

Ilya Vardin, “Voronskyism Must Be Destroyed” (1924)¹

On Politics and Literature

What is the basic error of comrade Voronsky and his supporters? They underestimate the political significance of literature, they overestimate the “objective moment” in the works of fellow-travelers, and they vaguely envision the absolutely exclusive position of literature in the epoch of the giant war of classes.

The literary policy of comrade Voronsky is in fact our traditional, “near-Marxist” (in the spirit of Lvov-Rogachevsky, Kubikov), progressive culture-bearing policy of the intelligentsia. In general, it correctly takes into account the significance of cultural heritage and more or less correctly raises the question of historical continuity, but it proves to be absolutely helpless in resolving the active political tasks of the proletariat in the realm of literature. That is not all: in conditions of the revolutionary epoch, this “traditional” literary policy actually turns into an instrument which the bourgeoisie, defeated at its main positions, contrives to seize. In our eyes, the policy of comrade Voronsky has turned into anti-revolutionary policy.



“Like science, art gives objective truths. Genuine art demands precision, because it deals with the object, it is experiential.” [AKV, p.100]

That is what comrade Voronsky writes in the article “Art as the Cognition

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of Life.” He devotes excessive space and attention to substantiating, explaining and chewing over this “eternal” truth. In doing so, he forgets such a trifle as ... the civil war of classes; he forgets the indubitable fact that in our epoch, even the most “objective” sciences have become instruments of class struggle, and that, not only in the realm of art, but also in the realm of the exact sciences, the bourgeoisie fights against scientific precision and conscientiousness.

“Genuine art deals with the object, it is experiential.” Generally speaking, this is beyond dispute. But in a concrete historical situation, it is an empty and deceptive phrase, for after all, biology also deals with the object, it is experiential, however this fact does not prevent the most prominent representatives of the bourgeoisie from going to war against Darwinism.

From exact sciences and from art, let us pass on to social sciences. Can sociology give “objective truth?” Of course, it can. But what sociology, to be precise?

Communist, Marxist, proletarian sociology. That is the concrete, precise and, therefore, the only correct answer. A general indication that sociology as a whole can give objective truth is an empty phrase, devoid of content. Comrade Voronsky’s following statement is one of those phrases:

“Art is a special means of cognizing life... In genuine art there is the same objective moment as in philosophy and science.”

Well, of course, speaking generally, an “objective moment” exists in nature. But comrade Voronsky overlooked a trivial thing: he forgot to indicate precisely, who exactly, what class, what party, what ideology, what social and political, philosophical tendency are the bearers of this “objective moment,” who exactly, what classes, what parties, ideologies and tendencies are the ferocious enemies of objective truth. Without such indications, comrade Voronsky’s locutions about “objective moment” quite simply smack of Struivism. Objective truth paves its way in contradictions, in the furious struggle of classes, resulting in the victory of the class of the future over the classes of the past. To forget this elementary truth, to treat the public to conversations about the “objective moment” in general, means to fall into Struivism. Nineteen years ago, Lenin explained in great detail the meaning of Struivist objectivism and counterposed materialism to this objectivism.

Comrade Voronsky is a man who is positive, well-grounded, and he very much likes to express himself firmly: “genuine art,” “a true artist,” “objective moment,” “true lyricism,” etc., etc. In our opinion, all these solid expressions

are actually... verbiage. And this is not because in nature there is no "true lyricism," but simply because comrade Voronsky does not indicate where all these true and objective things are located, he does not say directly that, just as communism gives the world objective philosophy, sociology, and history, in just the same way "genuine art," "true lyricism," truly objective, i.e., historically true and accurate literature will come from the ranks of the proletariat.

But what comrade Voronsky does is worse: the whole of his "true lyricism" is aimed at proving that, because there is an "objective moment" in nature, the bearers of this moment are the literary fellow-travelers of the proletariat who exist in the republic of the Soviets in 1923-1924. This is what is worst of all, this is where Comrade Voronsky takes the greatest sin on his soul! Instead of saying the simple and clear truth: the fellow-travelers will be able to grasp bits and pieces of objective truth to the extent that they approach proletarian ideology; instead of this, comrade Voronsky dabbles in general phrases about "true" and "objective" subjects. Meanwhile, comrade Voronsky is more obliged than any of us to buttonhole Pilniak, Vsevolod Ivanov, Esenin — each fellow-traveler individually and all of them together — and tell them straight out:

Friends, wonderful things are happening in the world, humanity is coming out, in the words of Esenin, "onto a different track," humanity is being reborn in fire and tempest. In this monstrously-grandiose struggle and work, objective reasons are at work, there are subjective moments... Objective truth, genuine truth, the real truth exists. But in order to understand it, so that you don't poke your nose in this whirlwind of events like blind puppies, you must become more or less politically literate, you must learn the basics of proletarian ideology, at least at the level of a provincial soviet party school...

It is possible that the Pilnyaks and the Esenins will laugh at comrade Voronsky, that they will reject his proposal with indignation. It is very possible. But in that case, Comrade Voronsky is obligated to say to these good people:

There is objective truth in the world, but you will not reflect it, you will not give us the "true art" of a new life, of a new epoch. Only accidentally, occasionally, inadvertently, you will give a piece of truth, but it more often than not will be drowned in the sea of historical untruth. Artistic truth requires ideological truth. Without

arming yourself with this truth, you will not find artistic truth.

Comrade Voronsky does not pose this question so clearly. True, he does understand that ideology cannot be ignored. He says:

“The main task is that subjectivism, ideology, and journalistic writing should not distort the writer’s artistic creations, that subjective sentiments should correspond to the nature of the object, that journalism and politics should at the same time be on the level of the best ideals of mankind” (See A. Voronsky, *Art and Life*, p. 14).

So, “true art,” “true lyricism,” etc., cannot do without ideology, without polemical writing, and without politics; the “objective moment” accompanies the subjective moment. With this kind of confession, we can wholeheartedly congratulate comrade Voronsky. After all, the “On-Guardists” were taken to task by him for their “simplistic,” superficial, agitational approach to literature. He now has understood that literature cannot be built on a single “objective moment,” that not only the ability to grasp, but also an understanding of what is grasped, is necessary in order to produce a thing worthy of attention. Ideology and politics, i.e., partisanship and a class approach, are inevitable in this case. It can only be a question of which ideology, which politics, which partisanship is desirable and, from the point of view of the “objective moment,” obligatory? We say obligatory, because comrade Voronsky himself stresses the need for “subjective sentiments to correspond to the nature of the object,” in other words, for ideology, politics, and partisanship to be at the level of the epoch we are experiencing.

What specific demands does comrade Voronsky make in this case? Alas, he as usual confines himself to a general phrase; he strenuously avoids a clear, precise, direct statement of the question. “The journalistic writing and politics” of our artists must stand at the level of “the best ideals of mankind.” What exactly does this mean? Which ideals exactly are the “best”? What kind of journalism, what kind of politics, what kind of partisanship most corresponds, or rather — solely corresponds — to the “best ideals of mankind”?

We consider the absence of a direct answer to all of these questions in comrade Voronsky’s article to be downright unseemly... Boris Pilniak is told: your subjectivism will only correspond to the “nature of the object” if your “journalism and politics” are at the level of “the best ideals of mankind.” What they tell Pilniak is true, but not the whole truth; they have not told him the most important thing, they have not emphasized the main thing, they have not rendered the most needed help for all the Pilniaks. “The best ideals of

mankind" are formulated only in the program of world communism. Only communist "polemical writing and politics" correspond to their objective nature. Every other partisanship other than communist is reactionary to one degree or another. Every other class, except the proletariat, is reactionary to one degree or another

This is what comrade Voronsky was obliged to say with all clarity and certainty. This is how he would have fulfilled his duty as a Communist leader of Soviet literature... We understand perfectly well: it is not customary to speak so clearly in the literary milieu. They usually limit themselves to tributes to the "Great October Revolution", to recognize the "merits" of the Bolsheviks, but guard their "independence" (from communism) with great jealousy. No one, of course, would dream of turning Pilniak or Esenin into Communists. No one intends to encroach on their literary "independence." But it must be made clear to them with all persistence and conviction that the further they are from communism, the further they will be from genuine life and struggle, from the basic demands of the epoch. Comrade Voronsky does not tell our fellow-travelers this truth directly, and thus violates his duties to the Party and Soviet literature.

Only at the end of his programmatic article: "Art as the Cognition of Life," does he find the actually necessary words:

"The task of the proletarian artist... is to depict... the whole of modern reality in its totality. All that is necessary is to see this reality through the eyes of a communist."

Magnificent! "All modern reality" — with its contradictions, rises and declines — must and can only be seen through the "eyes of a communist." Excellent! Undeniable truth! He who cannot look "through the eyes of a communist" is unable to artistically depict "the whole of modern reality in its totality," i.e., unable to artistically reflect objective truth. Our fellow-travelers do not look through the eyes of a communist, for they do not have these eyes, so the objective truth of the epoch is closed to them. This is the only conclusion to be drawn from the present confession unwittingly made by Comrade Voronsky.

But this confession is binding! If it is sincere and if Comrade Voronsky wishes to observe a minimum of consistency, he must draw practical conclusions from it. First of all, he must equip his fellow-travelers, at least, with communist... glasses. Whoever is unwilling or unable to wear these spectacles will thereby define his relation to the revolution, to communism, and to objective

truth. Clarity will be created, and it is extremely important. But, of course, “spectacles” will not be enough. Systematic party-political education of the fellow-travelers is a must. Those who do not yield to this education will naturally place themselves outside the literature of the revolution.

Second, the attitude toward the question of proletarian literature must be decisively reconsidered. In what direction? In the sense of “annulling” all fellow-traveling literature and transferring literary “power” to the representatives of today’s proletarian literature? No, that is not what we are talking about. We are posing the question of the literary perspectives of the revolution. What does Comrade Voronsky tell us about this?



In No. 5 of *Prozhektor* from 18 March 1924, comrade Voronsky published a report to the agitprop of the Central Committee of the Russian Communist Party on “the current moment and the tasks of the Party in imaginative literature. The note contains a characterization of the fellow-travelers, criticism of the On-Guardists and a formulation of the Party’s tasks in the field of literature. If the above-mentioned article by comrade Voronsky, “Art as the Cognition of Life,” is a programmatic document, then his memorandum outlines a tactical-organizational plan. What is the essence of comrade Voronsky’s tactics? He writes:

“In the lively language of artistic prose, the fullest voices about our Soviet reality were spoken by the artists who later received the winged name of fellow-travelers of the revolution, that is, those who came from the petty-bourgeois, peasant and intelligentsia milieu... *For all its diversity, motley, ideological instability, lack of self-control and sometimes outright ideological dubiousness, this literature as a whole has certainly managed to produce something artistically valuable, and significant...*” (italics ours – I. V.).

Let us take this characterization for what it is: the apparent unreliability of the fellow-travelers is obvious, and the proletariat cannot pin its main hopes in literature on them. Voronsky does not mean to say this. But the characterization of the fellow-travelers which he was forced to give, compels only such a conclusion. For, in fact, Voronsky later had to make an even more bitter admission about fellow-travelers. The main shortcoming of the fellow-traveler literature — according to comrade Voronsky — *lay in the fact that the fellow-travelers “often perceived the October revolution as a triumph of the*

muzhik element (italics ours – I. V.), in which the organizing, guiding, and disciplining role of the proletariat remained poorly and superficially illuminated."

In other words, the fellow-travelers understood nothing about our revolution, its character and driving forces remained a mystery to them. Not knowing and not understanding the main thing, they naturally could not give a reflection of the "objective truth." Consequently, the artistic value of this literature can be talked about very conditionally, with great reservations. Such a conclusion only follows from the characterization that Comrade Voronsky is forced to give of his fellow-travelers.

But let us hear more from our "leader" of literature:

"The fellow-travelers, while not badly portraying the Russian revolution in its national perspective, dimly and vaguely understood its international character, its connection with the world workers' movement and struggle, slipping sometimes into a kind of nationalism."

Strange, very strange, comrade Voronsky! We have just heard from you that the literature of the fellow-travelers has not grasped the nature and driving forces of the revolution — how, pray tell, could such literature "depict not badly" this revolution? It could not have been, and it did not happen. Why deceive yourself and others? Also there could not have been "not bad" depictions of the revolution in the "national perspective" because the fellow-travelers, it turns out, did not understand its connection to the international proletarian movement. Those who do not understand that our October Revolution is the highest point of the world workers' movement, those for whom the international character of our revolution is unclear, those who lapse into Changing-Landmarks nationalism, will never be able to depict it even in a "national perspective". Fellow-travelers have not yet been given an understanding of all of this. Will they be able to comprehend the "secret" of the Russia Revolution in the historical future? On the day they discover this "secret" for themselves, they will cease to be fellow-travelers of the revolution and will become its soldiers. But will this day come? Apparently not, for here is what we read in the above-quoted article by comrade Voronsky on art as the cognition of life:

"Where many of them (fellow-travelers) will drop their anchor in the end is unknown, but as long as Soviet power exists, as long as 'the revolution continues,' they will, I think, say: 'I, not a Bolshevik,

find it easier to keep company with Bolsheviks; they have vivacity and joy” (Boris Pilniak).

Thanks be to Pilniak; he was very comforting to the Bolsheviks with his flattering opinion of them. We are very touched and very grateful.

Well, what shall I say to you, Comrade Voronsky? I suppose I also have you to thank for the pleasant news that Boris Pilniak himself will be with us as long as we exist, as long as the “revolution continues!” I must think that the Pilnyaks’ favoring of the Bolsheviks is partly explained by the fact that you, Comrade Voronsky, have done a lot of work on the rapprochement between “the regime and literature.” Oh, history will not forget your services. And indeed, not only history! Quite a few of our contemporaries have already come to appreciate your great work for the benefit of Russian literature and culture. But about that below...

So, we have one great consolation: as long as we exist, the Pilnyaks will be around us and, not understanding anything about the revolution, will depict it “artistically,” “objectively,” and “truthfully. But, Comrade Voronsky, try to understand this kind of thing: the revolution demands that literature not only keep company with it while it is alive. The revolution demands that literature consciously, actively, and honestly work for the revolution to live, for the proletariat to march victoriously forward, for the past to be finally buried. If it is “unknown” where the Pilnyaks will drop their anchor, it means that they are the most unreliable of all the unreliable companions of the revolution, and you, Comrade Voronsky, who know all the Pilnyaks better than we do, are obliged to tell the proletariat about this directly. You must make every effort to find for the proletariat reliable, politically honest, politically literate workers of literature who are inseparable from the revolution. Literature is too important a field to be left in the hands of gallant gentlemen who are ready to keep us company while we are in power, and about whom one does not know where, in what camp, they will be tomorrow.

But Comrade Voronsky worries little about tomorrow. Having given his fellow-travelers a devastating characterization, having uncovered all their unreliability, he nevertheless finds the courage to proclaim calmly:

“With regard to the dispute over the role and specific weight of the so-called fellow-travelers and proletarian writers, there is no need at present to reconsider the question. The fellow-travelers remain the strongest core in literature.”

Voronsky, in his report, speaks all the time in the name of the Party. We

think that the Party is not really as unconcerned about the prospects of our literature as Voronsky is. The Party sees that fellow-travelers are only fellow-travelers, that the revolution needs its own writer – the entire one hundred percent. And the public thought of the Party poses the question: where will the real writer come from? There is only one answer: the real writer will come from where the real politicians, organizers, and warriors of the revolution came from. This writer will be imbued with the “best ideals of mankind,” i.e., the ideals of communism. Literature will be Bolshevized. The literary word will become a powerful instrument in the building of socialism. This will be done, no matter how much the bourgeois-intellectual dullards of today are baring their teeth about our “absurd,” “ridiculous,” “naive” idea about the Bolshevization of literature... The communist proletariat has performed too many miracles to doubt that it will also perform the “miracle” of mastering the artistic word.

All this is inevitable, but it will not happen by itself. Like a revolution in the state, a revolution in literature requires conscious, persistent, hard work. Every step here must be and will be conquered. Literature is one of the last strongholds of the bourgeoisie, and it will hang on to it to the last possible extent. Literary positions are extremely important political positions. Under a proletarian dictatorship, the bourgeoisie can only hold on to this position if it can rely on individual representatives of this dictatorship. Below we shall see that Comrade Voronsky’s literary policy is fully endorsed by the ideologists of the bourgeoisie — and the petty bourgeoisie. Voronsky has in fact become an instrument in strengthening the position of the bourgeoisie, for he has failed to realize that if literature is not won by the proletariat, it will serve the bourgeoisie.

The “On-Guardists” have understood and keenly felt the great political significance of literature and raised the question of its mastery by the proletariat. The “On-Guardists” did not speak of the need to put literary “power” immediately, today, into the hands of proletarian writers. “We know, we are still in adolescence,” wrote Libedinsky in № 4 of *On Guard*. The main thing in the position of the On-Guardists is to emphasize the necessity of preparing for the proletariat’s mastery of literature, to clarify the true essence and role of the fellow-travelers, and to correctly understand the political significance of literature, especially in the era of class war.

While furiously attacking the On-Guardists, comrade Voronsky has made this kind of accusation against them, among other things:

“In its essence, this (On-Guardist) position has been a transference

of the old anti-specialist sentiments in our Party into the sphere of literature, long since extinct in the political sphere, but still making itself felt in science and art.”

Let us assume that by some miracle everything written by Comrade Voronsky on the question of literature has disappeared. But if the lines just quoted were to remain, that is enough, nothing more is needed to make the political line of our “Litvozhd” [literary leader] clear. Before us is a manifestation of some incredible political blindness. The writer is compared to experts, and they forget such a trifle as to say that experts work in the field of technology and administration, while the writer deals with ideology. Yes, this is a kind of blindness! The man is so imbued with “objectivism,” has so lost a sense of political reality, that he has forgotten the difference between technique and ideology, has forgotten that in the field of literature, in the field of ideological “enterprises,” we can have no leases, no concessions, no mixed ventures... However, the experience of a mixed venture has been made by comrade Voronsky, and it is ending in a rather complete political loss for us...

Oh, no, comrade Voronsky, the On-Guardists are well aware of the importance of knowledge, of skill, of cultural inheritance! The On-Guardists want the figures of true revolutionary literature to be incomparably more cultured, literate, and purer than the “luminaries” of our literature, who spend their days and nights in pubs, creating and composing in a half-drunken stupor. We believe that even now the representatives of our very young proletariat should try to influence the most sincere and honest of the fellow travelers.

No, Comrade Voronsky, drop the awkward demagoguery about the On-Guardists cannibalizing the specialists, and let’s get down to the really controversial issues!

The revolution needs its own literature. The development of the revolution leads to the growth of the culture of the working class, to its cultural hegemony. The affirmation of the cultural hegemony of the proletariat means, among other things, the affirmation of proletarian literature and the withering away of the fellow-travelers.

The liquidation of the fellow-traveling tendency is not a matter of days, weeks or months, but a matter of years. We will win on this front if we want to win. Voronsky does not think of our victory. In his opinion, we dare not win here: “the fellow-travelers remain the strongest core in literature.” So it must be. But we say, and the Party will say with us: yes, so it was, so it is, but it must not be so. The proletariat must master, and it will master, imaginative literature.



We have reviewed the program and tactics of comrade Voronsky. What is his organizational policy? Does he have an organizational policy at all? If he has one, whom does he want to unite, whom does he want to split?

The main thing in the organizational literary policy of our "leader" is the breaking up of proletarian literature, the destruction of its ranks. Waging a "shattering" polemic against the On-Guardists (with the sympathy of all anti-revolutionary forces), Voronsky simultaneously makes an attempt to split off from proletarian literature, to split off from its organization the least politically educated and party-bred proletarians, and dissolve them into a common tangle of fellow-travelers and "old men". Voronsky is extremely happy about the "decisive break with the so-called MAPP of a good half of the youngsters who have already proved themselves in literature." He names Artem Vesely, Golodny, Yasny, Svetlov, and Kasterin. We confirm that Voronsky has indeed succeeded in breaking these comrades from MAPP in every possible way. Voronsky considers this fact "very characteristic and by no means accidental." We confirm that the breakaway of precisely the named comrades is indeed not "accidental." The named group consists of persons who are politically underdeveloped, ideologically unstable, semi-anarchic, and embittered by the difficult living conditions. Under very difficult circumstances, we are engaged in a very hard struggle for partisanship in literature. During such a struggle, defections, disillusionment, and the breakaway of the least mature elements are inevitable. Voronsky has drawn a bunch of deserters to his side and rejoices in this fact. Let him rejoice.

But we will ask comrade Voronsky: What did he do with the breakaways? Where does he lead them? What path does he show them? We argue that Voronsky, having broken the group of Artem Vesely away from MAPP, has subjected it to bourgeois influence. He leads this group not forward, but backward. Inspired by Voronsky, Artem Vesely gets to the point where real writers are not even among our fellow-travelers, but... in emigration!... Comrade Voronsky is doing really good work in favor of the revolution, progress, culture, in favor of "the best ideals of mankind."

Everything revolutionary, truly-communist, and truly-party in the literary youth is tightly linked to the On-Guardist literary banner. For more than ever, it is clear at this moment: the struggle between the On-Guardists and Voronsky is a struggle between party-mindedness and political divergences.



Yes, the literary position of comrade Voronsky is essentially anti-party. Whoever doubts this even for a moment, let him consider a very simple question: why does Voronsky receive lavish praise from the enemies of the revolution? Why do all kinds of Changing-Landmarks and half-SR “internal emigrants” laud him to the skies?

“Volya Rossii” [Russia’s Freedom], the organ of Chernov-Kerensky’s party, wrote in № 19 (November 1923):

The first “whale” of Soviet criticism, Voronsky — editor of *Krasnaia nov’* [Red Virgin Soil], *Nashi dni* [Our Days], *Prozhektor* [Searchlight], and “Krug” [Circle] — has been declared a White-Guard and literary Menshevik, a conciliator with the old literature, a traitor, etc. He has been denounced by the other three “whales” of contemporary Russian criticism — Volin, Lelevich, and Rodov. While denying Voronsky the right to be called the founder of modern Russian criticism and the organizer of all the best writers, etc., in the pages of the journal *On Guard*, the aforementioned critics point to Voronsky’s main crime: the policy of a broad coalition with bourgeois literature. *The whole fight has been going on because Voronsky began to treat literature from a literary point of view.* The dispute has now moved to the pages of the daily newspaper, and the question now comes down to what kind of majority of votes Voronsky will win among his readers. In the meantime, the press has repeated several times that Voronsky has not betrayed the revolution, that even if he did not publish any works by untalented authors, or even mediocre ones, in his journals, this is a long way from being a betrayal of October. I am taking note of this discussion from the point of view that, although the struggle between the “right” and the “left” is still in progress, *the attempt to approach literature from an artistic point of view is already taking shape. The path which Voronsky has embarked upon promises to bear some fruit.* For now, the attacks on him by the “left” will only help to refine the views of current literature held both by Voronsky and his supporters. On the other hand, the outbursts of his opponents will lead to the fact that they will hardly be given paper to print their publications because of their careless criticism of the avowed “critic.”

Comrade Voronsky, with your political behavior you have fully deserved this White-Guard kiss. In an era of class warfare, the slightest political

divergence is fraught with enormous consequences. In the age of class warfare, you cannot babble about objective art with impunity.

You have forgotten about the revolution; the White Socialist-Revolutionaries noticed it at once, and they approve of you in every possible way for your "literary", i.e. non-political, i.e. non-revolutionary, attitude to literature.

"The path on which Voronsky has embarked promises to bear certain fruits." From the point of view of the revolution, this is a death sentence for your literary policy, comrade Voronsky. Your path is endorsed by the Socialist-Revolutionaries; this alone is enough for the Party to call you to order decisively, immediately, and unconditionally.

The Socialist-Revolutionaries turned out to be prophets — they correctly predicted "the refinement of the views... held both by Voronsky himself and by his supporters." Our "chief critic" and "chief organizer" of literature in terms of "subtlety", in terms of capturing everything "genuine", "true", "objective", "all-human" in literature, has made tremendous progress. The Socialist-Revolutionary lovers of "true" literature might well be satisfied.

But the SRs turned out to be prophets in another respect as well: the On-Guardists — they declared — "for their careless criticism" of Voronsky "will hardly... be" given paper to print their "publications." The Novaya Moskva [New Moscow] publishing house did not wish to continue printing our magazine. Other publishers also refused to shelter such a "seditious" journal as *On Guard*. As a result, we have a break in our work. This is further, blatant proof that the party-political leadership of our publishing houses is no good at all...

Yes, the "path which Voronsky has embarked on" has already yielded "certain fruits," but in favor of whom? Not only have Voronsky's literary views been "refined," but also those of our publishers. But who loses politically from this and who gains?

Let's move on from the foreign SRs to the domestic SRs. There exists in nature a literary-critical vulgarian, Valerian Pravdukhin. He used to preach "eternal truths"; he defended "truth-ultimate truth" and "truth-justice" in the magazine "Siberian Lights". To Marxist "narrowness" and "intolerance" he contrasted Narodnik "breadth", "tolerance", and "objectivism".

At present this young man is active on the pages of *Krasnaya Niva* [Red Field], the journal edited by comrades Lunacharsky and Steklov. And do you know what he does there? He defends in every possible way comrade Voronsky (and comrade Trotsky) against... the On-Guardists. Pravdukhin's defense is so brilliant, fascinating and instructive that we cannot resist the temptation and must quote a large passage from his article. It begins, of course, with an

exposé of the On-Guardists. Pravdukhin writes:

In the struggle for an imaginary proletarian art, they have grown to hate art – the organic, creative, framing and cognition of the social and cosmic element. They are trying to replace it with the schemas of rectilinear dogmas, exsanguinating art, and intellectual designs, killing the will of the artists. They consider those artists who try to preserve their “Cossack liberties” — the wide and exuberant, humanly-normal and healthy emotional knowledge of life — as heretics. God forbid that such an artist, who has not discarded the free customs of the Zaporizhian Sich [Wild Fields], say an improper word; then they would not leave him alone, they would rip him to shreds, they would tear him to pieces, they would shame him, like Pylniak, for even parts of his clothing — they would go so far as to denounce his black, horn-rimmed glasses, “bought in Great Britain”! (See the article by S. Ingulov, № 4, *On Guard*).

They, like monks, try to create a religious-dogmatic ritual out of art, to dictate themes to the artist (See the article by Libedinsky); they want to dry up art, to deprive it of its flowering petals and lushly burgeoning green branches. [All they want is] one bare trunk, a schema suitable for their intellectual dogmas, rooted in the intelligentsia.

They, like medieval monks, are creating a school of “disputants,” sophist-scolders, and are extracting from the dust of centuries all the sharp and caustic words spoken in a very different setting, under completely different conditions. (See Boris Volin’s article in *On Guard*, № 4).

And they would have destroyed all writers; they had already dangerously injured many young writers, they had already shed blood and raised on their spears not only Gogol’s Kukubenko. And they probably would have succeeded in annihilating the entire literary host, clearing the entire literary field to the point that there would be no life left on it, as on a wasteland, if not for the resounding voice of the seasoned fighter, Taras Bulba, aka L. Trotsky, whose voice had rung out from behind an ambush.

“Cossacks, Cossacks! Don’t give away the best flower of your

army!" Trotsky waved his handkerchief, and a serious, business-like (even in battle) Ostap — A. Voronsky — spoke in defense of literature. He was able to defend and save many fighters from death; he firmly held the main positions of literature, its old, strong "classical" constructions, knowing that without them — on a bare wasteland — it is impossible to create strong foundations; he calmly defended the new, as yet inexperienced warrior-writers, whose artistic strokes evinced fresh, promising and vital strength.

But his defense further enraged the "On-Guardists."

With great zeal and tenacity, they began their attack, and Ostap would have died if Taras himself — Trotsky — had not joined the fight. He, graying and hardened in more dangerous battles, slashed both right and left (see "*Krasnaia Niva*", № 1, from 6 January 1924).

It goes on to say how Comrade Trotsky "with his experienced eye was able to choose truly strong and healthy positions," how he "proved" with indisputable clarity that the literature which wants to "conquer the whole world cannot set itself narrow class tasks which are self-limiting." In short, — as Plekhanov loved to ridicule the Narodniks: "You are broad, you are broad, oh ocean-sea!" Pravdukhin discovered this "oceanic breadth" in the literary positions of comrades Voronsky and Trotsky. Alas, he was not mistaken, just as the foreign Socialist-Revolutionaries were not mistaken in their praise of comrade Voronsky (and even earlier, comrade Trotsky — see *Volya Rossii*, № 18, November 1923) — for his "broad", "objective" statement of the problems of literature.

But back to Pravdukhin. His intolerable vulgarity is interesting in many ways. First, we have before us evidence of the unacceptably careless (to put it very mildly) attitude of two of the most prominent Communist editors to their duties. It is the height of political tactlessness to allow all kinds of literary-political scoundrels to attack "imaginary proletarian art." If comrades Lunacharsky and Steklov have something to say about the On-Guardists, let them say it themselves or entrust it to reliable party people. For it must be understood that we are having an argument about literary policy within the Party. It is inadmissible to involve in this discussion persons who are alien to the Party and the revolution.

As for the substance of Pravdukhin's article, we are quite satisfied with

it: it superbly exposes the entire falsehood of Voronsky's policy. After all, Pravdukhin "popularly" and "beautifully" expounds what is "scientifically" and "solidly" expounded by comrade Voronsky. Any more allies like this for the "serious, businesslike (even in battle) Ostap-Voronsky," and it will be clear to everybody for whose benefit policy is being conducted by our chief defender of the "old, solid, classical installations" of literature.

"More allies like that for our magnificent Ostap," we say. There are plenty of such allies already. For example, Citizen Lezhnev, the editor of the journal *Rossiya*. Lezhnev is smarter than Pravdukhin, he is not so talkative, he knows how to conceal his thoughts, and he does not want to compromise Voronsky with kisses that are too passionate. And yet, listen to what is said by this cautious representative of a current which in reality and in its dreams sees the transformation of dictatorship into democracy:

"The weapon of criticism has been replaced by the criticism of weapons. Instead of the knives of the literary kitchen, instead of kitchen knives, the knives of war are already rattling. All the commanding heights of literature — Gosizdat, *Krasnaya Nov'* and *Krug*, not to mention the others — are being taken "at gunpoint." "Two camps are set," "there cannot and must not be any neutral countries," "we must re-plow," etc. "To "re-plow" the literary department of *Krasnaya Nov'* means to leave the artistic department of the only literary journal to Tarasov-Rodionov et al. V. P. Z. R. (to the great writers of the Russian land).

It would be naive in our position to stand up for *Krasnaya Nov'*, but how can people not understand an elementary thing? If this solid journal — the only one in our country — is taken over by the Tarasovs, it will no longer be *Krasnaya Nov'*, but *On Guard* № 2 — that's all, and the commanding heights will turn at once... well, let's say, into a valley" (*Rossiya* № 1 for 1924, I. Lezhnyov: "Where is the new literature?," pages 180–181).

We willingly believe that even *Krasnaya Nov'* — our "only... solid journal" — does not satisfy Lezhnyov. But that's another matter. What is important is that in the dispute between the On-Guardists and Voronsky, our inner emigrant, our tame Thermidorian Lezhnyov, takes the side of Voronsky. He makes a choice in favor of Voronsky, for him he is the lesser evil. Every politician has a maximum program and a minimum program. Voronsky, for all the Lezhnyovs, internal and external, is the program-minimum. For all the

Lezhnyovs, internal and external, the On-Guardists are an absolute evil.

We can proudly state that all the anti-revolutionary forces both in Russia and in emigration have descended upon us with a fury. The parties and groups praising Voronsky are all over the place in their vilification of the On-Guardists. The counter-revolution has correctly considered from where and from which side its last positions are threatened

The SRs' *Volya Rossii*, which in November 1923 warmly praised Voronsky, wrote this in December in a large article devoted to the journal *On Guard*:

"Communism is passing through various stages. At first it achieved victories materially, on the front of living reality. It bound the subjects of the Bolshevik republic by submission to the dictatorship and by an obligatory uniformity of action. Then, the foreign Cheka, too, rendered invaluable services abroad.

Now it wishes to achieve a complete triumph on the spiritual front and to shackle the whole of Russia, and then the whole world, with the fetters of uniformity in thought and feeling. For this it has required an internal Cheka.

There is science, literature, art — autonomous realms of the human spirit. Couldn't a kind of Spiritual Center be established? And couldn't a commissar be sent to the autonomous areas, fully empowered, with a mandate, and if necessary, with a punitive detachment?"

So wrote the prominent SR publicist Mark Slonim in his article "Literary Cheka". (*Volya Rossii*, № 20, p. 33.) Let us give the enemy his due: he understood the next task of communism. He understood that the material victory of communism must be secured by a spiritual victory. The enemy understood what Voronsky did not. Voronsky's position is perfectly satisfactory to the enemy: "The path that Voronsky has embarked on promises to yield certain fruits." But the trouble is that Voronsky's policy is already under attack, that his error has already been unraveled and exposed, that the expected "fruits", perhaps, will not come. And the White-Guard writer goes into a frenzy. He protests violently against the new horror - against the "dictatorship over literature." He finds no words to stigmatize the behavior of the Sosnovskys, Volins, Leleviches, Rodovs, Demyan Bednys, Vardins. The SR publicist is especially indignant at the statement by the author of the present lines that "without politics there is no modern literature," that we "do not believe, never

will believe, that non-party literature can become the genuine literature of the revolution.” Completely in the spirit of the “popularizer” Voronsky-Pravdukhin, the employee of *Volya Rossii* protests against the orders of “party legislators,” against submission to the “hard line,” etc., etc.

Here is another instructive excerpt from an article by the horrified SR publicist.

“The Russian Communists have become so famous in all fields for kindness, mildness of temper, gentleness of manners, loveliness, and other virtues, that at least in literature they ought to give up these typical traits. And since, as one of the collaborators of *On Guard* asserts, the revolution goes “into the corridors of the old world” and “through the blue baton of the GPU investigator”, it is not difficult to understand which corridors the “revolutionizing of literature” will pass through and in which folders it will be imprinted.

Why does the Gosizdat publish seditious writers? Why do they feed non-proletarian poets? How are bourgeois authors admitted to libraries?” — the members of the proletarian “sacred squadron” fervently ask, pointing their accusing fingers at the criminals. And in the rapture of their new role as official denouncers and literary Chekists, they subject all contemporary literature to rigorous scrutiny” (p. 37).

Are you satisfied, Comrade Voronsky, with your ally in the fight against the On-Guardists? We are very satisfied. We are proud of the title of “literary Chekists.” We can see that we have hit the bull’s-eye, that we have struck the bourgeois-philistine scum in the most sensitive place. “At least in literature” give up your “typical features,” the desperate White-Guardist cries out. Voronsky is ready to yield to him, Voronsky is against “dictatorship in literature,” Voronsky is guilty of indulgence. We ruthlessly tear away all the “non-class,” “objective,” and “eternal” covers from literature, we expose its class essence, and thereby infuriate the enemies of the revolution.

We take pride in the fact that the irreconcilable enemies of the working class call us “official informers.” We are proud of the title of “members of the proletarian sacred detachment.” More than ever we know, we feel under the hail of enemies’ bullets, that we stand at our true proletarian post.

We need no better praise than that which Miliukov’s paper recently delighted us with. “In Russia,” wrote the *Latest News* in № from March 27

in an article by M. Osorgin, "in Russia a real state literature service has been created and formed. The journal *On Guard* represents the state officials. This is a literary GPU, the main merit of which lies in honoring denunciation of both the far and the near, even with the direct threat of being sent to a given destination.

"Denunciation... of one's neighbor." It is you, Comrade Voronsky, that Milukov's newspaper takes under its protection... The Slonims, the Lezhnyovs, the Pravdukhins, the Osorgins — doesn't such an entourage horrify you, Comrade Voronsky?



Such are the facts. They cry out that the situation in literature is politically extremely dangerous. The enemies of the revolution have seized upon Comrade Voronsky's deviations, as they seize upon all deviations in our milieu.

Voronsky's line is that of subordinating literature to the bourgeoisie. One might have overlooked it a few months ago, but now one cannot ignore it. The Party cannot continue to tolerate a situation in which the White parties, entirely in solidarity with the basic tenets of Voronsky's policy, wage an open struggle against the literary "Chekists." Yes, the question is precisely this: will we take the position in literature that the party has taken in the state, or will literature remain in the hands of the bourgeoisie? We are faced with a problem that is fundamentally political. We will never be able to solve it by Voronsky methods, for Voronsky in literature is a defeatist. This must be understood.

In one of his memos, our "Litvozhd" compared the On-Guardists to... "Rabochaya Pravda" [Workers' Truth]. One of two things: either Voronsky has no idea about "Rabochaya Pravda", or, counting on the ignorance of others, he has been trying to mislead someone with a bogeyman. If the latter is true, then Voronsky has been cruelly mistaken. We are well aware of the essence of "Rabochaya Pravda." It represents an attempt to put communism on the path of Menshevism, through a gradual degeneration of the party. There are an enormous number of such lines of degeneration, lines of allying with the bourgeoisie, the middle class, and the old-minded intelligentsia, Comrade Voronsky, and here one of the first places is occupied by literature. And here, too, your policy is entirely in line with the revolution's degeneration, with its arrival at "normal" shores.

It is most characteristic of Voronsky that, for him, the revolution is over, that he proceeds from the stabilization of world social life, that the post-NEP era for him is an era "after wars and revolutions." This is why the war of classes

is not felt in his articles; it is for this reason that he overestimates the “significance of objectivism,” the significance of “eternal” truths. This is why the worst enemies of the revolution solidarize with him...

The situation is very serious. We insist on a decisive revision, a decisive condemnation of Voronsky’s present literary policy. We insist on the rallying of communist literati on a definite party platform.

Voronsky recommends in his memorandum “that the unity of communist writers and their sympathizers (fellow-travelers) be recognized as desirable and timely.” We put the question differently; we do not consider it “desirable”, but urgent, necessary, and obligatory to “unite communist writers,” but without fellow-travelers. We are talking about a party association, about the creation of a faction which, under the leadership of the corresponding party committee and according to its directives, will carry out the party line in literature. Let this line not be refined in all its parts, let the Party not be able to give clear directives at once. Nonetheless, we must begin, and then experience will suggest the most correct line.

In any case, it is an intolerable situation when, in fact, Voronsky, Kasatkin (Union of Writers), Briusov (All-Union Literary Institute), and Lunacharsky can speak for the Party in literature and among writers. The situation is intolerable when the “organizer” of Soviet literature is in a factual bloc with all the anti-Soviet elements — against the workers of young proletarian literature, against the representatives of a truly Party policy in literature.

Voronschina [Voronskyism] must be liquidated decisively and forever. The interests of the Party and the revolution imperatively demand this.