

In this meaning, the word “intelligentsia” (and similarly “intelligibility [intellegibel’nost’]” – the mind’s ability to understand [umopostigaemost’]) was used by European philosophers of the 18th and 19th centuries, including Kant and Hegel, but only in Russia did the abstract capacity of the mind become the designation for an entire social stratum, which passionately gave itself over to the occupation of generalization. Not to physics, or economics, or philosophy, or theology, that is, not to any professional generalizations in the sphere of the individual sciences, but precisely to generalization as such, for everyone and about everything. It is only natural that as a result of such generalization there arose “truth for everyone”, “art for everyone”, “property for everyone” – the ideology of collectivization, which easily found material support for itself in the people’s communal way of life.

The debates over the people and the intelligentsia, which have been going on for over a century now, have become particularly heated since the late 60s – early 70s. The intelligentsia proclaimed itself “men of the air [*liud’mi vozdukh*],” “men from nowhere” (Grigorii Pomerants) and denied its umbilical link with the body of the people, and what is more, blamed the people for its opposition to all progressive educational reforms, starting with Peter the Great, as a result of which there appeared this dark, inert mass, the “people,” which historical changes can affect only by force. On the other hand, the defenders of the people (Aleksander Solzhenitsyn) blamed the intelligentsia for ceasing to serve the people and handing it over to destruction by the Bolsheviks, and what is more, for nursing the monstrous idea of a totalitarian state and bringing it to life.

It would appear that the intelligentsia is by its nature inclined to individualism, to isolation from the popular masses. But in this lies the distinction between the Russian intelligentsia and the West’s reasoning elite – communality, atomized and scattered in the form of individual existences, none the less remains a form of consciousness. The intelligentsia is the stratum of people that, in contradistinction to western intellectuals and professionals, thinks within [*predel’no*] general categories. Any narrowly professional conception, when it falls into a cultured milieu, is instantly collectivized [*obobshchestvlyaetsya*] and becomes a sort of general principle of thought. Thus, the Russian intelligentsia of the 19th century intellectually collectivized Darwin’s theory of evolution and Marx’s political economy and turned it into a “guide to action”. The intelligentsia’s passion is generalization [*obobshchenie*], to subsume life’s private events to general ideas, which turn out to be the regulator of social existence. (Mikhail Epstein, edited).

Literature: “The Man from Nowhere” by Grigorii Pomerants (1969) and “Repentance and Self-Limitation as Categories of National Life” by Aleksander Solzhenitsyn (1973)