

## SOVIET CULTURE

**Glasnost On Film**

As *glasnost* unleashes a torrent of Soviet talent, Dennis O'Grady dips into some new Soviet literature, and Clare Kitsen looks at Soviet film.

There were, of course, indicative rumblings beforehand, but it was in May 1986 that the momentous decisions were taken which are now reshaping every area of Soviet cinema.

At the 5th congress of the film-makers' union, the electoral system, previously nothing less than a farce, produced an astonishing result. The older generation, the 'official' directors, including long-standing first secretary Lev Kulidzhanov, were voted off the board, to be replaced by mainly younger types, including many of the most daring directors who have suffered most at the censors' hands. The *enfant terrible* of Soviet cinema, Elem Klimov, was elected first secretary.

Their remit was and is massive: legislation is currently under way to change the structure of film production so that the power to OK scripts and finance projects devolves from the government body Goskino to the individual studios. After the handover of funds from Goskino to the studios, the latter are to be self-financing - so, for the first time ever, there will be a connection between what gets made and what the public wants to see. More extraordinary, in a system where until now 'official' film-makers automatically received financing no matter how dire the project, is the plan to make film-makers freelance - those not in demand by the studios will be out of work, and diverted into other occupations.

So massive, of course, was the remit, that the results have been slow to come, especially in the production of feature films, which normally take a minimum of two years from script to completion. Yet we have seen in 1987 tremendous results in two areas: one is the production of documentaries which, being more immediate, have a very short production sche-

dule. At the end of 1986 came an extraordinary Latvian film *Is It Easy To Be Young?*, dealing with the problems of youth - their loss of ideals, their traumas post-Afghanistan, their tangles with drugs and with the law.

The other area where results are already seen is in the work of the 'conflict committee', set up by Klimov shortly after his election to consider and rehabilitate banned films. The first rehabilitations were Tengiz Abuladze's celebrated *Repentance*, a surreal portrait of a composite tyrant (who resembles Stalin and Beria rather more than other models) and his heirs, Gleb Panfilov's *The Theme*, which takes the lid off the 'official artist' syndrome, and Aleksei German's *Trial on the Roads*, a complex and humane picture of a Red Army deserter, which spent 15 years on the shelf.

The prognosis for the future is mostly good. On the negative side is the torrent of youth, drugs and prostitution films now apparently in production, not to mention the sub-Tarkovskian stylistic excesses to be expected, now that this latter is *persona grata*. The encouraging news is that most of the best directors are now working, and not on the newly-available, and obvious, themes.

Some, indeed, seem deliberately to have taken the opposite tack, with Panfilov working on a Gorki adaptation and Paradzhanov (*The Colour of Pomegranates*) on Lermontov. Kira Muratova has just completed a film and German, Abuladze and Abdrashitov are all making new films. Klimov, elected to his first-secretaryship for a period of five years, is currently delegating for a few months in order to shoot a new film. The results of cinematic *perestroika* will begin to hit the screen in late 1988. **O**

**Novel Events**

'The stronger the Soviet state became, the more cowardly, mistrustful and often suspicious became the treatment of the creative intelligentsia and its work', declared an editorial in the October issue of the Soviet Communist Party's theoretical journal *Kommunist*, commenting upon a quarter of a century's literary stagnation.

The cultural bureaucracy had in recent decades underestimated the ideals, consciousness and cultural level of the Soviet public, which 'is quite capable of understanding what suits them as intellectual food and what does not', said *Kommunist*, which has in recent years been in the forefront of the drive for *perestroika* and *glasnost*.

The last few months have seen the long-delayed appearance of novels written and first scheduled for publication over 20 years ago, and which have now become at once the symbols and the generators of *glasnost*. The most significant is Anatoly Rybakov's *Children of the Arbat*, with its controversial and thought-provoking portrayal of a section of Soviet society and of Stalin in the months immediately prior to the assassination of Kirov in December 1934 - the event which became the pretext for the adoption of the special legislation that was to provide the legal framework for the terror of the late 30s.

Like the plays of Mikhail Shatrov, which deal with an earlier period of Soviet his-

tory, it explores questions so far untouched by Soviet historians and few novels have provoked such discussion and controversy.

Poet Yevgeny Yevtushenko and ballad writer Bulat Okudzhava welcomed its appearance in letters published in the mass circulation illustrated weekly *Ogonyok*.

The next few months will see the publication of two novels whose fate served to illustrate the inadequacies of that earlier *perestroika* - Boris Pasternak's *Dr Zhivago*, to be serialised in the literary monthly *Novy Mir* after having been banned in 1958, and the late Vasily Grossman's Stalingrad epic *Life and Fate*.

Copies of the manuscript of *Life & Fate* were seized by KGB officers in 1961. Mikhail Suslov, then secretary of the Communist Party's Central Committee responsible for ideology who had risen to prominence and great influence under Stalin, told its author it could not be published for 200 years.

*Glasnost* has also brought a rediscovery of the literary heritage of an earlier period, with the publication, for example, of Anna Akhmatova's poem *Requiem* and of poems by her husband Nikolai Gumilyov, executed during the civil war, as well as works by such authors as Bulgakov, Platonov and Nabokov, a writer of the Russian emigration.

New works such as Rasputin's *Fire*, Aitmatov's *Place of Execution* and Astafiyev's *Sad Detective* explore a wide range of moral and social problems not hitherto touched upon in Soviet writing; their humanism reflects many diverse influences. **O**