Grappling with the relationship between intellectuals and communism after 1917 calls to mind two topics long treated as almost entirely distinct. The first concerns non-Soviet, generally noncommunist intellectuals around the world and, in particular, intense twentieth-century debates over the pro-Soviet “fellow travelers” in the decades after 1917. The second concerns the role and place of intellectuals living and working under communism itself as a new, postrevolutionary intelligentsia emerged. The two topics have been divorced from one another not only because they were studied by historians in separated fields, but because the differences between them seemed obvious. Foreign intellectuals, wooed as sympathizers or potential allies by the organs of Soviet cultural diplomacy, parts of the Comintern, and the party-state, were outsiders not infrequently distant from the workings of the secretive Soviet system. Under Stalinism, the most pro-Soviet of them—known as fellow travelers abroad and “friends of the Soviet Union” at home—were celebrated rather than repressed. “Domestic” intellectuals, by contrast, were directly enmeshed in the political, cultural, scientific, and ideological dimensions of Soviet power during a period when the intelligentsia and culture were drastically remade. In the most hackneyed, Cold War-era renditions of these two topics, foreign fellow travelers were naïve dupes or “useful idiots” (an apocryphal phase attributed to Lenin), while the Soviet intellectuals were either dissident martyrs or “hacks.”

It is the purpose of this chapter, by contrast, to hone in on a rich field of interactions, overlap, and parallels in the ways the new Soviet regime approached intellectuals both domestic and foreign and, by the same token, to identify certain common ways in which intellectuals both subject to and distant from Soviet power approached communism. These rare, twin juxtapositions reveal the patterns of a consequential
twentieth-century relationship rather than the easy answers of martyrology or demonization.

In the history of communism, intellectuals were anything but marginal, and the ways in which foreign and domestic intellectuals were linked were several. Most of the top Bolshevik leaders themselves emerged from the Russian revolutionary intelligentsia, and they attributed outsized importance to intellectuals even as they and other Marxists condemned most of them as servants of the bourgeoisie. Soviet Marxism entrenched a class framework for analyzing the intelligentsia as a wavering “stratum” that applied internationally as well as at home; the practices and institutions the new regime innovated to attract and police nonparty specialists at home had a major impact on the way intellectuals abroad were approached.¹ From the start, a nexus emerged between the internal and external dimensions of the Soviet system. This internal–external nexus ensured that both international and domestic factors, and in particular their interaction, shaped communist agendas and approaches to intellectuals. Both domestic and foreign intellectuals, in turn, shared a range of little-analyzed commonalities in their strategies toward and interactions with Soviet communism.

In other times and places, intellectuals have sometimes been seen as marginal or far from the core missions of the state. Under communism, and in the minds of party leaders, they became central. Both the determination of top Bolshevik theoreticians and politicians to create a “proletarian” intelligentsia in the 1920s and Antonio Gramsci’s roughly contemporaneous theory of organic intellectuals contained in his prison notebooks reflected the importance the communist movement attributed to the role intellectuals would play in a new socialist order. As a practical matter, the international weakness and isolation of the early Soviet state heightened the importance of foreign intellectuals.

By the time a simple class analysis of the intelligentsia as a wavering stratum caught between the poles of the proletariat and bourgeoisie became entrenched in the early Soviet years, communist policymakers in practice confronted a complicated and diversified array of intellectual groups, professions, and attitudes in their own and other countries. What was unusual was that the concept of “intelligentsia” inherited and reworked in the Soviet years was remarkably broad, ranging from

composers and literary figures to engineers and scientists, and under Stalin extending even to bureaucrats and “white-collar workers.”

This encompassing Soviet category thus united these varied groups conceptually and in terms of many policies, while in practice intellectuals played many roles, and hardly just those of visionaries and “thinkers.” Heightening their importance for the Soviet party-state, they included experts and shapers of culture in an age of “cultural revolution,” as well as publicists and public figures who could influence the “masses” in the wake of the international “propaganda revolution” of World War I. The era of total war made shaping popular opinion a top priority for states not just at home but also in other countries. The young Soviet state, in particular, held few international trump cards other than what we would today call its “soft power” among leftists and sympathetic opinion-makers.

At the same time, intellectuals represented a threat. Within the Russian Empire and well into the 1920s, the intelligentsia formed the backbone of civic and political groups and movements. Given the overpowering Bolshevik imperative to dismantle autonomous organizations and direct the construction of socialism, this too provided strong incentives either to coopt or to defeat old elites and launch the fateful project of creating a new intelligentsia.

As a result, there quickly emerged a striking dualism in Bolshevik and early Soviet approaches to intellectuals, an ambivalence that was very much present to varying degrees in the history of foreign communist parties and their personnel policies. Despite the crucial importance attributed to intellectuals by revolutionary leaders, the legacy of the workers’ movement and the habits of Marxist political thought also created a propensity to dismiss intellectuals and cultural policy as matters less fundamental than the reconstruction of the economic base or issues related to mass mobilization. The result of a dualistic approach was dualistic results: the Bolshevik Revolution directed considerable political violence toward members of the intelligentsia from the start, yet equally quickly moved down the path of according them very significant privileges.

The duplexity of the communist approach was squarely rooted in long-standing splits within the revolutionary movement and social democracy. The two major constituencies within Russian social democracy were workers and intellectuals, and there were innumerable permutations within the sociocultural, political, and ideological world of the revolutionary movement.
in response to this fraught cohabitation. There was a continuum over the years ranging from workerist and anti-intelligentsia sentiment, on the one side, and vozhdizm, or a de facto cult of elite, often intelligentsia leaders and leadership, on the other. Marx had said that only the workers could emancipate themselves, but the theoretician of this autonomy was himself an intellectual.

Lenin’s own position might be seen as a compromise, since his famous concept of professional revolutionary was accessible to workers and intellectuals alike. On the one hand, Lenin loathed the “bourgeois” intelligentsia; on the other, the revolutionary leader who once filled out a questionnaire about his own occupation by writing “litterateur” firmly believed in the need for political leadership of the masses by the interpreters of Marxism and the necessity for building socialism with white-collar, noncommunist hands. The first widespread use of “old” experts by the new regime may have been the “military specialists” in Trotsky’s Red Army in 1918, but it was Lenin in the same year who forbade “mischief-making” around the old Academy of Sciences after it expressed willingness to cooperate with the red republic. Lenin also presided over the use of former factor managers, white-collar personnel, scientists, and other “bourgeois specialists” even during the height of anti-intelligentsia sentiment and class-discriminatory social policies in the early Soviet years.

At the outset of the New Economic Policy (NEP), Bolshevik policymakers condemned spetsesdstvo (specialist-baiting) and Lenin railed against “communist conceit” toward experts, while at the same time longstanding intelligentsia traditions of civic opposition were broken. Between 1922 and 1924, a new modus vivendi with the old intelligentsia was put in place. For example, a 1924 VSNKh report commissioned on the initiative of Felix Dzerzhinsky, the Cheka founder, who came to defend official yet embattled NEP-era practices of accommodation with the specialists at the end of his life, started with the premise that the majority of the technical personnel in the country came from the “old technical intelligentsia.” Written by A. Z. Gol’tsman, it explicitly rejected the derogatory class connotations attached to “specialist” in favor of judging people by professional qualifications. At the same time, even this report followed the orthodoxy that new “red” specialists would take their place – but not,
however, overnight.\textsuperscript{4} Thus did practices associated with awarding scientific and cultural elites material rewards and privileges become established even as the project of creating their potential gravediggers – a new, proletarian or socialist intelligentsia – was launched.

While Lenin railed against the rotten bourgeois intelligentsia yet found ways to launch a specialist policy aimed at winning their services for the new state, his lieutenant Stalin foreshadowed future features of Stalinism with his “Tsaritsyn approach,” the civil war commissar’s 1918 combination of harsh maneuvers against military specialists and fabricated counterrevolutionary plots on the Southern Front. Stalin’s best biographers have emphasized his congenital suspiciousness of experts and intellectuals as manifested in this formative experience.\textsuperscript{5} But Stalin too went on to tolerate the NEP-era \textit{modus vivendi} with the specialists, even though he then presided over a great attack on specialists during the “Great Break”; by the same token, he rehabilitated the old specialists in 1932 and created vast new privileges for the intelligentsia during the two decades that followed, yet purged the intelligentsia ruthlessly and, as with all elites during the Great Terror, disproportionately.

A more convincing interpretation, therefore, is that Stalin, who as a seminary graduate definitively belonged to the intelligentsia wing of the party yet not its theoretical elite, reconfigured and expanded the fundamental Leninist dualism toward intellectuals. Like the other Bolshevik leaders, Stalin recognized and perhaps even overestimated their crucial importance yet saw most as unreliable if not enemies. As a result, he was ready at once to privilege and to repress them. Stalin did not only shape but was constrained and influenced by the successive policies of differing periods: war communism, NEP, the “Great Break.” To be sure, after he consolidated his one-man dictatorship in the 1930s he then demonstrated more willingness to take extreme, unprecedented steps in both areas – privilege and repression. As Erik van Ree has written, Stalin, himself a revolutionary \textit{intelligent} who had adopted the persona of a teacher vis-à-vis the workers, was “no Mao, no Pol Pot: he targeted these people not because they were an intelligentsia but because they were an intelligentsia of the wrong kind. To educate a politically


reliable new intelligentsia was even more important for him than to crush the old one."

As of the early 1920s, the line between foreign and domestic intellectuals was blurred by the presence of a large emigration at the end of the civil war of a kaleidoscopic array of cultural and intellectual figures from the Russian Empire who appeared in Harbin, Berlin, and other European capitals such as Belgrade. The Bolshevik leadership and the GPU in the early 1920s were more than a little obsessed with the Russian emigration, and their fears of Russian émigré influence on international opinion and Soviet initiatives abroad were heightened by the fact that the borders were not yet sealed. Some cultural and intellectual figures who traveled abroad did not come back, and others who had left returned. It was at this moment that the Changing Landmarks (Smena vekh) movement caused a sensation among Russian émigrés with their 1921 call for the Russian intelligentsia to “go to Canossa” and support the new Soviet state. The Bolsheviks were reuniting Russia, making it a great power on the world stage: in spite and not because of their ideology, Lenin and the Bolsheviks were in fact pursuing Russian national missions. The article “Patriotica” by N. V. Ustrialov assumed a central place in Smena vekh. The author, a right-wing Kadet disillusioned with party politics, had been director of the press agency glorifying Aleksandr Kolchak’s White dictatorship in Omsk. On the eve of his departure for Harbin, his movement defeated, Ustrialov underwent a conversion to his electrifying stance in favor of a strong Soviet state.

Conflict and compromise between “reds” and experts became a hallmark of the era. The NEP-era “carrots” of a regularized place in the Soviet order and material incentives for the nonparty intelligentsia were accompanied by swings of the stick: international travel policy tightened up and a range of key figures were simply evicted. Several hundred major intellectuals and their families considered anti-Soviet, including numerous philosophers, religious thinkers, and civic activists, were famously expelled from the country in 1922 on the “philosopher’s steamboat.” Civil groups led by the old middle-left yet non-Bolshevik intelligentsia, whose activist ethos had been heightened by total war, were either banned or coopted, while the new university charter of 1922 put party appointees in charge.

The first “bourgeois” foreigners to arrive for extended periods, such as the German scholar Otto Hoetzsch, were wooed, marking the emergence of a new system of cultural diplomacy focused on the reception of foreign visitors.

At this same time, the Bolsheviks met the smenovekhovtsy half-way and launched a policy of co-opting members of the Russian intelligentsia, explicitly including those motivated to reconcile with the Soviets on national, patriotic, and imperial grounds. In 1921, the party literary figure N. L. Meshcheryakov greeted the Changing Landmark intellectuals as “National-Bolsheviks” who would inevitably move closer to what he called true Bolshevik-Communists. The ideas of the smenovekhovtsy were triumphantly propagated as well as harshly criticized in the Soviet 1920s, and the label smenovekhovstvo was deployed in Soviet parlance far beyond the original Smena vekh group to encompass many different types able to come to terms with the new regime. This included a range of prominent Ukrainian émigré intellectuals (the Ukrainian equivalent of the term was zminovikhivstvo) who either became Sovietophiles or found an accommodation with the Bolsheviks at a time when the “ideology of the far right came to dominate the political thought of the Ukrainian emigration.” As a trail of Russian intelligentsia returnees received positions during the NEP, prominent members of the Ukrainian intellectual and political class returned to the Ukrainian SSR. These included the renowned historian and politician Mykhailo Hrushevsky; a section of his party, the Ukrainian Socialist Revolutionaries; a number of social democrats; and former members of the independent Ukrainian People’s Republic (UNR).

The ideological offensive of the “Great Break” after 1928 prompted an assault on both the Russian and Ukrainian returnees, and they were particularly vulnerable during the Great Terror. However, in the 1920s the precedent and success of early Soviet recruitment policies toward émigré intellectuals who were far from Bolshevism established a precedent for flexible maneuvering with ideologically distant foreign intellectuals willing to form partnerships with communism. These included nationalists and conservatives of various stripes in different countries, and, at key moments,
even far-right figures of Weimar Germany’s “Eastern Orientation” who were close to fascism.11

In the common émigré miscalculation that the new regime would gradually moderate itself and serve either Russian, national, or great-power interests – not to mention their own agendas – these insiders with linguistic and political knowledge of Soviet communism in fact mirrored a response common among a number of foreign intellectuals, who faced many more linguistic and cultural barriers in accessing information and understanding the Bolsheviks. For example, a number of liberals in the US ARA (American Relief Administration) famine relief mission circa 1922 believed that economic aid for reconstruction would lead to a stronger Russia without Bolshevism. Later in the decade, some of them assumed pro-Soviet stances.12 Conversely, a number of Mexican intellectuals, artists, and writers, experiencing the maturing, compromise-ridden stages in the life cycle of their own very different revolution begun in 1910, flocked to the “first socialist society” with the underlying yearning to restart stalled revolutionary transformations at home.13

If there was overlap in the calculations leading émigré intellectuals from revolutionary Russia and foreign intellectual observers to engage the young Soviet state, analogies can also be found between Russian intellectuals and the non-Russian intelligentsias in the borderland regions. A tutelary mission to enlighten and mold the masses was a distinguishing feature of the Russian intelligentsia since the mid nineteenth century. In the Central Asian context, the liberal reformers known as Jadids, with their “aggressively modernist interpretation of Islam,” developed a cult of knowledge and enlightenment hardly unfamiliar to the strong strain of kul’turtregervost in the Russian intelligentsia. But as Adeeb Khalid suggests, before 1917 the Jadids looked more to Istanbul than to St. Petersburg. After they were radicalized by the Bolshevik Revolution, they underwent a shift from liberal constitutionalism to the “politics of mobilization.”

Jadid intellectuals thus became central players in a cultural revolution and Soviet war on backwardness that unfolded throughout the 1920s. Party leaders from the center knew little about the Muslim “East,” and this opened a major space for the cooperation of indigenous intellectuals. But the Jadids’ cultural revolutionary project revolved around nation rather than class and engaged a particular, “Turkestan-centered Turkism.” In sum, their project became thoroughly intertwined with and ultimately subordinated to Bolshevik missions, but even so maintained its own logic and influence in the early Soviet decades, especially in Bukhara until 1924 and then in Uzbekistan. The history of Jadidism and Bolshevism provides a case study of entangled modernities in the emergence of Soviet Central Asia.

Non-Russian intelligentsias more generally became prime agents in Soviet-sponsored “national construction.” The involvement of non-Russian intelligentsias – whether Turkic, Slavic, or Transcaucasian – in the broad Soviet project of cultural revolution throughout the 1920s also held international ramifications in that decade and beyond. Domestic non-Russian intelligentsias became involved in Soviet cultural and political outreach directed at related nations and nationalities across Soviet borders or in other regions of the developing world. There is an analogy here with the major input of nonparty intellectuals in the all-union center into the creation of Soviet culture and science, which also involved official and quasi-official external missions. In all these instances, intellectuals helped construct their own gilded cage and, once inside, suffered greatly, especially in two waves of anti-intelligentsia persecution during the Great Break and the Great Terror.

Once the Soviet order had stabilized in the 1920s, another type of internal–external dynamic emerged as well. Communism was scientistic and promised advanced results from rational planning and state-funded projects, and this feature of the new regime went well beyond the realm of ideas alone. The collapse of the tsarist state had paved the way for a wave of postrevolutionary institution-building that included not only new types of

---

institutions—most notably, scientific research institutes—but also opened the
door to previously stymied or novel methodologies and subfields. When
disciplinary innovation occurred in fields that could be seen in harmony
with Soviet Marxism, it benefited from declarations of support for Soviet
goals. Often, new fields or approaches were simply pushed forward by visionaries and dreamers inspired by the revolution, and this occurred in
a wide range of medical, social science, and scientific fields. To cite only
well-known examples, these ranged from social medicine and eugenics to
more radical and utopian experiments, such as ex-Bolshevik Aleksandr
Bogdanov’s blood transfusion institute or the biologist Il’ia Ivanov’s
tries to crossbreed humans and apes. At the same time, impetus
toward social engineering and the great project of creating a New Man
inspired a range of social scientists in fields such as criminology, pedagogy,
and psychology to try to ride the tiger of the new Soviet state. While
a significant portion of the “old” intelligentsia went into emigration by
1920, another part of the professional and scientific intelligentsia came to
participate in the Bolshevik Revolution, with its core projects of remolding
society and creating a New Man, as either an inspiration, an opportunity,
or a bit of both.

The mushrooming new institutes and novel disciplinary configurations
created with state patronage by the Soviet scientific intelligentsia, in turn,
attracted the interest and attention of a wide variety of foreign profes-
sionals, scientists, social scientists, and cultural figures. While a number of
them joined the interwar “pilgrimage to Russia” and visited the USSR, it
was very common for those of them who viewed the USSR from afar to
combine pro-Soviet political views with an overriding personal interest in
a branch of Soviet science or culture connected to their own specific fields.
Some of them, such as the French physicist Paul Langevin or the Czech
musicologist Zdeněk Nejedlý, joined the ranks of the most ardent and
activist fellow travelers of the interwar period. Here there is an analogy
between the way the members of the Russian avant-garde, who were
“outsiders” of the late tsarist period, became “insiders” after they

15 On social medicine, see Solomon, Doing Medicine Together; on Bogdanov, see
Nikolai Krementsov, A Martian Stranded on Earth: Alexander Bogdanov, Blood
Transfusions, and Proletarian Science (University of Chicago Press, 2010); on cross-
breeding, Kirill Rossianov, “Beyond Species: Il’ya Ivanov and his Experiments on
277–316.
16 Daniel Beer, Renovating Russia: The Human Sciences and the Fate of Liberal Modernity
supported the revolution (and took advantage of Narkompros and Soviet state patronage). The heyday of the young Soviet avant-garde then contributed to a wave of cultural-political interest in the Soviet experiment, starting with a sensational exhibition of Soviet avant-garde art in Berlin on Unter den Linden in 1921 and continuing through the Berlin–Moscow cultural axis of the first Five-Year Plan.\textsuperscript{17}

On the right wing of the political spectrum, intelligentsia émigrés from the Russian Empire contributed to the most virulent new forms of anti-communism. Russian, Ukrainian, and Baltic anti-Bolshevism, anti-Semitism, and right-wing nationalism stimulated by the White struggle with the Red Army was transferred abroad via the Russian emigration, which included ideologues and intellectuals as well as political and military figures. In the Central European context this played a role in the rise of fascism. To be sure, the internationalism of extreme nationalisms was by definition limited, but circa 1920 key texts such as the notorious Protocols of the Elders of Zion were propagated through this dynamic.\textsuperscript{18}

Just as Soviet recruitment took advantage of émigré Russian nationalist intellectuals such as the Changing Landmark group, Soviet and Comintern operatives in certain times and circumstances courted those they conventionally considered bitter enemies – right-wing nationalists and fascist intellectuals, and in some cases before 1933, fascist intellectuals who were or later became Nazis.

The door was opened toward this little-known communist tactic because there was a strain of ideological fascination as well as enmity for Bolshevism and Stalinism on the extreme right of the political spectrum in interwar Europe. In Germany in particular, this was stimulated by the geopolitical “Eastern Orientation” and fascination with regimented mass mobilization for revolutionary goals. The aim on the Soviet side was not necessarily attempted conversion, but potential “neutralization” of the new nationalist, revolutionary intellectuals of the right.\textsuperscript{19}


Although such openings to right-wing intellectuals were not without controversy on the Soviet side, the flexibility to undertake them at all was enabled not only by Leninist politics, but also by Marxist-Leninist ideology—or, more exactly, an emergent doctrinal tenet that morphed into an early Soviet worldview. In the 1920s, as Marxism-Leninism became entrenched, Soviet writings on the intelligentsia widely disseminated a “class analysis” of the intelligentsia as a “wavering” stratum caught between the two great poles of the bourgeoisie and the proletariat.20 This early Soviet doctrinal cliché served several purposes. It explained how some intellectuals could go over to the side of the working class while others remained enemies. It also fed a marked anti-intellectualism in communist political culture writ large that associated intellectuals with indecisiveness and weakness. The flip side of the communist on-again, off-again accommodation with specialists was that the “wavering” of intellectual Hamlets was counterposed to the steely proletarian or Bolshevik qualities of resolute action and necessary ruthlessness.

This quasi-official class definition of the intelligentsia, as it was dispersed, was internalized by important figures such as the writer and Old Bolshevik Aleksandr Arosev, a friend of Molotov from childhood who became head of VOKS (All-Union Society for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries) during the years of the Popular Front. The stereotype of the wavering intellectual became a leitmotiv of Arosev’s thinking on the intelligentsia in the 1920s and 1930s. His diary shows he even applied it to himself, seeing himself as a Hamlet-like figure caught between his cultural and political ambitions. Tellingly, however, in his public pronouncements in the mid 1930s Arosev only contrasted the wavering of foreign and European intellectuals to the virile, ideological unity of the Soviet intelligentsia.21

As Soviet notions of the “Western” or “foreign intelligentsia” came into use, they became conduits for projecting into international contexts a number of familiar tropes applied to intellectuals at home. Stalinism ratified

20 For an example of the early Soviet debate on the intelligentsia within an emerging Marxist-Leninist framework, see Boris Isaakovich Gorev, “Intelligentsiia, kak ekonomicheskaia kateoriiia,” in Na ideologicheskom fronte: Shornik statei (Moscow: Gosizdat, 1923), ch. 1.

a veritable cult of culture in the 1930s, in which achievements in the cultural realm became a key part of a broader Stalinist superiority complex. With this official celebration of culture and “culturedness” (kul’turnost’), mini-cults of foreign intellectual “friends of the Soviet Union” served to appropriate the trappings of world culture. The celebration of foreign intellectuals ranged from George Bernard Shaw (who visited the USSR with fanfare in 1930) to the French writer Romain Rolland (who acquired a mini-cult during his visit of 1935).

To be sure, the celebration of pro-Soviet foreign intellectuals was outdone by even grander forms of domestic hero-worship of a pantheon of domestic writers, scientists, and professionals such as Maxim Gorky, Ivan Pavlov, the pedagogue Anton Makarenko, and the rocket scientist Konstantin Tsiolkovskii.22 In the case of nonparty or “bourgeois” intellectuals – both Soviet and foreign – narratives presented the famous intellectuals’ biography as a teleological process of overcoming early social and political flaws. In a tendentious Russian translation of Rolland’s autobiographical essay, for example, the French writer engaged in self-criticism of his “bourgeois individualist” youth, but set on the correct “path” toward embracing the Soviet Union after he overcome his pacifism and bourgeois intellectual “wavering.”23

This general Marxist-Leninist framework for understanding the intelligentsia in practice became linked to specific modes of party-state information-gathering and analysis concerning intellectuals. A general party-state practice of political reportage, commonly applied in the international arena, for example, was to divide any given group into three – enemies, friends, and those in between who could be swayed either way. This conventional triad fit neatly into the class analysis of the intelligentsia as a group caught in between.24 In the cultural diplomatic and security organs tasked with dealing with foreign intellectuals, apparatchiki judged levels of friendship and enmity with statements and publications about the USSR centrally in mind.

24 For an example, see E. V. Mikhin, “Klassovaia bor’ba i nauchnye rabotniki,” Nauchnyi rabotnik 5–6 (May–June 1930), 15–18.
Communism and Intellectuals

At home, they could rely on far more direct surveillance and loyalty tests. Thus, in practice, flexible and contingent classifications toward intellectuals could be inserted into a Manichean worldview. That said, foreign and nonparty intellectuals alike, even the most ardent of sympathizers, could never be completely “ours.” Famously, when André Gide published a book critical of the regime after his 1936 Soviet tour, one of the most celebrated friends of the decade became a maligned enemy faster than the blink of an eye.

By the late 1920s and 1930s, a range of party-state practices governing relations with the intelligentsia had solidified. These involved the carrot as well as the stick. Particularly in the case of utilitarian incentives, one can also discern a distinct overlap between the treatment of foreign and domestic intellectuals. Foreign intellectual sympathizers as well as members of the Soviet intelligentsia were offered economic incentives as well as non-monetary privileges. Policy toward the “bourgeois” specialists had ratified privileged pay differentials and a scientific “star” system already in the 1920s, and by the 1930s “intelligentsia privileges were often proudly announced.”

For their part, foreign intellectuals were offered royalties from translations, invitations to tour the USSR at state expense, banquets, and gifts. Other strategies involved flattery, such as exhibitions, wide distribution of the foreigners’ works, and press coverage.

The ritualistic, highly scripted aspects of Stalinist culture accentuated these early practices, but there is also evidence that Stalin’s own proclivities fed the unprecedented scale of the privileges accorded the new intelligentsia elite. In his memoirs, the editor of Izvestiia, Ivan Gronskii, recalled how Stalin discussed preparations for Gorky’s fortieth literary jubilee: “At one of the sessions, Stalin made a proposal: ‘Give Nizhnii Novgorod and the oblast Gorky’s name. Rename Tverskaia Street in Moscow after him.’” Gronskii reacted negatively, saying that this was laying it on too “thick,” but Stalin replied: “‘That doesn’t matter. That doesn’t matter.’ Leaning over, very quietly, he said to me: ‘He’s an ambitious man. We have to bind him to the Party.’”

In the 1930s, the visits of leading foreign intellectual “friends of the Soviet Union” became grandiose state visits filled with pomp, circumstance, and

meetings with the *vozhd*’. These Kremlin receptions, along with the galaxy of mini-cults of cultural and scientific figures, supported the central Stalin cult in direct ways by displaying the symbiosis of culture and power. The Stalin cult itself glorified the man who had launched his career in the intelligentsia wing of the party as a great Marxist theoretician and, in a trend that reached its apogee with Stalin’s 1950 tract, *Marxism and Problems of Linguistics*, a scientific genius in his own right.

Closely related to outright economic incentives for intellectuals were broader patterns of patronage. Patron–client relations in general became fundamental to Soviet intellectual life, because of both party-state direction of science and culture and the norms of the political system. But it was not just the domestic intelligentsia that had to have its own patrons in the guise of powerful politicians and key institutions; this phenomenon, too, was exported across state lines. A new form of transnational patronage emerged, in which institutions of the party-state charged with cultivating foreign intellectuals offered to favored or pro-Soviet figures such important tangible commodities such as travel and translations, or more intangible goods such as the political prestige or access to information that might accrue from high-level Soviet ties. Friendship societies abroad, the first of which was created in Berlin in 1923 under the concealed auspices of VOKS, and which in the course of the next decade spread to cities around the world, were one key conduit of this transnational patronage. Soviet embassies, especially at first in European capitols with significant Soviet colonies such as Berlin, Prague, Paris, and London, became another vehicle. What is most clearly the case in the transactions of transnational patronage in turn holds true for domestic, Soviet phenomena: patron–client relations were shaped by institutional and ideological rationales, and not only by personalistic favoritism, important as that may have been.

Another avenue along which domestic and foreign intellectuals became linked was in the innovative, indeed unique system in which the land of socialism was showcased abroad. On-site visits became the crown jewel of Soviet outreach to foreign intellectuals after noncommunist sympathizers began streaming in on their own accord after the end of civil war hostilities, at the very time the international practices of the new regime crystallized. It soon became clear that bringing outside observers in served key functions when it came to intellectuals. In what turned out to be a great advantage, members of the Soviet intelligentsia alike were mobilized to meet and greet their foreign counterparts. For example, when the American writer Theodore Dreiser visited in 1927, it was arranged for him to hobnob with
the crème de la crème of cultural and intellectual life of the era, including the theater director Konstantin Stanislavskii, the poet Vladimir Maiakovskii, and the filmmaker Sergei Eisenstein. Tours were tailored to the visiting intellectual’s specific field: the American pragmatist philosopher and progressive educational reformer John Dewey met the leading educational officials and theorists of the day, from Lunacharskii and Krupskaiia to S. T. Shatskii and V. N. Shul’gin. Overwhelmed by the extent to which his own theories were embraced and ostensibly put into practice, the future chair of the purge-era Commission of Inquiry into the Charges Made Against Leon Trotsky declared in 1927 that progressive pedagogy was more advanced in the USSR than in the USA.27

Perhaps most important, the presentation of Soviet socialism became centered on model sites that were presented as embodying the future or, in a key conflation, as typical of the Soviet present. The methodology of showing these models – which ranged from schools and institutes to prisons, collective farms, and communes for reformed juvenile delinquents – was termed kul’tpokaz, or cultural show. Kul’tpokaz had overlapping origins with Socialist Realism, which in the 1930s became a pervasive ideological mode of seeing the future in the present as well as the official if capacious doctrine in literature and the arts.

Soviet intellectuals played a key role in the history of kul’tpokaz. For one thing, they and their agendas were instrumental in displaying many of the model sites, or founding institutions that later became presented as models inside and outside the country. For example, the pedagogue Anton Makarenko and the writer Maxim Gorky were both heavily involved in the OGPU/NKVD labor communes for rehabilitating homeless juvenile delinquents in the late 1920s, when they became a prime stop on the itineraries of visiting intellectual dignitaries. Furthermore, the guides and translators who were attached to the intellectual visitors through VOKS or other Soviet institutions were versed in foreign languages and some area of culture or science, so the methodology of cultural show was propagated by people who can be considered minor Soviet intellectuals in their own right.

More generally, the Soviet intelligentsia was mobilized to promote cultural ties abroad and the international image of Soviet socialism. This took on a more coercive cast when Stalin’s Great Break of 1928–29 broke

the NEP-era *modus vivendi* with the “bourgeois specialists” and intergenerational, institutional, and political in-fighting reached its apogee. As professions such as engineering were decimated by arrests, Soviet intellectuals were pressured, for example, to sign the latest declaration *du jour* and make themselves available for the reception of foreign luminaries. Of course, even then such international contacts could be seen as a privilege as well as an obligation on the Soviet side. Even in the periods of greatest repressiveness, members of the Soviet intelligentsia were far from mere cogs in the machine; they were highly skilled in pursuing their own priorities.

In the Stalin period in particular, Moscow assumed an extraordinary, unprecedented position of dominance that deeply affected cultural and intellectual life. While Leningrad and many non-Russian cities were cultural centers in the years between 1918 and the end of the 1920s, Moscow in the 1930s was represented as the showcase socialist city for foreigners and the epicenter of a superior culture with global pretensions. Economic and cultural hyper-centralization drew provincial and non-Russian intellectuals like a magnet to the all-union center.28

Moscow was thus also the privileged meeting place for Soviet intellectual intermediaries and their foreign intellectual interlocutors. But for a charmed circle of leading Soviet intellectuals in the 1930s, the foreign intellectuals were cultivated abroad, *in situ*. As the first phase of the Stalin period after 1920 significantly tightened restrictions on international travel, the role of these elite Soviet mediators paradoxically increased. These were the privileged party and Soviet intellectuals, cultural officials, journalists, and diplomats who were able to crisscross Europe or embark for more distant venues to shape what an entire country read on international developments.

The successful Soviet intellectual mediator had to be able to navigate simultaneously in two worlds: the cultural and intellectual life in the relevant international context, on the one hand, and the pressure-cooker of Soviet and Stalinist cultural politics and ideology, on the other. Mediators’ close contacts with prominent Soviet sympathizers abroad put a certain class of these figures in a special position in both the institutions of Soviet cultural diplomacy and the extraordinarily

successful Comintern-based initiatives of Willi Münzenberg. Often several such figures were attached to every major pro-Soviet intellectual sympathizer.29

The most talented and impressive Soviet intellectuals, of course, had their own views about politics, culture, and the figures from abroad with whom they interacted. In the era before most of them met their destruction in the Great Terror, a number of Stalinist Westernizers, as they might be called, discerned a chance to bring Soviet culture close to the leftist culture of Europe. Many Soviet intellectual mediators genuinely admired the writers and intellectuals they also influenced or manipulated.30 As this suggests, Soviet cultural and intellectual elites had their own agendas that were distinct if overlapping with those of the political and foreign policy leadership. In pursuing them, they played a discernible role in making the interwar Soviet Union into a global preoccupation for intellectuals.

In non-Russian union republics, local intellectuals played a different kind of mediating role, part of what Mayhill Fowler has called internal transnationalism.31 They found themselves in between Moscow-based ideologues and cultural apparatchiki, on the one hand, and their own national audiences, on the other. In the case of Ukraine and the construction of Soviet Ukrainian national identity, for example, Serhy Yekelchyk has talked about both Ukrainian ideologues and intellectuals in the Stalin era as occupying “the ambiguous position of mediator between the Kremlin and their non-Russian constituencies.”32 Ethnic intellectuals, as this makes clear, preserved their own cultural prominence while playing a key role in the Soviet order. The international role of non-Russian intellectuals remains to be further investigated. For example, Masha Kirasirova has explored how Central Asians “were

31 Fowler, “Mikhail Bulgakov, Mykola Kulish, and Soviet Theater.”
32 Serhy Yekelchyk, Stalin’s Empire of Memory: Russian–Ukrainian Relations in the Soviet Historical Imagination (University of Toronto Press, 2004), 6, 12.
recruited to produce Eastern images of Sovietness for export to the Middle East through media and film propaganda and, increasingly after World War II, through physical travel abroad and managing tourism at home.”

***

Looking at intellectuals and communism across borders raises valuable interpretive possibilities. But it also reveals major differences between foreign intellectuals not directly subject to the jurisdiction of Soviet power and Soviet intellectuals increasingly shaped by their perspectives as insiders within the Soviet political and economic system, their proximity to the extensive Soviet ideological and cultural establishment, and the direct application of coercion and political violence. Intelligentsia elites lived through three peaks of repression under Stalinism: the early 1930s, the Great Terror, and the Zhdanov period. Even at the apex of anti-intellectual policies and ideological xenophobia at home, the project of wooing intellectuals abroad carried on.

While the domestic order was marked for the duration of the Soviet period by a shifting oscillation between crackdowns and thaws, intellectuals inside Soviet borders were ultimately affected even more by a long-term, linear intensification of institutional controls and self-censorship. The party-state built an elaborate and unprecedentedly intrusive arsenal of soft and hard levers that ran the gamut from political and ideological campaigns, economic privileges and incentives, centralized cultural unions, appointments and patronage, to the organization of institutions on the macro and micro level. Intellectuals developed elaborate strategies to deflect those instruments but at the same time engaged in self-mobilization, self-policing, lateral surveillance, and ubiquitous appeals to authority. While the intelligentsia’s self-image was one of a heroic force of resistance to preserve culture, it is important to reflect on how intellectuals themselves were caught up in their own repression. Finally, the history of Soviet scientific and cultural fields suggests that the internal configurations of disciplines, the actions of their leading figures, and the proximity of their core methodologies to Marxist-Leninist ideology led to significant variations affecting the professional lives of Soviet intellectuals.

Another dynamic specific to the internal history of the Soviet intelligentsia revolves around generational conflict. Because of the major breaks in political life, science, education, culture, and ideology that occurred both around the great turning-points of 1917–18 and 1929–30, a succession of distinct generational cohorts became central to the history of intellectuals in the Soviet space. Speaking in the broadest terms, those with prerevolutionary education and experience were separated from a younger, 1920s generation, which in turn was distinct from the rapidly promoted cadres (vydvizhentsy) of the Stalin period. This rough, tripartite generational division held for both the nonparty intelligentsia and the party intellectuals (Old Bolsheviks, 1920s party Marxists, and, for lack of a more nuanced term, Stalinists) and, mutatis mutandis, was replicated among non-Russian intellectuals in the Union republics. For obvious reasons, the last of the three foundational generational cohorts in the early Soviet Union had the least amount of international experience and was least successful at brokering ties with foreign intellectuals. The first phase of Stalinism during the first Five-Year Plan and after was marked by intergenerational conflict among all three groups. The importance of distinct generational cohorts of Soviet intellectuals remained salient for decades to come.

The trajectory of non-Soviet intellectuals’ relationship to Soviet communism was shaped by a very different set of dynamics. In the most general sense, what attracted foreign intellectuals and indeed all foreign observers in some way sympathetic to Soviet communism was the multifaceted appeal of an alternative modernity and noncapitalist path to the future. Without this element, for example, the new transnational patronage would have lost most of its effectiveness for foreign intellectuals. The NEP, with its domestic compromises, thus held far less appeal to many intellectuals abroad than the repressive “socialist offensive” of the first Five-Year Plan. Intellectuals in other countries were affected directly and in vastly different ways from domestic Soviet intellectuals by the twists and turns of Soviet foreign relations with their own countries and a succession of major conjunctural shocks, including the rise of fascism, the Great Depression, the Terror, the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact, and the Grand Alliance. Speaking no less broadly, the Soviet Union’s alternative modernity held its greatest appeal to intellectuals in Europe and the United States in the interwar period, while after World War II that appeal shifted to developing countries, whose elites perceived
in the Soviet superpower a recipe for rapid, authoritarian, and non-Western modernization.  

Despite the importance of these disjunctures between Soviet and non-Soviet intellectuals, this chapter has identified a number of overlooked commonalities in the relationship between Soviet communism and intellectuals inside and outside the USSR. In terms of Soviet policies and attitudes, or what might be termed intelligentsia policy, these commonalities emerged early on in part because the new regime crystallized at a time when the potential repatriation of émigré intellectuals blurred the line between domestic and international. They emerged also because the Marxist-Leninist analysis of the intelligentsia as a wavering stratum, which affected or justified some practices of recruitment of nonproletarian, nonparty intellectuals, was salient for intellectuals inside and outside the USSR. One can also posit that the pragmatic political, economic, and economic integration of nonparty “specialists” at home, however rocky that was, eased the way for the proletarian state to woo foreign “bourgeois” intellectuals with a good dose of ideological flexibility and scarce material incentives. From the point of view of the vast range of intellectuals who saw reason to cooperate with the first socialist society, attempts to link their own agendas in particular fields of culture and science to the new regime or to benefit from party-state patronage did not stop at the borders of the Soviet state.

All this suggests that the relationship between communism and intellectuals was not a question of ideas alone – the ideological or political attraction of Soviet communism as a system – as often portrayed in the discussion of fellow travelers and Western “dupes.” Rather, ideas worked in tandem with a range of material interests, specific disciplinary or cultural considerations, the experiences of visits, and the influence of networks of mediators. Of course, without ideological allure or political interest all other factors would have worked much less effectively.

As this chapter has also suggested, communist attitudes toward intellectuals were dualistic from the start: large doses of suspicion and hostility toward the intelligentsia were present at every stage, but at the same time the crucial significance of the intelligentsia was an idée fixe. Given the deep

---

roots of this Janus-faced mentality, there was a logic to the resulting situation in which the Soviet intelligentsia became at once enormously privileged and harshly coerced.

At the end of the 1920s, the secret police’s Solovetskii Camp of Special Designation in the far-north White Sea archipelago became the prototype for the emergent Gulag and by far the most infamous holding ground for repressed members of the intelligentsia. Dmitrii Likhachev, the future academician who, decades later, supplied Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn with the Solovskii-based title for his Gulag Archipelago, worked in a philological unit studying prisoner slang with a Russian scholar who held a doctorate from the Sorbonne.35 In 1930, an OGPU special commission studying camp conditions produced a three-volume report recommending greater ‘use’ of repressed specialists in the Gulag. Indeed, the Great Break marked one initial peak in the creation of the so-called sharashki, or special units of arrested scientists and engineers working on high-priority projects in relatively privileged conditions.36

The largest single category of prisoners at Solovki in 1930, which encompassed the incarcerated intellectuals, were “politicals” often classified in camp statistics as “counterrevolutionaries” (known as kaery after the acronym from the Russian letters k-r). Of 555 prisoners at Solovki on the books as informers in 1930 (the camp population reached 71,800 at the beginning of 1931), the OGPU commission concluded, too few derived from intelligentsia, specialist, and “cultured” elements. The commission therefore issued a call for more recruitment among “counterrevolutionary authorities” (k-r avtoritetov). This formulation, on the face of it so bizarre, signified intellectuals imprisoned for political crimes who would have influence among the “counterrevolutionary masses.”37 Even in the Gulag, Soviet power looked to the intelligentsia as a crucial, influential stratum between the authorities and the people and its members were mobilized, privileged, and used. Inside the camps, as without, willing partners were found.38

38 Here see the neglected classic by Thomas Lahusen, How Life Writes the Book: Real Socialism and Socialist Realism in Stalin’s Russia (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997).
Michael David-Fox

Bibliographical Essay


Communism and Intellectuals


The literature on Russian émigré intellectuals after 1917 is large. The seminal synthetic work on the emigration is Marc Raeff, Russia Abroad: A Cultural History of the Russian Emigration, 1919–1939 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990). Literature on the fascination of fascist intellectuals and German “National Bolsheviks” with communism is scattered, but see the references in Michael David-Fox, Crossing Borders: Modernity, Ideology, and Culture in Russia and the Soviet Union (Pittsburgh University Press, 2016), ch. 7, and Marlène Laruelle (ed.), Unknown Pages of Russian History: Russia and the Fascist Temptation (forthcoming).

Study of the non-Russian intelligentsias of the USSR and their international roles is also fragmented but developing in promising ways. The most suggestive works include (on the Ukrainian case) Serhy Yekelchyk, Stalin’s Empire of Memory: Russian–Ukrainian Relations in the Soviet Historical
Michael David-Fox