# The Anniversaries of the October Revolution, 1918-1927: Politics and Imagery

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The Anniversary of the October Revolution, 1918-1927:
Politics and Imagery

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This dissertation explores the politics and imagery in the anniversary celebrations of the October Revolution in Moscow and Leningrad from 1918 to 1927. Central to Bolshevik efforts to take political and symbolic control of society, these early celebrations not only provided a vehicle for agitation on behalf of the Soviet regime, but also reflected changing popular and official perceptions of the meanings and goals of October. This study argues that politicians, cultural producers, and the urban public contributed to the design and meaning of the political anniversaries, engendering a negotiation of culture between the new Soviet state and its participants. Like the Revolution they sought to commemorate, the October celebrations unleashed and were shaped by both constructive and destructive forces. A combination of variable party and administrative controls, harsh economic realities, competing cultural strategies, and limitations of the existing mass media also influenced the Bolshevik commemorative projects. Approaching political culture through a study of civic ritual and revolutionary symbolism, this work examines the official mass parades, street art, mass media, popular entertainment, and workers' club campaigns in the holidays during this turbulent era of civil war, reconstruction, and political consolidation. The study concludes by looking at Moscow's Decennial of the October Revolution in 1927 and explores how the Bolsheviks ultimately mobilized the population and harnessed cultural forces to project legitimacy and the

image of national consensus as the regime embarked on the Stalinist path of rapid societal and industrial transformation.

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# 1. Introduction

> *Anniversaries, for some reason, are dear to the Bolshevik heart. Perhaps it is because the regime is still young, so that each repetition of the day it began its existence is a cause for rejoicing, as children rejoice over their birthdays.*
>
> Walter Duranty, 1932[1]

In the first decade of Soviet power the anniversary celebrations of the October Revolution served as powerful tools to forge national consensus. Central to Bolshevik efforts to take political and symbolic control of society, these early commemorations not only provided a vehicle for agitation on behalf of the Soviet regime, but also reflected changing popular and official perceptions of the meaning and goals of the Revolution. For the regime, the commemorations fit into the state's larger political and cultural agenda, which aimed to unify national culture, mobilize the masses, transmit ideology, and mold a Soviet citizenry. With mass parades, street art, theatrical productions, popular entertainment, and workers' club holiday campaigns, these impressive commemorative projects constituted a strong nexus for the state, cultural producers, and for the public. Throughout the twenties, celebratory practices such as the commemorations took shape and were influenced by a diverse range of social groups, such as politicians, cultural ideologues, artists, and workers who contributed to the design, meaning,

[1] Walter Duranty, "Fifteen Years of Soviet Power," in *Sunday Magazine*, November 6, 1932 cited in William Duranty, *Duranty Reports Russia*, ed. Gustavus Tuckerman, Jr. (New York, 1934), 3.

organization, and execution of the revolutionary festivals, engendering a negotiation of culture between the Bolshevik state and the participants.

Like the Revolution they sought to commemorate, the anniversary celebrations unleashed and were shaped by constructive and destructive forces in this decade of upheaval. In their efforts to create a new revolutionary festival, symbolism, and celebratory practices, the Bolshevik commemorators intended to destroy the vestiges of the tsarist order and (tenacious) pre-Revolutionary cultural traditions. In the construction of a new identity, the anniversaries of October provided the new Soviet state with a vehicle to communicate patriotic values and a political agenda, as well as an opportunity to mobilize the public to participate in the framing of the October Revolution. However, competing strategies for structuring the commemoration frequently undermined the creation of an unambiguous historical narrative of the Revolution, effective political propaganda, and a unified cultural model for the festivals. Party and cultural producers had designed and contributed celebratory practices, symbolism, and art forms expressing differing views of culture—utilitarian, popular, conservative, and proletarian. From below, worker passivity, resistance to overt (and often incomprehensible) agitation, and divergent popular cultural tastes thwarted official plans to mobilize the citizenry. Moreover, in this turbulent era of civil war, reconstruction and political consolidation, Bolshevik commemorative projects suffered from a combination of financial restraints, variable party and administrative controls, scarce material and human resources, as well as the limitations of the existing mass media.

Subsequently throughout the decade of revolutionary change, the form and content of the early commemorative celebrations presented those in power with conflicting and shifting interpretations of the Revolution and its aims. By 1927, the Soviet state had succeeded in

achieving greater control of the design, coordination, and execution of the commemorative project, presenting an outwardly unified and disciplined display of national unity and mass mobilization. However, as this study suggests, the centralized system of national coordination for the political anniversaries circumscribed, but did not completely annihilate, alternative meanings and challenges to the official meaning of October.

Once considered anecdotal marginalia of history, official commemorations recently have been embraced as integral elements of emerging national identities and the legitimization of political orders.[2] This study draws on the pathbreaking studies of French revolutionary festivals and the attendant symbols, language, and civic rituals. Formative in this regard is Mona Ozouf's magisterial study of the French Revolutionary fêtes from 1789 to 1799 that investigates how the revolutionary festivals, in lieu of politics, proved to be crucial elements to transfer legitimacy to the new order. Moreover, the French planners viewed the celebrations as instrumental to the utopian project to forge a new political community, recasting time and space to create a new man. French (and later Bolshevik) festival organizers saw the revolutionary fêtes as schools for patriotism, a new civism. Ozouf's extensive treatment provides ample evidence to show that even in their most radical moments, the French revolutionaries deployed antiquity and battled popular and religious festive traditions in their attempts to construct a cult of new beginnings and unify the nation.[3] In this rich vein of French history, other cultural historians of the French Revolution have further investigated the power of revolutionary symbolism to reflect and shape

[2] Recently, the literature on commemorations and the construction of national identity has flourished. For a collection of European and American studies, see *Commemorations: The Politics of National Identity*, ed. John Gillis (Princeton, 1994).

[3] Mona Ozouf, *Festivals of the French Revolution* (Cambridge, 1976).

political perceptions of the emergent political culture and its visual, symbolic, and iconographic expression.[4]

As the present study highlights, Bolshevik festival planners consciously modeled early celebrations on the French revolutionary fêtes. Influential Bolshevik cultural leaders and celebration organizers, such as Anatolii Lunacharskii, People's Commissar of Enlightenment, aimed to create a genuine democratic people's festival, in which all the arts (and artists) would be mobilized to achieve national communion, thereby producing a like-minded new citizenry. Bolshevik anniversary organizers absorbed French models and ideas of festivity from a variety of works, including histories of the French Revolution, Roman Rolland's popular pre-Revolutionary writings on mass theater, and the timely publication of the Russian translation of Julien Tiersot's study of the French fêtes, *Prazdnestva i pesni frantsuskoi revoliutsii* in 1918. However, Bolshevik planners, party leaders, and the cultural critics often found the deployment of the symbolism and the historical analogue of the French Revolution in the early anniversaries of the October Revolution consistently problematic. In a Marxian analysis, the French Revolution represented a bourgeois revolution, and many cultural critics attacked the French revolutionary symbolism, rituals, and theater on these ideological terms. More controversially, the Provisional Government had openly appropriated the political culture of the French Revolution to legitimize its power born in the February Revolution. Yet, despite these problems, Bolshevik festival organizers, cultural producers and the party continuously drew on the

[4] See, for example, Lynn Hunt, *Politics, Culture and Class in the French Revolution* (Los Angeles, 1984), Maurice Agulhon, *Marianne into Battle* (Cambridge, 1981), Pierre Nora, *Realms of Memory: The Construction of the French Past*, vol. 3: *Symbols*, ed. Lawrence D. Kritzman, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (New York, 1998), and James Leith, *Media and Revolution* (Toronto, 1968).

historical precedent of the French Revolution in the anniversary celebrations to emphasize and transmit the socialist and revolutionary lineage.[5]

Operating from a different historic optic, Western scholars of modern revolutionary political cultures and regimes have further enriched historical inquiry into symbolic and celebratory practices as important means to mobilize mass constituencies. Exposed to the practices in their earlier underground activities, Bolshevik anniversary organizers adopted the cultural system and traditions of European socialist revolutionary movements in the late nineteenth century. As George Mosse has noted, the socialist movement in Germany depended upon workers' songs, flags, mass meetings, and processions to rally and maintain support, fighting spirit, and comraderie. The central idiom of socialist festival traditions, the mass workers' demonstration to the urban center presented spectators not only with a powerful visual representation of strength, but also served to reinforce working-class solidarity. Moreover, the European socialist movement skillfully deployed the agitational theater as a crucial political weapon to educate, inspire, and bind workers, often recasting Christian symbolism and allegories to spread a radical socialist message. The rituals and idioms of this political culture undeniably influenced Bolshevik festival theorists and organizers.[6]

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[5] James Von Geldern, *Bolshevik Festivals*, 1918-1920 (Berkeley, 1993), 22-23. For one example of Lunacharskii's comparison of Bolshevik and French festivals, see A. Lunacharskii, "O narodnykh prazdnestvakh," *Vestnik teatra*, no. 62 (1920). On the Provisional Government's use of French revolutionary culture, see Orlando Figes, *A People's Tragedy* (London, 1996), 357, Orlando Figes and Boris Kolotnitskii, *Interpreting the Russian Revolution: The Language and Symbols of 1917* (New Haven, CT, 1999), 30 -31, and Dmitrii Shlapentokh, "Images of the French Revolution in the February and October Revolutions," *Russian History*, vol. 16, no.1 (1989).

[6] George Mosse, *Nationalization of the Masses: Political Symbolism and Mass Movement in Germany from the Napoleonic Wars through the Third Reich* (Ithaca, 1991), esp. ch.7; Joan Wallach Scott, "Popular Theater and

Studies of the prominence, orchestration, and strategic role of mass spectacles in European one-party dictatorships have also contributed to this scholarly treatment of the anniversaries of the October Revolution. Following Mosse's pioneering cultural-political analysis of Nazi Germany's rituals, myths, monument, and spectacles, the Italian historian Emilio Gentile has examined Italian fascism as a new political religion in the pursuit of mass mobilization. Incorporating liturgies, catechisms, cults, and founding myths, the fascist rituals served to sacralize politics and bind Italians to the fascist regime. Although Gentile's cultural-political study of the appeal and strategies of these rituals offers invaluable insights and analogies in the mobilization of the masses and construction of national identity, the wholesale adoption of the category of "politics as a religion" presents certain problems in the early Soviet period, including the party's and festival organizers' less than systematic concern with an institutionalization of a leader cult in the mass celebrations.[7] The present study follows in this path by approaching political culture through a study of civic ritual and revolutionary symbolism.

Despite the cultural, political, and social significance of the official Soviet rituals, the October commemorations have only recently come under scholarly scrutiny. Although a considerable amount of Soviet literature on revolutionary festivals began to emerge in the 1970s, such works, primarily documentary in focus, provided rich descriptive accounts of the

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Socialism in Late Nineteenth–Century France," in *Political Symbolism in Modern Europe*, eds. Seymour Drescher, David Sabean and Allan Sharlin (New Brunswick, 1982), 197-215.

[7] Mosse, *Nationalization of the Masses*; Emilio Gentile, *The Sacralization of Politics in Fascist Italy*, trans. Keith Botsford (Cambridge, MA, 1996). For a slightly different cultural-political approach to the Italian fascist rituals, see Simonetta Falasca-Zamponi, *Fascist Spectacle: The Aesthetics of Power in Mussolini's Italy* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1997).

celebrations, but often ignored the larger historical, social and cultural contexts that influenced the celebratory forms. Studies by authors such as O. Nemiro, A. Raikhenstein, I. Rostovtseva narrowly focused on select artistic groups in the early festivals.[8] Yet, as the present treatment highlights, the Bolshevik authorities intended to mobilize a wide variety of artists and members of the cultural intelligentsia in these vast campaigns that ultimately resulted in commemorative aesthetics and cultural forms that articulated, shaped, or undermined official aims in the aestheticization of revolutionary politics. During this decade of revolutionary change, the commemorative projects served as loci of cultural debate and exchange that offered competing cultural visions of October. For the leftist artists and cultural producers who equated revolutionary art with revolutionary politics, the decade provided ample opportunities and challenges for them to implant themselves at the core of the festivities. In part, the present work seeks to reposition and assess the role of artists and cultural producers in the commemorative project in a decade in which the arts were subjected to increasing regimentation.

Western scholarship on Soviet official rituals has also produced blinkered views of the political holidays. Earlier studies by anthropologists and sociologists offered only top-down, cultural-hegemonic political analyses of the events. Operating under the assumption that political power is confined only to those who establish and operate institutions, these scholars have dismissed the complex interplay of popular perceptions and official ideology within the

[8] O. Nemiro, *V gorod prishel prazdnik* (Leningrad, 1973); *Agitatsionno-massovoe iskusstvo pervykh let Oktiabria: materialy i issledovanie* (Moscow, 1971); *Agitatsionno-massovoe iskusstvo. Oformlenie prazdnestv*. 2 vols., eds. V.P. Tolstoi and I Bibikova (Moscow, 1984); *Spektakli i gody*, eds. A Anastasev and E. Peregridova (Moscow, 1969); D. Genkin, *Massovye prazdnik* (Moscow, 1975).

celebrations.[9] Shifting attention to the cultural intelligentsia, scholars such as James von Geldern and Richard Stites have highlighted the theatricality and utopianism in the first anniversaries.[10] By design, these producer-centered analyses leave little room for the analysis of audience or popular participation. Ironically, the influence, albeit increasingly circumscribed, of the masses in Soviet mass festivals has remained unexplored. Such emphases on a unitary meaning of the rituals risk distracting attention from a deeper dynamic of centripetal and centrifugal forces at work in the commemorative process of the first decade. Offering a useful corrective, Katerina Clark has posited that the party and the cultural intelligentsia were never completely separate groups; nor was either of them homogenous; they formed part of an ecosystem that acted and was acted upon, responding to new conditions and demands from above and below.[11] Mindful of the limits on autonomous expression and the control and at times the coercive mechanisms present in the political anniversaries, the present study also challenges previous unidirectional views of the early commemoration projects, which viewed mass celebrations as superimposed by a separate, homogenized, and super-ordinate authority. In

[9] Christopher Binns, "The Changing Face of Power: Revolution and Accommodation in the Development of the Soviet Ceremonial System: Part I," *Man* 14 (1979); Christel Lane, *The Rites of Rulers* (Cambridge, UK, 1981). For a recent top-down analysis of Soviet official rituals, see Alexander Zakharov, "Mass Celebrations in a Totalitarian System," in *Tekstura. Russian Essays on Visual Culture*, eds. Alla Efimova and Lev Manovich (Chicago, 1993), 201-218.

[10] James Von Geldern, *Festivals of the Revolution, 1917-1920: Art and Theater in the Formation of Soviet Culture* Ph.D. thesis. Brown U. 1987 and *Bolshevik Festivals*, 1918-1920 (Berkeley, 1993) Despite the promise of the title, his later article, "Putting the Masses in Mass Culture, Bolshevik Festivals, 1918-1920," in *Journal of Popular Culture*, vol. 31, Pt. 4, 123-144, did little to include popular reception. Richard Stites, *Revolutionary Dreams: Utopian Vision and Experimental Life in the Russian Revolution* (New York, 1989).

[11] Katerina Clark, *Petersburg: Crucible of the Cultural Revolution* (Cambridge, 1995), *x*.

contrast, my close reading of the first decade of commemorative projects highlights the heterogeneity and evolution of celebratory models, aesthetics, and cultural agendas of party and cultural planners.

Responding to new sets of questions rooted in cultural history, the most recent scholarly additions on Soviet festivity have offered more nuanced readings, integrating popular perceptions and shifting official aspirations. Helmut Altrichter's study of the Russian peasants of Tver during the twenties shows the important role of persistent traditional beliefs and convictions of rural participants that subverted official plans of secularization in Soviet holidays.[12] Fixing his scholarly gaze on the Stalinist era, Malte Rolf's recent study of the rural Central Black Earth Region provides further evidence of peasant resistance to the demands of discipline and the imposition of an official Soviet holiday calendar during the first Five-Year Plan. With the investment and attempted creation of large and orchestrated celebrations, local organizers initiated examples and demands of the center to not only modernize the periphery, but also colonize it with a new temporal structure. Rolf argues that following the completion of the first Five-Year Plan, Stalinist celebrations and the attendant aesthetics, choreographies, reconfigurations of public space, and emotional coding were embedded in large frame of cultural practices (an elaboration of the Boris Groy's analysis of the Stalinist *Gesamtswerk*, or synthesis of arts) that all worked to reinforce the authority of the center and the cult of Stalin.[13] Based on

[12] Helmut Altrichter, "Insoluble Conflicts: Village Life between Revolution and Collectivization," *Russia in the Era of NEP*: *Explorations in Soviet Society and Culture* eds. Sheila Fitzpatrick, Alexander Rabinowitch, Richard Stites (Bloomington and Indianapolis, 1991), 192-209.

[13] Malte Rolf, *Sovetskii massovyi prazdnik v Voronezhe i tsentral'no chernozemnoi oblasti Rossiia, 1927-1932* (Voronezh, 2000); "Constructing Soviet Time: Bolshevik Festivals and Their Rivals during the First Five-Year Plan. A Study of the Central Black Earth Region," *Kritika*, vol.1 (2000), 447-473. "Working Towrds the Centre: Leader

extensive archival materials, Karen Petrone also has employed a discourse analysis of Stalinist celebrations in the thirties to compellingly demonstrate that even in the circumscribed political culture of Stalinism, party cadres and participants manipulated the inconsistencies and unstable meanings in the Stalinist celebration discourse, creating opportunities to construct hybrid identities and alter (or subvert) official aims for the holidays.[14]

In her analysis of the Stalinist carnivals of the mid-thirties, Rosalinde Sartorti also challenges the rigid view that Stalinist mass celebrations simply afforded the state another form of social control. Sartorti suggests that the "Socialist Realist" carnivals, characterized by grandeur and a high degree of party control, provided both a reward for the new Stalinist elite and an outlet for festivity for the masses. As the present study of the first decade of Soviet power shows, Bolshevik commemorators of the October Revolution also proved receptive to calls for popular entertainment forms in the official holidays. The inclusion or allowance of the traditional forms of entertainment such as *estrada* (the revue), however, ultimately undermined official political aims, prompting increased control mechanisms, a reinvention of the popular traditions (*sovietized* for agitational purposes), and marginalization of the genres. [15]

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Cults and Spatial Politics in Pre-War Stalinism," in *The Leader Cult in Communist Dictatorships: Stalin and the Eastern Bloc*, ed. Balazs Apor, et. al. (Basingstoke, Hampshire, 2004),141-161; and "Expression of Enthusiasm and Emotional Coding in Dictatorship—The Stalinist Soviet Union," *eScholarship Repository*, University of California (2004) http://repositories.cdlib.org/intrnational/cees/wp/3.

[14] Karen Petrone, *Life Has Become More Joyous, Comrades* (Bloomington, IN, 2000), 5, 20 and *passim*.

[15] Rosalinde Sartorti, "Stalinism and Carnival: Organization and Aesthetics of Political Holidays," in *Culture of the Stalin Period*, ed. Hans Gunther (London, 1990), 41-77. See also Richard Stites' views of Stalinist culture as a *mass* culture in *Russian Popular Culture. Entertainment and Society Since 1900* (Cambridge, 1992), ch.3.

Applying these new historiographical concerns to the years 1918 to 1927, the present work attempts to fill a crucial gap in the historiography of Soviet celebrations, serving in part as an exploration of the origins and evolution of many of the constructive and destructive forces inherent in the later Stalinist festivals. The study seeks to uncover the complex and contradictory nature of the politics and imagery of the anniversaries of October Revolution. My argument embraces the previously unexplored multivocality of the decade's commemorative projects that registers support, challenges, and subversions of the official meanings of commemorative event. Moreover, the undeniable process of greater bureaucratization and regimentation of the celebrations in this period did not directly translate into greater party control of the commemorative project. The anniversary celebrations in the first decade of power included a negotiation of culture among and within the party, cultural circles, and the public.

Viewing the commemorations as political and symbolic texts, I call upon a wide range of sources to illuminate the cultural interaction—planned, spontaneous or subverted—in the celebratory form. Like the French Revolutionary planners, the anniversary organizers attempted to mobilize all the available mass media and art in a vast program to attach citizens to the government through the holiday that blended procession, drama, art, propaganda, and entertainment into a total celebratory experience. Such an undertaking required mining recently opened Soviet and Russian archives and museums to access a rich assortment of written and visual sources. The former includes central and municipal party protocols, organizing commission records, factory club meetings, press coverage, and cultural critiques that illuminate the intentions, obstacles, debates, and execution of the commemorations. The latter category speaks to the celebratory frames deployed to express the meaning of the October Revolution,

including street decorations, parades, commemorative posters, public monuments, film, and theater intended to anchor the revolutionary myths, historical narratives, and iconography.

A comprehensive national study of the processes of negotiation in the October commemorations would prove a mammoth task. Instead, a compelling combination of political and symbolic reasons has prompted my selection of the two largest cities of Moscow, and, to a lesser extent, Petro/Leningrad as the foci of this study. In a decade of fiscal crises, the state's continuous investment in the budgets, designs, and media coverage of the large-scale holidays in these capital cities vividly illustrates the national and international significance attached to the official urban holidays in the campaign to forge and project national consensus. Clearly, the party viewed these two urban islands (in a peasant sea) as the centers where the commanding heights had to mobilize the most significant constituency, in terms of both numbers and politicization. In practical terms, the party and festival organizers in Moscow and Petro/Leningrad, unlike in the provinces, benefited from more established party organs, control agencies, a sizeable network of clubs, and a growing cohort of party personnel and activists to organize and conduct the holiday campaigns. Moreover, Moscow and Petro/Leningrad offered, without question, the largest pool of cultural resources, including not just artists, performers, playwrights and directors, but also cinemas, stages, and public historical sites to frame the celebrations. Taken together, the weight of these political, economic, cultural and institutional factors serves to better gauge efforts of central control of the political anniversaries. [16]

For the state, the two capital cities also possessed symbolic power that had to be harnessed or recast in order to legitimate the new Soviet power. Moscow, the official Soviet

[16] For studies on Soviet holidays and festivity in the provinces, see Altrichter, "Insoluble Conflicts," and Rolf, *Sovetskii massovyi prazdnik v Voronezhe i tsentral'no chernozemnoi oblasti Rossiia, 1927-1932*.

capital (since March 1918) and the former imperial capital and cradle of the October Revolution provided two unique symbolic theaters to stage the anniversaries. While Petro/Leningrad contained the revolutionary markers of the Bolshevik revolution central to the commemoration's construction of a new historical narrative, the city also retained problematic public symbols and cultural residues of the imperial era. Lacking the rich revolutionary symbolism of the northern capital, Moscow's organizers, throughout this first decade, confronted the pressing need to identify the city not only as the national seat of power, but also as the sacred center of the Revolution.[17] As Vladimir Papernyi and other scholars of Soviet history have noted, the onset of the Stalinist Revolution signaled a reorientation of Soviet geographical and cultural hierarchy, which firmly placed Moscow at the apex.[18] This study's exclusive focus on the Moscow's Decennial in 1927 reflects that spatial shift.

Whereas the present analysis of Soviet political culture begins its historical treatment with the first anniversary of the Bolshevik Revolution in 1918, the Bolshevik festival organizers, cultural producers, and participants drew on and responded to a political and festive culture that both predated and transcended the October Revolution in 1917. Richard Wortman's masterful treatment of the imperial celebrations describes the elaborate pageantry, grand firework displays, peoples' carnivals with fairground entertainment, and highly orchestrated monarchical

[17] On the early political symbolism of the two capitals, see Richard Wortman, "Moscow and Petersburg: The Problem of Political Center in Tsarist Russia, 1881-1914," in *Rites of Power: Symbolism, Ritual, and Politics Since the Middle Ages*, ed. Sean Wilentz (Philadelphia, 1985), 244-276. For a discussion of the official celebratory aims in Petrograd and Moscow in 1918, see Stites, *Revolutionary Dreams*, 90-97.

[18] Vladimir Papernyi, *Kul'tura dva* (New York, 2002). See also James von Geldern, "The Center and Periphery: Cultural and Social Geography in Mass Culture of the 1930s," in *New Directions in Soviet History*, ed. Stephen White (Cambridge, 1992).

presentations of power, which later served as models and counter-models for the Bolshevik commemorators in their efforts to legitimize power and mobilize the masses.[19] After the fall of the Romanov dynasty, the brief expressions of the Provisional Government's political culture, recently explored by the historians Orlando Figes and Boris Kolotnitskii, also influenced the early Bolshevik anniversaries. Sharing a similar impulse to transform Mars Field into a sacred site as the altar to the cult of revolution, the Bolsheviks quickly recaptured this symbolic battlefield, to transform it into a central space for public commemoration, the burial site for fallen comrades, and civilian pilgrimages during the Civil War. [20]

Moreover, the deeply entrenched ritualism and symbolism of Russian Orthodoxy both deliberately shaped and frustrated designs for the new revolutionary festivals. In the process of constructing a new identity in the October commemoration, the Bolshevik organizers and contributing artists consciously (and unconsciously) deployed and strategically recast religious idioms (most notably the icon) to communicate with a politically illiterate urban population. Yet, by 1927, the anniversary designers, in their efforts to create a new revolutionary ritual, were still never completely able to cast off comparisons to Orthodox rites and practices. For example, advocates of proletarian culture assailed the planned official mass demonstration as a

[19] Richard Wortman, *Scenarios of Power: Myth and Ceremony in Russian Monarchy, vol.2. From Alexander II to the Abdication of Nicholas II* (Princeton, 2000), and "Moscow and Petersburg," *passim*; On the history of the Russian folk festival (*narodnoe gulianie)* and popular fairground entertainment, see A. F. Nekrylova, *Russkie narodnye gorodskie prazdniki, uveseleniia i zrelishcha* (Leningrad, 1988).

[20] Figes and Kolotnitskii, *Interpreting the Russian Revolution*, 46-48, 75. For a discussion on the Fascist appropriation of the cult of the war dead in the construction of national identity, see also Gentile, *Sacralization of Politics*, ch. 2.

continuation of the traditional "walking of the cross" (*khrestnye khody*), religious processions in which streams of villagers held icons aloft.

The chronological span of this study is 1918 to 1927, the decade of revolutionary change in politics and culture that put the Soviet Union on the threshold of the Stalinist Revolution and its drives of rapid industrialization, rational planning, societal transformation, and modernization. Emphasizing the *process* of the October commemorations, each of the substantive chapters traces the designs, execution, and results of the anniversaries. Entitled "The Triumph of Communism?" Chapter Two examines the rich inaugural commemoration of October as a screen on which a variety of historical narratives were projected, reflecting the nascent regime's inability to construct and control the commemorative message of national unity and a new communist beginning. While party officials and the contributing cultural intelligentsia agreed on the urgency of the symbolic destruction of the old (tsarist and bourgeois) order to legitimize the new regime, no consensus about the celebratory forms and imagery of the meaning of the October Revolution existed among festival organizers or in the urban populations. The Bolsheviks enlisted the broad cultural community and competing cultural strategies in a vast program to propagandize the Revolution to their urban constituencies. Compromised by fiscal constraints, weak administrative controls, limited media capabilities, and a culturally diffused creative intelligentsia, the inaugural celebration reflected a polyvalent symbolic universe of pre-Revolutionary, French Revolutionary, and nascent Bolshevik political culture that imperiled the official meaning of October.

Chapter Three explores the period from 1919 to 1921, in which the civil war and its immediate consequences prompted militarized anniversaries, characterized by highly choreographed mass stagings, conscription of the cultural intelligentsia, coercive mobilization

efforts, the prominence of agitational media, and aesthetic austerity. The state aimed to engender support for the war effort and the new order by constructing the message of a nation-in-arms to inspire and bind the population and also to promote a revolutionary patriotic crusade against the internal and external enemy. This chapter examines how the symbolism and rituals of the October anniversaries provided a focus for mobilization in the struggle to win the war, to consolidate national power, and to project the concept of a worldwide October. Wartime constraints, harsh economic realities, a deeply divided cultural community, and worker passivity conspired to undermine the state's ability to effectively construct and deliver a viable meaning of October.

The commemorative projects from 1922 to 1926 in the period of the New Economic Policy collectively form the subject of Chapter Four. In part a concession to a growing weariness of agitational propaganda, celebratory forms in these years incorporated popular entertainment, such as *estrada* (revue) and carnival elements, into a range of anniversary festivities, from amateur workers' club theater to the official commemorative parade showcasing national achievements. Despite the bureaucratization and party attempts to control the commemorations in these years, the market-driven economy, polarized creative intelligentsia, unintelligible cultural productions, and the re-emergence of pre-Revolutionary cultural traditions ultimately challenged party control of the revolutionary message and the larger Bolshevik project of social transformation. Consequently, the state found itself unable to frame commemorative meaning or to mobilize the population's participation in the event.

The Epilogue views the impressive Decennial of the October Revolution from Moscow and explores how the Bolsheviks ultimately mobilized the population and harnessed cultural forces to project legitimacy and the image of national consensus as the regime embarked on the

path of socialist construction. In 1927, after a decade of missteps and defeat, the party had succeeded in the forging a system of national coordination for the October jubilees. At this time, the commemoration exhibited a greater institutionalization and regimentation of commemorative practices, cultural producers, and aesthetics. Despite the circumscription, the Decennial celebration still afforded opportunities to reveal ambiguous and contested meanings of the revolution. In official plans and cultural debates, simmering tensions between official representations and individual participation and between celebratory and agitational aims remained. Competing cultural visions and public displays of opposition also challenged the emergent official and statist commemoration, which appeared to abandon the message of social justice for the proletariat that had culminated in October.

This work offers an innovative perspective on a turbulent and transitional period in Soviet history, a decade in which a variety of citizens and authorities contributed to and shaped political symbolism and celebratory practices of the commemorations. The official celebrations, orchestrated on behalf of the regime, intended to promote consensus on the meaning of the revolution, but were not permitted to enjoy a monopoly on interpreting it. In the process of constructing the new socialist order, those in power had to contend with persistent cultural and social residues of the pre-Revolutionary era, which co-existed with the utopian projects of cultural revolutionaries. An examination of meaning through cultural manifestations, such as commemorations of the October Revolution, serves to explicate the mentality of a population during a period of intense revolutionary change. Such an approach allows us to go beyond official rhetoric to appreciate more fully the process in which the early Soviet regime, constructed its identity, negotiated that meaning, and built political authority through the anniversaries of the October Revolution.

## 2. Communism Triumphant?

> *Russia does not want its citizens to forget the Revolution. She uses every means to keep it alive.*
>
> Dorothy Thompson, 1927[21]

The richness and extravagance of the first anniversary celebrations of the October Revolution starkly contrasted with the harsh realities of the first year of Soviet power. In 1918, the nascent Bolshevik government confronted seemingly insurmountable hardships. The new order faced an escalating civil war and battled foreign interventionist forces. The demanding military campaign exacerbated existing food and fuel crises, and in March 1918 advancing white armies in the north forced the transfer of power from Petrograd to Moscow for safety. Internally, peasant rebellions, disgruntled and hungry urban populations, and armed counterrevolutionary uprisings threatened the new order. The final four months of the year witnessed the eruption of a period of red terror in the capital cities. The Cheka (All-Russian Extraordinary Commission for Combating Counterrevolution and Sabotage) responded to successful and attempted assassinations of Bolshevik leaders, most notably the attempt on Lenin's life in August, with mass arrests, incarcerations, and executions of disenfranchised political groups.[22] Moreover,

[21] Dorothy Thompson, *The New Russia* (New York, 1929), 29. The influential American journalist and foreign correspondent reported firsthand on Russian life in the 1920s.

[22] On the "red terror" and attendant casualty figures, see George Leggett, *The Cheka: Lenin's Political Police* (Oxford, 1981), ch. 6 and 463-4. See also, Sergei P. Mel'gunov, *The Red Terror in Russia* (London, 1926), 4, 40-44; Several leading politicians became targets of violence including V. Volodarskii, Commissar for Press, Agitation and Propaganda of the Northern Commune (killed on June 1918), M. S. Uritskii, second in command to Grigorii

factionalism, disorganization, inexperience, and a chronic dearth of resources in party and government administration produced dictatorial and erratic governance, on both the municipal and the national levels.[23] It was in this climate of mounting counterrevolution, deprivation, and instability that the inaugural anniversary of October Revolution was to be celebrated and celebrated extravagantly. The fact that the new regime was so fragile only seemed to intensify the efforts to commemorate and shape the history of the foundational event in order to transfer legitimacy to Bolshevik state.

At its core, the inaugural commemorative project aimed to symbolically dismantle the tsarist order and pre-Revolutionary bourgeois values, and in its wake construct a new identity, political culture, and celebratory practices to frame the October Revolution. For the Marxist-Leninist leadership and supporters, the October Revolution represented the inevitable and logical triumph of communism and the party intended to showcase this historical narrative in the commemoration to legitimize the power of the state. To disseminate the political message and mobilize the urban constituencies of Moscow and Petrograd, festival organizers established a vast program of indoctrination that utilized the existing cultural community and mass media and also strategically blended old and new cultural idioms, practices, and symbols—religious, tsarist, municipal, socialist, and proletarian. However, weak bureaucratic and party controls, scarce

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Zinoviev, Party Secretary in Petrograd (assassinated on August 30, 1918) and most notably, Lenin (wounded by a left Socialist Revolutionary on August 30, 1918). In response, Sovnarkom's decree of September 5 officially authorized the Cheka to kill and imprison enemies of the revolution, which included political suspects, and also prominent members of the bourgeoisie, former policemen, priests, landowners, and unlucky innocents.

[23] Timothy Colton's *Moscow: Governing the Socialist Metropolis* (Cambridge, MA, 1995) paints a vivid and compelling picture of the chaos of Moscow politics and municipal administration in the early years of Bolshevik rule, see especially ch. 2.

resources, a hostile and politically charged cultural landscape, limited media capabilities, ineffective propaganda, and competing and often contradictory cultural approaches on the structuring and fundamental aim of the first festival of the Revolution undermined the success of the commemorative project.

Despite the ambiguous significance of the October Revolution by 1918, the new state felt the urgent need to use the anniversary to overcome political illiteracy and to illustrate the meaning of the revolution in form and content. The party newspaper, *Pravda*, announced that during the upcoming anniversary, "the proletariat would clearly experience the meaning of the great days of the revolution."[24] Symbolically and rhetorically, the anniversary sought to dethrone the tsarist order in an attempt to break irrevocably with the past. Constructing a Soviet national identity and political culture, however, proved far more elusive. Facing a predominantly illiterate audience and extremely limited print capabilities, festival organizers chose to employ a wide variety of forms, visual and verbal, to communicate the message of "communism triumphant" and to mobilize the population.[25] As a result, the celebration's designs and symbols blended political meanings and styles, deploying biblical allegories, folk heroes, French Revolutionary ciphers, progressive democratic rhetoric, and an incipient Bolshevik iconography. Like the Revolution it sought to commemorate, the new order turned out to be a work in progress.

At this precarious juncture, the first year anniversary aimed to shore up public support. Party, government, and cultural leaders envisioned the celebration as a means to engage the urban population in the design and staging of the commemoration. Newspaper announcements

[24] *Pravda*, 20 September 1918.

[25] GARF, f. a-2306, op. 2, d.179, l. 48.

repeatedly encouraged the workers, Red Army soldiers and children—the embodiment of the Soviet social order—to participate actively in all aspects of the planned festivities. Festival organizers recruited a broad spectrum of the creative intelligentsia in the service of the new revolutionary state. Internal committee protocols portrayed the role of the party and cultural organizers as strictly administrative, entailing help with technical organization and financing.[26] Yet, instead of unleashing spontaneous grass roots enthusiasm, the organizers resorted to a combination of precautionary and coercive measures that would become an integral element of subsequent holidays.

The proposed budgets and the dizzying array of resources devoted to the anniversary festivities attested to its importance as a means to legitimize power. The Council of People's Commissars (Sovnarkom) allotted over 25 million rubles for city soviets in the Russian republic to celebrate the holiday. More than a quarter of the amount was earmarked for the new capital of Moscow; Petrograd, the birthplace of the revolution, received comparable funding.[27] In addition to control of the sizeable budgets, the festival committees wielded the power to requisition scarce

[26] Ibid.

[27] *Dekrety sovetskoi vlasti*, v. 2 (Moscow, 1957), 229. Some funding figures can be gleaned from GARF a-2306, op. 24, d. 56, l. 31; *Pravda*, 15 October 15 1918, *Izv.*, 5 November 1918; *Petro. pravda*, 25 October 1918 stated that 25,000 rubles were to be designated for decorations for each of the city's seven districts. Memoirs often set expenditures higher. For example, 30 million rubles were reportedly spent in Petrograd for the celebrations. See John Pollock, *The Bolshevik Adventure* (London, 1919), 128. Considerably smaller budgets were allotted for anniversary festivities at the front, Perm, Tambov, Vologda, and Tver. For comparisons, see *Pravda*, 1 November 1918.

materials (such as lumber, fabric, and food), as well as to mobilize human resources, conscripting artists, actors, and municipal workers for the elaborate celebrations.[28]

The first anniversary has attracted considerable scholarly attention. Recent studies have focused on the revolutionary utopianism, heady artistic debates, and theatricality of the inaugural celebration. These analyses, however, have presented a skewed picture of the cultural politics, privileging the role of artists and theatrical directors in shaping the celebration's content.[29] Such a connoisseurial approach has ignored the totality of the celebration in its planning, participants, and forms, as well as highbrow and vernacular cultural practices. The festival designers and artists of Petrograd and Moscow deployed, in addition to a central parade, a variety of artistic media to commemorate the revolution, including graphic art, sculpture, outdoor murals, professional drama, amateur theater, music, and film. Rather than dismiss the undeniable role of the artists, this chapter seeks to reposition that role within a more comprehensive approach that resurrects the multivocality, politics, and imagery of the commemoration of the Revolution in 1918.

Moreover, existing studies have diminished the role of the new government and official centralizing impulses in the anniversary. Despite the decentralized nature of administrative and cultural affairs in 1918, archival documents suggest that the party played a palpable role in

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[28] *Petro. pravda*; 1 October 1918. On conscription of theater workers, service personnel, and materials see for examples, GARF, f. a-2306, op. 24, d. 56, ll. 7,10,11,12. Judging by photographs of city decorations, the outlay of materials was indeed considerable. When asked about the exorbitant costs of designs in 1966, Natan Al'tman, architect of a large futuristic, artistic and architectural ensemble on Petrograd's Uritskii Square (formerly Palace Square) explained; "They didn't skimp back then." Quoted in Solomon Volkov, *St. Petersburg: A Cultural History*, trans. Antonina W. Bouis (New York, 1995), 213.

[29] James Von Geldern, *Bolshevik Festivals*, 1917-1920 (Berkeley, Ca., 1993), 8, and *passim*.

determining the message and design of the commemoration, imposing constraints, mobilizing participants, and even resorting to coercive measures. Concomitantly, the inaugural celebration served to funnel a variety of political and social motivations, at times conflicting and contradictory. The first anniversary celebrations in Moscow and Petrograd reflected a complex cultural negotiation among cultural, political, and social actors. A close analysis of the textual and visual record of the anniversary reveals competing political cultures and sympathies, as well as popular dissent in the capital cities in 1918, all of which compromised Bolshevik efforts to commemorate the revolution in a unique and durable form.

### 2.1. Revolutionary Designs

The first state initiatives to "mark the great revolution that has transformed Russia" appeared in April 1918. A government decree signed by Lenin and the People's Commissar of Enlightenment (Narkompros), Anatolii Lunacharskii, called for the destruction of flagrant manifestations of the old order—tsarist monuments, emblems, and street names—and their replacement with new revolutionary cultural markers that "reflect the ideas and mood of revolutionary working Russia." It was not until the following month, however, that Lenin's vaunted "Plan of Monumental Propaganda" began to take shape, transforming this vague resolution into a project for constructing a revolutionary ancestry.[30] Inspired by Tommaso

[30] The literature on Lenin's monumental propaganda is substantial. See John Bowlt, "Russian Sculpture and Lenin's Plan of Monumental Propaganda," in *Art and Architecture in the Service of Politics,* eds. Henry A. Millon, Linda Nochlin (Cambridge, Mass.,1978), 182-193; G. I. Ilina, *Kul'turnoe stroitel'stvo v Petrograde, Oktiabr' 1917-1920* (Leningrad, 1982); Christina Lodder, "Lenin's Plan of Monumental Propaganda," in *Sbornik, Papers of the Sixth and Seventh International Conferences of the Study Group on the Russian Revolution, no.6-7.* (Leeds, 1981), 67-82;

Campanella's utopian work *The City of the Sun*, Lenin's plan broadly envisioned a series of public monuments, busts or statues, of revolutionaries in the struggle for socialism. After conferring with Lunacharskii, Lenin considered the timing opportune to implement this project, concentrating on statuary and plaques of a temporary nature. In the final "Plan of Monumental Propaganda" (May 27, 1918), Lenin ordered the erection of fifty monuments in the capital cities that would provide the population with a "civic education in philosophy, history, and the arts intended to dazzle and reach the masses."[31]

Clearly, the overriding aim of Lenin's ambitious project was political education, privileging the agitational purpose of the holiday over a celebratory function. Lenin envisioned the monuments as a temporary revolutionary primer, and he urged that the public statuary be unveiled during the commemoration of the revolution. Lunacharskii compiled the original list of revolutionary subjects, culled from the arts, sciences, philosophy, and revolutionary history; Lenin offered only modest revisions.[32] To provide fixed political translations, void of ambiguity,

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A. Mikhailov, "O monumental'noi zhivopisi," *Iskusstvo i byt* (Moscow, 1968); *idem*, "Programma monumental'noi propagandy," *Iskusstvo*, 4 (1968), 31-34; N. A. Nilsson, ed. *Art, Society, Revolution: Russia, 1917-1921* (Stockholm, 1979); V. V. Shleev, *Revoliutsiia i izobrazitel'noe iskusstvo* (Moscow: Izobrazitel'noe iskusstvo, 1987), 267-294. The initial decree, "Dekret Soveta Narodnykh Komissarov o pamiatnikakh Respubliki" is reprinted in V. P. Tolstoi, and I. M. Bibikova, eds. *Agitatsionno-massovoe iskusstvo. Oformlenie prazdnestv. Materialy i dokumenty, 1917-1932* (Moscow, 1984), 43.

[31] *Pravda*, 16 December 1975, cited in I. I. Vasil'ev-Viazmin, *Iskusstvo liudnykh ploshchadei* (Moscow, 1977), 9-10. For a more recent discussion of Campanella's influence, see Stites, *Revolutionary Dreams*, 88, 90, and Anatolii A. Strigalev, "Ekho Kampanelly v Rossii," in *Dialog istorii i iskusstva*, N.M. Mironova, I.V. Popova, A.A. Strigalev, eds. (St. Petersburg, 1999),131-182.

[32] The Sovnarkom resolution dated July 30, 1918, signed by Lenin, requested that the proposed monument to Vladimir Solov'ev be removed. V. Solov'ev (1853-1900), a Russian philosopher, poet, teacher, and writer

Lenin emphasized the need for statue inscriptions and speeches to explain each monument; the juxtaposition of face and name was insufficient, given the low political literacy of the population. Lenin insisted that carefully selected party members and speakers deliver topical speeches, so that each opening would serve as an "act of propaganda." With each successive holiday, orators would "repeat the significance of the figure, always, of course, distinctly connecting him with our revolution and our tasks." With this emphasis on civics, Lenin postulated that "subconsciously, we [Bolsheviks] would achieve our first goal—to touch the soul of an illiterate person."[33]

The "Plan of Monumental Propaganda" had hortatory as well as didactic aims: it sought to enlist artists and sculptors in the service of the new state. During its early conceptualization, Lenin reportedly asked Lunacharskii whether a pool of talented artists was not only available, but willing to execute the project. Initially, Lenin suggested enlisting artists only in Moscow, but then broadened the purview to include Petrograd. In order to attract submissions, Lunacharskii proclaimed that artistic participation in the plan was a socialist duty; for less enthusiastic Bolshevik supporters, the plan offered much-needed work.[34] Lenin entrusted the competition

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emphasized the value of religion as part of modern society. The resolution also proposed the inclusion of two revolutionaries active in 1905, Nikolai Bauman and Aleksandr Ukhtomskii. See the reprinted decree in A. Iofit, ed. *Russkii Sovetskii teatr, 1917-1921* (Leningrad, 1968), 25.

[33] For the complete list of monuments and commissioned sculptors consult GARF, f. 2306, op. 2, d. 179, l. 15.

[34] Memoirs from 1918 bear witness to the pauperization of the artistic community. For example, the sculptor Sergei Konenkov noted the impoverishment of artists who eventually became involved in Lenin's plan. Sergei T. Konenkov, *Moi vek* (Moscow, 1971), 220. The situation was more acute for the more traditional artists, who had fallen out of favor with modern, revolutionary tastes. Vladimir Mayakovskii's brother, a realist Peredvizhniki painter, wrote to a friend, "we sit in our holes, hungry and cold, and dream how to make a penny." Quoted in Brandon Taylor, *Art and Literature Under the Bolsheviks*, v. 1 (Concord, MA, 1991), 42.

details and final selection of revolutionary heroes to Lunacharskii and Vladimir Friche, a member of the Moscow Soviet's arts section.[35]

Despite Lenin's personal interest in the project, there was little activity on it until late July. Shortly after an aborted mutiny by the Socialist Revolutionary party, Lenin personally intervened to resuscitate the "Plan of Monumental Propaganda." His calls for action prompted Sovnarkom to quickly approve a finalized list and allocate considerable funds towards completion of the project. Increasingly frustrated over delays, Lenin announced that the monuments' unveilings should coincide with the first anniversary celebration. Judging by the proposed budgets, competition regulations, and Lenin's continual personal involvement in the proper implementation of the plan, the ceremony of pantheonizing revolutionary heroes formed a crucial element of the upcoming holiday. Even monumental projects initially planned to open at later dates, such as N. Kolli's "Red Wedge Cleaving the White Guards," were rescheduled to coincide with the 1918 celebration.[36]

While all Bolsheviks hoped that the holiday would hasten the political acculturation of the masses, many festival planners saw the celebrations as a more profound manifestation of a new political religion. Lunacharskii and other members of the cultural intelligentsia gleaned these collectivist views from both the available literature on the fêtes of the French Revolution and the theories on people's theater by French author Romain Rolland and the symbolist

[35] Vladimir Friche (1870-1928) was a Soviet literary and art historian and Bolshevik Party member since 1917.

[36] *Izobrazitelnoe isskustvo*, no.1, 1919, states that each of the 62 sculptors were to receive 7000 rubles (payable in 2 installments), 71. This lucrative commission would be approximately 54 times the price of a standard ration of goods in late October 1918 or 24 times the price only a few months later in January 1919. William J. Chase, *Workers, Society, and the Soviet State* (Urbana and Chicago, 1987), Appendix 1, 307. On Lenin's agenda and intervention in the plan, see *V. Lenin i Lunacharskii. Perepiska, doklady, dokumenty* (Moscow, 1971), 61, 69.

Viacheslav Ivanov, which had been in circulation since the turn of the century. The goal of a people's festival was the theatricalization of life, the breaking down of boundaries through mass participation to instill a stronger sense of communion and collectivity than was possible in other art forms. In Bakhtinian terms, the revolutionary planners realized the festival's potential to create a new form of social configuration, outside of existing hierarchies. The liminal space of the carnival, where boundaries are temporarily erased, allows freer expression and the possibility of social and cultural enrichment.[37] The anomie of modern life would be shattered, and all social groups, from artists to uneducated citizens, would unite in the name of socialism. Lunacharskii informed potential artists that the holiday's primary goal was the necessity "to connect art with life" in order to unify the masses. In September 1918, he told the artistic community: "We are today in piles and heaps, lacking collectivity. Only socialism will tear down the walls that isolate a man."[38]

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[37] Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his World,* trans. H. Iswolsky (Cambridge, MA, 1968). Bakhtin also saw carnival of early modern culture as a potential means to subvert the official hierarchy or status quo. The Bolshevik commemorators also shared this concern throughout the decade.

[38] See Anatolii Lunacharskii, "O narodnykh prazdnestvakh," *Vestnik teatra*, 1920, no.62, 4-5. The connection of art with life had a dual purpose -- to bring all art to the masses, but also to attract the masses into all aspects of art. Lunacharskii, who provided the overall form for the first anniversary, maintained that the Bolshevik festivals should emulate the French Revolutionary fêtes. A former proponent of the heretical strain of Bolshevism known as "god-building" (*bogostroitel'stvo*), Lunacharskii's views in 1918 still promoted a proletarian religion from festivals and myths. He, Friche, members of the avant-garde intelligentsia, and others involved with the planning of the anniversary envisioned the gathering together of the community to produce a religious-like communion around a grand moral and political idea -- in this case, the Russian socialist revolution. For him, the central communal event could take many forms -- a parade, a district meeting, or symbolic performances, such as fireworks displays, a satirical or official theatrical presentations, or a collective burning of effigies. This idea centered on the creation of

This utopian view found favor with the organizing committees that in September formally adopted Lunacharskii's theoretical model for the anniversary. The Moscow committee agreed that the "anniversary should be a repetition of the experiences of the October Revolution," adding that the celebration should differ from the "official kind" held earlier on May Day, and instead "should have a profound inner meaning in the masses, reliving the upsurge of the revolution."[39] In an oral presentation to the Petrograd committee, Lunacharskii elaborated on the plan, demarcating three stages to the success of the celebration: an initial part to convey the meaning of the revolution, followed by entertainment, and finally a people's "apotheotic" carnival.[40]

After the adoption of the general plan, city soviets established October Celebration organizing committees to hammer out specific arrangements. These committees worked in tandem with local party apparatuses, Narkompros, and the creative intelligentsia at large. Numerous subcommittees immediately sprouted, their designated focus ranging from pyrotechnics to rations. Although in principle the party issued dictates overseeing the more political aspects of the holiday, such as slogans, while the organizing committees tended to

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collective enthusiasm so contagious that it would engender or reinforce citizen loyalty to the nation. On Lunacharskii's collectivist ideology, see Robert C. Williams, *Artists in Revolution* (Bloomington and Indianapolis, 1977), 45-46, and Richard Stites, *Revolutionary Dreams* (New York, 1989), ch.5. Also see Robert Russell, "People's Theatre and the October Revolution," *Irish Slavonic Studies*, 1986, no.7, 65-83. Appropriating art and theater as a cultural weapon had pre-Revolutionary roots in both the people's theater movement in Russia of the late 19th century and the Provisional Government's cultural policy. See Gary Thurston, *The Popular Theatre Movement in Russia, 1862-1919* (Evanston,IL, 1998); Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his World*, trans. H. Iswolsky (Cambridge, MA, 1968).

[39] *Izvestiia VTsIK*, no. 208, 25 September 1918.

[40] *Pravda* , 15 September 15 1918.

concentrate on artistic concerns, in reality the spheres of influence often blurred. The organizing committees suffered from the same deficiencies as the municipal government at large—inexperienced personnel, domineering personalities, bureaucratic reshuffling, and capricious policy-making.[41]

The composition of the Moscow organizing committee mutated after its original inception in August. By October, the steering committee included: Olga Kameneva (head of the Theater Section (TEO) of Narkompros), Chair of the theater and musical subcommittee; Vadim Podbel'skii (Moscow Party Committee member), chair of the communications subcommittee; and E. Afonin (Executive board member of the Moscow Soviet) from the budget subcommittee. Additional subcommittees included cultural-enlightenment, parade routes and pyrotechnics, propaganda, rations, and transportation subcommittees.[42]

In contrast, the Petrograd committee seemed to act autonomously, approving virtually all plans for the holiday and possessing full authority to draft personnel and to requisition any necessary materials. In mid-September, the Petrograd Soviet issued a decree naming the actress (and common-law wife of Maksim Gor'kii) Maria Andreeva currently Commissar of Theaters

[41] I. Rostovtseva,"Uchastie khudozhnikov v organizatsii provedenii prazdnikov i maia i 7 noiabr'ia v Petrograde v 1918 godu," *Agitatsionno-massovoe iskusstvo pervykh let oktiabr'ia. Materialy i issledovaniia.* (Moscow, 1971), 15.

[42] The actual composition of the committee appeared to change on paper several times. By October 2, resolutions of Moscow Soviet the Holiday Organizing Committee included Vladimir Zagorskii (of the Moscow Party Committee), Vladimir Friche, and Preobrazhenskii among others. Later the October Celebrations Organizing Committee expanded to include more party and government officials directing new subcommittees. In addition to E. Afonin, Petr Smidovich (Chairman of Moscow Soviet until August 1918) and Mandel'shtam, the committee's divisions now included subcommittees for Information, Agitation, Rations, and Transport. In addition, the committee also acted as the central information bureau for Moscow and for the surrounding provinces. GAMO, f. 66, op. 3, d. 814, l. 36. See *Izv.*, 6 November 1918, for a published list of members.

and Spectacles for the Northern Commune as the Chair of the Central Organizing Committee. Because the Petrograd Committee lacked distinct subcommittees, Andreeva had to work actively with representatives from the soviet, proletarian artists, Narkompros, and trade unions.[43] On more politically and economically sensitive issues, such as budgets, rations, and controversial artistic designs, final approval seemed to rest with Grigorii Zinoviev, Petrograd Party secretary, and the Soviet of the Northern Commune. Interestingly, the larger factories with political clout (located a considerable distance away), such as the Putilov and Baltic Shipbuilding Works, approved their own sketches, banners, and posters for the anniversary.[44]

The Moscow and Petrograd festival organizers created ambitious plans that attempted to fuse agitational and celebratory aims. Both celebration designs maintained the centrality of political education: "It will be our holiday, a holiday of communists, and the two concepts of holiday and merriment should not be confused." Petrograd felt more acutely the political need for solidarity and continued revolutionary struggle, and articulated that need in the committee's mission. During a meeting of the Petrograd Soviet in late September, Andreeva asserted: "The October Revolution was the greatest event in the world—a victory and a holiday for the proletariat ... But the battle is not over yet. There is still foreign blood pouring in, and it is only fitting that the holiday should have a serious and disciplined character."[45]

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[43] Petrograd's organizing committee (at least on paper) included another dozen delegates from the Petrograd Soviet, Proletkul't, Narkompros, provincial soviets, and trade unions, including Naum Antselovich who held positions in the Petrograd Politburo, the Petrograd Soviet and the trade union organizations. Rostovtseva, 14.

[44] Ibid., 14-15, 27. The Petrograd Soviet gave the committee full authority and Sovnarkhoz was obligated to give full material credit for the sum assigned to the holiday plans.

[45] GARF, f. a-2306, op. 2, d. 179, l. 48.

The Bolshevik party, of course, hoped that the anniversary would convey with piercing clarity the proper political message, that of socialist victory and solidarity. Officials viewed the workers' demonstration, a show of national strength and unity, as central to the holiday's success, and therefore they strictly regulated participation, procession routes, and militia supervision. Parade plans featured divisions of Red Army soldiers, trade union representatives, peasant delegations, and schoolchildren—the key targets of political indoctrination. To thwart counter-demonstrations, organizing committees required the official registration of all participating organizations. Moreover, organizers demanded that marchers exhibit "exemplary proletarian discipline," and instructed police officers to provide detailed accounts of the processions. In a clear sign of the tense political climate, the Petrograd Soviet specifically warned the Baltic Fleet to refrain from firing any shots and to remain on alert after fulfilling its marching duty, fearing possible counterrevolutionary activity or even public protests.[46]

The holiday plan also mandated a plethora of outdoor and indoor political speeches, union and party meetings, and commemorative newspaper articles not only to provide the proper context and interpretation of the revolution, but also to curb sedition. All organizations and factories were ordered to close at noon on November 6 for brief lectures by speakers commissioned exclusively from Bolshevik Party cells and factory committees, identifiable by official pins and party-endorsed papers. Organizers requested speakers to keep records of the talks and the attendance figures. Designated targets for political speeches were not confined to factory assemblies and clubs, but included unveilings of monuments and public works, theatrical stagings, and outdoor performances. Furthermore, the plan envisioned bombarding residents with proclamations on revolutionary achievements, civil war victories, and future socialist tasks

[46] *Pravda*, 5 November 1918; *Severnaia kommuna*, 5 November 1918, as quoted in Rostovtseva, 44.

printed on leaflets either dropped from planes or plastered on the walls of theaters, workers quarters, factories, and marketplaces.[47]

For the organizers, inculcating a new political culture meant involving the population in a wide variety of activities. Newspapers articles encouraged Muscovites and Petrograders to take part in the holiday planning; festival planners called on municipal workers to construct decorations, comment on designs, assist with factory parade banners, and join revolutionary choral ensembles. These methods, it was hoped, would not only induce mass participation, but also instill a sense of patriotism.[48]

The political acculturation of children, the future citizens of the revolutionary state, acquired a central place in the festival plan. Organizers saw the festivities as a form of early ideological formation, declaring that "the holiday of the proletariat is a holiday for youth."[49] Many shared the optimistic views of Iakov Sverdlov, Secretary of the Party Central Committee, who once commented to Lenin: "When we die the children will go forward, ever forward. If they are singing our songs at ten, they'll grow up into true revolutionaries and finish what we have begun."[50] All schools were directed to participate in choirs, to take field trips to monuments, to write patriotic essays, to learn revolutionary songs, and to create banners. To imprint the revolution indelibly in young minds, organizers hatched plans for free special meetings, civic

[47] GARF, f. a-2306, op. 2, d. 179, l. 49.

[48] *Pravda*, 15 September 1918. In her book, Lynn Hunt describes similar political activities as "microtechniques" that helped to "produce a republican citizenry and a legitimate government." Hunt, *Politics, Culture, and Class in the French Revolution*, 72.

[49] GARF, f. a-2306, op. 2, d. 179, l. 49 ob.

[50] P. Malkov, *Reminiscences of a Kremlin Commandant*. trans. V. Dutt (Moscow, 1967), 209.

games, historical plays, and commemorative souvenirs, such as pins**,** leaders' portraits and pamphlets.[51]

With the urban populations of Petrograd and Moscow suffering from a food crisis, the Bolsheviks and city soviets realized that the success of the anniversary depended on securing more food for Soviet citizens. Distributing holiday food had been a time-honored tsarist custom, but for the Bolsheviks, this aspect of the holiday held added significance. The sustenance of the cities and the proletariat was the responsibility of the new workers' state; it was what the October Revolution had promised. Moscow organizers made this aspect a top priority in plans for the festivities, voting to provide the new capital with more than one million meals at an exorbitant cost, even if it meant scaling back crowd-pleasing fireworks displays. The newspapers in Petrograd publicized the generosity of Moscow festival planners, predicting such abundance "on the proletarian holiday, that workers won't have to cook!"[52] In a significant contrast to Moscow, the Petrograd organizing committee in the northern capital where the population experienced greater food shortages and epidemics, opted for a more modest solution; it pledged increased rations, basic meals for children, and coffee and tea served free in communal cafeterias.[53]

Organizers ambitiously intended to orchestrate an elaborate wedding of all the arts to express a spectacle of "communism triumphant." Given the country's low literacy and the

[51] GARF, f. a-2306, op. 2, d. 259, ll. 3-4; op.2, d. 225, ll. 62-63.

[52] On the food crises and rationing in the capital cities during the civil war, see Mauricio Borrero, *Hungry Moscow: Scarcity and Urban Society in the Russian Civil War, 1917-1921* (New York, 2003), ch. 5, and Mary McAuley, "Bread without the Bourgeoisie," and Daniel Brower,"The City in Danger," both in D. Koenker, W. Rosenberg, R. Grigor Suny, eds. *Party, State and Society in the Russian Civil War* (Bloomington, IL, 1989), 58-80, 158-179; *Pravda*, 1 November 1918; *Petro. pravda*, 29 October 1918.

[53] *Petro. pravda*, 10 October 1918.

problems in producing print propaganda, planners adopted a synthesis of artistic media and cultural expression to appeal to a wide audience. Drawing on the socialist movement's cultural practices, the festivals were designed to meld political propaganda and entertainment with the inclusion of workers' songs in a variety of events. The anniversary plan included hymns, anthems, and songs, all of which considered the necessary elements of national warfare and a means to construct a new identity. The steering committees summoned orchestras and musicians to participate and to quickly memorize the revolutionary repertoire, which included "The Internationale," "The Workers' Marseillaise," and "Dubinushka" (a workers' protest song).[54] Organizers also promoted the lesser-known French Revolutionary import "Carmognole." This song, with its juxtaposition of gory lyrics and a catchy tune, appeared immediately after the imprisonment of the French royal family in 1792 and subsequently was sung in public venues in France, from theaters to the guillotine arena. To rectify the fact that many people probably would be unfamiliar with the chosen songs, especially the "Carmognole," considered "still new and little used," the committee proposed publishing the lyrics for public distribution. Poetry readings, preferably with choral accompaniments, were also in high demand.[55]

The October commemorations created the political imperative to represent the revolution either symbolically or through reenactments of the historical events. Theater as an instrument of

[54] On the different political associations of workers' songs during the Revolution, see Figes and Kolotnitskii, 61-68.

[55] *Kras. gaz.*, 28 October 1918; The song "Dubinushka" (The Cudgel) originated in the 1860s, and was popularized in the mid 1880s. *A Radical Worker in Tsarist Russia: The Autobiography of Semen Ivanovich Kanatchikov*, Reginald Zelnik, ed. and trans (Stanford, Ca., 1986), 419; *Vestnik teatra*, 1919, no. 1; Lowe, Heinz-Dietrich, "Political Symbols and the Rituals of the Russian Radical Right, 1900-1914," *Slavic and East European Review*, 76:3 (July 1998), 441-466; *Pravda*, 31 October 1918; the lyrics of the "Carmognole" can be found in Leith, James A., *Media and Revolution* (Toronto, 1968), 57.

civic education, therefore, was accorded tremendous importance, prompting feverish debates about questions of repertoire, cost, and venues. The lack of suitable new plays and the proximity of the holiday forced the theater subcommittees to settle for a repertoire of updated Russian and European classics or plays on the French Revolution as the means of setting the proper historical context for contemporary events.[56]

Despite the hardships of the then fledgling Soviet film industry, agitational and documentary films were also commissioned to provide footage on the revolution, Bolshevik leaders, Soviet achievements, and the ongoing Civil War. Planners hoped to set up projectors in strategic public squares to combat political illiteracy. In Moscow, the cinematic committee of Narkompros proposed a five-part film to the organizing bureau, tentatively entitled *The Anniversary of the Revolution*, which telescoped history into events before 1917, the battle against Kerensky, new Soviet Russia, workers' and peasants' achievements in the first year, and the fight against enemies of the Revolution. The film's ideological message not only stressed the triumph of the socialist revolution, but reminded viewers that there were still battles to be won to safeguard the victory.[57]

In the process of creating the celebration of the October Revolution, each city embroidered unique touches on the festival plans, forging new civic myths, and showcasing unique municipal revolutionary markers. Moscow planners strategically deployed carnival elements to help legitimize the new Soviet order. Most significantly, committee protocols called on artists to design bonfires and effigies, providing symbolic destruction of the old order in each

[56] See "Biulleten' No.1 Repertuarnoi Sektsii (Narkompros)" reprinted in *Russkii Sovetskii teatr*, 45-46 for a detailed listing of acceptable plays.

[57] *Pravda*, 2 November 1918, 8 October 1918. The committee also planned to show a short newsreel on events in the Ukraine.

district's main square. Red Square's Lobnoe mesto (Execution Place), chosen for the central spectacle, lent its macabre history as the tsarist execution site to heighten the effect. Planners issued broad directives on the actual composition of the trophies to set ablaze. Directives for the pyres sanctioned not only embodiments of the imperial order, with "its essential layers — capitalism, priests, secret police, arms, etc.," but also international emblems of imperialism, such as likenesses of U. S. President Woodrow Wilson and French Premier Georges Clemenceau. In a politically savvy twist, genuine artifacts – specifically, tsarist flags—were subjected to confiscation from private residences, establishments, and archives; they were to be burned in public bonfires. While the iconoclastic demonstrations symbolically destroyed the old regime, less precise were details concerning the representation of the new order to fill the symbolic vacuum. In the absence of popularly recognized state emblems, the organizing committees granted individual district organizers the right to determine their own symbolism for the new order, which could be representations of the Third International (which only officially came into existence in 1919) or a "similar" revolutionary emblem.[58]

In Petrograd, the revolutionary festival intersected with revolutionary history itself. In contrast to Moscow, Petrograd's festival planners felt it their solemn duty as custodians of the memory of the Revolution to enshrine Bolshevik mythology in the overall design. Committee Chairman Andreeva proudly pronounced that in Petrograd "…the holiday should adopt a national character. The revolution took place here, the Petrograd proletariat had the leading role, and October's victims are buried here."[59] The planned procession followed the symbolic, though abbreviated, itinerary of the revolution; marchers were to begin at the Bolshevik headquarters at

[58] *Pravda*, 30 October 1918, 1 November 1918.

[59] GARF, f. a-2306, op. 24, d. 56, ll. 7-13.

Smolny, file past the Winter Palace, and congregate at Mars Field for a funeral ceremony to honor those killed during the revolution. [60]

## 2.2. Aporias and Accommodation

A successful staging of such a grand design for the anniversary required a combination of firm administrative control, unified party directives, a cooperative creative intelligentsia, and unlimited resources—none of which existed in 1918. Faced with a hostile and politically charged cultural landscape, organizers had to encourage the inclusion of artists representing the gamut of political leanings. The planners closely worked with the fine arts section of Narkompros as well as with the more controversial and dictatorial Proletkul't. An autonomous cultural organization, Prolekul't sought the creation of a genuine proletarian culture as the chief aim of the socialist revolution, and the anniversary served as a unique opportunity to assert its claims. Yet the available pool of artists in theater, painting, and sculpture included not only the Proletkul't iconoclasts, but also a wide variety of artistic schools, some traditional, others modernist in their approach. Organizers had to contend with a variety of artistic styles and an inchoate cultural bureaucracy, over which the new order had tenuous control. As Sheila Fitzpatrick has effectively demonstrated, during this period culture was financed on demand.[61]

The grim economic and social realities of 1918 quickly threatened the extraordinarily ambitious holiday plan. Committee protocols contained frantic appeals for materials, such as canvas, to construct decorations. Aleksander Tairov, the futurist director of Moscow's Kamernyi

[60] Rostovtseva, 14-15.

[61] Sheila Fitzpatrick, *The Commissariat of Enlightenment* (Cambridge, 1970), ch. 6 and *passim*.

Theater, even petitioned festival organizers for a suit and fur coat as necessary for his stage contribution to the holiday. Constant shortages of artists jeopardized plans, resulting in a steady stream of official requests (and demands) for volunteers from all art and theater studios. All collected materials had to be guarded carefully to prevent theft in those lean years.[62]

The decentralized nature of cultural administration led to problems of unregulated expenditures, the proliferation of unviable project designs, and inevitable delays. Artists frequently worked at a frenetic pace to complete commissioned projects in a week's time. With so many projects completed on the eve of the celebration, organizers had to act quickly to remove inappropriate designs. Projected celebration costs skyrocketed. The Moscow pyrotechnic committee was forced to scale back the elaborate firework designs by a third. Moreover, the pervasive practice of issuing individual contracts ultimately proved costly and time-consuming. The Moscow artist, actor, and director Sergei Gerasimov described the chaos:

> There was terrible feverish activity. Clustered together were friends and other artists looking at and rejecting sketches; proposing fantastic, impossible projects. I remember comrade Afonin, in charge of the decorations of the city, always travelling with contracts to the decoration sites. He had a pack of forms for commissions that he would simply fill out on the way.[63]

Configuring a theater repertoire to frame the political message proved particularly challenging. Confronted by few suitable scenarios, Kameneva accepted plays "not fully in the spirit of the times," such as the staging of the German socialist play *Beyond Our Strength*

[62] *Petro. pravda*, 1 November 1918.

[63] GARF, f. a-2306, op.2, d. 179, ll.. 30-34; Sergei Gerasimov,“Pervoe prazdnestvo oktiabr’skoi revoliutsii,” *Iskusstvo*, 1957, no.7, 44.

(*Svyshe nashikh sil*). After a private screening of the production, she demanded revisions and eventually proposed that with a few introductory words prior to the performance, the play could still be shown for the holiday. Despite the Bolshevik intelligentsia's praise for Mayakovskii's script for *Mystery Bouffe*, however, she was unable to entice actors to take part in the new production, many of whom were actors of the imperial stages and refused to participate in the new revolutionary theater. Moreover, some traditional actors considered the playwright's use of biblical imagery to depict the revolution blasphemous, and categorically refused to participate. More dangerous in the contemporary political climate was the Korsh Theater's planned staging of the *Death of Danton*. After a rehearsal in mid-October, a correspondent writing for *Izvestiia* assailed the production for its "misunderstanding of the revolutionary temperament." Specifically, the paper criticized the portrayal of Parisian crowds as bloodthirsty and irrational, the idealization of the eponymous hero, and the vilification of the Jacobin cause. Furthermore, the paper accused the play of falsely attributing the start of the French Revolution to a rude mob. In light of the Bolshevik policy of terror already underway and the fragility of the new order, the writer wondered whether the play might have the impact of a "live hand grenade" if performed in its current form. As a historical analogue, the French Revolution proved problematic on the stage if it was not reshaped with the present historical agenda in mind.[64]

Cultural administrators, often harboring more traditional tastes, waged constant battle with leftist and Futurist artists who were determined to dislodge rival artistic projects for the celebration. Avant-garde artists in Proletkul't had successfully infiltrated organizing committees and attempted to hijack the celebration in the name of revolutionary politics. For example, in *Petrogradskaia pravda*, the Proletkul't artist Aleksandr Mgebrov and Andreeva battled over

[64] *Russkii Sovetskii teatr*, 378; *Izv*., 15 October 1918.

plans to build an obelisk for the festivities. For the self-proclaimed revolutionary artists, the offensive structure was blatantly tsarist, whereas Andreeva viewed it as an eternal symbol of glory and, thus, a sacred monument to revolution. After heated debate, the leftist artists were defeated. Yet their ideas and zeal often found favor with high-ranking party members, who approved Futurist artistic designs, several for prominent city squares. Either the Petrograd Soviet or Zinoviev himself accepted Natan Altman's futuristic designs for the Winter Palace. In fact, Petrograd's Proletkul't artists successfully lobbied for the decoration projects on Bolshevik's holiest shrines, such as Smolny, and usually at exorbitant expense.[65]

The combination of artistic clashes, poorly executed designs, delays, and prohibitive costs jeopardized arguably the most important element of the celebration, Lenin's "Plan of Monumental Propaganda." The crippling problems prompted Lenin to intervene to jumpstart the project, veto designs, and even sanction extreme measures against uncooperative artists in an attempt to reign in the chaos. The situation in Moscow was especially acute. Lunacharskii's memoirs contend that Lenin personally scuttled as many as sixteen individual monument designs. One rejected proposal, by Sergei Merkurov, showed a curious artistic ensemble with Marx supporting four elephants, possibly representing a fusion of Marxism and Hindu creation mythology. Culturally conservative, Lenin rejected a proletarian culture created *ex nihilio*, and instead favoring a socialist culture built on the pre-existing strengths of the previous culture. Lenin's wariness of Futurist tendencies caused other designs to be scrapped, as well.[66]

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[65] *Petro. pravda* 8 October 1918.

[66] A. Lunacharskii, "Lenin i iskusstvo," *Khudozhnik i zritel'*, 1924, no.2/3 402. In August 1918, Moscow Soviet proposed 60 sculptors and architects to take part in the competition, and a jury reviewed the designs in September. The project designs of sculptors Babichev, A.M. Giurdzhan, Mezentsev and the painter Nivinskii were rejected. *V.I.Lenin i izobrazitel'noe iskusstvo*, (Moscow, 1977), 221.

For Lenin the situation was akin to political sabotage and warranted serious action. In a letter to Lunacharskii in mid-September, Lenin wrote:

> …[M]onths have gone by and nothing's been done yet. There is still not a single bust, and the design for Radishchev's bust is a joke. There are no busts of Marx and nothing has been done regarding the propaganda slogans for the streets. This is a warning against this criminal and negligent attitude; I demand a list of those responsible to bring to trial.[67]

Although no artists were arrested, Lenin doggedly monitored the plan's progress. At his command, artists were relieved of their regular work obligations to ensure the plan's completion in time for the holiday. By October, Lenin had authorized the Moscow Soviet to wrest control of the plan away from Narkompros. Even though Lenin entrusted Nikolai Vinogradov, an architect and close personal friend, to spearhead completion of the project, the party leader persistently prodded Narkompros' artists and reproached the Moscow Soviet for delays.[68]

When the problems of spiraling costs, extravagant projects, and artistic skirmishes spilled into November, the party feared that the artistic side of the celebration threatened to overshadow the political message. Less than a week before the anniversary, *Pravda* officially condemned the emphasis on the external form of the holiday and pressed for more attention to the "inner" or agitational aspect of the commemoration.[69]

There were hints that the official proceedings might not enjoy a monopoly on the political interpretation and could even provide a focus for latent political protest. In Moscow, the

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[67] Ibid., 274.

[68] GARF, f. a-2306, op. 2, d. 179, l. 12; *Pravda*, 7 October 1918; Lodder, 69; *Lenin i izobrazitel'noe iskusstvo*, 220.

[69] *Pravda*, 3 November 1918.

Populist-Communist Party proffered its own alternative interpretation of the revolution. In a series of articles, this party provided a different narrative for recent revolutionary history, highlighting the crucial role of populism in the overthrow of the monarchy and in October 1917. The party not only intended to print commemorative articles and posters, but also planned to march under the populist banner in the parade.[70]

Despite attempts to impose political uniformity, organizers faced challenges in controlling the corporate order of the demonstration; several groups hostile to Bolshevism sought to use the official parade to show their solidarity and promote Menshevik support. *Izvestiia* repeatedly published invitations for readers trying to and attract the city's sizable number of white-collar workers, including dentists, teachers, chemists, and bank employees, to march in the parade. Other Menshevik trade unions, such as Moscow's postal and telegraph workers, pharmacists, students, and railroad workers, requested distinct marching units, rather than joining parade columns based on city districts. Not surprisingly, parade committees denied these requests**.** In fact, party officials thwarted all trade union attempts to band together in corporations, a statement of the party's mistrust of trade union autonomy during the Civil War. In Petrograd, the Bolshevik party used the anniversary as an opportunity to ban from the demonstration the pro-Menshevik or "yellow" printers, "clearly counter-revolutionary" in the eyes of the Soviet. Only the rival "red" or communist printers were invited to participate in the festivities.[71]

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[70] GIM (Izmailovo), f. 454, d. 246, ll. 17-20.

[71] *Izv*. 5 November 1918. My thanks to Diane Koenker for insights on the political divisions among Petrograd's printers. On the Mensheviks and Bolshevik efforts to silence them see Vladimir N. Brovkin, *The Mensheviks After October* (Ithaca, 1987); *Petro. pravda*, 2 November 1918; *Pravda*, 31 October 1918; *Izv*., 31 October 1918 and 5 November 1918; *Pravda*, 2 November 1918.

Even more problematic were the organizers' intentions to mark the anniversary with increased rations. As the food crisis deepened, it proved impossible to fulfill the organizers' pledges to feed the capitol cities. In Moscow, government officials, despite "feeling sympathetic" to committees' plans, were forced to scale back planned food provisions. Instead of free meals for the entire citizenry, Moscow now promised two-course meals for children aged two through fifteen, and doubled rations of bread, fish, sweets, and lard. In addition, district soviets were authorized to distribute cigarettes to trade unions, and fabric to families with children.[72] Compared to the Petrograd rations, the downsized provisions for Moscow seemed lavish. Petrograd newspapers printed public assurances of "voluntary sacrifices" of grain for the anniversary celebrations from rural areas such as Tambov and outlying village soviets. To quell the fears of the starving population, *Petrogradskaia pravda* reproduced Zinoviev's signed telegram authorizing three freight cars of grain specifically designated for the holiday.[73] The mounting food crisis was just one of sobering realities that worked to unravel utopian designs for a grand festival celebrating victory and national unity.

### 2.3. Celebrating the "Triumph of Communism"

Widely differing contemporary accounts have impeded scholarly assessments of the success and popular reception of the first Bolshevik anniversary. The stark biases of newspaper reportage, memoirs, and diaries sometimes provide skewed pictures of the celebrations. For government sympathizers, the holiday was a time of heroism, pure idealism, utopian dreams, and

[72] *Pravda*, 1 November 1918. Specifically, the committee's revised plan noted double rations: 2 lbs of bread, 1.5 lbs candy or jam, 2 lbs. fresh fish, and 1.5 lbs fat; TsGAM, f. 425, op. 1, d. 53, l. 53 ob.

[73] *Derevenskaia pravda*, 3 November 1918; *Petro. pravda*, 2 November 1918, *Izv.*, 5 November 1918.

perfect consensus. In contrast, the accounts of the regime's opponents, such as the urban bourgeoisie, described a climate of villainy, degradation, and disintegration. Not surprisingly, the official press immediately declared the celebration a national success, expending great quantities of ink on details about the parade, political speeches, and select holiday decorations. To reach a larger audience, newspapers and journals avoided political analysis of the holiday, and instead cast the mood in traditional and familiar folk narratives. Describing Moscow's display of lights, *Izvestiia* commented on the "strangely mysterious and beautiful" sky and a "radiant fiery castle [the House of Unions] floating in the air" as part of "an unforgettable fairy-tale evening."[74] Other published impressions of the parade compared the festivities to religious holidays, for example, declaring it a "Red Easter."[75] Depicting the new holiday as an alternative, or counter-weight, rather than as a replacement to the most religious Orthodox holiday, further shows the reliance on traditional cultural practices in the festival of the Revolution. Glossing over the inherent contradiction with such an approach, the press also repeatedly emphasized the holiday as a new beginning that permitted a momentary glimpse into socialism's roseate future.

Yet, the pervasive political message of solidarity and struggle reflected the new government's agenda both to shore up support and to stem public dissent which potentially threatened aim of unity in the commemoration. Emboldened by recent events in Germany, Lenin addressed delegates at the Moscow Congress of Soviets on the eve of holiday, calling for renewed vigor in the battle for a world socialist revolution. The leader's speeches not only aimed to reaffirm the new power of workers, the Red Army, and the rural poor, but also to counteract a widespread loss of morale. *Pravda* printed the highlights of Lenin's speech to a

[74] *Izv*., 9 November 1918.

[75] See the published letter by a *kombedy* representative in *Bednota*, 12 November 1918.

Red Army detachment in which he reassured the soldiers that the military situation was "far from hopeless," adding that even on the southern war front "our efforts are not going badly."[76] Posters further reinforced this message with slogans of "Forward without Fear, Without Doubts," "Don't Give Up!" and "We Will Be Triumphant." Party dignitaries and agitators delivered speeches, frenetically shuttling from one locale to another, from workshop floors to the unveiling of outdoor monuments, to ensure that the proper political message accompanied the festivities. In an attempt to control content and to deprive the opposition of a public soapbox, the party demanded that all public speakers have an official stamp of approval.[77]

The state, naturally, aimed its messages at the largest audience possible. Speakers at all events were required to provide a headcount of attendees as a measure of their success during the festivities. The government sanctioned the use of an airplane in Moscow to drop hundreds of agitational leaflets highlighting the official meaning of the October Revolution. The effect of this early foray into mass propaganda was dubious. One foreign observer remembered huge crowds rushing to grab the airborne pamphlets, but he added that, since paper was in such short supply, it was highly sought after for mundane use, such as rolling cigarettes.[78]

On the surface, the Bolsheviks presented a re-ordered political urban topography in the holiday parades, constructing official Soviet identities and reshaping social relations in a

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[76] *Pravda*, 9 November 1918; *Izv.* 9 November 1918; V.I. Lenin, "What is Soviet Power?" *Articles and Speeches on Anniversaries of the October Revolution* (New York, 1980), 27-28; Nadezhda Krupskaia, Lenin's wife remarked later that the "the days of the first October anniversary were the happiest days in [Lenin's] life." *Reminiscences of Lenin* (New York, 1970), 489.

[77] *Vestnik zhiznyi*, 1:3/4 (1919), 117.

[78] *Pravda*, 5 November 1918; Lopatin, 188; Sir Paul Dukes, *Red Dusk and the Morrow*: *Adventures and Investigations in Red Russia* (Garden City, NY and Toronto, 1922), p. 250.

modeled ideal hierarchy. Combining elements of conformity, exclusion, and coercion, parade planners presented an ideal community. The municipal processions showcased members of the city soviets, workers' unions, *kombedy* (peasant committees), and cultural groups. The new social order embodied in the procession was not lost on spectators. The historian Iurii Got'e observed, "The crowds were democratic unskilled labor, factory hands, indeterminate, a genuine personification of those who had seized power."[79] In Moscow, the demonstration deliberately paraded unions organized by districts, symbolically undermining the strength of the collective union. This symbolic configuration mirrored Bolshevik efforts to repress the autonomy of unions and destroy competing unions of the oppositions, such as the Menshevik printers. Of course, in demarcating the new lines of power and status, planners deliberately excluded potentially problematic associations and exaggerated the significance of others. Red Printers, especially those in Moscow, played a prominent and publicized role in the festivities; their representatives conspicuously flanked Lenin as he unveiled the centerpiece mural on the Kremlin wall.[80]

Beneath the surface, however, the corporate façade revealed cracks. Individual trades carved out independent identities in the procession. With a great deal of artistic freedom and amateur participation, labor creatively represented itself, using a varied mix of corporate imagery, past and present. While some unions marched with older Western-style trade banners, replete with classically garbed female allegories of Liberty, Proletkul't designed colorful Futurist union banners of the communist railroad workers in Moscow. The cultural press later criticized both styles equally, the former for its inappropriate bourgeois iconography and the latter for its

[79] Iurii Got'e, *Time of Troubles: The Diary of Iurii Vladimirovich Got'e*, trans. ed. and introduced by Terence Emmons (Princeton, 1988), 211.

[80] *Pravda*, 9 November 1918; Oleg Nemiro, "Lenin i revoliutsionnye prazdniki," *Istkusstvo* , 10 (1969), 3.

abstraction. Other banners, like traditional shop signs, simply advertised the tools of their trade, such as the seamstresses' oversized spool of thread or the white lab coats of the chemists' union. The twin realities of a shrinking labor force and a working class that still remained confined to districts outside Petrograd's center allowed municipal employees to figure prominently in the anniversary celebration. According to accounts, firemen of the northern capital not only marched in the official parade, but also played a pivotal part in the elaborate ritual on Mars Field honoring the victims of the Revolution. Some trade unions tried to assert their political independence in the parades with pennants calling for freedom of the unionist movement. In Moscow, the anarchist-dominated bakers' union unfurled its politically charged banner depicting bloodied loaves of bread, which touched a nerve in the hungry crowd, reportedly sparking quite a "furor."[81]

Despite economic hardships, the Bolsheviks, surprisingly, managed to dole out increased rations to the capitals. Reports varied about the actual amounts and products received in both cities. Petrograd's holiday rations included (stale) white rolls, one-sixteenth of a pound of tea for the first and second ration categories (workers engaged in heavy and light labor), and an additional one-eighth of a pound of fat for the first category. The Moscow Soviet announced that its city residents would receive the following foodstuffs: two pounds of bread and fish and a half-pound of both butter and sweets (either jam or candy). Some factory and local committees also distributed cigarettes. Many contemporaries remarked on the long lines, both day and night, to receive the anniversary handouts. Goods often didn't arrive until the day of the celebration

[81] Rostovtseva, 41-42; *Tablitsy*, plate 121; RGAKFD, "Prazdnovanie godovshchiny proletarskoi sotsialistichskoi revoliutsii" Petrograd 2 parts 1918, No. 11627, *Kinonedelia*, No. 24, 1918; Richard Sakwa, "Party and Society in Moscow During the Civil War," *Sbornik: Study Group of the Russian Revolution*, no.10 (Leeds, 1984), 68; *Izv*., 9 November 1918.

and some districts did not receive, or more accurately, distribute, any goods at all for the holiday. One memoir tells of a woman who stood in line for fourteen hours on both the 7th and 8th of November in order to receive the promised goods. Before the goods materialized, many residents feared a Bolshevik ruse, but, given the current scarcity of provisions, apparently even "Petrograd was pleased" with its meager handouts. As some had predicted, the temporary increase of rations resulted in a drop in daily rations after the holiday.[82]

The new Bolshevik holiday hewed to time-honored Russian holiday tradition by showering children with attention in the form of free treats and activities. Although the organizing committee's initial plans to provide complete dinners proved impossible, children in the capital cities enjoyed special morning activities and lunches in public dining halls and factories. Some factory committees, strapped for funds, sponsored the children's activities and meals as their sole anniversary event.[83]

The mobilization of children, the most vulnerable part of the population, illustrated in most unabashed form the organizers' desire to use the anniversary celebrations for the purposes of control and indoctrination. The anniversary provided a unique civics lesson for the next generation of "little proletarians." Students were obligated to sing revolutionary songs in choirs, to attend political assemblies, and to tour hastily constructed political and economic exhibits. Schoolteachers assigned essays on the meaning of October. To emphasize the event's political message, some of the photographs that captured the outings showed scantily clad, barelegged children outdoors in wintry weather. To supporters of the new government, such photos

[82] Z. Rikhter," Pervaia godovshchina," *Vchera i segodnia: ocherki russkikh sovetskikh pisatelei v dvukh tomax* (Moscow, 1960); John Pollock, *The Bolshevik Adventure* (London, 1919), 171; Nikita P. Okunev, *Dnevnik moskvicha 1917-1924* (Paris, 1990), 228-9.

[83] *Petro. pravda*, 6 November 1918, 10 November 1918.

demonstrated the eagerness of youth to receive the political message; however such ambiguous images also drew attention to deprivation and poverty affecting children, casting a far from favorable light on the new order. Moreover, cities staged special performances, combining spectacle and agitation, for and including children. In Petrograd, for example, the puppet show *David and Goliath* reinforced the theme of justified regicide. In perhaps the first mass spectacle of the anniversary celebrations, Petrograd's Narkompros mounted a pantomime morality play in which the Peterhof Children's Commune in tsarist costumes performed on Uritskii Square.[84]

## 2.4. A Contentious Wedding of the Arts

As with holidays past, this celebration offered a diverse menu of theatrical performances intended to both entertain and enlighten. Streets, squares, and parks accommodated *balagany* (puppet shows), poetry readings, and *estrada* shows. Performances in the cities' district theaters were remarkable for their number and propaganda potential. Conveniently located in outlying workers' districts**,** these theaters served an extremely important link in the process of cultural enlightenment and mobilization. Amateur and professional actors offered staple plays of workers' repertoiry, including Gerhart Hauptmann's *The Weavers*, Emile Verhaeren's *The Dawn*, and popular plays by Nikolai Ostrovskii and Maksim Gor'kii. Both Russian authors' plays had been officially banned on the imperial stage during the tsarist years. Despite the production's primitive quality and ubiquitous use of prompters, workers packed into the poorly heated halls to watch the amateur productions, whose actors received payment in food rations and even

[84] GIM, (Izmailovo). f. 454, op. 3, d. 51. *Petro. pravda*, 10 November 1918; Mikhail Guerman, *Art of the October Revolution* (New York, 1979), 22; RGAKFD**,** *Kinonedelia, No. 24.*

firewood. Additionally, itinerant theater troupes performed in more intimate spaces, such as taverns and public dining halls. One factory cafeteria enjoyed a variety show combining peasant and patriotic songs, including the new "Hymn of Free Russia," with skits on the backwardness of Russian rituals in the face of revolutionary change.[85] While traditional entertainment forms may have attracted the workers to the performances, the regime's grafting of the political message on to the shows ultimately succeeded in reaching a wider and captivated audience.

Music, whether part of the traditional variety stage format or as more formalized classical performances, contributed to the cultural intelligentsia's goal of democratization of the arts, and in some cases, helped further the political agenda. The staggering diversity of musical expression for the commemoration demonstrates the planners' confidence in (and experience with) music as weapon of mass enlightenement. Not surprisingly, revolutionary songs, such as "The Internationale" and "Marseillaise," capped off most public performances. Concerts included popular folk songs alongside newer patriotic anthems, the beloved opera singer (and recently declared Bolshevik) Fedor Shaliapin performed his original composition, "Revolutionary Hymn," atop public balconies to delighted crowds. Petrograd's Proletkul't organized a concert at Smolny that featured Mozart's *Requiem*. Other classical compositions, such as Ludwig von Beethoven's *Ode to Joy*, Hector Berlioz's *Triumphal Symphony*, and Henry Litolff's overture *Maximillian Robespierre*, reinforced the political themes of the anniversary and belied the conservative approach to socialist culture. For many, these public concerts afforded their first exposure to the classics.[86]

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[85] *Russkii Sovetskii teatr*, 392; Rostovtseva, 46; Z. Daltsev, "Moskva, 1917-1923. (Iz vospominanii)," *U istokov: sbornik statei* (Moscow, 1960), 184-5. A year later, many actors still had not been paid for their services.

[86] *Petro. pravda*, 12 November 1918; Rostovtseva, 46; *Muzikal'naia zhizn' Moskvy v pervye gody posle oktiabria. Khronika, dokumenty, materialy* (Moscow, 1972), 107, 282.

Impressive attendance figures and promotional press coverage, however, did not signal consensus. Contemporary observers of all political stripes underscored the passivity of marchers and spectators, which contrary to official aims, undermined attempts to effectively mobilize the masses. In its coverage, *Izvestiia* decried the public restraint of the crowds. Cultural ideologues complained that only the participants on floats showed any enthusiasm. Similarly, one onlooker noted, "When the music was playing, they [the crowds] were lively, but in the pauses they were bored, tired, unhappy. It was noticeable that many were in it because of the demand for party discipline and fear of counterrevolutionary activity."[87] Party controls proved incompatible with the goal of creating a festival as an ideal communal experience producing collective joy.

According to contemporary accounts, the Bolsheviks resorted to a number of draconian threats in order to coerce the public to participate in the anniversary**.** Petrograd's Postal and Telegraph workers found their monthly pay garnisheed (by one percent) as an obligatory contribution to the event. Housing committees threatened to report unwilling marchers to authorities. Others joined in the festivities to avoid a potential loss of food in these difficult times, whether bread rations for workers or an entire week's lunch privileges for schoolchildren. More ominously, Moscow officials decreed that students who "sabotage or dodge [the festivities] will face punishment and evacuation from the city." One memoirist even suggested that the soldiers of Kronstadt faced possible execution if they refused to attend Petrograd's anniversary celebration, after the city had shipped units there expressly to participate in the event.[88]

[87] *Izv.*, 9 November 1918; Got'e, 211; Okunev, 231; V. Kerzhenstev, "Posle prazdnika" *Iskusstvo*, no. 6 (November 1918), 3.

[88] Oleg Nemiro, *V gorod prishel prazdnik* (Leningrad, 1973), 8; Pollack, 128; GARF, f. a-2306, op. 2, d. 179, l. 52.

## 2.5. Cultural Borrowings and New Beginnings

Not only the politics of the celebration, but also the hybrid symbolism suggested a dissonant tableau and failed attempt to construct an unambiguous political message in the commemoration. The cultural intelligentsia and participating artists ultimately produced a confusing tangle of imperial, utopian socialist, eschatological, progressive democratic, proto-Bolshevik, and folk imagery to convey the significance of the revolution. The polyvalent symbolism conspired to form an ethos more reminiscent of the fluid political climate of the February Revolution. Clearly, no single narrative prevailed in the public art, rituals, and cultural events of the anniversary celebration.

The celebration of the October Revolution proved only partially successful in its political imperative to excise symbolically the authority of the imperial order and transfer legitimacy to the Soviet order. Several theatrical performances spotlighted the poignant theme of justified regicide. With Lenin in attendance, the Moscow Proletkul't staged an evening of entertainment that included Voltaire's *Brutus*. The play, written in 1730, was popular in the 1790s for its anti-monarchical sentiments. As part of their anniversary repertoire, the avant-garde café Red Rooster (formerly Pittoresque) turned to the fairground tradition of the Petrushka puppet theater with *The War of the Kings* to teach children about the overthrow of monarchies and the nature of global imperialism. As Catriona Kelly and others have shown, for propaganda purposes the Soviet government appropriated and reinvented this genre of street theater, popular with the cultural elite at the turn of the century.[89] Vasilii Kamenskii, Symbolist poet and Bolshevik sympathizer, had deliberately designed the holiday festivities at the Red Rooster, including

[89] Catriona Kelly, *Petrushka: The Russian Carnival Puppet Theatre* (Cambridge, 1990), ch. 5; Andrew Wachtel, *Petrushka: Sources and Contexts* (Evanston, IL, 1998), 17.

Petrushka, to recreate the essence of Russian carnival, now infused with socialist elements. In the play, "Comrade Petrushka," no longer a common hooligan but a liberated worker tells the tale of how imperialistic motives, a queen's frivolity, and the oppression of the worker-soldier destroy a monarchy and thereby empowers the working class. The narrative was intended as an analogy for the overthrow of the Russian monarchy and the Revolution.[90]

Pantomimes and allegorical processions also played a role in theatricalising the Revolution. The vast majority of these presented visible incarnations of tsarist power, rather a construction of new Soviet identities. Workers, soldiers, and children donned costumes of imperial ministers and generals, borrowed from the wardrobes of imperial theaters. These stagings were easy to perform and required few resources; as a result, some short pantomimes such as *Dethronement* (known also as *The Red Year*) had rapidly become staples for factory and Red Army club stages in these lean years. The appeal of allusion, the blurring of historical complexities, and the avoidance of sensitive political debates characterized the skits. Only a few exceptions, such as the amateur play *February Foul-ups and the Great October* directly confronted recent political history to construct a Soviet narrative. [91]

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[90] *Izv*., 9 November 1918. For one version of the puppet show *War of the Kings*, see *Mass Culture in Soviet Russia: Tales Poems, Songs, Movies, Plays and Folklore, 1917-1953*, James von Geldern and Richard Stites, eds. (Bloomington, 1995), 6-12; The café Red Rooster scheduled a jam-packed evening of cabaret entertainment for the festivities, including revolutionary songs, jokes, poetry readings, a topical "live newspaper" skit, scenes from *War and Peace* and Verhaeren's *The Dawn*, a question and answer segment with the audience, and "five minutes of burlesque fun." Vasilii Kamenskii designed the festivities to serve as an "indoor people's festival." Raikhenshtein, 100-101, 129; GARF, f. a-2306, op. 24, d. 54, ll. 12-13, ll. 1-2. On the Café Red Rooster, also see Khodasevich, Valentina. *Portreti slovami*. (Moscow, 1987), 118.

[91] "Death of the Monarchy" carnival procession, TsGAKFD, no. 31683; Rostovtseva, 46.

In addition, evening fireworks, bonfires, and outdoor posters displayed archetypal class and political enemies of the new Bolshevik order. But in comparison to subsequent anniversaries, these appeared less frequently and successfully. Local districts burned tsarist emblems, such as imperial flags, and political effigies, including a caricature of P.N. Miliukov, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Provisional Government. Unfortunately, the central bonfire at Lobnoe Mesto on Red Square failed to captivate the crowd when the straw "blood-sucking kulak" refused to ignite. Some banners crudely sketched a new enemy *troika* — tsarist general, priest, and capitalist — with black paint on white fabric. Posters, such as A. Apsit's famous *Year of the Proletarian Dictatorship, October 1917- October 1918*, stood out from the sea of primitive graphic art as a sophisticated semiotic example; the graphic ensemble featured the monarchical debris of double-headed eagles and a battered crown beneath the feet of the victorious proletariat.[92]

Despite the political imperative to stamp their authority on the cities, the Bolsheviks ultimately made no concerted effort to destroy many outward manifestations of tsarist domination. In Moscow, the names of only two public squares were changed to immortalize the October Revolution; Ekaterinskaia and Aleksandrov Squares became Commune Square and Uprising Square respectively. Authorities removed only a few imperial statues. In Petrograd,

[92] *Izv*., 9 November 1918; A. Apsit, real name Aleksandr Apsitis, but used the pseudonym A. Petrov on his posters signature. This famous poster was printed by VTsIK. *Revoliutsionnyi prazdnichnyi plakat, 1917-1927 (iz sobraniia Gosudarstvennogo Muzeia Velikoi Oktaibr'skoi Revoliutsii*) (Leningrad, 1982). On Apsit and the poster "Year of the Proletarian Dictatorship," see Victoria Bonnell, *Iconography of Power: Soviet Political Posters under Lenin and Stalin* (Berkeley, 1997), 23, 26, and Stephen White, "The Political Poster in Bolshevik Russia," *Sbornik: Study Group of the Russian Revolution* 8 (Leeds, 1982), 26 and also his book, *The Bolshevik Poster* (New Haven and London, 1988), 25-32; LGAKFD, nos. 5316-5317.

avant-garde artists simply camouflaged Pavel Trubetskoi's monument to Alexander III on Znamenskaia Square with a box decorated with revolutionary art slogans; the politically offensive monument of the tsarist hero, for all intents and purposes, still remained on the public square.[93]

Photographs from the era show jumbles of new Soviet icons and imperial cultural referents in the streets. On some city buildings, portraits of Karl Marx hung beside double-headed eagles. Whereas this hodge-podge no doubt reflected haste and disorder, some designers deliberately embraced the idea of juxtaposition and putting old symbols next to new uses. Natan Al'tman had deliberately intended his Futurist decoration of the Alexander Column and Palace Square to contrast the "imperial beauty of Rastrelli with the beauty of newly victorious masses." In his celebrated ensemble design, Al'tman placed an asymmetrical cluster of red, yellow, and orange cloth boards at the column's base to represent "tongues of fire." If the hailstorm of criticism on the abstract nature of many Futurist holiday designs is an indicator of inaccessibility, Al'tman's artistic meaning may have been lost on the spectators.[94]

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[93] *Dekrety sovetskoi vlasty*, 2, 95-6; Lenin's "Plan of Monumental Propaganda" had called for removal of egregious monuments honoring tsars and the imperial order, but with the stipulation that those with historical value or artistic use remain. Most likely the efforts of the cultural intelligentsia involved with preservation prevented more extensive destruction of monuments. *Tsentral'nyi gosudarstvennyi istoricheskii arkhiv goroda*, f. 1364, op. 1, d. 8, l. 68. In April 1918, the Bureau of Soviet *Raion* Dumas voted to begin the process of renaming streets and squares "whose names one way or the other bring up memories of the tsarist regime." Only a total of fourteen public spaces per year during 1918 to 1921 were actually renamed. See Colton, 110 and 108; *Izv*. 10 November 1918; For a photograph of the boxed monument, see *Tablitsy*, plate 42**.**

[94] See photo of Volzhsko-Kamskii Kommercheskii bank in Petrograd, photo GIML, #45982; *Tablitsy*, plate 42; Natan Altman,*Vospominaniia*, Otdel rukopicei GPB im. Saltykova-Shchedrina, f. 1126, tablistsy, plates 46-48.

To lend greater legitimacy and a sense of revolutionary continuity to the new order, many of the anniversary's cultural offerings relied on the text of the French Revolution. Only a few days before the holiday, the Petrograd party organization called on all district and factory theaters to stage versions of *The Taking of the Bastille*. This particular referent underscored both the October Revolution's legitimacy in socialist history, and provided a potent historical analogue to the Storming of the Winter Palace in the Revolution. While not all theaters were able to respond to the directive, numerous performances based on the revolutionary events in France occurred in both capital cities. Proletkul't's shows featured choral readings of the play. The Baltic Fleet on the Neva provided perhaps a more powerful historical parallel with the storming of the Winter Palace in its battle re-enactment of the burning of the Bastille. Similarly, in Moscow, Arthur Schnitzler's one-act play *The Green Cockatoo* centered on the eve of insurrection against French aristocrats in 1789. In some cases, theatrical stagings erased existing plot histories to impose the homologue of the French Revolution. Major revisions of history were considered excusable as long as the drama served propagandistic purposes. For example, Beethoven's *Fidelio* underwent significant revision when its plot, based on the Spanish Revolution of 1805, was replaced with a French revolutionary setting. Like so many of the anniversary's stagings, this opera ended with an actor's incendiary speech to the audience, charging them to carry on the revolutionary torch.[95]

To compensate for Bolshevik iconographic deficiencies, artists assiduously appropriated not only the symbols of the French Revolution, but also its hermeneutic female allegories. Women as contemporary workers rarely appeared in the street art of 1918. Instead, the vast

[95] *Petro. pravda*, 26 October 1918; J. Douglas Clayton, *Pierrot in Petrograd* (Montreal, 1993), 233; "Izveshchenie Voenno-morskoi seksii " *in Severnaia kommuna*, 5 November 1918; *Izv*., 9 November 1918.

majority of women on public canvasses represented historical justice, revolutionary valor, the arts, liberty, and the new republic. Street banners showed bare-breasted female angels in crimson chitons to symbolize the triumph of October. In Petrograd, the revolution sometimes took the symbolic form in graphic art of Marianne embattled, a reflection of both the vulnerability and the political turbulence of the northern capital. P. Zhilin's poster *Long Live the Great Anniversary of the Proletarian Revolution; Long Live the Commune* clearly took its inspiration from Francois Rude's famous freedom fighter in *La Marseillaise.* The poster resurrected this radical view of female liberty, with its sword-wielding Amazon sounding the charge of revolution.[96]

An American allegory of female liberty, however, provided the inspiration for the central bas-relief on the Kremlin Walls. The sculptor Sergei Konenkov, a key figure in the Arts Section of Narkompros in Moscow, deliberately selected the image of a Native-American princess to symbolize the October Revolution. In his memoir written in 1971, Konenkov elaborated on his choice:

> The task demanded a figure with global resonance. I found the answer on earth instead of in the heavens. I vividly remembered a wall tapestry called 'America' in the manor of my aunt, Maria Fedorovna Shupinskaia. The woman was a member of the 'Eagle' tribe. A crown of eagle feathers on this proud daughter of that North American Indian tribe gave it a splash of fantasy.[97]

The artist ultimately created a colorful bas-relief that featured a winged "embodiment of victory" clutching a red-banner and olive branch, standing atop a symbolic grave lit by a radiant

[96] See, for example, *Tablitsy*, plates 107-109, 127-129, Reproduction of P. Zhilin's poster in *Revoliutsionnyi prazdnichnyi plakat;* Nemiro, *V gorod prishel prazdnik*, 15; Marina Warner, *Monuments and Maidens*, 292-3. On the imagery of women in early Bolshevik graphic art see, Bonnell, 64-84.

[97] Sergei Konenkov, *Moi vek* (Moscow, 1971), 222, 224

sun shining over a new land. As Marina Warner's sweeping study of the allegory of the female form has shown, these graphic accouterments belong to the rich iconography of both French Marianne and also Britannia. In his study of French Revolutionary art, Jean Starobinski has demonstrated that the recurring symbol of the sun has signified the triumph of light over darkness, providing a powerful "solar myth of the revolution" for the new French nation. Steeped in this rich history, the solar symbol also quickly became a central feature of early Bolshevik iconography to symbolize the dawn of a new progressive era. Although Lenin had personally pre-approved the text of the commemorative art, "To Those Fallen in the Struggle for Peace and the Brotherhood of Peoples," the communist leader had not reviewed the design prior to the anniversary. After personally unveiling the bas-relief on Red Square, Lenin reportedly joined other critics who viewed the female allegory as alien and, therefore, as unintelligible symbolism, a mystery to the unlettered.[98]

Although homologous revolutions in Europe, both real and legendary, helped provide instructive parallels to October, homegrown narratives of uprisings appeared to have had a deeper resonance with audiences. Friedrich von Schiller's *William Tell*, officially sanctioned as appropriate to "the spirit of the times," proved an especially poignant European import. The play premiered in Petrograd expressly for the anniversary and continued to run throughout the Civil War period. Selecting a text from Russian literature, the Malyi Theater staged Aleksei Tolstoi's *Posadnik* (*The Governor*), which focused on sacrificial service to the people. Lunacharskii reported that the play's message made a "definite impression" on the audience, composed of workers, Red Army soldiers, and peasant delegates from remote villages. The majority of theater

[98] A. Siderov, "Dva goda russkogo iskusstva" *Tvorchestvo*, 1919, no.10/11, 43; Warner, 45-49 and ch.12; Jean Starobinski, *1789. The Emblems of Reason*, trans. Barbara Bray (Charlottesville, 1982), 41-51; *Gorn*, 3/4 1918.

productions presented revolutionary themes anchored in Russian history. The staging of *Veche*, for example, adapted from Nikolai Rimskii-Korsakov's opera *Pskovitianka* (*The Maid from Pskov*) focused on the democratic assembly of citizens and community elders, destroyed by (Muscovy's) absolutism – a scenario that provided a fitting analogy with October's events.[99]

The play *Sten'ka Razin*, written by the Cubo-Futurist V. Kamenskii, adroitly presented the controversial Russian historical figure in a collective light, rather than as an individual crusader. In the play, Kamenskii divides the characters into two opposing classes — the rebellious and oppressed lower orders, and the evil upper strata of boyars, merchants and princes, thereby diminishing the importance of the leader to the revolt. Following Sten'ka Razin's execution on Red Square, a representative from the onstage crowd (now waving red flags) approached the audience with a call to enlist in the current struggle: "Each of us is Sten'ka Razin," the actor proclaimed. "We cut our teeth on his struggle. And later on, we shall join him in the sunlit expanses of a universal brotherhood for all mankind." According to reviewers, the proletarian audience shouted its approval during the performance. The myth of Sten'ka Razin as both a Russian Robin Hood and popular revolutionary, occasionally accompanied by inspirational poetry, also appeared in street art, such as Pavel Kuznetsov's panel at the Moscow's Malyi Theater.[100] Unable to construct a new pantheon of revolutionary heroes to frame October, contributing artists capitalized on timeless appeal of the popular hero, recast in a Marxist-Leninist frame, to spread the political message.

[99] *Russkii Sovetskii teatr*, 103.

[100] Nikolai Gorchakov, *The Theater in Soviet Russia* (New York, 1957), 170-1; M. Eikhengol'ts, "Revoliutsiia i teatr,"*Vestnik teatra*, no. 12 (14-16 March 1919); *Tablitsy*, pl. 143 and 130.

Artists annexed not only legendary and folk figures, but also the rich imagery of Russian popular culture and folklore to add gravitas to the celebration. The image of St. George vanquishing a serpent, familiar from both icons and a common subject of recent World War I posters, was redeployed, this time to express the new political messages. For example, in S. Makletsov's panel design for a Petrograd building, a worker kills a crowned snake not only with a spear, but with a banner bearing the abbreviated inscription, "Oct(ober) Rev(olution)." Observers described the popular painted designs and vibrant colors on the (former) hawkers' stalls in Okhotnyi riad as reminiscent of the hues of ancient Muscovy. Folklore provided still another treasure trove of popular imagery. The artist Kuzma Petrov-Vodkin created a series of panel designs based on popular figures of Russian folklore and the imagery of the Madonna and child; the colorful sketches featured the legendary plowman Mikula Selianinovich, Ivan the Fool, the Firebird, and Vasilisa the Wise. According to the artist, the writer Gor'kii approved the use of fairytale subjects, but balked at the project for Ivan the Fool, allegedly because it implied that the new leaders might be perceived as fools[101] Surely Gor'kii knew that the folklore hero only appears as a fool, but ultimately wins out. His response highlights the festival planner's superficial use of popular imagery for propaganda purposes, stripped of any hint of opposition, even if symbolic.

In addition to folk motifs to reach a broad audience, artists recast familiar millenarian imagery of popular religion and fin-de-siècle literature. Apocalyptic tableaux blending biblical

[101] Ibid., plates 87-88. Kerzhentsev, 3; Got'e, 211; *Tablitsy*, plates 139-140; Oleg Nemiro, "Prazdnichnyi nariad goroda" *Leningradskaia panorama* (November, 1984), 26-28. On Gor'kii as cultural laison, see Fitzpatrick, esp. 130-131; Petrov-Vodkin's reminensces are cited in *Street Art of the Revolution: Festivals and Celebrations in Russia, 1918-33*, eds. Vladimir Tolstoi, Irina Bibikova and Catherine Cooke, trans. Frances Longman, Felicity O'Dell and Vladimir Vnukov (London, 1984), 70. A panel design of Baba Iaga was also scrapped, Rostovtseva, 17.

and crude revolutionary ciphers sought to convey both the enormity of October and the promise of a new world. Staged in Moscow's Musical Drama Theater, Maiakovskii's celebrated *Mystery Bouffe* presented semi-literate audiences with a Futurist, but simplified parody of the familiar biblical legend about the Ark. In the allegorical play, the oppressed masses rise up from hell ultimately to reach the "promised land," portrayed as a shiny mechanized future. While many spectators were generally pleased with the show, critics attacked the unintelligible Futurist designs, and spectator questionnaires indicated a dislike of the mass chanting and the sea of gray uniformed workers in the play. Another pair of Futurist artists chose a similar eschatological trope to celebrate the revolution, painting a mural on a concrete wall on Tverskaia depicting a new world born from chaos. Many outdoor panels, in fact, recycled this theme of ruination and creation, employing traditional scenes of smoldering classical ruins, winged prophets, and horse-driven chariots leading freed peoples to a new world. In one example, a bare-chested worker, symbolizing Russia, hammer on his belt, led an army of workers and peasants. Trumpeting heralds graced street banners, appeared in allegorical processions, and wreathed the perimeter of Mars Field.[102]

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[102] For a discussion of eschatological communism, see Dmitry Shlapentokh, "The Images of the French Revolution in the February and Bolshevik Revolutions," *Russian History*, 16, no.1 (1989). Much has been written on Maiakovskii's *Mystery Bouffe*. For one description, see Konstantin Rudnitsky, *Russian and Soviet Theatre: Tradition and the Avant-Garde*, ed. Dr. Lesley Milne, trans. Roxanne Permer (London, 1988), 42-43; Pollack, 128; Robert Russell, *Russian Drama of the Revolutionary Period* (Totowa, NJ, 1988), 45. *Tablitsy*, plates 141 and 142. The artisitic transformation of the formerly "boring fence" is described in Kerzhentsev, 4; See A. Klein's outdoor panel design "The old world has been destroyed, a new world is on the horizon," *Tablitsy*, plate 74 and "Power to the Workers", plate 114; T. P Chernyshev, "The Call", plate 115; D. Stepanov's design, plate 102; L.V. Rudnev, obelisk, arc and decorative hanging "In Memory to those Fallen to the Revolution". Photograph. LGAKFD no. dr. 24.

The resulting *dvoeverie* of Slavophilized Christianity and revolutionary ideology in the holiday decorations produced several artistically, and more significantly, politically confusing ensembles. Petrograd's artists exhibited a number of such scenes, startling in their synthetic and ideological incoherence. The Futurist artist Ia. Guminer designed the placard "Glory to the Heroes," with Karl Marx in a toga, not unlike the conventionally depicted figure of Moses, rising above a sea of Red Army soldiers and tanks. One large street panel featured a heavenly scene in which a divinely inspired Marx (again, in a toga) presented a copy of *Das Kapital* (appropriately bound in red) to blacksmiths at work. Another curious billboard presented the orphic trinity of Marx, Nikolai Bakunin, and the Apostle Paul.[103]

Undermining official aims, some onlookers interpreted the collectivist religious themes in the anniversary's public art as contributing to an overall sense of progressive democraticism. Select stanzas from Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*, a work long admired by the cultural intelligentsia for its democratic ideals, framed one of Petrograd's bridges. On rooftops, restaurants, fences, and city walls, painters and writers scrawled apothegms on liberty and the democratization of the arts. Similarly, aphorisms on temporary street plaques, a neglected component of Lenin's "Plan of Monumental Propaganda," added to the democratic ethos of the holiday. Several featured pseudo-Socratic quotes, such as, " I am not an Athenian or Greek, but a citizen of the world" and "You stand at the threshold of a golden age — [in which] people will live without laws, without punishment, and accomplishing with good will everything that is good

[103] Ia. Guminer's sketch, "Glory to the Heroes", *Tablitsy*, plate 49; Photograph "Holiday Decorations on Nikol'skaia ploshchad', 1918," GIML, No. 45986; Pollack, 127, Rostovtseva, 31.

and just." Plaques often sent mixed messages, such as the bas-relief depicting a man and woman eating under the caption, "Whoever doesn't work, doesn't eat."[104]

Despite inchoate iconography, the anniversary marked the rudimentary beginnings of a Bolshevik political culture and its attendant civic myths. The newly adopted Bolshevik symbolism, crossed (industrial) hammers and sickles, red stars, and Herculean workers, as well as likenesses of socialist thinkers and activists vied for cultural space in the public sphere. Festival planners in Petrograd showcased the city's pivotal role in the revolution, using the holiday and subsequent documentaries to anoint new shrines of Bolshevik mythology. The Smolny Institute, recent headquarters of Bolshevik forces, understandably played an important symbolic role in the anniversary. Decorated with portraits of and slogans from Marx, the site became the starting point for the parade. The procession (or pilgrimage) delineated a symbolic narrative of the revolution as it proceeded to the Winter Palace and finally to Mars Field for a ceremony to commemorate comrades killed in the February and October revolutions. The elaborate ceremony of bereavement on Mars Field was intended not only to create a shrine for collective mourning, but also to publicly erase recent historical connections with both the tsarist and the provisional governments. Lev Rudnev's memorial obelisk, erected for the anniversary, however, sparked controversy for its design. Not only was the monument criticized for its repugnant autocratic style, but the monument had also been approved the Provisional Government in 1917.[105]

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[104] Gote, 210-211. See the photographs of the plan's memorial plaques in the photograph department of Muzei "Novodevichii monastyr'" filial Gosudarstvennyi istoricheskii muzei.

[105] On the origin of official Bolshevik regalia, see R. Stites, "Adorning the Russian Revolution: The Primary Symbols of Bolshevism, 1917-1918," *Sbornik: Study Group on the Russian Revolution* (Leeds, 1984), 39-42, and his book, *Revolutionary Dreams*, 85-88; on twentieth century civic myths of the capital cities , see *idem*., 88-93, and

Ironically, Moscow planners also drew on classical symbolism to commemorate the birth of the 1918 Soviet Constitution and the new seat of power. During the anniversary celebration, an obelisk designed by Dmitrii Osipov was unveiled in front of the Moscow Soviet building at the center of a festooned Soviet Square. This monument, like so many others, was only partially completed. Instead of the winged female herald originally intended for its base, a hastily crafted inscription and poster with allegorical representations of a worker and peasant were temporarily substituted. In contrast to Petrograd, Moscow lacked recognizable revolutionary landmarks, and, consequently, was faced with creating new sites. One notable example was the groundbreaking ceremony for a future Palace of Soviets at the former Shchukin estate. Construction of the ambitious project, which included a vast complex with a palace for both Russian and foreign workers and a large theater, materialized only years later, under Stalin. [106]

## 2.6. Mobilizing New Media and Marketing

The anniversary marked the first appearance of a new type of propaganda film, the *agitka*, to transmit topical political and social concerns. These short films, five to thirty minutes

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Katerina Clark, *Petersburg: Crucible of the Cultural Revolution, passim*; on war memorials and political culture, see Michael Ignatieff, "Soviet War Memorials," *History Workshop Journal* 17, Spring 1984, pp. 157-163 and Jay Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning* (Cambridge, 1995), 78-79; V. Khazanova, *Sovetskaia arkhitektura pervykh let oktiabria* (Moscow, 1970), 160. On the obelisk controversy among futurist artists and the organizing committee members, see *Petro. pravda*, 13 October 1918, *Tablitsy*, plates 20-23.

[106] Ibid., plates 122-124; Raikhenshtein, 90; TsGA, f. 2307, op. 4, d. 21, ll. 145-146; Colton, 110; *Pravda*, 12 November 1918. In fact, the traditional monument would become an important civic symbol, appearing in Moscow's coat of arms until it was demolished in 1941.

in length, were shown on makeshift screens on city and district streets and squares, such as that of the Winter Palace. Political lectures frequently accompanied the screenings, not only to amplify the filmmaker's intent, but also to mitigate the poor (sometimes comical) quality of these early films. Overcoming crippling technical problems and a lack of actors and screenwriters, Moscow's Narkompros Film Section managed to produce three *agitki*. The Petrograd committee, which had settled in its new offices only weeks before the celebration, contributed only one movie. The screenings were always well attended, and while the fledgling state strongly pressured crucial political supporters, such as the navy, to view the films, all audiences genuinely enjoyed the *agitki* during these years.[107]

The films targeted pockets of social resistance and aimed to legitimize the new government. In Moscow, the new seat of power, audiences viewed films mythologizing Bolshevik history and ridiculing religion. The five-part *agitka Uprising* (*Vosstanie*) blurred real history with a mixture of documentary footage and reenacted events of 1917. *Underground (Podpol'e*) presented clandestine Bolshevik revolutionary activities under tsarism. The screen version of Demian Bednyi's fable *Priest Pankrat, Auntie Domna and the Appearance of an Icon* in Kolomno *(O pope Pankrate, tetke Domne i iavlennoi ikone v Kolomne*) took aim at religious superstition and the church. The film tells the story of an impoverished priest, Pankrat, who resorts to trickery so as to gain wealth. After purchasing an old icon at a market, Pankrat, secretly buries it. He tricks an easily corruptible and newly devout woman to disclose her dream of the miraculous icon and to reveal its location to the parish. As a result of its reputed healing

[107] *Izv*., 10 October 1918; *Sovetskie khudozhestvennye fil'my: Annotirovannyi katalog, (1918-1935)* vol. 1 (Moscow, 1961), 6; Peter Kenez, *Cinema and Soviet Society, 1917-1953* (Cambridge, 1992), 34.

powers, believers flock to the parish and Priest Pankrat's income increases. In the end, the complaints of a jealous neighboring parish priest prompt official church confiscation of the icon.

Another agitational film provided a cinematic primer for the re-education of Petrograd's intellectuals, many of whom were particularly hostile to Bolshevik policies after October. Undoubtedly inspired by his experiences in education policy as head of Narkompros, Lunacharskii had written the screenplay *Consolidation* (*Uplotnenie*) to court intransigent professors. The story took place one year after the October Revolution. Like so many intellectuals, a distinguished chemistry professor at Petrograd University supports the people after the Revolution, but harbors no strong political convictions. At the University, many faculty members believe that science should be free of politics, and therefore actively campaign against the Bolsheviks. While the professor's older son is an incurable enemy of the Revolution, his other son is undecided. The professor's pro-Bolshevik views take shape when he is forced to move in with an old worker and his daughter during the housing consolidation policy. Soon, the professor begins lecturing to workers in his apartment, but quickly moves to workers' clubs to accommodate the mass interest. To complete the morality tale of political conversion, his younger son marries the worker's daughter in the end.[108]

The anniversary celebration existed in large part to be reproduced through the mass media. The Bolshevik state hoped to control and transmit the political messages beyond those in attendance. In fact, the *agitki* and subsequent documentaries of the holiday events were just part of the arsenal used to prolong the anniversary celebration of the revolution. Following their city premieres, *agitki* traveled to the front, city workers' clubs, and surrounding areas. A full-length documentary newsreel of Petrograd's celebration carefully edited and repackaged the events for

[108] *Sovetskie khudozhestvennye fil'my*, 5-6; Of the three films, only a portion of *O pope Pankrate* still exists.

national consumption, as did a photo album compiled by the city's photography section. *Kinonedelia*, the Moscow-produced newsreel, limited its anniversary coverage to the official appropriation of public space in the capital, with shots of ceremonial openings of historical monuments and the symbolic groundbreaking of a workers' palace in Moscow. Moreover, the state produced over a million souvenir commemorative pins, brochures, and postcards to mark the holiday. Yet, the re-emergence of traditional practices of entrepreneurial activities during celebrations compromised organizers' attempts to control the historical memory of October. Familiar from pre-revolutionary folk festivals, private street vendors, hawking flags, flowers, and ribbons, emerged to cleverly tap into the commercial potential of the holiday, prompting subsequent festival planners to regulate this activity in the future.[109]

## 2.7. Towards A New World Order?

Paradoxically, if inevitably, the anniversary celebration of the first socialist revolution triggered a cascade of traditional symbolism and practices. Many spectators joined cultural critics in the accusation that the new celebration did little to displace recent tsarist holiday traditions. The prominence of a central parade, street banners, firework displays, and monument designs such as obelisks, all invoked comparisons to imperial political culture. In the case of political prisoners, however, the continuity with imperial ritual practices did not materialize. As one imprisoned English schoolteacher lamented: "In Butyrsky [jail] we sensed a new atmosphere in November, fueling hope that the Bolsheviks would release the prisoners. There was no amnesty, but we did get treated better and received improved rations." In a bitter twist of fate, an

[109] *Kinonedelia*, No. 24; Rostovtseva, 45.

imprisoned French merchant who recently had his candy company confiscated by the Bolsheviks received his own factory's candy as a holiday treat.[110]

Despite concerted efforts, the anniversary celebration produced cultural fare and aesthetics that catering to the disempowered bourgeoisie. In Petrograd, organizers failed to transform or close down former cabarets and nightclubs. Faced with threats of closure from the anniversary organizing committee, these "miniature theaters" continued to present politically offensive plays and vaudeville shows during the holiday. According to authorities, the plays contained sentimental and adulterous content, citing such productions as Moliere's *Misanthrope*. The new theater critics bemoaned not only the "poverty of spirit" of the productions, but also the persistence of the old regime in the audience. Not surprisingly, many artistic designs employing symbols of antiquity and allegorical representations were condemned as "bourgeois reactionary symbolism, " a charge that grew more voluble throughout the decade.[111]

For the leftist cultural intelligentsia, who equated revolutionary art with revolutionary politics, the celebration proved a disappointment. The cacophony of artistic styles and discordant symbolism thwarted efforts to construct a coherent representation of October. The disciples of Futurism garnered the most criticism in the press and in cultural administrative circles. Critics charged many of the modernist ensembles with the serious crime of unintelligibility. Lenin reportedly lambasted the Futurist designs at the Bolshoi, where artists

[110] R.O.G. Urch, *`We Generally Shoot Englishmen': An English Schoolmaster's Five Years of Mild Adventure in Moscow* (London, 1918), 231.

[111] *Zhizn' iskusstva*, 16 November 1918, *Russkii Sovetskii teatr*, 394; I. Gushchin, *Khudozhestvennoe oformlenie massovykh prazdnestv v Leningrade, 1918-1931* (Leningrad, 1932), 2.

permanently painted the shrubs in lilac hues. Numerous articles criticized the incomprehensibility of leftists' abstractions, calling some of them "violent crimson puzzles."[112]

War efforts and insufficient resources scuttled other revolutionary projects, most notably Lenin's "Plan of Monumental Propaganda." Few of the projected statues were unveiled in time for the celebration, many were composed of fragile plaster, eloquent perhaps of the provisional nature of the new order. As one member of Narkompros explained: "It was intended that the people themselves would be the jury. … Our level of sculpture is very low. And of course, when the monuments were put up, there was a clear desire to take them down quickly." Artists also came under fire for inappropriate placement of the statues or for failure to harmonize the statuary with the surroundings. The statue of Robespierre in a Petrograd park fell victim to vandalism, or, as the press noted, "counter-revolutionary activity." Unrealistic deadlines for the sculptures meant many were erected with paper inscriptions describing the significance and history of the revolutionary personage, such as the bust to the Ukrainian poet T. Shevchenko. The newspaper *Petrogradskaia pravda* provided elaborate descriptions of several monuments to ensure proper identification, such as the explanation of Marx's frock coat, in vogue during his time, and the Napoleonic placement of his hand inside the coat. Perversely, the design of a central statue of the ideological founders Marx and Engels quickly earned the nickname "the bearded bathers." The monument featured the two philosophers standing in a tub-like container of some kind (possibly intended to be a tribunal), which concealed their lower bodies.[113]

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[112] V. D. Bonch-Bruevich,"Vladimir Il'ich i ukrashenie krasnoi stolitsy," *Vospominaniia o Lenine* (Moskva, 1969), 380-381. On the reception to futurist or "modernist" designs see von Geldern, *Bolshevik Festivals*, 100-102.

[113] *Izobrazitelnoe isskustvo*, no.1, 1919. The artist Punin remarked: "Everyday I walked past the Radishchev monument, but only on the eighth day did I notice it had fallen over." (As quoted in Bowlt, 187). See the photographs of the plan's monuments and memorial plaques in the photograph department of Muzei "Novodevichii

Undoubtedly, the vibrant street decorations and myriad performances brought welcome entertainment to a weary population. However, the October Revolution celebration failed in its overriding mission to transform the population with a message of "Communism Triumphant." Although many city residents were exposed to a new political culture and revolutionary symbolism, the Bolsheviks discovered that traditional cultural practices were difficult to dislodge and compromised the mobilization of social participation in the holiday festivities. Konenkov, the artist responsible for the allegory of female liberty on the Kremlin walls, confronted the daunting prospect of cultural enlightenment firsthand when an old woman questioned the subject of what she perceived as a new "icon." She indignantly exclaimed that she had never heard of the saint of "Revolution."[114]

Despite festival planners' attempts, the intended utopian project of the "people's festival" ultimately failed to materialize. Party and commemorators' efforts to mobilize the urban population and to construct a vast media program with an effective and unchallenged political message floundered in light of the economic, political, and cultural challenges in the first year of Soviet power. Conceived as a means to create a like-minded Soviet citizenry, Lenin's "Plan of Monumental Propaganda" quickly fell victim to these destructive forces. As cultural critics expressed with surprise and concern, the mixture of coercive measures and an oppressive climate also failed to ignite a spirit of activism and spontaneity in the crowds. After the holiday, one critic reasoned, "Our crowds still have to learn how to celebrate, and in the [future] organization

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monastyr'" filial Gosudarstvennyi istoricheskii muzei, especially S. Volnukhin's monument to Shevchenko on Rozhdestvenskii Boulevard; *Petro. pravda*, 2 October 1918; GIML, photograph, nos. 45982 and 21464). On the list of monuments unveiled in Moscow for the anniversary, see Bibikova, 74, n.9.

[114] Konenkov, 222-223.

of the holiday attention should be focused on how to induce everyone to actively participate."[115] Subsequent October celebrations during the civil war would feature new symbolic practices to engage the masses in support of the war effort. More importantly, the war experience and ultimate victory helped shape a new identity, ethos, celebratory practices, and a revolutionary symbolism.

[115] Kerzhentsev, 3.

## 3. Bread and Circuses (1919-1921)

> *Many are sincerely convinced that "bread and circuses [lit. spectacles]"can overcome the difficulties and dangers of the present [period]. Bread–of course! As concerns spectacles–let them continue! I have no objections. But at the same time people shouldn't forget that spectacles aren't genuine, great art, but more or less pretty entertainment. They shouldn't forget that our workers and peasants in no way resemble the Roman lumpen-proletariat. They're not maintained at the government's expense, but themselves maintain the government through their work. They "created" the revolution and defended its cause, spilling streams of blood and making countless sacrifices. Believe me, our workers and peasants have earned something greater than spectacles. They've earned the right to genuine, great art.*
>
> Lenin, 1920[116]

> *You cannot have a ritual without regimentation.*
>
> Adrian Piotrovskii, *Za sovetskii teatr!*, 1925[117]

The anniversary celebrations of the October Revolution from 1919 to 1921 revealed the unmistakable influence of the Civil War.[118] The Bolsheviks fiercely defended the revolution on

[116] *Lenin o literature* (Moskva, 1957), 118. I am extremely grateful to Helena Goscilo for the translation.

[117] Adrian Piotrovskii was a film dramatist and Soviet literary and film critic. *Za sovetskii teatr! Sbornik statei* (Leningrad, 1925), 21.

[118] The anniversary celebrations are part of the revolutionary political culture influenced by the Civil War and the policies of War Communism. On the impact of the war on culture, see Sheila Fitzpatrick, "The Civil War as a

the battlefronts and on the home front in the commemorations of the founding event of the new state. Throughout these years, palpable fears of counterrevolutionary activity marred the festival planning. Wartime budgetary constraints resulted in debilitating shortages of materiél and cultural personnel necessary to create a people's festival; the state commandeered artists and supplies alike for the political holidays. To effectively wage the holiday's agitational campaigns, the party took steps to centralize cultural administration involved in the anniversaries. Yet, despite attempts to impose discipline on the designs, aesthetics, and contributing cultural workers, the Bolsheviks fought a protracted battle that resulted in anniversary projects with remarkable diversity and ambitions. A close analysis of not only the party and cultural producers involved in the holidays, but also the reception of the urban populations reveals little consensus and much more contention over the meaning and results of the celebrations. The visible trend toward militarism in the holidays, which paralleled the domestic policies of War Communism, had caused growing friction between state and society. Paradoxically, in this time of war, the party constructed and shaped celebratory practices and imagery of a nation-in-arms in order to galvanize the population and rally the capitals in defense of the Revolution; however, the creation of stricter controls**,** the emphasis on agitation (over celebration), and the ravages of war conspired to alienate the urban populace from the official commemorative aim.

Most scholarly studies on the Soviet political holidays in these years focus on the few, but ambitious, mass spectacles of the period that aimed to create a collective experience with casts of (literally) thousands. These productions, such as the *Storming of the Winter Palace*, performed in Petrograd for the third anniversary, are indeed significant for their aims, scale,

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Formative Experience," in *Bolshevik Culture*, eds. Abbot Gleason, Peter Kenez and Richard Stites (Bloomington, IN, 1985), 57-76.

regimented choreography, and successful executions. Yet, these productions are limited not only in number, but arguably in impact as well.[119] Moreover, there is a note of contrapuntal irony in the fixation on mass spectacles at a time when the urban *masses* are physically disappearing from the effects of hunger, epidemics, migration, and shortages of food, fuel, and materials. By 1920, the Moscow and Petrograd population had shrunk to half its size of just two years earlier. The dire food situation (and contributing fuel crisis) meant decreased daily rations and low caloric intakes. Furthermore, the loss of able-bodied men due to military mobilization, labor conscription, and grain detachments left cities not only with depleted labor pools, but also with an imbalance of women.[120] Often, in this time of extreme deprivation, the Bolshevik's core constituency of workers harbored conflicting priorities and preferences for the anniversaries that reflected the needs of a hungry and war-weary urban population.

In contrast to the bleak economic landscape, the holiday projects indicate no shortage of festive imagination during these years. Despite party efforts to regulate and control the holidays, festival planners and contributing artists envisioned and produced a variety of new, old, and hybrid celebratory forms and practices. Party leaders and influential cultural voices in culture tendered and promoted different ideas and projects to create a people's festival in the anniversaries—ranging from mass outdoor stagings of historical dramas to inspirational interpretative dance—with the elusive goal of forging a communal cathartic experience to bind a citizenry together, albeit provisionally. As a result, the symbolism and entertainment during the

[119] There is a lush yield of scholarly studies the early mass spectacles. For recent examples see Von Geldern, *Bolshevik Festivals*, especially ch.6, Clark, *St. Petersburg*, ch.5, and Stites, *Revolutionary Dreams*, 94-97.

[120] Mary McCauley, "Party and Society in Petrograd during the Civil War," in *Sbornik. Study Group on the Russian Revolution* no.10 (Leeds, UK, Summer 1984), 43-51; Chase, *Workers, Society, and the Soviet State*, 18. Both studies provide a good survey of the demographic disaster and economic ruin of the post-Revolutionary years.

Civil War celebrations highlighted and several cultural (and political) agendas, from those of the avant-garde proletarian cultural theorists to the cultural conservativism of Lenin.

### 3.1. "A Strict Economy": Priorities and the Party

During the Civil War, the Bolshevik Party increasingly sought greater control of the anniversary celebrations, imposing tighter reins on funds, resources, and propaganda. In part, the cutback of holiday expenditures during these years resulted from the crippling conditions of war and severe economic disruption that restrict and help define the options of any new state. However, the extravagance and unfocused political nature of the first year celebration also played a pivotal role in the Bolshevik's overtures to redefine and reshape the holidays. Party protocols repeatedly condemned the emphasis on the "outer form" of the 1918 celebration, which neglected the urgency of both economic realities of wartime and the shifting agitational needs of the party.[121]

The anniversary celebration budgets for decorations and entertainment were the most obvious targets of this immediate set of new priorities. The Soviet government collapsed the three-day holiday into just one official day of celebration. In light of the difficult situation of the war in 1919, the Party's Central Executive Committee demanded that "strictest economy" of resources be used for the second anniversary.[122] In sharp contrast to the inaugural October commemoration in 1918, less than one-fifth of 1919 budget was designated for decorations and celebratory events. By 1920, that same body continued to reject the need for city decorations

[121] See, for example, RGASPI, f. 17, op. 60, d. 5, l. 6.

[122] *Zhizn iskusstva*, 20-21 September 1919; "Dekret VtsIK o prazdnovanii II godovshchiny Oktiabr'skoi revoliutsii" 6 October 1919 cited in Tolstoi and Bibikova, *Agitatsionno-massovoe iskusstvo*, 97-98.

and ordered that "not one extra kopeck, and not one extra arshin of material" should be spent on the anniversary celebration.[123]

According to party protocols, festival planners had to "modify" urban decorations for the festivities. Moscow and Petrograd were to be minimally decorated with greenery and wood (and by 1920, lights) to lend an "architectural character" to the design. Instead of the elaborate street art of the first anniversary, the art of the wartime celebrations would consist of posters, red and white bunting, and a few portraits of revolutionary leaders. Whenever possible, organizers should recycle previous decorations. All materials were closely guarded and carefully distributed. The party called upon local commissions to redirect their efforts by cleaning the main squares for the holidays. Such restrictions led to an approach in which fewer but more symbolic sites for celebratory processions were emphasized to mark the commemorations. In Moscow, festival planners limited decorations and festivities to Red, Sverdlov, and Soviet Squares. Attesting to its popularity, the recently erected (in 1918) *Monument to Freedom*, located on Soviet Square, provided the only central monument singled out for an official public gathering. While Petrograd's Smolny Institute and Uritsky Square were chosen for decorative installations, most of the commission efforts went towards solemn processions on Mars Field and Lesnyi cemetery where the Bolsheviks buried soldiers and sailors killed in the Civil War. Ceremonies there were constructed to forge a patriotic cult built on sacred struggle, heroism, and martyrdom. [124]

[123] Ibid.; TsGA, f. 2307, op. 1, d. 307, l. 45.

[124] *Petro. pravda*, 4 November 1920*; Pravda*, 6 November 1919; *Petro. pravda*, 30 October 1921; RGASPI, f. 17, op. 60, d. 5, ll. 13-14, and d. 38, l. 38; *Zhizn iskusstva* 23-24 October 1920.

Not only were materials appropriated, but cultural workers also were conscripted to work for the urban celebrations or holiday entertainment at the front. Cultural service to the state was not always voluntary during the Civil War. Official directives stated, "It is the duty of all artists and lecturers to take part in concerts and meetings" for the celebrations. Performers from academic and proletarian theaters were pressed into service. In principle, the party agreed that artists should be paid for the holiday work, but, given the wartime constraints, actors and artists should do the celebratory work gratis. The Central October Commission report in 1920 reasoned that if the Union of Workers in Art (RABIS) would be paid for its work, the figure (based on the estimated cost of the previous May Day holiday work) would top 300 million rubles. There was one loophole that had continued to remain open for exploitation, namely that only artistic work deemed "complicated" would be compensated.[125]

At a time of political consolidation, the party was moving to reorganize and moving to attempt to centralize and control the administration of the celebrations. Beginning in 1920, protocols and directives from the newly established Agitprop Section of the Party's Central Committee provided the municipal celebration commissions with important guidelines concerning the character of the holidays and all agitational work during the festivities. Primarily for fiscal reasons, the governmental oversight agency Rabkrin (People's Commissariat of Workers' and Peasants' Inspection) stepped in to monitor the use of funds for the festivities. Officially, all contributing organizations had to report to the All-Russian Central Executive

[125] *Zhizn iskusstva*, 20-21 September 1919. During these years, actors were drafted to perform on the front under penalty of a Revolutionary Tribunal. Russell, "People's Theatre," 69. Serge Orlovsky documents a case in which a professional actress (from the academic stage of the Malyi Theater) was freed from compulsory sewing of soldiers' uniforms in order to perform. Serge Orlovsky, "Moscow Theaters, 1917-1941" in *Soviet Theaters 1917-1941*, ed. Martha Bradshaw (New York, 1954). *Vestnik teatra*, 7 November 1920, RGASPI, f. 17, op. 60, d. 38, l. 5.

Committee (of the Congress of Soviets) that had overriding control of the celebration funds and materials. Moreover, the party had begun the wider stabilization of cultural administration with the reorganization of Narkompros and, concomitantly, the subordination of Proletkul't to administrative control of that commissariat. By early 1920, the new government had passed legislation to curb the repertory and economic independence of private theaters. Less than two weeks after the second anniversary, Lenin announced the need to stage plays of a more revolutionary character. Two months later, the fuel crisis served as a major justification to close down a series of variety theaters. By February, Moscow's Soviet decreed that in light of their "intolerable character" fourteen variety theaters were to be closed with a redistribution of their facilities and stage property. These administrative controls demonstrated party desires for greater ideological and financial control of the celebrations.[126]

Actual accomplishments in the centralization of commemorative festivities, however, did not mirror government ambitions. A combination of unclear administrative lines, wartime constraints, understaffed cultural agencies, and varying degrees of cultural autonomy among theaters and groups conspired to thwart a streamlined coordination of the celebrations. Unlike the organizing committees of the first anniversary, the composition of the Central October Commissions during the Civil War years included representatives from a variety of agencies, many with competing cultural and aesthetic agendas for the celebrations. In 1920, the commission contained members from Agitprop, Narkompros, Glavpolitprosvet (Narkompros' Chief Administration for Political Education), Gosizdat (State Publishing House), VTSSPS (All-Russian Central Council of Trade Unions), and the Red Army's Political Section (PUR).

[126] Ibid., f. 17, op. 60, d. 5, l. 6; *Krasnaia gazeta*, 9 October 1919. The definitive study on the reorganization of Narkompros and attendant cultural agencies is Fitzpatrick, *Commissariat, passim.; Russkii Sovetskii teatr*, 381.

Although the Moscow Soviet's October Commission was technically in charge of the capital's celebration in 1920, Narkompros had to create and orchestrate the plan because the commission lacked the necessary time. Influential cultural personalities, such as actress and Petrograd Commissar of Theater and Spectacles Maria Andreeva (rather than government agencies) continued to shape the aesthetics of the celebrations acting on conservative cultural tastes. In addition, a welter of competing theaters and acting troupes complicated efforts to coordinate and monitor the cultural offerings of the celebrations. PUR, the Trade Unions, Narkompros, and Proletkul't each controlled their own networks of amateur theaters and art studios. Despite its semi-independent and controversial status, Proletkul't continued to declare the right of eminent domain over the aesthetics of the festivals of the proletariat. Such powerful decentralizing processes severely affected hopes of a programmatic cultural approach to the commemoration.[127]

While the Civil War battles still raged, and domestic unrest, in the form of peasant revolts, and workers' strikes, increased, the new Soviet republic actively launched a campaign to shape the public memory of October in order to create new Soviet citizens. In 1920, the state published numerous publications of a Soviet holiday calendar, providing a new constellation of official holidays that placed the Anniversary of October Revolution at the apex of the festival system. Expressing similar impulses of calendar French Revolution, the Bolsheviks sought to recast time and instill patriotic values with the introduction of a cycle of revolutionary holidays. Moreover, the party also created a commission to construct and preserve an official history of the Revolution. In September 1920, Sovnarkom officially established Istpart (Commission for the Collection, Study, and Publication of Materials on the History of the October Revolution and

[127] TsGA RSFSR, f. 2306, o. 23, d. 6, ll. 89-89 ob. Lynn Mally, *Revolutionary Acts. Amateur Theater and the Soviet State* (Ithaca and London, 2000), 29-33.

History of the Russian Communist Party). Enterprises, agencies, and citizens were asked to give relevant documents to the commission for inclusion in special archives, museums and libraries. Party circulars and commemoration planners instructed children to carefully study the party-sanctioned memorabilia and visit public monuments that transmitted the newly constructed revolutionary history. In addition, Gosizdat (the State Publishing House) commissioned two short biographies of Lenin timed for the third anniversary. In contrast to earlier years, by 1920 the party actively molded and exploited the history of the Revolution on a wider scale to convey patriotic lessons to create a Soviet citizenry. [128]

Realizing the significance of the anniversaries as an important venue for constructing legitimizing narratives of the Revolution, the party produced instructions for "memory evenings" as part of the commemorative festivities to specifically draw in nonparty workers. Party circulars provided scripts for the evenings to be held at all factories, enterprises, and agencies. First, meetings would begin with a short overview of the Revolution and its significance, drawn from the outlined points of party directives or even Leon Trotskii's study of the Russian Revolution. Then, participants and witnesses of revolutionary events should present authorized

[128] RGASPI, f. 142, op. 1, d. 142, l. 59. Lunacharskii's introductory notes to the calender place the new set of holidays into the larger project of creating a revolutionary life (byt')."Postanovlenie soveta narodnykh komissarov ob uchrezhdenii komissii dlia sobraniia i izucheniia materialov po istorii Oktiabr'skoi revoliutsii i istorii Rossiiskoi Kommunisticheskoi partii (Bol'shevikov)" in *Dekrety sovetskoi vlasti o Petrograde. 31 ian varia 1919g – 21 dekabria 1920g*. (Leninzdat, 1987), 222-223. Initially Istpart was founded as a branch of the State Publishing House of the Russian Federation according to the order by the Soviet o People Commissar and later became the Institute of Marxism-Leninism. For the role of Istpart in the construction of the cult of Lenin, see Olga Veliankova, *Making of an Idol*, trans. A. Millman (Gottingen and Zurich, 1996). *Pravda*, 5 November 1919; RGASPI, f. 17, op. 60, d. 5, l. 4.

recollections of the event to the audience. Fearing political ambiguity and spontaneity, the party asked organizers to select speakers with only the "sharpest and (most) valuable" reminiscences of 1917. In addition, the presenters later had to submit a written record of their narrative to Agitprop. Aside from lending heroic tales to the construction of a reassuring continuous historical narrative, the participants of the Revolution were showcased in commemorative processions. These memory evenings would become part of the institutionalized commemorative practices of the anniversary.[129]

The Soviet government acknowledged, however, that successful agitation included and rested upon the distribution of rations during the holidays. Sovnarkom's circular on the 1920 anniversary stated that the active fulfillment of rations was "fundamental to our work."[130] In light of the food crisis, holiday doles were more than just the continuation of a tsarist or reinvented Soviet tradition to engender a celebratory mood. As Petrone has noted, the "discourse of plenty" and the appearance of food in soviet holidays in times of extreme deprivation served as a powerful practice to exercise power on the population.[131] Newspapers continued to provide anodyne notices on promised provisions for the celebrations. Given the dire situation earlier in 1919, larger and better rations were designated for those in the highest category of rations, including members of the Red Army. That same year, Petrograd workers in the higher ration categories looked forward to receiving vegetables, jam, a new pair of shoes, fabric, and sewing bobbins. In Moscow, official newspapers advertised that a communal cafeteria would serve two

[129] RGASPI, f. 17, op. 60, d. 5, l. 2, and d. 38, l. 14-15; *Izvestiia TsK RKP(b)*, No. 33, October 1921, 44; TsGA, f. 2313, op. 2., d. 6, ll. 40 and ob.

[130] "Dekret VtsIK o prazdnovanii II godovshchiny Oktiabr'skoi revoliutsii" 6 October 1919 cited in Tolstoi and Bibikova, *Agitatsionno-massovoe iskusstvo*, 97-98.

[131] Petrone, 16-18.

free meals with bread. In 1920, newspapers boasted of better holiday rations; communal cafeterias (with extended hours) would include three free meals and beverages to the urban population, regardless of categories. Acknowledging problems in the past, *Petrogradskaia pravda* assured the population that all bakeries would begin baking white bread for holiday doles a full three days ahead of the anniversary. In all three years, the departments of socialist provisions supplied Moscow and Petrograd district soviets with more rations designated exclusively for children during the holidays.[132]

Spotlighting the impoverishment of children, repeated calls for cleaner school cafeterias and orphanages appeared in party circulars for the celebration. While well intentioned, a 1920 party request for clothing and shoes for children seemed unlikely to materialize for the anniversary. In any event, the scheduled variety of free holiday entertainment, recreational or political, would certainly reach the children. Schools, factories, agencies and the city festival planners had to devote considerable attention and resources to create a children's holiday as part of the larger celebration. Organizers in 1920 calculated that the addition of free outdoor performances and film showings in the cities would impact over seventy thousand children.[133]

In addition to the younger generation of future Soviet citizens, the party efforts focused on the military and women in the anniversary campaigns. Not surprisingly, the Red Army received extra attention during the holidays. At the height of the Civil War in 1919, Sovnarkom stipulated that forty million rubles of the fifty million national holiday budget would benefit soldier's families, mainly in the form of supplemental rations. A year later, the Party's Agitprop

[132] *Pravda,* 22 October 1919; *Pravda* 6 November 1919; *Petro. pravda* 6 November 1920; *Petro. pravda* 4 November 1920; RGASPI, f. 17, op. 60, d. 5, l. 2, 38.; *Petro. pravda* 7 November 1919.

[133] RGASPI, f. 17, op. 60, d. 5, l. 3-4; *Izv*., 3 November 1920.

instructed organizers to devote serious efforts to wounded veterans. The party officially welcomed the Red Army's participation in the festivities as a sign of the republic's strength. As part of the mobilization campaign, party directives also called on women to contribute to the war effort during the holidays, by sewing for the military. In 1921, Agitprop issued directives to agitators to reach out to mothers and housewives. Party representatives, particularly in the Zhenotdel (Women's Section of the Party), were expected to tutor women on the official character of the political anniversary and enlist their aid in famine efforts.[134]

Clearly, the party saw the political anniversary's agitational campaign as pivotal during these years. The attention to propaganda at the expense of celebratory practices was not just a response to the extravagance of the first anniversary, but also embodied a perceived need to connect the commemoration with the current and future political agenda—the necessity to continually struggle to secure the gains of October. The October Revolution anniversary offered a screen on which the past could be represented (or constructed) and current political tasks could be projected. Party protocols provided the official themes for each anniversary. For example, both the second and third political holidays included an emphasis on "Octobers of the countryside" to focus attention on the need to strengthen the bonds between peasant and worker. Openly adopting militaristic terminology, anniversary directives likened the holiday agitational campaigns to battles demanding concrete campaigns to defend the victory of October with the fulfillment of pressing tasks. Successful mobilization demanded that "abstract language, vague

[134] "Dekret VtsIK o prazdnovanii II godovshchiny Oktiabr'skoi revoliutsii" 6 October 1919 cited in Tolstoi and Bibikova, *Agitatsionno-massovoe iskusstvo,* 97-98; RGASPI, f. 17, op. 60, d. 5, l. 14, 3; According to Mark von Hagen, the size of the Red Army was formidable. By 1920 five million were enlisted in its ranks. Mark von Hagen, *Soldiers in the Proletarian Dictatorship: the Red Army and the Soviet Socialist State*, 1917-1930 (Ithaca, NY, 1990), 127; RGASPI, f. 17, op. 60, d. 5, l. 2; d. 38, l. 11.

phrases, and murky slogans" be omitted. Towards this aim, holiday propaganda should always strive to include facts, figures, and precise explanations.[135]

Combining the party concerns of accessibility and low production costs, posters replaced street decorations as the public art form suitable for succinctly conveying the Soviet message during the anniversaries. Stephen White has shown that the Civil War years witnessed a veritable poster boom, with a remarkable number of poster producers publishing agitational graphic art. The Bolsheviks placed a high value on the poster's ability to articulate the militant quality of Soviet ideas in these early years. Agitprop's directives on the character of the anniversary provided agencies such as ROSTA (Russian Telegraph Agency) and Gosizdat with approved poster subjects, including famine, economic collapse, and adversaries such as White Army Generals Wrangel and Deniken. Agitprop also called for internal reviews of the posters a full month before the holiday to prevent political ambiguity. The Soviet state regarded the posters no less valuable than military ammunition. Only the designated poster section of the festival commission had the authority to post the anniversary posters, which were closely guarded inside closed facilities and windows to prevent vandalism, theft, or counterrevolutionary reactions**.** Expertly executed and highly politicized, the multitude of anniversary posters published during the Civil War proved an influential medium to construct a new Soviet identity (and enemies) and in the creation of a lexicon of national symbols to project a nation-in-arms. [136]

The party also considered agitational film as a crucial weapon to mobilize the urban populations during the festivities. Commissioned by the government, the Moscow and Petrograd

[135] Ibid., f. 17, op. 60, d. 5, l. 2

[136] White, *Bolshevik Poster*, 112; RGASPI, f. 17, op. 60, d. 5, l. 3, 14-15; *Izv*. 5 November 1919**,** *Izv*., 5 October 1919; *Petro. pravda*, 30 October 1921.

Film Sections of Narkompros prepared special newsreels and documentaries of significant moments in the life of the new republic. Labeled "courses for adults," these short agitational films were intended as cinematic textbooks that presented a clear historic narrative, replete with the achievements of the October Revolution. The party directed cinemas to extend their hours and to provide free entrance to the films shown during the anniversaries. Auxiliary outdoor screenings of the newsreels guaranteed maximum exposure to the political message.[137]

Analysis of the party's priorities clearly shows the emphasis on agitational, rather than celebratory, aims for the anniversaries in the post-Revolutionary period. Providing no central directives for an official celebratory model, the party delegated Narkompros to determine the aesthetics and cultural offerings for the festivals. The delegation of power in the artistic sphere has misled some scholars to underestimate the party's influence in the celebration.[138] In his role as head of the commissariat, Lunacharskii worked with an array of combative and cooperative, cultural producers and artists on the anniversary designs, many with competing cultural strategies for the celebrational art and entertainment. While the party sought a tightly controlled political holiday, the inchoate nature of the cultural landscape ultimately would undermine the potential agitational impact. In the end, the lack of homogeneity precluded the enunciation of a unified historic narrative and identity.

[137] *Vestnik teatra*, 9-17 October 1920, *Pravda*, 6 November 1919; RGASPI, f. 17, op. 60, d. 5, l. 19, 14, 2-3; *Izv*., 2 November 1920; *Petro. pravda*, 9 November 1921; *Petro. pravda*, Nov.4, 1921.

[138] Von Geldern, *Bolshevik Festivals*, 211.

### 3.2. Enlisting the Cultural Workers: Opportunities and Opportunism

During the Civil War years, the debate among cultural producers and the party on what constituted a genuine people's festival continued and expanded. While older models, adapted from French Revolutionary ideals, persisted, artists from the left proposed new ideas in an attempt to create a true proletarian festival. Lunacharskii joined other cultural moderates in promoting a people's festival intended to provide a series of simple entertainments to bind the new citizenry in a moment of mass collectivity. In the fall of 1919, Lunacharskii set up the section of Mass Performances and Spectacles, a special department of the Theater Section of Narkompros (TEO) to focus and design the mass celebrations. Lunacharskii instructed the section to work out plans for a folk carnival, including directions to get professional performers to fill the city squares with music, song, and comic and dramatic performances revolutionary in content. The musical component (preferably choral songs) continued to be an important element in the festival to promote collectivity, as well as to provide entertainment. Festival plans included designs for orchestral performances on balconies, triumphal symphonies, opera performances, and choric poetry readings to realize the French Revolutionary ideal of festivity. Lunacharskii, following Robespierre's view, maintained that the objective of celebration's main spectacle, whether it be a mass pantomime, parade, or theatrical performance, was to unite the unorganized masses into a spectacle. Greek mythology continued to serve as a model for Lunacharskii and others in Narkompros, who suggested staging plays such as one based on Prometheus, to symbolize the struggle of workers against capitalists.[139]

[139] *Vestnik teatra*, 27 April – 2 May 1920; TsGA RSFSR, f. 2306, o. 23, d. 6, ll. 89-89 ob; *Izv.*, 2 November 1919; *Pravda*, 6 November, 1919.

While some looked back to an ancient theater for inspiration to transform society, new, often strident voices emboldened by the triumph of the workers' state offered and fought for new forms of festivity and ways to create a genuine workers' mass celebration. In reality, Communist factions, including Proletkul't members, often dominated the section of Mass Performances and Spectacles and proposed experimental projects that rejected the cultural "deposits of alien cults," including Greek drama, biblical myths, Christian rites, and even the French Revolutionary civic rites that resorted to the cult of antiquity to forge a revolutionary fête. [140]

Impractical in light of current wartime constraints, these ambitious and visionary designs were nonetheless important in their articulation of a utopian means of social regeneration. Aleksei Gan, the principal theorist of Constructivism, envisioned a mass celebration in which the entire population of Moscow intuitively would enact the Communist city of the future in the celebration. Not only would the content of the spectacle be radically different by presenting contemporary historical themes (Gan had proposed a reenactment of the History of the Three Internationals for May Day in 1920), but public space, the "stage," would have to be redesigned for such grand social reorganization. The action would take place on newly redesigned squares celebrating the arts and sciences, such as Geography or Political Economy Square. Another radical proposal, militaristic in design, aimed at physically involving the masses in the festivals. Valentin Smyshliaev, TEO member and head of Moscow's Proletkul't theater workshop, suggested that the participants should maneuver "easily surmountable obstacles" along the route

[140] *Vestnik teatra*, no.51, 5-8 February 1920.

of the holiday's mass action, such as climbing steps or scaling slopes, an almost sadistic proposal given the current hardships on the population.[141]

The mass spectacle *Storming of the Winter Palace*, planned for Petrograd's celebration in 1920, seemed to present a solution to satisfy both the moderates, who yearned for a collective theatrical experience, and the leftists, who demanded a new festive form with revolutionary content. The production yoked two influential contemporary trends in the creation of a mass theater. The first movement began prior to the Revolution. Based on ancient theater models and Viacheslav Ivanov's Symbolist writings, several pre-Revolutionary theaters emerged promoting collective experiences that would erase divisions between actor and audience (theater's "fourth wall"). The other, more recent phenomenon originated in the Red Army's Universal Military Training Corps (Vsevobuch) division, under the leadership of Nikolai Podvoiskii. Moscow's Sparrow Hills provided the location for a series of large open-air stagings or re-enactments of historical and contemporary events.[142] The *Storming of the Winter Palace* represented the most elaborate of three mass outdoor spectacles staged in Petrograd. The two models for collective theater seemingly merged in the 1920 re-enactment of the Bolshevik's founding moment, boasting a cast of hundred culled from the military, amateur theaters, and everyday citizens.

It was the former orientation in pre-Revolutionary theater that attracted Nikolai Evreinov to lead the directorial unit (of nine) for the production. Hardly a communist sympathizer, Evreinov no doubt was invited to (and accepted) the project in large part because of his earlier work and ambitions in the Theater of Antiquity, which produced morality plays from the past.

[141] TsGA RSFSR, f. 2306, o.23, d. 6, ll. 89-89 ob. Gan's project was later taken up by Liubov Popova and Alexander Vesnin, the designers of an elaborate theatrical parade for the celebration of the Third International in May 1921. See *Tablitsy*, pl. 210.

[142] Orlovsky, "Moscow Theaters," 24-25.

The scenario for the *Storming of the Winter Palace* contained similar theatrical elements: choric acting, larger-than-life protagonists, and dramatic Manichean forces. In an interview, Evreinov promoted the spectacle's combination of comedy and heroic drama, complete with an epic battle scene. An announcement for the production clearly stated the spectacle's lofty objective: "The production is not significant only because it is a reminder of the (hazy) October nights of 1917, but because this spectacle marks the beginning of the larger project of the creation of a theater of mass action."[143]

The search for a new revolutionary theater and repertoire was always at the center of the discussions about the revolutionary festivals. Well represented in Narkompros, the leftist cultural producers sought to install themselves at the core of the celebration's entertainment to achieve a truly revolutionary workers' festival. Lunacharskii's appointment of Vsevolod Meierkhol'd to head TEO in the autumn of 1920 further emboldened Proletkul't and communist cultural groups to stage and design cultural offerings for the holidays. Having just narrowly escaped execution by the Whites, Meierkhol'd at the time of his appointment was more iconoclastic than ever before. Meierkhol'd pushed for the nationalization of all theaters and the reappropriation of (non-revolutionary) state-subsidized theaters. For example, the Hermitage Theater located in the former Morozov mansion quickly became the new home for Proletkul't's Ton-Plas Studio, a theater that promoted the synthesis of music, physical movement, and choral speech techniques.[144]

[143] Spencer Golub, *Evreinov: The Theatre of Paradox and Transformation* (Ann Arbor, 1984), 138-139, 196-198, 201; *Russkii Sovetskii teatr*, 272-273.

[144] Robert Leach, *Revolutionary Theatre* (London and New York, 1994), 70.

In the place of traditional theater, Meierkhol'd called for a "Theatrical October." His program promoted the introduction of revolutionary plays, stage techniques, avant-garde set designs, collective performances, and agitational impact. The main executors of the program were Proletkul't and the newly appointed theaters of TEREVSAT (Theater for Revolutionary Satire) and the Theaters of RSFSR. The centerpiece of the new program was Meierkhol'd's production of Verhaeren's *The Dawns,* slated for the 1920 anniversary celebration in Theater RSFSR No. 1. Staged earlier by Proletkul't, the popular play was one that many revolutionaries had embraced in the first years of the Revolution because of its plot of an implosive imperialist war and the subsequent birth of a workers' revolution. In light of Meierkhol'd's campaign, the party and the theatrical world alike highly anticipated the new adaptation. Agitprop requested the a considerable advance for the production. *The Dawns* was heralded as the *first* socialist play.[145]

Lunacharskii's role as the anniversaries' impresario required considerable effort as he tried to support both the theatrical efforts of the left and the academic stages. He continued to endorse the cultural projects and input from communist artists. In fact, the zeal and participation of such groups as Proletkul't proved essential to the holiday plans due to shortages in suitable cultural offerings and contributing artists and actors. Yet the left's aggressive bid for cultural autonomy and its unintelligible avant-garde productions presented serious dilemmas. To increase cultural offerings, Lunacharskii established competitions for a new revolutionary repertoire, while simultaneously sanctioning lists of approved holiday plays by foreign and Russian authors. The surrogate play lists changed little from those issued for the first year

[145] For an overview of Meierkhol'd's campaign of Theatrical October see Konstantin Rudnitsky, *Meierkhol'd. The Director*. (Ann Arbor, 1981), 247-283; Taylor, *Art and Literature,* 98-101, Leach, *Revolutionary Theatre,* 62-69.

anniversary, including recognizable titles from Schiller, Mirbeau, Gor'kii, and Ostrovskii.[146] In an effort to revitalize academic stages and engage its hostile acting corps, Lunacharskii also wrote new plays to premiere on academic stages for the political holidays. In his leisure hours, the culture commissar also composed historical melodramas, such as *Narod* and *Oliver Cromwell*, to stage for the third and fourth anniversaries.

The new political culture demanded not only revolutionary plays, but also revolutionary sculpture to embody and transmit the values of the October Revolution. Lenin's "Plan of Monumental Propaganda" continued to produce commissioned sculptures of revolutionary leaders with unveilings scheduled for the anniversaries. Diametrically opposed to the traditional ("bourgeois-styled") portrait sculptures in Lenin's plan, a radical new direction in monumental sculpture emerged during these years. The avant-gardist Vladimir Tatlin had electrified the cultural intelligentsia with his pioneering ideas on aesthetics, spatiality and a revolutionary machine art. In 1919, Narkompros' IZO department commissioned the artist to create a monument to the Revolution symbolizing the dynamism of the new era. In fact, the project was originally conceived as part of the "Plan of Monumental Propaganda." Recently relocated to Petrograd, Tatlin began his much-anticipated work on the revolutionary monument that would employ architecture and public space to transform society.[147]

The state quickly recognized and rewarded the propaganda value of the contributing artists to the celebrations. For many artists, the anniversary work meant not just a salary, but occasionally, lavish compensation, privileges, and patronage at a time of deprivation for the urban population. ROSTA poster artists reportedly commanded high salaries (paid bi-monthly in

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[146] See "Biulleten' No.1 Repertuarnoi Seksii, 1919" in *Russkii Sovetskii teatr*, 45-46.

[147] Christina Lodder, *Russian Constructivism* (New Haven and London, 1983), 56-67, 234-5.

cash) for their work, reportedly determined by the complexity of their work. In theater, even actors who were less than enthusiastic about the new regime benefited by their work in productions. Moscow's actors competed for roles in agitational plays in lively outdoor "markets." Lunacharskii had all actors' (including those of the academic theaters) food rations raised to the highest food ration category in light of the enormous workload. For his performances, the pre-Revolutionary opera singer Fedor Shaliapin not only was rewarded with an automobile and the honor of being the first awarded the 'Peoples Artist' title, but he also continued to demand and receive exorbitant fees (in rubles or foodstuffs) for his performances in the celebrations.[148] According to the writer H. G. Wells, who visited the "comfortable home" of Shaliapin in 1920, "what he demands he gets, for Shaliapin on strike would leave too dismal a hole altogether in the theatrical world of Petersburg."[149] He was also able to use his celebrity status to entreat Lenin to end the reappropriation of stage property and wardrobe from the Marinskii Theater. Other artists also circumvented official procedures for personal demands. Despite the rejection of his earlier entry of Marx on four elephants in competition for Lenin's "Plan of Monumental Propaganda," the sculptor Sergei Merkurov continued to battle for a commission for a monument. Although Merkurov changed his project design for competition three times, the artist personally petitioned Lenin for redress. In response, the Soviet leader phoned Lunacharskii and requested a new jury to reconsider Merkurov's work. For the party, the

[148] For a brief discussion of the salaries of ROSTA artists, see White, *Bolshevik Poster*, 80; Robert Russell, "First Soviet Plays," in *Russian Theatre in the Age of Modernism*, eds. Robert Russell and Andrew Barrett (London, 1990), 150; Orlovsky, "Moscow Theaters," 10-12; Ivan Ol'brakht, *Kartiny sovremennoi Rossii* (Prague, 1920) 11-26 in *Russkii Sovetskii teatr*, 27.

[149] H.G. Wells, *Russia in the Shadows* (Westport, CT, 1973) 47.

pressing need for cultural producers to participate in commemorations frequently outweighed ideological concerns.[150]

### 3.3. War Holidays

By all accounts, official and unofficial, anemic demonstrations and a paucity of elaborate decorations marked the October Revolution anniversary celebrations during 1919-1921. The parades were depopulated, like the capital cities themselves. While official newspapers strained to put a positive spin on the thin holiday crowds, the reports had to concede that even the few parades that did take place were disappointing. Newspapers highlighted the small processions at key historical locations, such as the solemn pilgrimage to Petrograd's Square of the Martyrs of the Revolution or the parade in Moscow's Red Presnia which stressed the ceremonial privilege enjoyed by that workers' district. The reporting in *Krasnaia gazeta* registered a degree of surprise that, despite enormous difficulties, workers somehow were able to muster "enough energy, life, happiness and enthusiasm" to greet the anniversary in 1919.[151] By 1921, *Pravda* still noted the quiet streets during the October holiday. The party paper commented, "Outwardly, the city is frowning and concentrating. It is as if Moscow has shut itself inside its shell."[152] The overriding element in the descriptions of the urban public space is one of austerity.

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[150] F. I. Shaliapin, "Maska I dusha," in *Lenin, revoliutsiia, teatr,* ed. A. Iufit (Leningrad, 1970), 207-208; A. V. Lunacharskii, *Lenin i iskusstvo,* 162.

[151] *Kr. gaz.*, 9 November 1919.

[152] *Pravda,* 9 November 1921.

Given the chronic food shortages, the promise of food undoubtedly provided a strong motivation for many who participated in the holiday events. Factory committee records reveal that the distribution of goods, and more importantly, foodstuffs, would be available to workers who marched or attended political meetings devoted to the significance of the holiday. In one Moscow cotton dye factory, the minutes of its factory committee's celebratory meeting clearly stated that only those workers who marched could eat the free cafeteria lunches. At times, the political meeting yielded uncomfortable responses from the workers. One worker commented on the lack of decent rations in response to the speaker's rhetorical question, "What did the October Revolution give workers?"[153] Citizens seemed unlikely to applaud Soviet achievements—actual or promised—during this time of extreme deprivation.

Conflicting reports complicate the ability to accurately assess the fulfillment of promised anniversary rations. With the notable exception of white bread, the variety of rations from cucumbers to shoes promised in 1919 did not materialize. Petrograd communal cafeterias still managed to offer sweetened tea with candy and even two-course meals with bread. The limited amount and variety of rations signaled a noticeable drop from the previous year. Intuitively, commentators speculated that any excess food probably fed the Red Army. As the war situation improved, citizens in both cities received more holiday doles in subsequent years. Reports reveal that in Moscow, a majority of municipal districts were able to supply children with hot breakfasts or lunches of cabbage soup with meat, kasha, and either apples or fruit compote. In 1920, for example, some Moscow workers received rations of butter, eggs, candy, flour and cigarettes, even though the portions were, as one contemporary noted, "microscopic."[154]

[153] Gote, 434; TsGAM, f. 426, op. 1, d. 27, l. 72 and op.1 d. 38 l. 30.

[154] Gote, 316; *Petro.pravda*, 7 November 1919; *Izv*., 9 November 1919; Okunev, 397-8.

Compared to the first anniversary, the overall visual display of the celebrations was disappointing. The overwhelming majority of street decorations consisted of displays of greens and some wooden constructions, occasionally broken up by portraits of Marx, Engels, and Lenin. Red flags adorned some government buildings and also were scattered in the famed Red Presnia workers' district in Moscow. In 1919, *Izvestiia* explained that the decorative bunting served as the only urban decoration, providing citizens with a "visual reminder of the bloodshed shed for the Revolution."[155] One notable outdoor art installation was the wooden fortress constructed around Pavel Trubetskoi's monument to Alexander III in 1919. Previously in 1918, a decorative box covered with progressive art slogans hid the political statue; however a year later, festival artists instead chose the symbolic image of imprisonment of the former monarch, complete with a statue of a worker standing guard at the base of the artistic ensemble.[156]

By 1920, the appearance of several firework and light displays must have proved a welcome addition to the austere anniversary decorations. Despite the party calls for parsimony, Petrograd festival organizers seemed to instinctively follow tsarist celebratory traditions with firework installations for the third anniversary. *Petrogradskaia pravda* listed the designs and locations as part of the holiday entertainment. For example, spectators could see a windmill, steamship, and airplane firework display at Petropavlosk. Petrograd's authorities seemed receptive to tsarist celebratory models when Soviet practices and realities did not provide the necessary sparkle for a holiday. In Moscow, citizens encountered fewer displays signaling a celebration. In one example, agitational slogans in lights illuminated Moscow's Teatral'nia and Strastnaia Squares. Indoor anniversary decorations in clubs and factories also seemed to fail to

[155] *Izv.*, 9 November 1919.

[156] *Tablitsy*, pl. 176.

present a festive mood. A *Pravda* correspondent attending the holiday events in one Moscow factory barely noticed any ornamentation, with the exception of a "narrow thread of pine twigs and something resembling little pennants on the wall."[157]

To minimize costs previous street decorations reappeared in the anniversaries during these years, some tattered panels clearly showing their age. At Smolny, the previous year's decorative arch, with its Futurist-designed mural and framing side panels, featuring a hammer and sickle were re-erected in 1919. The old Stepan Razin hangings again adorned Petrograd's Technology Institute. Other decorations did not survive these years of shortages. Natan Al'tman's decorative canvasses from the previous anniversary had already been cut up and used for soldiers' foot bindings.[158]

The sparsely decorated public space contributed to the palpable funeral quality of the anniversaries. Cemetery pilgrimages literally replaced parades as the main highlighted activity in Petrograd. Strategically designed to reconsecrate rites and symbols of national unity and institutionalize a patriotic cult, the commemorations featured ceremonies at two significant gravesites: Mars Field and Lesnyi Cemetery on the outskirts of the Vyborg working class district. In 1919, the unveiling and dedication ceremony of Lev Rudnev's simply designed monument to the victims of the Revolution took place on Mars Field. Lunacharskii contributed the lyrical epitaphs for the expansive granite monument. The text immortalized those slain in the revolutionary battles of February and October, as well as several famous individuals killed after October, such as V. Volodarskii. According to the pithy heroic inscriptions, the fallen joined

[157] *Petro. pravda*, 6 November 1920; *Petro.pravda,* 9 November 1919; *Izv., 2* November *1920* and 9 November 1920; *Pravda,* 9 November 1921.

[158] Gote, 434; *Tablitsy*, pl.174 -175.

other universal freedom fighters such as the Jacobins and Communards, who died for the greater good of humanity. As Figes and Kolotnitskii have shown, leaders of Soviet parties in 1917 reinforced their positions and socialist causes by promoting the cult of the freedom fighter to transfer sacrality the new order. During the Civil War, the Bolsheviks appropriated that cult and reclaimed its symbolic battlefield, Mars Field. Jay Winter has noted that war memorials forced a public recognition of the dead and their sacrifice as well as appealing to the present indebted community to continue the sacrifice for the nation. The eulogies, laying of wreaths, political speeches, and reverential processions of workers and the soldiers at the Petrograd war memorial contributed to the site's function as one of "symbolic exchange." The Bolshevik ceremonies, however, afforded a larger opportunity to transform the cult of the fallen fighters to rally the nation and justify the battles to defend October.[159]

Ceremonies at the graves of Civil War combatants (Red and White) served as an important collective symbol in the creation of a new collective memory and Soviet identity. As a testament to the significance of the site, Petrograd Party Secretary Zinoviev delivered the keynote speeches at Lesnyi cemetery during these years. Assembled before party dignitaries, workers and the military, Zinoviev publicly linked the deaths of the "martyrs" to the greater goal of building communism in an effort to rally the population for the war effort. In 1920, the dais was uniquely decorated with lilac-trimmed white poles. Panels featured the official Soviet emblems of the hammer and sickle, as well as a book (as part of the battle against illiteracy). Newspaper accounts promoted the inspirational quality of the event, noting that those in attendance returned home with a newly found energy and boost in morale. By 1921, Zinoviev's oration fully articulated the official Soviet narrative of the Revolution. He spoke of those killed

[159] *Petro. pravda,* 9 November 1919; Figes and Kolotnitskii, 74-75; Winter, 94.

as “duped by Kerensky or duped into fighting with his forces” and that the urban workers present harbored no ill will against their brothers who fought for that doomed cause. In the official narrative, the slain workers represented the progressive historical forces, whereas the fallen military opponents were clearly innocent victims of bourgeois machinations. Far removed from the Revolution’s epicenter, Moscow’s anniversary events, such as the Proletkul’t sponsored evening at the Historical Museum, also paid tribute to the Revolution’s “fallen brothers” with eulogies and the socialist choral anthems of the Internationale and Marseillaise.[160]

Rudnev’s memorial *Victims of the Revolution* significance is further underscored by the fact that it was one of the noticeably few monuments from the “Plan of Monumental Propaganda” unveiled during the October anniversaries in these years.[161] Lenin’s Plan had continued to produce the occasional statue or memorial plaque timed for the political holidays, but the slow pace of production, inferior quality, and jumble of artistic styles had already jeopardized the overall success of the project. Between 1918 and 1920, only twenty-five monuments were erected in Moscow and fifteen in Petrograd. Artists, cultural leaders, the public, and Lenin often assailed the modernist-style statues, such as the Cubo-futurist B. Korolev’s *Bakunin* erected (but never publicly unveiled) in 1919. An angry letter to the Moscow Soviet newspaper *Vechernie izvestiia* demanded the removal of this “scarecrow” and its

[160] *Izv*., 10 November 1920; *Izv.*, 9 November 1919; *Petro.pravda*, 9 November 1921.

[161] Rudnev’s monument replaced the temporary memorial installed the year before. See L.V. Rudnev, obelisk, arc and decorative hanging "In Memory to those Fallen to the Revolution". Photograph. LGAKFD no. dr. 24.

replacement with a *real* monument. The statue remained boarded up until the wooden scaffolding was stolen and the monument was vandalized in 1920.[162]

Tatlin's commissioned monument to the Revolution was intended to resuscitate the moribund Plan and embody the meaning of the October Revolution. Maiakovskii praised Tatlin's design as the "first monument without a beard." Incorporating a sense of triumphalism, Tatlin had recently renamed the commissioned project to the *Monument to the Third International*; the new name and resulting design evoked both the historic event of October 1917 and the dynamism of an emergent revolutionary society. No longer just enough to focus on the revolution, let alone its inaugural year, the neoteric artist instead framed the model in terms of forward linkages. On November 7, 1920 Tatlin unveiled his model in his Petrograd studio as part of the celebratory events. The press announced the event and also a symposium of artists to publicly discuss the significance of the monument.[163]

Tatlin's bold and grandiose design embodied the soaring aspirations of the new state. Conceived to straddle the Neva River, the monument would rise more than 1300 feet in the air, making it the tallest building on earth. Employing Constructivist principles, the tower project had an imposing iron spiral framework stacked with three colossal (and temperature-controlled) rooms of glass, each rotating at different frequencies with the help of a special mechanism. At the base, the massive cylindrical chamber would contain lecture halls for mass assemblies and

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[162] *Izv.*, 9 November 1919; Akademiia Khudozhestv SSSR. Institut teorii istorii izobrazitel'nykh iskustv, *Istoriia sovetskogo iskusstvo. Zhivopis' skul'ptura, grafika.*vol.1 (Moskva, 1965), 48-49; Berton, Kathleen, *Moscow: An Architectural History* (London, 1977), 203.

[163] N. Khardzhiev, "Mayakovskii i Tatlin. K 90-letiyu so dnia rozhdeniia khudozhnika" reprinted in *Neue Russische Literatur. Almanach* (Salzburg, 1978), 90, cited in Lodder, *Russian Constructivism*, 61, n. 105; *Petro .pravda*, 7 November 1920.

revolve once a year. Atop that base, a conical room for executive organs, such as the Communist International and the Party Secretariat, rotated once a month. The upper cubical chamber was to house all the agitational agencies and equipment necessary to inform the proletariat, including a telegraph office and printing presses for posters and leaflets. The construction would also serve as a transmission tower of the pulse of the revolution. The upper level would beam political slogans on to the sky; radio masts would broadcast news and propaganda. A fleet of motorcycle and automobile couriers remained parked at the structure's base ready to disseminate the revolutionary messages by land. The tower's spiral design and perpetual motion aimed to recast time and space—the deepest impulse of the October Revolution.[164]

Tatlin's choice of materials was symbolic as well. The architect deliberately selected iron to indicate the strength of the proletariat; glass symbolized clarity of conscience. Synthesizing art and life, Tatlin's new aesthetics and revolutionary design drew critical acclaim. Maiakovskii declared the *Monument to the Third International* the "first object of October."[165]

Although the actual building was never constructed, Tatlin's model immediately became an enduring icon, symbolizing a new epoch in Soviet history. After a month-long exhibition in Petrograd, Tatlin dismantled the model and re-installed it for the meeting of the Eighth Congress of Soviets in Moscow, providing an inspirational backdrop for their discussions of Lenin's plan of electrification for the country. During the years of the New Economic Policy, Tatlin's Tower continued to serve as a powerful reminder of the utopian vision of October. The model enjoyed a long life in museum exhibitions and as part of parade floats in the anniversary parades.[166]

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[164] N. Punin, "Tour de Tatline" *Veshch*, 1922, nos. 1-2, cited in Taylor, 69, n.14. Descriptions of Tatlin's tower and its symbolism can be found in Lodder, *Russian Constructivism*, 60-67 and Clark, *St. Petersburg*, 139-142

[165] Lodder, *Russian Constructivism*, 59-65; and Khardzhiev, "Mayakovskii i Tatlin," 90.

[166] Lodder, *Russian Constructivism*, 64; Gushchin, *Khudozhestvennoe oformlenie*, 2.

### 3.4. October's Message and the Masses

Revolutionary posters and film transmitted the political message to a wide audience during the anniversaries. Assessing the exact political impact of these media is difficult, however the wide distribution of posters and films helped to maximize public exposure to the agitational message. Adding color to an otherwise drab landscape, ROSTA posters were frequently displayed in brightly lit windows that were usually surrounded by spectators. Additionally, official newspapers frequently included descriptions and texts of public posters issued for the anniversaries.[167] Free film screenings captivated audiences in clubs and outside on public squares, often mixing propaganda with a novel (and still exceedingly rare) entertainment during wartime. A brief analysis of these agitational forms shows how politicians and cultural producers used posters and film as an important element in the construction of historical narratives during the public holiday, as well as a means to reshape the meaning of October during the Civil War.

As in 1918, the anniversary posters continued to employ traditional genres during the war years to reach a politically illiterate audience and to aid in mobilization efforts. The Civil War intruded on the graphic art of the anniversary celebrations, resulting in posters that blended pre-Revolutionary cultural idioms with new narratives and an iconography formed in the crucible of war. St. George continued his reign in official art, although in a revamped role. In the poster *1917 October 1920* (*1917 Oktiabr' 1920*), a Red Army soldier substitutes for the Russian patron saint and slays a dragon outside a fortress, here represented by a city of factories flying the

[167] White, *Bolshevik Poster,* 112-115; *Izv.*, 9 November 1919.

banner of the RSFSR. Red has replaced the traditional colors; both the soldier and horse are crimson in hue. To insure an accurate interpretation of the new *bogatyr* and folktale, the accompanying text explains that now that the state has focused its energy and restocked war materiel, "It is with joy that we meet the 3rd anniversary of the October Revolution in the bloody battle. It guarantees our impending victory; we will no longer ever be slaves! We will march in the bright kingdom of Labor, and with a proletarian sword we will slay the dying, open-mouthed dragon of imperialism…The Soviet, Federated, socialist worldwide republic— Long live its power!"[168]

The influence of the *lubok* (popular print) with its combination of illustrations and text, was seen in other anniversary posters and ROSTA windows. Employing the popular *lubok* technique of a 'before and after' story, D. Mel'nikov's poster *25 October 1917-7 November (25 October) 1920* (*25 oktiabria 1917g.- 7 noiabria (25 oktiabria) 1920g*) narrates the empowerment of workers and peasants. Before the revolution, peasants worked for the nobility, workers' blood created the wealth, and landowners and capitalists held all the power. Now, the poster explains, the land belongs to all laborers, workers toil only for themselves, and power belongs to all those who work. The artist also called on the viewers, after the three years of battle, to push forward towards a worldwide October. The detail of the poster is remarkable, including panels with manor houses and fields of nobles' estates, an image of a chauffeur-driven industrialist's car, and a multitude of workers, both factory hands and miners. [169]

[168] Gosudarstvennyi tsentral'nyi muzei sovremennoi istorii Rossii (GTsMSHR), Fototeka, no. 88352.

[169] Gosizdat printed the poster for Moscow in 1920. The poster enjoyed an extremely large print run of 50,000 copies. *Revoliutsionnyi prazdnichnyi plakat, 1917-1927( iz sobraniia gosudarstvennogo muzeia Velikoi Oktiabr'skoi Sotsialisticheskoi Revoliutsii)* (Leningrad, 1982).

Moscow's ROSTA 'windows' also played a prominent role in the articulation of party directives and the establishment a new national identity during the war years. Maiakovskii created many posters for the third celebration in particular, offering the urban populations primers on patriotism. His lapidary posters valorized certain civic behaviors and repudiated bourgeois manners in relation to the collective ideals of communism and the needs of the war effort. Citizens were instructed to reject 'spectacle' or artifice and celebrate the holiday in useful ways, such as collection campaigns for the front, voluntary municipal public works, or active participation in the restoration of industrial production. The proletarian holiday, according to one poster, should be celebrated with a hammer, sickle, and a book. According to the graphic displays, only the bourgeoisie engaged in celebratory drinking, carnivals, pompous parading or decoration of the cities. Several of the windows symbolically castigated those workers who 'misunderstood' the true essence of an anniversary and simply strut in demonstrations, with puffed chests adorned with oversized red bows. Another ROSTA poster from 1920 exhorted the population to swear allegiance against the landowners and nobility and raise the flag higher, march with other workers, listen to speeches, and then disband in song on the anniversary. Other posters took comical aim at the fate of the bourgeoisie and other domestic enemies. Mocked by onlookers, industrialists cried crocodile tears on the graves of counterrevolutionaries in several of the posters. In one ROSTA window, the text reads, "When the workers won in Russian and the first anniversary arrived, the bourgeoisie weren't bothered and they walked with us. When the second anniversary came, the bourgeoisie got worried, their titles and ranks forgotten And, at the third anniversary, life seems strained to the utmost, so that the fourth anniversary celebrating Soviet Russia, will not disturb the dead bourgeoisie." [170]

[170] See the ROSTA Windows, nos. 400, 397, 401, 367 (u-1296), 382 (u-1274), 395 (u-1284), and 398 (u-1296) in

In addition to the carnivalesque mockery of insidious bourgeois attitudes, the anniversary posters worked to establish a national identity with sustained negative references of domestic and foreign enemies threatening the new state, and by implication, the October Revolution. The chauvinistic posters often painted the struggle in violent and grotesque imagery. In some of the posters the workers' defense of the revolution resembled a glorified street fight, perhaps appealing to the popular violence inherent in early workers culture. One Petrograd poster pictures a worker fighting an industrialist with a knife, while another worker watches at a distance. The accompanying text reads, "Those (of you) not in the Party—the capitalists want to destroy the working class. Don't sit on the sidelines. Join the Party to increase our forces and crush the enemies of the proletariat." *Labor will be the Master of the World! Three Years of the Proletariat Dictatorship* (*Vladykoi mira budet trud! Tri goda proletarskoi diktatury*) features a colossal pugilistic worker, shirt sleeves rolled up, with clenched fists and a raised foot, ready to stomp out a collection of terrified enemies comprising a White general, an Englishman in tweed, a generic capitalist, and Uncle Sam.[171]

Symbolic violence unquestionably has been a mainstay of war posters immemorial, and this element continued to dominate the posters for the celebration. An artist's reliance on excessive violence was problematic; posters during the post-Revolutionary period were criticized for their simplistic portrayal of the revolution as slaughter. The color red, the conventional marker for communism, but also the blood of the enemies, filled the placards and brought the bloodshed of the Civil War directly to the urban streets. One Soviet commentator later noted

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the Gosudarstvennyi muzei Maiakovskogo; *Petro. pravda*, 10 November 1920.

[171] Gosudarstvennyi Literaturnyi Muzei; For a discussion of the everyday street violence of workers culture in the Donbass-Dnepr region, see Charters Wynn, *Workers, Strikes and Pogroms* (Princeton, New Jersey, 1992), 86-94; White, *Bolshevik Poster*, 101, pl. 5.21 .

that in the period's posters "blood flowed in streams, to such an extent that quite often there was a danger that the supplies of red paint would completely run out."[172] Moreover, talented poster artists, such as Deni Moor, effectively combined menacing and ridiculous attributes to symbolically destroy the power of the enemies. For example, *Comrades, We celebrate Red October with a Bayonet and Hammer!* (*Tovarishchi, vintovkoi i molotom prazdnuem Krasnyi Oktiabr!*) depicts a Red Army soldier and worker taking turns pulverizing the grimacing and maniacal White Army General P. Wrangel, whose body assumes the form of a large anvil. The soldier pierces Wrangel's skull with a bayonet, while the worker waits, poised to strike the enemy with a hammer. Swatches of red filled the poster's frame, seen as banners with communist slogans, and also suggesting the necessity of shedding the enemy's blood to build communism. The images of Wrangel here and elsewhere appear particularly demonic and grotesque, no doubt in response to the last organized White Army threat. In 1920 Wrangel's forces posed a serious threat to the new state; in September his troops had begun a major offensive in the south. The Red Army eventually forced Wrangel to retreat and cede his hold on the Crimea during the first week of November. Ironically, the White forces began their evacuation when the poster was finally printed.[173]

Poster artists also depicted the former classes of the old order as both comical and dangerous to the RSFSR. The poster *Long Live the 3rd Anniversary of the October Revolution. The Last, Decisive Fight! (Da zdravstvuet 3-ia godovshchina Oktiabr'skoi revoliutsii. Poslednii, reshitel'nyi boi!* ) represents the war against capitalism. A Red Army soldier, the world his

[172] V. P. Polonsky, *Russkii revoliutsionnyi plakat* (Moscow, 1925), 61, cited in White, *Bolshevik Poster*, 115.

[173] N. Baburina has remarked that Deni Moor was a true artist since he identified with the revolution. As a result, his trenchant poster art was an effective weapon in the Bolshevik arsenal. *The Soviet Political Poster 1917-1980*, trans. Boris Rubalsky (New York, 1985), 3; Moscow, 1920, *Revoliutsionnyi prazdnichnyi plakat*.

pedestal, attacks a porcine, blood-spattered industrialist, debased both literally and figuratively in the poster. Some posters, such as *On the Eve of World Revolution (Nakanune mirovoi revoliutsii*) chose to emphasize the absurd, dehumanizing the enemies almost beyond recognition. Without the labels and conventional attendant visual props of a cross, a sack of rubles, and a royal scepter, the priest, the capitalist and even the tsar would be difficult to identify. The trio is eerily drawn as large red simian-faced monoliths. The anonymous artist deliberately framed them as primitive gods, complete with a sacrifice—in this instance, a pile of skulls in front of the slightly elevated tsar. A defiant bare-chested worker sets fire to the imposing menace. Given viewers' hostility (and often incomprehension of) avant-garde poster designs, the agitational effect of this example is questionable.[174]

The posters for the third anniversary certainly do not convey the underlying tone of fear and desperation, so visible in the posters issued in 1919. Both Deniken's and Iudenich's troops had astounding successes in that year, advancing dangerously close to both capital cities. In October, Deniken's forces had come within 250 miles of Moscow and the White army under Iudenich's leadership advanced to within a hundred miles of Petrograd. The posters reflected the crises and presented the stakes in vivid Manichean terms. One poster in Moscow announced, "The enemy is at the Gates. He brings enslavement, famine and death." In Petrograd, the Commissariat of War printed an anniversary poster that featured Iudenich. In the first frame, the White Army general towers above a frightened crowd, resting his arm on the gallows; the accompanying text reads," How Iudenich thinks the October Anniversary should be celebrated."

[174] Gosizdat printed the poster for Moscow in 1920. The poster had a 10,000 copy print run). *Revoliutsionnyi prazdnichnyi plakat*; GTsMSHR, 1920; White, *Bolshevik Poster*, 114.

The subsequent frame, with a Red Army soldier crushing the general and planting a red banner in his stomach, explains how "we celebrate the holiday."[175]

In contrast, the posters of 1920 indicate that October had taken on universal significance, far beyond an anniversary of the events of October 1917. By late 1920, the successes of the Red Army in the Civil War indicated that victory was at hand. For many Communists, the impending Communist victory signaled the inauguration of global socialist revolution and the attendant overthrow of the international bourgeoisie. The anniversary posters of 1920, and to a lesser extent 1921, repeatedly illustrated this sentiment, not only rekindling hopes of party activists, but also providing inspiration, and perhaps justification of the hardships to the war-weary urban populations. For example, the text of the poster *On October 25th 1917—On October 25th 1920* (*25e oktiabria 1917 goda—25e oktiabria 1920 goda*) reads, "The Russian proletariat has thrown off the chains of slavery, and now, having inhaled communism, will take over the whole world."[176] The widely circulated poster *The Workers Have Gained Power in Russia. Workers Will Gain Power all over the World. Long Live Worldwide October! (Rabochie zavoevali vlast' v Rossii. Rabochie zavoiuiut vlast' vo vsem mire. Da zdravstvuet mirovoi Oktiabr'!* ) inscribes this revolutionary mantra three times in its circular tableau, with increasing symbolic significance. The disembodied text located at the foot of the display is adopted in the red parade banner of the marching Russian proletariat. Moving right past the centrally located RSFSR official emblem, the might of the expanding October Revolution literally and figuratively repulses adversaries, as

[175] *Izv*., 9 November, 1919; *How Iudenich Thinks the October Anniversary Should be Celebrated* (*Kak dymal otprazdnovat' Oktiabr'skuiu revoliutsiiu Iudenich*) issued in Petrograd, 1919 in B.S. Butnik-Siverskii, *Sovetskii plakat epokhi grazhdanskoi voiny, 1918-1921*, 643, pl.232.

[176] GIM (Izmailovo), f. 454, d. 148, l. 21,

a large red flag with 'Worldwide October' forcefully tosses capitalists and a priest off the poster.[177]

The anniversary posters revealed more than just the theme of triumphal conquest. October's promise of vibrant industrial and economic growth featured prominently in many of the posters of the latter years of the war, often represented with the use of the symbols of billowing smokestacks or a bridge in the composition. Plumes of smoke from factories can be seen in many of the posters, signaling future industrial production and the tangible strength of the proletariat. The bridge also signified the transitional aspect of the Civil War (and later of NEP). Poster artists used the telltale iron arch as part of the future revolutionary city. A truss bridge features prominently in the 'kingdom of labor' of D. Mel'nikov's poster 25 October 1917-7 November (25 October) 1920). Another poster from that year makes the connection explicit. In *The October Revolution is the Bridge to a Radiant Future* (*Oktiabr'skaia revoliutsiia – most k svetlomy budushchemu*), a speeding train with endless freight cars traverses a stone bridge, moving from 1917 to the year 1921. Waving a red banner and puffing smoke, the locomotive's symbolism not only speaks to the future promise of October, but also celebrates the restoration of railroads severely disabled during the war. The train ltakes its name from 'Order No. 1042,' the transport order that required the repair of all railroads in 1920, making them serviceable during the war.[178]

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[177] M. M.., (Moscow, 1920). The poster had a print run of 20,000 copies. *Revoliutsionnyi prazdnichnyi plakat.* The poster also displays workers carrying banners with the slogans 'All power to the Soviets', 'With comunists [*sic*] in the soviets towards a better future' and, ironically given the poster's typographical error, 'Down with Illiteracy'.

[178] For a brief discussion of recurrent symbols in early Soviet agitational art see, V.P. Tolstoi et.al., eds., *Agitmassovoe iskusstvo Sovetskoi Rossii. Materialy i dokumenty. Agitpoezda i agitparoxody. Peredvizhnoi teatr. Politicheskii plakat. 1918-1932. Tablitsy.* (Moscow, 2002), 176-228, and 246; *Revoliutsionnyi prazdnichnyi plakat.*

The promise of October continued to be a popular idiom for the anniversary posters as the government tried to make appeals of support to the population, including women. As Elizabeth Wood has shown, the Communists tried to win the sympathies of working women to gain their support and elicit their assistance in the war effort. Poster art of the Civil War anniversaries from illustrate this type of graphic mobilization. ROSTA windows asked women to celebrate by sewing or collecting goods for the Red Army. The Civil War had thwarted progress in the improvement of women's lives, temporarily postponing delivery of promised resources for maternity as well as cultural enlightenment. The widely circulated *What the October Revolution Has Given the Worker and Peasant Woman* (*Chto dala Oktiab'skaia Revoliutsiia rabotnitse i krest'ianke*) registers the optimistic hope that victory would soon result in the creation of institutions to help working women. Gripping a hammer, an apron-clad female worker stands atop a rock with the verbal mottos "land to the peasantry" and "factories to the workers." Arm outstretched, the woman points to a cluster of neoclassical style buildings – a library, a communal cafeteria, a workers club for women, a school for adults, a kindergarten, and a workers and peasants soviet; interestingly the last governmental institution is dwarfed by a House for Mothers and Children. The poster's tone is ambiguous. A cloud of white smoke atop the buildings, a trick of fairy-tale magic perhaps, underscores the poster's somewhat chimerical quality and the fictitious ascendancy of women in the immediate post-Revolutionary period. With the notable exception of municipal soviets and communal cafeterias, few of these resources actually materialized. The limited number of openings of nurseries, children's' homes, and pediatric clinics were usually synchronized with the commemorations to illustrate progress towards the promise of October.[179]

[179] Elizabeth A.Wood, *The Baba and the Comrade: Gender and Politics in Revolutionary Russia* (Bloomington,

Simultaneously creating a genealogy for the revolution and legitimizing the new government, agitational films during the political holiday also served to articulate the party's political agenda. Cinemas and theaters showed free (political and commercial) films, regularly introduced by short topical political speeches. Several specially commissioned newsreels presented citizens with a genealogy of the Revolution via film footage of recent historical events and significant moments in the new history of the regime. Dziga Vertov expanded his earlier film *The Anniversary of the Revolution* that combined historical footage of the previous holiday festivities with a political chronicle in time for the 1919 commemoration. The newly added fourth reel was also separately screened (and released) as *The Brain of Soviet Russia* (*Mozg Sovetskoi Rossii*). As in his previous reels, the new section of the film used fragmented footage from *Kino-Week* (*Kino-Nedelia*) issues. Yet, the supplemental material focused almost exclusively on the current political leadership, providing a veritable "*Who's Who*" of the new Soviet government. The film included the first film shot of Lenin after the assassination attempt on his life. With the purpose of broader political education in mind, Lenin ordered the film released abroad as well. Two year later in 1921, Petrograd Film Section's documentary compiled a short narrative of the history of the new state which appeared to be another recycled effort using both old and new footage of historical events, in a style later criticized for the its abundance of funerals and parades. Meetings joined the list of subjects for cinematic

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Indiana, 1997), 45; The poster was printed in Moscow, 1920, with 25,000 copies issued; I have borrowed Jean Starobinski's term "fictitious ascendancy" to emphasize the symbolic, and not actual, revolutionary achievements afforded women. Jean Starobinski, *Invention of Liberty, 1700-1789* (Geneva, 1964) 53-54. A short list of opened maternal facilities can be seen in *Pravda,* 7 November 1921.

commemoration in this newsreel, which included special political congresses such as those of the Communist International and the Peoples of the Far East.[180]

Yet, the urban populations found cinematic political tributes formed a small fraction of free film offerings for the holidays. Not surprisingly, by 1921 the holiday film schedules included more commercial films competing with an official cinematic historical narrative. *Petrogradskaia pravda* listed new agitational historical films such as *The Red Leaders of October* (*Krasnye vozhdi Oktiabria*) and Black Days of Kronstadt (*Chernye dni Kronshtadta*) alongside the American films *Cabaret* and D.W. Griffith's *Intolerance.* Directed by Vsevolod Pudovkhin, Jack London's *Iron Heel* appeared as the sole commissioned film adaptation during these years. This story of a workers' revolution that ultimately overthrows a fascist oligarchy of American capitalists was a staple in the socialist literary canon. The 1919 film version, released by Narkompros, was part of an innovative (and critically acclaimed) production that interspersed film with live stagings, delivering a strong and, reportedly, successful political message.[181]

### 3.5. Compromise(d) Theater of the Revolution

Despite the period's extreme economic and political difficulties, the sheer quantity and aesthetic diversity of theater production for the anniversary celebrations were astounding. The increase in free and more affordable shows translated into a wider viewing audience. Compared

[180] *Izv*., 7 November 1919; Ibid., 2 November 1920.

[181] *Petro. pravda*, 9 November 1921; *Izv*., 9 November 1919. According to Leach, Pudovkhin staged *Iron Heel* in 1921, however the description of the movie and presentation matches the earlier production. Leach notes that due to budget constraints Pudovkhin cannibalized crowd scenes from American films and spliced them into his film. Leach, *Revolutionary Theatre,* 90.

to 1918, the amount of free shows had risen nearly fourteen times by 1919. Petrograd and Moscow offered a smorgasbord of holiday entertainment, from amateur skits on intimate factory club stages to gala performances of opera by the famous bass Fedor Shaliapin.[182]

Yet, during the Civil War, the majority of attempts to forge a new people's theater with political significance for the anniversaries failed. Initially the pre-Revolutionary academic and remaining variety theaters that tried to adapt (or survive) by staging revolutionary plays or new techniques garnered severe criticism. For example, cabarets that adopted the new style of agitational verse ultimately subverted the political meaning with a nostalgia for pre-Revolutionary luxuries, such as vodka. Later, critics assailed plays that combined political propaganda and popular literary genres to attract audiences. In 1921, Sergei Radlov's play *The Adopted Child* (*Priemysh')* offered viewers a Soviet detective play for the anniversary, borrowing from Sherlock Holmes stories and other "bourgeois adventure" literature. The story involved the theft of important Soviet documents by a Western European power, but critics complained that the circus-comedy action of the film overshadowed the political impact of the play.[183]

Faced with few new suitable plays, many academic and leftist theaters mined Narkompros' surrogate theater repertoire list for their anniversary productions. As during the previous holiday, the plays of Gor'kii and Nikolai Ostrovskii joined foreign theatrical fare of a revolutionary nature, such as *William Tell*, Schiller's *The Robbers*, and Mirbeau's *The Evil Shepherd*. Noted for it jarring realism, Charpentier's *Louise*, based on Parisian working-class

[182] *Russkii Sovetskii teatr*, 380-382; Mogilevskii, A.I. "Moskovskie teatry v tsifrakh," in *Teatry Mosky*, 12, cited in *Russkii Sovetskii teatr*, 381, n. 23; *Izv*., 9 November 1920.

[183] *Russkii Sovetskii teatr*, 381, 399.

life, made its first appearance during the 1920 anniversary.[184] Some productions attempted to incorporate successful agitation theatrical styles taken from traveling productions from the front and transplant the works onto urban stages. One such example was Spanish playwright Lopa de Vega's *Fuente Ovejuna* (*Ovechii istochnik*), which told the story of a tyrannical feudal lord murdered by oppressed villagers in the fifteenth century. The inhabitants defiantly refuse to confess to the killing, and eventually they are spared by the king's intervention. The Moscow staging for the third anniversary failed to duplicate the agitational success of the earlier wartime show, which had concluded with the audience of soldiers declaring a vow of loyalty to the state and demanding to fight. The 1920 production proved unable to rally the audience, perhaps due to the "hodgepodge of confusing movements" noted by critics. In one exception, the play *Revolutionary Wedding,* on the French Revolution succeeded in the transition from the front to Petrograd worker audiences in 1921. The academic stage actor Sergei Orlovskii provided an assessment of the French play's success: the revolutionary character and agitational style of the play suited the club administration, while an interesting plot with colorfully costumed characters captivated the (working class) audiences.[185]

Intended to engage the wider artistic community in topically suitable plays, Lunacharskii's own historical melodramas fell short of his goals and consistently drew sharp criticism, particularly from the left. Premiering on the 1921 anniversary, the Malyi's production of Lunacharskii's *Oliver Cromwell* aroused acrimonious debate in cultural circles, providing a touchstone for the larger issue of the role of Narkompros and the left in revolutionary theater.

[184] *Izv*., 6 November 1919; For an extensive list of scheduled performances that combines new and old repertoire, see *Pravda*, 7 November 1921.

[185] *Izv*., 3 November 1920. *Fuente Ovejuna* (*Ovechii istochnik*) was staged in Moscow in 1920; *Russkii Sovetskii teatr*. 399-400; *Petro. pravda*, 7 November 1921; Orlovsky, "Moscow Theaters," 10-11.

Lunacharskii had described his play as the story of the seventeenth-century English bourgeoisie recast (for contemporary relevance) to show Cromwell's reliance on the courageous and heroic simple folk, rather than the tale of a battle between Charles I and the revolutionary Cromwell. Lunacharskii had consciously modeled the character of Cromwell on Lenin, despite the former's biblical rationale and the latter's Marxist-Leninist philosophy. Denouncing the play as a "hymn to political compromise," Proletkul't theorist Platon Kerzhentsev attacked the its mysticism (or religiosity), condemnation of the Levelers, and misplaced focus on the "Danton" of the English Revolution.[186] The staging's wooden performances and simplistic plot garnered rebukes from audiences and theater critics. The film journal *Ekran* (*The Screen*) complained that the show was "hopelessly boring" and added that "at least the spectator, unlike the reviewer, was free to leave."[187]

Performed for the third anniversary in 1920, the much-vaunted spectacle *Storming of the Winter Palace* is truly significant for its place in the history of mass theater and for its theatricalization and legitimization of the October Revolution. The monumental undertaking, staged after only three weeks of rehearsal, involved a cast of over three thousand participants assembled from the Red Army, professional theater and ballet, amateur acting troupes, and everyday citizens. With the city of Petrograd as its stage, the performance also included a staggering number of military and municipal resources, including motorcycle couriers, trucks, automobiles, pyrotechnics, and the Battleship Aurora anchored nearby on the Neva. The Manichaean battle of Kerensky's Provisional Government versus Lenin and Petrograd's

[186] Fitzpatrick, *Commissariat*, 152-3; *Pravda*, 20 November 1921.

[187] *Ekran*, 13 November 1921. For a detailed study of *Oliver Cromwell*, see David Zolotnitskii, *Akademicheskie teatry na putiakh Oktiabria* (Leningrad, 1981), 91-95. Lunacharskii's other historical dramas seemed to have fared just as poorly. *Narod*, staged at the Nezlobin Theater in 1920 closed after only a few shows. Uvarova, *Estrada*, 354.

revolutionary workers and soldiers was hyperbolically re-enacted on two enormous (white and red) stages connected by a bridge. To minimize Kerensky's historical significance, his role was played by a single actor. The action begins with the installation of the Provisional Government in the February Revolution and ends with the workers storming the palace, forcing Kerensky to flee (disguised as a woman) and ultimately defeating the Whites.[188]

Judging from most accounts, the spectacle was both a theatrical coup d'état and agitational success. Despite the grand scale of the staging, the only technical difficulty during the performance came when the Aurora continued firing volleys because of a briefly severed telephone link to the ship. Accounts of the spectacle describe an incredibly enthusiastic audience of no fewer than 30,000. Reporters recounted the reactions of peasant women in the audience as initially fearful of the spectacle's pyrotechnics, but later enthusiastically joining the other members of the audience captivated by the dramatic action (or at the very least, the grand scale of the presentation.) According to one newspaper, workers and Red Army viewers spontaneously responded to the unfolding events on stage, heckling Kerensky with taunts such as, "You're not so arrogant now, begging your ministers and foreign bankers for money!"[189]

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[188] For more detailed descriptions of the performance see, "Libretto instsenirovki "Vziatie Zimnego Dvortsa"" in *Russkii Sovetskii teatr*, p. 272-273; *Vestnik teatra*, 30 November 1920; Nikolai Petrov in *Piatdesiat' i piatsot* (Moskva, 1960), 194-195; *Vestnik Teatra*, no.75, 30 Nov. 1920, pp4-5; Leach, *Revolutionary Theatre*, 46-50; Frantisek Deak, "Russian Mass Spectacles," *Drama Review*, vol. XIX, no.2, June 1975, 7-22, Von Geldern, *Bolshevik Festivals*, 200-207.

[189] Leach, *Revolutionary Theatre*, 48. It is difficult to provide an accurate count and profile of the spectators. *Vestnik teatra* published a figure of 30,000. In 1926, Adrian Piotrovskii estimated the crowds totaled 100,000. "Khronika Leningradskikh prazdnestv, 1919-1922," in *Massovye prazdnestva* (Leningrad, 1926), 75-76. According to observers, the inclimate weather held back thepotential numbers. Moreover, the crowd included civilians, military units, and visiting peasants and delegations. "Stat'ia neustanovlennogo avtora 'Vziatie Zimnego Dvortsa" in

Yet contemporary and later critics questioned whether the spectacle was truly a theater of mass collective action that aimed to transform the participants, or simply a highly choreographed and militarized theatrical performance unique to a period of war.[190] In fact, PUR had sponsored the mass spectacle. For some observers, the sense of joy and apotheosis of a true people's festival had been drowned out by the military coordination of the drama. Like a military battalion, units of actors were instructed to blindly follow their leaders on stage. One of the team of directors, Nikolai Petrov, felt that the organic nature sought in mass action had been lost to the militarization needed to stage such a grand-scaled play. In 1922, Adrian Piotrovskii echoed these sentiments and suggested that the solution was not to pursue mass spectacles, but to channel cultural energies to the amateur stages in clubs so as to develop an organic theater of the revolution.[191]

In fact, the amateur theater in workers' clubs and red army studios for the anniversaries proved popular and innovative. Many felt that this emergent genre held enormous potential for agitprop drama purposes and for the realization of a people's festival because of its spontaneity and freedom from conventionality. For example, in Petrograd in 1920 actors from a Red Army studio and the Putilov factory created a "Red Ball" —a communist masquerade party to be held in the palaces of those overthrown by the proletariat. The original plan was scaled back and the ball was held in the Tavricheskii Palace, the location of former imperial balls and the official seat

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*Izvestiia Petrogradskogo Soveta rabochikh i krasnoarmeiskikh deputatov*, 9 November 1920 cited in *Russkii Sovetskii teatr*, 273-4.

[190] In fact, a similar, albeit smaller theatrical battle drama entitled *The Taking of the Azov* was staged in the capital during World War I. See Von Geldern, *Bolshevik Festivals*, 16.

[191] Von Geldern, *Bolshevik Festivals*, 200; Petrov, *Piatdesiat' i piatsot*, 195; Piotrovskii, *Za sovetskii teatr!*, 161-162.

of dual power in 1917. In this revolutionary carnival, participants wore masks of the nobility and priests, and paraded around the halls singing workers' anthems. Such amateur productions were often improvised, stimulating impromptu (and potentially dangerous) reactions from the audience. In *The Cross* presented for the third anniversary in Moscow's Red Presnia district, workers responded violently to the actor playing a member of the bourgeoisie who had protested the Soviet's decision to take revolutionary action in 1917. The papers reported that after some viewers hurled objects at the "counterrevolutionary," the audience became agitated and was calmed only with difficulty. Accounts reveal that many workers (male and female) attended the amateur plays and that often the studios were filled to capacity.[192]

During these years, the results of the ambitious Theatrical October campaign to create a theater revolutionary in content and staging were mixed. In spite of a few misfires, TEREVSAT's productions for the anniversaries seemed to enjoy considerable success. In 1920, the theater premiered V. Shishkov's *The Little Peasant* (*Muzhichok*). The two-act play centers on the life of a rich peasant (*kulak)* who finally overcomes his reactionary attitudes only when some workers perform a scenario of a return to pre-Revolutionary days of constant hardship. The show premiered exclusively for the delegates of the All-Russian Peasant Conference in Moscow scheduled for the holiday; the play's initial success led to a run in other locales. On the following anniversary of the October Revolution in 1921, TEREVSAT premiered *Encircled City* (*Gorod v kol'tse*), a revolutionary chronicle about the defense of Tsaritsyn, written by a participant in the battle, S.K. Minin. Despite the plot's claim to authenticity (and the theater's deliberate rejection of Futuristic stage design), critics charged that the play lacked revolutionary realism. Reviews in the theater press showed a desire for hyperbole rather than realism. *Ekran*

[192] *Petro. pravda*, 10 November 1920; *Pravda*, 9 November 1920.

found the play's *only* woman and *only* representative of Soviet power (from the Provincial Central Committee or *gubispolkom*) colorless. Another reviewer added that the play failed to reflect "the uncontrollable happiness, the clear, bright colors of our revolution, the dynamism and powerful liberation of the spirit, and its genuinely revolutionary pathos."[193]

Meierkhol'd's staging of *The Dawns* at R.S.F.S.R. Theater No. 1 for the second anniversary suggested that the creation of a new revolutionary and agitational spectacle that would resonate with proletarian audiences was a problematic endeavor. Given the scale of Meierkhol'd's ambitions and the official endorsement of the pioneering production, the premiere sparked serious and often rancorous debate on the correct path for a new revolutionary theater and the value of Futuristic stagings. Meierkhol'd had provided a modern adaptation of Verhaeren's play, replacing some of the original text to mirror contemporary political events and adhere to a Marxist-Leninist historical paradigm. To achieve the effect of a political meeting and thereby erase conventional theatrical divisions, Meierkhol'd directed actors to read news communiqués about current military victories (or reversals) at the front. The proper agitational response required Meierkhol'd to insert "plants" or agitators in the audience to enthusiastically react to telegrams, such as the announcement of Wrangel's defeat. Reportedly, this innovative stage technique and its success prompted other theaters to read ROSTA news announcements directly from stages rather than post them in theater halls. Kerzhentsev applauded Meierkhol'd's novel combination of agitational methods and revolutionary content, hailing the play as the first revolutionary spectacle to emerge in three years. Testifying to the show's success, other

[193] Leach, *Revolutionary Theatre*, 87-88; *Ekran*, no. 1, 1921; *Teatral'naia Moskva*, no.2, 1921; "Vospominaniia V.P. Komardenkova," in *Russkii Sovetskii teatr*, 188.

supporters commented that the show played in packed houses every night, with many repeat viewers.[194]

Despite Meierkhol'd's pioneering staging, criticism about the incomprehensibility of the performance came from high-ranking cultural (and Party) figures, and also from Red Army and workers' audiences. Viktor Shklovskii (a future Russian Formalist theorist and writer) found that the mixture of the play's original text and the dynamics of a contemporary meeting simply did not work. Voicing serious doubts about the component of the political rally, Lunacharskii questioned the impulse to simulate a meeting on stage, since there were so many "tiresome" meetings in those days.[195] The play's avant-garde stage design, consisting of a giant black curtain with Suprematist decorations, confused viewers. Moreover, audiences disliked the sack-like costumes and lack of make-up on cast members. An early supporter of the production and its pioneering spirit, Lunacharskii complained that he was embarrassed answering workers' questions about the meaning of the symbols and decorations on the stage.[196]

Nadezhda Krupskaia attacked not only the staging, but also the simplistic, and, in her view, unsuccessful revisions to the original text, including the automatic replacement of the term "government" with "the bourgeoisie." And why, she rhetorically asked, were soldiers anachronistically using spears and shields in a twentieth-century war? In short, she concluded that Meierkhol'd's adaptation resulted in a muddled metaphorical and philosophical text. More damaging was the charge that the intended audience of workers and soldiers, the constituency of

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[194] *Zhizn' iskusstva*, 8 November 1920; *Russkii Sovetskii teatr*, 141; *Pravda*, 10 November 1920; "Iz stat'i M.B. Zagorskogo *Zori*," in *Russkii Sovetskii teatr*, 148; *Vestnik teatra*, 15 November 1920, No. 74; Leach, 84, 67-68.

[195] Viktor Shlovskii, *Khod konia. Sbornik statei*.(Moscow annd Berlin, 1927), 65-67; A. Lunacharskii, "Beseda o *Zoriakh* v Teatre R.S.F.S.R.," *Vestnik teatry*, no.75 (1920), 13.

[196] David Zolotnitskii, *Meierkhold. Roman s sovetskoi vlast'iu.* (Moscow, 1999), 60.

the October Revolution (and Theatrical October), did not understand the play, consequently spoiling the political impact of the production. Several accounts reveal that the play's agitators had to frequently prompt audience members when to applaud and laugh during the performance. Soon reports surfaced suggesting that unenthusiastic soldiers had been "herded" to repeatedly view the show. In addition to the staging's inpenetrability, one newspaper correspondent amusingly noted that many simply refused the free tickets hoping for a new revolutionary substitute for *The Dawns*, even if it meant an "an eclipse of the sun."[197] Soon the initial revolutionary enthusiasm for the play gave way to parody. In less than four months, Nikolai Foregger and Vladimir Mass injected Chekhov's farce "A Marriage Proposal" ("*Predlozhenie*") with staging techniques taken directly from Meierkhol'd's *The Dawns*. In the lampoon, choric shouts of political slogans interrupted Chekhov's characters; and the play's finale presented a celebration of the Revolution in a cow pasture.[198]

No performance during the anniversary celebrations of 1919 to 1921 showed more starkly the tensions in the construction of a revolutionary spectacle to commemorate October than Isadora Duncan's "Dance of the Revolution" performed in 1921. Duncan's reputation as a revolutionary sympathizer and pioneer in modern dance had earned her an official Soviet invitation to open a school in Moscow earlier that year. Lunacharskii had compared the dancer to an apostle teaching new aesthetic truths. A fellow enthusiast of mass festivals, Vsevobuch director N. Podvoiskii had also admired her adoption of ancient models in rhythmic

[197] *Pravda*, 10 November 1920, Leach, *Revolutionary Theatre*, 85; Zolotnitskii, *Meierkhold*, 59.

[198] Ibid., 59-60.

performances. Subsequently, Lunacharskii had invited Duncan to perform at the Bolshoi Theater on November 7th as the main entertainment for the political holiday.[199]

Predictably Duncan chose to present a revolutionary interpretative dance that depicted the tragedy, ecstasy, and rebirth of the Revolution. More controversially, the dancer selected Tchaikovsky's *Pathetique Symphony* and *Marche Slave*, which included several bars of the tsarist national anthem. The planned inclusion of refrains of "God Save the Tsar," although brief, sparked fear of counterrevolutionary reactions from the audience. Lunacharskii was quickly dispatched to view the final rehearsal and ensure acceptability of the performance before the gala event. Without revisions, the commissar approved the allegorical pantomime. To provide a proper political context for the performance, Lunacharskii introduced Duncan on the night of the performance and included preemptory explanatory remarks on the upcoming problematic musical section. In Duncan's rendition, he asserted, the *Marche Slave* was transformed into a powerful aesthetic and agitational weapon. Clad in an emblematic red peasant tunic, Duncan (with the help of several of her pupils) portrayed the story of the uprising of the enslaved peasantry and its ultimate liberation in the October Revolution. Yet,

[199] Isadore Duncan held revolutionary sympathies, but adhered to no formal ideology. From its inception, she had been drawn to the Russian Revolution. When the tsar was overthrown, Duncan paid tribute to the Russian masses in a performance at the Metropolitan Opera House in March 1917. Following a performance in London in April 1921, Leonid Krasin (Soviet Ambassador to Britain) approached Duncan with an offer to establish a school of dance in Moscow. Later she received an official telegraph from Lunacharskii finalizing the offer. The school was informally opened in July and officially in December 1921. *Teatral'naia Moskva*, 11 November 1921; On Podvoiskii's directorship of mass actions and his professional relationship to Duncan, see Susan Corbesero, "If We Build It, They Will Come: The International Red Stadium Society, 1918-1934 and the New Soviet Man," (paper presented at the Midwest Russian History Colloquium, University of Akron, 1995).

Lunacharskii's measured interpretation did not stifle left-leaning or moderate cultural critics, who vociferously questioned the suitability of a tsarist anthem in the homage to October Adopting the most diplomatic tone, *Izvestiia* published an overall positive review of the performance (mainly praising to Duncan's visible sincerity), but noted that several interpretive sections proved problematic.[200]

Among the cultural producers and critics on the left who were heavily invested in the creation of new proletarian art forms for the celebrations, the response was stridently indignant. Protesting the performance directly to Lunacharskii, one Proletkul't artist wondered how a people's festival "in the spirit of our times" could possibly emerge from Tchaikovskii's symphony. Moreover, Duncan's performance also illustrated the continued reliance on cultural genres from the past, instead of the creation of new commemorative practices and spectacles for the working class.[201]

Finally, and more significantly in light of the commemoration of October, Duncan's performance had a questionable agitational impact. Unrepresentative of the masses, the selective audience had included Lenin and other Party officials, government authorities, cultural leaders, foreign correspondents, and members of the military. Reportedly, Duncan had wanted to dance for the less fortunate workers, who, she noticed, had gathered in the snow outside the Bolshoi Theater and were later denied entrance by cordons of police. Yet the likelihood of a political impact on a more democratic audience seems even more dubious. Accounts reveal that many spectators reacted to the incomprehensibility of the dance with laughter. While some mocked

[200] Irma Duncan and Allan Ross Macdougal, *Isadora Duncan's Russian Days and her Last Days in France* (New York, 1929), 91-2; Ilya Schneider, *Isadora Duncan: The Russia Years*, trans. David Magarschack (New York, 1968), 72-73; *Izv.*, 9 November 1921.

[201] *Teatral'naia Moskva*, 11 November 1921.

Duncan's costume, other viewers took offense at its provocative nature. The meaning of the allegorical pantomime escaped many viewers**.** A young military pilot in attendance later confessed that since he did not understand the choreography, he looked to Lenin for the appropriate response to the performance. He was surprised to see the Soviet leader weeping, overcome with emotions from the performance.[202]

The charges leveled against Duncan's performance echoed the larger contest over the creation of a revolutionary spectacle and commemorative practices for the political anniversaries during the Civil War. For those seeking to create a people's festival that embodied the essence and ideal of October, the reaction to Duncan's dance illustrated the frustrated need to fulfill that goal by the Party, cultural producers, and the masses during a time of economic crisis and war. More conservative cultural figures voiced growing concerns about the encroaching militarization in the anniversaries during this period, intuitively at odds with the intent of creating unbridled joy in a revolutionary festival. Krupskaia openly attacked the crude use of artificial agitational methods transplanted from military campaigns at the expense of general enlightenment of the masses. Uniquely forged in the atmosphere of the Civil War, another anniversary model had also emerged during these lean years, one that eschewed mass public celebrations in favor of cemetery pilgrimages and festivities in workers' clubs, including agitational theater, political speeches and reminiscences from participants in the Revolutions. Such expressions worked to sustain the necessary image of a nation-in-arms. An article in *Petrogradskaia pravda* on the

[202] Duncan and Macdougall, *Isadora Duncan's Russian Days,* 93; Philip Gibbs, *Since Then* (London, 1930), 340; Kh. Pakov, "Vospominaniia o Lenine," in *Lenin, revoliutsiia, teatr*., 294-295.

fourth anniversary in 1921 had viewed these commemorative practices as a genuine people's holiday, in which citizens directly promote (and thereby absorb) the significance of October. [203]

In response to pressing economic realities and ideological needs of wartime, the Bolsheviks increasingly sought greater control of the meaning of October in the Civil War commemorations. Driven by ideological concerns to create a new citizenry and pragmatic needs to mobilize a traumatized and polarized urban population, the state promoted celebratory practices and imagery to recast the Revolution to promote a nation-in-arms, rallied behind the promises of October, and buoyed by the impending international victory of the Revolution. Yet, the intended agitational effects of the commemorative projects were muted and compromised by fiscal constraints, a severe food crisis, and competing cultural strategies to frame the Revolutionary message. More importantly, the resulting celebratory practices and holiday fare failed to resonate with urban spectators and proletarian audiences. For the many urban civilians who viewed the anniversaries as a source of food and diversion, a cultural (and in many cases, political) gap still existed between them, the politicians, and the cultural producers of the political holiday.

[203] *Teatral'naia Moskva*, 11 November 1921; Fitzpatrick, *Commissariat*, 254; *Petro, pravda*, 9 November 1921.

## 4. October on Display (1922-1926)

*Celebrations are the condensation of everyday life.*
Adrian Piotrovskii, 1923[204]

*Efforts should be made so that there are no barefoot children in the holiday demonstration as in past years. It leaves a depressing impression, especially in the cold weather, which is expected at the beginning of November.*

Leon Trotskii, 1922[205]

The anniversaries of the October Revolution from 1922 to 1926 exhibited remarkable consistency. Begun in the Civil War, the trend toward bureaucratization and increasing party control of the commemorations continued in this period, ultimately producing a party-directed hierarchy of commissions, participatory organs, cultural producers, and supervisory agencies. During the period of the New Economic Policy (NEP), the party aimed to mobilize the vast population in all aspects of the celebration to communicate the meaning of October. To showcase national strength and economic achievements, the anniversary parades in Moscow and Petrograd/Leningrad are noteworthy for their scale, official design, and inclusion of industrial spectacle. In the holiday's more intimate venue of workers clubs, the party now endorsed and promoted mass holiday campaigns that employed amateur activities and entertainment to attract

[204] Adrian Piotrovskii, *Petro. pravd*a, 9 November 1923.

[205] A "top secret" mail-telegram from Leon Trotskii to Lev Kamenev and Nikolai Muralov (commander of Moscow's military district) dated 14 September 1922. RGASPI, f. 17, op. 60, d. 163, l. 55.

and enlighten participants in the commemoration. The party also enlisted film and theater, as potentially powerful media for agitation, to spread the message of October during the holidays.

Introduced in 1921, the New Economic Policy's (NEP) gradual reintroduction of market economics, and a more plural artistic and cultural scene, ultimately brought contention to the commemorative project. By 1922, the militarism and rigidity of political holidays had discernibly shifted, as the party and cultural ideologues allowed and injected elements of carnival and entertainment into revolutionary commemorative practices. However, the new fiscal realities, plurality in arts, and re-emergence of urban commercial life jeopardized the ability of the party and advocates of proletarian culture to control and define the message of October during the holidays. Faced with alternative cultural offerings, the public often rejected and compromised political agitation and entertainment during the commemorations. For the party, the anniversary celebrations during these years highlighted serious tensions between entertainment and education, spontaneity and order, and amateurism and professionalism. By 1926, a growing chorus of cultural dialogues and reformers had joined the party calling for a more controlled and effective representation of October.

### 4.1. October and Political Culture: Exhibitionism and Inhibitions

Like other national spectacles in the interwar period, the mass celebrations commemorating October provided the Soviet state with a vehicle to buttress its authority and to give ordinary citizens a political compass in the turbulent 1920s. Anchored in the ideology that stressed the primacy of the party, internationalism, and the dictatorship of the proletariat, the celebration's purpose was to convey the triumphant message of the Russian proletariat's seizure of power and subsequent establishment of the Soviet government. Additionally, the

accompanying directives for each celebration included current political agendas, national and international. As one October Celebration Bulletin to trade union organizations summarized, "For every worker the holiday should remind him of the heroic struggle and gain, the subsequent path during the interim years, and the tasks that now stand before him in order to strengthen that dictatorship."[206]

Granted many of the topical propaganda aims, consistently appearing in the party directives, were similar throughout the period, such as the emphasis on a *smychka* (union) between peasant and worker, or the fight against international capitalism. However, some attendant political slogans and talking points specifically addressed issues of the day. In 1922, the party felt the necessity to arm agitators with an extensive arsenal of political topics that included the need to warn workers that, although "the cessation of the civil war marked the move towards revolutionary legality, they should be prepared to go back to a form of terror as long as the bourgeoisie remained on the offensive**."**[207] Official holiday bulletins provided slogans to address the loss of Lenin in 1924, such as "The Seventh Anniversary of October, without Lenin, but on the Leninist Path." Party and trade union directives instructed agitators to use previous holiday plans, simply inserting pressing topics, such as the emergent revolutionary movement in China. Occasionally, world events directly influenced the anniversaries. As part of the holiday

[206] On the official meanings for the holidays, see the Moscow Party Committee Agitprop protocols on the celebrations located in RGASPI, f. 17, *passim*. The protocols are the most descriptive for the years 1922 to 1923. Judging from published bulletins, planning for the celebrations for the later years followed the same party protocols. GARF, f. 5451 op. 8, d. 395, l. 1.

[207] GARF, f. 5451, op. 9, d. 526, l. 10; *Biulleten' Moskovskoi Gubernskoi Kommiccii po provedeniiu prazdnovaniia deviatoi godovshchiny Oktiabria*. 20 October 1926. No.1. There was no specific rationale cited for this talking point.

proceedings in 1923, the Petrograd October Commission installed a large radio tower on Uritskii Square to broadcast German telegrams about the communist movement.[208]

The anniversary celebrations also brandished the reconstruction of the economy as a political weapon to use against internal and external enemies. The party designed the political holidays of the NEP to restore popular faith in the vitality of the nation's economic and political system, and, more specifically, in the ability of the political leadership to lead the country on a new path of socialist construction, governance, and abundance. As such, the commemorations can be seen as celebratory practices of cultural and ideological repair and renewal, intended to show off the nation's economic strength. In the parades and club activities, the economic and political displays reinforced each other, offering Soviet citizens a visible evolutionary justification for the new political path.[209]

Moreover, the party hoped that the political message of the October celebrations would spread beyond Soviet borders. October Commission circulars highlighted the aim to use the anniversary demonstration to present an image of a single united will of workers and peasants for internal and external consumption. The intent was to demonstrate to the world the might of the new power, as well as to convince its own citizenry of national solidarity. In 1925, the Leningrad Communist Party anniversary directives graphically explained, "With Lenin's Economic Plan we have overcome plans to enslave us. The unity of the working class and the

[208] *Prazdnik Oktiabria v pioneerskom klube* (Moscow, 1924), 5; "Tezisy dlia agitatorov k piatou godovshchine Oktiabr'skoi Revoliutsiia," published by Agitprop Department of TsK RKP, (Moscow, 1922).

[209] GARF, f. 5451, op. 10, d. 493, l.1.

peasantry is our fortress against international sharks, and against the NEPmen and kulaks, whom we will encircle with our victory."[210]

A persuasive display of strength required not just the participation of every citizen, but also the comprehensive mobilization of financial, bureaucratic, and cultural resources. Securing state funds for the holiday proved extremely difficult, given the fiscal constraints of NEP, particularly in the early years. As a result, the party tapped into the revenues of trusts to augment limited state monies for financing grander holidays. In 1922, *Trud* called for Moscow's trusts to donate more funds to pay for holiday sweets and rolls to workers' children, and to offset the expenses of hiring professional actors and orchestras for the anniversary celebration.[211]

By 1922, the Agitprop (Agitation and Propaganda) Section of the Central Committee controlled and dictated the general plans for the holidays**,** not only issuing instructions, but also directing local and regional committees. A defined bureaucratic hierarchy was now in place to execute the holiday designs and events. The party established and directed the All-Russian Commission on the Celebration of the October Revolution, a scheme that was then replicated at every governmental and factory level.[212]

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[210] "Podgotovka detei i podrostkov k prazdnovaniiiu 6- godov Oktiabr'skoi Revoliutsiia," (Moscow, 1923); Museum of the October Revolution, Leningrad, No. 3607/2, from the Leningrad Gubernia Commission of RKP(b) and the Northwestern Bureau of the Central Committee of the RKP (b).

[211] RGASPI, f. 17, op. 60, d. 163, l. 52; *Trud,* 28 October 1922.

[212] RGASPI, f. 17, op. 60, d. 613, l. 37-38, op. 16, d. 558, l. 39, d. 572, l. 75-76. See also *Biulleten Moskovskoi Gubernskoi Komissii po provedeniiu prazdnovaniia deviatoi godovshchiny Oktiabria,* 20 October 1926, No. 1 and *Biulleten Moskovskoi Komiteta RKP po organizazatsii prazdnovaniia 7-i godovshchiny Oktiabrskoi revolutsii.* (Supplement to *Rabochaia Moskva*), (Moscow, 1924)

Under the watchful eye of the party, the municipal October Commissions employed local governmental and cultural resources to implement party directives for the holiday. In addition to the party official(s), the commissions generally contained representatives from the trade union organization, government, Komsomol, and Women's Section (*Zhenotdel*). In turn, the commissions contained various subcommittees, including artistic, literature and publishing, budgetary, route, and children's programs divisions. The municipal October Commissions published detailed directives for the holidays, including official slogans, talking points, economic production figures, parade instructions, and plans for cultural and club venues. Moreover, oversight agencies censored and monitored holiday entertainment. In Moscow and Petrograd/Leningrad, the municipal Glavpolitprosvet (State Political Education) screened repertoire, utilizing its education department (MONO), Glavrepertkom (State Repertoire Committee), or the recently established revolutionary *estrada* (revue) board to censor and regulate public and club theatrical fare during the holidays. For example, in Moscow in 1925, a list of shows for the October celebrations includes days for screenings of the revues, as well as the inclusion of MONO's approval of the theatrical fare slated for the holiday.[213]

This elaborate bureaucratic network did not necessarily imply party control of the holiday design or its implementation. Trade unions, with their own burgeoning network of administrative and cultural bodies frequently presented separate holiday plans for factory clubs, which the party often rejected as "parallelism." Moreover, local capabilities and influential

[213] RGASPI, f. 17, *passim*; The term *estrada* refers to a theatrical revue, or a broad range of cabaret-style, variety or vaudevillian entertainment. In the twenties the term can be used to describe skits, pantomimes, living newspapers, acrobatics, clowning, puppet shows (the *Petrushka*), *chastushki* (popular ditties), and other small forms in the theater. *Novyi zritel'*, 3 November 1924, 11. Representatives from Gubpolitprosvet, Glavrepertkom and Mosgublit (Moscow Provincial Publishing) formed the commission.

artistic groups still ultimately shaped the anniversary celebrations. The artistic committees often consisted of a variety of groups exhibiting different cultural dispositions. For example, the artistic committee of Moscow's October Commission of the Moscow Party included members of Proletkul't, Glavpolitprosvet, the Cultural Section of the Trade Union Organization, and the Academic Theaters. Despite official moves to limit the policy-making power of the proletarian militant cultural organization, Moscow's Prolekul't continued to play an active role in training, design, and participation in the public events as well as in club work, particularly in Moscow. In 1923, the municipal October Commission specifically requested the active participation of Proletkul't in the artistic design of the holiday.[214]

Massive municipal parades continued to form the essential public component of the commemorative holiday. For the party, trying to control the parade's appearance and impose discipline on the demonstration were paramount concerns. The party determined the parade elements, such as the order of the demonstrators, the inclusion of industrial emblems, and the specific effigies for political satire. Very early on, Trotskii realized the importance of the parade for public relations and issued numerous (often top secret) directives intended to ensure a uniform and impressive public display of Soviet power. First, he recommended the use of the air force to lend an imposing character, but warned against the possibility of a tragedy if the operation was poorly planned. The Commissar of War also requested new identical hats, shoes, and uniforms for the Red Army divisions, an unrealistic demand owing to shortages of cloth and other resources. (Ultimately, the Moscow party agreed that Vsevobuch (Universal Military Training Corps of the Red Army) should temporarily loan 7000 sweaters for the army divisions,

[214] RGASPI, f. 17, op. 60, d. 613, l. 68 (art. Committee), Proletkul't was eventually sponsored by VTSSPS (The All-Russian Central Council of Trade Unions).

but only on the condition that the items would be returned.) In an effort to present a disciplined parade of civilians, Trotskii sought to prohibit demonstrators in the parade from reading books and children from disruptive behavior such as running in and out of columns and playing with toy guns.[215]

The party paid special attention to the selection and care of delegations in the public commemoration; these visitors were meant to observe the proceedings and also to be observed in the national parades. The party commissions made plans to include sizeable delegations of peasants to represent the *smychka*. In 1923, a total of a thousand peasants (three to five from each rural district) made up the delegation for Red Square. The party also ensured that foreign delegations, such as Comintern (Communist International) members and news correspondents, were well represented and afforded access with uninterrupted views of the spectacle.[216]

Each year, the party also commissioned the state film industry to film the parade for domestic and even foreign propaganda. Cameramen filmed the public proceedings for short educational movies or as part of larger documentaries for worker audiences. Again, Trotskii very early on recognized the parade as an effective means of propaganda, requested special considerations for foreign cameramen. In 1922, he suggested that the October Commission work with these filmmakers to arrange an effective parade order and also to include slogans in different languages on parade banners.[217]

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[215] RGASPI, f. 17, op. 60, d. 163, l. 54, 71, 55.

[216] See for example, A. Lunacharskii, "O narodnaykh prazdnestvakh," *Vestnik teatra*, 27 April – 2 May 1920, 13. As an example of political satire, Trotskii had proposed that one of the best contemporary soviet artists, such as Deni Moor, construct a gigantic effigy of French President Poincaire and release it from an airplane onto Red Square. RGASPI, f. 17, op. 60, d. 163, l. 51; d. 284, l. 67; d. 163, l. 60, 72.

[217] RGASPI, f. 17, op. 60, d. 613, l. 33-34.

With the Civil War victory, the party and festival planners rejected the rigid and martial tone of past demonstrations, and began to include elements of carnival in the public holiday. Although the party and cultural authorities desired a livelier and merrier demonstration, the uncontrolled use of carnival elements and *politestrada* in the commemorative practices (such as the national parades) carried political risks of disorder and, worse, improvisation. Lunacharskii among other party leaders had consistently cautioned against spontaneous and unorganized holiday entertainment that lacked a proper political purpose. In 1922, Trotskii reiterated these party fears.[218] The party sanctioned the use of proper political satire in the parade. To ensure the proper message, effigies of international foes, such as French President Raymond Poincaire, required careful treatment and design for effective propaganda. Moscow party officials approved parade designs, such as the satirical banners created by artists from the Meierkhol'd art studios. While many internal party and commission documents welcomed the festive elements, debates on the efforts to control and proletarianize the popular genre persisted throughout the period. Welcomed and feared for its popular dimension, *estrada* became a distinctive and controversial element in both the public demonstrations and in workers' clubs. [219]

Previously established during the Civil War period, the commemorative meeting-concerts in workers clubs continued to provide the more "intimate" part of the official holiday. **During**

[218] RGASPI, f. 17, op. 60, d. 163, l. 27. On the introduction and evolution of small forms in theater, see Mally, *Revolutionary Acts*.

[219] See Susan Corbesero, "Add Pomp and Stir: Workers' Club Theaters and the Sovietization of Estrada" (Paper presented at the Annual Conference of the American Association for the Advancement of Slavic Studies (AAASS), Boston, 1996). RGASPI, f. 17, op. 60, d. 163, l. 51. In 1923, Moscow party officials debated the use of carnival in light of the severity of the crushing of the German uprising. In the vote, the decision to include carnival was upheld in the parade. RGASPI, f. 17, op. 60, d. 613, l. 37 and f. 17, l. 99-100. *Novyi zritel'*, 11 November 1924.

the NEP, the commemorative festivities took on added importance. As before, each factory celebration began with a factory or party member (or both) perfunctorily reading the official reports drawn from party directives. Also, the "memory evenings" in which participants in revolutionary events chronicled their past, remained in the holiday festivities. Guidelines on this political segment barely changed in this period, with the interesting exception that workers' clubs were encouraged to make every effort to ensure the historical actor did not fabricate his tale. In 1923, the party openly endorsed the idea that club cultural work should be directly relevant to political and economic campaigns, and more specifically that club work for the revolutionary holidays formed a crucial link in the enlightenment of the workers. Cultural reformers joined with the party in promoting synchronized mass club campaigns for the celebrations on the annual red calendar, with the anniversary of the October Revolution representing the most significant revolutionary holiday. To attract the maximum amount of workers in the activities and in the audience, worker's club administrators and club circles staged shows with *estrada*.[220]

The party and cultural authorities greeted the revival of *estrada* on club stages with suspicion, fearing the corrosive influences of urban commercial life. The introduction and growth of *estrada* during these years answered two needs. Worker's clubs, as voluntary self-financing establishments, chose popular entertainment to raise revenue. But many also saw inherent value in using the genre as ideal for simultaneously spreading agitation with much-needed amusements, such as clownery and cabaret. Krupskaia, among others, warned that October celebrations in clubs should be kept proletarian in form and content, expressing the common fears that merriment without direction translated into chaos. Given the paucity of both

[220] *Klub*, September 1926, 7; *Proletarskie prazdniki v rabochikh klubakh*, ed. N. Krupskaia, (Moscow, 1924); *Trud*, 21 October 1922; *Rabochaia nedelia*, 15 November 1925; GARF, f. 5451, op. 5, d. 615, l. 9.

politically correct repertoire and experienced club circle leaders, this goal seemed at best premature. During the NEP, the establishment of the worker's acting troupes such as Blue Blouses (under the aegis of the Trade Union Administration) helped fill the void, as did the networks of theater laboratories that sent out instructors to help stage holiday fare in the clubs. Club journals published by Glavpolitprosvet and the Trade Union Council devoted scores of pages to promote the proper forms and stage designs. For example, articles on the use of a "Red Petrushka" now revamped to include new jester of social justice, such as the Petrushka-rabkor (a worker-correspondent) and Petrushka-komsomolka (a female Komsomol member), asked workers clubs to transform the fairground genre to one representative of the new revolutionary everyday life. Detailed designs for agitational masks provided officially sanctioned prototypes for socialist heroes and class foes. For example, one club journal article from 1925 offered illustrations for the Red Petrushka dolls, including the enemies of the simian "General Fosh-ist" in a uniform with swastikas and "Mr. Bopp," a rotund cigar-smoking capitalist in a safari hat. Each year, new skits, living newspapers, *chastushki*, and agitation trials (*agitsud*) filled the workers journals for holiday campaigns. An official censorship commission (The Revolutionary Estrada Bureau) with representatives from Glavrepertkom and Glavpolitprosvet screened club performances prior to the holiday. Finally, club directives urged workers to avoid improvisation and adhere to the written texts to ensure the proper moral and political conclusions for workers and foreign visitors.[221]

[221] On workers club theater, see John Hatch, "The Politics of Mass Culture: Workers, Communists and Proletkul't in the Development of Workers' Clubs, 1921-1925," in *Russian History*, vol. 13, no 2/3 (1986), 19-48; M. Reisner, "Istoriia var'ete" *Ermitazh*, 1922 No. 5, 5-6; *Oktiabr'skie postanovki: Sbornik*, (Leningrad, 1926); *Sovetskoe iskusstvo*, No. 6, 6 September 1925, 32-38; On the popularity and usage of the *agitsud* see Elizabeth Wood, *Performing Justice: Agitation Trials in Early Soviet Russia* (Ithaca and London, 2005). *Novyi zritel'*, October 1925.

The party embraced theater and film as the principal genres to saturate the national audience with visual messages to promote the meaning and significance of the October commemoration. Party leaders such as Lenin and Trotskii saw both film and theater as effective counterweights to dangerous pre-Revolutionary customs. In 1922, Krupskaia had argued that for the unlearned masses, the use of an image-laden medium, such as the theater, was one of the most effective forms of agitation.[222] Amateur and professional theater offered a potentially large and powerful school of civism, speaking to a primarily illiterate audience. The party encouraged and sponsored revolutionary theatrical productions for the commemorations, such as the agitational dramas of Proletkul't and Meierkhol'd, both vying for the right to express the message of October. After the defeat of his Theatrical October campaign, Meierkhol'd adeptly had created one exemplary theater with workshops and training schools to promote revolutionary theater. The other pillar in the cultural campaign to spread the message of October was film. Given the crippling effects of the Civil War on Soviet film and the new competition with foreign film during the NEP, film studios struggled to provide solid films for the holidays. The party encouraged agitational (and frequently questionable) films and theater by providing discounted or free tickets, even though it often translated into significant box office losses. During the NEP,

[222] According to Lunacharskii, Lenin had labeled cinema the most important art from for the Bolsheviks. *Samoe vazhnoe iz vsekh iskusstv. Lenin i kino* (Moscow, 1963), 124. Leon Trotskii, "Vodka, the Church and the Cinema," in *Bolshevik Visions*, ed. William Rosenberg, (Ann Arbor, MI, 1984), 373; N. Krupskaia, "Vystuplenie na IV Kongresse Kommunisticheskogo Internationala [1922]. *Pedagogicheskie sochinenii* (Moscow, 1947), 9:90 cited in Wood, *Performing Justice*, 87.

the two media eclipsed formerly influential holiday artistic genres, such as monumental propaganda and poster art.[223]

Like film and theater, the holiday celebrations themselves had the potential to enlighten, entertain and play significant roles in the creation of new socialist everyday life. Cultural reformers viewed the political celebrations as a condensation of life and a self-conscious analysis of the commemorative holidays became one of the currents in this larger cultural debate.[224] Theater and club journals and the newly established section on mass celebrations in the State Institute of the History of Art (GII) generated voluminous research and proposals for the official ritual. Headed by Adrian Piotrovskii, the GII section on mass celebration considered the contemporary holiday an organic and unique product of the new revolutionary life. Advocating Lunacharskii's celebratory model as the schema for the holidays, the department labored to increasingly attract more participants in the holiday, rather than direct them as automatons. Towards this aim, the GII section published detailed studies closely dissecting the art, rhetoric, sound, theater and spectator elements of the anniversaries in mid-decade. Moreover, the Leningrad institute trained celebration organizers and contributed staff and actors to club circles. Other cultural and theatrical organizations also provided artistic training for agitators and festival organizers. Theatrical workshops and acting troupes sponsored by Proletkul't and Meierkhol'd offered the majority of this type of help for Moscow factories and organizations. As such, these agencies created a corps of politically reliable and experienced specialists (*spetsy*) for work in

[223] Vance Kepley, Jr. and Betty Kepley, "Foreign Films on Soviet Screens, 1922-1931," in *Quarterly Review of Film Studies*, 4.4. Fall, 1979; 436,438; On the reconstruction of the Soviet film industry, see Leyda, *Kino*, 155-169; *Kino*, No 5/9, October/December 1923; See Stephen White, "The Bolshevik Poster," 32-34, for a discussion on the decline of poster art in the postwar years.

[224] Adrian Piotrovskii, *Petro. pravd*a, 9 November 1923.

future holidays. OSMKS, the Society for the International Red Stadium, led by N. Podvoiskii (formerly of the Red Army's Vsevobuch) also contributed to the debate on the proper format of mass celebratory activities. OSMKS pioneered the use of physical culture in the mass proletarian carnivals. The Society's acting troupe, The Red Blouses, also contributed to the creation of a genuine proletarian club theater in the pluralistic climate of NEP.[225]

## 4.2. Octobering

Politically and symbolically the year 1922 marked a new beginning for the Soviet state. Demands for attendant new political rituals to commemorate the transition arose along with the formal establishment of the republic in December 1922. Party and cultural organizers of the fifth anniversary of the October Revolution embraced this rite of passage with the inclusion of a mass campaign to "christen" all factories, a twist on the revolutionary ritual of the dedication of newborns called Octobering (*Oktiabrina*). Designers had intended that in their celebratory meetings workers would rename their enterprise to reflect Soviet ideals, and simultaneously to destroy all vestiges of the old order. Newspapers listed the event as part of the official anniversary itinerary. Organizers scheduled the factory name changes to take place on the day of

[225] On early Soviet rituals, see Richard Stites, "Bolshevik Ritual Building in the 1920s," in *Russia in the Era of NEP*, eds. Sheila Fitzpatrick, Alexander Rabinowitch, and Richard Stites, (Bloomington and Indianapolis, 1991). *Problemy sotsiologii iskusstva: Sbornik komiteta sotsiologicheskogo izucheniia iskusstv* (1926), 130-138. On the amateur theater troupe the Blue Blouses see Mally, *Revolutionary Acts*, 65-73; *Massovye prazdnestva: Sbornik*, (Leningrad, 1926). On OSMKS, see Susan Corbesero, "If We Build It, They Will Come: The International Red Stadium Society," *passim.*

the national holiday.[226] As the metalworkers in the newly "christened" Sickle and Hammer (*Serp i molot)* Factory declared**:**

> In a country that is governing in a new way, everything should be new. Before it was the emblem of the eagle, now it is the Sickle and Hammer, before the street was named with some bourgeois name or in memory of some event in the life of the bourgeoisie, but now it bears the name of heroes of the proletariat or honors an event of life of the proletariat. Factories will no longer bear the names of former masters, but will have new names.[227]

In the wake of recent industrial ruin, the onomatological campaign symbolically helped to signal the vitality of the new political and economic system and to embody progress.

The Soviet baptism of factories of Octobering was not just to be confined inside factories. In Petrograd's Uritskii Square, the anniversary planners, with the resources of PUR, incorporated the ritual into the public festivities. In the only mass production in the holidays of this period, Sergei Radlov directed a people's spectacle of the "Baptism of the Factories." The spectacle included a pantomime with several actors, representing male and female workers, a White Army general and a soldier of the Red Army, who performed around a model of a factory, a symbol of the RSFSR. A mass choir of two thousand participants sang revolutionary anthems and also physically participated in the grand production.[228]

In 1923, Moscow's anniversary celebration contained the first public Octobering ritual of children, the future generation. Isadora Duncan was invited to perform at the ceremony. Sympathetic to the Bolshevik's larger project of human transformation, the dancer offered her

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[226] On the Bolshevik ritual of Octobering see Stites, *Revolutionary Dreams*, 111. *Petro. Pravda*, 3 November 1922.

[227] TsGAOR f. 176, op. 2, d. 121, l. 15.

[228] *Zhizn' iskusstva*, 5 November 1922, 8 and 4 November 1924, 16; *Petro. pravda*, 25 October 1922.

artistic services in the revolutionary counter-celebration. Held in a theater, the event also featured political speeches by prominent female communists such as Alexandra Kollantai and German Communist Clara Zetkin. Duncan deliberately chose Schubert's *Ave Maria* as a "supreme and moving" tribute to motherhood, performing solo and with her pupils for the gala event. As Stites has argued, the new ritualism of Octobering not only symbolized a new communist beginning for the infant, but also helped transform women into new Soviet citizens by removing the church restrictions that diminished their roles in motherhood. [229]

Clearly, observers linked the holiday of the proletariat with the larger cultural mission to create a new revolutionary everyday life and raise the cultural level of the masses. However, combating the old ways of life proved difficult. In 1922, one holiday editorial in Moscow's *Krasnaia gazeta* called attention to the egregious display of icons inside government offices, such as those of the transportation services and the Technical Institute. The writer feared that visitors and foreign delegations would inevitably get the mistaken impression that Soviet society practiced a mixture (*dvoeverie*) of primitive communism and Christianity. Hoping to create a new religion with surrogate rituals, other communist activists consciously analogized the revolutionary festival with Christian holidays. A *Pravda* correspondent wrote that the great proletarian festival was the "Red" equivalent of Christmas. Outside, the scene resembled Christmas Eve, Muscovites scurried along the streets carrying packages and purchases and the city was decorated with greenery and lights similar to a Christmas tree. Pre-Revolutionary celebratory practices, such as drinking, often frustrated the intentions of communist cultural reformers and holiday organizers. In 1922, authorities closed down casinos and bars as alternate

[229] Duncan and Macdougall, *Isadora Duncan's Russian Days*, 78, 102; *Duranty Reports Russia*, ed. Gustavus Tuckerman, Jr. (NY,1934), 227-228; Stites, "Bolshevik Ritual Building in the 1920s," 299-301.

venues of celebration. By 1926, officials were openly admitting that all too frequently, workers preferred to stay at home and mark the holiday with card games, drinking, and brawls. In his analysis of peasant migration to Moscow, David Hoffman has studied a similar response to the imposition of official Soviet culture and political propaganda in the thirties. New workers used peasant culture to circumvent official demands for discipline that offered no material incentives only hollow calls for sacrifice. The loss of enthusiasm for the holiday campaigns in workers' clubs in 1926 may signal similar strategies of resistance and the inability of the celebrations to engage the masses in the commemorative project.[230]

### 4.3. Spectacles of the New Economy

Tightly interwoven, visions of goods and political ideology threaded into the parades during the NEP. In 1922, *Pravda* described the appearance of oversized industrial products and consumer goods in the parades, such as gigantic cigarettes, boots and pencils "the size of tree trunks" as "bright symbols of bright hopes." Throughout these years, many actual items or models of products could be found in the long winding demonstrations. Factories crafted large replicas of their wares, from suitcases to engineering components, displayed on trucks or floats. Some cooperatives even tossed products into the crowds. By 1924, *Krasnaia gazeta* triumphantly proclaimed, "October is a great economic display, a brilliant display of our achievements. [In the parade] we can see the growth of Leningrad's industry as if it was in the

[230] *Krasnaia gazeta*, 3 October 1922, *Izv*. 5 November 1922. On the campaign to replace religious holidays, see C. Binns, "The Changing Face of Soviet Power: Revolution and Accommodation in the Development of the Soviet Ceremonial System," *Man* (December 1979), 594-595. *Pravda*, 5 November 1924; David L. Hoffman, *Peasant Metropolis: Social Identities in Moscow, 1929-1941* (Ithaca, 1994).

palm of our hand."[231] In a clear expression of the didactic function of these economic showcases (and a twist on the living newspaper theatrical skits), one correspondent labeled the parades "living books" because of these animated exhibitions of industrial prowess.[232]

From 1922 to 1926 parade floats presenting allegories of growth signaled progress towards the promised land of socialist abundance. Factory achievements, expressed in models, production figures and charts, presented the nation's new economic strength. Enterprises mounted placards that listed increasing production figures in a variety of economic areas, from agriculture to libraries. In one display, a small horse pulled a cart containing a graph with recent bread production figures. The Leningrad Communist Party even exhibited its increase in membership in 1925 using a flight of giant stairs festooned in political slogans and indices of growth. Some displays proudly underscored the new self-sufficiency of Soviet production, such as the Petrograd-built tractor. The Electric Power Station No. 4 decorated a tram park with lights and the slogan, "All of this was previously imported from France, but now it is totally Soviet produced!" Occasionally the model's message explicitly connected economic and military preparedness, such as the Kauchuk (Rubber) factory's airship, which advertised "Red Rubber for the Red Air Force." Increasing in number and sophistication with each passing year, these displays helped shore up the claim that the economic reconstruction was almost complete, a visual justification for the logic of the NEP.[233]

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[231] *Pravda,* 9 November 1922; Tolstoi, et. al, *Materialy*, pl. 227; *Massovye prazdnestva*, 98; *Petro. pravda* 6 November 1923; *Krasnaia gazeta*, 8 November 1924; *Lenin. pravda* 28 October 1926.

[232] *Pravda,* 9 November 1925.

[233] For a photograph collection of industrial and carnival elements in the eighth anniversary; see *Krasnaia Niva*, 22 November 1925; *Krasnaia gazeta* 10 November 1925.

The factory displays represented the *process* of industry, emphasizing the dynamic nature of production with movable exhibits or models. Observers noted designs, such as a peasant hut with working electricity and a model locomotive, with billowing smoke. Another enterprise built a small-scale streetcar station with circulating trams. Consistently singled out for innovative and poignant displays, the *Skorokhod* (Fastrunner) Footwear Factory in 1924 built a large turning swing that moved like a metronome, stressing the table of the plant's production figures, which had recently surpassed pre-war levels. In 1923, a group of Moscow railroad workers demonstrated how to change rails and also repair the cars.[234]

The parades of these years were intended to demonstrate national power not only with a cornucopia of available goods, but also with the display of a disciplined and formidable workforce. The official press consistently attached attendance figures, real or embellished, to the anniversary parades to signal national and international strength. For example, in 1923 and 1925, newspapers reported that Moscow's parades contained one million participants. Authorities still employed coercive measures to swell the ranks of the parade. Factory committee meetings of the anniversary events reveal constant calls for workers "without exception" to march in the parade. Authorities also continued to entice marchers with food and gifts such as scarves. Yet the increase in scale and discipline of the parades worked against a holiday atmosphere. Workers complained of the interminable length of the march, often ending late in the evening. The physical strain on young children forced authorities to limit their participation. One worker correspondent lamented that the duration and regimentation of the parade tired and bored participants, affecting the celebratory mood. Yet, many observers welcomed the new

[234] *Massovye prazdnestva*, 98; *Pravda*, 22 November 1922; Photograph GIML no 65354; *Krasnaia gazeta*, 8 November 1924; *Pravda*, 9 November 1922.

sense of order in the demonstration, markedly improved from the civil war holidays, that further underscored the advancements of the Soviet state. For some this development was used ideologically to defy western countries' claims of "Asiatic chaos" in Soviet celebrations. But other observers noted that inflexible guards enforced the new restrictions, denying entrance to ordinary and well-known citizens (such as Nikolai Bukharin in 1922) who lacked the necessary passes.[235]

The consumption-oriented public displays posed certain ideological problems, which to a degree mirrored similar debates on the degenerative influences of private enterprise. Some communist observers noted with dismay that small cooperatives remained open for business during this important political holiday. Agitprop condemned the "intolerable production" of anniversary medallions unofficially issued by cooperatives and local enterprises. In 1923, the party moved to ban the sale of all questionable souvenir pins, with the exception of one medallion with Lenin's portrait.

The marriage of convenience with trusts as holiday sponsors also ran the risk of compromising the political message of the holiday. A profusion of advertisements fill the posters issued by cooperatives for the anniversary in 1925. In one poster, the panel with a worker holding a banner emblazoned with "Long Live the 8th Anniversary of the October Revolution" occupies a mere third of the entire tableau. Advertisements for furs, silk stockings, shoes, chocolate and building products (eighteen in total!) surrounded the central political image. At least, the anniversary parades provided a venue to officially sanction consumption from

[235] *Pravda* 10 November 1925; *Petro. pravda*, 9 November 1923; *Pravda*, 9 November 1926; TsGAOR f. 176, op. 2, d. 248, l.60 and f. 426, op. 1, d. 101, l.1-1 ob.; *Rabochaia nedelia*, 15 November 1925; Samuel N. Harper, *Civic Training in Russia* (Chicago, 1929), 229-30; *Izv*. 9 November 1923; *Pravda*, 9 November 1922.

Soviet cooperatives and denounce speculation and disreputable enterprises. One of the few noted examples of this was a proletarian cooperative float designed as a store and included moving scales and sellers who promised not to swindle customers. In a more defiant display, workers from one soviet cooperative used a large hammer to beat a bearded private merchant called NEP-mug.[236]

That the parades included blatant political propaganda was not surprising, since anniversary directives provided the proper agitational points, sanctioned enemies, and official slogans. More remarkable, but less predictable, was the element of "carnival ingenuity," the descriptive term employed by cultural and political observers, in which factory club workers, with or without the aide of trained artists, created an entertaining mixture of corporate identity, political correctness, and carnival in a topical float. Of course, many floats celebrated the the unity of peasants and workers, as well as the goal of a worldwide October (Revolution). For the sixth anniversary in 1923, a cork factory constructed a large globe from that material, with red ribbons marking the revolutionary movements throughout the world.[237]

For the spectators, correspondents, and perhaps participants, the symbolic attacks on political enemies, however, proved the most enjoyable**.** In Leningrad, an ammunitions depot not only built a large missile with a capitalist perched on top, but the workers planned to (safely) explode the rocket. The famous footwear factory's (*Skorokhod*) float of a worker, peasant, and

[236] *Izv*.11 November 1924; RGASPI, f. 17, op. 60, d. 613, l.47; Russian State Library, P2P2. Poster issued by the Leningradskaia Tipo-litografia Len Gublit. For a similar poster, see *Liberation (Osvobozhdenie)* published by the Advertising Section of the Moscow Cooperative "Kitab." While more of this type of advertising poster may exist, only a few examples were available in the Russian State Library. *Krasnaia Niva,* 23 November 1924; *Pravda,* 9 November 1922.

[237] *Petro. pravda,* 1 November 1923.

soldier in a giant boot trampling on fascists quickly became an exemplary design for future anniversaries and studies of the mass celebrations. The "Red Star" Dairy showcased its particular economic strength in its float of a giant butter churn that pressed the enemies of the proletariat into butter. In a rare example, one factory included an effigy of its former owner in a barrel along with the official and familiar cast of international enemies, such as French President Poincaire. Many of these satirical displays were quite sophisticated. For example, the Chernigov refrigerator factory formed a large ice coffin in which a frozen "2nd International" was interred. Moreover, the addition of carnival to the political attacks satisfied both agitational purposes and entertainment needs. One worker's skit on the 2nd International involved a monstrous crawling worm-like creature, saddled with a cigar-smoking capitalist in a top hat, which reportedly drew peals of laughter from spectators enjoying the show.[238]

Official coverage and studies of the anniversaries welcomed these appearances of carnival elements as evidence of worker spontaneity and animation in the national celebrations. Yet the unscripted and self-directed skits of the demonstrators often threatened to subvert the order of the official proceedings. In a detailed study of the demonstrations in these years, observers in the State Institute of Art (of Glavpolitprosvet) noted that ninety percent of the action in these politico-satirical skits amounted to pure improvisation. As at the traditional entertainments of the fairground, contemporary spectators constantly heckled the worker-performers, sometimes even joining in the performances. While cultural analysts confidently reported that the impeccable class-consciousness of the workers always prevailed in the

[238] *Petro. pravda*, 6 *November* 1923; *Izv*, 9 November 1923. The number of politico-satirical floats seems to have remained constant until 1926. On more examples from Leningrad in 1925, see *Massovye prazdnestva*, 162-181. In 1926 there was a noticeable absence of the genre. *Leningrad. pravda*, 9 November 1926.

performances, the danger of social insubordination, made possible by the combination of political satire, masks and buffoonery, persisted. One example from the eighth anniversary parade (1925) illustrated the possibility of seditious behavior. During the course of the parade, a worker dressed as priest on a float accidentally swung his censer at a mounted policeman. The officer quickly brandished his sword, but then light-heartedly rebuked the performer. The priest responded with a hilarious tirade of ridicule, not only eliciting laughter from the crowd but also drawing them in to join the verbal attack. Observers admitted that the jokes and lively performances of the colorful and unsavory political characters such as the priest, like the traditional Petrushka, often garnered the most audience response, while the more "positive" but one-dimensional heroes, such as the worker or Red Army soldier, rarely engaged the spectator. For a regime that depended so heavily on "enemies" in the process of creating a national identity, the question of the proper representation was paramount. Club journals provided art circles with specific caricatures and emblematic elements for fascists, priests, capitalists and other political villains.[239]

The overwhelmingly positive and inspirational figure prominently displayed in the demonstrations and attendant public art was Lenin. As Nina Tumarkin has shown, the official press orchestrated a public relations campaign as early as the fall of 1922 to counteract the reality of Lenin's ill health.[240] The increased display of the Party leader was visible in the celebrations in Petrograd in 1924, when commentators singled out a full-size portrait of the leader outside the Spartacus Workers' Club and a float with a decorated steamer featured the leader under the banner "Three Cheers for the Captain of the Universal Revolution." The Moscow Komsomol

[239] *Massovye prazdnestva*, 91.

[240] Nina Tumarkin, *Lenin Lives! The Lenin Cult in Soviet Russia*. (Cambridge, 1983), esp. ch.4.

division in the parade marched under the banner "Lenin has shown us the way." Unsurprisingly, the first anniversary after Lenin's death showed a demonstrable rise expansion of his role in the public celebrations. In Leningrad, outdoor panels featured the beloved leader, arm outstretched, pointing the nation towards the path of the socialist future. The press repeatedly cited the parade float with "Lenin's Clock," with one face of the clock showing the domestic economic gap closed, and the other side with Lenin directing the Comintern to the impending worldwide revolution. Official anniversary posters also marked the shift. While the image of Lenin does not explicitly appear in A. Samokhvalov's poster *The Immortal Leader of October Lenin Has Showed Us the Path to Victory* (*Bessmertnyii vozhd' Oktiabria Lenin ukazal nam put' k pobede*), his off-canvas spirit and light guides a worldwide women's demonstration of workers and peasants. The following year, Gosizdat issued the poster *Long Live the International Proletarian Revolution!* (*Da zdravstvuet mezhdunarodnaia proletarskaia revoliutsiia!*), a visual tribute to the leader and his policies. The poster shows a holiday parade with a mass of demonstrators, a military band, and political banners, each slogan articulating a Leninist charge. Two sets of mismatched couples representing the allegorical *smychk*a lead the parade. In one, a worker with a hammer is paired with a female peasant carrying a sheaf of wheat, and the other couple joins a male peasant with scythe and a female worker clutching a book. The demonstrators pass a towering monument of Lenin, positioned to greet both the crowds and banners welcoming the worldwide revolution.[241]

In 1926, the unveiling of the first Lenin Memorial was the highlight of the Leningrad celebration. The monument erected at Finland Station featured Lenin atop an armored car, an

[241] *Pravda*, 9 November 1922; *Izv*. November 1924; *Revoliutsionnyi prazdnichnyi plakat*. The caption of the poster reads: "Long Live Leninism For the 7th Anniversary of the October Victory."

immortalization of his speech rallying the workers there in April 1918. Coverage of the event contained a mystical tone that certainly buttressed the cult of the leader. *Leningradskaia pravda* recounted the historical event explaining that workers instinctively (and not by information contained in handbills, as in historical reality) felt Lenin's presence and arrival in the city and assembled at the train station to hear the leader. The opening ceremony brought together old Leninists and workers who were there in 1918 and the new generation, represented by the Young Pioneers.[242]

The Lenin memorial represented one of the few public monuments associated with the political anniversaries during the NEP, and perhaps the only one that survived the period. This trend of rejection of monumental propaganda, as noted by Lars Kleberg, was fundamental to the cultural project of the avant-garde artists.[243] An analysis of public monument in the NEP yields few examples for the holiday celebrations. In freezing temperatures, the sculptor F. Lekht created a monument of a worker at the base of the Kremlin for the fifth anniversary in 1922. The white statue of a worker, a hammer in one hand and his tipped hat in the other, was seen as a symbol of the enormous enthusiasm for the new era. Observers noted that the statue joyfully greeted the workers marching in the demonstrations. Although the monument was dismantled in 1924 to make way for the Lenin mausoleum, the popularity of the statue's design and mood is unmistakably echoed in the monument to Lenin in the previously mentioned poster, *Long Live the International Proletarian Revolution!* Nearby, Proletkul't artists had contributed an outdoor panel erected at the base of the monument to Minin and Pozharskii. The design represented the

[242] *Leningrad. pravda,* 9 November 1926. The monument was created by S. Evseev (sculptor) and V. Schuko and V. Helfreich (architects); *Revoliutsionnyi prazdnichnyi plakat*, M. Ushakov-Poskochin.

start of the worldwide revolution and featured a worker engulfed in a glittering rainbow of fire who strikes his anvil so powerfully that lightning bolts fly throughout the universe. The monument to Alexander III in Petrograd experienced another artistic disguise in 1922. Nicknamed 'the Scarecrow,' the monument was concealed in a newly erected tribune decorated with political slogans in a variety of languages. The poetry of Demian Bednyi was added to a statue of a worker at the monument's base erected earlier in 1919 October anniversary. The entire ensemble was illuminated for the evening of the holiday.[244]

Mirroring the decline in monumental propaganda, few official posters marked the anniversary celebrations from 1922-1926, many of which failed to have the political edge of earlier anniversary posters during the Civil War. Although technically the posters incorporated party slogans and agitational targets, during the NEP a combination of poor quality and new aesthetic and design influences compromised the agitational power of the genre. The decline in commemorative graphic art was directly related to the overall decline of the political poster in the NEP. According to one contemporary art critic, Iakov Tukhendkhol'd, political posters had "almost degenerated into a form of advertising."[245] Bustling scenes of factory production and street commerce often crowded the posters. In the example *In the 7th Anniversary of the October Revolution Our Battle Slogan is Raise Labor Productivity!* (*V 7-iu godovshchiny Oktiabr'skoi Revoliutsii nash boevoi lozung: Podymai proizvoditel'nost' truda*), the visual display jams together images of a scaffolded building, heavy machinery, a scene of a large operating factory complex, and a bridge with small silhouettes of workers with banners. The predominant colors

[244] Lars Kleberg, *Theatre as Action* (London, 1993), 27-34;.*Pravda*, 9 November 1922.

[245] Iakov Tukhenkhol'd, "Sovremennyi plakat," *Pechat i revoliutsiia*, 8 (1926), 56-74 cited in White, *The Bolshevik Poster*, 120.

of brown and ocher do little to captivate the viewer. In 1925, a more disturbing Leningrad poster, reminiscent of Civil War imagery, employed violent images to convey political messages for the anniversary. Lightning bolts containing political battle cries of "Proletariat of the world, rise up in battle," and "Trade unions in the battle for a single global trade union" divide the poster. The bottom panels show an American soldier strangling a Chinaman, and rich industrialists in a cloud of gunfire and gas. Above this another violent tableau displays an image of gallows with dead men, including a priest. At the top, a worker dons a protective gas mask in the battle. Western advertising design and imagery also entered the jumble of poster styles for the holiday. For example, B. Izenberg's *Young Leninists – Il'ich's children. For the 7th Anniversary of the October Revolution* (*Iunye lenintsy – deti Il'icha. K 7-oi godovshchine Oktiabr'skoi revoliutsii*) depicts a dapper Soviet Pioneer whose hat and costume oddly resemble those of his British counterpart, the Boy Scout. With the exception of the caption, the 1924 poster is remarkable for its omission of an image of the Lenin in the year of his death.[246]

### 4.4. Battles for October On Screen

The market economics of the NEP, a recovering film industry, and popular tastes in cinema frustrated Party intentions to screen films with political gravitas for the holiday. Responding to the necessity to turn profits and simultaneously provide cinematic propaganda, the Leninist proportion in film had set a fixed percentage of Soviet films to compete with popular foreign imports on screen during the NEP. The consummate pragmatist, Lenin had

[246] GMPIR. Printed by Gosizdat, f. V, No. 994; Gosudarstvennyi Literaturnyi muzei (Vspol'nyi pereulok filial); *Revoliutsionnyi prazdnichnyi plakat.*

recommended that political speeches or short propaganda films be shown with Western movies to provide political propaganda. However, the party intended that the films selected and screened for the October anniversaries would serve the loftier goal of propagandizing the values of the Soviet state. To ensure that films articulated the proper political message, the party sponsored commemorative productions and provided approved lists of politically acceptable films for holiday showings in theaters and clubs. During the anniversary, all clubs, cinemas, and public squares should be pressed into service for the commemoration. When it came to the anniversary cinematic fare, "nothing should be accidental."[247] Moreover, despite a loss in revenue, October Commissions frequently set percentages for free showings during the holiday for maximum exposure.[248] Yet, the lure of Western cinema and the quantity and quality of output of the Soviet film industry often compromised the message of October.

In the early October anniversaries during the NEP, Western pictures dominated the screens during the political holiday. The featured film for the fifth anniversary in 1922 was the German import *Lady Hamilton*, about the alleged mistress of Lord Nelson. *Pravda* praised the technical and topical strengths of the picture. Noting the film "had everything," the reviewer highlighted the movie's scenes of naval battles, mutinies, imperial balls, and carnivals. Party officials had arranged a special screening of the film for the representatives from the anniversary's Comintern meeting. The paper blamed the inactivity of VFKO (All-Russian

[247] On the Leninist film proportion formula in the recovery of the film industry see, John D. Rimberg, *The Motion Picture in the Soviet Union, 1918-1952: a Sociological Analysis.* (New York, 1973), 35-37. *Rabochii zritel'*, November 1925.

[248] *Kino-nedelia*, 14 November 1924. The journal not states that almost eighty percent of the films shown in clubs in Moscow during the holiday were Soviet films. In Leningrad, thirty percent of the tickets on the holiday were given out free to workers and Red Army soldiers.

Photographic and Cinematographic Section) for this lamentable situation, in which party and Soviet audiences had to watch an imported film for the important political holiday. The comedy *Tale of How the Bast Sandal Wearers Came to Their Senses* (*Skaz o tom, kak lapotniki v razum voshli*), A. Panteleev's student film on the awakening of revolutionary consciousness, was the only Soviet film to premiere for the anniversary in 1922. A year later, only a handful of Soviet films competed with foreign features. In Moscow, the new offerings included a "living history of the October Revolution," which was also included in the All-Russian Economic Exhibition. Authorities also scheduled two mass screenings of the new film by the director A. Panteleev, *Long Live Soviet Power* (*Za vlast sovetov*) in the People's Palace. Petrograd's defense in 1919 against the Civil War's General Iudenich provided the setting for this romantic adventure picture. In the film, a Red Army soldier Konstantinov falls in love with a worker who turns out to be a White spy. The heroism of Civil War proved a supremely popular subject for films, satisfying both official propaganda needs and popular tastes for adventure and realism in cinema.[249]

In 1924, movie listings for the holiday in Moscow revealed a mix of imports and Soviet comedies and dramas. In one district, foreign films accounted for half the titles, several offering Muscovites intrigue and spectacular battles scenes, such as *Lucretia Borgia* by the German director Richard Oswald (who had also directed the earlier hit *Lady Hamilton*.). However, the recently reconstructed Soviet film industry produced a number of comedic and historical films and documentaries for Soviet audiences during the anniversary. Although waning, conventional agitational documentaries, such as *Microbe of Communism* (*Mikrob kommunizma*, footage of previous party and government meetings), and the filmed pantomime *Entente and Company*

[249] *Lady Hamilton* (1921) was directed by Richard Oswald. *Pravda*, 3 November 1922; *Sovetskie khudozhestvennye fil'my: Annotirovannyi katalog, (1918-1935*), 35, 41. A. Panteleev directed the film which premiered for the holiday.

(*Antant i Ko*), performed at the previous anniversary in Petrograd, remained in the cinematic mix. Movie screens showed light comedies with Soviet themes, such as the well-known and popular Lev Kuleshov cowboy and satire film, *The Extraordinary Adventures of Mr. West in the Land of the Bolsheviks* (*Neobychainye prikliucheniia mistera Westa v strane bol'shevikov*) and also the lesser-known comedy *Warm Company* (*Teplaia kompaniia*) on the life and adventures of homeless children in the 1920s. Dziga Vertov's *Kino-pravda* (*Cine-Truth*) *No. 20* (a special edition issued for the holiday) also exemplifies the appearance of comedic and less ideologically charged cinematic fare for the anniversary. The chronicle features the Pioneers and their excursion to the zoo and a village. One playful caption of the youngsters with the animals reads: "A smychka with animals!"[250]

A series of dramatic cinematic offerings centered on the countryside and its pre-Revolutionary cultural influences. For example, the plot of *Brigade Commander Ivanov* (*Kombrig Ivanov*) involves a communist brigadier who falls in love with a village priest's daughter. Ultimately, the daughter agrees to register their civil marriage in the ZAGS office, and abandons both religion and village for a new life. *Evdokiia Rozhnovskaia*, a feature film on the trope of progress, premiered for the anniversary. The plot centers on the post-revolutionary transformation of the eponymous character of a female peasant. Encouraged by a pro-Bolshevik teacher, Evdokiia bravely leaves the village and her abusive and coarse husband. In the city, she becomes involved in underground revolutionary activity. After conducting political work during the Civil War, she is later elected to the local soviet. Moscow Party officials set up a special screening of the film seen as a powerful allegory of progress and Bolshevik power. In Leningrad, a mass screening of the film also featured a *Kino-pravda* newsreel and a Charlie

[250] *Rabochii zritel'*, 4-18 November 1924.

Chaplin movie. Additionally, the celebratory meeting of the *smychka* between the city and the countryside with a speech by the Leningrad party Secretary Grigorii Zinoviev included a special screening of the film.[251]

Cinemas also showed a spate of officially recommended historical films, intended to provide an acceptable genealogy of October in these years. In part, communist cultural authorities hoped that these films would replace the popular historical films, many of which did not contain the proper class analysis or provided titillating looks at the "boudoir" intrigues of the imperial era.[252] Soviet audiences could see the unstoppable growth of the revolutionary movement in such films as *From a Spark to a Flame* (*Nit' za nit'iu*), an epic chronicle of the history of the Russian textile workers, covering the period of Alexander II until the Civil War. *Palace and Fortress* (*Dvorets i krepost'*) offers a gripping story of a young aristocratic officer imprisoned in the Peter and Paul Fortress by Alexander II. While the main character goes mad from the atrocious conditions, the revolutionary tide swells over time to show a final scene in which Soviet children play on the fortress walls. Both Soviet and Western viewers noted the impact of the film's political message. The recent history of the Civil War also proved a perennially popular subject, such as in the film *Red Partisans* (*Krasnye partizany*) about a group of Siberian partisans against Kolchak. Movies spotlighting international rebellions, such as

[251] According to Peter Kenez, the film was not extremely anti-religious and the communist hero exhibited human failings. *Cinema and Soviet Society, 1917-1953* (NY, 1992), 45. *Sovetskie khudozhestvennye fil'my*, 57; *Kino-nedelia*, 14 November 1924.

[252] *Novyi zritel'*, October 1925.

*China on Fire (Kitai v ogne,* 1925) and *Kiril'cho* (1925) about a Serbian revolt appeared later in the period.[253]

By 1926, cultural authorities could claim significant advances in the number and quality of films to mark the political holiday. Soviet agitation in film received maximum exposure resulting from a combination of outdoor screenings, more shows in workers' clubs, and increasing free or discounted tickets during the anniversaries. Testifying to the primacy of agitation over profit, some film production companies freely distributed almost 70 percent of films to workers' enterprises, schools, and army clubs in 1925. For many critics, however, the quality of films shown in the political holiday still did not convey the import of the October message. Organizers of the ninth anniversary (1926) intended the project of a "Week of Soviet Films" to provide Soviet audiences with the best Soviet cinema during the holiday. The lists of films included recent Soviet comedies and dramas as well as instructional films, such as *What To Do With Your Pay* (*O tom, kak postupat' s poluchkoi*), which propagandized savings banks. Despite the lofty aim of the project, *Leningradskaia pravda* complained that the Soviet film industry had failed to fulfill its political mission and had engaged in "economic speculation" to garner profits with the release of substandard films to the Soviet public.[254]

### 4.5. October on Stage

Experimental productions and revolutionary agitational theater to commemorate the October Anniversaries continued during the NEP, declining only after 1925. The October

[253] *Izv.*, 6 November 1924; *Sovetskie khudozhestvennye fil'my*, 57-58, 39; Leyda, *Kino*, 188-189; *Sovetskie khudozhestvennye fil'my*, 61-62.

[254] *Kino-nedelia*, 14 November 1924; *Leningrad. pravda*, 29 October and 6 November 1926.

Commissions and the party promoted these productions or sponsored their premieres during the holidays. In the pluralistic artistic scene, the voices of the left vied with each other for the ear of the Communist Party and for the right to express the socialist message to the people. In 1923, Proletkul't managed to gain party approval and full financial backing for an elaborate concert involving factory sirens and gunfire at the start of the large municipal demonstration in Moscow. Drawing on earlier similar productions in Nizhny Novgorod and Baku, the avant-garde musician Arsenii Avraamov designed the project for the sixth anniversary in 1923 to present "proletarian" music—factory sirens and military salutes—to symbolize the thunder of "Great October." Performed twice, the intricate symphony involved a special installation at the Moscow Electric Station (MOGES) that released sounds through central heating pipes, accompanied by factory sirens, gunfire (the percussions element) and psalmody of the *Internationale*, *Varshavianka*, and the Komsomol's anthem, *Young Guard*. No doubt the production's scale (and absence of a full rehearsal) contributed to the technical problems and unintelligible musical pieces. The symphony required the coordinated participation of a staggering array of organizations and enterprises, including the Revolutionary Armed Forces of the Republic, several large factories, a railway station, Moscow's Conservatory, and the Union of Metalworkers. While the value of the music as an ideological weapon had been compromised, the press (and later cultural observers) praised the innovation of the concert.[255]

Aleksandr Gorskii's children's ballet, *Ever Fresh Flowers*, also offered a unique revolutionary experiment to celebrate and transmit the victory of the proletariat. The show contained many techniques designed to edify the young generation and simultaneously, to draw

[255] For the detailed plans see *Gorn*, no.9, 1923, 109-116 and GAMO, f. 880, op. 1, d. 4, l. 81; *Pravda*, 6 and 14 November 1923; *Izv*. 9 November 1923.

them into active participation. Staged for the fifth anniversary (1922) the ballet combined new revolutionary iconography (such as a performer as a bare-chested blacksmith) with interactive performances with the audience. In the auditorium, actors directly engaged the viewers with dialogue, children's games, distribution of candies, and a political parade complete with a military band.[256]

Anniversary plays calculated to foster revolutionary principles and Soviet themes continued to be staged on Meierkhol'd's and Proletkul't's stages and the party promoted the productions, through official published recommendations and free performances for workers and soldiers. During these years, revolutionary theaters staged plays featuring foreign uprisings to promote the worldwide significance of the October Revolution. In 1922 Meierkhol'd's production of the French pacifist Marcel Martinet's *Night* in the Theater of Revolution met with mixed reviews. Some communists, such as Trotskii, hailed the story as a "landmark" because of its poignant treatment of the international workers' revolution. This probably encouraged Meierkhol'd not only to stage the play (which he reportedly disliked), but also to dedicate the production to the Red Army and Trotskii personally. The play centers on a soldiers' rebellion, crushed by a band of generals. The story is told through the eyes of an old widow who loses her son in the rebellion. In the end, both the mother and widowed daughter-in-law bravely face the future with the knowledge that a revolution will come to pass. Although Meierkhol'd innovatively employed projectors to put political slogans on screens in order to heighten the

[256] Leach, *Revolutionary Theatre*, 121

agitational message, critics complained that the combination of confusing Futurist stage designs and one-dimensional characters compromised the revolutionary symbolism of the play.[257]

For the fifth anniversary (1922), Meierkhol'd also turned to the work of the German playwright Ernst Toller, who had been arrested for his support of the failed 1919 Spartacist Uprising in Germany. The director staged Toller's *The Machine Wreckers*, a play spotlighting an early the nineteenth century weaver's revolt in England. The party and press widely promoted the play as an inspirational historical drama on a significant episode in the formation of the international proletariat. For some, the production signaled a necessary fillip for proletarian culture in the NEP. Yet according to most reviews, Meierkhol'd's pioneering staging of the complicated twelve-act play proved unable to make the metaphorical and highly metaphysical play comprehensible to viewers.[258]

In 1923, Proletkul't's production of the agit-guignol *Are You Listening Moscow?* (*Slyshish', Moskva?*) succeeded in rousing revolutionary sentiments in the audience. Hoping to quell unrest among his people, the main character, a German count, plans a festival for November 7 to honor his ancestor. Ultimately the workers prevail, turning the festival into a rebellion. In the dramatic climax, the victorious workers unveil the huge bas-relief that had originally been intended to display the count's ancestor. A gigantic portrait of Lenin has been installed in its place. Finally the workers onstage turn to the audience and ask, "Are You Listening, Moscow?", to which the audience enthusiastically responds in the affirmative. Stage and audience unite to sing the *Internationale*. Soviet bureaucrats, workers, and students (the

[257] op.cit., 139; *Trud*, 5 November 1922; *Pravda* 29 October 1922; *Petro. pravda*, 9 November 1922. Despite a revision by the constructivist playwright Sergei Tretiakov, the play still never realized its agitational potential

[258] *Izv*., 5 November 1922; *Pravd*a, 3 November 1922; *Trud* 5 November 1922.

recipients of free tickets) overwhelmingly filled the auditorium. Judging from reviews and answers to audience questionnaires, the play provoked highly charged emotional responses from the spectators. Spectators loudly applauded and shouted at the death of every "fascist" in the play. One viewer's enthusiastic call to kill the count's mistress and his subsequent satisfaction at her ultimate fate so frightened a nearby lady in furs that she fled the theater fearing a reprisal. Many spectators reacted with a similar impulse of to rush the stage and join the battle. Premiering on November 7, this play cleverly presented "a festival in a festival," adding heightened significance to the political holiday. [259]

Meierkhol'd continued to stage plays focusing on revolutions abroad and the international worldwide revolution. On the ninth anniversary in 1926, the avant-garde director offered two major agitational works intended to instill Soviet ideals. Infused with contemporary cultural references, *D.E. Give Us Europe! (D.E. Daesh' Evropy!)* weaves a fantastic story of global capitalist conspiracy and a transnational workers' rebellion. In the play, a large trust uses all means to destroy the proletariat of Western Europe. A small segment of the worker movement manages to escape to the Soviet Union. Together with the Comintern, this group forms the Radio Trust of the Soviet Union and constructs a massive tunnel from Leningrad to New York that helps workers escape. The Trust D.E. succeeds in its mission to control Western Europe; however the capitalists are forced to officially recognize the sovereignty of the Soviet Union. In the finale, the International Red Army uses the tunnel to support an uprising of the American proletariat that sparks a global socialist revolution. Unfortunately, the frenetic pace of the action and the scenes depicting the decadence of capitalism with jazz and foxtrot musical

[259] *Lef*, no.4, August 1924, 218-219; Leach, *Revolutionary Theatre*,155-158; *Zhizn' iskusstva*, no. 7, 1924; *Pravda*, 6 November 1923. Sergei Eisenstein directed the play by Sergei Tretiakov.

numbers compromised the political significance of the play. For many workers, the production "confused their brains" and many agreed that the play was not written with workers in mind.[260]

Western imperialism was the target in Meierkhol'd's staging of Sergei Tret'iakov's *Roar,China!* (*Rychi, Kitai*!) the same year. The playwright penned the play about an incident he had witnessed on a recent visit to China. An American had been killed following an incident with Chinese boatmen. A British gunboat captain felt so aggrieved that he demanded retribution. If the culprit could not be found, the British captain called for the execution of two innocent Chinese boatmen as punishment. Powerless in the face of Western imperialism, the Chinese mayor was eventually forced to comply with the latter course of action. The stirring but problematic production garnered mixed reviews. Soviet reviewers found a disconcerting balance in the quality of characterization of the two sides that ultimately diminished the production's agitational power. Many noted the sophistication and depth of the Chinese characters, but bemoaned the elementary portrayal of the villains.[261]

Criticism of the naked agitation of revolutionary theater mounted. Workers and cultural observers attacked the shallow caricatures in the plays, and the worlds crudely divided into two camps. Meierkhol'd and Proletkul't appeared in competition to present a more contemptuous bourgeoisie, supremely evil, debauched, and deceitful in nature. The political symbolism of

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[260] Gorchakov, *The Theater in Soviet Russia*, 194; Zolotnitskii, *Meierkhold*, 151-158. The play was based on Iliia Ehrenburg's story, however Meierkhol'd commissioned an adaptation more in tune with Soviet political needs. Il'ia Ehrenburg, *People and Life, 1891-1921*, trans. Anna Bostock and Yvonne Kapp (New York, 1962), 367-368. The (unintended) glamorization of western style inspired a brand of cigarettes at the time. *Rabochie o literature, teatre i muzyke*, 48.

[261] Leach, *Revolutionary Theatre*, 167; Russell, *Russian Drama of the Revolutionary Period*, 52-55. The pathos of the story would later inspire other countries to stage the play.

productions was often lost on the spectators. The circus and vaudeville entertainment in the productions proved more engaging to audiences, many of which represented the beneficiaries of the NEP economy. Although the party and anniversary planners had intended to expose workers to revolutionary theater without cost, workers often did not receive the free tickets. As Lunacharskii noted, most times the tickets (provided by the October Commission's Artistic Committee and distributed in enterprises) bypassed the workers, to end up in the hands of the affluent public. Some revolutionary theaters, such as the Mastfor Theater, adopted renascent vaudevillian and cabaret elements in popular parodies of the agitational plays and Soviet life. However, censoring bureaus and cultural authorities often criticized the political satire that exposed the problems of everyday life.[262]

Facing the threat of trailing box office receipts, independent and academic theaters often staged politically questionable cultural fare or shows catering to the nouveau riche during the anniversaries. In 1923, Glavrepertkom chastised the Bolshoi Theater's repertoire for its counterrevolutionary elements, such as the continual portrayal of monarchs as sympathetic and just historical figures. Other theaters staged a short Blue Blouse skit (using young actors from its cast) prior to the main performance in order to satisfy political demands. Cultural critics noted that, although historical dramas were popular, the productions during the commemorative holiday glamorized imperial courts, bedroom intrigues, and conspiracies. For example, *Petrogradskaia pravda* attacked the Passazh Theater's play *Governor,* staged during the fifth anniversary (1922) as a totally "inappropriate product" of the past that appealed to its "ultra-NEP" audience. Later reviewers noted that the historical chronicle *Elizaveta Petrovna* in 1925

[262] Gorchakov, *The Theater in Soviet Russia*, 194; TsGAOR, f. 176, op. 2, d. 248, l. 2; *Zrelishcha* no.4 1922.

simply pandered to its audience with glamorous imperial costumes and tasteless jokes about the German influence on the Russian monarchy.[263]

Answering the calls of Lunacharskii and workers for conventional plays, the plays of Ostrovskii and Gogol continued to be perennially staged as part of the anniversary festivities. In conjunction with the hundredth anniversary of Ostrovskii in 1923, Lunacharskii encouraged Soviet theaters, directors, and playwrights to study and learn realism from the Russian masters, and thereby move away from the unintelligible modernist forms in overt agitational theater like Meierkhol'd's, which failed to engage working class audiences. Responding to workers' critiques of the inaccessible revolutionary cultural fare, the cultural administrator hoped that a "theater of the red way of life" would emerge in this learning process, one in which realism would join with socialist ideals to portray the emotions with the devastated lives in the Civil War. Workers seemed to share Lunacharskii's sentiment, and amateur skits on club stages had already responded with Civil War plays early in the NEP years. In 1925, *Krasnaia panorama* openly welcomed the appearance of Civil War dramas in state and independent theaters, such as B. Lavrenev's *Mutiny* (*Miatezh*) at the Bolshoi Drama Theater.[264]

By 1926, critics were calling for theater capable and worthy of conveying the significance of October. In the pluralistic and market-driven cultural landscape, popular tastes dwarfed political cinema. A survey of the cabaret fare for the ninth anniversary (1926) illustrates the exasperation of communist activism dampened by the drag of NEP culture, and a demand for

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[263] *Russkii Sovetskii teatr*, 69; *Petro. pravda*, 9 November 1922; Bradshaw, *Soviet Theaters, 1917-1941*, 36

[264] See theater listings in *Teatr i myzyka* 6 November, 1923. *Izv.*, 9 November, 1923, *Izv.*, 6 November, 1924; Leach, *Revolutionary Theatre*, 142. On Lunacharskii's views as a precursor to socialist realism, see A.L. Tait,, *The Literary Works of A.V. Lunacharskii*, unpubd. Ph.D. thesis, Cambridge U., 1971, 303; *Krasnaia panorama* No.45, Nov. 6, 1925

more revolutionary vigilance against bourgeois backsliding. The correspondent from *Leningradskia pravda* attended four revues, each advertising entertainment for the commemoration. The shows featured American dance numbers, gypsy songs, and nostalgic lyrics, such as "Oh give, give me freedom." In one theater that had advertised the first showing of *Battleship Potemkin* a year earlier, the parade-entrée did not contain a single Soviet word or song despite plenty of available material. One reviewer wrote that the theater owner did not understand the significance of the holiday, and his financial manager clearly preferred "the foxtrot to a living newspaper and the 'street' to ideology."[265]

### 4.6. October in the Clubs

In 1925, the worker's journal *Klub* published several insightful observations about the current state of the commemorative events in clubs. Like previous holidays, that year's festivities spanned three days. On the first day, workers attended meetings and listened to official reports, with such soul-searing titles as "The USSR and the Eighth Anniversary." Evenings of reminiscences immediately followed the speeches. On the second day, clubs held more meetings, marched in the large municipal parades, and then staged shows in the evenings. On the last day, clubs organized children's parties in the morning and more meetings in the evening. This rigid itinerary begged the question: "So where's the celebration of the holiday?"

[265] *Novyi zritel'*, 9 November 1926; *Lenin. pravda*, 6 November 1926.

The article concluded that while revolutionary holidays should not be simply aimless fun, it would be a mistake to banish entertainment and celebration from them.[266]

With the aim of creating a festive holiday mood in clubs, party officials and cultural authorities attempted to involve and interest as many workers as possible in the club campaigns. Poor club attendance, worker passivity and inertia, and a lack of resources combined to thwart mass campaigns. Sympathetic observers lamented that workers simply lacked the time and energy for club campaigns; critics rebuked the culprits for laziness and a dearth of revolutionary spirit. *Leningradskaia pravda* chastised workers who criticized holiday club productions from their "comfy apartment couches."[267] The newspaper's correspondent added that it was revolutionary patriotism that inspired club circle leaders to tirelessly prepare commemorative events sometimes late in the evenings and often in freezing temperatures. To foster a deep love for the holiday campaigns, club enthusiasts instructed workers to shake off the inertia of the past and participate in festivities, decorate clubs, and even clean their communal apartment hallways. The holiday club campaigns primarily attracted young workers and activists, whereas older workers (and their families) tended to shun both the preparatory work and the spectacles.[268]

Financial constraints and a persistent lack of reliable and competent personnel often resulted in holiday campaigns and productions that were hastily and poorly prepared. As observers noted, budgetary constraints often deflated plans for grander festivities. Hiring acting troupes, such as the Blue Blouses, to perform holiday living newspapers drained club funds.

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[266] *Klub*, No.5, October 1925, 3 and No.7, December 1925. The minutes, reports and attendance figures were recorded. See TsGAM, f. 425, op. 6, d. 10, l. 38-39 ob. for a detailed itinerary of the official meeting with 2750 workers in attendance.

[267] *Trud*, 21 October 1922, 3; *Problemy sotsiologii iskusstva*, 135; *Lenin. pravda*, 6 November 1926.

[268] Ibid., *Rabochia nedelia*, 3 November 1925.

Enterprises occasionally chose to divert funds intended for the October club celebrations towards more useful purchases, such as furniture or even a hair salon. Marshalling responsible agitational instructors, playwrights, club circle leaders. and actors who would inject the necessary political significance in the productions proved a formidable and unrealistic task. While state-sponsored enthusiasts had opened special training institutes to meet these demands, their courses attracted few worker enlistees. As one worker-correspondent lamented, even if workers were sincerely interested in such instruction, few had the time to attend courses and nighttime rehearsals. More invidiously, acting choral and literary directors often came from politically suspect backgrounds. One club surveyed in 1926 employed a former church rector to lead all its musical productions, and some clubs reportedly posted signs to recruit workers into church choirs.[269]

Although the relaxed cultural atmosphere of the post-war era brought *estrada* into the holiday spectacles, by 1925 holiday club productions showed that entertainment had displaced the political message of October.[270] Exhibiting true revolutionary culture, many clubs adopted officially approved agit-skits for the holidays, with such titles as "Path to Victory," "Aurora," and "A Land on Fire." Others took party directives on worker's creativity to heart and wrote and staged political skits on moments in the October Revolution, such as a short play about a conversation of Lenin and Nikolai Muralov, an Old Bolshevik, in 1917. Yet, year after year, party authorities and cultural reformers complained that final skit stagings or subjects such as "The Adventures of Kim and Karl" did not adequately convey the political significance of

[269] *Sovetskoe iskusstvo* October 1925; *Trud*, 28 October 1922; *Klub*, December 1925; TsGAM, f. 539, op. 2, d. 4, l. 3 and 10; *Rabochie o literature, teatre, i muzyke*, 65, 84.

[270] For a detailed analysis of the failed attempts to create revolutionary entertainment in NEP, see Corbesero, "Add Pomp and Stir".

October. Clubs often mixed approved agitational plays with *estrada* elements, such as cabarets, acrobatics, or songs. Reviewers of one club holiday production noted that the official political report on the history and achievements of October was irreverently followed by a clown act. Another club staged a demonstration of physical culture, but instead of highlighting the connection of physical and national strength, the performance did little more than imitate circus forms, even recklessly endangering the participants. Even the Blue Blouses, in their guest holiday performances, were continually criticized by cultural authorities for their reliance on slapstick humor and exaggerated gestures that corrupted the political message of the scripted feuilleton. Attempts at political parodies often produced the opposite result, as workers eagerly performed the "rollicking songs of the riff-raff with far too much pleasure."[271]

From the official standpoint, the entertainment for the holidays demanded more attention to the victory of socialism in October and the attendant political themes of industrial growth, agricultural advances, cultural enlightenment, and international events refracted through a socialist lens. Yet few club productions fulfilled this lofty task, instead often risking a trivialization of the commemoration's significance. A combination of low political literacy, worker passivity, and popular tastes affected the club's ability to stage acceptable theatrical propaganda. International adversaries, such as Neville Chamberlain and French President Poincaire, were often given the same importance as more mundane social problems, such as alimony payments. Musical numbers and workers' *chastushki* failed to convey revolutionary élan, and were described by observers as primitive and illiterate (both politically and grammatically). Worker correspondents also remarked that many of the *chastushki* simply

[271] *Rabochii zritel'*, 4-18 November 1924; *Pravda*, 6 November 1923; *Lenin. pravda*, 10 October 1923; *Iskusstvo trudiamshchimsia*, 17 November 1925; *Rabochie o literature, teatre, i muzyke*, 54.

recycled folk and tsarist melodies, feebly interspersed with pseudo-revolutionary phrases. In contrast, club activists complained that workers refused to sing revolutionary anthems and the *Internationale* during the shows.[272]

Workers resisted official attempts to graft naked agitation on the popular forms of entertainment, often showing their displeasure with empty seats at club holiday shows. Many clubs often disregarded published materials and continued to design and stage light music, comedy, and novelty acts as part of the holiday celebrations. Tired of agitational entertainment, other workers simply hungered for substantial theatrical fare, such as the classic plays of Ostrovskii. By the ninth anniversary (1926), one survey cited precious few examples of acceptable entertainment and highlighted an original doggerel entitled "A Conversation between a NEPman and Aleksei Rykov" (Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars), which ridiculed the trader's speculative activities. More often than not, the observers noted, clubs still used the same fairground repertoire and failed to embrace sovietized *estrada* despite all official efforts. Workers for the most part preferred traditional entertainment to celebrate the political holiday, including gypsy songs, acrobatic displays, and buffoonery, which always found its way onto club stages during the October anniversaries in the NEP.[273]

By 1926, the intractable situation in club holiday campaigns prompted Glavpolitprosvet to publish an *agitsud* to teach workers how to improve the October entertainment. Although it is unclear whether any clubs staged the trial, the script reveals the tensions between popular entertainment and agitation in workers' clubs. In an attempt to engage more workers in more enlightening commemorative campaigns, the trial combined an effective *agitsud* strategy: the

[272] *Novyi zritel'*,10 November 1925; *Rabochie o literature, teatre, i muzyke*, 54; *Klub*, No. 4, 1925, 47.

[273] *Rabochie o literature, teatre, i muzyke*, 54; D. Shegelov, "U istokov," in *U istokov*, 150.

assignment of collective guilt. The scripted trial with fictional characters collectively accused Mr. Temnikov, a club administrator, Mr. Gradov-Ural'skii, a former pre-Revolutionary actor and workers' drama circle director, and Comrade Talantov, an enthusiastic Komsomol member, for their roles in the current crisis. In the end, the jury (composed of club workers) deliberated the fate of the club members and equally distributed the guilt among the defendants. Temnikov had failed to sponsor and promote entertainment that expressed the significance of the great proletarian holiday, instead resorting to staging clown acts and gypsy songs to lure workers away from the bars. True to his class nature, the drama instructor had chosen skits that nostalgically celebrated tsarist culture, and his *chastushk*i lyrics paid only lip service to soviet ideals. For criticizing and abandoning club circles during holiday campaigns, the jury charged the young Komsomol member Talantov with elitism.[274]

From the official point of view, the tensions in the holiday campaigns between agit-prop and entertainment threatened to compromise the meaning of October. The demonstration for the ninth anniversary (1926) clearly signaled a shift away from carnival and amateur activities. *Leningradskaia pravda* labeled the anniversary "an amusement-free October." In contrast to the previous year, this parade contained no distinguishable carnival elements and no colorful industrial floats. The newspaper's correspondent praised the new tone of austerity and frugality as a welcome sign of the times. Club campaigns, public celebrations, film, and theater in the October celebrations of the NEP had proved unsuccessful at communicating patriotic values and mobilize the public to participate in the framing of October and national identity. In less than a year, the arts journal *Zhizn' iskusstva* would publish a call for a new "monumental style of mass

[274] See the script "Sud nad teatral'nom khalturoi," ("Trial of Theatrical Hack-work") in *Sbornik agit-sydy*, (Moscow, 1926), 71-89. Wood, *Performing Justice*, 150-173.

spectacle." The shift to more control would immediately be felt in the highly orchestrated and elaborate design of the tenth anniversary.[275]

[275] *Leningrad. pravda,* 9 November 1926*; Zhizn' iskusstva,* No. 42, 18 October 1927.

## 5. Epilogue: The October Decennial in Moscow (1927)

Less than two weeks after the ninth anniversary in 1926, the Soviet government established a permanent central coordinating commission and charged it with issuing directives and regulations for the decennial. Entrusted with overseeing the largest and most ambitious commemoration to date, this Commission of the Presidium of the All-Union Central Executive Committee on the Organization and Execution of Celebration of the Decennial of the October Revolution included leading party, governmental, and cultural figures, such as Mikhail Kalinin, president of the RSFSR, Nikolai Podvoiskii, formerly the director of Vsevobuch and now director of OSMKS (The Society for an International Red Stadium), Lunacharskii, Nikolai Bukharin, and the journalist and cultural ideologue I. Skvortsov-Stepanov.[276] By 1927, a national system of coordination of the holiday of the Anniversary of the October Revolution had been created.

In Moscow, a powerful October Commission in charge of the celebration in the capital (and the province as a whole) planned, organized, and executed the central October celebration, acting in accordance with the guidelines. Divided into numerous subcommittees, this commission determined and coordinated the forms of the celebration, ranging from the design of the official parade to marketing and distribution of decennial memorabilia.[277] When the holiday campaign ended, every organizing committee, ranging from those in workers' clubs to museums,

[276] See for example the *Builleten' komissii pri prezidiume TsIK Souiza SSR po organizatsii i provedeniiu prazdnovaniia 10 letiia Oktiabr'skoi revolutsii*, no. 1, July 1927 (Moscow, 1927).

[277] TsGAMO f. 66, op. 11, d. 5772 and 5812, *passim*.

filed detailed reports on the completed work for the holiday. Moscow's October Commission compiled a massive survey of the commemorative project, which included achievements as well as deficiencies, and submitted that report to the national commission.[278]

With this bureaucracy in place, the October anniversaries became more orchestrated and institutionalized than ever before; the regimentation of the decennial was a result of both the evolutionary forces throughout the decade that led to the imposition of ideological and institutional controls on commemorative projects and of the onset of the revolutionary program of socialist construction that demanded rationalization and order. In 1927, the jubilee organizers labored to successfully construct a large-scale commemoration that reframed the historical meaning of October to promote the national campaign for rapid and societal transformation, replete with a well-disciplined, controlled, and politicized mass parade, utilitarian aesthetics, the mobilization of the mass media, and symbolic practices marking the centralism of Moscow. However, the tightening of the official celebration did not ultimately stifle contestations and challenges to the decennial program. Dissenting voices, mainly, but not exclusively, emanating from intellectuals on the left, rejected the holiday's content and form that diminished the celebration's popular dimension and abandoned principles of social justice, contrary to the meaning of October. Instead the Decennial program's design and scale was shaped by overriding forces to project national and international strength.

By 1927, as Catherine Cooke has noted, the commemoration had become an industry in itself.[279] Closely adhering to party directives, the municipal commission spent months working

[278] The full text of the final report can be found in TsGAMO, f. 66, op.11, d. 5812. The report for Leningrad, complete with detailed statistics of the elements in every district parade column, can be found in RGALI, f.645, op.1, d. 489.

with numerous subcommittees, coordinating local organizations, debating proposals, allocating budgets, and reviewing artistic components for the holiday. The October Commission produced an enormous amount of agitational material in conjunction with the holiday. For example, according to its final report, the commission issued 198,000 political slogans contained in 19,000 brochures, and 18,000 public broadsheets with the holiday itinerary, in addition to the massive instructional bulletins distributed to districts, enterprises, cultural organizations and outlying rural administrations. The commission's massive literary output also included 79,000 posters in party-approved categories; the themes of the Moscow official posters were industrialization, Lenin, Women, the Red Army, the countryside, and informational posters on the holiday itinerary.[280]

By now, the commemoration also involved mass merchandising that not only generated profits, but also provided the population with lasting mementos of the holiday. Taking seriously its role as national custodians of the historical memory of October, the commission carefully weighed and approved designs for jubilee posters, armbands, toys, busts, porcelain, and pins for sale by organizations during the commemoration. For purposes of quality and ideological control, only officially approved agencies had the right to sell jubilee products. Moreover, the contracted organizations issued posters to promote the sale of the memorabilia. Awarded the contract to mint jubilee pins, the civil defense organization Osoaviakim issued posters that chided, "I bought a pin for the October decennial. Have you?" In another example, an ominous-

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[279] Catherine Cooke, "Celebrating the Industrial Dream," in *Street Art of the Revolution. Festivals and Celebrations in Russia, 1918-1933*, eds. Vladimir Tolstoy, Irina Bibikova and Catherine Cooke (London, 1990), 168.

[280] TsGAMO f. 66, op. 11, d. 5812, l. 35; RGALI, f. 645, op. 1, d. 489, l. 85; RGALI, f. 1230, op. 1, d. 1453, l. 8; "Iz protokola soveshchaniia Akademii khudozhestv po voprosy ob uchastii ee v organizatsii prazdnestv 10-letiia Oktiabr'skoi revoliutsii," 10 April 1927 in Tolstoi, et. al, *Materialy*, 151.

looking pair of eyes filled a dark colored poster and intimidated the viewer with its accusatory caption: "I don't see your pin for the October decennial."[281] The arts subcommittee of the commission solicited and weighed many proposals for the commemorative namesakes, often rejecting projects that failed to dignify the historical event. One private firm proposed to manufacture commemorative wallpaper, replete with portraits of communist leaders and revolutionary events. The committee rejected the project, charging the company with economic speculation exploiting both the Revolution and its leaders.[282]

Indeed, the purview of the October Commission was astonishingly extensive in line with the mission to create an all-embracing plan for the large-scale jubilee. The arts subcommittee confronted the daunting challenge to design and organize the decennial to form one magnificent and integrated work of art to represent the revolution. In fact, this trend towards uniformity, scale, and, arguably, a sense of majesty had emerged in the previous decade in response to a variety of, and often competing, celebratory impulses.[283] Guided by these overarching principles, the arts subcommittee played a significant role in symbolic presentation of October; the subcommittee judged, revised, and coordinated designs for the capital's public squares and streets for the jubilee. Ensuring even greater ideological and artistic controls, the new institutionalization of a coordinating central *troika* comprising a cultural administrator, an architect-engineer, and a political consultant (in this case, from Glavpolitprosvet) carefully

[281] *Builleten' komissii pri prezidiume TsIK Souiza SSR po organizatsii i provedeniiu prazdnovaniia 10 letiia Octiabr'skoi revolutsii,* no. 1, July 1927 (Moscow, 1927), 8-9. Both posters are housed in the State Historical Library, P3 XXVIII.7.

[282] TsGAMO f. 66, op. 11, d. 5772,1. 14.

[283] This trend also signals a move towards the hierarchical and centralized culture that Vladimir Papernyi affixes to the Stalinist era. See Papernyi, *Kul'tura dva, passim*; *Iskusstvo v massy*, no. 5-6, 1929, 29-30.

reviewed the public holiday designs. Anna Dodonova, a member of both the cultural department of the Moscow Soviet and the Proletkul't leadership, chaired this influential arts subcommittee.[284]

The preference for three-dimensional and imposing ensemble projects was clearly visible in the committee's deliberations and final selections. This aesthetic served to convey the grand scale of both the new drive to industrialize and the task of socialist construction. For example, the *troika* accepted, without revisions, constructivist artists Georgii and Vladimir Stenberg's (famous for their earlier film poster designs) elaborate illumination project for the MOGES power plant, which featured silhouettes of Lenin and political slogans in lights. For other preliminary sketches, the committee provided detailed critiques and artistic suggestions to meet the aesthetic and political criteria for the commemoration. Graphically exhibiting a Taylorist notion of mastery of time that spoke to the new economic turn, proposals that spotlighted numerical figures and diagrams also won approval. The winning design for the main staging area on Red Square consisted almost exclusively of two large sets of revolutionary dates, '17' and '27,' hung on the Kremlin Walls. The deployment and primacy of numerals, as one artist noted, was a powerful (symbolic) weapon to beat down enemies.[285] The cultural intelligentsia

[284] TsGAMO, f.66, op.11, d. 5812, l.123-125. On Dodonova's career, see Fitzpatrick, *Commissariat*, 108.

[285] TsGAMO, f. 66, op.11, d. 5772, l. 95-98 and d. 5772, l. 111. For photographs of the decorations, see Tolstoi, *Materialy*, pl. 254, 255 and *Pravda*, 9 November 1927. This symbolism of numbers also applied to several of the commemorative posters. See for example the poster *Under the Banner of the All Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks) along the Path of Lenin, We Are Moving towards Communism.* (*Pod znamenem VKP(b) po puti Lenina idem k sotsializmy*), GTsMSIR (Fototeka), A52127.

on the left shared the preference for the aesthetic principles of utilitarianism and industrial design featured in the street decorations.[286]

Judging by the submissions and accepted proposals, avant-garde artists continued to contribute to (but not control) the aesthetics of October. Both Proletkul't and Meierkhol'd's art studios created artistic ensembles for Moscow's central squares. In addition, the committee mobilized art students from the Vkhutemas (Moscow Higher State Artistic and Technical Studios) to lend their training and production art to the celebration. With this aim in mind, the Soviet government had earlier established these studios to produce artists to work in industry, and now the politically literate and professionally trained Vkhutemas artists formed part of the new artist-*spetsy*, politically and professionally trained artists and technicians, to work on the official celebrations. Although the party had not given its imprimatur to the avant-garde, the commission continued to draw on the enthusiasm, resources, and talents of such groups as Proletkul't to frame the symbolism of October.[287]

The totalizing aim of the October Commission's artistic plan included not only the construction of new configurations of public space to frame October, but in the re-appropriation of bourgeois urban space and practices. This can also be seen in their efforts to utilize Moscow's public commercial space to spread the political message. The arts committee worked with several commercial enterprises to create politically and aesthetically appropriate window displays to engage marchers along the processional route or to provide entertaining diversions for evening strolls during the holiday. Whether a result of revolutionary zeal or a lack of

[286] Sergei Tretiakov, "Kak deciatiletit'," *Novyi Lef*, no. 4, 1927, 35-37.

[287] TsGAMO, f. 66, op.11, d. 5772, l.114. On the origins and work of the Vkhutemas, see Cooke, *Russian Avant-garde*, 161-164.

ideological guidance, some enterprises, however, improvised in their commemorative displays, thereby prompting accusations of trivializing the holiday's import with revolutionary kitsch. One writer described a large rotating mobile of a "Mephistophelean" Lenin, with his arm outstretched, accompanied by political caricatures of the enemies of socialism featured in the office window of the newspaper *Kommunar*. The main window at GUM caused a noticeable stir among onlookers: instead of the familiar, uninspired, overcoat-clad mannequin a singular model wore a red shirt and looked out at spectators through prison bars, with the caption "Greetings, Prisoner of Capital!" Marrying socialist bliss and bourgeois domesticity, the Univermag department store window display contained a couple in a comfortable living room with armchairs, furniture, and lace curtains – all in red. One confectioner's shop created a sugar cube sculpture in the form of a jubilee emblem.[288] To critics from the left, the last display failed to revolutionize public space, but, rather, violated it with a disrespectful presentation that signaled a sovietization of *meshchanstvo* (petit-bourgeois culture).[289]

Plans to increase and promote the revolutionary historic profile of Moscow further redefined public space to showcase the new central orientation of Moscow. In fact, these efforts

[288] "Zapisnaia knizhka," *Novyi Lef*, no.10, 1927, 7-14; The trend to use shop windows continued under Stalin. In 1931, a writer remember a portraits of a revolutionary leader sculpted from marmalade. G. Andreevskii, *Moskva v stalinskuiou epokhy, 1920-1930e* (Moscow, 2003), 26.

[289] "Zapisnaia knizhka," *Novyi Lef*, no.10, 1927, 7. The observer also noted that the confectionary window display illustrated an excess of the principle of aestheticization over utilitarianism. Criticism of similar holiday window displays for the May Day celebration that year can be found in *Sovetskoe iskusstvo*, no.2, 1927; On Soviet advertising under Stalin, see Randi Cox, "All This Can Be Yours!: Soviet Commercial Advertising and the Social Construction of Space, 1928-1956," in *The Landscape of Stalinism: The Art and Ideology of Soviet Space*, eds. Evgeny Dobrenko and Eric Naiman (Seattle, 2003), 125-162.

to restructure spatial politics can also be viewed as an expansion or redefinition of the Leninist "Plan of Monumental Propaganda" to use the city as a political text for the history of Soviet socialism and its achievements. Directives from the Commission of the Presidium of the All-Union Central Executive Committee on the Organization and Execution of Celebration of the Decennial of the October Revolution specifically called on municipal organizers to make Moscow a center of civism, not just for the urban population, but for visitors as well. The governmental commission encouraged historical and cultural tours of the city. Local organizers were also urged to publicize revolutionary sites and markers with outdoor film screenings of historical films, podiums for speeches, and even kiosks to sell pertinent literature on the site's significance in the revolution.[290] Some cultural critics yearned for more commemorative installations illustrating revolutionary achievements on streets and parks as well as in storefronts, a call that would be answered by the large architectural ensembles for the holidays in just a few years' time.[291] One utopian project submitted to the commission exemplifies the re-emergence of Lenin's didactic program in connection with the holidays. The proposal sought to turn the streets of Moscow into a university, with each boulevard representing an important historical figure, event, or branch of science or humanity. For example, Anatomy Street would include large diagrams of the human body with explanatory panels. Although unrealized, the project spoke to the civic aims of the commemoration.[292]

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[290] *Builleten' komissii pri prezidiume TsIK Souiza SSR po organizatsii i provedeniiu prazdnovaniia 10 letiia Octiabr'skoi revolutsii*, no. 1, July 1927, 33-34/

[291] See the examples of a gigantic outdoor map of the Moscow Metro in 1932 and installation of a Machine Tractor Station in the park outside the Bolshoi Theater in 1933 in *Street Art*, pl. 204 and 218.

[292] *Iskusstvo v massy*, no. 5-6, 1929, 29-30; TsGAMO, f. 66, op.11, d. 5812, l. 23-26; TsGAMO, f. 66, op.11, d. 5770, l. 65-66.

The purview of Moscow's October Commission in matters of film and theater, unlike in art, was more circumscribed. Significant changes in cultural policy in 1927 (and 1928) tightened party control on the content and form in both media.[293] The gravitas of the decennial provided a strong impetus to commission new productions on the revolution for the holiday. Prior to the ninth anniversary celebration in 1926, the party called for new plays and commissioned films for the October Decennial. Acceptable subjects for plays included Lenin's life, the workers' movement, the Civil War, and the socialist homologue, the French Revolution**.** The Party's Agitprop Department contracted film directors Sergei Eisenstein and Dziga Vertov for the commemorative cinematic project. Hired in the hope that he would repeat the cinematic and agitational achievement of *Potemkin*, Eisenstein was hired to produce a historical epic of the October Revolution for the holiday. The party engaged Vertov to create a documentary of the decennial celebration specifically designed to showcase "the grand construction of the epoch."[294] Other directors and studios soon followed suit in the race for a masterwork on the Revolution; the leading lights of Soviet cinema, Vsevolod Pudovkin, Boris Barnet, and Esther Shub all competed to screen films for the jubilee.

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[293] On the new set of party controls in the theater, see Gorchakov, *Theater in Soviet Russia*, 266**.** In 1927, the party increased its control of content and form in theaters. Also the installation of party members as general theater managers helped ensure stagings of politically correct plays. On the layers of censorship and compromise in the Soviet film industry, see John Rimberg, *Motion Picture in the Soviet Union, 1918-1952* (New York, 1973), 155-174. 1928, the Communist Party conference on cinema called for films to be more political and criticized the box-office orientation of cinema. See *The Film Factory: Russian and Soviet Cinema in Documents 1896-1939*, eds. Richard Taylor and Ian Christie, London and New York, 1988, 225-232.

[294] RGALI, f. 2091, op. 2, d. 405, l.1-1a.

On the municipal level, the Moscow October Commission planned the logistics for the final productions of the films and plays. To spotlight national achievement, the commission unanimously decided that only Soviet films would be shown on the holiday. Heated debates on ticket costs arose, however, and prompted the commission to distribute free tickets to workers only on the first day of the two-day holiday. Some on the commission felt that after ten years of struggle, theater, and films should be free to workers throughout their holiday. In the end, financial considerations trumped the political rationale to provide unlimited entrance throughout the holiday.[295]

As commemorative theatrical fare during the NEP had shown, the lack of political and professional personnel involved in *estrada* productions in both workers' clubs and in the official public celebration could still undermine the political message. To rectify potentially subversive situation, the October Decennial Commission enforced stricter party directives to control and monitor live performances. To ensure the regulation on these small forms of agitational theater, the Moscow October Commission delegated small teams to inspect and report on the productions, adding another layer of censorship to the existing oversight agencies' efforts in these areas. The Blue Blouse acting troupes still performed in workers' clubs, however, Moscow Party representatives had screened and critiqued the skits in advance and dictated that party or trade union officials provide a political speech to frame the performance. To ensure greater political reliability, a newly trained cohort of more than a thousand *deistvenniki* (activists) had increasingly replaced club circle organizers, working on club holiday productions, public

[295] Leyda, *Kino,* 235; *Sovetskii ekran,* 22 November 1927**,** TsGAMO, f. 66, op. 11, d. 5812, l. 96.

commemorative events, and parades.[296] Such developments underscore the related processes of increasing professionalization in the commemorative projects and the suppression of elements of spontaneity in the holiday.

Organizers expended considerable efforts to prevent political missteps and possible political subversion of carnival elements in the official demonstrations. The Moscow October Commission hired professional actors for the *Petrushki* production in the official parades, including one featuring an international cast of puppets (England, Poland, America, and France). Now exclusively produced in a special art studio, masks and effigies in the parades were also to be strictly controlled (in size, number, and form). Moreover, the commission contracted and approved professional artists' sketches for the parade's central political carnival pieces.[297]

In 1927, a wartime crisis atmosphere resulting from a series of international rebuffs no doubt played a role in the party's decision that elements of political satire in the official parade were too important to be left in the hands of amateur artists and workers.[298] Impressing foreign delegations of workers, writers, and others in Moscow for the holiday was a central concern for both the party and the Moscow organizers, and the press and organizers carefully noted their

[296] GARF, f. 5451, op. 11, d. 517, l. 6, 95. The *deistvenniki* came from the Komsomol, the political educational department of the military, and workers schools.

[297] A.I. Mazaev, *Prazdnik kak sotsial'noe khudozhestvennoe iavlenie* (Moscow, 1978), 368; *Builleten' komissii pri prezidiume TsIK Souiza SSR po organizatsii i provedeniiu prazdnovaniia 10 letiia Oktiabr'skoi revolutsii*, no. 4 (Moscow, 1927), 20.

[298] In 1927, the British decision to break diplomatic relations with the USSR, the Chinese Nationalist Party attack on Communists, and the assassination of a Soviet ambassador to Poland all convinced the Soviet leadership of a conspiracy (led by Britain).

reactions to the political displays in the parade.[299] The press coverage detailed the British delegation's enthusiastic response to the numerous effigies of British leaders Ramsey MacDonald and Neville Chamberlain. *Pravda*'s description of the Germans' delight as they watched a float in which a worker-blacksmith atop the earth continually strikes down the bobbing head of a capitalist also reveals the increasing politicization in the official parade.[300]

The efforts to regulate carnival did not mean that festivity in the celebration was banished; it was just put under stricter control. While the idea of the transformative people's carnival was still powerful and elicited considerable backing from cultural authorities, the decennial celebration illustrates the movement to marginalize the potentially subversive genre in the official holiday. According to the national October Commission, mass carnivals would have

[299] Ibid. The Moscow October Commission's final report on the commemoration provided detail records of the activities and reactions of the total 1012 foreign visitors in Moscow for the holiday. Only a small portion of the delegates observed the official parade from the reviewing stand on Red Square. The majority of visitors were organized into district columns inside the demonstration, with mixed results. The official summary reported the extreme dissatisfaction of the delegates who were kept in areas for several hours by incompetent and uninformed district organizers. Delegates also complained of the quality of food served to them in the dormitories as well as the cost of pre-arranged tours. On a more positive note, delegates attending commemorative meetings overwhelmingly had good impressions of the events. TsGAMO, f. 66, d. 5812, l. 27. For one of the many photographs documenting the presence of the foreign delegates, see the French workers delegation that included a participant in the Paris Commune from GTsMSIR, (Fototeka), no. 66348.

[300] *Pravda*, 10 November 1927; TsGAMO, f. 66, op.11, d. 5772, l. 1-1ob. Another carnival procession lampooning foreign leaders called "Chain of Champions" included Chamberlain as the champion of false promises, Mussolini as the champion of hooliganism, and caricatures of other international leaders. *Nasha gazeta*, 10 November 1927.

to adhere to tighter regulations, enlist professional *deistvenniki*, and be held outside the center of the city.[301]

As an influential member of the national October Commission, Podvoiskii was able contract his own cultural organization (OSMKS, but with the participation of Proletkul't) as the organizer of a mass carnival for the holiday**.** With seven hundred participants, the mass production "A Worldwide October" chronicled national revolutions in China, England, Russia, America, and Japan in choreographed skits highlighting the capitalist oppression and the plight of oppressed groups. The impressive event included marches, songs, dances, games, and exhibitions of physical culture. Yet, the carnival was held on Sparrow Hills on the second day of the holiday, removed in both space and time from the official proceedings. This development marked the deliberate separation of the official parade from leisure and recreational activities during holidays.[302]

The control of the mass demonstration was one of the primary functions of the Moscow October Commission and the parade design worked to promote the current political task of socialist rationalization. The national Organizing Committee directives instructed Moscow organizers to ensure that the official parade would present an impressive display of national strength involving factories and the countryside in the demonstration, so that only "the enemies

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[301] GARF, f. 5451, op. 1, d. 517, l. 54; *Builleten' komissii pri prezidiume TsIK Souiza SSR po organizatsii i provedeniiu prazdnovaniia 10 letiia Oktiabr'skoi revolutsii*, no, 3 (Moscow, 1927); Mazaev, *Prazdnik kak sotsial'noe khudozhestvennoe iavlenie*, 368-369.

[302] For the detailed schedule and plan for the event, see RGALI, f. 2732, op. 1, d. 97. GARF, f. 4346, op.1, d.549, l1-16, Betti Glan, *Prazdnik vsegda s nami* (Moscow, 1988), 54. On OSMKS and activities in the decennial, see Corbesero, "If We Build It," 16-18. See Sartorti, 12-13, on the creation of state sponsored organized leisure, in the form of mass carnivals.

of labor (and science)" would be excluded from the commemoration.[303] Additionally, the government hoped that the decennial demonstration would mobilize the population and "ignite in the masses the enthusiasm to build socialism."[304] Yet municipal organizers echoed the concerns of the cultural intelligentsia on the left that the official parade that intended to present the perfect symbolic representation of the ideal workers state, in fact, did little to engage or integrate workers. Instead, many complained that the demonstration resembled a lifeless military parade in which hundreds of thousands of participants dutifully marched.[305] This realization coupled with the predicted interminable length of the parade prompted the Moscow commission to introduce a ceremonial innovation designed to have the columns join together, or closely pass by one another, to exchange comradely greetings at designated intervals. The change was intended to foster an inner symbolism of union; the architects of October and socialist construction (peasants, workers, nationalities) would greet foreign delegations (international carriers of socialism) and divisions of children (the heirs of the revolution). As the final report of the Moscow Commission revealed, the sheer number of marchers (estimated at one and a quarter million people), the insufferable length of the parade (eight and a half hours), and the poor district management of parade columns overshadowed the potential benefits from the parade innovation.[306]

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[303] *Builleten' komissii pri prezidiume TsIK Souiza SSR po organizatsii i provedeniiu prazdnovaniia 10 letiia Oktiabr'skoi revolutsii*, no.4 (Moscow, 1927), 34.

[304] TsGAMO, f. 66, op. 11, d. 5772, l. 259.

[305] V. Zhemchuzhenyi, "Protiv obriadov," in *Novyi Lef*, no.1, 1927, 46.

[306] *Builleten' komissii pri prezidiume TsIK Souiza SSR po organizatsii i provedeniiu prazdnovaniia 10 letiia Oktiabr'skoi revolutsii* (Moscow, 1927), 34; TsGAMO, f. 66, op. 11, d. 5812, l.18. According to organizers, the estimated number of marchers exceeded not only last year's count of approximately 500,000, but also surpassed the

Mobilizing Moscow's population, however, potentially meant organizing categories of social groups that symbolically challenged the ideal workers state. Unlike in previous years, the meeting minutes of the municipal commission seriously confronted the reality of the legions of orphans, mothers lacking childcare, and thousands of unemployed workers in the Moscow area. The commission weighed proposals to request increased childcare facilities for women, but acknowledged that the government neither would nor could approve such an expenditure. Including orphans in the demonstration meant nationally (and internationally) exposing of the problem of homeless children. One proposal, ultimately accepted in the final plan, called for orphans to march within factory and military units, symbolically transforming them into "former orphans."[307]

The commission debates on the plight of the unemployed, however, raised serious questions about the role of the anniversary. The commemoration of the meaning of October forced organizers to confront not only issues of festivity, but beneficence as well. One commission member accused his colleagues of ignoring the problem, asking them to do something for the millions of unemployed workers, yet he added that their inclusion in the parade would not be appropriate. To create a festive mood, several festival organizers suggested providing Muscovites with bread so that they could celebrate the holiday with traditional celebratory foods, such as dumplings, or at least ensuring that stores stock plenty of baked bread and meat for the holiday.[308]

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750,000 count in the May Day celebration in 1927. For comparison, the estimated number of demonstrators in Leningrad's demonstration was slightly under one million.

[307] TsGAMO, f. 66, op. 11, d. 5812, l. 87, 119; *Pravda*, 10 November 1927.

[308] TsGAMO, f. 66, o.11, d. 5812, l. 110,120.

In 1927, the country was on the threshold of a new economic future and the decennial design reflected this turn towards rationalization and discipline. In April, the Fourth Congress of the Soviets had voted to establish a rationalized economy based on Five Year Plans; six months later the Party adopted specific goals for the plan. Reflecting the dawn of new Soviet era, the central government and local jubilee organizers consciously modeled the jubilee so as to accomplish two goals: to provide a symbolic closure for the October Revolution, and to mark a point of departure for socialist construction. According to the national October Commission, the bifurcated aim of this decennial commemorative project was to assimilate the history and achievements of the past, and "with greater confidence, continue the work of October 1917."[309]

As past commemorations had illustrated, presenting an unambiguous, instructional, and engaging history of October proved difficult. By 1927, organizers acknowledged that the ossification and institutionalization of official holiday meetings had alienated and distanced citizens from the history. In part a recognition of this failure to integrate and engage workers in previous commemorative projects and a official nod for the need for more forms of entertainment to supplement agitation, the Decennial planners issued instructions to animate the historical material for the evenings of reminiscences that followed the official reports of clubs and organizations. While the narratives had to exhibit a solid and acceptable historical understanding (provided by party-approved texts), organizers encouraged participants to present lively and colorful stories of real revolutionary events. Despite the protocols with regulations on acceptable histories and detailed instructions for presentations, organizers promoted the memory

[309] GARF, f. 5451, o.11. d. 517, l.30; *Builleten' komissii pri prezidiume TsIK Souiza SSR po organizatsii i provedeniiu prazdnovaniia 10 letiia Oktiabr'skoi revolutsii*, no.1(Moscow, 1927), 6.

nights for their unscripted and unformulated quality.[310] Club journals reported on the lively tales that captivated audiences with their "fresh, non-mechanical quality." Yet, some of the narratives read like farce rather than respected and sacred history, perhaps compromising the serious intent to provide a lesson in national civics. In one Civil War story (as told by invalids), Red Army soldiers attacked a Cossack unit using a wine barrel, so they wouldn't "fall (prey) to temptation."[311] Another evening in a printers' workers club featured workers relating their personal heroism during the October Revolution, in which they seized their own press. With remarkable "good humor," the printers also recounted their trips in search of provisions during the "hungry years" of the Civil War.[312] Illustrative of the increased regimentation of the holiday, clubs and enterprises were required to submit accurate and detailed accounts of the memory nights to festival organizers purposes of verification.[313]

The party-commissioned cinematic histories of October also provoked debate about the proper re-presentation of the October Revolution for the present. Completed on time, Pudovkhin's *End of St. Petersburg* and Barnet's *Moscow in October* shared the bill at the gala jubilee screening at the Bolshoi Theater. Barnet's treatment of the revolutionary battles in the capital proved the less successful of the two. To authenticate the history, Barnet had asked and received official appearances from Bolshevik leaders, including Stalin, Bukharin, and Alexei Rykov. According to film scholar Jay Leyda, the recycling of an explosion scene throughout the

[310] GARF, f. 5451,op.11, d. 517, l. 132; *Klub*, no. 11, 1927, 44.

[311] TsGAMO, f. 66, o. 11, d. 5770, l. 5-6 and d. 5812, l. 82; *Klub*, no. 11, 1927, 44-45.

[312] Ibid.

[313] GARF, f. 5451,op.11,d. 517, l. 132.

film caused "uproarious results," and compromised the historical impact. Unfortunately the film no longer exists in its entirety.[314]

Both Pudovkhin and Eisenstein, who publicly screened parts of *October* on November 6, suffered heavy criticism for creating intellectualized films that failed to engage the proletariat. Reflecting present political needs of mobilization and collective sacrifice and purpose, both films foreground the masses as the driving force of the October Revolution. While Lunacharskii hailed Eisenstein's *October* as "an enormous triumph," influential members of the film industry and cultural critics assailed the film for its theatricalization of the Revolution and its unintelligibility to workers. For some reviewers, the problem rested in Eisenstein's cinematic omission of important and (obligatory) stages of the Revolution's history, such as the collapse at the front in World War I or the growth of the workers' movement. The documentary filmmaker Esfir Shub joined other critics in attacking Eisenstein's disgraceful distortion of history, including the use of a real, and therefore fallible, person, the actor V. Nikandrov, to play the sacred and mythic Lenin.[315]

With the recent turn towards realism and away from naked agitation, theatrical offerings for the Decennial achieved greater success than film in presenting the Revolution for mass audiences. Vsevolod Ivanov's *Armored Train 14-69* topped the list of plays that successfully

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[314] *Zhizn iskusstva*, no.43 (1927), 38; Leyda, 235.

[315] On the cinematic critiques, especially Eisenstein's *October*, see *Inside the Film Factory*, eds. Richard Taylor and Ian Christie (London and New York, 1994), 196-197; A Lunacharskii, "Review of *October*" (*Kino*, 20 March 1928) trans. in *The Film Factory: Russian and Soviet Cinema in Documents*, 216, Esfir Shub, "The Work Cries Out ("Eta rabota krichit'), (no. 11, *Kino*, 1928), Ibid., 217. See also "The *Lef* Ring: Comrade! A Clash of Views," ('Ring Lefa', 'Tovarishchi! Sshibautes' mneniyami!'), (*Novyi Lef*, no. 4 (April), 1928, 34), Ibid, 225-232. For a study on the use and misuse of Lenin in Stalinist film and stage, see Petrone, 163-168.

combined a politically acceptable narrative with moving human portrayals in the popular Civil War genre. The play tells the story of Red partisans in Siberia who capture a White Army armored car in order to attack Japanese and American interventionist forces. Ivanov garnered praise for his main hero, the partisan leader Peklevanov, a modest but deeply revolutionary man who inspires heroism. The play enjoyed a long run. One American visitor who watched a later production of the drama commented on the play's powerful impact as well as the timely agitational message of self-sacrifice, self-initiative, and heroism.[316] Despite tightened party controls on theater and pre-holiday official screenings of productions, plays such as Roman Rolland's *Taking of the Bastille* later were judged as lacking the necessary gravitas for the October commemoration. Reviewers not only attacked the subject matter as out of touch with contemporary times, but also criticized the frippery of the French Revolutionaries, which seemed better suited for a costume ball than an insurrection.[317] The closely monitored club productions of the jubilee also occasionally failed to impart a reverential history of the commemorative event. For example, a review of a soldiers' club play about a young war correspondent during the Civil War praised the choice of subject, but condemned the overuse of cheap gimmicks and stunts, including entertaining stock characters of spies and bandits, the cliché device of secret documents and chase scenes, all of which were more suitable for a film than a serious club production.[318]

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[316] On the anniversary production of Ivanov's play at the MkhAT-2 Theater, see Rudnitsky, *Russian and Soviet Theatre*,188-189; Gorchakov, *Theater in Soviet Russia*,182-184. *Pravda*, 18 November 1927; Walter Arnold Rukeyser, *Working for the Soviets. An American Engineer in Russia* (London, 1932), 80-81.

[317] *Pravda*, 12 November 1927.

[318] *Klub*, no. 11, 1927, 1.

According to Agitprop department protocols, the party not only used the glorification of October in theater and other commemorative activities to claim a direct connection with the heroic past, but also to urge the populace to emulate the heroism of the past as the country faced the new campaign to build socialism. Marking a shift in tempo and symbolism, parade banners articulated the dawn of a new era in the dictatorship of the proletariat. One organizer exclaimed, "The holiday is not only a scorecard for our achievements, but must be a holiday of new beginnings and socialist construction."[319] The numerous dedications of new establishments (each one documented) slated for the holiday underscore the significance of these beginnings in socialist construction. On trade union reported over one hundred new establishments in the Moscow area, including clubs, schools, nurseries, cafeterias, department stores, and telephone stations. In Moscow's Rogozhsko-Simonovskii district, twenty-one community services opened, including a firing range in a former monastery.[320]

For the organizers, symbolism and verifiable statistics of growth took precedence over financial outlays to properly outfit the new establishments. As one commission commented, "It is crucial to open a school for the jubilee," even if the building was completely empty. In contrast, the commission rejected a worker's proposal to renovate rows of dilapidated homes and businesses to "truly show the meaning of October." The symbolism of socialist construction required images of new growth not of restoration projects, even if it provided tangible improvements to workers' living conditions.[321]

[319] RGASPI, f. 17, op. 3, d. 657, l. 6-14.

[320] TsGAMO, f. 66, op. 11, d. 5772, l. 45.

[321] TsGAMO, f. 66, op. 11, d. 5812, l.113.

Showcased in posters, the parade, and street decorations, electrification offered one of the most prominent symbols of the future. Announced in 1920, Lenin's Plan for electrification was just coming on line by 1927. As Emma Widdis has shown, electrification carried not just practical but also symbolic significance. Electrification would facilitate rapid and wide-scale industrialization and simultaneously "transform everyday life in every corner of the Soviet territory, providing a network that would integrate center and periphery."[322] The decennial organizers harnessed the symbolic power of the electrification plan to mobilize the population. Club journals provided decennial poster designs, such as "Electrification – the achievement of October." Moreover, the arts subcommittee of the October commission approved several designs that featured electrification. In one float, a plump peasant woman stands outside her hut, adoringly gazing at a utility pole; Lenin's 1920 pronouncement, "Soviet power plus electrification equals communism," provided the caption to the float. Decennial organizers favored outdoor lighting installations for the holiday. The illumination of the MOGES plant by the Stenberg brothers proved extremely popular and politically potent. The project included floodlights, and illuminated Soviet slogans and emblems. Additionally, the design included illuminated detailed silhouettes of Lenin. Exploiting the symbolism of the Stenberg brothers' display, Vertov included footage of the illuminated MOGES plant in his documentary on the jubilee, entitled *The Eleventh Year* (*Odinnadtsatyi*), released in February 1928.[323] The

[322] Emma Widdis, *Visions of a New Land. Soviet Film from the Revolution to the Second World War* (New Haven, 2003), 22.

[323] For the artist's sketch and committee approval, see TsGAMO, f. 66, op. 11, d. 5770, l.158. A photograph of the parade float can be found in Tolstoi, et.al, *Tablitsy*, pl. 257. On the MOGES decoration see Tolstoi, et.al, *Tablitsy*, pl. 254 and nighttime photos of Moscow's decennial in *Novyi Lef*, no.10, 1927. *Sovetskii ekran*, 22 November 1927.

prominence of electrification in the decennial design illustrated the plan's symbolic ability to extend Soviet power.

Despite the imposition of ideological and institutional controls on the commemorative activities, opportunities to contest the official representation and meaning of October still existed. A scathing letter from a Member of the Union of Proletarian Writers (RAPP) submitted to the organizing committee criticized the pomp and extravagance of the public commemoration as a betrayal of revolutionary ideals. Instead of squandering thousands of rubles on the upcoming spectacle, the committee (and by implication, the state), according to the writer, should be answering the needs of the thousands of destitute children, hungry workers, impoverished peasants, and prostitutes in the country. As a self-appointed spokesman for the oppressed, the activist demanded that the state divert commemorative budgets to help unemployed workers and orphans, the children of the heroic defenders of the revolution, who deserved a place of honor on this day. In what was supposed to be a celebration of the proletariat, workers and the wider public had been reduced to passive witnesses in an elaborate display of state worship. The writer charged that the planned holiday "blasphemed" against October by "clothing the idea of communism in traditional forms, the clothing of a cult."[324] He joined other cultural intelligentsia on the left who, prior to the decennial, campaigned against the traditional ritualism of the holiday. Some critics, such as the avant-garde Soviet playwright and theorist Sergei Tret'iakov, compared the mass demonstration to the Orthodox procession of the cross, and the memory nights to the religious service of vespers. [325] The energetic debate in the

[324] TsGAMO, f. 66, op. 11, d. 5570, l. 140.

[325] S. Tretiakov, "Kak deciatiletit'," *Novyi Lef*, no. 4, 1927, 35-37; V. Bliumenfel'd, "Pered oktiabr'skoi demonstratsii," *Zhizn iskusstva*, no.40, 4 October 1927, For a sampling of the left debate on the need for a new revolutionary anniversary see V. Zhemchuzhnyi, "Protiv obriadov," in *Novyi Lef*, no.1, 1927, 43-47; TsGAMO f.

organizing committee protocols on proposals to provide special assistance to these impoverished groups suggests that Tret'iakov was not alone in questioning the statist form of the commemorative holiday, which seemed to betray the struggle for social justice for workers that culminated in October.

The most direct and public challenge to the official representation of the October Revolution came in the form of a counterdemonstration by Trotskii and members of the Left Opposition. Denied access to both the central party apparatus and the media, the politically defeated leaders of the opposition and some of their followers had decided to participate in the demonstrations, carrying their own slogans and placards in an eleventh-hour appeal to the masses. In the Moscow demonstration, some workers tried to shore up support by calling out the names of Trotskii and Zinoviev in protest. Several marchers carried banners with slogans such as "Down with the Kulak, Nepmen, and the Bureaucrat!" "Honor Lenin's Thought," and "Preserve Bolshevik Unity," which alluded to the Left Opposition's political and economic agenda on anti-bureaucratism and condemnation of anti-democratic practices within the party. More prominent members attempted to deliver speeches from their balconies and to hang up portraits of Lenin and Trotskii – the latter as rightful political heir to the great leader. Trotskii drove around the city to address pockets of Muscovites. However, the political control mechanisms quickly extinguished the potential counter-demonstration. In the city, police and OGPU officers arrested speakers, destroyed banners, dispersed crowds, and allegedly fired shots at Trotskii's car. In the official demonstration, agitators and police reacted quickly to the subversive tactics, physically removing fellow counter-demonstrators and preventing marchers from unfurling the

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66, op. 11, d. 5770, l. 135-140, "Velikii prazdnik," *Sovetskoe iskusstvo*, no. 3, 1927, 9-12; and N. Maslenikov,"pora gotovit'sia," *Sovetskoe iskusstvo*, no. 2, 1927, 16-20; TsGAMO f. 66, op. 11, d. 5570, l. 102.

confrontational banners. In a clever theatrical tactic, the politically sympathetic Chinese student delegation from the city's Sun Yat-Sen University managed to send out the opposition's message. After forming a large sinuous dragon in the march, the students allegedly threw oppositional leaflets into the crowd. But the counter-demonstration failed. Whether a result of political loyalty, fear, a lack of support for the oppositionist views, or simply confusion, marchers ignored the protest of the oppositionists and the concomitant Trotskyist claim of legitimacy. Western correspondent Eugene Lyons barely registered the protest, noting that it was "an annoyance that was easily brushed aside." In addition to the OGPU and municipal police, the scores of party agitators integrated into the parade formed a very effective barrier against possible subversive activities and challenges to the official narrative of the Revolution.[326]

The planning, design, and execution of the Decennial of the October Revolution in Moscow clearly reflected the evolution to greater regimentation and rigorous control of the contributing organizations, cultural producers, aesthetics, and also public participation.[327] The development of the commemoration into a highly centralized and choreographed event answered

[326] On the counterdemonstration, see Victor Serge, *Memoirs of a Revolutionary, 1901-1941*, trans. Peter Sedgwick (London, 1963), 226; Victor Serge and Natalia Sedova Trotskii, *The Life and Death of Leon Trotskii* (New York, 1975) 51; Ronald Segal, *Leon Trotskii: A Biography* (New York, 1979), 310; Dmitrii Volkogonov, *Trotskii* (New York, 1996), 300. The opposition also staged demonstrations in Leningrad. Although ultimately a failure, the Leningrad counter-demonstrators successfully managed to exhibit their banners in front of the main staging area at the Winter Palace. Eugene Lyons, *Assignment in Utopia* (New York, 1936), 47-48.

[327] Many scholars have noted the increased controls on the official celebrations beginning with the first five-year plan. Lane, *Rites of Rulers*, 179-180, A.I. Mazaev, *Prazdnik kak sotsial'noe khudozhestvennoe iavlenie* 366-370; Stites, *Revolutionary Dreams*, 228; Alexander Zakharov, "Mass Celebrations in a Totalitarian System," 210, 214.

the needs of the Soviet state that defined and used the holiday to legitimize its authority and political agenda, both nationally and abroad, but also as a means to mobilize its citizenry. By 1927, Soviet commemorators had succeeded in forging a national system of coordination for the anniversary of the October Revolution, the most significant holiday in the Soviet calendar, which projected the Moscow-centered political topography. The permanent government commission on the commemorative project campaign now operated in tandem with a responsive multi-layered bureaucracy, censorship controls, trained technicians for mass celebrations, a uniform aesthetic, and a pliable cultural intelligentsia to create a model for future official commemorations.

The October jubilee in 1927 highlights important elements of continuity and change in the commemorative projects in early Soviet Russia. The increased scope, greater party control, and militarization of the Decennial not only signaled a transition to a new standardized model befitting the rational planning of the Great Turn, but also can be viewed as the realization of the overriding commemorative impulse (shared by many proletarian cultural theorists and producers) of ideological and state control consistently frustrated throughout this first decade. The competing political and cultural strategies of commemorations revealed that Lenin, the party, and influential cultural figures formed a heterogeneous group of festival organizers; conservative and radical cultural programs coexisted and undermined attempts to control the politics of the celebration. The harsh political and economic realities throughout this decade of brutal warfare, Civil War hardships, and the subsequent introduction of a market-driven economy further handicapped the realization of political control of the anniversaries. In the midst of tremendous obstacles, the party managed to establish political, bureaucratic, and cultural mechanisms of control of the commemorations, such as the network of censorship agencies that aimed to regulate the holiday entertainment.

The 1927 Decennial in Moscow is also instructive in demonstrating that the new system of highly controlled and monitored political anniversaries still afforded cultural and public space, albeit limited, in which oppositional ideas still could challenge the official presentation and history of the October Revolution. Quickly extinguished by firmly established police controls, the Trotskyist counterdemonstration presented the most visible, and potentially powerful, reminder of an alternative historical trajectory of October, one without Stalin's ascent to power. Although less accessible to the public, the closed discussions of celebration designs or in party-commissioned cinematic treatments of October the closed discussions of celebration designs in party-commissioned cinematic treatments of October generated alternative visions of the past, frequently undercutting the present-day official demands of history.

While this study of the first decade of anniversaries of the October Revolution shines light on the cultural and political interstices of the celebrations which allowed, and even encouraged, negotiation of the commemorative project, the party and cultural producers deliberately, and occasionally unintentionally, worked to silence the politics, celebratory practices, and imagery of political and cultural dissent. For example, festival organizers symbolically configured the new social relations and enemies in official parades, public space, on stages, in workers' club holiday campaigns, and street art to mobilize support and stifle opposition. Party, cultural producers, and even the public audiences helped extinguish artistic styles and aesthetics that compromised official aims for the cultural frames of October's message. Fearful of potential outlets for subversive celebratory practices, festival organizers suppressed elements of spontaneity, notably the carnivalesque entertainment. Increasing restrictions on amateur club theaters, quality control of satirical floats in the mass parades, and the marginalization of the *narodnoe gulianie* by 1927 trace the official expurgation of liberatory

aspects of the popular celebratory forms and the professionalization of holiday cultural campaigns. Furthermore, the increasing desire, demand, and enforcement of mass participation in the official commemorative projects such as the mass parade and factory holiday meetings, however, removed another form of possible resistance, the decision to remain outside the Soviet festivals of unity. The Stalinist celebrations completed the transformation of spectators into mass participants.

The October Revolution in 1917 and its commemorations unleashed destructive and constructive political and cultural processes integral to the establishment of new political authority; in the anniversaries, iconoclastic impulses of delegitimization and desacralization of the old regime preceded and joined with efforts to transfer legitimacy to the new Bolshevik state. The first decade of the October commemorations afforded the unprecedented opportunity to enlist the existing mass media—art, theater, film, music, graphic art, and so on—in a vast plan to legitimize the new order and mold a new citizenry. At its core, Lenin's "Plan of Monumental Propaganda," proposed in 1918, aimed to educate a new Soviet citizenry by saturating public space with symbols, heroes, and a revolutionary civism.

Like many of the revolutionary designs inspired by October, the immediate fulfillment of Lenin's original plan suffered from the economic turmoil, too little money, and scarce resources. Moreover, a lack of unified planning, weak party controls, and competing cultural strategies for the commemorative aesthetics conspired to thwart ambitious plans, compromise ideological intentions, and create propaganda that frequently did not serve the political message. Many party-sanctioned theatrical productions proved overly intellectual and complex for the intended proletarian audiences, who often resisted nakedly agitational art forms during the NEP and gravitated towards traditional, and ideologically retrograde, popular forms of entertainment.

Throughout much of the decade, the creation and successful implantation in the commemorations of a revolutionary symbolism and ritualism to permanently dislodge and replace pre-Revolutionary and tsarist cultural practices also proved an elusive goal for the party, commemorators and cultural producers.

Despite limitations in the existing media and problematic political messages, the anniversary campaigns in these years demonstrate that the party was moving towards closer control of the media for the commemorations. By 1927, centralization helped make possible and even expand many of the goals of the early festival planners, including the mobilization of artists, art forms, public space and the masses to frame and transmit the contemporary political message of October, rapid economic and societal transformation. In the thirties, the anniversaries of October formed an integral part of the Stalinist *Gesamtkunstwerk* (synthesis of the arts) to project a new ideological and revolutionary landscape.[328]

[328] Rolfe, "Constructing a Soviet Time," 455.

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*Abbreviations in brackets after title*


*Ekran*
*Gorn*

*Izvestiia [Izv.]*
*Kino-nedelia*
*Krasnaia gazeta [Kr. gaz]*
*Klub*
*Iskusstvo*
*Iskusstvo v massy*
*Izobrazitel'noe iskusstvo*
*Novyi Lef*
*Novyi zritel'*
*Petrogradskaia/Leningradskaia Pravda [Petro./Lenin.pravda]*
*Pravda*
*Rabochaia nedelia*
*Severnaia kommuna*
*Sovetskii ekran*
*Sovetskoe iskusstvo*
*Teatral'naia Moskva*
*Trud*
*Tvorchestvo*
*Vestnik teatra*
*Vestnik zhiznyi*
*Zhizn' iskusstva*
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