

Revolution of the Mind

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Revolution of the Mind

HIGHER LEARNING AMONG
THE BOLSHEVIKS, 1918–1929

MICHAEL DAVID-FOX

Studies of the Harriman Institute

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FOR SANFORD AND VIVIAN
who give much but ask little

The cultural revolution, which we write
about and speak about so much—it is
above all a “revolution of the mind.”

—*Revoliutsiia i kul'tura*, 1928

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Preface

While this project was in the making, the Soviet Union and Soviet communism collapsed, the party and state archives in Russia were opened, and the field of Russian history was transformed. There is no simple correlation, of course, between this transformation and my views of the revolutionary period I studied. Even so, it seems to me that my present, so to speak, has influenced my past in several ways. In part this book has been my attempt to contribute to an understanding of the Soviet 1920s, largely centering on the years of the New Economic Policy (NEP, 1921–28), which stresses that period’s pivotal, transformational, often revolutionary, yet above all contradictory nature. The move away from the hoary dichotomies between an alternative to Stalinism and the straight line to totalitarianism, change from above versus change from below, seem at least partly due to a historical heightening of critical distance—a fading of present-day urgency invested in a NEP model, the Bolshevik Revolution, and communism. Second, the way in which many dimensions of systemic transformation are interconnected, driven home to me through very different kinds of “revolutions” since 1989, seems in retrospect one reason I expanded this book and changed its focus. It was to be about the making of a “socialist intelligentsia” in Soviet Russia. Yet I soon realized that the attempt to mold a new intelligentsia was only one part of a constellation of Bolshevik missions on the “third front” of culture. Finally, and most concretely, the opening

of the Communist Party and Soviet state archives made it possible for the first time to write the history of the relatively little known Bolshevik institutions of higher learning dedicated to remaking the life of the mind.

Along the way, I have incurred many debts which it is my pleasure to acknowledge. Like many first monographs, this book began as a dissertation. During my graduate work at Yale in the early 1990s, and in many cases well after I had defended the dissertation, I was aided above all by Ivo Banac, Paul Bushkovitch, Katerina Clark, Mark Steinberg, and Mark von Hagen.

My work has also developed within the orbit of Columbia University's Harriman Institute, first in a semester as an exchange scholar, later as a frequent pilgrim from the provinces, and finally as a post-doctoral fellow. I have had the opportunity to present my work on the 1920s several times at the institute in recent years. The generation of younger historians I grew up with there has influenced me in ways that would be difficult to unravel.

I was first introduced to Russian studies by an extraordinary group of scholars at Princeton in the mid-1980s, including the late Cyril Black, Stephen F. Cohen, and Robert C. Tucker. Although since then some of my views have diverged from some of theirs, my studies of those years were a formative experience.

At the Kennan Institute for Advanced Russian Studies I was able to spend a crucial year of research and writing as a Research Scholar, and I am grateful that since then I have been welcomed back many times.

I am also grateful to several other sources of support, without which this work could not have been written. I received research grants or fellowships from Fulbright-Hays, the American Council of Teachers of Russian, the Spencer Foundation, the Javits fellowship program of the U.S. Department of Education, and on two occasions from the International Research and Exchanges Board (IREX). In the final stages, I was a fellow at the Swedish Collegium for Advanced Study in the Social Sciences in Uppsala.

I have also been fortunate to have been able to conduct research in some great libraries, including the Russian State (formerly Lenin) Library, INION (which inherited the library of the Communist Academy), the Library of Congress, the New York Public Library, the Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, and the libraries of Columbia, Harvard, and Yale Universities. I thank the staffs of these institutions, and a great many Rus-

sian archivists from each of the archives listed in the bibliography, for their spirit of cooperation.

Other debts have been both scholarly and personal. Susan Gross Solomon has been a source of support, tactful criticism, and inspiration. Nikolai Kremmentsov and I found out right away that we had much in common, and our exchanges have left their mark on my work. Peter Holquist has been a font of provocative ideas during our ongoing conversation in New York, Moscow, Washington, and points beyond. I have greatly valued my close association with György Péteri, and he has pushed me, at times with a well-deserved scholarly shove, into several new areas.

All the aforementioned scholars have critiqued parts or all of this work; for the same generosity in commenting on parts of it in various incarnations I also thank Julie Cassiday, Charles Clark, Katerina Clark, Paul Josephson, Peter Konecny, Woodford McClelland, Daniel Todes, and Vera Tolz. Still, I and I alone bear the responsibility for its deficiencies.

I thank my colleagues at the University of Maryland at College Park, especially George Majeska and James Harris, for their strong encouragement. Also in Washington, Zdeněk Václav David, historian and librarian, has over the years shared his unconventional wisdom and showered me with materials of the most diverse kind.

Sergei Kirillovich Kapterev, self-styled vulgar culturologist, has usually been around when I needed him.

Katja David-Fox, my wife and sharpest scholarly critic, has built a foundation of love and understanding without which the whole enterprise would have been impossible.

PORTIONS of the chapter on the Institute of Red Professors were published as "Political Culture, Purges, and Proletarianization at the Institute of Red Professors, 1921–1929," *Russian Review* 52 (January 1993): 20–42. I thank the Ohio State University Press for permission to incorporate them here.

From 1989 until the completion of this book I spent a total of about two years on five research trips to the archives in Russia. By a stroke of fortune I was able to make a bit of history myself, when in the fall of 1990 I became one of the first Western researchers admitted to the former Central Party Archive and, I was told, the second foreigner to work at the former Moscow Party Archive. Since new archival documentation comprises a large part of this study, I have developed a method of

citation different from the standard Soviet and Russian practice, which has in general been adopted by Western historians. Rather than citing a document only by collection, list, folder, and page, I have preceded this information with the official title or heading of the document in quotation marks and its date. I believe specialists will gain invaluable information from the full identification of archival material, instead of just facing an “alphabet soup” of abbreviations and numbers. In many cases I (or the archivists themselves) dated the document either from internal evidence or by material in the folder surrounding it. In such cases, and in cases when the day, month, or year are not certain, that is indicated in the citation. Occasionally, when I have cited many documents of the same type, I have for reasons of space omitted the document title. It is my hope that the benefits of this methodology will be quickly apparent, and that it will attract attention to problems of source criticism in a new era in the study of Soviet history.

MICHAEL DAVID-FOX

Washington, D.C.

Glossary of Terminology, Abbreviations, and Acronyms

AN	Akademiiia nauk (Academy of Sciences)
Agitprop TsK	Agitation-Propaganda Department/Central Committee
agitprops	Agitation-Propaganda departments of regional party committees
aktiv	activists
BSE	<i>Bol'shaia Sovetskaia Entsiklopediia</i> (Great Soviet Encyclopedia)
byt	everyday life, lifestyle, existence
diamat	dialectical materialism
doklad	paper, report
FONy	Fakul'tety obshchestvennykh nauk (social science departments)
GUS	Gosudarstvennyi uchennyi sovet (State Scholarly Council) of Narkompros
GPU	secret police, successor to Cheka
Glavlit	Main Administration on Literature and Presses, the Soviet censorship agency
Glavprofobr	Main Administration on Professional Education of Narkompros
Glavpolitprosvet (GPP)	Main Committee on Political Enlightenment
Glavrepertkom	Main Committee on Repertoire, censorship agency for public performances

gubkom	regional party committee
higher school	vysshaia shkola (higher educational institution)
IKP	Institut krasnoi professury (Institute of Red Professors)
ikapist(y)	student(s) of IKP
intelligent	member of intelligentsia
istmat	historical materialism
KUNMZ	Communist University of the National Minorities of the West
KUTV	Communist University of the Toilers of the East
Kadet	Constitutional Democratic Party
Komakademiia (KA)	Kommunisticheskaia akademiia (Communist Academy)
Komsomol	Communist Youth League
Komvuzy	Communist universities
kruzhok/kruzhki	study circle(s)
MK	Moskovskii Komitet (Moscow Committee of the Communist Party)
MKK	Moscow Control Commission
narkomat	commissariats
Narkompros	Commissariat of Education (Enlightenment)
nauka	science, scholarship
Orgburo	Organizational Bureau of Central Committee
Proletkul't	Proletarian Culture movement
Profintern	Trade Union International
PSS	Pol'noe sobranie sochinenii (complete collected works)
PUR	Political Administration of the Red Army
partiinnost'	party-mindedness, "partyiness"
PZM	<i>Pod znamenem marksizma</i>
politgramota	political literacy
politprosveshchenie	political enlightenment
pravlenie	administration (of educational institution)
proverka	verification; used synonymously with purge
rabfak	workers' faculty (preparatory section)
raikom	district party committee
raion	district
RANION	Russian Association of Social Science Scientific Research Institutes

SAON	Sotsialisticheskaia akademiia obshchestvennykh nauk (Socialist Academy of Social Sciences)
SR	Socialist Revolutionary Party
sluzhashchie	white-collar employees
social minimum	mandatory courses in Marxist social science
sotrudniki (nauchnye)	researchers, research associates
sovpartshkoly	soviet-party schools
studenchestvo	student body
Sovnarkom (SNK)	Council of People's Commissars
spetsy	abbreviation of spetsialisty; specialists
Sverdlovets/Sverdlovtsy	student(s) of Sverdlov University
Sverdloviia	nickname for Sverdlov Communist University
TsKK	Central Control Commission
third front	cultural front, as opposed to military and political fronts
ukom	uezd party committee
VKA	<i>Vestnik Kommunisticheskoi akademii</i>
VKP(b)	All-Union Communist Party (bolsheviks)
VSA	<i>Vestnik Sotsialisticheskoi akademii</i>
VSNKh	All-Union Council of the National Economy
VTsIK	All-Union Central Executive Committee of Soviets
VUZy	vysshie uchebnye zavedeniia (higher educational institutions)
velikii perelom	Great Break
Vpered	"Forward" group of the Russian Social-Democratic Labor Party (RSDRP)
vydvizhensty	socially promoted cadres

Revolution of the Mind

INTRODUCTION /

THE BOLSHEVIK REVOLUTION

AND THE CULTURAL FRONT

In the years after 1917 the institutions of party education and scholarship the new regime founded in the wake of the Revolution were dedicated to molding a new intelligentsia, refashioning education and science (*nauka*), building a new culture, transforming everyday life, and ultimately creating a New Man. These institutions, notably Sverdlov Communist University, the Institute of Red Professors, and the Communist Academy, rose to become the most prominent centers of Bolshevik training and thought in the 1920s.

Bolshevik higher learning, as it embraced such quests, evolved along the contours of a particular—and particularly consequential—conjuncture in the Russian Revolution.¹ Fundamental revolutionary missions, most of which predated the Bolshevik Party and remained broader than Bolshevism, were channeled through the Party and its institutions. As a result, the concern with creating “new people,” for example, part of the program of revolutionary and student movements since Chernyshevskii and the nihilists in the 1860s, began in part to mean making Bolsheviks; developing a new science came, in part, to imply spreading party Marxism. In a similar fashion, building a socialist culture and cultivating Bolshevik mores, molding a new intelligentsia and training red special-

1. I use the phrase “higher learning” to encompass all higher education, research institutes, and academies. *Nauka* (science), like its equivalents in other European languages, encompasses all fields of knowledge; thus I distinguish it from “natural science” throughout.

ists—all became connected, for each overarching mission could be refracted through a “party” lens. This Bolshevik particularizing of universalistic revolutionary goals, and this universalizing of specific Bolshevik agendas, took place during an extended historical moment, after the October Revolution of 1917 but before Stalin’s Great Break of 1928–29, a moment in which the emergent party-state was still exploring the relationship between power and further revolutionary change.

It is the centrality of the party in power that makes the missions to be explored here, as they were pursued in the institutions of communist higher learning, part of an influential and distinctive revolutionary enterprise. These quests—in scope, intensity, and number greater than before—were pursued all at once and often under the same roof. They were for the first time carried out by a political party in control of a state. Thus Bolshevik higher learning, as it became an established, institutionalized enterprise in its own right, was at the same time integrated into the party polity, developed within an inner-party system of power relations, and, in no small part because virtually all the leading Bolshevik intellectuals were involved, placed near the center of high politics. In these newly created Bolshevik institutions—unified in a new system of education and research that in the 1920s at once became a countermodel to prerevolutionary, “bourgeois,” and Soviet state-run systems—the attempt to revolutionize the life of the mind, along with all other attendant transformations, was therefore filtered through evolving communist practices and concerns. And the objects here were not the benighted masses, but the Bolsheviks themselves, giving party education, like the Party itself, simultaneously a mass and elite character. The Bolshevik Party carried out a project of self-transformation, experimenting on itself more intensively and, in the case of higher learning, at least a step ahead of the society it was attempting to build.

This book is thus not merely about communist visions and theories (although those were ubiquitous) but about the contested and messy attempts to implement them within new institutions. What held these diverse missions together was that they were all pursued as the result of an expansion of the Bolshevik revolutionary project to the “third” or “cultural” front. This new battleground was declared open around 1920–21, just as revolutionary and party agendas were being made inseparable. The cultural arena was widely proclaimed the next locus of revolutionary activity in the wake of Bolshevik victories on the first

two “fronts,” the Party’s military and political struggles in the civil war.²

Nascent institutions of Bolshevik higher learning emerged as an intrinsic part of this third front enterprise. Their goals, to bring the revolution into the realms of culture, science, education, and ideology, became in their heyday—the 1920s—a linchpin of the Bolshevik project.

Institutionalizing Revolution

The mingling of revolutionary missions and Bolshevik agendas both reflected and advanced one of the great co-optations of revolutionary history, as the Party deliberately and successfully identified itself with the revolution as a whole.³ This stage of the Russian Revolution, to be sure, had its roots in October, but it emerged full-blown from a discrete historical conjuncture that roughly corresponded to the red victory in the civil war. As the other socialist parties were suppressed and party leaders began to disparage the “declassed” proletariat that had turned against them or melted into the countryside, top Bolsheviks in a time of unusual candor openly justified the dictatorship of a party “vanguard.”⁴ To effect this dictatorship the Party added the reconstruction of its own base of support to its list of primary missions. Equally important, between 1919 and 1921 “the relationship between party and state in Soviet Russia underwent a profound change,” not at all fully fore-ordained, as the former assumed dominance over the latter.⁵ It was at the same time as well that the Party with supreme assurance put itself forward as the model for all foreign communist parties, which were to be “bolshevized,” and October as the prototype for all “proletarian”

2. Samuel N. Harper recognized the link between the third front and party education many years ago, when he wrote that “a forced retreat on the economic front [i.e., NEP] led to special emphasis on education, and particularly on Communist training.” Harper, *Making Bolsheviks* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1931), 108.

3. Although no single work fully explores this epochal shift in the Russian Revolution, its importance and its links to the Bolsheviks’ ability to create effective new institutions are underlined in Stephen Kotkin’s *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as a Civilization* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 13–14, 292.

4. Sheila Fitzpatrick in “The Bolsheviks’ Dilemma: Class, Culture, and Politics in the Early Soviet Years,” *Slavic Review* 47 (Winter 1988): esp. 609–11. The “self-conscious reorientation of the regime’s justification” as a party-dominated dictatorship of the proletariat by mid-1920 is analyzed by Neil Harding in “Socialism, Society and the Organic Labour State,” in Harding, ed., *The State in Socialist Society* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1984), 22–25.

5. T. H. Rigby, *Lenin’s Government: Sovnarkom, 1917–1922* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 185.

revolutions.⁶ Indeed, in the scope of its pretensions this moment around 1920–21 might be considered the bolshevization of the Russian Revolution. The birth of a unified system of party education and research—which was part of this same historical conjuncture—ensured that party higher learning would combine a specifically Bolshevik identity with universalistic aspirations for revolutionizing the life of the mind.

This great bid for hegemony also corresponded to the elaboration of a full-fledged Bolshevik engagement in the cultural arena. The proletarian culture (Proletkul't) movement—a mass organization that had tried to maintain independence from the Party, yet had attracted those Bolshevik intellectuals most concerned with creating a new culture—was stripped of its autonomy, and the impetus for a full-fledged communist cultural mission was set in place. Certain key terms were invoked as the cultural front was constituted: enlightenment (*prosveshchenie*), education (*obrazovanie*), and upbringing (*vospitanie*). All three imply both long-term tutelage and cognitive transformation. Indeed, “enlightenment,” understood not merely as propagandizing for short-term benefit but as the transformation of people and the popular “consciousness,” emerged as such a fundamental feature of the new regime that Soviet Russia might with justification be called the enlightenment state.⁷ From the start enormous resources and energies were devoted to transforming “consciousness” in what had become an overwhelmingly didactic revolution. Even labor camps formed departments of “political,” later “cultural” upbringing.⁸

The Bolshevik Revolution, following what was in many ways a chaotic explosion of educational and “enlightenment” movements during the first years after 1917, turned more systematically toward both culture-building and institution-building in the evolving order of the 1920s. One scholar, perhaps the first, to clearly identify this “cultural” program as the beginning of a new stage in Lenin’s Bolshevism and, implicitly, of the revolution was Robert C. Tucker. By 1920, he argued, Lenin “had reached the point of conceptualizing Soviet Russia as the scene of a culture-building culture.”⁹

6. As famously and formally codified in the “21 Conditions” adopted by the Second Congress of the Comintern, which opened in July 1920.

7. Peter Kenez gives an overview of activities referred to at the time both as agitation-propaganda and as political enlightenment in *The Birth of the Propaganda State: Soviet Methods of Mass Mobilization, 1917–1929* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

8. See chapter 18 of Alexandr Solzhenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago*, trans. Thomas Whitney (New York: Harper & Row, 1975), 2:468–501.

9. Robert C. Tucker, “Lenin’s Bolshevism as a Culture in the Making,” in Abbott Gleason

Lenin's endorsement, indeed, was instrumental in raising the profile of the Bolshevik cultural mission, which had hitherto been the special province of the Vperedist wing of the Party. Yet the opening of the third front was a larger phenomenon; virtually the entire top leadership agreed on its importance. By the early 1920s Bolshevik leaders across factional lines came to portray cultural transformation, educational work, and the creation of a Bolshevik intelligentsia as pivotal to the fate of regime and revolution. Trotskii declared, "The upbringing of youth is a question of life and death for the Republic." Bukharin claimed that only a "cultural reworking" by means of state power could produce the cadres the proletarian dictatorship demanded, and that this was important enough to determine "our fate and historical path." He added that "the cultural question" is "a central problem of the entire revolution." Lunacharskii, referring to these statements by Bukharin and Trotskii in 1924, reformulated the question as the creation of "our own intelligentsia" and suggested there could be only one point of view within the Party on its exceptional importance.¹⁰

In this book I trace the roots and evolution of this push to bring the revolution into new realms and show how the many third front missions became tightly linked to party institutions. The creation of a system of party education and, under its auspices, the pursuit of revolutionary quests became major components of the "third front" agenda. The rise of a network of party educational and scholarly institutions followed from the constitution of this new revolutionary arena. Yet clear-cut victory on the battlefield of the mind proved more elusive than either military triumph or the consolidation of political power.

The story of Bolshevik revolutionary missions is filled with irony, unexpected yet pervasive constraints, and sudden turns. The third front missions endorsed in 1920 were followed by the New Economic Policy (NEP) in 1921. The transformational urge was tempered not only by the enormous weight of "Russian reality" and a decided deficit in the plasticity of man and culture that defied all revolutionary rhetoric but also by urgent considerations forced upon the new regime by the implosion of revolution and the collapse of "war communism." A preserva-

et al., eds., *Bolshevik Culture: Experiment and Order in the Russian Revolution* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), 36.

10. L. Trotskii, "Polozhenie respubliki i zadachi rabochei molodezhi (Doklad na V Vserossiiskom s"ezde RKSM 11 oktiabria 1922 g.)," in *Sochineniia* (Moscow: Gosizdat, 1927), 21:308; N. Bukharin, *Proletarskaia revoliutsiia i kul'tura* (Petrograd: "Priboi," 1923), 9, 25; A. V. Lunacharskii, "Novoe studenchestvo," *Narodnoe prosveshchenie*, no. 2 (1924): 7-8.

tionist, stabilizing complex of tendencies — which in their cultural manifestation Richard Stites has aptly called anti-iconoclasm — was bolstered by certain features of NEP.¹¹ Such tendencies found justification chiefly in the need to rebuild the economy and reach a *modus vivendi* with the “bourgeois specialists” upon whose survival industry, education, and the state bureaucracy depended. They also included moves to maintain higher education, specialist training, and nonparty scholarship, to reach a working accommodation with the overwhelmingly nonparty professoriat, and, as it was frequently phrased, to adopt the best of the culture of the past.

In much of the literature on the postrevolutionary order as it relates to education, cultural policy, and the intelligentsia, “1921” has overshadowed “1920,” just as a post hoc notion of a “NEP in culture” has overshadowed the third front.¹² I contend that the 1920s order in higher learning was only partly the product of the New Economic Policy. It was initiated by an aggressive Bolshevik “advance” on the third front and only then modified by a particular “retreat” associated with NEP. Moreover, NEP the policy could not be disengaged from NEP the concept, as the acronym itself became linked with images of degeneracy and corruption. The very phrase “NEP in culture,” a Western coinage denoting accommodation and moderation, would have at the time implied the insidious cultural influence of NEPmen and class enemies. Still, the NEP era, which largely coincided with the settling of an academic order that coalesced after 1922, unquestionably imposed constraints on communist intellectuals, party scholarship, and myriad forces on the Bolshevik Left. In part this was due to the circumstance that the “old” (prerevolutionary) and other (nonparty) universities, higher educational institutions (VUZy), research institutes, and academies administered under Soviet state auspices were now slated either for long-term, gradual “reform” or ceded their own spheres of influence outright. The great paradox of NEP was that such constraints led almost immediately not only to a resurgence of long-term Bolshevik visions and strategies but also to attempts to transcend “retreat” in new areas, in part stimulating the attempt to realize revolutionary goals first and foremost within the

11. Richard Stites, *Revolutionary Dreams: Utopian Vision and Experimental Life in the Russian Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 76–78.

12. In a significant branch of historiography in the 1970s and 1980s, the cultural “compromises” were taken out of context, mistaken for the whole of the new regime’s cultural and educational policy, and reified under the title “NEP in culture.” For an example, see Timothy O’Connor, *The Politics of Soviet Culture: Anatolii Lunacharskii* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1983).

Communist Party. NEP with all its ambiguities and contradictions was a revolutionary era, a phase of the revolution of a particular kind.

Many of the tensions built into the academic order during the NEP period flowed along the contours of this fundamental contradiction at its birth. Among the outcomes least anticipated was the fate of the very institutions of party higher learning I examine here. In a decisive yet ultimately Pyrrhic victory they triumphed over their nonparty rivals at the end of the 1920s, but in the process spiraled into decline and deprived themselves of a primary *raison d'être*, setting the stage for their own demise.

Mirrors, Structures, Symbols: An Approach

By 1928, on the cusp of the Great Break, which altered the organization and ethos of all higher learning in the country irrevocably, one party activist had come to the striking reformulation that comprises the epigraph to this book: the transformative third front missions, now most frequently regrouped under the rubric of cultural revolution, were really about the creation of a new mind. Despite the barrage of plans in this epoch to invent virtually everything *ab novo*—including, in the widespread phrase, a “new world”—such a modification itself was hardly new. The proposal for a new mind was but one brightly colored thread in an entire tapestry of attempted transformations.

Taking in this sweeping range of the third front of culture requires a broad angle of vision from the historian. Indeed, central categories that generations of scholars of the early Soviet experience have generally considered stable and to a large degree analytically discrete were all profoundly intertwined on a front that advanced a barrage of missions and harbored totalizing aspirations.¹³ Indeed, a remarkable feature of the age was how categories like “culture” were expanded in a revolutionary way. In party usage in the early Soviet period, *kul'tura* was increasingly understood not only as high culture but—in what until then had been an ethnographic sense—as encompassing all habits, traditions, customs, and everyday life (*byt*).¹⁴ Better known, but equally in need of exploration, is the explosive expansion of the “political” in the 1920s into realms previously unmarked or private.

13. I prefer to speak of totalizing aspirations rather than totalitarianism in order to emphasize the decisive gap between plans and achievement.

14. I. Luppel, “Problema kul'tury v postanovke Lenina,” *Pechat' i revoliutsiia*, no. 7 (October–November 1925): 14–28.

A major theme of this book, then, is the interconnectedness of activity on the third front. In broadest terms, this characteristically revolutionary sweep can be related to a communist inversion of the fundamentally liberal axiom that such spheres as the economic, political, scientific, and cultural are separate and autonomous. After all, conceptualizing in terms of the entire “superstructure” and “base”—in the midst of social revolution and the attempt to build a radically new society—led to an inveterate proclivity to aggregate and to link. The Bolsheviks’ Marxism dictated the primacy of class; the Leninist tradition placed political struggle at the center of all revolutionary tasks; the Party had belatedly adopted a cultural mission as it embarked on revolutionary state-building to prepare a “backward” society for socialism. The resulting merger of spheres, the intertwined missions, became a perennial feature of the “cultural” front. This was not simply an enlightenment state, but, however imperfectly realized, a system with an organic thrust.

The holistic texture of the Bolsheviks’ “third front” has several implications. It suggests that its manifold agendas—from creating a new social group, a socialist or proletarian intelligentsia, to reworking science, pedagogy, and education—are fruitfully explored in tandem. It implies, as well, that “ideology” is best examined in conjunction with the practices of the new regime.¹⁵ Reflecting on ideology and social revolutions, a historian of the French Revolution, William Sewell remarked upon the ubiquity of a “hierarchical” strategy of “asserting the primacy of some type of cause over the other,” which tends to subordinate the roles of other factors or conflate them with “the chosen causal factor.” The same might be said about the treatment of causality in early Soviet Russia, a problem also caught up, of course, with an overriding question of the origins of Stalin’s “second revolution.” The nature of the “cultural front” has suggested that reductionist approaches, those that rush to privilege a single category, are less likely to capture overlapping dimensions of revolutionary change.¹⁶

15. I know of no *Begriffsgeschichte* of ideology in the early Soviet period, which in general was shifting from a classical Marxist, demystifying notion of ideology as “false consciousness” to a positive notion of codified doctrine and worldview. See, for example, the discussion and citations in V. V. Adoratskii, “Ob ideologii,” *Pod znamenem marksizma* (henceforth cited as *PZM*), no. 11–12 (November–December 1922): 199–210. Because I am concerned with institutions of party-Marxist thought and education which used *ideologiia* to refer to Marxist-Leninist doctrine, and more broadly to self-conscious worldviews, I restrict the term to those connotations.

16. William Sewell, “Ideologies and Social Revolutions: Reflections on the French Case,” *Journal of Modern History* 57 (March 1985): 57–58. Of the most visible examples of such a

In each of the four extended inquiries into which this book is divided, I attempt to show how third front missions were woven into the history of Bolshevik higher learning, its institutions, and the groups of party intellectuals and students involved. Having said that, I take special aim at capturing and integrating two of the dimensions of postrevolutionary development that have been—to make a large but not unfounded generalization—less deeply probed in the early Soviet period and in the history of Bolshevism: the cultural and the institutional.

These party institutions are mirrors that reflect many processes that flowed from the establishment of the third front. For example, the effort to live a new communist lifestyle or everyday life (*byt*) at Sverdlov Communist University; the search to create a truly “red” specialist at the Institute of Red Professors; and the championing of a planned, “practical,” collectivist, orthodox party Marxist science at the Communist Academy were preoccupations of communist students, red professors, and Bolshevik scholars at these three institutions and shaped the development of the institutions where they were pursued most intensively.

In the context of early Soviet Russia, it is clear, institution-building in higher learning following the Revolution was no consolidation of long-prepared cognitive changes or cultural shifts; rather, it occurred simultaneously with such changes. These centers of party higher learning were a new breed of specifically Bolshevik Party institution. As such, they refined distinctive practices and policies that shaped life within their walls. These practices and policies were highly novel for the academic enterprise. Among the most important of these were the activities of the party cell, purge and promotion policies, and the attempts to regulate social origin. By tying such practices to the broader context of the Soviet state and Communist Party—in areas such as purges, proletarianization, the *nomenklatura* system, and what I call the Party’s disciplinary regime—I explore the participation of party higher learning in Bolshevik institutional organization not only for general insight into

strategy in the Russian field, one can mention Martin Malia’s “agenda” of “reassert[ing] the primacy of ideology and politics” (Malia, *The Soviet Tragedy: A History of Socialism in Russia, 1917–1991* [New York: Free Press, 1994], 16), with heavy emphasis on the first of the dyad; Richard Pipes’s characterization of the “decisive and immediate factors making for the [old] regime’s fall and the resultant turmoil” as “overwhelmingly political,” in *Russia under the Bolshevik Regime* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993), 491; and Ronald Grigor Suny’s identification of “social polarization” as the “key to a new paradigm” in his landmark survey, “Toward a Social History of the October Revolution,” *American Historical Review* 88 (1983): 31–52. Certainly it is also possible, in a similar way, to come to a cultural essentialism that seeks a cause of causes in Russian or Soviet culture.

much broader phenomena connected to party political practices and Bolshevik state-building but also for particular understanding of the influential results of the practices for the new Bolshevik academic enterprise.

Further, these Bolshevik centers were also actors in the struggles of the day in higher education, culture, pedagogy, and scholarship. During the 1920s, the world of postrevolutionary higher learning was small, and scholars and intellectuals were overwhelmingly centered in Moscow and Leningrad.¹⁷ The central Moscow party institutions under the microscope here, as a result, played a decisive role in a decade-long rivalry with the state-run system of old universities, institutes, and the Academy of Sciences, all still dominated to one degree or another by members of the nonparty academic intelligentsia. These rivalries, both constrained and maintained by the dualistic NEP academic order, culminated in the Great Break assault on the chief nonparty institutional rivals.

Finally, these party institutions assumed the status of models and symbols of progress on the third front. The Moscow institutions founded first quickly became prototypes for an entire country-wide system of party education; soon afterward, they began to be explicitly portrayed in the party-Marxist camp as “model” (*obraztsovye*) institutions for further revolutionary change in the social sciences and, frequently by implication, in higher learning as a whole. In an academic world in which Bolsheviks were a small and parvenu minority, party institutions quickly became symbolic representations of the revolutionary. In this way the very structures of the new party-state, as they were developing, were imbued with meaning. The decade-long experience of party academia therefore took on decisive implications during a Great Break upheaval that attempted to bring the revolution to unreconstructed realms.

In the attempt to scratch beneath the surface of an often secretive communist world, I have paid special attention to the rise and formative

17. According to 1922 and 1923 census data, up to 90 percent of all professors, lecturers, and scholars lived in Moscow or in the cities of the Moscow *guberniia*; analogous figures for various kinds of professionals and “literati” ranged between 70 and 80 percent. Figures on scholars and scientists at the end of the 1920s show that the vast majority of these groups had not budged from the large cultural centers of Moscow and Leningrad. See L. A. Pinegina, “Nekotorye dannye o chislennosti i sostave intelligentsii k nachалу vostanovitel'nogo perioda (po materialam perepisei 1922 i 1923 gg.),” *Vestnik Moskovskogo Universiteta*, 8th ser., no. 3 (1979): 12–20, and V. S. Sobolev, “Uchet kadrov issledovatel'skikh uchrezhdenii i vuzov (1918–1934),” *Vestnik akademii nauk SSSR*, no. 11 (1989): 87–91.

years of party institutions and their everyday practices, not just to penetrate the walls of Bolshevik institutions, but to uncover the framework, the cultural underpinnings, that informed activity within them. Communist conventions, refined in the power politics of this "party of a new type," combined to form a powerful crucible for initiating people. Party schools were explicitly portrayed as "weapons" of "Bolshevik upbringing." Despite the fact that an institutional framework was, broadly speaking, not primary in Marxist or Bolshevik thought, it is interesting to note how quickly party educational institutions became—and, just as important, were perceived as—primary vehicles of cultural transmission. Andrei Bubnov, powerful head of the Central Committee's Agitprop department, which oversaw the party schools, gave a very clear indication of this to a group of students from Sverdlov Communist University in 1922: "This is not merely a building, into which new people are packed each year; this is a university, which possesses a defined system of regulations, certain defined internal interrelationships. . . . An institution—with its basic tone, character, customs, everyday life [*byt*—all of this creates a certain succession from one graduating class to the next."¹⁸

This book explores Bolshevik culture and culture-building in several different settings and among key groups comprising the milieu of party higher learning: Old Bolshevik intellectuals and Marxist theoreticians, rising groups of "red professors" of the early and late 1920s, and the activists and rank and file of the communist *studentchestvo*. Taking into account the attributes of such groups, I attempt to portray Bolshevik culture as potent and increasingly conventionalized in many of its manifestations, but itself caught in the throes of change and never static or fully unified.

Because the branch of academia under consideration was part and parcel of the Party, and practices derived from inner-party politics and Bolshevism pervaded the life of party scholarship and education, Bolshevik political culture is critical to this inquiry.¹⁹ What has stood out

18. "Zasedanie 26/1-23 goda. Agitprop Otdel TsK RKP," RTsKhIDNI f. 17, op. 60, d. 500, l. 47.

19. Sidney Verba's classic definition of political culture refers to that "system of empirical beliefs, expressive symbols, and values which defines the situation in which political action takes place. It provides the subjective orientation to politics." Lucian Pye and Sidney Verba, eds., *Political Culture and Political Development* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965), 513. By using the term I hope to capture not only that system of values and norms informing approaches to politics but also those expressed in the canon of "cultural" activities developed in the Soviet state as part of political education, such as "political-enlightenment work."

above all is the ritualistic, scripted, and even theatrical quality of Bolshevik political culture in the 1920s. Commonalities across various settings have emerged which, I believe, show how this political culture acquired mass, depth, and an expanded currency in the 1920s; it thus has to be reckoned with in accounting for change. For example, the intense environment of the red professors' theory seminars exhibit similarities to staged performances of agitational trials, and telltale traces of the rites of party cell meetings are shown to be present in the social science writings of party Marxists. The written word was not isolated from the many other modes of transmission. This explains the special interest here in the development of Soviet Marxism less as a philosophy or system of ideas—for this has been examined many times before and in some fine studies—but as a prominent part of a broader political-cultural idiom. Among the implications for the party intellectuals were that central ideas such as class conflict and methodologies such as unmasking reinforced modes of action and helped crystallize a party style in intellectual life.²⁰

The Bolsheviks, including the intellectuals among them, prided themselves on being tough customers and hard-headed political operators. Some might dismiss the nuances of their political culture as of secondary importance. I do not agree, for the web of stylized conventions they wrought, and which in turn wrought them, became a prominent feature of the communist *modus operandi* on the third front. Their methods, and the ways of acting and thinking that accompanied them, formed a crucial component of their rise to the commanding heights of organized intellectual life. Bolshevik culture was not only evolving but spreading rapidly outward in the 1920s. In higher learning attempts were made to impose forcibly its conventionalized manifestations, most violently of course at the end of the decade. Here one can cite only one example when the worlds of party and nonparty scholarship clashed, during the bolshevization of the Academy of Sciences in 1929. It is striking how transparently party emissaries attempted to inject well-worn inner-party methods—specific methods of denunciation, self-criticism, purge sessions, and exegesis of the political meaning of one's biographical past—into a hitherto completely nonparty institution. The quintessentially

20. Karl Mannheim first adopted the concept of style as developed in art history to his notion of "styles of thought," denoting constellations of patterns that become meaningful in social context. See his "Conservative Thought," in *Essays in Sociology and Social Psychology* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1953), 74–164.