

Denis Sdvižkov, *Das Zeitalter der Intelligenz: Zur vergleichenden Geschichte der Gebildeten in Europa bis zum Ersten Weltkrieg*, Göttingen 2006, Vandenhoeck&Ruprecht, 256 pp., bibliography, indexes

The book by Denis Sdvižkov, an academic worker of the Institute of Universal History of the Russian Academy of Sciences, which appeared as the third volume in the series 'Probleme europäischer Geschichte', is a synthesis of the history of educated strata in four European countries: France, Germany, Poland and Russia. The author declares that it has not been his ambition to present the results of his own research, but to describe the history of the intelligentsia of

those countries in a concise and interesting way and to present a number of original interpretative proposals and a subjective review of the historiography of the topic. His narration starts with the beginning of the history of the institutes of higher education in those countries and he carries it until the end of the 20th century — although the subtitle of the book suggests it would end with the First World War. Sdvižkov's main attention, however, is focussed on the 'golden age of the intelligentsia', that is the 'long 19th century', when the educated strata enjoyed, in his opinion, the greatest prestige and both symbolic and material influence (p. 11). The fragments concerning the 19th century dominate over other parts of the book and they are certainly the most interesting and most valuable in the cognitive respect.

In the 'Introduction' Sdvižkov devotes a lot of effort to two neck-breaking undertakings: apologizing for the incoherence of the meanings inscribed in the notion of intelligentsia and for limiting his analyses to four countries only. He acquits himself of the first task by pointing to the divergences in the understanding of the ostensibly universal term 'intelligentsia' in various national and linguistic traditions, due to which any attempt at a synthetic description is threatened by schematization and over-simplification. Thus he avoids giving a precise definition of this notion and chooses the way of description and fragmentary analyses that take into account the socio-historical context. Sdvižkov conceives the intelligentsia as a stratum endowed with a 'specific self-consciousness' (pp. 12–13): a sense of their own exceptional social role and participation in a supra-national, rational, European civilization. In the further parts of the book the author follows the line presented in these declarations: in all chapters he places emphasis on showing the points of intersection of the ideas and ideals of the intelligentsia with its material and 'objective' situation: family upbringing, labour market, system of education, policy of the authorities, life-style, ways of recruitment of its new members and social advancement.

The choice of those four countries was dictated, as the author admits, by his personal competences, but also by his strong conviction that it is representative: on the one hand these are countries in the history of which the role of the intelligentsia was important, and especially well-described by historiography; on the other their very different traditions let us hope that their comparative analysis would roughly render the general European context. However, the author feels especially obliged to explain why his analysis omits the educated strata of the British Isles; this is because the British intellectuals enjoyed a greater autonomy with regard to the State and were more assimilated to a broader social group — the middle class, than their colleagues on the continent.

The second part of 'Introduction' is devoted to the prehistory of the intelligentsia — from the Carolingian Renaissance until the 17th century (pp. 21–30). In an impressively brief, but skilful and convincing outline, the author shows the process of formation of the European *res publica doctorum* and the model of a person who makes his living by intellectual work in pre-Enlightenment eras.

In chapter I (pp. 31–66) he presents a short picture of the history of educated strata in France. In his deliberations he is led, as he declares himself, by his un-orthodox attitude to the tradition seeing France as the dictator of European intellectual vogues and trends, the more so, because he stresses that the actual

heyday of the French intelligentsia as a social group endowed with the consciousness of its social separateness and mission came relatively late — at the end of the 19th century, and lasted till the 1980s. In his concept the 'golden age' of the French intelligentsia as a group connected with the structures of state power by a subtle network of interdependencies, but effectively cultivating its hard-won autonomy and high social prestige, was actually that of the Enlightenment with its *philosophes*. The Revolution was a painful break which for a century deprived the French intellectuals of their group authority and political cohesion. The 19th century, which according to the author's assumptions was the heyday of the intelligentsia, is presented by him as an era of atomization of the French educated strata on the peripheries of the increasingly powerful bourgeoisie and in the service of an archaic educational system, though overshadowed by the Romantic ideology of individualism which raised outstanding individuals: mainly writers, poets, and men of learning, to the pedestal of social esteem. The reform of education, secularization of the State and national consolidation during the Third Republic, led, according to him, to a reconsolidation of the French intellectuals around their group ideals, seen especially during the Dreyfus affair. Only from that moment onwards the intellectual elite of France turned again into the political elite, and the actual 'rule of souls' was taken over by this group in the inter-war period. At the same time, however, they experienced an 'ideological seduction' which in the case of the Left lasted almost till the downfall of communism, which marked the end of the 'committed intellectuals' like Sartre or Foucault. Nevertheless the post-Dreyfus belligerent spirit is still alive, says Sdvižkov, and the future will show if it can be revived in a new, European edition.

The second chapter (pp. 67–102) has been limited to the deliberations on the Prussian-Protestant part of Germany. Just as the previous one, it starts with a broad panorama of 18th century German intellectual milieu, and places a special emphasis on the various pedigrees of the German intellectuals of the era, especially focussing on pastors' sons. Sdvižkov locates the heyday of the German intelligentsia in the era of romanticism, of the consolidation of German national consciousness and a characteristic politico-philosophical idealism, crowned by the events of 1848 and the Frankfurt 'Professors' Parliament'. However, even in this era of efflorescence, there lurked the beginnings of a decline: this was connected with the inclination to abstract thinking inherited from Hegel and idealism, as well as with 'being chained to the idea of the State'. Pathos inherent in as well as philosophical and ethical connotations of the German notion of *Bildung*, suspended between practical life and abstract humanist ideals, contributed to the alienation and loss of political orientation of the *Bildungsbürgertum*. In comparison to other parts of the book the analysis of the history of the German intelligentsia stops at the earliest moment — with the portrayal of the generation of the First World War. Of most interest among the author's reflections upon the Germans seem to be those concerning the way of life, of recruitment to the stratum of the intelligentsia and professional advancement of German intellectuals in the 'long 19th century' (pp. 85–95). He gives an interesting and convincing picture of everyday life: from school education in its 'classic' and 'real' version, through the match-making strategy (especially when it was a passport to academic career), the students' customs with their specifically

German culture of *Burschenschaft* (which he does not hesitate to call an 'idiocy'), until the seduction of scholars and officials into lucrative state posts. The end of William's stable Empire merges here with the end of the caste of the 'Prussian mandarins' (which is underlined by the eloquent title *die entzauberte Welt des Zauberbergs*), finally and symbolically sealed by the events of 1968.

The subsequent chapter is devoted to the history of the Polish intelligentsia (pp. 103–38). What will probably strike the Polish reader is that the author treats the Polish case as a variant of the 'normal' social development of Latin Europe, which in fact did not diverge largely from the patterns to which the Polish intelligentsia aspired. The author does not enlarge on the gentry ancestry of the Polish intelligentsia, but places emphasis on the trauma of statelessness that accompanied this stratum since its rise. While noting that Romantic ideals found a very good ground among this group, he stresses their essential affinity to the German nation-creative ideology of Hegel and Fichte. After a cursory discussion of political turmoil connected with the era of national uprisings, Sdvižkov passes onto his favourite period: the end of the 19th century, where he gives an insightful description of systemic differences between the three partitions, as well as of the various forms of illegal or semi-legal social and educational activity. In his opinion the spiritual heritage of 'work from the foundations' has marked the mentality of the Polish intelligentsia no less than their Romantic ideals, rather complementing them than contradicting. These ideals co-created the world outlook of the Polish intelligentsia of the turn of the 20th century, based on an anti-bourgeois phobia and an appreciation of ascetic dedication to the national cause, which he considers to have been only natural for the pauperized gentry and 'unsaddled' landowners. Here the author dwells (pp. 127–30) on the Polish anomaly: a lack of a strong native burgher class as an actual nucleus of the middle class, a circumstance which in his opinion largely contributed to the strengthening of the resentment of the Polish intelligentsia — against the philistines — Germans, Russians and Jews. On a few subsequent pages we find a factual but also picturesque portrayal of everyday life of the Polish intelligentsia (especially in Warsaw) at the end of the 19th century, provided with some comments on the nature of connections between Polish patriotism and Catholicism (pp. 133–4). The chapter closes with remarks devoted to the Second Polish Republic as an 'intelligent state' and to the reactivation of the partition-era ideals of the intelligentsia by the opposition in People's Poland. The Third Republic is marked by the dispersal of the traditional intelligentsia and its absorption by the modern middle class, a fact which seems to be welcomed, the author sarcastically comments, by its representatives with joy.

Chapter IV (pp. 139–84), under an eloquent title 'Onkel Vanja und die Dämonen', deals with the history of the Russian intelligentsia and seems to be the most ambitious in the whole book, though the reader may be unsatisfied with some answers. The basic problem here — and it cannot be otherwise — is the suspension of the Russian intelligentsia between European patterns and native reality, the more conspicuous, because a lot of attention is devoted here to the dependence of the intelligentsia on the authoritarian-totalitarian State. The author says outright in the Introduction that he will not solve this dilemma, commenting philosophically that the Russian example shows best that 'an der

Wiege jeder Intelligenz nicht nur speziell *ex Oriente* oder *ex Occidente* aber generell *lux externa* ist' (p. 140). The author devotes a lot of space to the dilemma of the specification of the historical role of this stratum, oscillating between its mission of a national leader and an incurable inclination to revolutionary opposition on the one hand, and its function as a social elite and as an unripe substitute for an actual middle class on the other. Here also of most interest seem to be his friendly, though slightly ironical descriptions of its mentality, as well as of the everyday life and living conditions of Russian students, Orthodox popes' sons, teachers, academics and provincial prototypes of Chekhov's characters. The author describes with much sympathy, though deprived of sentimentality, the revolutionary idealism of students, and without venom presents the dilemmas of officials and the academic staff ('hostages' of radical students), about whom he has no illusions. Finally, he stresses the façade character of the self-consciousness of a typical representative of the Russian intelligentsia, at the end of the century dominated by anti-philistine phobias. As if to counter-balance this rather stereotype image, Sdvižkov devotes a lot of attention to the cultural, political and economic animation preceding the First World War, the traditions of artistic patronage and the symbiosis of the intelligentsia of Moscow and Petersburg with the educated bourgeoisie. He is extremely critical of the part played by the intelligentsia in the preparation for the October Revolution. His assessment of their internal dilemmas in the years preceding the Great Terror and after Krushchev's thaw is, however, equivocal. Just as in the case of Poland, the author sees no proper place for the Russian intelligentsia, and no practical use for its ideals in the new capitalist system.

The extensive 'Summary' (pp. 185–234) is filled by remarks of a methodological character, which throw into relief the points common to all the four countries under the author's analysis and at the same time provide as if an extended definition of the intelligentsia as the subject of research of European historiography. We find here a number of generalizing observations, for example concerning the role of the family and 'dynasty' in this stratum, the tensions between its 'genetic spirit of opposition' and dependence on the State and its policy, or finally between the assimilation of national minorities and the awakening of their national consciousness. The author does not shun debatable questions, for example he does not go along with Weber's thesis of the intellectual superiority of Protestants over the Catholics; he also stresses the characteristic distinction between the traditional burgher class and the intelligentsia, consisting in that the latter treated their professional work as a mission; this also helps him to support his thesis of the dispersal of the intelligentsia and its absorption by the modern class of market-oriented experts. He also argues that there were more things that connected than those that divided the continental intelligentsia, and that the national specificity of those groups is in a large measure an 'imagined disunity'.

Denis Sdvižkov's work is certainly valuable and interesting: the author skilfully handles his narration; there is no monotony about it and the schematic arrangement of his text rather helps the reader to orientate himself in the author's intentions. His style is marked by a profuse use of pertinent and concise quotations and equitably selected examples from various domains of life of his heroes

(both individual and collective). Whenever we come across a fragment devoted to the political or ethical ideals of the era and their philosophical or artistic (usually literary) articulations, it is balanced by an insightful characterization of their socio-economic or simply material-existential conditions. It only seems that the author exaggerates in his tendency to citing the original terminology in the languages of all the four cultures under his analysis (plus the indispensable English terminology), the more so because the editor has not avoided many small errors. Also we may wonder why the author so many times carries his discussion far into the 20th century, up till the times after the downfall of communism — but this was perhaps the design of his work.

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