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978-1-107-03110-4 - Making the Soviet Intelligentsia: Universities and Intellectual Life
Under Stalin and Khrushchev

Benjamin Tromly

Excerpt

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Introduction

A tourist visiting the Soviet Union in the 1950s would likely be shown a university as part of a standardized tour. Often housed in neoclassical buildings and surrounded by parks and monuments, universities occupied a prominent place in the Soviet cityscape. In Moscow, the spectacle was particularly grand. In addition to its eighteenth-century buildings across the street from the Kremlin, Moscow University received a massive complex of buildings on the Lenin Hills overlooking the capital, which opened with much fanfare in 1953.¹ The “palace of science,” as it was dubbed in the press, was a state-of-the-art campus replete with modern laboratories, a twenty-two-floor elevator, and massive dormitories that offered each student a separate room – an unimaginable luxury for a generation that had grown up in cramped communal apartments. MGU’s tower on the skyline of the capital was a symbol of the place that learning and culture held in Soviet socialism.

The Soviet university might have seemed both a familiar and foreign setting to the hypothetical visitor. The early Cold War saw the ascendancy of the university on both sides of the Iron Curtain as states proved eager to harness the potential of higher education for national defense and economic development. But the perceptive tourist – and later historian – might ponder what it meant for universities to occupy such a prominent place in state socialism’s self-image. Despite the massive letters reading “Science to the Toilers” adorning the entrance to the main building of MGU, the scene inside the university would hardly suggest communist radicalism. On the contrary, telltale signs of academic hierarchy were on display within it: crowds of students parting in the hallways for august professors and lecture halls resounding with the voices of lecturers and the scratching of pens – all drowning out the hushed but animated discussions in the back rows. Moreover, the tourist would gain the impression that historical traditions were taken very seriously in the Soviet university. Soviet higher education

¹ “Velikaia zabota o Sovetskoi nauke,” *Moskovskii universitet*, 29 August 1953: 1.

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establishments carried honorific names drawn not only from party leaders like Stalin and A. A. Zhdanov but also from historical figures tied to a specific institution: Moscow University was named after the eighteenth-century scientist M. V. Lomonosov credited with founding it. Pride in connections to a pre-revolutionary past seemed unlikely in a state predicated on transforming the world.

The official aggrandizement of Soviet universities might appear a puzzle to the perceptive observer for another reason. In Europe and North America, the university is often thought of as an institution devoted to impartial learning as its own end, and therefore as one unencumbered by transient considerations of politics and narrow utility. As an historian of education has quipped, “the distinguishing value of the university is its apparent uselessness.”² If this notion remains controversial in the West – some criticize universities for failing to live up to the ideal of an ivory tower, while others blame them for trying – it seemed positively aberrant against the backdrop of Soviet realities. For the founders of the Soviet state, learning could hold no value outside of the struggle to build the communist future; Vladimir Lenin held that “the very term ‘apolitical’ or ‘non-political’ education is a piece of bourgeois hypocrisy, nothing but humbuggery practiced on the masses . . .”³ The use of Gulag labor to build the Lenin Hills campus is a fitting illustration of the political foundations of Soviet higher learning. With its historical ties and focus on non-applied knowledge, the university appeared an unlikely symbol of the postwar Soviet order.

The relationship between palaces of science and the state and society that surrounded them is the subject of this book. It focuses on one essential product of universities – students – in order to explore relationships among learning, identity, and society in the postwar Soviet Union. Universities served multiple purposes for the Soviet state during the early postwar period, understood here as one encompassing the sub-periods of late Stalinism (1945–53) and the first post-Stalin decade dominated by Nikita Khrushchev (1953–64). They were training grounds for the military-industrial complex, showcases of Soviet cultural and economic accomplishments, and, especially after Stalin’s death, valued tools in international cultural diplomacy. Yet despite their ascendancy in the Soviet order, universities occupied a decidedly awkward position within it. The universities’

² Frank M. Turner, “Newman’s University and Ours,” in John Henry Newman, *The Idea of a University* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1996), 291.

³ Vladimir Lenin, *Collected Works*, 4th English edn., 45 vols. (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1965), vol. 31, 340–41.

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pursuit of disinterested knowledge could appear as apolitical insularity, while their prestige and venerable dignity sometimes struck outsiders as a mask for social entitlement. The real and imagined faces of the universities made campus politics a tumultuous affair. This was especially clear with regard to the students the universities trained, people who would one day constitute the country's intellectual elite of scientists, researchers, teachers, and industrial specialists. The fêted national institutions rarely seemed to fit the mold policymakers set for them, in part because the students themselves emerged from the palace on the hill with changed self-conceptions and ambitions.

Little of this was foreseen when the Stalinist state embarked on massive expansion of higher learning after a crippling war. In 1960, there were 2,396,100 higher education students, almost three times the number in the USSR on the eve of World War II.⁴ As the postwar educated strata mushroomed in numbers and grew in visibility, the question of where they would fit in the Soviet project became a critical one for all involved: party and state bureaucrats, professors, and the young specialists-in-the-making with their families. Shaping this postwar intellectual stratum proved a difficult endeavor for the Soviet system, in part because it dredged up longstanding and complicated questions about the life of the mind under Soviet socialism. Looming over postwar higher learning from the start was “intelligentsia,” a term describing thinkers as a social group that had deep roots in Russian and Soviet history.

Imagining the Soviet intelligentsia

What is the intelligentsia? Although this is a question posed perennially in modern Russian and Soviet history, clear answers to it have rarely been forthcoming among scholars. In part, the word suffers from a malady common to many terms in heavy use among historians like “class” and “nation” – “intelligentsia” is heavily colored by ideological affinities and methodological presumptions. This problem is compounded by the very contours of Soviet history; fast-changing ideas about what intelligentsia should mean ensured that the term would carry myriad associations in any given period, let alone across a longer time span. The nineteenth-century origins of the concept, however, seem relatively clear. Few would contest that many educated Russians under the Tsarist regime showed

⁴ S. V. Volkov, *Intellektual'nyi sloi v sovetskom obshchestve* (St. Petersburg: Fond “Razvitie,” Institut nauchnoi informatsii po obshchestvennym naukam RAN, 1999), 28, 31.

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passionate, and sometimes fanatical commitments to truth, progress, and equality or that “intelligentsia” was the mantle for self-identification along such lines. Of course, intellectuals the world over have claimed to represent the public interest, but it was only in underdeveloped and authoritarian Russia – and elsewhere in Eastern Europe in an ethnic nationalist mold – that intellectuals constituted a separate social stratum with its own cultural codes, what Isaiah Berlin called a “secular priesthood.”⁵ The Bolsheviks came to power armed with deep hostility toward the pre-revolutionary intelligentsia from which their leaders had emerged and a determination to replace it with one drawn from the people – that is, until the arrival of communism would make the concentration of knowledge in a distinct part of society unnecessary.⁶

In one of many drastic reversals of the Stalin period, a social category that had been relegated to the dustbin of history experienced an unexpected revival. In 1936, the dictator declared that a reformed and loyal “toiling intelligentsia” had emerged, a “stratum” (*prosloika*) with a rightful place in socialist society alongside the workers and collective farmers.⁷ While perhaps dubious in its Marxist credentials, Stalin’s re-establishment of intelligentsia as a social category was both constitutive and reflective of the social system that took shape in the 1930s. By legitimizing the place of educated professionals under socialism in doctrinal terms, Stalin’s “toiling intelligentsia” signaled a wider integration of educated elites in the Soviet order. It solidified the career trajectories of the *vydvizhentsy* or “promotion candidates,” young workers and peasants rushed through higher education to take up professional occupations (and who would come to provide a crucial basis of social support for the Stalin regime).⁸ Just as importantly, the “toiling intelligentsia” provided the possibility of rehabilitation to the remaining representatives of the pre-revolutionary educated stratum, people

⁵ Entry points to the voluminous literature on the Russian intelligentsia are Richard Pipes (ed.), *The Russian Intelligentsia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961) and Isaiah Berlin, *Russian Thinkers* (New York: Viking Press, 1978). On the troubled relationship of Russian intellectuals to the ethnic nation, see Nathaniel Knight, “Was the Intelligentsia Part of the Nation? Visions of Society in Post-Emancipation Russia,” *Kritika*, 7 (2006): 733–58. For comparison to the Polish case, see Alexander Gella, “The Life and Death of the Polish Intelligentsia,” *Slavic Review*, 30 (1971): 1–27.

⁶ On early conceptions of the intelligentsia and higher learning, see Igal Halfin, *From Darkness to Light: Class, Consciousness, and Salvation in Revolutionary Russia* (University of Pittsburgh Press, 2000) and Michael David-Fox, *Revolution of the Mind: Higher Learning among the Bolsheviks, 1918–1929* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997).

⁷ I. V. Stalin, “O proekte konstitutsii soiuza SSSR,” in Robert H. McNeal (ed.), *Sochineniia*, 3 vols. (Stanford, CA: The Hoover Institution on War, Revolution, and Peace, Stanford University), vol. 1, 142–46.

⁸ Sheila Fitzpatrick, “Stalin and the Making of a New Elite,” in *The Cultural Front: Power and Culture in Revolutionary Russia* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1992), 149–82.

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who had been considered class enemies or marginalized as “bourgeois specialists” in the preceding years. Of course, such assimilation came at a price: the Stalinist system made professional thinkers of all sorts more dependent on state power and agendas than ever before. Relentless demands from above for unquestioning service and “party-mindedness” accompanied state-employed intellectuals’ newfound prominence and (relative) social privilege. Indeed, the very construct of the “toiling intelligentsia” underscored intellectuals’ reliance on serving the state, as it defined membership in the group according to formal educational achievement and occupational criteria (the performance of “mental labor”), both of which the party-state monopolized.⁹

Whatever its ideological or social limitations, the Stalinist reworking of an old notion created new possibilities for the emergence of a distinctly Soviet intelligentsia. In fact, Soviet intellectuals – understood broadly as producers and consumers of highly specialized and abstract ideas – always had a sense of purpose and social standing, one that eluded the Stalinist vision of an army of obedient state servants. Three broad aspects of the Stalinist project complicated the idea and reality of a “toiling intelligentsia.” First, intellectuals were agents in communism’s core agenda of creating a modern social order and overcoming Russian “backwardness,” a commitment Bolshevism inherited from the pre-revolutionary Russian intelligentsia.¹⁰ If society is subject to human design through rational intervention, holders of knowledge should, at least in theory, be society’s teachers.¹¹ Reflecting this consideration, the life of the mind was a vital part of socialist “culture,” which in the Soviet understanding was a “missionary ideal,” “a standard of civilization to be met, not a descriptive or relativistic term.”¹² According to official

⁹ The standard Russian dictionary from 1989 follows this understanding, defining “intelligentsia” as “people of mental labor who possess education and special knowledge in different spheres of science, technology and culture; the societal stratum of people who engage in such labor.” S.I. Ozhegov, *Slovar’ russkogo iazyka: okolo 57,000 slov* (Moscow: Russkii iazyk, 1989), 251.

¹⁰ Works that place modernity at the center of analysis of Stalinism include Stephen Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as a Civilization* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995) and David L. Hoffmann, *Stalinist Values: The Cultural Norms of Soviet Modernity, 1917–1941* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003).

¹¹ Zygmunt Bauman, “Legislators and Interpreters: Culture as the Ideology of Intellectuals,” in Chris Jenks (ed.), *Culture: Critical Concepts in Sociology* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 316–36. Indeed, Lenin’s hatred of the old intelligentsia sat uncomfortably with his belief that the proletariat would need to build on culture inherited from the bourgeois past. See Neil Harding, *Lenin’s Political Thought: Theory and Practice in the Democratic and Socialist Revolutions* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2009), 638–50.

¹² Stephen Lovell, *The Russian Reading Revolution: Print Culture in the Soviet and Post-Soviet Eras* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2000), 19. Throughout this book, I use “culture” in this specifically Soviet definition in order to avoid applying other meanings of the word to the Soviet case anachronistically.

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policies and pronouncements, intellectuals were the carriers of “culture” and exemplars of “culturedness” (*kul'turnost'*), the core attributes of the modern subject such as reason, discipline, personal cultivation, and fluency in a commonly agreed-upon body of knowledge.¹³ A core mission of the Soviet project was to create the most modern and cultured society in the world – something one scholar has called “Socialist Realist mass culturalization” – and the intellectuals were to be at the forefront of it.¹⁴

Changing ideas about history were another aspect of Stalinism that infused new life into the intelligentsia. In the 1930s, the Stalinist party-state rehabilitated aspects of the pre-revolutionary past, part of a broader trend toward traditionalism, conservatism, and social inequality that has (controversially) been dubbed the “Great Retreat.” While the term might be misleading – no thought of historical regression entered official calculations in the 1930s – the developments it characterizes were of lasting importance for Soviet history, and perhaps for educated society most of all.¹⁵ The veneration of a (selective) canon of “progressive” writers, artists, and scholars from the pre-revolutionary period constituted a pillar of Soviet culture.¹⁶ Nowhere was the echo of the old intellectual class clearer than in higher education, which took on a decidedly more traditional character under Stalin. Class quotas in admissions disappeared, traditional models of learning replaced experimental methods in the classroom, and comprehensive universities – previously attacked as preserves of class privilege – re-emerged, staffed in part by representatives of the non-communist professoriate.¹⁷ Far from eschewing their historical roots, universities actively cultivated them: the MGU newspaper appealed to

¹³ Important studies of *kul'turnost'* are Catriona Kelly, *Refining Russia: Advice Literature, Polite Culture, and Gender from Catherine to Yeltsin* (Oxford University Press, 2001) and Vadim Volkov, “The Concept of Kul'turnost': Notes on the Soviet Civilizing Process,” in Sheila Fitzpatrick (ed.), *Stalinism: New Directions* (London: Routledge, 1999), 212–13. For Soviet intellectuals' particular connection to *kul'turnost'*, see Timo Vihavainen, *The Inner Adversary: The Struggle against Philistinism as the Moral Mission of the Russian Intelligentsia* (Washington, DC: New Academia Publishing, 2006).

¹⁴ Svetlana Boym, *Common Places: Mythologies of Everyday Life in Russia* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994), 105.

¹⁵ For the terms of debate, see David L. Hoffmann, “Was There a ‘Great Retreat’ from Soviet Socialism? Stalinist Culture Reconsidered,” *Kritika*, 5 (2004): 651–74 and Matthew E. Lenoe, “In Defense of Timasheff's Great Retreat,” *ibid.*: 721–30.

¹⁶ For the rehabilitation of Tsarist-era figures and traditions, see Kevin M.F. Platt and David Brandenberger, *Epic Revisionism: Russian History and Literature as Stalinist Propaganda* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2006) and Karen Petrone, *Life Has Become More Joyous, Comrades: Celebrations in the Time of Stalin* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), esp. 113–48. For the Ukrainian question within historicized Stalin-era discourse, see Serhy Yekelchuk, *Stalin's Empire of Memory: Russian–Ukrainian Relations in the Soviet Historical Imagination* (University of Toronto Press, 2004).

¹⁷ Sheila Fitzpatrick, “Professors and Soviet Power,” in *The Cultural Front*, 37–64. See also Michael David-Fox, “The Assault on the Universities and the Dynamics of Stalin's ‘Great Break,’ 1928–1932,”

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postwar students to become “continuers of the traditions” of pre-revolutionary thinkers (and former students) such as Belinskii, Griboedov, Lermontov, and Herzen.¹⁸ Not surprisingly, young college-educated Soviet citizens before and after the war imagined themselves as continuers of the Russian intelligentsia tradition – unaware, perhaps, that they had abandoned much of its distinctive ideals of intellectual introspection and political opposition.¹⁹

A third factor that shaped the situation of postwar intellectuals was the Cold War. Technological developments and, most of all, the race to acquire an atomic weapon encouraged Stalin to grant scientific workers and other highly trained educated elites a new position of material privilege that was particularly impressive against the backdrop of universal deprivation of the early postwar years.²⁰ Heavy funding of the military-industrial complex created desirable new careers in science and spurred rapid expansion of the higher education institutions that provided access to them. As the ranks of educated society grew, the notion that intellectual affairs were integral to the future of the country became entrenched. In particular, the postwar years saw the consolidation of an officially sanctioned cult of science in Soviet society; the scientist who perfected the world and uncovered the secrets of the universe became “hero and idol” in the postwar Soviet imagination.²¹

These different facets of Stalinism – the valorization of *kul'turnost'*, the turn to the past, and the exigencies of the Cold War – formed the basis for the postwar intelligentsia as a distinct social phenomenon. In the postwar conditions, the meanings and imaginative associations of “intelligentsia” shifted. For increasing numbers of Soviet citizens, intelligentsia appeared much more than a mass of toilers with diplomas as the formal Stalinist definition would have it. Rather, it was an “imagined community” defined by its close connection to culture and the enlightening mission of the Soviet

in Michael David-Fox and György Péteri (eds.), *Academia in Upheaval: Origins, Transfers, and Transformations of the Communist Academic Regime in Russia and East Central Europe* (Westport, CT: Bergin and Garvey, 2000), 73–104.

¹⁸ N. Obolenskaia, “Osushestvlas' zavetnaia mecha,” *Moskovskii universitet*, 9 September 1957: 2 and S. Kozlova, “Poet-demokrat (k 75 – letiiu so dnia smerti N. A. Nekrasova),” *Stalinets*, 10 January 1953: 2.

¹⁹ Yuri Slezkine, *The Jewish Century* (Princeton University Press, 2004), 256–57, 280–81.

²⁰ N. L. Krementsov, *Stalinist Science* (Princeton University Press, 1997), 98–105.

²¹ Mark Kuchment, “Bridging the Two Cultures: The Emergence of Scientific Prose,” in Loren R. Graham (ed.), *Science and the Soviet Social Order* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990), 335. Different treatments of mass science in the USSR include Asif A. Siddiqi, *The Red Rockets' Glare: Spaceflight and the Soviet Imagination, 1857–1957* (Cambridge University Press, 2010), 301–13, and Paul R. Josephson, “Rockets, Reactors, and Soviet Culture,” in Graham (ed.), *Science and the Soviet Social Order*, 168–94. For the emergence of popular science in the prewar period, see James T. Andrews, *Science for the Masses: The Bolshevik State, Public Science, and the Popular Imagination in Soviet Russia, 1917–1934* (College Station, TX: Texas A & M University Press, 2003).

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state. Moreover, building on the longstanding association between learning and civilized values in Soviet discourses of *kul'turnost*, the postwar Soviet construct of intelligentsia took on overtones of moral behavior: an *intelligentnyi* (intellectually refined) person was also a good one, or at least had a duty to be.²²

Rather than being a merely etymological issue, the resurgence of intelligentsia signaled – and, to some degree, affected – social realities in the postwar Soviet Union. The valorization of the figure of the *intelligent* as an agent of enlightenment and civilization distinguished intellectual life in the USSR from that of non-socialist twentieth-century societies. In the capitalist West, intellectuals are often understood as a class apart, divided from the “laity” by the esoteric and lofty nature of their pursuits and by their seemingly inherent proclivity to question power structures.²³ In contrast, Soviet intellectuals – provided, of course, that they were able and willing to pursue knowledge under the aegis of the state – could be confident that their work was part of an overarching mission to civilize society and thereby to contribute to communist construction. As Czesław Miłosz argued, by structuring society on a system of abstract thought and enabling its articulators, Soviet-style socialism made intellectuals feel like they belonged.²⁴

The ways that Soviet intelligentsia ideals shaped political and social practices in the USSR remain understudied. Rather, the tendency has been to simplify the issue by defining intelligentsia as a well-defined social group with clear traits of either a social or political nature. The first direction, to see intelligentsia as a “new class” specific to socialism, is understandable: given its ties to cultural superiority and refined values, the postwar intelligentsia was inevitably entangled in social hierarchies. Without a doubt, the early postwar years saw a sharp rise in the material privilege of the highly trained intellectual professions, including “scientific workers” in both higher education and research positions.²⁵ Along with improved standards of living came hereditary continuity. The Stalin-era professional strata – both the old holdovers and the many more

²² The place of moral concerns in intellectual life is discussed in Philip Boobbyer, *Conscience, Dissent and Reform in Soviet Russia* (London and New York: Routledge, 2005). My account differs in depicting the moral language of the intelligentsia in a neutral rather than normative sense.

²³ Cf. Edward Shils, “The Intellectuals and the Powers: Some Perspectives for Comparative Analysis,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 1 (1958): 5–22.

²⁴ Czesław Miłosz, *The Captive Mind* (New York: Vintage International, 1981), 9.

²⁵ On privileges and perks in Soviet educated society, see Kirill Tomoff, *Creative Union: The Professional Organization of Soviet Composers, 1939–1953* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006), 215–67 and M. R. Zezina, *Sovetskaia khudozhestvennaia intelligentsiia i vlast' v 1950–60-e gody* (Moscow: Dialog MGU, 1999), 57–66.

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newcomers – reproduced their social position by passing on educational achievement to their children, taking advantage of the end of forced social mobility. In this sense, the educational system in the USSR, as in other modern countries, helped to cement social hierarchies. Indeed, *kul'turnost'* functioned as a form of what Pierre Bourdieu calls “cultural capital,” the inherited markers of intellect and social bearing that contribute to social inequality, particularly through their impact on educational systems.²⁶

Despite its deep connections to socio-economic divisions, however, the Soviet intelligentsia was not a social class as scholars have sometimes posited.²⁷ Rather, intelligentsia should be understood as a status group in the Weberian sense. Two considerations make the conceptual distinction between status and class important in this context. First, membership in the intelligentsia emerged from the “social honor” derived from a particular style of life, not from an economic position *per se*.²⁸ Becoming a Soviet *intelligent* meant abiding by a set of social codes that demonstrated ethical consciousness, concern for transcendent ideas, and distaste for banal and selfish (“petty-bourgeois”) concerns.²⁹ A prime example of the everyday and habituated component of intelligentsia was the reverent attitude to books in educated circles; it was mandatory for a true *intelligent* to have a novel on his or her bedside table, one of the group’s self-proclaimed members recently explained.³⁰ And while the intelligentsia lifestyle marked it off from other social groups, it also – like any other status marker – relied on the values of Soviet society as a whole. Indeed, party-state elites also made “claims to culture” by keeping classical literature on their bookshelves next to their collection of agitprop materials, even if only for show.³¹

²⁶ Pierre Bourdieu, *The State Nobility: Elite Schools in the Field of Power*, trans. Laurretta C. Clough (Stanford University Press, 1996), 5–6.

²⁷ For an overview of neo-Marxist approaches, see Ivan Szelenyi and Bill Martin, “The Three Waves of New Class Theories,” *Theory and Society*, 17 (1988): 645–67. Some studies approach the intelligentsia as social elite without following the Marxist methodology of “new class” theories. See Mervyn Matthews, *Class and Society in Soviet Russia* (New York: Walker, 1972) and L. G. Churchward, *The Soviet Intelligentsia: An Essay on the Social Structure and Roles of Soviet Intellectuals during the 1960s* (London and Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1973). See also Eric J. Duskin, *Stalinist Reconstruction and the Confirmation of a New Elite, 1945–1953* (Houndmills, Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave, 2001).

²⁸ On the category of status, see Max Weber, “Class, Status, Party,” in H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (eds.), *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1958), 180–95.

²⁹ Boym, *Common Places*, 71–73.

³⁰ Vladimir Shlapentokh, “A Sociological Portrait of a Russian Intelligent: My Friend Felix Raskolnikov,” *Johnson’s Russian List*, no. 85 (1 May 2008), www.cdi.org/russia/johnson/2008-85-40.cfm (accessed 22 March 2009). On intellectuals’ internalization of the “Russian reading myth,” see Lovell, *The Russian Reading Revolution*.

³¹ Mikhail Voslensky, *Nomenklatura: The Soviet Ruling Class*, trans. Eric Mosbacher (London: Bodley Head, 1984), 221.

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This example leads to a second consideration: the intelligentsia's prestige as bearers of enlightenment and "culturedness" did not reinforce the hierarchies of wealth and power in Soviet society as directly as Bourdieu's class-based model would suggest. For instance, sociological studies of occupational prestige in the Soviet context, conducted among both students in the USSR and postwar Soviet émigrés, show the unique appeal of careers in learning in mature Soviet society. Soviet citizens held careers in research and teaching at the post-secondary level in greater esteem than administrative posts that yielded higher levels of privilege and power. Likewise, they saw second-tier educated ("mass intelligentsia") professions such as teaching in schools as more prestigious than better-paid but less education-based positions in production.³² In short, being a Soviet intellectual was an end in itself, even if the path to its attainment – formal learning and engagement in ideas – flowed seamlessly into broader socio-economic divisions.

The alternative tradition of assigning a political essence to the Soviet intelligentsia is influential in recent writing in both the West and the post-Soviet space. In the usual presentation, the "intelligentsia" is characterized as the "liberal intelligentsia," a group defined by a civic, moral, or political agenda in implicit or explicit opposition to the authoritarian state.³³ A correlate of this approach is to connect the postwar intelligentsia to its pre-revolutionary Russian antecedent. Thus a recent comprehensive overview presents postwar intellectuals as reconstituting the traditions of championing social justice and freedom that had defined the intelligentsia under the Tsars; invoking the protagonist from Boris Pasternak's novel about the Russian Revolution, the study dubs them "Zhivago's children."³⁴

Defining intelligentsia as a group defined by political strivings falls short on several counts. Most obviously, it imposes on the period a specific definition of intelligentsia that was far from universal among educated elites

³² See Michael Swafford, "Perceptions of Social Status in the USSR," in James R. Millar (ed.), *Politics, Work, and Daily Life in the USSR: A Survey of Former Soviet Citizens* (Cambridge University Press, 1987), 292–98. A major study of displaced Soviet citizens after World War II, which focused on the interwar years, yielded similar results. See Alex Inkeles and Raymond A. Bauer, *The Soviet Citizen: Daily Life in a Totalitarian Society* (New York: Atheneum, 1968), 76–79.

³³ This view, long influential in Western historiography, has been particularly marked in émigré and post-Soviet historical writing. See Elena Zubkova, *Obshchestvo i reformy* (Moscow: Rossiia molodaia, 1993); Iu. Z. Danyliuk and Oleh Bazhan, *Opozytsiia v Ukraini: druha polovyna 50-kh–80-ti rr. XX st.* (Kyiv: Ridnyi kraj, 2000) and Vladimir Shlapentokh, *Soviet Intellectuals and Political Power: The Post-Stalin Era* (Princeton University Press, 1990).

³⁴ Vladislav Zubok, *Zhivago's Children: The Last Russian Intelligentsia* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2009). A fruitful *longue durée* perspective on the intelligentsia – albeit one that also underestimates differences in historical context – focuses on the social expectations of intellectuals in both the Tsarist and Soviet periods and the inability or unwillingness of political power to satisfy them. See Marshall S. Shatz, *Soviet Dissent in Historical Perspective* (Cambridge University Press, 1980).