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Alexandr S. Stykalin



ILYA EHRENBURG AND HUNGARY'S 1956

**Ehrenburg, the Khrushchev Party Elite and the Western
Intelligentsia**

December 2008

Alexandr S. Stykalin is Senior Research Fellow of the Institute for Slavic and Balkan Studies, Russian Academy of Sciences, Moscow. Dr. Stykalin is the author of numerous important publications on post-1945 the cultural and academic relations between the USSR and East Central Europe (particularly Hungary). His books include *Prervannaia revoliutsiia: Vengerskii krizis 1956 goda i politika Moskvyy* [The Interrupted Revolution. The Hungarian Crisis of 1956 and the Policies of Moscow] (Moskva: Novyi khronograf, 2003).

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**Ilya Ehrenburg and Hungary's 1956:
Ehrenburg, the Khrushchev Party Elite, and the Western
Intelligentsia**

by

Alexandr S. Stykalin

Institute for Slavic and Balkan Studies, Russian Academy of Sciences,
Moscow

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Ilya Ehrenburg and Hungary's 1956: Ehrenburg, the Khrushchev Party Elite, and the Western Intelligentsia

Ilya Grigorievich Ehrenburg's versatile creative work as writer, poet, political essayist, memoirist, and translator, as well as his public activities and life, still attract the attention of philologists, historians, and the broader audience. The publication of his voluminous creative heritage, which includes his correspondence, is still in progress.¹ Beginning in the 1990s in St. Petersburg, the staff of the library of the Russian Academy of Sciences (RAN) has been putting together a multi-volume chronology of Ehrenburg's life and writing.² The compilers of this chronicle—V. Popov and B. Frezinsky—are also preparing a comprehensive biography that reveals heretofore unknown details about his life. New and comprehensive biographical research indicates that Ehrenburg (1891-1967) was a man of his epoch not only as a humanist, but as a political activist, too.³

¹ This includes newly published essays written for newspapers in various periods of his life: I. Ehrenburg, *Na tonushchem korable. Stat'i i fel'etony 1917-1919 gg.* Compiled with an introduction by A. Rubashkin (St. Petersburg, 2000); I. Ehrenburg, *Voina* (Moscow, 2005); a two-volume correspondence of Ehrenburg has been also published, prepared by B. Frezinskii, *Dai oglianut'sia. Pis'ma 1908-1930 gg.* (Moscow, 2004) and *Na tsokole istorii. Pis'ma 1931-1967* (Moscow, 2004). See also the collection of letters addressed to Ehrenburg, B. Frezinskii, "Ia slyshu vse..." *Pochta Erenburga, 1916-1967* (Moscow, 2006).

² V. V. Popov, B. Ia. Frezinski, Ilya Ehrenburg. *Khronika zsyzni i tvorchestva (v dokumentakh, pis'makh, vyskazyvaniakh pressy, svidetel'stvakh sovremennikov)* (St. Petersburg, 1993-2001) v. 1, 1891-1923; v. 2 1924-1932; v. 3. 1933-1935; v. 4. 1936-1941; v. 5. 1941-1945.

³ There are detailed biographical essays that focus on certain periods of his life and activities. See, for example, B. J. Frezinski, "Ilya Erenburg v Kieve (1918-1919)," *Minuvshee. Istoricheskii al'manakh* (St. Petersburg, 1997), Vyp.22, pp. 248-335. About the role of Ehrenburg in the preparation of the International Congress of Writers Against Fascism (Paris, 1935) see B. Ia. Frezinski "Velikaia illuziia - Parizh, 1935 (Materialy k istorii Mezhdunarodnogo kongressa pisatelei v zashchitu kul'tury)," *Minuvshee. Istoricheskii al'manakh* (St. Petersburg, 1998), Vyp.24, pp. 166-239. Among the other biographical essays see: A. I. Rubashkin, *Ilya Erenburg: Puti pisatel'ia* (Leningrad, 1990). S. Zemlianyoy in his essay concerning the most important novel of the writer touches on Ehrenburg's attitude to the Russian revolution and Bolshevism and analyses his worldview in early 1920s in "Revoliutsiia i provokatsiia. O romane Il'i Erenburga "Julio Jurenito," *Shtrihi k portretu minuvshogo veka* (Moscow, 2004). Since the early 1990s, researchers have paid more attention to Ehrenburg's attitude to the Jewish question as well as his Jewish connections. They have also placed his legacy into the context of the Jewish culture and public movements. See B. M. Paramonov, *Ilya Erenburg: Portret evreia* (St. Petersburg, 1992). Ehrenburg's point of view on the Jewish question and the reaction of

Despite this extensive work, a complete analysis of the writer's life, as well as the attitude towards his works in the former Soviet Union and beyond, remain challenging, which can be easily explained by the fact that only recently have top secret records from Communist Party and diplomatic archives become accessible. The expansion of the source range adds specific new biographical facts and offers profound new insights into the character of the relationship between Soviet power and one of the central figures of the country's literary establishment over several decades, not to mention a man whose active creative and public work often inspired an international response. A further examination of Ehrenburg's life is important also in and of itself due to the significance of the place it occupies in the literary process and in the literary history of the USSR. The Ehrenburg phenomenon is also interesting in the broader context of the relationship between an artist of left socialist convictions, the principles of artistic freedom connected to them, and the total power of the state that attempted to bend literature and the arts to its will and restrict them to political directives. On the one hand, the dramatic story of these relations describes the inevitable and far-reaching compromises as well as moral lapses on Ehrenburg's part. On the other hand, it also provides insight into his

public opinion to his declarations on the Jewish question are presented on the basis of his correspondence, including his letters to Communist Party leaders. See: "'Protiv popytok voskresit' evreiskii natsionalizm.' Obrashchenie Erenburga k Stalinu," *Istochnik*, No. 1, 1997; B. Ia. Frezinski, "Evreiskaia tema memuarov I. Erenburga 'Liudi, gody, zhizn'' - v pochte 'Novogo mira' za 1961 g.," *Vestnik Evreiskogo universiteta v Moskve*, No. 2, 1998, pp. 157-164. In the 1980s and 1990s, Russian as well as foreign researchers paid close attention to Ehrenburg's legacy and public activities. See the American biography by J. Rubenstein, *Tangled Loyalties: The Life and Times of Ilya Ehrenburg* (New York, 1996). In French, see E. Berard, *La vie tumultueuse d'Ilya Ehrenburg* (Paris, 1991). See also the British biography, written by the well-known commentator of the Russian service of BBC, A. Goldberg, *Ilya Ehrenburg. Writing, Politics and the Art of Survival* (London, 1984). As we can see from these titles, Western biographers were particularly interested in the ambiguities and seeming contradictions in the life and in the "art of survival" of the prominent Jewish-Russian writer, who sacrificed his reputation in the 1930s, supporting and even glorifying Stalin's policy, but later, in the 1950s and 1960s, was among the most persistent advocates of the internal moderation of the Soviet regime.

desperate attempts to expand the limits of cultural life within a communist country, including—and perhaps most importantly—its cultural contacts with the West.

One of the chapters of Ehrenburg's well-known memoirs, *People, Years, Life* describes his visit to Budapest in October 1955. Setting out for the World Peace Council meeting in Vienna, Austria, Ehrenburg, who was the council's deputy chairman since 1950 and also deputy chairman of the Soviet Committee for the Defense of Peace, had to stay in Budapest due to inclement weather. He was staying there together with Nikolai Tikhonov, a poet and the chairman of the Committee. They were received by Mátyás Rákosi, a Hungarian Party leader, who asked for a meeting with the two writers. Having remarked that an unhealthy atmosphere had been created in the writers' milieu, he did not, however, go into details. Of course, Ehrenburg and Tikhonov did not know about the fact that a large group of writers and cultural workers had at that time directed to the Hungarian Workers' Party leadership a protest memorandum against infringements on their creative freedom, and several people had quit the writers union in protest.⁴

However, the Soviet guests could not overlook the tension among the Hungarian writers. The atmosphere of the meeting was rather strained. The people present were obviously worried, excitedly discussed things, and only the seventy-year-old philosopher and literary critic, György Lukács who had seen much in his lifetime, sat imperturbably smoking a cigar. Later, Ehrenburg recalled: "I decided to choose a neutral topic—an author, when writing for a newspaper, in the first place should think about the

⁴ See Rainer M. Janos, *Az író helye. Viták a magyar irodalmi sajtóban 1953-1956* (Budapest, 1990); V. T. Sereda, A. S. Stykalin, "Iz istorii odnogo protivostoianiiia: soiuz vengerskikh pisatelei v obshchestvenno-politicheskoi bor'be serediny 1950-h godov," *Politicheskie krizisy i konflikty 1950-60-h godov v Vostochnoi Evrope* (Moscow, 1993), pp. 93-145.

reader and not the editor, he should find the words that get across to the readership. The writer must claim his right to use the language of his own and not let the editor cross out any fresh word he might find with a red or a blue pencil.”⁵ Hardly had he finished when his Hungarian interlocutors changed the subject to a more specific topic. The conversation turned to Ehrenburg’s sensational novel *The Thaw (Ottepel’)*, which, having been translated into Hungarian, nevertheless failed to reach the bookstores as only 100 copies were ‘published’ and circulated only among the Party elite. Ehrenburg skipped over this salient fact so that tensions would not grow further. The meeting seemed to have finished without any obvious scandal. The author went on in his memoirs: “I still did not get it, what had happened with the Hungarian writers; one thing is clear, though: they are dissatisfied. When we returned to the hotel on that small island [Margit Island], I asked Tikhonov why Rákosi sent us to meet those writers. Nikolai Semenovich answered: ‘God knows. The atmosphere was strange, indeed’. Tomorrow I will have to deliver a speech in Geneva” on European security.⁶ Ehrenburg finished the small Hungarian chapter of his memoirs with the following words: “Alright, but what is going on here? The writers are embittered. Why hadn’t Rákosi warned us about that? I realized everything, not on that night though, but a year later.”⁷

Information about the events that followed Ehrenburg and Tikhonov’s return to Moscow can be found in the records of the Central Committee of the Communist Party

⁵ *Ogonyek*, No. 23, 1987, p. 22. Further we quote Ehrenburg’s memoirs using the first (magazine) version of the two “Hungarian” chapters, which were published first under Gorbachev’s regime (Ibid., 22-26). The first book edition to include these chapters is I. G. Ehrenburg, *Liudi, gody, zsign’*. *Vospominaniya v 3 tomah*. Izdanie ispravlennoe i zakonchennoe. Ed. I. I. Ehrenburg, B. Ia. Frezinski (Moscow, 1990).

⁶ Ehrenburg meant the meeting of the leaders of the USSR, the USA, Great Britain, and France in Geneva (18-23 July 1955), which was a sign of some softening of international tensions.

⁷ About the trip to Budapest in 1955, see the publication concerning the relations between Ehrenburg and N. Tikhonov in B. Ia. Frezinski, “Kakie byli nadezhdy, I. Erenburg - N. Tikhonovu, 1925-1939; O N. Tikhonove, 1922-1967,” *Voprosy literatury*, No. 3, 2003, pp. 255-257.

of the Soviet Union that are located in the Russian National Archive of Modern History (RGANI) and have been published in recent years. The meeting of writers in Budapest was held in the presence of Soviet embassy officials, who soon after sent a letter to the Central Committee describing the essence of the discussion.⁸ According to the report on the meeting approved by Ambassador Yuri Andropov, later head of the KGB and, later still, briefly general secretary of the Communist Party: “Ehrenburg allowed himself to justify his position in the eyes of those belonging to the right anti-party side” in Hungarian literature. For instance, on answering the question concerning the correlation between ideological control over literature and academic freedom, Ehrenburg stated that the editor’s red and blue pencils are the things he hates most of all, and that he refused to accept the criticism of the Soviet press regarding his novel *The Thaw*, and, what is more, he would write the second part of it.⁹ The embassy report continued that Ehrenburg spoke ironically about the so-called “social directive” that concerned workers’ demands

⁸ This document has proved impossible for me to locate and consult.

⁹ The first part of the short novel “The Thaw” was published in the magazine *Znamia (Banner)* in 1954 (No. 5), the second in 1956 (No. 4). Despite its artistic insignificance, the novel took its place among literary works that marked the turn towards new tendencies in Soviet literature, which strive for the emancipation from rigid dogmas of Socialist Realism in its Stalinist-Zhdanovist version. Moreover, it gave the name to the whole period in Soviet history—the first years after Stalin’s death. The term “Thaw” (*Ottepel’*) defined the political content of these years despite the position of the new party leader N. Khrushchev and his idea of the essence of the changes in the country. Khrushchev’s son-in-law, the well-known journalist Alexei Adzhubei, writes: “Khrushchev repeatedly noted both publicly and in a limited circle of persons, that it could not be allowed any ‘ideological slack,’ because it could cause uncontrolled processes in public life. For instance, he did not like Ehrenburg’s term ‘Thaw,’ because he was sure that some kind of ‘thaw’ could transform itself into a disastrous flood. Some of Khrushchev’s associates used his position in their interests very skillfully” (A. Adzhubei, “Te desiat’ let,” *Znamia*, no. 7, 1988, 101). The short novel “Thaw” was criticized for subjectivism and false representation of Soviet reality in some speeches at the Second Congress of Soviet Writers in December 1954. Critical statements were heard later too, even after the Twentieth Congress of the CPSU. See, for example, the program statement of the literary weekly *Literaturnaia Gazeta* from May 8, 1956. As concerns Ehrenburg, he was not inclined to acknowledge the correctness of his critics in all cases. In his speech at the Second Congress of Soviet Writers, he noted that he usually treated the opinions of literary critics not as some kind of verdict, but as an invitation to a discussion. This position contradicted sharply the usual practice in Soviet literary life during the Stalin years.

that he write books about them. He also slighted the Soviet production novel.¹⁰

Ehrenburg showed “a nihilistic attitude” towards the entire Soviet literary development experience.¹¹ As the Central Committee’s Department of Culture summarized it, based on the embassy report, “the captious, calculated declarations of Ehrenburg” “were favored by followers of the right, petty bourgeois wing and were used as an argument for ‘artistic freedom,’ and against ideological party leadership over literature.”¹²

After the diplomatic note from Budapest reached the Central Committee, Ehrenburg could not help but face demands for explanations although he was not a Party member. On October 8, 1955, he submitted a letter to M. A. Suslov, a presidium member and Central Committee secretary responsible for ideology. In the letter,

¹⁰ Ehrenburg opposed the narrow-minded interpretation of the social order in literature in his important essay “On the Work of the Writer” (*Znamya*, No. 10, 1953), which was, after Stalin’s death, one of the first program statements of Soviet intellectuals who were striving for radical changes in literary and artistic life. A. Chekhov and L. Tolstoy, as Ehrenburg noted, did not fulfill “social orders,” they could create only in harmony with their internal motives.

¹¹ The note of the Department of Culture of the Central Committee of the CPSU from January 4, 1956, was signed by the chief of the department D. Polikarpov and the chief of one of the sections of the department V. Ivanov. It was addressed to the Central Committee of the CPSU. See on the document the resolution of the Secretary of the CC of the CPSU D. Shepilov from January 23, 1956. Ed. V. Afiani, *Apparat TsK KPSS i kul'tura. 1953-1957. Dokumenty* (Moscow, 2001), Doc. No. 117, p. 466. This publication is part of the series *Kul'tura i vlast' ot Stalina do Gorbacheva. Dokumenty*.

¹² *Ibid.* In his memoirs, Rákosi remembers Ehrenburg and Tikhonov’s visit to Budapest. According to Rákosi, he waited for a long time for the visit to Hungary of the Soviet “authorities in literature” (“generals of literature”—“literaturnykh generalov”) in the hope that they would help him to calm down the Hungarian writers who opposed power. The non-flying weather gave him a chance to organize the meeting of the Soviet and Hungarian writers, but Rákosi was to be disappointed. In his memoirs, he mistakenly (but maybe intentionally) wrote that this episode dated from the first months after February 1956 and he connected it with what he, when writing the memoirs, understood to have been a fatal influence on the future of the world Communist movement: the Twentieth Congress of the CPSU. The anti-party moods, as he wrote, “received impulses from the USSR. For instance, once I asked the Soviets to send us several famous writers who could influence our writers in a positive way. They could explain to our writers all their mistakes accordingly to the ideas of the Twentieth Party Congress. Ilya Ehrenburg came to Budapest, but his speeches and line of conduct brought grist to the mill of right-wing elements. He declared that the idea of his novel ‘Thaw’ was correct and now he was writing the second part of the book. Gyula Háty and his allies spread his words with joy asserting that they proved that the Soviet writers supported the platform of the (Hungarian) right-wing writers” (See: Ed. A. Stykalin, V. Sereda, A. Chervnev, A. Chernobaev, A. Korotkov, “‘Liudyam svoistvenno oshibatysya.’ Iz vospominanii M. Rakosi,” *Istoricheskii arkhiv*, No. 1, 1999, 25. See also the first Hungarian edition of the memoirs Rákosi Mátyás, *Visszaemlékezések. 1940-1956*, Vol. II (Budapest, 1997), pp. 1010-1011.

Ehrenburg claimed that his speech was misinterpreted. “Speaking about the writer’s work and the editor’s role, I said, as I have already mentioned more than once, that I do not like the editor’s sometimes unreasonable crossing out of new fresh images or turns of speech with his blue or red pencil. Of course, when talking about the ‘red’ pencil, I did not mean anything by this, [a statement that] could only be interpreted as such by American journalists.”¹³ Ehrenburg admitted, however, that some of the questions he was asked could be considered “provocative,” which he could not understand as he was not quite aware of the situation in Hungarian literature at the time and was not acquainted with the people in attendance. He also did not know that *The Thaw* was a semi-forbidden novel in Hungary. Ehrenburg’s letter made plain his displeasure with Hungarian colleagues who carried a consistent “party” orientation, on whose initiative, he thought, surely not without reason, that the complaint to Moscow’s higher authorities was filed: “I think that if any of my statements seemed to cause false rumors, then the Hungarian communists at that meeting could have asked me questions to clear up things instead of undeservedly accusing me later on.”¹⁴ The Central Committee Department of Culture did not accept the famous writer’s explanations. What is more, his Hungarian speech was added to the folder containing his others speeches to foreign writers and cultural representatives—the Committee did not lack information of that nature, of course.

When he was seventeen years old in December 1908, Ehrenburg visited Paris for the first time and often visited France during the following decades. Because of his fluent French and numerous connections in artistic fields, the Stalin leadership used

¹³ *Apparat TsK KPSS i kul'tura. 1953-1957. Dokumenty*, Doc. No. 111, p. 452.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

Ehrenburg to establish and maintain the USSR's contacts with leftist intellectuals in France and in several other countries beginning in the 1930s.¹⁵ He was one of the few Soviet writers who was allowed to go abroad several times a year even at the height of the Cold War in the early 1950s.¹⁶ After Stalin's death and Beria's arrest in 1953, the atmosphere in Soviet society became less tense. Leaving for Paris, Ehrenburg let himself be more critical of Soviet cultural conditions that he found unacceptable. An item in the archive of the Department of Culture dated January 4, 1954 noted that while delivering a speech in May 1954 to the National Committee of Writers in Paris, Ehrenburg "also characterized Soviet novels as grotesque (a fact that Ehrenburg emphasized even more in Budapest) and Soviet critics and literature as nihilistic, not paying any attention to their positive aspects."¹⁷ In October 1955, Ehrenburg met the famous Mexican artist David Alfaro Siqueiros to whom he admitted of being tired of propagandistic art. According to the Central Committee's Department of Culture, "Ehrenburg does not conceal his commitment to modern bourgeois decadent formalistic art." When in 1955 he found himself on the editorial board of the newly-established *Inostrannaia literatura*, Ehrenburg, according to a note dated January 4, 1956, "tried to impose his will on the editorial board and get the literary work he wanted on the pages of the magazine." Thus,

¹⁵ Ed. T. Balashova *Dialog pisatelei. Iz istorii russko-frantsuzskikh kul'turnykh svyazei XX veka. 1920-1970* (Moscow, 2002), part III, chapter 5 (From the dossiers of I. G. Ehrenburg. Compiled by M. A. Arias and T. V. Balashova). About Ehrenburg's French contacts, see B. Ia. Frezinski, "...Chert menia dernul vliubit'sia v chuzhuiu stranu" (Pyat' suzhetov iz istorii franko-sovetskikh kul'turnykh svyazei," *Vsemirnoe slovo*, No.13. (St. Petersburg, 2000), pp. 77-85; B. Ia. Frezinski, "Il'ia Erenburg i Pablo Pikasso," *Pamiatniki kul'tury: Novye otkrytiia. Pismennost. Iskusstvo. Arkheologiya. 1996* (Moscow, 1998), pp. 66-92.

¹⁶ Among the publications in which the trips of Ehrenburg to the West from the 1930s to the 1950s were reflected, see the memoirs of diplomat and historian, member of the Soviet Academy of Sciences I. Maiskii in *Voprosy literatury*, Nos. 11 and 12, 1990.

¹⁷ *Apparat TsK KPSS i kul'tura. 1953-1957. Dokumenty*, Doc. No. 117, p. 467. In 1954, the party agitprop (ideological structures) expressed their displeasure with Ehrenburg's interview by the Austrian magazine *Brucke*. Party ideologists paid attention to the "decadent mood and erroneous declarations of the writer." See: RGANI (Russian State Archive of Modern History). F. 5, Op. 17, D. 487, L. 14.

he was “beside himself with delight” about Ernest Hemingway’s “naturalistic and uninspired” *The Old Man and the Sea*, as the party functionaries put it, which Ehrenburg believed “even in its weakest sections to be better than those average things usually published in magazines.” Among real writers Ehrenburg recommended William Faulkner, whose works were treated as “extremely formalistic and dismal” by the Central Committee’s Agitation and Propaganda Department (“Agitprop”), and Mauriac, who was seen as a “reactionary Catholic writer.” At the same time, Ehrenburg disparaged Stil’s politically-loaded novels and referred to Vailland’s play *Colonel Foster Will Plead Guilty* about the Korean War as “vapid and filthy.” He was also critical about the current condition of literature in the countries of “people’s democracy,” i.e. the socialist countries of Eastern Europe.¹⁸ To demonstrate his disagreement with the journal’s policies that failed to correspond to his aesthetic tastes, Ehrenburg left the editorial board of *Inostrannaia literatura*, which was an extraordinary act at the time.¹⁹ He continued to work in the magazine, however. One of his articles “Stendhal’s Lessons” (1957, no. 6) in the August 1957 issue gave the Central Committee reasons to scrutinize him further.²⁰

¹⁸ *Apparat TsK KPSS i kul'tura. 1953-1957. Dokumenty*, Doc. No. 117, p. 467.

¹⁹ See the documents that reflect the concept of *Inostrannaia literatura* magazine and the approach to present-day foreign literature of the magazine’s editor A. Chakovskii, and, from the other side, the approach of the Department of Culture of the Central Committee of the CPSU—Chakovskii’s letter to the secretary of the CC CPSU M. Suslov from December 23, 1955, and the note of the CPSU Central Committee Department of Culture: *Apparat TsK KPSS i kul'tura. 1953-1957. Dokumenty*, Docs. Nos. 113 and 120, pp. 457-459 and pp. 477-479. Ehrenburg had his own principles and his own criteria of the selection of literary works for publication. They depended on his attitude not only to current foreign literature in all its variety, but also to the problem ‘art and power.’ Ehrenburg’s platform appears in his letters addressed in various years to the Party and state leaders. See: “‘Ia ne ponimaiu literaturny ravnodushnoi,’ Pis'ma I. Erenburga N. Bukharinu, I. Stalinu, N. Khrushchevu, D. Shepilovu i dr.” *Istochnik*, No. 2, 1997, pp. 109-121.

²⁰ According to the opinion of the Department of Culture of the CC CPSU, Ehrenburg used the review of Stendhal’s nineteenth-century artistic explorations as a pretext to expose his own opposition views on the policy towards Soviet literature and art. In particular, he considered “to be absurd any discussion

Ehrenburg's independent behavior irritated the Soviet leadership because they had been treating him as one of the "authorized representatives of Soviet literature."²¹ This might "cause damage to the ability of Soviet literature and aesthetic tastes to influence the development of foreign art and literature."²² A note from the Department of Culture dated January 4, 1954, stated that "Ehrenburg should be invited to the Central Committee to explain that, when speaking to foreign writers, it is unacceptable that he expresses opinions that fail to correspond with the party's policy and ideology in the spheres of art and literature."²³ This conversation took place,²⁴ but had no effect on the

of the difference between socialist realism and preceding artistic trends," he also confirmed that power could not control art. The Department of Culture considered Ehrenburg's public statements harmful for Soviet ideology. The *Literaturnaia gazeta* received an order to criticize Ehrenburg's "false assertions," which it obediently did. See: N. Tamancev, "V chem zhe vse-taki 'Uroki Stendalia?'," *Literaturnaia gazeta*, 22 August 1957. Then the discussion continued: E. Knipovich "Eshche ob urokakh Stendalia," *Znamia*, No. 10, 1957. J. Elsberg's essay in the *Literaturnaia gazeta* (29 October 1957) closed the debate. See the note of the CC CPSU Department of Culture from August 2, 1957, about the "mistakes" in Ehrenburg's essay "The Lessons of Stendhal" in *Apparat TsK KPSS i kul'tura. 1953-1957. Dokumenty*, Doc. No. 194, pp. 692-694. From the other side, the well-known French writer Natalie Sarraute greeted Ehrenburg's notes about Stendhal. Born in Russia, she closely followed the Soviet literary press (see her letter from October 1959 in *Dialog kul'tur*, p. 456). Famous Communist poet L. Aragon also reacted positively to these notes in "La lettre francaise" (1957, Sept. 19-25).

²¹ Compare this with the opinion of the well-known German Communist writer Johannes Becher (minister of culture of the GDR), who (as we know from the note addressed to the CPSU Central Committee) reacted to Ehrenburg's article "On the Work of Writer" (1953): "In every Soviet person, the Germans see the Soviet Union as a whole. Therefore an article of the old, great writer Ehrenburg was apprehended as the directive, but it is hard to correlate it with their steady notion of the essence of Soviet literature." According to the same note, the Western press seized Ehrenburg's article and juxtaposed it with Zhdanov's famous statements on literature and art and tried to present it as maybe the new official position concerning Soviet literature. (See V. N. Azchaev's note from March 14, 1954 about the reception in the GDR of Ehrenburg's "On the Work of Writer" and V. M. Pomerantsev's "On Sincerity" in *Apparat TsK KPSS i kul'tura. 1953-1957. Dokumenty*, pp. 207-208.) According to writer M. Shaginian, other countries perceived Ehrenburg's article as a manifestation of revisionism in the official view on Soviet literature—now Soviet literature allegedly began to be criticized in the USSR not only because of its low artistic value, but because it was mercenary, insincere, and produced according to party functionaries' orders. See M. Shaginian's letter to the secretary of the Soviet Writers Union B. Polevoi, March 15, 1954, *Apparat TsK KPSS i kul'tura. 1953-1957. Dokumenty*, p. 209.

²² The note of the Department of Culture, CPSU Central Committee, from January 4, 1956, *Ibid.*, p. 467.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 468.

²⁴ See the handwritten mark on the note (report) from January 4, 1956. The mark is dated September 4. According to the order of the CPSU Central Committee Secretary D. Shepilov, members of the staff of the CPSU D. Polikarpov and B. Riurikov were to meet and to talk to Ehrenburg. In his memoirs, the writer repeatedly recalled the instructions of party functionaries which he heard in various years.

writer because he continued to deliver “free” speeches before foreign audiences. The Soviet leadership was particularly displeased over a speech delivered in the spring of 1957 in Japan.²⁵ According to the minutes of a meeting held on January 2, 1963, the Party’s top management made an informal decision (but not one fixed by any protocol) “to limit Ehrenburg’s trips” abroad in the future.²⁶ This decision, by the way, was not the first of its kind,²⁷ and was not a firm one—Ehrenburg continued to visit foreign countries, including France and Italy, until his health worsened suddenly not long before his death in 1967.²⁸

It is worth mentioning that, in 1963, the Central Committee Presidium—which is what the Politburo was called during the Khrushchev era—repeatedly discussed the “Ehrenburg question” mainly because of the publication of his memoirs *People, Years, Life*. The memoirs, although they appeared with considerable omissions in *Novyi mir*,

²⁵ A note from the Department of Culture dated August 2, 1957 remarked that “During the visit to Japan this spring Ehrenburg made public statements that were close to bourgeois liberalism.” Why “bourgeois liberalism”? Talking with the Japanese writers, Ehrenburg asked them to list the literary works that could be translated and published in the USSR. He added: “Selecting works for publication, it is desirable to proceed not from the political standpoint of the writer, but from the artistic value of his works.” Inviting the Japanese writers to visit the USSR, Ehrenburg noted: “It would not be interesting if only the so called friends of the Soviet Union come to the USSR. We want to meet also those who do not sympathize with the Soviet system, Soviet policy. Otherwise it is impossible to attain mutual understanding.” Ehrenburg’s statements were published in the bulletin of the Japanese Pen-center. See: *Apparat TsK KPSS i kul’tura. 1953-1957. Dokumenty*, Doc. No. 194, p. 693.

²⁶ A. A. Fursenko, V. Iu. Afiani, ed., *Prezidium TsK KPSS. 1954-1964*. Tom 1. *Chernoye protokol’nye zapisi zasedanii. Stenogrammy* (Moscow, 2003), p. 669.

²⁷ In 1958, the Swedish Writers Union invited Ehrenburg to present a report about Soviet literature, but the Party leadership did not give the writer permission to go to Sweden. The resolution read: “The Department of Culture of the CC CPSU considers it to be inexpedient to send Ehrenburg abroad to present a report on the problems of Soviet literature because he usually expresses in such reports false views” (RGANI, F.5, Op. 36, D. 64, L. 63).

²⁸ In 1964, he visited Budapest and came away with good impressions that were reflected in the “Hungarian” chapters of his memoirs: he noticed that in the bookstores it was possible to find works of current Western authors; moreover, intellectuals could easily go abroad and see life in the West with their own eyes.

triggered an enthusiastic response among readers.²⁹ The Central Committee was all but enthusiastic over the memoirs. They were of the opinion that the author did not stick to the “class approach” and made “politically dubious and false formulations.”³⁰ This concerned not only the evaluation of historical events such as the Nazi-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact of 1939, but also politicians and cultural personalities. The Party leadership also found it disturbing that most of the book focused on writers whose works were considered to be “alien to the Soviet reader.” At a March 8 1963 meeting of the creative intelligentsia, Khrushchev said: “When you read Ehrenburg’s memoirs, you note that he presents everything in gloomy tones.” The writer’s position seemed to him even more unacceptable because “comrade Ehrenburg himself was not marked for persecution, nor experienced any restrictions during the time of the cult of personality.”³¹ At another meeting of party leaders with the creative intelligentsia, L. Il’ichev, the Central Committee Secretary for Ideology, was even more critical and accused Ehrenburg of hypocrisy because although he had praised Stalin, he also doubted his achievements, while other writers did the same but more sincerely.³² The writer was also accused of providing the “anarchistic” literary youth with leadership, of acting as an apologist of *l’art pur l’art* tendencies and of promoting “extreme” liberalism in literary life.

²⁹ See the collection of documents concerning the memoirs of Ehrenburg V. Alloï, ed., “Vokrug memuarov Il’i Erenburga (publikatsiia E. Berar),” *Minuvshee. Istoricheskii al’manakh*, Vyp.8 (Paris, 1990; Moscow, 1992), pp. 387-406.

³⁰ RGANI, F. 5, Op. 36, D. 120, L. 128.

³¹ *Pravda*, 10 March 1963.

³² See the records of Khrushchev and Il’ichev’s meetings with the artists on March 7 and 8 1963 in *Pravda* March 9 and 10, 1963.

Ehrenburg insistently refused the suggestion that he make fundamental changes in the next installment of his memoirs before publication.³³ The last time the Presidium discussed the inappropriateness of publishing the memoirs was September 17 1964—a month before Khrushchev’s ouster.³⁴ It is important to mention that the relationship between the writer and the First Secretary was complicated and had its “ebbs” and “flows.” Some subjective reasons explained this in part—Khrushchev’s relations with the intelligentsia depended very much on his mood. However, to some extent, prevailing tendencies of cultural policy and the unstable process of de-Stalinization also contributed to this. On the one hand, the Communist Party of the Soviet Union made the anti-Stalinist decision at the Twenty-Second Congress in 1961 to allow the publication of Solzhenitsyn’s novel *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* (it got published in 1962). On the other hand, there was Khrushchev’s severe criticism of the organizers of an exhibition of modern art in December 1962 and other rude attempts to call to order the creative intelligentsia that was striving to broaden its freedom of self-expression. According to one source, in the summer of 1963 the First Secretary of the Central Committee, being in high spirits, during an informal conversation assured the writer that

³³ See: “‘Erenburg ne sdelał vyvodov...’ O publikatsii memuarov pisatel’ia,” *Istochnik*, No. 2, 2000, pp. 103-112. In 1962, the staff of the Central Committee of the CPSU adopted a resolution to stop the publication of the Ehrenburg’s memoirs “unless considerable corrections [are made] and unless publication of criticism of the memoirs in the central Soviet press [can be secured]” (see RGANI, F. 5, Op. 36, D. 141). The writer had to make some compromises. On the problems of Ehrenburg’s relations with Soviet leaders in the Khrushchev years, see M. R. Zezina, *Sovetskaia khudozhestvennaia intelligentsia i vlast’ v 1950-1960-e gody* (Moscow, 1999); V. Eggeling, *Politika i kul’tura pri Brezhneve i Khrushcheve. 1953-1970 gg.* (Moscow, 1999); RGANI documents concerning Ehrenburg and the publication of his memoirs see in V. Iu. Afiani, ed., *Apparat TsK KPSS i kul’tura. 1953-1957. Dokumenty* (Moscow, 2005).

³⁴ After *Novyi mir* magazine published the memoirs in 1961, the publishing house of the Soviet Writers Union published the first and the second parts of the memoirs and, after long delay, it published the third and the fourth parts in 1963. Between 1960 and 1965, Ehrenburg finished the fifth and sixth parts and published them in *Novyi mir*. The seventh part remained unfinished.

he could publish whatever he wished and that the censors would not say a word.³⁵ As a gesture of “forgiveness,” on August 13, 1963, *Literaturnaia gazeta* published the speech that Ehrenburg delivered in Leningrad to the European Congress of Writers, even though it contained several elements of heterodoxy from the standpoint of Soviet ideology.³⁶ The Party leaders’ inability to make up their mind as to how to relate to Ehrenburg is also manifest in the permission to publish an interview the chief editor of *Novyi mir*, A. Tvardovsky gave to an American reporter of the United Press International in *Pravda* on May 12, 1963. In it, Tvardovsky highly praised Ehrenburg’s memoirs.³⁷ However, all this did not remove the obstacles to publishing the next installments of his memoirs.

Nevertheless, one should not exaggerate Ehrenburg’s somewhat selfish opposition during de-Stalinization as it never crossed the boundaries that the state had established. The writer’s behavior during the “Budapest autumn” of 1956 indicates his degree of loyalty towards the government. Ehrenburg’s impressions of the Hungarian Revolution, the first time when “one had to pay the bill of the Stalin era,” occupy an entire chapter in

³⁵ The German researcher V. Eggeling touches on the meeting between Khrushchev and Ehrenburg quoting the well-known literary critic V. Lakshin. See V. Eggeling, *Politika i kul'tura pri Brezhneve i Khrushcheve. 1953-1970 gg.* (Moscow, 1999), pp. 151-152, 268. During their last meeting in August 1963 in Leningrad, Ehrenburg told Khrushchev that every ideology would prove its superiority over other ideologies only through discussions and by the force of its ideas.

³⁶ Ehrenburg defended the works of Joyce, Kafka, and Proust, which some speakers criticized sharply as the pillars of 20th-century modernism. He said that together with the authors writing for the broad public, there are also authors who write for a select circle. Ehrenburg compared them with the “test pilots” of the literary process. It is possible to agree with one of the researchers of the writer’s legacy, A. Rubashkin: “During ‘the Thaw’ it became easier for Ehrenburg to defend the phenomena of poetry, fine art, theatre that were close to him. In the USSR, many people got to know from Ehrenburg exclusively about the great masterpieces of the culture of our century.” Rubashkin had in mind Ehrenburg’s memoirs, essays, his introductions to books by Western authors, and his book *The French Notebooks*. “Ehrenburg confessed that in his life he was misguided a lot; that was true, but one thing was invariable—his devotion to culture.” See the biographical dictionary *Russkie pisateli XX veka* (Moscow, 2000), p. 796.

³⁷ Tvardovsky’s position could be revealed from his letter to Ehrenburg. See “Eto kniga dolga, kniga sovesti...”, *Vstrechi s proshlym*, Vyp.4 (Moscow, 1987), pp. 297-300.

his memoirs.³⁸ Having recognized that it was difficult to judge by the Soviet press what was going on in Hungary, the writer at the same time paid his tribute to stereotypes, according to which, emigrants from the West were coming back and that the “workers, confused by Rákosi and Gerő’s regime, fought for aims that were alien to them.”³⁹ However, that was not the most important thing, according to Ehrenburg. He said that, with the beginning of the Hungarian events “the spirit of Geneva came to nothing at once,” and the sustained efforts of those struggling for peace, independent of their political convictions, ran the risk of becoming useless.⁴⁰

Already at the end of October, that is a few days before the government of Imre Nagy was overthrown by the Soviet troops, and the government of Kádár came to power, a series of leading activists of the international peace movement appealed to the

³⁸ First published in *Ogonek*, No. 23, 1987, pp. 25-26.

³⁹ Later Ehrenburg spoke about the events of the “Budapest autumn” of 1956 with his Hungarian biographer Pál Fehér, the editor of the cultural section of the Hungarian party daily, *Népszabadság*. Ehrenburg did not accept the Hungarian revolt, he was afraid by its right-wing (first of all anti-Semitic) tendencies. Possessing very limited information about the Hungarian events, he appraised these phenomena inadequately. Somebody put into his head that the Hungarian events began by the hanging of several Jews being off street-lamps. This insinuation determined for him everything (B. Frezinski about his talk with Feher. See: *Voprosy literaturi*, No. 3, 2003, p. 257). It must be said, however, that Ehrenburg had also other sources of information about the Hungarian events. See the letter to Ehrenburg from the secretary of the Swedish committee of defense of peace, Swanson. Earlier a diplomat, who had worked for 4 years in Hungary, he came there again in November 1956 and stayed in Hungary for 2 weeks. Swanson’s impressions were profound and painful. His conclusion was that a national revolt had taken place in Hungary (RGANI, F. 5, Op. 28, D. 448, L. 210). As for anti-Semitic manifestations in Hungary in autumn 1956, most scholars agree that they were not too large-scale, although there were pogroms in some places. However, among the 200,000 refugees from Hungary, about 20-25,000 Jews left the country in anticipation of a possible growth of anti-Semitism the country. See: Szabó R. György, *A kommunista párt és a zsidóság Magyarországon (1945 - 1956)*, 2nd revised and enlarged edition, (Budapest, 1997); György Litván, “The Jewish Role in Hungarian Communism, Anti-Stalinism and 1956,” *Király Béla emlékkönyv* (Budapest, 1992); Gábor Matuz, *Zsidóvilkosságok 1956-ban? Vádak és tévhitek* (Budapest, 2004); János Pelle, *Az utolsó vérvádak. Az etnikai gyűlölet és a politikai manipuláció kelet-európai történetéből* (Budapest, 1995); Éva Ständeisky, “Antiszemitizmus az 1956-os forradalomban,” *1956-os Intézet Évkönyv XII* (Budapest, 2004); Tibor Valuch, *Kisvárosi történet. Az 1956-os forradalom és a zsidóellenes megmozdulások Hajdunánáson* (Budapest, 2001).

⁴⁰ Compare these words with Ehrenburg’s far more optimistic position in the beginning of 1956, which was declared just in the name of his article “The Good Beginning.” See: “Dobroe nachalo: O mezhhdunarodnoi obstanovke k nachalu 1956 g.” *Novoe vremia*, No. 1, 1956.

World Peace Council Secretariat with a strong demand that the organization react to the events in Hungary. The vice president of the WPC, Ehrenburg, who was at once notified from the headquarters in Helsinki, set forth the outline of a statement, which would appeal not only to the communists, but also to the so-called “fellow travelers,” who were not prone to approve of each foreign-policy decision of the USSR.⁴¹ Instead of this outline, another proposal, produced by the Central Committee, was sent to the headquarters from Moscow.⁴² Ehrenburg, having become acquainted with the latter text, wrote a letter to Khrushchev, in which he declared that the proposed resolutions would definitely call forth serious objections from many leading figures and, as a result, the whole movement could fall apart. “The problem is that we might lose even those parties or groups, which now are on our side,” wrote Ehrenburg.⁴³

As the documents show, members of the British, French and Italian peace movements gathered to make an official statement in connection with the events in Hungary and in the Middle East (caused by the current aggressive policies of Britain, France and Israel against Egypt). The idea of making a statement signed by the World

⁴¹ See the full text of the document. Judging by the stylistics of the Russian version, this is a translation from French, made by Ehrenburg in a hurry (he wrote the original in French). “The World Council of Peace Movement expresses its deep anxiety that murderous incidents darken the situation in Hungary, but also expresses its assurance that the Hungarian advocates of peace will make every effort to protect the great principles of peace and friendship between the peoples. The tragic turn of events in Hungary to a great extent is connected with the international tension that still takes place in spite of the efforts of peoples. The World Council firmly expresses its hope that the Hungarian people will live and work in peace and develop their state institutions without open or hidden interference of external forces. The World Council of Peace calls the people of all the world to defend the sovereignty of the Hungarian People’s Republic and not to allow the use the Hungarian events for new aggravation of the international situation” (See RGANI, F. 89, Per. 45, D. 30, L. 9 and *Dialog pisatelei. Iz istorii russko-frantsuzskikh kul’turnykh svyazei XX veka, 1920-1970*, p. 624).

⁴² I have not been able to localize and consult this document.

⁴³ The letter to Khrushchev is dated October 30. Ehrenburg wrote that under current circumstances the movement should aim to build “broad political blocs with mutual concessions,” instead of acting along the same lines as Soviet diplomacy. Therefore he drafted the text for a declaration, which “differs from the Soviet point of view, but is not directed against us” (RGANI, F. 89, Per. 45, D. 30, L. 8 and *Dialog pisatelei. Iz istorii russko-frantsuzskikh kul’turnykh svyazei XX veka, 1920-1970*, p. 624).

Peace Council with the signatures of its president and vice president arose. The statement was supposed to condemn any interference in another country's affairs, leading to a formulation that would not lose its force regardless of whether the question pertained to Hungary or the Middle East. There were a number of indications of new tendencies in the pro-Soviet peace movement, which became more evident after the Twentieth Party Congress. The congress revealed and criticized Stalinist political practices and introduced certain corrections in the Party's ideological doctrines. (Khrushchev's report to the congress included references to the possibility of avoiding of war, rather than its inevitability under Stalin, to the numerous possible paths toward transition to socialism, and it exhibited, in general, a more tolerant attitude towards the social democrats which was manifest in the contacts of Soviet leaders with representatives of the British Labor and French socialists in April-May 1956). This tendency was not only initiated by Moscow, but was also from the beginning used as a tool in confronting Stalinist foreign policies. Embracing the ideas of the Twentieth Party Congress seriously, several Western activists considered the abandonment of the Stalinist heritage to be a welcome signal for freer and more independent actions on behalf of the allies of the communist movement that had earlier been tied to the center through strict discipline. After Khrushchev's denunciation of Stalin, keenly aware of the risk of losing their influence in Western society, the peace movement began to emancipate themselves from Moscow's control and assert increasing independence. Better than most people in Moscow, Ehrenburg understood the mood and tendencies of leftists among the West European intelligentsia and expected from the Soviet leadership

a compromise resolution in the interests of keeping the movement under Soviet influence.

After a phone call between Ehrenburg and French author and activist Emmanuel d'Astier de La Vigerie, members of the movement decided to refrain from the prepared statement until the full meeting of the World Peace Council scheduled for November 18.⁴⁴ Although the writer managed to prevent the publication of a declaration critical of the Soviet government, his position did not find any support from the Central Committee Department on Relations with Foreign Communist Parties and from its head, B. Ponomarev – on the contrary it was declared to be wrong.⁴⁵ With a decision of November 7, the Presidium stated that Soviet representatives no longer had the right to agree to the publication of any document in the name of the World Peace Council where the action of Soviet troops in Hungary were described as an intervention with the country's internal affairs. If foreign partners proved to be unyielding to the demand that the World Peace Council address the Hungarian question according to Soviet wishes, the Soviet Committee for the Defense of Peace should issue a declaration in line with the official position of the USSR.⁴⁶

In his memoirs, Ehrenburg describes in detail the circumstances of the full meeting of the WPC in Helsinki on November 18 where in the process of “lengthy and

⁴⁴ RGANI, F. 89, Per. 45, D. 30, L. 4.

⁴⁵ “According to Ehrenburg, it is impossible now to keep the unity in the movement for peace without a concession on the Hungarian question. We consider this point of view incorrect.” (Ibid.)

⁴⁶ That is to declare that “the counterrevolutionary putsch of reactionary forces in Hungary, threatening the vital interests of the Hungarian people and resulting in the outburst of brutal violence against the progressive forces of the country, threatened also the peace and security in the whole of Europe.” The Presidium of the CPSU Central Committee approved the telegram to the Ambassador of the USSR in Paris. It was decided with the help of “the French friends” (obviously communists) to make clear to the president of the World Peace Council, the Nobel-prize winner F. Joliot-Curie, “the correct view on the events in Hungary” (Ibid, 1.1-2). By that time the government of Imre Nagy had already been ousted by the Soviet forces. See: A. S. Stykalin, *Prervannaia revoliutsiia. Vengerskii krizis 1956 goda i politika Moskvy* (Moscow, 2003).

chaotic discussion of the Hungarian events” a sharp discussion arose relative to the nature of those events and also how adequate Soviet policies were. “The Hungarian events changed something in each of us participants in the peace movement,” he wrote. “I saw a lot of sessions and meetings that took place under difficult circumstances, but nothing can be compared to that meeting [November 18]. It was necessary to preserve the united front of the movement, even though those who came to the meeting had different views on the events and, moreover, looked with hostility at one another.” In the Western countries, anti-Soviet demonstrations took place. The Italian socialists demanded a sharp rebuke of the USSR, their alliance with the communists turned out to be at risk, and a stormy discussion in the Italian Communist Party, one of the most powerful western communist parties, occurred.⁴⁷ The crisis of the Left went deeper in France, where the communist leader M. Thorez, unlike his Italian colleague P. Togliatti, did not show any will to fundamentally reconsider Stalin’s legacy. The leading politician E. Herriot and writer and philosopher J. P. Sartre left the Society of French-Soviet Friendship in protest, and the outstanding writer of Catholic orientation F. Mauriac supported them. The double standards with which the Soviet leadership treated events in different parts of the globe caused great unease. “It is impossible to defend the right of a people to control their own destiny, talking about Egypt or Algeria, and deny the same

⁴⁷ It is known that the Italian Communist leader P. Togliatti in his statements after the Twentieth Party Congress of the CPSU more consistently than other communist leaders of such rank spoke for a break with Stalin’s political traditions and therefore gained some popularity among the reformist communists in the whole world. But in the Hungarian events he could not see the triumph of the idea of a more democratic socialism (as many left intellectuals in the West). On the contrary, he saw in it a threat to the geopolitical positions of the USSR—the main support of the Communist movement in the West. The Eighth Congress of the Italian Communist Party (December 1956) adopted a resolution condemning not only the “counterrevolution” in Hungary, but also its advocates in the Italian Communist Party. See: F. Argentieri, “A magyar ’56 és Olaszország,” *Mozgó világ*, No. 9, 1992; F. Argentieri, “A ‘széplelkek’ emlékiratai. Az 1956-os olasz kommunista pártellenzék visszaemlékezéseiből,” *1956-os Intézet. Évkönyv II* (Budapest, 1993); “Togliatti két levele 1956-ból,” *1956-os Intézet Évkönyv V* (Budapest, 1997).

right for the people of Budapest [Il n'est pas possible de defendre le droit des peuples a disposer d'eux—memes en Algerie et en Egypte et le nier a Budapest],” noted the writer Claude Morgan in the middle of November in his correspondence with Ehrenburg.⁴⁸

After a few months, in March 1957, the head of the French peace movement Emmanuel d'Astier de La Vigerie, visiting Moscow, told the deputy chief editor of *Pravda* and the newly-appointed chairman of the State Committee of the USSR for International Cultural Relations, Iu. Zhukov, that among the French political left, particularly among the intelligentsia, after the Hungarian events there was complete confusion, and all the more so since the communist newspaper *L'Humanité* took the unhelpful position of denying the facts that had been presented by the “bourgeois” press without any proof, and in an exceedingly one-sided way pretending, in the face of the events, as if nothing serious had happened in Hungary. Andre Stil's article “Budapest's Smile” became widely used for anti-communist propaganda.⁴⁹ The writer, who belonged to the communist party, bitterly confessed in his letter of November 15 to Ehrenburg that he would probably have desisted from the publication (which would have cost him his party membership), if the French Communist Party, “as a gesture of idiotic servility ..., had not decided to welcome and support the action of the Soviet army in Hungary.” He continued, “The forces of the left are completely torn apart here, the party is isolated as never before and, in the present day situation, that is its only destiny. I want to say that it is isolated not only from the other more or less leftist parties, but also from the masses of simple people who have no political prejudices, as it had abused their feelings and common sense. I sincerely believe that the mistake committed in Hungary is of the

⁴⁸ *Dialog pisatelei. Iz istorii russko-frantsuzskikh kul'turnykh sviazei XX veka, 1920-1970*, p. 646.

⁴⁹ Zhukov sent the record of the talk to the secretary of the CPSU Central Committee D. Shepilov on March 27, 1957. See: RGANI, F. 5, Op. 30, D. 223, L. 143.

same magnitude as the rupture with Tito. It would make more sense to lose one country—and it is lost anyway—than to lose millions of hearts, for which the sense of humanity prevails over any ideology. And what they have done destroys the possibility of working class unity for quite a long period of time obviously.”⁵⁰

Letters with similar content and spirit arrived in Moscow from other countries as well. “The price you have paid for your policies in Hungary is the total collapse of the good will to your country, which was achieved so painfully,” wrote Doris Lessing, the British writer⁵¹ who sympathized with the USSR and was member of the British Communist Party between 1952-1956, in a letter to Boris Polevoi, Secretary of the Union of Writers of the USSR, responsible for international contacts with writers.⁵²

“How many impassioned speeches and irate comments I had to listen to,” Ehrenburg recalled the November 18 meeting in Helsinki. “Night fell, the arguments grew hotter.” He wrote, “I did realize that Hungary was the price we now had to pay for the past, but at the same time, it became an obstacle to the future, and that morning, it seemed to me, there was no way to break through.” Eventually, on the morning of November the 19, a compromise resolution that saved the movement was found. It acknowledged that “the primary reason for the Hungarian tragedy was, on the one hand, the ‘Cold War’ with its long years of hatred and distrust and the politics of blocks and, on the other hand, the mistakes of the previous Hungarian leaders and the use of these mistakes in foreign propaganda.”⁵³ The peace movement did not approve of the Soviet

⁵⁰ The letter of K. Morgan. See: *Dialog pisatelei*, p. 646.

⁵¹ Received the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2007.

⁵² See: E. D. Orekhova, V. T. Sereda, “Kompartiiia Velikobritanii i vengerskii krizis 1956 goda. Dokumenty iz fondov TsKhSD,” *Istoricheskii arkhiv*, No. 1, 1995, p. 44. The letter is dated January 22, 1957.

⁵³ We know the contents of the resolution from the memoirs of Ehrenburg.

intervention, but admitted that there had been a risk of a radical turn to the right in the political life of Hungary, the activation of fascist forces that would use the discontent of the population in their interests. It was suggested that the Soviet troops should leave Hungary according to an agreement made between the governments of the two countries, based on the principle of the sovereignty of Hungary. In the long run, this compromise resolution prevented the breaking up of the peace movement in France, among other places, where it had become completely paralyzed. As d'Astier told Zhukov, the decision in Helsinki proved that the peace movement was not a tool of Soviet politics and was able to take an independent position. Many, who had quit the movement returned, such as J. P. Sartre. But for the Helsinki resolution, the movement would consist of communists only.⁵⁴

However, there was no unity among communists either. Some demanded that their political leaders distance themselves from the USSR. Two young English communist reporters who had been in Hungary when the events took place, at the end of November wrote to the general secretary of the British Communist Party, J. Gollan, that Soviet policy in Hungary had been based, from their viewpoint, on an incorrect estimation of the political situation and, as a result, turned out to be a disaster. Under such circumstances, other communist parties should not mechanically follow Moscow's directive but should stick to their own independent opinion based on the information they have. Although the principle of international solidarity of the working parties was still in force, "the international political situation at the present time differs from that

⁵⁴ RGANI, F. 5, Op. 30, D. 223, L. 145. The adoption in Helsinki of the resolution did not mean that all the national peace movements supported it. In his report to the CPSU Central Committee from 10 December 1956, Ehrenburg wrote about the complicated situation in the Peace movement. See: Ibid. F. 5, Op. 28, D. 448, L. 217-222.

when the defense of the new Soviet state was the major political concern.”⁵⁵ At the moment, “the best thing we can do to help the international movement is to create our own party and to improve the leadership by means of our working class”. But if the impression arises that the British Communist Party has no political individuality and always goes wherever Moscow says it to go, it will isolate itself from the English working class.⁵⁶

Moscow was informed about the mood prevalent among Western communists, but had no intention to concede on the issue of Hungary. Having agreed to publish the compromise declaration in November 1956, Ehrenburg had the courage to go against the Central Committee directives. This, however, had no consequences for him. The political reorientation alluded to by the Twentieth Party Congress and the new international political realities had created a new context for the issues of the peace movement and the place of the USSR in it. All this would have required new thinking on behalf of the Party’s foreign political management. The Party leadership, however, still had to catch up with the changes. Party functionaries, who did not attend the meeting of the World Peace Congress and therefore were not aware of the situation, rebuked the writer first of all for not having shown the necessary persistence.⁵⁷

It is important to mention that Ehrenburg himself in discussions with foreign writers was prepared to compromise only to a certain extent. As a real Soviet writer and a public figure, his position was that of the defender of the official position of his

⁵⁵ Doris Lessing in her letter to Polevoi from January 22, 1957, expressed the same thought more definitely: “It was correct to praise You when You were weak and vulnerable.” See: “Kompartiiia Velikobritanii i vengerskii krizis 1956 goda,” p. 42.

⁵⁶ The report of Ch. Coutts and K. Burch to the leadership of the British Communist Party. See: *Ibid.*, pp. 38-39.

⁵⁷ On the resolution in Helsinki see also RGANI, F. 5, Op. 30, D. 174, L. 139-140.

country, and probably, he was quite sincere at that. “It was a time of war, and to admit that we had armed ourselves with the wrong weapons was foolish,” Ehrenburg justified his signature on the written response of Soviet writers to their French colleagues, who had protested on the pages of *Le Monde* against the actions of the USSR in Hungary.⁵⁸ This letter was broadly publicized in the foreign and the Soviet press. Besides that, as Ehrenburg himself admitted, among those in France who signed the letter were “our former allies,” people who earlier were for the expansion of cultural contacts with the USSR, and even his friends. “Light frost was coming after the thaw. I tried to do everything I could to prevent the resumption of the Cold War.” On December 1, *Literaturnaia gazeta* published a letter to the editor from Ehrenburg, in which the writer called for differentiating between friends and enemies, even if the friends do not always agree with you in one or another question.

The letter was not published in France—the editorial staff of the *Lettres françaises* explained that the letter targeted the writers instead of the broader French public. Ehrenburg’s name on the Soviet response to French writers now acquired negative connotations in the Parisian press and was more often mentioned in connection with the Soviet writers’ shameful justification of the Hungarian events. But those whom Ehrenburg called his friends still trusted him. Claude Roy, who protested in public against the Soviet military campaign in Hungary and who was as a result of the protest expelled from the communist party, sent a letter to Ehrenburg dated December 12: “We kept on thinking about you during all those terrible weeks. We knew that all the news

⁵⁸ The letter under the headline “To see the whole truth” was dated November 22, but some writers signed it on November 24. See: *Literaturnaia gazeta*, 22 November 1956; *Novoe vremia*, No. 9, 1956. It was published also in: *Dialog pisatelei*, pp. 915-917. See also the open letters of the French writers and intellectuals concerning Soviet policy in Hungary: (Ibid., pp. 917-922). *Literaturnaia gazeta* reacted to the polemics that took place in the French press on December 13.

we received were no less painful to you.”⁵⁹ Claude Morgan repeated the same idea:

“Protesting against the use of the Soviet army for suppression of the Hungarian insurrection, I still am a good friend to my Soviet comrades and to you, in particular.”⁶⁰

The events in Hungary coincided with a huge Picasso exhibit, organized with Ehrenburg’s help in the Moscow Museum of Fine Arts. This was the first exhibition after the beginning of the “Thaw” helped to raise the Iron Curtain. The exhibition of such a great artist (of leftist political affinities, but far from the officious aesthetics of “socialist realism”) symbolized great changes and not only in Soviet cultural policy. It meant the easing of the Cold War climate and the expansion of contacts with the West. The Soviet policy in Hungary, on the contrary, became a reminder of the fact that the Stalinist tradition was alive and entirely unprepared to give up its place without a struggle. The striking contrast between the past and the present could almost be sensed physically by the leading thinkers of the Soviet intelligentsia. The famous historian S. S. Dmitriev, a professor of Moscow State University, on his return home after visiting the Picasso exhibition made a short, but expressive note in his diary: “The main topic of all the discussions are the Hungarian events. Tomorrow, if not today, an open Soviet

⁵⁹ *Dialog pisatelei*, p. 656. Ehrenburg was particularly hurt by the publications in the French yellow press in late 1956, in which he was unfoundedly accused of assisting Stalin’s regime in repressing the Jewish intellectuals in 1949-1953 (*Dialog pisatelei*, p. 681). It is known from the memoirs, however, that in 1949 during Stalin’s anti-Semitic campaign Ehrenburg expected for months to be arrested. Meanwhile, some political gestures that the Soviet government made in autumn of 1956, reminded Ehrenburg of the years of late Stalinism. Thus, in the beginning of November, after the military action of Great Britain, France and Israel against Egypt, the writer was invited to the main Party house at the Staraia (Old) Square and one of the main CPSU ideologists P. Pospelov suggested that he should prepare a letter on behalf of some well-known Soviet intellectuals of Jewish origin condemning Tel-Aviv. As Ehrenburg remembered later, at that moment he once again felt the atmosphere of 1949. The writer politely but firmly answered the functionary that he was no more responsible for Israeli leader Ben-Gurion than Pospelov himself or any other Soviet citizen of Russian origin. At the same time, Ehrenburg agreed to sign the document after Pospelov signed it, too.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 646.

intervention will take place. Hungary will be red with the blood of its people.”⁶¹ He wrote these lines not long before the Soviet intervention and the establishment of the new government in Hungary, which was ready to carry out Moscow’s instructions.

At the beginning of November 1956, one of the greatest experts on nineteenth-century Russian history can not have failed to associate the Hungarian events with Field Marshal Paskevich’s⁶² campaign in 1849. Ehrenburg was in a different situation compared to Dmitriev. He was a public figure, with broad international contacts, and, as a high-ranking functionary of the Soviet system (although not belonging to the Party) and the deputy chairman of the Soviet Committee for the Defense of Peace, he believed that it was his obligation to justify the Soviet government’s policies. However, he was concerned that the Hungarian events could lead to a rupture of cultural ties between the USSR and the West. He carried on his correspondence with French friends, raising the question of the necessity of putting on new exhibitions that presented French art in the USSR.⁶³ The task was not an easy one at all. The French intelligentsia boycotted not only the USSR during these months, but also its own leftist politicians and intellectuals who failed to openly condemn the Soviet policy towards Hungary. “Your trip to Moscow—is a trip to your own funeral,” the French writer Vercors, who intended to visit the USSR, was told.⁶⁴ The only break in the cultural blockade in the first months

⁶¹ “Iz dnevnikov S. S. Dmitrieva,” *Otechestvennaia istoriia*, No. 2, 2000, p. 149.

⁶² Ivan Fiodorovich Paskevich (1782–1856), Ukrainian born commander of the Russian troops sent to the aid of Austria against the Hungarian revolution and attempt at independence. He compelled the surrender of the Hungarians at Világos in 1849.

⁶³ See the fragments of correspondence concerning this period: *Dialog pisatelei*, Chapter 5. See, in particular, Vercors’ letter to Ehrenburg from December 4, 1956 (*Ibid.*, p. 695). On December 18, a shortened version of it was published in *Literaturnaia gazeta*.

⁶⁴ RGANI, F. 5, Op. 30, D. 236, L. 116. In Moscow, Vercors suggested that Soviet, French, and Hungarian writers should meet and make clear their positions to each other. For the Hungarian intellectuals (Vercors referred to P. Ignotus), the thought was unbearable that they were sometimes seen in the USSR as close to fascists. Moreover, Vercors was interested in what had happened with

after the Hungarian events was the visit of the famous stars, Yves Montand and Simone Signoret, to Moscow in December 1956. According to witnesses, at the New Year celebration in the Kremlin they tried to convince Khrushchev of the inadequacy of Soviet policy in Hungary (and he, in his turn, emotionally pointed out that the Soviet army again had saved the world from the fascist plague). Regardless, having returned home, both were ostracized by public opinion for having broken the boycott. They were rebuked even by those who after Stalin's death and the Twentieth Congress hoped for some kind of a democratic evolution of the Soviet regime.⁶⁵

The Twentieth Party Congress and Khrushchev's denunciation of Stalin at the closed session called forth mixed but mostly negative responses among Western social opinion. Having opened the eyes of the Western intellectuals to the real nature of

György Lukács who was deported by Soviet authorities to Romania together with Imre Nagy and many others from his "group". "If I could come home and report to the public with full confidence that Lukács was well taken care of, had the possibility to write and did not stop his work, this information would produce a very good impression in France and calm down many intellectuals, including Sartre." Vercors said in Moscow that the Soviet actions in Hungary prevented progressive French intellectuals from finding a constructive solution to the problem of Algeria. See the publication by E. Standeisky of the documents from the Russian archives concerning the response of the French writers, including Vercors on the Soviet policy in Hungary in 1956: *1956-os Intézet. Évkönyv III* (Budapest, 1994).

⁶⁵ Many contracts with Montand and Signoret were broken. As a result, Montand published a statement in *Le Figaro*. He declared that he would keep his distance from the Communist Party and stop attending receptions in the Soviet Embassy. On the moods of the French intellectuals and their response to Montand and Signoret's trip to Moscow, see the memoirs of G. Erofeeva, mother of the well-known Russian writer Viktor Erofeev (in 1956 she lived in Paris as the wife of a Soviet diplomat responsible for cultural contacts): *Neskuchnyi sad. Nediplomaticheskie zametki o diplomaticheskoi zhizni* (Moscow, 1998). French public opinion was influenced not only by Soviet activities in Hungary, but first of all by the threatening tone of the Soviet declarations addressed to France in connection with the joint military action against Egypt. The letter of the Soviet prime-minister N. Bulganin, sent to the French government on the night of November 6, asked the French leaders the following: "What would happen in France, if it found itself the object of attack by other countries possessing modern and terrible means of destruction?" Members of the French government, summoned immediately to a meeting, perceived the Soviet letter as a direct threat of using missiles or nuclear weapons – although the Soviets were bluffing; according to Moscow's strategy until November 10, the Soviets intended to limit their military activities to sending volunteers to the zone of the Suez Canal. In mid-November at a reception in honor of the Polish state delegation headed by W. Gomulka, Khrushchev publicly named the British-French actions as "robbery." The French Ambassador (a persistent advocate of Soviet-French rapprochement) and his British colleague left the reception as a sign of protest. See: *Sovetskii Soiuz, Frantsiia i mezhdunarodnye krizisy 50-kh godov XX veka* (Moscow, 2005).

Stalin's regime from the 1930s through to the 1950s, the speech came as a shock that led them finally to break with the communist movement. Both conservative and liberal circles treated with suspicion any program to revitalize Bolshevik ideas by freeing them from the Stalinist ballast. Thus, the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, even before the end of the Congress and Khrushchev's secret speech, reacted on February 23 to the changes in the Kremlin's doctrine in the following way: "Many western well-wishers treated the demonstrative denunciation of Stalin as a sign of the purge of the Soviet regime which left its rude revolutionary manners behind and, thanks to this, became capable to carry out negotiations and join alliances. In fact, the new development is something extremely dangerous—an attempt to strengthen the fanaticism and the revolutionary character of the communist movement, now frozen in Stalinist dogma, by going back to Leninist internationalism." The ideological overcoming of Stalinism could be seen, thus, not merely as a new attempt to combine socialism with some democratic principles, but also as a direct return to the aggressive proletarian messianism of the 1920s with projects to bring about the much waited for "world revolution" – an interpretation which found, it must be admitted, confirmation in the conspicuously increased level of Soviet presence in Asia and Africa.

In the decisions of the session of the Socialist International held in Zürich in March 1956, it was noted that the nature of the Soviet dictatorship was not transformed merely by the rejection of Stalinist doctrines. As for the thesis about the numerous paths to socialism mentioned in the summary report, this was considered to be no more than a dangerous tactical trick—it was about a preference for destroying parliamentary democracy by "peaceful means" (as it happened in the case of the putsch in

Czechoslovakia in 1948), with the social democrats receiving an invitation to take part in their own destruction. The Socialist International policy documents and its leaders' speeches noted that various paths of achieving socialism exist, but they were also emphatic about the fundamental differences between communists and social democrats in their understanding of the objectives of socialism. For the latter, an oppressive socialism was a contradiction in terms.

On the other hand, some members of the Western liberal intelligentsia, including American intellectuals, saw in the Soviet regime's self-criticism a hint of the possibility of evolution. Roman Jakobson, the famous Russian philologist, professor of Harvard, an emigrant, who was personally acquainted with Ehrenburg, visited Moscow in 1956, and at the end of his trip came to the conclusion that a renaissance in the cultural life of the USSR had begun, and that "nothing can prevent the scientific cooperation of the west and the east at the present time."⁶⁶ Several French intellectuals entertained similar hopes about the Twentieth Party Congress and they reacted with grief and resentment to the Soviet military intervention in Hungary.

Amidst a wave of anti-Soviet sentiment in France, an interview with the veteran General Charles de Gaulle (who was not tied up by any official status and was waiting to return to the summit of the French political Olympus at the end of May 1958)

⁶⁶ Jakobson's idea to visit the USSR was received very negatively by liberal intellectuals in the US. His younger brother Serge, who was the chief of the Slavic Department at the Library of Congress, appraised the invitation addressed to his brother to visit Moscow (where the regular meeting of the International Committee of Slavic Studies would be held) as "a new step of Moscow's gangsters aimed at the political, military, and spiritual disarmament of the free world." He called his elder brother to reject resolutely "the shameful invitation" and not to become a victim of Soviet propaganda. See: A. S. Stykalin, "K voprosu o priglasenii R. Iaakobsona posetit' SSSR v 1956 g." *Slavianovedenie*, No. 4, 2005, pp. 110-115. The above-mentioned position of an American liberal intellectual helps us to realize how difficult a task Ehrenburg set for himself with the building of bridges between East and West. On each side of the "iron curtain" there were both advocates and opponents of expanding contacts between Soviet and Western intellectuals.

generated discord. The well-known politician called the attention to the fact that the Soviet action had a certain military character, but the intervention was in no way an attempt to extend the Soviet sphere of influence to include new lands. Rather, its objective was to maintain control at all cost over one of the countries that had been brought into the Soviet sphere of influence as a result of World War II.⁶⁷ In a sense, de Gaulle's position confirmed the opinion that J. P. Sartre expressed to Konstantin Simonov in France in December 1957—January 1958: Intellectuals of rightist politics, who were mostly indifferent to the Soviet Union, did not react strongly to the Hungarian events. "As for me, I was extremely worried because I am and always will be a friend to the Soviet Union."⁶⁸

"November 1956 seems to have been the most difficult month in my life: I had to pay too high a price for other people's sins," Ehrenburg would recall a decade later. The main lesson of the Hungarian events, in his opinion, was the following: "I got rid of simple-mindedness: I realized that it might take years and even decades before we can finally overcome the overwhelming ice age of the 'Cold War' before spring finally asserts its rights. I doubted whether I would live long enough to see it, but this can be the aim of life, one must fight for that". At the beginning of 1957, Ehrenburg refused to take part in the anti-American hysteria, as the Cold War intensified and Soviet-American

⁶⁷ See the record of the conversation: RGANI, F. 5, Op. 30, D. 223, L. 144.

⁶⁸ See the report that K. Simonov made after his trip to France and addressed to the CPSU Central Committee: Ibid. Op. 36, D. 65, L. 24. See the main statements of Sartre concerning the Hungarian events: J.-P. Sartre, "Après Budapest. Sartre parle," *L'Express*, 9 November 1956, pp.13-16; "Sartre sur la Hongrie," *France observateur*, 13 December 1956, p.8; J.-P. Sartre, "Le fantôme de Staline," *Les temps modernes*, January 1957, pp.577-696; J.-P. Sartre, "Le fantôme de Staline," *France observateur*, 17 January 1957, pp.10-11. In Hungarian, see *1956 es a franciak. Francia gondolkodok a forradalomrol* (Budapest, 1993). The book includes speeches by major French thinkers such as A. Camus, J.-P. Sartre, R. Aron, K. Lefort, M. Merlot-Ponty, and prominent political scientist of Hungarian descent F. Feito, among others.

relations deteriorated. Moreover, he went directly and openly against this tendency and defended American culture on the pages of *Literaturnaia gazeta*.⁶⁹

Similar ideas (let alone failure to fulfill the directives of the Central Committee in connection with the Helsinki resolution) evoked more irritation among the conservative officials in the Kremlin. It is extremely significant, however, that even in France, a country dearly loved by Ehrenburg, there were influential power brokers who were not interested in lessening tensions and who feared lest Ehrenburg's activity should incline some of his French colleagues to cooperate with the USSR and thus lead to the breach of the boycott. The writer failed to obtain a visa to leave for Paris, where the new conference of the World Peace Council took place in January 1957. The Soviet Union was represented by A. Korneichuk, a Ukrainian dramatist, who, as a rule, did not deviate from the Party line. "Apparently, they were afraid of softness and not toughness," Ehrenburg noted with irony in his memoirs. At the request of Ehrenburg, Korneichuk spread the writer's appeal to members of the peace movement through the participants in the World Peace Council. The leitmotif of the message was as follows: "Today it is more than ever important to avoid a new wave of the Cold War."⁷⁰ Approximately at the same time, Ehrenburg sent a letter to d'Astier: "I believe we must do everything we can to avoid a schism [Je crois que nous devons faire tout notre possible pour ne pas aboutir

⁶⁹ See Ehrenburg's letter to *Literaturnaia gazeta* published on March 23, 1957, which contained sharp polemics with an article of the journalist A. Kasem-Beck, who returned to Russia from the US after many years of emigration "Amerika bez prikras," *Literaturnaia gazeta*, 28 February 1957. Ehrenburg's letter caused displeasure among Stalinist intellectuals (see the letter of V. Kochetov to the CPSU Central Committee: RGANI, F. 5, Op. 30, D. 235, L. 21), but at the same time it had a response in the West. The Italian *La Stampa* published the article under the expressive headline "Ehrenburg Defends American Culture in Russia" (See also: RGANI, F. 5, Op. 30, D. 235, L. 32-35).

⁷⁰ See the full text: *Dialog pisatelei*, pp. 683-684.

a une scission].”⁷¹ A new exhibition of French Art held in Moscow in the Spring of 1957 was Ehrenburg’s success in overcoming the boycott imposed on Moscow during those years. The author Vercors, who attended the opening, later wrote about it in the French press.⁷²

Some changes in the mood of French society that favored the USSR occurred by the end of the year and were due to the grand triumph of Soviet technological might on October 4, 1957. After the launching of Sputnik into orbit, Jean-Paul Sartre told Simonov that the USSR gained a lot of new friends in France, although one should not rely on them too much, as the friends are less happy about your success per se as they are about the fact that it annoyed the Americans. As for Sartre himself, when he was asked to deliver a speech to the press in connection with the anniversary of the revolution in Hungary in October 1957, he refused to do so “because the Hungarian events are not a historically important date that should be celebrated for the sake of someone’s egoistic interests or a cause to organize a Sabbath because of them.”⁷³ The Hungarian events came again were into the focus of French public life in June 1958 in connection with the notorious trial of Imre Nagy. The death sentence caused a burst of indignation. For many (and not only in France), the unsubstantiated nature of the charges was all too evident. Nagy’s main “guilt” was a Hungarian plan formed in the 1940s for obtaining sovereignty for his country that ran counter to its relationship with

⁷¹ See the letter from January 12, 1957: Ibid., p.683.

⁷² His trip to Moscow resulted in the essay published in *Le Monde* (May 8-9, 1957).

⁷³ RGANI, F. 5, Op. 36, D. 65, L. 19. Moreover, Sartre told Simonov: “If we looked at the Soviet intervention in Hungary in the prospect of the epochal interests of socialism, it maybe turns out to be justified” (Ibid., L. 20). But the Soviet writer did not take the words of his French colleague too seriously. Simonov assumed that “Sartre’s formulation was not improvisation, it is likely to be considered beforehand, and this is probably the most acceptable appraisal for him now of the Hungarian events in the conversations with Soviet visitors” (Ibid.)

the USSR. G. Erofeeva recalled how, after reading about the hangings in *L'Humanité*, the poet Louis Aragon rushed to the Soviet Embassy in deep distress and angrily asked the cultural attaché: “Could you not find some lentil porridge to feed Nagy for the rest of his life?”⁷⁴ In the West, there was hardly anyone who doubted that Moscow gave the signal for the execution. Recently published documents of the Presidium permit us to clarify the situation. It was János Kádár who failed to take advantage of opportunities that arose in February 1958 to deal with the case without carrying out the death sentence.⁷⁵

By 1958, the French Communist Party had reestablished its control over the National Peace Movement, having pushed to the periphery many of those who defended views that diverged from the dictates of Moscow. “When we [in the council of the National Peace Movement] were of a different opinion than our comrade communists, the only thing they permitted was to put our opinions in our pockets and cover them with a handkerchief,” the writer Vercors said openly to his Soviet interlocutors.⁷⁶ The same situation prevailed in other countries. The suppression of divergent opinion among

⁷⁴ G. Erofeeva, *Neskuchnyi sad*, p. 85. The British Communist paper *Daily Worker* on June 19, 1958, published an editorial, in which they expressed their regret over the execution of Imre Nagy. “To publish the article with another appraisal of the event would mean for the British party political suicide and we will never go this way”—the chairman of the British Communist party Harry Pollitt told a Soviet diplomat. He also reminded his Soviet colleague that support lent to the Soviet military intervention in Hungary by the British party in November 1956 resulted in the loss of 20% of its members. See the record of the talk with Pollitt on June 21, 1958: “Kompartiiia Velikobritanii i vengerskii krizis 1956 goda,” p. 46.

⁷⁵ See the highly significant minutes of the session of the CPSU Central Committee Presidium from February 5, 1958. The Kremlin recommended that the Hungarian leaders “display firmness and generosity”: *Prezidium TsK KPSS. 1954-1964. Tom 1. Chernovye protokoly nye zapisi zasedanii. Stenogrammy* (Moscow, 2003), p. 293. In Moscow, there were fears that severe sentences concluding the Nagy Trial could spoil the impression in the West made by the Soviet peace proposals addressed to the US and its allies. Kádár preferred to postpone the trial but not to soften the punishment. A more suitable moment was chosen for the trial—June 1958. In May 1958, after the new Program of the Yugoslavian Communist Union was published and adopted, the Soviet leaders launched a loud campaign against “international revisionism.” However, this whole issue requires further research and discussion.

⁷⁶ RGANI, F. 5, Op. 30, D. 236.

supporters of the peace movement did not signify, however, the overcoming of the crisis of the movement, on the contrary. On April 16, 1958, Ehrenburg sent Khrushchev a letter concerning the situation prevailing in the World Peace Movement. In this he expressed anxiety with regard to the continuing decline of the movement's international influence. He suggested taking measures to broaden the political basis of the movement by attracting forces to it that were to a certain degree distancing themselves from the foreign policy of the USSR in a number of concrete ways.⁷⁷

The ideas that Ehrenburg set forth in the letter to Khrushchev found an original reflection in his literary works: "No matter how powerful was the Peace Movement, on this earth there were more supporters of peace than participants of this Movement. In a series of countries, the opinion has arisen that the Peace Movement is distinguished by narrow ideology and prejudiced viewpoints. I will not now begin to argue with people who think this way. In the final analysis, the most important thing is to support peace. To fight for peace [is what matters], not in which movement or which organization a

⁷⁷ During his trips abroad and meetings with foreign intellectuals, Ehrenburg came to the conclusion that there were serious obstacles against expanding the peace movement launched by the USSR. On the one hand, "the opposition to the policy of war increases everywhere". On the other hand, "most of the recent campaigns against nuclear war and nuclear weapons tests take place outside the movement"—the demonstrations in Britain and the US, the appeals of the scientists to the United Nations Organization, and the rise of new anti-war organizations in various countries. "We can see the narrowing of the movement in Western countries, the growing lack of interest on the part of the allies." According to Ehrenburg, "the growing passivity of the movement can be explained to some extent by a certain tiredness of its personnel, the bureaucratic tendencies in its management, but the main reason is deeper—the disorder in the ideas of the movement, the vagueness of its objectives." Besides, "an important reason preventing the broadening of the movement is the desire of some of its participants to turn the actions of the movement into the actions of direct support to Soviet foreign policies." Because of this tactics, the movement in the western countries "can rely only on forces which were already gained by communist parties," a fact that undoubtedly narrowed the political base of the movement. According to Ehrenburg's firm conviction, the international peace movement should not follow the lead of Soviet diplomacy and support every step of Soviet foreign policy. "Even in the case of its broadening the movement would never become hostile to us—the political forces close to us would not lose the majority. But if we try to turn the movement into a bloc of peaceful forces, we must reject the idea of forcing upon them some of our formulae and we must refrain from managing [the movement] by orders and decrees." (RGANI).

person fights for it, which is not the essential issue.”⁷⁸ The peace movement, Ehrenburg noted in his letter to members of the International Council of Peace, “is a force that does not depend either on political parties or on a government”; it should represent “a very broad political block of forces that moves forward on the basis of mutual compromises, and it is not required that this or that party always agrees with all of the resolutions that the International Council passes.”⁷⁹ The correctness of Ehrenburg’s views found confirmation in letters that arrived in Moscow from Western leftists. Thus, the British writer Doris Lessing noted in January 1957 that throughout the world there existed peace-loving forces that were not connected with communism and that “will strive toward friendship with you under the conditions that they are not required all the time to sing hymns of praise to you that abandon the truth.”⁸⁰ However, the Kremlin did not listen closely to Ehrenburg’s opinion and advice. Created as an instrument of Soviet politics and sponsored by Moscow, the movement continued to be perceived in this light both by its organizers and by Western public opinion. Moscow had no intention of a radical reevaluation of its policies *vis-à-vis* this movement and its crisis continued to deepen.

After the ouster of Khrushchev, the Ehrenburg problem lost much of its significance in the eyes of the party leadership. *Novyi mir* continued to publish the

⁷⁸ I. Ehrenburg, “Mysli pod Novyi god,” *Ogonek*, No. 1, 1959, p. 9. Ehrenburg wrote about “our firm desire to counteract the atmosphere of the Cold War with the spirit of real cultural cooperation and fair competition.” In the moment of some lessening of international tensions, he noted: “Though my nature is not too optimistic, it seems to me that some kind of turning point emerged in the world’s public opinion.”

⁷⁹ *Dialog pisatelei*, p. 77.

⁸⁰ “Kompartiiia Velikobritanii i vengerskii krizis 1956 goda,” p. 42. Lessing emphasized that, in Britain and other countries, “there are a lot of people who would make efforts for preventing the war and the establishment of good relations with your country. Nevertheless they can sharply criticize you and you must know that it is natural when people criticize you. You don’t need to regard each person criticizing you to be an enemy.” (Ibid., p.45).

subsequent chapters of his memoirs, although not without difficulties with the censors. A compromise was reached on the question of the separate publication of the fifth and sixth volumes: the chapters, published in the journal, appeared in the nine-volume collected works that were published in 1962-1967. The aging author was left to his devices, concentrating the not-quite three years of life remaining to him on the completion of his memoirs, which he completed by the mid-1960s.⁸¹

For all its uniqueness and inimitability, Ilya Ehrenburg's creative legacy shared several moments with the spiritual evolution of other humanists of his epoch. Living primarily in the USSR, Ehrenburg was forced to play by the rules of the game that prevailed in the social order. Many West European intellectuals in the 1930s supported the USSR. They saw in the Stalinist regime the main counterbalance to the Nazi threat, and in the Soviet model the only dynamic social system capable of progress.⁸² Later on, however, several of these people (some of them under the influence of the Twentieth Party Congress) seriously embraced de-Stalinization and wanted to see it executed in a consistent manner. Having consciously chosen the position of criticism of the Soviet system from within, Ehrenburg managed to humanize its face (first of all, of course, in the sphere of cultural ties with the international community). We may surely say that the

⁸¹ Moreover, Ehrenburg continued, within his powers, to take part in public and literary life as a determined advocate of de-Stalinization. In the spring of 1964, he actively supported the idea of awarding A. Solzhenitsyn the Lenin Prize (the main state prize in the USSR). Later, after Khrushchev's departure, in the beginning of 1966, Ehrenburg signed a letter of protest against the conviction of the writers Andrei Siniavski and Yulii Daniel who published their works in the West without the permission of Soviet authorities. At the same time, he refused to sign the letter to protect Iosif Brodsky who was deported from Leningrad to a northern village as a "parasite" and "antisocial element." Ehrenburg failed to see in the 24-year-old translator the future Nobel-prize winning poet and did not attach any importance to his case at the time.

⁸² See in particular: H. R. Lottman, *The Left Bank: Writers, Artists and Politics from the Popular Front to the Cold War* (Boston, 1982). For Ehrenburg's compromise with Stalin's regime see the recent work: Jan C. Behrends, "Voelkerfreundschaft und Amerikafeindschaft. Ilja Ehrenburgs Publizistik und das Europabild des Stalinismus," Faraldo J.M. et al., eds. *Europa im Ostblock. Vorstellungen und Diskurse (1945 - 1991)* (Cologne, 2007).

history of the relationship between Ilya Ehrenburg and the leadership of the Communist Party of the USSR in the post-Stalin period indicated the limits of independence of a great writer who strove for the liberalization of the Soviet regime, but could not permit himself direct confrontation with the ruling elite in his public and social activity. As for Ehrenburg's speech to the Hungarian writers in November 1955, this seems to have been a private episode in the history of Soviet-Hungarian literary ties that accurately indicates the extent to which the two countries' historical trajectories and the conditions of socialism as a world system made the Hungarian writers (even those who were distant from the USSR) receptive and interested in how their Soviet colleagues lived and what they fought for. The social, political, and historical experiences of Soviet and Hungarian writers manifested themselves in a manifold manner not only in their creative and literary-social lives, but also in direct personal contacts. The Soviet example could lend legitimacy and had a tendency to appeal not only to opponents of but also to supporters of reforms – they all sought to justify the political and artistic projects they identified themselves with (this became especially notable in the first months after the Twentieth Party Congress.).⁸³

⁸³ Soviet diplomats as well as writers and artists visiting Eastern European countries repeatedly noted that Eastern-European writers attentively followed the discussions in the Soviet literary press and displayed a particular interest in statements that attracted official criticism. See the report of the Soviet Ambassador in Eastern Germany, G. Pushkin, on the situation in the Union of German Writers (July 1957): RGANI, F. 5, Op. 33, D. 24, L. 70-86.

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