Party Line Changing

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“The Soviets have failed to create a new man. Soviet literature is the proof of this.” Dr. John Fizer, Chairman of the Russian language and literature department at Rutgers University, made this claim speaking at Will Rice College November 20.

Dr. Fizer illustrated his point by reading poems from a collection of underground literature which had been smuggled out of Russia. “Today I don’t believe anything. Everything is propaganda, the whole world is propaganda.”

The body of Fizer’s talk was a tracing of the history of Soviet Literature. Socialist Realism, the official theory of aesthetics in the USSR, was defined in 1932. All Soviet writers are expected to adhere to its basic maxims.

Boy Meets Tractor

Typical of these maxims is the requirement of people-mindedness. An acceptable piece of social realist literature addresses itself to the large masses of toiling people so that they can perceive it.

The official restrictions limiting artists were not significantly loosened during the change-over from Stalin to Khrushchev. In 1959 Khrushchev announced that “Creative people are not allowed to make an error. The party will be merciless with any deviation from Socialist Realism.”

Relaxed Atmosphere

Despite official statements the atmosphere has become much more relaxed. According to Dr. Fizer under Stalin “people suspected of being potentially dangerous were removed from the scene.”

In recent years writers have been allowed to publish works describing loners, deviates, and off-beat characters, all of which have very little, if anything, in common with Socialist Realism.