THE «OLD» AND «NEW» INTELLIGENSIAS AND THE SOVIET STATE

INTRODUCTION

The relationship between the Soviet intelligentsia and the state is an old and much debated topic, which has been previously discussed in scholarly work. I would like to address this question once more by juxtaposing two discourses — that of the state and that of the intelligentsia themselves.

Recent studies of early Soviet society highlight the power of public discourse and its role in the formation of social identities and self-concepts. Jochen Hellbeck shows that young Soviet people in the 1930s began to think and describe their feelings using newspaper and ideological cliches. Jeffrey Brooks analyses the press and concludes that it «contextualized the Soviet experience» and «imposed a structure on thinking». Igli Halfin studies social institutions which are related to higher education and which are entailed by the state to ascribe young people to class categories (the universities, the workers' faculties, the trade unions, the purge commissions). He shows that these institutions were «embodied discursive formations» conferring «a certain matrix of meanings» on the younger generation. Karen Petrone reconstructs the message of Soviet celebrations and mass festivals regarding them as the means of communication between the rulers and the people and of creating a hierarchical social order.

One of the discursive realities created by Soviet ideology was the existence of groups of «old» and «new» intelligentsia in post-revolutionary Soviet society and the competition between them. The interplay of these ideological categories had long-lasting consequences for pre- and post-war Soviet society. This article explores the role of these notions in shaping the self-concepts of contemporaries. It addresses the question of how the Soviet intelligentsia was stratified and what touchstones served to establish the identity of representatives of the different groups within this stratum.

To trace the discourse of the state I looked through all the publications concerning the intelligentsia in the daily newspaper Komsomolskaia Pravda from 1925 to 1941 and, selectively, in the Literaturnaia Gazeta from 1932 to 1941 as well as in the local Leningrad newspaper Krasnaia Gazeta from 1921 to 1935. The discourse of the intelligentsia is derived from memoirs and in-depth biographical interviews with people born in the period 1905–1918.

In the newspapers the intelligentsia is studied as a separate universe, which did not necessarily correspond to social and political reality, but what they wrote was a powerful instrument in the creation of a new language and new habitual situations. The task of the newspaper analysis was to find keywords, major subtopics and different contexts in which the concept of «intelligentsia» appears. The goal of the interviews was to study the identities and practices of the intelligentsy, their preconceptions, moral principles, possibilities and impossibilities and their solutions to practical problems. Moreover the stories narrated in the interviews reveal what realities were emotionally significant enough to form the collective memory of the intelligentsia.

The research will be focused on the generation of the 1930s. To define the «generation of the 1930s» the well-known sociological concept of Karl Mannheim is used. According to Mannheim, people form a generation if they live through the same significant social events in their formative years. The generation of the 1930s is represented by people whose formative years (approximately from 17 to 25 years) coincided with the First Five-Year Plan (1928–32). This time of enormous economic and political change which coincided with Stalin's Cultural Revolution played an important role in creating the boundaries between individuals and social institutions and in shaping social identities.

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In the newspapers the topic of the intelligentsia appeared in different types of item — in the speeches of the party leaders, in editorials commenting on these speeches, in official reports concerning the income and level of life of white collar workers, in moralistic sketches describing real or imagined persons and life events, in the letters from readers commenting on these sketches and in the book and film reviews.

From the time of the Revolution up to the mid-1920s the words intelligentsia, intelligent, intelligentska referred to the representatives of the pre-revolutionary educated strata working for the Soviet state. In the second half of the 1920s new ideological categories appeared — the «old» and the «new» intelligentsia. In general in Soviet newspapers the words «old» and
The concept of **intelligentsia** was close to another ideological label, «the former people» (byvshii, iz byvshii). These words were applied to people of the same social origins and they both had a negative connotation whereas «old intelligentsia» was more positive. It designated persons who were needed as specialists and as such were tolerated by the state. The «former people» were the «useless» ones, those deprived of a workplace and consequently of a bread ration. Therefore for any person originating in the pre-revolutionary educated strata, it was preferable to belong to the «old intelligentsia» rather than the byvshie.  

The «old intelligentsia» were needed as people with specialist knowledge. The necessity of employing «bourgeois specialists» was postulated by Lenin and was considered axiomatic during the ten years from 1918 until the Shakhtry trial in 1928. But the «philistine intelligentsia» represented a certain danger to Soviet society. So-called «political opportunism», which was considered to be a typical trait of the intelligentsia, was always a concern of Soviet ideologists. They were convinced that, for an average philistine intellectual self-realisation in one's profession and more generally in creative activities had always been more important than fidelity to the ruling class. Intellectual philistines needed a comfortable everyday life for their creative activities and therefore they were ready to serve any ruling class if it would employ them and would provide them with comfort. Being «petty bourgeois ninnies» with a taste for window-dressing and using impressive phrases about «lofty humanism» and «enlightened self-sacrifice», the philistine intelligentsia did not understand the real meaning of the Revolution, its norms and its historic goals. All in all an **intelligent** manifested himself impressionistically in his political views, he lacked real class hatred and even if he tried to understand the Revolution, he did not have enough revolutionary drive to do so.  

Apart from the political opportunism which was ascribed to members of the old intelligentsia, there were other traits in their life style which were not suitable for the new order. Being interested in theoretical matters more than in practical ones, they tried their best to hide from real life and to get locked in their own world. One of the consequences of their theoretical orientation was individualism and a thirst for loneliness. Before the Revolution an average intellectual was «savouring his loneliness and reading symbolist poetry». Certain representatives of the intelligentsia were extremely ego-centric. Instead of thinking of the collective good, they just dreamt of fame, of being «the first ones, the best ones». Due to their class essence they could not enjoy community and communality «in spite of their capacity to
The sabotage of engineers «revealed» and «suppressed» during the First Five-Year Plan corresponded to the scenario for the building of socialism described by Marx, Engels and Lenin. The old intelligentsia’s wrecking behaviour (sabotage, vreditelstvo) was considered a natural phenomenon. Stalin felt compelled to make his own proposals for dealing with the matter²¹ and, according to him, by 1931 the wreckers and spies had been «rendered completely harmless». As for the other groups of useful specialists, the new ruling class had to take care of them, re-educate them, lead them in such a way as to make the intelligentsia its servants. The «class essence» of the intelligentsia, i.e. its destiny to be the servant of the ruling class, was considered both to pose a great danger and to present an opportunity at one and the same time. The fiction and films of the period such as the famous Engineer Elagin²² demonstrate the uneven success of the process of converting the old specialists.

Around that time the concept of the «new intelligentsia» established itself in the articles of the Soviet press though, in fact, the concept had appeared in the writings of Marxist thinkers as early as the 1910s²³. To some extent it had proved of practical use in the early 1920s in educational political discussion and in the activities of the Proletkul't²⁴. But it only became a popular term after it was used in Stalin’s famous congress speech of 1931²⁵ and has been the subject of much comment by newspaper journalists ever since. The term «new intelligentsia» embraced young specialists with higher education who had proletarian or peasant origins. They were to form the group of «industrial and technical intelligentsia serving the working class», in short, engineers who would replace the old specialists in leading positions and would implement the programme of socialist industrialisation previewed in the first Five-Year Plan. Socialism «was attacking on all fronts». The working class had become the ruling class and therefore it was high time to create its own intelligentsia who were willing to serve to it.

The state not only made clear the duties of the technical intelligentsia, but also made it a privileged group. The new law of the Council of Ministers (SNK) and of the Central Executive Committee of the Party (TSIK) of 5 August 1931 declared that engineers were to be given equal rights with industrial workers. Previously engineers had belonged to the social category of «employees» (sluzhashchie). As such they had been deprived of certain opportunities available to workers and soldiers. According to the new law, engineers were to get medical insurance for emergency cases and free treatment in medical resorts. They were to benefit from a better supply of food and other goods and were given priority rights to housing, extra living space and tax reduction. Children of engineers were to have the same privileged access to higher education as the children of proletarians²⁶.
In the late 1930s the concept of a «Soviet intelligentsia» became more and more vague. An article entitled Intelligentsiya claimed that in the Soviet Union workers could also be ranked among the intelligentsia. They read fiction, they visited museums, they possessed home libraries. So, the criteria of belonging to the intelligentsia were changing. At the beginning of the 1930s being engaged in white-collar work had been the main criterion but from 1935 onwards it was rather conformity with the new standards of «culture» and political consciousness.

The place of the intelligentsia stratum in the class structure of the USSR was formalized at the 7th Congress of Soviets and was fixed in the new Constitution of 1936. Now the victory of the new ruling «class-architect», «class-constructor», «class-builder» proletariat over the surviving relics of the philistine intelligentsia was proclaimed. The old specialists had been re-educated and the new generations in general did not bear the traits of the old psychology. The descendants of the «capitalists» and the «nobility», according to the newspapers, had been in general re-educated as well. The intelligentsia was defined as occupying a «layer» between two non-antagonistic classes — the peasantry and the workers. Between these last two classes and the intelligentsia layer there were unforeseen no economic controversies and the cultural differences were in the process of disappearing. As there was no exploitation, the intelligentsia served not just the ruling class but the whole nation. Concerning the background of the Soviet intelligentsia there was reported the following: «Descendants of the working class, peasantry and other labouring groups make up 80–90 percent. Descendants of the nobility and bourgeoisie make up 10 percent.» One of the tasks for the future formulated in 1936 was the ensuring of the eventual disappearance of the intelligentsia together with the still existing differences between physical and mental labour.

Marriages between descendants of these different groups served as a sign of the disappearance of differences between the «old» and the «new», the «urban» and the «rural» intelligentsia. A debate on the article by Krushinskii entitled Unequal Marriage blamed those parents who were against the marriage of their children with intelligentsia of other origins. «Yesterday — combine operator, tomorrow — director of a kolkhoz», — such a prospect was considered to be no less prestigious than that of an urban engineer.

Later there appeared the new concept of the «rural intelligentsia» and it was very widely used in 1937–1938. Some rural professions were considered to be intelligentsia. «In every village there is a group of intelligentsia. There can hardly be found a village without one. In the country there appeared thousands of representatives of the new professions: the engineers of the tractor-repair
stations, the technician-zoologists at the cattle-breeding farms, the directors of the hut laboratories, the teachers in secondary schools, the mechanics in repair workshops, the village librarians, the vets, the lawyers... New educated people have arisen — combine and tractor operators, brigade-leaders, cattle-breeders.»
N.K. Krupskaia appealed on behalf of the rural intelligentsia calling for an improvement in their education and cultural level.

In 1938 the Concise Course on the History of the VKPb appeared and was intended to become an «encyclopedia of Marxist knowledge» for the Soviet intelligentsia. It was an instrument of «dialectical thinking» which would make the intelligentsia more politically strong than any Western counterpart or any enemy. Armed with such a guide the Soviet intelligentsia could become as ideologically trustworthy as proletarians. Therefore at the 18th Congress of the Party A.A. Zhdanov announced the decision of the Central Committee of the Party to provide an equal opportunity for workers and representatives of the intellectual professions to enter the party. In exchange the party expected from the intelligentsia «the creation of remarkable new masterpieces, reflecting the grandeur of the Stalin epoch».

In the years preceding the war the concept of the intelligentsia became ever more vague and meaningless. There were no longer «old» and «new» Soviet specialists, indeed there were no more social differences whatsoever.

«Before the whole world a great event took place in our country — 170,000,000 people became members of the intelligentsia; the number of intellectual workers, collective farmers, employees and members of their families is rising and the boundaries between physical and mental labour are becoming weaker and weaker.»

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The state placed the responsibility for the creation of the new intelligentsia both on the educational institutions and the workplaces. They had to provide suitable educational and political socialization for the younger generation, ensure their participation in the activities of the youth organizations (Pioneers, Komsomol), teach them to «speak Soviet» and to be more loyal to the state goals than to family values. Let’s see what role these institutions played in the socialization of youth, according to the stories told by contemporaries.

Interviews and memoirs of those representatives of the intelligentsia of the USSR who later in life joined the ranks of the «intelligentsia of the USSR» show that, in general, in the 1920s children from all social strata tended for different reasons to study episodically and to change schools often.

Peasants’ children who lived in far away villages or even on the outskirts of towns failed to go to school for very simple and pragmatic reasons. Sometimes there were not enough shoes and clothes in a family for all the children. Some of our respondents who were born in the villages recall that they did not study because in addition their «hands» were needed in the family. If they did go to school, then it was only from November till April, when there was less work in the fields.

During the time of the Civil War schools in some towns did not open because of street fights. One of the respondents born to an educated family (b. 1906), recalls that she lived with her family in the city of Zhitomir in the early 1920s during the time of the Civil War. Because of constant shooting in the streets, the schools were permanently closed. Several neighbouring families agreed to create an improvised school at home and the adults gave lessons in turn to several children. One of the parents was responsible for mathematics, another for the Russian language and a third for history.

During the time of the New Economic Policy, from 1921 to 1929, many schools continued to work with minor changes in spite of the attempts of the state to reform them. Only the elite educational institutions like the institutes for noble ladies, cadets and the page corps were closed, but the regular gymnasia, lycées and specialized secondary schools continued to operate as «Soviet Labour Schools». The «good old» schools were well known, and parents who were very concerned about the quality of education for their children sent them to such schools if they could. This lasted until Stalin’s Cultural Revolution when schools underwent radical reorganisation not only in theory, but in practice.

Even if old traditional schools still existed in the 1920s, they were not available to all those who would have liked to enter them. Besides that the various experiments in primary and secondary education and the politicisation of the teaching process could not be avoided entirely and these experiments aroused parents’ suspicion. Parents were also worried about the influence of the «street» children on their descendants and about the effects of «mixed» education. In fact, old schools were now officially identified by numbers and not by names and they had to open their doors to all children who lived in the neighbourhood. So the social composition of schools changed and they became more socially heterogeneous than before; moreover boys and girls began to study together. Socially and sexually «mixed» education was considered unfair and dangerous by old-fashioned parents although, even if parents did not approve of it, children were rather happy about «mixed» education and were curious to observe the life of classmates from social milieus different from their own.
Parents who were not satisfied with school programmes tried to organise alternative teaching at home with the help of grandparents or private teachers. In such cases children had still to come to school every year to pass the exams. This alternative teaching was possible until the year 1930 when schooling became obligatory. Those people who were taught at home and then went to school, found that they had been better educated than their classmates. On the other hand they were not integrated into the social life of young people and felt themselves strangers in public institutions.

Pupils who experienced experimental teaching in the 1920s told amusing stories about the school programmes, but regretted later on in life not knowing the basic method. The «new socialist» methods of teaching, like the «complex teaching method» and the «polytechnic elements in education», left deep traces on the memories of the children of the 1920s. There were very similar accounts from two people, a woman born in 1909 and a man born in 1911, referring to the so-called «complex» method of teaching, which decreed that all the study disciplines and all subjects of teaching had to be interrelated. Both interviewees recall that for some months as part of some pedagogical experiment they studied all subjects and topics in relation to ducks. They studied ducks from the point of view of biology and agriculture and in the kitchen, ducks in Russian literature and the relationship of ducks and people as an example of the general relationship of man and nature.

Among the experimental school activities evaluated positively was «polytechnic education». Boys and girls were obliged to learn to do many practical things under the guidance of grown-ups. They repaired electrical equipment, for example, and worked with wood and steel. Our respondents found that this polytechnic education proved to be very useful to them later in life, especially during the war and evacuation.

Many schoolchildren remember the years 1929–1930, because they brought about big changes in their lives. Some of them, from 1930 onwards, were, for the first time, obliged to go to school every day, so that this year marked the real beginning of their schooling. Others, who already been attending school earlier, remember the purges of teachers in their schools, and recall how the leading persons were replaced by newly educated ones with a «proletarian» social background. This process, which was generally described in the newspapers as «purging the educational institutions of alien elements», was remembered as a rather painful time by pupils. They missed their old teachers a lot.

One of the interviewees (b. 1915) a pupil of Annenschule, an old German school in St. Petersburg, remembers that in 1929 her favourite teacher of Russian language and literature was replaced by a poorly qualified person who spoke in a village dialect, who used to make mistakes in Russian and had no feeling for literature. Adolescents treated her «with scorn» and felt offended by what had happened to their previous teacher. Another interviewee (b. 1911) recalls that in the same year the principal of school No. 34, «a Russian of French origin and a bright and educated man, was replaced by a working class person». Such situations that they observed at school, which were in some cases commented upon by their parents or by other teachers, stimulated children and adolescents to take sides, to explain to themselves what was going on and to justify the existing order of things. Some of them took the side of the dismissed teachers and found themselves sympathising with, or belonging to a group of cultivated and unfairly treated persons.

Typical of the experience of the «generation of the 1930s» was the confrontation between their parents and the state over the latter's demands upon them during their school years. Young people were the target group for the production of the «New Man» by the state and at the same time they were brought up by people having «alien» or «archaic» beliefs and morals from the state's point of view. At school children were instructed to influence their parents. At home they had to obey them. The most serious issue to sort out was one's attitude to religion. Many parents were still believers. Even if they were not fanatically religious, they were nevertheless not ready to be the vehicles of anti-religious propaganda in the home. Some of them had icons on the walls and in many families Easter and Christmas were celebrated. At school pupils were told that God did not exist. Generally if parents were believers, they instructed their children not to say anything at school about their attitude to this question. This problem was remembered by some of our respondents as a very crucial one. They recalled that it was very hard to decide whom to support — a teacher (or Komsomol leader) or a parent. They were afraid of God's and their parents' anger and were no less afraid to become the laughing-stock of the class. For the same reason some children avoided joining the Young Pioneer and Komsomol organisations. Because they were forbidden by their parents to talk about the matter, they did not discuss the issue with other pupils and therefore did not know what their opinion was about such questions. One of our respondents (b. 1918) recalls an episode at school which happened when she was thirteen and which made her tremble with fear. Usually she shared a desk in the classroom with a girl who was the daughter of acquaintances of her parents and she communicated mostly with her. This day her friend was ill and another girl took a place close to her at the desk. Suddenly in the middle of the lesson this girl turned to her and whispered: «Do you believe in God?» She did not
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know what to do. «I had to decide. This was at the time when there were attacks on priests and on believers in general. And I thought, if I say that I believe in God, it can bring harm to my family, and if I say that I don’t believe then I will be renouncing God. I decided that to renounce God was worse, so I answered, be renouncing God. I decided that to renounce God was worse, so I answered, be renouncing God.»

«Yes, I believe,» and she whispered, «Me too... What a relief!»

From childhood onwards this generation learnt to take sides in the conflicts between the private and the public, between family and state. To acquire savoir-vivre in contemporary society young people had to question their parents’ values. In general the parents’ ability to exercise control over their children, to instruct them, to transmit family values and to help them diminished. The new symbolic order of society, the new criteria of distinction and the new possibilities were to be explored by the young people themselves.

Higher educational institutions were the most important agents in the construction of young people’s identities in their formative years. Throughout the 1920s and 30s these institutions underwent «proletarianization». The new «proletarian» symbolism appeared in slogans, on posters and in university journals as early as 1918 and they propagated a student of a «new type», combining abstract knowledge with commitment to the hammer, the sickle and the rifle. Proletarianization of the universities was the proclaimed goal of the state but the realization of this aim proved extremely difficult for many reasons. Even so it was partly achieved. The social composition of the student body changed significantly during the Cultural Revolution especially in technical educational institutions. The students with a «working-class» social background constituted the majority in the engineering professions by the beginning of the 1930s.

The stories narrated by students of higher technical educational institutions suggest that the Soviet VTUZs (the Higher Technical Education Institutions) contributed greatly to both the education of workers and the re-education of the descendants of the old elite and consequently to a rapprochement between these groups.

Workers from the plants, who formed a majority in the VTUZs felt comfortable there in spite of the new surroundings. One of interviewees (b. 1911) remembers that at the ship-building VTUZ where he studied there were a lot of workers among the students. They knew about ship-building from a practical standpoint and wanted to acquire the theoretical knowledge required to become engineers. People with work-experience were in a majority there and their experience was valued positively by the professors and helped them in their studies.

Among students at the higher technical educational institutions there were children of old specialists who had failed to enter higher education immediately after school and had started their careers as workers; later they were to become engineer-practitioners (praktiki) and to acquire higher education later in life. They acquired a Soviet identity alongside their professional knowledge. Being gripped by the work enthusiasm typical of the period they could more easily construct new identities on a different basis distanced from the time-honoured old/new dichotomy. One interviewee (b. 1909) remembers that her brother who was not admitted to the university because of his noble background went to work in a ship-building plant. He greatly appreciated the atmosphere of the plant and liked his colleagues. Later on, as a worker, he was able to enter the ship-building VTUZ and continue his career as an engineer. Another man who was not admitted to higher education and went to work in an enterprise remembered getting so attached to his plant and to his colleagues that he did not regret the difficulties he had to live through to become an engineer and to earn a living. Born to a noble family in 1908 he characterizes himself in childhood as intelligentniy malchik (an intelligent boy) and in the questionnaire he confessed to being iz dvorian (a nobleman) and as such he was not admitted either to a VTUZ, or to the Pioneer and Komsomol organizations. His main goal in life was «to make a good engineer» and «to do good work», and finally he managed to achieve what he wanted. In his life-story the «old» and «new» dichotomy did not play any role. The obligation to work harder than the others he took as a challenge and as an opportunity to show his loyalty and to attain exceptional professional qualities.

The moral and intellectual climate was very different in the humanities and natural science faculties of the universities. Their «sovietization» was not the highest priority for the state and their study plan and the social composition of their students changed much less during the Cultural Revolution. The spirit of the old university still ruled there. Students of proletarian and peasant origins felt extremely uncomfortable in such educational institutions and generally, they avoided entering them. This problem was discussed in Komsomolskaya Pravda in 1932. Even if the cultural intelligentsia was less important to the state, the latter was concerned about the creation of a population with a knowledge of the humanities but with a proletarian background, who could justify the new order by means of art, philosophy and literature. The task was reported to be rather difficult, however. Working-class young people wanted to become engineers and to work in a plant. The prestige of the other professions — teachers, doctors, scientists — was very low among workers. To be an engineer was the dream of the potential new member of the intelligentsia. For every 1000 demands for a student place in a non-technical faculty only 8% of the applications
were from industrial workers and among those 8% the majority consisted of those who had worked in a plant for less than a year (presumably to acquire a proletarian social background)\(^5\). The resentment felt by the people of working-class background towards the humanities and natural science faculties was justified not only by the rival attraction of an industrial milieu, but also by their inability to fulfill the requirements of the study process in the universities. In the natural science and humanities faculties of the university where general education, erudition and capacity for abstract thinking were needed, both able students and professors were unanimously ranged against poorly educated people. «Our attitude to the «working-class intelligentsia» was, I am afraid, rather snobbish. This working-class intelligentsia was very illiterate. It had nothing in common with what I had seen since my childhood. They were people who wanted to get a quick higher education, an education which was not backed by any basic knowledge. After some years of rural or factory school they applied to the universities and they were admitted. Several persons of this kind were studying together with me. My first pedagogical experience was with them. I was obliged by the institution to give them extra tuition. Three times a week for two hours I tried to teach these awful smatterers. My professor said, «You are teaching the fools very well.» But their level corresponded to the 4th or 5th grade yet they were at the university. I tried my best but could not help them; they did not manage with their studies and finally were forced to leave the university (b. 1915).

The identity of the old intelligentsia was reproduced in the public arena, where their activities were focused on non-political and exclusively cultural matters. The old traditional educational institutions, the university in particular, played an important role in cultivating the academic style of communication. But there were also other educational institutions which were the «nests» of the old intelligentsia\(^4\). The enclaves of science, literature and culture, e.g. libraries, museums and theatres also maintained the spirit of the hereditary educated class. They not only attracted and actually accumulated as employees many descendants of the pre-revolutionary elite\(^2\), but they created an atmosphere encouraging the cultivation of traditional hierarchical systems and approaches.

Regarding the differences between educated professionals in their relationship with the Soviet power, the differences between the professions and between the institutions should be taken into account.

Researchers claim that the technical intelligentsia, both the engineers and the representatives of the natural sciences, were more politically active than their colleagues from the humanities in that they manifested more openly their political views and their criticisms of the drawbacks of the Soviet regime\(^6\). Scholars explain this in part by pointing to the greater hostility shown by the Soviet state towards the cultural intelligentsia and by the state's assumption that those who had studied the humanities were less «useful» than the natural and technical scientists and that their voice need not be listened to. Partly the passivity of those members of the intelligentsia who had studied the humanities was traditional. In the Soviet era, as well in the pre-revolutionary years, the cultural intelligentsia preferred using artistic means to express their anxieties rather than political protest.

Our interviews show the greater sensitivity of the university public to the Soviet ideology compared with that of the representatives of practical engineering. Due to their inclination to abstract-thinking and to theoretical discussion, the university intellectuals were more interested in the philosophical roots of the Marxist–Leninist ideology, were influenced by it, became its adherents and then its enthusiastic critics. A student of the philological faculty in the Leningrad State University, later herself a philologist and professor of foreign literature (b. 1915), recalled that her group of nine friends who were students of the humanities were all «theoretically grounded, convinced Marxists» who «were discussing a lot the contradictions between the surrounding reality and Marxist theory and wanted to protect Marxism from vulgar «sociologism». They all wanted to become Party members but only two of them were accepted, the others being refused because of their «extremely intellectual social background».

They followed the newspaper discussions attentively, tried to decode the message of the state and reflected a lot on the attitude of the state towards their social group. Major social events (such as the adoption of the New Constitution of 1936) they described as giving hope of a better future and of a peaceful existence. Of all the newspaper campaigns the most widespread response among the «old» intelligentsia was to reports in which they were accused of «sabotage». The interviewees claimed that these publications insulted them and that they never believed the reports of sabotage by «old bourgeois specialists», because it contradicted their understanding of professional pride. They felt themselves vulnerable because of their professional interests and ambitions and because of their consequent dependence on the state's mercy. The narratives of the intelligentsy prove that in some way Soviet ideologists were right in their conclusions about the «class essence» of the intelligentsia and its readiness to serve the ruling class in exchange for comfort and professional security.

The newly educated specialists from the industrial world responded more to newspaper discussions of what was meant by «being cultured». These people reported in the interviews that they had actually tried to use all the
available possibilities for cultivating themselves. In line with the advice of Komsomolskaya Pravda they mastered Pushkin and other Russian classics and went to the cinema and theatre. The attitude of the Soviet state to the intelligentsia was not so personally important for them although they counted themselves members of that social group. They were convinced that the possibilities for professional development were wide open for all hard-working specialists. The material conditions of students were constantly improving and the students in technical education were the first to benefit from state support. The young engineers became a privileged social group. They were grateful to the state and approved of its politics rather than being opposed to them.

The social backgrounds of those people who considered themselves to be representatives of the Soviet intelligentsia varied considerably among our interviewees. Among them there were, naturally, engineers and other professionals but there were also qualified industrial workers and all kinds of white-collar employees without any education. For example, one respondent counted herself as intelligenta because she worked in a village Party Committee, whereas her friends worked on the farm. Seemingly, the reports in the newspapers of the late 1930s that «a hundred and seventy million people had become intelligentsia» influenced people’s minds. Despite the fact that this meant that the major part of the Soviet population now counted themselves members of the intelligentsia, for them the concept ceased to be a problem. They did not reflect on it and ignored the existence of the real intelligentsia.

Meanwhile the «old» intelligentsia claimed its right to be regarded as the true, genuine intelligentsia in contrast to other groups who were mistakenly identifying themselves as being such. To mark the invisible boundaries of their own circle they needed a group symbolizing what they were not. The Soviet intelligentsia became such a frame of reference. The representatives of the Soviet intelligentsia were described by their opponents as badly educated and uncultured and politically retarded with narrow horizons, carrying on boring discussions about money and «where to buy furniture». This caricature image of the Soviet intelligentsia is represented in the interviews by their descriptions of a Soviet engineer and a female schoolteacher (uchitel’ niza).

But how did they describe themselves? The descriptions provided by the real/old intelligentsia of their own typical traits of character naturally differ from those in the newspapers. Nevertheless, they are full of self-criticism and they even share some of the conclusions of Soviet ideologists about their social group without that affecting their opinions. For example, like the authors of the articles cited above, the interviewees are convinced, that even if the old Russian word intelligentsia did not vanish from the Russian language and even became one of the concepts of the Soviet rhetoric, this social group did not manage to reproduce itself fully. People who were born before the Revolution into educated and wealthy families and were brought up in the Soviet world by persecuted yet employed parents claimed to be in many ways different from the previous generations. Repression, difficulties in earning a living, lack of free time for self-development (especially in the 1940s–1950s), limits on their subjects of study were, according to the respondents, the main reasons for the inter-generational changes. The generation of the 1930s described itself as more practical and less dreamy, less educated and more hard-working than their parents and grandparents. As one interviewee (b. 1909) put it, the fate of the intelligentsia of her generation, could be summed up in just two words: razgrom (utter defeat) and prisposoblenie (adjustment, accommodation).

Being deprived of voice and power the adjusted real intelligentsia claimed its right to be the moral vanguard of society. The interviewees attributed to their circle such qualities as unselfishness, altruism, a striving for knowledge, an interest in «spiritual savings» (as opposed to material ones), exclusive cultural consumption, patriotism combined with cultured cosmopolitanism, professional honesty and an understanding of the other person’s point of view. They also claimed their superiority over Western intellectuals and their own conviction of Messianism.

Given the lost hopes and the feeling of injustice brought about by repression and discrimination, their love-hate relationship with the utopian ideology resulted in hostility towards the state and its politics. But even then the real intelligentsia always cultivated a special attitude to the state, an attentive and critical concern for the state’s actions. A specific «understanding» (porimanie) of what the state was and of what it was not became an important criterion of belonging to certain circles and the construction of a «we/they» identity. «They» were those, who did not «understand». Similarly the real intelligentsia contrasted itself with the Soviet one. This understanding tended to replace many other possible criteria for the evaluation of educated people. So, in an inverted and curious way, the «old» intelligentsia adopted the official view that the real intelligentsia should be politically «armed» with «class hatred». This paradox was perhaps rooted in the negative attitude of politically active educated people towards philistineism at the beginning of the century. The Soviet press considered an apolitical intelligentsia to be «philistine» and similar views were expressed by the interviewees. But the state required the class hatred to be directed against
the enemies of the regime whereas the real intelligentsia voted for hatred towards the state and sympathy for the opponents of the regime. Although the origins of these views of the real intelligentsia belonging to the generation of the 1930s in some ways date back to the late 30s, they only developed them fully later on in the post-Stalin era.

A good illustration of that is provided in one interview with a young woman (b.1975), representing the fifth generation of the pre-revolutionary wealthy classes, who talked about her maternal and paternal grandparents. The grandfather on her mother's side had noble origins but became in his youth a convinced communist who supported the politics of the state. He was a professor in a ship-building VTUZ and his wife was a chemist. Her grandparents on her father’s side were born into families of the prosperous bourgeoisie; both became university professors in the humanities and were critical of the Soviet regime. «The father of my mother Vsevolod was born into a noble family and he was brought up with moral principles of honesty, decency and altruism. In other words he was brought up «in the right way» from the point of view of my grandmother on my father's side. But his views were entirely communist, or, say, philistine. And my granny, when she mentions him, uses a special formula: «Your grandfather Vsevolod was a fine man, but unfortunately, he was not very intelligent». That he was cultivated and knew many interesting things did not count because he was «not very intelligent» in a political sense».

The attitude to the regime caused a breach between people who otherwise had a similar educational level and had had a similar socialisation in childhood. Those who shared a political understanding were continually developing their mythology further and they backed their «we» feeling also by contrasting themselves with the new or Soviet intelligentsia not only in terms of their political views, but also in terms of everyday and professional matters.

Conclusions:

In this article I have tried to trace the discourse of the state to show how the ideologists created their concepts, how they invented new words and meanings in the Russian language, how they actually framed the conflict situations in society and how they guided people, explaining the possible ways of categorising their friends and their enemies.

The role of the state in the stratification of the Soviet intelligentsia was very important. The engineers of the new life invented the distinction «old/new» which proved to be an effective criterion of differentiation. The ideological concepts of the «old» and «new» intelligentsia were well-known to all young people whether they were studying or in jobs. In general there were very few social groups in society who totally ignored the «hot» topics and the categories of official discourse and these tended to be the outsiders of Soviet public life—housewives, housemaids, and those working in the service professions (e.g. cleaners and salesmen)98.

This research confirms the finding of other authors that the language of power became to some extent the language of the people. And some of the ideological concepts like «class essence», «sabotage», «culturlessness» produced long-lasting reflections and informal debates.

Nevertheless the role of the state should not be overestimated. The realities behind the ideological facade were more complex than the schematic descriptions in the newspapers suggest, though they do give some reflection of them. Often the public word in the private setting was used in an inverted way to create an ironic frame of discussion. So the label «old intelligentsia» was voluntarily employed by the descendants of the pre-revolutionary elite, but in a different sense from the one it had in public use. For them «old» meant «good», «real», «of good quality». They tended to use this term either to recall the «good old times» or to joke about their present status.

If the statesmen and journalists created concepts and labels proceeding from ideological goals and theoretical assumptions, «informal» classifications, boundaries, self-identities and labels on the other hand originated from real-life situations, most often from a feeling of injustice or from conflicts. Such situations occurred in the places and spaces where the representatives of different social groups met each other and communicated. The processes of the suppression and re-education of the old intelligentsia and its replacement by the new Soviet elite described in the newspapers were observed by our interviewees first at school, then in higher educational institutions and finally in the workplace.

Not the state itself, but the image of the state created by people became the foundation for the construction of the identities of different groups among the intelligentsia. The (often unreflecting) positive image of the state and loyalty to its ideology and politics were typical of the Soviet intelligentsia. «Understanding» of the «real» (negative) essence of the Soviet state and hostility to its internal and external politics were at the core of the real intelligentsia's identity.

Whereas the real intelligentsia claimed its right to be the moral vanguard of society, the loyal pro-Soviet engineers were sure to represent aktiv strony (b.1914), the group taking decisions and being responsible for the productivity and development of the country. They lived according to the principle that the common good was more important than private interests; they favoured
The party's control over individuals and were against privatization during perestroika.

The social groups of the old and new Soviet intelligentsia existed not only in the cartoons, but also in real life. But they were not entirely based on the foundation of social background and family socialisation, as Soviet public discourse suggested. Together with the family and public culture, Soviet institutions also played an important role in this process. Certain public areas of Soviet society were very effective at «education» and «re-education». In this sense they can be seen as engendering the structures of Soviet mentality. Other public areas, on the other hand, were cultivating the spirit of traditionalism and, consequently, encouraging in young people a movement away from the modern life spirit towards «inner emigration».

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during their studies. These respondents met their ideologically stronger «competitors» later on in their professional life.

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СОВЕТСКАЯ ВЛАСТЬ – НАРОДНАЯ ВЛАСТЬ?

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