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### Episodes from the History of American-Soviet Cultural Relations: Stanford Slavic Studies, Volume 5 (1992)

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**Lazar Fleishman**

**Episodes from the History  
of American-Soviet Cultural Relations**

**Stanford Slavic Studies, Volume 5 (1992)**

translated by

**Ronald D. LeBlanc**

## Author's Foreword

The present volume may be viewed as an idiosyncratic sequel to the book, *Russkii Berlin* [*Russian Berlin*], which I – along with Olga Raevskaia-Hughes and Robert Hughes – prepared for publication and then published in 1983. It grows directly out of the work that was begun by the three of us at that time (work that I recall with a feeling of ardent gratitude) and is likewise based entirely upon materials on Russian literature and culture that are housed in a single, but extraordinarily valuable, collection – the archive of the Hoover Institution. As was true in that earlier case, this archive consists of materials that outwardly appear to be heterogeneous, materials, furthermore, that relate to what are decidedly divergent stages in the history of Russian culture – the prerevolutionary stage in the first section (the “Gorky” section) and the Soviet stage in the second section. The difference between these two sections is strengthened by the particular international-geographical context in which the documents being published here appear: now West European, now American. Nevertheless, for all the heterogeneity of the materials being offered here to the reader of this work and for all its salient differences from the content of *Russkii Berlin: 1921-1923*, there is something fundamentally common in their problematics, something, it seems to me, that attests not only to the stability of the author's academic interests, but also to the commonality of the fates of Russian culture in its historical existence: literature's fatal involvement in the political collisions and revolutionary storms that descended upon Russian society in the twentieth century.

My book was begun long before the fetters fell, fetters that for decades had shackled the word not only in literature and in political expression, but also in historical inquiry in Soviet Russia. My book was also begun long before the opening up of the archives, not only whose contents, but whose very existence had constituted a state secret, and long before the process was widely begun of a complete rethinking of the historical past and our cultural heritage, a rethinking that did not depend upon self-serving considerations. It is difficult to conjecture whether my work would have proceeded differently if, from its very beginning, there had not existed barriers between Russian archival collections and Western scholarship. In any event, at all the stages of my work I was steadily striving toward accountability and toward the use of all available sources. And I hope that the materials included in this book will serve as an aid to historians of Russian culture in learning how to master new areas of research.

My colleagues at the Hoover Institution and its Director rendered me substantial support in this work, providing me with a grant for carrying out my research, and likewise the staff at the Institution's archive and library generously shared with me their knowledge, their skills, and their references. It is with a feeling of special appreciation that I would like to mention here Michael Bernshtam, Ronald Bulatov, Elena Danielson, Olga and John Dunlop, Joseph Dwyer, Ann Van Camp, Olga Katz, Robert Conquest, Hilja Kukk, Molly Molloy, and Charles Palm. I received as well so much invaluable help on the part of my colleagues in the Slavic Department at Stanford University – Edward Brown, Joseph Van Campen, Andrew Wachtel, Wojciech Zalewski, Vyacheslav Vsevolodovich Ivanov, Gregory Freidin, Joseph Frank, and Richard Schupbach, as well as in the person of the department administrator, Catalina Ilea. To all of them go my deepest gratitude.

## Contents

Author's Foreword . . . . .	2
Translator's Note . . . . .	4
Introduction . . . . .	5
Joseph Freeman and Boris Pilnyak . . . . .	14
In Polemic with Max Eastman . . . . .	42
Toward a History of Eisenstein's Mexico Film . . . . .	66

### Translator's Note

While conducting some basic research a few years ago on Boris Pilnyak's intriguing, yet largely ignored, American travelogue, *O'kei: Amerikanskii roman* [*Okay: An American Novel*] (1933), I came across, quite fortuitously, the illuminating essays by Professor Lazar Fleishman contained in Volume 5 of the book series *Stanford Slavic Studies*. Titled *Materialy po istorii russkoi i sovetskoi kul'tury: Iz Arkhiva Guverovskogo Instituta* [*From the History of Russian and Soviet Culture: Documents from the Hoover Institution*] (Stanford University, 1992), Professor Fleishman's seven essays are divided into two sections: the first section, "Iz Gor'kovskoi biografii" ["From Gorky's Biography"], examines Maxim Gorky's relationship and correspondence with a handful of political activists and revolutionaries – primarily Khaim Osipovich Zhitlovskii and his wife Vera Sever'ianovna Zhitlovskaiia, Feliks Vadimovich Volkhovskii, and Vladimir L'vovich Burtsev – in the late imperial period, while the second section, "Epizody iz istorii amerikano-sovetskikh kul'turnykh otnoshenii" ["Episodes from the History of American-Soviet Cultural Relations"], explores the relationship and correspondence between a small group of American writers and journalists who were supporters of the Communist movement during the late 1920s and early 1930s – primarily Joseph Freeman, Max Eastman, and Upton Sinclair – and their counterparts in the Soviet Union during this same time period – primarily Boris Pilnyak, Sergej Dinamov, and Sergej Eisenstein.

With Professor Fleishman's permission, I have translated into English the four essays contained in the second section of his book, seeking to make available to American scholars who cannot read Russian (especially those Americanists who are interested in American-Soviet literary, cultural, and political relations during this time period). In terms of the conventions of translation and transcription, I have sought to make the texts of these four essays as reader-friendly as possible for the non-academic reader: that is to say, I have used a modified version of the Library of Congress system for the spelling of Russian names and titles that reflects familiar usage (e.g., "Trotsky" rather than "Trotskii"). In the endnotes, on the other hand, I have sought to preserve scholarly elements (thus "Pil'niak" rather than "Pilnyak") and have provided both transcriptions and translations in English of the Russian titles of books and articles. I have not added any endnotes of my own to the essays in the translation: all of the endnotes, as a result, are those provided by Professor Fleishman back in 1992 (they have not been updated). Wherever possible, however, I have taken the liberty of adding first names and patronymics (inside brackets) when only initials had been provided (e.g., A. A. Elistratova has become [Anna Arkad'evna] Elistratova).

## Introduction

The materials published below have been extracted from the archive of Joseph Freeman, who is now an almost completely forgotten journalist, poet, and prose writer, but who, during the 1920s and 1930s, was one of the central figures of the Communist movement in the U.S. and of the “proletarian period” in American literature. He was born on October 7, 1897 into a Jewish family in the small town of Piriatina, near Poltava, in Ukraine. In December 1904, in the midst of the Russo-Japanese War, when the boy was seven years old, the family emigrated to America. They settled in Brooklyn, a poverty-stricken borough of New York, where Freeman finished high school.<sup>1</sup> His literary inclinations and his enthusiasm for socialist ideas began to manifest themselves distinctly already in his teenage years. This led him to take part in the Zionist circle of Poalei Zion during his upper grades in high school. And by the time he enrolled in Columbia University in 1915, he had become an ardent reader of the journal *Masses*, in which John Reed, Floyd Dell, and Max Eastman played the leading role.<sup>2</sup> Beginning in 1915, poems written by Freeman started to appear in print.

The October Revolution of 1917 in Russia evoked an acute radicalization of Freeman’s political views. During these years, the idea of the “cult of the universal man” was taking shape inside him. In the domain of literary activities, this idea expressed itself in a striving to erase the boundaries between art and political propaganda in poetry.<sup>3</sup> After a year in Europe, spent partly in Paris and partly in London as a foreign correspondent for the newspaper *Chicago Tribune*, Freeman returned to New York in 1921 and started contributing to what was at that time the most popular of socialist journals, *Liberator*, edited by Max Eastman and his sister. In 1922, Freeman joined the Communist Workers’ Party, and from the moment that the *Liberator* turned into the official organ of the Party, beginning in 1924, he was the journal’s editor. At this time, he became close friends with a number of prominent representatives of leftist and “proletarian” literature (Claude McKay, Floyd Dell, Michael Gold). In 1926, along with Michael Gold, he founded the journal *New Masses*<sup>4</sup> and completed a pilgrimage to Soviet Russia, where he worked as a foreign correspondent for the American press and as a translator at the office of the Comintern [Communist International]. In the course of the nine months he spent there, Freeman made connections in the artistic and literary world of Moscow, gathering material for a book he was planning to write about Soviet culture. He was, in particular, well received in the LEF [Left Front of the Arts] circle, with whose leader, Vladimir Mayakovsky, he had become acquainted earlier in New York during the poet’s trip across America in 1925.<sup>5</sup> But it was the proletarian literature of Soviet Russia that evoked the primary interest in him.<sup>6</sup> Due to his insufficient command of the Russian language, the nuances of the literary situation and the acuity of the literary polemic to a large extent eluded him. And the general picture of Soviet literary reality was shaped for him largely under the influence of those Party functionaries and those RAPP [Russian Association of Proletarian Writers] critics who were in charge of managing international cultural contacts and who specialized in western “proletarian” literature (Sergei Dinamov, Ivan Anisimov, Osip Beskin).<sup>7</sup> They remained his main consultants even after his departure from the U.S.S.R.<sup>8</sup> Many years later, Freeman emphasized that their consultations did not amount to sectarian recommendations of an exclusively RAPP character, but that, to the contrary, it was precisely thanks to them that “fellow-traveler literature” came into his field of

vision. All throughout this period of his dealings with the leaders of the “proletarian” wing of Soviet literature, Freeman sought, in turn, to have an impact on their judgments about American authors, one that was not limited to the items he wrote that were intended for publication in the Soviet press. Thus, on the eve of Theodore Dreiser’s visit to the U.S.S.R., Freeman sent to his Moscow friend, Sergei Dinamov, a confidential warning about the insufficient Communist orthodoxy of the ideological positions taken by their American guest. The fact that Freeman was included as a member of the editorial board of the Moscow journal, *Vestnik inostrannoi literatury* [*The Herald of Foreign Literature*], in 1928 testifies eloquently to the reputation he had acquired at this time within RAPP circles.<sup>9</sup> His articles were being published in Soviet journals, while his verse works were included in Petr Semenovitch Kogan’s anthology, *Revoliutsionnaia poeziia sovremennogo Zapada* [*Revolutionary Poetry of the Contemporary West*] (1927).

Freeman included materials he had gathered in Moscow in the book, *Voices of October*, which he prepared together with two other Communist critics – Joshua Kunitz and Louis Lozovik – and which appeared in print in New York in 1930. This volume was preceded by an unrealized project of his: to release a book about current cultural life in the U.S.S.R. that was based entirely upon the testimonies provided by Soviet authors (including the critics [Alexander] Voronsky and [Vyacheslav] Polonsky, and the film directors [Vsevolod] Meyerhold and [Sergei] Eisenstein).<sup>10</sup> One of the documentary reflections of this plan is a previously unknown letter from Vsevolod Meyerhold that has been preserved among Freeman’s papers:

19-VIII-1928  
Paris

Hotel Malherbe  
11, rue de Vaugirard  
Paris VI

Return address:  
8, rue Martin Bernard  
Madame *Olga Sossine*  
pour Vsevolod Meyerhold-Reich.  
Paris XIII

NB. In the event of my departure, letters addressed to my name will be forwarded to me through the kind assistance of madame O. Sossine.

Dear Comrade J. Freeman,

I find myself at the present time in Paris, where I arrived on June 27th. Just before my departure from Moscow, a person unknown to me, as per Your request, spoke with me by telephone and asked me to send, as soon as possible, an article that I had promised to write about Soviet theatre for a book devoted to the achievements of Soviet culture that was to be published for distribution in the United States by the publishing house “Vanguard Press.” I told this person that I

had been so ghastly busy when I was in Moscow that I was not able to fulfill Your request and that I intended to complete this work while in Paris. But even in Paris, during the first six weeks of my stay here, I was not able to write the article either. I only managed to put in order the materials I had brought with me for the article I had promised You, since I was busy with organizational work associated with business matters that involve proposed tours across Europe and America by the State Theatre named after me [Gosudarstvennyi teatr imeni Meierkhol'da]. It is only now that I have succeeded at last in creating for myself an arrangement that is entirely conducive for finishing the work that I had started for You.

But here is a question for You: have You perhaps already lost hope of getting an article from me and have You perhaps approached some other Russian film director with a request analogous to the one with which You approached me?

I beg You to inform me right away by telegram upon receiving this letter of mine: is my article still needed and what final deadline are You giving me for submitting the article to the publisher?

In a letter dated November 23, 1927, You wrote me that the publishing house "Vanguard Press" planned to issue a whole series of volumes devoted to the Soviet Union. Perhaps it is possible to include my article about theatre not in the first book, if that one is already at the final stage of its public release, but in the second one?

In addition to that question, I take the liberty of turning to You with a request: if my participation in the projects of the publishing house "Vanguard Press" is desirable, of course, please send me (by telegram at my expense) an advance of two hundred dollars (a hundred of it to be counted toward the first order, the fulfillment of which I will bring to completion very soon, and a hundred to be counted against other works that You designate) to the second address indicated at the top of this letter (madame Sossine).

I beg You to receive an acquaintance of mine, Sergei Veniaminovich Geiman,<sup>11</sup> whom I have entrusted to provide You with an account of all our plans concerning tours abroad and whom I have asked to provide me with counsel regarding the issue of which of the American impresarios should be approached in connection with our theatre's tours. He will inform me by letter what You will tell him on that score.

Regards,  
V. Meyerhold

Freeman met with Meyerhold during his stay in the U.S.S.R. A signed photograph of the great director is preserved in his archive, as is a typescript of two of his articles: reviews of Tairov's *Zapiski rezhissera* [*Notes of a Director*] and the text of his lecture "Akter budushchego" ["The



Actor of the Future”] (1922). Their contacts must have been rather cordial if Freeman deemed it possible in October 1927 in New York to give Theodore Dreiser, who was setting off for Russia, a covering letter that was addressed to Meyerhold.<sup>12</sup> The person in Moscow who was fulfilling Freeman’s commission was, from all appearances, the American journalist, Louis Fischer (1896-1970), a foreign correspondent for *The New York Times* and during those years an ardent enthusiast who admired the Soviet government, or else his wife, Bertha Markovna (“Markoosha”) Mark (died in 1977), who later published two books about her impressions of the U.S.S.R. On May 5, 1928, Freeman wrote to Fischer:

Dear Louis: Some time ago I asked Meyerhold and Eisenstein to write the chapters on the theatre and the movies for the VANGUARD PRESS book on Soviet art. They both promised (by cable) to do so, and said they would have the stuff in New York by February. That was a long time ago, and though I’ve written them several times, they haven’t replied. The book must go to press, and if they don’t come across we’ll have to make other arrangements.

Do you ever see either of these birds? If you do, I’d greatly appreciate your jogging them up a bit. They both have long letters explaining what it is all about (namely, a 10,000-word chapter on the Russian theatre from 1917 to 1928 and a similar one on cinema). If it is at all possible for you to do so, please find out definitely whether they intend to do it or not, so that we can go ahead with our plans, and let me know. I’ll be grateful for the favor.<sup>13</sup>

Meyerhold’s letter was written during one of the most dramatic moments of his post-October biography. Toward the end of the 1927-1928 season, the symptoms of a creative crisis for the theatre he was directing made their distinct appearance: its popularity had sharply declined, its best students had left the collective, and Meyerhold’s relations with the leaders of cultural politics had become strained. By September, when Meyerhold decided to linger in France for medical treatment, reports of his “desertion” and of the forthcoming closure of his theatre appeared in the Soviet press.<sup>14</sup> Several weeks later, he succeeded in settling the conflict, the troupe opened the new season, and on December 2nd Meyerhold returned to Moscow. The idea of an overseas tour was realized only at the beginning of 1930, but the trip to the U.S. did not take place. Nor did his article for Freeman’s book get written. Freeman had better luck with Sergei Eisenstein’s article. Eugene Lyons (1898-1985), who not long before this had been appointed the foreign correspondent for United Press in Moscow, wrote to Freeman on August 8th:

I ran into Eisenstein last night. He was visibly embarrassed by the mention of your name, and explained that his article is “almost ready.” I urged that he wire you to that effect or you’d go to press without him.

If you still want his piece, wire me (UNIPRESS MOSCOW) and I’ll push him again.

Freeman incorporated this Eisenstein article into his survey of Soviet cinematography in the collection of essays, *Voices of October* (pp. 225-239).

From the mid-1920s, Freeman became one of the most active contributors to the Communist press and to the various organizations that were connected to the Communist Party, in particular, the John Reed Clubs that set as their goal the cultivation of proletarian literature in the U.S. In 1925, he published a book about American imperialism, *Dollar Diplomacy: A Study of American Imperialism*, that he had co-authored with the well-known Socialist, Scott Nearing. In 1926, it came out in a Russian translation [*Diplomatiiia dollara*] in the Soviet Union (it was published in a Spanish translation and a German translation as well). Seven years later, on the eve of the terrible famine that gripped Soviet Russia, he published an apologetic book about the situation in the country that was based entirely on official Soviet data.<sup>15</sup> In 1927-1929, 1931-1933, and 1936-1937, he edited (sometimes switching over to the pseudonym J. F. Evans) the journal *New Masses*. The preface to an anthology of proletarian literature that appeared in 1935 belongs to him.<sup>16</sup> He regularly spoke out publicly in the central press organ of the Communist Party: the New York newspaper, the *Daily Worker*. From 1925 through 1931, Freeman was the Deputy Director of the TASS News Agency [Telegrafnoe agentstvo Sovetskogo Soiuza] office in New York, and in 1931-1932 he worked at Amtorg [Amerikanskaia torgovlia] (a Soviet trade organization in the U.S.). In October 1933, he accompanied Henri Barbusse on his lecture tour across the U.S.<sup>17</sup> In all of his public appearances during this time, Freeman – just like Michael Gold, his closest comrade-in-arms in the camp of proletarian literature – was an immutable supporter of the “general line” of the Stalinist leadership in the Soviet Union. It is no accident that, already in 1928, Sergei Dinamov, without mincing words, said in a Moscow journal that both Freeman and Gold belong to the “proletarian-revolutionary” branch in American poetry.<sup>18</sup> In June 1934, Pavel Fyodorovich Iudin sent him a telegram with an invitation to take part in the work of the First Congress of Soviet Writers. Pleading that he was busy with Party commissions and literary commitments, Freeman sent word to him in a reply letter that it was not possible for him to accept this invitation.<sup>19</sup>

A sincere faith in the infallibility of the Kremlin leaders did not safeguard Freeman from anger and ostracism on the part of Party functionaries when, in early autumn 1936, his book of reminiscences and confessions, *An American Testament*, appeared in print. It was met with genuine interest by the critics and by members of the left-leaning intelligentsia; the Congress of American Writers named it the best autobiography that appeared in 1937. Its British edition (1938) was likewise an unqualified success. The book turned out to be objectionable only for Freeman’s closest comrades-in-arms within the Party, despite the fact that right before its publication the author submitted the manuscript to their censors. Moreover, the attacks on his book that emanated from the Moscow center took a casuistically evasive, phantasmagorically “Kafkaesque” form that was all the more painful for the author, since the initial reaction in Moscow had seemed so positive. In a letter dated December 29, 1936, Freeman’s closest friend there, Sergei Dinamov (who called himself Freeman’s “Russian agent”), not only praised the book (thanking the author especially for those pages that were devoted to their past encounters), but also raised the question of publishing it in the Soviet Union. Excerpts from the book appeared in the journal *Internatsional’naia literatura* [*International Literature*]. American Communists who were living in Moscow likewise reported that people there had a favorable attitude toward Freeman’s book. Several weeks later, however, this appraisal changed abruptly, and Dinamov explained bluntly that this was due to “political errors” that had been uncovered in the book. The author never did succeed in finding out from Dinamov what exactly it was that

was erroneous in his book, since his “Russian agent” was arrested and died in prison two years later. But from Earl Browder, the head of the American Communist Party, who had just returned from a trip to Moscow, word leaked out that Freeman’s autobiography had been condemned at a special session of the Comintern [Communist International] leadership and that among the ideological flaws that incriminated the author was his excessively benign appraisal of Trotsky and his inappropriate references to past encounters with Western revolutionaries, all of whom, almost without exception, had become victims of the “Yezhovshchina” [Great Terror]. Accusations of covert “Trotskyism” (which were completely unfair, if judged from all of Freeman’s activities) were communicated to him confidentially and for some reason were not initially made public. It was hard for Freeman emotionally to endure the “plague-stricken” nature of the atmosphere that surrounded him.<sup>20</sup> But two years later the Party’s appraisal of his book ceased to be a secret any longer. In August 1939, in the official organ of the Comintern, *The Communist International*, attacks appeared not only upon the book and its author, but also, to an even greater degree, upon the newspaper, the *Daily Worker*, which sometime in 1936 had ill-advisedly featured a sympathetic review of Freeman’s autobiography. Moreover, the author of the review<sup>21</sup> expressed amazement at the fact that Freeman continued all the same to be reckoned a member of the Party. It is noteworthy that, prior to this, no one (including Freeman himself) had ever heard about any any sort of formal decision – or proposal – about his expulsion from the Party.

From this point on, Freeman was forced to withdraw from his political activities. His attempts to regain from the Party’s higher-ups their faith in him proved ineffective. The author’s bitter meditations upon the fate of the revolutionary movements were reflected in the most famous of his works, the novel *Never Call Retreat*, which was published in 1943. During the war, Freeman worked in radio, wrote a book about American-Russian relations, and was planning to write a book with Maurice Hindus about the Soviet Union’s war with Hitler. His confidential relations with Ivy Litvinov, the wife of the Soviet ambassador in Washington, have been preserved.<sup>22</sup> After the appearance of his second novel, *The Long Pursuit*, Freeman for all practical purposes dropped out of literature. All of his Soviet connections had been lost as well. The old ideals had suffered defeat. To the end of his days, Freeman scrupulously avoided making any sorts of public acknowledgements of his disillusionment with them and with Communism. But in his private conversations and in his correspondence following the Twentieth Congress of the CPSU [Communist Party of the Soviet Union], he said time and again that his discord with the Party was unavoidable, since literary pursuits and an artistic temperament are by their very nature incompatible with Party discipline. Moreover, he drew a parallel between his own fate and the fate of such victims of Stalin’s terror as [Boris] Pilnyak and [Isaac] Babel. He died on August 9, 1965.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> See Joseph Freeman’s February 16, 1934 letter to Alexander Stoklitsky (a copy), in the Archive of the Hoover Institution (Freeman, Box 141); Valery Yakovlevich Tarsis, Ivan Ivanovich Startsev, S. Urban, *Sovremennye inostrannye pisateli. Bio-bibliograficheskii spravochnik* [Contemporary Foreign Writers. A Bio-Bibliographical Handbook] (Moscow-Leningrad: Gosizdat, 1930), p. 167.

<sup>2</sup> Joseph Freeman, *An American Testament: A Narrative of Rebels and Romantics* (New York: Farrar & Rinehart, 1936), pp. 49-53; Gary Robert McConnell, *Joseph Freeman: A Personal Odyssey from Romance to Revolution* (Ph.D. Dissertation, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1985), pp. 1-3.

<sup>3</sup> See the valuable study: Daniel Aaron, *Writers on the Left: Episodes in American Literary Communism* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1961), pp. 71-72.

<sup>4</sup> Joseph Freeman, *op. cit.*, pp. 339, 381-386. For information on this journal, see: S. Dement'ev, "Vzaimovliianie sovetskoi sotsialisticheskoi i demokraticheskoi progressivnoi kul'tury SShA v predvoennye gody" ["The Reciprocal Influence of Soviet Socialist Culture and U.S. Democratic Progressive Culture during the Pre-War Years"], *Vzaimodeistvie kul'tur SSSR i SShA XVIII-XX vv.* [*The Reciprocal Action of the Cultures of the U.S.S.R. and the U.S. in the XVIII-XX Centuries*] (Moscow: Nauka, 1987), p. 38; Abel' Isaakovich Startsev, "Novye massy – organ amerikanskogo proletliteraturnogo dvizheniia" ["New Masses – The Press Organ of the American Proletarian Literature Movement"], *Na literaturnom postu* [*On Literary Guard*], No. 10 (1931).

<sup>5</sup> Freeman gives an account of his meetings with Mayakovsky in New York and Moscow in his book, *An American Testament*, pp. 367-369, 372, 540-543.

<sup>6</sup> *An American Testament*, pp. 511-512.

<sup>7</sup> Daniel Aaron, *op. cit.*, pp. 134-135; cf.: Deming Brown, "Soviet Criticism of American Proletarian Literature of the 1930's," *American Contributions to the Fourth International Congress of Slavists* ('s-Gravenhage: Mouton & Co., 1958), pp. 1-17.

<sup>8</sup> Numerous letters from Sergei Dinamov, which contain appraisals of contemporaneous Soviet literature and cover a ten-year period, are preserved in the Freeman Archive at the Hoover Institution. Sergei Sergeevich Dinamov (1901-1939), a literary critic and prominent figure in RAPP, was a member of the Bolshevik Party beginning in 1919. Within RAPP, he was considered the leading specialist in Anglo-American literature. He was a member of the Soviet delegation at the Kharkov Conference of Revolutionary Writers in 1930, he was a member of the editorial board for Soviet journals devoted to Western literatures, he was the chair of the Anglo-American Commission of the International Union of Revolutionary Writers, for a short time he was the editor of *Literaturnaia gazeta* [*The Literary Gazette*], etc.

<sup>9</sup> See: Valentina Nikolaevna Sushkova, *Sovetsko-amerikanskii literaturnye sviazi (20-30-ye gody)* [*Soviet-American Literary Connections (1920s and 1930s)*] (Vladivostok: Izdatel'stvo Dal'nevostochnogo universiteta, 1986), p. 147.

<sup>10</sup> This project fell apart because the majority of the authors who were invited to contribute did not submit their articles on time (see Freeman's June 6, 1928 letter to Sergei Dinamov). In the case of [Alexander] Voronsky and [Viacheslav] Polonsky, there is no reason to be surprised at this: it was exactly at this time that they were forced out of their positions in the course of the

campaign against Trotskyism. On the other hand, as Freeman claimed in his later reminiscences, the editor himself refused in the end to take part in this scheme, having detected Soviet propaganda in the presentations by the fellow travelers.

<sup>11</sup> A Parisian acquaintance of the Meyerholds, he was the husband of a close female friend of theirs, Zinaida Nikolaevna Raikh. See: “Iz istorii odnoi druzhby (Perepiska V. E. Meierkhol'da i Z. N. Raikh s L. N. Oborinyam)” [“From the History of a Friendship (The Correspondence of V. E. Meyerhold and Z. N. Raikh with L. N. Oborin)”], *Vstrechi s proshlym* [Encounters with the Past], Vyp. 6 (Moscow: “Sovetskaia Rossiia,” 1988), pp. 232, 237.

<sup>12</sup> See: V. E. Meierkhol'd, *Perepiska. 1896-1939* [V. E. Meyerhold, *Correspondence. 1896-1939*] (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1976), p. 270. Freeman handed over a similar letter for Meyerhold to the American journalist and dramatist Sophie Treadwell, who was setting off for Moscow in 1933.

<sup>13</sup> Joseph Freeman Collection, Hoover Institution Archives (copyright Stanford University).

<sup>14</sup> For information on this issue, see: Iurii Ofrosimov, “I Meierkhol'd zaprosilsia za granitsu!” [Meyerhold, Too, Asked to be Allowed to go Abroad!], *Rul'* [The Rudder] (Berlin), September 2, 1928; “Meierkhol'd i Lunacharskii” [“Meyerhold and Lunacharsky”], *Poslednie novosti* [The Latest News] (Paris) (September 17, 1928); David Zolotnitskii, *Budni i prazdniki teatral'nogo Oktiabria* [Weekdays and Holidays of Theatrical October] (Leningrad: Iskusstvo, 1978), p. 202; Alexander Ninov, “Master i prokurator” [“The Master and the Procurator”], *Znamia* [The Banner], No. 1 (1990): 192.

<sup>15</sup> Joseph Freeman, *The Soviet Worker: An Account of the Economic, Social and Cultural Status of Labor in the U.S.S.R.* (New York: Liveright, 1932).

<sup>16</sup> *Proletarian Literature in the United States: An Anthology* (New York: International Publishers, 1935).

<sup>17</sup> Gary Robert McConnell, *Joseph Freeman: A Personal Odyssey from Romance to Revolution*, p. 8.

<sup>18</sup> Sergei Dinamov, “Ob amerikanskoi proletarskoi i revoliutsionnoi poezii (Neskol'ko zamechanii k stat'e Roberta Uol'fa)” [“About American Proletarian and Revolutionary Poetry (A Few Remarks on an Article by Robert Wolfe)”] *Vestnik inostrannoi literatury* [The Herald of Foreign Literature], No. 5 (1928): 143. Cf. Freeman's response to a questionnaire about the October Revolution in the Moscow journal *Internatsional'naiia literatura* [International Literature], No. 3-4 (1934).

<sup>19</sup> Michael Gold was not able to attend the Congress either. See his letter in the book: *Literaturnoe nasledstvo. Tom 85. Iz istorii Mezhdunarodnogo Ob"edineniia Revoliutsionnykh Pisatelei (MORP)* [Literary Heritage. Volume 85. From the History of the International Union of Revolutionary Writers (IURW)] (Moscow: Nauka, 1969), pp. 482-484.

<sup>20</sup> Gary Robert McConnell, *Joseph Freeman: A Personal Odyssey from Romance to Revolution*, pp. 113-115; the account of these events in Daniel Aaron's book, *Writers on the Left*, p. 368, which is based upon the testimony provided in the memoirs of Freeman himself, is not entirely accurate. See also: Boris Aleksandrovich Gilenson, "Stalinizm i literatura SShA ('Belye piatna' 'krasnykh tridtsatykh')" ["Stalinism and the Literature of the U.S. ('Blind Spots' of the 'Red Thirties')"], *Voprosy literatury [Issues of Literature]*, No. 12 (1989): 65-71.

<sup>21</sup> Philip Dengel, "Book Reviewing Is a Serious Matter," *The Communist International*, No. 8 (August 1939): 947-948.

<sup>22</sup> Elena S. Danielson, "The Elusive Litvinov Memoirs," *Slavic Review*, Vol. 48, No. 3 (Fall 1989): 477-483.

## Joseph Freeman and Boris Pilnyak

Joseph Freeman became acquainted with Boris Pilnyak while the former was still in Moscow, but apparently they did not at first take a particular liking to each other. In any event, Pilnyak was given much less attention in the book *Voices of October* than was usually accorded to him at that time in Russian and foreign surveys of post-revolutionary literature. This was all the more striking because by 1930 several of his things – *Golyi god* [*The Naked Year*] and the stories that were included in two anthologies, *Flying Ossip: Stories of New Russia* (1925) and *Azure Cities* (1929) – had already come out in America in English translations, and he had become, without doubt, one of the most famous Soviet writers of his generation in the West. In his 1936 autobiography, Freeman spoke of his perception of Pilnyak at the time as an alien phenomenon for proletarian culture. He wrote there: “Pilnyak was not a Bolshevnik; he was a fellow traveler. He was not yet of the vanguard; he was still part of the past, though anxious to follow the future.”<sup>1</sup>

But Pilnyak’s American tour brought him closer to Freeman. He came to the U.S. at the invitation of Ray Long, one of the most colorful and influential figures of the American press corps during those years. He was the editor of the popular journal *Cosmopolitan* (it was published with a print run of 1,700,000 copies). A confirmed advocate of Soviet-American rapprochement, Long had visited Russia shortly before then, in the autumn of 1930, and had spoken about his impressions there in the book he wrote immediately upon his return home.<sup>2</sup> Through the journalist Eugene Lyons and the translator Charles Malamuth, both of whom were living in Moscow, he established contacts with a number of Soviet writers, signed contracts with them, and then took their manuscripts back home with him.<sup>3</sup> Among these writers were [Evgeny] Zamyatin and Pilnyak, both of whom had been toppled from the official Soviet literary Olympus as a result of the scandal of 1929 involving the publication of their books abroad. Their meeting with Long could not have taken place, of course, unless it had been supported by some highly placed officials among the Soviet authorities, who were putting out feelers about the possibility of establishing diplomatic relations with the U.S. As far as the direct literary-publishing goals that he had set for himself in connection with his trip are concerned, Ray Long said the following in his book: “One of my fears had been that all of the literature which had been produced since the Revolution would be so full of propaganda that it might be unpalatable in the United States. I found that this fear was groundless. While it is true that some of the books are propaganda, many of them are extremely critical of conditions under the present regime. Several books poked fun at the conditions of today, and all of those for which I made contracts seemed to me to give the reader not only a good story but an opportunity to understand Russia. Especially, I think the novel *The Volga Falls to the Caspian Sea*, by Boris Pilnyak, is a true picture of modern Russia and the Russians of today. Parts of it are almost drastic in their criticism.”<sup>4</sup>

At the height of the “Russian boom” in the United States, both the American sponsors and the Soviet side sought to attach special significance to Pilnyak’s visit. On the eve of Pilnyak’s arrival in New York, Long inserted into his magazine the translations of stories by three Soviet writers: Pilnyak himself, Zamyatin, and [Valentin] Kataev.<sup>5</sup> In honor of his exotic guest, he

arranged a large reception at which the most prominent representatives of the literary and publishing world were present.<sup>6</sup> The publication by the Cosmopolitan Book Corporation during the summer of 1931 of the English translation of Pilnyak's novel, *Volga vpadaet v Kaspiiskoe more* [*The Volga Falls to the Caspian Sea*], which had just been released in his homeland, was also timed to coincide with Pilnyak's visit.<sup>7</sup> As is well known, this work was created with the expectation that it would neutralize the attacks that were being made upon the writer by RAPP (attacks that even resounded from the rostrum at the 16th Party Congress), accusing him of being the leader of a "neo-bourgeois" type of literature,<sup>8</sup> and that it would demonstrate that the author had embarked upon a path of active reformation. For the Soviet higher-ups, the official trip abroad by a man of letters who had just recently been subjected to unprecedented persecution in the official press provided them with an opportunity to demonstrate their non-involvement in the excesses by RAPP. For those activists within American culture who were sympathetic towards Soviet Russia, the arrival of a writer who was known for his far from orthodox views in the past and who time and again had brought social storms down upon himself served as decisive proof of the triumph of liberal tendencies in the sphere of cultural life within the socialist state. The trip to the U.S. was also extraordinarily important for Pilnyak himself, in light of the perception held of him in the West as a "special envoy" of Soviet culture. There was opening up before him the possibility of restoring to himself the official status within Soviet literature that had been lost as a result of the campaign of 1929.

The piquancy of the decision to send Pilnyak on an official trip to the West cannot help but be noticed when it is considered against the background of the circumstances that the other main victims of the campaign of 1929 – [Mikhail] Bulgakov and [Evgeny] Zamyatin – found themselves in. Bulgakov, as we know, was never allowed to travel abroad despite his repeated appeals to Stalin. Zamyatin, who in his efforts to be granted a foreign visa cited the precedent established with Pilnyak, did receive a foreign passport in the fall of 1931 (following the insistent diplomatic *démarches* made by Gorky), but in the process he was forewarned that the way back to his homeland would be closed to him. The differences in the way the Soviet administration dealt with these three writers stem from the differences in their behavior during the course of the campaign of 1929 and during its aftermath. Out of the three of them, only Pilnyak exhibited a willingness to compromise with the authorities. But if the "steadfast" leaders of RAPP refused to heed this signal and continued to place him on the same level with Zamyatin, then the liberal circles in the leadership, in the person of the editor of the newspaper *Izvestiia* [*News*], Ivan Mikhailovich Gronskey, took steps directed toward domesticating the former leader of the "fellow traveler" movement in Soviet literature.<sup>9</sup> It was precisely Gronskey who had arranged Pilnyak's trip to Tadzhikistan and who had published in his newspaper a cycle of Pilnyak's reportage about the achievements of the Five-Year Plan that was written as a result of this official trip.<sup>10</sup> These travel sketches were selected (in an abridged English translation) by the bulletin of the Soviet Union Information Bureau in Washington, *Soviet Union Review*, which featured them in their monthly issues in February through April of 1931. The timing of the publication of this propaganda to coincide intentionally with Pilnyak's arrival in the U.S. is underscored by the fact that the biographical sketch about the author was published not in the first excerpt from the cycle, as one would have expected, but preceded the second piece in the March issue.



The appearance in Pilnyak's writing of a willingness to conform is not confined to the cycle of sketches about Tadzhikistan and to his work on the novel *The Volga Falls to the Caspian Sea*.<sup>11</sup> The December 6, 1930 issue of *Izvestiia* featured an essay of his that supported calls for reprisals against the leaders of the mythical "Industrial Party," which was facing charges in court.<sup>12</sup> At Gronsky's prompting, he presented his request for permission to travel abroad in a personal letter addressed to Stalin, following which he was granted permission to depart for the West.<sup>13</sup>

It is clear that all these circumstances that preceded Pilnyak's departure abroad obligated him to maintain a certain carefulness in his public statements and conduct. Although the campaign of 1929, which was directed against him and other writers who were fellow travelers, had long subsided and Pilnyak could seduce himself into thinking that there were indications of a benevolent attitude toward him on the part of the higher-ups in the Party and the GPU [Secret Police], the stamp of apostasy still remained attached to him in the majority of public mentions of his name in the Soviet press. "What Pilnyak has written about our construction in his last novel can only serve the goals of *vulgarizing* the very idea of socialist construction. [. . .] *Mahogany*, as is obvious, has sent forth strong roots in Boris Pilnyak's creative work . . ." one of the reviewers declared.<sup>14</sup> Differing in the degree of their severity, all of the comments in Soviet publications were, however, unambiguously negative. In addition, there appeared in January 1931 an article that demonstrated the ideological connection that existed between the saboteurs from the "Industrial Party," who had just been unmasked, and the "Change of Signposts" [Smenovekhov] movement from the beginning of the 1920s,<sup>15</sup> one of whose ideological inspirers Boris Pilnyak was considered to be. During his stay in America, a scandal broke out back home in connection with the publication of the story "Vprok" ["For Future Use"] by Andrei Platonov, his friend and his co-author of a work in 1928.<sup>16</sup> Pilnyak was the first Soviet writer to make a visit to America since Mayakovsky's trip there in 1925. The ticklish nature of his situation was exacerbated by the fact that he, just like Mayakovsky, did not speak a word of English. In addition, the arrest of his father by the organs of the GPU soon after his departure abroad must have played a role of no small importance in determining the line of public behavior that he adopted while in the U.S. Word of his father's arrest became known to the writer's acquaintances and foreign friends in Moscow. The arrest is mentioned later by Max Eastman in his book, *Artists in Uniform*, and by Eugene Lyons in *The Red Decade: The Stalinist Penetration of America* (Indianapolis-New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1941), p. 110. All of this explains to what extent during his stay in America Boris Pilnyak turned out to be dependent upon his guide and advisor on site. It is also clear why the Soviet representatives recommended precisely Joseph Freeman to him in the first place. Unlike [Isaac] Don Levine, the author of a "Trotskyite" book about Stalin that had just come out in print, who took care of the Soviet writer initially in New York,<sup>17</sup> Freeman possessed an irreproachably orthodox reputation within the Communist milieu. He quickly became friends with Pilnyak, and the Moscow guest soon checked out of his hotel and moved in to live with Freeman at his apartment.<sup>18</sup> Conversation and companionship with Pilnyak helped Freeman to form a wider picture of Soviet literary life and to improve his proficiency in Russian. During his meeting with Ilya Ilf four years later, he boasted that "Pilnyak taught him the kinds of words that [Nadezhda] Krupskaya does not know."<sup>19</sup> Freeman took upon himself the responsibility for handling Pilnyak's negotiations and contacts with the publishing house at *Cosmopolitan*, helped him with the editing of the translation and the reading of the proofs for the novel, introduced him into the circles of proletarian *literati*, and set off together with him for California, for Hollywood, when, following Ray Long's

recommendation, a representative of the movie studio Metro-Goldwin-Mayer, the screenwriter and director Albert Lewin (1895-1968), enticed Pilnyak into working on the script of a film about the Soviet Union that was being proposed. Among Freeman's papers, a contract signed by Pilnyak and the Vice President of the movie studio, dated April 2, 1931, is preserved there. It reads:

Dear Mr. Pilnjak:

The following is the agreement between us:

You are leaving Sunday, April 5th, 1931, for our Studios at Culver City, California, and we are furnishing you transportation for yourself and your interpreter Joe Freeman.

When you arrive at our Studios you will discuss with our executives there the work that they have in mind your undertaking, that is, writing for us and/or advising us in reference to an original Russian story as has been tentatively discussed here. If as a result of further explanation and discussion at the Studio it appears that it will not be advisable for you to undertake this work then we will furnish return transportation of yourself and Mr. Freeman to New York City, providing you leave forthwith, and in such case you are to render no further services to us, and receive no compensation (except your said traveling expenses) and neither has further obligation to the other.

It is understood that if you and our executives there agree that you are to write this story for us and/or advise in reference thereto, then it is understood that you will do this for us at a rate of compensation of Five Hundred Dollars (\$500.00) per week for the period you so actually render services to us, and until the work is completed to our satisfaction, beginning at our reporting at the Studio ready to begin work. It is of course understood that if you so write this story for us all rights in your writings of every kind will belong to us as you will write this as our employee.<sup>20</sup>

Pilnyak himself, both in newspaper interviews and in his "American novel," spoke about the factors that led to the break up of the collaboration between the writer and Metro-Goldwin-Mayer.<sup>21</sup> These reasons, as one would have expected, were ideological in nature: Pilnyak could not afford, in particular, to get involved in a "Hollywood" treatment of such a ticklish theme as the role of the GPU in the life of the Soviet state. Besides, in the course of negotiations with Lev Isaakovich Monoszon, the representative of the Soviet company Amkino [Amerikanskoe kino], which was in charge of the distribution of Soviet film production in the U.S., it came to light that since it was assumed that a number of episodes in a film about the Five-Year Plan were to be shot "in situ," the Soviet authorities reserved for themselves the right of control over its content. It would have been ridiculous, however, to imagine that a Hollywood film company would have undertaken to shoot a film based on the clichés of Soviet propaganda. On the contrary, the movie studio Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer thought that the films it intended to make about the First Five-Year Plan would serve to counterbalance the Soviet productions that were bursting onto

Western movie screens.<sup>22</sup> The attempts to reach an agreement between all the interested parties continued until the beginning of June, when the movie studio came to the conclusion that there was no longer any need for the writer to remain further in Hollywood (although it did not reject the idea of somehow adjusting the film script to suit its needs). In the public statements he made on the eve of his departure for the U.S.S.R., Pilnyak, who was trying to protect himself from any possibly unpleasant situations, accentuated the contrast in their artistic convictions – and in the aesthetic tastes of his American partners. “There wasn’t the slightest trace of art,” he said, “in Hollywood.”<sup>23</sup>

The two friends made their return trip from California to New York not by train, but in the new Ford automobile that Pilnyak had purchased. *The New York Times* was on the point of expressing a desire to commission the Soviet guest to provide an account of his impressions of America. But since to a considerable extent the feature article that he submitted amounted to attacks on the Hollywood movie business, the editorial board was forced to reject this venture,<sup>24</sup> and in the end Pilnyak’s article, in an English translation provided by Freeman, appeared in the Communist journal, *New Masses*.<sup>25</sup> The American press, which had displayed a genuine interest in the guest’s attestations about the exotic sides of life in Soviet Russia,<sup>26</sup> remained indifferent on the whole to his impressions about the U.S. The “American novel” *O’kei* [*Okay*], which was written when Pilnyak was already back in Moscow, did not evoke any responses at all in America. Parts of the novel – in parallel with their serial publication in *Novyi mir* [*New World*] before a separate book edition appeared in print – were published only in the Communist Russian-language newspaper, *Russkii golos* [*Russian Voice*], in New York (in the spring of 1932).

The letters that were exchanged between Freeman and Pilnyak immediately following the latter’s departure from America are remarkable for the broad gamut of moods exhibited by the correspondents and by the wide range of stylistic colors in their exchanges – from friendly, intimate effusions and reminiscences painted in humorous tones to emotional socio-political reportage tempered by a journalistic spirit. They provide eloquent material for assessments of the character and the dynamics of their relationship. Not all of their letters, it appears, have been preserved: we were not able to locate one or two of them among Freeman’s papers.<sup>27</sup> Pilnyak’s letters are being cited here from the originals (each is a typescript with the author’s signature and hand-written corrections), while Freeman’s letters are being cited here from copies in his archive.<sup>28</sup> Typographical errors, as a rule, have been corrected without any special qualification. Pilnyak sent the first letter during his transatlantic crossing on the steamship Bremen.

## 1

### **Pilnyak letter to Freeman**

Aboard the Bremen, during the night before arriving in Cherbourg

Dear Joe,

There is so much disorder in the sea right now that there are neither any brains, nor any time, naturally enough, for the writing of letters. Now if you were to be

here with us, you would become twice as emaciated as opposed to what you were in Santa Monica.<sup>29</sup> Like the sea and the sky, people donate what they can: whereas the sky donates the blue color, the sun, the darkness, the moon, and the stars, and whereas the sea donates peace and quiet, the administrative staff of the steamship is donating feasts and concerts in the evening. Girls, as we know, beginning with the most beautiful girl from Andalusia, cannot give more than what they have, and they, like the sky, donate what they can. There is a Lithuanian girl on board – it's the first time that I've seen a girl from that nation – whom I go visit after the balls for "brief interviews." She's not bad, just like all other girls, only when she gets excited (like a tempestuous sea, in bed), she says things that are more incomprehensible than if she were speaking in English. You go judge for yourself, you who knows Lithuanian!? Once I was sitting in the closet, but this took place during one of our trysts, so it is not subject to history. Whiskey is ten kopecks a glass. Beer is ten kopecks a mug. And together with the sea on the leeward side and the Lithuanian savageries, there was such a jumble of impressions and thoughts in my head, that it would take about two years for me to sort them all out. This is just as well, for I will be writing for the next two years. It will all come pouring out of me in bucketsful. And I will send you the first thing that I write for your approval and for its publication in a month.

Some business matters. Forgive me!!! Send the press clippings to me at Arens's address.<sup>30</sup> If you're planning to write me about girls, please write academically. If you're planning to call Elena, please tell her that I owe her three dollars. I remember the debt and I'll send her a gift from the U.S.S.R. . . .<sup>31</sup>

It's all such nonsense: while I was getting ready to write to you, there were thousands of things that I wanted to tell you. But now everything has tumbled out of my head. The wind has whipped up, and such strange thoughts are crawling into my head, such as the steamship going along the eternity of the ocean to a place where there cannot be any sorts of civilizations, except those of fish. But this eternity compels one to feel (and to honor!) old lady Europe in an especially acute way. But it does not compel one to pursue similar kinds of delirium in letters to a friend. I am waiting for letters from you and for news, such as your trysts with your beloved. You understand that America is for me now my native land, where my passions are buried.

Remember me to my friends. Tell Leonid that I will fulfill his request the first day I'm back.<sup>32</sup> I'll be in Moscow on the 14th.

I kiss you warmly.

Special greetings to Alex<sup>33</sup> and to your old man.

Your Boris.

Please forgive the typos!

### Freeman letter to Pilnyak

From: Joe Freeman  
301 East 38th Street  
New York City

August 19, 1931

Boris rodnoj! [My dear Boris!] forgive me for writing you in English. Since you have left, I have had no opportunity to keep up with my Russian, which was always rather feeble, anyway; and while it would no doubt amuse you to read a note full of comical errors, there are some things I want to tell you, and this I can do only in a language which comes easily to me. Perhaps Louis Fischer or Talmadge<sup>34</sup> will be good enough to translate this for you. However, if it causes you any trouble, let me know, and I'll have my future letters translated here.

It was a delight to get your letter this morning and to learn that even on the high seas you pursue your ethnological studies. I respect the Lithuanian people for their contribution to your cultural investigations on an international scale.

However, since your departure, a great silence has fallen over the cultural front in America. The telephone at home hardly ever rings. Occasionally I run into a female member of the gens [genus] Americanus who sadly asks whether I have heard from you, where you are, what are you doing.

Nevertheless, in another respect, you have left behind you in this country a terrific echo which is still reverberating. If you will go to see Arens, you will find waiting for you mountains of clippings about Boris Pilnyak, his works, his American "adventures," and his statements, views, ideas, tastes and comments on women, skyscrapers, prohibition, Hollywood and the decay of capitalism. These clippings come from every part of the United States. No town is so small, no newspaper so picayune but has published something about you. You cannot imagine how your final interview swelled the local pride of the few towns and villages you mentioned by name. You will discover which these are by looking for clippings which carry the name of one town in large letters.

The sale of your book goes on – but no real report can be expected for some months. Our "krassata" ["beauty"] is away on her vacation, but when she returns, I'll get a definite report for you, and mail it.<sup>35</sup> Regarding the film, I heard some news yesterday. Korovay<sup>36</sup> came back from his vacation trip full of health, enthusiasm and news. He had seen Lewin,<sup>37</sup> to whom I had given him a letter.

Lewin told him M.G.M. is going ahead with the film, which will be “neither pro-soviet nor anti-soviet.” You remember that stupid formula, of course. They have, no doubt, by this time thoroughly ingsterized<sup>38</sup> the film. The present title is simply brilliant; it will be called “SOVIETS.” But, as you know, Hollywood can change its mind faster than a ballerina her costume or a French politician his allies; by the time the film is actually produced it may be called anything from “ORANGES IN SPITZBERGEN”<sup>39</sup> to “STANDARTIZATION.”

Korovay, incidentally, is very intelligent and genuine. He saw and heard much on his trip. He found the MGM lot rather smaller than he expected, but Upton Sinclair rather bigger. The streets of Chicago – Korovay told me – are crowded with unemployed workers – hatless, coatless, hungry; they sleep in the parks, on the steps, in the doorways of public buildings.

The night before last I passed Washington Square Park, at the beginning of Fifth Avenue, one of the richest streets in the world. The unemployed workers seeking sleep in it were so many that, in order for any of them to be comfortable at all, they had to arrange themselves in straight, tightly wedged rows, like a regiment of soldiers. Thus they slept; the sky was their roof, the grass and the asphalt their bed; and for covering they had newspapers carrying lying articles about the wonderful steps the government is taking to relieve the unemployed this winter.

On the other hand: last night I saw a large Communist street meeting on Fourteenth Street. There must have been about 500 people in the audience, all men, nearly all workers, most of them obviously unemployed. They stood there, sallow, tired, – and very attentive to the speaker.

I shall deliver your message to Leonid, to Helen, and to Alex (who has left for a two-week vacation in the New England states but whom I shall see when he gets back). In return, I wish you would give my warmest regards to Louis Fischer – and Ella Winter.<sup>40</sup> There will arrive in Moscow shortly the American writer Waldo Frank. He is an Idealist, something of a mystic, but inclined to sympathize with revolutionary movements – provided they are outside the United States. Thus he is something of a hero among the anti-imperialist bourgeois intellectuals of Latin America, where he spent about a year traveling and lecturing. He was a friend and admirer of Mariategui, Communist intellectual and party leader of Peru.<sup>41</sup> I have given Waldo a letter to you; I think you will find it interesting to talk to the author of *Our America* and *America Rediscovered*.<sup>42</sup>

“Cherepakhinka” [Little Turtle] has asked for news of you. The turtle continues to enjoy life on the terrace of the sixty-first floor. He is now called BORIS. Recently, the textile baron (whose son has returned from Moscow where he studied theatre) presented Our Lady of the Skyscraper with a smaller turtle as a companion to our citizen of the Arizona desert.<sup>43</sup> I have not ascertained the gender of the small turtle, and so cannot report whether it is a mikaka for Boris or merely – an interpreter.

The Lady's book is finished and in a better shape than it was originally. In about three weeks she sails for the USSR.<sup>44</sup> When you see her, look calmly and consider whether it was worth all those storms which hurled the Pacific to the heavens and back again furiously against the shores of Santa Monica.

The city sweats under a brutal sun; I drink quantities of water, milk and iced coffee (only), work hard, and think of our long midnight conversations which I hope we shall some day soon resume in another city.

3

**Freeman letter to Pilnyak**

New York  
August 27, 1931

Dear Boris:

I am sending you an additional number of press clippings. They continue to come in without cease. It's not worth reading them because the provincial press simply reprints what New York writes.

I saw [Sol] Flom's secretary yesterday. Your book is selling well.<sup>45</sup>

Warmest regards. I look forward to receiving a letter from you soon.

Joe

4

**Pilnyak letter to Freeman**

My dear, dear Joe,

I haven't written to you in ages because I wanted to write intelligibly, and I'm only able to do that starting today because it's only today, September 1st, that I've been at home from morning on and it's only starting today that I'm beginning to work. And the first bit of work that I'm doing is writing you a letter. It's been just two days short of a month since we parted. And allow me to tell you now, after that sifted time has elapsed, that I consider you a remarkable, splendid

person, one of the people who is dearest to me in the whole wide world. All of this became evident to me after the time we spent together. And if I'm guilty of having sinned against you, please forgive me my trespasses.

I arrived back in Moscow on the fourteenth of August, and I've been busy up until yesterday with getting things in order. You know about the regulations that forbid the import of private automobiles into the U.S.S.R. I made the rounds of the People's Commissariats and received a permit. As soon as I received it, I went to Leningrad to get the car. The brigands who packed the car in New York forgot to switch off the motor and so the battery overheated, and I had to get it replaced. It was hard to find one, and the one I found was an old broken one. I drove back (with a Russian engineer and with Eugene<sup>46</sup>) from Leningrad to Moscow. I changed the licenses and received new ones. I'm still struggling to find a garage, so I'm parking the car outside beneath a tarpaulin (but it's already autumn and the frosts are near at hand!). I'm writing about the car in such a detailed way so that you'll tell Leonid and Vladimirov about it.<sup>47</sup> I forgot to mention that they waived the import tariff for me at customs. Tell Leonid, by the way, that I'll be writing to him the day after tomorrow, as per his command. I found Moscow to be summerly: construction is going on all the time, all the streets are dug up. At home, meanwhile, everything is tucked away inside trunks for next summer: you can't find anything you're looking for, everything is scattered. I merely took into account that this is the way Moscow is, of course (and was happy about that for a while), but at home I arranged everything for winter: dragging the bookcases and couches over, and unpacking as well as repacking for summer. Besides that, there wasn't any money, so I needed to go get some. I had to take care of my food card, my rations. I had to talk things over with some of my comrades about my work. Louis Fischer and I are going to work together on a Russian book for *Cosmopolitan*, we're going to start that project the day after tomorrow.<sup>48</sup> I'm going to publish some sketches about America in *Izvestia*, but we've decided that I should finish writing all of them first and only then publish them<sup>49</sup> (call *Russkii golos* [*Russian Voice*] and tell them about this; as soon as all of this is finished, I'll send the manuscript to you via Amtorg). When I have a moment to spare, I'll write the novel that Alex nudged me to write, the one that derives from two old stories. I haven't made any arrangements with anybody about this novel. How should we proceed with it!? Should we give it to *Cosmopolitan* once again?!

News is reaching us here, and we happened to hear by chance that the Volga is flowing pretty well. Is that indeed true? Write me, please, about this. And send me the press clippings that Miss Reifil [Miss Raphael] has collected. It would be best to send them to the address of the Press Office of the NKID [People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs], care of [Yakov] Podolsky,<sup>51</sup> for me.

I have seen Ella [Winter] twice: once at Louis's place, the other time I drove her, Julia [Blanchard],<sup>52</sup> and Louis and his wife to Herzen House to see some writers and to have dinner. Ella loves you very much. She speaks only about you. She tried to pry it out of me whether you love her and whether you've been faithful to



her. “Yes,” I told her, “absolutely.” She can’t understand why you don’t write to her? She looks great and she’s in good spirits. When I told her that you are about to come to the [Soviet] Union, she positively beamed. And, really, how are things going with your plans to take a trip here? A room, a couch, a feast, and my heart – they’re all waiting for you. Do come, we have things going on here right now that are very, very interesting. You and I could sit in separate rooms and write. And, you never know, we just might write a single novel together: you would write the English text, and I the Russian. Please do come!

Warmest regards to all our mutual friends.

Hugs and kisses, my dear, dear Joe!

Please give my warmest regards especially to your parents, and please apologize to your father for me for not sending him a postcard while I was at sea.

Hugs and kisses,  
Your Boris

Moscow 40  
Second Street of Yamskoe Pole, Bldg. 1A, Apt. 21  
Boris Andreevich Pilnyak.<sup>53</sup>

5

**Freeman letter to Pilnyak**

New York  
September 14, 1931

Dear Boris:

Yesterday I received your wonderful letter of September 1st. I will respond to it fully a little later. Right now I am sending you some press clippings from newspapers.

Your novel – *The Volga Falls to the Caspian Sea* – is enjoying great success. Reviewers all across the country are raving about it. I sent you many press clippings via Arens’s address at Narkomindel [People’s Commissariat of Foreign Affairs], so I don’t understand why they haven’t been passed on to you.

Did you receive the lengthy letter that I sent to you several weeks ago?

For now, I gently press your hand

Yours  
[Joe]

6

**Pilnyak letter to Freeman**

Moscow  
Yamskoe Pole  
October 3, 1931

My dear, dear friend!

Today marks exactly two months since we parted on American soil, in New York. I don't know what the weather is like in New York today, but outside my window it's a gray, murky day. I have an electric heater on beneath my feet, and I'm sitting here wearing warm pajamas. The trees outside my window have turned a bit yellow, and it looks like a rain shower is about to begin any minute now. All morning today I was lying around on the couch, reading about America. I don't remember whether I wrote to tell you that I had to drop my work for a month because I had been called up and mobilized into the Army, roaming around our villages and rural areas. I returned home just a few days ago. Only today have I started working on the book about America. It appears that I'm going to have an entirely American day today . . . What a pleasure it would be for me to be sitting for a while with you today, lying on the Mexican carpets on your couch, drinking shots of whiskey with you, smoking "Chesterfields" (or even a cigar), and talking, talking with you . . . when, oh, when will you be coming!?! My couch is waiting for you and lying on it is, if not a Mexican carpet, then at least an Indian one, the carpet that you and I bought from members of the Zuni tribe! Come see us as soon as you can! And write to tell us when we can expect you! We'll live "veri okei" ["very okay"]!

And so, I've written down here essentially everything that I had wanted to tell you. In general, I'm feeling cheerful, only today, no doubt from lying down and looking at boring numbers, do I understand that it's autumn outside, a time of year that prompts reflection and feelings of our temporality. In my thoughts, I am with you, with New York, but seeing as how thoughts are much more lightweight than is the human body, and my body is thousands of kilometers away from New York, so that you can't simply cast it aside, like thoughts, then – despite my sadness – write to me about your cheerful New York experiences. Write to me about yourself, about how things are going for you, about when you'll be arriving here. Write to me about Alex. Call Ellen Wiener and have her search out black Regina.<sup>54</sup> When will Regina be coming to the U.S.S.R.? Bring her here with

you! Tell her that if she comes, I'll marry her. I'm dead serious. She and I will write plays together. She'll teach me how. I'm not kidding. I love Regina very much. And, incidentally, I'm waiting for you so that you and I can write something together, not just record fond memories, but also write a novel, which we could start working on right away, you in English, and me in Russian. They say that the little turtle will be coming soon: I'm glad even to have turtles! Come! Bring Regina with you! Or else, who knows, perhaps I won't be able to wait until she comes, and, following your example, I'll indulge in the same kind of standardized arrangement that you indulged in all over California, New York, and Mexico!<sup>55</sup> . . . Write to me about my American literary matters and about what took place at *Cosmopolitan*.<sup>56</sup> They sent me a clearance-sale telegram and threatened me with a letter. I haven't seen our mutual Moscow friends because I was away from Moscow. Louis [Fischer] and Ella [Winter] will be coming over to my place this evening. If I don't manage to send this letter off before they come, we'll attach their letter together with mine. But allow me now to kiss you warmly, ever so warmly!

Your Boris.

7

**Freeman letter to Pilnyak**

From: Joe Freeman  
301 East 38th St.  
New York City

Oct. 4, 1931

Dear Boris: I am still waiting for an opportunity to answer your last letter fully; but these have been busy days. I have just edited in a great hurry the four reports of the Soviet delegation to the international socio-economic congress which met in Amsterdam August this year, put them into decent English and prepared them for publication here. Having completed that job this morning, I have a breathing space to send you the enclosed clippings, one of which is a translation of your article about New York which appeared in the *Nation*. I am now trying to get some money for you out of it. You will see from the clippings that according to Gene Lyons' report you said some interesting things about the USA on return to Moscow. Most of it is true, but I am probably the only bandit you met here. Have you heard already that your old firm (the Cosmopolitan Book Corporation) has been sold to another publishing firm? Your new *izdatel'* [publisher] is Farrar and Rinehart – and your old friend, *nasha krasata* [our beauty], is unemployed. Reports have reached me here that you have been assigned to the Red Army as chauffeur. This makes the Red Army more invincible than ever.

Believe me, Boris, I miss you greatly. It is about time I visited you at Yamskovo Polya [sic! – L. F.] – which I'll probably do soon.

8

**Freeman letter to Pilnyak**

From: Joe Freeman  
301 East 38th St.  
New York City

October 8, 1931

Dear Boris: Here are some more clippings. One of them will interest you especially: The Engineering News-Record has asked your publishers to send them a copy of *The Volga Falls to the Caspian Sea* because, as they said, it is “largely concerned with engineers engaged in dam construction in Russia.” The book has been sent to them. When they publish a review of it, I'll send it to you.

Michael Gold has published a violent attack on your novel in the *New Masses*, a copy of which I'll send you. You can rest assured that many good *tovarishi* [comrades] disagree with Gold.<sup>57</sup> (A Comsomol standing near me just remarked that Gold has a “habit of running away with himself, of writing rabid criticism.”)

More soon. My warmest regards.

As ever

[Joe]

9

**Freeman letter to Pilnyak**

From: Joseph Freeman  
301 E 38 St.  
New York City, NY

Oct. 20, 1931

Dear, dear Boris! I have at last been able to find a few free moments I have wanted to write you more fully than I have been able in the brief notes that accompanied the clippings. Incidentally, you have no doubt noticed that

American press continues to discuss you and your sayings. Your book goes slowly but well, so much so that your new publisher Farrar and Rinehart – the firm that recently purchased the Cosmopolitan Book Corp – is anxious to retain you as one of their authors. I had a long talk with John Farrar, one of the heads of the firm, about you. He thinks very highly of your writing. He wants to publish as soon as possible an English translation of one of your books which has already appeared in Russian. I therefore suggest that you at once select (1) the best collection of your best stories and novelletas, (2) your best novel apart from the *Volga* and *The Naked Year*. Mail these to me at once, with any suggestions or instructions you see fit. I will arrange for the usual standart contract, and for a good translator.

I would like to add that you are fortunate in having Farrar and Rinehart as your publishers. They are among the best of bourgeois publishers from every viewpoint. They have an excellent list of authors, including “papashka” [daddy] Upton Sinclair, and “bakimbardami” [with side-whiskers] Floyd Dell, so that you are in much better literary company than you were with the Cosmopolitan outfit. I hope you will not let your friend Ray Long or anyone else persuade you to leave your present publisher. As you know I have personally nothing at stake in this matter except your own interest which is close to me. Farrar and Rinehart are in a position to give you serious literary standing and, what is equally important, to push the circulation of your books.

By the way: Farrar and Rinehart have sent me the following note: “DuBose Heyward’s *PORGY* has been pirated in Russia. This does not worry us at all but we want to get hold of two or three copies of the Russian edition if possible and I am wondering if Pilnyak couldn’t get them for us. DuBose and I would much appreciate your help as we have a collection of pretty much everything and we are anxious to add the Russian” . . . DuBose Heyward writes on Negro life in the South. As you see, he asks no payment for the Russian translation of his book and wants only a few copies of it. It would be very good if you could have them sent to him.”<sup>58</sup>

Michael Gold’s attack in the *New Masses* on your *Volga* book has been sent to you. While your book may be open to criticism from the Marxist standpoint, I do not share Mike’s particular viewpoint. However, since I am branded as your personal friend and “angel khranitel” [guardian angel], I am in no position to publish a reply. If you will get some Soviet critic in good standing (if possible Karl Radek) to write a reply, I will see that it gets published.<sup>59</sup> It seems to me that the unnecessary confusion created needs some clarification.

Julia Blanchard, correspondent for the NEA, has returned with good tidings of you. I was glad to hear that you are looking well and working hard. Is it true, as they say, that you have been serving in the Red army and have applied for membership in the Comparty [Communist Party]?<sup>60</sup> I myself am now in the swing of things, working hard on various fronts. Our monastery maintains its

chaste traditions. I have begun writing and publishing again, signed and unsigned articles and have even, on occasion, relapsed into verse, the price of virtue. More seriously, I am doing some work in economics<sup>61</sup> and a good deal of work along practical lines. I am still planning to ride in the Fordunok along the Tverskaya with you, as always, the captain at the helm, but this time no longer relying on me as navigator in a sea of unintelligible English. But that probably will not be until next spring, and between now and then, I hope we shall exchange many letters.

Our friend Alex was deeply grieved by the death of Morrow, who as you know, favored recognition of the USSR, although in general, he was a clever and loyal imperialist.<sup>62</sup> Alex sought and found consolation in his Connecticut farm about forty miles from New York, where last week, I helped him chop wood, assassinate chickens, board up windows, set fire to old shacks, in short all kinds of agricultural work except that of collectivization.

No word has come from Hollywood as to the fate of the scenario but I am writing to find out and will let you know what I learn. On the Mexican front, the situation has completely reversed itself. All errors have been admitted and urgent requests sent for the resumption of diplomatic relations, but this time it is we, who are reluctant to resume the status quo ante bellum. This of course is strictly confidential.<sup>63</sup>

Write me soon about yourself and your work: send me news about recent developments in the USSR and Soviet literature. If there is any material you want on any aspect of American life, please do not hesitate to ask me for it. I look forward very much to hearing from you.

Affectionately,

[Joe]

## 10

### Freeman letter to Pilnyak

From: Joe Freeman  
301 East 38th St  
New York City

Oct. 21, 1931

Dear Boris: Your letter came yesterday – just after I had mailed you a long letter of my own. You ask about your publishers. Farrar & Rinehart bought out Cosmopolitan Book Corporation. Your new publishers – as I wrote you in my previous letter – are O.K., one of the best firms in the country, with high literary

standards, liberal views, and the ability to push books. Tell this to the other Soviet authors on their list – namely, Kataev, Ilya Ilf and Eugene Petroff [Petrov], in case they are interested.

Most of the news went into my previous letter. Alex called up the other day and asked news of you. He has recovered from the shock of Morrow's death and is busy again.

I am glad you are back to work and look forward to seeing your new writings. I am sure your service in the Red army did you good – though it is to the abstinence it entailed that I attribute your plaintive cries for the oppressed Negro. If I get an opportunity, I shall transmit your message, but I must warn you that there is now a strict prohibition on the export of meat, and would suggest you patronize Soviet products. Besides “cherepakhinka” is there, if only American products now please your connoisseur's palate . . .

Here in the USA the crisis is becoming so sharp that the liberal intelligentsia has swung to the left. All sorts of talented liberal writers, once proudly “above the battle,” are snooping around the Comparty and its liberal organizations. The “New Republic” crowd (perhaps the most talented of the liberal writers and journalists) talks of “taking Communism away from the Communists” and of “economic planning” – not very specifically, of course; and Professor Newton Arvin, fellow traveler teaching literature at Smith College, publishes a piece in the Fall Book Section of the “NATION” announcing that individualism is dead and that if the writer does not wish to perish he must go to the proletariat . . .<sup>64</sup> Theodore Dreiser and a lot of other writers are going off to Harlan, Kentucky, to see the coal strike for themselves. Here they will see the class struggle in the raw, not as printed words on page; there have been pitched battles between strikers and armed company guards, with a number of dead and wounded. The winter will see a sharp conflict in many places. Already the public buildings of the city are filled at nights with the sleeping shivering figures of homeless unemployed; and so stinking rotten is bourgeois art now that you can read dozens of literary journals, novels, stories and poems in the bourgeois publications, see every play on Broadway and every movie that comes rolling out of Hollywood without catching a single glimpse of the crisis, the unemployment, the hunger or the revolt of workers goaded by desperation.

Do write soon again. I am looking forward to the time when we can resume our long conversations.

Joe.

[November 3, 1931]

Dir, dir, dir Dzho [Dear, dear, dear Joe]!!!

I just received at one and the same time your two wonderful letters. A kind of tradition has been established with us that I write to you on the day of my departure from New York. What a pity that I'm going to have to wait until spring for you to come visit. To be sure, I don't know how I should react to your Spanish diplomacy – bring the darkness of meat, as you designate it, along with you! . . .

In a few days I'll send you the first packet of my American impressions, that is, of my writings about America. It's written, it seems, none too badly, but American beauty turns out to be something in the nature of our beauty Ruth. In any case, after you've taken a look at it, pass the Russian text over to Kitin for publication.<sup>65</sup> And proceed with the English text as was stipulated in the contract. [Sol] Flom wrote to tell me that my contracts with him have been transferred over to Rinehart. Let them publish it as your beauty looks to the Russian eye. What must be published in English, naturally, is not just this one excerpt, but the entire book, which I will send consecutively as the writing progresses. You write that Rinehart intends to publish those of my writings that were written prior to this one. I think in that case it would be best to proceed this way: not to have me be the one to choose what to publish, but rather someone who knows American tastes better than I do, Alex, for example, or the librarian (I've forgotten his name, he's the head of the Russian section at the New York Public Library).<sup>66</sup> You (you and Korovaia) have my two trashy little books that came out after the *Sobranie sochinenii* [Collected Works] published by GIZ [State Publishing House]: namely, *Tadzhikistan: Sed'maia sovetskaia* [Tadzhikistan: The Seventh Soviet], and *Kitaiskaia sud'ba cheloveka* [The Chinese Fate of a Man]. You can get a copy of my *Collected Works* from Kitin at Pepper's\* (the latter's address is listed below, I sent him my books before my trip to America, as per Lyons' advice, and they are sitting idle in his possession). You can likewise get a copy from [Charles] Scribner's [Sons], where that son of a bitch Dan [Levin]<sup>67</sup> – who is not unknown to you – dropped them off. Out of all these books, one or two of them could be made into a translation. Only don't use the stories *Zavoloch'e* [The Land Beyond the Portages] and *Ivan-Moskva* [Ivan-Moscow] for a translation, since I'm redoing them, making them into a novel. I will send them to you, already in the form of a novel, at the earliest possible date after finishing the American book, roughly in January. Have Rinehart send me a contract so that I can receive a small advance. And send me their address, these Rineharts. The dollar, it turns out, is not bad coin, and I'm again starting to get interested in it because I'm dreaming of getting myself a new car by spring, after succumbing roundly to a passion for automobiles. And please find out how many copies of *Volga* have been sold, that is, what sum of money for *Volga* can I count upon after January. This is turning out to be not expressly a letter but only a series of continuous business matters! A certain sketch of mine has been published in *The Nation*.



I've seen it.<sup>68</sup> And Louis [Fischer] and Ella [Winter] said that they should have paid us for it there. Please ring them up and tell them to split the fee in half, paying you one half and me the other. And have them pay me my half in a food package sent through Am-Derutra,<sup>69</sup> have it be a food package that contains all sorts of the most American food products – condensed, standardized, and so on – and have them send it addressed to Olga Sergeevna Shcherbinovskaia at 2nd Street of Yamskoe Pole, Bldg. 1a, Apt. 21, Moscow 40.<sup>70</sup>

From everything I've written above, I ask you to conclude that I'm now working a lot, which is a fact, and that I'm feeling well, that I'm cheerful and happy.

Love and kisses!  
Give my regards to our friends!

Your Boris.

\*Benjamin Pepper  
152 West 42nd Street  
N.Y. City

Why won't Alex drop me even a single line?!

Kiss [Michael] Gold for me and tell him that I'm no less a revolutionary than he is, and therefore I'm not angry at him and I'll not take exception to what he says about me, so that our common cause won't be undermined.

## 12

### Freeman letter to Pilnyak

Joseph Freeman  
35 East 30th Street  
New York City

Feb. 17, 1932

Dear Boris: Your letters have arrived, and I hardly know how to apologize for my long silence. These have been extremely busy days for me. I have been doing a lot of writing, and some speaking, and in general have been spending so much time on work that I have not had a moment to myself. A pile of unanswered letters lies on my desk, and whenever I think of answering them, there are calls for conferences, committee-meetings, articles, speeches. However, I hope soon to find time for a long letter to you; things here are becoming extremely interesting. Meantime, I hasten to send this brief note regarding your novel. I am enclosing a statement and a letter from your publisher which are self-explanatory. This week

I shall have a talk with your publisher and send you a report of the conversation. It seems they do not owe you any money yet; on the contrary, the advance you received is ahead of profits on sales; but they seem anxious to retain you on their list and do their best by you . . . There is now a swing to the left among the American intellectuals due, of course, to the acuteness of the economic crisis. I think that if you wrote an article on Soviet literary tendencies and theories it could be sold here and would be read with great interest. In general, there is a great anxiety on the part of the American younger intellectuals to become acquainted with Soviet literature and literary theory. Unfortunately, no theoretical works have been translated in this field, and the critics and writers are developing their own "Marxist" theories which are full of misconceptions and errors. What an opportunity for serious educational work. But more of that later.

[Joe]

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Joseph Freeman, *An American Testament*, p. 579.

<sup>2</sup> Ray Long, *An Editor Looks at Russia: One Unprejudiced View of the Land of the Soviets* (New York: R. Long & R. R. Smith, Inc., 1931; London: Constable & Co., Ltd., 1932).

<sup>3</sup> Eugene Lyons, *Assignment in Utopia* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1937), pp. 404-405. Ray Long also signed a contract with Gorky to publish the biography of Stalin that he had promised to write. See: L. I. Spiridonov, "Novoe o Gor'kom" ["New Information on Gorky"], *Istoriia sovetskoi literatury: novyi vzgliad. Po materialam Vsesoiuznoi nauchno-tvorcheskoi konferentsii. 11-12 maia 1989 goda, Moskva. Chast' 2* [*The History of Soviet Literature: A New Look. From Materials Presented at the All-Union Academic and Creative Work Conference. May 11-12, 1989, Moscow. Part 2*] (Moscow: Nauka, 1990), p. 87.

<sup>4</sup> Ray Long, *An Editor Looks at Russia* (London: Constable & Co., Ltd., 1932), pp. 71-72.

<sup>5</sup> Cf.: "The *Cosmopolitan* of Ray Long," *Fortune* (March 1931): 50-51.

<sup>6</sup> In the press coverage of this event, the only thing that was mentioned was the scandal that broke out at the reception when Theodore Dreiser delivered a slap to the face of the Nobel Prize laureate, Sinclair Lewis. Pilnyak provides an account of this incident in his book *O'kei* [*Okay*].

<sup>7</sup> Boris Pilnyak, *The Volga Falls to the Caspian Sea*, translated from the Russian by Charles Malamuth (New York: Cosmopolitan Book Corporation, 1931). For an analysis of the work, see the article by Kenneth N. Brostrom, "The Enigma of Pil'njak's *The Volga Falls to the Caspian Sea*," *Slavic and East European Journal*, Vol. 18, No. 3 (Fall 1974): 271-298. See also: Reinhard Damerau, *Boris Pil'njaks Geschichts- und Menschenbild. Biographische und*

*thematische Untersuchungen (Marburger Abhandlungen zur Geschichte und Kultur Osteuropas)*, Band 11 (1976), S. 214 ff.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. the disavowal of these accusations in the foreword (dated August 1930) to the German edition of this novel written by Karl Radek, a close friend of Pilnyak: Karl Radek, "Boris Pilnjaks Stellung in der sowjetrussischen Literatur," in Boris Pilnyak, *Die Wolga faellt ins Kaspische Meer*, Deutsch von Erwin Honig mit einem Beitrag von Karl Radek (Berlin: Neuer Deutscher Verlag, 1930), SS. V-XXIII.

<sup>9</sup> Vera T. Reck, *Boris Pil'niak: A Soviet Writer in Conflict with the State* (Montreal and London: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1975), p. 167.

<sup>10</sup> See also the separate publication in book form: Boris Pilnyak, *Tadzhikistan. Sedmaia sovetskaia. Ocherki. Material k romanu* (Izdatel'stvo pisatelei v Leningrade, 1931) [*Tadzhikistan: The Seventh Soviet Republic. Sketches. Materials Toward a Novel* (Writers' Publishing House in Leningrad, 1931)].

<sup>11</sup> As Victor Serge asserts, Pilnyak's co-author in this work was Nikolai Ivanovich Yezhov, the future People's Commissar of Internal Affairs and the same person upon whose summons the writer departed for the prison at Lubianka Square on October 28, 1937 to meet his expeditious doom. See: Victor Serge, *Memoirs of a Revolutionary, 1901-1941* (London: Oxford University Press, 1963), p. 269; Vera T. Reck, *op. cit.*, pp. 175-176. See also: "Arest Pil'niaka," *Russkaia mysl'* (Parizh) ["Pilnyak's Arrest," *Russian Thought* (Paris)] (October 28, 1976): 6; Boris A. Andronikashvili-Pil'niak, "O moem ottse," *Druzhba narodov* ["About My Father," *The Friendship of Peoples*], No. 1 (1989): 154; Pilnyak's final plea at his trial on April 21, 1938 – "Arkhivnykh del mastera," *Komsomol'skaia Pravda* ["Masters of Archival Case Files," *Komsomol' Truth*] (October 17, 1990).

<sup>12</sup> Lazar Fleishman, *Boris Pasternak v tridtsatye gody* [*Boris Pasternak in the Thirties*] (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, 1984), p. 35.

<sup>13</sup> Vera T. Reck, *op. cit.*, p. 182; Walter Duranty, *Duranty Reports Russia* (New York: The Viking Press, 1934), p. 203; Louis Fischer, *Men and Politics: An Autobiography* (New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1941), p. 242. Stalin's comment about Pilnyak, made in a February 1929 letter to those Communist writers who belonged to RAPP, a letter that defended Bill'-Belotserkovsky against their criticism, is noteworthy: "Take, for example, a fellow traveler, such as the writer Pilnyak. It is well known that this fellow traveler knows how to contemplate and to depict only the backside of our revolution. Isn't it strange that for fellow travelers, such as these, you happen to have words about a 'regard for,' a 'cautious relationship' toward, while for B.-Belotserkovsky such words have not turned up?" Cited in Alexander Ninov, "Master i prokurator," *Znamia* ["The Master and the Procurator," *The Banner*], No. 1 (1990): 199.

<sup>14</sup> E. M. Blium, "Roman o chestnom, no beskrovnom stroitel'stve," *Literatura i iskusstvo* ["A Novel About Honorable Yet Bloodless Construction," *Literature and Art*], No. 1 (September 1930): 121.

<sup>15</sup> R. P. Katan'ian, "Predshestvenniki vreditel'stva. 1. Smena vex," *Krasnaia nov'* ["The Predecessors of Wrecking. 1. Change of Signposts," *Red Virgin Soil*], No. 1 (1931): 113-124.

<sup>16</sup> The sketch, "Che-Che-O," written jointly with Platonov, incriminated Pilnyak following his arrest and appeared in the minutes of his interrogation on December 11, 1937. See: "Arkhivnykh del mastera," *Komsomol'skaia Pravda* ["Masters of Archival Case Files," *Komsomol' Truth*] (October 17, 1990). Cf.: ". . . Ia derzhalsia i rabotal.' Stranitsa biografii Andreia Platonova (K 90-letiiu pisatel'ia)." Publikatsiia E. Litvin. *Pamir* [" . . . I Held My Ground and Worked.' A Page Out of the Biography of Andrei Platonov (Toward the 90th Anniversary of the Birth of the Writer)." Publication of E. Litvin. *Pamir*], No. 6 (1989): 115-116; Mikhail Geller, *Andrei Platonov v poiskakh schast'ia* [*Andrei Platonov in Search of Happiness*] (Paris: YMCA-Press, 1982), p. 141.

<sup>17</sup> See: *The New York Times* (March 13, 1931): 3.

<sup>18</sup> See: Boris Pil'niak, *O'kei: Amerikanskii roman* [*Okay: An American Novel*] (Moscow: Federatsiia, 1933), p. 50.

<sup>19</sup> Ilya Ilf, "Amerikanskii dnevnik (1935-1936)," *Literaturnoe Nasledstvo* ["An American Diary (1935-1936)," *Literary Heritage*], Volume 74: *Iz tvorcheskogo naslediiia sovetskikh pisatelei* [*From the Creative Heritage of Soviet Writers*] (Moscow: Nauka, 1965), p. 545.

<sup>20</sup> The Freeman Papers, Box 176. Freeman's name in the text of the contract is given erroneously as Freidman.

<sup>21</sup> Boris Pilnyak, *O'kei* [*Okay*], pp. 145-153.

<sup>22</sup> "2 Soviets, No Propaganda, Are Making in Hollywood," *Variety* (June 9, 1931).

<sup>23</sup> "Pilnyak Departs; Says Hollywood Never Knew Art," *The New York Herald Tribune* (August 4, 1931); "Pilnyak Predicts Fall of Capitalism," *The New York Times* (August 4, 1931).

<sup>24</sup> See the letters of Lester Markel, the editor of the Sunday edition of the newspaper, from July 21, 1931 and July 23, 1931 in the Freeman archive.

<sup>25</sup> Boris Pilnyak, "Farewell to America," *New Masses* (September 1931): 14-15.

<sup>26</sup> In addition to the numerous newspaper interviews that he gave, see also the sketch that Pilnyak wrote right before his departure from New York: Boris Pilnyak, "Scenes from the New Russia," *The Nation*, vol. 133 (October 7, 1931).

<sup>27</sup> As far as Pilnyak's Moscow archive is concerned, a significant part of it, as we know, was destroyed by the writer in expectation of his arrest in 1937. See: Vera T. Reck, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

<sup>28</sup> Joseph Freeman Collection, Hoover Institution Archives. The copyright for all of Freeman's letters to Pilnyak belong to Stanford University.

<sup>29</sup> During the time they were working on the film script in Hollywood, Pilnyak and Freeman stayed at the Hotel Miramar in Santa Monica, California.

<sup>30</sup> Jean Lvovich Arens, an official at the Narkomindel [People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs], was later the Soviet General Consul in New York.

<sup>31</sup> Apparently Max Eastman's wife, Elena Vasil'evna (1894-1956), an artist and the sister of the Soviet Commissar of Justice, N. V. Krylenko, who was working at this time at Amtorg. For information on her, see: "Elena Krylenko ne khochet ekhat' v SSSR," *Novoe Russkoe Slovo* (N'iu-Iork) ["Elena Krylenko Does Not Want to Go to the U.S.S.R.," *New Russian Word* (New York)] (February 11, 1933); Max Eastman, *Love and Revolution: My Journey Through an Epoch* (New York: Random House, 1964). She also wrote poetry; one of her poems was published in *Novyi Zhurnal* [*New Journal*], 5 (1943).

<sup>32</sup> Leonid Grebnev (Feinberg, 1897-1969), a member of a group of Russian proletarian poets in America. In 1923, he published in Berlin a book of poetry, *Na paperti dorog* [*On the Portico of Roads*], and in 1947 he published an anthology, *Evreiskaia poeziia* [*Jewish Poetry*] (New York: Publishing House of the Union of Russian Jews in New York), which consisted of his translations of American poets writing in Yiddish. He was the author of a number of collections of verse and of several novels in Yiddish. For information on him, see: Roman Gul', *Ia unes Rossiia. Apologiia emigratsii. Tom 1. Rossiia v Germanii* [*I Carried Russia Away. An Apologia of Emigration. Volume 1. Russia in Germany*] (New York: Most, 1981), p. 158.

<sup>33</sup> He is no doubt referring here to the entrepreneur, Alexander Gumberg [Aleksandr Semenovich Gumberg] (1887-1939), who exerted a lot of effort toward realizing a rapprochement of business and political circles in the U.S. with the Soviet Union. He is mentioned in *O'kei* [*Okay*] (p. 142). A pre-revolutionary emigrant from Russia, he was close to the higher-ups of the Republican Party in the U.S., he participated in the organization of the ARA [American Relief Administration], he headed the New York office of the All-Russian Textile Syndicate in 1923-1926, and then facilitated the shipment of American tractors to the U.S.S.R. In addition to commercial and industrial connections, he sought to contribute to the establishment of closer cultural relations between the two countries and, as early as 1928, he tried to arrange a trip to the U.S. by Pilnyak. See: James K. Libbey, *Alexander Gumberg & Soviet-American Relations, 1917-1933* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1977), p. 159. His two brothers remained in the Soviet Union. The older of the two, Sergei, an active participant in the October Revolution, was a journalist whose work was published under the Party alias of S. Zorin (1890-1937). During 1919-1921, he served as Secretary of the Petrograd Committee of the RCP(B) [Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks)], and beginning in 1922 he worked at the Comintern. He became a victim of repression following the charge of Trotskyism being leveled against him. His younger brother, Veniamin, the vice-president of a chemical syndicate, was subjected, as was Alexander, to sharp attacks in *Pravda*.

<sup>34</sup> Talmadge (Irving DeWitt Talmadge, 1905-1974) was an American man of letters and translator who resided in Moscow during 1931-1933, living in Pilnyak's house. He was a

contributor to the Moscow newspaper *Workers News*. See: Vera T. Reck, *Boris Pil'niak: A Soviet Writer in Conflict with the State*, pp. 102, 175.

<sup>35</sup> Rut Reifil (Ruth Raphael) was the assistant editor at the publishing house, Cosmopolitan Book Corporation.

<sup>36</sup> Mikhail Korovai was the head of the Economic Division of Amtorg. In 1933, he left for the U.S.S.R.

<sup>37</sup> Al Lewin, 1894-1968, was a film director and prose writer. He was the “supervisor” for the film that Pilnyak was working on at M.G.M. Studios. He is mentioned in *O'kei [Okay]* (see, in particular, pp. 153-154).

<sup>38</sup> Boris Inkster (or Ingster) was a Soviet film producer who moved to the U.S. and worked in Hollywood (see *O'kei [Okay]*, p. 145). He was assigned to edit the text of the screenplay that Pilnyak had submitted, and at the beginning of 1933 it was still being reported that Boris Inkster was “for the second year finishing up the writing of the ‘Pilnyak’ film script . . .” Henri Gris, “Russkie v Khollivude (Iz amerikanskikh vpechatlenii),” *Novoe Russkoe Slovo* [“Russians in Hollywood (From American Impressions),” *New Russian Word*] (January 13, 1933).

<sup>39</sup> Freeman is paraphrasing here the remarks that Pilnyak made at a press conference right before his departure from New York. See: Ruth Seifel, “Pilnyak Sails; Covets Niagara,” *New York Evening Post* (August 4, 1931); cf.: Boris Pilnyak, *O'kei [Okay]*, pp. 151-152.

<sup>40</sup> Ella Winter (1898-1980) was a journalist, a contributor to Communist publications, and, from 1924 to 1929, the wife of the famous journalist, Lincoln Steffens. During the fall of 1930, she took a trip to the U.S.S.R., in the course of which she became acquainted with a number of Soviet writers. Out of them, she mentions in her later memoirs only [Korney] Chukovsky and [Samuil] Marshak (see: Ella Winter, *And Not to Yield: An Autobiography* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1963), p. 161). But from her book, *Red Virtue: Human Relationships in the New Russia* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1933), which is devoted to an apologetic description of Soviet everyday life, we can conclude that she met with Pilnyak in Moscow and that she visited him at his home. She reports there: “Another Russian writer, Boris Pilnyak, lives in comparative comfort in a frame house of his own on the outskirts of Moscow. (Although all land belongs to the state, one may own one’s own house but only for ninety-nine years.) It has five or six rooms, well furnished, and the author has collected a large number of antiques and knickknacks. His wife is a young actress; her mother and two old aunts live with them. The wife and a little peasant worker run the household. This novelist is reputed to be one of the richest men in the Union; his income is estimated at 30,000 rubles a year. He goes abroad frequently and has traveled in and written about the Orient, the United States, and Europe. His books sell in great quantities. Pilnyak is a fellow traveler, no Communist, but he betrays at times a yearning to be ideologically more in the swim than he is” (p. 279). In a letter to Freeman dated August 27, 1931, Louis Fischer tells of how Pilnyak brought with him, to a party held at his home, his own personal “party” of guests, among whom one of them was Ella Winter. In letters written to Freeman, dated September 1, 1931 and November 3, 1931, Pilnyak himself mentions

having met with her in Moscow. In 1935, while they were in America, Ilf and Petrov visited her and Lincoln Steffens.

<sup>41</sup> Jose Carlos Mariategui (1895-1930) was a journalist and a Marxist political thinker, a follower of Lenin, and the founder of the Socialist Party of Peru (1928), which was transformed into the Communist Party immediately following his death. See: John M. Baines, *Revolution in Peru: Mariategui and the Myth* (The University of Alabama Press, 1972).

<sup>42</sup> In the U.S.S.R. during the 1920s and 1930s, Waldo Frank (1898-1967) was considered one of the most colorful representatives of Western revolutionary literature. After his tour across Latin America, he published in 1931 a book titled *America Hispana: A Portrait and a Prospect* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1931). He talks about his meetings with Mariategui both there and in a book, published posthumously, titled *Memoirs of Waldo Frank*, edited by Alan Trachtenberg, Introduction by Lewis Mumford (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1973), p. 172. See also: William W. Stein and Renato Alarcon, "José Carlos Mariátegui y Waldo Frank: dos amigos," *Anuario Mariateguiano*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (1989): 161-184. Frank's trip across the Soviet Union took place between August and November 1931, and he recounted his impressions there in the book, *Dawn in Russia: The Record of a Journey* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1932), which was met favorably by the Soviet press (see: Alexander Abramov, "Novaia kniga amerikanskogo pisatel'ia Uoldo Frenka" ["A New Book by the American Writer Waldo Frank"], *Literaturnaia gazeta [The Literary Gazette]* (October 17, 1932). The fleeting mention that is made in this book of a writer, whose name is not given, who owns a Ford automobile that has attracted general attention to itself (p. 161), attests to the fact that Frank did indeed meet with Pilnyak in Moscow. In February 1932, Waldo Frank headed up a committee of writers in defense of miners in the states of Tennessee and Kentucky. Later he was elected chairman of the pro-Communist League of American Writers and was invited to the International Congress of Writers in Defense of Culture, which took place in Paris in June 1935. His rapprochement with the American Communist Party reached its culmination point in 1936, when he participated in the presidential election campaign of the Party's leader, Earl Browder. The Moscow show trials of 1936-1938 made him cool toward Stalinism and distanced him from the circles of *New Masses*, but they did not deliver him from the kindly feelings he harbored toward revolutionary movements.

<sup>43</sup> A turtle that Pilnyak had picked up in the Arizona desert was given by him as a gift to one of Freeman's New York acquaintances, the famous photo-journalist Margaret Bourke-White (1904-1971). Along with a textile magnate and his son (the latter set off for Moscow to study with Meyerhold), Margaret is mentioned in *O'kei [Okay]*, pp. 298-299, and also in Pilnyak's story, "Rozhdenie prekrasnogo," *Novyi mir* ["Birth of the Beautiful," *New World*], No. 10 (1934): 37.

<sup>44</sup> Margaret Bourke-White, *Eyes on Russia*, with a preface by Maurice Hindus (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1931). The author's introductory note to this book containing her photo-reports, which were prepared during her first trip to the Soviet Union in the summer of 1930, is dated August 1931.

<sup>45</sup> Sol Flom was an editor at the *Cosmopolitan* publishing house.

<sup>46</sup> Eugene Lyons.

<sup>47</sup> Vladimirov was, apparently, an employee at Amtorg in New York.

<sup>48</sup> This project was never realized.

<sup>49</sup> *O'kei* [Okay] was published not in the newspaper *Izvestiia* [News], but in the journal *Novyi mir* [New World]; it appeared in the monthly issues for March through June in 1932.

<sup>50</sup> He is talking here about the novel *Dvoyniki* [Twins], which was written in 1933. It is a montage of several pieces that Pilnyak had written earlier: “Chertopolokh” [“The Thistle”], “Zavoloch’e” [“The Land Beyond the Portages”], “Ivan Moskva” [“Ivan Moscow”], and “Tadzhikistan, sed’maia sovetskaia” [“Tadzhikistan, the Seventh Soviet Republic”]. This novel came out in print only in a Polish translation in Warsaw in 1935. In 1983, Mikhail Iakovlevich Geller reconstructed the original Russian version and published it for the first time. See: Boris Pilnyak, *Dvoyniki* [Twins]. *Vstupitel’naia stat’ia i podgotovka teksta Mikhaila Gellera* [Introductory essay and text preparation by Mikhail Geller] (London: Overseas Publications Interchange Ltd., 1983). A new redaction of the novel that the author completed in 1935, which was given the title, *Odinnadtsat’ glav klassicheskogo povestvovaniia* [Eleven Chapters of a Classical Narrative], was suppressed by the censor and appeared in print only in 1988, in the journal *Pamir* (Nos. 10-12).

<sup>51</sup> Yakov Podolsky was the Deputy Director of the Print Office of the People’s Commissariat of Foreign Affairs; later (before his arrest in the fall of 1937) he was a special envoy in Kaunas [Lithuania].

<sup>52</sup> Julia Blanchard (1892-1934) was an American news correspondent in Moscow. For information on her, see below Freeman’s letter dated October 20th and also the books: Ishbel Ross, *Ladies of the Press* (New York: Arno Press, 1976), p. 435, and Louis Fischer, *Men and Politics*, p. 212.

<sup>53</sup> In order to inform the publisher about Pilnyak’s literary plans, Freeman forwarded excerpts from this letter, which he had translated into English, to Ruth Raphael on September 15th.

<sup>54</sup> The journalist Ellen Viner [Ellen Wiener], in whose Greenwich Village salon Pilnyak would meet with representatives of the Negro intelligentsia, including Regina Anzhul [Regina Andrews Anderson], is mentioned in *O'kei* [Okay], pp. 189-190.

<sup>55</sup> During the spring and fall of 1929, Freeman, in his capacity as a representative of [the Russian News Agency] TASS, was living in Mexico. He became acquainted there with a female artist who became his first wife. By the time Pilnyak arrived in America, a year and a half later, Freeman had already divorced her. In her autobiography, published in 1944, she touches upon this marital history. See: Ione Robinson, *A Wall to Paint On* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1944). See also: Gary Robert McConnell, *Joseph Freeman: A Personal Odyssey from Romance to Revolution*, p. 7.



<sup>56</sup> Ray Long left the publishing house in October 1931.

<sup>57</sup> Freeman is speaking here about Michael Gold's article, "Notes on Two Soviet Books," which is devoted to the release of English translations of Pilnyak's *Volga vpadaet v Kaspiiskoe more* [*The Volga Flows to the Caspian Sea*] and [Aleksandr Ignat'evich] Tarasov-Rodionov's *Fevral'* [*February*]. The article was published in the October issue of the journal *New Masses*. Here, in part, is what was said there:

Pilnyak does *not* represent Soviet Russia. There happens to be, in Russian opinion, at least a dozen writers greater than Pilnyak. He is *not* the leader of the young guard of literature, but is severely criticized by them, has been their chief target for several years, because so much of the old Russia lives in him.

But one doesn't need to know of the recent storms of criticism and controversy that have broken around Pilnyak in his homeland. A trained critic knowing something about the problems of American proletarian writing and the American labor movement would have been able to detect Pilnyak's serious failures in this novel.

Declaring *Volga* a slander upon the revolution, Gold concludes his article by saying: "The Marxist critic must condemn it, while understanding that Pilnyak's intentions have been worthy [. . .] He is an intellectual of the old world, trying to adapt himself to the new." (Cf. also Gold's review in the journal, *Literatura mirovoi revoliutsii* [*Literature of World Revolution*], No. 11-12 (1931): 183-184.).

Such an assessment came as a hard blow not only to Pilnyak, who was expecting that a Western critic supportive of proletarian literature would shield him from attacks by RAPP, but also to Freeman's reputation as a critic and a Marxist. In 1930-1931, Gold's name was especially popular in Soviet Russia, since two of his books (including the novel, *Jews Without Money* [*Evreiskaia bednota*]) appeared at once during that time and *Literaturnaia gazeta* featured an article about him by V. F. Calverton that was translated from the original English manuscript. Louis Fischer, summarizing the statements made by the Soviet press about the novel, *Jews Without Money*, wrote to Freeman in a letter dated August 27, 1931: "They say it is revolutionary but not Marxian. He did not notice the class struggle, they complain."

<sup>58</sup> The most famous of the novels written by [Dubose] Heyward (1885-1940), *Podzhi* [*Porgy*] (1924), later served as the basis for Gershwin's opera, which came out in a Russian translation published by the Leningrad publishing house Vremya [Time].

<sup>59</sup> Karl Radek's article, which was published in a German edition of *Volga* (Michael Gold mentioned it in his review), did not appear in America.

<sup>60</sup> Pilnyak did not react to this question at all. Although information on his intention to join the Communist Party never appeared in print, it is safe to assume that this rumor was not devoid of some basis in fact and that Pilnyak really did decide to submit an application, reckoning, apparently, on the support of [Ivan] Gronsky (and perhaps of some other authorities who were

even more highly placed). Acceptance into the ranks of the Party membership would have been equivalent to Pilnyak's full rehabilitation, both as a writer and as a Soviet citizen. While weighing this step, Pilnyak probably did not realize that, given his situation at the time, his chances of success were next to none. Only the November 1st article in *Pravda*, evidently, opened his eyes. Whatever the case may be, the haste with which he tried to notify his foreign friends about his plans was perhaps regarded as his response to Michael Gold's riposte, which had wounded him.

<sup>61</sup> Joseph Freeman, *The Soviet Worker: An Account of the Economic, Social and Cultural Status of Labor in the U.S.S.R.* (New York: Liveright, 1932).

<sup>62</sup> Dwight Whitney Morrow (1873-1931) was a lawyer, a banker, a statesman who belonged to the Republican Party, and the U.S. ambassador to Mexico during 1927-1930.

<sup>63</sup> Freeman is speaking here about the conflict between Upton Sinclair and Sergei Eisenstein, who at this time was shooting the film *¡Que Viva Mexico!* in Mexico.

<sup>64</sup> Newton Arvin (1901-1963), the author of a book about Herman Melville, was a professor at Smith College from 1922 to 1961. Freeman is speaking here about his article, "Individualism and American Writers," *The Nation*, Vol. 133, No. 3458 (October 14, 1931): 391-393.

<sup>65</sup> P. Kitin was a member of the editorial board at *Russkii Golos* [*Russian Voice*]. See the references to him in David Burlinuk's poem, "Druzheskaia oda na 15-letnii iubilei *Russkogo Golosa*" ["A Friendly Ode on the Occasion of the 15-Year Jubilee of *Russian Voice*"], published in the newspaper *Russkii Golos* (New York) (January 31, 1932).

<sup>66</sup> Avram Yarmolinsky (1890-1975) was a translator who headed the Slavic Division of the New York Public Library from 1918 to 1955. Cf. Evgeny Zamyatin's letters to him in *Stanford Slavic Studies*, Vol. 1 (1987).

<sup>67</sup> Dan Levin (Isaac Don Levine, 1892-1981) was a famous American journalist and political scientist.

<sup>68</sup> Boris Pilnyak, "Scenes from the New Russia," *The Nation*, Volume 133 (October 7, 1931): 355-357. Pilnyak was commissioned to write this sketch on the initiative of Alexander Gumberg.

<sup>69</sup> This was a Soviet trading company in the U.S.

<sup>70</sup> Olga Sergeevna Shcherbinovskaia, an actress at the Moscow Academic Malyi Theater, was Pilnyak's second wife. Despite the fact that the marriage had disintegrated from the beginning of the 1930s and that both he and she each had another family, Shcherbinovskaia was arrested in 1937, due apparently to the charge of "espionage" that had been brought against him (Vera T. Reck, *Boris Pil'niak: A Soviet Writer in Conflict with the State*, pp. 2-3). Her second husband, Vladimir Eduardovich Meier, a famous actor at the Malyi Theater, committed suicide after failing to receive permission to follow her into exile (see: A. Volgin, "Pokushenie Amoglabei")

[“The Assassination of Amoglabeli”], *Narodnaia Pravda* [*People’s Truth*] (Paris), No. 7-8 (May 1950): 16. Serge Orlovsky, “Moscow Theaters, 1917-1941,” in: *Soviet Theaters 1917-1941. A Collection of Articles*, ed. Martha Bradshaw (New York, 1954), p. 96).

## In Polemic with Max Eastman

Following this letter, the epistolary relations between Pilnyak and Freeman became less intensive. It does not seem likely that Pilnyak would have given serious consideration to the suggestion, contained in this letter, that he write an article about theories of literature in Soviet Russia. As a writer, he did not feel at all confident about his abilities in the area of literary criticism, and in light of the odiousness of his current situation (which the article in *Pravda* on November 1, 1931 underscored) and given the oppressiveness of RAPP's [Russian Association of Proletarian Writers] supremacy during the past several months, Pilnyak publishing an address of this kind in the foreign press would have been tantamount to committing suicide. On the other hand, Freeman's suggestion, in and of itself, bears witness to how vaguely he was picturing the Soviet literary reality of those days, and especially the actual place that Pilnyak occupied within that reality. A similarly skewed picture of Soviet literary relations was characteristic of many other "revolutionary writers" in the West. It is precisely this skewed picture that explains, for example, the celebration that these writers arranged in honor of [Evgeny] Zamyatin in Paris during the spring of 1932.

As one might well have expected, the Soviet press reacted skeptically to Pilnyak's reports about his American journey. The writer's very first public speaking appearances brought in their wake a sharply negative reaction from his audience. In the words of one reporter:

Frequently invoking the expression "the American philistine," Boris Pilnyak spoke about his impressions in such a way that it seemed as if the visit to America had been undertaken by a . . . Russian philistine. [. . .] One cannot help but agree, therefore, with the American who spoke following Pilnyak, Comrade *Clark*, the assistant editor of the newspaper, *Workers News*, who voiced his total disenchantment with the report given by Pilnyak because he "did not take into account the most important social phenomena of contemporary America, the arrangement of, and the interrelationship between, its class forces," which, it goes without saying, are reflected in American literature.

His remarks came to a close on an ominously admonitory note:

We will see, in his book about America, how he presents "American providence" to us.<sup>1</sup>

In an attempt to avert such attacks and to safeguard Pilnyak's new work from them, Ivan Mikhailovich Gronsky, who was at the zenith of his power and influence in 1932-1933, immediately declared it to be a great success, one that demonstrates the author's complete regeneration. He placed *O'kei* [Okay] on a par with such significant, to his mind, achievements of socialist realism as [Mikhail] Sholokhov's *Podniataia tselina* [Virgin Soil Upturned] and [Aleksei] Novikov-Priboi's *Tsusima* [Tsushima]. At the Plenum of the Organizing Committee of the Union of Soviet Writers, he declared:

Plinyak is a veteran writer who got entangled with Trotskyites and, under the influence of these Trotskyites, he wrote a disgusting thing, *Krasnoe derevo* [*Mahogany*]. We castigated him. Some writers turned their backs on him, but we Bolsheviks decided to give him a chance, perhaps something would come of this, and so we sent him to Central Asia. We received back from him *Tadzhikskie ocherki* [*Tadzhik Sketches*]. After that, he went abroad, primarily to America, and as a result of his trip there he wrote a work in which he has truthfully described the situation in capitalist countries, and, primarily, in America. The result is a book that is really quite good, indeed very good.”<sup>2</sup>

No one, however, backed up Gronskey’s enthusiastic assessment of the book. David Zaslavsky subjected Pilnyak’s “American novel” to a completely unflattering critique: “One did not have to go to the U.S. in order to write *Okay*. No matter how meager our literature about the U.S. is, it is incomparably richer than what Pilnyak saw and what he found interesting there.”<sup>3</sup> A more liberal Leningrad journal seconded Zaslavsky’s critique: “*Okay* exhibits a certain desire on the author’s part to reconstruct himself, to take a step in the right direction, a step forward that Pilnyak needs to take and that the Soviet public justly expects him to take. The step that he took, however, turned out to be not a step forward, not a step in the right direction, but instead some kind of sideways step, a step that is false and unsteady [ . . . ] There is a lightness, facility, superficiality, and anecdotal quality to his approach – and this is what the merits of *Okay* drown in. The book, as a result, turns out to be insufficiently meaningful and, simply put, insufficiently interesting.”<sup>4</sup>

But even on the “other shore,” the book did not evoke any transports of rapture. The New York publishing house Farrar & Rinehart was prepared initially to consider the manuscript of *Okay* in the form of a translation undertaken by Irving DeWitt Talmadge. The quality of that translation, however – and, possibly, the author’s own personal impressions of it – were such, that these plans were quickly discarded. And, in turn, Joseph Freeman, who was better informed about Pilnyak’s American journey than any other of the book’s readers would be, had a sharply negative attitude toward the “novel.” At a later stage, after the Moscow journal *International Literature* had featured fragments of *Okay*,<sup>5</sup> Freeman, in a letter of June 12, 1933 to Sergei Dinamov, strongly denounced the publication of this fragment:

I have not had a chance to read more than the first piece in *International Literature* – Pilnyak’s *O.K.* I think its publication is a mistake since it reveals a lamentable lack of knowledge about America. A number of months ago, when Pilnyak sent me the piece in manuscript, I wrote him frankly what I thought of it and advised him against publishing it in book form in the U.S.S.R. If you ever see him and if he has kept my letters, ask him for them. (Freeman, Box 176)

It is unclear what exactly it was that prompted this negative assessment<sup>6</sup> – was it the fact that the “revelatory” passages in the book about American reality seemed insufficiently fervent, or was it the fact that Pilnyak described with unpardonable distortion and lightness episodes that Freeman himself had been a witness to? Apparently, the collapse of plans for an American edition of *Okay* intensified the cooling of relations between Pilnyak and Freeman.<sup>7</sup>

The April 23, 1932 Resolution of the Central Committee of the AUCP [All-Union Communist Party] about the disbanding of RAPP inaugurated drastic changes in Soviet literary life. In an instant, an organization that had seemed to Freeman, as it had seemed to many of his colleagues, to be the supreme arbiter in the domain of Marxist aesthetics and literary politics, was suddenly stripped of its former power and influence. The reins of control over literature were being transferred over to different hands. The scale of official literary values was abruptly altered. In an instant, the concept of “proletarian literature” had become an anachronism. Gorky’s entourage was seeking support in the international sphere, not so much among Party loyalists and functionaries of the Freeman type, as much as among prominent master writers, even if these writers had not distinguished themselves by any crystal-clear ideological purity. The disbanding of RAPP turned out to be a crushing blow as well for the International Organization of Revolutionary Writers,<sup>8</sup> leading it to a protracted crisis and, in the end, to its disintegration. In addition to the purely organizational frameworks, however, the representatives of “Marxist” criticism in the circles of “proletarian” literature in the West were turning out to be disoriented by the sudden shift in Soviet literary politics. It was difficult for them, for instance, to understand why the slogan of “dialectical materialism,” which just recently, at the Kharkov Plenum in November 1930, had been importunately introduced by the Party bosses, was now being declared outdated and fallacious. It was even more difficult to grasp what the new term, “Socialist Realism,” which was being advanced by the top Soviet authorities, came laden with. Events in Moscow, the new trends at the highest levels of authority, the changing of literary-political guidelines and criteria – all of this, with long delays in transmission and in extraordinarily vague form, was sinking in with “revolutionary writers” in the West. Out of habit, they were waiting for elucidations and instructions from the functionaries of RAPP, but during the first months following the April “upheaval,” these functionaries were themselves fully perplexed.

It is easy to imagine the amazement Freeman must have experienced when he learned of the attacks, inconceivable earlier, that were now being launched against Sergei Dinamov, his closest confidant in Moscow, who had quickly risen to the top as a literary bureaucrat. During the fall of 1932, at the First Plenum of the newly created Organizing Committee of the Union of Soviet Writers, Bruno Jasiński, declared:

. . . the current editor of *Literaturnaia gazeta* [*Literary Gazette*], well-known to all of us, Comrade Dinamov, like the mythical Circe, who with just one touch of her hand turned the most beautiful youths into swine, possesses the rare ability to turn the most beautiful idea, no matter how slightly he touches it, into a vulgar caricature of itself. [. . .] I wish only to remind you that Comrade Dinamov himself used to represent the “left wing” of RAPP. (Applause) Only a short time before the liquidation of RAPP, Comrade Dinamov was heatedly addressing conferences on literary criticism with his left-wing deviations. Following the TsK’s [Central Committee’s] historic decision, Comrade Dinamov did not take the trouble anywhere to disassociate himself from his own RAPPish mistakes, did not mention a word about them, although he had an entire newspaper at his disposal for doing so. [. . .] Up until now, Comrade Dinamov has not acknowledged his RAPPish mistakes, has not overcome them. He has only turned his coat inside out, giving a new face to his old mistakes. Comrade Dinamov’s

activity at *Literaturnaia gazeta* bears obvious enough witness to this. [. . .] *Literaturnaia gazeta* and its editor are compromising the correct line of the Organizing Committee.<sup>9</sup>

Against the background of this turmoil (in light of the practice that had remained in force of inculcating Kremlin decisions into Western proletarian literatures), the exchange of letters between Dinamov, in his capacity as one of the leaders of the International Union of Revolutionary Writers, on the one hand, and Joseph Freeman, on the other, is interesting in terms of what each of them has to say about the dissolution of RAPP. In the spring of 1933, former members of RAPP had already managed to recover from the initial shock, and so on May 27th Dinamov wrote to his friend, who was at that time serving as the editor of *New Masses*:

Dear Joe,

I wonder whether the decision of the Central Committee of our Party on the dissolution of RAPP and other similar organizations has ever received sufficient attention in America. The bourgeois press has of course discussed it (I remember the *Nation's* articles, Louis Fischer's comments in the *New York Herald Tribune*, etc.). But it seems that this decision and the subsequent development of our Soviet literature have never been thoroughly discussed by our revolutionary cultural organizations in America (I mean the JRC,<sup>10</sup> the *New Masses*, etc.). If this is the case, we should take some steps in order to make the April decision and its general meaning better known in America.

We are writing today to the JRC of the U.S. asking them for their opinion of this matter. But I should like to have your personal opinion as well.

Hoping to hear from you soon.

Yours as ever,

Sergei Dinamov [. . .]  
(Freeman, Box 176).

Freeman felt compelled (in a letter written on June 20th) to try to justify himself, offering excuses to Dinamov:

You are quite right about the importance of the decision in regard to RAPP. We all know that important changes have taken place in Soviet literature, but unfortunately we are not very definite as to what they are. We have, of course, seen the official resolution disbanding RAPP and from the wide scope of the recent number of *International Literature*, we gather that many new and important things have happened. However, it is difficult for us to discuss the matter unless we have more material. I would greatly appreciate it, therefore, if you would send us a comprehensive report, either by yourself or someone else,

explaining the meaning of the RAPP decision and its consequences. It would help to clarify many problems. (Freeman, Box 176)

Nevertheless, the signals originating from Moscow seemed, as before, to be contradictory. The symptoms of disregard for foreign proletarian literature that had appeared in the Soviet press aroused particular anxiety in orthodox revolutionaries of the Freeman type. On December 14, 1933, in a letter sent on behalf of the editorial board of the journal *New Masses* to Aleksei Aleksandrovich Bolotnikov, who had replaced Dinamov in the post of editor-in-chief of *Literaturnaia gazeta*, Freeman voiced an objection in regard to the elucidation (in the November 29th issue of the newspaper) of current American literature:

These articles confined themselves to a few liberal writers. Passing mention was made of three or four revolutionary writers indiscriminately chosen. [...] The liberal writers mentioned in the GAZETA are part of the decade of the twenties. They now occupy a purely historical role in American literature. Their influence on literature was great in the past; today they exercise no influence upon young writers at all, regardless of social class or grouping. [...] Your survey of American literature would have been more accurate had it paid some attention to the NEW MASSES and the John Reed Clubs, which are the centers around which the new and effective movement of revolutionary arts and letters is developing. (Freeman, Box 141)

The stronger the commotion was during those month in everything that concerned internal matters of Soviet literature, the more categorical became the orders from Moscow, which made it incumbent upon Communist organizations in the West to cleanse themselves of any ideological deviations. The critic and Marxist philosopher, Victor F. Calverton (pseudonym of George Goetz, 1900-1940), and his journal, *Modern Quarterly* (from 1933 to 1938, *Modern Monthly*), became one of the main targets of a “purge” within the American labor movement. At one point in time, in 1927, Calverton had visited the U.S.S.R., was warmly received there, and was invited to take part in some influential Soviet literary publications. Dinamov had even intended to write a book on American literary criticism together with him. Calverton regularly published his work in the newspaper *Daily Worker* and was a sought-after contributor to *New Masses*. However, his aspiration to rise above the skirmish between warring factions of the labor movement and his conciliatory attitude toward Trotsky and Trotskyites led him to break with the leadership of the American Communist Party in 1930.<sup>11</sup> This was followed by his expulsion from the journal *New Masses* in 1931 and – two years later – by a fierce public polemic with this journal. It is important to underscore here that the signal that a campaign would be unleashed against him came from outside. In its first issue for 1932, the Moscow journal *International Literature* published a lengthy article by Anna Arkad’evna Elistratova about *New Masses*, in which the editorial board of the American Communist monthly was accused of lacking integrity – specifically, the absence of any critical statements about the “social Fascist” Calverton and the “Trotskyite” Max Eastman.<sup>12</sup> In essence, Elistratova’s article was nothing other than the enunciation of a directive from the office of the International Organization of Revolutionary Writers. In response to instructions sent out from Moscow, *New Masses* published in its January 1933 issue an unprecedentedly fierce attack upon Calverton.<sup>13</sup> In connection with this attack,



Charles Yale Garrison, one of the five members of the journal's editorial board, left the board, accusing the journal of servilism toward the Stalinist clique.

The polemic between *New Masses* and Calverton's journal became the main event in the life of the American Communist press in 1933-1934. Reverberations from this campaign reached other Communist cohorts in the West. Basically, it touched upon the interpretation of questions of Marxist philosophy and the ideological politics of the Party. In the face of fascist threats in Germany, Calverton, who was concerned about the drift toward the bureaucratization of the Communist movement, considered it necessary to make a statement about his disquiet regarding the extermination of any dissidence within the Party milieu. In the polemic that had broken out, Calverton found an exceptionally strong ally in Max Eastman, who introduced a new aspect into the polemic, one that focused attention on Stalinist politics in the areas of culture and literature. A poet, a philosopher, and a literary critic, one of the patriarchs of the Socialist movement in the U.S. and one of the most informed foreign experts on domestic life inside the U.S.S.R., Max Eastman was widely known, particularly for the fact that he was perhaps the first person who reported to the world about the existence of a "last will and testament" left behind by Lenin and about its contents.<sup>14</sup> In 1933-1934, he joined the editorial board of Calverton's journal. Having overcome by this time his hesitations aroused by a reluctance to play into the hands of anti-Socialist forces, Eastman decided to launch an open battle with Stalinism within the labor movement. In the course of two years, his articles appeared in literally each issue of *The Modern Monthly*. Besides articles written on general ideological and philosophical themes, Eastman likewise published there a series of vivid polemical articles that were based upon a concrete analysis of Soviet reality and were directed against a line of spiritual enslavement within Soviet culture and against a utilitarian interpretation of art and the subordination of art to the dictates of Party functionaries. It is noteworthy that it is precisely the "counter-revolution in the domain of culture" (using his own words), which reigned in Soviet Russia after 1929, that emerged as the impetus for Eastman to launch a public polemic with former colleagues in the Communist movement.<sup>15</sup> In the anti-pluralistic attitude that had become just as distinct in the sphere of art as it was in the sphere of Party life, Eastman was addressing the very essence of the Stalinist regime. He ridiculed the idea, fundamental for Soviet propaganda, of a dichotomy between "bourgeois" and "proletarian" ideology, between "bourgeois" and "proletarian" art. He dedicated his article in the August 1933 issue of *The Modern Monthly* to the "militarization" of culture in Communist Russia, a trend that had reached its apogee following the establishment of RAPP's absolute supremacy in 1929 (with such slogans as "The Five-Year Plan in Poetry," "The Magnitostroi of Art," etc.). Taking as his point of departure the appearance of Béla Illés, the Secretary of the International Bureau of Proletarian Writers, dressed up in a military uniform, at the Plenum in Kharkov in 1930, Eastman titled his essay about the situation in Soviet culture "Artists in Uniform."<sup>16</sup> With deadly sarcasm, he spoke in his article both about the zeal with which the leaders of international proletarian literature had instantly changed their previous slogan of "dialectical materialism" to the new term, "Socialist Realism," and about how the journal *New Masses* was prepared to fulfill, without reservation, any directives emanating from the Moscow authorities. The article concluded with caustic ripostes directed against Michael Gold and Joseph Freeman, the two main henchmen of the Moscow bureaucracy in American literature. Eastman maintained that both of them had totally offered up their literary talent and creative interests as a sacrifice for the sake of subservience toward Party authorities.

Joshua Kunitz, one of the three authors of the miscellany *Voices of October*, immediately came forward in *New Masses* with a defense of the principles of Soviet cultural politics that had been ridiculed by Eastman.<sup>17</sup> It is paradoxical that in his diligence Kunitz came to the defense even of those people with whom, just a year or two earlier, he had been at daggers drawn – the functionaries of RAPP. He even disavowed what had been declared in the Soviet press following April 1932: namely, the “excesses” of RAPP’s leadership. As a result, it was difficult to find a more convincing demonstration that Eastman’s thesis about “uniforms” was correct than this servile aspiration on the part of an American Communist not to disparage in any way the reputation of Soviet leaders. In the process, Kunitz reached the point of absurdity, denying the existence of whatever changes there may have been owing to the Central Committee’s resolution of April 23, 1932. He stated, for instance, that the slogan of “Socialist Realism” is simply a different name for “dialectical materialism” – they both have in mind one and the same creative method. Needless to say, in the eyes of Soviet critics an assertion such as this one looked like pure heresy.<sup>18</sup>

Eastman responded right away to Kunitz’s article with a brief note,<sup>19</sup> from which it was obvious that he had decided to dedicate an entire book to the position of art in Soviet Russia. He provided a more developed response to Kunitz in his article “Stalin’s Literary Inquisition.” In it, Eastman fixed precisely on what had evoked such discomfiture for his opponent at *New Masses* – the role of RAPP in Soviet literature. In passing, he subjected *Voices of October*, the book by Freeman, Kunitz, and [Louis] Lozovik, to a scathing critique, claiming that it offers a completely false picture of Soviet culture. He likewise showed in what a methodical way the norms of cultural politics established by the prior Kremlin leaders – Lenin and Trotsky – had eroded as a result of everyday Soviet life under Stalin.<sup>20</sup> In confirmation of this claim, the journal published the translation of an article by Viacheslav Polonsky, the liberal leader of the fellow traveler literary movement, who had fallen into disgrace before his death.<sup>21</sup>

Upon his return to New York from a lecture tour undertaken together with Henri Barbusse, Joseph Freeman lunged into the polemic. During these weeks he had been granted a column, “What a World!,” which Michael Gold ran daily in the newspaper *Daily Worker* from the end of August. Freeman’s first task was to disavow the accusation that the book *Voices of October* was incompetent and mendacious. When speaking in his newspaper articles about Soviet literary matters, he chose a different tactic than had Kunitz. Instead of standing up for the infallibility of RAPP (a group that he, by the way, treated with much more reverence than Kunitz did), he began to demonstrate that the omnipotence of this organization had been greatly exaggerated and that the Party’s management of literature had never been entirely entrusted to it. At the same time, Freeman referred to his friendship with Pilnyak:

From March 12th to August 3rd, 1931, Boris Pilnyak lived at my house. I saw him literally twenty-four hours of the day. He was not able to speak English and did not even seek to learn how to speak it, such that it was impossible for him to fend for himself.

For all the differences in our characters, our mental outlooks, and even our views on politics, we became good friends. He talked to me a great deal and with

unusual candor. It is precisely due to these talks that my fluency in Russian became so much better and my knowledge of Soviet literature so much richer.

Every day, during the course of five months, I heard stories about Soviet life and literature from this acknowledged master of imagery and style. I learned many things about Soviet literary groups and personalities which you will not find in print.

Pilnyak was a fellow traveler. RAPP did not like him, and he did not like RAPP. He recounted a great deal to me about this mutual enmity, an account that does not in any way embellish RAPP's reputation, and he gave me a tableau vivant of those very same RAPP methods that subsequently turned out to be the reason for the disbanding of RAPP. On the other hand, he also spoke about the behavior of those writers who were fellow travelers, behavior that in due time resulted in the strengthening of RAPP's power.

The picture drawn by Pilnyak differs completely from the diatribe of the journal *The Modern Monthly* with regard to the role of the Party in literary matters. This alleged victim of "Stalin's literary inquisition," this writer who was a fellow traveler, showed me documents that had served to protect him from attacks by RAPP.

"Stalin's literary inquisition" was actually a bulwark against the excesses committed by RAPP *both with respect to writers who were Party members and with respect to non-Party writers*. The Party acted as a brake with respect to that literary group, which along with correct actions committed some incorrect ones as well. In the end, the Party abolished this group.

If one is to believe the noisy rattle of the journal *The Modern Monthly*, the Party thrust itself into the game no earlier than April 23, 1932, when it disbanded RAPP. But as early as a year before that, in April 1931, I heard with my own ears, from one of the most implacable enemies of RAPP, a documented account of how the Party was defending the fellow travelers from attacks by RAPP.<sup>22</sup>

In one of his subsequent articles, refuting assertions about how deplorable the situation was for fellow travelers, Freeman once again referred to the example of Pilnyak. In the year 1930 alone, according to his account, Pilnyak earned more money than anybody else in the U.S.S.R. – 28,000 rubles. Paying no attention at all to RAPP's persecution of the writer, the State Publishing House continued to publish his works in enormous print runs.<sup>23</sup>

Despite the fact that he chose a different tactic than did Kunitz, Freeman, nevertheless, found himself "entrapped" in his polemic with Eastman, just as his co-author of *Voices of October* had been earlier. These newspaper articles put his bellicose opponent wise to return to the circumstances of the 1929 campaign. It cannot be said that this campaign had at one time passed unnoticed in the West – already in the fall of 1929 reports about it could be glimpsed in American newspapers. Prior to Eastman, however, no one anywhere had been especially

occupied with analyzing it and no one anywhere had tried to understand its role in the overall cultural politics of the Kremlin leadership. Eastman was the first one to do this, and his article, “The Humiliation of Boris Pilnyak,”<sup>24</sup> should be viewed as an important milestone in the history of the study of Soviet literature in the West.

Eastman began his article with a sarcastic citation of the affidavits provided by Ella Winter about Pilnyak’s fabled wealth. If, in her eyes, this fact should have confirmed the case to be made about the flowering of literature under the conditions of socialism, then for Eastman, as he declares, Pilnyak’s example serves as testimony to the opposite – namely, it demonstrates the unprecedented control that the bureaucratic machine has over Soviet literature. He juxtaposed the independent social position that Pilnyak enjoyed during the 1920s, as it manifested itself, in particular, on the pages of his diary, published in the 1924 miscellany, *Pisateli ob iskusstve i o sebe* [*Writers About Art and About Themselves*], to the permanent repentance and the endless attempts to justify himself that were so characteristic of Pilnyak’s behavior during the 1930s. Eastman tied this abrupt change with the “veritable pogrom,” with the literary “lynching,” committed in 1929 by a “mob,” but instigated and staged by the leadership. As a counterbalance to Freeman’s starry-eyed account of Pilnyak’s situation, Eastman advances his own elucidation of events, basing it, as he emphasized, on the testimony of two of the writer’s good friends.<sup>25</sup> He showed how all the manifestations of touching “concern” on the part of the Party bureaucracy (in the person of Gronskey) led inexorably to an enslavement and “taming” of Pilnyak that was growing larger all the time. Recalling in this context the story of Pilnyak’s trip to the U.S., Eastman brought his article to a close with these words: “Probably no work of art in the world’s history was ever created in more direct violation of the artist’s conscience, or with a more unadulterated motive of self-preservation, than Pilnyak’s *The Volga Flows Into the Caspian Sea*.”

Freeman had the opportunity to become acquainted with Eastman’s article even before the journal issue came out in print, and right away he sounded the alarm. The article was satiated with details possessing such explosive force that Freeman realized that his own information and qualifications would be inadequate for refuting them. It became clear to him that Eastman’s forthcoming book would turn out to strike a blow not only at the miscellany *Voices of October* and at its compilers, but also at the reputation of the American Communist Party as a whole within the sphere of the intelligentsia. By this time, generally speaking, there did not exist any books on Soviet cultural politics in the West similar to Eastman’s work. According to one Soviet propagandist, “Eastman’s book served more or less as the discernible beginning of an American ‘cultural Sovietology,’ at the heart of which lay anti-Communism and hatred of everything Soviet.”<sup>26</sup>

This is why Freeman was forced to rush off to contact his Soviet friends and seek their assistance. He started with Dinamov. In a letter of December 11, 1933, Freeman suggested that Osip Brik be commissioned to write an article that would serve as a refutation of the claim that the Soviet regime was responsible for the death of Vladimir Mayakovsky. He also proposed that statements regarding events during 1927-1932 be obtained from [Lydia] Seifullina, [Isaac] Babel’, Mikhail Slonimsky, and other fellow travelers (Freeman, Box 176). Their disagreements with RAPP should not be concealed, he advised Dinamov. They simply needed to emphasize the fact that there was not the slightest hint that this “literary inquisition,” which enemies of the

Soviet system were talking about over and over again, ever even existed. Freeman never did receive any assistance from the people in these circles. His appeal to Pilnyak was more successful. Not yet knowing, however, whether or not Pilnyak would be responsive to his plea, Freeman hastened to write in parallel to Dinamov again. We are quoting this letter here in its entirety:

### Freeman letter to Dinamov

From: Joseph Freeman  
65 Irving Place  
New York City

January 31, 1934

Dear Sergei: I hope by this time you have received copies of the Daily Worker from November 22 to December 4 and have read in the *What a World* column (conducted by Mike Gold) my replies to Max Eastman's scurrilous attacks on Soviet literature.

In the February 1934 issue of The Modern Monthly, Eastman publishes another installment of his polemic, which will soon appear in book form. This piece is called "The Humiliation of Boris Pilnyak." I have sent a copy of it to Pilnyak and have asked him to write a reply for the New Masses. It seems to me that the logical person to explain Boris Pilnyak is Boris Pilnyak.

I hope that Pilnyak will realize the importance of his writing a reply *at once*, while the controversy is fresh. Please see him, read the Eastman article which I sent him, and translate it for him into Russian (he cannot read English), and see that he writes a reply for the New Masses soon. Unless this campaign of slander systematically conducted by the United forces of the Trotzkyite and Lovestoneite<sup>27</sup> and Muste<sup>28</sup> gang gathered around Calverton's sheet is answered by *facts* soon, it will poison many of the intellectuals sympathetic to the USSR.

The New Masses will be glad to publish statements by various fellow travelers who are supposed to be "persecuted" by the "Stalin bureaucracy" giving their honest reaction to the accusations of these irresponsible and unscrupulous mudslingers.

Please write me soon about this.

As ever,  
[Joe]  
(Box 163)

It remains unknown whether it was, in fact, Dinamov who was the one conversing with Pilnyak regarding the advisability of his reply and the form in which it should be clothed or whether the

question was being discussed at other levels, and their opinion had been communicated to him through such people as [Ivan] Gronsky and [Karl] Radek, who had been seeking to rescue him in 1930. But it is clear that Pilnyak could not have made the decision to respond to Eastman independently, at his own risk and peril – the situation that was taking shape was too ticklish and his own position during these months was too fragile. His own personal attitude toward Freeman’s suggestion that he enter into the polemic could not help but be ambivalent. On the one hand, he, of course, would have preferred generally not to get mixed up in the scandal that was unfolding within the American leftist press, but his refusal would have been regarded as a tacit acknowledgment of the correctness of the unbridled American Trotskyite. On the other hand, the picture drawn by Eastman not only compromised the leading figures of Soviet literary politics, but also affected Pilnyak himself personally, both as a writer and as a man. For this reason, there was no way that he could resist the pressure that was being applied on him by those who insisted that he respond. Nevertheless, the fact that instead of a formal publicistic statement, he clothed his rejoinders in the form of a private letter, having granted his addressee, however, the right to dispose of this document at his own discretion, already testifies to the fact that he had strong reservations.

### **Pilnyak letter to Freeman**

Moscow 40  
2nd Street of Yamskoe Pole, ½, 21.  
February 20, 1934

My dear friend, Joe! – greetings, brotherhood, handshakes!

I received your latest package of books and newspapers, thank you. And I found out, in particular, that I am, it turns out – a “bought” and “sold” writer! I’m speaking about Eastman’s “communiqués:” I have not fallen into hysterics from them.

Eastman writes: “The facts recounted from this point on were given me by two friends of Pilnyak . . . both of whom are in a position to know them, I think, better than Joseph Freeman.”

Let’s suppose that this is indeed the case, – nonetheless, we must suppose that I know these facts better than do the three of you. I don’t know what you’ve written about me of late, – but Eastman’s “friends,” of whom, in all likelihood, there are none at all, are shooting their mouths off, telling all sorts of lies about me, as if I were already a dead man who cannot defend himself, though I am still very much alive, very much safe and sound. I can attest to that fact.

My dear friend, allow me to remind you of certain truths. The first is this: the biggest “ass” is – a fact, – facts are more stubborn than the asses out of fables. The second truth is this: a man, even one with a very fine upbringing, sitting beneath a table, while all the rest of the company are sitting around the table, sees things differently than does a man sitting at the table, – much differently. This second

truth applies tangibly to Eastman. Some twenty-seventh truth has it that there is nothing to talk about with people beneath a table, they are people, and not dogs, they can't bite you on the leg with their teeth. A thirtieth truth tells us that references to "friends" are called, in colloquial speech, gossip, which gives birth to squabbles among those who use that method of argumentation. As far as I'm concerned, I say (quoting what Eastman quoted) that "not having the leisure to enter a polemic with emigrés," – in this case, with emigrés fleeing from the revolution – I would leave Eastman's communiqués in the place beneath the table whence they arose.

If I'm now writing about Eastman, then it follows that this is in no way for his benefit. And (quoting what Eastman quoted) – "I find it necessary to bring to the attention of readers who respect the destiny of the Soviet Union," – well, if only this, the fact that what was just quoted was written by me right at the height of the unpleasant episode with *Mahogany*, when even during the days of *Mahogany* I was concerned about the destiny of the Soviet Union, – as far as it was within my powers and my ability as a Soviet writer.<sup>29</sup>

Eastman began his communiqué in true American fashion – with money. Eastman determined that my "income is estimated at 30,000 rubles a year," that I am considered "one of the richest men in the union." Eastman needs this monetary computation not only for the sake of an American "style," but also for the sake of affirming the "truth," that I can be "bought" by my nature and "sold" by my Soviet situation. But Eastman recounts the following as well: a conversation (not only a twisted conversation, but also a made-up one, that is to say, the most unadulterated lies) – my conversation with Ivan Mikhailovich Gronsky, the editor of *Izvestiia*. The "very wealthy" Pilnyak "asked timidly about the visa." "Of course, of course," said Gronsky. "But I wonder what you will use for money abroad? We (that is, the Bolsheviks, I suppose?) cannot afford the valuta, of course!"

(By what habituations, speaking parenthetically, does Eastman suppose that people who are traveling abroad should receive money from their governments!?)

The "very wealthy" Pilnyak – did not have any money. B-b-ut . . . according to the information provided by Eastman: ". . . here this sad story is illumined by the arrival of a good fairy . . . only that divine (!?) American (!) Providence (!) . . . can explain the arrival in Moscow at this critical moment of Ray Long . . . The cash for Pilnyak's holiday was provided like manna from heaven – an advance (American!) made against the Volga novel" . . .

The "very wealthy" Pilnyak goes to America on American money.

". . . he was fêted at a great banquet of American arts and letters, a banquet enlivened by an exchange of compliments between Dreiser and Sinclair Lewis . . .

he found Irving Thalberg waiting for him with a salary of five hundred dollars a week . . . his own automobile” . . .<sup>30</sup>

In a word – American providence, an automobile, and Lewis! – Five hundred dollars a week, – that is twenty-six thousand dollars a year, – that is not thirty thousand Soviet rubles, which are in circulation only in the Soviet Union, – that is fifty-two thousand gold rubles, – the American “god,” dollars, which are in use all over the world! . . .

Pilnyak, as Eastman was trying to show, can be bought and sold. At home, in his native land, Pilnyak had been brought “to his knees,” Gronskey tried to get him “a visa for a journey abroad, where he (Pilnyak) would be for a time out of the teeth of ‘soviet sociality’ and have an opportunity to draw a quiet breath.”

Pilnyak – has been bought and sold. In America, he was “sold” cheaper than in the U.S.S.R. In America, Pilnyak was in heaven – both Sinclair and dinners, and an automobile.

Nonetheless, according to the information provided by that selfsame Eastman (in this instance, correct information), Pilnyak returned to the U.S.S.R., where he “wrote an indictment of American capitalism under the title O.K.”

Joe, my dear friend, the point, it turns out, is not the buying power of the ruble! – one must throw off measuring the morality of Soviet writers with money and leave that morality on Eastman’s conscience. During the years of revolution, I crossed the Soviet border about twenty times – before *Mahogany* and after it. It would seem that nothing could have been simpler than for me to act the way that certain scoundrels and traitors acted (toward both the fatherland and the revolution), – what could have been be simpler than for me to have remained abroad with an automobile, dinners, and Eastman!?

I did not do that, and I will not do that, because (I am quoting what Eastman quoted from what I wrote in my diary from 1923, an entry whose “candor can hardly be questioned,” according to Eastman’s commentary) – “I acknowledge that the Communist power in Russia is determined . . . by the historic destinies of Russia, and in so far as I want to follow these Russian historic destinies, I am with the Communists.”

This truth, whose “candor can hardly be questioned,” even by Eastman, which I expressed eleven years ago, is obligatory for me today as well. Everything is included in this: both the destiny of *Mahogany* and the destiny of Eastman, in particular. What was just quoted above was expressed eleven years ago. Many of those people, for whom that truth was obligatory then, have now turned out to be beneath the table. As for my part, for me this truth grew and became clearer: the current destinies of the U.S.S.R. – this is the destiny of all peoples, the destiny of Communism – this is the destiny not only of the Soviet Union, but – of the



Socialist Union of the Globe. Out of a Soviet writer who was a fellow traveler, I have become a Communist writer, even if one who lacks a Party membership card. And I am at least justified in feeling proud of that and particularly of those eleven years, during which time I was a fellow traveler who was developing into a Communist.

In Eastman's communiqué, I found out that hourly and monthly I "repent," I "behave like a loyalist," and I "go down on my knees," – and when does this happen? where? in whose inflamed brain!? what slander this is!? Or, perhaps, Eastman thinks that all of my recent works are "repentances," because they have become more Party-friendly than my earlier writings? In that case, this is a matter for his own conscience. He was once a Communist – and then ceased to be one. I was once a fellow traveler – and then I became a Communist. This is a matter for Eastman's conscience: whether to consider it repentance that he once believed in something and then he betrayed it. As far as I'm concerned, I have never betrayed the "historical destinies" of Russia. And I have nothing to repent of.

When I was speaking about the "ass" of facts, I was alluding to the fact that the First Five-Year Plan had been constructed, that the Second Five-Year Plan is in the process of being constructed, and that the only socialist country on Earth is the Soviet Union. These are not images, but – simple facts.

And here is Eastman's communiqué – these are not facts and not even images, but bits of gossip and lies, on the one hand, and conjectures on the part of a man who is sitting beneath a table, on the other. All the conversations about Gronsky that Eastman mentions are a lie. All of Gronsky's conversations with me are the same thing – the "exasperation of a perishable thought" of a man who is sitting beneath a table. I will illustrate this by means of Eastman himself.

In August 1929, during the days of *Mahogany*, when I was a "class enemy" and when I "broke definitively with the social revolution," I wrote in my "repentant" letter, as quoted by Eastman: "The tale of *Mahogany* was finished January 15, 1929. On February 14th I began a novel (now in process of completion) in which *Mahogany* is worked over into chapters."

The story I was talking about here is *The Volga Falls to the Caspian Sea*. A rough draft of it was completed on May 29, 1929, before the *Mahogany* events occurred. But on another page Eastman writes: ". . . Pilnyak, in extreme misery (after the "storm" of *Mahogany*), came to Gronsky, the editor of *Izvestia*, begging him to intercede with the powers . . . Gronsky then told Pilnyak the story of Professor Poletika, and urged him to rewrite *Mahogany*."

Where does Eastman tell a lie?

The brouhaha that was created around my name by *Mahogany*, a brouhaha that did not, incidentally, contain any historical dimensions, was raised by members of

RAPP and it was raised stupidly. RAPP, according to the information provided by Eastman – “the monster-child of Stalinism” – turns out to be “Stalin’s weapon in the domain of the press.” I have the honor to report that Eastman, of course, knows, although he remains silent about this, that RAPP was disbanded by a resolution of the Central Committee of the All-Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks): not, in all likelihood, without the participation of Joseph Vissarionovich Stalin.

Revolutions are not made by people wearing ballroom gloves. The revolution of the proletarian class is by no means a vegetarian activity. Revolutions triumph in those cases when the classes that are launching them are disciplined. In the trenches, under fire from the bullets of one’s adversary, it is tedious and purposeless to hold a mass-meeting. For a person who has accepted the revolution completely, discipline is a natural element of the revolution. For a person who has accepted the revolution “only up to a point,” discipline is needed only “insofar as” it does not inconvenience them “to a certain extent.” If a person wakes up in the morning feeling rested, with a clear head, and has not noticed this, it will seem to this person that everything has been turned upside down, everything except he himself. This pertains to those people who have sat down beneath the table of history and settled down there. Eastman’s story about the destiny of *Mahogany* – this is indeed the “exasperation of a perishable thought” from the perspective of a man who has been sitting beneath a table, a man who does not notice that it is not the things surrounding him and human soles that are beginning to move from the bottom upwards, but that he himself is seeing them upside down. Such people are either fools or scoundrels. One must either despise them or pity them. Khristian Georgievich Rakovsky, in his capacity as one of the “pillars,” used to belong to Eastman’s breed, that is to say, to the Trotskyites: today, while I’m writing this letter, a telegram from Rakovsky has been published in our newspapers, where he considers it “the revolutionary duty of a Communist and Bolshevik to discontinue, completely and unreservedly, the ideological and organizational battle against the leadership and the general line, established by the Party at its recent congresses, and to submit to its decisions and to its discipline.”<sup>31</sup>

I’ll repeat once again Eastman’s quoting of what I wrote during the days of the “pogrom” (Eastman) as a result of *Mahogany*: “I wish to and will work only for Soviet literature, for that is the attitude of every honest writer and man.” According to Eastman, this is what is called “repentance!”

Nevertheless: the only Soviet country is the U.S.S.R., the leader of the U.S.S.R. is Joseph Vissarionovich Stalin. These are facts.

My warmest regards, Joe, my friend!

Boris Pilnyak  
(Freeman, Box 141)

This letter, with minor abridgments, the primary (but not the sole) purpose of which was the elimination of any traces of the genre of friendly correspondence, was published in the journal *Partisan Review*. In the course of translating the letter, several passages were inserted that bore the marks of especial loyalty to the regime. Thus, the ending of Pilnyak's letter (following the citation from the "repentant" statement of 1929) was replaced with a sentence that was absent in the original:

I am not alone in this attitude; that is how all Soviet writers feel today because they realize what Eastman is so anxious to conceal: that the Soviet Union is showing humanity the road to a socialist world.<sup>32</sup>

The published version was accompanied by an essay from Leon Dennen that, on the whole, attacked Eastman's book, *Artists in Uniform* (which had come out in April), and that refuted his interpretation of the reason for the suicides of [Sergei] Yesenin and [Vladimir] Mayakovsky and for the prolonged creative silence of [Isaac] Babel'.<sup>33</sup>

The question arises: why wasn't Pilnyak's letter published in the official organ of the Communist Party, *New Masses*, as Freeman had originally counted upon and pressed for? Right up until the end of April, he continued to fight for its publication precisely in that journal. In a letter to William Browder, he said:

Dear Bill: I am sorry to trouble you about the enclosed carbon of a letter to the NM editors, but unfortunately, while I have had several letters from the office in the past six or seven weeks I have heard nothing about the Pilnyak matter. We have voted any number of times at fraction meetings that a reply should be written to slanders against Soviet literature and revolutionary literature in general. Pilnyak took the trouble to write such a reply and I think it ought to be published. It cannot be said that Pilnyak's name is unimportant, nor can it be said that Pilnyak cannot write. Eastman's book is coming out, and we ought to have Pilnyak's piece in type so that it appears in the NM at the time when the Eastman book is out. There could be no more effective reply to Eastman's slanders about Soviet writers than the one written by a Soviet writer. I am therefore troubling you to attend to this matter as soon as possible. (Letter of April 26, 1934 – Freeman, Box 163)

Despite all of these pleas, the editorial board nonetheless chose not to publish Pilnyak's letter.<sup>34</sup> The board's vacillations were easily explained: following the attacks by the secretary of MORP (Mezhdunarodnoe ob"edinenie revoliutsionnykh pisatelei) [IURW (International Union of Revolutionary Writers)], upon the journal in 1932 for its publication of works by [Mikhail] Zoshchenko and Pilnyak<sup>35</sup> and following Michael Gold's assessment of the novel *The Volga Falls to the Caspian Sea*, there was no assurance whether in Moscow they might not look upon this new appearance by Pilnyak on the pages of an American Communist semi-official publication as yet another attempt to whitewash the former leader of the opposition's fellow travelers. Moreover, the leadership of *New Masses* saw the slowness of the Moscow authorities and their reluctance to get involved in a direct argument with Eastman, and therefore it was in no

hurry to support Freeman, who was spoiling for a fight. The question of whether or not to publish Pilnyak's letter became the subject of arguments among members of the editorial board. This is evident from the letter that Freeman sent from Washington on May 2nd to one of his correspondents:

I think it would be bad revolutionary tactics as well as simple discourtesy to our comrades in the USSR not to give Pilnyak's letter all the play possible. Some people may have begun to feel so important that they think Eastman has no influence. They are mistaken; a lot of people we do not like have influence, not among the sophisticated intellectuals we hang around with in N[ew] Y[ork], but among the professional classes, teachers, etc. who are part of "public opinion" – part of the petit bourgeois intelligentsia to whom the N[ew] M[asses] is to some extent addressed. On this trip I have run across a lot of people who are "liberal," even sympathetic to the USSR yet are upset by the Isaac Don Levines, Eastmans etc. (Freeman letter – to Alan Calmer, Box 153)

Freeman simply did not succeed in convincing his colleagues, and so he decided at that point to hand Pilnyak's letter over to *Partisan Review*, which had just recently come into being, an organ of intellectuals, favorably attuned to Communism, who were consolidated in the John Reed Club. The journal was headed by two young littérateurs, William Philips and Philip Rahv, who at that point in time were being strongly influenced by Joseph Freeman. Their aim was to publish a literary journal that, in contrast to *New Masses*, was free from the dictates of the transitory political interests of the day. Before long, this led them to a break with the Party, but during the first phase of its existence *Partisan Review* enjoyed the complete trust of the Communist leadership.<sup>36</sup> On May 14th, Philip Rahv informed Freeman: "The Pilnyak letter is now in the hands of the translator. It will come in a day or so, and we will send it to you together with the translation" (Freeman, Box 153). When the translation was completed, Freeman replied to Rahv on May 30th with a long list of recommendations and instructions:

The Pilnyak piece is now a fine thing. It would be advisable, in view of the anti-Soviet campaign now being conducted in the literary sections by Adams, the N[ew] Y[ork] Times book review sections, etc., to give the piece all the play you can so as to solicit comments in those papers which have given the question some attention. I think the following would be the most effective procedure:

- 1) Run the Pilnyak piece *first* in the issue, as the lead article.
- 2) Feature it on the cover by printing the title and the author in large type – all other contributions in small type. *Make this piece stand out on the cover.*
- 3) When you have the proofs of the article – before you even start printing the magazine – take about ten copies of the proof and send it to the literary editors of the World-Telegram (Madelein Marx), The Times (John Chamberlain), The Nation, New Republic, Lewis Gannet of the Herald

Tribune and others with a little note on *Partisan Review* stationery running something like this:

“When Max Eastman’s article about the alleged ‘humiliation of Boris Pilnyak’ first appeared in magazine form, we thought that Boris Pilnyak probably knows more about Boris Pilnyak than anyone else – especially more than Max Eastman who has not been in the USSR for eleven years and does not know Pilnyak personally. Pilnyak was apparently surprised to read the fantastic tales which enemies of the Soviet Union are spreading about him and wrote the true story of his ‘humiliation.’ It will appear in the — issue of *Partisan Review*. We are taking the liberty of sending you advance proofs in the belief that you may be interested in Pilnyak’s own story.”

4) When the magazine is out, send marked copies to these literary editors – and also to various writers such as Dreiser, Dos Passos, Edmund Wilson, etc. [...]" (Freeman, Box 153).

John Chamberlain’s remark about Eastman’s book provides sharp insight into why, in Freeman’s eyes, Pilnyak’s letter required such broad publicity. The reviewer was shocked and confused by the picture that was revealed to him, one that differed so greatly from the representations about Soviet culture that were being disseminated at that time in America. He wrote:

[. . .] We are handicapped in our efforts to give a fair report on *Artists in Uniform*. Reading Eastman, we say: “He sounds as if this must be true.” But when we read Joshua Kunitz and Joseph Freeman, who are critics of Eastman, we say, “Well, this puts a new face on the matter.” And we lack the necessary immersion in the literary background of the controversy to make any decision that would be worth two cents.<sup>37</sup>

The hopes that Freeman had pinned on Pilnyak’s article were not vindicated. American critics practically passed over this article in silence. Only Charles Malamuth, in his review, made mention of Pilnyak’s letter. He mocked his arguments and provided additional facts in support of Eastman’s testimony.<sup>38</sup> Kunitz, meanwhile, who had called Eastman’s book “charlatanical,”<sup>39</sup> generally did not risk touching upon Pilnyak and his ill-fated story. In the series of articles that he wrote about Soviet literary politics, Kunitz switched over to a less dangerous discussion of Zamyatin<sup>40</sup> and other fellow travelers.

But even more astounding is the fact that Pilnyak’s letter did not merit any kind of response in the writer’s homeland. Not only was the letter never published in its original form, but even any mentions of it never appeared in the Soviet press at any time. This silence, in and of itself, testified eloquently to just how murderous Eastman’s argumentation had looked. Initially, the Soviet authorities stubbornly avoided any open battle with him whatsoever. When it became more impossible for them to keep silent, they preferred to launch attacks on the concept of “art in uniform” in and of itself, instead of parsing concrete accusations and facts. One thing, for example, that testifies to their attempt to avoid the leakage of any information on *Artists in*

*Uniform* that was too detailed, was the fact that a large section of A. Stork's article, in an English version that analyzed Eastman's book at length,<sup>41</sup> was completely deleted when the Russian original was published.<sup>42</sup> With the sole exception of Pilnyak, not a single other Soviet writer was dragged into the polemic with Eastman. The Soviet press began to speak about Eastman only when yielding to requests from Communist intellectuals in the West (including Joseph Freeman<sup>43</sup>) or on the strength of considerations of an internal battle within the U.S.S.R. on the eve of the First Congress of Soviet Writers.<sup>44</sup> But in so doing it avoided any ticklish facts and questions raised in the book *Artists in Uniform*, limiting itself to a general ridiculing of the positions taken by its author and to personal attacks against him.<sup>45</sup> Such a position toward Eastman reached its culmination point in Joseph Stalin's famous address at the Plenum of the Central Committee at the height of the "Yezhovshchina" [Great Terror]. Enumerating the "reserves of Trotskyite saboteurs" abroad, he said: "Or, for example, the distinguished horde of writers from America, with the famous rogue Eastman at their head, all of these brigands of the pen, who live by the pen in a way that slanders the working class of the U.S.S.R., – in what way are they not reserves for Trotskyism?"<sup>46</sup> It remains unknown whether the polemical letter penned by Pilnyak figured – and if so, in what capacity – in the records of the interrogations to which he was subjected following his arrest in the fall of 1937.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> D. Kal'm, "Vpechatleniia ot vpechatlenii Borisa Pilniaka ot Ameriki" ["Impressions of Boris Pilnyak's Impressions of America"], *Literaturnaia gazeta* [*Literary Gazette*] (November 22, 1931).

<sup>2</sup> "Zakliuchitel'naia rech' tov. I. M. Gronskogo na II plenumе orgkomiteta SSP SSSR" ["Comrade Ivan Mikhailovich Gronsky's Closing Speech at the II Plenum of the Organizing Committee of the Union of Soviet Writers of the U.S.S.R."], *Literaturnaia gazeta* [*Literary Gazette*] (March 5, 1933); *Novyi mir* [*New World*], No. 2 (1933): 258. Cf. the sympathetic reference to Pilnyak's sketches by an American proletarian journalist in Moscow: Walt Carmon, "Literaturnyi N'iu-Iork" ["Literary New York"], *Literaturnaia gazeta* [*Literary Gazette*] (November 11, 1932).

<sup>3</sup> David Zaslavsky, "S ptich'ego duazo" ["A Bird's Eye View"], *Literaturnaia gazeta* [*Literary Gazette*] (March 23, 1933).

<sup>4</sup> Valentin Serebriakov, [Rev.:] "Boris Pil'niak, *O'kei. Amerikanskii roman* ["Boris Pilnyak, *Okay: An American Novel*] (Moscow: Federatsiia), *Literaturnyi sovremennik* [*Literary Contemporary*], No. 5 (May 1933): 152, 155. Cf. A. Isakov, ["Odnostoronnaia Amerika" ["One-Sided America"], *Khudozhestvennaia literatura* [*Belles-lettres*], No. 12 (1933); G. Munblit, "Dve Ameriki" ["Two Americas"], *Literaturnaia gazeta* [*Literary Gazette*] (April 26, 1934). Cf. treatments of Pilnyak's book in research studies: Valentin Kiparsky, *English and American Characters in Russian Fiction* (Berlin, 1964), pp. 113, 136; Alayne P. Reilly, *America in Contemporary Soviet Literature* (New York: New York University Press, 1971), pp. 23-30, and in Soviet works: Valentina Sushkova, *Sovetsko-amerikanskie literaturnye sviazi (20-30-e gody)* [*Soviet-American Literary Connections (1920s-1930s)*] (Vladivostok: Izdatel'stvo

Dal'nevostochnogo universiteta, 1986), pp. 33-51; Valentina Sushkova, "'Otkrytie' Ameriki sovetskimi pisateliami" ["The 'Discovery' of America by Soviet Writers"], *Vzaimodeistvie kul'tur SSSR i SShA XVIII-XX vv.* [*The Interaction of the Cultures of the U.S.S.R. and the U.S. During the XVIII-XX Centuries*] (Moscow: Nauka, 1987), pp. 168-174.

<sup>5</sup> Boris Pilnyak, "O.K. From a Book of American Impressions," translated by I. D. W. Talmadge, *International Literature*, No. 1 (1933): 5-20.

<sup>6</sup> Among Freeman's papers, there are no copies of any letters written to Pilnyak that were mailed after February 1932.

<sup>7</sup> Letters from Louis Fischer to Freeman in August 1932 attest to this.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. the resolution of the Secretariat of MORP (Mezhdunarodnoe ob"edinenie revoliutsionnykh pisatelei) [IURW (International Union of Revolutionary Writers)], "Perestroika mezhdunarodnogo revoliutsionnogo literaturnogo fronta" ["The Reconstruction of the International Revolutionary Literary Front"] *Literaturnaia gazeta* [*Literary Gazette*] (August 5, 1932).

<sup>9</sup> *Sovetskaia literatura na novom etape. Stenogramma pervogo plenuma Orgkomiteta Soiuza sovetskikh pisatelei (29 oktiabria – 3 noiabria, 1932)* [*Soviet Literature at a New Stage. A Stenogram of the First Plenum of the Organizing Committee of the Union of Soviet Writers (October 29 – November 3, 1932)*]. (Moscow: Sovetskaia literatura, 1933), pp. 215-218.

<sup>10</sup> John Reed Clubs.

<sup>11</sup> For information on Calverton, see: Daniel Aaron, *Writers on the Left: Episodes in American Literary Communism* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1961), Chapter 13 ("The Radical Impresario").

<sup>12</sup> For information on this article by [Anna Arkad'evna] Elistratova, see: Eugene Lyons, *The Red Decade*, p. 144.

<sup>13</sup> David Ramsey and Alan Calmer, "The Marxism of V. F. Calverton," *New Masses*, No. 1 (1933): 9-27.

<sup>14</sup> Yury Felshtinsky, "Lenin, Trotsky, Stalin and the Left Opposition in the USSR 1918-1928," *Cahiers du Monde russe et soviétique*, XXXI (4) (octobre-décembre 1990): 577. Cf. the documents clarifying the circumstances surrounding the appearance of Trotsky's and Krupskaya's articles relating to Eastman's book – "Pis'ma I. V. Stalina V. M. Molotovu" ["Letters of I. V. Stalin to V. M. Molotov"] *Izvestiia TsK KPSS* [*News of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union*], No. 9 (1990): 188-191.

<sup>15</sup> See: Max Eastman, *Love and Revolution: My Journey through an Epoch* (New York: Random House, 1964), p. 583.

<sup>16</sup> Max Eastman, "Artists in Uniform," *The Modern Monthly*, Vol. VII, No. 7 (August 1933): 397-404.

<sup>17</sup> Joshua Kunitz, "Max Eastman's Hot Unnecessary Tears," *New Masses* (September 1933): 12-15.

<sup>18</sup> Louis Fischer, incidentally, wrote about this to Joseph Freeman on December 13, 1933: "[...] this is unfortunate, because by defending RAPP he falls into a bushel of errors of fact and interpretation. I am surprised that Kunitz who is so well-informed should have been drawn into Eastman's ambush. As usual, I am too lazy to analyse the whole situation for you in this letter. Some day I may do it personally. But the long paragraph under the subtitle *THE RAPP* implies that Kunitz covers up the mistakes which RAPP made and which the CC [Central Committee] of the CPSU [Communist Party of the Soviet Union] in the famous April 23, 1932 decree disbanding RAPP criticised. This makes it necessary for him to create the false impression that the many *poputchiki* [fellow travelers] he names just ignored RAPP 'and did not accept *diamat*' [dialectical materialism]." (Freeman, Box 164).

<sup>19</sup> Max Eastman, "How Art Became a Class Weapon," *The Modern Monthly*, Vol. VII, No. 9 (October 1933): 556-557.

<sup>20</sup> Max Eastman, "Stalin's Literary Inquisition," *ibid.*, Vol. VII, No. 10 (November 1933): 623-631.

<sup>21</sup> Vyacheslav Polonsky, "Lenin's View of Art," *ibid.*, Vol. VII, No. 12 (January 1934): 738-743.

<sup>22</sup> *Daily Worker* (November 25, 1933) (the translation is mine. – L. F.).

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, (November 27, 1933).

<sup>24</sup> Max Eastman, "The Humiliation of Boris Pilnyak," *The Modern Monthly*, Vol. VIII, No. 1 (February 1934): 42-50.

<sup>25</sup> I suspect that these two friends might be Eugene Lyons and Charles Malamuth (the translator of Pilnyak's *The Volga Falls to the Caspian Sea*). Cf. Malamuth's review of Eastman's book, *Artists in Uniform*, in the journal *The Modern Monthly*, Vol. VIII, No. 9 (October 1934): 569-573.

<sup>26</sup> Al'bert Andreevich Beliaev, *Ideologicheskaia bor'ba i literatura. Kriticheskii analiz amerikanskoi sovetologii [Ideological Battle and Literature. A Critical Analysis of American Sovietology]*. 4th Edition, supplemented and emended (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1988), p. 13. Cf.: Boris Aleksandrovich Gilenson, "Stalinizm i literatura SShA ('Belye piatna' 'krasnykh tridsatykh')" ["Stalinism and U.S. Literature ('Blind Spots' of the 'Red Thirties')"], *Voprosy literatury [Issues of Literature]*, No. 12 (1989): 57-60.

<sup>27</sup> Jay Lovestone (Jacob Liebshtein, 1898-1990) was one of the founders of the Communist Party of America; from 1922, he was its national secretary; in 1929, he was ousted from its leadership



and from the Comintern [Communist International] on the charge of belonging to the Bukharin deviation; in 1933, he founded an oppositional Communist Party (Independent Labor League of America).

<sup>28</sup> Abraham Johannes Muste (1885-1967) was a Presbyterian priest and pacifist who switched over to the labor movement during the 1920s and 1930s; in 1933, he founded the American Workers Party, which in 1934 merged with some Trotskyite groups and was renamed the Workers Party (see: “Disguised as Marxists,” *New Masses* (February 20, 1934): 8-9); in 1936, he crossed over to the Socialist Party, but in 1937 he returned to the Presbyterian Church. For information on him, see: *Biographical Dictionary of the American Left*, ed. Bernard K. Johnpoll and Harvey Klehr (New York: Greenwood Press, 1986), pp. 253-255.

<sup>29</sup> See: *Literaturnaia gazeta [Literary Gazette]* (September 2, 1929); Boris Andronikashvili-Pil’niak, “O moem ottse” [“About My Father”], *Druzhiba narodov [Fraternity of Peoples]*, No. 1 (1989): 151-152.

<sup>30</sup> Irving G. Thalberg (1899-1936) was a famous film producer who headed the Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Studios until 1933.

<sup>31</sup> Rakovsky’s telegram (from his exile in Barnau), a telegram from the most resistant of the members of the Opposition, published in the February 20, 1934 issue of *Pravda*, made a stunning impression on left-wing circles abroad. Joshua Kunitz dedicated his note, “All Out of Step But Trotsky,” to this telegram. See *New Masses* (May 1, 1934): 6-7.

<sup>32</sup> Boris Pilnyak, “In Reference to Myself,” *Partisan Review. A Bi-Monthly of Revolutionary Literature*, Vol. I, No. 3 (June-July 1934): 21.

<sup>33</sup> Leon Dennen, “Bunk by a Bohemian,” *ibid.*, 21-26. Cf.: Gregory Freidin, “Vopros emigratsii. II: Velikii perelom i Zapad v biografii I. E. Babelia (po arkhivnym materialam 1930-1933 gg.),” [“The Question of Emigration. II: The Great Turn and the West in I. E. Babel’s Biography (From Archival Materials from 1930-1933)], *Stanford Slavic Studies*, Vol. IV: *Literature, Culture, and Society in the Modern Age: In Honor of Joseph Frank*, part II (Stanford, 1991).

<sup>34</sup> In his April 27, 1934 letter to Freeman, Alan Calmer called this position stupid. See: Freeman, Box 153.

<sup>35</sup> [Anna Arkad’evna] Elistratova, “New Masses,” *International Literature*, No. 1 (1932): 107.

<sup>36</sup> See: Daniel Aaron, *Writers on the Left: Episodes in American Literary Communism*, pp. 297-303; Richard H. Pells, *Radical Visions and American Dreams: Culture and Social Thought in the Depression Years* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), p. 334 ff.; James B. Gilbert, “Partisan Review,” in *The American Radical Press: 1880-1960*, ed. with an Introduction by Joseph R. Conlin, Vol. II (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1974), pp. 548-553; William Phillips, *A Partisan View: Five Decades of the Literary Life* (New York: Stein and Day, 1983); Terry A. Cooney, *The Rise of the New York Intellectuals: “Partisan Review” and Its Circle* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1986); Alan M. Wald, *The New York Intellectuals: The Rise*

and *Decline of the Anti-Stalinist Left from the 1930s to the 1980s* (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1987); Sidney Hook, *Out of Step: An Unquiet Life in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century* (New York: Harper & Row, 1987), p. 509 ff.

<sup>37</sup> John Chamberlain, “Books of the Times,” *The New York Times* (May 7, 1934).

<sup>38</sup> *The Modern Monthly*, Vol. VIII, No. 9 (October 1934): 571-572; cf.: Max Eastman, “Artists in Strait-Jackets, *ibid.*, Vol. VIII, No. 7 (August 1934): 445-448.

<sup>39</sup> See: Joshua Kunitz, “A Note on Max Eastman, *New Masses* (May 8, 1934): 24.

<sup>40</sup> See: Joshua Kunitz, “Literary Wars in the U.S.S.R. IV: Smugglers of Reaction in Soviet Letters,” *New Masses* (July 10, 1934): 22-24.

<sup>41</sup> A. Stork, “Mr. Calverton and His Friends: Some Notes on Literary Trotskyism in America,” *International Literature*, No. 3 (1934): 109-124. Stork does not say a single word about Pilnyak.

<sup>42</sup> See: A. Stork, “‘Teoriia’ gospodina Kal’vertona. Zametki” [“Mister Calverton’s ‘Theory.’ Notes”] *Internatsional’naia literatura* [*International Literature*], No. 5 (1934): 108-116.

<sup>43</sup> See Freeman’s note, “Sovetskaia literatura i Soedinennye Shtaty” [“Soviet Literature and the United States”], *Internatsional’naia literatura* [*International Literature*], Nos. 3-4 (1934). In his June 11, 1934 letter to Dinamov, Freeman sent word that he had embarked upon writing a book about proletarian culture that was directed against Eastman’s assertions (Freeman, Box 163).

<sup>44</sup> See Lazar’ Fleishman, *Boris Pasternak v tridtsatye gody* [*Boris Pasternak in the 1930s*] (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, 1934): pp. 188-192.

<sup>45</sup> Karl Radek, “Lakei bez mundira” [“A Lackey Without a Uniform”] *Izvestiia* [*News*] (July 18, 1934).

<sup>46</sup> “O nedostatkakh partiinoi raboty i merakh likvidatsii trotskistskikh i drugikh dvurushnikov. Doklad t. Stalina na Plenum TsK VKP(b) 3 marta 1937 g.” [“On the Deficiencies of Party Work and the Measures for Liquidating Trotskyite and Other Kinds of Double-Dealers. Comrade Stalin’s Address at the Plenum of the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks) on March 3, 1937”], *Pravda* [*Truth*] (March 29, 1937); I. V. Stalin, *Sochineniia, tom I [XIV]: 1934-1940* [J. V. Stalin, *Works, Volume I [XIV]: 1934-1940*], edited by H. McNeal (Stanford: The Hoover Institution on War, Revolution, and Peace, 1967), p. 218. Cf.: Max Eastman, *Stalin’s Russia and the Crisis in Socialism* (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1940).

## Toward a History of Eisenstein's Mexico Film

Out of the numerous representatives of the literary and artistic world with whom Freeman met in Moscow during 1926-1927, Sergei Eisenstein is the one who inspired him with the greatest amount of piety. The fact of the matter is not only that there was no language barrier between them. Freeman saw in Eisenstein an organic combination of an artistic avant-gardism that corresponded with his own aesthetic ideals at the time, along with a "Proletkultism" [advocacy of proletarian culture], a stupefying erudition, and a sophisticated intellectualism as well as with an unconditional support of the Communist idea and the Soviet state. Eisenstein was perceived both within LEF [Left Front of Art] and within the milieu of "proletarian" artists as a kindred soul, as one of their own. Freeman was also drawn to Eisenstein by the latter's intensive interest in Freudianism, an interest that, in terms of its depth, did not seem to have an analogue within Soviet culture of that time.<sup>1</sup> Freeman himself, just like any number of other American "proletarian" writers of his generation, fell under the exceptionally strong influence of Freud's teachings. Freeman visited Eisenstein on several occasions at his apartment in the Chistye Prudy district of Moscow and had the opportunity to view the film, *Generalnaia liniia* [*The General Line*], during an early stage of his work on it.<sup>2</sup> Eisenstein, in turn, took an interest in Freeman not only in his capacity as one of the most brilliant, as it seemed at the time, figures in the nascent proletarian culture within the U.S., but also in connection with the plans that had arisen of him taking a trip to America. Not long before Freeman made the acquaintance of Eisenstein, Douglas Fairbanks and Mary Pickford arrived in Moscow. They invited the author of *Bronenosets Potemkin* [*The Battleship Potemkin*], which had just begun its triumphant procession across the movie screens of the world, to come to Hollywood, and Eisenstein seriously considered this idea.<sup>3</sup>

Work on the miscellany, *Voices of October*, likewise brought Freeman and Eisenstein together. Eisenstein was the sole Soviet author, among those who were invited to contribute to this collection, who had kept his word and sent in his promised contribution on schedule. By the time the book was published, however, its original plan had been changed, and in lieu of a forum among Soviet representatives, it was decided to put together a volume made up of survey articles written by American journalists. Freeman, therefore, incorporated the article that Eisenstein had sent him into his own survey of Soviet cinematography.<sup>4</sup> Eisenstein's first letter to Freeman pertains to the initial stage of work on the miscellany.<sup>5</sup>

### 1

#### Eisenstein letter to Freeman

Dear Comrade Freeman!

I am writing to you in Russian, because I do not want to take a chance with my command of English orthography!

Ernestine Evans,<sup>6</sup> whose acquaintance I was very glad to make, will hand over to you  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the material that I had promised You. The final  $\frac{1}{4}$  of that material – and the most interesting part – is about theoretical monism in Soviet cinema. In all good conscience, I must tell You that I have only just now managed to finish this chapter, inasmuch as it is only now that I have more or less distinctly clarified for myself the conclusions to be drawn from my film *Oktiabr* [*October*]: the question about intellectual cinema and the perspectives of the development of formal thought in cinema.<sup>7</sup>

Here is where a fragment of my program for the Directors' Department at the Film Technical School comes in. An article about sound film and a number of other things.

Now, about what there is here:

1) Do what You wish with this material – it is being sent to You as it was written, without a single correction! Only do not publish it separately from what I will urgently send You *right away*.<sup>8</sup>

2) The style of exposition – a little bit of “a sentimental fairy-tale” – seemed to me to be the most correct one – it was necessary to speak about the revolution in a maximally “affectionate” way, because, of course, the meaning of the book is to be understood not as information, but . . . as agitation for our [Soviet] Union! It seemed to me that such a way of depicting an American “philistine” would be the most appropriate one. If You think otherwise – and You should know better than I do – then please *reshape it as You wish*.<sup>9</sup>

3) Try to arrange it so that this material is not translated into other languages. Because if it were to be sent to Germany, for instance, it would have to be written in a completely different style.

Anyway, write to me right away and let me know what You think about this with total frankness – after all, I am not a journalist – my “strength” is in a different specialty.

*As soon as I receive Your letter, I will send off to You les beaux restes.*

Do not bother to send me any money, and hold on to any possible honorarium – as a “bank account.” I might need some kind of *book*<sup>10</sup> material from the U.S. and at that point I'll be able to order it, since the difficulties with foreign currency are so serious that converting currency is allowed only in very small sums.

Don't forget me and please write.

It's too bad that I wasn't able to show E[rnestine] E[vans] pieces of my *General Line*. I think that I will finish it in December. In the meantime, take a look at the

photos (although even in these past 2 to 3 days I didn't manage to collect any better ones!)

Sincerely and Respectfully Yours,  
S. Eisenstein

Moscow, 27/IX/28

The book, *Voices of October*, came out in print during the summer of 1930, at which time Sergei Eisenstein had already arrived in the U.S. As emerges from Grigory Aleksandrov's memoirs, the question of a trip abroad to be taken by Eisenstein and his assistants was, in principle, already decided as early as the spring of 1928 in their conversation with Stalin, Voroshilov, and Molotov. During this meeting, Stalin rejected the original version of the film, *The General Line*, and issued instructions on how to rework it.<sup>11</sup> The purpose of the official trip was to become acquainted with the technical innovations of the film industry, which was developing tempestuously in the West (primarily, the study of sound film, which was already becoming current there, and likewise the study of attempts to expand the movie screen and to produce color images), and to propagandize there the achievements of Soviet socialist culture.

The beginning of the overseas journey undertaken by Eisenstein and his assistants coincided with some drastic changes that were taking place in Soviet art: they left Moscow on August 19, 1929,<sup>12</sup> and exactly a week later the scandal involving [Boris] Pilnyak and [Evgeny] Zamyatin broke out, a scandal that at its root changed the situation not only in literature, but in all the other areas of Soviet cultural life as well. However much the travelers might have liked to flatter themselves with the illusion of their own personal extraterritoriality and immunity in regard to the new trends, the fearsome news emanating out of Moscow could not help but trouble them, particularly on the strength of the fact that their most recent film, *Staroe i novoe* [*The Old and the New*] (as *The General Line* was being called in its reworked form), had received a predominantly negative assessment in the Soviet press, despite the sincere attempts on the authors' part to fulfill the leadership's directives. It is likewise noteworthy that ever since 1927 one of the projects that had been occupying Eisenstein was the idea of a film whose story line should be based upon Zamyatin's novel *My [We]* (which was banned in the U.S.S.R. and which emerged as one of the reasons for the scandal in 1929).

In the course of their official trip to the West, Eisenstein and his assistants were forced to coordinate with high-ranking Soviet officials at nearly every step. This substantially restricted them in their negotiations with possible partners regarding collaboration on planned projects. The matter was exacerbated by the fact that in the political circles of Europe and the U.S. the propagandistic functions of Eisenstein's statements often obscured the artistic meaning of his films and of his creative ideas. And in this regard Eisenstein, as an artist and thinker of great genius, evoked greater circumspection than did, for instance, Boris Pilnyak, in the course of his American tour. For all the incommensurability of the creative potential and the role of these two representatives of Soviet culture, Eisenstein's situation abroad, in the final analysis, was much more complicated.

As a result, not one of the ideas that had seized him on the eve, and at the start, of his American journey was pursued to any serious stage of work.<sup>13</sup> This was explained by a number of reasons – the incongruity of the Soviet director’s creative interests with the adjustable commercial principles of the Hollywood movie business, the inability or unwillingness on the part of the artist to adapt to the conditions of the functioning of American culture and to strike a compromise with a system of values that was foreign to him.<sup>14</sup> A factor of no small importance was the furious ideological campaign launched by right-wing extremists that was poisoning the atmosphere surrounding the Soviet guest’s visit to the U.S. and that was leading to the victory, in the end, of that right wing among the members of the board of directors at Paramount, a board that, from the very beginning, had viewed with some skepticism the prospect of collaborating with Eisenstein. Upon completion of the specified six-month time period, the contract with Eisenstein was not extended and, in connection with the expiration of the validity of his entry documents, Eisenstein was to have left the U.S. immediately.

Of all the projects that Eisenstein nurtured prior to his coming to America<sup>15</sup> or that were suggested to him by Paramount, only two resulted in completed screenplays. Both of them were to serve as a sample of “real American films,” as the director rather naively declared.<sup>16</sup> The first project was the screenplay for *Zoloto Zuttera* [*Sutter’s Gold*] (based on the novel by Blaise Cendrars), which was suggested to the American side by Eisenstein. Although, in principle, the screenplay was well received, it was not accepted by the studio because of the extremely high production costs involved in shooting the film.<sup>17</sup> Benjamin P. Shulberg’s son, incidentally, reports, with reference to his father’s story, that Paramount’s rejection of the screenplay was the result of pressure coming from New York financial interests, who were afraid that these envoys of the Soviet state would provide an overly radical treatment of the theme of the power of gold.<sup>18</sup>

The second project was *An American Tragedy* (based on the novel by Theodore Dreiser).<sup>19</sup> Jesse Lasky, who was the one who sponsored Eisenstein’s trip to California, was hoping, by means of this suggestion of his, to stop at the last minute the collapse of the whole scheme with the invitation of the Soviet director and to obtain an extension of his stay in Hollywood. Ivor Montagu (subsequently a prominent figure in the British Communist movement) asserts in his memoirs that Eisenstein and his assistants, right from the very start of their work on *An American Tragedy*, did not believe that the prospective film would prove to be acceptable for their sponsors, and so, while composing the screenplay, they were conscious that they were heading for a rupture. Eisenstein’s screenplay, which emphasizes the social orientation of Dreiser’s novel, received the author’s complete approval. It is worth remembering that, following his trip to the U.S.S.R. (in 1927), Dreiser was increasingly expressing solidarity with the radical circles of the labor movement, and at the beginning of the 1930s openly announced his support of the Communist Party.<sup>20</sup> When, several months later, following Eisenstein’s negotiations, Josef von Sternberg produced *An American Tragedy*, using a different screenplay, the novel’s author filed a lawsuit against Paramount for having put out a distorted treatment of his work.<sup>21</sup>

The succession of failures that pursued Eisenstein in the U.S. complicated his relations with the Soviet authorities as well. In the spring of 1928, after having approved the idea of an official trip overseas for them, Stalin, in a conversation with Eisenstein and his assistants, placed before them the task of “learning from the West and teaching it.” Despite the tumultuous resonance of

Eisenstein's lectures and addresses in the professional environment of Europe and America, it would have been impossible to claim that the goal posited by Stalin had been achieved if the director were to return from Hollywood empty-handed. In addition, the technical conditions for working in cinema in the West looked dreamlike in comparison with those in Russia. That is why it became so important for Eisenstein to get an additional extension of his overseas voyage in order to be able to shoot a film about Mexico, a country that had long been an object of his dream. To acquire the means needed to make this trip, Eisenstein followed Charlie Chaplin's advice and approached Upton Sinclair, who had connections with California millionaires that were sympathetic toward left-wing circles.

Sinclair was in sympathy with Eisenstein's Mexico idea right from the very start: the Mexico theme – and the Latin America theme more generally – was becoming fashionable in the milieu of the leftist, radical intelligentsia during those years. He perceived the disruption of the Hollywood plans of the famous Soviet director as a disgrace for America, and the Mexico project seemed doubly attractive and important precisely when seen against the backdrop of the failures in Hollywood. Sinclair agreed to support Eisenstein not on the strength of any philanthropic instincts, but rather out of weightier cultural and political considerations and ambitions.<sup>22</sup> Believing right away in the success of the planned venture, he assumed that his involvement in it would augment his literary fame both within artistic circles and within leftist political circles in the West.<sup>23</sup> He viewed Eisenstein's request in the context of the idea of “international solidarity” among proletarian artists. Sinclair reckoned as well that high-level Soviet officials would be grateful to him for having taken upon himself the trouble of doing this.<sup>24</sup> Finally, he could assume that the support he would be rendering Eisenstein would lead in the future to the realization of the director's long-standing plans of producing a film based on one of Sinclair's novels. Absent all of these considerations, it is difficult to imagine that he would have taken such an enormous material risk, a risk that was obvious to anyone who was to the slightest extent familiar with how the motion picture industry operated. After all, the money that he had raised for Eisenstein was not a donation from a benefactor, but rather an investment with clearly stipulated commercial and legal conditions and guarantees.<sup>25</sup> One can understand why even the rigid time limit specified by the contract that had been signed – no more than three months of shooting in Mexico – did not seem suspiciously unrealistic to Sinclair and did not disturb him: he knew that Eisenstein, together with [Grigory Vasilevich] Aleksandrov and [Eduard Kazimirovich] Tisse, had managed to film their supreme masterpiece, *Battleship Potemkin*, during the same period of time.<sup>26</sup> On the other hand, the thought could not have entered his head that the Soviet government would abandon its best artist to the whims of fate, were he to find himself in a difficult situation abroad.

No matter with how much of a jaundiced eye the Soviet authorities were looking at Eisenstein's increasingly dragged out overseas tour (as compared to its originally established one-year time limit), the readiness on the part of Sinclair, the leading proletarian writer in the West, to take the Mexico project under his patronage appears to have neutralized the objections made by Soviet officials and reduced to naught their attempts to force the film director to return home immediately. It is also evident, however, that the unexpected decision to linger in Mexico, in and of itself, and the circumstances surrounding the signing of a “private” contract with Sinclair's wife, and the plans for the post-production scoring in Hollywood of the film footage that had been shot in Mexico (which would have required an additional prolongation of his stay

beyond the borders of the U.S.S.R.), and the stipulation specially included in the contract that the proposed film contain “apolitical” content<sup>27</sup> – all of this could not have carried the higher Soviet authorities off their feet with enthusiasm: after all, Soviet cinema at this time was developing in a direction that was diametrically opposed to Eisenstein’s artistic aspirations. The radical changes that were being implemented in the U.S.S.R. during the course of Stalin’s “revolution from above” of 1929-1931 had sharply changed the forms of governmental control over cinema art and were advancing, in counter-balance to the masters of cinematography who had become famous during the 1920s, a new generation of favorites. Soviet culture of the 1930s, including cinema, was moving steadily toward formal simplification and stylistic leveling, toward the extermination of an artist’s “apoliticism,” toward a primitive and saccharine rhetoric. Imagining Eisenstein’s Mexico film in this context is, perhaps, even more difficult than imagining the director himself operating within the system of the Hollywood movie business.

One should not be surprised, therefore, at the reluctance with which the Soviet authorities responded to Sinclair’s appeal that he become affiliated with the work of the “trust” (and in this way indemnify his financial side). The American writer tried to conduct the negotiations over this deal through any number of conceivable conduits – through his own son David (a member of the Socialist Party), who visited Moscow in 1931, through Gorky,<sup>28</sup> through Lunacharsky and Radek. According to published documents,<sup>29</sup> it is clear to what extent Sinclair’s situation was becoming desperate, as the work of the Soviet group was dragging on hopelessly: after all, by the end of the summer of 1931, they had already spent over nine months in Mexico instead of the originally designated three. Among the Moscow contacts through which Sinclair was trying to obtain the support of the Soviet authorities was Boris Pilnyak, with whom he had become acquainted in the spring of 1931 in California. We cite here his unpublished letter to Pilnyak, sent to him through [Joseph] Freeman.<sup>30</sup>

### **Upton Sinclair letter to Pilnyak**

August 25, 1931

Boris Pilnyak  
Moscow 40  
2nd Yamskaya Polya, 1A – 21

My dear Boris:

I assume that this letter will find you safe at home. The papers are still talking about you, and the next thing will be the book you are to write about America!

I am going to delay that book one day by asking you for help in the matter of the Eisenstein picture. I have borrowed every dollar I can get. We are now holding on desperately – reluctant to bring the party back from Mexico with the picture incomplete. We have been delayed by Eisenstein’s illness, by a long spell of rainy weather, and by miles of Mexican red tape. I have been to everybody I can think of for money. I have tried Mrs. Gartz twice and been turned down. Her



dividends have been cut, and she has been told there will be no more dividends until times improve.

I wrote to the State Publishing House [Gosizdat], asking them for help, and my son, David, who was in Moscow, went to see [Artemic] Khalatov,<sup>31</sup> and cabled me on August 14th that the Government Commission had given consent for valuta [foreign currency] to be sent me. His cablegram stated that Khalatov would decide the amount to be sent, and that I would have a decision August 17th. My son, relying on that promise, left Moscow for New York. No decision has come, and cablegrams bring no response.

I do not need to be told that Khalatov has a thousand problems piled up on his desk, and I am not complaining, I am just trying to find somebody in Moscow who will take up my cause, and go and see Khalatov, and get that particular *dossier* out of the files, or from underneath the piles of papers on his desk, and keep it in his mind long enough for the decision to be taken. Can you do this for me, or can you think of some one else who can do it for me?

My son wrote me that Béla Illés<sup>32</sup> would do it, but I have not heard from him. I wrote to Lunacharsky, Gorky, Radek, and to Yazikoff<sup>33</sup> who was my first Russian translator; but I have not had any reply from any of these persons, although there has been plenty of time. So, you see, I badly need a friend at court.

I have no idea if you will be in a position to do anything, but will you, upon receipt of this, be so good as to send me a deferred cablegram, telling me if you can. I figure it will take about two weeks for this letter to reach you, and I will hold on for this length of time.

You see the situation: we have some money pledged, but we dare not spend it in Mexico, because it will be absolutely needed for the expenses of cutting the picture, and until the picture is cut, we have nothing. And so every week that I let them stay on, I am risking everything. We have put a mortgage on our home, and pledged the money we hope to get out of my new novel. I hate to put a burden like this upon you, but you asked to tell you if there was anything you could do for me in Moscow, and here it is.

I wrote to Khalatov, pledging myself that if and when the money came out of the picture, I would not take a dollar for myself, but would take it and all the profits it might earn and use it to put sets of my books in libraries throughout the world. In furtherance of my pledge, I am establishing a foundation to handle the money. I enclose the circular which explains this. I also enclose the new circular of *The Wet Parade*. You will be interested in Horace Liveright's opinion.<sup>34</sup>

I will make a proposition which will amuse you: Joe Freeman tells me that you were not able to take a tractor back with you, because living in America proved to be so expensive. So, if you will get busy and put this thing through for me, I will

send you a tractor! But perhaps you will first have to get a decision from the authorities to the effect that this will not be considered a bribe!

We all join in sending you our kindest regards.

Sincerely,  
[Upton Sinclair]

At this point in time, Eisenstein's closest friends in Russia had begun to bombard him with signals about the necessity of an immediate return home. Rumors about his "failure to return" were spreading all over Moscow. Esfir Shub wrote him on September 9th: "You must return to the U.S.S.R. right away, as soon as possible. I'm writing You in this way for the first time and, knowing my love for You and my friendship with You, You will understand how thoroughly I have thought this over. I know that You are having many difficulties with Your work in Mexico. I know that You are enthralled by it, that a whole series of Your preoccupations are, no doubt, acquiring a special sharpness in the process of their being allowed to be used on material that is completely new to You. I understand all this very well, and I feel it even more, and yet all the same I'm telling You – You must make haste to come back home right away. [. . .] Don't get angry, dear one, that I am asserting so boldly, from across the ocean, that the material You have now shot on film is completely sufficient for Your new work."<sup>35</sup> Maksim Shtraukh, another close friend of Eisenstein, subsequently recalled with some regret about his role in these efforts to get the director to return home without delay: "Yet another rather difficult mission has fallen to my lot. I tried to stay in the know about all that was happening, and I knew, of course, about the troubles that Boris Shumyatsky was preparing for Eisenstein, and I was supposed to inform him by means of hints, sometimes in allegorical form, about what storm clouds were hanging over his head. I inclined him toward the idea of the speediest possible return home. Maybe this was a mistake. It was necessary that Eisenstein edit his *Mexico* undisturbed, right there, on site, and then return home with a finished motion picture. It never crossed my mind that what happened could have happened, that is to say, that the film could perish."<sup>36</sup>

For Sinclair, the only way out of the catastrophic situation that was developing seemed to be for the Soviet authorities to provide direct support for Eisenstein's project. Without it, the private individuals in the U.S., to whom he was appealing for help, refused to invest capital in the film. At the beginning of November, the troubles, it seemed, were crowned with success, and Amkino agreed to invest twenty-five thousand dollars. Although, in and of itself, this was far from solving the innumerable financial problems, Eisenstein did receive a four-month extension for his work in Mexico, and Sinclair was gaining time for raising additional financial aid from private sources. But at this point some dramatic events occurred that played a fatal role in the fate of the film.

Sinclair, apparently, had long been pondering a pathway for informing Stalin directly about the Mexico enterprise. Such a pretext presented itself to him in Moscow in the summer of 1931, when Anatoly Danashevsky, a producer at "Sovkino,"<sup>37</sup> who had been repatriated to the U.S.S.R. in the mid-1920s, was arrested (on the charge of sabotage), and his son, a technician who had remained in the U.S. and who was engaged in Hollywood in the development of the film footage that Eisenstein had shot in Mexico, asked Sinclair to intercede with the Soviet authorities. At the

height of negotiations with the distributing company, Amkino, even before an agreement had been concluded, Sinclair addressed a letter to Stalin. Sinclair fringed his request for intervention into the investigation into the Danashevsky case with immoderate praise directed at Eisenstein's forthcoming masterpiece, without passing over in silence his personal financing of that project. He also informed Stalin of his plans to come to Moscow in the spring and of his hopes of meeting with Stalin there. One must assume that it was precisely this final allusion that prompted Stalin to reply to this correspondent: since the beginning of the 1930s, Soviet propaganda had been trying persistently to instill in the minds of major contemporary writers the idea of writing a book about the Soviet leader. In a telegram sent almost a month later, Stalin, although he reiterated the case that had been made by the GPU [State Political Directorate] about the heinous crimes committed by Danashevsky, sent a signal, however, that he was prepared to "plead for mercy" on behalf of the arrestee – if Sinclair were to insist upon this. He also greeted the plans for Sinclair to come to Moscow and to meet with him. The telegram looked much less genial, however, in the part that touched upon Eisenstein. "Eisenstein has lost the trust of his comrades in the Soviet Union," it read. "They consider him a defector who has torn himself away from his country. I fear that the people will soon lose all interest in him. Unfortunately, everything that I am asserting here is a fact."<sup>38</sup>

It is easy to imagine just how astounded Sinclair must have been by these words. They promised a catastrophe not only for the film director and all the work of his group, but also for Sinclair himself – after all, the people who had been giving him money for this project considered this to be indirect support of Soviet interests abroad; the enormous amount of funds invested into this work turned out to be money cast to the four winds. Through his words, Stalin was giving Sinclair to understand that no matter what the results of the Mexico expedition might be, it no longer followed to see Eisenstein as the darling of the Soviet authorities. It is as if Stalin was inviting him to get rid of his guest with the same decisiveness that the "Soviet people" (judging by the telegram) had demonstrated. Such a recommendation eliminated any chance there might have been of success in signing a contract with Amkino, which was then under consideration. Two weeks prior to Stalin's reply, in the November 7th holiday issue of *Pravda*, in an international questionnaire, titled "The 'Secrets' of Our Victories," there was inserted, among other materials, a note from Upton Sinclair, where he specifically announced to Soviet readers his collaboration with Eisenstein:

I am not encountering any difficulties in my work, except for the boycotting by the capitalist press of any kind of socialist activism in the United States. I am collecting money for a motion picture that Eisenstein is filming in Mexico, – a brilliant triumph of Russian cinematographic technique.

I hope to visit Russia this coming summer and to collect material for a novel about the participation of Americans in the reconstruction of agriculture, and also material for the screenplay for an Eisenstein film on this same theme.<sup>39</sup>

It was now becoming clear that the boycott by the capitalist press was not the only obstacle. In light of Stalin's telegram, Sinclair's incredible efforts in the course of the past year were turning out to be in vain, all his hopes were crumbling into dust. Immediately upon receiving the telegram, Sinclair decided to respond with a letter, in hopes of influencing the Soviet leader's

attitude toward Eisenstein and of staving off an inevitable catastrophe. He declared that he was convinced of Eisenstein's absolute loyalty, citing the principled stand that he had taken in Hollywood, the slander campaign launched against him by the Mexican police and the censor, the coordination of all of his actions with Lev Isaakovich Monoszon, the representative of Amkino, and, finally, the revolutionary sounding and meaning of the film footage that was being shot.

The strangeness of the remark about Eisenstein in the telegram lay in the fact that its appearance was not motivated by anything in Sinclair's first letter, a letter to which Stalin had responded. To this day, the threatening nature of that remark evokes amazement on the part of the film director's biographers. It would be completely groundless, however, to conjecture (as several researchers have done) who exactly it was, out of those who were the leader's confidants, that "slandered" Eisenstein in front of him.<sup>40</sup> There is little evidence to support the notion that Boris Zakharovich Shumyatsky, the newly appointed leader of the Soviet film industry (repressed in 1937), must have been this slanderer, since he, as opposed to his predecessors, did not feel any sympathy toward Eisenstein, as he demonstrated time and again over the course of thirty years. In view of Stalin's usual suspiciousness regarding any kind of dealings that Soviet citizens might be having with people from foreign countries, in view of the firmly taken course of "tightening the screws" and ridding Soviet culture of the remnants of the laissez-faire approach of the 1920s, and, finally, in view of his instinctive antipathy toward "excessive" complexity and "tricksterism," one should not search for any kind of backstage action being taken by schemers for explaining the words about Eisenstein found in Stalin's telegram. Of course, it was not Shumyatsky's "slander" that misled the leader; on the contrary, it was instead the latter's instructions that entirely determined the cold and haughty attitude of the leaders of Soviet cinema toward Eisenstein, an attitude that remained unchanged right up to the time of the "Yezhovshchina" [Great Terror]. It is beyond any doubt that the appointment of Shumyatsky, in and of itself, just like the recall to Moscow in November 1931, right after the contract with Sinclair had been signed, of Lev Monoszon, an official who felt pity for Eisenstein, was a manifestation of a new course of Party politics in the domain of cinema.

The immediate cause of the leader's overt expression of displeasure, however, was, we dare say, Edmund Wilson's article in the New York journal, *The New Republic*. Wilson's article, which set forth in detail the story of Eisenstein's Hollywood failures and his work in Mexico, and which was steadfast in its spirit of friendliness toward the U.S.S.R., contained a remark that, although it was innocent from the point of view of its author, was completely unacceptable for the Soviet authorities and that immediately alarmed Eisenstein: it was said there that, in the Mexico film, Eisenstein, for the first time in his life, found true freedom as an artist. This remark, as the correspondence between Sinclair and Eisenstein testifies, reflected, among other things, some information that was being rather widely circulated by then: that, at Stalin's insistence, all of the shots involving Trotsky were cut out of the film *October* (1927).<sup>41</sup> A refutation of Wilson's article, which Eisenstein sent right away to Monoszon for his approval, just before it went to press,<sup>42</sup> and which appeared in the New York journal a month later,<sup>43</sup> could not, of course, lay to rest the suspicions harbored by the Moscow authorities.

As a result, Amkino's recently concluded contract with Sinclair was annulled and the promised Soviet subsidy was canceled. This made the continued existence of the "trust" impossible. In

addition, in order to apply decisively some arm-twisting pressure on Eisenstein and his companions, the Moscow authorities ceased paying the monthly salary of the “defectors” to the members of their families who were residing in the U.S.S.R. On January 7, 1932, Eisenstein sent Stalin a telegram,<sup>44</sup> imploring him for the final time to extend the official trip. But the Soviet authorities remained steadfast in their resolve to recall Eisenstein and have him return home immediately. The belief that distrust of the film director’s political loyalty lay at the heart of their position is irrefutably evidenced by the fact that Amkino was at the same time agreeing to allow his assistants, [Grigory] Aleksandrov and [Eduard] Tisse, to stay on in Mexico. On the other hand, the conflicts that were intensifying between the film production group and Hunter Kimbrough, Sinclair’s brother-in-law, who was authorized to control the expedition’s expenses, and the total breakdown of the financial base of the Mexico project forced Sinclair to insist on the prompt suspension of the shooting. It was suggested, moreover, that Eisenstein leave Mexico and return to Hollywood and that there, on site, he would assemble, out of the material collected during the expedition, a motion picture that was suitable for release.

But, as is well known, on the strength of the confluence of a series of adverse external circumstances (the immigration authorities did not grant him authorization to visit Hollywood), Eisenstein could not do this, neither by his remaining in the U.S. nor by his returning to the Soviet Union. The financial obligations that Sinclair had taken upon himself forced him to commission Sol Lesser to make a film on the basis of the Eisenstein material. Thus emerged *Thunder Over Mexico*, which first appeared on movie screens in May of 1933, and then *Death Day* (1934). Sinclair took this step with a heavy heart, yielding to conditions that were dictated to him by the investors. Feverish negotiations with official Soviet authorities and with Eisenstein – concerning the return of the negatives to the director and the production of the Soviet version of the film – continued right up until the winter of 1934. These negotiations took place to the accompaniment of a bitter campaign in the press mounted by an ardent admirer of Eisenstein in Hollywood, Seymour Stern (he edited the journal *Experimental Cinema*), and of threats to bring legal proceedings against the director in court. No matter how sincere the indignation at Sinclair’s behavior was on the part of many representatives of the liberal intelligentsia, behavior that resulted in the eminent film director being divested of his beloved brainchild, none of Eisenstein’s supporters in this dispute were able to mobilize the financial support that was necessary for the “buyback” of the film, and so the attempt to collect \$100,000 for this purpose ended in failure. On the other hand, the position of Amkino and Soiuzkino in the negotiations confirmed Sinclair’s impression that “Moscow is not interested in this motion picture.”

Joseph Freeman was drawn into efforts to settle the conflict even before the scandal was splashed across the pages of newspapers. His mutual friends and those of Eisenstein in Moscow had been asking him in the summer of 1932 to exert some influence on Upton Sinclair. The circumstances surrounding this story were so dark and tangled, however, and Sinclair’s complaints about the intractability of both the film director and the Soviet authorities were so strong, that Freeman preferred simply to ship the materials he had received off to Victor Smirnov, the president of Amkino in New York. With the theatrical release of Lesser’s film, it became more difficult to observe neutrality in the dispute. In addition to the financial and legal aspects, there arose an additional, almost the most significant – and, for Eisenstein, the most unnerving – factor. Rumors about the release of the film – under his name – in American movie

theaters were reaching Moscow and were casting a shadow over his political reputation, one that, even without this, was suffering due to his outlandish peregrinations overseas. One of the American reviewers, who sympathized with Eisenstein and fulminated against the Hollywood “vandals,” singled out the “fascist-sounding” ending of the picture, which was perceived as an anthemic celebration of the “reactionary” Mexican regime, whereas those very same frames, in the author’s hands, could have acquired an opposite meaning – a satirical one.<sup>45</sup> It is easy to imagine how the Moscow bureaucrats had to pass judgment on the fruits of Eisenstein’s extended official trip overseas, judging by such criticisms about the film. Their anger was especially substantiated by the fact that Sinclair – partly on the strength of advertising considerations, partly on the strength of a sincere conviction on his part – was everywhere reiterating, over and over again, that the content of the film reel that had been released was completely in line with the Soviet director’s intention.<sup>46</sup>

This is why, during the summer of 1933, the idea was advanced of having the director himself release a second version of the film, his own personal version. The negotiations between the warring sides were led by Louis Fischer, who had seen Lesser’s film and did not find, from the ideological point of view, anything that was objectionable for Moscow in it.<sup>47</sup> In July, he and Sinclair exchanged a number of telegrams on this matter, and at one point the attainment of an agreement began to seem possible. Once again, however, the deal fell through: the Soviet authorities adamantly refused to waste “valiuta” [foreign currency] on the buyout of film recordings from Sinclair. In the meantime, the New York premiere of Lesser’s film was approaching, and Pera Atasheva (1900-1965), a close friend of Eisenstein, sent Freeman copies of all these telegrams, in the hope that in his hands they would emerge as an effective instrument of pressure upon Sinclair. Louis Fischer, however, for understandable reasons, categorically forbade the promulgation of this confidential correspondence, and at that point, on August 31st, Atasheva forwarded to Freeman, together with the screenplay for the Mexico film (which had been approved, at one point in time, by the Mexican censor),<sup>48</sup> Eisenstein’s petition, written with the goal of opposing Lesser’s production of his idea. This petition accentuated the agitational-ideological orientation of the work that had not been preserved. The “protective” function of this document – when viewed against the background of the “apolitical” nature of the Mexico project that had been announced earlier<sup>49</sup> – was obvious. The protective function was especially indispensable since the director had not managed to film the most successful part of the project in terms of ideology – “Soldadera” [Female Soldiers]. We are citing here the text of Eisenstein’s petition (from a copy sent to Freeman by Atasheva), preserving its linguistic peculiarities, but correcting any obvious typing misprints:

COPY

### *The Statement Concerning the Mexican Film*

The theme of the film: to show by the example of the Mexican Indians the enslavement of the primitive peoples by colonisers and the Catholic Church (in the given instance – Spain). In this way the film falls organically into three groups of the subject-matter:

1. the natural tropical life up to colonisation

2. the intrenchment by the sword and cross of the new economic owners and the enslavement of the indians

3. the exploitation of free peoples by the united apparatus of feudal system and church.

Mexico is noteworthy in this, that at the present time there exist side by side forms of life and social relationship relating to the most varied epochs of Mexico's development. In this way the historical changes of stages were easily substituted by geographical expeditions to the corresponding places in Mexico where such forms are preserved and there I've filmed the scenes we desired.

In the first part is presented Oahaca where is preserved the primitive biological life of the pre-Columbus period.

The second stage presents clerical-spanish Mexico of the conqueror Fernando Cortez, as it is traditionally resurrected in the pompous dawn of religious festivals and pilgrimages and the remnants of alluvial spanish culture to this day (this material is grouped by around very rare shots taken during the festival of the hundred-year old "magic" ikon of the Madonna de Guadalupe, showing episcopal dignities, mass self-torture, religious dances, bull fights etc.).

We make particular emphasis on the third episode – the arousing of the social instinct in the Indians in the circumstances of mexican feudalism, particularly heightened in the period of 1910, when the first mexican revolution broke out. We show this in the period immediately preceding demonstrating the barbarous forms of serf-labour of the indians (in Central Mexico hardly changed to this day) pre-revolutionary sparks of revolt, suppression and execution etc.

The epilogue is a perspective glance on the approaching new Mexico, the developing capitalist system and police regime, and together with this, in its very development, arousing the social instinct of the primitive indian (under the influence of the Mexican revolution), and bearing the seed of the future class-conscious proletariat.

The picture is a "play-film" of great dramatic tension and at the same time is a wide exposition of Mexico both social, cultural and ethnographical. The majority of the material on the screen appears for the first time and apart from anything else is of great cultural interest.

Signed (S. Eisenstein).<sup>50</sup>

Despite Eisenstein's desperate attempts to attract numerous friends in the West to defend his film,<sup>51</sup> the campaign fizzled out relatively quickly. What is noteworthy is the fact that the official Communist news organs were by no means the campaign's most energetic choir leaders.

The journal *New Masses* behaved rather listlessly toward the scandal,<sup>52</sup> whereas the newspaper *Daily Worker* mentioned only once the forthcoming premiere of the “distorted” version of Eisenstein’s masterpiece.<sup>53</sup> This taciturnity on the part of orthodox Communist news organs came across as a complete contrast even if only to Calverton’s *The Modern Monthly*, which devoted a lot of attention to the Eisenstein story. The Soviet press, all in all, virtually ignored it. If its initial reserve (just like, again, the reserve of Sinclair himself) could have been interpreted as an eagerness to avoid internecine conflicts so as not to provide fodder for “bourgeois” propaganda, then subsequently this explanation made no sense: the Soviet and the American Communist press continued to hush up the matter, even at a time when Sinclair had become the target of their sharp attacks for his new political platform (known under the acronym EPIC, i.e., “End Poverty In California”) and for his decision to put forward his candidacy for the office of governor of California from the Democratic Party.<sup>54</sup> This once again demonstrates how tepid the attitude of the Soviet authorities initially was toward Eisenstein’s work in Mexico and how shaky his situation had become in Moscow at that point in time. In essence, this was an obvious fall from grace: not only was the resolution of the “Mexico” problem frozen, but all of the other films that Eisenstein was planning to make were being turned aside, one after another, up until the year 1938 (*Alexander Nevsky*).<sup>55</sup> Viewed in this retrospective light, the persistence with which the Soviet authorities in the spring of 1932 demanded Eisenstein’s immediate return to Moscow, under the pretext of the necessity for him to make a film marking the 15th anniversary of the October Revolution, looked completely senseless.

Viewed against the background of this fall from grace, Eisenstein’s public appearance with “An Open Letter to Goebels” – his first purely political declaration – acquired special significance for the film director.<sup>56</sup> A speech by the Fascist Minister of Propaganda on February 10, 1934, in which he appealed to German cinematographers to create a Nazi film that would surpass in quality *Battleship Potemkin*, served as the occasion for him writing this address. Eisenstein turned to Freeman in search of a wider promulgation of the article abroad. The choice of the journal *New Masses*, the most orthodox Communist journal in the U.S., was a natural one. Alternatively, Eisenstein could rely on Freeman’s advice in arranging to get the article into a periodical that was “not one of ours” – i.e., into the non-Communist press – since Freeman, together with Ella Winter, was at that time organizing an anti-Hitler committee in the U.S.<sup>57</sup> The editorial board at *New Masses* joyfully accepted the document sent to them: major artists of this kind did not often make a gift of their attention to the journal. A translation of the article was published in the June 5th issue. But the wish that Eisenstein had expressed – that as much high profile publicity for the letter as possible be provided in non-Communist circles – could not be fulfilled by it being published in *New Masses*: it passed virtually unnoticed in America.<sup>58</sup>

## **Eisenstein’s Correspondence with Freeman**

### **2**

#### **Eisenstein letter to Freeman**

My dear Freeman!



It is about eternity that you have not heard from me. I am working very, very hard on my book about the theory of directing.<sup>59</sup> I'll write you more about it as soon as it will approach completion.

This time it is to transfer to you the "open letter to Herr Goebbels" which you will find included. I hope you'll do your best to make it known as widely as possible. You can see the proof of importance given to it here by the way it is placed in our official Literary Newspaper.<sup>60</sup> Hope it might get also somewhere besides *our* papers and magazines in the U.S. And hope to hear as soon as possible about the results about yourself. Best regards from Durand<sup>61</sup> whom I met here and like very much. Best wishes and greetings to everybody. Much love to you.

Always yours,

S. Eisenstein

P.S. Would appreciate it very much if it were possible to get the "New Masses" send over here. And also a set of back numbers.

### 3

#### Freeman letter to Eisenstein

From: Joseph Freeman  
65 Irving Place  
New York City

Washington, D.C.  
April 26, 1934

My dear S. M.! – Although I have given you in upper left hand corner of this sheet my New York address, I am writing you this note from Washington, the capital of our great democratic republic. The fact is, I have not been in New York for several months, which explains why your undated letter took so long to catch up with me. I've been in various southern states – with the tobacco workers in Tampa, visiting a class war prisoner in Raleigh, etc. etc. . . . Your open letter to Herr Goebbels is splendid. I've forwarded it to the New Masses urging them to publish it and to communicate with you. At present – due to the general disillusion with the New Deal,<sup>62</sup> the literary situation is such that the publication of your letter in the New Masses will get even more attention than elsewhere. The magazine is now read by all kinds of people . . . Incidentally, you will find even Hollywood changed – not the officials, of course, but many actors (like James Cagney), directors (la Cava) and writers (Sam Ornitz, John Bright, Lester Cohn,<sup>63</sup> etc. etc.) are "left" – and how . . . The movies themselves, however, are even worse than when you were here. Technically they are better, thanks, in part, to you. I often think about you these days whether I like it or not. Sitting in a

cinema three or four times a week as I do, there is hardly a feature film these days which does not contain imitations of your montage.<sup>64</sup> It isn't always good; it doesn't always fit; and sometimes it becomes just another Hollywood cliché; nevertheless there it is; amidst the quatch of Hollywood "naturalism" come those moments of superimposed symbols which shout – but alas only a few sophisticates like myself – Sergei Eisenstein in every movie house from here to Los Angeles. In theme the movies have changed also under the influence of the Soviet film – but in a capitalist manner – naturally. Just as the success of the Five Year Plan has compelled the White House to talk about "planned" capitalism so Hollywood has tried – about as successfully as the White House – to adapt to capitalist needs certain aspects of *General Line, Ivan*,<sup>65</sup> etc. If – they apparently reasoned – the Soviet film can make a tremendous success out of economic themes like the socialization and mechanization of agriculture, the building of Dnieprostroy, why not make a success (i.e., money) out of American economic themes? And if Soviet "business" (i.e. the proletarian state which owns and directs the national economy) subsidizes Soviet films, why cannot American business subsidize American films? No sooner said than done. We have now had a flood of films dealing with one advertised product or another. These films are *subsidized* by various business firms, and the story revolves around the product they wish to advertise. The story is usually the same: the beautiful boy chases the beautiful girl or vice versa; and the beautiful boy or beautiful girl says NO for a few reels, then no for a few more reels, then y-e-s . . . for another few reels and finally shouts YES – fadeout . . . A movie called *Heat Lightning* had coca-cola as its real hero, the actress Aline Macmahon<sup>66</sup> was supposed to be the star; I've seen no less than *four* movies, starring big shots like Clark Gable, Claudette Colbert, Robert Montgomery, Fay Wray, Lew Ayres,<sup>67</sup> etc. centering around the cross-country buses (Greyhound,<sup>68</sup> etc.). And I've seen two (*Looking for Trouble*<sup>69</sup> with Spencer Tracy and Jack Oakie<sup>70</sup> and *I've Got Your Number*<sup>71</sup> with Joan Blondell and Pat O'Brien<sup>72</sup>) dealing with the wonders of the telephone company. The first of these used your montage method to open the film with; a dozen shots rapidly follow each other showing what a great and noble service the telephone company performs for humanity – a woman phones for a doctor; a broker phones the stock exchange, etc. etc. Moreover, I've seen four movies dealing with newspaper offices, all of them with more or less the same story, and the last one – *I'll Tell the World*<sup>73</sup> openly advertising the UNITED PRESS by name, with shots taken (as advertised) in the United Press offices. There's also been a movie "exposing" the fake drug racket – that is, supporting the organized pharmaceutical trust in maintaining high prices against people who try to undersell them by making dangerously inadequate drugs and cosmetics. I've seen two movies exposing fake doctors – men who practice medicine without a license; a movie glorifying the companies which make the big advertising posters and signs which sing from coast to coast the praises of Lifebuoy soap, Coca Cola, Lucky Strikes, Socony gasoline,<sup>74</sup> etc. I am leaving out of this brief and wholly inadequate list (which you can expand by getting a few American movie journals) those movies which glorify the American navy, army, aviation corps, the marines, etc etc. So you see, my dear S. M., your stay in the USA has not been in vain; Hollywood

has “socialised” its movies. Of course, you will say they are now simply producing glorified ads for American business for which American business pays them; and you will say that the stories are superficial and false; and you will, my dear and ironical S. M., be 100 percent correct. I’ve now gotten to the point where I can close my eyes and be listening to the first three sentences of the dialogue know the whole story in advance, especially in those cases where five or six movies are made by various companies around the same story. O yes . . . one other great “social” change. Hollywood has recognized the existence of the crisis. You remember that when you were here, Clark Gable, Fredrik March, Ricardo Cortez, Charlie Farrel<sup>75</sup> and their lady friends acted their synthetic fordized stories in magnificent mansions, ball rooms, cabarets, and private drawing rooms. The magnificence is now on a “social” scale; there have been scores of musical comedies where the swell gowns and jewels are worn by the actresses and the swanky furniture is on a stage or in the cabaret; but the movies about private lives are now laid in humble homes and cheap hotels and the heroes and heroines of the “sophisticated” drama of three years ago are now “plain,” “simple” folk without jobs or in modest circumstances. So you see Hollywood knows how to capitalise even the sufferings of the American people . . . Perhaps I should not bore you with these details about the American film which you follow anyway in the press; but I thought you’d like to hear some recent news about your cruel stepmother – or should I say Madame? . . . My warmest regards to you as ever. Do write me again soon, and let me know how your book is coming along and what films you are working on. Remember me to Tisse<sup>76</sup> and Alexandroff . . .<sup>77</sup>

Joe Freeman

#### 4

### Freeman letter to Eisenstein

From: Joseph Freeman

June 21, 1934

Dear Sergei – by this time you must have received the copy of the New Masses containing your open letter to Goebbels. Now I have a favor to ask of you. I am writing a book in which I should like to include your experiences with Hollywood.<sup>78</sup> I have heard various stories about your relations with Paramount in regard to the Dreiser film; but I do not want to write anything based on *gossip*. I should like to have something *authentic*. Could you tell me just what happened? The *principle* involved – the relation of the creative revolutionary artist to the capitalist “non-propaganda” film industry of the USA, is of the utmost importance. Also if you care to add a resume of the Mexican film affair I would appreciate it, though on that subject there is considerable material here. I am working under great pressure and every moment counts; so although you are very busy I would deeply appreciate it if you would send me your story at once. Thank

you very much in advance for anything you may do to help me in this matter. The story ought to be very instructive at this time.

As ever  
Joseph Freeman

P.S. I am working out in the woods and do not, to avoid complications with a small and extremely curious village, use my own name here. Please, therefore, address your letter to: J. F. Evans – R.F.D. No. 1 – Accord, New York – United States of America.

## 5

### **Eisenstein letter to Freeman**

My dear “Mr. Evans!”

I surely am happy to furnish you with the details of both stories concerning the “tycoons” of Paramount which could not work with me because of ideological impossibility but treated me more than fairly and our “brother Socialist” who behaved in the lousiest way and with much less understanding of idea, art and even simply human attitude towards an artist! This is a point which I would like you not to lose in mentioning both things together.

I add the details very shortly in outline because I am terribly busy. I never got a copy of “New Masses!” It would be very nice of you to give them a hint about sending me one, and add to it several back numbers! Also send them to me in future!

Always sincerely yours and ready to do whatever you might need.

S. Eisenstein

A detailed memo was attached to this letter, one that constituted a brief synopsis of Eisenstein’s report on his work during the time of his stay in America. This report resonated with his recent article, “The Cinema in America,” *International Literature*, No. 3 (1933), and with his later autobiographical notes (see Sergei Eizenshtein, *Izbrannye proizvedeniia v shesti tomakh*, Tom 1, pp. 400-414) [Sergei Eisenstein, *Selected Works in Six Volumes*, Volume 1, pp. 400-414]. According to Freeman’s note, he received the memo on July 24, 1934. Intending to make it public, Freeman retyped it on his typewriter, subjecting it to a certain stylistic alteration and accompanying it with several of his own bits of commentary. We are citing it here, using as our basis the text in Freeman’s redaction of it, but amending it by inserting several adjustments in accordance with the original.<sup>79</sup>

Prehistory unimportant. Knowledge of me not as much through my work as such, but from renown and name among movies. Usual situation – engagement based

on reputation and publicity around a name. In 1930 – very friendly meeting with Lasky – Lasky a type of film man which is disappearing: the romantic, gambling, sporting type of film businessman.

The opposite type – the newer one – the Wall Street “clerk” type: no phantasy, no poetry, no romantic risk, no desire to try or risk something not surely known from the beginning as to the exact market value of the final product. (The worst handicap even in the restricted limits of development possibility in the American film.) Fight of these two types in the management of Paramount. The Lasky group<sup>80</sup> and the Schulberg group (B. P. Schulberg – the California boss)<sup>81</sup>. Fight of the two methods. Final result – Lasky leaves Paramount several years later. Paramount completely “Wall Streeted,” bureaucratic and losing its rank in the movie prestige field. Production mediocre. Standard of pictures low. (Veteran of the old gambling type – entrepreneur jf<sup>82</sup> – also Carl Laemmle Sr.<sup>83</sup> Compare with Irving Thalberg – combining business shrewdness with filibuster “temperament” and “condottieri” style of first gold-rushers! Successes of M.G.M. Am engaged by Lasky, who sees interesting experiment in possibility of combining “Russian creative temperament” with “American super-technique.” No illusions as to results on both sides. Gamble. We sign contract, as experiment on both sides. “We will see.” Contract in for three months. Prolongated in Hollywood to six (because of entering into main experiment: scenario preparation of “American Tragedy”)<sup>84</sup> – slogan: – “try to produce something *different* from usual Hollywood.” Stories proposed in Paris when signing<sup>85</sup> include as main subjects “The Process of Zola.”<sup>86</sup> A glimpse of what means “unusual” in Hollywood is another proposed subject: “Grand Hotel.”<sup>87</sup> Reject it there and then. Complete change of attitude the moment arrived in the States. The real meaning of the formula “unusual” – to make exactly the same things! Am shown “The Virginian” as the ideal of a picture.<sup>88</sup> “Our main audience is the small townner – he is the one who pays.” Two lines of subjects: one coming from Paramount:

- 1) The martyrdom of the Jesuit missionaries in the United States during the civilization<sup>89</sup> (probably: horrors of the red skins torturing the father jesuits – great stuff for blood-thirsty “bolshi”).<sup>90</sup>
- 2) Pacifistic “Broken Lullaby” – produced later on by Lubitch.<sup>91</sup>
- 3) Above mentioned “Grand Hotel” – etc. etc. in the same style: “Laughing Boy” etc.

Another coming from us:

- 1) Gold Rush to California – “Sutter’s Gold” by Blaise Cendrars. I actually completed the scenario on this – but Paramount was afraid to produce it. Opposition from “Daughters of American Revolution” and other patriotic organization.<sup>92</sup> Panic about bolshies treating the subject of gold.<sup>93</sup>

2) Bazil Zacharoff,<sup>94</sup> etc. etc.<sup>95</sup>

Finally agreed upon subject of “American Tragedy.” Lasky “enthusiastic.” B. P. Schulberg, supposing it might interest the Americans how “bolshies” look at a typical American story. Strict instruction – treat story as police story about “a boy and a girl.”<sup>96</sup> Controversy started with that. No social background.<sup>97</sup> No story of development and growth of character.<sup>98</sup> My question – why take Dreiser’s book, pay him \$100,000 – if such point of view – easier to take any story out of every day newspaper. Second big controversy when asked if in my treatment Clyde Griffith is criminal or not. Main point in my treatment – conditions of education, bringing up, work, surroundings and social conditions *drive* characterless boy to crime. And electrocuting him afterward. “Such a film would be a monstrous accusation against American society,” says Paramount. Still they let me do the script.<sup>99</sup> When finished, we part. Story – developing and emphasizing Dreiser’s situations and bringing them into pure relief. We added nothing – just accentuated the important sociological points which, with Dreiser’s objective method, all are in the book. This brought the departure. Add to it the Fish Committee, the dumping stuff at that time.<sup>100</sup> And the inner fight of the two tendencies inside of Paramount. Von Sternberg<sup>101</sup> produces the picture afterwards – entirely in the pattern which they tried to force on me. Von Sternberg has in the picture nearly all we wanted to eliminate – and eliminates nearly all we wanted to show.<sup>102</sup> For instance – the court room stuff filling nearly  $\frac{3}{4}$  of Von St[ernberg]’s picture – interested me only in so far as to be a background to the fight in the election campaign, wherein the life or death of Clyde Griffith plays but the role of propaganda for one or the other groups in the campaign. Finally Mason gets the death sentence for Clyde, which gives him the majority in the farming circles of the state. The interest in Clyde as a human being is of no value to the society which brought him to crime and sentenced him to death etc. On the other hand, everything connected with Clyde’s youth, his moral corruption by “tips,” the imbecilities of the religious mission where he grows up to become a “lumpenproletarian” etc. was of great interest. As well as the atmosphere of exploitation when Clyde works at the collar manufactory of his uncle (and not gloves as in the actual film) etc. etc. I think you get the picture.

Now what concerns the way they treated me – I must say in the most gentlemanly way. Paying me every cent (and even more), filling their obligations – and after we parted helping us and making everything easy. The final “bon mot” of B. P. to the whole matter was: “It was a noble experiment” – and that is the funniest thing in the whole story.<sup>103</sup> That was the experience with the capitalists – now comes the one with the socialist. Here it is very important to point out that I already had an arrangement for financing the picture. I was interested to know and see the country and agreed to go in it for only the living and producing expenses. Sinclair entered at this moment – said that the conditions were unfair – proposed to break the thing off – let him arrange the thing and promised us to pay 10 percent of the income. The main motive was that we would have no ideological difficulty and

nobody would misrepresent the picture we made. With some difficulty we succeeded in cancelling the other arrangement and signed the one with Sinclair. All the stories about my coming and imploring Sinclair to save my reputation are a “little bit” overemphasized. I was pretty anxious and nervous – having an expiring visa – but as you see I could have had the thing without Sinclair! The funniest joke is that both motions<sup>104</sup> with which Sinclair “persuaded” me – the ideological facilities and the little income of the picture we would get – *both* have been frustrated. We did not get one cent from the picture – living only on our living expenses in Mexico and what is the really important part of it – we have a completely artistically and *politically* falsified and murdered body of a film! (90 percent going to those who gave the money and 10 percent to those who wrote the story and produced the film – is *by itself* also not *too* “socialistic” if you consider the figures?!) Another point is “the miles and miles” of film. Consider the costs of the film – \$53,000, whereas my *personal salary* at Paramount would have been almost this figure! And the smallest Hollywood film being not cheaper than \$350,000. Murnau’s “Taboo”<sup>105</sup> – also privately produced, was something about \$250,000! I wonder nobody is talking about that! Forgetting that film footage is the cheapest thing! The artistic “hints” and “instructions” and “advices” from Sinclair would make blush the lousiest picture-mongers in the lowest depths of Hollywood’s. – “Chapultepec conserves the crowns of former king Maximilian and Queen Charlotte. Dress two people as them and put them on the terrace overlooking Mexico City. It would make a beautiful picture.” (I quote from memory. You know that Sinclair searched my baggage for photographs when sending it to Moscow, “losing” at the same time part of our personal things! But this letter might be in my possession.) Or instructing me that Mrs. Crane Gartz<sup>106</sup> likes the Don Quixote mayolica fountains in the Park<sup>107</sup> and it would be good to make some shots. I *really* do not *see* an *inch* of difference between Hollywood and Pasadena. The “boy and girl”<sup>108</sup> instructions were filling most of the letters. Sinclair never could understand that suppressing a part brings changes in the conception of the whole. That rushes shown without order and elimination hurt and spoil impressions with the people. I never could explain him anything about composition, continuity etc. His badly written and composed books, just racketeering on the sensational stuff they grab, ought to have opened my eyes before on the fact that we had to do with a completely unartistic person. And the smallest little have-been peddler in Hollywood who has grown up to a business manager has just as much understanding as this “great writer.” The way they have “arranged” my picture talks for itself. I ask you very much to use all this stuff *without quotations* – because that will involve an interminable correspondence with this lousy skunk. I have had enough grief about the whole “Mexican tragedy” and do not want to lose any more time and nerves on the man who ruined three of my best creative years (cf. Arthur Stirling<sup>109</sup>). Send me direct questions to everything you want to know. I’ll answer you. Always very sincerely,

Yours,  
S. Eisenstein.

**Freeman letter to Eisenstein**

J. F. Evans  
 Box 190  
 RFD No. 1  
 Accord – New York

July 25, 1934

Dear Sergei Michaelovich – your letter just arrived – and I have had the opportunity of only glancing through it; but I can see that what you have been kind enough to send me is extremely valuable material. I shall use it in the book – and want to thank you for your cooperation – as well as the rapidity with which you answered my request.

It is curious that the New Masses has sent you no copies – but I have written them again about the matter and will see to it that you receive copies.

Our “socialist brother” Upton Sinclair, as you probably know, was expelled from the Socialist Party in the autumn of last year (1933) when he announced that he would seek the Democratic nomination for governor of California. Since then he has been making an active campaign for that nomination. It is said that he has good chances of getting it – and even of being elected governor of California as the candidate of Roosevelt’s party – the party under whose administration workers have been murdered in San Francisco, Minneapolis, etc. Sinclair’s slogan is EPIC – which stands for “End Poverty In California” – and his ambition is to outdo the bolsheviks – He wants to establish socialism not in one country – but in one state – the state of California – and not through a workers but through a capitalist party. Do not laugh, my dear Sergei Michaelovich, our “socialist brother” is opening a new epoch in human history. He says so himself . . .

[Joseph Freeman]

**Freeman letter to Eisenstein**

J. F. Evans  
 Box 190  
 RFD No. 1  
 Accord – New York



August 30, 1934

Dear S. M. – enclosed is a letter for Jay Leyda.<sup>110</sup> He wrote me - but forgot to give me his address. I hope you or Atashova can get the letter to him.

Your “pal” and “patron,” Mr. Sinclair, has finally been nominated by the Democrats. His opponent was another ex-socialist – George Creel. You see, the social-democrats are more or less the same the world over.

Sinclair is going to establish socialism in one state – which is way ahead of you people who only want to establish it in one country – and possibly the whole world. When Sinclair ends poverty in California – why don’t you come over and make a film of that utopia? You have always wanted to do a comedy, I believe.

[Joseph Freeman]<sup>111</sup>

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> See: Marie Seton, *Sergei Eisenstein: A Biography* (New York: A. A. Wyn, Inc., 1950), p. 119; cf. O. Bulgakova, “Sergei Eizenshtein i ego ‘psikhologicheskii Berlin’ – mezhdru psikhoanalizom i strukturnoi psikhologii” [“Sergei Eisenstein and His ‘Psychological Berlin:’ Between Psychoanalysis and Structural Psychology”], *Kinovedcheskie zapiski* [*Cinematological Notes*], 2 (1988): 174-191; for information on Stefan Zweig’s intention of arranging a meeting between Eisenstein and Freud, see his December 18, 1928 letter in *Inostrannaia literatura* [*Foreign Literature*], No. 1 (1958): 246; cf. also: Fridrikh Ermler, “Druzhit’ s nim bylo legko . . .” [“Being Friends With Him Was Easy . . .”], *Eizenshtein v vospominaniakh sovremennikov* [*Eisenstein in the Reminiscences of His Contemporaries*] (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1974), p. 204.

<sup>2</sup> Joseph Freeman, *An American Testament*, pp. 588-595. Freeman’s essay on this film was published in the newspaper, *Vecherniaia Moskva* [*Evening Moscow*] (January 20, 1927).

<sup>3</sup> A similar invitation was also extended to Eisenstein by Joseph Shenk (Schenck), the president of the motion picture company, *United Artists*. See: Marie Seton, *op. cit.*, p. 119; Grigorii Vasil’evich Aleksandrov, *Epokha i kino* [*Epoch and Cinema*] (Moscow: Izdatel’stvo politicheskoi literatury, 1983), p. 128.

<sup>4</sup> “Eisenstein on Soviet Film,” in Joseph Freeman, Joshua Kunitz, and Louis Lozowick, *Voices of October: Art and Literature in Soviet Russia*, pp. 225-239.

<sup>5</sup> See the Freeman archive (Freeman, Box 152). All of the documents published below, with the exception of stipulated instances, are cited from this source.

<sup>6</sup> Ernestine Evans (1890-1967), an American journalist, an author of works of children's literature, and a proofreader, worked as the Moscow correspondent for the newspaper, *The New York Herald Tribune*, from 1915 to 1920.

<sup>7</sup> Apparently, this part of the essay had something in common with Eisenstein's article, "Perspektivy" ["Perspectives"], published in 1928 in the journal, *Iskusstvo* [Art] (Sergei Eizenshtein, *Izbrannye proizvedeniia v shesti tomakh*, Tom 2 [Sergei Eisenstein, *Selected Works in Six Volumes*, Volume 2 (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1964): pp. 35-44; English translation: S. M. Eisenstein, *Selected Works*, edited and translated by Richard Taylor. Volume 1: *Writings, 1922-1934* (London: BFI Publishing, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), pp. 151-160. Cf.: François Albéra, *Eisenstein et le constructivisme russe. "Stuttgart:" dramaturgie de la forme* (Lausanne: L'Age d'Homme, 1990).

<sup>8</sup> This chapter did not appear in the miscellany, *Voices of October*. The content of Eisenstein's essay published there is reduced entirely to a justification of Soviet cultural politics in the domain of cinematography.

<sup>9</sup> In the original letter, this part is underlined by Freeman.

<sup>10</sup> In the original letter, this part is underlined by Freeman.

<sup>11</sup> Grigorii Vasil'evich Aleksandrov, *Epokha i kino* [Epoch and Cinema], pp. 118-119; Semen Chertok, "Urok Eizenshteina" ["Eisenstein's Lesson"], *Kontinent* [Continent], 46 (1985): 299-300.

<sup>12</sup> Rostislav Iurenev, *Sergei Eizenshtein. Zamysly. Fil'my. Metod* [Sergei Eisenstein. Projects. Films. Method]. *Chast' vtoraiia* [Part Two]: 1930-1948 (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1988), p. 5.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. the observation made by a contemporary English observer: "Eisenstein's conflict with the Soviet has doubtless helped to send him to America, where at the moment he is to be found, presumably making a sound picture. America has ruined many producers and many actors, but Eisenstein has the qualities to survive, if survival be possible." Gerald F. Noxon, "Conflict in the Russian Cinema," *Experiment* (Cambridge), No. 6 (October 1930): 46-47.

<sup>14</sup> Ilya Erenburg cites the following statement made by Adolph Zukor [Adolf Cukor], the head of Paramount Pictures: "Of course, Eisenstein should come to his senses. Hollywood is not Moscow. I will not tolerate any kind of tendency. Strictly between us, I fear that nothing will come of this. He is unbelievably stubborn. This is all a game. And sometimes we lose." Il'ia Erenburg, *Fabrika snov. Khronika nashego vremeni* [The Dream Factory: A Chronicle of Our Time] (Berlin: Petropolis, 1931), p. 25.

<sup>15</sup> As published documents show, he shared several of these projects with Freeman in New York and on the way to California.

<sup>16</sup> "[S.] M. Eisenstein Here," *The New York Times* (May 18, 1930), VIII, p. 5; Yon Barna, *Eisenstein* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1973), p. 150.

<sup>17</sup> Jesse L. Lasky, *I Blow My Own Horn* (New York: Doubleday, 1957), p. 223.

<sup>18</sup> Budd Schulberg, *Moving Pictures: Memoirs of a Hollywood Prince* (New York: Stein and Day, 1981), p. 369. In 1936, a film by James Cruze [Jens Vera Cruz Bosen], based on this same novel, came out with a different screenplay.

<sup>19</sup> The screenplays for *Sutter's Gold* and *An American Tragedy* are published in the book: Ivor Montagu, *With Eisenstein in Hollywood: A Chapter of Autobiography* (New York: International Publishers, 1969). See also: Jay Leyda and Zina Voynov, *Eisenstein at Work* (New York: Pantheon Books/The Museum of Modern Art, 1982), pp. 53-58.

<sup>20</sup> See: Sergei Dinamov, "Travlia Draizera nachalas" ["The Persecution of Dreiser Has Begun"], *Literaturnaia gazeta [Literary Gazette]* (October 27, 1931); Sergei Dinamov, "Theodore Dreiser Is Coming Our Way," *Literature of the World Revolution*, No. 5 (1931): 126-132; "Dreiser Promises Vote to Communist Ticket," *New York Herald Tribune* (July 5, 1932). For information on the book, *Dreiser Looks at Russia [Draizer smotrit na Rossiuu]* (promulgated for the first time in the U.S.S.R. only after 1988), see the remarks by Tamara Lazarevna Motyleva that are cited in the essay: "Sovetskii opyt i pisateli Zapada" ["The Soviet Experiment and Writers of the West"], *Inostrannaia literatura [Foreign Literature]*, No. 8 (1989): 216.

<sup>21</sup> Harry Alan Potamkin, "Novel into Film: A Case Study of Current Practice," *Close Up*, Vol. VIII, No. 4 (December 1931): 267-279; Hyman Solomon Kraft, "Dreiser's War in Hollywood," *The Screen Writer*, 1 (March 1946): 9-13; William Andrew Swanberg, *Dreiser* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1965), pp. 376-378; Edward Murray, *The Cinematic Imagination: Writers and the Motion Pictures* (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1972), pp. 116-123.

<sup>22</sup> Sinclair and Eisenstein met for the first time in New York at the end of May 1930 and discussed at that time the plan for a film based on a libretto by Sinclair. Even earlier, three years before their initial meeting, while Eisenstein was preparing for a trip to America and contemplating a prospective film about America, he thought about a collaboration with Sinclair and, in a February 16, 1927 letter to Eisenstein, Sinclair expressed his consent. See: "Steklannyi Dom S. M. Eizenshteina: K istorii zamysla" ["S. M. Eisenstein's Glass House: Toward the History of an Idea"], Text preparation and commentary by Naum Ikhil'evich Kleiman, *Iskusstvo kino [Film Art]*, No. 3 (1979): 94-95; Sergei Eizenshtein, *Izbrannye proizvedeniia v shesti tomakh [Selected Works in Six Volumes]*, Tom 6 (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1971), p. 535; Rostislav Iurenev, *Sergei Eizenshtein. Zamysly. Fil'my. Metod [Sergei Eisenstein. Projects. Films. Method]. Chast' vtoraia [Part Two]: 1930-1948* (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1988), pp. 12, 14.

<sup>23</sup> During the winter of 1930-1931, incidentally, Sinclair's name was put forward as a candidate in the competition for the Nobel Prize.

<sup>24</sup> In the course of the 1920s, incidentally, Sinclair was the most popular contemporary foreign author in the U.S.S.R. No one could compare with him when it came to the number of editions of his work that were being published there. In 1930-1932, a new twelve-volume collection of

his works came out from Gosizdat [State Publishing House] in Moscow and the question was debated about whether to pay the author a royalty in foreign currency.

<sup>25</sup> The unreliability of all the calculations that provided the basis for the Mexico project caught the eye of Ivor Montagu, who considered the project a gamble, refused to participate in it, and insisted that the Soviet director return home immediately.

<sup>26</sup> “The brilliant speed with which he had filmed his previous pictures allowed people to believe Eisenstein when he said that he would do everything at the earliest possible date,” Viktor Shklovsky writes in his book, *Eizenshtein [Eisenstein]* (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1973), p. 197.

<sup>27</sup> Otherwise, the chances of the film’s wide release in the West would have turned out to be zero.

<sup>28</sup> See his June 20, 1931 and August 25, 1931 letters to Gorky in *Arkhiv A. M. Gor’kogo, Tom 8: Perepiska A. M. Gor’kogo s zarubezhnymi literatorami [The Aleksei M. Gorky Archive, Volume 8: Gorky’s Correspondence with Men of Letters Abroad]* (Moscow: Izdatel’stvo Akademii Nauk SSSR, 1960), pp. 308-309. Sinclair refers to the first of these two letters in a July 13, 1931 letter to Joseph Freeman. See: Freeman, Box 156.

<sup>29</sup> *Sergei Eisenstein and Upton Sinclair: The Making & Unmaking of “¡Que Viva Mexico!”* ed. Harry M. Geduld & Ronald Gottesman (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1970). Cf.: Inga Karetnikova, in collaboration with Leon Steinmetz, *Mexico According to Eisenstein* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1991).

<sup>30</sup> The letter is printed from a typescript copy in the Freeman archive (Joseph Freeman Collection, Hoover Institution Archives).

<sup>31</sup> Artemic Bagratovich Khalatov (1896-1938), a Party official who served from 1927 to 1932 as the Chairman of the Board of Directors at the the State Publishing House, was a staff member at the People’s Commissariat for Education, and was one of the leaders of MORP (Mezhdunarodnoe ob”edinenie revoliutsionnykh pisatelei) [IURW (International Union of Revolutionary Writers)].

<sup>32</sup> Béla Illesh (1895-1974), a Hungarian Communist writer, was a participant in the Hungarian Revolution of 1919 who lived in emigration in the U.S.S.R. from 1923 to 1945, occupying the post of Secretary of MORP (Mezhdunarodnoe ob”edinenie revoliutsionnykh pisatelei) [IURW (International Union of Revolutionary Writers)], until 1933.

<sup>33</sup> We do not possess any information on this person: his surname [Yazikoff] is not listed in any of the bibliographies. It is possible that this is a slip of the pen on Sinclair’s part, and that he has in mind Ieronim Ieronimovich Yasinsky or Mikhail Alekseevich D’iakonov, in whose translations the first Soviet editions of the American writer’s works were published.

<sup>34</sup> An American publisher who published works by leftist radical authors. For information on him, see: Walker Gilmer, *Horace Liveright: Publisher of the Twenties* (New York: David Lewis, 1970).

<sup>35</sup> See: Esfir' Shub, *Zhizn' moia – kinematograf. Krypnyim planom. Stat'i, vystupleniia. Neosushchestvlennye zamysli. Perepiska* [*My Life as a Cinematographer. A Close-Up Shot. Articles and Addresses. Unrealized Projects. Correspondence*] (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1972), p. 388. Cf. the translation in the edition: *A Premature Celebration of Eisenstein's Centenary*, ed. by Jay Leyda (Calcutta: Seagull Books, 1985), pp. 48-49.

<sup>36</sup> *Eizenshtein v vospominaniakh sovremennikov* [*Eisenstein in the Reminiscences of His Contemporaries*], p. 72. Cf.: Richard Taylor, "Boris Shumiatskii i sovetskoe kino v 30-ye gody: ideologiya kak razvlechenie mass" ["Boris Shumyatsky and Soviet Cinema in the 1930s: Ideology as Mass Entertainment," *Kinovedcheskie zapiski* [*Cinematological Notes*] 3 (1989): 38-67.

<sup>37</sup> His portrait is included in a series of caricatures of leading Soviet theatrical figures and cinematographers that is reproduced in the book: *Eizenshtein v vospominaniakh sovremennikov* [*Eisenstein in the Reminiscences of His Contemporaries*], p. 205.

<sup>38</sup> Sinclair's October 26, 1931 letter to Stalin (after the copy preserved in the addresser's archive), together with Stalin's reply telegram of November 21, 1931 and Sinclair's ensuing letter to Stalin of November 22, 1931, were first published while the writer was still alive, in 1965. Cf.: Ronald Gottesman, "Sergej Eisenstein & Upton Sinclair," *Sight and Sound*, Vol. 34, No. 3 (Summer 1965): 142-143. These documents are included in the volume: *Sergei Eisenstein and Upton Sinclair*, ed. by Harry M. Geduld and Ronald Gottesman (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1970): pp. 190-191, 212-214, cf. pp. 226-227. In the U.S.S.R., their full text (in a translation from a journal publication) appeared only in 1988. See ". . . Edva ne stal 'nevozvrashchentsem:' Maloizvestnye stranitsy tvorcheskoi biografii S. Eizenshteina" ["... He Nearly Became a 'Defector:' Little-Known Pages from the Creative Biography of Sergei Eisenstein"], newspaper *Sovetskaia kul'tura* [*Soviet Culture*] (June 11, 1988). But extensive excerpts from Sinclair's November 22, 1931 letter were cited in the commentaries of the sixth volume of Eisenstein's *Izbrannye proizvedeniia* [*Selected Works*] (1971), pp. 536-537.

<sup>39</sup> Epton Sinkler, "Stroite sotsializm!" [Upton Sinclair, "Build Socialism!"], *Pravda* (November 7, 1931).

<sup>40</sup> Rostislav Iurenev, *Sergei Eizenshtein. Zamysly. Fil'my. Metod* [*Sergei Eisenstein. Projects. Films. Method*]. *Chast' vtoraiia* [*Part Two*], p. 53.

<sup>41</sup> Cf.: Jay Leyda, *Kino: A History of the Russian and Soviet Film* (New York: Macmillan, 1960), p. 239.

<sup>42</sup> Rostislav Iurenev, "S. Eizenshtein – pis'ma iz Meksiki" ["S. Eisenstein – Letters from Mexico"], *Prometei* [*Prometheus*] 9 (1972): 198.

<sup>43</sup> Serge Eisenstein, “A Mexican Film and Marxian Theory,” *The New Republic* (December 9, 1931), pp. 99-100.

<sup>44</sup> He informed Sinclair about his telegram. See: *Sergei Eisenstein and Upton Sinclair*, p. 265.

<sup>45</sup> Herman G. Weinberg, “The ‘Lesser’ of Two Evils: Concerning the Case of *¡Que Viva Mexico!*” *The Modern Monthly*, Vol. VII, No. 5 (June 1933): 300; William Harrison Richardson, *Mexico through Russian Eyes, 1806-1940* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1988), p. 187.

<sup>46</sup> On the other hand, all of the allusions in the press about the revolutionary sound of the planned film should have put the representatives of the Mexican government on their guard and irritated them, for they had allowed the filming to proceed on condition that strict censorial control be placed over it.

<sup>47</sup> See Upton Sinclair’s letter to the editorial board of *The Modern Monthly*, Vol. VII, No. 6 (July 1933): 373.

<sup>48</sup> Published by Seymour Stern in his journal *Experimental Cinema*, 5 (1934): 4-13, 52. It was published in Russian for the first time in the sixth volume of Eisenstein’s *Izbrannye proizvedeniia* [*Selected Works*] (1971).

<sup>49</sup> See, for example, the article by Adolfo Best-Maugard, who curated the work of the group in Mexico and who took Eisenstein’s side in the conflict with Sinclair: Adolfo Best-Maugard, “Mexico into Cinema,” *Theatre Arts Monthly*, Vol. XVI (November 1932): 926-933. Cf.: “Signor Best-Maugard Repudiates It Too,” *The New Republic* (August 23, 1933): 49-50; *Close Up* (London), Vol. 10, No. 3 (September 1933): 256-257. For information on him, see: Wilhelm Harrison Richardson, *Mexico through Russian Eyes, 1806-1940*, p. 167.

<sup>50</sup> Cf. the Russian variant of this text provided in the edition: Sergei Eizenshtein, *Izbrannye proizvedeniia v shesti tomakh*, Tom 1 [Sergei Eisenstein, *Selected Works in Six Volumes*, Volume 1 (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1964): pp. 620-621. See also the variant libretto of the film, composed in 1932 – *Iskusstvo kino* [*Film Art*], No. 5 (1957): 109-113.

<sup>51</sup> “Eisenstein did not want to see a single one of his films up on the screen more than this one. To do this, he was even prepared to go to war,” wrote Ivan Aksenov in 1933. See: Ivan Aleksandrovich Aksenov, “Eizenshtein (Portret khudozhnika)” [“Eisenstein (A Portrait of the Artist)”], *Iskusstvo kino* [*Film Art*], No. 1 (1968): 112.

<sup>52</sup> Samuel Brody, Tom Brandon, “A Mexican Trailer,” *New Masses* (September 1933): 28; “The Thunder Dies,” *ibid.* (January 23, 1934): 21.

<sup>53</sup> “Sergei Eisenstein,” *Daily Worker* (August 26, 1933).

<sup>54</sup> See below Freeman’s letters of July 25, 1934 and August 30, 1934. Cf.: Mikhail Levidov, “Epicheskii Epton” [“Epic Upton”], *Literaturnaia gazeta* [*Literary Gazette*] (January 24, 1934);

Cf.: Leonard Leader, "Upton Sinclair's EPIC Switch: A Dilemma for American Socialists," *The Upton Beall Sinclair Centenary Journal*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (September 1978): 69-87; Leon Harris, *Upton Sinclair: American Rebel* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1975), pp. 294-319; Sender Garlin, "Upton Sinclair: Reactionary Utopian," *New Masses* (May 22, 1934): 10-12 (see the Russian translation in the journal *Internatsional'naia literatura* [*International Literature*], No. 5 (1934): 132-135).

<sup>55</sup> The first such aborted production was the comedy *M.M.M.* See: *Iz istorii kino. Dokumenty i materialy* [*From the History of Film. Documents and Materials*]. Vypusk 10 [Issue 10] (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1977), pp. 94-156; Nikolai Lytkin, "Kak v kino. Zapiski kinokhronikera" ["As in the Movies. Notes of a Cameraman"], *Nezakonchennoe proshloe. O zhizni kinematografistov* [*An Unfinished Past. On the Life of Cinematographers*] (Moscow: Sovremennik, 1988), p. 42. Cf.: Louis Fischer, *Men and Politics: An Autobiography* (New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1941), pp. 301-302.

<sup>56</sup> Marie Seton, *Sergei M. Eisenstein: A Biography*, pp. 326-327.

<sup>57</sup> See: Ella Winter, *And Not to Yield: An Autobiography* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1963), p. 174.

<sup>58</sup> The "big" press made note of this document only after it had appeared in German translation on the pages of the newspaper *Pariser Tageblatt*. See "Eisenstein to Goebbels," *The New York Times* (December 30, 1934): IX, 4. Besides *Pariser Tageblatt* and *New Masses*, the letter also appeared in the journal *Film Art* (Winter 1934): 11-12. See also: Sergei Eizenshtein, *Izbrannye proizvedeniia v shesti tomakh*, Tom 5 [Sergei Eisenstein, *Selected Works in Six Volumes*, Volume 5] (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1968): 224-228; S. M. Eisenstein, *Selected Works*, edited and translated by Richard Taylor. *Vol. 1: Writings, 1922-1934* (London: BFI Publishing, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), pp. 280-285.

<sup>59</sup> The research study/textbook, *Rezhissura* [*Film Directing*], which Eisenstein worked on beginning in 1932. See: *Izbrannye proizvedeniia v shesti tomakh*, Tom 4 [*Selected Works in Six Volumes*, Volume 4] (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1966).

<sup>60</sup> Eisenstein's article, "On Fascism, German Film Art, and Real Life. An Open Letter to the German Minister of Propaganda, Doctor Goebbels," appeared on the front page of *Literaturnaia gazeta* [*Literary Gazette*] on March 22, 1934.

<sup>61</sup> Most likely this is a slip of the pen, and Eisenstein has in mind here Kenneth Durant (1889-1972), the first American correspondent for the Soviet news agency TASS and the head of its affiliated branch in New York from 1923 to 1944 (where Joseph Freeman also worked), who was a close friend of William Bullitt, the first U.S. ambassador to the Soviet Union. For information on Durant, see: Eugene Lyons, *Assignment in Utopia* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1937), pp. 40-41, 231; Louis Fischer, *Men and Politics: An Autobiography*, pp. 299-300. But it is also possible that Eisenstein is speaking here about Walter Duranty (1884-1957), a British journalist (and ardent supporter of Stalin) who served as the correspondent for *The New York Times* in Moscow beginning in 1920. For information on Duranty, see: James William Crowl,

*Angels in Stalin's Paradise: Western Reporters in Soviet Russia, 1917 to 1937, A Case Study of Louis Fischer and Walter Duranty* (Washington: University Press of America, 1982); S. J. Taylor, *Stalin's Apologist: Walter Duranty, The New York Times's Man in Moscow* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990).

<sup>62</sup> President Roosevelt's economic program.

<sup>63</sup> James Francis Cagney, Jr. (1899-1986) was one of the most famous stars of the "Golden Age" of Hollywood; he made his film debut in 1930, becoming famous for his performances in comedic and gangster roles. Gregory La Cava (1892-1952) was a film director who, beginning in 1922, worked in Hollywood, where he was the first to combine live actors and animation in films. Samuel Ornitz (1890-1957) was a writer and screenwriter who worked as a staff member at *New Masses*; John Bright (born in 1908) was a screenwriter who, beginning in 1930, collaborated with the Warner Brothers Company and acquired fame with the film, *The Public Enemy* (1931); Lester Cohn (born in 1904) changed his surname in the 1920s to Cole and, under that name, acquired fame as a screenwriter; in his autobiography, *Hollywood Red* (Palo Alto, CA: Ramparts Press, 1981), he includes interesting material about the leftist trends in Hollywood beginning in the 1930s. See also: Eugene Lyons, *The Red Decade: The Stalinist Penetration of America* (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1941), pp. 284-295.

<sup>64</sup> For information on the influence of montage on American film during these years, see: Lewis Jacobs, *The Rise of the American Film: A Critical History* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1939), pp. 312-324; Seymour Stern, "Hollywood and Montage," *Experimental Cinema*, 4 (1932): 47-52.

<sup>65</sup> [Alexander] Dovzhenko's film, which appeared on Soviet movie screens in November 1932.

<sup>66</sup> The actress Aline Macmahon (1899-1991) began her theatrical career in 1920, and in 1931 she made the switch over to the cinema; she acted in 43 films (*The Mouthpiece, One Way Passage, Life Begins, Gold Diggers of 1933, Heroes for Sale, Babbitt*, et al.). For information on her, see: David Shipman, *The Great Movie Stars: The Golden Years* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1970), pp. 360-363.

<sup>67</sup> William Clark Gable (1901-1960), one of the most popular American actors, began acting in films in 1924 (*No Man of Her Own, New York – Miami*, et al.); Claudette Colbert (her real name was Lily [Claudette] Chauchoin, born in 1905) began acting in films in 1927, in particular, in the films *The Torch Singer, The Sign of the Cross*, and *Cleopatra*; Robert Montgomery (his real name was Henry Montgomery Jr.), born in 1904, made his film debut in 1929; Fay Wray [Vina Fay Wray], a movie actress born in 1907, performed on stage and on screen beginning in 1923. For information on her, see: James Robert Parish and William T. Leonard, *Hollywood Players: The Thirties* (New Rochelle, N.Y.: Arlington House, 1976), pp. 540-547; Lew Ayres (born in 1908) was an actor, musician, and film director who made his debut in the MGM movie, *The Kiss* (1929), and acted in such films as *The Sophomore, All Quiet on the Western Front*, to name but a few.

<sup>68</sup> A major motor transport company.



<sup>69</sup> It appeared on movie screens in 1932.

<sup>70</sup> Spencer Tracy (1900-1967) was a great American actor who made his theatrical debut in 1922 and his film debut in 1930; Jack Oakie (Freeman makes a slip of the pen in his letter, spelling his surname “Okey”), whose real name was Lewis D. Offield (1903-1978), was a famous screen actor in comedies, appearing with Charlie Chaplin in the latter’s film, *The Great Dictator* (1939).

<sup>71</sup> It appeared on movie screens in 1934.

<sup>72</sup> Joan Blondell (1909-1979) was a screen actress who began her career in Hollywood together with James Cagney in 1930; in 1972, she published a novel, *Center Door Fancy*, about life in Hollywood. Pat O’Brien (1899-1983) was a screen actor who acted in more than 100 films.

<sup>73</sup> It appeared on movie screens in 1934.

<sup>74</sup> These are well-known industrial and commercial companies.

<sup>75</sup> Frederic March, whose real name was Ernest Frederick McIntyre Bickel (1887-1975), made his theatrical debut in 1920 and his film debut in 1929. Ricardo Cortez, whose real name was Jacob Kranze (1899-1977), appeared in the films *The Torrent* (together with Greta Garbo), *Thirteen Women*, *Private Life of Helen of Troy*, *Shadow of Doubt*, et al. Charles Farrell (born in 1902) was a star in silent films who gained fame with the film *Seventh Heaven* (1927); he served in the United States Navy during the Second World War, and then served for a number of years as mayor of the city of Palm Springs. For information on him, see: James Robert Parish, *Hollywood’s Great Love Teams* (New Rochelle, N.Y.: Arlington House, 1974), pp. 61-95.

<sup>76</sup> Eduard Kazimirovich Tisse (1897-1961) was the cinematographer who shot all of Eisenstein’s films.

<sup>77</sup> Grigory Vasil’evich Aleksandrov (Mormonenko, 1903-1983), one of Eisenstein’s closest colleagues before 1932, was a director and screenwriter who shot the film *Romance Sentimentale* in Paris in 1930; upon his return from Mexico, he met with Stalin (at Gorky’s home) and made a successful independent career for himself in Soviet cinema, producing, in particular, the documentary film *Internatsional [Internationale]* (1933), the comedies *Veselye rebiata [Jolly Fellows]* (1936), *Tsirk [Circus]* (1936), to name but a few. He was named a People’s Artist of the U.S.S.R. in 1948 and a member of the CPSU [Communist Party of the Soviet Union] in 1954. At the end of his life, he was working on the restoration and completion of the film *¡Que Viva Mexico!* See: G. Aleksandrov, “Na montazhnom stole – fil’m S. M. Eizenshteina” [“On the Cutting Table – S. M. Eisenstein’s Film”], *Iskusstvo kino [Film Art]*, No. 2 (1979): 93-100.

<sup>78</sup> This work, conceived by Freeman as a counterbalance to Eastman’s book about Soviet literature, never did get written.

<sup>79</sup> A small piece from this memo has been cited in the book by Jay Leyda and Zina Voynov, *Eisenstein at Work*, p. 59.

<sup>80</sup> Jesse Lasky (1880-1958) was one of the founders of the Lasky Feature Play Company in 1913, subsequently – up until 1932 – he served as Vice President of the Paramount Company. See his autobiography, *I Blow My Own Horn* (New York: Doubleday, 1957).

<sup>81</sup> B. P. [Benjamin Percival] Schulberg (1892-1957) was the main manager of the California branch of Paramount from 1925 to 1932.

<sup>82</sup> This word was added by Freeman.

<sup>83</sup> Carl Laemmle [born Karl Lämmle] (1867-1939), one of the pioneers of American cinema, was the founder of the company Independent Motion Pictures (1910), which became, beginning in 1912, Universal Pictures. The creator of a “star system” in the practice of the American movie business, he tried to lure Eisenstein away from Paramount to join his company in Hollywood. For information on him, see: John Drinkwater, *The Life and Adventures of Carl Laemmle* (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1931).

<sup>84</sup> Freeman adds here the remark: “note by jf – in N[ew] Y[ork], before he left for Hollywood Eisenstein told me he wanted to do two things: the stock market crash (he is speaking here about the catastrophic drop in share prices on the New York Stock Exchange in 1929 – a symptom of the world-wide economic crisis of the 1930s) and Sutter’s Gold by Blaise Cendrars – but doubted whether they’d let him – I shared his doubt.”

<sup>85</sup> Freeman’s insertion: (“contract with Lasky?”).

<sup>86</sup> A film about the [Alfred] Dreyfus affair.

<sup>87</sup> Later, this film version of the novel by the Austrian writer [Hedwig] “Vicki” Baum (who emigrated to the U.S. in 1931 and started working in Hollywood) was produced by Irving Thalberg (M.G.M.) and was called the best film of 1931-1932.

<sup>88</sup> *The Virginian* was a 1929 sound film produced by Paramount Studios (a “western”), with Gary Cooper in the title role, that had an enormous commercial success. For information on this film, see: Paul Rotha, *The Film Till Now* (New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1963), p. 201.

<sup>89</sup> For information on this subject (the martyrdom of Jesuit missionaries), see Eisenstein’s notes for his memoir, *Izbrannye proizvedeniia v shesti tomakh*, Tom 1 [*Selected Works in Six Volumes*, Volume 1] (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1964): 377.

<sup>90</sup> “Bolshi, i.e., “Bolsheviks.”

<sup>91</sup> Ernst Lubitsch (1892-1947) was a famous German comic actor and film director who began working in Hollywood in 1922, and from 1935 through 1939 he was the artistic director of Paramount. His film, *The Man I Killed (Broken Lullaby)*, was shot at Paramount in September and October 1931. See: Robert Carringer, Barry Sabath, *Ernst Lubitsch: A Guide to References and Resources* (Boston, Mass.: G. K. Hall & Co., 1978), pp. 110-112.

<sup>92</sup> The “Daughters of the American Revolution” was one of the anti-Communist groups in the U.S. In Eisenstein’s original, instead of the words “and other patriotic organizations” was “and ‘Sons of . . . something.’”

<sup>93</sup> Freeman added his own comment on this: “note by JF – also great opposition by leading California families whose fortunes built in the gold robbed from Sutter . . .”).

<sup>94</sup> Basil Zaharoff [Bazil’ Zakharov] (1849 or 1850-1936), an arms dealer and oil merchant, was one of the wealthiest people in Europe, playing a behind-the-scenes role in world politics. His parentage and, to a significant degree, his career were surrounded by an aureole of secrecy and mystery. For information on him, see: Dr. Richard Lewinsohn, *The Mystery Man of Europe: Sir Basil Zakharoff* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1929); Guiles Davenport, *Zaharoff: High Priest of War* (Boston: Lothrop, Lee and Shepard Company, 1934); Donald McCormick, *Peddler of Death: The Life and Times of Sir Basil Zaharoff* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1965). According to Rostislav Iurenev, the idea of a film about Zakharov was originally suggested by Eisenstein to a French movie company. See: R. Iurenev, *Sergei Eizenshtein. Chast’ vtoraiia: 1930-1948* [*Sergei Eisenstein. Part Two: 1930-1948*] (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1988), p. 8. Eisenstein combined Zakharov’s image with some of his other ideas for a film about the “Übermensch” [superman]. See: Sergei Eizenshtein, *Izbrannye proizvedeniia v shesti tomakh*, Tom 4 [*Sergei Eisenstein, Selected Works in Six Volumes, Volume 4*] (Moscow: Izkusstvo, 1966), pp. 321-322.

<sup>95</sup> Freeman’s addition: “(3) jf – stock market crash.”

<sup>96</sup> Eisenstein wrote about the contrast between his interpretation of Dreiser’s novel and Paramount’s interpretation of it in his article, “Odolzhaites’!” [“Help Yourself!”], which was published for the first time at the end of 1932. See: Sergei Eizenshtein, *Izbrannye proizvedeniia v shesti tomakh*, Tom 2 [*Sergei Eisenstein, Selected Works in Six Volumes, Volume 2*] (Moscow: Izkusstvo, 1964), pp. 69-70.

<sup>97</sup> Freeman adds to this in parentheses: “(jf – which Dreiser included in book!).”

<sup>98</sup> Freeman adds to this in parentheses: “(jf – which Dreiser has in book also).”

<sup>99</sup> See Eisenstein’s article, “Odolzhaites’!” [“Help Yourself!”] in *Izbrannye proizvedeniia v shesti tomakh*, Tom 2 [*Sergei Eisenstein, Selected Works in Six Volumes, Volume 2*]: 69-80, and its English translation in S. M. Eisenstein, *Selected Works*, Vol. 1: *Writings, 1922-1934* (London: BFI Publishing, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), pp. 219-237; cf. S. M. Eisenstein, “An American Tragedy,” *Close Up*, Vol. X, No. 2 (June 1933): 109-124.

<sup>100</sup> This was a committee, under the leadership of Senator Hamilton Fish, that in 1930-1931 was investigating the anti-American activities of Communists and Soviet representatives. See: Marie Seton, *op. cit.*, pp. 184-185.

<sup>101</sup> Josef von Sternberg (1894-1969) was a film director who produced the films *The Salvation Hunters* (1924), *Escape*, *Underworld*, *Thunderbolt*, *The Blue Angel*, *Dishonored*, *An American Tragedy* (1932), et al. He met Eisenstein for the first time in 1929, in Berlin, where he was shooting his film, *The Blue Angel*.

<sup>102</sup> Barnet George Braver-Mann, "Josef von Sternberg," *Experimental Cinema* 5 (1934): 17; cf.: Josef von Sternberg, *Fun in a Chinese Laundry* (New York: Macmillan, 1965), pp. 44-46, 258-259; John Baxter, *The Cinema of Josef von Sternberg* (London: Anton Zwemmer, New York: A. S. Barnes & Co., 1971), pp. 87-89.

<sup>103</sup> Sergei Eizenshtein, *Izbrannye proizvedeniia v shesti tomakh*, Tom 1 [Sergei Eisenstein, *Selected Works in Six Volumes*, Volume 1], p. 406.

<sup>104</sup> Eisenstein's letter has this as "motives."

<sup>105</sup> Friedrich Wilhelm Murnau (real surname – Plumpe, 1889-1931) was a German film director who started working in Hollywood in 1926. His final film, *Taboo* (1930), served as the "point of reference" for discussion of the technical and financial problems of the "Mexico" project.

<sup>106</sup> Kate Crane Gartz (1865-1949) was a close acquaintance of Sinclair who had inherited a handsome fortune. She wrote a number of books and articles on questions of social security, subsidizing various projects supported by liberal circles and investing funds in the production of Eisenstein's Mexico film (cf. her letter to the editor published in the September 6, 1933 issue of *The New Republic*). Eisenstein has in mind here Sinclair's letter of July 9, 1931, to which he replied two weeks later. See: *Sergei Eisenstein and Upton Sinclair: The Making & Unmaking of "¡Que Viva Mexico!* p. 110.

<sup>107</sup> Freeman adds to this remark in parentheses: "(of Chapultepec)."

<sup>108</sup> Freeman omitted here the word "story."

<sup>109</sup> An Upton Sinclair fictional character.

<sup>110</sup> Jay Leyda (1910-1988), an American literary scholar, translator, and film expert, was a professor at New York University who had been Eisenstein's student at the Gosudarstvennyi institut kinematografii [State Institute of Cinematography] in Moscow in 1933-1936.

<sup>111</sup> All of Freeman's letters to Eisenstein are being published here from typescript copies out of his archive (Joseph Freeman Collection, Hoover Institution Archives); copyright Stanford University.