

by directing, all its writers and still be a good efficient well-run state, providing those essentials, food, shelter, freedom from fear? (You agree that to be called good, a state must provide these at least?) The food and the shelter, perhaps, yes: it is possible to imagine a ruler or a bureau of rulers whose benevolent right hand held out loaves and houses while his left was pressed hard over Tolstoy's mouth or executing Lorca for making a nuisance of himself. And freedom from fear? The writer's fear of making a mistake, a perhaps fatal mistake? Would this matter? What is a Lorca or two to a citizenry with its belly full?

✕ The answer, I am now certain, is that it would matter enormously. ✕ Once our rulers begin to direct minds, in the interests of economic or political or social aims, in the interests of whatever benevolent and excellent aims you can think of, they start a creeping paralysis which in the long run will infect every part of the people's life. At a deep level, at the level of origin, that same free movement of the mind which produces a *War and Peace* or Bellini's *Il Salvatore Benedicente*, produces the marvels of modern engineering, nuclear physics, the advances in medicine and surgery. Interfere with one impulse of this free movement, and you interfere—in the end—with all the others. The mechanism—call it that—is too complex, the balance too delicate. The subtlest attempts at direction and control will be too clumsy, and the final result will be a slowing-down of the movement itself—and boredom, a profound boredom and malaise of the human spirit.

I must, to be perfectly honest, say that the damage which is done to the State by interfering with the freedom of writers, and the damage done to the individual writers themselves, seem to me to be equally serious. The individual must sometimes suffer in the cause of social justice. But the eternal temptation of the planners of social justice is to stretch the limits within which it is essential that one man should die for the people, in order to include occasions when his death is merely convenient or time-saving or tidy. Individual happiness comes to seem a paltry affair in comparison with the good of the community, that less definable but grander aim. Nevertheless I believe the happiness of the individual to be of supreme importance. And once, as thinker or ruler, you deny its overwhelming importance, the way which opens leads far more quickly to gas-chambers for 'human refuse' and slave labour for 'political misfits' than to any social paradise where collectivised cats and mice play together, and writers are content to compose odes to the Stalin of the moment.

A clumsy authority, bored by a writer, kills him as Lorca was killed. Or, as in Czarist Russia, torments him by a capricious censorship, as Pushkin was tormented. The more efficient, economical, and ingenious minds of the Czars' successors decided to try to make use of their Lorcas and Pushkins by subjecting them to a subtler form of direction. The experiment which is being carried out in countries behind the Iron Curtain is of immense importance. The long-term results will prove or disprove, once and for all, the argument that when you control men's minds you stunt and cripple them. It is an experiment of the greatest moral and spiritual interest, and no pains are being spared to make it work out to the satisfaction of its organisers. Putting it a little crudely, what has to be demonstrated is that an intelligent and imaginative writer can be

indoctrinated so well that his mind will work along the lines of the doctrine with all the energy and pleasure it might have taken in working on self-chosen lines. It is a very old trick—there may be more ways of killing a cat than choking her with cream, but the cream has often proved effective. And let us make no mistake about it: writers in Eastern Europe who do not make the mistake of being too witty or too ironical or too subjective, or in any other way offensive, get more cream than whippings, far more cream, of a richer sort, than you and I do. Among intellectual workers, they form a favoured élite, and are cherished and encouraged almost as carefully as top-ranking scientists. They have material privileges, they are respected, they have prestige and a modified power.

Moreover, the very condition on which they are given this favoured position is designed subtly to flatter their vanity and pride. All they have to do, to qualify as members of this élite, is to be so intelligent that they understand in all its profundity and complexity the doctrine of historical necessity. Understand it, accept it, as a highly-trained Jesuit understands the doctrine of his Church. It is required of the most intellectual of Christians that he feel humility when he thinks of the Cross. I suppose—certainly it is not unimaginable—that a successful intellectual in Moscow or Warsaw may feel a pang of humility when he thinks about the price paid, and still to be paid, in the name of historical necessity, the deaths, cruelties, suffering. But it is not required of him beyond an intellectual grasp of a philosophically complex doctrine and complete moral acquiescence in it. He does not have to lie to himself. He need not, as his Western fellow-believers do, deny the cruelties: he can, and probably does, despise, as incurably crude and naive, these enthusiastic fellow-believers. He himself is in the position of Faust, but a Faust who knows, knows with an absolute certainty, that the devil he has sold his soul to is God. There will be no day of reckoning, because the sum has already been worked out, and he knows the answers, all the answers. He can afford to smile at ignorant and uninstructed writers talking about freedom and their conscience. 'Freedom? But I freely serve necessity,' he says: 'and your conscience—what is conscience but a subjective illusion, something you cling to, to excuse yourself from making the effort necessary to grasp the truth of the human condition?'

And what, we ask, is this truth? Again a little crudely, since he is talking to obtuse infidels, he explains that, in effect, human beings are the instrument through which history accomplishes itself. They exist to serve the purpose of history, and once this purpose is known—as it is known to a dialectically-trained few—then all means which will hasten its accomplishment are right means, however great the sum of individual suffering involved. And, it follows logically, there must be no corrosive doubts: no one may doubt the rightness of the means, nor their efficacy, nor the validity of the aim.

So, on the margin of this process, assisting it with their pens, the dialectically-trained writers' élite gives itself up to all the refinements of the new scholastics, the new theology. And, on a lower intellectual level, to the production for use of optimistic novels. There must be moments when writers like myself, too indisciplined or too sceptical to swallow the new theology, feel many of the sentiments of a hardworking virtuous housewife when she catches sight of a *grande cocotte* at the height of her career.