

Mother Russia by Luba George

Russians sweep Berlin Film Festival

The "Berlinale," said Hollywood mogul Jack Valenti, "made possible what Reagan and Gorbachov were not able to make possible to date."

Immediately after Moscow's International Peace Forum, Gorbachov's "new line" in the cinema world got top billing at the Berlin Film Festival (Feb. 20-March 3). Gleb Panfilov's film, *Thema*, won first prize, the Golden Bear, while the other two Soviet entries, *Farewell to Matyora* and *The Bells of Chernobyl* took honorable mention. Except for the American *Platoon* (awarded the Silver Bear), all three Russian films got by far the most coverage and publicity in West Germany, with lengthy promotional excerpts shown on German TV.

The theme of all three films was the sacred Russian soil. Panfilov's long-censored *Thema*, aside from expressing the need for more *glasnost* and "democratization" in the Soviet film world, dwelt heavily on the Dostoevskian "blood and soil" elements buried deep in the Russian psyche. The hero, a Moscow scriptwriter tired of living in a world of "passivity and lies," returns to the village of his youth to regain his Russian *dukhovnost* (spirituality). Here he plans to stage the Old Slavic epic *Song of Igor*. For inspiration, he visits the village cemetery and meets a gravedigger, a would-be author, who is seeking an exit visa to Israel. The Jewish writer argues that he'd rather feel homesick in Israel than live a life full of hate about "everything here." The message: Through Russian spirituality, the problems tormenting Russians and would-be émigrés can be solved.

Elem Klimov's *Farewell to Matyora*, is about a village on the Island of Matyora which is to be flooded by

a Siberian river in a hydroelectric construction project. On top of scenes where the village's age-old tree withstands the fire, symbolic for nature's triumph over technology, there is the scene of the old peasant woman Darya ("Matushka Rus"), who refuses to be evacuated. Digging her hands in the soil in the village cemetery, she cries: "My ancestors, my ancestors . . . so much suffering, so much pain . . . I don't want to leave."

The film is based on the novel by Valentin Rasputin, whose novels, according to Klimov, have all been read by Mikhail Gorbachov. First released under Yuri Andropov, it did much to prepare the shift three years later at Gorbachov's 27th Party Congress, where the costly "Project of the Century"—the Siberian River Diversion Project—was scrapped. Rasputin is a leading figure of the "Russian Party" school of writers called *derevenshchiki* (village prosaists), which launched the campaign against the River Diversion Project.

Interviewed in *Der Spiegel*, the 54-year-old Klimov, a communist party member since 1962, admitted his "close personal" ties to Gorbachov. Klimov, who gained notoriety for his earlier film *Agonia* depicting the mystic Rasputin as stemming from the "deep Russian soil," lost his "dissident" status when the "Russian Party" staged a coup inside the Soviet Film Makers' Union Congress in May 1986. Two-thirds of the Old Guard were ousted and Klimov was elected first secretary of the Union. The Film Makers Congress was graced by the

presence of Gorbachov and his propaganda chief Aleksander Yakovlev.

Klimov has since been put on Raisa Gorbachova's Soviet Culture Foundation staff and is leading the fight against the bureaucratic state film enterprise, Goskino. In a tribute at the Berlin Film Festival to his associate Andrei Tarkovsky, who died in exile last December, he declared that "revolutionary changes" are afoot in the U.S.S.R. The next big move for Klimov will be the July Moscow Film Festival, which he says will be "totally reorganized" to fit Gorbachov's new image.

The Bells of Chernobyl, which made its Western premiere in Berlin, starts with a mother recounting her son's farewell. "I'll dig the garden for you, mother. Don't try to do it yourself," he says before being buried beneath the melted-down wreck of the Block Four Chernobyl reactor. For certain Soviet "useful idiots" in the West like West German Green Party member Otto Schily, the film said "everything there was to say" about the "dangers" of nuclear power.

To the Soviet people, the Chernobyl film, depicting heroic military exploits, lives sacrificed to protect the "native soil," scenes of deserted villages and towns, and civilian refugees, evokes the image of World War II, and demonstrated Russian survival capability in case of nuclear war.

Klimov stayed for another few days in West Berlin to lead a "Klimov workshop" arranged at the Academy of Fine Arts (March 4-6) attended by German and Soviet artists and film makers. He was then admitted to the West Berlin Academy.

A Klimov associate at the Berlin Film Festival told *EIR* that the Golden Bear award was "symbolic" of the fact that "Europe and especially West Germany were taking Gorbachov's reforms seriously."