In his moralizing pictures, William Hogarth showed how a decent young man was turned into a ‘rake’ and how an innocent maiden become a whore. In both cases, glorious promise was turned into nasty practice and in the end the protagonists died in disgrace. The Bolsheviks began with a modest reform program in 1903, veered into over-zealous leveling at the time of the revolution and then tried to reinstate a kind of rational consumerism. Their rule ended when there was nothing more to consume.

The first program of the Bolshevik Party from 1903 concentrated on practical demands, concerning the main political and material rights of the workers. It greatly resembled other social democratic programs. From the point of view of the 21st century it looks rather modest and even realistic. Its most conspicuous points, concerning suffrage, working conditions and social insurance are commonplace in many countries of modern Europe.1

The next program, from the year 1919, which was supposed to give the general outlines for the construction of a socialist society, was much more radical and utopian. For instance, it proclaimed the idea of total leveling, although higher wages for specialists were to be permitted for some time.2 The tenor of that party program was very production-oriented and egalitarian. It also stressed everybody’s duty to take part in administration.3 Speaking about wages and the distribution of goods, it stressed the importance of leveling and the distribution of goods and services free of charge.4 Affluent society was not yet the order of the day, liquidation of privilege was more important.

To be sure, even before World War II, the Bolsheviks did not aspire to build just an egalitarian society for its own sake. Apart from those almost puritan and egalitarian goals, which were presented in the Bolshevik Party’s program in 1919 (which was in force until 1961), more refined ideas concerning the

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2 Ibid., 52.
3 Ibid., 41.
4 Ibid., 57.
growth of the human personality in the future socialist society were popular within the Bolshevik Party.

Maxim Gorky was just one prominent representative of a curious current which predicted the emergence of a Nietzschean superman out of the ranks of the proletariat. Humanity would reach new heights when emancipated from the capitalist yoke. Also Nikolai Bukharin and Leo Trotsky had such ideas.\(^5\)

This kind of high-brow speculation may have had little popularity among the mass of Bolshevik supporters. But resentment against ‘bourgeois’ instincts or meshchanstvo (philistinism) was obviously shared by both the leaders and the masses.

According to Marxist logic, it was concluded that because of his class position, the small proprietor was likely to be a meshchanin (philistine). Obviously he did not want the revolution, because he had in this world other things to lose besides his chains, as Marx famously said. The proletarian for his part had a different class nature.

For some reason, Marx and Engels seemed to believe that proletarians did not even want to become proprietors; instead, they wanted to annihilate the whole institution of private property. So, in a certain sense, the ideal proletarian, whom Marx depicted as a paragon of virtue, was also a hero of virtue, who did not indulge in the imminent gratification of his needs – a quality considered to be typical of the underclass.\(^6\)

The ideal Bolshevik was not supposed to be a utilitarian calculator of pain and pleasure. Paradoxically, although he was supposed to be a materialist par excellence, he had to keep his soul above material things. In Russia, the classics of socialist realism depicted the proletarian as the moral opposite of the selfish meshchanin. Maxim Gorky demonstrated this in several of his works, notably in the novel ‘Mother’ (Mat’), which became the great standard work of socialist realism. In the novel, the hero is a young worker, Pavel Vlasov, who puts his personal advantages at the service of the revolutionary cause. His personality resembles that of a Christian hero of faith.

Other exemplary Bolshevik heroes of Soviet literature like all Komsomol youths’ idol, Pavel Korchagin in Nikolai Ostrovsky’s cult novel ‘How Steel was Tempered’ (Kak zakalialas’ stal’) or Gleb and Dasha Chumalov in Feodor Gladkov’s chef d’oeuvre of socialist realism, the ‘Cement’ (Tsement) also combined the virtues of asceticism, personal prowess and collectivism.

Personal well-being was absolutely unimportant for these altruistic heroes. Ultimately, it was altruism, the well-being of the masses which drove them

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