialisticheskii vestnik*, 23 Nov. 1923, and *Pravda*, 30 Dec. 1923. The *Pravda* account refers to only a handful of adherents to Workers' Truth.

53. *Rabochii klub*, No. 3-4 (May-April 1924), p. 42; *Pravda*, 11 Sept. 1923 and 13 Sept 1924. See *Pravda*, 8 Jan. 1925 and *Profsoiuzy Moskvy* (Moscow: Profizdat, 1975), pp. 177-78, for a discussion of remedial measures that were adopted.

54. *Moskovskii proletarii*, 21 Sept. 1924.

vide effective leadership. Beginning in 1924, then, steps were undertaken by the Communist Part to breath new life into workers' clubs. These steps, which entailed the upgrading of the Party's role in clubs and the institution of "club democracy," were initiated by the Party as part of the more general effort to improve Party-worker relations during this period. The most well-known expression of this policy was the Lenin Levy of early 1924, a mass recruitment of workers into the Communist Party. Traditionally, Western historians have emphasized that Stalin and his supporters authorized the Levy in order to undercut the largely "petty-bourgeois" Left Opposition.[55] Given the Party's isolation from the working class, it is likely that such a policy would have been embarked upon sooner or later. The influx of thousands of *lenintsy* meant that the Party could begin measures to restore the reponsiveness of grass-roots organizations to workers by encouraging rank-and-file participation. For clubs, as well as for factory committees and Party cells, this meant "workers' democracy." Thus, the second chapter in the politics of mass culture was wrought up in this complex unity of centralization and democratization.

Before 1924, the Party took only perfunctory interest in factory cultural work, and most industrial cells completely ignored it. Perhaps as a response to the Proletkul't episode, as well as Glavpolitprosvet's weaknesses, the Tenth Moscow Party Conference in April, 1923 adopted measures aimed at improving the "party-political" content of club work. But by September, the MK was again lamenting the Party's poor performance in this area.[56] The small size of industrial cells and the overwork of their members in economic and administrative duties made this neglect comprehensible. The Proletkul't and Workers' Truth episodes in 1923, though, along with the industrial unrest in the fall and summer of that

55. See, for example, Robert Daniels, *The Conscience of the Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1960), p. 238.

56. *Rabochaia Moskva*, 20 April 1922, and 11 Jan. 1923; *K otchetu o Moskovskoi gub. konferentsii R.K.P. (25-28 iiunia 1921 g.)* (Moscow: Gosizdat, 1921), pp. 7-8; and *Pravda*, 22 June and 6 Aug. 1924.

year, must have impressed upon the Party the advisability of strengthening its profile in factory organizations, including workers' clubs.

Shortly after the 1924 Lenin Levy, the MK adopted measures to improve the Party's role in clubs and upgraded this activity to the status of a Party obligation. The Thirteenth Party Congress confirmed these measures in May 1924, and officially proclaimed the Party's leading role in club work with the aim of promoting a consistent Party line in factory cultural activities.[57] By 1925, 22 percent of all club members were Communists, and political-education circles flourished as *lenintsy* took crash courses on Leninism and the history of the Party.[58] In Khamovnicheskii district, the Party committee organized club fractions, assigned *lenintsy* to smaller clubs, and set-up training courses on the methods of club leadership for Party members. Between five and forty *lenintsy* were assigned to each club in Khamovnicheskii, resulting in a marked improvement in the relations between factory cells and workers' clubs. In Zamoskvoretskii *raion*, 14 percent of all *lenintsy* were assigned to cultural work.[59] Table 2 provides an example of the types of cultural assignments *lenintsy* received, and although it refers to a transport workers' cell, the situation in industrial cells was basically the same.[60]

57. *Pravda*, April 10, 1924; *Rabochii klub*, No. 6 (June 1924), pp. 3-4.

58. *Trud v Moskovskoi gubernii v 1923-1925 gg.* (Moscow: Trud i Kniga, 1926), p. 40. *Rabochii klub*, No. 5 (May 1924), p. 58, notes that 75 percent of the participants in political education circles in the "Ivan Federov" club were Communists.

59. *Rabochii klub*, No. 8 (Aug. 1924), pp. 53-55; *Pravda*, 13 May and 11 Oct. 1924.

60. On industrial cells, see *Pravda*, 20 and 27 March, 8 June and 16 Sept. 1924.

TABLE 2

DISTRIBUTION OF PARTY OBLIGATIONS AMONGST LENINTSY ASSIGNED TO CULTURAL WORK, MAIN SERVICE SHOP, M.-B. B. RAILROAD

Obligation	#Lenintsy Assigned
Club Administration	5
All Circles	15
Excursion Bureau	5
Struggle vs. Hooliganism	7
Club Economic Commission	12
Library	5
Press Distribution	9
Total	58

Source: *Pravda*, 24 April 1924.

Club and circle duties were favorite areas of assignment for *lenintsy*. Beyond this, the relative popularity of political-education circles, as opposed to the unpopularity of trade union circles, was also due to the influx of *lenintsy*.

Impressive as these reports are, the Khamovnicheskii experience was more the exception than the rule. Contrary to expectations, *Pravda* reported that Party members on the whole did not take the initiative in joining clubs. Industrial cadres were failing to treat factory cultural work as a Party obligation despite instructions from the MK.[61] According to *Rabochii klub*, "some [Party] fractions, whose members were transferred from some other Party assignment, have turned into consultative organs and are not leading practical work. [Others consist of] new Party members [and] are suffering from their lack of preparedness."[62] A number of suggestions were made to improve this state of affairs: cells were urged to assign qualified Party members who were not

61. *Pravda*, 11 Oct. 1924.
62. *Rabochii klub*, No. 9 (Sept.-Oct. 1924), p. 7.

otherwise overburdened with work, and intra-club commissions with strong Party representation were suggested as a structural response to disorganized club work. The inactivity of club administrators, "an everyday occurrence" despite the fact that 64 percent of them were Communists, was to be treated as a violation of Party and trade union discipline.[63] Despite these efforts and sanctions, by the end of 1925, *Pravda* was complaining that the clubs were underutilized by the Party as centers of political influence over the working class.[64]

"Club democracy" had as its aim the mobilization of the spontaneous energies of the masses in the activities of clubs. It never meant autonomy from central controls, nor was it a process of real choice between contending notions of the methods and aims of cultural work. Rather, "democracy" signified a strategy for mobilizing club members into direct participation in club life under close Party (and trade union) supervision. Ideally, election meetings were to be forums of frank discussion of the shortcomings of the previous administration followed by a vote that would install only the most qualified and active workers into positions of responsibility. It is certainly more than a little ironic that this modified version of one aspect of Proletkul't's program was reintroduced into the clubs, but given the overall tenor of Party-worker relations, and the sensitivity of the Politburo majority to charges of bureaucratism, such a policy makes sense.

The success of the elections hinged upon worker response and the inclination of factory officials to conduct them democratically. The elections, which occurred in fall 1925, were carried out on a broad scale and by the end of 1925, 85 percent of all clubs in the Moscow region had elected administrations.[65] As a real achievement, however, they fell short of their professed goals. According to a MGSPS survey of 135 clubs, only 55 percent

63. *Ibid.*, p. 7; *Trud v Moskovskoi gubernii*, p. 339.

64. *Pravda*, 7 Sept. 1925.

65. *Moskovskii proletarii*, 22 Aug. 1925; *Trud v Moskovskoi gubernii*, p. 339.

of the membership voted, and even in the Printers' Union, which was said to have done the best job, turnout was barely 60 percent. In one club, only 50 out of its 496 members attended the election meeting.[66]

The general consensus was that the elections had failed in their purpose. The lack of adult-worker participation was a major shortcoming, and it was attributed to the disruption of election meetings by younger members. As a result, election meetings had difficulty attracting quorums, and officials often proceeded with the voting without having the requisite numbers formally required.[67] Another problem was the lack of enthusiasm exhibited by factory cadres in conducting the elections. Factory committees were criticized for holding meetings at the same time scheduled for club elections, and in general for carrying out elections "limply." A typical bureaucratic procedure resorted to by Party fractions was the "list" (*spisok*) system, whereby a slate of candidates was approved in advance of the election meeting and then voted in automatically.[68]

Neither the Lenin Levy nor club democracy contributed to a substantial turnaround in the quality of club leadership and mass participation in 1924-26. The habits of neglect were resistant to change as industrial cadres remained indifferent to the needs of factory cultural work. *Leninsty* were frequently unqualified to lead clubs, and club democracy was often only a formality. In some respects, however, the picture was not entirely negative: some Party organizations were taking cultural work seriously, and many *leninsty* were receiving practical experience and political training; and club democracy did provide a more participatory structure for those members already active in clubs. That elections were carried out at all was a vindication for the local cultural officials who had been arguing since 1923 that some measure of local autonomy and initiative was nec-

66. *Moskovskii proletarii*. 31 Oct. 1925.

67. *Ibid.*, *Resheniia VII gubernskogo s"ezda professional'nykh soiuzov* (Moscow: Trud i kniga, 1926), pp. 60-61; Ia. I. Boiarskii, *Chto skazal VII s"ezd profsoiuzov o rabochem klubakh* (Moscow: Izd. MGSPS,1927), p. 35.

68. *Moskovskii proletarii*, 31 Oct. 1925; Boiarskii, *Chto skazal*, p. 35.

essary to enhance worker participation in clubs. It is important to recognize that the reasons for the limitations and partial successes of these policies were found not only in the attitudes of factory officials, but also in the manner they intersected with the conditions within the clubs.

After the reductions of 1923, only 156 clubs remained in the Moscow region. From 1924 on, however, there was a steady increase, and by 1925, MGSPS counted more than 450 clubs under its jurisdiction, 75 percent of which were organized on a factory basis. Aggregate membership doubled from 70,000 in 1924 to 140,000, or over 10 percent of all registered trade unionists, in 1925.[69] Many clubs functioned poorly, and membership figures were often padded. One account noted that formal membership procedures may have netted clubs hundreds or even thousands of inactive, but dues-paying, members.[70] Based on a survey conducted by Glavpolitprosvet in 1924, Trotskii reckoned that an average club was visited only thirteen times a day over the course of the year.[71]

Young workers (*molodezh*) composed the overwhelming majority and most active sector of the membership of workers' clubs. Seventy percent of all club members in the Moscow region in 1925 were under thirty, and 64 percent of the textile workers belonging to clubs in 1926 were under 23 years of age.[72] In the Textile Workers' Union, the *aktiv* belonging to various club commissions and sections composed 23 percent of the aggregate membership, and 67 percent of these were

69. *Otchet . . . M. G. S. P. S. . . . 1922-1923 g.*, p. 117; *Trud v Moskovskoi gubernii*, p. 338; *Moskovskii proletarii*, 16 June and 16 Dec. 1925.

70. *Rabochii klub*, No. 2 (Feb. 1924), p. 20. The Metal Workers' Union defended this practice. See, *Pravda*, 3 Nov. 1923.

71. *Pravda*, 24 July 1924.

72. *Trud v Moskovskoi gubernii*, p. 340; *Otchet o rabote Moskovskogo gubotdela ianvar'-iiun' 1926 g.* (Moscow: Izd. Mosgubotdela Profsoiuza Tekstil'shchikov, 1926), p. 58. Figures for one factory indicate that 43 percent of its members were teenagers. See *Pravda*, 15 March 1925. According to Chase, about 50 percent of Moscow's working class was under the age of 30. See, Chase, "Moscow and its Working Class," p. 146.

involved in youth sections.[73] The best estimate is that no more than two-third's of club members actively participated in club life, most of whom were *molodezh*.[74] The mass of adult workers had little or no contact with the clubs, and as a result, only "capable young workers" or, as one official put it, "leading workers, *komsomoltsy*, *partitsy*," with clearly defined cultural needs joined clubs because "boring and sterile" methods frightened the rest away.[75] What sort of impact did these membership patterns have on club activities after 1923? How did cultural officials attempt to broaden the clientele of clubs?

The very fact that clubs attracted large numbers of young people was enough to keep adult workers away:

> As a result:
> 1. Recently organized Marxist circles for adults categorically refuse to meet in clubs. It is too loud there.
> 2. After a meeting of political school [*politshkol*] for young people, the participants remain in the club until closing time. After a meeting of political-literacy [*politgrammota*] for adults, not a single participant remains in the club.
> 3. Only young people attend general meetings. Adults do not attend, just young rowdies.
> 4. [As a result] the club administration only reluctantly calls general meetings.[76]

Various accounts detailed how in almost every club the facilities had been taken over by *molodezh* (we have already seen their impact on election meetings) to the detriment of attendance by adults who were interested in rest and relaxation. *Rabochii klub* conceded that even

73. *Otchet . . . Moskovskogo gubotdela*, p. 65.

74. This figure is based on particapation rates in the club elections and the percent of club membership involved in circles. See *Moskovskii proletarii*, 31 Oct. 1925, and Boiarskii, *Chto skazal*, p. 19.

75. *Pravda*, 13 Sept. 1924; *Pechatnik*, 1 Jan. and 27 Feb. 1926; Boiarskii, Chto skazal, pp. 8-9.

76. *Rabochii klub*, No. 2 (Feb. 1924), pp. 50-51.

after an extensive membership drive, "the club [consists] . . . mainly of *molodezh*."[77]

According to a MGSPS survey in 1923, over 60 percent of club circles were artistic-creative. Although this proportion declined slightly in 1924 due to increased emphasis on utilitarian themes, they continued to flourish and may have even made a partial comeback in 1925.[78] Theatrical, choir, and music circles together accounted for 53 percent of all circle participants in the Textile Workers' Union in 1926.[79] A survey of five clubs conducted by the MGSPS Cultural Department, the MK Agitprop Department, and Moscow Politprosvet in 1924 confirmed the popularity of artistic-creative circles among *molodezh*.[80] Clearly, these circles enjoyed a popularity that post-dated the Proletkul't era, the "young, capable workers" that the latter was accused of catering to at the expense of other workers were, in fact, the only natural, active constituency for workers' clubs.

In addition to artistic-creative circles, clubs contained a wide range of other types of circles that either served economic or political-ideological purposes, such as trade union, production, political literacy, or atheism circles, or catered to the interests or cultural needs of workers, such as radio, literacy, and general education circles. The demand for these circles, however, was never as great as the demand for artistic-creative circles. Circles on the trade union movement had a particularly rough going, declining in 1923 from the already low levels of 1922. Poorly led by VUZ and *rabfak* students assigned from outside the factory, adult workers were unlikely to be attracted to them, and younger workers had other interests. Those workers who did attend were usually grass-roots union activists.[81] After repeated exhortations to improve the performance of trade union circles,

77. *Ibid.*

78. *Otchet . . . M. G. S. P. S. . . . 1922-1923 g.*, p. 119; *Trud v Moskovskoi gubernii*, p. 341; Boiarskii, p. 19; and *Moskovskii proletarii*, 16 Dec. 1925.

79. *Otchet o rabote*, p. 63.

80. *Rabochii klub*, No. 2 (Feb. 1924), pp. 50-51.

81. *Otchet o rabote*, p. 65.

MGSPS gave up in 1925 and urged club members "with a trade union consciousness" to carry out individual agitation.[82]

By their very nature, circles could appeal to energetic young workers or to workers with pressing cultural needs or obligations. Thus, illiterate workers attended literacy circles; union activists, trade union circles; and *lenintsy*, political-education circles. Clearly, programs had to be developed that could attract workers on a more casual basis. Beginning in 1924, there was a systematization of ideas on how best to organize club activities to achieve this goal. Most of these ideas focused on the role of workers' clubs as the place for the "experience and entertainment" of the masses. Perhaps the easiest way to attract workers was through special social and informational events, such as theatrical performances, concerts, family evenings, dances, lectures, and question and answer sessions. By 1926-27, these programs were generating good turnouts in at least some clubs.[83] Not all club activists, though, supported this emphasis on "entertainment" over "education," and attendance by workers at these events did not translate into greater active participation in the daily life of clubs.

A key point of contention was whether or not clubs should offer the sale of beer as a way to attract adult, male workers. Alcoholism was a problem of major proportions among male workers in the 1920s, and the struggle against it was a recurrent theme in the daily press.[84] Cases abounded: in one incident, a worker was expelled from the Leather Workers' Union for engaging in speculation and for bringing home-brewed spirits (*samogon*) to the factory to sell to fellow workers. Two others had become inebriated and had attempted to force themselves on female workers.[85] In another, the appearance of 80 proof alcohol resulted in the mass ab-

82. *Moskovskii proletarii*, July 31, 1925. See also, *Otchet. . . M. G. S. P. S. . . . 1922-1923 g.*, p. 123, and *5-i gubernskii s"ezd*, p. 34.

83. *Otchet. . . Moskvoskogo gubotdela*, p. 61; Robert Dunn, *Soviet Trade Unions* (New York: Vanguard Press, 1928), p. 204.

84. See, for example, *Pravda*, 5 Aug., 21 Sept., and 21 Oct., 1922.

85. *Moskovskii kozhevnik*, No. 8 (1924), p. 9.

sence of workers from one factory the following day, including twenty-eight Communists.[86]

Adult male workers clearly preferred the comradery of the tavern to the "boring and sterile" atmosphere of clubs. This basic fact of life accounted for the refusal of state agencies and cooperatives to set-up food counters in clubs that did not permit the sale of beer. Clubs were caught squarely in a dilemma: on the one hand, alcoholism was a major problem that led to demoralization, hooliganism, and low labor productivity. On the other hand, how were adult workers to be enticed out of the tavern for whatever ancillary agitation might be directed at them, without offering the sale of beer? Trotskii, for one, disapproved of this idea, as he made clear at the All-Russian Conference of Club Workers in July 1924: "If the worker senses an element of coercion at the club . . . he will go to the tavern instead. But it also happens that the tavern comes to the club . . . a food counter that sells beer can certainly enhance statistics for attendance rates . . . Of course it is possible to attract the masses to the club by offering them beer, but to lure them away from the tavern with the help of beer is tantamount to driving out the devil with the help of Old Nich![87] Trotskii's conclusions, which emphasized the need to restructure club activities around themes of factory life, occasioned a retort from F. Shul'ts, a club director from the Metal Worker's Union, who pointed out that "workers feel more at ease and free in taverns than in clubs . . . it is necessary to remember that workers are not only revolutionaries . . . they are also people."[88]

This exchange reveals basic tactical differences that arose out of divergent ideological traditions. As Stephen Cohen has pointed out, Trotskii was the leading spokesman of the revolutionary-heroic tradition in Bol-

86. *Rabota Rogozhko-Simonovskogo rainnogo komiteta RKP(b) s ianvaria po oktiabr' 1925 g.* (Moscow: Gosizdat, 1925), pp. 31-32. Some Communists attended cell meetings drunk. See *Izvestiia MK*, No. 5 (Aug. 1925).

87. Trotsky, *Problems*, pp. 301-03.

88. *Pravda*, 27 Aug. and 13 Sept. 1924.

shevik thought.[89] Although inhabiting the same left-wing spectrum in Bolshevik ideology as utopianism, the revolutionary-heroic tradition emphasized the primacy of economics. Trotskii thus was critical of Proletkul't for its iconoclasm, its narrowly artistic"laboratory" approach to culture, and its cultural utopianism. Instead, he advocated a hard-headed subordination of club activities to the basic problems of economic reconstruction and socialist transformation of society. For Trotskii, beer was a beverage unsuited for clear thinking about the building of socialism, and on this point, Trotskii and Proletkul't could agree. As late as 1927, militant club activists still frowned upon the frivolousness of evening dances.[90] The NEP was characterized not by its revolutionary militancy, however, but by its pragmatic approaches to difficult social and economic problems, and was it reasonable to assume that this basic approach would change when it came to culture? No, because in 1925, as if to underscore this connection, the question of the sale of beer in clubs was left open for each club to decide.[91]

Conclusion

Although its low profile in the 1921 Party discussion shielded it from any direct repercussions from that event, growing differences over the conduct of cultural work made it increasingly difficult for Proletkul't to carry out its utopian program. More and more, the function of clubs was determined by their utility as cultural "transmission belts" serving as centers for the development of a socialist working class culture under the political and ideological hegemony of the Communist Party. Perhaps Tomskii's formulation that "the raw village youth who knows no class discipline and who brings to the factory town all the prejudices and super-

89. Stephen Cohen, *Bukharin and the Bolshevik Revolution* (New York: Vintage, 1971). McClelland distinguishes between "revolutionary heroic" and "utopian" left-wing ideological traditions. See, "Revolutionary Heroism."

90. Dunn, *Soviet Trade Unions*, p. 204.

91. *Moskovskii proletarii*, Feb. 3, 1925.

stitions of the countryside" best expressed the problem from the standpoint of the Party.[92] To discipline the clubs to the tasks of bringing this "raw village youth" a Party consciousness and appreciation of industrial culture, the rejection of Proletkul't's utopian program of de-emphasizing political education and loosening central controls was required.[93]

The Party, though, was caught in the same dilemma for which Proletkul't was roundly criticized: despite their different thrusts, both utopian and utilitarian activities appealed to the same stratum of "capable young workers." Most workers, male and female, were either unable or unwilling to spend their free time in the "boring and sterile," youth-oriented atmosphere of clubs. As a result, and despite the misgivings of revolutionary-heroic and utopian leftists, popular leisure activities were incorporated into the repertoire of clubs. Increasingly, clubs assumed the role as centers for both the "communist education" and the "experience and entertainment" of workers.

In this sense, the compromises in club work after 1923 reflected, in a microcosm, the compromises between Bolshevik voluntarism and Russian socioeconomic conditions characteristic of the NEP. We must recognize, however, that this changing orientation took place within the context of a historical legacy that predated NEP, and which bequethed to cultural politics a whole complex of ideological and institutional dynamics. After all, as an ideological tradition, proletarian culture predated World War I, and the founding of Proletkul't in 1918 gave utopianism an institutional foothold from which it could play an instrumental role in the development of cultural policies. The diffusion of utopianism into the trade unions after 1920 was one consequence of this legacy, even as it was facilitated by the dislocations of the early NEP.

92. As paraphrased in Dunn, *Soviet Trade Unions*, p. 205.

93. The problem of new peasant cadres in factories and their low levels of "consciousness" and inexperience in factory work was an important theme of the deliberations of the December, 1925 Moscow Party Conference. See, *Ocherednye zadachi agitpropraboty. Tezisy k XIV gubpartkonferentsii* (Moscow: Gosizdat, 1925), p. 3.

Part of the reason for Proletkul'ts persistence after economic conditions–had they been all determining–should have resulted in its orderly demise had to do with the strength of utopianism at the local and grass roots levels. This vitality was exhibited in a variety of fashions that have been recounted abouve, and the 1923 and 1925 purges indicate the seriousness with which grass-roots utopianism was viewed by the Party and trade unions. To blame the persistence of utopian "mistakes" on Proletkul't's national leadership, as does one Soviet historian, is to miss the significant contribution to this phenomenon made by local activists.[94] By the same token, the utilitarian approach was not articulated and implemented from above so much as it congealed out of concerns raised by different political and cultural constituencies in the Party, state, and trade unions.

To be sure, workers' clubs continued to suffer from serious deficiencies during the NEP, and the commitment of industrial cadres to their success was inconsistent at best. The activist core of clubs continued to be *molodezh* who still preferred artistic-creative pastimes. Adult workers attended clubs only intermittently. By the late NEP, though, some clubs exhibited healthy signs, combining a steady program of daily activities with special lectures and social events that attracted a considerable clientele.[95] That workers' clubs operated at a time when financial stringency and bureaucratic neglect could easily have dictated otherwise was itself no mean achievement.

Among leading Bolsheviks, Trotskii was the most sensitive to the potential held by the cultural traditions of the working class movement as the source for visionary solutions to the problems of Russian backwardness. "Lenin wrote," Trotskii stated,

94. Gorbunov, *V. I. Lenin*, p. 5. For a thorough discussion of the social basis of the Proletkul't movement, see Mally, "Blueprint for a New Culture."

95. See, for example, Dunn, *Soviet Trade Unions*, pp. 179-205, and *Otchet o rabote*, p. 61. Of course, some trade unions and enterprises were better able to support workers' clubs. See Blair Ruble's remarks in *Soviet Trade Unions* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1981), p. 105.

> that we should raise the teacher to a height such as never been attained in the world. This idea also applies totally and completely to those who staff clubs . . . If the club is not the smithy where proletarian culture is forged, it is one of the most valuable links in our total system for influencing the working masses and creating a new, socialist, culture. To the extent that we can draw ever wider layers of the masses into involvement in public affairs, the club's aim should be to bring them to Leninism, not as an awe-inspiring truth handed down from on high and demanding "Get down on your knees before me," but as to a generalization of their own experience, and experience which was disconnected and fragmentary, which has been gathered together by the club, generalized politically by the party, defended and strengthened by the authority of the state.
>
> And if we can use workers' clubs to teach every working man and woman to deduce the foundations of the world today, then we will not only make them capable of understanding this world, but of transforming it as well, making it a wider world, more spacious world, a happier world to live in.[96]

The failure of clubs to measure up to these lofty aims should not be surprising. The mere existence of workers' clubs, however, attests to the sharp break made with the Old World in 1917, and heralded, in the cultural shpere, a new and closer relationship between workers and the state.

University of California, Irvine

96. Trotsky, *Problems*, p. 320.