

Mother Russia by Luba George

'Repentance' film signals great purge

Raisa Gorbachova's cultural mafia is at work again, preparing Russians for the war-plan transformation of the Soviet economy.

Party boss Mikhail Gorbachov's talk about "democratization" is nothing more than stating the mechanism by which the remnants of the Brezhnev party apparatus will be removed by 1988. Under Gorbachov's rule, the broadest *chistka* (purge) in the U.S.S.R. since Stalin has occurred, and the final act is now set to begin.

One indisputable sign was the premiere of the film, *Pokayanie* (Repentance), in Moscow's Rossiya Theater. The film, the work of Georgian director Tengiz Abuladze, deals with the terror under Joseph Stalin. Before being released to the Russian public, the film was shown to small elite groups and select foreign audiences, and had been playing in Soviet Georgia. Roy A. Medvedev, a "dissident" Soviet historian on the Stalin period, who saw a preview, said: "The release of this movie will be the most important event in Soviet cultural life in at least a decade."

The movie is the story of one Varlam Avaridze, who bears striking resemblance (with a small black mustache, pince-nez, and leather suspenders) to Lavrenti Beria, who ran Stalin's secret police.

According to film world sources, the film's release was decided on by Politburo members Yegor Ligachov and Eduard Shevardnadze, the former KGB chief and party boss in Georgia. It was timed with big shake-ups in the Interior Ministry and the KGB in January, in the same week as a plenum of the party Central Committee. After the plenum, the Soviet government announced the arrest of Brezhnev's son-in-law, Yuri Churbanov, former First

Deputy Interior Minister. Churbanov, 50, purged for "bribe-taking" two years ago, will now go on trial, facing the death penalty.

The coming KGB shake-up was signaled in *Pravda* on Jan. 8, when KGB boss Viktor Chebrikov announced the sacking of a senior Ukrainian KGB official for "unlawful actions." Chebrikov's speech to last year's party congress, warmly praised by Gorbachov, was the first by a serving KGB chief. The Interior Ministry purge began a year ago when Gorbachov protégé Aleksandr Vlasov took over, replacing Vitali Fedorchuk. Recently, Vlasov told the youth paper *Komsomolskaya Pravda* that he was removing "crooked militiamen."

The film is a clinical example of manipulating mass psychological reactions by using the Stalin image. For a Russian audience, the cathartic effect of "dealing honestly" with the wrongs of the past creates emotions of hope and "faith" in the people's present "Little Father," Mikhail Gorbachov. Such films are invaluable to promote the coming purge of inept and corrupt bureaucratic dead wood, denounced by Gorbachov at the plenum for embodying the "thinking of the 1930s and '40s."

Abuladze's film, made in 1984, was promoted after Abuladze's close friend Elem Klimov was elected to chair the Filmmakers' Union last fall. On the personal initiative of Gorbachov's wife, Raisa, director Klimov, and other leading Soviet artists and poets were enlisted into Raisa's Soviet Culture Foundation to rid the cultural sphere of the old guard. Klimov, Yev-

geni Yevtushenko, Andrei Voznesensky, Vladimir Lakshin, Chinghiz Aitmatov, and well-known "anti-Stalinists" Sergei Zalygin and Georgi Baklanov, editors of *Novy Mir* and *Znamya*, all have been assigned to lift the taboo on publicizing the crimes of the Stalinist past.

The first review of the film *Pokayanie* in the Russian press (before its mass release) was in the Nov. 30, 1986 issue of the weekly *Moscow News*. Literary critic Lakshin—himself purged from *Novy Mir* as a liberal over 15 years ago—wrote: "I feel that words fail me to describe this work of art that is bound to become a *catharsis* for many." Indeed, such a film cuts deep into the Russian psyche. Stalin's terror touched every Russian household in one way or another.

A commentator for the West German Hessische Rundfunk, after the Moscow premiere, said the high point of the film was the scene when the body of the buried dictator was exhumed by the People. For anyone knowing Russian history, he said, the message was clear: Russian soil, metaphorically speaking, is "sacred soil" and must not be polluted by the evil this dictator represented. "Holy Russian soil stands for the will of the people."

On Feb. 2, Radio Moscow concluded a long commentary on *Pokayanie*: "The West only wants the film to be about Stalin. However, for us the film has a much wider significance. Our world is threatened by a crisis . . . that is only comprehensible to those authorized to take great universal decisions."

Gorbachov, the new "Czar," is taking such "great universal decisions." At the plenum, Gorbachov called for an Extraordinary Party Congress in 1988—the mystical 1,000th anniversary of the Russian Church.