



Intelligentsia as a liberal concept in Soviet history, 1945-1991

LSE Research Online URL for this paper: <http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/100028/>

Version: Accepted Version

Book Section:

Zubok, Vladislav (2019) Intelligentsia as a liberal concept in Soviet history, 1945-1991. In: Cucciolla, Riccardo Mario, (ed.) Dimensions and Challenges of Russian Liberalism: Historical Drama and New Prospects. Philosophy and politics - critical explorations (8). Springer, Cham, Switzerland, 45 - 62. ISBN 9783030056650

https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-05784-8_5

Reuse

Items deposited in LSE Research Online are protected by copyright, with all rights reserved unless indicated otherwise. They may be downloaded and/or printed for private study, or other acts as permitted by national copyright laws. The publisher or other rights holders may allow further reproduction and re-use of the full text version. This is indicated by the licence information on the LSE Research Online record for the item.

Metadata of the chapter that will be visualized online

Chapter Title	Intelligentsia as a Liberal Concept in Soviet History, 1945–1991	
Copyright Year	2019	
Copyright Holder	Springer Nature Switzerland AG	
Corresponding Author	Family Name	Zubok
	Particle	
	Given Name	Vladislav
	Suffix	
	Division	
	Organization/University	London School of Economics and Political Science
	Address	London, UK
	Email	V.M.Zubok@lse.ac.uk
Abstract	<p>There was no liberalism as a consistent political and intellectual movement in Soviet history; it was destroyed by the Russian revolution and the Bolshevik terror. During the Cold War scores of Western observers searched for “liberals” in Soviet society. Instead, they found the intelligentsia, which remained—in the period after Stalin’s death—a remarkably tenacious collective subject that embodied real and imagined liberal, as well as socialist, qualities. This chapter explores these main qualities, as well as the structures of Soviet life and experience that maintained them. The core mission of the intelligentsia was to transcend the state and society created under Joseph Stalin to create “socialism with a human face” based on intellectual and cultural freedoms, but without capitalism. In 1968 this concept was smashed by the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia. It resurfaced in Gorbachev’s perestroika two decades later. The chapter argues that intelligentsia’s aspirations helped Gorbachev’s reforms take a democratic and liberal turn, and perhaps even blocked an authoritarian alternative. At the same time, the beliefs and choices of the Soviet intelligentsia contributed to the rapid collapse of the Soviet economic system and state. Both the intelligentsia and its “liberalism” perished under the rubble.</p>	
Keywords (separated by “ - ”)	Soviet intelligentsia - Liberalism - Socialism - Gorbachev - Soviet collapse	

Chapter 5

Intelligentsia as a Liberal Concept in Soviet History, 1945–1991

Vladislav Zubok

Abstract There was no liberalism as a consistent political and intellectual movement in Soviet history; it was destroyed by the Russian revolution and the Bolshevik terror. During the Cold War scores of Western observers searched for “liberals” in Soviet society. Instead, they found the intelligentsia, which remained—in the period after Stalin’s death—a remarkably tenacious collective subject that embodied real and imagined liberal, as well as socialist, qualities. This chapter explores these main qualities, as well as the structures of Soviet life and experience that maintained them. The core mission of the intelligentsia was to transcend the state and society created under Joseph Stalin to create “socialism with a human face” based on intellectual and cultural freedoms, but without capitalism. In 1968 this concept was smashed by the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia. It resurfaced in Gorbachev’s perestroika two decades later. The chapter argues that intelligentsia’s aspirations helped Gorbachev’s reforms take a democratic and liberal turn, and perhaps even blocked an authoritarian alternative. At the same time, the beliefs and choices of the Soviet intelligentsia contributed to the rapid collapse of the Soviet economic system and state. Both the intelligentsia and its “liberalism” perished under the rubble.

Keywords Soviet intelligentsia · Liberalism · Socialism · Gorbachev · Soviet collapse

There was no liberalism as a consistent political and intellectual movement in Soviet history; it was destroyed by the Russian revolution and the Bolshevik terror. During the Cold War scores of Western observers searched for “liberals” in Soviet society. Instead, they found the intelligentsia, which remained—in the period after Stalin’s death—a remarkably tenacious collective subject embodying real and imagined liberal, as well as socialist, qualities. The emergence of this subject was a major phenomenon of post-1945 Soviet history, a part of its transition from late Stalinism to

V. Zubok (✉)

London School of Economics and Political Science, London, UK
e-mail: V.M.Zubok@lse.ac.uk

© Springer Nature Switzerland AG 2019

R. M. Cucciolla (ed.), *Dimensions and Challenges of Russian Liberalism*,
Philosophy and Politics - Critical Explorations 8,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-05784-8_5

30 de-Stalinization. Yet its prominence in late Soviet society was far from predeter-
31 mined. In Soviet official language, “intelligentsia” had nothing to do with creative
32 freedom and liberal inclinations. It designated a broad social group that included
33 educated professionals, scientists, engineers, scholars, teachers, artists and people
34 of culture. Just like Soviet society as a whole, the intelligentsia was both a socio-
35 logical and ideological category. It represented a link between the productive basis
36 of Soviet society and its mission to create a new type of person for “socialism”. The
37 Soviet intelligentsia was both a motor and an embodiment of this social engineer-
38 ing, whose tasks and objectives were defined by the communist party, the real “van-
39 guard of Soviet society”. The relationship between the ruling party and the
40 intelligentsia, however, was always a problem for the communist regime. This prob-
41 lem was about using the skills of the intelligentsia, while keeping their intellectual
42 “anarchism” under strict control. Ultimately, however, the intelligentsia’s “socialist
43 men and women” became grave-diggers of the Soviet system and the Soviet Union
44 itself.¹

45 From the moment the Bolsheviks took power, the members of the intelligenti-
46 sia—Russian and non-Russian alike—represented a serious challenge to the new
47 dictatorship. They had to be recruited to the cause of constructing a new economy,
48 society and culture, and yet they were regarded as the most dangerous potential
49 enemies of the new order. The Bolshevik regime had consigned the old intelligenti-
50 sia to the status of “former people”, those who had sided with the reactionary
51 classes and were indeed part of them. Thousands of educated people perished in the
52 “red terror” and civil war, thousands more emigrated, and countless others were
53 deported and jailed in the GULag. Yet the Bolshevik rulers had to recognize that
54 their ambitious revolutionary program of modernization could not be implemented
55 without people of education, science and advanced professional skills. This tension
56 between the two poles in Bolshevik policies was finally resolved through the delib-
57 erate construction of a specifically Soviet intelligentsia. The concept was inscribed
58 in the Soviet constitution and implemented as a set of state-funded guilds and insti-
59 tutions, where “engineers of the human soul” (as Stalin called Soviet writers) could
60 overcome their “bourgeois” origins and work to help build socialism.

61 The construction of a Soviet intelligentsia became one of Stalin’s most success-
62 ful projects. The intelligentsia became a crucial tool in many of his objectives, from
63 the build-up of military–industrial potential and war mobilization to cultural repro-
64 duction. At the same time, because of improvisation, haste, and various pressures
65 and demands, the intelligentsia of Stalin’s time combined features that did not fit
66 into the clear-cut “totalitarian” matrix. It inherited from the now defunct pre-
67 revolutionary intelligentsia its revolutionary utopianism and messianism, even its
68 nationalism and romanticism. The Soviet utopia, even at the time of Stalin’s dicta-
69 torship, continued to appeal to the ideals of social justice and humanism; for many

¹Many points in this chapter build on my previously-published works. See Vladislav Zubok, *Zhivago’s Children: The Last Russian Intelligentsia* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press, 2009) and Vladislav Zubok, *The Idea of Russia: The Life and Work of Dmitry Likhachev* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2017).

intellectuals these ideals helped to justify “temporary” realities—terror, the Gulag, a slave economy, the omnipotence of the police state and widespread misery. The diaries of such remarkable scientists and thinkers as Vladimir Vernadsky and Sergei Vavilov—people of great integrity—testify to this collective delusion. The supreme objectives of the Soviet project, the creation of a modern—but non-capitalist—society, appeared to be justified and necessary in the eyes of intellectuals, from the scientist Vavilov to the poet Boris Pasternak. These hugely ambitious objectives dictated dictatorial means; backwardness inherited from the past could only be overcome by heroic efforts to realize gigantic Enlightenment projects and colossal scientific achievements. The repressive policies and campaigns, which stifled creativity and free thought, would become “negated” in the Hegelian sense by the inexorable progress of education and science. In the idealist vision of the Soviet future, the social order would have to become not only the most advanced in the world scientifically, but culturally as well. The ideals of self-cultivation and self-improvement through culture—understood in terms of the nineteenth century European Romanticism—became a mantra for millions, and the Soviet intelligentsia was supposed to embody and propagate that mantra.

The liberalizing impulses of the Soviet intelligentsia surfaced during the Second World War; the patriotic surge and the victory over Nazism inspired many intellectuals. Those impulses brought about hopes that Stalin and the party–state structures would tolerate more freedom of expression. Instead, Stalin crushed what one historian has defined as “wartime de-Stalinization”.² The ruler of the Soviet Union directed Soviet elites with an iron hand to the new mammoth task of competing with the United States and its allies in the emerging Cold War. Stalinist campaigns of “patriotic education” of the intelligentsia proved to be a horrifying experience, destructive and divisive both in the physical and in the moral sense. Still, as scholars indicate, late Stalinism did not extinguish the intelligentsia’s romantic idealism. Moreover, this idealism was even stronger in the optimistic cohorts of students that filled Soviet universities and institutions of science after 1945. The overwhelming presence of thugs, cynics, careerists, and secret police agents only highlighted by contrast the grandiose nature of the utopia. As Gilbert K. Chesterton wrote in his biography of Charles Dickens, the time of optimism is also the time of darkness, when the dawn of the better future contrasts with the silhouette of the guillotine. In the Soviet Union, the silhouettes of watch towers in the concentration camps contrasted with great postwar optimism and a strong belief in a grandiose future. This was the time of the quack agronomist Trofim Lysenko, his pogrom in biology, and countless frauds and careerists in every field of Soviet science and culture. Yet this was also time of huge expansion in the Soviet scientific-technical sector, where remarkable people, such as Andrei Sakharov, worked. The state imprisoned millions, but also funded the “Knowledge Society”—a national network of Enlightenment projects, including organized lectures for workers and peasants—

²Elena Zubkova, *Russia After the War: Hopes, Illusions, and Disappointments, 1945–1957* (London–New York: Routledge, 1998).

111 and supported “Literary Monuments”, a magisterial series of translated classical
 112 texts representing human civilization and culture.

113 **5.1 The Paradoxes of the Thaw Intelligentsia**

114 Stalin’s death and the sporadic, halting de-Stalinization that challenged the utopian
 115 vision embedded in the Soviet intelligentsia, and the revolutionary eschatology of
 116 the future was forced to face the specter of the past. Two awkward manifestations
 117 arose in this context. One was a déjà vu of the Tsarist times, when the revolutionary
 118 intelligentsia had faced police persecution, anti-Semitism and Russian imperial
 119 chauvinism. A similar phenomenon occurred in the 1940s when the Stalinist regime
 120 had become openly reactionary and Russo-centric. The second was the public revel-
 121 ations of the enormity of Stalinist repression and crimes. De-Stalinization also
 122 posed a novel question about the future: who would lead Soviet society into the
 123 future and guarantee against new disastrous errors and detractions? Khrushchev’s
 124 answer was the communist party itself, restored as a Leninist vehicle of revolution-
 125 ary progress.³ This answer, however, did not satisfy many Soviet intellectuals. The
 126 party had failed to stop Stalin and had even allowed him to destroy its best cadres.
 127 This brought up a nagging question about the “degeneration” of the communist
 128 party during Stalin’s years, its bureaucratization and intellectual demise. Almost
 129 every charismatic and intellectual Bolshevik had been murdered and of those sent to
 130 the Gulag, only a few returned. Careerism and cynicism permeated the ranks of
 131 Stalinist appointees (*vydvizhentsy*) and their manifest anti-intellectualism threat-
 132 ened to make a mockery of the promise of “a collective mind” of the party. Nikita
 133 Khrushchev, the father of the “return to Leninism”, was clearly no Lenin, but rather
 134 a smart, half-literate peasant lacking the necessary skills to assume the mantle of the
 135 leader of global communism.⁴

136 Doubts about the past and the future and the absence of an unquestionable lead-
 137 ing authority profoundly affected the postwar cohorts of educated Soviet youth, the
 138 second generation of the Soviet intelligentsia. After 1945, multitudes of newly edu-
 139 cated people were brought up to join the ranks of the Soviet elite. The Soviet leader-
 140 ship assumed that these individuals would not only replace the politically unreliable
 141 imperial-era scientists and intellectuals, but also compensate for the enormous
 142 losses incurred during the Second World War and help the Soviet Union to compete
 143 with the developed West in the emerging Cold War. This was the generation on

³ Donald A. Filtzer, *The Khrushchev Era: De-Stalinization and the Limits of Reform in the USSR, 1953–1964* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1993); William Taubman, *Khrushchev: The Man and His Era* (London–New York: Free Press–W.W. Norton, 2003); Miriam Dobson, “The Post-Stalin era: De-Stalinization, Daily Life, and Dissent”, *Kritika* 12, no. 4, 2011, pp. 905–924.

⁴ Julian Fuerst, Polly Jones, and Susan Morrissey, “The Relaunch of the Soviet Project, 1945–1964: Introduction”, *The Slavonic and East European Review* 86, no. 2, 2013, pp. 201–207; Polly Jones (ed.), *The Dilemmas of De-Stalinisation: Negotiating Cultural and Social Change in the Khrushchev Era* (New York–London: Routledge, 2006).

whose intellectual power and patriotism the outcome of the bipolar confrontation would depend. 144
145

For the postwar cohort, then, the 1950s were a time of hope and creativity but also a new pathos. De-Stalinization threatened to kill this budding optimism and idealism and turn utopia into dystopia. Almost instinctively, university students turned to the time-proven salvation: Russian literature. The first literary debates of 1954–1956 supplied a much-needed conversation that updated the utopian vision; “sincerity” in those debates was a quest for integrity, yet also the need to preserve a revolutionary democratic idealism. Vladimir Dudintsev’s 1956 novel *Not By Bread Alone* presented a crucial binary for the post-Stalin idealism of the second generation of the Soviet intelligentsia. The novel tells the story of an idealistic innovator opposed by a career bureaucrat. The young new thinker came to represent the imagined and idealized intelligentsia; the career hack stood for the ruling party.⁵ 146
147
148
149
150
151
152
153
154
155
156

From that time on, the imagined role of intelligentsia in the Soviet society found a second wind. While the party and Khrushchev had clearly failed to fill Lenin’s and Stalin’s shoes, scientists and intellectuals in general, became the new ideal types of a new imagined community: a Thaw intelligentsia. Artists and people of performative arts began to represent intelligentsia on screen, stage, and canvass as new paragons of modernity. No longer cast as bizarre relics from the past, a distinctly “former people”, they were now mysterious gurus paving the road into the future, who knew everything and discussed everything with authority. The “socialist realism” texts and films still presented party officials as virtuous and strong figures. The latter, however, provided an increasingly negative contrast to the intellectuals. As members of the Soviet intelligentsia liberated from the constraints of the past, the intellectuals nevertheless hued still to the ideals of the revolutionary project. Liberating this project from the pressures of the party–state bureaucracy became, in the eyes of many, a general precondition for progress toward communism. 157
158
159
160
161
162
163
164
165
166
167
168
169
170

A later debate among Soviet intellectuals, which would erupt in the early 1960s, was about which parts of the Soviet intelligentsia had more capacity for liberation. In the spontaneous dialectic between physicists and lyricists, the people of humanities appeared to be far too corrupted by official and self-censorship (as well as careerism), their language stifled and stunted. Scientists and engineers, on the other hand, spoke in the universal language of formulas and logarithms; they—especially the nuclear physicists, as imagined by Mikhail Romm in the 1962 film *Nine Days in One Year*—appeared to be remarkably free, basking in the glory of discovering eternal sources of energy and solving the mysteries of space. Two emigres from the Soviet Union, Pyotr Vail and Alexander Genis, would later write about this period of optimism thus: “Scientists were to succeed politicians. Hard science would replace imprecise ideology. Technocracy, instead of partocracy, would lead the country toward utopia”.⁶ 171
172
173
174
175
176
177
178
179
180
181
182
183

⁵Priscilla Johnson, *Khrushchev and the Arts: The Politics of Soviet Culture, 1962–1964* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1965); Denis Kozlov, *The Readers of Novyi Mir: Coming to Terms with the Stalinist Past* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013).

⁶Peter Vail and Aleksandr Ghenis, *60–e. Mir sovetskogo cheloveka* (Moskva: AST, 2014); Mark

184 The people of literature and art lost the debate between “physicists and lyricists”,
 185 yet it was they who contributed the main humanist content to the ethos of the Thaw
 186 intelligentsia. Writers like Ilya Ehrenburg and young poets, such as Evgeny
 187 Yevtushenko and Bella Akhmadullina, sought to articulate the humanitarian mis-
 188 sion that linked revolutionary democracy with love, remembrance, and the peren-
 189 nial importance of culture. During the 1960s, the literary journal *Novy Mir*, under
 190 the ambitious editorship of Aleksandr Tvardovsky, attempted to return literature to
 191 its central place as the main shaper of hearts and souls and the leading patriotic and
 192 critical force of the society. Despite spectacular achievements, this turned out to be
 193 a losing battle. Tvardovsky’s agenda was limited, and ultimately ruined by state
 194 censorship. The famous literary critics of *Novy Mir* tried to launch public discus-
 195 sions about the role of culture and literature in the great Soviet future. Yet the past
 196 spoke much more loudly from the journal’s pages; its publications brought back the
 197 “accursed questions” that had preoccupied the pre-revolutionary intelligentsia that
 198 had—apparently—not been solved by the revolution. Ivan Denisovich, a character
 199 in an Aleksander Solzhenitsyn novel—made one think of the collectivization and
 200 the GULag, but also of the long-standing features of the Russian national character.
 201 The novel was also a thinly-veiled criticism of the intelligentsia. Attempts by *Novy*
 202 *Mir* and other journals to resuscitate the primacy of literature revealed the irrepara-
 203 ble damage that had been done to it—and to culture in general—by decades of post-
 204 revolutionary party–state ideology. “Sincerity”, instead of nourishing democratic
 205 idealism, opened any number of closets filled with skeletons.

206 The proliferation of informal groups (*kompanii*) of friends and colleagues
 207 became the most natural way of liberation of the Thaw intelligentsia could escape
 208 from the totality of party control and gain protection from the dangers of mistrust,
 209 atomization, and dystopia. From the beginning, the *kompanii* were professionally
 210 heterogenous: physicists encountered novelists, poets, and artists; university profes-
 211 sors and people in the liberal arts met physicians and lawyers; intelligent educated
 212 men met intelligent educated women, etc. Friendship itself, as sociologist Vladimir
 213 Shlapentokh aptly defined it, became the substitute for the absent structures of civil
 214 society and private economy.⁷ It is difficult to speak about a specific ideology among
 215 the liberal-minded members of these *kompanii*. The ethical pivot was an apprecia-
 216 tion of high culture (music, fine arts, bard songs, etc.) and humor without cynicism,
 217 what Milan Kundera would immortalize in his *Unbearable Lightness of Being*. Still
 218 there was a set of values that one can loosely call “socialism with a human face”. It
 219 was powerfully shaped by Marxism–Leninism and based on the concept of “scien-
 220 tific materialism”, but could be combined with other forms of modernity. The mem-
 221 bers of *kompanii* identified trust and confidence as the signal virtues. Another
 222 prominent value was belief in *logos*, rationality and “truth” expressed in words.

223 From their predecessors, the revolutionary democratic intellectuals, the Thaw
 224 intelligentsia inherited other premises. The first was that authoritarian power was

Lipovetsky, “The Poetics of the ITR Discourse: In the 1960s and Today”, *Ab Imperio* 1, 2013.

⁷Vladimir Shlapentokh, *Strakh i druzhba v nashem totalitarnom proshlom* (St. Petersburg: Zvezda, 2003).

based on ignorance and lies; truth and transparency (*glasnost*) would shatter this power. Another was that Russian culture was an antidote to Russian nationalism and education, science and rationality would eventually defeat anti-Semitism and national hatreds. The Thaw liberal-minded intelligentsia developed hatred for despotism in any form and contempt for money. At the same time, Western capitalism and liberal-democratic forms, with their structured chaos and lack of “methodology” were viewed as inappropriate for the Soviet Union; this would have meant a historical setback, denial of the revolution, and “a return” to outdated practices and institutions. Rationalism and methodology was for the leading Soviet liberal-minded thinkers of the 1960s, a replacement for ideology.⁸

The members of the *kompanii* often lived in austere conditions, yet they were proud of their equality and considered market capitalism to be an enemy, not a precondition for free and meaningful life. Ideally, the *kompanii* members would have translated their experience of informal and direct democracy to a national scale. State property should ideally belong to “working collectives” and, instead of a division of power there should be revival of “Soviets” as direct forms of democracy and governance. Most of these ideas were rather a reflection of a vague nostalgia for the revolutionary period before Stalin seized power; they did not result in systematic studies. There was little in this thinking that indicated a retreat from Leninist socialism toward liberalism, be it Western or Russian. Indeed, Thaw intellectuals had yet to encounter this liberalism in books, which remained hidden in secret sections of Soviet libraries. Direct democracy was still considered superior to liberal democracy, conceived as being in the interest of the “bourgeoisie” of the capitalist societies.

5.2 The Technical Intelligentsia Takes the Lead

The liberal concept of the Thaw intelligentsia had a rigid logic and was passionately shared by its many adherents, yet—like most utopias—it was profoundly contradictory. Not only would the dream of a Hegelian *Aufhebung*—the surpassing and overcoming of the troubled past—prove to be impossible, due to the resilience of the subject. The “totalitarian” Soviet bureaucracy also seemed to hard dislodge or even change. The state bureaucracy controlled economic assets and all sources of subsistence. The people of the intelligentsia, whatever their ambitions, remained a salaried class, and received state-controlled privileges in exchange for demonstrations of loyalty; their status in the hierarchy and state patronage defined the amount of privileges. All publishing houses, theaters, movie production studios, artistic schools, universities and scientific labs belonged to the state and controlled by the ubiquitous party committees and censors. Intellectually, liberal-minded members of the intelligentsia dreamed of assuming the form of the Hegelian Spirit that would

⁸ See Ilya Kukulín, “Alternativnoie sotsialnoie proiektirovaniiie v sovetskom obshchestve 1960–1970-kh godov”, *Novoie literaturnoie obozrenie* 88, 2007, pp. 169–201.

263 “negate” the ignorant and reactionary bureaucrats. The most prudent of them
 264 believed that it was necessary to cultivate a union with enlightened *apparatchiks*, a
 265 distinct minority in the Soviet party–state. The most idealistic and impatient of
 266 them, however, were less pragmatic than even Hegel himself. Instead of looking for
 267 patrons, these Soviet free-thinkers wanted to be the Spirit that would destroy and
 268 supplant the bureaucracy.

269 In a recent discussion about the Soviet intelligentsia, the literary scholar Mark
 270 Lipovetsky has suggested that the discourse of technical-scientific intelligentsia
 271 “shaped the cultural mainstream of the late Soviet and post-Soviet liberalism”.⁹ This
 272 discourse was different from the contemporary Western liberal thought and old
 273 Russian liberalism. In the binary of Dudintsev’s novel, the bureaucrats, careerists,
 274 and hacks constituted the “other” for Soviet scientists, engineers, intellectuals, and
 275 artists. The Cold War—above all the nuclear arms race—provided a strong focus,
 276 contrasting with the messy business of international relations. Nuclear stand-off
 277 was a matter too important to be entrusted to politicians; it required the primacy of
 278 experts and thinkers. In his writings from 1966–1968, Sakharov concluded that the
 279 survival of humankind required solidarity among the intelligentsia of the West and
 280 the East against their respective bureaucracies and military–industrial complexes,
 281 the forces that put their own interests ahead of progress: “International affairs must
 282 be completely permeated with scientific methodology”. Sakharov believed that the
 283 intelligentsia could win primacy through “scientific–democratic” reforms and the
 284 introduction of freedom of information, travel, and speech.¹⁰ In fact, the bubble of
 285 Soviet isolationism—virtually complete for people like Sakharov—was a necessary
 286 condition for the remarkable cohesion and certainty of the liberal-minded ethos of
 287 the Soviet intelligentsia. Soviet scientists and the “technical intelligentsia” as a
 288 whole based their liberal ideas mostly on their reading of Western journals and lib-
 289 eral, progressivist literature. *Samizdat* and *Tamizdat*—essays and discussions pub-
 290 lished either underground or abroad behind the back of Soviet officials—as well as
 291 limited access to special secret sections of Soviet libraries produced bookish knowl-
 292 edge. Yet the real, lived experience was missing. Most Soviet intellectuals never
 293 traveled outside the Soviet Union and did not have the possibility to live abroad.
 294 Their vision was one of secret scientific labs and privileged, Soviet-style gated
 295 communities.

296 Several factors helped the acceptance of liberal messages by the intelligentsia of
 297 the 1960s. These included: a faith in *logos* and culture as the force that would pre-
 298 vail over all forms of obscurantism, ignorance, and religion; embrace of the
 299 European Enlightenment as a foundation of scientific revolution; preference for the
 300 “scientific method” over bureaucratic coercion and ideological campaigns; a pro-
 301 gressivist mentality that looked into the future with optimism; a deeply-held inter-
 302 nationalism that combined the communist “scientific” conviction that nationalities

⁹Lipovetsky, “The Poetics of the ITR discourse”, p. 116.

¹⁰Zubok, “Zhivago’s Children”, pp. 285–286. See also Andrei Sakharov, *Progress, Coexistence and Intellectual Freedom*, Sakharov Center (<http://www.sakharov-center.ru/asfconf2011/english/articleseng/1>).

would eventually fade out and the transnational nature of scientific discoveries; and, finally, intellectual defiance of hierarchy and respect for individual uniqueness, diversity, and reputation. The relatively high percentage of assimilated Jews in the privileged labs of the military–industrial complex (as designers of Soviet nuclear weapons, in applied mathematics, etc.) and the social mingling between science, arts, and humanities via *kompanii*, added to the liberal-minded spirit of scientific-technical communities across the Soviet Union.

In a paradox of history, the extremism of the Soviet party–state and the Cold War divide, Soviet isolationism, and Soviet structures of life and experience made the emergence and survival of a liberal concept within the Soviet intelligentsia possible. Ironically, it was the reviled military–industrial complex and the patronage of “enlightened” party apparatchiks (along with some politicians, including Yuri Andropov and Leonid Brezhnev) that accounted for the remarkable growth and influence of the intelligentsia’s social base.

5.3 The Watershed of 1968

The relationship between the liberalism of the Soviet intelligentsia and Western liberalism was neither linear nor one-sided. When Western journalists and other visitors of the Soviet Union discovered “Soviet liberals”, they exaggerated the level of their opposition to the Soviet regime, gave Western spin to their motivation and highlighted the binary nature of their thinking. For many liberal-minded intellectuals in Moscow and Leningrad, where most encounters with foreigners took place, the West became the second important “other” for their utopian idealistic vision, a positive pole to the negative opposite of the Soviet bureaucracy. At the same time, for the liberal-minded people of the Thaw, and even more during the 1960s, the West was never a liberal idyll; it was a place where struggle between classes and the fight against “progress” and “reaction” proceeded much more freely and intensely than in the Soviet Union. Representatives of the “progressive camp”, from European communists to social democrats, had much more credibility than “reactionaries”, an extremely vague category that encompassed European conservatives and American Republicans. Crucially, the West also included some countries of the Soviet socialist bloc, particularly Poland and Czechoslovakia, whose cultural products (films, novels, journalism) were the main filter—but also the main translator—of Western experience and ideas. Much of what “happened” in Western democratic countries, came to be digested by the Soviet intellectuals via Polish interpretations.

Not all Soviet liberal-minded intellectuals were Westernizers, but most of them gravitated in this direction quite naturally. As is often the case, they borrowed very selectively from the West, taking what matched their pre-existing beliefs and values. For a while, as Sakharov’s writings of the 1960s testify, Soviet liberal Westernizers did not consider the West as an opposite of the Soviet experiment, but rather a cousin, with whom reconciliation was possible and, indeed, necessary. The filters and limitations on the reception of Western influences were considerable; neither

344 classic liberalism nor the “New Left” really made it into the Soviet intellectual
345 milieu. For Soviet intellectuals, the classic Western liberalism defended by Friedrich
346 von Hayek and Ludwig von Mises was “reactionary”, and also conditioned by the
347 Cold War rivalry. Most crucially, it did not admit the possibility of a historical com-
348 promise between the socialist East and the capitalist West. And the “New Left”
349 movement, rising at the end of the 1960s in Western democracies, remained abso-
350 lutely alien to the beliefs and values of the liberal-minded intelligentsia. The idea of
351 unlimited individual freedom, especially sexual and identity experimentation, did
352 not appeal to the socialist members of the *kompanii*.¹¹

353 At the same time, the reaction of Soviet intellectuals to the events in Paris of May
354 1968 constituted an important milestone: after many years imagining a romantic,
355 revolutionary experience, the Soviet liberal-minded intelligentsia began to reject
356 violence and chaos that accompany a revolution. The rejection of the Western “New
357 Left” paralleled the renunciation of the Cultural revolution in China. To their credit,
358 Soviet intellectuals understood better than their Western counterparts that behind
359 the radical youth in China stood ruthless manipulators, who would bring only more
360 tyranny, not increased freedom. In just 15 years following Stalin’s death, the con-
361 cluding theme of the Soviet intelligentsia shifted irrevocably, against a revolution to
362 one of reform. This shift was in fact reflected much earlier, in 1965, in the documen-
363 tary of the cult filmmaker Mikhail Romm which drew connections between revolu-
364 tionary frenzy and Nazi dictatorship.

365 1968 served to confirm the liberalism of the Soviet intelligentsia, yet prompted a
366 crushing moral and intellectual crisis within it. The “Prague Spring” in April-August
367 matched the utopian liberal concept perfectly. The removal of communist censor-
368 ship and the Czech *glasnost*, public and free discussion of all social ills, captivated
369 attention. But few paid attention to the economic projects of the communist reform-
370 ers, and those were never implemented. Tvardovsky was one of thousands who felt
371 he could have signed the “Two Thousand Worlds”, the declaration of the Czech
372 reformers.¹² Inside the party apparatus, the center of real power, enlightened appa-
373 ratchiks battled openly against Cold Warriors, who believed that the order in
374 Czechoslovakia must be restored by tanks. The Soviet occupation that killed the
375 Czech reforms was a huge blow to the dreams and expectations of the liberal-
376 minded intelligentsia. The myth of a socially engaged and morally superior intelli-
377 gentsia collapsed as well. Only a handful of “human rights defenders” dared to
378 protest openly in Moscow’s Red Square; thousands drowned their outrage and
379 impotence in alcohol and work. They were not prepared to sacrifice for the cause, as
380 their predecessors—the Russian Decembrists, the terrorists of the People’s Will and
381 others—had been. While conformist themselves, they raged against obedient Soviet
382 majority that cared for neither political—nor intellectual and artistic—freedom.

383 After 1968, the very word “reform” became taboo in the official Soviet discourse
384 for almost two decades. The anti-intellectual trend in the ruling apparatus gained

¹¹ Zubok, “Zhivago’s Children”, p. 282–283.

¹² Alexander Tvardovsky’s entry in his diary for 10 August 1968. See: Alexander Tvardovsky, “Rabochie tetrad”, *Znamia* 9, 2003, pp. 142–143.

ground. Liberalization could continue only in highly specialized institutions, such as Moscow’s Institute for World Economy and International Relations, Leningrad’s Institute of Physics, and the Novosibirsk branch of the Soviet Academy of Sciences—sometimes referred to as “oases of freedom”—as well as in the cultural underground. The Soviet intelligentsia in Moscow, Leningrad, and other major centers of culture and the military–industrial complex lived through the 1970s in a complex dance of disunity and search for identity, vaguely mirroring the similar processes in the democratic societies of the West. Many old *kompanii* fell out, as people pursued new fads and cultural inclinations. The very idea of liberalism detached itself from the Soviet project.

There were several exit ramps in the exodus from utopia. One was professional escapism into “real science” and “real scholarship”, within the confines of the official academies, institutions and labs. Another was an ethical sectarianism, going in for religious experience. There was also a heroic ethic exodus, which saw people form a new kind of *kompanii* where they consciously sought to live their ideals in the unfree society—they were called dissidents. Another massive and popular form of exodus was immigration, suddenly available with the beginning of East–West détente. Because the emigres were supposed to go to Israel, this was known, officially and unofficially, as “Jewish” immigration. In reality it affected the core of the base of the Thaw activists and the liberal intelligentsia. As many assimilated Soviet Jews defected from the communist project that their parents had built and defended, they began to compare the Soviet Union to Nazi Germany, casting the Soviet system as reactionary and irreformable. It was then logical for them to emigrate and raise their children in other societies.

Andrei Sakharov began to distance himself from his technocratic utopia; his wife, Yelena Bonner, who joined the party in expectation of reforming it from within, became an anti-Soviet dissident. Hundreds of thousands of others did the same. In 1970, the mathematician and writer Vladimir Kormer wrote a blistering article about the “doublethink” of the intelligentsia, likely influenced by Orwell. Kormer essentialized the notion of the intelligentsia as a part of Russian socio-cultural path dependency. The intelligentsia, he wrote, continued to fall into the same temptations of revolutionary change, the inevitability of socialism, the induction of the rule of law from above, the patriotic unity of the people during war and adversity, an inevitably bright future, technocratic rationality and faith in the Enlightenment. The people of the intelligentsia were not only incapable of replacing the despotic regime, they lived in “symbiosis” with it, maintaining its existence while dreaming of its collapse.¹³ These criticisms, ahistorical and schematic as they were, were aimed at Soviet liberal-minded idealism. Solzhenitsyn, influenced by Kormer’s article, organized a conservative nationalist attack on the liberal-minded people of the 1960s, calling them “smatterers”, and denouncing their erroneous Westernism, their alienation from the “organic” foundations of Russian history and culture and their moral cowardice.

¹³Vladimir Kormer, *Dvoinoe soznanie intelligentsii i psevdokul'tura* (Moskva: Traditsiya, 1997).

427 In fact, quite a few brave scholars, scientists, engineers and writers took consid-
428 erable risks to help Solzhenitsyn, and other people who incurred the wrath of party-
429 state officials and were harassed by the KGB. In the first half of the 1970s,
430 Moscow—and to a lesser extent Leningrad—had sizable networks of people, who
431 sought to find a middle-ground between dissent and emigration, who listened regu-
432 larly to Western radio, shared *Samizdat* and *Tamizdat* literature, and sought to pre-
433 serve the ethos of the old *kompanii*. Still, those who had dreamed of walking out of
434 step 10 years prior had become family people, burdened with various duties and
435 commitments. And the focus of conversations and activities of the aging Thaw intel-
436 ligentsia shifted from an optimistic expectation of direct democracy for all to encap-
437 sulation and protection of their own milieu. There were also new conservative
438 features in this milieu: repugnance toward mass politics and radicalization and
439 alienation from the working class and the peasantry. While in the non-Russian
440 republics of the Soviet Union many intellectuals espoused cultural nationalism,
441 Russian nationalists never developed a hegemonic position within the educated
442 strata of ethnic Russians. Along with assimilated Jews, most ethnic Russian intel-
443 lectuals equated nationalism with “Russian fascism”.

444 The last visible echo of the vibrant liberal-minded movement of the 1960s was
445 the creation of Helsinki groups in 1976–1977 by people who called themselves
446 “human rights defenders”.¹⁴ In a short while, the KGB arrested most of them and
447 forced others to emigrate. Their sympathizers were “prophylactized”—that is to
448 say, warned about the dire consequences of dissent—and ended up with their tail
449 between the legs. Sakharov’s utopian concept of a free intelligentsia turned out to
450 pipe-dream. With a typical aberration of intellectuals, the tamed Soviet free-thinkers
451 began to blame the “Russian slave mentality”, the raw material that had supposedly
452 thwarted implementation of their liberal designs. Intellectuals with Jewish back-
453 ground were among the first to turn against their homeland. They agreed among
454 themselves that Soviet population, above all the Russian majority, would be never
455 ready for freedom; they were not victims of the ruthless bureaucracy, but the foun-
456 dation of bureaucratic order. Logically, revolutionary democracy, Marxism–
457 Leninism, and the understanding of history as a struggle for liberation of the lower
458 classes became casualties of disillusioned intellectuals. In 1980, one historian wrote
459 in his diary that 63 years of Soviet totalitarianism had only made the Russian people
460 more aggressive and illiberal. Totalitarianism, he added, was a deeply-rooted
461 “Russian” phenomenon.¹⁵ The old Russian intelligentsia had claimed to represent
462 the people against the Tsarist regime. The Thaw intelligentsia hoped to educate and
463 lead the people toward an enlightened socialism. In the 1970s, most Moscow intel-
464 lectuals gave up on this vanguard role. The writers Arkady and Boris Strugatsky
465 reflected this evolution best in their novels. In one of their science-fiction stories
466 they featured “progressors”, messengers from a superior civilization, who sought to
467 change history and the fate of the dark masses. The result was catastrophic failure:

¹⁴ On this movement, see Benjamin Nathans, “The Dictatorship of Reason: Aleksandr Vol’pin and the Idea of Rights under Developed Socialism”, *Slavic Review* 66, no. 4, 2007, pp. 630–663.

¹⁵ Zubok, “The Idea of Russia”, p. 118.

“progressors” could barely escape themselves from the all-devouring dark hole of
 obscurantism, bigotry and violence. The metaphor was clear: the free-thinking
 intelligentsia had to hold together or perish in the dark sea of Soviet society.

5.4 The Last “Progressor”: Gorbachev

By 1985 the liberal utopia of the Soviet intelligentsia was in crisis, overwhelmed by
 growing corruption, cynicism, historical pessimism, and conservative nationalism.
 Then came Mikhail Gorbachev, an uncannily ideal person for this utopia. He
 believed in *logos*, reason, and reform. He opposed aggressive nationalism and was
 (with several painful exceptions) against the use of force. He wanted to the rule of
 law and consensus. He was anti-authoritarian by nature and looked down at bureau-
 cracy; he abhorred the terrible Soviet past but was an incorrigible optimist who
 continued to believe in the bright future of “socialist choice”. Gorbachev felt com-
 fortable in the West and among Westerners; he wanted to dismantle the Cold War
 and open the country to world.¹⁶

Gorbachev reached out to many cultural and intellectual figures of the 1960s,
 including Andrei Sakharov, a prominent liberal hero, with an appeal to help his
 perestroika. In 1987–1988, glasnost flourished, and cracks began to appear in the
 regime of state censorship. The time for Soviet intellectuals suddenly went back to
 1968 and then rushed forward with tremendous acceleration. The main communist
 newspapers and journals began to criticize bureaucrats and lionize intelligentsia as
 a vanguard of perestroika and glasnost. Both “physicists” and “lyricists” experi-
 enced a heady return to the utopian enthusiasm, only this time with many more
 rights and freedoms. Just a couple of years after the Soviet authorities and the KGB
 had crushed the dissident movement of human rights defenders, Gorbachev granted
 to the liberal intelligentsia the freedoms they had coveted for decades: glasnost, the
 ability to form discussion groups and associations and freedom of conscience. They
 were also accorded the status of being “perestroika’s vanguard”, the group that
 would prepare the rest of Soviet people for liberalization. Gorbachev’s wife, Raisa,
 became a patron and a member of the Soviet Cultural Foundation, an organization
 fully funded by the state, that supported any cultural projects intellectuals could
 dream of. Writers and journalists, all people of letters and ideas, had a brief “golden
 age”: the circulation of literary journals surged to many millions, all their expenses
 paid from the state budget. Eminent scientists, writers, artists and even musicians
 and actors accompanied Gorbachev on his foreign trips and reform-minded journal-
 ists helped to dismantle the Soviet ideological orthodoxy with an avalanche of glas-
 nost publications. They also helped to deconstruct the Soviet “enemy image”, by

¹⁶On Gorbachev and his connection to the cultural and liberalizing trends of the early periods, see Robert English, *Russia and the Idea of the West: Gorbachev, Intellectuals and the End of the Cold War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000); William Taubman, *Gorbachev: His Life and Times* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2017).

504 appealing to Western liberal audiences with messages of a nuclear-free world and
505 “common European home”.

506 This charmed time, however, did not last long. Perestroika foundered, then col-
507 lapsed like a house of cards. Everything began with the ill-conceived economic
508 reforms of 1987–1988. The hallmark of those reforms was erosion of the state’s
509 economic monopoly and devolution of controls for resources and profits from the
510 state budget to the empowered “working collectives” of state enterprises (the units
511 of the state economy), as well as to the NEP-like private sector of “cooperatives”
512 and “banks”. In 1988, Gorbachev removed the party apparatus from the manage-
513 ment of economic processes; industrial ministries began to turn into de facto state
514 corporations. Apparently both Gorbachev and his economists were inspired to put
515 the economic agenda of the Prague Spring of 1968 into practice. The unintended
516 outcome was ever-accelerating problems with availability of consumer goods, a
517 growing budget deficit, and ultimately a financial and economic crisis of the Soviet
518 system writ large. In reaction to this crisis, in 1989 Gorbachev accelerated political
519 liberalization; the Soviet Union had the first semi-free elections ever held in a com-
520 munist country. The combination of suboptimal economic reforms and political lib-
521 eralism immediately destabilized the Soviet Union and unleashed the forces of
522 separatism, which ultimately went out of Gorbachev’s (or anyone else’s) control.¹⁷

523 During these remarkable years, the concept of intelligentsia remained one of the
524 pillars of Gorbachev’s reforms, and the liberal-minded Soviet intellectuals were his
525 political allies both inside and outside the communist party. The Congress of
526 People’s Deputies, and its upper house counterpart, the Supreme Soviet, became the
527 institutions where hundreds of scientists, scholars, journalists, writers, and other
528 intellectuals could express their views freely and choose their political orientation.
529 The new environment of ideological and political freedom, however, produced a
530 surprising effect: the concept of intelligentsia, which combined freedom and social-
531 ism, transformed into a radical anti-communist politics aimed at complete destruc-
532 tion of socialist foundations and the state itself. In this new politics, the tropes and
533 beliefs of the old intelligentsia fractured and changed beyond all recognition.

534 An important historical flash-back is required at this point. Earlier, the same
535 transformation had happened to Soviet emigres in the West. Thousands of intellec-
536 tuals from Moscow, Leningrad, Kiev and other cities became disillusioned with the
537 Soviet project had been forced by the KGB to emigrate during the 1970s. For many
538 educated ex-Soviet emigres, who ended up in the United States and Israel, the intel-
539 ligentsia of the 1960s remained a key social and cultural model. Many of them
540 hoped to recreate the liberal world of *kompanii* and dissident circles, opening liter-
541 ary journals and convening conferences. Yet they soon found both worlds evaporat-
542 ing before their eyes: the imagined West and the milieu of intelligentsia. The realities

¹⁷ Steven L. Solnick, *Stealing the State: Control and Collapse in Soviet Institutions* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998); Stephen Kotkin, *Armageddon Averted: The Soviet Collapse 1970–2000* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001); Rudolf G. Pikhov, “Vlast. Nomenklatura. Sobstvennost. Ob odnoi iz prichin raspada SSSR”, in *Zapiski Arkheografa* (Moskva: Universitet Dmitriia Pozharskogo, 2016), pp. 384–400.

of the market economy and free choice killed the idea of a transplanting the intelligentsia abroad. The factional and ideological divisions camouflaged at home by Soviet structures of life and a common opposition to the regime came to the surface in the West. Writer Vasily Aksenov admitted that life in the West “unwittingly did more to undo the dissident movement than the KGB”.¹⁸ He could have said the same about the main notions of intelligentsia. Ironically enough, the educated Russian emigres in the United States and Israel found their home on the right wing of the democratic political spectrum and brooked no sympathy with Western liberalism.

In retrospect, some argue that Chinese-style authoritarianism and reforms would have spared the shattering and often tragic experience of Soviet disintegration. Many more claim that the Soviet Union had always been doomed and its relatively peaceful dissolution was the best of all realistic alternatives. There are, of course, many reasons why the Chinese way (or any authoritarian way) of Soviet transformation would not have worked out.¹⁹ The structures of Soviet society, and in particular the role of intelligentsia should be singled out. Much of the baggage of ideas, notions, and experience of the Soviet intelligentsia proved to be inadequate and insufficient for constructive and productive reforms. The most articulate and free-thinking groups of Soviet society assumed that the state and bureaucracies were the problem, not the tool for reforms. In fact, during perestroika, the most vocal and active segments of Soviet intelligentsia stood against Chinese-style authoritarian reforms, and in favor of liberalization, devolution of the party–state controls, and empowerment of the cultural and scientific elites. In a major paradox, during the earlier phases of glasnost and perestroika, Soviet journalists, scientists of the military–industrial complex, artists, and other members of intelligentsia assumed that they could have their freedoms while keeping guaranteed state funding. The symbiotic relationship between the intelligentsia and the authoritarian state, noted by Kormer, reversed itself in the politics of perestroika. The intellectuals wanted liberalization from and destruction of the state yet did not see that this would make them exposed to the unforgiving forces of mass politics and the market.

The main strength of the intelligentsia, the creation of cultural and intellectual structures and public discourses, should be reconsidered in the light of what we have learned about the destructive reforms of Gorbachev. Many scholars, following Alexei Yurchak, concluded that the change of “discursive practices” during Gorbachev’s glasnost led to an abrupt crumbling of the ossified “dominant discourse” of “real” Soviet socialism, which resulted in the collapse of the Soviet system and state. “It was forever until it was no more”, concludes Yurchak and his followers.²⁰ Of course, the sudden ideological vacuum destabilized Soviet society,

¹⁸Vasily Aksenov, “Novyy sladostnyy stil”, *Znamia* 5, 1997, p. 152.

¹⁹For discussion of the reformability of the Soviet system, see Stephen F. Cohen, “Was the Soviet System Reformable?”, *Slavic Review* 63, no. 3, 2004, pp. 459–488; Vladislav Zubok, “The Soviet Union and China in the 1980s: Reconciliation and Divorce”, *Cold War History* 17, no. 2, Spring 2017, pp. 121–141.

²⁰Alexei Yurchak, “Soviet Hegemony of Forms: Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More”, *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 45, no. 3, 2003, pp. 480–510; Alexei Yurchak,

580 paralyzing the party functionaries and repressive structures, while empowering
581 nationalist movements. Yet how can one explain why other, non-official forms of
582 socialist discourse floundered so quickly in 1989–1991, giving way to a radical,
583 quasi-liberal anti-communism?

584 Some authors theorized that, in contrast to intellectuals who demanded socialism
585 with a human face, other groups in Soviet society, linked to state ownership and
586 production, shifted to a capitalist agenda in order to translate their political control
587 into ownership. Others, less socially deterministic authors, speak about neoliberal
588 Bolshevism, which pushed aside the dream of a mixed economy, ideas of direct
589 democracy, and the rest of the agenda of the 1960s intelligentsia.²¹ Other scholars
590 attribute the radical transformation of perestroika politics to glasnost and the fall of
591 the Iron Curtain. True, Soviet controls on travel and exchange collapsed in 1988–
592 1989, and thousands of Soviet intellectuals were able to go abroad and participate
593 in numerous conference, seminars and training workshops. Almost always their
594 hosts were Western, especially American, NGOs with a very explicit agenda of
595 “democratization” and economic neoliberalism.

596 Other sources, including biographies of the new public and political activists of
597 1989–1991 (among them, Yeltsin’s advisers and activists of the Democratic Russian
598 movement and many nationalists in the non-Russian republics) demonstrate that
599 these people, who had earlier shared the agenda of socialism with a human face,
600 shifted overnight to anti-communism. This occurred under the impact of a Western
601 consumerist shock, which had a transformative effect equal to—or even more
602 important than—the transfer of Western ideas of liberal democracy. In fact, the
603 manifest superiority of the Western economy and societies proved the correctness of
604 Western ideas in the eyes of those who had earlier adhered to the Soviet-made
605 reformist agenda.

606 While the cumulative effect of all these causes cannot be denied, their impact on
607 the intelligentsia’s reorientation was not so clear or linear. What played a huge role
608 was the economic and financial crisis produced by earlier Gorbachev reforms and
609 the absolute misunderstanding of the sources of this crisis among reform-minded
610 Soviet intellectuals, including economists. Those people never recognized that the
611 reforms of 1987–1988 were the main cause of the desperate economic situation
612 later on. Instead, they (and Gorbachev along with them) blamed the problems on the
613 resistance of the Soviet bureaucracy, the old enemy. The binary of innovators versus
614 bureaucrats led Soviet analysts astray—the deeper the economic problems and con-
615 sumer dissatisfaction became, the more they concluded that the entire old party–
616 state system should be dismantled. In ideological terms, it was now a struggle

Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).

²¹ See David Kotz and Fred Weir, *Revolution from Above: The Demise of the Soviet System* (London–New York: Routledge, 1997); Peter Reddaway and Dmitri Glinsky, *The Tragedy of Russia’s Reforms: Market Bolshevism Against Democracy* (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace Press, 2001), Steven Kotkin and Jan Gross, *Uncivil Society: 1989 and the Implosion of Communist Establishment* (New York: Modern Library, 2010).

against “totalitarianism” to the end, until the full destruction of all forms of Soviet life. It was another example of the idealistic mentality of Soviet intellectuals. This was a long-sought act of rebellion against the Soviet party–state, the Hegelian “negation” of it.

The “democratic revolution” of 1989–1991 was the greatest political act of the Soviet intelligentsia. Its energy helped to mobilize masses of disgruntled Soviet consumers, elect new representative political assemblies bent on radical change, delegitimize and undermine the authoritarian party and state structures. At several crucial junctions, contrary to dominant expectations and fears in the West and among the intelligentsia itself, the ideas and penchants of liberalization and direct democracy prevailed over authoritarian and national-imperial forces and ideas. In 1990, a liberal-democratic coalition helped Russia to declare “national sovereignty”, followed by all other Soviet republics. In August 1991, thousands of Muscovites, driven by the same spirit, blocked a poorly-prepared, reactionary coup.

Now, instead of a leap into an ideal socialist future, the radicalized intelligentsia groups wanted to take a giant leap directly into a “civilized” market, the newly-recognized source of all social goods, and into Western liberal democracy. When Gorbachev in the fall of 1990 refused to take this leap, embodied in the “500 days” program, swathes of Moscow intelligentsia turned viciously against the Soviet reformer. The diaries of Gorbachev’s adviser, Anatoly Chernyaev, are filled with jeremiads against the “democratic intelligentsia” and its lack of common sense and elementary gratitude to Gorbachev.²² Ignored were a few voices who cautioned against such radicalism and warned that an application of American-style libertarianism would be disastrously costly for Soviet society and might actually lead back to authoritarianism.

The behavior of the Soviet intelligentsia at this historical juncture deserves more systematic analysis, but even a brief outlook of its generational trajectory and profile suggests possible answers. Many radicalized intellectuals, who formed a nucleus of political advisers of Boris Yeltsin in 1991, felt liberated from the dualism of the past, and wanted to build “a new democratic Russia”, based on Western-style liberal recipes, as opposed to the “fascist Russia” of their nationalist rivals. This was their new mission, which made them support Boris Yeltsin against Gorbachev’s “center” and aligned them with nationalist-separatist forces in the Baltics, Georgia and Ukraine. The Russian nationalists, in the minority and marginalized by the political storm of 1989–1991, witnessed with horror at the destruction of the Soviet Union, and just like their predecessors had done many decades previously, blamed collapse of the old order on the liberal cosmopolitan intelligentsia.

Inebriated on the slogans of market liberalism, the radical intellectuals refused to put “two plus two” together. The majority of those who supported Yeltsin did not realize that they were participating in the rapid dismantling of the Soviet Union. They acted on the belief that the old totalitarian statehood had to be destroyed at any cost. After that, they imagined, new democratic institutions and transition to a

²²Anatoly Chernyaev, *Sovmestnyi iskhod. Dnevnik dvukh epoch. 1972–1991 gody* (Moskva: ROSSPEN, 2008), pp. 887, 891, 919.

659 market economy would quickly fix the endemic problems of the post-Soviet polity
660 and economy. The Western economist Michael Ellman was astonished in 1990 to
661 see tens of thousands of people from the institutes of Academy of Science and the
662 military–industrial complex marching in support of market liberalism. All of a sud-
663 den, this was a new utopia of capitalist prosperity and emancipation, which replaced
664 socialism with a human face. Ellman called those people “the turkey that celebrated
665 Thanksgiving”.²³ The vast majority of these people would lose their status, jobs and
666 livelihoods within a couple of years.

667 The intelligentsia and its liberalizing, transformative role in Soviet society can be
668 considered as collateral damage of the collapse of 1989–1991. The old Soviet elites
669 melted and morphed, different social groups emerged; the tandem of power and
670 money replaced the ideocratic state and culture-centric Soviet civilization. Some
671 idealists, in Russia and abroad, lashed out at those from the old intelligentsia who
672 succumbed to the temptations of power and riches. This criticism, however, misses
673 the main point: the conditions and structures that had made the Soviet intelligentsia
674 possible were no longer around. Even in Western democracies, the classic ideas of
675 liberalism—the child of the Enlightenment and experience—had been replaced by
676 the politics of identity, economic neoliberalism (inimical not only to socialism but
677 to any socially-conscious “embedded” liberal thinking) and mass culture. Almost
678 immediately, younger professionals and intellectuals in the post-Soviet republics
679 began to push their predecessors to the sidelines of history, blaming them for all
680 kinds of sins, from impractical idealism and ideological dogmatism to subversive
681 anti-statism.²⁴ All attempts by prominent cultural figures, with the support of the
682 Russian state, to convene “congresses of intelligentsia” and develop liberal parties
683 on this basis failed miserably, just like the previous attempts among the emigres in
684 the West. As it turned out, the disappearance of the liberal-minded intelligentsia in
685 Russia was a huge blow to the potential of liberal democracy. The new Russian
686 middle class, that emerged after the anarchic 1990s in Russia, did not become dem-
687 ocratic and have readily rejected liberal concepts in favor of the authoritarian state,
688 bureaucracy and a stable economic order.

689 The intelligentsia as an imagined community of free-thinking liberal-minded
690 people proved a remarkably tenacious collective subject of late Soviet history. It
691 represented an idealized place of memories and hopes—as opposed to the material
692 world, with the oppressive dominance of an omnipotent and ever-present party–
693 state and an obedient, if dissatisfied, population. This community and concept, how-
694 ever, did not survive the fall of Soviet communism and is not likely to be reborn in
695 the new, money-oriented and authoritarian Russia.

²³The author’s conversation with Michael Ellman on 23 October 2017 in Berlin.

²⁴See among many sources on this Arkady Ostrovsky, *The Invention of Russia: The Journey from Gorbachev’s Freedom to Putin’s War* (London: Atlantic Books, 2015).

AUI **References**

696

- Chernyaev, Anatoly. 2008. *Sovmestnyi iskhod. Dnevnik dvukh epoch. 1972–1991 gody*, 887, 891, 919. Moskva: ROSSPEN. 697
698
- Cohen, Stephen F. 2004. Was the Soviet system reformable? *Slavic Review* 63 (3): 459–488. 699
- Dobson, Miriam. 2011. The Post-Stalin era: De-stalinization, daily life, and dissent. *Kritika* 12 (4): 905–924. 700
701
- English, Robert. 2000. *Russia and the idea of the west: Gorbachev, intellectuals and the end of the cold war*. New York: Columbia University Press. 702
703
- Filtzer, Donald A. 1993. *The Khrushchev Era: De-Stalinization and the Limits of Reform in the USSR, 1953–1964*. Basingstoke: Macmillan. 704
705
- Fuerst, Julian, Polly Jones, and Susan Morrissey. 2013. The relaunch of the Soviet Project, 1945–1964: Introduction. *The Slavonic and East European Review* 86 (2): 201–207. 706
707
- Johnson, Priscilla. 1965. *Khrushchev and the arts: The politics of Soviet culture, 1962–1964*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press. 708
709
- Jones, Polly, ed. 2006. *The dilemmas of De-Stalinisation: Negotiating cultural and social change in the Khrushchev Era*. New York/London: Routledge. 710
711
- Korner, Vladimir. 1997. *Dvoinoe soznanie intelligentsii i psevdokul'tura*. Moskva: Traditsiya. 712
- Kotkin, Stephen. 2001. *Armageddon averted: The Soviet collapse 1970–2000*. New York: Oxford University Press. 713
714
- Kotkin, Steven, and Jan Gross. 2010. *Uncivil society: 1989 and the implosion of communist establishment*. New York: Modern Library. 715
716
- Kotz, David, and Fred Weir. 1997. *Revolution from Above: The Demise of the Soviet system*. London/New York: Routledge. 717
718
- Kozlov, Denis. 2013. *The readers of Novyi Mir: Coming to terms with the Stalinist past*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. 719
720
- Kukulin, Ilya. 2007. Alternativnoie sotsialnoie projektirovaniie v sovetskom obshchestve 1960–1970-kh godov. *Novoie literaturnoie obozrenie* 88: 169–201. 721
722
- Lipovetsky, Mark. 2013. The poetics of the ITR discourse: In the 1960s and today. *Ab Imperio* 1: 109–131. 723
724
- Nathans, Benjamin. 2007. The dictatorship of reason: Aleksandr Vol'pin and the idea of rights under developed socialism. *Slavic Review* 66 (4): 630–663. 725
726
- Ostrovsky, Arkady. 2015. *The invention of Russia: The journey from Gorbachev's freedom to Putin's war*. London: Atlantic Books. 727
728
- Pikhoia, Rudolf G. 2016. Vlast. Nomenklatura. Sobstvennost. Ob odnoi iz prichin raspada SSSR. In *Zapiski Arkheografa*, 384–400. Moskva: Universitet Dmitriia Pozharskogo. 729
730
- Reddaway, Peter, and Dmitri Glinesky. 2001. *The tragedy of Russia's reforms: Market Bolshevism against democracy*. Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace Press. 731
732
- Shlapentokh, Vladimir. 2003. *Strakh i druzhba v nashem totalitarnom proshlom*. St. Petersburg: Zvezda. 733
734
- Solnick, Steven L. 1998. *Stealing the state: Control and collapse in Soviet institutions*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. 735
736
- Taubman, William. 2003. *Khrushchev: The man and his era*. London/New York: Free Press/W.W. Norton. 737
738
- . 2017. *Gorbachev: His life and times*. New York: Simon and Schuster. 739
- Tvardovsky, Alexander. 2003. Rabochie tetradi. *Znamia* 9: 142–143. 740
- Vail, Peter, and Aleksandr Ghenis. 2014. *60–e. Mir sovetskogo cheloveka*. Moskva: AST. 741
- Yurchak, Alexei. 2003. Soviet hegemony of forms: Everything was forever, until it was no more. *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 45 (3): 480–510. 742
743
- . 2005. *Everything was forever, until it was no more: The last Soviet generation*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. 744
745
- Zubkova, Elena. 1998. *Russia after the war: Hopes, illusions, and disappointments, 1945–1957*. London/New York: Routledge. 746
747

- 748 Zubok, Vladislav. 2009. *Zhivago's children: The last Russian Intelligentsia*. Cambridge, MA: The
749 Belknap Press.
- 750 ———. 2017a. *The idea of Russia: The life and work of Dmitry Likhachev*. London: I.B. Tauris.
- 751 ———. 2017b. The Soviet Union and China in the 1980s: Reconciliation and divorce. *Cold War*
752 *History* 17 (2): 121–141. Spring.

Uncorrected Proof

Author Query

Chapter No.: 5 467115_1_En_5_Chapter

Queries	Details Required	Author's Response
AU1	Complete reference has been retained in footnotes and reference list has been created. Please check if okay.	

Uncorrected Proof