

THE ARTIST AND POLITICS (1954)¹

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In our country, which has only recently passed through democracy's gates, people's individuality and personhood have not yet begun to be considered as a social problem. Most of the state authorities and politicians refuse to consider the people for whom they are responsible as psychological singularities, as entire and singular worlds unto themselves; or they feel no need to do so; or their cultural background and their own interior depths do not allow them to acknowledge such a need.

For most of them [the authorities], people exist as statistical figures, or at most, nothing more than the crowd in the street.

In our country, we have not yet been able to eradicate the lingering mindset of thousands of years of dictatorship, which gives no importance to the rights and interests of the individual alongside the interests of society; instead, society and the individual are treated as an unconnected duality, where society is the birth child and the individual is the stepchild, a mindset that may require much more time to fully eradicate.

Politicians and state authorities will only feel the need to abandon this mindset when a local citizenry compels them to do so.

As the number of people who are able to raise their voices above

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the noise of the crowd increases—those who, considered from a narrow point of view, appear to reduce the interests of society to nothing, instead doting upon the rights of the individual person—politicians’ and state authorities’ views, too, will gain clarity. Individual members of the crowd, which currently appears to the authorities as a nebulous mass, will begin to stand apart from one another and come into focus.

In our country, it is writers and, in the broadest sense, artists, who are best situated to begin to pressure politicians and state authorities in this way.

The most significant proof of how effective artists can be in such a process is the importance given in all dictatorships to placing artists under heavy pressure. Such was the situation of artists in Nazi Germany and in Soviet Russia!

Man, in all the breadth and depth of his psychological world, is the artist’s primary subject and material. So much so that even psychologists and psychoanalysts follow the paths paved by artists, in the wake of the traces they have (perhaps unconsciously) left behind.

There can be no democracy in countries where the artist is not actively involved in politics. Because in those countries where the artist is not involved in politics, not only those who govern, but also those who are governed, are unable to learn what Humanity is, how to cultivate respect for Humanity in an abstract sense, and how to give it value above all else in this world. Societies where this value is not given to Humanity are not democratic.

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