



The Cultural Front: Power and Culture in Revolutionary Russia. by Sheila Fitzpatrick

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The city's colorful history receives a thoughtful, balanced examination in this study. The author and the publisher are to be commended on the book's many colorful illustrations, drawn from contemporary photographs. Hamm's study is a valuable contribution to our understanding of Russia's urban development. It will be particularly useful reading in courses that confront the complex reality of the multi-national history of the Russian Empire.

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The Cultural Front: Power and Culture in Revolutionary Russia. By Sheila Fitzpatrick. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992. xx, 264 pp. \$39.95, hard bound; \$13.95, paper.

Every school child growing up in Stalin's USSR learned that under socialism there were two classes, workers and peasants, as well as a stratum (*prosloika*), the intelligentsia. Where the large and ever expanding contingent of party and state officials created by the revolutionary process fit into such a schema remained unstated. It has been this unspoken relationship between the intelligentsia and the new class of officials that has served as the principle subject of Sheila Fitzpatrick's prolific scholarship.

For the past two decades, Fitzpatrick's influence on Soviet history has been equaled only by that of Moshe Lewin, her celebrated competitor. The appearance of a volume of nine of her essays, eight previously published, offers an excellent opportunity to appreciate her parallel efforts to revise the totalitarian interpretation of stalinism. Added value comes from a preface and introduction in which Fitzpatrick defends the development and place of her work. Provoking a certain criticism from the outset, she made use of a wide range of official sources, including incomplete but nonetheless important archival materials. Her foray into archives was a major step forward and an inspiration to others.

The earliest essay included here dates from 1974, the year Fitzpatrick organized a conference at Columbia University on what she and her collaborators christened the Soviet "cultural revolution." Whatever the ultimate fate of that concept, it is fair to say that her research agenda inaugurated a kind of cultural revolution within the discipline. She shifted the focus from the narrowly political and economic issues of the succession struggle in the 1920s and the viability of NEP to what she insisted was the cultural radicalism of the first five-year plan and its subsequent metamorphosis into the conservatism of the group that she and others identified as the Brezhnev generation.

In analyzing the generation of the *vydvizhentsy*, or upwardly mobile, Fitzpatrick puts forward a version of what Nicholas Timasheff had called the "Great Retreat," itself a variant of Trotskii's thesis on the revolution's betrayal. Tracing the humble origins and rapid rise of the Stalin-era elite, whose members she also refers to as "the new middle class," Fitzpatrick argues that, though born of the revolution from above, these beneficiaries repudiated further revolutionary mobilization in favor of stability and the revival of familiar patterns. She catalogues their philistine tastes, sexual puritanism, acceptance of state intervention in all areas of life and loyalty to a system whose values they seemed to embody. Fitzpatrick also points out that the new elite's technical education made it well suited to the demands of managing an industrial society. By characterizing the Soviet elite as culturally conservative yet technically literate, she has sought, in effect, to make less conspiratorial and pejorative Trotskii's assertion that stalinism had a "social base" in the bureaucracy.

For the advent of stalinism, Trotskii, and Milovan Djilas following him, blamed the new class. Working in a similar vein, Moshe Lewin also blamed the functionaries, although he placed at least as great an onus on the "backward" peasantry and its supposed influences over the *apparat*. Fitzpatrick blames no one. For her, stalinism seems to have been neither a surprise nor an accident, nor even an overwhelming

tragedy, but something of a natural process, given how revolutions work and what the people who benefited from this particular one were like. In her empiricism and emphasis on the naturalness of the Stalin revolution and its conservative yet ultimately progressive denouement, she gives evidence of the impact on her thinking of E.H. Carr.

What distinguishes Fitzpatrick's views on the "Great Retreat" is not only her refusal to condemn the outcome but her explanatory model. She highlights the interplay between the old intelligentsia, bearers of cultural power, and bolshevik political figures, wielders of political power—"two competing elites, resentfully independent, jealously jockeying for position" on the "cultural front." It might seem that after an uneasy standoff during the 1920s the "bourgeois" intelligentsia was violently thrust aside during the first five-year plan. But Fitzpatrick contends that many cultural figures were restored to positions of authority by the mid-1930s, enjoying substantial material benefits, state sponsorship and access to officialdom. These culture makers, in her view, provided the spiritual leadership for the new generation of rising officials, presiding over the alleged triumph of the non-revolutionary, non-avant-garde values that the bourgeois intelligentsia had championed during the 1920s under the banner of higher "culture."

Readers will note that Fitzpatrick has largely ignored the component of the old intelligentsia forced into emigration and only belatedly recognized the full scope or importance of terror. She comes across as less than fully sensitive to the moral quandaries involved in a coercive revolutionary project. Her assertion that contemporaries for the most part understood "culture" in the narrower sense of high-brow pursuits appears to give short shrift to the debates and living experiments aimed at discovering new values and habits in daily life. Questions could also be raised about the extent to which the supposed cultural proclivities of the upwardly mobile Soviet-era elite or the alleged cultural guidance provided by the surviving old intelligentsia constitute an analysis of the revolutionary process, let alone of the resultant socialist society.

But many readers should find refreshing her straightforward statements that when Lenin said dictatorship he meant dictatorship; and that there was both a soft line and a hard line inside the bolshevik movement, yet it was the latter which for a variety of reasons proved to be the stronger. More than anyone else she has taken seriously the centrality in the revolution of class issues and the dilemmas they posed. Her analyses of the content and reception of specific novels, plays, films and operas can be brilliant. Finally, her chief thesis that, despite many ups and downs, the intelligentsia's privileged position in society emerged strengthened in the Soviet era has been underscored by the downfall of communism, a turn of events that the intelligentsia played an important role in bringing about, unwittingly undermining its own special status.

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Alternative Paths: Soviets and Americans, 1917-1920. By David W. McFadden. New York: Oxford University Press, 1993. x, 448 pp. Index. \$60.00, hard bound.

The central argument of this book is that American policy toward the bolshevik regime remained in a state of flux, constantly bombarded by contradictory influences, until the Colby note of 1920 finally established a consistently hostile stance of non-recognition and non-intercourse with the Soviet state. In spite of the persistent refusal of the Wilson administration to recognize the Soviet regime as the legitimate government of Russia and despite the invasion of Soviet territory by US armed forces, McFadden contends that there were, at that time, serious and substantial possibilities for Soviet-American cooperation. To support this view the author shifts the focus of analysis from White House policy debates to the efforts of various Americans, sometimes acting in an unofficial capacity in Russia, as well as to the work of Soviet representatives in