

## **COMPass**

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## **THE STRUGGLE AGAINST REVISIONISM IN THE FIELD OF LINGUISTICS**

"No science can develop and flourish without a battle of opinions, without freedom of criticism".

(Josef V. Stalin: 'Concerning Marxism in Linguistics')

### **PREFACE**

Following the establishment of working class power in Soviet Russia, class struggle assumed new and generally covert forms. The open revisionism of the post-Stalin era, which led to the restoration of capitalism, has its origins in concealed revisionism, a perversion of Marxism serving the interests of international capital (including ex-capitalists and would-be capitalists in the Soviet Union), stretching back almost to the revolution itself. This concealed revisionism manifested itself in virtually all walks of life, including such areas as science and the arts. In the field of linguistics, for example, the unscientific and anti-Marxist theories of Nicolai Marr were dominant for more than twenty years.

This paper is an attempt to explain this phenomenon. It provides evidence to show that influential figures in the Soviet Communist Party, who provided backing for Marr, were 'revisionists', that is, persons who presented themselves as 'Marxists', but in fact distorted Marxism in such a way as to remove its revolutionary core so as to undermine the socialist social system.

The official fostering of unscientific theories helped undermine the socialist system by alienating honest intellectuals from the Communist Party, which could be seen to be giving its support to unscientific irrationality. It also provided a pretext for removing from positions of influence honest scientists who tried to expose the unscientific character of the theories concerned, and of genuine Marxists who tried to expose their anti-Marxist character.

We believe that an understanding of the destruction of socialism in the former Soviet Union can only be achieved if the long history of concealed revisionism - and of the struggle

against it -- is exposed.

## INTRODUCTION

Linguistics, or philology is: "...the scientific study of language".  
(*New Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Volume 23; Chicago; 1994; p. 40)

It is generally regarded as having been born in 2 February 1786, when the British orientalist and jurist William Jones (1746-94), told the Bengal Asiatic Society in Calcutta:

"The Sanscrit language ... is of a wonderful structure, more perfect than the Greek, more copious than the Latin, and more exquisitely refined than either, yet bearing to both of them a stronger affinity, both in the roots of verbs and in the forms of grammar, than could possibly have been produced by accident; so strong indeed that no philologer could examine them all three, without believing them to have sprung from one common source which, perhaps, no longer exists". (William Jones: 'The Third Annual Discourse', Asiatic Society, Calcutta, (February 1786), in: 'Works', Volume 1; London; 1799; p. 26).

On this basis, during the 19th century, this process of comparative linguistics continued to advance, demonstrating genealogical relationships between many of them:

"The most outstanding achievement of linguistic scholarship in the 19th century was the development of the comparative method which comprised a set of principles whereby languages could be systematically compared with respect to their sound systems, grammatical structure and vocabulary, and shown to be 'genealogically' related."  
(*New Encyclopaedia Britannica*", Volume 23; Chicago; 1994; p. 42-43).

The genetic classification of languages postulates

"...that certain languages are related in that they have evolved from a common ancestral language".  
(*New Encyclopaedia Britannica*', Volume 22; Chicago; 1994; p. 572).

On this basis languages were grouped into families, often named after figures drawn from Jewish mythology -- for example, after the sons of Noah (Ham, Shem and Japheth), such as:

the Hamitic family,

"...a group of African languages, comprising the Ancient Egyptian and the Berber, Galla and other allied extant languages".  
(*Oxford English Dictionary*', Volume 6; Oxford; 1989; p. 1,056).

the Semitic family,

...of which Hebrew, Aramaean, Arabic, Ethiopic and Ancient Assyrian are the principal members".

(Oxford English Dictionary', Volume 14; Oxford; 1989; p. 961).

the Japhetic family, namely, as the term was originally used,

"the Kartvelian family of languages".

(Lawrence L. Thomas: 'The Linguistic Theories of N. Y. Marr'; Berkeley (USA); 1957; p. 39).

that is, the

"... family of languages, including Georgian, ... that are spoken south of the chief range of the Caucasus".

('New Encyclopaedia Britannica', Volume 6; Chicago; 1994; p. 752).

Comparative linguistics divides each language family into groups. For example, the Indo-European family has the Germanic group (embracing Danish, English, German, Icelandic, Netherlandic, Norwegian and Swedish); the Romance group (embracing the languages derived from Vulgar Latin, such as French, Italian, Portuguese, Spanish and Romanian); and the Slavonic group (embracing Belorussian, Bulgarian, Czech, Macedonian, Polish, Serbo-Croat, Slovene and Ukrainian).

In Russia and the Soviet Union prior to 1925,

"...the linguistic theory underlying the predominant trends was. . the same as that held by philologists throughout the world. This body of theory, which developed during the 19th century, includes the assumption of the existence of 'ancestral' languages like Indo-European, from each of which whole families of languages are derived".

(Jeffrey Ellis & Robert W. Davies: 'The Crisis in Soviet Linguistics', in: 'Soviet Studies', Volume 2, No. 3 (January 1951); p. 210).

From 1930

"... to 1950 ... the field of linguistics in the Soviet Union was dominated by the so-called Marr school".

(Lawrence L. Thomas: op. cit.; p. vii).

that is, by the system of ideas developed by philologist Nikolai Marr.

### **THE CAREER OF NIKOLAI MARR**

Nikolai Yakovlevich Marr (1864-1934) was born in Kutaisi in Georgia in January 1865, his father being Scottish and his mother Georgian. After attending the local grammar school in Kutaisi, he entered the Department of Oriental Languages at St. Petersburg University in 1884 at the age of twenty, studying particularly, and becoming expert in, the languages spoken in the Caucasus.

He was appointed Professor of Armenian in 1901, was awarded his doctor's degree in 1903,

and in the following year was appointed Professor of Armenian and Georgian Literature.

In 1912 Marr became an active member of the Imperial Academy of Sciences, and in 1917, he

"... welcomed the October Revolution without reserve".  
(Jeffrey Ellis & Robert W. Davies: op. cit.; p. 214).

In 1921,

"... with the express approval of the Academy of Sciences ... he founded the Petrograd (later Leningrad) Japhetic Institute".  
(Katherine H. Phillips: 'Language Theories of the Early Soviet Period'; Exeter; 1986; p. 77).

for the study of the Japhetic (that is, Kartvelian) family of languages.

In 1923

"...Marr was elected President of the Central Council of the Intellectual Workers' Department". (Katherine H. Phillips: ibid. ; p. 80).

He was admitted to the Communist Party in 1930, and in January 1934 was awarded the Order of Lenin.

He died in Leningrad in December 1934 at the age of 69.

After his death, the linguistic Institute which he had headed was renamed the 'N. Y. Marr Institute of Language and Thought'.

## **MARR'S LINGUISTIC THEORY**

### **Japhetidology**

Early in his career, Marr created what he termed

"... Japhetidology",  
(Grigory A. Kapantsyan: 'On Certain of N. Marr's General Linguistic Theses' (May 1950), in: Elizabeth Kresky (Ed.): 'The Soviet Linguistic Controversy: Translated from the Soviet Press'; New York; 1951; p. 42).

that is, the scientific study of the Japhetic (defined originally as 'Kartvelian') languages and the relations between them.

Marr's first published paper (1888) postulated that

"... the Georgian language... is genetically related to the Semitic family of languages".  
(Nikolai Y. Marr: 'The Nature and Peculiarity of the Georgian Language' (1888), in: Lawrence L. Thomas: op. cit.; p. 2).

and this theory became with Marr an obsession which quickly ran ahead of any scientific facts:

"The origin of Marr's system is clear. His entire work during this period was subordinated to the task of proving his theory of Japheto Semitic genetic relationship. ... One has somewhat the impression that it is the facts which are blameworthy".  
(Lawrence L. Thomas: *ibid.*; p. 17).

Enthralled by this obsession, Marr soon began to enlarge his definition of 'Japhetic languages'. The number

"... was gradually broadened to include not only the Caucasus languages, but subsequently others as well (Basque, Etruscan, Urartu, Elamite, etc.) until their imagined genealogical connection with the Semitic ones disappeared",  
(Grigory A. Kapantsyan: 'On Certain of N. Marr's General Linguistic Theses' (May 1950), in: Elizabeth Kresky: *op. cit.*; p. 42).

Sometimes

"...Marr even added languages to the Japhetic family without ever pursuing a special study of them".  
(Lawrence L. Thomas: *op. cit.*; p. 38).

and by the middle of 1920,

"...Marr could assert that the entire Mediterranean area was inhabited by an unbroken Japhetic substratum before the arrival of the Indo-Europeans".  
(Lawrence L. Thomas: *ibid.*; p. 52).

Thus,

"... Japhetic elements began to 'appear' in the most diverse languages; the Japhetic languages turned out to be 'related' to all languages; hence relationship by origin, or genetic relationship, lost all meaning".  
(Arnold S. Chikobava: 'On Certain Problems of Soviet Linguistics' (May 1950), in: Elizabeth Kresky (Ed.): *op. cit.*, p. 11).

### **The New Studies of Language**

Until the year 1924, although it went beyond established facts, Marr's theoretical work was

"... essentially within the framework of orthodox linguistic theory".  
(Jeffrey Ellis & Robert W. Davies: *op. cit.*, p. 212).

However, in 1924 he began to put forward theoretical views which deviated significantly from what had been regarded up to then -- and continued to be regarded outside the Soviet Union -- as having a scientific basis. This body of theory came to be known as Marrism.

It was at this time Marr renamed his 'Japhetic Theory' the 'New Studies of Language':

"The term 'new studies of language' was first used in 1924; prior to that Marr called his theory 'the Japhetic theory'".  
(*'Great Soviet Encyclopedia'*, Volume 18; New York; 1977; p. 181).

and, in line with this change in terminology,

"... in 1931 the name of the Leningrad Japhetic Institute was changed to that of the 'Institute of Language and Thought'".  
(Katherine H. Phillips: op. cit.; p. 85).

At the same time,

"... in 1925, Marr sought to link his system with the philosophical views of historical materialism".  
(*'Great Soviet Encyclopedia'*, Volume 18; New York; 1978; p. 181).

that is,

"... he set out -- consciously and deliberately -- to reassess and adapt his theories in accordance with the principles of dialectical and historical materialism".  
(Katherine H. Phillips: op. cit.; p. 80).

The fact that there were contradictions between Marrism and the findings of linguistic science could then be countered by the assertion that Marrism was 'Marxist linguistics' and so must naturally be engaged in ideological struggle with 'bourgeois linguistics', which was 'incompatible with Marxism':

"When Marr's hypothesis on linguistic kinship led to a contradiction of the facts of linguistic scholarship, he attempted to eliminate this contradiction by declaring all 'traditional' ... linguistics antiquated and incompatible with Marxism"..  
(*'Great Soviet Encyclopedia'*, Volume 15; New York; 1977; p. 492).

For example, in an address at the 110th anniversary celebrations at Leningrad University in 1930, Marr said that his linguistic theory

"... embodies the national-proletarian antithesis to the feudal bourgeois great-power thesis".  
(Nikolai Y. Marr: Address at Leningrad University (1930), in: William K. Matthews: op. cit., p. 176).

It was unfortunate that Marr understood Marxism

"... in an over-simplified way, in the spirit of the vulgar sociological approach";

('Great Soviet Encyclopedia', Volume 18; New York; 1978; p. 181).

Or, as Stalin put it more bluntly,

"Save us from N. Y. Marr's 'Marxism'! N. Y. Marr did indeed want to be, and endeavoured to be, a Marxist, but he failed to become one. He was nothing but a simplifier and vulgariser of Marxism, similar to the 'Proletkultists' or the 'Rappists'".

(Josef V. Stalin: 'Concerning Marxism in Linguistics' (June 1950) (hereafter referred to as 'Josef V. Stalin (1950) (1)', in: 'Works', Volume 16; London; 1986; p. 228).

The principal theses of Marr's 'New Studies of Language' are described in the next six paragraphs:

### **Rejection of Genetic Relationships**

Marr's 'New Studies of Language' rejected the whole concept of genetic relationship between languages. He

"... refused to recognise kinship between languages, their genealogical classification".

(Grigory

Kapantsyan: 'On Certain of N. Marr's General Linguistic Theses' (May 1950), in: Elizabeth Kresky (Ed.): op. cit.; p. 42).

Marrism:

"... seems to begin with his personal conviction that the notion of 'language-families' was... essentially a false metaphor". (Molly Miller: 'Marr, Stalin and the Theory of Language', in: Soviet Studies', Volume 2, No. 4 (April 1951); p. 364).

Marr's

"... New Linguistics is an exaggerated protest against 'the classification of languages into family groups', each descended from its own ancestral language". (D. B. Y.: 'The Stalin-Marr Philological Controversy in the USSR', in: 'World Today', Volume 6, No. 8 (August 1950); p. 156).

and so:

"had broken away from the main stream of the development of linguistics";  
(Jeffrey Ellis & Robert W. Davies: op. cit.; p. 214).

Or, as Stalin put it, Marr

"... shrilly abused the comparative-historical method as 'idealistic'. ...  
N. Y. Marr haughtily discountenanced every attempt to study groups (families) of languages... Yet it cannot be denied that the linguistic affinity of nations like the Slav

nations is beyond question, and that a study of the linguistic affinity of these nations might be of great value to linguists in the study of the laws of language development"..  
(Josef V. Stalin (1950) (1): op. cit.; p. 229-30).

In other words, he:

"rejected the achievements of comparative-historical linguistics."  
('Great Soviet Encyclopedia', Volume 18; New York; 1978; p. 181).

Achievements to which Friedrich Engels had paid tribute in his polemic with the German philosopher Eugen Duhring:

*"It is clear that we have before us a linguist who has never heard a word of the wide and successful development of the historical science of language which has taken place during the last sixty years".*

(Friedrich Engels: 'Herr Eugen Duhring's Revolution in Science' (June 1878); New York; 1939; p. 349).

### **The 'Non-Communicative' Origin of Language**

Marr's 'New Studies of Language' rejected the theory that language arose out of men's need to communicate with one another:

"There is a no less substantial fallacy when they (people -- Ed.,) impute to language at its origin the function which is now the primary one -- the conversational Language is a magical expedient. ...The necessity and possibility of using language as a means of communication are a much later matter".

(Nikolai Y. Marr: 'Contribution to the Baku Discussion on Japhetidology and Marxism', (1932), in: Lawrence L. Thomas: op. cit., p. 102).

"Marr denied that the original function of language was communication, as Marx taught".  
(D. B. Y.: op. cit.; p. 360).

His thesis that language arose as a magical technique was borrowed from the French philosopher Lucien Lévy-Bruhl (1857-1939):

"In the formulation of his semantic laws, .. Marr owed a greater debt to the French philosopher-ethnologist Lévy-Bruhl than he owed to Marx...

Marr accepted Lévy-Bruhl's theses; but, on the one hand, he vulgarised them and, on the other hand, tried to give them a Marxist basis".

(Lawrence L. Thomas: op. cit.; p. 78, 79).

The founders of Marxism, however, did hold that language arose out of men's need to communicate with one another:

"Language only arises from the need, the necessity, of intercourse with other men".  
(Karl Marx & Friedrich Engels: 'The German Ideology' (June 1846); London; 1942; p. 19).

"Men in the making arrived at the point where they had something to say to each other. Necessity created the organ; the undeveloped larynx of the ape was slowly but surely transformed by modulation to produce constantly more modulation, and the organs of the mouth gradually learned to pronounce one articulate sound after another".  
(Friedrich Engels: 'The Part played by Labour in the Transition from Ape to Man' (June 1876), in: 'The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State' London; 1972; p.253-54).

### **Language as a 'Superstructure'**

Marxism defines the basis and superstructure of society as follows:

"The basis is the economic structure of society at the given stage of its development. The superstructure is the political, legal, religious, artistic, philosophical views of society and political, legal and other institutions corresponding to them, Every basis has its own corresponding superstructure... If the basis changes or is eliminated, then, following this, its superstructure changes or is eliminated; if a new basis arises, then, following this, a superstructure arises corresponding to it".  
(Josef V. Stalin (1950) (1): op. cit.; p. 195-96).

According to Marrism, language belongs to the superstructure of society:

"Language is of the same type of superstructural social value as painting or art in general".  
(Nikolai Y. Marr: 'The Japhetic Theory' (1928), in: Elizabeth Kresky (Ed.): op. cit., p. 11).

"Marr's theory made language a superstructure".  
(Françoise Gadet, Jean-Marc Gayman, Yvan Mignot & Elisabeth Roudinesco: 'Les maitres de la langue, avec des textes de Marr, Staline, Polivanov' (The Masters of Language, with texts by Marr, Stalin, Polivanov); Paris; 1979; p. 13).

and the Marrist philologist Stepan Nikiforov insisted:

"Quite a few of Academician N. Y. Marr's theses are really incontrovertible. ... The decisive one is the recognition of language as a superstructure".  
(Stepan Nikiforov: 'The History of the Russian Language and N. Y. Marr's Theory' (June 1950), in: Elizabeth Kresky (Ed.): op. cit. p. 62).

But this is contrary to Marxism:

"Language differs radically from the superstructure... In the course of the past thirty years,

the old, capitalist basis has been eliminated in Russia and a new socialist basis has been built. Correspondingly, the superstructure on the capitalist basis has been eliminated and a new superstructure created corresponding to the socialist basis. ...

What has changed in the Russian language in this period? To a certain extent the vocabulary of the Russian language has changed, in the sense that it has been replenished with a considerable number of new words and expressions... As to the basic stock of words and the grammatical system of the Russian language, which constitute the foundation of a language, they ... far from having been eliminated and supplanted by a new basic word stock and a new grammatical system of the language, they have been preserved in their entirety. ...

In this respect language radically differs from the superstructure. Language is not a product of one or another basis, old or new, within the given society, but of the whole course of the history of the society ... for many centuries. ...A language may equally serve both the old, moribund system and the new, rising system...

A language therefore lives immeasurably longer than any basis or superstructure... Hence:

- a) A Marxist cannot regard language as a superstructure on this basis,
- b) To confuse language and superstructure is to commit a serious error...

N. Y. Marr introduced into linguistics the incorrect, non-Marxist formula that language is a superstructure, and got himself into a muddle and put linguistics into a muddle. Soviet linguistics cannot be advanced on the basis of an incorrect formula".

(Josef V. Stalin (1950) (1): op. cit.; P, 196, 197–98, 199, 203, 229).

"Language cannot be included either in the category of bases or in the category of superstructures.

Nor can it be included in the category of 'intermediate' phenomena between the basis and the superstructure, for such 'intermediate' phenomena do not exist". (Josef V, Stalin: 'Concerning Certain Problems of Linguistics' (June 1950) (hereafter listed as Josef V. Stalin (1950) (2), in: 'Works', Volume 16; London; 1986; p. 232).

### **The 'Primacy' of Gesture**

Marr held that gesture (which he called 'linear' or 'kinetic' speech') preceded the development of vocal speech.

"Manual language... gave way to oral speech very late".

(Nikolai Y. Marr: 'Language and Thought' (1933-40), in: Lawrence L. Thomas: op. cit.; p. 102).

According to Marr, kinetic speech

"... was replaced by a system of articulate speech only when ... a separate class of 'magicians' arose who first used speech. ... It was they who in time imposed vocal speech

on the whole collective".  
(Jeffrey Ellis & Robert W. Davies: op. cit.; p. 215).

"According to Marr, the communicative needs of man were served for countless generations not by oral language but by 'kinetic' or gesture, language. Oral language only appeared at a later stage in the development of man and was not evoked by any need for communication".  
(Lawrence L. Thomas: op. cit.; p. 64).

"According to Academician N. Y. Marr's theory, the origin of language is conceived as follows: a gesture language is aboriginal ('manual language'); vocal speech arose much later".  
(Arnold S. Chikobava: 'On Certain Problems of Soviet Linguistics' (May 1950), in: Elizabeth Kresky (Ed.): op. cit., p. 12).

Attempting to give his theory a 'Marxist' veneer, Marr postulated the idea of a 'class struggle' between communities with and communities without vocal speech. According to Marr,

"Manual language...gave way to oral speech ... in the course of a struggle . . . between the collective with ... oral speech and the collective without oral speech".  
(Nikolai Y. Marr: 'Language and Thought' (1933-40); in: Lawrence L. Thomas: op. cit., p. 102-03).

This was a struggle

"...between communities with, and those without, vocal speech, until the former triumphed".  
(Jeffrey Ellis & Robert W. Davies; op. cit., p. 215).

"Marr... invented the ridiculous fable of a class struggle (between 'speakers' and 'gesturists') at a stage of social development when, according to Marxist theory, there were no class divisions".  
(D. B. Y.: op. cit., p. 360).

"Comrade Belkin ...seems to think ...that at one time human society had no language of words, that 'hand' language at that time played the part of the language of words, which appeared later. ...

But... spoken language, or the language of words, has always been the sole language of human society capable of serving as an adequate means of intercourse between people. History does not know of a single human society, be it the most backward, that did not have its own spoken language. Ethnography does not know of a single backward tribe ...which did not have its own spoken language. ...

The significance of the so-called gesture language, in view of its extreme poverty and limitations, is negligible... Properly speaking, this is not a language, ...but an auxiliary means of extremely limited possibilities, to which man sometimes resorts to emphasise

this or that point in his speech".

(Josef V. Stalin: Letter to Comrades D. Belkin & S. Furer (July 1950), in: Josef V. Stalin (1950) (2): op. cit.; p. 242-43).

### Language as a 'Class Phenomenon'

According to Marrism,

"...there has never been a non-class language; language was of a class nature from the moment it began, it was the language of the class having control over the implements of production".

(Nikolai Y. Marr: 'Contribution to the Baku Discussion on Japhetidology and Marxism' (1932), in: Elizabeth Kresky (Ed.): op. cit., p. 12),

"A national ... language does not exist".

(Nikolai Y. Marr: 'Why it is so Difficult to become a Theoretical Linguist' (1929), in: Lawrence L. Thomas: op. cit., p. 95).

So,

"...the idea of the class nature of language is woven through the entire theory (of Marrism – Ed.)".

(Lawrence L. Thomas: *ibid.* ; p. 111).

Indeed, Marr goes to the absurd lengths of saying that the languages of the same class of different nations are more closely related to one other than are the 'languages' of different classes of the same nation!:

"Languages of one and the same class in different countries, given an identical social structure, display greater similarity of type than do languages of different classes... one and the same nation".

(Nikolai Y. Marr: 'Why it is so Difficult to become a Theoretical Linguist' (1929), in: Elizabeth Kresky (Ed.): op. cit.; p. 12).

However, Marxism holds that

"... a common language is one of the characteristic features of a nation". (Josef v. Stalin: 'Marxism and the National Question' (January 1913), in: 'Works', Volume 2; Moscow; 1953; p. 304).

"Everywhere and at all stages of development, language as a means of intercourse between the people of a society, was the common and single language of that society, serving its members equally, irrespective of their social status.

I am not referring here to... empires. ... These empires ... could not have had a single language common to the whole empire.

They were conglomerations of tribes and nationalities, each of which... had its own language... History tells us that the languages of these tribes and nationalities were not class languages, but languages common to the whole of a tribe or nationality. ...

With the appearance of capitalism, ... nationalities developed into nations, and the languages of nationalities into national languages. History shows that national languages are not class, but common languages, common to all the members of each nation and constituting the single language of that nation".  
(Josef V. Stalin (1950) (1): op. cit.; p. 203-05).

Of course, admits Stalin,

'class' dialects, jargons, high-society 'languages' are created...

Can these dialects and jargons be regarded as languages? Certainly not. They cannot, firstly because these dialects and jargons have no grammatical systems or basic word stocks of their own -- they borrow them from the national language. They cannot, secondly, because these dialects and jargons are confined to a narrow sphere, ...and are entirely unsuitable as a means of human intercourse for society as a whole".  
(Josef V. Stalin (1959) (1): ibid.; p. 205-06).

Stalin points out that it is wrong to

"... confuse language with culture. ... Culture and language are two different things, Culture may be bourgeois or socialist, but language, as a means of intercourse, is always a language common to the whole people. ...

Hence:

- a) Language, as a means of intercourse, always was and remains the single language of a society, common to all its members;
- b) The existence of dialects and jargons does not negate but confirms the existence of a language common to the whole of the given people, of which they are offshoots and to which they are subordinate;
- c) The 'class character' of language formula is erroneous and non Marxist". (Josef V, Stalin (1950) (1): ibid.; p. 213, 215).

### **The 'Stadial Theory'**

Marr's theory of glottogony, or language creation, holds that linguistic change takes place stadially, meaning in

... a series of successive stages". ('Oxford English Dictionary', Volume 16; Oxford; 1989; p. 439).

That is, as the Marxist linguist Garma Sanzheyev expresses it, language development proceeds not only by gradual, quantitative changes, but also by revolutionary, qualitative leaps:

"The partisans of Academician Marr consider ...that language develops not only by evolution, i. e., by quantitative changes in various aspects and facets of language, but also by revolution, by skips and mutations, i. e., by the transition of this language from one qualitative state into another, ending the evolutionary path of development".

(Garma D. Sanzheyev: 'Either forward or backward (May 1950), in: Elizabeth Kresky (Ed.): op. cit.; p. 37).

"Marr's view of the development of languages assumes changes from one stage to another by sudden 'dialectical' leaps".

(Jeffrey Ellis & Ropbert W. Davies: op. cit.; p. 217).

But, as Stalin points out, the stadial theory is contrary to fact and to Marxism-Leninist principles:

"Languages did not develop by the destruction of existing languages and the creation of new ones, but by extending and perfecting the basic elements of existing languages. And the transition of the language from one quality to another did not take the form of an explosion, of the destruction at one blow of the old and the creation of the new, but of the gradual and long-continued accumulation of the elements... of the new linguistic structure, and the gradual dyings away of the elements of the old. ...

Marxism does not recognise sudden explosions in the development of languages".

(Josef V. Stalin (1950) (1): op. cit.; p. 222).

Stalin agrees that there are numerous instances in history of linguistic changes by means of 'crossing' or 'hybridisation', but insists that such changes are gradual and quantitative:

"Linguistic crossing cannot be regarded as the single impact of a decisive blow which produces its result within a few years. Linguistic crossing is a prolonged process which continues for hundreds of years. There can therefore be no question of explosions here. Further, it would be quite wrong to think that the crossing of, say, two languages results in a new, third language which does not resemble either of the languages crossed... As a matter of fact, one of the languages usually emerges victorious from the cross, retains its grammatical system and its basic word stock, and continues to develop in accordance with its inherent laws of development, while the other language gradually loses its quality and gradually dies away". (Josef V. Stalin (1950) (1): *ibid.*; p. 224-25).

Thus, the linguistic theories known as Marrism are contrary to Marxist principles in many important respects.

### **THE BACKING OF MARRISM BY REVISIONIST POLITICIANS**

The question naturally arises: how was it that such obviously unscientific and anti-Marxist theories as those of Marr came to dominate linguistics in the Soviet Union for twenty-five years?

The answer is that these theories had the backing of influential figures in the Soviet Communist Party -- figures we define as 'revisionists', that is, persons who presented themselves as

'Marxists' but in fact distorted Marxism in such a way as to remove its revolutionary core so as to sabotage the socialist social system.

Of course, the official fostering of an unscientific theory in such a field as linguistics does not undermine the socialist system directly, as may unscientific theories in such fields as economics or politics. Nevertheless, it helps to undermine the social system indirectly.

It does so by alienating intellectuals -- and not merely those in the particular specialised field concerned -- from the Communist Party which appears to have given its support to unscientific irrationality.

It does so by helping to secure the removal from influential positions both of genuine Marxists who try to expose the anti-Marxist character of the theories concerned, and of honest scientists who try to expose their unscientific character.

### **THE ROLE OF MIKHAIL POKROVSKY**

An important role in bringing about the dominance of Marrism in Soviet linguistics was played by the revisionist historian Mikhail Pokrovsky (1868–1932), who was Deputy People's Commissar for Education of the RSFSR (1918-32), director of the Institute of Red Professors (1921-32), director of the Central State Archive (1922-32), and director of the Society of Marxist Historians (1925-32).

Pokrovsky

"... remained the boss of Soviet historiography until his death in 1932"..

(Marin Pundeff (Ed.): 'History in the USSR: Selected Readings'; San Francisco; 1967; p. 64),

and was also:

"... Chairman of the Presidium of the Communist Academy".

(George M. Enteen: 'M. N. Pokrovsky and the Administration of Soviet

Historical Scholarship', in: 'Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas'

(Yearbooks for East European History), Volume 22, No. 12 (1974); p. 58).

So,

"... with the patronage of the 'Marxist' historian Pokrovsky, afterwards discredited, ...Marr won the approval of the Communist Academy and laid down the thematics and the methodology of the new philology of the proletarian era".

(D. B. Y.: op. cit., p. 358).

It was with the patronage of people like Pokrovsky that the claim of Marrism:

"... to be specifically Marxist. and, indeed, the only possible Marxist theory of language, was officially recognised in the 1920s, and ...for ... twenty-five years

enjoyed a virtual ideological monopoly of linguistic teaching and research in the Soviet Union".

(D. B. Y.: *ibid.*, p. 355),

It was Stalin who opened the political struggle against the revisionist 'empire' which Pokrovsky had built up. In 1930 Stalin wrote a letter to the editorial board of the journal 'Proletarian Revolution' -- which specialised in Party history -- protesting at its action in publishing an

"... anti-Party and semi-Trotskyist article"

(Josef V. Stalin: 'Some Questions concerning the History of Bolshevism' (1930) (hereafter listed as 'Josef V. Stalin (1930)', in: 'Works', Volume 13; Moscow; 1955; p. 86).

which implied that in the pre-First World War period

"... Lenin did not wage an irreconcilable struggle against opportunism".

(Josef V. Stalin (1930): *ibid.*; p. 86).

At the beginning of 1931,

"... criticism of Pokrovsky was succeeded by a direct challenge to his authority.

Kaganovich, as one of the secretaries of the Party Central Committee, requested a report from Pokrovsky on the state of the historical front".

(John Barber: 'Soviet Historians in Crisis: 1928–1932'; London; 1981; p. 124).

Shortly afterwards,

"... at a meeting of the presidium of the Communist Academy on 15 January (1931 -- Ed.), Pokrovsky was confronted with a statement by three of its members demanding a thorough examination of the Institute of History".

(John Barber: *ibid.* ; p. 124).

A meeting of the Party fraction in the Society of Historians

"... ended with the adoption of a resolution strongly critical of the leadership of the Society. Lacking 'Bolshevik vigilance' and guilty of rotten liberalism', it had provided a tribune for "Trotskyist contrabandists' by publishing the letter complained of".

(John Barber: *ibid.*; p. 133).

After Pokrovsky's death in 1932,

"... his historiographic empire began to ... be actively broken up. The Institute of Red Professors, ... the Communist Academy, and the Society of Marxist Historians were all gradually dismantled and the functions providing leadership in the field of history and supervising it were vested in the Institute of History of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR".

(Marin Pundeff (Ed.): *op. cit.*; p. 97).

"The Communist Academy was closed in 1936".

(George M. Enteen: 'The Soviet Scholar-Bureaucrat: M. N. Pokrovsky and the Society of Marxist Historians'; University Park (USA); 1978; p. 191).

On 16 May 1934 a joint decree of the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party and the Council of People's Commissars,

"... without explicitly mentioning Pokrovsky, condemned the 'abstract sociological schemes' of his school.

The decree also set up several teams to write new textbooks to replace the products of Pokrovsky's era". (Marin Pundeff (Ed.): op. cit.; p. 98).

The decree opened by asserting

"... that the teaching of history in the schools of the USSR is unsatisfactorily handled. Textbooks and instruction have an abstract schematic nature".

(Joint Decree of Council of People's Commissars and CC of the All-Union Communist Party on the Teaching of History in Schools', (16 May 1934), in: Marin Pundeff (Ed.): ibid.; p. 98).

Two other decrees were issued on 8 and 9 August 1934:

"Signed by Stalin, Kirov and Zhdanov, these were specific directives for the implementation of the May 16 decree. ...Though the decrees did not mention Pokrovsky, it was evident that the Party opted for his detractors". (George M. Enteen: op. cit., p. 190).

The decrees

"... were published in 'Pravda' . on 27 January 1936, in an article that condemned Pokrovsky -- the first public repudiation".  
(George M. Enteen: ibid. ; p. 190).

The accompanying article referred to Pokrovsky's characterisation of pre-Revolutionary Russia as a 'monopoly capitalist', or 'imperialist', country:

"Russia was not only a capitalist country, but a country of monopoly capital, an imperialist country".

(Mikhail N. Pokrovsky, cited in: George M. Enteen, Tatiana Gorn & Cheryl Keen: 'Soviet Historians and the Study of Russian Imperialism'; University Park (USA); 1979; p. 25).

In contrast, the Marxist-Leninist view was that:

"... the most important branches of Russian industry were in the hands of foreign capitalists... All these circumstances ...chained tsardom to British and French imperialism, and converted Russia into a tributary, a semi-colony of these countries".

('History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Bolsheviks): Short Course'; Moscow; 1939; p. 162).

The article announced that the new draft textbooks were as unsatisfactory as their predecessors and for the first time made an explicit denunciation of Pokrovsky:

"The authors of the textbooks mentioned continue to insist on historical definitions and interpretations repeatedly criticised by the Party and plainly groundless, which are based on the well-known mistakes of Pokrovsky. ... The Council of People's Commissars and the Central Committee of the Party emphasise that these harmful tendencies and attempts to eliminate history as a science are first and foremost connected with ... the so-called 'historical school' of Pokrovsky".

(Council of People's Commissars & CC of the CC of the CPSU: Statement of 27 January 1936; in: John Barber: op. cit.; p. 139-40).

This statement began a campaign of criticism

"... culminating in the Central Committee's resolution of November 1938 condemning Pokrovsky's school for 'anti-Marxist distortions' and 'vulgarisations'".

(John Barber: *ibid.*; p. 140).

In 1939–40, the Institute of History of the Academy of Sciences

". . . published two volumes of essays criticising his (Pokrovsky's -- Ed.) views and writings".

(Marin Pundeff (Ed.); *ibid.*; p. 140).

The first volume, entitled 'Against the Historical Conception of M. N. Pokrovsky' was published in 1939, the second, entitled 'Against the Anti-Marxist Conception of M. N. Pokrovsky', in 1940. The opening essay by historian Anna Pankratova (1897-1957) denounced Pokrovsky's school of historiography as a

"... a base for wrecking activities by enemies of the people unmasked by the organs of the NKVD, by the Trotskyite-Bukharinite hirelings of fascism, and by wreckers, spies and terrorists who had skilfully camouflaged themselves with the aid of the harmful and anti-Leninist historical conceptions of M. N. Pokrovsky".

(Anna M. Pankratova: cited in: Marin Pundeff (Ed.): *ibid.*; p. 140).

Historian Nikolai Rubinshtein in his book "Russian Historiography" writes:

"The so-called historical school of Pokrovsky. . . developed the erroneous anti-Marxist positions of the historical scheme of Pokrovsky; some did that unconsciously without subjecting the positions to Marxist Leninist criticism, while others did it as wreckers hiding their anti Soviet ideological activity behind the master's authority".

(Nikolai Rubinshtein: 'Povrovsky' (1941), in: 'Russkaia istoriografia' (Russian Historiography); Moscow; 1941, cited in: Marin Pundeff (Ed.): *ibid.*; p. 141).

## THE 'ARAKCHEYEV REGIME'

But the exposure of Marr's former patron Pokrovsky did not put an end to the dominance of Marrism in Soviet linguistics.

After Marr's death on 1934, leadership of the Institute of Language and Thought was taken over by Marr's leading disciple, Ivan Meshchaninov (1883-1957), and these followers of Marr proceeded

“... to transform (the ideological monopoly of Marrism -- Ed.) into an absolute administrative monopoly...

Marr's followers, entrenched in the Institute of Language and Thought, methodically established their ideological dictatorship over Soviet philology”.

(D. B. Y.: op. cit.; p. 355, 358).

Under Meshchaninov, the revisionist line that criticism of Marrism was 'anti-Communist' and 'counter-revolutionary' was developed further.

In May 1950 the Marrist philologist Fedot Filin still felt able to say:

"Academician N. Y. Marr formulated the new teaching on language which he designated thus to distinguish it from old. bourgeois linguistics”.

(Fedot Filin: 'Against Stagnation, for the Development of Soviet Linguistics' (May 1950), in: Elisabeth Kresky (Ed.): op. cit.; p. 38).

But only days later, Stalin was calling the regime established in Soviet linguistics by the disciples of Marr an 'Arakcheyev regime':

"The Arakcheyev regime was set up by the 'disciples' of N. Y. Marr”.

(Josef V. Stalin (1950) (2): op. cit.; p. 239).

The term is derived from the tsarist military officer Aleksey Arakcheyev (1768-1834), with the meaning of a regime having:

“... a policy of extreme reaction, police despotism and crude militarism”.

('Great Soviet Encyclopedia', Volume 2; 1973; p. 229).

Stalin reported in June 1950:

"In linguistic bodies both in the centre and in the republics, a regime has prevailed which is alien to science and to men of science. The slightest criticism of the state of affairs in Soviet linguistics, even the most timid attempt to criticise the so-called 'new doctrine' in linguistics, was persecuted and suppressed by the leading linguistic circles. Valuable workers and researchers in linguistics were dismissed from their posts or demoted for being critical of N. Y. Marr's heritage or expressing the slightest disapproval of his teachings. Linguistic scholars were appointed to leading posts not on their merits, but because of their unqualified acceptance of N. Y. Marr's theories.

It is generally accepted that no science can develop and flourish without a battle of

opinions, without freedom of criticism. But this generally recognised rule was ignored and flouted in the most unceremonious fashion. There arose a close group of infallible leaders who, having secured themselves against any possible criticism, became a law unto themselves and did whatever they pleased. ...

This...happened... because the Arakcheyev regime established in linguistics cultivates irresponsibility and encourages such arbitrary actions".  
(Josef V. Stalin (1950) (1): op. cit., p. 226-27).

Under the Meshchaninov regime, the tendency was

"... to preserve his (Marr's -- Ed.) views, including the obviously erroneous ones". ('Great Soviet Encyclopedia', Volume 18; New York; 1978; p. 181).

so that even aspects of Marrism which its founder had withdrawn were revived. For example, in 1926 Marr had:

" ... advanced the idea of 'four elements' that supposedly constituted the basis for the lexical stock of all languages. By this time he was making his final break with scholarly comparative-historical linguistics".  
(('Great Soviet Encyclopedia', Volume 18; New York; 1978; p. 181).

"All languages of the world were now said to derive from the four monosyllabic combinations: Şal, Ber, Yon and Ros".  
(Katherine H, Phillips: op. cit.; p. 82-83).

In 1931 Marr had abandoned this hypothesis. His disciple Ivan Meshchaninov characterised the 'element theory' in October 1946 as one

"... which we renounced fifteen years ago".  
(Ivan I. Meshchaninov, in: Jeffrey Ellis & Robert W. Davies: op. cit.; p. 224).

Yet in June 1950 philologist Arnold Chikobaya was complaining about the 'rehabilitation' of the 'element' theory:

"Element analysis once forced Academician N. Y. Marr's theory of linguistics into a blind alley. Now that element analysis has been rehabilitated, all linguistic work is arriving at an impasse".  
(Arnold S. Chikobaya: 'On Certain Problems of Soviet Linguistics' (May 1950), in: Elizabeth Kresky (Ed.): op. cit.; p. 10).

"Marr himself, at the end of his life, had withdrawn from circulation a course of Lectures he had given at Baku, which taught his erroneous 'four element' theory, but it was revealed (during the 1950 debate -- Ed.) by Meshchaninov that this course was still

being used by undergraduate students".  
(Jeffrey Ellis & Robert W. Davies: op. cit.; 220).

Of course, Marrism

".. evoked harsh criticism of the new studies of language by Soviet linguists".  
(‘Great Soviet Encyclopedia’, Volume 18; New York; 1978; p. 181).

Among the philologists who opposed Marrism as unscientific were Arnold Chikobava (born 1898), Grigory Kapantsyan (1887–1957), Mikhail Peterson (1885–1969), Evgeny Polivanov (1891–1938) and Viktor Vinogradov (1895–1969):

"Scholars like Vinogradov, Peterson and Chikobava ignored or openly flouted the New Linguistics".  
(D. B. Y.: op. cit.; p. 359).

"... the most consistent critic being E. D. Polivanov".  
(‘Great Soviet Encyclopedia’, Volume 18; New York; 1978; p. 181).

It was

"... in 1926 that Polivanov began to express opposition to the theses of Marr".  
(Françoise Gadet et al.: op. cit.; p. 36).

claiming that - contrary to official propaganda -- Marrism was anti-Marxist and opposition to Marrism was in accordance with Marxism:

"Polivanov attempted to set up a 'Marxist linguistics' in opposition to Marr".  
(Jeffrey Ellis & Robert W. Davies: op. cit.; p. 217).

At this time Polivanov was working in Moscow, which was the centre of opposition to Marrism:

"Marrist influence was strongest in Leningrad, and opposition to Marr strongest in Moscow, particularly in the Moscow University".  
(Jeffrey Ellis & Robert W. Davies: *ibid.* ; p. 222).

From this time on, and particularly after Marr's death in 1934,

"... anti-Marrist tendencies were vigorously opposed".  
(Katherine H. Phillips: op. cit.; p. 87).

Marrism became

"... a credo"  
(Katherine H. Phillips: *ibid.*; p. 87).

which it was 'heretical' to question. But

" ... Polivanov was a dangerous opponent for those who tried to canonise 'the new study of language' and to portray it as the only Marxist study of language. Therefore the struggle against him went on until his death".

(Aleksey A. Leontiev et al.: 'The Life and Activities of E. D. Polivanov', in: Evgeny D. Polivanov: op. cit.; p. 24).

As early as December 1928, the Marrist establishment was publicly accusing Polivanov

"... of being a Black Hundred (in other words, a fascist)".

(Françoise Gadet et al.: op. cit., p. 35).

In February 1929, during Marr's absence abroad, Polivanov delivered a report entitled 'The Problem of Marxist Linguistics and Japhetic Theory' which was highly critical of Marrism as unscientific. In it he said:

"The basic defect of the Japhetic theory (and specifically the material which should be revised) is... the use of concrete living material which contradicts the facts. ...

Any science which claims to participate in the creation of a realistic and, in particular, a Marxist ideology, should be deduced from factual material and should not amount to several general premises unconnected with concrete facts...

The route of creating Marxist linguistics should not proceed from the Japhetic theory: with the aid of Marxist methodology and on the basis of Marxist premises, one must explain... the factual material which is beyond argument and suspicion... The discipline created should begin to operate at first with known material and only after thoroughly moulding its methods should begin to cross deeper into the unknown". (Evgeny D. Polivanov: 'The Problem of Marxist Linguistics and the Japhetic Theory' (February 1929), in: 'Selected Works: Articles on General Linguistics'; The Hague; 1974; p. 169).

Later in 1929, Polivanov

".. was relieved of the positions he held...and he went to Samarkand".

(Aleksey A. Leontiev et al.: op. cit.; p. 27).

There he continued in university employment, but the Marrists were able

"... to block publication of his manuscripts". (Aleksey A. Leontiev et al.: *ibid*; p. 27).

He

"... wrote a great deal, but could not break into print". Aleksey A, Leontiev et al.: *ibid*.; p. 29).

However, in early 1931 Polivanov succeeded in publishing

"... a collection of popularly written articles entitled . . . 'In Favour of Marxist Linguistics'". (Aleksey A. Leontiev et al.: *ibid*.; p. 26).

The appearance of this book

"... which razed to the ground... 'The New Study of Linguistics' roused Polivanov's opponents... into the fullest frenzy".

The 'heavy artillery' was moved into battle".

(Aleksey A. Leontiev et al.: *ibid.* ; p. 26).

In September 1931, the 'Great Soviet Encyclopedia' expressed Marrist anger:

"Direct hostile attacks may be observed, reflecting the bourgeois science and imperialist politics of capitalism (E. Polivanov's 'In Favour of Marxist Linguistics'". ('Great Soviet Encyclopedia', (September 1931), in: Aleksey A. Leontiev et al.: *op. cit.*; p. 26).

At the end of 1934,

"...E. D. Polivanov was sent to Frunze, where he worked in the Kirghiz Institute for Cultural Construction...and taught in the Pedagogical Institute".

(Aleksey A. Leontiev et al.: *op. cit.*; p. 29).

The 'heavy guns' referred to above were the Soviet security police who, between July 1934 and December 1938 were in the hands of a band of revisionists headed by Henrikh Yagoda (1891-1938) and Nikolai Yezhov (1895-1939). It was in these circumstances that

"... in March of 1937, E. D. Polivanov was arrested"..

(Aleksey A. Leontiev et al.: *ibid.*; p. 30).

In January 1938 he died

"... in Smolensk in imprisonment".

(Heinrich E. Schulz, Paul K. Urban & Andrew I. Lebed (Eds.): 'Who was Who in the USSR: A Biographic Dictionary'; Metuchen (USA); 1972; p. 454).

### **THE 1948 DISCUSSION**

Polivanov's death did not, of course, end the discussions on linguistics.

A most important debate took place in 1948, after the revisionist elements in the CPSU leadership had been able to secure Central Committee (and Academy of Sciences) backing for the biological theories of Trofim Lysenko (1898-1976). These developments temporarily strengthened the position of the Marrists in the field of linguistics:

"The Marrists thought that they had found weighty support in the session of the Academy of Agricultural Sciences (of 31 July - 5 August 1948), marked by the famous report of T. D. Lysenko, where there was proclaimed in particular the radical opposition between 'bourgeois science and proletarian science', a report which had received the support of the Central Committee of the Communist Party".

(René L'Hermitte: *Science et perversion idéologique: Marr, Marrisme, Marristes: Une*

page de l'histoire de la linguistique soviétique' (Science and Ideological Perversion: Marr, Marrism, Marrists: A Page from the History of Soviet Linguistics); Paris; 1987; p. 59).

"The discussion and resolutions of the special August 1948 session of the Lenin Academy of Agricultural Sciences strengthened those who wished to secure the predominance of Marrism".

(Jeffrey Ellis & Robert W. Davies: op. cit.; p. 227).

"Particularly sinister were the proceedings of a philological conference held in November 1948. Academician Meshchaninov delivered the main address. ... Soviet philologists were to infer that Marr was the Michurin of linguistics and Meshchaninov his Lysenko.

'Party spirit' in philological science and adherence to Marr's doctrine were identical".

(D. B. Y.: op. cit., p. 359).

"That the meetings were intended by the organisers to parallel the biological discussion is emphasised by the title of Meshchaninov's report 'On the Situation in Linguistic Science', an exact parallel with Lysenko's 'On the Situation in Biological Science'".

(Jeffrey Ellis & Robert W. Davies: op. cit., p. 228).

### **THE 1949 DISCUSSION**

In January 1949 meetings were organised:

"... in all linguistic institutes of the Soviet Union, in all academies of sciences of the union republics and higher educational institutions of our country during the observance of the 85th anniversary of N. Y. Marr's birth and the 15th anniversary of his death".

('Current Digest of the Soviet Press', Volume 2, No. 18; p. 13).

Commenting on these meetings, the Editorial Board of the influential journal 'Problems of Philosophy' admitted that they had

"... revealed the generally unsatisfactory situation in the field of linguistics",

(Editorial Note: 'Problems of Philosophy', No. 3, 1949, (hereafter listed as 'Philosophy (1949)' in: "Current Digest of the Soviet Press", Volume 2, No. 18; p. 21).

by which they meant that

"... the session did not reflect the creative development of N. Y. Marr's theoretical heritage by his pupils and followers in the 15 years since the founder of materialist linguistics died", ('Philosophy'(1949): p. 21).

that some philologists, particularly among those opposed to Marrism, had boycotted the session:

"It is utterly inadmissible that linguists doing research on the great Russian language took no part in the session's work. It was especially important that they participate, because it

is precisely in this field that a struggle against anti-Marr traditions is extremely urgent", ('Philosophy' (1949): op. cit.; p. 21).

It called for action

"... to end the covert and overt attacks on Marr and to raise Soviet, materialist, Marr linguistics to a higher level". ('Philosophy' (1949): op. cit.; p. 21).

Later in 1949,

"... the whole question was discussed by the Presidency of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR, the most important scientific body in the Soviet Union, and on June 21, 1949 it passed a long resolution of 3,000 words on 'The Present Position in Soviet Linguistics and Measures for the Improvement of Linguistic Work in the Academy of Sciences of the USSR'. ...

It attacks Vinogradov, Chikobaya and others, and praises the work of Meshchaninov". (Jeffrey Ellis & Robert W. Davies: op. cit.; p. 231).

The resolution was one:

"... extolling the merits of Marrism and condemning all deviationist tendencies", (Katherine H. Phillips: op. cit., p. 90).

and condemning opposition to Marrism as

"... activity of a tendency hostile to materialist linguistics, influence of idealist-reactionary currents from foreign **bourgeois** linguistics...

Among those named were Vinogradov, Chikobava and Peterson". (René L'Hermitte: op. cit.; p. 66).

During

"... the remainder of 1949 the drive for Marrism continued". (Jeffrey Ellis & Robert W. Davies: op. cit.; p. 233).

### THE 1950 DEBATE

By the spring of 1950 Marxist-Leninists in leading positions in the Communist Party of the Soviet Union felt themselves to be in a position to initiate action against revisionism in the field of linguistics.

They acted through the CPSU newspaper 'Pravda' (Truth), taking advantage of the admission of the Editorial Board of 'Problems of Philosophy' of

"...the generally unsatisfactory situation in the field of linguistics".

('Philosophy' (1949): op. cit.; p. 21).

On 9 May 1950, the Editorial Board of 'Pravda' announced that

"...in connection with the unsatisfactory state of Soviet linguistics, the editors consider it essential to organise an open discussion in 'Pravda' in order, through criticism and self-criticism, to overcome the stagnation in the development of Soviet linguistics and to give correct direction to further scientific work in this field"..

(Editorial Note, 'Pravda' (9 May 1950), in: 'Current Digest of the Soviet Press', Volume 2, No. 18; p. 3).

The discussion was opened by the anti-Marrist philologist Arnold Chikobava. It:

"... lasted nine weeks, and included contributions from 14 important philologists".

(Jeffrey Ellis & Robert W. Davies: op. cit.; p. 234).

Stalin made two interventions in writing -- on 20 June and 29 June 1950. He made it clear that he intervened at the request of a group of younger comrades', and that he did do so not as an expert in linguistics, but simply as a Marxist:

"I am not a linguistic expert and, of course, cannot fully satisfy the request of the comrades. As to Marxism in linguistics, as in other social sciences, this is something directly in my field".

(Josef V. Stalin (1950) (1): op. cit., p. 195).

Even half-way through, Stalin held that the discussion had been very valuable:

"The discussion ... has proved to be very useful first of all because it brought this Arakcheyev regime into the light of day and smashed it to smithereens. ... It ...also brought out the incredible confusion of ideas on cardinal questions of linguistics which prevails among the leading circles in this branch of science. ...

It turned out that in N. Y. Marr's teachings there are a whole number of defects, errors, ill-defined problems and sketchy propositions. Why, one asks, have N. Y. Marr's 'disciples' begun to talk about this only now, after the discussion opened? Why did they not see to it before? Why did they not speak about in in due time openly and honestly, as befits scientists?"

(Josef V. Stalin (1950) (1): op. cit., p. 227-28).

In fact, even before Stalin's intervention the openness of the discussion had enabled the opponents of Marrism to rout the Marrists:

"The anti-Marrists...had little difficulty in demonstrating that Marr's doctrine is amorphous, arbitrary, unproven and in contradiction with certain important Marxist tenets".

(D. B. Y.; op. cit.; p. 360).

Stalin summed up his views on linguistics as follows:

"I think that the sooner our linguistics rids itself of N.Y. Marr's errors, the sooner it will be possible to extricate it from its present crisis...

Elimination of the Arakcheyev regime in linguistics, rejection of N. Y. Marr's errors, and the introduction of Marxism into linguistics -- that, in my opinion, is the way in which Soviet linguistics could be put on a sound basis".

(Josef V. Stalin (195) (1): op. cit.; p. 230).

"The debate was closed on 4 July 1950",

(Katherine H. Phillips: op. cit.; p. 90).

when 'Pravda' published Stalin's second contribution to the debate entitled 'Concerning Certain Problems of Linguistics'. In this he made it clear that, despite the fundamental errors in Marrism, there were positive aspects to Marr's writings which must not be overlooked:

"Of course, the works of N. Y. Marr do not consist solely of errors.

. . . Marr has certain good and ably written works in which he, forgetting his theoretical claims, conscientiously and one must say skilfully, investigates individual languages. In these works one can find not a little that is valuable and instructive".

(Josef V. Stalin (1950) (2): op. cit.; p. 238).

and made a final summary of his views as follows:

"The cause of the stagnation in Soviet linguistics is . . . the Arakcheyev regime set up by the disciples of N. Y. Marr. Theoretical; confusion was brought into linguistics by N. Y. Marr and his closest colleagues. To put an end to stagnation, both the one and the other must be eliminated. The removal of these plague spots will put Soviet linguistics on a sound basis".

(Josef V. Stalin (1950) (2): *ibid.* ; p. 239).

On 4 July 1950, Ivan Meshchaninov wrote a letter of self-criticism to the editors of 'Pravda':

"The majority of us Soviet linguists, and especially myself, were so firmly convinced that language was a phenomenon of a superstructural nature that we did not even make any effort to think over those definitions of superstructures and their relation to the base which are contained in the Marxist-Leninist classics. Hence the erroneousness of many of our other theoretical theses.

Our assessment of the superstructural nature of language inevitably led to the incorrect assertion of its class nature, of its development through 'upheavals' and consequently of the incorrect evaluation of the role of language hybridisation as the basis of language formation and development. ...

These and many other errors of Marr himself and of his pupils, particularly myself,

actually led to stagnation in Soviet linguistics. ...

The attempts made to study the grammatical structure of languages were indiscriminately proclaimed formalistic and met with direct opposition from the representatives of that linguistic regime which Comrade Stalin quite correctly labelled as 'Arkacheyev-like' (Ivan I. Meshchaninov: Letter to the Editors of 'Pravda' (4 July 1950), in: Elizabeth Kresky (Ed.): op. cit., p. 92).

### **THE DEMOTION OF THE MARRISTS**

At the conclusion of the linguistics debate, in July 1950, a decree was issued providing for:

"the release' from their functions at the Institute **of Language and Thought** attached to the Academy of the three principals",  
(René L'Hermitte: op. cit.; p. 79).

namely, Ivan Meshchaninov, Georgi Serdyuchenko (1904–65) and Filot Filin (born 1908).

The decree also provided for

"...the annulment of the decision which had been taken on 21 July 1949. , by the Presidium of the Academy, precisely on the initiative of these three persons; the liquidation of the Institute of Language and Thought as such; it was combined with the Institute of Russian to form a new academic entity, the Institute of Linguistics',  
(René L'Hermitte: op. cit., p. 79).

to be headed by Viktor Vinogradov.

It has to be noted that

"...the former champions of the new theory of language, although they were demoted on the administrative plane, were not the object of any repressive measure. Nothing comparable, for example, to the tragedy of E. D. Polivanov in the thirties".  
(René L'Hermitte: *ibid.*; p. 80).

Meshchaninov

". . was allowed to retain his academic title and to continue his activities -- in relative isolation but without official interference".  
(Katherine H. Phillips: op. cit.; p. 94).

### **POSTSCRIPT**

After the death of Stalin in 1953, and the triumph of open revisionism in the Soviet Union under Nikita Khrushchev (1894–1971) and his successors,

"... the Marrists saw the opportunity to take their revenge".  
(René L'Hermitte: op. cit.; p. 82).

since they

"... could now present themselves as victims of the intervention of 1950"  
(René L'Hermitte: ibid. ; p. 81).

that is, as victims of 'the cult of personality'.

In short, there was a partial

"... rehabilitation of Marrism".  
(René L'Hermitte: ibid.; p. 84).

in that

"... Marrists, headed by Filin, with official support, assumed again a directing role in Soviet linguistics".  
(René L'Hermitte: ibid.; p. 84).

although

"...their authority was no longer omnipotent, as it had been between 1930 and 1950".  
(René L'Hermitte: ibid.; p. 84).

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