

ГОДИШНИК НА СОФИЙСКИЯ УНИВЕРСИТЕТ
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THE INTELLIGENTSIA AND REVOLUTION

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Кристофер Рийд. ИНТЕЛЛИГЕНЦИЯ И РЕВОЛЮЦИЯ

Автор анализира отношението на руската интелигенция към Октябърската революция, а также условията за съществуване на интелигенцията по време на революционния период. Той показва отношението към революцията в различни групи на интелигенцията. Той описва развитието на културната и интелектуалната живот в това време — постепенна изолация, влошаване на икономическите условия за съществуване на интелигенцията. На примера на живота на великите руски интелектуалци (писатели, поети, художници) той проследява съдбата на различни групи на руската интелигенция.

Christopher Read. THE INTELLIGENTSIA AND
REVOLUTION

The author analyses the attitude of the Russian intelligentsia towards the October Revolution as well as the conditions for the existence of the intelligentsia during the revolutionary period. He shows the different reception of the revolution by various groups of the intelligentsia. He describes the development of the cultural and intellectual life at that time and points out the gradual isolation from the world, the deterioration of the economic conditions for the existence of the intelligentsia. Taking as example the life of some great Russian intellectuals (writers, artists) he describes the fate of various groups of the Russian intelligentsia.

From the time of its origin the intelligentsia had lived and breathed revolution to such an extent that this orientation was part of its definition. Whether one took Lavrov's position that they were "critically thinking people" or the populists' "mind, honour and conscience of the people" or the less poetic but more precise definition that they were the "verbally articulate critics of Tsarism", the theme of social change, revolution, was central to their existence. The topic had been

approached from every conceivable angle. Every imaginable tactic or strategy had been put forward. In the early twentieth century even liberals defended the revolutionary tradition of the intelligentsia and its great figures. It comes, then, as something of a surprise that the year 1917 seems no more than a minor unevenness in the intelligentsia's development, that in 1917 the intelligentsia did nothing in particular and did it very well. Where one might have expected it to be at the centre of the development of the revolution in general, rather it became preoccupied with its own life and its own world. In this world, surprisingly little changed after the February revolution. There was no sign of a great upsurge in intellectual activity or thoroughgoing alteration in their way of life.

A couple of examples might help to illustrate this. For the liberal intelligentsia university reform had been an important issue. Higher education policy had been a constant source of friction between them and the autocracy since the mid-century. The collapse of the autocracy did not, however, result in an outburst of university reform. Certainly, professors who had been dismissed from their posts shortly before the war, as part of the continuing reaction of the 1906-1914 period, were re-instated. The Provisional Government even set up a commission to elaborate a reform programme, but (and in this it faithfully mirrored its parent) the commission's progress was slow. University autonomy was proclaimed but, by and large, this was a front for the consolidation of professorial power in universities. Wider objectives were not achieved. The social composition of the student body was not changed. There was continuing powerful resistance to the admission of women. In January 1917 there were 28 women students in Moscow university. In January 1918 the number was still only 202. The student body grew only from 7,000 to 8,500 in the period. A comparison with figures for the following years is a rough measure of comparison of the pace of cultural revolution in 1917 itself in the early Soviet period. In January 1919 there were 23,000 students including 6,500 women¹.

Artistic life and high culture also show continuity with the past rather than a radical break in 1917. Like the university professors the cultural establishment saw the February revolution as an opportunity for replacing state control of (or influence over) the arts (which was not that great anyway) with their own. The suggestion that the Provisional Government should include an arts ministry was greeted with howls of opposition. The arts, it was argued, did not need top heavy bureaucratic direction, rather they needed liberating, autonomous grass-roots organisations, though these last did not materialise.

As a result, mainstream cultural and artistic life went on in 1917 as "normally" as it could. Publishers published, painters painted, exhibitions were held, critics criticised as best they could. All this has been confirmed by Lapshin's indispensable account of artistic life in Moscow and Petrograd in 1917². Reading through that account one can only agree that the picture suggests that cultural life was continuing, as the Russians say, "from inertia" or that people were simply going through the motions. As an extremely rough indication of the relatively even tenor of artistic life through 1917, Lapshin's chronology of events devotes about the same amount of space to each month of the year except for the summer months, especially August, which is much shorter, presumably as a traditional vacation

period. Though one should not put too much stress on this piece of evidence the impression given by other sources is very similar.

It must, however, be emphasised that the "normality" that runs into and through 1917 is the "normality" of the war years, not of the pre-war period. The effect of the war had been to create a sombreness and thinness in intellectual life in general. Conscription had drawn many younger intellectuals into the armed forces. Enrollment in universities fell. A glance at any of the intelligentsia journals shows the effects vividly. They ceased to be "thick" journals and became physically thinner, the quality of paper deteriorated but the range of contents narrowed even more spectacularly. Europe was, of course, divided into three intellectual blocks, one centred on Paris, one on Vienna-Munich-Berlin and, a poor relation, in Moscow and Petrograd. Contact between them was sparse. Very little news filtered through. Interchange between them, such a vital part of intellectual life, was very restricted. Only a few enclaves of contact — Switzerland and, for a while, Italy — survived. Like the radical political intelligentsia, the Russian artistic intelligentsia, and its young avant-garde above all, was itself divided among these groupings. Kandinsky, Altman, Chagall and Tatlin had recently returned from the west and were caught within the virtual cultural blockade while Bakst, Goncharova, Larionov, Lipchitz and Soutine were at the heart of the Russian avant-gard emigration in Paris.

As a result an unaccustomed parochialism descended on Russian intellectual life. Editors strained to make something of any local events. Happenings abroad were usually limited to brief reports, often based on unreliable sources. The only areas to benefit, if that is the right word, were war art and the beginnings of official poster art which are to be found in the war years rather than in 1917 or after.

Most of these effects are well-known from, for example, the last few pages of the memoirs of Benedikt Livshits — *The One-and-a-half-eyed Archer* who brilliantly describes the transition from peace-time Petersburg to war-time Petersburg³. He describes his own willing transformation into a soldier, the division mobilisation made in the community and the disruption to other areas of life. The university, for instance, is handed over to the garrison. In Livshit's words "The university became (not in the metaphorical sense but in the literal sense of the word) a nidus of infection". This came about not least because, as he describes, soldiers seemed to get a particular pleasure out of defecating on the main staircase. This, not unnaturally, tended to put a damper on the life of the university.

Putting such hazards aside, however, it was certainly the war and its implications that had affected intellectual life before February and continued to do so for a long time afterwards rather than the question of revolution itself. The chief concern of centrist, right-wing and not a few left-wing intellectuals continued to be the war. Most took a patriotic position and shared the hope that the February revolution would chiefly be a step towards victory over Germany. Very few seem to have gone much beyond that. Peter Struve was an exception in that in the first post-February edition of *Russkaia mys'* he emphasised the vital importance of maintaining the integrity of the army if the aims of the Provisional Government were to be fulfilled⁴. Very few (apart, of course, from Lenin in Zurich) were aware of the possibility of a second revolution so early on. Others like Andreev took a

strongly patriotic line and only later became aware of the growing social revolution which filled him with dismay. In March he wrote 'Thus, in the struggle on two fronts — with Nicholas inside Russia and with the Hohenzollerns without — the Russian has obtained the right to be a citizen in his own land'⁵. The main threat to this new freedom, for Andreev, was the "dark people" to whom he appealed in an increasingly shrill way to perform their patriotic duty. By the end of summer he was drawing a distinction between revolution — the noble step forward of February — and *bunt* — the growing social revolution which, he feared, would create chaos. As early as April he had asked the populist intelligentsia 'And where is the *narod* whom you served so tirelessly and honourably? It has forgotten you'⁶.

Perhaps it would be truer to say that intellectuals like Andreev had forgotten the *narod*. The one exception to the picture that intelligentsia life only changed gradually in 1917 is to be found among those intellectuals who set out not to deplore the dark people but to educate them. This was an area in which the fall of Tsarism had a clear impact. While the autocracy existed societies for adult education among the urban poor were very suspect. The slightest infringement of the rules could result in closure⁷.

However, the overthrow of the police system led to growing possibilities in this area. Both the Provisional Government and the Soviets became involved. Many Soviets (one cannot say how many) had cultural sections. Political parties organised parallel activities of their own. One of the best known activists in this area was Nadezhda Krupskaya who had a lifelong interest in worker education. Her first meeting with Lenin had been at a committee for literacy in the 1890s. In 1917 and after Krupskaya continued to work in this field. After she and Lenin returned to Petrograd from Switzerland she threw herself into work at the grass roots in the Vyborg district which she much preferred to the boring tasks she had been assigned in the bolshevik secretariat at Party headquarters in the Ksheshinskaya mansion. At a Petrograd city conference Krupskaya claimed to have upstaged the popular Provisional Government deputy minister Countess S.V. Panina. The latter's report admitted the Provisional Government's plans for education were not being fulfilled while Krupskaya claimed that the Bolsheviks and the people themselves had great achievements to their credit⁸.

Ideas began to develop about bringing all this work together and achieving co-ordination. One attempt was made by the cultural-educational section of the Moscow Soldiers' Soviet in early 1917. An appeal was made to "Painters, sculptors, artists, poets, musicians and architects" who were called upon to respond to the enthusiastic upsurge of interest in and opportunities for cultural growth. It was hoped that, in the special circumstances of the sin of a great war between peoples that those responding to the appeal would throw art a lifebelt⁹.

Initiatives of this sort led to the formation of Proletkul't in the days immediately preceding the October revolution. Its chief luminaries, Bogdanov and Lunacharsky, had been involved in cultural-educational work in a variety of ways. Lunacharsky's most notable contribution was in the form of mass lectures in the Cirque Moderne. His favourite theme was scientific explanation of various religious cults and practices. At the beginning of October the first Petrograd conference of proletarian

cultural educational organisations was held and it was from this that Proletkul't grew. In addition to Lunacharsky and Bogdanov, Krupskaya showed some interest but never played a significant role. The Central Committee of Petrograd Proletkul't met for the first time on November 17th 1917 and established the different departments which the organisation retained throughout its existence. These were theatre, literature, clubs, lectures, fine art, music, school and extramural education.

For all their differences, one feature is shared by all these various types of activities. They were all very predictable in that they arose from ideas and convictions held by the *intelligentsia* involved prior to 1917. The revolution and its aftermath were, not surprisingly, assimilated into pre-existing world views. Andreev had never been an admirer of the *narod* and therefore came to see the unfolding events as a justification of his views. Struve had long before drawn attention to the importance to the state as a focus of a civilised and orderly life, hence his warning about the catastrophic effects of the disintegration of the army. Krupskaya, Lunacharsky and Bogdanov had long been advocates of mass cultural work and threw themselves into it. All this leads us to the perhaps depressing but nonetheless inescapable conclusion that intellectuals seldom change their minds once they have made them up. This characteristic no doubt added to the continuity and inertia already noted. Blok himself remarked on this phenomenon in 1917 in a letter to Zinaida Gippius which was never sent¹⁰. The divisions in the intelligentsia, he commented, had their roots in 1905, not in 1917. Certainly the prior experience of revolution only twelve years earlier had crystallised intellectuals' ideas but, as in 1917, it was not the first revolutionary year, 1905, which brought about such re-evaluations and re-alignments as there were, rather it was the subsequent years of reflection and analysis which had this effect.

It is worth nothing, before going on to outline the changes which eventually occurred, that the October revolution did not instantaneously change the situation any more than the February revolution had done. The "inertial" process still had a little way to run before profound changes began to transform Russia's cultural, intellectual and artistic scene. The universities continued to function as best they could with little attempt at direct intervention before September 1918 (although arrests of individuals began to increase). Books continued to be published. Theatres tried to continue functioning. But conditions were becoming more and more difficult.

The ambiguity of the period was caught in a debate held at the Writers' Union in Petrograd at the time of the signing of the Brest-Litovsk treaty in March 1918. On the one hand the theme of the debate, 'The Tragedy of the Intelligentsia' implied that the current situation and prospects were disastrous while, as one correspondent reporting on the debate said, the occasion itself gave the impression 'that no such tragedy had befallen either the intelligentsia or Russia as a whole. The same people were on the platform and the audience had hardly changed'¹¹.

This was perhaps the last moment at which even a vestige of 'normality' could be detected as transforming forces were at work. It becomes even more difficult after this point to talk about 'the intelligentsia' rather than about on the one hand those who were casualties of the new situation and, on the other, those who were

its beneficiaries, though these latter, including nearly all intelligentsia bolsheviks, were eventually to be casualties themselves.

What were the forces bringing about this division?

At first, one thinks of deliberate political pressure and the various systems of reward, or, more frequently, punishment in the form of the Cheka, which were brought to bear. These were certainly real enough. Anti-parasite laws, compulsory labour obligations, waves of political arrests all fell heavily on the intelligentsia. These attitudes were heightened by the fact that the intelligentsia as a whole, cultural, professional and technical, began to fall into a role that was increasingly fatal to it. It was becoming a kind of surrogate bourgeoisie. Bolshevik ideology fanned the flame of class struggle in Russia but one of the prime requisites — a powerful and oppressive bourgeoisie — was missing. It was even harder to find in 1918 since those with wealth and property had deserted the Soviet areas if at all possible, rifled their company safes, sold what they could, picked up the family valuables and gone for white protection or emigration. That left employees and intellectuals as a prominent component of the old elite within Soviet areas. If class struggle had to be prosecuted and the real class enemies — capitalists, bankers, landowners and so on — were on the run, then the intelligentsia were the best the militants could find in their place. Something of this dogged relations between the non-intelligentsia party left and the educated classes throughout the 1920s.

Political processes alone, however, do not explain what happened. A major transforming effect came about through, perhaps one could call it the *perestroika*, the re-structuring of the economic base of intellectual life at this time. The political economy of the major intellectual institutions — the press, publishing, the theatre, concert halls, cinemas, universities, schools and so on — was falling to pieces.

The chief sources of intellectual incomes — profits from performances; private patronage, sponsorship and purchase; the Tsarist state budget especially for higher education; the book market; newspaper and journal readerships, were all breaking up and suffering from economic collapse themselves. Most *intelligenty* were not well paid and had few reserves to fall back on. Those that did have savings soon lost them in the collapse of paper money. This economic hurricane wreaked greater havoc among intellectuals than the direct political pressure of the fledgling bolshevik state. Many intellectuals were reduced to manual labour, to cultivating small plots of land, to flight, to starvation. Where the economic situation was particularly bad, in Petrograd for example in 1919, the death toll among intellectuals appears to have been enormous. Eminent elderly and undernourished scholars had little resistance to cholera and typhus. Memoirs recall the frequency of death and funerals in this period. Younger people, too, were affected as Zamyatin grimly portrays in his story *The Cave* in which the stove-god in the apartment of an unemployed intellectual couple swallows up their furniture, reduces them to stealing firewood and a few potatoes to live on; but eventually they give in and commit suicide¹². This fictional tragedy was being repeated in real life.

However, one of the key features of intelligentsia life in these stormy years was that the effects of political and economic pressure were far from even. Some intellectuals suffered heavily, some hardly at all; a few thrived and prospered. Some

semblance of traditional intellectual life survived in the most unlikely oases. This was partly because of pure chance, particularly for those in the provinces where local attitudes mediated the effects of central policies; partly as a result of intelligentsia self-defence against the situation and partly as a result of govt. policies and decisions which offered some protection to parts of the intelligentsia. I want to devote the remainder of the paper to sketching a few aspects of what happened to the intelligentsia in 1918-20 as the revolutionary process deepened and impinged on it more directly. Bearing in mind that the intelligentsia was increasingly divided into a non-bolshevik and a more pro-bolshevik part, the experience of each would be better dealt with separately.

For non-Bolsheviks, various forms of self-defence against the new conditions began to emerge. Some of them — flight and emigration — are obvious and require little elaboration here. Sporadic active political resistance also occurred but after the summer of 1918 this was increasingly rare as political repression was stepped up in the wake of the S.R. uprising and the shooting of Lenin. Self-defence under these circumstances meant fighting to preserve existing institutions, setting up new ones that met the new conditions and, less easily measured, a change of consciousness. Overall these three things can be summarised by saying that the intelligentsia became more aware of its own *separate* class position than had been the case before. It increasingly saw its own *value* to society — a feeling far removed from the guilt associated with its privileges by earlier generations — and began to demand appropriate respect for itself as a class. This was summed up by a speaker in the 'Tragedy of the intelligentsia' debate. For 130 years, he argued, the intelligentsia had considered itself to be outside or above class and to be in the service of the whole people. 'The revolution,' he said, 'had shown this to be a laughable self-deception',¹³.

Once again this was a process which had been underway before 1917, particularly in the war years, when, to oversimplify, populism lost further ground to nationalism among the educated classes. Nationalism had begun to be purged of its obscurantist, Tsarist, slavophile and anti-Semitic tones in favour of a more honourable and respectable patriotism legitimised by the national duty of defence against Germany and by the discrediting of the hated traditional system in this struggle. Struve had been the prophet of this process after 1905. Miliukov was its high priest in the Duma and the February revolution, when loyalty to country rather than Tsar, was invented by more and more members of the elite as a justification for defending their own interests by means of ditching the dynasty. For intellectuals of the centre and right the new democratic Russia was a worthy object of nationalist sentiment where the old one had not been. Defencists on the left had felt the same way. Even bolsheviks, of course, adapted some of these arguments after October.

These two elements of intelligentsia consciousness — the growing sense of their class interests and their creative role in the service of the nation rather than the *narod* — found expression in a variety of ways. In the forefront of these was a series of trade-union type organisations devoted to protecting and promoting the professional interests of creative intellectuals and of workers in the

cultural/educational institutions. The general pattern these went through is rather similar. They set out with "labourist" demands — for the right to work, defence of working conditions and such specific grievances as each group felt — and then moved on (if they survived) into a more limited form of assertiveness and were usually subjected to a growing degree of party control. It is notable that even in their early and more militant days, such organisations described their aims as 'organisation and defence of the labour of members and improvement of their economic and legal standing' or 'the defence of the professional and spiritual interests' of their members¹⁴. References to the political and social duties of intellectuals towards the people were rare, almost non-existent.

In addition, attempts were made to defend old institutions as much as possible. One of the most interesting and surprising rear-guard actions was put up by the universities in the summer of 1918. Narkompros (the Ministry of Education) had wanted to inject more adult, working-class and political education into the universities, open them to women on an equal basis and provide for the election of professors. The universities refused most of this, conceding only that some courses on socialism should be taught and that there would be very limited democratisation of university administration. They insisted on including the word autonomy in the proposed definition of a university. Narkompros was temporarily defeated but began to implement its proposals in a piecemeal fashion in the following years.

Finally one should make brief mention of a variety of lesser bodies, private publishers, writer co-ops, bookshops which provided a fragile haven for disparate groups. Gershenzon's Writers' Publishing House, set up in 1918, published 111 titles in its first year, ranging from Bogdanov to Rabindranath Tagore¹⁵. Mikhail Osorgin remembered the bookshop he ran in these years as 'not only the anchor of our personal safety but also a small cultural centre for Moscow'¹⁶.

The non-bolshevik intelligentsia did not, of course, simply retreat into its shell and take on a purely defensive attitude. Various platforms of reconciliation, thoroughly, perhaps excessively, documented by Soviet scholars also began to appear. In this sphere an initial sorting came about on the basis of usefulness to the regime. From early 1918 Soviet policy was geared towards incorporating needed skills and expertise of the old educated classes. Doctors, managers, engineers, army officers and senior administrators headed the list. While this to some extent blunted direct hostility to part of the educated class, the creative intelligentsia proper did not benefit. The advent of embryonic planning commissions and the Commission headed by the rector of Moscow University, M. Novikov, charged with making an inventory of Russia's natural resources, provided employment and some protection for academic economists, scientists and statisticians. But only a handful were involved. Many, were left out. Those with skills which were in demand were fortunate to the extent that the new authorities needed them and were prepared to support them, though this was a somewhat mixed blessing if, like Dr. Zhivago, you were conscripted at gun-point and carried far into the distant reaches of the Civil War.

The creative intelligentsia was only coincidentally the beneficiary of these processes. More important to them were the establishment of food aid, rations, for prominent cultural figures. A, perhaps, surprisingly broad range of prominent persons was included in the list. The rations were usually distributed by the intellectual organisations themselves though the total number was decided upon by the state. While there was a great deal of lobbying to get on the list most accounts seem to suggest that actual delivery of the promised provisions was erratic and, for some, never arrived. Nonetheless, it did provide a lifeline for many unemployable prominent intellectuals particularly in the worst years.

The same could be said for publishing which, especially in the form of Gorky's World Literature project, provided a system of outdoor relief for writers who were prepared to translate and edit volumes intended for it. But this brings us into contact with the second part of the intelligentsia, those who were prepared to work more actively with the regime.

For many of them the experience of the early Soviet period was one of an opening up of new opportunities and of undreamed of power and influence. The cultural explosion of the, loosely, revolutionary avant-garde is sufficiently well-known not to require elaboration here. I would, however, like to make a few observations about the social and institutional underpinnings of this phenomenon and say a little about the overall "consciousness" behind much of this work.

As the traditional sources of funding of the arts dried up as markets contracted and patrons emigrated new sources, pre-eminently the new Soviet authorities, began to channel some resources into the arts. On the surface it seems odd that they would do this at all at a time when the new regime was so stretched. However, much of it was intended to support almost utilitarian objectives — effective propaganda of the ideals of the new regime and raising the cultural level of the working class. The former led to well-known achievements in poster art, street demonstrations, commissions to produce monuments appropriate to the new values, new plays (most of which seem to have been written by Lunacharsky) and so on. Proletkul't engaged in a campaign to develop artistic and cultural skills among factory workers and peasants through their network of studios. It mainly took on the education of literate workers. Contrary to a widely held misconception it was not in any sense iconoclastic and was happy to employ non-proletarian specialists such as Belyi and Bryusov to give lectures and help workers develop their creative talent and to begin to acquire the rudiments of the history and appreciation of culture as well as the re-interpretation of it in the light of the new values.

Proletkul't, like many other lesser groups, depended on the central patronage institution, Narkompros, for its budget. In these early years Narkompros was a rather sprawling and uncontrolled bureaucracy with a set of tasks far beyond its means. Trying to conciliate the almost uniformly non-bolshevik teaching profession and, simultaneously, sovietise school education made life very difficult. The former objective made compromise over the latter inevitable and proposals for a radical reform of education — the Unified Labour School — were beaten off within the ministry to be replaced by a less ambitious scheme. Scientific research, publishing, adult education, technical and higher education were also its responsibility. In the

civil war years it did not operate in a coherent and harmonious fashion but rather through a series of crises and priority campaigns which drew the attention of Lunacharsky, Pokrovsky, Krupskaya and its other leading figures hither and thither wherever the next difficulty was cropping up.

The atmosphere within Narkompros tended to be one of bitter factional conflict and this was true of the new institutions as a whole. As a general rule they were riven by faction fighting and bureaucratic empire-building as different groups sought to gain access to the relatively limited sources of patronage. Intellectual groups set out to colonise parts of the new system and set up their dominion within it. This pattern of cultural politics, noted by many observers looking at the 1920s, was equally intense in these early years. Many of them have mistakenly concluded that the very scope and intensity of the struggles show that the party and the authorities were not heavily involved in them at this time. While it is obviously true that the degree of control which emerged later was not borne full blown in the revolution it is wrong to conclude that because the complete system was not there, then the party was taking a more liberal line. In the first place, the party and government controlled the flow of patronage on which the battles depended and around which they raged. Many groups were, from the outset, excluded from participation in these struggles. Centre and right-wing intellectuals had no place in them. All those involved were, in some sense, revolutionary, so the spectrum had been cut down from the outset. There are three main reasons why party intervention was not even greater at this time. First, the new Soviet authorities were relatively weak in these years; secondly their attention was focussed on more critical issues like defeating the whites and reconstructing the economy and, thirdly, they had no policy to implement. In these years there were three different, even competing, generators of party cultural policy — Lunacharsky and his allies in Narkompros; Proletkul't and, the one which was eventually the most important, the cultural (i.e. largely publishing and agitprop) sections of the central committee. Battle lines formed between them even though each of them still contained different groups within. It was these factors which created the puzzling pluralism of the civil war years in which one can find a) more survivals of pre-revolutionary culture than at any other time in Soviet history (e.g. in higher education); b) terrible suffering and starvation among intellectuals and c) the brilliant achievements of the avant-garde.

In the background the authorities were beginning to move themselves into a position from which they could exert more purchase on this chaos. It is typical of the time that the first blows were struck, not at the right-wing of fledgling Soviet culture, but at its left, Proletkul't. In 1919 its project for a Proletarian University was ruthlessly rejected and amalgamated into the party's own Sverdlov University. In 1920, though it was not wound up, Proletkul't itself was virtually broken by a resolution of the Central Committee which asserted direct party control over it.

To conclude, however, it might be appropriate to look briefly at the career, in this period, of an individual who typifies many of the processes I have referred to. Many such individuals could be chosen and are frequently chosen for this purpose — Blok, Gorky, Belyi, Bryusov, Mayakovsky, Lissitsky, Malevich, Tatlin. These

are all people who, in a special way capture something of this early revolutionary moment. One person who is less frequently thought of in this context, to the detriment of an understanding of the period and of his work as a whole, is Marc Chagall. His career mirrors some of the changes mentioned above. There was some evolution in his life and art when the war began but the main turning point came in late 1917, up to which time he had been living and exhibiting in Petrograd, the summer of 1917 finding him in the country busy painting landscapes. By the time he returned to the city late in the year the situation had degenerated to such a degree that he withdrew to his beloved Vitebsk, his native town situated near the Polish border. In August 1918, with Lunacharsky's approval and funding, Chagall opened his famous Vitebsk Art Academy which was devoted to bringing art to the people and, literally, bringing it into the streets, the decoration of which for the first anniversary of the October revolution was one of Chagall's first major projects there. To that extent the anniversary had more immediate impact in Chagall's life than the revolution itself. His enthusiastic organisation ran quickly into the endemic faction fighting and struggle for patronage which reached even into the backwaters of Byelorussia. Through superior bureaucratic organisation he was, of course, defeated by Malevich, his former pupil Lissitsky, Puni and the suprematists who took the Academy over. He returned to Petrograd and was commissioned to decorate the Kammernyi State Jewish Theatre, which settled in Moscow in November 1920. This occupied much of his time before he left Russia in the summer of 1922. One of the main forces which had driven him out was the changing economic circumstances of the time, as a result of which the state patronage he had enjoyed during the Civil War had dried up. Artists no longer received grants; the state no longer had money to buy his paintings, nor did anyone else in Russia and, like many other intellectuals, the N.E.P. transition to economic accounting and profitability blew a chill wind of market forces through the intellectual life of the country which brought chaos to many artists and institutions. Such state support as there was began to be channelled to members of the realist school rather than to members of the avant-garde.

Above all, however, Chagall's flirtation with the revolution, and his subsequent work, remind us of one of the fundamental forces distinguishing those, like himself, who worked with the Bolsheviks from those who remained neutral. What Chagall saw in the revolution, for all its faults, was a step forward in the life of ordinary people. He was not terrified and appalled by the dark people as Andreev had been, rather he loved them and tried to bring his art closer to them. Populism should take its place alongside the whimsicality, optimism, false naivete and Jewishness always associated with Chagall. It remained with him long after. In the mid 1930s his triptych *Revolution*, depicting an acrobatic Lenin standing on one hand in the middle of a carnival, referred back to the joy Chagall had felt in the heroic years. His painting *White Crucifixion* of 1936, inspired by the worsening plight of Jews in Germany, has, as a symbol of hope, a rag-taggle Red Army composed of the *narod* appearing in the background as liberators¹⁷.

It was a similar populist impulse that brought Blok, Gorky and many other intellectuals to overcome their repugance at the dictatorial tendencies of

Bolshevism and to ally themselves, if not fully with the party and state, at least with the hope the revolution had aroused. They were also responding to another somewhat overlooked aspect of October which is that, for all its proletarian form, it retained a dimension of being itself an intelligentsia enterprise, led by a part of the intelligentsia which had traditions which were at least as much Russian as they were internationalist and Marxist in the western sense. The broad populist impulse — understood as the desire to fight on behalf of the oppressed — was strongly present in the revolution. The word *narod* came readily to the new rulers. Even the government was composed of *narodnyi kommissari*, people's commissars. The rapid bracketing of workers with poor peasants and later peasants as a whole was a step to a disguised reconstitution of the *narod* as the very basis of the revolution. One would imagine that a study of workers and peasants in 1917 would show a greater degree of consciousness of themselves as the *narod*, or the labouring masses, as it would of them as workers or peasants. Oddly, no one has tried to find this out. Be that as it may, from the point of view of intellectuals, the populist impulse was a powerful bridge between themselves and the new authorities, as well as having an impact on bolshevik intellectuals themselves. This populism reminds us that those intellectuals who sympathised with the revolution saw that the Bolshevik project itself, no matter how flawed, emanated from the intelligentsia tradition itself. It is also interesting to note that it was only when the intelligentsia Bolsheviks had lost influence that the revolution reached its nadir in the mid-1930s, though, of course, many other things had also changed by then, notably the rise of Hitler.

Conclusions

This examination of the intelligentsia's experience of revolution suggests a number of conclusions both about the intelligentsia itself at this time and about the wider processes of social revolution in these years. First, the amplitude of the wave of the intelligentsia revolution differs from that of political revolution. For intellectual life the revolution only began to bite in early 1918 rather than in February or October 1917. Up to that point, the war rather than the political revolutions had been having a greater impact on intellectual life. It follows from this that, in its first few months of office, the 'effectiveness' of the bolsheviks does not contrast as sharply with the 'ineffectiveness' of the Provisional Government over a similar time period. The situation was still one in which deep processes of social revolution were occurring which were beyond anyone's control. Different sections of society were participating in this process to greatly differing extents at different times. The peaks and troughs of peasant revolution, for example, do not coincide with the political turning points nor with the pace and direction of intelligentsia revolution.

Secondly, the intelligentsia divided more clearly, but not completely, into liberal-nationalist and populist sub-groups. The former begin to evolve a more specific intelligentsia "class" consciousness which asserted its independence, its rights and its value to society through the pursuit of its own skills and interests. By and large

the intellectuals in this camp did not welcome the October revolution but exhibited a wide range of responses from a pragmatic agreement to work with the new Soviet authorities to outright hostility. The latter, populist, group were more enthusiastic about the revolution in the long term arguing that, for all its faults, many of which were attributable to the evils of Tsarism anyway, the revolution did offer some hope of liberation to the ordinary people of Russia. In a sense, those intellectuals within the party can be assimilated to this group as well as sympathisers with the revolution from beyond the party's ranks. It should be remembered also that some intellectuals exhibited characteristics from both of these groups. Though quantification is hazardous, there can be little doubt that the majority of established intellectuals drifted into the former camp. Within this group, the traditional distinction between creative intellectuals and mental labourers began to break down as both rallied to the defence of their material interests and of nationalism rather than to the *narod* or to intellectual and spiritual causes. Incidentally, Machajski's fashionable predictions that the intelligentsia would use revolutionary socialism as a class ideology in which to conceal its material interests showed no sign of coming true. The opposite was happening. Those who were most adamant in asserting class interest drifted furthest away from socialism. Similarly, the more powerful the Soviet system became, the weaker the intelligentsia influence within it. Equally, there was no evidence that the ordinary people systematically turned on the intelligentsia in these years. If anything, they turned to them. If they met a blank or hostile response they might well become more bitter towards them but there is no sign of widespread anti-intellectual pogroms at this time. Gershenzon's opinion of 1909 that the bayonets and prisons of Tsarism were protecting the intelligentsia from the wrath of the people proved to be an exaggeration.

A third conclusion worth emphasising is that these divisions were not created in these years but were a development of earlier arguments and attitudes within the intelligentsia. They resulted from pre-existing differences being drawn out rather than from mass conversions to new principles.

Fourthly, the civil war years, and particularly 1918/1919, were a period of decisive struggle for hegemony in the society, not just militarily but also socially. The fight of civil society (i.e. social organisations outside the formal state system) for independence, a key feature of 1917 with links going back to 1905, was resulting in the triumph of the new state at the expense of the embryonic institutions of civil society — Soviets, trade unions, political parties and, in intelligentsia terms, its own independent organisations such as the Pirogov Society, the Imperial Free Economic Society, its trade unions and so on. In many respects it is necessary to recognise that the civil war period, rather than 1917, was the time of the real revolution in Russia. Really it would be better to think of it as the Russian revolutionary war.

Fifthly, though it is not really touched on in the present paper, the period 1920-22 was one in which the victors in this struggle for hegemony organised themselves. The party/state apparatus began to mop up areas outside its control. In intellectual life the Central Committee gained the upper hand over Proletkul't and Narkompros. Gosizdat (the State Publishing House) dominated book production, the censorship

(Glavlit) was founded, university autonomy was brought to an end and potentially troublesome and ideologically "unsound" intellectuals were forcibly expelled.

Sixthly, economic hardship and the dislocations caused by the social revolution were a more important source of erosion of intellectual life than direct political pressure, particularly in the early years. The cultural economy collapsed rapidly from early 1918 on. This facilitated the growing dominance of the state in this area because it was left as the sole arbiter of patronage and controller of the cultural economy. There is no denying that the party intervenes extensively in intellectual life in this period, the most prominent example being over Proletkul't, but across the whole spectrum its impact grew as alternative organisations died out or were forcibly brought under control.

Finally, it should not be forgotten that the Bolshevik leaders, for all their differences, were largely drawn from the intelligentsia tradition and shared a respect for cultural values even though they were usually contemptuous of the creators and purveyors of those values, the intellectuals themselves. It is significant that it was only after the death or defeat of Lenin, Trotsky and Bukharin that the revolution moved into its most barbaric phase. Thus one has to remember that the intelligentsia and the intelligentsia tradition have an impact on the revolution as well as the reverse. Although its open expression has been difficult, many aspects of the humanism of the old intelligentsia — its belief in reason, democratic rights, genuine human emancipation, respect for free intellectual development, devotion to high moral and ethical standards, service of the people and respect for culture — have survived in Russia in the minds of reformers, critics and dissidents. They can even be traced in recent developments in the Soviet Union. The copy of *Pravda* (February 17th, 1987) that arrived on the day this paper was initially presented had the main headline 'Study art in order to live in the world', a theme of a speech by Mr. Gorbachev given the day before in which he had talked of 'universal moral standards' and of the need for people to understand one another's cultures in order to live in peace. The issue for the day on which this paper was originally presented (19th February 1987) reported another speech of his under the main headline 'The people (*narod*) is the creator of the perestroika'. In rhetoric at least, and probably in substance too, the intelligentsia tradition still has a role to play in the Soviet Union.

ENDNOTES

¹ F 2306.2.12.

² Lapshin (1983).

³ Livshits (1977), 243-245.

⁴ Struve (1917) p. XII.

⁵ Andreev (1985) p. 36.

⁶ Ibid. p. 99.

⁷ See Kleinbort (1923).

⁸ See Krupskaya (1970), 307-308 and McNeal (1973) p. 177.

⁹ Lapshin (1983) p. 138.

¹⁰ Blok (1960), T. 7, p. 335.

- ¹¹ A.I. (1918).
- ¹² A translation of this grim story can be found in Evgenii Zamyatin *The Dragon and other stories* Harmondsworth, 1978.
- ¹³ Red'ko (1918) p. 264.
- ¹⁴ F 5508.1.4.8 and F 5508.1.93.1.
- ¹⁵ Nazarov (1968) 129-130.
- ¹⁶ Osorgin (1928) p. 21.
- ¹⁷ The fullest account of Chagall's life in this period is to be found in Meyer (n.d.) 217-314. There are black and white reproductions of the two items mentioned on p. 392 and p. 417. See also Chagall (1966).

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