

# Reply to Bill-Belotserkovsky

February 2, 1929

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Comrade Bill-Belotserkovsky,

I am very late in replying. But better late than never.

1) I consider that to raise the question of "Rights" and "Lefts" in literature (and, hence, in the theatre also) is in itself incorrect. In our country today the concept "Right" or "Left" is a Party concept, properly speaking an inner-Party concept. "Rights" or "Lefts" are people who deviate to one side or the other from the purely Party line. It would therefore be strange to apply these concepts to such a *non*-Party and incomparably wider sphere as literature, the theatre, and so on. They might at a stretch be applied to some Party (communist) circle in the field of literature. Within such a circle there might be "Rights" and "Lefts." But to apply them to literature, at the present stage of its development, where there are trends of every description, even anti-Soviet and downright counter-revolutionary trends, would be turning all concepts topsy-turvy. It would be truer in the case of literature to use *class* terms, or even the terms "Soviet," "anti-Soviet," "revolutionary," "anti-revolutionary," etc.

2) It follows from this that I cannot regard "Golovanovism" <sup>1</sup> either as a "Right" or a "Left" danger—it lies outside the bounds of Party trends. "Golovanovism" is a phenomenon of an anti-Soviet order. It does not of course follow from this that Golovanov himself is incorrigible, that he cannot rid himself of his errors, that he has to be hounded and persecuted even when he is prepared to renounce his errors, that he must be forced in this way to leave the country.

Or take, for example, Bulgakov's "Flight," which likewise cannot be regarded as a manifestation either of a "Left" or a "Right" danger. "Flight" is the manifestation of an attempt to evoke pity, if not sympathy, for certain sections of the anti-Soviet emigres—hence, an attempt to justify or semi-justify whiteguardism. In its present form, "Flight" is an anti-Soviet phenomenon.

However, I should have nothing against the staging of "Flight," if to his eight dreams Bulgakov were to add one or two others, where he depicted the inner social mainsprings of the civil war in the U.S.S.R., so that the audience might understand that all these Seraphims and all sorts of university lecturers, who are "honest" in their own way, were ejected from Russia not by the caprice of the Bolsheviks, but because (in spite of their "honesty") they were sitting on the necks of the people, that, in expelling these "honest" supporters of exploitation, the Bolsheviks were carrying out the will of the workers and peasants and were therefore acting quite rightly.

3) Why are Bulgakov's plays staged so often? Presumably because we have not enough of our *own* plays suitable for staging. For lack of the genuine article, even "Days of the Turbins" is accepted instead. Of course, it is very easy to "criticise" and to demand the banning of non-proletarian literature. But what is easiest must not be considered the best. It is not a matter of banning but of step by step ousting the old and new non-proletarian trash from the stage by competing against it, by creating genuine, interesting, artistic Soviet plays capable of replacing

it. Competition is a big and serious matter, because only in an atmosphere of competition can we arrive at the formation and crystallisation of our proletarian literature.

As to "Days of the Turbins" itself, it is not such a bad play, because it does more good than harm. Don't forget that the chief impression it leaves with the spectator is one that is favourable to the Bolsheviks: "If even such people as the Turbins are compelled to lay down their arms and submit to the will of the people because they realise that their cause is definitely lost, then the Bolsheviks must be invincible and there is nothing to be done about it." "Days of the Turbins" is a demonstration of the all-conquering power of Bolshevism.

Of course, the author is altogether "innocent" of this demonstration. But that is not our affair.

4) It is true that Comrade Svidersky very often commits the most incredible mistakes and distortions. But it is also true that the Repertory Committee in its work commits at least as many mistakes, though of an opposite nature. Recall "Crimson Island," "Conspiracy of the Equals" and the similar trash that for some reason or other is so readily sanctioned for the really bourgeois Kamerny Theatre.

5) As to the "rumours" about "liberalism," let us rather not talk about that—you would do better to leave "rumours" to the gossiping wives of Moscow traders.

## **J. Stalin**

February 2, 1929

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### **Notes**

1. "Golovanovism" manifested itself in attempts on the part of a certain section of the theatrical profession to transplant the old, bourgeois habits and methods of work to the Soviet theatre. In 1926-28 a group of actors of the Bolshoi Theatre, headed by orchestra conductor Golovanov, opposed the reform of the theatre's repertory in conformity with the higher standards and requirements of the broad strata of the working people and the tasks of socialist development. The group took up a hostile attitude to the general body of the theatre and refused to promote young talent. Measures taken by the Party for the reconstruction of the work of the Soviet theatres resulted in "Golovanovism" being overcome.

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