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HIST 2100

Cement

Among the major themes in the novel there are three which characterize the attitudes and values of the 1920s in Russia. The first is the attitude that no exploiter is a good Communist. Second, that the individual suffers for the good of the whole. Finally, that there is a strong unification among the Communists, there is no sense of personal relationship (but this may just be an attitude of Mekhova).

Dasha is a strong representative for the attitude that Communists must not be exploiters. For the first half of the book, she continues to represent to Gleb the fact that she will not be exploited by him. “But you are also a brute man, needing a woman to be a slave for you, for you to sleep with. You’re a good soldier, but in ordinary life you’re a bad Communist.”

Zhidsky and Tskheladze feel that Badin is committing a scandal and ruining the Party by meeting in Shramm’s high-class room, indeed, exploiting a maid. Badin is “trying to insinuate himself into party ranks”, a phrase that shouldn’t even be sensical in a Communist community. Such secretive pleasures should be no one’s; they all share the burden of work and the fruits that are reaped.

Dasha and Gleb both provide us with a good example of the value that the good of the movement justifies the individual’s suffering. Gleb gives a

speech to the workers stating that “they have won this day and that with their work and suffering, they can win the world.” Dasha sacrifices the care of her own daughter, which will mean her daughter’s life, in order to concentrate on work and the movement. Work comes before everything: “their hearts must be of stone,” she says.

Mekhova represents the theme that, while the Communists are unified and together in cause, they have no personal relationships. “That’s just it,” she says, “we’re strongly organized, strongly bound together. But we’re terribly apart, one from another, in our private lives.” This is another facet of the sacrifice theme, where one must exchange love and family for work and the movement. Mekhova continues to question this value, both in her words and her actions, causing her to appear weak.