

STUDIES IN INTELLIGENCE

The CIA and the Congress for Cultural Freedom in the Early Cold War

The limits of making common cause

Sarah Miller Harris



The CIA and the Congress for Cultural Freedom in the Early Cold War

This book questions the conventional wisdom about one of the most controversial episodes in the Cold War, and tells the story of the CIA's backing of the Congress for Cultural Freedom.

For nearly two decades during the early Cold War, the CIA secretly sponsored some of the world's most feted writers, philosophers, and scientists as part of a campaign to prevent Communism from regaining a foothold in Western Europe and from spreading to Asia. By backing the Congress for Cultural Freedom, the CIA subsidized dozens of prominent magazines, global congresses, annual seminars, and artistic festivals. When this operation (QKOPERA) became public in 1967, it ignited one of the most damaging scandals in CIA history. Ever since then, many accounts have argued that the CIA manipulated a generation of intellectuals into lending their names to pro-American, anti-Communist ideas. Others have suggested a more nuanced picture of the relationship between the Congress and the CIA, with intellectuals sometimes resisting the CIA's bidding. Very few accounts, however, have examined the man who held the Congress together: Michael Josselson, the Congress's indispensable manager – and, secretly, a long time CIA agent. This book fills that gap. Using a wealth of archival research and interviews with many of the figures associated with the Congress, this book sheds new light on how the Congress came into existence and functioned, both as a magnet for prominent intellectuals and as a CIA operation.

This book will be of much interest to students of the CIA, Cold War History, intelligence studies, US foreign policy and International Relations in general.

Sarah Miller Harris is a lawyer and has a PhD in International Relations from the University of Cambridge, UK.

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**For my grandfather
Michael A. DeMarco
1920–2001**

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Preface

For nearly two decades during the early Cold War, the Central Intelligence Agency secretly sponsored the Congress for Cultural Freedom, an organization that comprised some of the world's most feted writers, philosophers, and scientists. The CIA did so as part of a campaign to stop Communism from regaining a foothold in Western Europe and Asia. And, by backing the Congress, the CIA subsidized dozens of prominent magazines, as well as global congresses, annual seminars, and artistic festivals. When this operation – QKOPERA – became public in 1967, it ignited one of the most damaging scandals in CIA history.

Many historians have argued that the CIA manipulated a generation of intellectuals into lending their names to pro-American, anti-Communist ideas. Others have presented a more nuanced picture of the relationship between the Congress for Cultural Freedom and the CIA, pointing to instances where intellectuals took positions that were at odds with the CIA's perceived objectives. Most accounts have focused on either the Congress's larger role in Cold War geopolitics, or its impact on twentieth-century intellectual history.

This book takes a very different approach. It recounts the little-known history of Michael Josselson, the man who helped found the Congress for Cultural Freedom, became its de facto manager, and ensured its survival – and who, as a CIA officer in Berlin in the late 1940s, invited the CIA's first involvement with the organization. Using a wealth of archival research and interviews with many of the figures associated with the Congress for Cultural Freedom, this book examines Josselson's unlikely career in order to shed new light on how the Congress came into existence and survived a series of crises that nearly doomed the organization in its early years. This book argues that Josselson was the lynchpin of the Congress for Cultural Freedom – both from the vantage of the intellectuals who flocked to it, and from the Agency's perspective. One cannot assess the positions the Congress took, or the meaning of its relationship with the Agency, without taking a close look at Josselson's objectives and his loyalty and long-time personal ties to the intellectuals involved. Josselson was the key to the Congress's successes – and the reason why replicating something like the Congress for Cultural Freedom may be impossible today.

Chapter 1 recounts how Michael Josselson came to embrace the cause of combating the Soviet Union in the cultural arena. Born in Estonia in 1908,

Josselson and his family moved to Berlin in 1917 to escape the Russian Revolution. After a few semesters at the University of Berlin – and with the Nazis gaining power – Josselson dropped out to become a department-store buyer. He progressed swiftly up the ranks, honing his skills as a negotiator and solidifying his command of a half-dozen languages. On the eve of the Second World War, he emigrated to the United States, became a U.S. citizen, and enlisted in the Army, where his linguistic skills made him a sought-after interrogator. After the war ended, Josselson continued serving the American occupation government in Berlin. Tasked with assisting in American denazification efforts, Josselson found himself at the center of allied efforts to rebuild German cultural life. He brought together government officials and German cultural figures just as the Soviet Union launched myriad cultural campaigns aimed at winning over German hearts and minds. Above all, what Josselson saw on the ground – from mass deportations of refugees to the Soviet gulag, to Soviet officials’ successes in manipulating the denazification process – convinced him that the Soviet Union’s cultural initiatives were a danger to what remained of German and European civilization.

Chapter 2 discusses how the intellectuals who eventually came to be associated with the Congress for Cultural Freedom shed their illusions about Communism and became its most determined critics long before the Central Intelligence Agency entered the picture. In the 1930s, many of the intellectuals who later flocked to the Congress for Cultural Freedom were dedicated Communists, committed to the belief that Communism offered the only viable path to an egalitarian future. This chapter recounts how the Soviet Union succeeded in enlisting intellectuals to its banner – and why a number of intellectuals broke with Communism by the outbreak of the Second World War.

Chapters 3 and 4 describe how many of these intellectuals, with Josselson at their side, took initial steps that led to the founding of the Congress for Cultural Freedom. After the Second World War ended, the Soviet Union launched a renewed cultural offensive, first in Berlin and then in the rest of Europe and America. Well before the American government developed a coherent strategy for responding to the Soviet Union, non-Communist intellectuals began to counter Soviet-sponsored gatherings of intellectuals with their own events. Non-Communist intellectuals’ initial efforts were disorganized and often unsuccessful – but Josselson made a point of attending all of them. He did so before he joined the CIA, and he began floating an idea that soon took on a life of its own: that non-Communist intellectuals should hold a larger congress in Berlin, for its symbolic value.

Chapters 5 and 6 discuss how Josselson joined the CIA in 1949, just as plans for a Berlin congress for cultural freedom were well underway. These chapters detail the Agency’s efforts to find a group of non-Communist intellectuals to back, and its frustrations with early, disorganized efforts. The Agency had nearly given up on the idea of such an endeavor when Josselson pitched the idea of subsidizing a Berlin congress. Chapters 5 and 6 also reveal new details about how the Congress for Cultural Freedom came into being. While Josselson and

his circle of acquaintances recruited speakers, floated topics for discussion, and handled logistics, the Agency contemplated Josselson's proposal and eventually agreed to foot the bill. It was Josselson who invited the Agency's involvement with what became the Congress for Cultural Freedom. When the Berlin Congress proved immensely successful and spurred the formation of a permanent organization of intellectuals, the Agency decided to remain involved – but Josselson was not expected to play an ongoing role in the Congress, at least not initially.

Chapters 7 and 8 detail the crises that beset the Congress for Cultural Freedom and nearly caused its dissolution before it got off the ground. After the success of the Berlin Congress, the organization floundered. Its leadership was uncertain. Intellectuals who had taken lead roles in Berlin vehemently disagreed over its purpose and future direction. Some felt that it should be a primarily cultural organization, focused on implicitly contrasting the cultural achievements of the West with Communism's stifling effect on intellectual inquiry. Others – most prominently, the American philosopher James Burnham, who secretly served as a full-time CIA consultant during his sabbatical – instead envisioned the Congress for Cultural Freedom as an avowedly political organization whose ultimate aim should be to agitate for the overthrow of Communism in the Eastern bloc. Burnham's efforts prompted considerable resistance, and internal divisions, coupled with the lack of personnel capable of launching new initiatives, nearly ended the organization. Josselson arrived at the Congress for Cultural Freedom's Paris office in late 1950 for what was supposed to be a brief stint. But – through happenstance, skill, and shrewd maneuvering – Josselson stayed on for the next seventeen years.

Chapters 9 and 10 discuss how the Congress for Cultural Freedom transformed into a cultural organization capable of attracting some of the twentieth century's most prominent intellectuals, and how Josselson was able to take command of the organization. These chapters recount how changes within the CIA itself, and the growing interest of senior CIA officials in the so-called “non-Communist left,” led to Burnham's marginalization within the Congress for Cultural Freedom, and within the CIA, while helping to solidify Josselson's position. Meanwhile, the Congress for Cultural Freedom entered a new era of prominence by organizing a flurry of events – most conspicuously the 1952 Paris Festival, which showcased a wide array of dance performances, concerts, art exhibits, and seminars focused on the twentieth century's greatest artistic achievements. By the end of the festival, the Congress was back on sound footing – and Josselson was the only man left on the inside who was fully privy to the CIA's relationship with the group. He became indispensable to both the Congress and the CIA.

Chapters 11 through 15 address major challenges that Josselson and the Congress for Cultural Freedom confronted in the ensuing years, as Josselson assumed a more public role as its administrative secretary and de facto manager. In 1953, the Congress launched *Encounter*, one of the most renowned magazines of the twentieth century – and the project that consumed most of Josselson's

time. Contrary to many accounts, neither Josselson nor the CIA micromanaged *Encounter* to suppress criticism of America or to censor pieces that did not comport with CIA objectives. Rather, Josselson devoted most of his energies to *Encounter* to try to mediate between its warring editors, whose clashing personalities and political perspectives occasionally threatened the magazine's future.

Josselson also had to grapple with transitioning leadership at the CIA – which meant new senior officials overseeing the Agency's relationship with the Congress for Cultural Freedom. Here again, the historical evidence suggests a very different story from prior accounts: rather than consolidating its control over the Congress for Cultural Freedom as the years went on, the CIA took an increasingly hands-off approach.

Furthermore, Josselson led the Congress for Cultural Freedom through an existential crisis. By the mid-1950s, the Congress's initial project – discrediting Communism as a valid means of structuring intellectual inquiry – seemed complete. Communism was eschewed as an idea, if not as a political movement. And, with the Hungarian Revolution, the Congress's objectives seemed especially vindicated. The Congress had succeeded beyond all expectations in helping to break intellectuals' fascination with Communism – but with that task seemingly accomplished in most of Europe, the Congress in the mid- to late 1950s faced the challenge of finding a new reason to exist, and turned to initiatives in Latin America and Africa.

Before his quasi-retirement in 1960, Josselson also confronted a controversy that threatened *Encounter*'s reputation and readership: the decision to axe an article written by Dwight Macdonald, a short-lived editor of *Encounter* who submitted a profoundly anti-American piece for publication. Josselson was behind the decision to reject this piece. But – contrary to prior accounts – Josselson does not appear to have done so at the CIA's behest. Rather, the available evidence suggests that Josselson kept this article out of *Encounter* to facilitate his long-standing plans to extricate the Congress for Cultural Freedom from the CIA's sponsorship, and to instead secure the backing of independent private foundations. He feared that American foundations would not readily sponsor such blatantly anti-American work.

Finally, Chapter 16 describes how the Congress for Cultural Freedom – and Josselson's career – imploded in the wake of revelations, in 1967, that the CIA had been secretly subsidizing the Congress since its inception. The book concludes by reassessing the Congress for Cultural Freedom's significance and the role Josselson played in the early Cold War.

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Introduction

There are certain men whose outsized roles in how America waged the Cold War seem to have been foreordained by their exploits in the Second World War and their pedigrees. Michael Josselson was not one of them. He was an Estonian refugee who chanced his way into American citizenship thanks to his employment as the European buyer for an American department store. He was a university dropout. He enrolled in the U.S. Army in 1943 and spent most of the Second World War interrogating prisoners. Thickset, with dark, side-parted hair and dark, almost-black eyes, his face carried an air of sadness. On the surface, Josselson fit no one's idea of a key player in the Cold War. To this day, he is hardly well-known.

Nevertheless, in December 1949, Josselson drafted a memorandum that would change his life, spawn one of the most important and controversial Central Intelligence Agency operations of the Cold War, and foster an organization that became a haven for some of the twentieth century's most prominent intellectuals. Josselson was then 41 years old. He had just joined the Office of Policy Coordination, a clandestine offshoot of the CIA whose ambit covered all forms of covert action against the Soviet Union. From his second-floor office in West Berlin's Tempelhof, Josselson penned a proposal to counter the Soviet Union's extensive efforts to woo the world's most prominent artists, writers, philosophers, and scientists by sponsoring a "Congress for cultural freedom" in Berlin. As Josselson envisioned it, the congress would feature prominent non-Communist intellectuals, who would hopefully champion Western cultural and political ideals, denounce totalitarianism in all its forms, and signal that a critical mass of Western intellectuals adamantly opposed the Soviet system.¹

The idea of covertly funding non-Communist intellectuals was nothing new. The Soviet Union had used front congresses successfully for decades to capture intellectuals' hearts and minds, proselytizing Communism as a powerful ideal. By 1949, with the Cold War an established reality, the Soviet Union's propaganda efforts were in full swing. Hundreds of prominent artists, writers, and scientists – everyone from Pablo Picasso to Nobel Prize-winning physicist Frédéric Joliot-Curie – joined nominally independent organizations dedicated to championing the Soviet Union as the world's best chance for peace and its paramount defender of culture. Those efforts, Soviet Deputy Premier Georgy Malenkov

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claimed, had “found the greatest response in all countries,” and attracted some \$250 million per year in Soviet funds.²

Intellectuals thus had to be taken seriously as a politically relevant group in the Cold War. Practically since its inception in June 1948, the CIA had been screening different groups and trying to encourage non-Communist intellectuals in America and Europe to coalesce into an effective opposition. But, to date, the CIA had backed the wrong figures, and senior officials had begun to despair of ever finding a functional group of anti-Communist intellectuals who might (with covert subsidies) be able to mount an effective, highly publicized counterdisplay. Josselson – who had ties with a network of intellectuals in Berlin and the organizational skills necessary to pull off a high-profile gathering – solved these problems. His proposal reached Washington in January 1950 and eventually secured a \$50,000 budget.³

Six months later, in June 1950, 125 intellectuals – writers, artists, composers, philosophers, and scientists from America, Europe, and Asia – gathered in Berlin to proclaim their shared opposition to Soviet Communism as the enemy of intellectual freedom. The Agency discreetly footed the bill, masking its involvement through a network of intermediaries. Josselson and several others with hidden connections to the Agency handled behind-the-scenes arrangements. By the end of the gathering, delegates voted to establish a new organization, the Congress for Cultural Freedom, which was committed to the proposition that “the theory and practice of the totalitarian state are the greatest challenge which man has been called on to meet in the course of civilized history,” in the words of the Congress’s Manifesto.⁴

After a rocky start, the Congress flourished. It sponsored over thirty magazines worldwide.⁵ *Encounter*, its most prestigious title, counted British Prime Minister Anthony Eden and U.S. President John F. Kennedy among its readers.⁶ Even critics conceded that “it must have provoked more cocktail-party conversation than any comparable magazine of our time.”⁷ *Preuves*, the Congress’s French-language magazine, fought against the headwinds in France, where the Soviet peace campaign had made its greatest inroads.⁸ *China Quarterly* and *Soviet Survey* published smuggled manuscripts from dissidents behind the Iron Curtain and became noteworthy sources of reporting on conditions under Communism.⁹ And, in Nigeria, *Black Orpheus* published and supported writers Chinua Achebe and future Nobel Prize winner Wole Soyinka.¹⁰ The Congress also launched a multitude of festivals, where Igor Stravinsky conducted his *Rite of Spring*, the Boston Symphony Orchestra made its European debut, and George Balanchine’s New York City Ballet won accolades.¹¹ And the Congress staged dozens of seminars, from Manila (“Drama in the Philippines”) to Vienna (“Worker Participation in Management”), to Karachi (“Islam in the Modern World”).¹²

The Congress’s endurance was all the more remarkable given that even its most dedicated participants agreed on little beyond their conviction that Communism, as an idea and in practice, was incompatible with free intellectual inquiry. The Congress attracted personalities as disparate as the French philosopher Raymond

Aron, American sociologists Daniel Bell and Edward Shils, and the Austrian philosopher Friedrich von Hayek. British Labour Party luminaries such as Hugh Gaitskell and Tony Crosland, distinguished Indian politician and writer Minoo Masani, and Robert Oppenheimer, father of the atomic bomb, all became regulars at Congress gatherings. For non-Communist intellectuals, the Congress was “the one place in Europe, and later in other parts of the world, where intellectuals could find support and sustenance from the harassments of the Communists,” reflected Bell.¹³

Its participants were under no illusions as to why the Congress managed to stay afloat despite incessant factionalism. They credited Michael Josselson, whom they variously described as “the key man and father figure of the Congress,” the “moving genius of the organization,” its “decisive animator,” and “the brains and the leading spirit of the Congress.”¹⁴ Less than a year after the Congress’s founding in Berlin, Josselson arrived at the Congress’s new headquarters in Paris, and never left. To the intellectuals involved in the Congress, Josselson was its unflappable administrative secretary and manager, handling myriad financial and personnel issues and steering the organization through crises.

Meanwhile, to the CIA, Josselson was one of the most valuable officers on its roster: he was, for many years, the Agency’s only direct pipeline to the Congress for Cultural Freedom. After the 1950 Berlin Congress attracted considerable favorable press (and rave reviews from President Truman’s cabinet), the CIA decided to permanently channel funds to the fledging Congress in an operation codenamed QKOPERA. When the Congress faltered shortly thereafter, the CIA sent Josselson to the Congress’s Paris headquarters, where he quickly assumed an integral role. And, when an overworked Josselson suffered a heart attack in 1955, the CIA sent a second agent, John Hunt, to serve as his deputy. The Agency also sent a series of case officers to Paris to provide them with operational support. By the mid-1960s, the CIA was secretly funneling the Congress over \$3 million through a web of purported philanthropic foundations.¹⁵

Senior CIA officials considered this money well spent. To former CIA director Allen Dulles, “the idea of an active movement which was intellectually appealing to non-Communist liberals” was a cause that “engaged [Dulles’s] personal attention and encouragement as much as, if not more than, any other activity of the Agency,” according to his in-house biographer – and that was during the golden era of Agency covert action.¹⁶ Likewise, former CIA director Richard Helms viewed the Congress as the standout among the Agency’s “long-lived successes ... [in] Cold War covert political action.”¹⁷ To similarly minded Agency officials, Josselson was somewhere between a godsend and a miracle worker. He earned a reputation as “one of the most astute and effective American agents,” recalled his Agency colleague James McCargar.¹⁸ Frank Lindsay, the first head of the CIA’s Eastern European division, credited Josselson with “a magnificent job not only in building the Congress, but in arranging for its survival.”¹⁹ To Director Helms, Josselson’s success in “keeping the congress intact and focused on its original missions” bordered on the incredible.²⁰

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By the time Josselson embarked on semi-retirement in Geneva in 1960, he had quietly built up a formidable network of some of the most famous names of the twentieth century, who considered him a close friend and benefactor. In 1967, it all collapsed. The CIA's covert involvement with dozens of private organizations – including the Congress, the National Committee for a Free Europe, the National Students Association, the American Federation of Labor, the Asia Foundation, and the International Committee of Women – suddenly came to light. At the height of the Vietnam War – and in an atmosphere of profound public mistrust of the Johnson administration and the CIA – these revelations had an explosive effect. Every group that had received CIA funding faced withering criticism for accepting what many considered tainted money. The Congress and many of the other groups never recovered.²¹

The Congress for Cultural Freedom has probably attracted more scholarly attention than any other group of twentieth-century intellectuals. Organizational histories, notably Peter Coleman's excellent *The Liberal Conspiracy* (1989), have canvassed how the Congress's gatherings, magazines, and seminars shaped European thought in the twentieth century.²² More recently, a growing body of scholarship has evaluated how the Congress's overtures in Latin America and Africa during the late 1950s and 1960s affected intellectuals there. These works have fostered a lively debate about whether the Congress encouraged intellectuals to assimilate to Western culture or fostered greater independence, and the extent to which these intellectuals were able to carve out independent movements outside either American or Soviet influence.²³

The bulk of historical accounts, however, have centered on the Congress's relationship with the CIA, and the extent to which the CIA used the Congress to covertly influence the course of twentieth-century intellectual history. Since 1967, the prevailing view has been that the CIA valued the Congress for a simple reason: the CIA pulled the Congress's strings. Under this view, the CIA cherry-picked intellectuals with favorable views of American foreign policy, and the CIA's intervention into the Congress eviscerated intellectuals' independence.²⁴ Most prominent among these critics is Frances Stonor Saunders, who argued in *Who Paid the Piper?* (1999) that the Congress was the centerpiece of America's "cultural Cold War," an ideological battle for men's minds in which the CIA comprehensively controlled what the Congress's participants said and published in Congress magazines. The Congress, she charges, deliberately silenced criticisms of American foreign policy, McCarthyism, and American race relations. And by accepting this state of affairs, she contends, intellectuals associated with the Congress compromised themselves and the ideal of intellectual freedom itself.²⁵

Other scholars have questioned the extent of CIA control. British historian Hugh Wilford's works thoroughly canvass a multitude of international organizations that the CIA sponsored during the Cold War in an effort to shape international opinion. Wilford agrees that the Congress for Cultural Freedom was indeed "the US's principal weapon in the Cultural Cold War," and that "the editorial freedom supposedly enjoyed by the CCF's magazines was in fact

mythical.” However, Wilford also argues that intellectuals associated with the Congress often proved less pliable than the CIA wished, and that while the CIA may have attempted to exert control, intellectuals were often effective in resisting.²⁶ Others, such as British historian Giles Scott-Smith, take a more conceptual approach to the Congress’s function for the American government, and consider it a “remarkable intervention” designed to provide intellectual justifications for American hegemony in Western Europe.²⁷

Perhaps because the literature has focused so heavily on big-picture questions about the Congress’s impact on intellectuals in various parts of the world, few of these accounts have explored Michael Josselson’s actual role in the Congress at any length. Frances Stonor Saunders is the exception; she portrays Josselson as an increasingly torn CIA agent who tried but failed to protect the Congress from extensive Agency interference by higher-ups in Washington.²⁸ But the full story of how Josselson came to align himself with a group of non-Communist intellectuals – and his considerable role in founding the Congress and preventing its early collapse – has never been told. Josselson himself spent considerable effort trying to obscure his role. Though he arrived at the Congress’s Paris office in fall 1950, few of his letters before 1952 – when he formally became the Congress’s administrative secretary – survive. He insisted on being omitted from memoirs that discussed the Congress.²⁹ Until 1967, Josselson lied repeatedly about the source of the Congress’s funds, and after CIA financing was revealed, he never gave a full accounting.³⁰ “My attitude is, and has been ever since the disclosures about some Government-funded operations, one of great disgust for all those who volunteered to give away certain secrets,” he wrote. “If I were now to follow their sordid example, I would forfeit my self-respect.”³¹ After years of cajoling, the American sociologist and Congress stalwart Edward Shils convinced Josselson to come to Cambridge, where Shils was a fellow, to record an interview for posterity. Josselson died of a heart attack two weeks before his visit.³²

Zeroing in on Josselson’s role within the Congress, however, yields new insights into how the Congress came into existence, why it was able to endure, and why it managed to attract a number of prominent American and European intellectuals. Josselson’s trajectory also sheds light on an under-developed area of intelligence history, namely how the very earliest CIA operations actually functioned on the ground and evolved as different managers in Washington came aboard. Without Josselson, the Congress would by all accounts have looked very different – and likely involved a far greater degree of control from CIA officials in Washington. Why Josselson cast his lot with the Congress, and how he sold the CIA on an organization of left-leaning intellectuals who frequently espoused anti-American positions, is as central to the Congress’s history as the ideas it embraced and the impact it ultimately had.

Despite Josselson’s persistent efforts to erase himself from history, enough remains from chance mentions in memoirs, trails of correspondence across archives, and interviews with figures involved in the Congress to reconstruct his extraordinary odyssey. His path to the Congress began in Berlin at the end of the

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Second World War, where he served the American occupation government as liaison with the Soviet occupation government and as a member of one of the quadripartite commissions charged with the denazification of German artists and musicians. Josselson's extensive knowledge of and interest in German culture more than compensated for his lack of formal education, and he quickly became an influential figure in the recovering German cultural scene – where he met many of the figures who became the Congress's leading lights.

Josselson's denazification work led, in turn, to a post as one of the American occupation government's most senior intelligence officers in Berlin, which gave him a front-row seat to the unfolding Soviet cultural offensive in Germany.³³ Josselson had no illusions about the headway his Soviet counterparts were making in convincing Germans that Soviet leadership offered them the best chance of living under a government that respected German cultural achievements and German identity. Josselson also watched as Soviet authorities sent thousands of displaced Soviet prisoners in Germany back to the Soviet Union, knowing that they were bound for the gulag.

Well before he joined the CIA, Josselson joined a tiny group of expatriate Americans determined to resist a Communist threat that Josselson had come to see as inimical to the survival of Western culture. His circle in Berlin did not oppose the Soviet Union primarily as a destabilizing geopolitical influence or because they considered its military expansionism a threat to American interests. They opposed Communism as an ideology that had rationalized millions of deaths as a fair exchange for a utopian future.

Today, the knowledge that the Soviet Union would collapse before the end of the twentieth century makes it hard to believe that Communism's fallacies were ever in doubt. In 1950, Josselson and the intellectuals who formed the Congress had no such comfort. Before the Second World War, Communism was the shining ideal of a generation of intellectuals who proclaimed themselves willing to die for it; in the Spanish Civil War, many did. That ideal endured at the dawn of the postwar era, when intellectuals again flocked to Soviet-backed congresses. Rumors of Stalin's purges and the aftereffects of the Nazi-Soviet Pact dimmed the Soviet Union's luster, but, in 1950, most European intellectuals held out hope that the Soviet Union would fulfill its revolutionary ambitions. Meanwhile, British historian A.J.P. Taylor declared in November 1945 that "nobody in Europe believes in the American way of life – that is, in private enterprise; or rather those who believe in it are a defeated party ... which seems to have no more future than the Jacobites in England after 1688."³⁴

For a small but determined core of American and European intellectuals, the Congress for Cultural Freedom was the culmination of a series of counter-rallies that they launched to disrupt and discredit Soviet-backed front groups. Many in this group were ex-Communists. Most were at least sympathetic to Communism or its variants during the 1930s. They feared the resurgence of the Communist idea as well as a cultural void in war-ravaged Western Europe. Europe's great intellectual magazines had either gone bust (as in England) or had been taken over by Communists (as in France). Non-Communist intellectuals came together

out of guilt over their responsibility for lending credence to Communist ideology, and felt compelled to expose the errors of their former way of thinking and its disastrous effect on free inquiry.

Josselson was a constant but unobtrusive part of this resistance from the beginning. He was there in Berlin in 1947, when a single speech of protest upended the Soviet-orchestrated German Writers' Congress. He attended every counter-rally thereafter. He was the joint inventor of the idea of the Congress, and started planning the Berlin Congress with American and European intellectuals even before he joined the Agency.³⁵

When Josselson wrote his fateful proposal to his employers in December 1949, it was apparently OPC's first inkling of his plans. But, by then, Josselson and his compatriots had already put their plans into motion. A Berlin congress would have happened with or without the CIA; the only question was on what scale, and with what kind of budget. By pitching the idea to the Agency, Josselson secured the kind of money needed for the Congress to make a splash internationally. But, in fostering a clandestine alliance between the Congress and the Agency, Josselson also inadvertently sowed the seeds of the Congress's downfall.

After the success of the Berlin Congress, the Congress for Cultural Freedom became a permanent organization – then it very nearly collapsed. Josselson arrived at the Congress's tiny Paris office in fall 1950 to stabilize a floundering organization, and became its *de facto* manager. But Josselson's official titles – Administrative Secretary and later Executive Director of the Congress – never quite captured what he did. “He ran an organization of prima donnas,” said Roderick MacFarquhar, editor of the Congress-sponsored *China Quarterly*, “and managed to keep them all in the stable.”³⁶ Josselson was no slouch intellectually, either; he read every book written by any figure of note associated with the Congress, in almost any language.³⁷

Josselson ran the Congress as if it were a business. He oversaw all day-to-day activities, showing little tolerance for mistakes. When editor François Bondy agreed to punch up *Preuves*'s cover by highlighting the lead article author's name in bold red letters – then misspelled her name – “I think that was the angriest I ever saw Mike,” recalled John Hunt, Josselson's eventual deputy. “He wanted to fire François. He wanted to never see him again.”³⁸ But alongside his temper and curtness, Josselson possessed tremendous personal charm. English poet Stephen Spender, who co-edited *Encounter*, wrote of “the warmth and kindness and understanding you have shown in your relations to us all.”³⁹

For bigger decisions about the Congress's activities, Josselson consulted a web of trusted advisors. Two of the most important were Nicolas Nabokov and Melvin Lasky, Josselson's closest friends from his Berlin days. Nabokov, the Congress's Secretary-General, was a master at winning prominent friends for the Congress, though Josselson occasionally found “his Chekhovian fits, tears and breast-beating one day, effusive affection the next” trying.⁴⁰ Melvin Lasky, who originated the Berlin Congress with Josselson and eventually became an editor of *Encounter*, was a vital sounding board.⁴¹ Hunt summed up the relationship as follows: “Mike goes out of the room saying, I like that – we're going to do it.

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Mel is still embroidering on the idea, and Nicolas is in a state of ecstasy.⁷⁴² And when the Executive Committee – the Congress’s governing body, comprising a few dozen of its leading members – met to debate future agendas for the Congress, Josselson “didn’t manipulate people’s points of view,” recalled Daniel Bell. “If he wanted a policy, if he supported a particular organizational decision, he wouldn’t hide behind someone else; he was forthright, and people respected that.”⁷⁴³ Before Josselson arrived to manage the Congress, it was incapacitated by feuds and inactivity. Josselson created order.

At the same time, Josselson was playing a difficult game: at various points, he leveraged his position as the Agency’s indispensable link to the Congress to ward off Agency interference. When the 1967 scandal broke, Josselson justified taking CIA money by explaining that “I was in a position to help hundreds of people all over the world do what they themselves wanted to do.” He added: “All this I enjoyed doing, and if you think that the CIA got anything out of it, believe me, the shoe was on the other foot!”⁷⁴⁴ However self-serving that statement might have been, there was a good deal of truth to Josselson’s defense. The CIA has yet to declassify the vast majority its files on QKOPERA. But recently available archives, declassified government documents, memoirs, and numerous interviews with some of the CIA officials involved put further perspective on the Agency’s motivations in supporting the Congress. To be sure, post-hoc justifications by Agency officials may be viewed with some skepticism. But those reflections often tally with available sources that pre-date the 1967 scandal. They are, in any event, an important part of the historical record.

At the Congress’s inception, CIA officials in Washington oversaw early personnel decisions and many of the Congress’s day-to-day operations. And when Josselson arrived at the Congress’s Paris office in late 1950, he was not the only one with ties to the Agency working within the Congress. Two other prominent early figures involved with the Congress were employed by, or closely affiliated with, the CIA. Both of them were far more eager than Josselson to commandeer the Congress for use in other CIA operations and to require the Congress’s activities to strictly hew to the viewpoints they felt were most strategically advantageous. Josselson appears to have outmaneuvered them both, and was soon the CIA’s only direct conduit to the Congress’s headquarters.

As different CIA officials in Washington took charge of supervising the Agency’s relationship with the Congress, they took an increasingly hands-off approach. Far from insisting that the Congress hew to overtly pro-American positions, the Agency tolerated a remarkable degree of dissent. True, the Congress left no doubt that American leadership, while imperfect, was vastly preferable to the Soviet system. But, instead of portraying American life positively, many of the Congress’s leading figures offered criticism – often in the pages of the Congress’s flagship, *Encounter*. To list just a few examples: the Congress’s honorary chairman, British philosopher Bertrand Russell, accused the FBI of “atrocities” in investigating the Rosenberg atomic spy case that were comparable to “Nazi atrocities.”⁷⁴⁵ When the Congress’s American branch harshly condemned Russell’s remarks, Josselson desperately tried to talk Russell out of

resigning and urged the Americans to apologize.⁴⁶ French philosopher Raymond Aron – one of the Congress’s central figures – stated in *Encounter* that “there is still much to criticize” in America, especially “the problems and injustices which official optimism tends to gloss over.”⁴⁷ American critic Leslie Fiedler not only opposed Senator McCarthy’s investigations into Communists’ penetration of the American government: he declared that “the fight against McCarthyism is more than a fight against McCarthy; it is a struggle against the distortions of the Right and the outlived illusions of the Left.”⁴⁸

American foreign policy fared even worse. British politician Woodrow Wyatt took to the pages of *Encounter* to bemoan America’s “negative anti-Communism,” which “carried her into the ludicrous position of propping up the ramshackle and discredited Chiang Kai-shek administration on Formosa.”⁴⁹ A group of the Congress’s leading figures, including honorary president Salvador de Madariaga, publicly called for the United States “to withdraw its military forces from Santo Domingo and help reinstate President Juan Bosch” during the 1965 U.S. invasion.⁵⁰ And, after the failed Bay of Pigs invasion, *Encounter* ran American historian Theodore Draper’s denunciations of the episode as “perfect failure” and a wholesale indictment of “Cuban exile politics and United States policy,”⁵¹ while English critic Anthony Hartley judged “American action in Cuba as wrong and contravening principles on which a steady and successful foreign policy should be based.”⁵² As for the Vietnam War: *Encounter* published German writer Richard Löwenthal’s scathing indictment of American intervention, which he projected would “do incalculable harm to the cohesion of the Western alliance, to the world position of the United States, and even to its internal stability.”⁵³

Not only was the Congress frequently ambivalent about America and its foreign policy; it was unrepentantly so. In 1956, former Voice of America official Norman Jacobs reviewed *Encounter*’s effectiveness in presenting favorable impressions of America, likely at the CIA’s behest. Jacobs concluded that *Encounter* failed “to offset the cliché widely accepted abroad that the U.S. is inhabited by barbarians and that American intellectuals are dying out.” Worse, Jacobs concluded, *Encounter* often reinforced these stereotypes, prompting Jacobs to propose more suitable authors and subjects.⁵⁴

The Congress’s leadership refused. “Don’t let’s make American propaganda,” Nicholas Nabokov responded.⁵⁵ Melvin Lasky was equally adamant: “America ‘projects’ itself badly, and Europe is tired of these Sisyphus efforts,” he told Josselson in a memorandum plainly intended for official consumption. “We – not unlike everybody else – have too many problems ... consistently to come out with a positive word of cheer for the Stars-and-Stripes forever.” Instead, Lasky stressed, the Congress should not be judged “by the visible and calculable efforts and results.” The Congress’s magazines “are not merely a matter of what they publish, who reads them, what gets remembered,” he continued:

There is an effect, an impact, to an intellectual review which, I submit, goes beyond factors of readership, prestige, and persuasiveness. . . . “Preuves” and “Encounter” . . . have become symbols in the cultural life of two ancient

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nations of free, humane, and democratic international (and transatlantic) exchange. This is quite an achievement ... [and, he concluded,] those friends whose support has made it possible should find it comforting and gratifying.⁵⁶

Not only was the CIA unable to get the Congress to propagandize; its beneficiaries lectured the Agency to expect nothing of the kind.⁵⁷

This sort of dynamic goes far to explaining why, within the CIA, “the Congress was not liked by a lot of people,” and was seen as “a great waste of money” and “counterproductive,” as one case officer recalled.⁵⁸ Yet the CIA continued supporting the Congress to the tune of several million dollars a year, because the senior CIA officials who ultimately made operational decisions remained convinced that the Congress could provide a much-needed counterweight to Soviet front groups by fostering abstract intellectual dialogue – and by publishing prestigious magazines like *Encounter*. Above all, senior CIA officials supported the Congress as an act of faith. There are no real metrics for gauging the effectiveness of this sort of operation. The men who oversaw the Agency’s relationship with the Congress from Washington believed in the Congress because they shared many of its ideals and because they believed in Josselson. He had seamlessly integrated himself into the Congress’s work and averted its collapse in its early days. He kept the Congress busily putting out magazines and sponsoring seminars that, with their global reach, were surely making a difference, however unquantifiable, to the Cold War. He arranged the Congress’s annual financing with the Agency by sending a detailed budget; the Agency sent back *pro forma* approvals of everything requested.⁵⁹ He was indispensable – and that gave him leeway in which to operate. On paper, Josselson was a subordinate, surrounded by case officers and subject to his superiors’ ultimate control. In practice, the CIA ceded the reins to a man whose ultimate loyalties remained with the Congress.

There was a final side to Josselson’s role within the Congress: he was the man designated to assume total responsibility in the event that the truth about CIA financing emerged. Within the Congress, Josselson promoted the fiction that funding came from private American foundations with enlightened benefactors like Cincinnati magnate Julius “Junkie” Fleischmann.⁶⁰ Few close to the Congress believed such assurances. Few cared. “Almost everybody knew that CIA money was involved,” said Bell.⁶¹ Herb Passin, the Congress’s point man in Asia, learned from an unimpeachable source that John Hunt was connected to the CIA and told Josselson that he had concluded “the Congress was the most important intellectual organization in the world, no matter what, and that its work must go on.”⁶² Melvin Lasky was likely privy to the details from the start, and attended meetings with senior CIA officials when it came time to negotiate how to bring his German-language magazine, *Der Monat*, under the Congress’s auspices.⁶³

“People were prepared to go along,” John Hunt felt, “provided they didn’t have to know.” Certainly no one wanted to know Josselson and Hunt’s precise

connections to the American government. “I think everyone felt, look, let’s not look a gift horse in the mouth.” The message, as Josselson and Hunt took it, was “you’re going to have to go on being solitary, because none of us want to hear about it.”⁶⁴ Bell, for one, headed off further candor:

Josselson, a completely honest man, said to me after dinner one evening, “Dan, I want to tell you where the money comes for the Congress.” “Mike,” I replied, “I do not want to know; if I did, I would lose my independence.”⁶⁵

Indeed, the widespread rumor that CIA money was involved made Josselson’s presence perversely comforting. If there was a link to the CIA, Josselson was it, and he could be watched closely for signs of untoward influence. “Perhaps I did not mind being deceived by Josselson, since I thought him to be acting in a good cause to which I knew him to be deeply committed,” reflected Edward Shils. “The most important thing for me was the deception was not leading me into doing things which I would not have done otherwise.”⁶⁶

Josselson’s presence was comforting for another reason: until Hunt’s arrival, Josselson was the only one privy to all of the Congress’s arrangements with the Agency. Thus, if the Congress’s CIA financing ever came to light, Josselson would take the fall. In so doing, Josselson believed, he could “protect all those associated with the Congress from any damage to their reputations which might result from a discovery of the CIA connection.”⁶⁷ That was the bargain that Hunt and Josselson felt they had made and, in private, they would hypothesize about the consequences.⁶⁸ Josselson anticipated that, if CIA funding came to light, he could assume blame and receive forgiveness from the intellectuals associated with the Congress. He was nearly right. But for a single miscalculation at the end, he might have remained at the helm of the Congress even after the CIA financing scandal broke in 1967. Instead, he lost almost everything, and the organization he built never recovered.

Notes

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- 3 Warner, “Origins of the Congress for Cultural Freedom, 1949–50.”
- 4 “Manifesto of the Congress for Cultural Freedom,” June 30, 1950, MS 2395/4, Arthur Koestler Papers, University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh, Scotland (“AK”).
- 5 Price Waterhouse & Co. Audit of Congress for Cultural Freedom Statements of Receipts and Disbursements, December 14, 1966 (for the year 1964), Folder 4, Box 19, Michael Josselson Papers, Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, University of Texas-Austin, Austin, Texas (“MJ”); François Bondy to Freddie Warburg, October 22, 1972, Folder 1, Box 20, MJ.

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- 7 Clipping in “*Encounter: From Recent Comments* (1962), Folder 13, Box 31, ML-99, Shepard Stone Papers, Dartmouth College, Hanover, New Hampshire (“SS”). Courtesy of Dartmouth College Library.
- 8 Keith Botsford, “François Bondy and Melvin J. Lasky,” *News from the Republic of Letters* (Fall/Winter 2004), p. 29; see also Pierre Grémion, “*Preuves dans la Paris de la guerre froide*,” *Vingtième siècle* (January–March 1987), pp. 63–82.
- 9 Walter Laqueur, “The Congress for Cultural Freedom: A Memoir,” *Fin de Siècle and Other Essays on America & Europe* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1997), pp. 244–6; Roderick MacFarquhar, “The Founding of *The China Quarterly*,” *The China Quarterly* (September 1995), pp. 692–4.
- 10 Peter Coleman, *The Liberal Conspiracy: The Congress for Cultural Freedom and the Struggle for the Mind of Postwar Europe* (New York: Free Press, 1989), pp. 89–91, 196–7, 203–4.
- 11 Festival booklet (May 1952), Folder 2, Box 28, MJ.
- 12 “List of Congress for Cultural Freedom Seminars,” n.d., Folder 9, Box 304, Series II, CCF.
- 13 Daniel Bell to Michael Josselson, April 12, 1967, Folder 5, Box 32, MJ.
- 14 Matthew Spender, *The House in St. John’s Wood: In Search of My Parents* (New York: Farrar, Straus, & Giroux 2015), p. 238 (quoting 1961 letter from Stephen Spender to Reynolds Price regarding Josselson as the “key man and father figure of the Congress”); Daniel Bell, “Souvenirs: Paris, 1956–57,” *Tocqueville Review* XXI (2000), p. 22 (“moving genius”); François Bondy to Michael Josselson, March 2, 1977, Folder 5, Box 32, MJ (“decisive animator”); Nicolas Nabokov to J.E. Slater, August 11, 1971, Folder 1, Box 23, MJ (“brains and leading spirit”).
- 15 Price Waterhouse & Co. Audit of Congress for Cultural Freedom Statements of Receipts and Disbursements, December 14, 1966, Folder 4, Box 19, MJ.
- 16 Wayne Jackson, *Allen Welsh Dulles as Director of Central Intelligence*, Vol. 1, 1973, pp. 59–60, Box 1, RG 263/24/35/05, National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, Maryland (“NARA”).
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- 18 Christopher Felix (James McCargar), *A Short Course in the Secret War* (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., 1963), p. 104.
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- 22 See generally Coleman, *Liberal Conspiracy*; Pierre Grémion, *Intelligence de l’Anti-Communisme: Le Congrès pour la liberté de la culture à Paris 1950–1975* (Fayard: Paris, 1995); Michael Hochgeschwender, *Freiheit in der Offensive? Der Kongreß für kulturelle Freiheit und die Deutschen* (München: Oldenbourg, 1998).
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 - 26 Hugh Wilford, *The CIA, the British Left, and the Cold War: Calling the Tune?* (London: Frank Cass, 2003), pp. 80–1, 87, 97–8, 103, 113–15, 263, 270–1, 276; Wilford, *Mighty Wurlitzer*, pp. 70–122. See also Ian Wellens, *Music on the Frontline: Nicolas Nabokov’s Struggle against Communism and Middlebrow Culture* (London: Ashgate, 2002), p. 11.
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 - 29 Edward Shils to Michael Josselson, January 13, 1978, Folder 4, Box 24, MJ (noting Josselson’s omission from memoirs of Nicolas Nabokov and Manès Sperber at Josselson’s behest); Diana Josselson to Sidney Hook, Folder 25, Box 16, Sidney Hook Papers, Hoover Institution, Stanford, California (“SH”) (praising Josselson’s omission from Hook’s memoirs); Iain Hamilton to Michael Josselson, February 15, 1977, Folder 2, Box 29, MJ (promising to omit Josselson from his Koestler biography).
 - 30 See, e.g., Michael Josselson to Stephen Spender, September 17, 1966, Folder 6, Box 25, MJ (denying CIA rumors); Michael Josselson unpublished *Ramparts* interview transcript (1967), Folder 4, Box 32, MJ (claiming that the CIA approached him only after he became administrative secretary); Michael Josselson to Edward Shils, November 25, 1974, Folder 4, Box 30, MJ (acknowledging account was untruthful).
 - 31 Michael Josselson to Win Knowlton (Harper & Row president), December 27, 1976, Folder 2, Box 30, MJ.
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 - 38 John Hunt interview, June 9–10, 2007, Lyon, France.
 - 39 Stephen Spender to Michael Josselson, April 10, 1967, Folder 6, Box 25, MJ.
 - 40 Michael Josselson to Sidney Hook, July 21, 1975, Box 2, Folder 30, MJ.
 - 41 Michael Josselson to Nicolas Nabokov, December 13, 1972, Folder 6, Box 30, MJ; Shils, “Remembering the Congress (II).”
 - 42 John Hunt interview.
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 - 44 Michael Josselson to Stephen Spender, April 26, 1967, Folder 4, Box 26, MJ.
 - 45 Bertrand Russell, “The Sobell Case,” *The Manchester Guardian* (March 26, 1956).
 - 46 Michael Josselson to Daniel Bell, April 25, 1956, Folder 8, Box 6, Series I, CCF.

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- 56 Melvin Lasky memorandum, April 1956, Folder 8, Box 241, Series II, CCF.
- 57 Michael Josselson to Stephen Spender and Irving Kristol, May 14, 1956, Folder 4, Box 7, Series I, CCF.
- 58 John Hunt interview.
- 59 *Ibid.*
- 60 See, e.g., Michael Josselson to Stephen Spender, September 17, 1966, Folder 5, Box 26, MJ.
- 61 Daniel Bell interview; see also Laqueur, "The Congress for Cultural Freedom: A Memoir," pp. 246–7; Arthur Koestler to Job Dittberner, October 11, 1972, MS 2395/3, AK.
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- 63 Melvin Lasky, cable to Michael Josselson, October 7, 1956, Folder 7; "Appendix on Future of *Der Monat*," July 4, 1956, Folder 8, both in Box 241, Series II, CCF.
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- 68 John Hunt interview.

1 Berlin

The early years

Many of the men who would become Michael Josselson's CIA colleagues came of age in the infancy of the "American century," their patriotism reinforced by family traditions of government service, boarding schools, and overlapping social circles.¹ Josselson was instead born in 1908 in Tartu, Estonia. "The simple mention of being born in Estonia," Josselson reflected, "inevitably produces an embarrassed 'Oh, yes?' or, what is infinitely worse, the quasi-knowledgeable 'You mean you are from Riga?'"² He was nine when his family fled the Bolshevik Revolution, which reached Estonia in 1917. His father, a Jewish lumber merchant, moved the family to Berlin; they arrived the year before Germany's disastrous defeat in the First World War.³

Josselson came of age in the short-lived golden days of the Weimar Republic, a country plagued by hyperinflation, crippled by the Versailles Treaty, and battered by political crises. Yet it briefly supplanted Paris as a beacon of culture. Historian Peter Gay wrote:

When we think of Weimar we think of modernity in art, literature, and thought; we think of the rebellion of sons against fathers, Dadaists against art, Berliners against beefy philistinism, libertines against old-fashioned moralists; we think of *The Threepenny Opera*, *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*, the *Bauhaus*, Marlene Dietrich.⁴

For Josselson, it gave him the greatest cultural education the twentieth century had to offer, and he attended hundreds of performances. Artur Nikisch, whom Josselson deemed "the dean and forerunner of all the great German conductors," was at the Berlin Philharmonic. Violinist Yehudi Menuhin soloed there as a boy. In the Grosse Schauspielhaus, Max Reinhardt put on productions of *Julius Caesar*.⁵ Berlin's "quite large" Russian expatriate colony of "perhaps fifty thousand" was, Josselson felt, a "world in itself," where intellectuals mingled with "doctors, lawyers, businessmen." He knew Vladimir Nabokov as a "very good tennis player" from the courts on the Lietzenburger Strasse and devoured his short stories.⁶ "Mike's notions of culture and the importance of culture," Hunt reflected, "came from Germany."⁷

But, by the late twenties, the Nazi Party's inroads among universities made Germany an uncomfortable place for a Jewish émigré. In 1928, three semesters

into a history degree at the University of Berlin and running out of money, Josselson accepted a job with Gimbels, the American department store.⁸ The offer was not just well-timed luck. Josselson had wangled a student internship at Gimbels' Berlin office buying toys and luxury goods for American stores.⁹ Taken on his first trip to meet a seller, a Czech handbag manufacturer, twenty-year-old Josselson made a deal for several thousand handbags at a price far below the one his boss had futilely demanded for hours. His career as a buyer seemed assured.¹⁰

The job had a certain glamor. Gimbels was then the premier department store in America and the biggest buyer in Europe, and department stores were also auction houses, galleries, and sponsors of art exhibitions. Gimbels sponsored a tour of Cubists around the country, displayed Rembrandts in its old masters gallery, and put on two concerts daily. Along with its competitors, Gimbels was "more influential than all the nation's museums combined" in exposing Americans to fine art, according to the president of New York's Metropolitan Museum.¹¹

By 1935, Josselson, then aged twenty-seven, was in charge of all Gimbels purchases from Czechoslovakia. Two years later, he was in Paris as the head of all European purchases, choosing everything from couture to sundries. He joined the French Racing Association and the Chamber of Commerce. His travels took him to Berlin, Prague, and even the Soviet Union. He began dating Colette Joubert, a blonde Frenchwoman who worked at Saks.

Then war began, and European markets collapsed. Josselson had safe passage to America, but Colette's visa took nerve-wracking months. They arrived in New York just before the fall of France, married in Cuba, and moved to Gimbels' Pittsburgh headquarters.¹² Josselson became a citizen in 1942 and an Army conscript in 1943.¹³ He would never live in America again.

In the Army, Josselson advanced quickly. His fluency in Russian, French, and German as well as English drew the attention of General Robert McClure's Psychological Warfare Division, created in 1944 as the nerve center for all psychological activities against the Axis powers.¹⁴ He became an interrogator; the job "amounted to our roaming around and constituting the eyes and ears of the intelligence section of the PWD up and down the Front, or rather prisoner of war cages," his colleague Leo Fialkoff remembered.¹⁵

Four years after fleeing the continent, Josselson was in newly liberated France, spending twelve-hour days interrogating prisoners of war. Occasionally, figures from his old life beckoned him back. In the champagne houses at Reims, the managers abandoned prominent American clients to embrace him. He attended the *Théâtre de la Mode*, the legendary Paris couture show staged with puppets due to fabric shortages.¹⁶ But, by now, Josselson saw the war as a welcome escape from his old life as a buyer – "They were only interested in money, nothing else."¹⁷ His marriage was over.¹⁸ His unit was bound for Berlin; as one of the only Russian speakers in the unit, he was the obvious choice for the position of liaison to the quadripartite government.¹⁹ In July 1945, Josselson thus was among the first Americans to arrive in the home he had left two decades before.²⁰



Figure 1.1 Michael Josselson (right) with his brother Peter, Paris, 1938 (reproduced with permission of Jennifer Josselson Vorbach).

THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

ORIGINAL
TO BE GIVEN TO
THE PERSON NATURALIZED

CERTIFICATE OF
NATURALIZATION

No. 5547312

Religion No. 135844

Personal description of holder as of date of naturalization: Age 34 years, sex Male, color White, complexion Medium, color of eyes Brown, color of hair Brown, height 5 feet 8 inches, weight 190 pounds, visible distinctive marks None, Marital Status Married, former nationality Estonia

I certify that the description above given is true, and that the photograph affixed hereto is a likeness of me.

Michael Josselson
(Complete and true signature of holder)

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
WESTERN DIST. OF PENNSYLVANIA } ss:

Be it known, that at a term of the _____ District _____ Court of
The United States

held pursuant to law at _____ Pittsburgh
on June 25th, 1942, the Court having found that
MICHAEL JOSSELSOHN
then residing at 4740 Baum Blvd., Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania
intends to reside permanently in the United States (when so required by the
Naturalization Laws of the United States), had in all other respects complied with
the applicable provisions of such naturalization laws, and was entitled to be
admitted to citizenship, thereupon ordered that such person be and he was
admitted as a citizen of the United States of America.

In testimony whereof the seal of the court's clerk is hereunto affixed this 25th
day of June in the year of our Lord nineteen hundred and
and forty-two and of our Independence the one hundred
and sixty-sixth.

G. H. BERGER,
Clerk of the U. S. District Court.

By *H. Collins* Deputy Clerk.

DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

It is a violation of the U. S. Code and
punishable as such to copy, print, photograph,
or otherwise illegally use this certificate.



Figure 1.2 Josselson, as shown in his naturalization form, became a naturalized U.S. citizen in 1942 (reproduced with permission of the Ransom Center).

Nothing in Berlin seemed to have escaped the war. The city center was a graveyard of shelled tanks. The Reichstag had lain abandoned since the 1933 fire, its columns mottled by burn marks. The Tiergarten was a field of stubs, its stately trees long since hacked into firewood.²¹ Corpses clogged the canals; summer heat made the smell unbearable.²² Prewar Berlin's busiest intersection had reverted to nature; wild rabbits darted through a dark mass of overgrown weeds and nettles.²³

The Red Army had won the Battle of Berlin with block-by-block fighting. For the next two months it was the sole victor on the ground, and it descended with a vengeance, raping tens of thousands of women, from preadolescent girls to great-grandmothers.²⁴ Berlin had lost one-third of its population, and, of the survivors, half a million women were reduced to prostitution.²⁵ Food shortages worsened; Berliners subsisted on under 1,000 calories a day.²⁶

Yet signs of recovery emerged. Less than three weeks after the surrender, the Philharmonic was playing Mendelssohn's joyful Overture to *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, banned under the Nazis.²⁷ Theaters, opera houses, and symphonies performed anew. Cabarets came back by the dozen.²⁸ A thriving black market sprung up in Alexanderplatz, fueled by Russian soldiers flush with newly

minted occupation marks. (The American government had made the expensive mistake of turning over its own currency plates so Stalin could pay his soldiers years of back pay.) In Russia, a watch could be exchanged for an entire cow; in Berlin, Red Army soldiers wore half a dozen per arm, and the Mickey Mouse watch became Berlin's most prized commodity.²⁹

In the two months before Josselson arrived with the first wave of American occupiers, the Soviet Military Administration in Germany (SMAD) set its own plans in motion. Those plans became the province of Colonel Sergei Tulpanov, head of SMAD's Information Department.³⁰ Born in 1901 to a family of educated peasants, Tulpanov was forty-four when he came to Berlin, immense, egg-bald, and a protégé of Andrei Zhdanov, the Cominform's future head. Tulpanov arrived fluent in German and with a singular feel for the situation on the ground. In his view, the creation of a divided Germany was inevitable; the object was to consolidate Soviet control as rapidly as possible.

At a time when other Soviet commanders favored slowly building a sphere of influence without risking access to West German industrial centers, Tulpanov was an outlier. His rivals lobbied their superiors in Moscow for his removal. That his parents were convicted spies made him a perennial candidate for investigation. Time was of the essence, because he could never be certain which way the winds in Moscow might shift. Tulpanov would eventually be sent back to Leningrad under a cloud of suspicion in September 1949. But, until then, he dominated Soviet occupation policy because he could adapt to, and anticipate, developments in Germany in ways his rivals could not – and because Stalin, watching behind the scenes, wanted to see how much he could achieve.³¹

Within months, Tulpanov resurrected the German Communist Party and began engineering its hostile takeover of the Social Democrats.³² He appeared at “every political meeting from Leipzig and Dresden to Chemnitz and Rostock,” recalled one observer, and:

explained why Marxism was an irrefutable science ... where the German people could find peace and security (in opting for a Communist alliance with the USSR); when they would be genuinely free and reunited (the day the revolutionary mass pressure would get the Americans out of Europe).

Tulpanov ensured that Stalin was everywhere, overseeing Berliners from larger-than-life posters announcing, “The Hitlers come and go, but the German people and the German State remain!” Germany's all-too-recent experience with one form of totalitarianism compounded the difficulties of consolidating Soviet control. But Tulpanov persisted, even candidly acknowledging the “shameful” excesses of the Red Army – only to find his remarks censored by the Soviet sector newspaper.³³

Long before Germany's surrender, the Soviet Union recognized the role German cultural figures might play as tools of political persuasion and planned accordingly. A week after Germany's surrender, General Berzarin hosted two hundred German artists and writers in a show of hospitality.³⁴ Freight trains

carried volumes of Marx, Engels, and Lenin to book-starved Germany.³⁵ Radio channels ran Soviet-controlled programming; Soviet movies were showing in theaters three weeks after the surrender.³⁶ The Soviets even had a special rationing system for intellectuals, giving them better portions depending on their perceived stature.³⁷

In Tulpanov's hands, the Soviet campaign evolved into a calculated celebration of Germany's storied past. Germany, Tulpanov well knew, was a country where writers and artists had not only enjoyed disproportionate political and moral sway, but also defined German identity. The Nazis had exploited this by attributing the greatness of German philosophers, performers, artists, and writers to the superiority of the German *Volk*. Under one view, the Holocaust and all the other evils the regime perpetrated could be traced back to a pervasive defect in German culture; from Nietzsche, Wagner, and Goethe emerged Hitler.³⁸

Tulpanov took the opposite tack, blaming Hitler and the higher echelons of Nazi officialdom alone. German culture, as portrayed by the Soviets, was both separable from the regime and something the Soviets understood and venerated. "Overtly, towards the Germans, they began from the very outset to play the role of patrons of German art, German music and German culture," recalled an American official.³⁹ Tulpanov paid his respects to the Nobel Prize winners Thomas Mann and the dramatist Gerhart Hauptmann.⁴⁰ His officers – generally well-educated, cultured, cosmopolitan, and Jewish – could reel off lengthy passages by the poet Heinrich Heine in flawless German.⁴¹ Within months, the new Aufbau Verlag was reissuing editions of Goethe and Schiller.⁴² The Soviet House of Culture offered warmth, luxurious surroundings, and a well-stocked library (though, on close inspection, its portrait of the first Soviet in 1917 featured a conspicuous gap in Trotsky's place.)⁴³ Germans might never forgive the Red Army's pillaging, but Tulpanov hoped that dazzling performances and a nod to common cultural ground could mitigate the sting of occupation.⁴⁴

This approach also dictated leniency in the denazification process. If the actor Gustaf Gründgens and the conductor Wilhelm Furtwängler – the Nazi regime's two most feted living artists, and still overwhelmingly popular – could be celebrated again, ordinary Germans could feel secure that they, too, were absolved.⁴⁵ The other Allies summarily rejected the director Wolfgang Staudte's script for *The Murderers Are Among Us*, reasoning that the Germans could not yet be trusted to return to filmmaking. Tulpanov's cultural commissar, Colonel Alexander Dymshitz, gave the green light for its production in fall 1945, and the film became Germany's first postwar domestic movie; millions flocked to it. The film's very existence seemed proof of the Soviet Union's cultural sophistication. And Dymshitz's unseen interference guaranteed the desired message – that justice against former Nazis belonged to the state alone – came across even as the film was celebrated as the rebirth of independent German filmmaking.⁴⁶

Josselson came to Germany as part of an occupation government whose approach has been described as "a repetition of what eighty years previously the victorious Union had conferred upon the defeated South after the Civil War." The losers were not just defeated; the moral foundations of their societies were

also vanquished.⁴⁷ (Informed of the comparison, General Lucius Clay, head of the American occupation government and a proud native of Georgia, retorted that “I didn’t exactly fancy myself being cast into the role of one of Margaret Mitchell’s marauders in *Gone With the Wind*.”⁴⁸)

The official policy of the U.S. Office of Military Government in Germany (OMGUS) was that proper democratic values had to be imposed through the “four Ds”: demilitarization, denazification, decentralization, and democratization.⁴⁹ During the first months of the occupation, Americans were prohibited from social contact with Germans until their loyalties could be ascertained.⁵⁰ OMGUS’s denazification policy equated acquiescence in the Nazi regime with complicity; Germans were to be blacklisted unless they could prove their lack of involvement.⁵¹

American policy thus reflected skepticism that German culture should be rebuilt at all. If all vestiges of the Nazi regime were to be rooted out, officials reasoned, anyone who had served even a symbolic role to the Nazis should be deprived of influence. If Germans wanted to read newspapers and magazines, listen to radio, watch films, or attend performances, they would do so only in outlets authorized by General McClure’s Information Control Division (ICD), PWD’s successor.⁵²

Thus, according to an ICD Music Control officer, “Officially, we were supposed to be concerned only with the following: (1) to eject the Nazis from German musical life and license those German musicians . . . whom we believed to be ‘clean’ Germans. (2) To control the programmes of German concerts” so “they would not turn into nationalist manifestations,” and “(3) To guard and protect the ‘monuments’ and ‘treasures’ of Germany’s culture” that were now under American jurisdiction.⁵³

Anyone who wanted to perform or publish had to first go through the denazification process, beginning with the despised *Fragebogen*, 131 questions surveying an applicant’s personal and professional histories and contacts. ICD intelligence officers sorted applicants into three categories: white, able to take any job in the American sector without restriction; “gray acceptable,” allowed to work, but barred from senior positions; and “gray unacceptable” and blacklisted, allowed only manual labor. A single application could take six months, and the maddeningly slow pace made for few performances, films, or books in the American sector.^{54,55}

Josselson’s first posts, which he held until March 1946, were as ICD’s Chief Intelligence Officer and liaison to the Soviet occupying government – mid-level positions that required considerable work but carried little real authority.⁵⁶ ICD’s intelligence officers significantly influenced the outcome of applications for cultural positions by interviewing applicants and contacts and assessing who wanted to do what in which proposed organization.⁵⁷ Eventually, as the American representative on the Cultural Affairs Commission of the Allied Kommandatura, the body that approved all denazification decisions, Josselson attended meetings on such issues as whether proposed equestrian clubs, circuses, and writers’ groups should be allowed and whether architects should be classified as artists or professionals.⁵⁸

But, as a matter of official policy, nothing was to be done about the Soviet cultural campaign. Until 1947, OMGUS's view was that the Soviets' "almost fanatical worship of art and artists, paired with the belief that artistic activity is in itself good and necessary for the people in times of uncertainty and suffering," showed they shared Germany's moral weakness. "It seems as though the Russians are inclined to forget a great deal when it comes to artists," chided one report. "They seem to consider them a different species who are hardly to be held accountable."⁵⁹

OMGUS was intensely bureaucratic, but it was also an anomaly. Tasked with executing sweeping policies in an unfamiliar context, officials able to get things done could operate well outside the lines of their job descriptions. Across ICD, freewheeling officials – mostly émigrés who knew Germany and its culture – flouted OMGUS's official non-recognition of the Soviet cultural offensive and engaged with German artists and writers.⁶⁰

Josselson, like Tulpanov, thus arrived in Berlin with an enormous advantage: his total ease operating in Germany, and his familiarity with its cultural figures, made him disproportionately influential – despite being seriously ill much of the time. "Something was much amiss and although he was in and out of the hospital for observation during the year and a half I was there, the doctors were never able to precisely diagnose what was wrong," recalled a former colleague. "He was terribly, and understandably, depressed by all this." Meanwhile, Josselson "was under tremendous pressures in his work – a huge operation, understaffed (and the staff there was pretty mediocre) and endlessly mired in Army red tape, that he had to run virtually singlehanded."⁶¹

Josselson at least found a kindred spirit among his new colleagues: Nicolas Nabokov, cousin of Josselson's prewar, tennis-playing friend, the novelist Vladimir Nabokov, a composer and irrepressible bon vivant, arrived in Berlin in August 1945 as a fellow ICD officer tasked with the denazification of German music.⁶² His longtime friend Arthur Schlesinger Jr. described him as "a tall man with a great mop of tousled, snow-white hair," "a notable raconteur in half a dozen languages," "a notable mimic," and, "rare in an artist, a penetrating and ironical intelligence."⁶³ His circle of acquaintances encompassed everyone from foreign policy heavyweights like Isaiah Berlin and Chip Bohlen to photographer Henri Cartier-Bresson.⁶⁴ Drawn together by their shared love of music, Nabokov and Josselson bonded over the sense that "like most policies, ours was far removed from reality," as Nabokov put it. Denazification was a small part of what they saw as their real work: "trying to help the Germans re-establish a semblance, a modicum of culture after the twelve years of the Third Reich."⁶⁵

After the initial interview, most intelligence officers never spoke again with the artists and writers whose fates they influenced.⁶⁶ Josselson courted them even after the denazification process was done; his parties became a neutral meeting ground for German artists and performers who had stayed in Germany and exiles who had been forced to leave. Austrian writer Hilde Spiel and her husband Peter de Mendelssohn, the German historian turned ICD officer, had fled the *Anschluss*; they attended Josselson's soirees alongside Jürgen Fehling, the

eminent theater director, who had continued work under the Nazis.⁶⁷ Josselson also threw a well-attended party for Gustaf Gründgens, Goring's favorite actor, whose privileged position under the Nazis was made precarious by his homosexuality and his efforts to aid Jewish and Communist colleagues. The Soviets interned him, then abruptly cleared him; the other Allies blacklisted him; Josselson befriended him.⁶⁸

"I was deeply involved in the birth of a new democratic cultural life in postwar Germany," Josselson reflected. "During these years my interests broadened enormously and I became very familiar with the European political and cultural scene and with the statesmen and artists and intellectuals who were influencing events."⁶⁹ Like many returning exiles, he seems to have acknowledged "how many shades and gradations of thought and behavior there had been toward the Nazi regime on the part of the intellectuals who had remained in Germany." Spiel considered that, "We learned to judge, and if possible not to condemn, each person by his or her individual inclinations toward resolution, steadfastness, or quite simply a sense of morality."⁷⁰

Berlin was also Josselson's political awakening. He arrived in Berlin as an essentially apolitical operator, and relations with the Soviets were warm at first. At a memorable dinner General McClure held for Tulpanov in November 1945, the evening ended with Josselson and Nabokov "singing Russian songs and also 'We're Working on the Railroad.'"⁷¹ But, within two years, such camaraderie was unthinkable. "Colonel Dymshitz bows, but our relationship with the Russians is over, on our part rather than theirs, for with their hypocrisy they would probably go on making conversation indefinitely," Spiel recorded in spring 1947.⁷² "They began at first secretly, then openly, to castigate the Americans and the British as suppressors of German culture, pointing at our 'hands-off' policy with an accusing finger," Nabokov recalled.⁷³

OMGUS's aim of barring compromised figures from German cultural life had become impossible. While OMGUS blacklisted performers it deemed complicit in the Third Reich, the Soviets swiftly cleared anyone of significance and heralded them as symbols of German cultural greatness at performances in the Soviet sector.⁷⁴ In theory, all four powers had to agree on denazification decisions through the Kommandatura's Cultural Affairs Commission. In practice, Josselson complained, the Soviets so often flouted decisions that the Commission's work was pointless.⁷⁵ Individual performers held up in OMGUS's lengthy process used the threat of heading to the Soviet sector as leverage. Men like Josselson – familiar with all the players and skilled in difficult negotiations – became essential brokers.⁷⁶

In spring 1947, the case of Wilhelm Furtwängler vividly illustrated these dynamics, and created a crisis for OMGUS. Under the Nazis, Furtwängler presided over the Philharmonic, consulted for the Propaganda Ministry, and performed at Nazi events. But Furtwängler had also declined to join the Nazi party, defended the modernist composer Paul Hindemith at some cost, and saved some Jewish members of the Philharmonic from detention. He fled to Switzerland before the war ended, and was furious that OMGUS, which saw him as the

cultural symbol of Nazism, had barred him *in absentia* from performing. Most Germans considered him no more complicit than they were; they overwhelmingly wanted him cleared.⁷⁷

General McClure, however, deemed Furtwängler's return impossible "when we are endeavoring to eliminate all vestiges of Nazism." Meanwhile, Tulpanov engineered Furtwängler's arrival. A February 1946 letter in the Soviet zone's *Berliner Zeitung* announced: "We who . . . seek to rebuild a new and democratic Germany need you, the highest symbol of artistic perfection, to arouse German self-consciousness against the relapse into barbarism that was National Socialism." By March, Furtwängler was on a Berlin-bound Soviet plane; by June, he was cleared for work in the Soviet sector and promised the State Opera.⁷⁸

But Furtwängler's aim was to return to the Philharmonic – which was in the American sector. He agreed to the only denazification process OMGUS would recognize: clearance by the German-run Schlüterstrasse committee, with sign-off from the Kommandatura's Cultural Affairs Committee. But, months later, a subcommittee vetoed Furtwängler's removal from the blacklist, prompting a storm of criticism. OMGUS was soon forced to soften its position. Better to clear Furtwängler for work in the American sector, OMGUS decided, than to stand by while the Soviets exploited his case as a cause célèbre.

Furtwängler was told his case would be reconsidered in six months. Then the Schlüterstrasse committee – misreading what it believed were OMGUS's wishes – expressed concern about whether Furtwängler had used his position to harm supporters of his rival Herbert von Karajan. It refused to decide the case until ICD furnished further information. ICD, however, had just adopted a new policy of non-interference in German denazification decisions. Officials panicked, and unconvincingly attributed the stalemate to a "paper shortage" as papers in the Soviet zone mocked American policy.⁷⁹

Fed up, Furtwängler "came to East Berlin and gave a press conference there threatening to go to Moscow if we would not clear him at once," Nabokov recalled. Josselson spirited him to Nabokov's billet, where the three spent hours discussing Bach, Bayreuth, and Brahms.⁸⁰ Then Josselson intervened. He told the Schlüterstrasse committee that no more files would be forthcoming and that they risked an investigation by OMGUS's Public Security Review Board. Furtwängler was cleared by the end of December 1946.⁸¹

Thereafter, Nabokov returned to the United States, while Josselson stayed on.⁸² "The great event of this spring of 1947 in Berlin was the return of Furtwängler," Spiel recalled. "Josselson, the passionate music lover, had personally seen to the denazification of the *Herr Staatsrat*."⁸³ OMGUS was spared further backlash from German public opinion – though its original denazification policy was now in tatters. Josselson's reputation as a fixer grew. More than ever, Josselson was convinced that "the Russians are trying to beat the Western Allies" through signs of "their own efficiency and good will towards the German people." Tulpanov had become "the ferocious 'enemy'" – and Josselson had become his adversary on the cultural battlefield.⁸⁴

Notes

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- 72 Spiel, *Dark and the Bright*, p. 242.
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- 74 Janik, *Recomposing German Music*, pp. 131–4.
- 75 “Appendix to minutes of 17 November 1947,” December 2, 1947, in RG 84, Records of Foreign Service Posts, Germany: US Mission Berlin, Cultural Affairs Committee, Box 3, 84/350/56/35/05, NARA.
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2 Intellectuals

From Communism to anti-Communism

The intellectuals who would form the Congress for Cultural Freedom came to oppose Communism through a quite different path. In the 1930s, while Josselson made deals for handbags and glass in Prague, many of them joined the Communist Party. For some, it was a passing enthusiasm; for others, Trotskyism sufficed. But they were all, in some sense, a “twice-born generation,” men who “were intense, horatory, naïve, simplistic, and passionate,” then “disenchanted and reflective,” wrote Daniel Bell.¹ Their determination to build a postwar world outside the reach of Communism’s flawed ideals was born from their experiences, and the events of the thirties were the lens through which they viewed the early Cold War.²

Above all, they remembered five days at the end of a sweltering June in 1935, when many of them had made their way to Paris’s Left Bank for the Mutualité Congress, the event that came to symbolize the mood of the era.³ That spring, vague invitations had gone out to hundreds of writers, scientists, artists, and philosophers, announcing that “[i]n the face of the dangers which threaten culture in a number of countries, a group of writers are taking the initiative of bringing together a congress in order to examine and discuss the means for defending that culture.”⁴

At the time, the *Oxford English Dictionary* defined the “intelligentsia” as “the class consisting of the educated portion of the population regarded as capable of forming public opinion.”⁵ France was in decline as a world power, but for a few decades more the Left Bank was still at the center of the intellectual universe. “The Republic of Letters,” wrote the critic and essayist Jean Guéhenno, was the place “in which ideas are unmade and remade,” and was “wholly contained in a few Parisian houses, some cramped magazine or publishing offices, some drawing rooms, some cafés, some artists’ studios, some attic rooms.”⁶ André Gide and André Malraux drank and debated their way through nights at Café Les Deux Magots; in the morning, they ambled a few doors down to the offices of *La Nouvelle Revue Française*, the era’s most influential journal. Paul Nizan, the novelist and philosopher, was, at thirty, the lead writer for the daily *Ce Soir*. There, too, was Pablo Picasso and his group.⁷ At nearly seventy, the Nobel Prize-winning dramatist Romain Rolland was the group’s elder statesman; he soon became ubiquitous in the antiwar, anti-fascist groups that sprung up.⁸

Newcomers fleeing fascism had flooded to Paris in droves. Arthur Koestler, then an itinerant journalist, came in 1933 after a lengthy tour of the Soviet Union.⁹ Austrian writer Manès Sperber fled Red Vienna, where he had trained as an engineer, and became a regular in Malraux's circle, as did Nicola Chiaromonte, the charismatic writer and refugee from Mussolini's Italy. German writers Gustav Regler and Anna Seghers arrived in the early exodus from Hitler's Germany.¹⁰

These men and women, and the delegates joining them at the Mutualité Congress, were not merely united by an abstract commitment to the life of the mind. For them, political action was the natural consequence of their shared ideals, and those ideals were rooted in Communism. Gide wrote of the Soviet Union as "this gigantic and still so human enterprise" and professed, "If my life were necessary to assure the success of the USSR, I should sacrifice it at once."¹¹ Nizan's rise to fame coincided with his ascent within the Party's ranks; *Ce Soir* was the Party daily. Surrealist poet Louis Aragon's poetry extolled the Party; he even consulted with Party apparatchiks before publishing issues of *Ce Soir*.¹² Rolland lobbied for intellectuals to join together in a *front unique* with workers to protect the Soviet Union against what he saw as imperialist warmongering.¹³ Koestler, Sperber, and Regler enlisted in the Party's secret propaganda work.¹⁴

The International Writers' Congress, held at the Palais de la Mutualité, endures as the symbol of intellectuals' enthrallment with Communism.¹⁵ Everyone there understood that the danger vaguely intimated in the invitation was fascism. Virtually everyone agreed that Communism was the only serious counterweight. Gide, Malraux, Julien Benda, E.M. Forster, Aldous Huxley, George Bernard Shaw, the English poets Stephen Spender and W.H. Auden, and the American writers John Dos Passos, John Steinbeck, James Farrell, and Sinclair Lewis all attended. Crowds of thousands craned their necks to spot star delegates. Barefoot children bestowed flowers. Beer flowed freely. Attendees spontaneously sang the Internationale.¹⁶ Never before, and perhaps never again, would intellectuals mobilize around a cause with such a singular degree of unanimity. This unanimity was no accident. The Comintern – the branch of the Soviet government devoted to propagandizing the Soviet experiment and fomenting revolution through subversion abroad – controlled the event from beginning to end.¹⁷

In retrospect, the era's defining feature was that intellectuals were extolling the virtues of Soviet Communism just as Stalin was killing tens of millions of his own citizens in the name of that very cause. "Numberless men of letters, both in Europe and America were attracted to Communism," wrote Labour politician Richard Crossman, and "their conversion ... expressed, in an acute and sometimes in a hysterical form, feelings which were dimly shared by the inarticulate millions who felt that Russia was 'on the side of the workers.'" ¹⁸ "For most American intellectuals," the critic Robert Warshaw observed, "the Communist movement of the 1930s was a crucial experience," and "there was a time when virtually all intellectual vitality was derived in one way or another from the Communist party."¹⁹ How did the leading minds of a generation get to this point,

convinced that their highest calling was to hasten the coming of a world revolution while accepting direction from the Communist Party? This was the question that later consumed repentant former converts in countless memoirs, most prominently in *The God That Failed* (1949).²⁰

The twentieth century had begun with the Great War, which claimed millions of lives, rewrote European geography, and sapped liberal democracy of its perceived legitimacy.²¹ As many European and American intellectuals saw it, Europe's very identity was under assault from American-style mass capitalism, mass production, and mass culture.²² Soviet writer Ilya Ehrenburg captured the mood in his influential novel *The Life of the Automobile* (1929), suggesting that such conditions destroyed individualism and social conscience. Pierre, the protagonist, working at an automobile factory, realizes:

the Newcomer was still green. . . . He believed in books, discussions, in self-education groups, and in the world revolution. Pierre no longer believed in anything . . . Pierre no longer ran the machine, the machine ran him. . . . He forgot about the brotherhood of man. He understood only one thing. Nothing could possibly change. The conveyor belt moved. Against that, all arguments were powerless.²³

T.S. Eliot, worlds apart from Ehrenburg politically, warned that mass culture would muddle the distinctions between high and low culture and destroy both.²⁴

These were broad stereotypes, but they were virtually articles of faith to European and American intellectuals. American mass culture had traveled to Europe; few American intellectuals had. Unlike their European counterparts, American intellectuals barely existed as a discrete and acknowledged class. Those who spent considerable time in Europe – Hemingway, Gertrude Stein, John Dos Passos, Henry James – were refugees eager to assimilate, not ambassadors for their home country. Eliot reflected that his poetry, “in its sources, in its emotional springs . . . comes from America” – but he also became a British subject and claimed that his poetry “wouldn't be what it is if I had stayed in America.”²⁵

When the Depression came, then, it was easy for many intellectuals to believe that capitalism was in its dying stages. The European middle class was decimated. Homelessness was rampant. The gap between the isolated rich and the multitudinous poor looked unbridgeable.²⁶ In this void, the twin extremes of Communism and fascism seemed to many like the radical remedies the continent needed to recover. And, to intellectuals, fascism, with its brutal racism and declared hostility to the left, was no alternative at all.²⁷

Communism seemed the only cause committed to addressing inequities while holding Hitler and Mussolini at bay. The Soviet Union, barely a decade old, was touted as the future, its experiments in economic planning and a classless society heralded as successes. As an ideology – i.e., a total world view predicated on a deterministic set of assumptions – Communism offered ready answers to the problems of capitalism and a self-contained, seemingly infallible set of beliefs

promising an egalitarian future.²⁸ Surrounded by economic collapse, Communism offered a simple explanation: the class structure, and the inherent tensions between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, caused this destruction. Those same forces would inevitably lead to revolution, the end of the state, and the rise of a proletarian utopia. “I became converted because I was ripe for it and lived in a disintegrating society thirsting for faith,” reflected Arthur Koestler.²⁹ “[T]he Party became family, school, church, barracks,” the writer and Italian Communist Party founder Ignazio Silone wrote, and “the world that lay beyond it was to be destroyed and built anew.”³⁰

That the Soviet Union was under attack from all sides only heightened its appeal. In Germany, the 1933 Reichstag fire, blamed on the Communists, led to their mass arrests, expulsion from parliamentary positions, and consolidation of control by the Nazis.³¹ In Britain, the Communist Party was legal, but its members were subject to surveillance and deportation, which made them a sympathetic group in intellectuals’ eyes.³² Political engagement, whether in the form of starting newspapers and journals, formally joining the Party, enlisting in front organizations, delivering speeches, or extolling the correct values in one’s writing, became intellectuals’ avowed calling. “A member of the intelligentsia could never become a real proletarian,” Koestler wrote, “but his duty was to become as nearly one as he could.”³³

Self-interest also played a role. The Soviet Union sponsored books by Western writers who eagerly touted its progress towards an ideal society after carefully orchestrated tours.³⁴ Rather than elevating the intellectual, “[t]here resulted a disastrous vulgarization of intellectual life,” where “every act and every idea had behind it some ‘larger consideration’ which destroyed its honesty and its meaning,” Warshaw reflected. Communism, far from insulating against mass culture, ushered it in; middlebrow literature with the “right” messages became indistinguishable from “serious” art.³⁵ There were ample incentives to ignore signs that the Soviet Union was not the paradise it proclaimed. And shortcomings could be rationalized as “the necessary life, the necessary slander,” the transient growing pains of a new society.³⁶ In 1935, before Stalin’s worst purges began in earnest, harsher explanations seemed inconceivable to enthralled intellectuals.³⁷

Behind this façade stood the Comintern, and behind the Comintern was Willi Münzenberg, the pied piper of the interwar Communist movement. Münzenberg – a “shortish, squat, heavy-boned” man who “looked like a master-cobbler in a Thuringian village” and “sauntered into a room with the casualness of a tank bursting through a wall” – was also a “fiery, demagogical, and irresistible public speaker, and a born leader of men,” remembered Koestler, who worked for him in Paris.³⁸ “If he had been an American,” wrote the historian François Furet, “he would have been another Hearst.”³⁹

But Münzenberg was instead born to a Thuringian bar-keeper, and in Bern, as a twenty-six-year-old Communist who had developed one of Europe’s most sophisticated smuggling systems, he chanced into Lenin’s inner circle of Bolsheviks before the revolution. He saw them off on the fateful train to the Finland

Station, left behind over a passport issue. Five years later, he was in charge of orchestrating the Soviet Union's international propaganda effort.⁴⁰ His "activity was so multifarious and ubiquitous," the British writer Goronwy Rees reflected, "that in a sense it would be true to say that the great anti-fascist crusade of the thirties was an invention of Münzenberg's."⁴¹

Münzenberg's greatest innovation was to pioneer the use of front organizations – ostensibly independent organizations for charitable or political purposes – to enlist innocents to the cause. Their press releases and petitions were deliberately vague, to capture the widest possible coalition of signatories. And their activities and fundraising were dedicated to winning adherents to Communism in the West. Münzenberg began by transforming the Volga famine from a devastating indictment of mismanaged central planning into a worldwide relief campaign, spearheaded by a famine relief organization that branded itself as a way for outsiders to contribute to the Soviet experiment. He raised millions; little actually went to famine relief.⁴²

Münzenberg then attracted the era's most prominent intellectuals to the International Workers' Relief Committee, the League Against Imperialism, the League Against War and Fascism, and the World Committee for the Relief of Victims of German Fascism, among other groups. All were ostensibly non-political organizations for peace, intellectual freedom, and anti-fascism. All were also dedicated to proclaiming that Soviet Communism stood for these ideals. Publications, production companies, and news services followed. The fronts were soon providing other Comintern operatives with cover and functioning as recruiting grounds for Soviet agents, among them Kim Philby, the most effective of the Cambridge Five spies.⁴³

Münzenberg's efforts produced seemingly remarkable results. His front organizations predated the Popular Front, but Koestler and the poet Stephen Spender, among others, credited them with facilitating its later political successes.⁴⁴ Intellectuals devoted themselves to what they believed was a just cause, only to disavow their responsiveness to Münzenberg's cues. Malraux reflected that:

French politics has always had its writers on call, from Voltaire to Victor Hugo. They played an important role in the Dreyfus affair. They thought they had rediscovered that role at the time of the Popular Front. But already they were being used. This utilization, on the Communist side, was worked out with considerable cleverness by Willi Münzenberg.⁴⁵

Across the Atlantic, "[t]he greatest triumph of Communist propaganda ... was the creation of the papier-mâché front organizations," Bell recalled. "Many poor dupes, imagining that they were the leaders of the great causes, found themselves enslaved by the opium of publicity and became pliable tools of Communist manipulators behind the scenes."⁴⁶

In June 1935, none of this self-examination was apparent. The Soviet Union was yet an unblemished ideal, and the Mutualité Congress the embodiment of intellectuals' conviction that their collective influence could move the

world towards a progressive future. Münzenberg was not there – even then, his standing with Stalin had begun to falter – but this Congress was, like all others, his inspiration.⁴⁷

By 1935, congresses were hardly parades of innocents, nor was Münzenberg and the Comintern's influence invisible. For over a decade, the London *Times* had run exposés of Münzenberg's most important fronts.⁴⁸ In 1932, Münzenberg had presided at the Amsterdam–Pleyel meeting, which launched the antiwar popular front among intellectuals. Romain Rolland had lauded him as “this great artist in revolutions.” Even Münzenberg's role in the Comintern was well known.⁴⁹ And the degree of control the Comintern exercised over the congresses, front organizations, and affiliated magazines was so apparent that, somewhere along the way, participants had chosen either to remain ignorant or to rationalize the Comintern's interference.

The Mutualité Congress very nearly established the consensus that the Comintern sought. Speaker after distinguished speaker struck the same themes. Gide announced confidently that “what the Soviet Union is beginning to show us after a difficult period of struggles ... is a condition of society which would permit the fullest development of each man.” Louis Aragon extolled “the new slogan of Soviet literature: Soviet realism. Culture is no longer something for just a handful of people.”⁵⁰ The speakers had submitted their remarks months beforehand, and the organizers had weeded out any aberrations.⁵¹

Yet, for a few tense minutes at the end of the penultimate day, the veneer cracked. Gaetano Salvemini, an elderly, bespectacled Italian parliamentarian in exile, was granted the floor thanks to his friendship with Gide. His speech began by blandly denouncing censorship as an evil in fascist and bourgeois societies. Then Salvemini announced:

I would not feel as though I had the right to protest against the Gestapo and against the Fascist OVRA if I endeavored to forget about the existence of a Soviet political police.... In Germany there are concentration camps, in Italy there are penitentiary islands, and in Soviet Russia there is Siberia – it is in Russia that Victor Serge is a prisoner.

That last remark caused a sensation. Serge was the subject that the Comintern and the Congress's organizers most strenuously wished to avoid.⁵² In 1928, Stalin had expelled Serge, a well-respected Russian revolutionary writer and former Comintern member, for aligning with Stalin's political enemies. In 1933, Stalin interned him in the Urals. Friends in Paris formed the Comité Victor-Serge and repeatedly demanded his release. His case, of course, put lie to Stalin's claim that writers were free to write and act as they wished. To mention Serge, as Salvemini did, was to jeopardize the entire edifice.⁵³

The moment passed. Subsequent mentions of Serge were drowned out in boos, and Ilya Ehrenburg, Gide, and Malraux restored order. But the damage was done. Gide and Romain Rolland, the Soviet Union's most prized spokesmen in the West, were uneasy enough that they lobbied the Soviet Ambassador.

Stalin, in a never-repeated act of mercy, released Serge.⁵⁴ Despite organizers' best efforts, Salvemini's speech would resonate through the years.

Events soon upended intellectuals' attempts at a united front. Under Adolf Hitler's chancellorship, Weimar was no longer a democracy, and Germany repudiated the Versailles Treaty.⁵⁵ France was futilely reinforcing the Maginot Line with barbed wire and sirens.⁵⁶ Stalin was finishing plans for the Great Terror; among the millions of victims were three members of the feted 1935 Soviet delegation, Isaac Babel, the playwright Kirshon, and Mikhail Koltsov.⁵⁷

In the late 1930s, a handful of intellectuals began speaking out against Soviet attempts to win their allegiances. No one better understood the threat posed by Soviet front groups, and the seductive reasoning of Communism, they believed, than former converts and sympathizers like them. The least they could do to atone for their earlier enthusiasm, they felt, was to expose Communism's fallacies and lay bare the fiction that Soviet fronts were free of outside control.

Front groups like the League of American Writers, the American Artists' Congress, and the American Committee for Democracy and Intellectual Freedom no longer seemed so innocuous to a small group of American and émigré intellectuals in New York, who formed the "Committee for Cultural Freedom" in 1939 to expose them. Chaired by the preeminent American philosopher John Dewey, the Committee was among the first to link Nazism and Soviet Communism as two analogous forms of totalitarianism. The most pressing problem facing intellectuals, per the Committee's Manifesto, was that "[a]rt, science and education – all have been forcibly turned into lackeys for a supreme state, a deified leader and an official pseudo-philosophy."⁵⁸ In response, the Committee proposed "opposition to and exposure of all forms of totalitarianism" and circulated lists of suspected fronts in its newsletters.⁵⁹

By the early 1940s, two journals had joined the charge. *Partisan Review* began in 1934 as a subsidiary of the American Communist Party created to showcase "proletarian" literature. Editors William Phillips and Philip Rahv were deemed lacking in revolutionary fervor; they broke off, and *Partisan Review* was reborn in 1937 as an anti-Stalinist (but nominally Marxist) magazine. It championed Trotsky, equivocated on America's entry into the war, and overflowed with talent, with regular pieces by Orwell, Eliot, Auden, and Edmund Wilson.⁶⁰

The *New Leader*, previously the official organ of the American Socialist Party, received a facelift and became the first paper to reveal the existence of Soviet gulags and to attribute the Katyn forest massacre to Stalin. Its editor, the irascible Sol Levitas, was an old Menshevik; its staff included a young Daniel Bell and his City College classmate Melvin Lasky. Irving Kristol, their fellow classmate and best friend, did book reviews. The magazine soon became the natural home for disillusioned former Trotskyists. It also attracted European Socialists fleeing the continent, including various Mensheviks and former leaders of European Communist parties who had experienced the Russian Revolution firsthand.⁶¹

Instrumental to these endeavors was the philosopher Sidney Hook. Then in his late thirties, Hook was the Committee for Cultural Freedom's de facto head,

a frequent contributor to *Partisan Review*, and the dominant intellectual force at the *New Leader*.⁶² The critic Alfred Kazin remembered him as “the most devastating logician the world would ever see.”⁶³ Hook grew up in Brooklyn’s slums, attended City College, obtained his doctorate under Dewey at Columbia, and became the first tenured Jewish professor at New York University. As a teenager, Hook embraced socialism. By college, he was a committed Communist. In 1933, early in his academic career, he published *Towards the Understanding of Karl Marx*. That same year, he visited the Soviet Union, decided that Stalin was to blame for Hitler’s rise, and broke with Communism forever. Hook’s opposition to Communism soon became the struggle of a lifetime. From the late 1930s onwards, he was America’s most influential intellectual opponent of Communism.⁶⁴

Meanwhile, European intellectuals were still in thrall to Communism, but dissent was growing. In 1936, a year after the Mutualité Congress, André Gide finally reached his elected homeland, only to find the Soviet Union stifling and sinister. After publishing *Retour de l’URSS*, Gide was vilified in the Soviet Union, but his criticisms marked “a turning point in our attitudes towards politics during the thirties,” the English poet Stephen Spender remembered.⁶⁵

Writers flocked to Spain to fight on the Communist-supported republican side in the Spanish Civil War. Some emerged even more committed.⁶⁶ Others were horrified by the discovery that the Communists were liquidating republican friend and fascist foe alike, as George Orwell described in *Homage to Catalonia* (1938).

For many, Stalin’s purges and the accompanying Soviet show trials finally ended their devotion to Communism. It was so for Koestler, who broke with the Party in 1938 and penned his masterpiece *Darkness at Noon* as the Nazi army closed in on the continent.⁶⁷ And when the Nazi–Soviet Pact made a mockery of the Soviet Union’s claims that Communism was the only true anti-fascist cause, even the ardently committed Paul Nizan recanted.⁶⁸

When Hitler invaded and the Soviet Union switched sides to join the Allies, intellectuals scattered to the winds. Many joined the very governments they had long disdained. In England, Spender and philosopher Isaiah Berlin took jobs with the Foreign Office.⁶⁹ Historians Hugh Trevor-Roper and Denis Brogan, philosopher A.J. “Freddie” Ayer, and writers Graham Greene and Malcolm Muggeridge were involved in intelligence work.⁷⁰ In America, historian Arthur Schlesinger Jr. joined the Office of Strategic Services, CIA’s predecessor.⁷¹ The Left Bank fragmented. Malraux joined the French Resistance.⁷² Nizan died at Dunkirk.⁷³ Koestler and other émigrés faced internment as aliens, Jews, or both, and tried to flee.⁷⁴

So did Münzenberg. He had avoided calls to return to Moscow for months; to be an exceptionally talented member of the Comintern was to be in mortal peril during the Great Terror. The NKVD monitored him closely. Falsely blamed by the Nazis for instigating the 1933 Reichstag fire, Münzenberg was also anxious to stay ahead of the Germans’ swift advance. He made it to Grenoble in June 1940, just before France fell to the Nazis, then disappeared.⁷⁵

Four months later, on a bright October morning in the forest of Caugnet, two hunters discovered a corpse at the base of a tree, its neck still encircled by a noose, all that remained of Münzenberg.⁷⁶ Word spread, yet even Britain's MI6 was unconvinced that the man they had tracked for over a decade was gone. As late as 1944, officers were inquiring whether "Willy," a former Reichstag deputy arrested in Paris, might be Münzenberg, surviving against the odds.⁷⁷

Even after the war, Münzenberg retained an indelible hold on his former compatriots' imaginations. Long after his closest associates crossed the barricades to become Communism's fiercest opponents, they wrote of him fondly, burnishing his reputation as a propaganda genius who had won over the era's great minds like a "chess master walking from board to board, playing twenty games at once."⁷⁸ In the harsh glare of the postwar era, Münzenberg's brilliance was also a convenient comfort, providing a partial defense for why so many had fallen so hard for the wrong side. They were determined not to make the same mistake again. So in the early postwar years, when the Soviet Union attempted to regain their allegiances, they mobilized – spontaneously, with little organization at first – and with Michael Josselson among their ranks.

Notes

- 1 Daniel Bell, *The End of Ideology: On the Exhaustion of Political Ideas in the Fifties*, new edn (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), p. 300.
- 2 E.g., Nicola Chiaromonte, "The Will to Question," *Encounter* I (November 1953), p. 2.
- 3 Herbert Lottman, *The Left Bank: Writers, Artists, and Politics from the Popular Front to the Cold War* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), pp. xii–xiii, 7.
- 4 Roger Shattuck, "Having Congress: The Shame of the Thirties," in *The Innocent Eye: On Modern Literature and the Arts* (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1984), p. 11.
- 5 This definition formed the basis for Arthur Koestler's essay "The Intelligentsia," in *The Yogi and the Commissar and Other Essays* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1945), pp. 68–9.
- 6 Quoted in Lottman, *Left Bank*, pp. 9–10.
- 7 *Ibid.*, pp. 7–8, 15, 22–4, 48–52.
- 8 David James Fisher, *Romain Rolland and the Politics of Intellectual Engagement* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2004), pp. 13, 158–62.
- 9 Michael Scammell, *Arthur Koestler: The Literary and Political Odyssey of a Twentieth-Century Skeptic* (New York: Random House, 2009), pp. 100–4.
- 10 Lottman *Left Bank*, pp. 23–5, 39–42.
- 11 Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 25.
- 12 *Ibid.*, pp. 15, 58–9.
- 13 Fisher, *Romain Rolland*, pp. 160–1.
- 14 Scammell, *Arthur Koestler*, pp. 104–5.
- 15 Lottman, *Left Bank*, p. 7.
- 16 The International Writers' Congress has been extensively covered in the literature. See, e.g., François Furet, *The Passing of an Illusion: The Idea of Communism in the Twentieth Century*, trans. Deborah Furet (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), pp. 280–6; Lottman, *Left Bank*, pp. 84–97; Shattuck, "Having Congress," pp. 3–37.
- 17 Shattuck, "Having Congress," p. 24.

- 18 Richard Crossman essay in Richard Crossman (ed.), *The God That Failed: Six Studies in Communism* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1950), p. 8.
- 19 Robert Warshow, "The Legacy of the '30s: Middle-Class Mass Culture and the Intellectuals' Problem," *Commentary* 4 (December 1947).
- 20 See Paul Hollander, *Political Pilgrims: Travels of Western intellectuals to the Soviet Union, China and Cuba 1928–1978* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981); Paul Hollander, *The End of Commitment: Intellectuals, Revolutionaries and Political Morality* (Chicago: Ivan Dee, 2006).
- 21 Arthur Koestler essay in Crossman (ed.), *The God That Failed*, pp. 28–30.
- 22 Volker Berghahn, *America and the Intellectual Cold Wars in Europe* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), pp. 78–96.
- 23 Quoted in Gary Cross, *Time and Money: The Making of Consumer Culture* (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 55.
- 24 *Ibid.*, pp. 59–60.
- 25 Donald Hall, "The Art of Poetry, No. 1: T.S. Eliot (Interview)," *Paris Review* 29 (Spring/Summer 1959), pp. 47–70.
- 26 Hollander, *Political Pilgrims*, pp. 99–100.
- 27 Crossman, *God That Failed*, pp. 10–11.
- 28 *Ibid.*; Koestler, *God That Failed*, p. 28; Stephen Spender essay in Crossman (ed.), *The God That Failed*, pp. 238–9.
- 29 Koestler, *God That Failed*, pp. 26–7.
- 30 Ignazio Silone essay in Crossman (ed.), *The God That Failed*, pp. 104–5.
- 31 Hajo Holborn, *A History of Modern Germany: 1840–1945*, Vol. 3 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), p. 724.
- 32 Andrew Thorpe, *The British Communist Party and Moscow, 1920–43* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), p. 16.
- 33 Koestler, *God That Failed*, p. 58.
- 34 Hollander, *Political Pilgrims*, pp. 372–4.
- 35 Warshow, "Legacy of the '30s."
- 36 Hollander, *Political Pilgrims*, pp. 160–63; Koestler, *God That Failed*, pp. 68–9, 79; Silone, *God That Failed*, pp. 104–5.
- 37 Hollander, *Political Pilgrims*, pp. 114–21; Spender, *God That Failed*, p. 256.
- 38 Arthur Koestler, *The Invisible Writing: The Second Volume of an Autobiography, 1932–40* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1954), p. 205.
- 39 Furet, *Passing of an Illusion*, p. 214.
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38 *Intellectuals: from Communism to anti-Communism*

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- 71 Schlesinger, *A Life in the Twentieth Century*, pp. 295–313.
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- 77 SIS (MI6) Report, September 29, 1944 (extract); M.J.E. Bagot to J.C. Curry, October 9, 1944, both in NA KV2/774, The National Archive: Public Records Office, Kew Gardens, UK ("PRO").
- 78 Gustav Regler, *The Owl of Minerva: The Autobiography of Gustav Regler*, trans. Norman Denny (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1959), p. 170; see also Koestler, *Invisible Writing*, pp. 198, 205–7, 314.

3 The outbreak of ideological hostilities

In late 1947, Berlin was the birthplace of both the Soviet campaign to resurrect Münzenberg's successes and an unexpected resistance movement. Stalin's creation of the Cominform in September 1947 ended any pretense of genuine cooperation with the West.¹ The Cominform resurrected all the prewar tactics of the Comintern, namely to wage subversion and mount worldwide propaganda campaigns to rally the world's populations to the Soviet cause. There were "two camps" dividing the world, announced Andrei Zhdanov, the Central Committee figure charged with cultural policy: an American and British "imperial camp," and the Soviet "antifascist" camp.² Thus began the "fight for peace" against a United States bent on the "preparation of a new imperialist war" and committed to "an aggressive and openly expansionist policy," in Zhdanov's words.³

During the first few days of October, while the Cominform held its inaugural meeting in Belgrade, Tulpanov and Dymshitz were ahead of the curve, launching the German Writers' Congress. The similarities to the congresses of the thirties were striking – and intentional. The opening convocation invoked the 1935 Mutualité Congress and its "lessons" for "the activation and integration of the intellectual class in the revolutionary struggle." Even panel titles were recycled.⁴

Held in the new annex to the Max Reinhardt Theater, the event was nominally sponsored by all four occupying powers. The Americans sent no one. The distinguished Soviet delegation comprised the satirist Valentin Katayev, the playwright and screenwriter Vselovod Vishnevsky, and Boris Gorbatov, the chronicler of Soviet miners' purported revolutionary enthusiasm. With them were Johannes Becher and Anna Seghers, two prominent and ardently Communist German writers.⁵ The opening banquet had "a particularly surreal effect" for near-starving German intellectuals: "The enormous table groaned under the weight of bowls of caviar and seafood salad," recalled Austrian writer Hilde Spiel. "[T]ones of a balalaika orchestra were drowned by ... the ever more fervent invitations of our hosts to yet another toast to the glorious Red Army, [and] to the King of England."⁶

The German Writers' Congress began on October 4 with appeals to comradeship among all nations. Those pleas ended on the second day, when Vishnevsky veered from reflections on the Battle of Leningrad to announce that "the Soviet Union wants nothing but peace and freedom" while "[r]eactionary forces in

Washington and London are trying to create an iron curtain.” Vishnevsky – resplendent in a tweed suit and three rows of medals that bounced when he spoke – finished jubilantly: “Brothers, comrades, we know how to answer. If you need us, call for our help and we will fight together.”⁷

With that, the participants adjourned for the day, leaving several German writers uneasy. Tulpanov had invited non-Communists in the hopes of creating a broad coalition; that proved a mistake. Led by Gunther Birkenfeld, the next day’s chairman, they sought an American or British writer to even the scales. Flying anyone over, at this late date, was unlikely.⁸

There was, however, an American writer on hand, albeit one with no name recognition: Melvin J. Lasky, correspondent for the *New Leader* and *Partisan Review*, whose main selling points were his flawless German and his availability. Lasky, a slight young man with a Trotskiesque spade beard, came from a Russian-Jewish immigrant family in the Bronx.⁹ He had abandoned Trotskyism by the time he graduated from City College, then a breeding-ground for influential American writers and thinkers.¹⁰ As a tour guide at the Statue of Liberty during the Depression, Lasky could be found midway to the torch, his face buried in a book, gesturing “up” with his index finger.¹¹ His career at the *New Leader* was an education in the Communist movement and its discontents, and he became a protégé of Sidney Hook.¹² Lasky was determined to become a serious editor; to date, his greatest achievement had been obtaining a piece for his undergraduate history magazine from Harold Laski, the English political theorist, by appealing to their “nomenclatural affinity.”¹³ “There was an old joke,” recalled Daniel Bell, a close college friend: “someone goes to the Soviet Union and is asked to give his impressions. One word: good. Two words: no good. With Mel, one word: brilliant. Two words: impossible.”¹⁴

Lasky had arrived in Berlin in fall 1945 after serving in the U.S. Seventh Army as a combat historian. He spent his first months in Germany visiting Jaspers’s fenced-in house in Heidelberg, interviewing Jünger in Hanover, and speaking of Santayana and Dewey with Heidegger in his Black Forest ski hut.¹⁵ He found Germany “a spectacular barrenness of a wasteland. This is a deep, organized, systematic, humdrum emptiness. This is the twentieth century with its throat cut and looking only slightly pale. . . . And where now will we be able to find points from which to begin?”¹⁶ The signs were not promising: “the whole cultural world has been hopelessly atomized,” and “the German intelligentsia has learned nothing, read nothing, since 1933.”¹⁷ Lasky’s aim was not to bring America to the Germans – he considered the American intellectual scene artificial and undeveloped – but to transform both. He was all of twenty-seven years old.¹⁸

Lasky was unsurprised by Vishnevsky’s speech; he had come to the German Writers’ Congress prepared. Tulpanov, Lasky believed, hoped that “at the least,” the event “would recruit a few more writers for the struggle, and, at the most, could ‘change everything utterly.’”¹⁹ Days beforehand, Lasky called at least one friend to ask, “Well, what are we going to do about it? . . . The Soviets will be there with bells on.”²⁰

Lasky's chance came when Birkenfeld announced him on the second day as a surprise speaker appearing in the interests of reciprocity.²¹ Lasky began by praising the historical significance of German authors meeting again. He extolled American authors, "fighting continuously for thirty years against the power of narrow-minded moralists of the middle class." Applause. Then: "The same American ... welcomed and saluted the heroic struggle of the Russian people against Hitlerism and was able to go on and say, without fear or anxiety, that the present regime in Russia was, unfortunately, an unattractive totalitarian dictatorship." Dymshitz was summoned. Lasky pressed on with his now-evident theme, the need to protest restrictions on cultural freedom wherever they arose, promising "spiritual solidarity" with Soviet intellectuals in their own "struggle for cultural freedom." And then Lasky looked straight at the Soviet delegation: "We know how soul-crushing it is to work and write when behind us stands a political censor and behind him stand the police." He closed with a passage from André Gide's *Retours de la URSS*, the book that got Gide's works banned in the Soviet Union:

I believe that a writer's value is intimately linked ... to the force of his spirit of opposition. ... In all the countries of the world, a great writer has always been, more or less, a revolutionary, a fighter. ... [H]e wrote, in opposition to something. He refused to approve. He brought into the minds and into the hearts of people the germs of insubordination, of revolt. Respectable people, public powers, the authorities, tradition, had they been farseeing enough, would not have hesitated to recognize in him the enemy.

Then he stepped down, to several full minutes of applause.²² The speech would change his life.

The next day, October 7, 1947, found Michael Josselson inside the Max Reinhardt Theater, conversing with Soviet delegate Boris Gorbatov. Gorbatov – winner of the Stalin prize and a deputy of the Supreme Soviet – was visible proof of the importance the Soviets attached to the event. Josselson, now deputy chief of Information Control in Berlin, came because his work now focused on Soviet propaganda.²³ Lasky's speech prompted American press correspondents and OMGUS officials to show up in droves, perhaps to judge the little-known Lasky for themselves.²⁴

Josselson, at least, had no need to form an impression of Lasky – Lasky was his oldest friend in Berlin.²⁵ Nor was this the first time Lasky had attracted OMGUS's attention. Just after his arrival, he was nearly court-martialed when he refused to describe the Soviet Union as one of "the four Great Democracies" that were destined to guarantee peace in our times" in his last lecture to Allied troops as a combat historian.²⁶ Lasky considered OMGUS's non-fraternization policy idiotic and brazenly flouted it to court his future wife.²⁷ He believed OMGUS's policy of denazifying Germany through blacklists and complicated licensing schemes only gave Stalinism "the half-light it needs to have its own way." And Lasky saw the Soviet cultural campaign as doubly pernicious; it was

winning over German intellectuals, and its program of “passive appreciation of the art of a happier era” would thwart German intellectuals from developing novel ideas and creative forms that would put the Nazi era behind them.²⁸

Temperamentally, Lasky and Josselson were opposites. “Mel was a talker, not a doer,” remembered John Hunt. “But Mike was a doer, not a talker . . . Mel needed Mike, and Mike needed Mel.”²⁹ They were inseparable. In summer 1945, they had seen thousands of displaced Russians, imprisoned by the Nazis and liberated by the Allies, sent back to Soviet gulags. Officially, the other Allied powers did nothing to stop this forced migration. But Josselson had more than an inkling of the fate awaiting them, and was profoundly disturbed. Lasky later recalled it as the moment they lost any remaining illusions about what the Soviet regime meant for Germany and the rest of Europe, and “decided to save Western civilization.”³⁰

Joining Lasky and Josselson in this effort was Boris Shub, a fellow *New Leader* alumnus. Son of a prominent Menshevik, his childhood home had been a way stop for exiled leaders of the Russian Revolution.³¹ Before the war, he had been Soviet defector Walter Krivitsky’s interpreter; when Krivitsky was found dead in a locked hotel room with three suicide notes, Shub knew where to assign blame.³² In Berlin, Shub became the moving spirit behind Radio Berlin and “functioned as a kind of self-appointed chief-of-staff at the outbreak of ideological hostilities in 1947–48,” Lasky recalled.³³ He accompanied Lasky to the German Writers’ Congress, where he questioned Gorbатов relentlessly. Gorbатов, Josselson told Shub with a grin, “says you’re a good guy, but why do you have to talk about Stalin?”³⁴

The effects of Lasky’s speech were immediate. Soviet papers deemed him “the father of the Cold War” and a “gangster of the pen” and attacked his spade beard as “a cheap Hollywood imitation of Trotsky.” Dymshitz published a lengthy screed.³⁵ To native Berliners, Lasky became “Unzer Lasky,” and young Germans copied his beard as a political statement.³⁶

To General Clay, however, Lasky’s speech was “a disruption of the routine governmental agenda” and a “scandal.” Clay considered having Lasky expelled from Berlin; only the further deterioration of relations with the Soviets stopped him.³⁷ As one OMGUS report observed, “No matter what the issues under discussion,” Soviet materials depicted America as “a capitalist, imperialist exploiter of common people” that was “enslaving the German working class” and “splitting Germany to form an anti-Soviet bloc.”³⁸ In the weeks after Lasky’s speech, Clay decided to acknowledge what Josselson, Lasky, and Shub well knew: any pretense of cooperation was gone. “Operation Talk Back,” Clay announced, would counter Soviet propaganda through every German media outlet.³⁹

Lasky, allowed to stay, discovered that “[m]y name has suddenly become a war-cry and my telephone a national headquarters.” He found himself “the representative of Western culture in these parts – publishers beat a path to my door demanding advice on political, historical, literary, psychological issues of every variety.” He imagined himself “a missionary in a dark continent”: “inasmuch as I seem to have conscripted myself for this political war, I might as well arrange to do it decently. . . . There is absolutely no material available here at all.”⁴⁰

The answer, Lasky decided, was to launch a new, cultural magazine for German intellectuals. He would edit it – if he could persuade American authorities that he merited a license and the requisite budget. For OMGUS, this was not an obvious proposition. As an American official, Lasky's every remark could be attributed to the government. Lasky, perhaps sensing the obstacles, submitted a proposal in December 1947 that deliberately played to official policy. An "American review" that was "American-edited and American written," he suggested, could dispel damaging misconceptions about American foreign policy while "serving as a constructive fillip to German-European thought" and showing that "behind the official representatives of American democracy lies a great and progressive culture."⁴¹

While American officials deliberated, Lasky could not resist another job. In *Partisan Review* that January, he warned that the "dark-age shadows over Germany's intellectual life are real and literal." In part, "physical factors issuing out of the post-Nazi breakdown" were to blame, but "just as much responsibility can be laid at the door of the British and American authorities," he wrote. "The large official policy is deadening enough; combined with the pettiness and provincialism of the bureaucrats themselves it exercises a paralyzing influence on what little native talent and inspiration there is."⁴²

Back in Washington, American policymakers were slowly reaching the conclusion that Josselson, Lasky, and their compatriots in Berlin had already reached: the Soviet Union was intractably opposed to the West, and one of its greatest advantages in gaining global influence was the power of Communism as an idea. For Josselson and Lasky, this conclusion seemed obvious. But for the Truman administration it was an about-face that profoundly altered the very structure of the federal government. In 1945, Truman had suddenly become President after Franklin Roosevelt's unexpected demise. He entered office convinced that the postwar peace depended upon developing a multilateral system centered on the United Nations, and swiftly eliminated the Office of Strategic Services, the central U.S. wartime intelligence organization.⁴³

The Cold War accordingly came as an unwelcome surprise to the American government. Stalin had seized the end of the war as an opportunity for his intelligence agencies to consolidate control over newly liberated Eastern Europe.⁴⁴ Western Europe seemed powerless to resist further expansion of Soviet influence. Its economies were decimated. Communist parties were worryingly popular. England was deeply in debt and ravaged by the Blitz.⁴⁵ In Paris, rations stood at 1,200 calories a day. Starving workers at the Renault factory abandoned their machines to hijack trucks carrying meat.⁴⁶ And these were the victors.

To say that America was unprepared to address these developments was an understatement. The Soviet Union had been a country for less than thirty years, and was still an unknown to American policymakers – even as Soviet agents extensively penetrated the highest echelons of the American government. The Soviet Union was closed to outsiders in a way unimaginable in this era of satellites and global communications. "In 1946 intelligence files on the Soviet Union were virtually empty," remembered Harry Rositzke, later head of the CIA's

Soviet division. “Even the most elementary facts were unavailable – on roads and bridges, on the location and production of factories, on city plans and airfields.”⁴⁷

The Truman administration was sharply divided over how to read Soviet intentions. A 1946 State Department memorandum proposed that America could convince the Soviets to respect the United Nations and secure an American–Soviet alliance with a six-person staff in Moscow, a lending library, several boxes of American films and magazines, and positive word of mouth.⁴⁸ At the other end of the spectrum was a February 1946 telegram the U.S. embassy in Moscow had sent in response to a request to analyze Soviet policy towards an international monetary regime. The request had reached the embassy when it was in the hands of the deputy ambassador, an intense, forty-two-year-old career diplomat suffering from cold, fever, and toothache. He was George Kennan; he knew more about the Soviet Union than virtually any other American official, and he sent a 5,000-word reply – the aptly named Long Telegram.⁴⁹

To Kennan, the Soviet Union was a closed totalitarian society that combined Marxist doctrine, internal repression, and external insecurity to devastating effect. The Soviet Union, he argued, was genuinely committed to Communist ideology. And that ideology dictated that the Soviet Union would expand its influence as far as it could, because the ideological goal of world revolution necessitated fomenting revolt and subversion abroad. For the foreseeable future, the Soviet Union would exploit all opportunities to extract maximum concessions, weaken Western influence in colonial areas, and covertly penetrate political groups and international organizations. The glimmer of hope, Kennan concluded, was that the Soviet Union responded to the threat of superior force. Faced with credible opposition, Stalin would weigh the risks and back away.⁵⁰ This was the origin of containment, by which Kennan meant the “long-term, patient but firm and vigilant containment of Russian expansive tendencies.”⁵¹ Within months, the whole administration had read his analysis.⁵²

Containment – which assumed sustained American intervention to thwart Soviet expansion – became America’s primary strategy, but not its only strategy.⁵³ No Western European power was in any position to forcefully counter the Soviets. Britain, no longer able to defend all its empire, encouraged America to take its place, lest the Soviet Union move into the strategically vital Middle East and Mediterranean.⁵⁴ Truman accordingly promised economic and military assistance to all “free peoples who are resisting attempted subjugation by armed minorities or by outside pressures” in the April 1947 Truman Doctrine.⁵⁵ In June 1947, Secretary of State George Marshall committed America to long-term economic assistance for Europe in the form of the Marshall Plan.⁵⁶

Thus, by the time the Soviets were preparing for the German Writers’ Congress in late September 1947, Truman considered the Cold War a recognized fact. When Stalin launched the Cominform, Truman reflected that “Russia has at last shown her hand and it contains the cards [Secretary of State] Marshall and I thought it would.”⁵⁷ American policymakers began developing plans to liberate Eastern European satellite states by fomenting internal rebellions with outside

support. Advocates of liberation versus containment were continually at loggerheads; in practice, the American government hedged its bets and pursued both strategies during the early Cold War.⁵⁸

With his initial assumptions dashed, Truman restructured the executive branch for the conflict ahead. He created the Department of Defense and placed the Departments of the Army, Navy, and Air Force within it.⁵⁹ The National Security Act of 1947 established the National Security Council and the Central Intelligence Agency. The NSC was to produce high-level strategy based on assessments of military, diplomatic, and economic problems.⁶⁰ The CIA had as its main functions the collection and analysis of intelligence, advising the NSC on intelligence matters, and “other functions and duties related to intelligence affecting the national security.”⁶¹

Propaganda, covert support for sympathetic anti-Communist groups, and other methods now seemed indispensable. Stalin’s Cominform began launching dozens of ostensibly independent organizations aimed at unifying labor unions, intellectuals, students, and other groups behind the propositions that the Soviet Union was the world’s great champion of peace, was threatened by the American atomic monopoly, and sought nothing more than an adequate settlement to defend itself.⁶² And the Soviets had dominated the field of propaganda since the Russian Revolution; the Truman administration saw itself as playing catch-up in unfamiliar territory.

“The present world situation,” NSC-4 stated in November 1947, “requires the immediate strengthening and coordination of all foreign information measures of the US Government designed to influence attitudes in foreign countries in a direction favorable to the attainment of its objectives and to counteract effects of anti-US propaganda.” The State Department was to expand overt information activities using pamphlets, radio programming, and other initiatives openly attributed to the government.⁶³ The CIA was to undertake “covert psychological operations” to defeat the “vicious psychological efforts of the Soviet Union, its satellite countries, and Communist groups to discredit and defeat the aims and activities of the United States and other Western powers.”⁶⁴

These covert operations, broadly encompassed under “psychological warfare,” were fast becoming a centerpiece of the Cold War. Truman would soon proclaim that psychological warfare was “a necessary part of all we are doing to build a peaceful world,” and “as important as armed strength or economic aid.”⁶⁵ By 1950, NSC-68 would prescribe that winning the Cold War required the United States to promote freedom, “the most contagious idea in history,” and “demonstrate the superiority of the idea of freedom by its constructive application” by coordinating with “private agencies in the United States, including a wide range of business, professional, civil, labor and youth organizations.”⁶⁶

The American government, however, had no coordinated plan for how any of this would be done. Instead, as the Cominform’s front groups spread across Europe and attracted distinguished intellectuals to the Soviet peace campaign, individual American government agencies mounted ad hoc, uncoordinated responses.⁶⁷

In the meantime, the Soviet peace campaign began to focus on a group that Washington policymakers had little idea of how to fit into America's burgeoning efforts: European intellectuals. Nazism was gone, but the psychological climate in which it flourished – “a profound sense of anxiety, loneliness of spirit, absence of roots in soil, church, or family” – was more fertile than ever, wrote the Swiss humanist Denis de Rougemont. Politicians had no cure. European intellectuals, whose function would seem “precisely to restore to Europe a clear concept of man's nature and place on this planet, from which men of action . . . could draw the appropriate conclusions,” were the most rudderless of all.⁶⁸

Many thus welcomed the opportunity to attend the World Congress of Intellectuals, the Cominform's first postwar international gathering, held in Wrocław at the end of August 1948. Three years on, the former Breslau, Germany, was still fire-scarred, its factories fallow, its buildings pock-marked by artillery, its Germans expelled, the Poles returned. Five hundred delegates came: writers, poets, scientists, historians, philosophers, and artists, all expenses paid.

The Congress's aim was ambitious: to forge a broad coalition uniting Communists, fellow-travelers, neutralists, and pacifists behind the Soviet peace campaign.⁶⁹ The star-studded roster of delegates included Pablo Picasso – whose sympathy for the Soviet Union was undiminished even though his works were banned there – as well as philosopher Julien Benda, Surrealist poet Paul Eluard, and editor and poet Pierre Seghers, all of whom arrived from Paris.⁷⁰ From Britain came scientist J.B.S. Haldane; Oxford historian A.J.P. Taylor; Hewlett Johnson, the “Red Dean” of Canterbury; the young publisher George Weidenfeld; biologist and UNESCO head Julian Huxley; and *New Statesman and Nation* editor Kingsley Martin. The Soviet delegation was led by the writers Alexander Fadeyev and Ilya Ehrenburg, and rounded out by Pudovkin and Eisentein, the great film directors. The American delegation counted stalwarts like playwright Clifford Odets, journalist Ella Winter, and writer Upton Sinclair. The German delegation was equally prominent.⁷¹

But whatever hopes delegates held of papering over differences between East and West disappeared almost as soon as the Congress opened. Fadeyev began by exhorting “intellectuals of the world to unite” to stop American capitalism from exporting its “trite films” and corrupt culture.⁷² A.J.P. Taylor – no friend of American or British policy – then rose unexpectedly to the podium.⁷³ “The first duty of intellectuals,” he began, “is to be intelligent.” At Wrocław, they found “the same bogeys” as at home: “here it is called American Fascism, over there it is called Russian Bolshevism. We intellectuals, instead of inflating those bogeys, should be trying to bring peoples on both sides to their senses.”⁷⁴ The hall stilled to silence. “Now I know,” Taylor told a seatmate, “how Martin Luther must have felt at the Diet of Worms.”⁷⁵

At dinner, Ilya Ehrenburg reassured Edward Crankshaw that Fadeyev simply “had to define the enemy.” And in the next day's session, Ehrenburg conceded that “there is much good in the Americans” – only to proclaim they were “preparing for barbaric war.” A resolution blaming the United States and Britain for the war was passed. The organizers announced the formation of a permanent

“International Committee of Intellectuals in Defense of Peace.” The British delegation dissented, condemning Wrocław as a “waste of a great opportunity.”⁷⁶

Cominform head Andrei Zhdanov heralded the Congress as a great success: “[T]he situation had changed in our favor, which gives us reason to look even more confidently toward our future.”⁷⁷ The Soviets resurrected front groups in earnest. The Popular Front of the thirties had built broad appeal by tolerating deviations among Communist sympathizers in the West; no longer would such leeway be given. Still, Soviet fronts enlisted millions of signatories and eminent names to the purported cause of defending peace.

Believing that Western civilization required an active intelligentsia to identify and renew its essential values, writers across Europe – de Rougemont, Silone, Chiaromonte, Aron, and Spender among them – sounded the alarm. “Cultural freedom and the freedom of the individual within an externally influenced political system are among the realest issues in Europe today,” wrote Spender. “The question remains whether there is more future for intellectual freedom within an American or a Russian influenced Europe” – and Europeans, Spender argued, needed proof soon that Americans were interested in the preservation of European civilization, rather than destroying it with American mass culture.⁷⁸ But, for now, European intellectuals who were willing to publicly oppose Communism were scarce. And the Cominform seemed the only organization interested in offering European intellectuals an opportunity to come together with long-absent colleagues in the early postwar years.

For Lasky and Josselson, these developments came with a silver lining. As American foreign policy hardened against the Soviet Union and increasingly focused on combating Communist ideology, the need to woo German intellectuals who might otherwise attach themselves to Soviet fronts became imperative. And, as the situation in Germany worsened, OMGUS grew more receptive to the idea of a magazine aimed at discrediting Communism in the eyes of German intellectuals. By March 1948, General Clay was warning that a Soviet invasion “may come with dramatic suddenness.”⁷⁹ In June, when the Soviets halted all supplies of food and fuel into Berlin’s Western zones, the Soviet Union’s determination to drive the other allies out was unmistakable. Allied planes began delivering the supplies needed to sustain Berlin via small, creaky planes that had survived Normandy – but every month that the airlift succeeded seemed a minor miracle.⁸⁰

Thus, after months of waiting, Lasky got his magazine, *Der Monat* – along with an official position in the American occupation government. Clay promised *carte blanche*; his encounters with Lasky had presumably confirmed the futility of trying to rein him in.⁸¹ And from the time *Der Monat* launched, in October 1948, it was clear that Lasky’s magazine would bear little resemblance to the proposal Lasky had submitted for government approval. Rather than extolling American life and culture, *Der Monat* took its inspiration from T.S. Eliot, whose 1946 BBC broadcasts to Germany on the “Unity of European Culture” remained Lasky’s lifelong touchstone. To Eliot, the war had a “numbing effect upon creative activity within every country.” Intellectuals had to act, and quickly, to “recognize our relationship and our mutual dependence upon each other. What

matters is our inability, without each other, to produce those excellent works which mark a superior civilization.” And the necessary means were well-established, said Eliot: “a network of independent reviews, at least one in every capital of Europe, is necessary for the transmission of ideas – and to make possible the circulation of ideas while they are still fresh.” By that method, Western civilization might yet be saved.⁸² *Der Monat*, as Lasky saw it, was part of the “great tradition of European journals,” and, in editing it, “I had, thus, fulfilled a school-boy’s dream of consorting with the likes of T.S. Eliot’s *Criterion*, André Gide’s *Nouvelle Revue Francaise*, Ortega y Gasset’s *Revista de Occidente*.”⁸³

Edited by Lasky and Hellmuth Jaesrich, *Der Monat*’s stated mission was “to make heard as large a number of different voices as possible from Germany and all parts of the world.” Its roster of contributors read like a who’s who of twentieth-century intellectual history: Bertrand Russell, Arthur Koestler, Raymond Aron, Jean-Paul Sartre, Friedrich von Hayek, Sidney Hook, and Ernest Hemingway were all featured in early issues.⁸⁴ George Orwell, its London correspondent, wrote more than half of *Der Monat*’s pages in a two-year span, and the magazine republished *Animal Farm* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* in full.⁸⁵ Though many contributors were bitter critics of Communism, most were not American, and they emphatically did not purport to advance an American perspective.⁸⁶

Der Monat was soon the most influential cultural publication in Germany. “For us,” the Swiss editor François Bondy reflected, it was “a surprising, an unforeseeable creation” that became “a common intellectual homeland.”⁸⁷ Hook told Lasky “it would not be an exaggeration to say that you are getting out the best cultural magazine in the entire world.”⁸⁸

Lasky also used *Der Monat*’s budget to surreptitiously fund more active opposition to the Soviet leadership. “I’ve dredged our budget in *Der Monat* so deep for resistance work we don’t even have enough cash to pay for legitimate book-reviewers,” he later complained.⁸⁹ As for official oversight, the only OMGUS official with whom Lasky had any interest in discussing *Der Monat* was Josselson, whose offices were just down the hall from his.⁹⁰

To Lasky, Josselson, and Shub, Berlin was no longer just the center of a struggle between American and Soviet occupiers. As Lasky put it, “Berlin is the center of ‘a great faith’ – namely, that the possibility of staving off war and moving toward a non-violent solution of the world-crisis lies only with a radical democratic political offensive” of non-Communist intellectuals.⁹¹ With *Der Monat*’s rapid success, they had a ready roster of names.

Josselson left few traces of his own thinking, but his actions spoke volumes. As non-Communist intellectuals began to actively confront the Soviet peace offensive, Josselson joined them. He attended nearly every counter-rally and congress. He devoted his official work with the occupation government to what would become the Congress for Cultural Freedom.⁹² Simply put, Josselson saw the cause, identified with it, and enlisted himself. His greatest early contribution was to advance a single idea: Berlin, where the blockade dragged on and Soviet-sponsored festivals, youth congresses, and writers’ groups mobilized weekly, could sorely use a counter-congress.

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4 From the Waldorf to Paris

In 1949, Soviet front groups targeting intellectuals, lawyers, labor unions, students, and women sprang up across Western Europe and arrived in America. The beginning sounded innocuous enough: the National Council of the Arts, Sciences, and Professions announced a “Cultural and Scientific Conference for World Peace” at New York’s Waldorf-Astoria Hotel in March 1949.

The National Council, however, had been invented for the occasion as a new offshoot of the Cominform’s peace campaign, and the American press was not fooled. The *New York Times* predicted a spectacle of Soviet delegates parroting the party line while fellow travelers watched for applause cues.¹ “There is simply no excuse for anyone not to know that the National Council of Arts, Sciences and Professions is a fellow traveler outfit, run by fellow travelers ... [who] follow the party line,” declared the *Chicago Tribune*.²

On the eve of the Waldorf Conference, the American Jewish League and the American Legion urged the State Department to deny visas to delegates and other “subversive elements.”³ Senators denounced the conference.⁴ The State Department defended its decision to let Soviet delegates enter by noting that America had no Iron Curtain.⁵ The press intercepted them at the airport. The ubiquitous Fadeyev was first off the plane, and then Dmitri Shostakovich, the most gifted composer of his generation, stepped into public view. Photographers swarmed, blinding him with their flashbulbs; reporters shouted out “Hey, Shosty, look this way! Wave your hat!”⁶

There, too, was Josselson. From a hotel on East 42nd Street the night before the Waldorf Conference, he wrote Lasky that he was “traveling a great deal between Washington and New York, trying to get the job done for which I was sent over” and, as usual, “working under terrific pressure.”⁷ The trip was fortuitously timed: There was “[p]lenty of excitement here because of the cultural peace congress – screaming headlines, 100,000 pickets and what have you. Boris [Shub] and I are going to attend all of it, peace congress, counter rally, Russian counter rally.” And Josselson was already in touch with the key figure behind the counter rally: “[Sidney] Hook, whom I expect to talk to this afternoon, is playing the part that you played at the [German Writers’ Congress]. Wish you were here with us to share all of it.”⁸

On March 25, the conference's opening night, 2,800 delegates congregated in the Waldorf's ballroom for a black-tie dinner. Howard Fast, literary critic F.O. Matthiesen, twenty-six-year-old Norman Mailer, composers Aaron Copland and Leonard Bernstein, playwright Lillian Hellman, and writer Dashiell Hammett comprised the American delegation.⁹ Shostakovich chain-smoked, watching others deliver speeches in his name.¹⁰ "[T]he first speaker, a retired bishop from Utah ... nearly broke up the whole affair by talking forever," reported one account. But the speeches were beside the point: what mattered were the delegates' prominent names, the symbolism of New York, the denunciations of American aggression, and the clamor for a peaceful settlement.¹¹

Outside, in pouring rain, 500 police officers circled New York's largest picketing ring, while 1,000 protesters thronged the sidewalks. The Catholic War Veterans prayed. American Legion members waved placards. Eastern European émigrés waved the old flags of their home countries as the water bled their colors together. A woman held an "Exterminate the Red Rats" sign with one hand, using the other to spray anyone entering the Waldorf with a water gun.¹² Meanwhile, at the Ritz, 300 Communists chanted "Send that bundle back to Britain" in a picket line protesting about Churchill, the guest of honor at a dinner hosted by *Time-Life* publisher Henry Luce.¹³

In the Waldorf's bridal suite, Sidney Hook presided over a motley assembly of friends and acquaintances whom he tentatively named "Americans for Intellectual Freedom." His message to the group was clear: the Soviet Union was again using front groups to win the sympathy of the world's intellectuals; the conference had to be disrupted, its true sponsors revealed, and its myth of freely expressed views exposed.¹⁴ (Members of Hook's group, Lasky later noted, had been "busy doing much the same anti-Stalinist clarification when the [State] Department's diplomats were busy selling the good character of Uncle Joe Stalin!"¹⁵)

Hook's group was also miniscule. Its full membership, enlisted a few weeks prior, could fit in a small living room; only a dozen made it to the Waldorf. Journalist Arnold Beichman handled logistics and publicity.¹⁶ Mary McCarthy had recently published her second novel, *The Oasis*, about a thinly veiled Dwight Macdonald ("Macdougall Macdermott"), who had accompanied her.¹⁷ Robert Lowell had just served as Poet Laureate and won his first Pulitzer.¹⁸ William Phillips and Philip Rahv, the editors of *Partisan Review*, had seen their publication become an institution among New York intellectuals.¹⁹ James Farrell was an acclaimed novelist whose best works – the *Studs Lonigen* trilogy, published at twenty-five – were long behind him. Nicolas Nabokov, the composer who had been one of Josselson's closest friends in Berlin, was now back in America and formed part of this circle.²⁰ Nabokov had visited David Dubinsky, the head of the International Ladies' Garment Workers Union, "and obtained from him a modest subsidy plus secretarial and public relations expenses."²¹ Dubinsky also helpfully "negotiated" the suite at a steep discount by threatening a hotel staff strike.²² Many were ex-Communists; most had been deeply sympathetic to the Soviet Union. They agreed on little except that the Waldorf Conference could not be allowed to succeed.²³

At first there was no plan, only half-baked pranks. Conference mail was poached. Absurd press releases were issued in the organizers' names. Hook, anticipating resistance if the group went downstairs, insisted they arm themselves with umbrellas and prepare to tap the floor for attention if they were ejected. McCarthy and Macdonald thought this a bit much.²⁴ Far better were the messages of support the group obtained from luminaries like the poet T.S. Eliot, the writer Ignazio Silone, and the British philosopher Bertrand Russell, all of whom sent telegrams denouncing the conference as an affront to intellectual freedom. In 1949, these men were considered celebrities, and their telegrams qualified as news.²⁵

The group's greatest success, however, was to ask Waldorf delegates pointed questions about Stalin's Russia during question-and-answer sessions. Macdonald asked Fadeyev what became of the novelist Isaac Babel, the poet Boris Pasternak, and other renowned Russian writers who had disappeared. Fadeyev's reply – "They all exist; they are in this world. Pasternak is my neighbor ... I don't know about Babel, and about [the playwright Vladimir] Kirshon I won't say" – was embarrassingly weak. Kirshon and Babel were long dead, and their fates widely suspected.²⁶ Nabokov asked Shostakovich, recently disgraced in the Soviet Union for "ignoring harmony," whether Soviet censorship had helped his work. Shostakovich barely managed an affirmative reply, privately fearing that his hesitation would cost him his life.²⁷ Meanwhile, the press cheered the confrontations.²⁸

The next evening, onlookers crowded into an overflowing hall at Freedom House, just off Bryant Park, to hear Hook denounce the Soviet Union's suppression of intellectuals.²⁹ Nabokov spoke of Shostakovich's double victimization, trotted out as a prop by his Soviet handlers at the Waldorf while his works were heavily revised at home to conform to socialist realism.³⁰ Nearly 1,000 people crowded around the two loudspeakers set up outside.³¹

At the end, Nabokov "saw a familiar face rise from the back row of the hall and come at me"³² – Josselson. "Mike appeared at the Freedom House rally and was so enthusiastic about what we had done that he decided that something of this kind had to take place in Berlin. This is where the Congress was born," Nabokov later recounted.³³

Americans for Intellectual Freedom soon disbanded, but Hook was satisfied. "It almost killed me," Hook wrote, "but it was a great victory."³⁴ The Communist press also claimed victory, promising an even bigger gathering in Paris at the Partisans of Peace gathering the next month.³⁵ "Apparently," the writer Irving Howe reported in *Partisan Review*, "some sort of similar cooperation among anti-Stalinist intellectuals is to be organized in France to oppose the much more dangerous 'peace conference' soon to be held there."³⁶

Paris in April 1949 was no longer the center of the world of arts and letters, but the capital of a war-torn and fading power. The dominant philosophy was now existentialism, which held that there were no moral absolutes, only individual choices that defined the self. Jean-Paul Sartre was its primary exponent in plays, lectures, and novels and in *Les Temps Modernes*, his group's magazine.

In the absence of universal values, Sartre argued, there was no overarching difference between Communism and the West, only shades of moral relativism.³⁷ Sartre's sympathies nonetheless lay with the Soviet Union, though the French Communist Party, stuck with venerating socialist realism, dutifully castigated his works.³⁸

In the context of the Cold War, existentialism went hand-in-hand with neutralism. The choice not to choose was as much of a choice as any other. Among French intellectuals, the choice between a Europe dominated by the Soviet Union or America defined friendships and ended political and professional alliances of decades' standing. Philosopher Raymond Aron, once Sartre's close friend, had declared his own choice in *Le Figaro* in 1947:

The truth is that in our times ... the choice that determines all else is a global one. ... One is in the universe of free countries or else in that of lands placed under harsh Soviet rule. From now on everyone in France will have to state his choice.³⁹

For this, Aron was derided as an American lackey; his standing in France suffered for a generation.⁴⁰

Disagreements escalated into defamation suits. Victor Kravchenko sued *Les Lettres Françaises* for denouncing his book *I Choose Freedom* as fictions produced to please his alleged American masters. David Rousset, the editor of *Franc-Tireur*, sued the same publication for claiming the Soviet labor camps he detailed were inventions. Both men won, but received nominal damages and lost the battle for public opinion. Sartre admitted the camps were probably real, but excused them as limited to what was "necessary," whereas detention facilities in French colonies, Greece, and Spain, he said, endured forever.⁴¹

Paris, then, was still a natural home for the Communist peace movement, and for six days in April, 1,700 delegates flocked to the Salle Pleyel for the World Congress of the Partisans of Peace.⁴² Some 20,000 Parisians surrounded loud-speakers and hoped for a glimpse of the delegates. Fadeyev again presided. Howard Fast and the baritone Paul Robeson came as the American contingent. "Red Dean" Hewlett Johnson came from Britain, accompanied by biologist J.D. Bernal. Pierre Joliot-Curie, head of France's atomic energy commission, announced, "We are not here to ask for peace but to impose it. This congress is the reply of peoples to the signers of the Atlantic pact. To the new war they are preparing we will reply with revolt of the peoples." Thousands applauded uncomprehendingly at a pre-recorded speech in Mandarin by Kuo Mo-Jo, China's foremost Marxist writer. Parisians bore banners: "Our blood will never flow again to make American capitalists rich," "French women will never send their sons to fight the Soviet Union." Picasso unveiled his "dove of peace," the symbol of the movement, as attendees released thousands of live doves.⁴³

This time, the opposition was ready, or so its organizers believed. The International Day of Resistance to Dictatorship and War, with Rousset at the helm, was where "the groundwork for a world-wide organization of the non-Communist

Left would be laid,” Rousset told the *New York Times*.⁴⁴ Hook and Farrell came from New York. The ex-Communist writer Ignazio Silone came from Italy. And Josselson and Lasky joined them from Berlin.⁴⁵

The event was instead a disaster. Rousset had enlisted a coalition of leftist French intellectuals (the Rassemblement Democratique Revolutionnaire’s Executive Committee) as co-sponsors. That coalition, however, turned out to be more accepting of Communism than anti-Communism. To placate them, Rousset refused to invite Koestler, Aron, or American philosopher James Burnham, the three highest-profile anti-Communists.

Worse still, during the event, Anarchists and Trotskyists seized the microphone. American chewing gum, segregation, Coca-Cola, and “imperialism” were condemned with equal force, Hook reported, while the French criticized the Soviet Union gingerly, if at all. Hook concluded, “If those who attended were actually representative of the non-Communist ‘left,’ it is testimony of the devastating effect of the war and Nazi occupation on its political education.”⁴⁶ Farrell added: “Had I known what the situation was, I should not have flown over to attend the Conference.”⁴⁷

Still, the idea of rallying non-Communist intellectuals took hold. Arthur Koestler had long advocated the general idea of a “cultural offensive” against the Soviet peace campaign.⁴⁸ Lasky now championed a more specific plan, the one Josselson had mentioned to Nabokov in New York: non-Communist intellectuals should gather in Berlin – then still blockaded – where the symbolic force of their opposition would be greatest. Lasky sounded out Hook in Paris; a photograph captures the two, along with the ex-Communist Franz Borkenau, in animated discussion with Josselson.⁴⁹ Lasky and Hook visited Koestler at his chateau outside Paris to flesh out the idea.⁵⁰ Encouraged, Josselson and Lasky began laying the groundwork.⁵¹

Notes

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- 18 Christopher Bentley, "Sing for Me, Muse, the Mania," *The New Republic* (October 8, 2008).
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- 26 "Jackals with Fountain Pens," *Time* (May 28, 1956).
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- 32 Michael Josselson to Frank Platt, December 10, 1975, Folder 3, Box 30, MJ.
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- 42 "'Cultural' Battle Will Go on in Paris."

- 43 Peter Coleman, *The Liberal Conspiracy: The Congress for Cultural Freedom and the Struggle for the Mind of Postwar Europe* (New York: Free Press, 1989), pp. 7–8; “Conditioned Reflex,” *Time* (May 2, 1949); “Flight of the Dove,” *Time* (September 17, 1951).
- 44 “‘Cultural’ Battle Will Go on in Paris.”
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- 46 Sidney Hook, “Report on the International Day Against Dictatorship and War” (1949), in Edith Kurzweil (ed.), *A Partisan Century: Political Writings from Partisan Review* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), pp. 98–108.
- 47 James Farrell to ‘Gliksman,’ copied to Arthur Schlesinger Jr., July 1, 1949, Box P-13, Arthur Schlesinger Jr. Papers, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library, Boston, Massachusetts (“ASJ”).
- 48 Scammell, *Arthur Koestler*, pp. 353–4.
- 49 Photograph, May 2, 1949, inset in Diggins, *Up from Communism*, pp. 300–1.
- 50 Lasky to Hook, December 29, 1949, Folder 3, Box 124, SH; Scammell, *Arthur Koestler*, pp. 353–4.
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5 Josselson joins the Agency

Only at this point, with plans for the Berlin Congress well underway, did Josselson make the career change that would profoundly influence the Congress's future. The Soviet blockade of West Berlin had prompted the little-known Office of Policy Coordination (OPC), a secret offshoot of the CIA, to expand its negligible presence in Germany.¹ Thus, in autumn 1949, OPC's Frankfurt chief, Lawrence de Neufville, brought on Josselson as OPC's first Berlin agent.² "It was probably induced with Mel, agreed to by Mel," Harold Hurwitz, a friend and colleague of both men, speculated. "Why do I say that? Because they were very close."³ And by then, Josselson's new employers had also developed a keen interest in the same intellectuals whom Josselson had been working with for months.

The organization Josselson joined bore little resemblance to the organization the CIA would become in the ensuing decades. In 1949, the CIA was a two-year-old agency concerned almost exclusively with intelligence collection. It began as a tiny organization housed in the old OSS headquarters at 2430 E Street, an unmarked red brick building that looked like a prep school fallen on tough times. Its first director, Admiral Roscoe Hillenkoetter, was so unremarkable that Truman omitted him from his memoirs.⁴

OPC, Josselson's new employer, came into existence only in June 1948, when Truman's National Security Council charged the organization with conducting a panoply of covert actions against the Soviet Union, including subversion of Soviet-sponsored political groups, support for guerillas to liberate Eastern Europe, economic warfare, and propaganda.⁵ Though nominally part of the CIA, OPC was sufficiently autonomous that its head, 40-year-old Frank Wisner, ran OPC as his own fiefdom. Colleagues recalled him as "almost boyishly charming, cool yet coiled, a low hurdler from Mississippi constrained by a vest."⁶ Before and after the war, he was a Wall Street lawyer. During the war, he joined OSS, where his exploits in Romania ranged from keeping a close watch on the Russians to performing magic tricks for the royal family. Stationed in Germany at war's end, he became convinced that Russia was an emerging enemy; his warnings fell on deaf ears.⁷

From the start, OPC operated in crisis mode and saw itself playing catch-up against a far more experienced foe. Wisner feared that no matter how vigorous America's efforts, Communism would continue its rapid conquest of the free

world. The Defense Department had set 1954 as its best-case projection for the outbreak of all-out war with the Soviet Union.⁸ The Communist threat was everywhere: in dozens of international meetings and rallies capped off by the singing of the “Internationale”; behind fractious Foreign Ministers’ meetings and diplomatic failures; in the Soviet Union’s alarmingly rapid development of an atomic bomb, and in the millions of Red Army soldiers still mobilized. It was behind the forcible transformation of Eastern European governments into “people’s democracies.” It was manifest in Berlin, where the Soviet Union repudiated quadripartite governance, imposed a blockade on West Berlin, and seemed poised to invade. It raged on the French docks, where Communist unions blocked Marshall Plan shipments of provisions, machinery, and fuel. And the threat gained credence with the worryingly rapid progress of the Chinese Communists, securing the north and plunging towards Shanghai.

Faced with these developments, American diplomacy seemed inadequate. Communist movements in a half-dozen countries seemed on the verge of toppling governments. The governing assumption was to prepare for a sudden war where the Soviets would swiftly overrun Western Europe and “employ subversive activities and unconventional warfare ... to an extent unparalleled in history,” an OPC forecast concluded.⁹ Wisner’s job was to buy more time while preparing for a war even worse than the last, and covert action seemed the only way to tilt the scales.

When Josselson joined OPC in 1949, however, OPC was also a tiny, understaffed outfit whose objectives far outstripped its capabilities. “The establishment of an organization such as OPC is unprecedented in the peacetime history of the United States,” Wisner reflected. “Because of this, a significant body of knowledge, personnel, reserves, techniques, and philosophy of operations are not readily available.”¹⁰ OPC may have seen the Soviet threat more acutely than the rest of the American government, but in its first year it lacked the staff and capabilities to originate operations itself, and relied on the State Department and friends or acquaintances outside government for ideas.¹¹

Thus, while Wisner envisioned from the beginning that OPC would actively support “anti-Communists in Free Countries” and combat Soviet front groups, how this would happen was largely a matter of chance and opportunity.¹² In an era when private American organizations believed it their patriotic duty to pitch ideas for combating the Communist menace to every government agency they could reach, OPC had no shortage of operational candidates.¹³ Wisner would eventually boast of these operations as his “Mighty Wurlitzer,” a network of operations so far-reaching that he could “sit down ... and play just about any tune he liked.” But the “Mighty Wurlitzer” was always more a reflection of Wisner’s ambitions for OPC than an accurate assessment of how these operations worked.¹⁴ Indeed, Wisner believed all these operations would be short-lived; when he later learned of their longevity, he “remarked sadly, ‘And to think that we set these up as emergency operations.’”¹⁵

Wisner, overseeing dozens of potential projects at once, had no time to drill down on all of them; many thus fell to Carmel Offie, Wisner’s special assistant.¹⁶

At a time when most CIA officers were Ivy Leaguers from socially prominent families, Offie stood out as the son of a railroad hand, and one of the few openly gay men in government. He was a protégé of several U.S. ambassadors to the Soviet Union, and at OPC involved himself in everything from recruiting former Nazis knowledgeable about the Soviet Union to developing relationships with the Eastern European émigré community. He was Thomas Cromwell to Wisner's Henry VIII: an extraordinary fixer, and OPC's most divisive figure.¹⁷

Offie also became OPC's resident expert at channeling large sums of money to anti-Communist groups who were already independently trying to undermine Soviet front organizations. If OPC wanted a counterweight to a particular front, it looked for a promising private organization in need of money, preferably one with existing ties to OPC officers. Foremost among these was the American Federation of Labor's Free Trades Union Committee, led by Jay Lovestone (former Secretary-General of the Communist Party, now a firm anti-Communist) and his deputy (and fellow ex-Communist) Irving Brown. Until OPC's creation, Brown and the union figures he enlisted were often the only obstacles stopping the consolidation of European trade unions under a Soviet-controlled aegis. Brown was personally involved in breaking apart pro-Soviet unions in France and Italy and enlisting dockworkers to forcibly end blockades that prevented the delivery of Marshall Plan goods.¹⁸

Word traveled: Defense Secretary James Forrestal told Wisner that Lovestone was worth cultivating. Wisner reached out in December 1948; by 1950, Lovestone and Brown were receiving nearly \$200,000 a year and operating as far as India and Formosa. How they spent this money was never clear; eventually, their hazy accounting practices would lead the CIA to have second thoughts.¹⁹ But, for now, their efforts seemed proof that, with enough money, dedicated private operators could beat back their Communist counterparts.²⁰

Finding a way to counter the growing number of Soviet fronts attracting European and American intellectuals, however, proved difficult. Well before Josselson joined OPC, Wisner and Offie had concluded that these fronts posed a clear danger and that OPC should try to sponsor an anti-Communist group to counter them. If enough American and European intellectuals resumed their prewar roles as spokesmen for the Soviet cause, or simply endorsed neutralism, mass public opinion would likely follow. Wisner and his staff were painfully aware of how effectively Münzenberg and the Comintern had exploited intellectuals' public role in the thirties. And in the early Cold War, writers, artists, and scientists were still celebrities who attracted large audiences and seemed capable of swaying public opinion.

To Wisner, the 1949 Waldorf Conference vividly illustrated the threat – and how little the American government had done about it to date. OPC had no jurisdiction over events on American soil; thus, Wisner and Offie were mere bystanders as Soviet delegates arrived in New York to immense fanfare and the crowds around the Waldorf swelled. They apparently learned about Sidney Hook and his impromptu group, Americans for Intellectual Freedom, from news reports lauding the group's effectiveness in disrupting the conference.²¹ Wisner was

delighted, and became enamored of the idea of “having a little DEMINFORM.”²² But “the likelihood of melding such ardently independent individuals into any organization . . . seemed remote,” recalled future CIA director Richard Helms.²³

When the Soviet-directed Partisans for Peace announced plans for a bigger gathering in Paris in April 1949 at the close of the Waldorf Conference, Wisner decided that the time had come for OPC to intervene. Offie considered the State Department’s proposed response too feeble and proposed an OPC-backed counter-rally. He contacted Irving Brown and others in Paris; they approached David Rousset, an editor of the *Franc-Tireur*, to organize the event.²⁴ Rousset was amenable, and Wisner swiftly secured \$16,000 to fund a counter-congress.²⁵

Wisner’s hopes for a counter-punch, however, were soon dashed. OPC – just like Hook, Lasky, Josselson, and numerous other attendees at the “International Day of Resistance to Dictatorship and War” – considered the event a debacle. Offie fretted that the *Franc-Tireur* group was more united by anti-Americanism than anti-Communism and was incapable of attracting a wide audience of European intellectuals. Wisner likewise worried that “this type of leadership for a continuing organization would result in the degeneration of the entire idea (of having a little DEMINFORM) into a nuts folly of miscellaneous goats and monkeys whose antics would completely discredit the work and statements of the serious and responsible liberals.” Needless to say, Wisner had “serious misgivings” about ongoing OPC support for such a group.²⁶ So did Brown and the American Federation of Labor (AFL) – although “Frank and his friend seem to be more optimistic than you are,” Brown reported to Lovestone.²⁷

OPC, at this point, seemingly had little idea that intellectuals were taking matters into their own hands and forging ahead with the idea of a counter-congress in Berlin. Instead, OPC eagerly but passively reviewed proposals that various contacts forwarded along. In September 1949, Offie received one such proposal from a State Department contact: a plan for “big Anti-Waldorf-Astoria Congress in Berlin itself” by Ruth Fischer, a 54-year-old Harvard researcher who had formerly led the German Communist Party and now worked for the CIA’s short-lived and little-known rival, “The Pond.”²⁸ Fischer envisioned “a gathering of all ex-Communists, plus a good representative group of anti-Stalinist . . . intellectuals, declaring its sympathy” for the peoples of the Soviet satellites. The ultimate aim, she said, was to give “the Kremlin hell right at the gate of their own hell.”²⁹

What OPC did not know was that Fischer’s proposal was a premature offshoot of the plans that Josselson, Lasky, and Hook had been working on since Paris. During the summer, Lasky had spoken with Fischer about the idea, and in July 1949 Fischer sent Lasky a memorandum detailing her vision of a political counter-offensive.³⁰ By late August, Fischer was approaching State Department contacts with her version of the idea and soliciting official support; they, in turn, sent Offie her proposal.³¹ Lasky was irked, dismissing Fischer as a “most ‘explosive’ personality” who “was running around Western Europe . . . with proposals for a Berlin Congress” as if she had originated the idea.³² Josselson concurred:

“[T]he idea of the congress was not hers, but had been mooted some time before ... I have no idea to whom her memorandum was addressed, do not remember ever seeing it. She had her own connections.”³³

Within OPC, Fischer’s proposal for a Berlin congress hit a dead end. Fischer herself may have been the obstacle. In the estimation of one OPC consultant, Fischer “still dreams about her previous days as a mass leader,” but “no longer has any mass influence; and it seems to me unlikely that she could develop any.”³⁴ Offie kept lobbying for a Berlin congress, but the prospects looked dim – until Josselson finally revealed to OPC a sketch of the plans he and Lasky had labored over for months.³⁵

Notes

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- 2 *Battleground Berlin*, p. 106; Michael Warner, “Origins of the Congress for Cultural Freedom, 1949–50,” *Studies in Intelligence* 38 (1998), available at: www.cia.gov/library/center-for-the-study-of-intelligence/csi-publications/csi-studies/studies/95unclass/Warner.html (accessed April 21, 2016).
- 3 Harold Hurwitz, October 7, 2007, telephone interview.
- 4 Christopher Andrew, *For the President’s Eyes Only: Secret Intelligence and the American Presidency from Washington to Bush* (London: HarperCollins, 1995), pp. 170–71.
- 5 NSC 10/2, June 18, 1948, *Documents of the National Security Council, 1947–1977* (Washington, DC: University Publications of America, 1980), Reel I; see generally Hugh Wilford, *The Mighty Wurlitzer: How the CIA Played America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008), pp. 23–8.
- 6 Tom Braden, “I’m Glad the CIA is ‘Immoral,’” *Saturday Evening Post* (May 20, 1967).
- 7 Evan Thomas, *The Very Best Men: The Daring Early Years of the CIA* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995), pp. 22–3.
- 8 Robert Joyce to Deputy Undersecretary of State (Matthews), December 31, 1952, Douglas Keane and Michael Warner (eds.), *Foreign Relations of the United States: The Intelligence Community, 1950–55* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2007), pp. 391–3.
- 9 “CIA/OPC Strategic War plan in Support of the Joint Outline Emergency War Plan,” April 4, 1951, *Foreign Relations of the United States: The Intelligence Community*, pp. 121–30.
- 10 Memorandum by Assistant Director for Policy Coordination of CIA (Wisner), May 8, 1950, *Foreign Relations of the United States: Emergence of the Intelligence Establishment*, p. 13.
- 11 Warner, “Origins of the Congress,” p. 91.
- 12 Frank G. Wisner, Memorandum for the Director of Central Intelligence, “OPC Projects,” October 29, 1948, in Michael Warner (ed.), *The CIA Under Harry Truman* (Honolulu: University Press of the Pacific, 2005), pp. 241–2.

- 13 See, e.g., Edward M. O'Connor Memorandum for George A Morgan (Acting Head, PSB), Subject: Suggestions and Offers of Assistance from Private Groups in the United States, October 7, 1953, Folder 4, Box 10, Psychological Strategy Board Central File, Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library, Abilene, Kansas ("PSB Central File"); Thomas, *Very Best Men*, pp. 40–1.
- 14 Thomas Powers, *The Man Who Kept Secrets: Richard Helms and the CIA* (New York: Pocket Books, 1979), p. 101; see also Thomas, *The Very Best Men*, pp. 60–3.
- 15 Christopher Felix (James McCargar), "The Unknowable CIA," *The Reporter* (April 6, 1967), p. 24.
- 16 Thomas, *Very Best Men*, pp. 63–4.
- 17 Unsurprisingly, Carmel Offie has proven an irresistible subject for historians. See, e.g., Anthony Carew, "The American Labor Movement in Fizzland: The Free Trade Labor Union Committee and the CIA," *Labor History* 39 (1998), pp. 30–2; Burton Hersh, *The Old Boys: The American Elite and the Origins of the CIA* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1992), pp. 42, 44, 63–6, 442–3; Ted Morgan, *A Covert Life: Jay Lovestone, Communist, Anti-Communist, and Spymaster*, New York: Random House, 1999), pp. 209–14, 219–20, 223–32.
- 18 Morgan, *A Covert Life*, pp. 177–94; *Time*, "The Most Dangerous Man" (March 17, 1952); see also Ben Rathbun, *The Point Man: Irving Brown and the Deadly Post-1945 Struggle for Europe and Africa* (London: Minerva, 1996).
- 19 Morgan, *A Covert Life*, pp. 182, 197; Carew, "The American Labor Movement in Fizzland," p. 29.
- 20 *Ibid.*, pp. 25–31, 37, 41; Morgan, *A Covert Life*, pp. 195–240.
- 21 Warner, "Origins of the Congress."
- 22 *Ibid.*, quoting Wisner memo.
- 23 Richard Helms, *A Look Over My Shoulder: A Life in the Central Intelligence Agency* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2003), p. 351.
- 24 Warner, "Origins of the Congress."
- 25 *Ibid.*
- 26 Quoted in *ibid.*; see also Helms, *A Look Over My Shoulder*, p. 351.
- 27 Irving Brown to Jay Lovestone, May 9, 1949, Folder 18, Box 698, Jay Lovestone Papers, Hoover Institution, Stanford University, Stanford, California ("JL").
- 28 Warner, "Origins of the Congress." For a brief but excellent history of The Pond, see Mark Stout, "The Pond: Running Agents for State, War, and the CIA," *Studies in Intelligence* 48 (2004). Fischer apparently kept reports to The Pond in her personal files. See, e.g., MS 2073, Ruth Fischer Papers, Houghton Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts ("RF").
- 29 Ruth Fischer to Norris Chipman, August 24, 1949, MS 1185, RF; Warner, "Origins of the Congress."
- 30 Ruth Fischer to Melvin Lasky, July 23, 1949, MS 1579, RF.
- 31 Ruth Fischer to Norris Chipman (U.S. Embassy, Paris), August 24, 1949, MS 1185, RF.
- 32 Melvin Lasky to Sidney Hook, February 19, 1950, Folder 3, Box 124, Sidney Hook Papers, Hoover Institution, Stanford University, Stanford, California ("SH").
- 33 Michael Josselson to Iain Hamilton, January 13, 1977, Folder 2, Box 30, Michael Josselson Papers, Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, University of Texas-Austin, Austin, Texas ("MJ").
- 34 James Burnham to OPC, "Subject: Truman-Smith memorandum concerning Ruth Fischer," April 14, 1950, Folder 2, Box 11, James Burnham Papers, Hoover Institution, Stanford University, Stanford, California ("JB").
- 35 Warner, "Origins of the Congress."

6 A congress for cultural freedom

Berlin, 1950

November 1949 found Josselson on the road again, bound for the European Cultural Congress in Lausanne with Lasky and his *Der Monat* co-editor, Hellmuth Jaesrich. Their goal: to figure out how a Berlin congress would work – and what approach would appeal to European intellectuals.¹ Organized by Swiss writer and philosopher Denis de Rougemont, attendees at Lausanne opposed Communism principally as a threat to the survival of Western culture, not as a political phenomenon.² The theme worked as a unifying principle; there was, at least, none of the fractiousness and political bickering that had doomed previous efforts to failure. To the legal scholar and German politician Carlo Schmid, Lausanne was thus the “first round in the founding of the Congress for Cultural Freedom . . . and the first step toward what would become a more cultural orientation.” And, he told Josselson, “I know how much we are all indebted to you” for its founding.³

By December, Lasky and Josselson were approaching possible patrons about a “Congress for Cultural Freedom” to be held in spring 1950. “I have meaning to write to you for a long time of a little dream of ours that was just always on the point of taking on reality,” Lasky wrote to Hook. “Ever since Paris last April we have been playing with the idea of a ‘Monat’ Congress – and in Berlin.” Now, “I am trying to raise enough funds for a Berlin Congress – for ‘peace and liberty’ or better perhaps for ‘cultural freedom,’” which Lasky anticipated would culminate in the formation of a permanent “International committee for Cultural Freedom.” Lasky envisioned, “If we can manage to invite and bring over 50 prominent ‘foreign’ (i.e., non-German) persons I think we will have a political show on our hands which will mean something.”⁴ He hoped for “the widest possible front” among “non-Communist intellectuals.”⁵ He begged for Hook’s help so that “[i]t would, finally, take the initiative on the political-cultural front – as we have been hoping and planning for so long.”⁶

Josselson simultaneously sought the kind of backers who could pay for extensive travel, lodging, publicity, and logistical expenses in an array of foreign currencies without blinking an eye: his new bosses at OPC. His strikingly similar proposal for a “Congress for cultural freedom” in Berlin envisioned that the congress would promote “the fundamental ideals governing cultural (and political) action in the Western world and the repudiation of all totalitarian challenges.”

A Berlin “Congress for cultural freedom,” Josselson urged, could powerfully counter the messages of the Soviet peace campaign by championing “the fundamental ideals governing cultural (and political) action in the Western world and the repudiation of all totalitarian challenges.”⁷ Prominent scholars in Berlin could co-sponsor the event with an informal committee of American and European intellectuals. Invitations would go to the most prominent (and politically desirable) names, with the aim of establishing a permanent organization.

While Josselson awaited word from Washington, Lasky plowed ahead and set the date for late June 1950. As Josselson’s proposal made its way to OPC in Washington that January, Lasky enlisted James Burnham, Hook’s New York University colleague, to help with the planning.⁸ By February, Lasky had taken a leave of absence from *Der Monat*, titled himself “General Secretary, the Berlin Congress,” and sent invites to *Der Monat*’s roster of contributors. “The Congress,” Lasky assured prospective delegates, “will be prepared to cover all expenses for travel to and from, and stay in Berlin.”⁹ By March, Arthur Koestler – perhaps the most eminent anti-Communist of all – had enthusiastically joined the informal planning committee.¹⁰

By April, Josselson had received the welcome news that Wisner and OPC had signed off on the project and had allocated a \$50,000 budget. Indeed, to OPC, Josselson’s proposal finally looked like their best hope of realizing Wisner’s dream of “a little DEMINFORM.”¹¹ The AFL’s Irving Brown was dispatched to



Figure 6.1 Melvin Lasky (right) with François and Lilian Bondy at the 1950 Berlin Congress (reproduced with permission of the Lasky Center for Transatlantic Studies).



Figure 6.2 Michael Josselson (right) and Melvin Lasky (left) at a Congress gathering (reproduced with permission of Jennifer Josselson Vorbach).

handle financial arrangements and to serve as the Congress's putative (and quite plausible) backer. But Wisner added an unwelcome instruction: to make Lasky less visible. With Lasky – technically an American official – as its main organizer, the Berlin Congress looked like an official American production, and thus a ripe target for hostile press. Josselson demurred: “No other person here, certainly no German, could have achieved such success” in enlisting delegates.¹² Wisner's order went nowhere. With the Congress two months away, Lasky was too central, and too enmeshed in planning, to drop out of sight.

Berlin in spring 1950 was ground zero of the Cold War. Show trials were sweeping the new Soviet satellites. A month before the Congress, German Communist leader Walter Ulbricht proclaimed May Day 1950 as “the signal for national uprising.” Some 20,000 youths slept in tents outside the Lustgarten before a “spontaneous demonstration of the peace-loving people's identity with the great Soviet state and our glorious Stalin.” Half a million attended an opposing demonstration at the Tiergarten, where Berlin's mayor, Ernst Reuter, declared, “We Berliners are not afraid of anything.”¹³ The Berlin Congress, the *New York Times* reported, was to be “the first major offensive against Soviet propagandists” boasting “literary and scientific personages of international repute.”¹⁴ Former Comintern agent Gerhard Eisler, the new head of East German radio propaganda, denounced delegates as “literary monkeys and spies for the American secret police.”¹⁵

Lasky, with discreet input from Josselson and an active steering committee – Burnham, Koestler, Aron, and Irving Brown – had assembled a formidable group.¹⁶ From America came Hook and various alumni of Hook’s Americans for Intellectual Freedom, including Farrell, Nicolas Nabokov, and Arthur Schlesinger Jr. The British delegation comprised MP Julian Amery, the abrasive historian Hugh Trevor-Roper, philosopher Freddie Ayer, and Cambridge don and American historian Denis Brogan. The French contingent had Rousset, and his *Franc-Tireur* co-editor Georges Altman. Among the Italians were Silone, Chiaromonte, and writer Carlo Levi. De Rougemont and Bondy, the Swiss representatives, were straight from the Lausanne congress.¹⁷ Berlin Mayor Ernst Reuter was an enthusiastic Congress proponent from the beginning. Five philosophers – Bertrand Russell (English), John Dewey (American), Jacques Maritain (French), Benedetto Croce (Italian), and Karl Jaspers (German) – served as the Congress’s honorary chairmen, though none came. All the delegates were non-Communist; what exactly this meant would prove contentious.¹⁸

As the delegates checked into the Hotel am Steinplatz, the Congress’s self-appointed steering committee rushed to finish its work.¹⁹ Lasky and Burnham asked Koestler to prepare a “short opening address to round off the somewhat too ceremonial opening program with a political-keynoting speech,” as well as a manifesto for the Congress. The committee had sorted out everything: the invitations, the format of the Berlin Congress, the advance publicity, and the tentative structure of a permanent congress organization.²⁰ Once the Berlin Congress began, they met every morning and night for a “housekeeping” session to “plan for exigencies,” as Hook put it.²¹ Josselson consulted from the sidelines, but was so unobtrusive that he later claimed “Koestler did not even know of my existence in Berlin.”²²

On June 25, 1950, exactly fifteen years since the Mutualité Congress, a hundred delegates arrived for the Congress’s opening session. Few remembered the anniversary; the news that Communist North Korea had just launched a surprise invasion of the South overshadowed everything. During the opening session, Koestler spontaneously “leapt onto the platform and called in impassioned tones for the formation of an international brigade of writers similar to that in the Spanish Civil War,” recorded Hilde Spiel.²³ For the next few days, Hook recalled, “it seemed uncertain whether the Russians would march in Germany too.”²⁴

In his opening speech, Koestler argued there was no time left to equivocate, only time to answer “Yea, Yea, Nay, Nay.” In a later session, he argued that the Soviet Union’s claims to represent the “left,” “peace,” and “democracy” had emptied the “old antimonies” of meaning. “Socialism” as practiced in Russia was no longer a progressive creed compared to American capitalism. The only dichotomy that mattered now, Koestler concluded, was between “total tyranny and relative freedom.” But the fight for “relative freedom” was necessarily constrained: “Democracy, by its very nature, can create no conspiratorial instrument comparable to the Cominform, nor produce a counter-phantom to the communist creed.” Still, he envisioned, a permanent organization would engage in political

agitation and sow the seeds of dissent both in the West and behind the Iron Curtain.²⁵

Echoing Koestler, Burnham argued that the Soviet peace offensive “weaken[s] the will and the relative ability of [its followers] to survive.” To sign petitions to abolish nuclear weapons is “to provide a recruiting list and ground for the Communist parties.” He added, “I am not, under any and all circumstances, against atomic bombs . . . I am, yesterday and today at any rate, *for* those bombs made in Los Alamos, Hanford and Oak Ridge.” And “I should think that Europeans would join me in being *for*, not against, those latter bombs . . . For five years, those bombs have defended – have been the sole defense of – the liberties of Western Europe.” The only hope was that “[t]hrough a moral, psychological, and political counteroffensive, through a worldwide anti-Communist Resistance, we can disintegrate the Communist power without the last desperate resort – which otherwise will surely come – to atomic bombs.”²⁶

To some, Burnham and Koestler seemed reckless. André Philip retorted that the only bomb he feared was “the misery-bomb of the unhappiness of the working man.”²⁷ Even Hook felt “[Burnham] is right, but his problem is that he doesn’t know how to deliver the unpalatable truth in a way that is digestible.”²⁸ British delegates Hugh Trevor-Roper and Freddie Ayer faulted Koestler’s Manifesto for focusing single-mindedly on opposing Communism at the expense of any positive program.²⁹ “What irritated both Hugh and myself,” Ayer explained, “was the hysterical atmosphere in which the Congress was held, orchestrated as it was by revengeful ex-Communists, *imprimis* Arthur Koestler.”³⁰ Their proposed amendments, urging “the creation of new freedoms” and a “positive obligation: to offer new and constructive answers to the problems of our time,” were readily acclaimed.³¹

More to their liking was Ignazio Silone, whose speeches envisioned a quite different role for intellectuals resisting Communism. Like Koestler, Silone had been a committed Communist and had written of these years in his semi-autobiographical novels.³² But, unlike Koestler, Silone saw the stakes of the struggle in abstract terms. His speech divided the intellectual world not into East and West, but into those who respected the “supreme duty of freely speaking the truth” and those who renounced it. True converts to Communism, in his view, had lost their consciences and chose silence in the face of Stalin’s purges. Nothing less than the freedom to one’s own individual thoughts seemed at stake. Only the free exchange of ideas, Silone believed, could preserve the freedoms that had been lost. Silone, an indifferent public speaker, lost the rhetorical battle – but his views ultimately appealed to more of the delegates.³³

Lasky’s speech synthesized the two positions. He promised that the Congress would offer “moral and material support” to intellectuals behind the Iron Curtain, but he also acknowledged the need to strengthen an intellectual community in the West.³⁴ The two approaches could reinforce each other, he believed: the “democratic unity achieved at the Berlin Congress” was between “two main groups, one group putting the emphasis on militant resistance against the threats from the East, the other group putting emphasis on enterprising

reconstruction of the West.” For now, Lasky believed, “there is place for all the democratic elements, whether of the ‘left’ or the ‘right.’”³⁵

On the last day, before an audience of 15,000, Koestler triumphantly declared, “Friends, freedom has seized the offensive!” Notwithstanding the delegates’ varied perspectives, all agreed with the basic premise “that totalitarianism in any shape or form is the arch-enemy of mankind and that it must be fought by a world-wide struggle both against its internal encroachments and its pressure from outside,” concluded German writer Richard Löwenthal.³⁶ Delegates approved a permanent organization and elected an Executive Committee to decide on future projects that fall; in the meantime, a makeshift committee would handle interim planning.³⁷

Lasky and Josselson had seemingly achieved the impossible task of unifying a disparate, fractious group of intellectuals around their shared opposition to Communism. “One has to praise Melvin J. Lasky as an extremely efficient chairman – very familiar to everybody in the Western Sector and the best hated American in the Russian sector,” concluded one attendee.³⁸ Lasky was elated, and planned to continue on as the Congress’s Secretary-General.

Josselson, too, had much to celebrate. He had dedicated more than a year to putting on the Berlin Congress. Now a permanent Congress for Cultural Freedom had come into existence. His bosses at OPC were delighted and deemed the Berlin Congress a major success.³⁹ The State Department was equally effusive in its praise: “Briefly, the Congress was a propaganda gold mine, and Mr. Melvin Lasky deserves recognition for a brilliant piece of work,” a State Department memorandum concluded.⁴⁰ And, while the Berlin Congress left the Congress’s future direction deliberately unclear, Josselson advised OPC that an organization that opposed Communism through more indirect, cultural endeavors – as Silone had urged in Berlin – would resonate more than the overt, political movement that Burnham and Koestler favored.⁴¹

But the Congress’s success, and the prospect of a permanent Congress for Cultural Freedom, ushered in new problems. Josselson had invited the Agency’s backing for a one-off project. But, now that it had succeeded, the CIA sought a long-term stake. Indeed, OPC officers began discussing a permanent operation to support the Congress almost immediately.⁴² “In considering the success of [the Berlin] conference,” future CIA director Richard Helms recalled, “the State Department and the Agency decided that if the Congress for Cultural Freedom was to have a future, it could not be known as an official mouthpiece for U.S. foreign policy.”⁴³ That was especially critical given that the U.S. Congress was adamantly opposed to the idea of spending public monies to promote modern art or European leftists.⁴⁴ Wisner accordingly insisted that official sponsorship would be “‘the kiss of death’ to the Congress for Cultural Freedom.”⁴⁵ As for private foundations, the Ford, Rockefeller, and Carnegie Foundations all passed, despite repeated approaches from Wisner and others.⁴⁶

Years later, Josselson would speculate why alternatives fell through: “Was it because the Agency had found something which it jealously wanted for itself?”⁴⁷ Josselson’s intervention with OPC ultimately gave the Congress financial stability

– but at a price. In the short term, Wisner attached a string to Agency financing that Josselson vehemently opposed. And in the long term, Josselson’s pitch to OPC to fund the Berlin Congress produced a clandestine relationship between the Congress and the Agency that weighed on Josselson for the rest of his career.

Notes

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- 3 Carlo Schmid to Michael Josselson, October 20, 1977, Folder 5, Box 32, Michael Josselson Papers, Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, University of Texas–Austin, Austin, Texas (“MJ”).
- 4 Melvin Lasky to Sidney Hook, December 29, 1949, Folder 3, Box 124, Sidney Hook Papers, Hoover Institution, Stanford University, Stanford, California (“SH”).
- 5 Melvin Lasky to Sidney Hook, February 19, 1950, Folder 3, Box 124, SH.
- 6 Lasky to Hook, December 29, 1949.
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- 9 Melvin Lasky to Arthur Schlesinger Jr., February 28, 1950, Box P-18, Arthur Schlesinger Jr. Papers, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library, Boston, Massachusetts (“ASJ”).
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- 16 Memorandum from James Burnham, Raymond Aron, Arthur Koestler, Subject: Revisions and new projects and plans for the Congress, n.d., Folder 7, Box 8, JB; Josselson to Hamilton, January 13, 1977, MJ.
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- 20 Melvin Lasky to James Burnham, June 12, 1950, Folder 6, Box 8, JB.
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- 22 Michael Josselson to Iain Hamilton, January 13, 1977, MJ.

- 23 Hilde Spiel, *The Dark and the Bright: Memoirs 1911–1989*, trans. Christine Shuttleworth (Riverside: Ariadne Press, 2007), p. 265.
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- 25 Michael Scammell, *Arthur Koestler: The Literary and Political Odyssey of a Twentieth-Century Skeptic* (New York: Random House, 2009), pp. 356–9.
- 26 James Burnham, “Rhetoric and Peace,” *Partisan Review* XVII (1950), pp. 866–7 (reprinting Burnham’s Berlin speech).
- 27 “Berlin Congress Discusses Bombs: Black, White, and Misery,” *Manchester Guardian* (June 29, 1950).
- 28 Quoted in Daniel Kelly, *James Burnham and the Struggle for the World* (Wilmington: ISI Books, 2002), p. 162.
- 29 Bondy, “Berlin Congress.”
- 30 A.J. Ayer, *More of My Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), pp. 63–4.
- 31 Coleman, *Liberal Conspiracy*, p. 251; Scammell, *Arthur Koestler*, p. 359.
- 32 Ignazio Silone, *Bread and Wine*, new edn (New York: Penguin Books, 1968), p. 33.
- 33 Stanislaw Pugliese, *Bitter Spring: A Life of Ignazio Silone* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2009), pp. 201–3.
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- 35 Melvin Lasky, Letter to the Editor, *The Economist*, July 24, 1950, Folder 9, Box 13, Irving Brown Files, George Meany Memorial Archive, National Labor College, Silver Spring, Maryland (“IB”).
- 36 Richard Löwenthal, “Western Intelligentsia No Longer Easy Prey to Communism,” *The Scotsman* (July 3, 1950).
- 37 “Memorandum from Melvin Lasky, General Secretary, the Berlin CONGRESS, Berlin,” July 5, 1950, Folder 14, Box 13, IB. The Executive Committee was to number 25, but fell a few short; members included Brown, Burnham, Hook, Koestler, Nabokov, de Rougemont, and Silone.
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- 41 Warner, “Origins of the Congress.”
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- 43 Richard Helms, *A Look Over My Shoulder: A Life in the Central Intelligence Agency* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2003), p. 351.
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- 45 Quoted in Volker Berghahn, *America and the Intellectual Cold Wars in Europe* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), p. 220.
- 46 Michael Warner, “Sophisticated Spies: CIA’s Links to Liberal Anti-Communists, 1949–1967,” *International Journal of Intelligence and Counterintelligence* 8 (1996/7), p. 428; James Burnham to OPC, “Subject: The Ford Foundation and the Congress for Cultural Freedom,” July 5, 1951, Folder 5, Box 11, JB; Sidney Hook to Michael Josselson, July 27, 1958, Folder 8, Box 135, Series II, International Association for Cultural Freedom (Congress for Cultural Freedom) Papers, Regenstein Library, University of Chicago, Chicago, Illinois (“CCF”) (describing unsuccessful approaches).
- 47 Michael Josselson to Lawrence de Neufville, January 30, 1974, Folder 3, Box 30, MJ.

7 From Berlin to Paris

Josselson and the Congress in transition

The Berlin Congress proved a short-lived triumph for Josselson and the Congress for Cultural Freedom alike. Josselson remained in Germany, while the Congress's course was being charted by the informal steering committee from Berlin – Burnham, Koestler, Lasky, and Brown. Within months of the Berlin Congress, the Congress was on the verge of collapse, and Josselson and Lasky's longstanding partnership was upended.

When Wisner decided in summer 1950 that OPC should permanently underwrite the Congress for Cultural Freedom in operation QKOPERA, OPC's aims were amorphous. The Congress's perceived purpose, said Wisner's deputy Frank Lindsay, was "to strengthen European intellectuals against Communism."¹ Future DCI Richard Helms gave an equally broad description of the Congress's objective: he simply felt that the "potential value" of "rallying" eminent anti-Communist intellectuals into a "counterforce" was "obvious."² If the Congress was going to resolve whether to focus primarily on cultural or political endeavors, that direction was not going to come from Washington.

Wisner did, however, have one clear vision for the Congress: Melvin Lasky was not going to be part of it. That August, Wisner ordered Josselson to remove Lasky from further organizational work – or the Agency would refuse to give the Congress any more money. Wisner was adamant that, because of Lasky's known status as an American official, his continued visibility was a "major blunder" that reflected "an unfortunate tendency . . . to succumb to the temptation of convenience (doing things the easy way) and irrespective of security and other technical considerations of the utmost importance."³

Josselson unhappily complied. In the following months, Josselson and Lasky had a heart-to-heart, and Lasky reluctantly withdrew, realizing that "Mike had tried his best and been overruled," as Lasky later told a colleague.⁴ (Rumors that Lasky himself was a CIA agent are unlikely.⁵ Lasky almost certainly knew of OPC's involvement early on, but OPC considered him unwitting as of the Berlin Congress. "If there were anybody in the Congress setup who would make the CIA bureaucrats gnash their teeth," one CIA officer explained, "it was Mel. Mel was too much. He was brilliant, but impossible at human relations."⁶)

In September 1950, Josselson unexpectedly resigned from his post in Berlin and moved to Paris, citing "health reasons."⁷ Later, he would spin an inspired

but incomplete explanation to his colleagues in the Congress. "While stopping off in Paris on my way back to the United States," he claimed, "I let myself be persuaded to help organize the Congress for Cultural Freedom."⁸ Josselson purportedly planned to resume work as a department store buyer, but "my close association with writers, publishing, and other intellectual pursuits during the five years after the war had created in me a strong distaste for what is called the dry goods business." So "when it was suggested to me that I should take on the task of creating a permanent organization fathered by the Berlin Congress, I willingly accepted."⁹

Josselson's presence in Paris was in fact Wisner's decision. By September 1950, the Congress had done little and was crippled by infighting. Josselson – a known quantity to many of the intellectuals involved – was a logical choice to straighten the mess out. But his position at first seemed temporary. He did not even arrive with a plausible cover reason for his perennial visits to the Congress's Paris headquarters.¹⁰ Josselson and his case officer, Lawrence de Neufville, even set up a provisional apartment together – a move that would have raised obvious security concerns had Josselson planned to stay long under non-official cover.¹¹

By mid-September 1950, Josselson was enough of a regular at the Paris office that François Bondy, the Swiss editor who had become the Congress's de facto administrator, was casually relaying Josselson's advice.¹² Josselson could see clearly enough that the Congress was in trouble. Bondy was beyond frustrated. He had been promised editorship of a yet-to-be-launched Congress magazine, but was instead stuck serving as the Congress's all-purpose administrator, corresponding with figures potentially interested in the Congress and defending it against mounting criticism.

The rest of the Paris office was a dysfunctional and transient cast hired by members of the self-appointed provisional committee that was effectively running the Congress after Berlin: Irving Brown, James Burnham, Arthur Koestler, Raymond Aron, and Lasky. Given the infighting within that committee, their respective hires in the Paris office unsurprisingly did not get along. Planning for future Congress activities was disorganized; the Paris office was not even able to circulate reprints of the speeches from Berlin promptly.

Even the Congress's new permanent headquarters were a misstep. Set up by Koestler and Irving Brown on the Avenue Montaigne, they were "posh offices in the most expensive district of Paris" that, to many, practically shouted that American dollars were behind the Congress. The French "boycotted it totally," recalled the Polish poet Czeslaw Milosz, who had just defected to Paris.¹³

Worse still, the Congress's future direction was unclear, and its ability to attract anyone prominent in Britain – the key country if it was to make any headway in Europe – was in jeopardy. Delegates at the Berlin Congress had been divided over whether the Congress should be a primarily political body that engaged in political campaigns and overtly supported the overthrow of Soviet regimes in Eastern Europe, or whether it should focus primarily on cultural endeavors and condemn Communism at a more abstract level. Immediately after

Berlin, the provisional steering committee – Burnham, Koestler, Lasky, Aron, and Brown – assumed that the Congress could be both political and cultural, and could orient itself simultaneously towards the liberation of the East and towards the revitalization of Western cultural exchanges.

Events over the summer, however, cast doubt on the viability of a something-for-everyone approach. In July 1950, the *Guardian* ran British historian Hugh Trevor-Roper's "Ex-Communist v. Communist," an acerbic takedown of the Berlin Congress. Trevor-Roper portrayed the Congress as an ambush: it "turned out to be a political demonstration," but "was not advertised as such, and I do not think that it would have obtained all its sponsors or all its delegates if it had been correctly advertised." Extremist ex-Communists "preached total war," prompting most European delegates to express "open opposition." The message was clear. To figures like Trevor-Roper – in other words, to representative British non-Communist intellectuals – a Congress focused on political activism and featuring vocal ex-Communists was a non-starter.¹⁴ And Trevor-Roper was sufficiently influential that his views almost single-handedly destroyed the Congress's reputation in Britain.

In August, the crisis grew acute when Trevor-Roper's criticisms prompted honorary Congress chairman Bertrand Russell to resign.¹⁵ Given Russell's stature, if his resignation became public the Congress would almost certainly be finished in Britain. Trevor-Roper's criticisms would be all but impossible to dispel. The crisis landed on Bondy's unwilling lap.¹⁶ Bondy passed the baton to Arthur Koestler and Arthur Schlesinger Jr., who made a personal visit to Russell to reassure him that Trevor-Roper's portrayal of the Congress was overblown. Russell withdrew his resignation.¹⁷ But the episode underscored the existence of "much irritated resistance to the extreme position of Arthur Koestler and James Burnham" at Berlin, particularly in Britain.¹⁸ A temporary employee in the Paris office reported that, whenever he discussed the Congress with British intellectuals, "I encounter more or less strong prejudice." Koestler and Burnham's speeches were seen as attacks "directed so largely against socialists for failing to cooperate with capitalists in the face of Communist aggression."¹⁹

Most problematic of all, from Josselson's vantage point, was that there were already two OPC assets heavily involved with the Congress by the time Josselson arrived in Paris. Both were on the informal steering committee that was running the Congress until the Executive Committee voted on formal leadership in November 1950. And they were enmeshed in a bitter turf war in which they leveraged their Agency connections to covertly shape the Congress to their desired and opposing ends.

The first asset was the AFL's Irving Brown, who was initially OPC's only conduit for secretly channeling large sums of money to the Congress in the months after Berlin. He was widely known as the Congress's moneyman, and used the leverage others attributed to him to bring the Congress closer to Force Ouvrière and other left-leaning labor organizations. He frequently showed up to the Paris office to keep an eye on developments, and preemptively (and unilaterally) offered the job of Congress Secretary-General to his own pick even before

the Executive Committee met in November.²⁰ But the AFL was also losing interest and confidence in the Congress's prospects, as well as becoming increasingly frustrated with its own dealings with the Agency. As Brown's relationship with the Agency deteriorated, Brown refused to account for how he spent OPC's money; OPC delayed paying him, and Brown, in turn, told Congress people that money for their projects had run out.²¹ Brown, in sum, was on his way out of an active role in the Congress, which neither the AFL nor the Agency wanted him to maintain. But, for the Congress's first year, Brown was nonetheless an important player in attempting to shape the Congress's future agenda and staff.

The second and far more dangerous OPC asset was James Burnham. Burnham was arguably the best-known member of the Berlin Congress's American delegation, a courtly, bespectacled New York University philosophy professor who had gone from prominent Trotskyite to preeminent anti-Communist.²² The *New York Times* hailed him as "the cloak and dagger philosopher of Washington and Washington Square."²³ His latest book, *The Coming Defeat of Communism* (1950), argued that Communism aimed at world domination and containment guaranteed defeat; victory would come only by liberating Eastern Europe.²⁴

Burnham was simultaneously and quite secretly an influential "consultant to OPC on virtually every subject of interest to our organization," as a colleague recalled.²⁵ And Burnham was determined to make the Congress a political "united front" of right and left that would rally intellectuals behind the liberation of Eastern Europe and the banishment of neutralism in the West. QKOPERA became the focal point of Burnham's work for the Agency – and, at least at first, Burnham wielded his Agency connections quite effectively to advance his vision of the Congress. Unlike Brown or Josselson, Burnham had the most plausible of reasons for assuming a leadership role within the Congress: he was arguably America's most famous anti-Communist intellectual, he knew virtually everyone involved, and his continued influence seemed natural. Also unlike Brown or Josselson, Burnham was based in Washington, and thus could get far more immediate, direct, personal access to Wisner and other decision-makers in OPC while keeping tabs on cable traffic and scuttlebutt from Paris.

Josselson, however, had a very different sense of what the Congress should be. From the start, he saw delegates' reactions at the Berlin Congress as evidence that a Congress focused on cultural endeavors would be the best and only chance of attracting the European left. And attracting that group was essential, because the non-Communist left was the group most likely to otherwise fall prey to the Soviet peace campaign. Josselson knew, too, that this group was hostile to anything overtly political and was often anti-American. But, he believed, accepting these limits was the price of a functional Congress.²⁶

It would take Josselson two years to emerge as the Congress's administrative secretary and manager, presiding over a Congress that reflected his vision. No one envisioned a separate administrative secretary, let alone that Josselson would be it. The earliest traces of Josselson's official correspondence on behalf of the Congress date only to early 1952.²⁷ And only in September 1952 would the Executive Committee formally recognize Josselson as the Congress's administrative

secretary.²⁸ By then the Congress had emerged as a prominent and stable cultural organization with an equally prominent ostensible private patron, Julius “Junkie” Fleischmann, who played this role at the Agency’s behest. By then, too, OPC saw Josselson as “able to provide political guidance and influence over the Congress,” recalled Wisner’s deputy Frank Lindsay. “Wisner regarded [Josselson and his case officer, Lawrence de Neufville] as thoughtful and well-informed and tended to respect their conclusions and judgments.” So Josselson “was given free rein on tone.”²⁹

Much of how Josselson consolidated his role within the Congress and steered it from the brink of dissolution remains shrouded in mystery. Josselson is virtually absent from the archives during this period. And all he ever admitted was that it was “no accident that people like Burnham and James T. Farrell [were] among the first to be dropped from the Congress’s invitation lists.”³⁰ But the story of Josselson’s rise is also the story of Burnham’s fall from influence both within OPC and the Congress – and that story, thanks to Burnham’s long-buried files, survives.³¹

Notes

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- 3 Evan Thomas, *The Very Best Men: The Daring Early Years of the CIA* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995), p. 363 (quoting Frank Wisner to Breckinridge, “Berlin Congress for Cultural Freedom: Activities of Melvin Lasky,” August 8, 1950).
- 4 Harold Hurwitz, October 7, 2007, telephone interview; see also Sidney Hook to Melvin Lasky, November 10, 1950, Folder 3, Box 124, Sidney Hook Papers, Hoover Institution, Stanford University, Stanford, California (“SH”).
- 5 Tom Braden, “I’m Glad the CIA Is ‘Immoral,’” *Saturday Evening Post* (May 20, 1967). Braden initially sparked speculation by referring to “an agent in *Encounter*.” But Braden’s article was full of inaccuracies, and Lasky denied the rumors. Based on classified files, Warner concluded that OPC considered Lasky “unwitting” as of Berlin. Michael Warner, “Origins of the Congress for Cultural Freedom, 1949–50,” *Studies in Intelligence* 38 (1998), available at: www.cia.gov/library/center-for-the-study-of-intelligence/csi-publications/csi-studies/studies/95Unclass/Warner.html (accessed April 21, 2016).
- 6 John Hunt interview, June 9–10, 2007, Lyon, France. Further corroboration comes from the fact that, as of 1951, an OPC consultant was chastising OPC for not exploiting Lasky and *Der Monat*. James Burnham to OPC, “OPC and the Flade Affair,” February 13, 1951, Folder 4, Box 11, James Burnham Papers, Hoover Institution, Stanford University, Stanford, California (“JB”).
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- 9 Michael Josselson, “Confidential: Report on the Financial History of the Congress for Cultural Freedom,” statement to the General Assembly of the Congress for Cultural Freedom, March 1967, Folder 13, Box 31, ML-99, Shepard Stone Papers, Dartmouth College, Hanover, New Hampshire (“SS”). Courtesy of Dartmouth College Library.

- 10 James Burnham to Frank Wisner and Gerry Miller, Subject: Certain Recommendations Concerning OPC Operations, Primarily in Western Europe, December 11, 1950, Folder 2, Box 11, JB.
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- 12 François Bondy to Melvin Lasky, September 16, 1950, Folder 4, Box 241, Series II, International Association for Cultural Freedom (Congress for Cultural Freedom) Papers, Regenstein Library, University of Chicago, Chicago, Illinois (“CCF”).
- 13 Czesław Miłosz, *Miłosz’s ABCs*, trans. Madeline Levine (New York: Farrar Straus and Giroux, 2001), pp. 87–8.
- 14 Hugh Trevor-Roper, “Ex-Communist v. Communist,” *Manchester Guardian* (July 10, 1950).
- 15 Bertrand Russell to Melvin Lasky, August 30, 1950, Folder 4, Box 241, Series II, CCF; Mamaine Koestler, September 20, 1950 diary entry, in Celia Goodman (ed.), *Living with Koestler: Mamaine Koestler’s Letters, 1941–51* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1985), p. 160.
- 16 Lasky to Bondy, September 11, 1950, Folder 4, Box 241, Series II, CCF.
- 17 Arthur Koestler to Arthur Schlesinger Jr., September 13, 1950, Box P-17, Arthur Schlesinger Jr. Papers, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library, Boston, Massachusetts (“ASJ”).
- 18 François Bondy, “Berlin Congress for Freedom: A New Resistance in the Making,” *Commentary* 10 (September 1950), available at <https://www.commentarymagazine.com/articles/berlin-congress-for-freedom-a-new-resistance-in-the-making/> (accessed April 21, 2016).
- 19 David Williams to Melvin Lasky, September 20, 1950, Folder 9, Box 304, Series II, CCF.
- 20 Irving Brown to Arthur Koestler, November 2, 1950, Folder 11, Box 13, Irving Brown Files, George Meany Memorial Archive, National Labor College, Silver Spring, Maryland (“IB”); Arthur Schlesinger to Sidney Hook, November 10, 1950, Folder 3, Box 124, SH; Irving Brown to Louis Fischer, January 9, 1951, Folder 10, Box 13, IB.
- 21 Anthony Carew, “The American Labor Movement in Fizzland: The Free Trade Labor Union Committee and the CIA,” *Labor History* 39 (1998), pp. 30–2; James Burnham to Mino Masani, January 10, 1951, Folder 1, Box 7, JB; Summary of Telephone Conversation 0930 with Daniel Apert in Paris, December 22, Folder 10, Box 5, JB.
- 22 Sidney Hook, *Out of Step: An Unquiet Life in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Harper & Row, 1987), pp. 203–4.
- 23 “A Chart for Taming the Russians,” *New York Times* (February 19, 1950).
- 24 James Burnham, *The Coming Defeat of Communism* (New York: John Day, 1950), pp. 30, 219–22, 231.
- 25 E. Howard Hunt, *Undercover: Memoirs of an American Secret Agent* (London: W.H. Allen, 1975), p. 69; E. Howard Hunt, *American Spy: My Secret History in the CIA, Watergate, and Beyond* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 2007), p. 48.
- 26 John Hunt interview.
- 27 Michael Josselson to Sidney Hook, January 20, 1952, Folder 4, Box 124, SH.
- 28 “Committee of 11 September 1952,” minutes, Folder 1, Box 3, Series II, CCF.
- 29 Frank Lindsay interview.
- 30 Michael Josselson, Notes on Planned Reply to Christopher Lasch, n.d. [1967], Folder 4, Box 26, MJ.
- 31 Burnham kept copies of memoranda he sent to OPC during his 1949–52 consultancy in a box of personal files that became available to historians only in this past decade. See Box 11, JB.

8 James Burnham's rival

Had James Burnham succeeded in leveraging his position within OPC to ensure that the Congress developed along the lines he hoped, it would have been a very different organization and a very different operation. Burnham was one of the key organizers of the Berlin Congress. For a brief period immediately afterwards, he was also the moving force behind the Congress's early activities. If Burnham had his way, the Congress would have cultivated a united front of anti-Communists on the right and left. It would have launched both cultural and militantly political initiatives to rally intellectuals around the liberation of Eastern Europe and resistance to neutralism in the West. And it would have been subject to significant CIA control via Burnham himself, who planned to discreetly wield the Congress's purse-strings to ensure that it hewed to his vision. Josselson might never have stayed in Paris.

Instead, Burnham's involvement in the Congress prompted backlash and opened the way for Josselson. In part, Burnham failed to keep control of the Congress because he misjudged the loyalties of numerous intermediaries whom he installed in the Congress's Paris headquarters or pushed forward as preferred candidates to lead the Congress. He certainly misjudged Josselson. But, above all, Burnham misjudged the depth of the intellectual left's unwillingness to align together with the right against Communism. Burnham himself became a rallying-cry for non-Communist European intellectuals who found overt political agitation against Communism distasteful. His vision for the Congress swiftly proved incompatible with attracting British intellectuals, or much of the rest of the European left, and the Paris office – along with Josselson – valued attracting the left far more than they valued Burnham's ideas or Burnham's involvement.

For a time, Burnham's influence within OPC seemed to offer enough leverage over the Congress to mitigate this opposition. As evidenced by memoranda with titles like "An Act of Idiocy," Burnham was unafraid to issue ultimatums to his employer, and he frequently urged OPC to intervene behind the scenes with the Paris office to put the Congress back on track along the lines he proposed.¹ But Burnham's plans floundered – in no small part because his approach alienated a number of non-Communist European intellectuals who seemed critical to Josselson and, eventually, to the rest of the Agency.

Burnham received word of the Berlin Congress in January 1950, just as Josselson's proposal made its way to OPC in Washington. His involvement began

with an invitation from Lasky: "I have written to Sidney [Hook] (confidentially) about an emerging plan to hold an international 'Monat' Congress here: for 'Cultural Freedom,' under the auspices of the Free University, etc. in Berlin. It will take all the careful transatlantic planning we can muster."²

Within OPC, where he been a consultant since fall 1949, Burnham was an "intellectual leader on issues of Communism," said Frank Lindsay, Wisner's deputy.³ Burnham's work for OPC was soon indistinguishable from his determination to make the Congress "the most important anti-Communist affair of this kind that has been held during the past fifteen or twenty years."⁴ He was an indefatigable organizer. Burnham anticipated that "[t]he principal political problem of the Congress will almost certainly be a debate over 'Neutrality'; and the Allied denunciation on equal terms of American and Soviet barbarism." But "[n]umerically those delegates who are clear about such matters (that is to say, agree with us) will be very definitely a minority," he wrote. "We have got to do some good work both in papers or formal discussion and in more personal talk."⁵

Burnham thus revamped the list of delegates "to include . . . a sufficient group of persons who are really reliable politically."⁶ To prevent another "flop" like the ill-fated 1949 Paris counter-congress, Burnham worked on a strategy with Arthur Koestler and Raymond Aron in Paris.⁷ They came up with and secured the Congress's honorary chairmen (Benedetto Croce, John Dewey, Karl Jaspers, Jacques Maritain, and Bertrand Russell), whose "non-controversial yet unambiguously anti-totalitarian names of international repute" would help the Congress make more of a splash.⁸ Burnham also "approach[ed] 'key men' to take over papers for main discussion" and coordinated with Josselson on security.⁹ He picked the American delegation with Hook.¹⁰ And he planned for a steering committee months in advance, envisioning "eight or ten of us who share the same political point of view" to meet beforehand "to discuss ways and means of making the Conference more successful and fruitful."¹¹ Lasky, faced with a *fait accompli*, acquiesced.¹²

Burnham soon saw himself as the Congress's central figure – so much so that he insisted that his wife accompany him to Berlin as cover. "Particularly in view of the fact that I shall present to the Congress what will probably be the key political paper," he told OPC, "it is necessary to make certain that the other delegates shall regard me as a private individual."¹³

After arriving in Berlin, Burnham also made key early personnel decisions. He was confident enough of the Congress's future that he hired Bondy as provisional editorial director and all-purpose factotum before the delegates even agreed to create a permanent body. "[W]e discussed the basis and the future of the Congress," Burnham recalled, and he was satisfied that Bondy agreed with Burnham that the Congress's mission was to forge a united front.¹⁴ And, as the only permanent officer in the Paris office, Bondy was soon, "by force of circumstance . . . the key person who runs the show."¹⁵

Wisner had told Burnham to avoid an overtly prominent role in the Congress – so Burnham complied by seamlessly inserting himself into behind-the-scenes organization immediately after the Berlin Congress. Until the Congress's

Executive Committee met in November 1950 to elect formal leadership, Burnham, Koestler, Brown, and Lasky were in charge, and their meetings produced plans that hewed closely to Burnham's vision.¹⁶ "The natural division of CONGRESS sympathizers into two psychological and ideological groups," i.e., "the uncompromising resisters against the East, the optimistic builders of the West," would be reflected in an Eastern bureau in Berlin and a Western one in Paris. The Eastern bureau would obtain materials from behind the Iron Curtain and foster defections; the Western bureau would "tak[e] the offensive against the Communists' peace and culture campaigns."¹⁷ The Congress would unite left and right, East and West, and political and cultural projects.¹⁸ And the Congress would broaden its base by creating a "movement directed at the professional classes, trade unions, students and other youth groups" – the *Amis de la Liberté*.¹⁹

As summer progressed, few projects materialized, and Koestler tried to jump-start the work himself.²⁰ Koestler campaigned to remove Bondy, whom he considered hopeless at organizing and insufficiently dedicated to a united front.²¹ Koestler complained, "Everything done by the Congress has been done by me so far, and nothing will come of it; to this day not one word has gone out from the Berlin office to supporters telling them what's happening." He had given up on his fellow organizers. Aron was a "coward," Lasky "goes to the *Musee de l'Homme* when he's come to Paris to do some work" – and Burnham was "a dangerous lunatic."²² After a nervous breakdown in August, Koestler resigned.²³

Burnham persuaded him to reconsider. "It is true that the Congress has not got into post-Berlin action to anything like the degree that our enthusiasm and the objective needs called for." Still, hopeful signs had emerged: "I have worked on the problem of getting a solid (however small) nucleus of support here. . . . It is now, I think, assured, provided that the European side doesn't collapse wholly," Burnham wrote. "Enough money can be channeled into Congress work to get things moving – and there would be more, I am sure, if the movement began to look serious."²⁴ Koestler withdrew his resignation for now.

What Burnham neglected to tell Koestler was that he, too, was worried about Bondy and the Paris office. Thus, soon after Josselson arrived in Paris, Burnham recruited his own agent to insinuate himself into the Paris office. "I feel that you should, for the present at least, stay very much in the background," Burnham instructed Louis Gibarti in October 1950. "Specifically, I think it desirable that you should not visit the Congress office regularly, but should communicate suggestions and proposals you have to François Bondy."²⁵

Gibarti – whose well-known past as Willi Münzenberg's former right-hand man made him anything but unobtrusive – proved a spectacularly ill-advised operative. MI5 considered him "a thoroughly untrustworthy and unscrupulous, also venal, intelligence monger"²⁶ and a likely agent of the Hungarian Military/Political Department, concluding that his involvement in the Congress "lends the affair . . . a sinister aspect indeed."²⁷ He was also indiscreet. When Burnham confronted him about revealing their connection to Bondy and Brown, Gibarti claimed, "I had to refer to your authority when trying to obtain the necessary

support and recognition.” This, of course, backfired; others in the Paris office simply told Gibarti, “‘I don’t give you the material you need because I do not believe in the methods of Burnham.’”²⁸

Gibarti confirmed that Bondy had no intention of carrying out Burnham’s vision of the Congress. “[T]here is a certain factionalism in our work,” Gibarti reported. “While I am typing this letter our friend F[rançois] is making the following statement . . . : ‘We are, of course, swinging away from a political line. Broadly speaking, we are swinging away from Burnham.’” There was further evidence: “[T]he Berlin publication which is a kind of synopsis of the [Berlin Congress] . . . contains everybody’s contribution to the discussion and also the pictures of the leading stars,” Gibarti observed. “Conspicuously any mention of your speech is avoided and your picture does not appear. There are, of course, other indications. From the very beginning the *Franc Tireur* people, the Mel Lasky faction, heavily engaged in a campaign against me.”²⁹

More troubling was a memorandum Gibarti forwarded regarding “comment from our French, German, and Italian contacts about the unilateral tendency of the American sponsorship” and complaining that the wrong kind of “American representation is the controlling force in our organization.” It was urgent for “a broader base of leaders of liberal trends and social progress, well-known defenders of civil rights, and creative artists” to represent America. “In Western Europe, particularly, only such people can attract and unite the wavering non-Communist Left, which is so essential to our enterprise,” the memo added. “We do not need to make a strong appeal to the already well-organized, militant groups, like the Gaullists, or the political Catholics.”³⁰ Burnham, in turn, sent Gibarti’s reports – which abruptly stopped in November – to OPC as examples of problems in the Paris office that needed fixing.³¹

Burnham then turned his attention to a related problem. Despite their shared vision of a Congress founded on a united front, Burnham considered Koestler’s potential “domination of the Congress” a danger, and warned his employers at OPC of the need to reduce Koestler’s influence.³² So Burnham looked for other allies, and turned to the young, liberal Harvard historian Arthur Schlesinger Jr. as one possibility.³³ Burnham proposed to OPC that he visit Schlesinger “in order to draw him closer to the CONGRESS FOR CULTURAL FREEDOM, and to discuss with him the problem of a general secretary for the Congress”³⁴ – a post Burnham hoped Schlesinger would accept.³⁵ OPC, in turn, saw Schlesinger’s participation as critical to ensuring the Congress was “soundly developed at an early date.”³⁶

Unbeknownst to Burnham, Schlesinger was not remotely sympathetic to Burnham’s views. Burnham saw Schlesinger as the kind of liberal who would welcome a broad united front. But for Schlesinger the Congress’s central problem was Burnham himself. The Congress’s American representation was too “narrowly based,” at the expense of moderate voices “highly respected in Europe,” Schlesinger felt.³⁷ The solution was “a decent list of American sponsors so that the Burnham influence may be entirely submerged.”³⁸ Moreover, Schlesinger knew of OPC’s interest in the Congress and may well have made

these points to Wisner, an old OSS friend whom Schlesinger found “reasonable, and always responsive to my letters.”³⁹

In the meantime, Burnham took one further step to advance his vision. In October 1950, Burnham was behind the formation of the American Committee for Cultural Freedom. Here, as elsewhere, he sought a united front. “I think that even at the beginning we must consciously aim to broaden the base of support for the Congress,” Burnham instructed Hook, the Committee’s first chairman. Outreach to “more conventional ‘American’ types” beyond “the old radical and *avant garde* circles” was essential: “We will kill the Congress in its infancy if it is too much a *Partisan-New Leader*.”⁴⁰ The Committee soon attracted dozens of names.

But, to Burnham and his employers in OPC, the Committee’s real purpose was quite different. As Wisner later noted, it was “inspired if not put together by this Agency for the purpose of providing cover and backstopping for the European effort.”⁴¹ The AFL’s Irving Brown was no longer a reliable conduit for funds to Paris, so the American Committee would supply them. “On the organizational side,” Burnham told Hook, “you should be authorized to act as, in effect, the American Secretary for the Congress,” with “clear control of the funds.”⁴² Pearl Kluger, Hook’s former secretary, became the fully witting executive secretary and oversaw all transfers to Paris – giving Burnham a way to oversee the wayward Paris office.⁴³

In November 1950, the Congress held its Brussels conference and seemingly validated Burnham’s plans. Burnham had arranged advance press releases proclaiming that the Brussels “Rally of World Intellectual Leaders to Defend Freedom of the Mind” would “expose the pro-Soviet aims of the so-called World Peace Congress of the Partisans of Peace.”⁴⁴ The conference proceeded on an agenda Burnham hoped would signal that “the Congress is a serious enterprise and means business.”⁴⁵ The Executive Committee approved initiatives to challenge Soviet peace groups to public debates and to approach prominent French government officials and academics.⁴⁶ To attendees, Burnham emphasized that “if we are not in the business of making propaganda” – which was “justified . . . because it is propaganda for truth and freedom” – then “I don’t know why we are in this organization.”⁴⁷

There were notable absences. Koestler had moved to America and declined to attend on fears that his visa would be invalidated if he left.⁴⁸ Schlesinger, about to go on research leave from Harvard, was “sorry as hell” to miss it.⁴⁹ Lasky was out; Josselson’s talk was effective.⁵⁰

But, thanks to Burnham’s preparations, the key personnel decisions at Brussels – that the Congress would be run by a figurehead President and an active Secretary-General – were foregone conclusions. Weeks beforehand and after consulting with OPC, Burnham had lobbied Schlesinger and others “that Denis de Rougemont be made titular head of the permanent organization of the Congress with some American as the executive secretary doing the actual organizational work.”⁵¹ To Burnham, his “obvious advantages” were in “being a European, of having no particular political identification beyond a general

commitment to the humane values of western civilization and of representing a small country naturally designed to mediate among France, Germany, and Italy.”⁵²

Nicolas Nabokov quickly became the consensus choice for Secretary-General, despite Irving Brown's best efforts to install the American journalist and ex-Communist Louis Fischer instead.⁵³ Schlesinger had strongly backed Nabokov beforehand, citing his “great administrative vigor, brilliant intellectual understanding and a unique linguistic equipment,” and adding that “his State Department contacts, of course, are excellent.”⁵⁴ Hook and Burnham agreed.⁵⁵ Nabokov also happened to be one of Schlesinger's – and Josselson's – closest friends. By Brussels, Nabokov's nomination to Secretary-General was a done deal, and Burnham had facilitated it.

Nabokov returned “full of enthusiasm about the Brussels meeting” and “brought back an overwhelming admiration and affection for Jim Burnham,” reported Nabokov's then-wife, Patricia Blake. “He has been offered a job with the congress as ‘Cultural Relations’ director, in Paris, and he is very tempted by it.”⁵⁶

On his return, Burnham confidently submitted recommendations to Wisner and Gerry Miller, the head of OPC's Western Europe division. “A start on the East European University shall be made with the greatest possible speed,” and “[t]he Congress shall attempt to use the entire Press generally, and shall cease the deliberate discrimination in favor of the Left Press,” Burnham demanded.⁵⁷

Josselson's role in all of this was still up in the air. No one in Brussels expected him to become the Congress's administrative manager. That job was supposed to be Nabokov's, part of his work as Secretary-General. Josselson's very presence in the Paris office was at an uncertain stage: Burnham urged Wisner that “[a] cover for Josselson shall be provided immediately, of a nature which will give him a plausible excuse for maintaining overt contact with the Congress for Cultural Freedom.” And Burnham was confident that, through recommendations to Wisner, he could influence what Josselson was doing. “Josselson shall be instructed to push the acceptance of [Ivan] Bahrianyi [the Ukrainian exile writer and resistance leader] as a member of the [Executive] Committee,” he told Wisner.⁵⁸

That winter, Irving Brown nearly undid everything Burnham believed he had achieved at Brussels – and Burnham began to suspect that Josselson was not using his behind-the-scenes role to advance a united front, either. Brown, initially eager to support the Congress as a complement to the AFL's anti-Communist labor activities in Europe, was disillusioned with its lack of progress.⁵⁹ Moreover, Brown and Lovestone's relationship with OPC was in tatters, and Lovestone had “cooled off quite a bit on the whole project” of the Congress. While Brown was “cooperating wherever and whenever possible,” he found it “somewhat discouraging to have to deal with intellectuals whose sense of organization is quite weak.”⁶⁰

To Burnham, Brown's main objective was alarmingly clear: to align the Congress more closely to the French labor left. In late December, Burnham's latest proxy in the Paris office, the Gaullist Daniel Apert, frantically called Burnham

with the news that Brown and Bondy were about to force him out. Worse, from Burnham's vantage, Brown and Bondy now deemed Nabokov's presence unnecessary.⁶¹ A panicked Nabokov told Burnham that Brown said there was no definite job – and that journalist Arnold Beichman, whom Burnham considered “one of LOVESTONE's boys,” had telephoned Nabokov to tell him “not to take a job on the staff of the Congress,” which was “definitely going to fold up before September.”⁶² Burnham alerted OPC; Brown swiftly backed down and claimed to be delighted with Nabokov's appointment.⁶³

Still, Burnham worried. Shortly thereafter, Brown attempted to replace Apert with a member of the SFIO (the French socialist party). Worse, from Burnham's vantage, Brown did so with Bondy and de Rougemont's blessing.⁶⁴ Burnham told Apert to stand firm,⁶⁵ but Apert was desperate, though “[s]till trying to follow your instructions.”⁶⁶

Burnham again appealed to OPC, and this time blamed Josselson for failing to fix the matter. He cabled OPC, “Josselson has fallen into or helped make a political trap.” Installing the “Brown henchman,” Burnham claimed, “would mean first destroying political united front which is [the] basis and sole justification for Congress second breaking principal link to serious cultural figures in France third reducing Congress to province of Lovestone empires” – and “I would personally have below zero interest in a mushy Leftist Lovestonite Congress.”⁶⁷

Burnham, “much disturbed by what I have learned about recent developments in the Paris office of the Congress,” then wrote to Bondy that

my own conception of the political foundation of the Congress has been, and remains the same: what can be called an “anti-communist united front,” excluding only outright totalitarians (whether Fascists or Communists) and thereby comprising Socialist and non-Socialist Right as well as traditional Left, religious and non-religious, etc. It was my impression that you shared this conception with me.

Burnham believed “[t]his conception is the sole basis and justification of the Congress.” Now “a virtual crisis seems to have arisen, which threatens the continuing existence of the Congress”: Apert's attempted replacement with a French leftist. This, said Burnham, would “violate the united front basis of the Congress” and “destroy it politically; its organizational destruction would inevitably follow in due course.”⁶⁸

Bondy's reply apparently satisfied Burnham that “you and I share the same perspective about the political structure of the Movement.”⁶⁹ Burnham accepted Apert's departure – but had now lost confidence in Bondy and de Rougemont, and pinned his hopes on Nabokov. After reassuring Nabokov that the Congress's financial circumstances were now stable, Burnham negotiated Nabokov's salary with a key supplement. “I am to receive \$100 per month (in dollars) payable directly to me by the American Committee – this sum not appearing on the books of the European operation,” Nabokov confirmed. He promised to “see to

it that reports on our activities in Europe are sent regularly to the American Committee. I shall also see to it that all our future projects be communicated as fully as possible to the American Committee, for its opinion, advice, and for publicity purposes.”⁷⁰ Burnham thus arranged for Nabokov to receive more money from a channel that the Paris office would not see, for the job of telling Burnham what the Paris office was doing and deciding about Congress activities.

Burnham, heartened by these promises, told Nabokov “your presence there is more urgently needed than ever” as the solution to the Congress’s “most serious problem,” which:

is political. Partly by design and partly by inertia, the leftists, who dominate the staff numerically, are always tending toward the transformation of the Movement into simply another clique in their own image. Unless the Movement can maintain a united front which bridges the traditional right and left ... its whole point of existence evaporates. I feel sure that you agree with me in this political estimate, and that your presence in Paris would be an effective guarantee against sectarianism.⁷¹

Bondy, too, saw Nabokov as essential – but to curtail Burnham’s influence. In February, Bondy told Nabokov that he was badly needed in Paris to foster closer collaboration between the American Committee and the Paris office. Bondy added:

I want to say for us all here that we do not plan to do everything that the communists do on the same spot and in the same style. . . . There is a great need for us to establish our prestige as a cultural organization which our name implies, and not to act as an exclusively and strictly political agency for counter-manifestations.⁷²

Within the Paris office, Josselson’s vision of a culturally oriented Congress was steadily gaining ground – and Burnham’s position within the Agency was about to take a significant hit.

Notes

- 1 James Burnham to Assistant Director of Policy Coordination, Subject: “An Act of Idiocy,” October 15, 1951, Folder 6, Box 11, James Burnham Papers, Hoover Institution, Stanford University, Stanford, California (“JB”).
- 2 Melvin Lasky to James Burnham, January 24, 1950, Folder 53, Box 6, JB.
- 3 Frank Lindsay interview, July 20, 2006, Lexington, Massachusetts; see also Daniel Kelly, *James Burnham and the Struggle for the World* (Wilmington: ISI Books, 2002), pp. 146–7.
- 4 James Burnham to Joseph Czapski, April 10, 1950, Folder 5, Box 9, JB.
- 5 James Burnham to Julian Amery, May 26, 1950, Folder 6, Box 5, JB.
- 6 James Burnham to Sidney Hook, April 5, 1950, Folder 49, Box 6, JB.
- 7 Burnham to Koestler, April 10, 1950, Folder 49, Box 6, JB.

- 8 "Congress for Cultural Freedom, From: James Burnham, Raymond Aron, Arthur Koestler, Subject: Revisions and new projects and plans for the Congress," n.d. [likely late May, 1950], Folder 7, Box 8, JB.
- 9 "May Program for the Congress," May 1950, Folder 7, Box 8, JB.
- 10 James Burnham to OPC, "Subject: Official Trip to New York to Confer with Various Persons in Connection with the Berlin Congress for Cultural Freedom," May 22, 1950, Folder 2, Box 11, JB.
- 11 James Burnham to Joseph Czapski, April 10, 1950, Folder 5, Box 9, JB; see also Burnham to Mamaine and Arthur Koestler, May 26, 1950, Folder 49, Box 6, JB.
- 12 Lasky to Burnham, June 12, 1950, Folder 6, Box 8, JB.
- 13 Burnham to OPC, "Subject: Berlin Congress for Cultural Freedom," May 17, 1950, Folder 2, Box 11, JB.
- 14 Burnham to Bondy, February 6, 1951, Box 3, Folder 8, JB.
- 15 Arthur Koestler to Irving Brown, August 7, 1950, MS 2395/3, Arthur Koestler Papers, University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh, Scotland ("AK").
- 16 Arthur Koestler to Melvin Lasky, July 4, 1950, Folder 10, Box 13, Irving Brown Files, George Meany Memorial Archive, National Labor College, Silver Spring, Maryland ("IB"); Celia Goodman (ed.), *Living with Koestler: Mamaine Koestler's Letters, 1941–51* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1985), p. 148; Kelly, *James Burnham*, pp. 160–63.
- 17 Memorandum from Melvin Lasky, July 5, 1950, Folder 14, Box 13, IB.
- 18 Arthur Koestler to Melvin Lasky, July 4, 1950, Folder 10, Box 13, IB.
- 19 Fontaine le Port, 18 July 1950, Present: Irving, Mel, Arthur, Copies to: Sidney Hook, James Burnham, Folder 7, Box 8, JB.
- 20 Michael Scammell, *Arthur Koestler: The Literary and Political Odyssey of a Twentieth-Century Skeptic* (New York: Random House, 2009), pp. 366–7.
- 21 Arthur Koestler to Irving Brown, August 7, 1950, MS 2395/3, AK.
- 22 Mamaine Koestler diary entry, August 10, 1950, quoted in Scammell, *Koestler*, p. 367.
- 23 Mamaine Koestler diary entry, August 17, 1950, in Goodman (ed.), *Living with Koestler*, p. 154; Arthur Koestler to James Burnham, August 18, 1950, Folder 49, Box 6, JB.
- 24 Burnham to Koestler, September 2, 1950, MS 2395/3, AK.
- 25 James Burnham to Louis Gibarti, October 5, 1950, Folder 32, Box 6, JB.
- 26 P.C. Bamford, Section OS 4, to DIB India, January 26, 1950, KV2/1402 (Dobos-Gibarti), The National Archive: Public Records Office, Kew Gardens, UK ("PRO").
- 27 Letter from [name redacted] to Miss Small (MI5), September 12, 1950, KV2/1402 (Dobos-Gibarti), PRO.
- 28 Louis Gibarti to James Burnham, November 2, 1950, Folder 32, Box 6, JB.
- 29 Louis Gibarti to James Burnham, September 8, 1950; Gibarti to Burnham, November 2, 1950, both in Folder 32, Box 6, JB.
- 30 Burnham to OPC, "Re: Congress for Cultural Freedom," November 2, 1950, Folder 3, Box 11, JB.
- 31 Burnham to OPC, "Subject: The Congress for Cultural Freedom, Paris Bureau," September 26, 1950; Burnham to OPC, "Subject: Re: Congress for Cultural Freedom," November 2, 1950, both in Folder 2, Box 11, JB.
- 32 James Burnham to OPC, "Subject: The Congress for Cultural Freedom," November 3, 1950, Folder 3, Box 11, JB.
- 33 James Burnham to François Bondy, October 27, 1950, Folder 6, Box 8, JB.
- 34 James Burnham to OPC, "Subject: A Trip to Boston and New York," November 1, 1950, Folder 3, Box 11, JB.
- 35 James Burnham to Warren Fuggit, "Subject: New York Developments in Connection with the Congress for Cultural Freedom," October 27, 1950, Folder 3, Box 11, JB; James Burnham to Sidney Hook, October 20, 1950, Folder 38, Box 6, JB.

- 36 'Jim' to William Barrett (n.d.), Box 67, RG 59/250/62/13/1, National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, Maryland ("NARA") (enclosing November 14, 1950 letter from "Wisner's shop" for Asst. Secretary William Barrett to sign, encouraging Schlesinger to attend the Brussels conference).
- 37 Arthur Schlesinger Jr. to Irving Brown, July 18, 1950, Folder 10, Box 13, IB.
- 38 Arthur Schlesinger Jr. to Arthur Koestler, October 20, 1950, MS 2395/3, AK.
- 39 Arthur Schlesinger Jr. interview, July 25, 2006, New York.
- 40 Burnham to Hook, October 20, 1950, Folder 38, Box 6, JB.
- 41 Frank Wisner to Deputy Assistant Director for Policy Coordination, "Reported Crisis in the American Committee for Cultural Freedom," April 7, 1952, Michael Warner (ed.), *The CIA Under Harry Truman* (Honolulu: University Press of the Pacific, 2005), p. 455.
- 42 Burnham to Hook, October 20, 1950, Folder 38, Box 6, JB.
- 43 James Burnham to OPC, "Subject: Information Supplied by SIDNEY HOOK Concerning PEARL KLUGER," October 12, 1950, Folder 3, Box 11, JB. Hugh Wilford has extensively detailed the American Committee's formation and early days. See Hugh Wilford, *The Mighty Wurlitzer: How the CIA Played America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008), pp. 70–98.
- 44 Congress for Cultural Freedom, Press Release, November 23, 1950, Folder 1, Box 1, ACCF.
- 45 James Burnham to François Bondy, October 27, 1950, Folder 6, Box 8, JB.
- 46 François Bondy to Arthur Schlesinger, December 18, 1950, Folder 13, Box 245, Series II, International Association for Cultural Freedom (Congress for Cultural Freedom) Papers, Regenstein Library, University of Chicago, Chicago, Illinois ("CCF"); American Committee for Cultural Freedom, Executive Committee minutes, Folder 2, Box 7, TAM 023, American Committee for Cultural Freedom Records, Tamiment Library/Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives, New York University ("ACCF").
- 47 Executive Committee Minutes, Brussels, November 27, 1950, Folder 9, Box 2, Series II, CCF.
- 48 Arthur Koestler to Denis de Rougemont (forwarded to Burnham), January 29, 1951, Folder 3, Box 8, JB.
- 49 Arthur Schlesinger Jr. to Irving Brown, November 22, 1950, Folder 11, Box 13, IB.
- 50 Sidney Hook to Mel Lasky, November 10, 1950, Folder 3, Box 124, Sidney Hook Papers, Hoover Institution, Stanford University, Stanford, California ("SH"); Harold Hurwitz, October 7, 2007, telephone interview.
- 51 Arthur Schlesinger to Sidney Hook, November 10, 1950, Folder 3, Box 124, SH (describing conversation with Burnham); see also James Burnham to OPC, "Subject: The Secretary of the CONGRESS FOR CULTURAL FREEDOM," November 3, 1950, Folder 3; James Burnham to Warren Fugit, "Subject: The Brussels Meeting of the Congress for Cultural Freedom," October 23, 1950, Folder 2, both in Box 11, JB.
- 52 Arthur Schlesinger to Sidney Hook, November 10, 1950, Folder 3, Box 124, SH (describing Burnham's views).
- 53 Irving Brown to Arthur Koestler, November 2, 1950, Folder 11, Box 13, IB; Schlesinger to Hook, November 10, 1950; Hook to Bondy, November 21, 1950, Folder 3, Box 124, SH; Irving Brown to Louis Fischer, January 9, 1951, Folder 10, Box 13, IB.
- 54 Schlesinger to Hook, October 17, 1950, Folder 3, Box 124, SH.
- 55 Hook to Schlesinger, October 18, 1950, Folder 3, Box 124, SH.
- 56 Patricia Blake to Arthur and Marion Schlesinger, December 5, 1950, Box P-20, Arthur Schlesinger Jr. Papers, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library, Boston, Massachusetts ("ASJ").
- 57 James Burnham to Frank Wisner and Gerry Miller, Subject: Certain Recommendations Concerning OPC Operations, Primarily in Western Europe, December 11, 1950, Folder 2, Box 11, JB.

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- 59 Anthony Carew, "The American Labor Movement in Fizzland: The Free Trade Labor Union Committee and the CIA," *Labor History* 39 (1998), p. 31.
- 60 Irving Brown to Louis Fischer, January 9, 1951, Folder 10, Box 13, IB.
- 61 Summary of Telephone Conversation 09.30 with Daniel Apert in Paris, December 22, Folder 10, Box 5, JB; James Burnham to OPC, December 12, 1950, Folder 3, Box 11, JB.
- 62 James Burnham to OPC, "Subject: ARNOLD BEICHMAN on telephone," January 11, 1951, Folder 4, Box 11, JB; see also Nicolas Nabokov to Denis de Rougemont, January 18, 1951, Folder 3, Box 8, JB; James Burnham to Minoo Masani, January 10, 1951, Folder 1, Box 7, JB.
- 63 Cable from Irving Brown to Nicolas Nabokov, January 19, 1951, Folder 10, Box 5, JB; Nicolas Nabokov to James Burnham, January 21, 1951, Folder 3, Box 8, JB.
- 64 Daniel Apert, telegram to James Burnham, January 19, 1951, Folder 6, Box 8, JB.
- 65 James Burnham, telegram to Apert, January 19, 1951, Folder 10, Box 5, JB.
- 66 Daniel Apert, telegram to James Burnham, January 20, 1951, Folder 6, Box 8, JB.
- 67 Burnham to Gerald Miller, cable, January 22, 1951, Folder 3, Box 8, JB.
- 68 James Burnham to François Bondy, February 6, 1951, Box 3, Folder 8, JB.
- 69 James Burnham to François Bondy, February 26, 1951, Folder 3, Box 8, JB.
- 70 Nicolas Nabokov to James Burnham, January 21, 1951, Folder 3, Box 8, JB; Burnham to OPC, "Subject: NABOKOV's Job in Paris Office of MOVEMENT FOR CULTURAL FREEDOM," January 29, 1951, Folder 3, Box 11, JB.
- 71 Burnham to Nabokov, January 30, 1951, Folder 3, Box 8, JB.
- 72 François Bondy to Nicolas Nabokov, February 6, 1951, Folder 8, Box 246, Series II, CCF.

9 The CIA and the non-Communist left

Through most of 1950 and 1951, James Burnham was able to rely on his employers in OPC as a receptive audience for his concerns about the Paris office and his expectations for the Congress's future direction. That, in turn, bolstered Burnham's leverage within the Congress, both by exercising some control over the Congress's purse-strings and hires and by using the newly formed American Committee as a counterweight to the Paris office.

Had OPC's leadership remained stable and continued acquiescing in Burnham's efforts to influence the Congress in his preferred direction, Burnham might have had a chance of fighting off discontent within the Congress and imposing his vision of a united front. Instead, Burnham's standing within the Agency plummeted just as his standing within the Congress weakened. The Agency's restructuring in the early 1950s ushered in future Director Allen Dulles and his fleet of young hires – and resulted in leaders convinced that the European non-Communist left was the critical group to support. That view did not just doom Burnham's ability to convince his employers of the desirability of molding the Congress into a united front. It also doomed Burnham himself, spelled an end to Burnham's clandestine employment, and did more than anything else to solidify Michael Josselson's position as the Agency's trusted conduit to the Congress.

When Burnham joined OPC in fall 1949, he was part of the Political and Psychological Group, a small division run by his college classmate Joe Bryan. Nicknamed the "Duke of Richmond," Bryan had no background in intelligence or propaganda. Indeed, he described his new position as "a job as remote from any previous experience of mine as would be, say, singing in the Sistine Choir."¹ This was no exaggeration: Bryan's previous job was as a freelance writer specializing in circus stories.² Bryan was inspired to join after Burnham announced at their twentieth Princeton reunion that the threat of nuclear war made a twenty-fifth unlikely; Frank Wisner hired him for his political connections.³

Bryan's group had the feel of a Princeton reunion, not least because Bryan primarily recruited his fellow editors on *Tiger Magazine*, Princeton's undergraduate humor publication.⁴ Lewis "Pinky" Thompson, owner of the South's finest quail-hunting plantation, and Gates Lloyd, one of the country's preeminent art collectors, left their New York banking jobs to join their old classmates.⁵

Carleton Alsop, Judy Garland's Hollywood agent and another Princetonian, soon followed.⁶

Other recruits had more relevant experience. The well-traveled journalist Edward Hunter took on psychological warfare projects in Asia; he would soon invent the term "brainwashing."⁷ Lyle Munson, an OSS alumnus, shared responsibilities for Far East operations. Rounding out the group was Howard Hunt, who would later gain notoriety as the most famous Watergate plumber. For now, he was another OSSer known for writing such novels as *Stranger in Town* and *Bimini Run*.⁸ He joined OPC because it seemed like one of the few government agencies willing to take a firm position against Communism.⁹

Proposals from Bryan's group covered everything from guerrilla warfare to slapstick. Bryan's men took "dirty tricks" literally: the group's most notorious proposal was to drop extra-large American condoms labeled "medium" into Russia.¹⁰ Alsop developed the animated film version of Orwell's *Animal Farm*.¹¹ Bryan and Munson pitched a proposal to distribute American company employee magazines abroad – "It is difficult for Continental Europeans to believe, or even to comprehend, the high standard of living enjoyed by the American worker"¹² – to the bewilderment of State Department officials, who had already done this for years.¹³ Burnham circulated a plan to "mess up Stalin's birthday celebration" by floating false rumors of a planned assassination attempt.¹⁴ Proposals like these led Frank Lindsay, Wisner's deputy, to remark, "Burnham would get crazy ideas for black propaganda schemes he wanted OPC to launch, and we'd shake our heads at each other and say, this is nonsense. Usually these were wild ideas we wouldn't dare touch."¹⁵

Still, beneath the silliness, Bryan's group united around a serious vision of how the Cold War should be waged – Burnham's vision. "The people there seem to understand what is, and what should be done better than any other group of which I know," Burnham wrote after initial meetings. But "[t]hey do not know how to implement their knowledge and willingness," he told Hook, whom he informed of his clandestine work.¹⁶ "We ought to be able to find some way to help them – and ourselves – there."¹⁷

To Burnham, the liberation of Eastern Europe was a non-negotiable objective; containment was no better than appeasement. America's best and only hope was to roll back the tide of Soviet expansionism. Allies were those who passed the fundamental test of being willing to accept the likelihood of war and commit to unwavering loyalty to combating Communism. Anyone else – namely, the non-Communist left on its own, without a firmer backbone from the right – was too politically unreliable and too willing to cave in to a united front with the Communists.¹⁸ And Burnham's views came to define the way many in his group defined what OPC's strategic objectives should be.¹⁹

When General Walter Bedell Smith became Director of Central Intelligence (DCI) in October 1950, the Political and Psychological Warfare Group's two outstanding features – its irreverence and its focus on psychological warfare – became immense liabilities. Wisner could no longer protect it, even if he was so inclined. The Agency suddenly had a Director who was unimpressed by OPC's

record, unintimidated by Wisner, and determined to curtail OPC's independence by absorbing it under his direct control within the Agency.²⁰ And, in Smith's view, psychological warfare was the worst form of covert action. As Smith told it, the only achievement of covert propaganda in the war was "when a Rhine barge was sunk as a result of a direct hit by an unopened package of propaganda leaflets."²¹

Smith's arrival, coupled with his antipathy toward psychological warfare and his objective of transforming the Agency into a professional outfit, thus prompted major staffing changes. Carmel Offie, Wisner's freelancing assistant, was one of the first to go. Despite his talents, Offie was openly gay in an era when homosexuality was considered an automatic security risk – thus he had no place in Bedell Smith's by-the-books Agency.²²

Bryan's group was soon enough on the chopping block, especially after Deputy DCI William Jackson reported seeing the group massacre balloons strung up around the office in a barrage of BB gun fire.²³ Its members, in turn, were deeply uncomfortable with the Agency's changed sense of its mission and concerned that Bedell Smith was unacceptably slowing the pace of American efforts. The group gradually dissolved.²⁴ Burnham stayed on as an all-purpose consultant, but under an increasingly uncertain chain of command – and with diminishing leverage over the Congress from within.

Worse still, from Burnham's vantage, was that Bedell Smith's new hires proved fundamentally opposed to Burnham's strategic vision – and entirely sympathetic to Josselson's read of which European intellectuals the Agency should foster. First and foremost among them was Allen Dulles, who arrived in January 1951 as Deputy Director, Plans, and Wisner's immediate supervisor.²⁵ "Parted gray hair, carefully trimmed mustache, tweeds, and his preferred rimless oval glasses gave the impression of . . . a virile Mr. Chips, rarely to be seen without a pipe in hand," Helms recalled.²⁶ Dulles's grandfather, uncle, and brother all served as Secretary of State. He had been OSS's top spymaster in Europe, and was one of few Americans experienced in the new business of intelligence.²⁷

Like Smith, Dulles wanted Wisner on a tighter chain. Unlike Smith, Dulles was troubled only by the caliber of Wisner's operations; he saw covert action as a shortcut to foreign policy objectives and was a propaganda enthusiast.²⁸ (He would later respond to Khrushchev's riposte that "[t]hose who wait for the Soviet Union to abandon Communism will wait until shrimp learn to whistle" with a proposal to broadcast whistling shrimp over the airwaves. "Shrimp," Dulles was informed, "emit a crackling noise similar to that of hot grease in a frying pan. Unfortunately for your purpose, it bears no resemblance to a whistle."²⁹) By August, Dulles was the Agency's second-in-command and had Director in his sights.³⁰

Dulles was also keen to use his own men, bringing in former OSS aides and giving them senior positions.³¹ Most significantly for the Congress – and for Josselson's and Burnham's respective roles in it – Dulles hired Tom Braden as his special assistant.³² Braden, a tall, handsome, and gregarious thirty-two-year-old, was one of the "very liberal people who never would have been able to work

there if there was an inflexible mind at the top,” according to colleague Bill Bundy.³³ Braden hailed from tiny Greene, Iowa; his father was a low-level insurance company employee whom Braden dismissed as “insular and uneducated.” When told to finish high school and work in the local tie store, Braden instead dropped out, headed to New York, apprenticed as a printer, got hired by Harvard University Press, and hobnobbed with its authors.

An unexpected inheritance from a relative paved the way to Dartmouth, where he promptly “developed a chip on [his] shoulder,” surrounded by prep school classmates “who had all read Shakespeare and Balzac” when “[he] had read only the Bible.” He became class president, wrote for *The Dartmouth*, and cultivated a reputation as a contrarian. When he invited Earl Browder, head of the Communist Party of the United States, to speak, the trustees took notice. One – future vice president Nelson Rockefeller – dropped in for a chat. Braden soon had a job writing the employees’ bulletin for Rockefeller, who became a lifelong mentor.

When America entered the Second World War, Braden joined OSS. After the war, Rockefeller came calling again, offering the executive vice presidency of the Museum of Modern Art.³⁴ (“I was in way over my head,” Braden said. “I didn’t know enough about modern art.”³⁵) Through Rockefeller, Braden also met his wife, Joan. Shortly after the wedding, Dulles – having cleared it with Rockefeller – called with a job offer.³⁶

The Bradens arrived in Washington in early 1951 eager to leave their mark. Joan was a legendarily ambitious hostess; Tom decided that the CIA had no centralized effort to counter Soviet front groups and proposed a new “International Organizations Division,” with himself as the head. The way the CIA worked then was, “you have an idea, you sell it, and I was in a good position to sell it,” Braden said, “because I had been assistant to Allen Dulles.”³⁷ In June 1951, two months into his tenure, he told Dulles of his idea. Dulles was encouraging, and Braden spent the next few months perfecting his pitch to Wisner and the other division heads.

Communist front groups, Braden believed, were poised to “win the alliance of most of the world” thanks to their success in “throw[ing] a peculiar spell over some of the world’s intellectuals, artists, writers, scientists, many of whom behaved like disciplined party-liners.”³⁸ The State Department’s response was inadequate, he felt. In the course of his initial work managing the Agency’s complicated relationship with the AFL and the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO), he had discovered the CIA already had operations to combat various Soviet fronts, but that they were haphazard and poorly supervised. With Offie gone and the Political and Psychological Warfare group in disarray, OPC’s ability to coherently oversee its various operations involving private groups – including QKOPERA – had broken down. To Braden, it seemed that “nobody was doing anything.” There were “a lot of projects going on, and I just moved them all together. . . . What I saw was chaos, and I started to define it, organize it.”³⁹

To Braden, the principle uniting all the operations he wanted to cobble together – labor, the National Students Association, the Congress for Cultural Freedom, among others – was that they all appealed to the non-Communist left,

i.e., European socialists and others of the liberal left who were disillusioned with Communism but not necessarily committed to capitalism, the Atlantic Pact, or American leadership. “In much of Europe in the 1950s,” Braden believed, “socialists, people who called themselves ‘left’ – the very people whom many Americans thought no better than Communists – were about the only people who gave a damn about fighting Communism.”⁴⁰

Braden also fully understood that the European left was often anti-American, and at odds with American foreign policy. But, to him, these were not necessarily downsides. Braden divided the world into “the stupid cops and those of us who were trying to really defeat Communism,” and considered the latter to include the European left and people like Arthur Schlesinger Jr. “[Y]ou wouldn’t say Arthur Schlesinger was anti-American because he wrote criticisms on occasion,” Braden said. “But there were stupid people who would,” and Braden was convinced that “the right, the hard right in America, was one of the chief enemies in the pursuit of trying to fight Communism.”⁴¹

Thus, Braden came to his meeting with Wisner and the CIA’s various geographical division heads armed with a quite specific strategic vision for the Agency’s various operations involving private groups – including QKOPERA. But Wisner and the division heads vetoed the plan. Most of the operations Braden wanted to take over fit reasonably well into existing geographical categories; Braden was encroaching on their turf.

Braden then played his trump card: he went to Dulles and threatened to resign.⁴² Dulles backed his protégé. “Allen, oh boy, he got Frank Wisner on the line, ‘Frank what’s this I hear, Tom Braden tells me this and this and this, well, Frank, stay out of it, well, you tell those other boys to stay out of it,’” Braden recalled. “So I won, I went home happy.”⁴³ So from September 1951 onwards, the International Organizations Division became the group that managed QKOPERA and all the other CIA operations supporting private groups.

More than favoritism was at work. Dulles backed his protégé above all because he firmly believed in Braden’s assessment of the non-Communist left. Dulles “believed strongly in the necessity of providing intellectually acceptable instrumentalities for the exchange and development of liberal thought for the center and center-left forces which were coming to the fore, or seeking means of expression, in the post-World War II world,” wrote Wayne Jackson, Dulles’s in-house biographer.

These operations “engaged [Dulles’s] personal attention and encouragement as much as, if not more than, any other activity of the Agency,” according to Jackson – an extraordinary observation given that high-stakes coups in Iran and Guatemala, the failed Bay of Pigs invasion, the development of the U-2 spy plane, and the interception of Soviet landline communications in the Berlin tunnel all happened during his lengthy tenure. If any operations established the CIA’s reputation as a bastion of liberalism under Dulles, it was the operations now under Braden’s purview in the International Organizations Division.⁴⁴

To Burnham, this was the moment when the CIA was co-opted by officers in thrall to the non-Communist left – “a doctrine foisted on CIA by Allen Dulles.”

To Burnham, this was a fatal strategy: “You cannot have an anti-Communist apparatus without anti-Communists.”⁴⁵ Braden’s and Dulles’s ascendancy within the Agency conclusively ended Burnham’s prospects for molding the Congress in a different direction. And Burnham’s loss was Josselson’s gain. From the beginning, Josselson had conceived of the Congress as an organization that would be most effective if it found ways of reaching the non-Communist left in particular. Now his objectives were aligned with the Agency’s key leaders – giving Josselson greater opportunities to manage the Paris office without interference.

Notes

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- 2 Michael Burke, *Outrageous Good Fortune* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1984), p. 132.
- 3 Joe Bryan to James Burnham, n.d. (1949), Folder 22, Box 5, JB; James McCargar interview, November 1, 2006, Washington, DC.
- 4 E. Howard Hunt, *Undercover: Memoirs of an American Secret Agent* (London: W.H. Allen, 1975), p. 66; Daniel Kelly, *James Burnham and the Struggle for the World* (Wilmington: ISI Books, 2002), p. 149; Evan Thomas, *The Very Best Men: The Daring Early Years of the CIA* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995), p. 34.
- 5 Hunt, *Undercover*, p. 66.
- 6 George Dixon, “When Wives Add Up Mix-Ups May Follow,” *Washington Post*, June 26, 1954.
- 7 Louis Menand, “Brainwashed: Where the ‘Manchurian Candidate’ came from,” *The New Yorker*, September 15, 2003.
- 8 Gore Vidal, “The Art and Arts of E. Howard Hunt,” *New York Review of Books*, December 13, 1973.
- 9 Hunt, *Undercover*, p. 63.
- 10 Thomas, *Very Best Men*, p. 84.
- 11 *Ibid.*, p. 33; Hunt, *Undercover*, p. 70.
- 12 CIA memo from Bryan/Munson, “Company Employee Magazines in the ‘Cold’ War,” August 1949, Box 20, RG 59/250/50/18/03, National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, Maryland (“NARA”).
- 13 Memo from W.T. Stone to Mr. Sargeant, Subject: CIA project for “Company Employee Magazines in the Cold War,” August 9, 1949, Box 20, RG 59/250/50/18/03, NARA.
- 14 Burnham to OPC, n.d. (late 1949), Subject: Stalin’s Birthday, Folder 1, Box 11, JB.
- 15 Frank and Margot Lindsay interview, Lexington, Massachusetts, November 7, 2006.
- 16 Frank Lindsay interview, July 20, 2006, Lexington, MA; Hugh Wilford, *The Mighty Wurlitzer: How the CIA Played America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008), pp. 77–8.
- 17 James Burnham to Sidney Hook, December 22, 1948, Folder 5, Box 8, Sidney Hook Papers, Hoover Institution, Stanford University, Stanford, California (“SH”).
- 18 James Burnham, *The Coming Defeat of Communism* (New York: John Day, 1950), pp. 8–18, 25–30, 65–6, 81–6, 148–68, 202–3; see also James Burnham, *Containment or Liberation? An Inquiry into the Aims of United States Foreign Policy* (New York: John Day, 1953), pp. 20–5, 34–5, 43, 94–5, 196–7.
- 19 Hunt, *Undercover*, p. 69; Miles Copeland, “James Burnham, 1905–1987,” *National Review* (September 11, 1987), pp. 37–8.
- 20 Arthur Darling, *The Central Intelligence Agency: An Instrument of Government to 1950* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1990), pp. 410–15. This was originally a 1953 internal history.

- 21 Ludwell Lee Montague, *General Walter Bedell Smith as Director of Central Intelligence, October 1950–February 1953* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992), p. 214 footnote b.
- 22 Ted Morgan, *A Covert Life: Jay Lovestone, Communist, Anti-Communist, and Spy-master*, New York: Random House, 1999), pp. 212–13; Anthony Carew, “The American Labor Movement in Fizzland: The Free Trade Labor Union Committee and the CIA,” *Labor History* 39 (1998), p. 31.
- 23 Thomas, *Very Best Men*, p. 64.
- 24 Hunt, *Undercover*, p. 70.
- 25 Montague, *General Walter Bedell Smith*, p. 4.
- 26 Richard Helms, *A Look Over My Shoulder: A Life in the Central Intelligence Agency* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2003), pp. 58–9.
- 27 Thomas, *Very Best Men*, pp. 72–4.
- 28 Peter Grose, *Gentleman Spy: The Life of Allen Dulles* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1994), pp. 309–11, 326.
- 29 Gordon Gray to Allen Dulles, October 4, 1955, October 3, 1955, Folder 20, Box 29, Allen Welsh Dulles Papers, Mudd Manuscript Library, Princeton University, Princeton, New Jersey (“AWD”).
- 30 Montague, *General Walter Bedell Smith*, p. 4.
- 31 Thomas, *Very Best Men*, pp. 79–80.
- 32 Tom Braden, “I’m Glad the CIA Is ‘Immoral,’” *Saturday Evening Post* (May 20, 1967); Monk (Carmel Office) to Jay Lovestone, April 6, 1951, Folder 13, Box 381, Jay Lovestone Papers, Hoover Institution, Stanford University, Stanford, California (“JL”).
- 33 Quoted in James Srodes, *Allen Dulles: Master of Spies* (Washington DC: Regnery, 1999), p. 476.
- 34 Kandy Stroud, “The Bradens’ Washington Salon: The Politics of Their Parties,” *New York Magazine* (February 15, 1975).
- 35 Quoted in Morgan, *A Covert Life*, p. 220.
- 36 Joan Braden, *Just Enough Rope: An Intimate Memoir* (New York: Villard Books, 1989), pp. 54–5.
- 37 Tom Braden interview, January 8, 2007, Denver, Colorado.
- 38 Braden, “I’m Glad the CIA Is ‘Immoral.’”
- 39 Tom Braden interview.
- 40 Braden, “I’m Glad the CIA Is ‘Immoral.’”
- 41 Tom Braden interview.
- 42 Braden, “I’m Glad the CIA Is ‘Immoral.’”
- 43 Tom Braden interview.
- 44 Wayne Jackson, *Allen Welsh Dulles as Director of Central Intelligence*, Vol. 1, 1973, pp. 59–60, Box 1, RG 263/24/35/05, NARA.
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10 The 1952 Paris Festival

Just as Tom Braden arrived in Washington to shape the Congress's fortunes within the Agency, another figure was starting work at the Congress's Paris office. After several delays, Nicolas Nabokov came to Paris in April 1951 to assume the post he had been promised six months earlier in Brussels, Secretary-General of the Congress. He arrived with one major objective: to mount "a large Congress Festival for the arts" forthwith.¹ Having observed the "festival frenzy" of the past few years – European musical festivals had "replaced the sedate spa of the nineteenth century" for tourists – Nabokov decided that the Congress needed one of its own, on a grand scale.² The Masterpieces of the Twentieth Century Festival would, Nabokov proposed, rebut the propaganda that has "plant[ed] in our own minds doubts of the validity, strength, and vitality of our Western culture" and showcase the achievements of artists freed from the "narrow restrictive rules" of a "totalitarian regime."³

Nabokov saw his own position and the fate of the Congress bound up with his proposal, and for good reason. To date, the Congress seemed to be doing nothing but running through money and goodwill fast. National bureaus had sprung up from Belgium to Ceylon – in no small part due to James Burnham's tireless world travels to promote the Congress – but disappeared just as quickly.⁴ A March 1951 "Indian Congress" had attracted a few big names – Burnham, Spanish writer Salvador de Madariaga, Nobel Prize-winning geneticist H.J. Muller, English poets Stephen Spender and W.H. Auden – but failed to resonate.⁵ *Preuves*, the Congress's first magazine, launched in March 1951 with Bondy as its editor, but its readership was modest and its reception in France hostile.⁶

Indeed, Nabokov was so pessimistic about the Congress's future that he had already lined up a backup job at the Ford Foundation. If his idea for the Festival went nowhere, Nabokov was certain to leave – and the Congress was unlikely to recover from the high-profile resignation of the man who seemed to offer the best chance of winning over the Congress's detractors and attracting high-profile names to its cause.⁷

Instead, Nabokov's idea for a Paris festival revitalized the Congress, established it as an organization with a primarily cultural orientation, and convinced the Agency to devote hundreds of thousands of dollars to a month-long celebration of twentieth-century modernism in music and art. The Festival was no less

of a turning point for Josselson, who used the Festival (and its accompanying large-scale money transfers) to solidify his own role in the Congress and to end Burnham's plans for the Congress once and for all.

Much to Nabokov's surprise, Burnham turned out to be the main proponent for his Festival. Whereas the Executive Committee's reaction was more measured, Burnham assured Nabokov of his fullest support.⁸ When "the Paris office" – i.e., Josselson, Bondy, and a rotating cast of assistants – suggested that the preparations for a large-scale festival would take time and proposed delaying the event until summer 1952, Burnham derided this as "one more indication of their tendency toward too incestuous and intra-office life."⁹

But Burnham's support for the Festival idea came with conditions – and a very different view of what it should involve. To Burnham, the Festival was a chance to reignite his conception of a united front: "The Congress has got to keep reaching out to the widest possible public and to use every possible means for this purpose."¹⁰ If the Festival was going to "assure the world standing of the Congress for ever after," it needed "an overall 'angle' which will make it stand out from all other festivals, and which at the same time will make it play, in its own sphere, a major part in the struggle for the world," he told Nabokov.¹¹

Burnham thus urged his employers at OPC to finance the Festival, but the proposal he presented them coupled Nabokov's cultural gathering with a number of overt political elements. There would be ballets, operas, concerts, and art exhibitions – but also, Burnham suggested, "certain special manifestations, with a political as well as a cultural significance; e.g., a concert devoted to musical works forbidden in the Soviet Union." There would be panels on the arts – but, as the Festival's finale, "there should be a great public meeting, in which the most prominent persons who could be secured would draw the philosophical and political conclusions." He concluded by asking for a budget of several million dollars "(Considerably less, after all, than one B-36.)"¹²

The money would be worth it, Burnham urged OPC, because without the Festival, Nabokov would surely make good on plans to leave for a job at the Ford Foundation, and perhaps cripple the Congress for good.¹³ "The problem of the Congress is to get out into the public world," Burnham argued – making it "essential for them to have some sort of impressive public meeting this coming autumn."¹⁴

Burnham, however, had again misjudged his man. Nabokov soon made it clear that he had no intention of playing up a political angle. Burnham complained to Nabokov and simultaneously urged OPC that "the points here made should be communicated independently to Paris in order to reinforce [another OPC officer's] intervention with respect to them."¹⁵ But the intervention backfired. "I don't think that at the present time it is correct to say that our work here is suffering from 'a tendency to make the Congress an office operation,'" a miffed Nabokov told Burnham. Nabokov had tirelessly contacted British intellectuals "in order to gain support of a broader intellectual front. I have seen important personalities like T.S. Eliot, Isaiah Berlin," he wrote, and had "dissipated to some degree their misgivings about our Congress. Many of them think

of our Congress as some kind of semiclandestine American organization controlled by you, Koestler, and . . . Borkenau.” Besides, Nabokov wrote:

I think our constant efforts should be directed towards proving to European intellectuals that the Congress for Cultural Freedom is

- a not an American secret service Agency, and
- b not an organization in which intellectuals are being asked to accomplish tasks which to most of them are distasteful (public speeches, press conferences, public meetings, etc.)

The real problem, to Nabokov, was that the Congress had done so little since Berlin. So he tried to placate Burnham, explaining that immediate political action was impossible: “it will be a very slow and gradual task to gain first the confidence and then the cooperation of ‘publicly distinguished individuals’ for our active work.”¹⁶

“I am having a tough time trying to put some order in this enterprise and I still feel as if I were sitting on top of a sand dune, waiting for the slightest breath to blow away the sand,” Nabokov confessed to Schlesinger. The Festival, at least, “will be a huge international affair which I believe will have much more *retentissement* than a hundred speeches by Arthur Koestler, Sidney Hook and James Burnham, about the neurosis of our century.” As for the growing divide between certain American intellectuals and the rest of the Congress, “It seems to me that some of our friends have veered so far to the right that soon it will be hard to talk to them.”¹⁷

In the meantime, Burnham was making a final push within OPC and among his contacts within the Congress to implement his vision for the Congress. Burnham was now firmly convinced that Koestler – who objected to a cultural Festival in principle – was more trouble than he was worth, and bound to “bite the hand that feeds him.” Upon hearing that Koestler might have been granted some sort of security clearance, Burnham thus wrote a lengthy memorandum denouncing Koestler to OPC as a conspiracy-obsessed, “neurotic” personality bent on ferreting out “suspected ‘secrets’ of American networks and clandestine activities.” Burnham urged that his “participation in organizational matters” should be “minimize[d],” but he was a “prime asset” in “journalistic and literary collaboration, his speaking, and his production of imaginative slogans and ideas.”¹⁸ Soon after a weekend with the Burnhams in summer 1951, Koestler resigned for good, later reflecting that he was “made to withdraw in a very gentle and effective way.”¹⁹ Burnham’s behind-the-scenes intervention to OPC was almost certainly responsible. But Burnham had effectively shot himself in the foot. He used his influence with OPC to remove the one prominent ally who actually shared his vision of a united front Congress, leaving behind a host of figures who were keen to marginalize Burnham’s involvement.

As Nabokov bucked Burnham’s plans and it became clear that the Festival would require many more months of planning, Burnham turned to another

expedient: using the Festival's financial arrangements to reassert control over the Paris office. Since funds transfers for the Festival would go through the American Committee, Burnham hoped they would, under his direction, become a "continuous control and check to be exercised over the Paris Bureau."²⁰ Burnham thus proposed that a special "Festival Account" in New York, "under the joint control of Sidney Hook and Pearl Kluger in covert understanding with an OPC representative," would guarantee "close basic control by OPC," through Burnham.²¹ Kluger then urged Nabokov to come to New York immediately to consult more about the Festival.²²

But the Agency soon scuttled Burnham's plans. With the changing of the guard within the Agency, Tom Braden was now the primary overseer of the CIA's involvement with the Congress. When the idea of having the Congress sponsor a lavish festival of twentieth-century art and music crossed Braden's desk in late 1951, he was enthusiastic – so much so that he later made it sound like he came up with the idea. Unlike Burnham, however, Braden saw the Congress as "a rallying point for what would be called by the Rotarians as 'left wing' thought," and had no interest in the kind of political program Burnham wanted.²³ Rather, to Braden, the Festival was exactly the kind of bold but politically subtle initiative that could debunk the myth of American cultural barrenness without forcing a political message that might alienate European leftists. He secured a budget of \$300,000, reasoning, "If you're going to do it, get the best. Al [Allen Dulles] and myself, we knew better. It sounds arrogant, but that's what we thought. *We knew*. We knew something about art and music, and State didn't."²⁴

The Agency seized on the Festival as an opportunity to put the Congress on new, solid, and ostensibly independent financial footing – and to remove Irving Brown and Burnham from any role as intermediaries in transferring funds to Paris. Nothing could be more natural than a deep-pocketed backer for an extremely expensive arts festival. So the Agency established the Farfield Foundation, a purported private foundation dedicated to the arts, and Julius "Junkie" Fleischmann, heir to the Fleischmann's yeast fortune, gladly took credit for supplying "artistic direction" as well as the Festival's budget.²⁵ From the Agency's vantage, Fleischmann – a world-class yachtsman, publisher, hotel owner, president of the Ballet Russe, orchid connoisseur, and amateur anthropologist – seemed the perfect patron. (To date, Fleischmann had also bankrolled a dozen forgettable Broadway shows and spent thousands training ducks to perform in a vaudeville show; after this, he seemingly relished the public prestige of backing the Congress for Cultural Freedom.²⁶)

In late fall 1951, CIA officer Albert Donnelly thus arrived at the American Committee's New York office as Fleischmann's purported assistant. Donnelly, not Burnham, now had "complete authority in all Festival matters." Burnham was firmly told that "[t]he advisability of any person's telephoning the American Committee from Washington," or vice versa, "is seriously questioned," and "[i]t has been decided to hold up on certain financial plans mentioned by you."²⁷ A furious Burnham told OPC, "I see no reason for my own further continuous

participation in the Festival project, and I therefore plan to withdraw from such participation.”²⁸

As plans for the Festival – now scheduled for spring 1952 – progressed, the Congress faced a new and unexpected crisis, one which delivered the fatal blow to Burnham’s already shaky position. In March 1952, a mere month before the Festival, the Congress’s American Committee got into a hugely public spat over Senator Joseph McCarthy’s investigations into the Soviet Union’s unprecedented penetration of the American government.

Burnham was blindsided. He strongly agreed with McCarthy’s aim of fully investigating Soviet subversion within the American government, although he questioned McCarthy’s tactics. More to the point, Burnham saw McCarthy’s investigations as irrelevant to the Congress’s work, which in Burnham’s eyes was supposed to be forging a united front against Communism in Europe and the developing world.²⁹ Burnham was thus unprepared when liberals like the writer James Farrell and Schlesinger deemed McCarthy a threat to cultural freedom and moved to force the American Committee to take a stand against him.³⁰ To Schlesinger, “I don’t have much more in common with those who admire McCarthy than I have with those who admire Stalin,” and “I don’t think either type of devotee belongs in a committee for cultural freedom.”³¹ So Schlesinger and the writer James T. Farrell moved to force the issue at the American Committee’s public conference in late March, “In Defense of Free Culture,” after trying to “smoke out people” and “bring in some people who are clearly on our side.”³²

The Committee’s March conference at the Waldorf swiftly erupted into a very public civil war between Committee members. Before a crowd of six hundred, writer Max Eastman won loud applause when he denounced “fuzzy-minded liberals” whose toleration for Communism “in the name of cultural freedom” destroyed freedoms. But the audience turned sour when he defended McCarthy. Playwright Elmer Rice, who spoke next, lambasted him.³³

After Eastman’s speech, Farrell, Richard Rovere, and others gathered in the hallway, planning to present a resolution condemning McCarthy. American Committee Secretary Pearl Kluger managed to persuade them to hold off until the Committee’s upcoming membership meeting, and thought she had neatly resolved the matter.³⁴ But Schlesinger’s coalition was adamant about pressing the issue, and believed they could carry most of the Committee behind an anti-McCarthy resolution.³⁵

Schlesinger thus delivered an ultimatum to Sidney Hook, the Committee’s then-chairman. Either the American Committee would “take a clear cut anti-McCarthy position,” or Schlesinger would resign – and “I am certain that Reinhold Niebuhr would feel the same way, as well as many other members of the Committee (a good many of whom I helped recruit.)” A Committee “which tries to straddle the McCarthy issue” was “intolerable,” and “[a]s far as Europe is concerned, our failure to denounce McCarthyism in unequivocal terms would be a fatal blow to the whole conception of the Congress for Cultural Freedom.” Schlesinger added: “I am sure you know how strongly Nicolas Nabokov feels

about just this point and how a repetition of the Waldorf episode would cripple his operation.”³⁶

Up until this point, the Committee’s debates over whether to take a position on McCarthy’s investigations might have been resolved without any notice from OPC. Burnham, at least, had told OPC nothing to date about the matter, and no one in the Paris office apparently knew what was happening in New York.

That all changed when Schlesinger wrote an “alarming” letter to Frank Wisner, his former OSS colleague. Schlesinger had known of OPC’s involvement in the Congress from an early date, and apparently expected Wisner to back Schlesinger’s position. But Schlesinger misjudged Wisner’s reaction. Up until now, Wisner “had not heard about these developments,” not least because his role vis-à-vis the Congress had diminished when Dulles gave Braden free rein to oversee QKOPERA. Now, Wisner was displeased and feared for operational security. OPC, the Committee’s hidden sponsor, had “an inescapable responsibility for its conduct, its actions, and its public statements.” For the Committee to take an official stance on McCarthy would “inject[] us into an extremely hot American domestic political issue” that “is sure to get us into trouble and to bring down on our heads criticism for interference in a matter that is none of our concern whatsoever.” Wisner’s own preference was to “put across to the members of both factions that we are talking about Europe and the world outside the United States, and that we should stick to our last – and that if we do not do so the entire effort will be exposed and shot down because of our involvement in domestic political issues.”³⁷

Whether Wisner took further steps is unclear. Regardless, Hook immediately reassured Schlesinger that he would not oppose a resolution against McCarthy, and urged against a split.³⁸ At an April 16 Committee meeting, Burnham likewise urged that “the existence of the Committee depends on its not having any political affiliations. It can’t identify itself with any group or it will cease to exist. This is a united front.”³⁹

Nabokov was not reacting as Schlesinger expected either. He exploded at Kluger for failing to alert him to the crisis. But Kluger held her ground, protesting that “Schlesinger and Rovere, without waiting for a discussion to see what differences there are and making an attempt to work them out, are threatening to split the organization.” She urged: “[I]f you have any influence with Arthur I would suggest you wire him that the matter is a question for discussion without threats of split.”⁴⁰ That was one of Kluger’s last letters for the Committee. Two days later, Hook announced to the Committee that she would go to Paris to help with the Festival, and “will not return as Executive Secretary.”⁴¹ The truth, Hook later admitted, was that she had “gotten a raw deal.”⁴²

Nabokov nonetheless took Kluger’s advice and cabled Schlesinger, “Any movement tending at this time to split American Committee tremendously detrimental to our work Europe. Please apply all your efforts reach agreement preserve unity committee letter follows.”⁴³ Nabokov’s letter explained, “I find it hard to believe that there is any basic disagreement among the members of the American Committee on the matter of intellectual freedom, and in particular

about McCarthy.” Nabokov himself was strongly against McCarthy, and “if I genuinely believed that the members of our American Committee were pro-McCarthy in sentiment, I would have no alternative but to resign.” That not being the case, “I urge you to do everything you can to prevent a split in the American Committee. I cannot put my conviction strongly enough that such a rupture would virtually represent a death blow to our work here.”⁴⁴

Indeed, Nabokov had every reason to oppose Schlesinger’s plan to force the Committee to take a stand on McCarthy. The Festival – the Congress’s first major event since Berlin, and the event upon which the Congress’s future seemed to ride – was a week away. Nabokov had already warned Kluger long before the McCarthy issue surfaced that if the American Committee or the Congress began “making political speeches and propoganda now ... we will put our whole International Exposition of arts in jeopardy.”⁴⁵ Now the American Committee was threatening to do so at the very worst possible time, on the most hot-button possible issue – risking an avalanche of press that would detract from the Festival at the critical moment.

On April 23, the Committee approved a general resolution denouncing McCarthyism without mentioning him by name – watering down the resolution Schlesinger favored – and passed a second resolution denouncing McCarthy for specific statements.⁴⁶ “The whole thing left a very bad taste in my mouth,” Schlesinger confided to Nabokov, concluding that the American Committee “has become an instrument for these bastards.”⁴⁷

Hook resigned his chairmanship soon thereafter.⁴⁸ But Burnham ended up with a huge organizational liability on the eve of the Paris Festival, and growing difficulties with his employers at OPC. Burnham had orchestrated the Committee’s creation, installed Hook as its chairman, kept tabs on its meetings (which he sent to OPC), and had attempted to use the Committee as a way to tighten the reins over the Paris office. From OPC’s vantage, Burnham was supposed to be overseeing the American Committee. But he had failed to prevent (or even inform OPC) of critical developments that had put the Festival’s reception at risk.

On April 30, 1952, crowds congregated outside Paris’s Church of Saint-Roch for a concert commemorating “victims of tyranny in the twentieth century.” Inside, the chapel overflowed; two hundred former German, Russian, and Spanish prisoners occupied the front pews. Fritz Münch led the Orchestre des Concerts Lamoureux; works by Bach alternated with those of neoclassical French composer Francis Poulenc.

Thus began Nabokov’s “Masterpieces of the Twentieth Century,” which lasted an entire month and featured nine symphonies, three opera companies, thirty-three soloists, and sixty-eight composers. On the eve of the Festival, the Parisian press called the Congress “a recent American organization practically unheard of here.”⁴⁹ By the end, the Congress was back on the map. An all-black cast put on Virgil Thomson’s *Four Saints in Three Acts*. Stravinsky – one of Nabokov’s close friends – conducted his *Rite of Spring*, *The Firebird*, and his ballet *Orphée*. The Boston Symphony Orchestra made its European debut. Balanchine’s New York City Ballet dazzled. Symphonie orchestras played

pieces by Shostakovich and Prokofiev banned in the Soviet Union. Spectators gazed on Cézannes, Modiglianis, Van Goghs, and Picassos.⁵⁰ Distinguished writers – Auden, Spender, and William Faulkner among them – discussed “The writer in his environment” and “The meaning of twentieth-century painting.”⁵¹ The Congress put on so many displays that “no human being could have the strength to stagger around and see and hear it all, day after day and night after night,” wrote a *New Yorker* critic.⁵²

Nabokov was triumphant. “The Congress for Cultural Freedom is known today all over Europe – known as a cultural organization with cultural objectives,” he emphasized to Burnham. “We have, I think, gained the respect of a great many of those non-Communist intellectuals who are on our side, yet who hesitated to support our movement.”⁵³ The Festival was also “the only kind of action we could have undertaken here in Paris which would have established the Congress in the minds of the European intellectuals as a positive, and not only a polemical organization,” Nabokov told Hook.⁵⁴ Luminaries like the English poet Stephen Spender had seen Berlin as too aggressive. The Festival was a welcome shift.⁵⁵ Even the British press conceded that “the festival has offered a fascinating sample of the rich, febrile, controversial, and ... immensely stimulating output of twentieth-century artists.”⁵⁶

The CIA was similarly exultant. Braden considered the festival a massive success, later boasting that showcasing the Boston Symphony Orchestra “won more acclaim for the United States in Paris than John Foster Dulles or Dwight D. Eisenhower could have bought with a hundred speeches.”⁵⁷

But for Burnham, the end of the Festival was also the end of his involvement in the Congress and his career in OPC. His vision of a Congress founded on a united front failed in part because of tactical blunders. He was no longer welcome to press his views on the Paris office; Bondy and Nabokov, his own hires, had turned against him. Koestler’s diagnosis was astute: “I believe that you are an important political thinker in our time but a rotten judge of people.”⁵⁸

Burnham had also underestimated growing divides among anti-Communist intellectuals. The vast majority of European intellectuals identified with the left, and this group saw political agitation, Eastern European liberation, and Burnham himself as non-starters – therefore, so did Josselson, Nabokov, and Bondy. In retrospect, “[t]he ‘McCarthy period’ saw the rise to cultural predominance of the ‘non-Communist left,’ which soon became ‘anti-anti-Communist.’” Burnham appreciated too late what this meant for him. “In almost all the countries, uncompromisingly anti-Communist writers, no matter what the intellectual and aesthetic level of their work, lost resonance.”⁵⁹ By early 1953, he was gone from all Congress activities and a pariah among American intellectuals.⁶⁰ “The liberals now dominate all the cultural channels in this country,” *Partisan Review*’s Philip Rahv remarked. “If you break completely with this dominant atmosphere, you’re a dead duck. James Burnham has committed suicide.”⁶¹

Burnham’s career at OPC floundered for the same reasons. From Burnham’s vantage, the Agency had been co-opted by officers in thrall to the non-Communist left – “a doctrine foisted on CIA by Allen Dulles.” Men like Braden,

who now handled QKOPERA, were anathema to Burnham's conception of the Congress, and vice versa. To Burnham, the Agency had settled on a fatal strategy: "You cannot have an anti-Communist apparatus without anti-Communists."⁶² His last report to OPC was dated May 22, 1952; he left some months later, seen by many as "too' hard line" and even "fascist," recalled a colleague.⁶³

For Josselson, the Festival facilitated his emergence as the trusted manager of a revitalized Congress. In Josselson's hands, the Paris office became the nerve center of the Congress's administrative activities and the clearing-house for everything from editorial appointments to selecting delegates for upcoming congresses. In a symbolic break with the Congress's early days, Josselson moved its headquarters away from the Avenue Montaigne to 104 boulevard Haussmann, on the right bank, just next door to Marcel Proust's old quarters.⁶⁴ There, the Congress's titular president, Denis de Rougemont, made occasional appearances, but was usually off in Geneva running his Centre Européen de la Culture. Nabokov, Josselson's close friend, remained the Congress's public face; he continued traveling far and wide to promote the Congress's activities, launch new national committees, and attract new names. In a nearby office, Bondy happily bowed out of further administrative duties and edited *Preuves*. And, while Josselson had faithfully persuaded Lasky to drop any formal role, Josselson still consulted him often behind the scenes.

Going forward, the Congress aimed only at "the large part of the intellectual stratum which, although somewhat biased in favour of the Communists, was not rigidly attached to Communist organisations and beliefs," i.e., those who were "more willing to see the damage which Communism was doing to political and intellectual life, but not yet ready to render a negative judgment because they were inclined to be sympathetic to any idealistic collectivistic tendencies away from capitalistic society," sociologist Edward Shils recalled.⁶⁵ And, as the Festival illustrated, the Congress now aimed to appeal to this group through cultural initiatives alone, not political demonstrations. This was Josselson's conception of the Congress from the beginning, and Congress stalwarts later considered it essential to the Congress's success. The Congress "did not take the line that Jim Burnham or Irving Brown . . . had wanted. And if it did, it would not have lasted a year," reflected Daniel Bell.⁶⁶

Josselson's emergence as the Congress's manager and the only OPC contact left standing also perversely diminished the CIA's control over the Congress. Burnham had repeatedly solicited OPC's intervention. But Josselson had no need to turn to his bosses in Washington for anything other than money – and no desire to do so. It had taken him two years, but Josselson was finally in a position to lead the group of intellectuals he had helped form in Berlin, and to protect them against any further interference from Washington. All the qualities that made Josselson so suited to the Congress – his ease among its participants, his ability to inspire trust, and his managerial skills – made him difficult for the CIA to discipline.

Braden, by his own account, barely tried. Braden considered the Congress Josselson's show; Josselson was "running around from meeting to meeting, from man to man, from group to group, and keeping them all together and all

organized and all getting something done.”⁶⁷ Braden had no interest in interfering – perhaps because Josselson’s plans for the Congress already aligned with Braden’s political views. Braden likewise claimed that he safeguarded “the integrity of the organization . . . by not requiring it to support every aspect of official American foreign policy.”⁶⁸ That is more than plausible given Braden’s own disagreement with many aspects of official American policy – and Allen Dulles’s willingness to back Braden when needed. Braden, in sum, believed Josselson “was relieved when I started the International Organizations Division, to have somebody who understood him and what he was trying to do in this back home, sending cables at the other end.”⁶⁹

Indeed, Braden saw his main function as keeping those he considered “dummies” in the Agency – like a senior representative in Paris who considered Josselson a “left winger” – out of Josselson’s hair.⁷⁰ Braden guarded his division’s operations zealously, torpedoing calls to use them for cover or to coordinate them with other agencies’ efforts. Far from taking part in a coordinated “cultural Cold War,” Braden isolated the operations he oversaw. “It’s easy to dream up, why don’t we have this group coordinate with that group,” he reflected. “But they never amount to a goddamn thing . . . I never coordinated with anybody, I really didn’t.”⁷¹

Josselson’s case officer, Lawrence de Neufville, was equally under Josselson’s spell, less a minder than Josselson’s willing ambassador to headquarters. “I saw Josselson every day, or if not, every week, and I would go to Washington with whatever he wanted to accomplish,” de Neufville recalled. “I saw my job as trying to facilitate the development of the Congress by listening to people like Josselson who knew better than I did.”⁷²

Notes

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- 3 “Exposition of Arts is Planned in Paris,” *New York Times* (November 29, 1951).
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- 10 James Burnham to "Friends," June 1, 1951, Folder 9, Box 48, Series II, CCF.
- 11 James Burnham to Nicolas Nabokov, June 16, 1951, Folder 9, Box 48, Series II, CCF.
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- 17 Nicolas Nabokov to Arthur Schlesinger Jr., July 19, 1951, Box P-20, Arthur Schlesinger Jr. Papers, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library, Boston, Massachusetts ("ASJ").
- 18 Burnham to OPC, "Subject: Arthur Koestler," May 31, 1951, Folder 5, Box 11, JB.
- 19 Arthur Koestler to Nicolas Nabokov, July 30, 1951, Folder 11, Box 197, Series II, CCF; Michael Scammell, *Arthur Koestler: The Literary and Political Odyssey of a Twentieth-Century Skeptic* (New York: Random House, 2009), pp. 384–6.
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- 21 James Burnham to OPC, "Subject: Transfer of Money to PARIS ARTS FESTIVAL," December 10, 1951, Folder 6, Box 11, JB.
- 22 Pearl Kluger telegram to Nicolas Nabokov, September 18, 1951, Folder 12, Box 4, Series II, CCF.
- 23 Tom Braden interview, January 8, 2007, Denver, Colorado.
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- 44 Nabokov to Schlesinger, April 21, 1952, Folder 1, Box 30, Series II, CCF.
- 45 Nicolas Nabokov to Pearl Kluger, December 20, 1951, Folder 1, Box 246, Series II, CCF.
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69 Tom Braden interview.

70 Ibid.

71 Ibid.; see generally Sarah-Jane Corke, *US Covert Operations and Cold War Strategy: Truman, Secret Warfare, and the CIA, 1945–53* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2008), pp. 119–38.

72 Quoted in Saunders, *Who Paid the Piper?*, p. 108.

11 *Encounter* magazine

The Congress's "greatest asset"

Shortly after the April 1952 Paris Festival, Josselson received long-awaited sign-off from Washington on an idea he had championed: an English-language, transatlantic magazine. The magazine, as Josselson and members of the Congress's Executive Committee conceived of it, would be an Anglo-American partnership, with one American editor and one British one. And it would mix arts and literature with politics, so that the magazine would be more overtly political than the Congress's seminars or festivals, but still predominantly cultural in its focus.

Launching *Encounter* from London in October 1953 was either a much-needed boost to transatlantic relations or a lost cause. "There's no doubt that relations between America and Britain are now worse than at any time since 1940," wrote Hugh Gaitskell, the leader of the Labour Party.¹ Stalin's death in March 1953 led the Churchill government to hope for a thaw in relations, and the Eisenhower administration to warn against a false sense of security.² The Korean War – to America, a war of necessity against enemy China, to Britain a dubious drain on slim resources – staggered to an unsatisfying draw.³ American and British policies towards Mao's China were diametrically opposed. America hoped that, by supporting the Nationalists in Formosa, China might yet return to non-Communist hands, while Britain recognized and traded with Mao's China and considered American policy risky and unrealistic.⁴ Adam Watson, stationed in Washington as a Foreign Office liaison with the CIA and State Department on propaganda, recalled a "Henry James syndrome" in the relationship: "the innocent Americans being taken for a ride by these cunning Europeans," and "a corresponding feeling in the British mind. . . . There they go again."⁵

McCarthy's rise further undercut fragile relations. British opinion considered McCarthy's campaign against Communist infiltration excessive and resented his sustained attacks on Britain – which ranged from repeated references to "Comrade Attlee" to calls for America to "go it alone" if Britain continued to trade with China.⁶ The Rosenbergs' execution in June 1953 became a further rallying-cry against American policy in Britain, where their crimes were dismissed as minor and motivated by good intentions. Most Americans, on the other hand, believed that the Rosenbergs had received fair trials for the grave crime of spilling atomic secrets to the Russians, and considered Britain dangerously blind to the perils of Communist infiltration – especially after senior

British officials and longtime KGB double agents Guy Burgess and Donald Maclean defected to the Soviet Union.⁷

Despite this inauspicious climate, *Encounter* was a hit. Over the years, *Encounter* would publish some of the twentieth century's most memorable articles – Lionel Trilling on Jane Austen's use of irony, William Faulkner on Mississippi, Isaiah Berlin on nineteenth-century Russian intellectuals.⁸ Hugh Trevor-Roper would take to its pages to shred Arnold Toynbee's ten-volume *Study of History* ("written in a style compared with which that of Hitler or Rosenberg is of Gibbonian lucidity," yet in America "as a dollar-earner ... it ranks second only to whisky"). P.G. Wodehouse would allow it to print his controversial wartime broadcasts during his internment:

If anyone listening to me seems to detect in my remarks a slight goofiness, the matter, as Bertie Wooster would say, is susceptible of a ready explanation. I have just emerged from a forty-nine weeks' sojourn in a German prison camp for civil internees ... and the old bean is not the bean it was.¹⁰

It ran poetry by Robert Lowell, Marianne Moore, Auden, Rilke, Dylan Thomas, e.e. cummings, Philip Larkin, and Ted Hughes, and stories by Vladimir Nabokov.

For Josselson, *Encounter* would become the Congress's "greatest asset."¹¹ But the magazine would also become Josselson's greatest headache. Precisely because *Encounter* gave the Congress its only truly global platform, the magazine could not be allowed to fail. And, to avoid that fate, Josselson would have to devote a considerable portion of his time to resolving editorial disputes – not because *Encounter* was veering in an undesirable political direction, or because the Agency insisted upon it, but because *Encounter's* inaugural editors fought tooth and nail and demanded Josselson's intervention.

"There is nothing sinister" in the "real story" of *Encounter's* origins, Josselson reflected.¹² If anyone invented *Encounter*, it was the English writers who looked upon the Congress as a deep-pocketed patron for their oft voiced plans to launch a new transatlantic magazine. Cyril Connolly's *Horizon* – home to Orwell and Koestler, Sartre and Camus, Auden and Marianne Moore, and dedicated to the ideal of fostering a transatlantic literary community – shuttered in 1950.¹³ No sooner was *Horizon* gone than its former editors and contributors cast about for a successor.

In September 1950, the English writer Tosco Fyvel began floating "the idea of a journal" where "writers of the British and American Left" would "discuss the problems of what is loosely called the Atlantic Community."¹⁴ Fyvel then pitched "an Anglo-American-Left-of-Centre publication" to Bondy at the Congress's Brussels meeting in November 1950. A "political journal but with its cultural side," Fyvel argued, could "attract and influence readers among those 'intellectuals' in Europe and America (and elsewhere) who today tend towards a neutralist attitude."¹⁵ The British journalist Malcolm Muggeridge – who was also president of the defunct British Society for Cultural Freedom, the Congress's short-lived British offshoot – would be its cofounder.¹⁶ Others pitched the idea

to Nabokov in May 1951.¹⁷ By summer 1952, discussions with the Congress were well underway; publisher Fred Warburg, a close friend of Fyvel and Mugeridge, met with the Paris office about an "English edition of Preuves," though he conceded all he knew about it was that some of the Congress's British members "would like to run a magazine."¹⁸

To Josselson, *Encounter* was a no-brainer. Intellectuals were clamoring for a magazine that could reach a more global audience; he saw its potential, and made it a reality.¹⁹ "I was in a position to help hundreds of people all over the world do what they themselves wanted to do," he later reflected, "whether it was to write books, paint pictures, pursue certain studies, travel when and where they wanted to go, or edit magazines."²⁰

Josselson did so for *Encounter* by adding one amendment to earlier proposals: the Congress should support an Anglo-American magazine concerned with transatlantic relations – but its ultimate aim would be to appeal to Asian readers. This feature was likely how Josselson sold the idea of spending over \$40,000 a year on a low-circulation cultural magazine to Tom Braden and the CIA.

It was a canny pitch. British cultural prestige in Asia was at its zenith, despite waning British political influence. The same British Labour leaders who would avidly seek out *Encounter's* pages were widely respected in Asia, where socialism was seen as a universal, unifying movement. And America had few other ways of reaching Asian intellectuals, a critical group that also seemed worryingly sympathetic to neutralism.²¹ In Josselson's eyes, "[o]ur major and immediate problem is not ... to have 'Encounter' establish itself as an English magazine, but to establish it firmly from the very beginning as an organ of discussion between Europe, Asia and America."²²

This purpose was far from hidden. It was exactly the pitch Josselson made to the Congress's Executive Committee, which approved a new magazine to "not only ... stimulate the 'transatlantic dialogue,' but encourage an inter-continental colloquy" aimed at Asia, whose "intellectuals do not now have any organ in which they can take part as equals in discussions with their Western colleagues."²³ Likewise, during planning discussions for *Encounter's* launch, Josselson was quite clear that *Encounter's* objective was to reach readers in countries with "a communist or neutralist problem" – i.e., "not ... readers in England and in the United States."²⁴

In one fell swoop, Josselson sold the CIA on a magazine to counteract Asian neutralism, British intellectuals got the transatlantic magazine they wanted, and the Congress had a new platform to reach a worldwide audience. *Encounter* "carried weight, it was an answer to, well, what are you guys doing besides trying to break up strikes – is there any content along the way?" case officer John Hunt recalled. People in the White House might not read it, but "it was on the desk" to signal their sophistication.²⁵

Josselson did hide one aspect of *Encounter's* creation: the arrangements that he and case officer Lawrence de Neufville were finalizing with their counterparts in MI6. A CIA-subsidized Anglo-American magazine with a prominent British co-editor required MI6's consent, especially since the magazine would be edited

from London.²⁶ Christopher "Monty" Woodhouse, a distinguished Greek scholar and longtime MI6 officer, negotiated with de Neufville. But Woodhouse soon dropped out of sight, describing the joint venture as the last gasp of fading cooperation in an era where the CIA was "increasingly confident that it no longer needed British expertise," especially when the British "were also thought to be soft on Communism."²⁷ MI6 ultimately wanted to keep an eye on the operation itself, and supported the idea of counteracting neutralism in Asia. But, in the end, MI6 simply used Muggeridge – who had worked for the agency during the Second World War and remained a sometime consultant – to supply the British editor's salary and sign off on British personnel.²⁸

Muggeridge was certainly a plausible intermediary given his existing involvement in the Congress's British activities.²⁹ He was also incorrigibly duplicitous. Outwardly, he was MI6's willing watchdog. His private view was that "when-ever at a gathering anyone is outstandingly stupid, you may be sure that he belongs to that particular service."³⁰ He professed enthusiasm for the Congress; in his diary, he recorded that he "grew weary" of the "Congress for Cultural Freedom business,"³¹ and dismissed it as a "still-born" idea involving "American Jews preserving Western values, all the small-time racketeering."³² Josselson viewed him warily.³³

For Josselson, the months leading up to *Encounter's* debut were a blur of activity. He hired two editors for the magazine – one British, one American – whom he hoped would complement each other well. They could not have been more different. Stephen Spender was, at forty-two, one of Britain's most eminent poets. He was not merely at home in literary London: he dominated it. His poetry and autobiographical writing had brought him tremendous renown for over two decades, and his stint as *Horizon's* literary editor only added to his cachet. Auden and the philosophers Isaiah Berlin, Stuart Hampshire, and Freddie Ayer were dear friends, while Virginia Woolf had been a confidante and reader. Tall, blue-eyed, white-haired, and slightly disheveled, he was an absent-minded dreamer prone to leaving his house sporting two ties.³⁴

From Josselson's vantage, Spender was the ideal man to continue rehabilitating the Congress's reputation in Britain. Spender had repeatedly written of his disillusionment with Communism, considering it "something right which had gone wrong."³⁵ Before the Congress's creation, Spender had championed the need for American and European intellectuals to come together to revitalize European culture – and to erode impressions of America as a cultural wasteland.³⁶ And, once the Congress began focusing on cultural endeavors, Spender had enlisted with zeal, finding it "enterprising and imaginative and staffed by people I was glad to consider friends."³⁷

Spender's unparalleled enthusiasm for an Anglo-American cultural magazine also made him deeply invested in its success. Ever since *Horizon* folded, Spender had fervently hoped "to start a new high-brow periodical with the usual 'U.S. outlet' involving some rich and benevolent figure in the U.S." – so much so that Isaiah Berlin wrote of him, "I see precisely why Mr. Hutchins [of the Ford Foundation] has decided to call his Californian estate 'Itching Palms.'"³⁸

As "useful as it is to enable a few writers to travel or to free them from having to take official jobs," Spender felt, "these things are no substitute for the kind of ferment which a few good reviews or the kind of literary social life which existed until 1939 can provide."³⁹ Thus, when Josselson offered him the co-editorship of a transatlantic, Congress-sponsored magazine, Spender told Isaiah Berlin that his own idea had come to fruition: "I think I have managed – in fact I know I have – to do what we wanted, namely to start a new magazine."⁴⁰

The flip side of Spender's enthusiasm, however, was that Spender fully appreciated the weight his name carried on *Encounter's* masthead – and how much he had bound his own reputation to the magazine's. In Spender's view, "What enters people's minds" when reading *Encounter* "is: Who has done this? Who has paid for this? It is the Congress. These awful Americans have done this." Any whiff of "a kind of nagging anti-Communism" would, he felt, sink the magazine. "In England there is a very clear line beyond which you cannot go," he explained, "because people will simply refuse to write [for] us if they thought this a subsidized American magazine for the purpose of putting across the American version of the Cold War."⁴¹ Spender was acutely aware of the rumors of the strings attached to American backing, and resolved to refute them.⁴² Had Josselson wanted *Encounter* to be determinedly pro-American and anti-Communist, Spender would have been an implacable opponent.

Spender's co-editor, the American writer Irving Kristol, was a relatively unknown thirty-two-year-old. In the decades to come, he would emerge as the father of neoconservatism and one of America's most prominent intellectuals. For now, however, he was the Executive Secretary of the American Committee for Cultural Freedom. Josselson hired him in December 1952 after recommendations from Lasky, Kristol's close college friend, and Hook, his mentor.⁴³ To the Paris office, Kristol's familiarity with the Congress and his work as managing editor of *Commentary*, the small but influential journal published by the American Jewish Committee, made him the "ideal" editor for an "English language counter-part to Preuves."⁴⁴

Kristol came aboard convinced that the "right tone, politically" was to "reject Communism at the roots, as something that a civilized person must find, not simply objectionable but also hideous and loathsome."⁴⁵ He had little sympathy for Senator McCarthy's tactics, but even less for the "petulant righteousness" of American liberals who "refus[e] to see Communism for what it is: a movement guided by conspiracy and aiming at totalitarianism, rather than merely another form of 'dissent' or 'nonconformity.'"⁴⁶

From the beginning, Spender cautioned Kristol that he would be "in a rather anomalous position in London" because he would likely be seen as "an interloper."⁴⁷ This proved an understatement. By the standards of the New York intelligentsia, Kristol was a moderate. But by the standards of the British literary establishment, Kristol's views qualified him as a strident Cold Warrior, and "[m]y situation in England has been a not too easy one because of this suspicion," he wrote.⁴⁸ Kristol's patience for British anti-anti-Communism and Labour Party socialism soon wore thin. ("The prospect of the entire world evolving into a

cheerless global Sweden, smug and unhappy, had no attraction for me," he explained.⁴⁹) And the significant differences in Spender's and Kristol's respective views of Communism – as well as their vastly different positions within the British intellectual firmament – soon spelled problems for the magazine they were supposed to run jointly.

Planning for the launch, which began in earnest in January 1953, got off to a rocky start. Josselson took Kristol to dinner at Manès Sperber's Paris apartment; Kristol, violently allergic to garlic, passed out after being served snails, and barely made it to London for a queasy lunch at the Savoy with Josselson and Muggeridge.⁵⁰ Kristol had been promised that the magazine would be based in Paris; Muggeridge vetoed the suggestion, and Kristol unhappily decamped for London instead. Spender was on a guest lectureship in Cincinnati, so Kristol was the lone editor planning and putting together the magazine right up until its October launch.⁵¹ Kristol was to handle political pieces, Spender the literary side.⁵² It took months for the two to agree on a name for the magazine, until a suggestion by Spender's wife carried the day: *Encounter*.⁵³

In the ensuing months, Josselson attended to the Congress's varied other initiatives while keeping a close eye on the new magazine. He oversaw the last details of the July 1953 Hamburg conference on "Science and Freedom," where a hundred-odd Western scientists and philosophers gathered for abstract debates about the "freedom of science" and discussions on the suppression of scientific inquiry behind the Iron Curtain.⁵⁴ Members of the American Committee saw *Encounter* as "supererogatory" and felt "the Far East is not afraid of 'made in America' products"; Josselson placated them by promising to buy up subscriptions of *Partisan Review* and the *New Leader* for European distribution.⁵⁵ Josselson corresponded frequently with Kristol in London about every detail of the debut. And Josselson married Diana Dodge, a bright young American who worked in Paris for the Economic Cooperation Administration.⁵⁶

Meanwhile, in London, Kristol was finding that "[l]ife here is hellish, in a beefy sort of way. I'm a business entrepreneur with one hand (dealing with lawyers, real estate agents, government tape), and an editor with the other."⁵⁷ *Encounter*'s annual \$40,000 budget was sufficient but hardly generous; contributors were paid a modest 3 cents per word.⁵⁸ "I rented a shabby two-room office and hired a secretary-assistant in the person of Margot Walmsey," Kristol recalled, and "the two of us put out our first issue," modeled after *Commentary*.⁵⁹

Spender, in turn, convinced Leonard Woolf to send pages from Virginia's diary and secured other contributions. Cecil Day-Lewis sent a poem on Pegasus, Albert Camus an essay on death, and Edith Sitwell, the grande dame of avant-garde British poetry, contributed two poems. From Christopher Isherwood came a sketch of Ernst Toller, the German Communist playwright.⁶⁰ Japanese writer Dazai Osamu supplied two short stories. Kristol wrote an enthusiastic account of the Congress's "Science and Freedom" conference.⁶¹ Nabokov penned "No Cantatas for Stalin," on the stultifying effects of socialist realism for Soviet music,⁶² and de Rougemont described a visit to India ("Incapable of belief in anything," he wrote of Westerners, "we fly to admire those who venerate cows."⁶³)

Kristol had also procured a standout: American critic Leslie Fiedler's "A Postscript to the Rosenberg Case." The Rosenbergs, Fiedler argued, were seduced by Communist ideology into spying for Russia and then transforming themselves into symbolic propaganda when caught. The piece was harsh – it concluded the Rosenbergs had killed their own humanity long before they were executed – but also brilliant.⁶⁴ "We really must publish it," Kristol told Josselson. Spender, Muggeridge, and English writer Tosco Fyvel, assisting with the first issue, "all agreed that it is the best piece written anywhere, anytime, on the Rosenberg case."⁶⁵

Josselson agreed, but worried over Kristol's editorial decisions as *Encounter's* debut grew near. Kristol was irritated: "We here in London are not inept morons, and I sincerely believe we can better judge the situation than you can in Paris," he told Josselson. To Josselson's objections to *Encounter's* cover, Kristol retorted, "maybe you're wrong – magazine covers are not, after all, your specialty." To Josselson's claim that the debut was "insufficiently political," Kristol replied the book reviews were also political pieces, and the first issue needed to be heavily literary because "This is our billet d'entrée . . . into British and Asian cultural circles."⁶⁶

Likewise, Josselson complained *Encounter* had too few Asian contributions; Kristol felt it had to be more British at first, arguing that only magazines esteemed in Britain carried influence in Asia, and that finding good Asian writers would take time. "Above all, have patience! I have a very clear idea of what the Congress wants, and of how one should go about getting it," Kristol insisted to Josselson. "But I can't operate efficiently with the Paris office breathing down my neck, sending editorial directions, etc."⁶⁷ Josselson backed off, and Kristol sent reassurances: "I really think that, in Encounter, the Congress has hold of something far more important than even you realize" – a magazine that could be, "in a few months, the English-language cultural periodical, and not only in England but for Asia too. Give us a few months, and we'd be the idol of the intelligentsia, East and West."⁶⁸

As the eighty-six page inaugural issue hit newsstands, Kristol, Spender, and Josselson anxiously hoped for the best. Then the first issue, with a run of 10,000, sold out in the first week. Josselson deemed it "rather phenomenal" and pronounced himself pleased, though British reviews were lukewarm.⁶⁹ A.J.P. Taylor admired the Fiedler piece, but wrote of *Encounter's* editors and sponsors, "it is difficult to resist the suspicion that the practical impulse which brought them together was anti-communism." But "Communists will not read *Encounter*, still less will they be shaken by it. Do the rest of us need saving so desperately from this particular enemy of culture?"⁷⁰ Philip Toynbee praised "Encounter's brilliant and encouraging first number," but observed, "There is something bland and open-faced about this magazine – no air of secret plotting, anarchy, or iconoclasm . . . 'Encounter' is a splendid, but in some odd way an *official*, publication."⁷¹ Josselson took the long view: "The criticism is in the air, whatever we do we're going to get it, and the only thing to do is to last it out."⁷²

Eventually, Josselson would take a more active approach by taking Kristol to task for what Josselson deemed subpar political pieces. But these interventions

were not attempts to force Kristol to include softer portrayals of America, or harsher condemnations of Communism. Rather, Josselson's complaints originated with Spender, who found Kristol impossible, berated the quality of the political articles Kristol procured, worried they would harm his reputation – and insisted that Josselson handle it.⁷³ The “thing that really soured [Josselson], and really poisoned his life,” Hunt remembered, “was Stephen and Irving, it was constant, it was every month. . . . And that was probably the curse Mike had most of all, because he really cared about *Encounter*, in a way that he didn't care about the others.”⁷⁴

The first issue had barely launched when Spender concluded that Kristol was just the kind of “awful American” who could ruin *Encounter's* reputation. “All his friends are called by names like Pfeffersuss or Opalblut,” Spender recorded. “His occupation, of course, is editing – which indeed, he is meant to do. But he means something quite different from what we mean by it. He means rewriting, chopping about, and tailoring all the articles that come in.”⁷⁵ Thus began Spender's campaign against Kristol, in which he not only intended but demanded that Josselson intervene in managing the political side of the magazine.

Spender was horrified by reactions to the first issue. E.M. Forster and T.S. Eliot told him privately that Fiedler's piece on the Rosenbergs was distasteful, and Spender told Josselson he could hardly bear the implication that he was lending his name to propaganda.⁷⁶ Shortly thereafter, Spender wrote again to Josselson to convey that he was “very worried” about a piece Kristol solicited on Harry Dexter White, the deceased former Treasury Department official accused of passing secrets to the Soviets. Spender felt that assuming White's guilt exhibited a “lack of respect or faith in one's fellow beings,” and told Josselson he was vetoing the piece.⁷⁷ “[R]eaders would have known that it could not have been accepted on its merits by me, and would therefore assume that it was ‘forced’ on me,” he told Josselson.

Spender was equally emphatic about what he felt needed done.

The ideal way of silencing criticism would be for 1) the American contributions to be of a higher literary standard than the English ones; 2) for the political articles to be as well presented and as well written as the literary material. It is the low standard of chopped up politics which make people think it is propaganda.⁷⁸

Spender sounded the same theme to Josselson just a few days later, reiterating that the “inferiority” of the American side of *Encounter* to Spender's English side was what “gives the impression that we are dictated to by a committee of tough Americans.”⁷⁹

Six months in, Josselson faced a regular barrage of letters from Spender about his unhappiness with Kristol and *Encounter's* political coverage. Spender felt “[w]e have an immense chance to be one of the best magazines in the English language throughout the world,” but “unless Irving can be made to care more about the magazine than asserting his own smartness and refusing to admit his

ignorance, we shall be defeated in this, and, in fact, we would lose the position we have attained.”⁸⁰ Spender demanded “an atmosphere which is not one of complete negation and obstruction,”⁸¹ and was convinced Kristol had “a policy ... of being as uncommunicative as possible.”⁸² By summer 1954, Spender was asking Josselson for a part-time assistant to handle editorial correspondence during his overseas trip, because “I don’t have complete and utter confidence in [Kristol’s] ability to discriminate between being polite and being impolite.”⁸³ (Kristol, in turn, considered Spender “absolutely no kind of editor ... I ran the magazine, he made major contributions to it.”⁸⁴)

For the time, Josselson lent a sympathetic ear, but let Kristol be. “On the whole, the political pieces have been on a pretty high level,” he told Spender. Criticism of *Encounter* had less to do with the quality of its political pieces and more to do with the atmosphere in Britain. “Far more serious for *Encounter's* future than some of the points you raise is the question of teamwork,” Josselson felt:

The artificial fence between you and Irving must be broken down. You will agree that Kristol is very capable and steady, but that he has certain faults that go with youth. Therefore ... you should use your experience and savoir-faire to develop Kristol’s talents for the best possible use.

As for finding better American writers, “Irving has contacted them all ... and I hope that with your and our own assistance we shall gradually use our dependence on what you somewhat unfairly call the ‘Commentary and New Leader’ clique.”⁸⁵

That first year, Josselson was content to send a flurry of suggestions to Kristol and Spender – his way of managing Tom Braden and the Agency’s interest in *Encounter* without overtly dictating content. There were “long discussions, not arguments, about all the topics that were in *Encounter*” with Josselson, Braden recalled. “And what the topics were in *Encounter*, I’ve forgotten. But it had to do with trying to put out an intellectual magazine, a magazine that appealed to intellectuals.”⁸⁶

Some of Josselson’s ensuing suggestions – like a “New Year’s wish” for “a really first-rate discussion of the problem of coexistence in *Encounter*,” the desirability of running something from Sidney Hook, and the possibility of reprinting a piece from *Preuves* on Sartre’s tortured relationship with the French Communist Party – Kristol and Spender accepted in theory.⁸⁷ Others – like a letter “from a friend of mine, Mr. Lawrence de Neufville,” Josselson’s case officer, proposing a piece on “the conscience of the individual versus the requirements of hierarchy” – were ignored with no qualms.⁸⁸ (What this abstract suggestion had to do with the CIA’s strategic interests is anyone’s guess.) “It would be untrue to write that the Congress never tried to influence editorial policy of *Encounter*,” Spender reflected, “although the influence it attempted to exercise was by no means always political: simply, the people in Paris had bright ideas about the kind of articles we should put in.”⁸⁹

There was one subject Josselson returned to often which almost certainly reflected the Agency's preferences as well as his own judgment: the need to boost circulation in Asia. Soon after *Encounter's* debut, he hired American sociologist Herb Passin and sent him to Japan, where he was to cultivate Asian contributors for *Encounter*.⁹⁰ Josselson had hoped circulation in India would quickly hit 3,000. When the numbers were a fifth of that, Kristol futilely protested, "*Time* mag's circulation in India is little over 1500!"⁹¹ A piece on Asia, or by Asian writers, appeared in virtually every issue, yet Josselson proclaimed himself "seriously concerned about" readership in Asia and "not at all happy about things the way they are now."⁹² In May 1954, he reminded Kristol to "please continue to solicit and print Asian contributions to ENCOUNTER and thereby perform the mission which was assigned to ENCOUNTER by the Congress."⁹³ Whether Josselson was determined to expand the Congress beyond Western Europe or trying to make headway on an issue of interest to the CIA, the result was the same: Kristol and Spender labored to improve numbers in Asia, with little results.

If Asian contributors were hard to come by, Kristol could at least ensure coverage of relevant foreign policy developments and, in mid-1954, his planned round table on American and British policy towards China was certainly timely. Britain recognized and traded with Communist China; America emphatically did not. The Labour Party promised even closer ties and was about to embark on a goodwill visit; America championed Chiang Kai-shek and hoped to engineer the return of his exiled Nationalists.⁹⁴ Cambridge scholar D.W. Brogan and journalist Guy Wint soberly presented British views. Emily Hahn – a *New Yorker* contributor who had lived in 1930s Shanghai with her pet gibbon, developed an opium addiction, befriended Sun Yat-Sen and Chiang Kai-shek's wives, romanced the head of British army intelligence, and was interned by the Japanese – was to give the American perspective.⁹⁵ From these beginnings emerged the single demonstrable instance of a CIA veto.

Spender was irked by the Hahn piece from the beginning, complaining to Josselson before it even arrived that he "never knew an article on China by Emily Hahn had been commissioned til I saw it announced in our 'house page.'"⁹⁶ When Kristol handed him the proofs in July, Spender forwarded them to Josselson for comment. Josselson's response, that the proofs seemed fine, was hardly reassuring; Spender, by now, took a uniformly dim view of the pieces Kristol obtained.⁹⁷ Meanwhile, Kristol had circulated the proofs for comment everywhere but the Paris office – including to four Labour MPs, to Senator William Knowland and Representative Walter Judd, the U.S. Congress's two most adamant supporters of Chiang Kai-shek, and to *Washington Post* editor Philip Graham.⁹⁸

How Braden received the proofs is unclear. But after "a helluva fight back at the office," Braden insisted that Hahn's article could not run in its present form.⁹⁹ This was not because Hahn was too critical of American foreign policy. Quite the contrary: her piece was, if anything, too full-throated a defense of America's China policy. She opened with the premise that Americans had a deep understanding of the indigenous Chinese that made them sentimentally attached to

China, whereas the British saw China solely in terms of trading posts and empire. The tenets of British policy, she said, were that the Nationalists were corrupt, Chinese Communists were different from the Soviets, and American support for the Nationalists only pushed Mao further towards Stalin – which in her view was appeasement. “Chinese Communism is Communism,” she wrote, “and that is why Americans reach a pitch of exasperation with British who won’t admit it in the face of overwhelming proof.”¹⁰⁰ It is ironic indeed that the only known article the CIA vetoed in *Encounter* was axed for championing American policy too vigorously.

Josselson deftly managed the situation. On second glance, “when I took the articles home and started reading Emily Hahn’s piece, I found it utterly shocking. It will certainly not make new friends in England,” he told Spender.¹⁰¹ “I am grateful that you thought this, since it had the effect of holding the thing up for a month,” Spender replied. “The point really is that reading Emily Hahn’s article a typical Englishman like myself . . . or Freddy Ayer . . . to whom we’ve shown this – just thinks ‘silly bitch!’” Spender saw no issue with the tone, but was happy to axe it: “I do feel that the discussion could be on a far higher level,” and Kristol “thinks that her article is ‘personal’ whereas it is just a New Yorkerish example of the lack of feminine logic.”¹⁰²

Nabokov then lectured Kristol on “some of the principles upon which we had all agreed in the course of the talks we had at the time of launching *Encounter*, as well as in our various subsequent meetings.” He was apoplectic that Kristol had circulated proofs to prominent outsiders without alerting the Paris office. A magazine concerned with transatlantic dialogue, Nabokov added, should present controversy “in a manner as not to be offensive to national feelings on either side of the ocean.” Nabokov faulted Hahn’s claim that “Labourites as a class are not fond of foreign affairs” by pointing out that a Labour delegation was about to head to China. Her gripe about the “over-standardized” British press was “unfounded and offensive.” Either Kristol would obtain a rewrite with “complete change of tone eliminating its most abusive passages,” or the piece should be cut “and this crucial issue raised again at a later date with a more reasonable person than Miss Hahn representing the American point of view.”¹⁰³ Kristol protested; Spender thanked Nabokov for his “mostly true” points and dismissed Kristol’s “personal reactions. I do not agree with any of the points he makes.”¹⁰⁴

Kristol circulated a revision. Warren Manshel, Josselson’s short-lived assistant (and Agency officer) wrote back for the Paris office and deemed it no better. He criticized Hahn’s statement that “[t]he Labourites, as a class, are not very experienced in Foreign Affairs, and China is a long way off” as absurd given the current Labour delegation visit to China. Her claim that “the British . . . have always concentrated on India, to the detriment of their knowledge of China” had too many problems for Manshel to count. Manshel likewise castigated her statement that “Chinese Communism is Communism, and that is why Americans reach a pitch of exasperation with British who won’t admit it in the face of overwhelming proof” as “nonsense.” He concluded: “I cannot imagine . . . that such a full-throated defense could go over very well in the East, nor do I think that

English readers would take very kindly to the fairly caustic remarks on Britain and British policy towards China." Worse, "I have the feeling that ENCOUNTER could only lose appeal for its English and Asian audience – in a phrase, that 'the Hahn may well cook our goose.'" ¹⁰⁵ Manshel strongly advised axing the piece; at a minimum, Kristol was to insist on heavy revisions.

Kristol complied; the Hahn piece never ran. Still, this was not quite a veto of editorial discretion or micromanagement from Washington. Braden certainly never saw it that way; in his view, "I don't see how the CIA ever had any interference with intellectual freedom," and "we didn't interfere with criticism of American foreign policy."¹⁰⁶ Even the Hahn piece was not simply axed at the Agency's insistence. Spender independently invited intervention by soliciting Josselson's views, and then signed off on killing a piece that he disliked from the start. There was some truth to Kristol's view that "Stephen appealed to the Paris office against its publication, and Paris backed him up."¹⁰⁷

In the end, Josselson managed the Hahn article well enough to satisfy everyone but Kristol. Spender was vindicated, and felt that Josselson was firmly on his side in preserving *Encounter's* standing in Britain. Meanwhile, Josselson left Braden with the "impression was that [the CIA] had the last word. But we never really had anything to fight about."¹⁰⁸

By the end of 1954, Josselson despaired of reconciling Spender to Kristol. The political side was disorganized, Spender griped: Kristol had no system, and was deliberately "chaotic" rather than "businesslike."¹⁰⁹ Of a dinner with Koesler and Kristol, Spender reported himself "utterly repelled by their united front of the second rate."¹¹⁰ (Kristol was equally uncomfortable at parties with Spender's literary friends: "I never felt more solemnly New York-Jewish than at one of these occasions, and never more bourgeois."¹¹¹) Spender complained that Kristol took all the credit for *Encounter's* editorials, yet Spender always had to rework them. Every issue was a fight.¹¹² "I really think that as we are, with the present setup, we cannot really advance much," Spender wrote, "because on the editorial side there is no American drive and initiative, and no original and energetic political thinking" – and "we really do need an American editor at this stage whom more than a small circle of people know about."¹¹³

Josselson had now come around to Spender's view. Josselson "was sensitive to Stephen's position in England," Hunt reflected:

Mike had an organization to run. He had to think about people in India, and Asia – how is this going to play ... and what will people say – that our magazines aren't responsive to their concerns, and will we end up looking like we're the tail, and New York the dog.¹¹⁴

Though Josselson felt that "no changes should be made in the present line of ENCOUNTER," he confided to Passin, "I am of the opinion that many more articles of political importance should be published."¹¹⁵ Kristol got blunter treatment; in February 1955, Josselson came down hard, reiterating complaints Spender had long made.

To Kristol, Josselson's vague but emphatic demands were unreasonable. Josselson had a ridiculous "fixation" with getting a piece on the Labour Party's views of China, Kristol wrote. The subject had been so thoroughly canvassed in the British press that Kristol saw no way for *Encounter* to say anything new. "We are not a substitute for a sensible Social-Democratic weekly, and we can't try to act as one," he continued. "We cannot save the Labour Party from itself – that is beyond our powers. What we can do is to create a certain kind of intellectual-cultural milieu, which would in turn have far-reaching – but indirect – effects."¹¹⁶

"What's all this crap about the Labour Party fixation?" replied Josselson. "It's not a question of my wanting a piece on China or coexistence or what-have-you." Rather, "It is your job as political editor of the magazine to get the right pieces on the right topics from people who have something fresh and important to say about them." To conclude the daily press had already covered an issue enough was, to Josselson, an admission of failure. "As far as Congress publications go, *Encounter* is the weakest link in the chain – and this in the most important language. A good editor can't have a supercilious attitude and judge all contributions in terms of his own omniscience," Josselson snapped.¹¹⁷

Kristol called a truce: "I believe I know the kind of magazine that you and the Congress want, and I shall do my best to deliver," he wrote. "Your suggestions are always welcome – but, basically, I have to do things my way, because I don't know how to do it in any other. If my way turns out to be inadequate, there's always a 'final solution.'"¹¹⁸ Kristol publicly stressed the point weeks later:

The "line" of *Encounter*, insofar as it has one, is laid down by the editors – i.e., Stephen Spender and myself. We were hired by the executive committee of the Congress for Cultural Freedom; we can be fired by them; and that is the total extent of their control.¹¹⁹

Unbeknownst to Kristol, Josselson was already laying the groundwork for his replacement.¹²⁰ "We had very good reasons to be dissatisfied with Irving after having made every effort to nurse him along over a period of more than two years," Josselson explained to Sidney Hook.¹²¹ Muggeridge agreed: "Irving is a very nice fellow but perfectly useless and incapable of cutting any ice here."¹²²

Kristol knew soon enough that he was done, and why: "I'm not persona grata with some of [Stephen]'s anti-anti-Communist friends" – though he suspected Spender "used quite different arts of persuasion" with Muggeridge and Josselson. "I get the impression that Stephen has painted a picture to Paris of my being rejected by the English intellectuals," he told Hook, but "[i]t is Stephen who moves within a small literary-artistic clique, while I am in touch with the bulk of the magazine's contributors and friends." Still, he conceded, "It is obviously not desirable to have the American editor supply the anti-Communism while the British editor supplies the anti-anti-Communism."¹²³

For two years, Josselson had overseen *Encounter* with minimal interference from the Agency. He had battled hard to win a wider readership in Asia. And he

had chosen Spender over Kristol, swayed by the sense that Kristol was unsuited to the British climate – or the calculation that Spender's literary cachet was more indispensable to *Encounter's* success.¹²⁴

As the Milan Congress loomed, replacing Kristol was only one of many crises confronting Josselson. The American Committee had moved from unhappiness with the Congress's direction to open rebellion. The Congress was at a crossroads over its future orientation. Discrediting Communism – the purpose that had united the Congress's participants during its first five years – increasingly seemed like a project that had run its course. And Josselson's relations with the Agency were also in transition. Tom Braden was about to quit the Agency, leaving the International Organizations Division – and the fate of QKOPERA – in the hands of a new and very different manager.

Notes

- 1 Hugh Gaitskell, "Britain and America," *Fact (Background to World Events)*, Transport House, October 1953, in A49, Hugh Gaitskell Papers, University College London, London ("HG").
- 2 Hugh Gaitskell, "Britain and America," *Fact* (October 1953) (typescript), A49, HG; "U.S. Expects Continuation of Cold War and Tension," *Washington Post* (November 6, 1953).
- 3 "Armistice Signed in Korea," *The Times* (London) (July 27, 1953).
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- 5 Adam Watson interview, October 30, 2006, Charlottesville, Virginia.
- 6 Jussi M. Hanhimaki, "'The Number One Reason': McCarthy, Eisenhower, and the Decline of American Prestige in Britain, 1952–54," in Jonathan Hollowell (ed.), *Twentieth Century Anglo-American Relations* (London: Macmillan, 2001), pp. 113–15.
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- 8 Isaiah Berlin, "A Marvelous Decade," *Encounter* IV (June 1955), pp. 27–39.
- 9 Hugh Trevor-Roper, "Arnold Toynbee's Millennium," *Encounter* VI (June 1957) p. 14.
- 10 P.G. Wodehouse, "Berlin Broadcasts (II)," *Encounter* III (October 1954), p. 17.
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- 12 Michael Josselson to Edward Shils, January 30, 1974, Folder 4, Box 30, Michael Josselson Papers, Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, University of Texas-Austin, Austin, Texas ("MJ").
- 13 Hilton Kramer, "Cyril Connolly's Horizon," *New Criterion* 8 (September 1989), pp. 5–10.
- 14 Tosco Fyvel to Arthur Schlesinger Jr., June 10, 1951, Box P-14, Arthur Schlesinger Jr. Papers, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library, Boston, Massachusetts ("ASJ").
- 15 Tosco Fyvel to Irving Brown, August 5, 1951, Folder 10, Box 13, Irving Brown Files, George Meany Memorial Archive, National Labor College, Silver Spring, Maryland ("IB"); Bondy to Fyvel, December 5, 1950, Folder 7, Box 116a, Series II, International Association for Cultural Freedom (Congress for Cultural Freedom) Papers, Regenstein Library, University of Chicago, Chicago, Illinois ("CCF").
- 16 David Williams to François Bondy, September 20, 1950, Folder 9, Box 304, Series II, CCF.

- 17 Nicolas Nabokov to Richard Crossman, May 30, 1951, Box P-20, ASJ.
- 18 "Notes on the visit of Mr. Warburg, James [Fred??] on Monday, June 9, 1952," Folder 2, Box 99, Series II, CCF.
- 19 See, e.g., Michael Josselson to Melvin Lasky, August 14, 1952, Folder 4, Box 241, Series II, CCF (awaiting "news" on proposed magazine).
- 20 Michael Josselson to Stephen Spender, April 26, 1967, Folder 6, Box 25, MJ.
- 21 See, e.g., Nicolas Nabokov to Woodrow Wyatt, December 18, 1952, Folder 1, Box 247, Series II, CCF; Michael Josselson to Irving Brown, November 13, 1952, Folder 18, Box 13, IB (forwarding "Report on Far Eastern Trip of M.R. Masani and F. Bondy, October 26 to December 4, 1952").
- 22 Josselson to Passin, November 19, 1953, Folder 6, Box 1, Series I, CCF.
- 23 Magazine proposal, n.d. (likely December 1952 or early 1953), Folder 6, Box 94, Series II, CCF; see also American Committee for Cultural Freedom, Executive Committee minutes, February 16, 1953, Folder 2, Box 7, TAM 023, American Committee for Cultural Freedom Records, Tamiment Library/Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives, New York University ("ACCF").
- 24 Michael Josselson to Stephen Spender, March 5, 1953, Folder 9, Box 294, Series II, CCF.
- 25 John Hunt interview, June 9–10, 2007, Lyon, France.
- 26 Andrew Defty, *Britain, America, and Anti-Communist Propaganda, 1945–53* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2004), pp. 204–5; Malcolm Muggeridge, diary entry, January 14, 1953, Box II.A.9, Malcolm Muggeridge Papers, Wheaton College, Wheaton, Illinois ("MM").
- 27 Christopher Woodhouse, *Something Ventured* (London: Granada Publishing, 1983), p. 135.
- 28 *Ibid.*; Malcolm Muggeridge, "When I Hear the Word 'Gun' I Reach for My Culture," *New Statesman & Nation* (May 19, 1967); Josselson to Kristol, September 7, 1954, Folder 6, Box 2, Series I, CCF. Muggeridge diligently recorded meetings with MI6 officials in his diary; the diary indicates that his meetings were infrequent and grew even more so over time.
- 29 Nicolas Nabokov to Malcolm Muggeridge, October 15, 1952, Folder 2, Box 248, Series II, CCF.
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- 33 Michael Josselson to Stephen Spender and Irving Kristol, May 8, 1953, Folder 9, Box 294, Series II, CCF.
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- 35 Stephen Spender, *The Thirties and After: Poetry, Politics, People (1933–75)* (London: Macmillan, 1978), p. 161.
- 36 Stephen Spender, "We Can Win the Battle for the Mind of Europe," *New York Times* (April 25, 1948); Sutherland, *Stephen Spender*, pp. 328–53.
- 37 Spender, *Thirties and After*, p. 163.
- 38 Isaiah Berlin to Arthur Schlesinger, June 6, 1952, Box P-9, ASJ.
- 39 Stephen Spender, "Britain: Culture in Official Channels: Does the English Writer Have a Chance?" in Louis Galantière (ed.), *America and the Mind of Europe* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1951), p. 66.
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- 41 Executive Committee meeting minutes, November 26–7, 1953 (Rome), Folder 3, Box 3, Series II, CCF.

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- 42 Stephen Spender to Michael Josselson, January 22, 1954, Folder 9, Box 294, Series II, CCF.
- 43 Irving Kristol, "An Autobiographical Memoir" (1995), in *The Neoconservative Persuasion: Selected Essays, 1942–2009* (New York: Basic Books, 2011), pp. 326–7.
- 44 Nicolas Nabokov to Irving Kristol, December 10, 1952, Folder 2, Box 247, Series II, CCF.
- 45 Irving Kristol to Michael Josselson, July 31, 1953, Folder 6, Box 94, Series II, CCF.
- 46 Irving Kristol, "'Civil Liberties,' 1952 – A Study in Confusion," in *The Neoconservative Persuasion*, pp. 48–60.
- 47 Irving Kristol to Michael Josselson, March 16, 1953, Folder 6, Box 94, Series II, CCF.
- 48 Irving Kristol to Isaiah Berlin, May 17, 1956, MS 148, ISB.
- 49 Kristol, "An Autobiographical Memoir," p. 336.
- 50 *Ibid.*, p. 333; Stephen Spender to Irving Kristol, February 22, 1953; Irving Kristol to Stephen Spender, February 26, 1953, both in Box 4, Folder 18, ACCF; Michael Josselson to Malcolm Muggeridge, January 31, 1953, Folder 6, Box 94, Series II, CCF.
- 51 Kristol, "An Autobiographical Memoir," p. 319.
- 52 Michael Josselson to Stephen Spender, March 5, 1953, Folder 9, Box 294, Series II, CCF.
- 53 Stephen Spender to Irving Kristol, March 26, 1953; Kristol to Spender, March 27, 1953; Kristol to Spender, April 6, 1953; Spender to Kristol, April 18, 1953; Kristol to Spender, April 24, 1953; Spender to Kristol, April 24, 1953, all in Box 4, Folder 18, ACCF; Malcolm Muggeridge, "When I Hear the Word 'Gun' I Reach for My Culture."
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- 58 Irving Kristol, "Memoirs of a 'Cold Warrior,'" in *Reflections of a Neoconservative: Looking Back, Looking Ahead* (New York: Basic Books, 1983), p. 19.
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- 60 Christopher Isherwood, "The Head of a Leader," *Encounter* I (October 1953), pp. 29–33.
- 61 Irving Kristol, "Men of Science – and Conscience," *Encounter* I (October 1953), pp. 57–60.
- 62 Nicolas Nabokov, "No Cantatas for Stalin," *Encounter* I (October 1953), pp. 49–52.
- 63 Denis de Rougemont, "Looking for India," *Encounter* I (October 1953), p. 36.
- 64 Leslie Fiedler, "A Postscript to the Rosenberg Case," *Encounter* I (October 1953), pp. 12–21.
- 65 Irving Kristol to Michael Josselson, July 31, 1953, Folder 6, Box 94, Series II, CCF.
- 66 *Ibid.*, September 16, 1953, Folder 7.
- 67 *Ibid.*, September 15, 1953.
- 68 *Ibid.*, September 16, 1953.
- 69 Michael Josselson to Nicolas Nabokov, October 8, 1953, Folder 9, Box 243, Series II, CCF.
- 70 A.J.P. Taylor, "A New Voice for Culture," *The Listener* (October 8, 1953).
- 71 Philip Toynbee, "First Encounter," *Observer* (October 4, 1953).
- 72 Michael Josselson to Stephen Spender, January 30, 1954, Folder 9, Box 294, Series II, CCF.

- 73 See, e.g., Stephen Spender to Michael Josselson, May 3, 1953; January 22, 1954; April 24, 1954; and Spender to Josselson and Nabokov, July 29, 1954, all in Folder 9, Box 294, Series II, CCF.
- 74 John Hunt interview.
- 75 Quoted in Sutherland, *Stephen Spender*, p. 373.
- 76 Saunders, *Who Paid the Piper?*, pp. 186–7.
- 77 Stephen Spender to Michael Josselson, January 18, 1954, Folder 9, Box 294, Series II, CCF.
- 78 *Ibid.*, January 22, 1954.
- 79 *Ibid.*, January 22, 1954.
- 80 *Ibid.*, March 31, 1954.
- 81 *Ibid.*, April 24, 1954.
- 82 Stephen Spender to Irving Kristol, April 24, 1954, Folder 9, Box 294, Series II, CCF.
- 83 Stephen Spender to “Michael and Nicolas,” July 29, 1954, Folder 9, Box 294, Series II, CCF.
- 84 Kristol, “An Autobiographical Memoir,” p. 334.
- 85 Michael Josselson to Stephen Spender, January 30, 1954, Folder 9, Box 294, Series II, CCF.
- 86 Tom Braden interview, January 8, 2007, Denver, Colorado.
- 87 Michael Josselson to Irving Kristol, December 23, 1954 (coexistence), and August 2, 1954 (Hook contribution), both in Folder 6, Box 2, Series I, CCF; Josselson to Kristol and Spender, March 16, 1954, Folder 7, Box 3, Series I, CCF (Sartre piece); Kristol to Josselson, December 28, 1954, Folder 2, Box 95, Series II, CCF (agreeing on need for coexistence piece but objecting to difficulties in getting one); Paul Parisot, “Keeping Up with M. Sartre,” *Encounter* III (May 1954), pp. 56–8 (recommended piece on Sartre).
- 88 Josselson to Spender and Kristol, March 1, 1954, Folder 6, Box 2, Series I, CCF.
- 89 Spender, *Thirties and After*, pp. 161–3; see also Kristol, “Memoirs of a ‘Cold Warrior,’” p. 17.
- 90 Michael Josselson to Nicolas Nabokov, August 18, 1953, Folder 9, Box 243, Series II, CCF; Michael Josselson to Herb Passin, November 19, 1953, Folder 6, Box 1, Series I, CCF.
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- 94 Irving Kristol to Hugh Gaitskell, July 27, 1954, Box F17, HG.
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- 98 Kristol to Gaitskell, July 27, 1954 (listing all names consulted about the article).
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- 100 Emily Hahn, article proofs, Folder 1, Box 95, Series II, CCF.
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- 102 Stephen Spender to “Michael and Nicolas,” July 29, 1954, Folder 9, Box 294, Series II, CCF.
- 103 Nicolas Nabokov to Irving Kristol and Stephen Spender, July 30, 1954, Folder 9, Box 294, Series II, CCF.
- 104 Stephen Spender to Nicolas Nabokov and Michael Josselson, August 3, 1954, Folder 9, Box 294, Series II, CCF. Kristol’s letter does not survive.
- 105 Warren Manshel to Irving Kristol, August 19, 1954, Folder 6, Box 2, Series I, CCF.
- 106 Tom Braden interview.

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- 108 Braden interview.
- 109 Stephen Spender to Michael Josselson, January 7, 1955, Folder 10, Box 294, Series II, CCF.
- 110 Stephen Spender to Nicolas Nabokov, February 16, 1955, Folder 10, Box 294, Series II, CCF.
- 111 Kristol, "An Autobiographical Memoir," p. 334.
- 112 Stephen Spender to Nicolas Nabokov, February 24, 1955, Folder 10, Box 294, Series II, CCF.
- 113 Stephen Spender to Michael Josselson, April 12, 1955, Folder 10, Box 294, Series II, CCF.
- 114 John Hunt interview.
- 115 Michael Josselson to Herb Passin, Nov, 24, 1954, Folder 3, Box 3, Series I, CCF.
- 116 Irving Kristol to Michael Josselson, February 8, 1955, Folder 3, Box 95, Series II, CCF.
- 117 Michael Josselson to Irving Kristol, February 3, 1955, Folder 2, Box 187, Series II, CCF.
- 118 Irving Kristol to Michael Josselson, February 16, 1955, Folder 3, Box 95, Series II, CCF.
- 119 Irving Kristol to David Daiches, March 7, 1955, Folder 3, Box 95, Series II, CCF.
- 120 Nicolas Nabokov to Arthur Schlesinger, February 7, 1955, Folder 2, Box 187, Series II, CCF.
- 121 Michael Josselson to Sidney Hook, August 18, 1955, Folder 6, Box 4, Series I, CCF.
- 122 Stephen Spender to Michael Josselson, June 5, 1955, Folder 10, Box 288, Series II, CCF.
- 123 Irving Kristol to Sidney Hook, June 17, 1955, Folder 14, Box 18, SH.
- 124 Shils, "Remembering the Congress (II)," Folder 6, Box 22, MJ.

12 New management at the Agency

When Tom Braden left the CIA in September 1954 to run an Oceanside, California, newspaper, his deputy Cord Meyer became head of the International Organizations Division.¹ Braden had been a hands-off manager; Meyer was widely seen as an obsessive autocrat. Journalist Stewart Alsop – Braden’s best friend – described Meyer as “a bright but rebarbative man, with a positive genius for making enemies.”² Colleague Jim McCargar remembered him as “dictatorial – not quite the word but nearly. When he spoke, you were supposed to listen, and if you were smart, you’d agree.”³ Arthur Schlesinger Jr. saw him as a former friend who had “swung from the extremes of idealism to the extremes of realism” to become “an apparatchik of formidable rigidity.”⁴ On this basis, prior accounts of the Congress have portrayed Cord Meyer as the CIA manager who established comprehensive Agency control over the Congress and issued prolific directives to Josselson.⁵

For Josselson, however, Meyer was a godsend. Rather than interfering with the Congress, Meyer left Josselson alone – even as *Encounter* did nothing to rebut anti-American stereotypes and declared the Vietnam War a disaster.⁶ Indeed, Meyer all but guaranteed Josselson’s independence by deliberately assigning case officers to the Congress who were, to a man, literary-minded idealists like Meyer himself, not doctrinaire proponents of American foreign policy. And, in Meyer, Josselson found the most sympathetic possible audience for the Congress’s abstract cultural mission – so much so that Meyer would write to other agencies rapturously of the Congress’s potential to “provide fresh insights into contemporary ideological issues.”⁷ Meyer, in sum, was not a manager to be resisted; he was a man who deeply admired and identified with the intellectuals associated with the Congress to such a degree that he sent fan mail to *Encounter*’s editor.

What kind of man was Cord Meyer? Given that he single-handedly ran the International Organizations Division for nearly twenty years, Meyer’s temperament mattered a great deal to the fate of the operations under his jurisdiction. At first glance, his background resembled countless other, privileged Agency hires of the era. He was the tall, well-spoken son of a prominent and wealthy family; his grandfather and namesake chaired the New York Democratic Party. He attended St. Paul’s, then Yale, where he edited *The Yale Lit*, wrote what he

deemed “some passable verse,” and graduated in 1942, *summa cum laude* and the winner of the Snow Prize, given to the senior who best embodies Yale’s traditions of intellectual achievement and character. His wife, Mary Pinchot, was the standout graduate of her Vassar class, a gifted painter and the daughter of an equally connected family.⁸

Unlike most of his Agency colleagues, however, Meyer joined the Marines, rather than OSS, in 1943. There he served on the front lines in the South Seas (of which his main point of reference was “literary descriptions . . . derived from Conrad, Stevenson, and Maugham.”)⁹ There were no daring drops into occupied territory, only a Japanese charge at Eniwetok in which “we cut them down like overripe wheat, and they lay like tired children with their faces in the sand.” Between skirmishes, he wrote letters home that were published in *Atlantic Monthly*, and reflected, “I really think, if possible, I should like to make a life’s work of doing what little I can in the problem of international cooperation.”¹⁰

He nearly lost the chance. A Japanese soldier slid a grenade into his foxhole, killing his fellow lieutenant and costing Meyer his left eye, three teeth, and ruptured eardrums. He convalesced by writing “The Waves of Darkness,” winner of the 1946 O. Henry Prize for the year’s best short story, about an unnamed protagonist startled by the hiss and sudden explosion of a grenade who awakens to see the stars’ dim light with his lone remaining eye.¹¹ He brooded: “My future to a frightening extent is in my own hands,” he wrote. “I owe to those who fell beside me . . . the assurance that I will do all that is in my small power to make the future for which they died an improvement upon the past. The question is how?”¹²

The answer, at first, was to champion some of the era’s most idealistic causes. He served as an aide to Harold Strassen in San Francisco, at the founding conference of the United Nations.¹³ Meyer left disappointed, convinced that the UN Charter had done little to advance the fundamental goal of creating a supranational government capable of “transform[ing] the anarchy in which we live into the order and justice of which the Preamble to the Charter wishfully speaks.” So he helped found the United World Federalists, an organization dedicated to creating world government under the theory that there was a “real possibility that the Russian leaders are primarily motivated by fear of external aggression” and that the solution was to simply eliminate national sovereignty.¹⁴

With disabled veteran Charles Bolte, Meyer also founded the American Veterans Committee, dedicated to rallying veterans behind the causes of expanding the New Deal and promoting universal human rights.¹⁵ The group quickly became a target for Communist infiltration (and thus the subject of considerable CIA interest).¹⁶ Bolte and Meyer led an opposing faction to resist infiltration and squeaked out a narrow victory. For Meyer, it was an eye-opening exposure to Communist tactics – and to how pervasively Soviet front groups had spread.¹⁷

Meyer’s first book, *Peace or Anarchy* (1947), was a manifesto for the world federalist movement that featured an ecstatic blurb from Albert Einstein. Journalist Louis Fischer wrote of it, “Young Meyer’s pen is so able, his imagination so vivid, his facts about atomic and bacteriological warfare-preparations so harrowing as to actually convey physical pain and mental torment.”¹⁸ From 1947

to 1949, he traveled 40,000 miles, gave seven speeches a week, and enlisted thousands in world federalist student chapters. If world government did not come about by 1951, he told crowds, he would move his young family to Africa.¹⁹

Instead, 1951 was the year Cord Meyer joined the CIA. He had resigned from activism two years earlier, concluding that it was “[t]wo years spent in exhorting, pleading, warning, until my own reserves of confidence and hope have been so heavily overdrawn that it is hard for me to urge others on to action, when I now doubt the efficacy of any kind of action.”²⁰ He accepted a fellowship in Harvard’s government department, the main perks of which included “sitting next to Vladimir Nabokov ten years before *Lolita* made him famous.”²¹ In 1950, he testified before Congress that “we have failed in many respects to meet the ideological challenge and no quantity of bombs can make up for that failure to appeal to the hearts and minds of men.”²² In 1951, Meyer was adrift and looking for a new job to satisfy “the need to be actively involved in a cause that I believed in.”²³

The Agency was not Meyer’s first choice, but it became his only choice. Meyer, seen as one of the most promising men of his generation a few years earlier, was virtually unemployable in 1951. Ford Foundation director Robert Hutchins promised to look for a suitable position, but cautioned, “We shall probably not dare use the words ‘world government’ out loud.”²⁴ Secretary of State Dean Acheson told Meyer he was delighted by Meyer’s interest in the State Department.²⁵ But Meyer’s contacts “were not encouraging. They explained quite frankly that my prominent association with the world federalist movement had made me so controversial that the department could not risk the public criticism my appointment might cause.”²⁶

Allen Dulles alone offered Meyer a post.²⁷ But, even then, Meyer’s past in the United World Federalists movement branded him such a serious security risk that Dulles had to overrule the FBI to get him cleared. “Back came a report from the FBI that he was a ‘dangerous individual, Communist tendencies,’” Tom Braden recalled:

Allen found this out, he gets down to the dirt, “What do you mean he’s got Communist tendencies?” . . . Eventually, the FBI excuses were so puerile and childish that we got rid of them, we cast them aside. . . . What’s a Communist tendency? I suppose to a stupid American reviewer, it would be anyone who’s for world government must have Communist tendencies.²⁸

Hiring someone with Meyer’s past for a division focused on supporting the non-Communist left, however, soon came to haunt the Agency. In the early 1950s, the U.S. Congress considered socialists virtually indistinguishable from Communists – not least because the two groups often strenuously condemned American foreign policy. Some in Congress likewise considered world federalism tantamount to opposing American sovereignty. Moreover, the U.S. Congress was preoccupied with investigating federal agencies for evidence of Communist penetration – and for good reason. The Soviet Union had extensively

penetrated the American government in the 1930s and 1940s. Prewar episodes of espionage came to light just as the Soviet Union extended its hold over Eastern Europe, acquired the atomic bomb faster than expected, and won China to Communism. No American official, no matter how accomplished, could be free from suspicion after Alger Hiss – a brilliant and socially prominent lawyer and public official who had once clerked for Justice Holmes – was revealed as a Communist spy and convicted of perjury, or after Julius Rosenberg, a member of the Manhattan Project, turned out to have been passing American atomic secrets to the Soviets.²⁹ Numerous State Department officials were demonstrably sympathetic to Communism and carelessly disregarded security procedures, if they were not actually engaged in espionage.³⁰

By 1953, Senator Joseph McCarthy, the most prominent Senator opposing Communist subversion, had finished investigations into several federal agencies. His investigation of the State Department alone had led to 830 resignations or dismissals.³¹ On July 4, 1953, McCarthy began his investigation of the CIA, which he portrayed as “the worst situation” of all.³² This, said McCarthy’s assistant Roy Cohn, was “the investigation which McCarthy told me interested him more than any other.”³³ Bill Bundy, who had contributed \$400 to the Alger Hiss Defense Fund, was the first name called to appear before McCarthy’s subcommittee. Meyer was next.³⁴

These names were no shots in the dark. McCarthy’s ace in the hole, recalled Cohn, was his suspicion “that the CIA had granted large subsidies to pro-Communist organizations.”³⁵ To McCarthy and many others in Congress, the non-Communist left was so anti-American that it was essentially advancing Soviet aims. Not only that: the FBI had long been investigating whether the AFL’s Jay Lovestone might yet be a Communist, and had turned up curious references to CIA officials in his phone conversations.³⁶ From this vantage, the CIA’s secret use of public funds to secretly support European leftists was possible evidence that the Agency was either dangerously naïve, or had been coopted like so many other federal agencies.

Had McCarthy’s investigation continued, Braden’s International Organizations Division surely would have come under fire. Instead, Allen Dulles gave his all to thwarting McCarthy’s investigation. Dulles told Bundy to refuse McCarthy’s summons and “[g]et out of here, get out if you can, get out of the country.”³⁷ Dulles announced that speaking to McCarthy without his personal permission was a firing offense.³⁸ He fed McCarthy disinformation.³⁹ And Dulles told President Eisenhower that he would resign if McCarthy’s investigation proceeded.⁴⁰

Faced with this level of resistance, McCarthy backed down. Vice President Nixon brokered an agreement ending McCarthy’s investigation by promising that McCarthy could identify CIA employees for further investigation by the CIA.⁴¹ Dulles emerged the toast of Washington.⁴² Braden got off with a few questions about Dartmouth from the CIA’s security chief, and felt vindicated. “I always felt that we were ahead of the game,” he said. “We were the bright lights, ahead of all those dummies, McCarthy and the others.”⁴³

Meyer, however, was still in limbo. After Dulles's deal with McCarthy, Meyer was subject to an internal investigation, which turned up allegations that he associated with Communist sympathizers. Meyer was suspended from the CIA pending further review; he spent this time obsessively rereading Kafka's *The Trial*.⁴⁴ He returned after Thanksgiving 1953, ambivalent about staying on: "What I would really like is a position as editor in a good publishing firm with which I could combine my own writing and some active politics."⁴⁵

Braden's departure in October 1954, and Meyer's promotion to head the International Organizations Division, changed everything. Among colleagues, Meyer's reputation was as a "crazy one-eyed intellectual" derisively nicknamed "Cyclops."⁴⁶ But he was also "Allen Dulles's favorite," Jim McCargar recalled, and he had carte blanche to run his division as he saw fit.⁴⁷ "My resolve to leave the government has been delayed by a promotion that keeps me so busy that I am so weary at night that I fall into bed after a quick glance at the newspaper," Meyer recorded.

There was a time when I believed in redemption through political activity, and it was then that I discounted my own yesterday and was in a sense ashamed of it as the day dream of a privileged boy, who had had no right to those dreams.⁴⁸

When Meyer assumed control of the International Organizations Division in 1954, he was an idealist in search of another cause – and he found it in the Congress for Cultural Freedom.

To Meyer, the Congress was a godsend for the Agency. At the Congress's inception, Soviet peace congresses had been a concrete phenomenon associated with discernible fronts, like Partisans for Peace. These fronts, by 1954, were far less powerful than they had once seemed, but the ideas they espoused had taken hold across Europe and the developing world, creating a more amorphous and widespread problem. The Congress's magazines and seminars increasingly centered on abstract subjects, like the nature of liberty, or the characteristics of freedom, and sought to reach those who were disappointed by Communism but disdainful of full-throated attacks. To Meyer, the Congress was thus "one of the very few assets that had access to people who were occupying that ground," recalled a colleague.⁴⁹ And *Encounter*, Meyer believed, "played a critical role in alerting the West to the communist danger and in encouraging those behind the Curtain to continue their resistance."⁵⁰

Meyer's attachment to the Congress, however, went well beyond its Cold War rationale. The Congress was not a discovery on his arrival at the Agency; it was yet another cause he'd already joined. As a young World Federalist disillusioned by his firsthand experience with Communist fronts, he attended the March 1949 Freedom House rally, where Sidney Hook and others denounced the Waldorf Conference and Josselson started clamoring for a similar event in Berlin.⁵¹ At the Agency, Meyer cast the Congress's value in terms that defied the usual bureaucratic terminology. In an otherwise routine memorandum

instructing the United States Information Agency not to go overboard in publicizing the Congress's 1955 Milan Congress, Meyer was unable to resist extolling what he saw as the Congress's higher virtues. The Congress, he explained, had been "established for the purpose of defending the freedom of creative and critical thought against the regimentation which all forms of totalitarianism threaten to impose upon it." Delegates at Milan "will participate in discussions of important contemporary ideological issues," and "[i]t is hoped that these discussions will provide fresh insights into contemporary ideological issues." Nor would these discussions invariably affirm American foreign policy. "[T]he entire substance and focus of the meeting," Meyer believed, "will go beyond the foreign policy pleasantries that have been exchanged and deal with fundamental questions of free versus slave societies still very much at issue in the cold war."⁵²

Meyer followed every page of *Encounter* closely – as a reader. In letters and journal entries, he confessed that it expressed some of his own, long-dormant ideas. He gave his son, an East Asian studies major at Yale, a subscription to *The China Quarterly* because "[i]t is the best magazine I know of on current affairs," and he enthusiastically recommended it, along with *Soviet Survey*, as post-retirement reading for Allen Dulles.⁵³ He wrote "[j]ust a note to say how much I enjoyed reading your piece in the current *Encounter*" to Mel Lasky well after CIA's interest in the magazine had ended.⁵⁴ "Cord's heart was with the Congress. He loved that. It was his territory, his world; and there was no need to explain to him what it was, and why it was needed," reflected John Hunt.⁵⁵

Had Meyer wanted to keep Josselson on a tight leash, Meyer could have insisted that the Congress take certain positions on pain of losing its CIA money. Or Meyer could have surrounded the Congress with case officers who would pressure Josselson into ensuring that the Congress defended American foreign policy and unremittingly opposed Communism in all its political manifestations. And there was no shortage of men in the Agency who would have welcomed that tack. Many of Meyer's colleagues saw the Congress as "something really out of line," Hunt recalled. "They didn't see any benefit to the Agency having time, effort, and money being spent on intellectuals, most of whom . . . would be sort of difficult, [and] fundamentally anti-American."⁵⁶ Case officer Lawrence de Neufville concurred: "Some people in CIA didn't think it was proper to be spending all this money on these leftists."⁵⁷

Instead, Meyer hired men whose superlative trait was the wish that they, too, might have been part of the Congress. John Hunt, for a time the Congress's Washington case officer, was a writer who claimed that "[i]f anybody recruited me" to the CIA, "it was Czeslaw Milosz." *The Captive Mind*, Milosz's account of the mind's resistance to Soviet-imposed conformity of expression in the satellites, expressed "who I was and where I had to go," he said. Months later, after visiting Harvard's careers office, Hunt was a newly minted junior CIA officer. (Improbably, Hunt's impulse led him to Milosz himself, who was in Paris writing occasional articles for *Preuves*, the Congress's French-language magazine.)

Being the Washington case officer meant being “helpful as needed, to take care of certain administrative things” – background checks and financial arrangements. But it was mostly a boondoggle: “What to do was decided in the Congress offices, by Congress people,” and “there was really nothing for me to do; except I was supposed to keep myself informed.” Besides, “the Congress and Mike [Josselson] had a reputation: one was not to try to interfere with what was going on. That idea was put into my head very, very quickly,” Hunt said:

Never in the ten to twelve years that I knew Cord and worked with him did he ever suggest anything. . . . The only time he got exercised at all about the Congress was if he thought something had gone wrong in the handling of the relationship between the Agency and the Congress.

But, where substance was concerned, Josselson was on his own.⁵⁸

Josselson’s case officers in Paris, who saw him often, were enthralled. Paris case officer Robie Macauley was a protégé of Ford Madox Ford and a close friend of poets Robert Lowell and Randall Jarrell; when he left the CIA, it was to edit the prestigious *Kenyon Review*.⁵⁹ “In the course of a lifetime one is lucky enough, perhaps once or twice, to come across an intellect that is so dazzling and so beautifully concentrated that only the word ‘genius’ will do for it,” he told Josselson. “The Congress is and will continue to be one of the few really vivid and vital intellectual forces in the world of our own time,” he predicted to Josselson: “And it has been able to do this largely because of your own force and high intelligence.”⁶⁰

It was no accident that Macauley’s successor, Lee Williams, was a Princetonian who wrote his senior thesis on the prospects for a world legislature.⁶¹ “Mike liked me,” Williams reflected, “because I never tried to teach him his job – I sat at his feet, I was deferential to him.”⁶² Indeed, Meyer’s selection preferences were so transparent to others that Williams’s wife asked him “if I realized that I had made both Lee and John Hunt try to resemble me.”⁶³

Likewise, rather than stocking the witting staff of the Farfield Foundation with financiers or bureaucrats, Meyer approached John Thompson, his fellow aide to Harold Strassen at the UN’s founding, a confidante of Robert Lowell, and the author of *The Founding of English Meter* (1961).⁶⁴ Thompson, too, held Josselson in awe. “Keeping that particular crew on speaking terms with one another requires the attention of such a ringmaster as he apparently is – uniquely,” he told Meyer.⁶⁵ Meyer’s eyes and ears on the ground, the officers who met with Josselson often, sent back a single message: unadulterated admiration. That was exactly as Meyer wanted it.

Notes

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- 4 Arthur Schlesinger Jr. interview, July 25, 2006, New York.
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13 The 1955 Milan Congress and the end of ideology

Milan was sweltering when Josselson flew in from Paris in late September 1955. Traffic clogged the main roads. New, modern buildings were everywhere. Italy was booming, with production of everything from steel to scooters at an all-time high. Milan, Italy's industrial heart, had become Europe's most futuristic city – and a symbolically apt site for the Congress's latest gathering, "The Future of Freedom."¹ Josselson had little to do with arrangements, leaving the agenda to planners Michael Polanyi, Raymond Aron, and Daniel Bell.²

One hundred fifty delegates checked into the Principe di Savoia, the Palace, the Grand Hotel de Milan, and the Excelsior. The caliber of the attendees – among them future Nobel laureates Friedrich von Hayek, Willy Brandt, and Arthur Lewis – underscored the Congress's heightened stature.

American sociologists – Bell, Shils, Seymour Martin Lipset – flocked to Milan, along with Sidney Hook (still skeptical of the Congress's cultural direction) and economist John Kenneth Galbraith. From Britain came the new wave of the Labour Party: Party leader Hugh Gaitskell; future Foreign Minister Tony Crosland; future Chancellor Denis Healey; future Home Secretary Roy Jenkins; and the contrarian Dick Crossman. Delegates from the Philippines, Indonesia, Japan, Africa, and Latin America disembarked from long flights.³ There, too, was an attendee described to Josselson as having a "good reputation in Great Britain and knows all the English delegates personally": John Cairncross, lately a member of the Cambridge Five Soviet spy ring and now reporting for *The Economist*.⁴

Soon, delegates would file into the narrow hall of the Museo Nazionale della Tecnica e della Scienza, formerly a sixteenth-century Olivetan monastery, and don giant earphones to hear interpreters translate opening addresses. There would be no mass rallies; congresses were now quieter affairs where abstract themes dominated.⁵ Milan's premise, its planners explained, was that "our guiding concepts" – socialism, capitalism, planning, social welfare, colonialism, nationalization – "have assumed in their application a vastly different form than in their original meaning." Delegates would "define as concretely as we can the requirements of individual material well-being and spiritual freedom and examine together the alternative methods which modern society may employ to fulfill these needs" – an ambitious task for a five-day congress so packed with speakers that many were limited to five minutes apiece.⁶

Sessions cycled through the vague subject of threats to freedom, comparisons of the American and Soviet economies, and issues of freedom in the developing world. Shils found it “like a conversation among a group of lively, well-informed, and disciplined minds which goes on for hours and hours and touches on long series of fascinating and tricky problems.”⁷ To American journalist Dwight Macdonald, Milan instead “resembled less the academy of Plato and Socrates than the Tower of Babel or . . . a subway rush.”⁸

Still, Milan revealed one fundamental point of agreement: the Congress’s participants no longer believed that intellectuals needed to dedicate themselves to exposing Communism’s fallacies. Without a new purpose, they warned, the Congress would fade into irrelevance. And, for Josselson, the Congress’s turn away from overtly opposing Communism was not merely an opportunity for reinvention; it was also the source of another major internal crisis.

Until now, the Congress had been defined by the idea that intellectuals were duty-bound to oppose Communism as an ideology whose rigid, deterministic tenets extinguished free individual inquiry. As Josselson saw it, war-fatigued Europe looked in danger of yielding to Communism, and the possibility that intellectuals might be willing (or forced) to repudiate individual thought to serve a false cause imposed “an obvious and simple duty: to resist, fight back, denounce the lies, and maintain a solid front for freedom.”⁹

At the 1950 Berlin Congress, this proposition bridged Koestler’s calls for militant resistance and Silone’s sober pleas for a community of the mind. It underpinned the Congress’s Manifesto, which proclaimed that Communism’s promise of a predetermined path to progress was inimical to intellectual freedom.¹⁰ *Preuves* considered Stalinism an intellectual problem because it “goes well beyond the classical categorizations of left and right, progress and reaction, capitalism and socialism, while it is those very categories that require it to be re-examined in the light of a new reality.”¹¹ Even as the 1952 Paris Festival established the Congress’s cultural focus, performances of works banned in the Soviet Union, coupled with examples of the art produced under conditions of freedom, pointedly conveyed the message. Likewise, scientists and philosophers who gathered for the Congress’s 1953 Hamburg meeting denounced subjecting scientific inquiry to ideologically prescribed conclusions.¹²

Innumerable early articles in *Encounter* also condemned the price ideological fealty exacted on intellectual endeavor. “The first duty of any philosopher who professes to have anything to say about the conduct of affairs in the modern world is to examine the materialistic Marxism on which Communism is based, and to decide whether it is true or false,” proclaimed British economist Colin Clark. “And if he finds that it is based on falsehood, as it is, he must hate and despise it with every fiber of his being, and seize every conceivable opportunity to attack and discredit it.”¹³ Koestler warned of the “emotional saturation, a complete experience of belonging” offered by Communism, which carried “the dynamism of a secular religion.”¹⁴ Communism was “the most powerful existing institution which opposes such changes and reforms as liberalism proposes,” proclaimed Kristol; to focus on it was only natural.¹⁵

But, by Milan, discrediting Communism no longer seemed like an imperative mission. *Encounter* had run piece after piece suggesting that no one in the West, or even behind the Iron Curtain, still considered Communist ideology a valid means of interpreting events, or a meaningful set of aspirations. The occupation of Germany had ended; in divided Berlin, wrote Swiss historian Herbert Luthy, “[t]he curtain that runs crookedly across the city hangs in tattered shreds.” Communism was defeated not by the West’s counter-propaganda but by East Berliners’ ability (for the time) to travel into West Berlin and observe the differences.¹⁶ Even Germans who voted socialist “no longer subscribe to Marxist ideas,” Aron observed.¹⁷ Communism was still fashionable among French intellectuals, but it was now the frustrated posture of a marginalized and insular group, not a belief with any real traction.¹⁸ Sartre’s once-fervent embrace of the Communist Party had soured.¹⁹

In Britain, the first-ever Labour government had merely shown “what the Labour Party has really stood for – the reality of a solid, pragmatic British political party beneath the deceptive superstructure of international socialist theories,” concluded British writer Tosco Fyvel.²⁰ Differences between Labour and Conservatives were of degree, not kind, Aron concluded: no one argued for or against state intervention in the economy per se, but about how much or how little. And if the capitalist American economy was more “competitive” than its European socialist counterparts, it was due to the American spirit and context, not systemic differences.²¹ Ideological categories no longer seemed to correlate with political or economic performance, yet “too many people,” Polanyi wrote, “are still glaring at each other through the angry masks of obsolete ideologies.”²²

Now that Communism had seemingly lost its power as an explanatory creed, there was no need to discredit it further. “[A]s we all know, the myth of the liberating power of the proletariat has dissolved along with that other myth of the inevitability of progress,” wrote Silone, and “the decline of that myth must be obvious to anyone who takes the trouble to inform himself of the conditions prevailing in the world beyond his own backyard.” The Communist Party still had its recruits, but “those joining the mass parties out of inner ideological conviction are very few.”²³ No one accepted Marxist theory as a lens for interpreting the world any longer, Aron asserted. Even in Asia, Communism was seen as a means of imposing controls on underdeveloped societies that could accelerate industrialization, not as a faith. “It is not impossible that the Soviet Union . . . may succeed a few years or a few decades from now, in destroying Western society,” he concluded, “but this does not mean that Communism is a serious intellectual movement.”²⁴

Even the past now looked different. The notion that intellectuals bore a special responsibility for universally surrendering their critical faculties to the seductive logic of ideology seemed too absolute. Not everyone was a Koestler, converting to Communism in a “lightning storm of revelation,” reflected American novelist Mary McCarthy. She portrayed her own conversion as an act of social-climbing rather than conviction; she had admired her Communist acquaintances’ sense of certainty, but “I knew nothing about the cause I had

espoused; I had never read a word of Lenin or Trotsky, nothing of Marx but the Communist Manifesto.” So, too, “Our anti-Communism came to us neither as the fruit of a special wisdom nor as a humiliating awakening from a prolonged deception,” she concluded, “but as a natural event, the product of chance and propinquity.”²⁵

These themes were the impetus for the Milan Congress; there, nearly every paper seemed confirmation of “the turning-point to which we have come in the last years,” Shils reflected: “the end of ideological enthusiasm.”²⁶ “The end of ideology,” a phrase Shils coined, has accumulated a long trail of meanings.²⁷ To Aron, the irrelevancy of ideological categories to the socioeconomic and political features of a given society confirmed that empirical analysis was the only legitimate way to interpret phenomena.²⁸ To Bell, the “end of ideology” reflected the experience of the cohort of intellectuals who came of age amidst the upheavals of the thirties, saw the twin forces of fascism and Communism as competing ideals, and expected to live in an era of radical transformation. That atmosphere – and intellectuals’ faith in the capacity of ideologies as roadmaps to constructing a wholly new society – was now gone.²⁹ But, to critics, the “end of ideology” lulled intellectuals into complacency about the progressivism of Western institutions to manufacture a common front against Communism.³⁰

For the Congress, however, the “end of ideology” was, above all, a radical break from its original mission. At Berlin in 1950, Koestler had posited that the only meaningful dividing-line was between those who sympathized with Communism and those who rejected its premises. In the months leading up to Milan, that dividing-line had eroded. Lasky had stressed the “Johnny-One-Note ineffectiveness” of incessant anti-Communism, and Bondy had concluded, “Today, one looks again for a positive idea, a reason to live and work. Anti-Communism, after five years, is not sufficient to give us this idea, not with vigor.”³¹

Josselson readily saw the writing on the wall, and agreed: “anti-Stalinism ... was not sufficient and could not by itself provide the basis for their common activity,” he told the Executive Committee. To date, “Experience has demonstrated that the great interest shown by the Congress and its publications in purely cultural problems has helped to increase its influence and has drawn to its meetings and debates many persons who would not have been attracted by the anti-Communist front alone.”³²

By Milan, the “conviction that Communism had lost the battle of ideas with the West” gave the gathering “the atmosphere of a post-victory ball,” Shils felt.³³ In a world where the Soviet economy looked like a stunted but recognizably industrial version of America’s, and where Communism no longer held sway as a meaningful system of beliefs, the Congress’s intellectuals believed that the Congress’s founding premise had become obsolete. The proposition that Communism was no longer a serious intellectual problem was not a new way of voicing opposition; it was a repudiation of the very need to do so. While the Congress had canvassed “the substantive errors of totalitarianism and extremist enthusiasm” and “the wrongfulness of the type of ideological orientation which once constituted its attraction,” Shils wrote, “There is, however, more to life,

and especially intellectual life, than the detection and refutation of error.”³⁴ Thus, Aron echoed, while the Congress would remain anti-Communist, broadly speaking, it was “unnecessary to make [the Soviet Union] the incarnation of Evil or a unique event in the annals of crime.”³⁵

If the CIA had any qualms about the Congress’s transition, Josselson assuaged them. But he was a facilitator, not an inventor of ideas, and could merely encourage others to develop more concrete plans for the Congress’s future activities.

For Josselson, the “end of ideology” did not just augur a fundamental reconsideration of the Congress’s mission. It also prompted the last major showdown between the Congress’s European and American factions. And Josselson was determined to minimize the latter’s influence over the Congress – not at the Agency’s behest, but because he saw the American Committee as a strident minority whose views would forever alienate the rest of the Congress’s participants from the Congress’s endeavors.

From the start, the New York intellectuals who joined the Congress’s American Committee fitted uneasily with the Congress’s more numerous European contingent. Burnham had established the American Committee in 1951 to facilitate the CIA’s financing of the Congress. By geography and inclination, the group was more independent and detached from the Congress’s broader works. Many in the Committee saw themselves as the Congress’s proper vanguard;



Figure 13.1 Michael Josselson in intent conversation (reproduced with permission of Jennifer Josselson Vorbach).

they, after all, had sounded the alarm against Soviet fronts of the thirties while European intellectuals were still Communists. Moreover, Committee figures such as Hook saw Americans for Intellectual Freedom as the Congress's true progenitor, and retained a proprietary view of the international Congress.³⁶

Above all, the American Committee had for years protested about various Congress activities initiated by the Paris office, on the grounds that the Congress was not doing enough to overtly oppose Communism. The Committee castigated the 1952 Paris Festival as "an ill-considered expenditure of enormous sums of money that could well have been utilized more directly in the cause." Members likewise derided *Encounter* for its "apparent unwillingness to offend what it presumes are English sensibilities with explicit anti-Communism." And, by 1954, unhappiness with the international Congress had reached such a pitch that Committee meetings were dominated by debates over how to discipline the international Congress and whether to formally disaffiliate.³⁷

Thus, when plans for the Milan Congress hinted that the Congress planned to shift further away from anti-Communism, the Committee decided it had had enough. To Hook and other New York intellectuals who dominated the American Committee, the "end of ideology" was final proof that the Congress had lost its way, and at a time when "[i]t has never been more urgent ... to remind the free world, and especially its intellectual element, of the unchanged, repressive, and totalitarian nature of the Soviet regime and of the world Communist movement."³⁸ To Committee chairman Sol Stein, the Congress's sole purpose was to combat the "residues of Communist influence frontally," and the Milan Congress amply illustrated that the Congress was abandoning that mission.³⁹

Thus, in January 1955, Hook formally conveyed to Josselson and the Congress's Executive Committee that the American Committee was unwilling to tolerate the Congress's "willing[ness] to compromise with an atmosphere far too tolerant of totalitarianism and hostile to America's role in the preservation of the free world."⁴⁰ The Committee's memorandum of protest continued: "We believe it to be a fallacy – worse, a derogation of our duty as anti-Communist intellectuals – to be satisfied with endeavors of a cultural sort, no matter how worthy, when they have little or no bearing on our principal purpose, at a time when the world is burning."⁴¹

But the American Committee was numerically a minority, its influence in Europe negligible, and its membership seen as "New York black and whiter," as Josselson called them, trying to co-opt the international Congress.⁴² "The international Congress (as distinguished from the American committee) was in the vanguard of changing attitudes towards the cold war, giving credence to the thaw before practically anyone else did," he believed. And there were "constant tensions from the beginning due precisely to the American Committee's vigilantism."⁴³ The prominent Europeans associated with the Congress – Aron, Silone, Polanyi, Bondy, Spender and de Rougemont among them – were, by 1955, convinced that Communism had been vanquished as an idea and that the Congress needed a new focus. Some Americans – younger sociologists like Shils and Bell, liberals like Schlesinger, and expatriates like Lasky – agreed.⁴⁴

Accordingly, neither Josselson nor the Congress's Executive Committee had much patience for the American Committee's objections, and rejected the Committee's complaints as fatal to the Congress's appeal in Europe and Asia.⁴⁵ When the Milan Congress confirmed the end of the Congress's explicit focus on anti-Communism as a rallying-cry, Hook saw the Congress as irrevocably capitulating to European complacency.⁴⁶ The American Committee remained nominally affiliated with the Congress, but any real alliance was gone. "[T]he permanent officers and bureaucracy in Paris were more interested in acquiring a kind of respectability in the eyes of the predominantly nonpolitical, even neutralist, European intellectuals than in effective militant opposition to Communist cultural influences," Hook lamented.⁴⁷

In the aftermath, all Josselson could do was avoid an ugly, public disaffiliation – and quietly encourage the American Committee to either reconstitute itself so that its membership was more attuned to the international Congress's perspective, or to die a quiet death. Even before Milan, Josselson had already warned that the Congress would "not be able to continue" financial support for the Committee going forward. Josselson had also lectured Hook, "The American Committee has become something of a super Civil Liberties Union," whereas "The Congress for Cultural Freedom is not a Civil Liberties Union ... The more one yells the less one is listened to."⁴⁸ But neither measure worked.

Now, Josselson also encouraged Schlesinger, Bell, and Hook to persuade the Committee's "hotheads" to exit.⁴⁹ Cord Meyer, who periodically solicited reports on the Committee's activities from Arthur Schlesinger Jr., reiterated the same message to Schlesinger.⁵⁰ But Committee members had their own connections to the Agency and requested funds directly from Allen Dulles and other senior officials, even as Meyer and Josselson distanced themselves.⁵¹ Hook gradually withdrew.⁵² The Committee lurched through further flare-ups until its final demise in 1957.⁵³

In the meantime, Josselson suffered a major heart attack in October 1955 that underscored just how indispensable he had become.⁵⁴ The work was too much for him to handle alone – and the risk the CIA would be left with no one inside the Congress became too great. So Cord Meyer decided that John Hunt might be a suitable assistant, and sent him to Paris for Josselson's review in February 1956.⁵⁵

Josselson, Hunt quickly discovered, was not looking for a bureaucrat. His ideal assistant was someone who "sounds like a European" and "who will fit into our own little family."⁵⁶ At Josselson's Paris apartment, Hunt faced a "very, very searching and severe interview" that had nothing to do with his experience as a case officer. The only subject was "what I had or didn't have in the way of general culture," and the dispositive question was his reaction to Graham Greene's *The Quiet American*. Josselson, it became evident, was trying to screen out an Alden Pyle. "Mike didn't like any of that sort of thing ... and if you were a straight arrow American, you didn't have a chance." Josselson's view, Hunt surmised, was that "most Americans had not been exposed enough to life to really get it. They just lived over there on the other side of the ocean and were protected, or thought they were." Hunt, a direct descendant of Davy Crockett

from tiny Pawhuska, Oklahoma, seemed straight from the pages of James Fenimore Cooper. “That’s the kind of America Mike wanted,” Hunt felt. “It was fantasy . . . [but] I was free of some of the things Mike didn’t like about America, because he was fighting against his need to like America, and his instinctive dislike of much of what he saw.”

Back in Washington, Hunt’s days as a case officer ended. His first novel, *Generations of Men*, had just been shortlisted for the National Book Award, an honor that made his presence within the Congress all the more plausible. Still, nothing in his short CIA career prepared him for what followed. On paper, CIA case officers in Paris and Washington handled Josselson, CIA contacts at the Farfield Foundation coordinated on funding, and Meyer supervised it all. But in Paris, Hunt quickly determined that “Washington was the tail of the dog, and it was following the best it could the activities of an impresario genius.” Hunt was captivated: “I saw myself as Mike’s skipper. I was there for him. I believed in him, just the way virtually everyone else did. He was our man, and I was there to help.”⁵⁷

Notes

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- 3 Congress for Cultural Freedom, 5th International Congress, “The Future of Freedom,” Milan 12–17 September 1955, Conference Program, D11.1–11.2, Hugh Gaitskell Papers, University College London, London, United Kingdom (“HG”).
- 4 François Bondy to Michael Josselson, September 2, 1955, Folder 13, Box 6, Series III, CCF; John Cairncross, *The Enigma Spy: An Autobiography* (London: Century, 1997), pp. xix, 120.
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- 6 Nicolas Nabokov, “The Future of Freedom: Proposal for a Conference to Be Held in Milan in September 1955,” F17, HG; Edward Shils, “The End of Ideology?” *Encounter* V (November 1955), p. 52; Dwight Macdonald, “No Miracle in Milan,” *Encounter* V (December 1955), pp. 68–9.
- 7 Shils, “The End of Ideology?” p. 52.
- 8 Macdonald, “No Miracle in Milan,” pp. 68, 72.
- 9 Comment by the Secretariat on Point (2) of the Agenda (“General Orientation and Future Tasks of the Congress”) January 24, 1955, Folder “Executive Committee Meetings,” Box 1, TAM 023, American Committee for Cultural Freedom Records, Tamiment Library/Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives, New York University (“ACCF”).
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- 12 Coleman, *Liberal Conspiracy*, pp. 104–8; Pierre Grémion, *Intelligence de l’Anti-Communisme: Le Congrès pour la liberté de la culture à Paris 1950–1975* (Fayard: Paris, 1995), pp. 105–30.

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- 15 Irving Kristol, "On Negative Liberalism," *Encounter* II (January 1954), p. 2.
- 16 Herbert Luthy, "Berlin: An Unhaunted City," *Encounter* II (February 1954), pp. 35–8.
- 17 Raymond Aron, "Nations and Ideologies," *Encounter* IV (January 1955), p. 28.
- 18 *Ibid.*, pp. 26–7; François Bondy, "Paris on the Psychoanalyst's Couch," *Encounter* III (April 1954), pp. 50–2.
- 19 Paul Parisot, "Keeping Up with M. Sartre," *Encounter* III (May 1954), pp. 56–8.
- 20 T.R. Fyvel, "Chairman of a Revolution: *As It Happened*," by Clement R. Attlee," *Encounter* III (May 1954), pp. 81–2; see also Max Beloff, "Democracy and Its Discontents: Great Britain," *Encounter* III (June 1954), p. 51.
- 21 Aron, "Nations and Ideologies," pp. 24–5, 29.
- 22 Michael Polanyi, "On Liberalism and Liberty," *Encounter* IV (March 1955), p. 34.
- 23 Ignazio Silone, "The Choice of Comrades," *Encounter* III (December 1954), pp. 25–6; see also Aron, "Nations and Ideologies," p. 31.
- 24 Aron, "Nations and Ideologies," pp. 30–33.
- 25 Mary McCarthy, "My Confession," *Encounter* II (February 1954), pp. 43–56.
- 26 Edward Shils, "The End of Ideology?" *Encounter* V (November 1955), p. 52.
- 27 See generally Coleman, *Liberal Conspiracy*, pp. 108–10; Giles Scott-Smith, "The Congress for Freedom, the End of Ideology, and the 1955 Milan Conference: 'Defining the Parameters of Discourse,'" *Journal of Contemporary History* 37 (July 2002), pp. 444–8.
- 28 Aron, "Nations and Ideologies," pp. 30–3.
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- 36 Sidney Hook, *Out of Step: An Unquiet Life in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Harper & Row, 1987), p. 423.
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- 49 Michael Josselson cable to Sidney Hook, October 31, 1955, Folder 6, Box 4, Series I, CCF; Michael Josselson to Arthur Schlesinger, April 27, 1956 and Michael Josselson to Daniel Bell, April 27, 1956, both in Folder 2, Box 288, Series II, CCF.
- 50 Michael Josselson to Sidney Hook, June 25, 1954, Folder 5, Box 2, Series I, CCF; Michael Josselson to Sol Stein, September 22, 1954, Folder 4, Box 3, Series I, CCF; Cord Meyer to Arthur Schlesinger, May 16, 1955, Box P-20, Arthur Schlesinger Jr. Papers, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library, Boston, Massachusetts ("ASJ").
- 51 ACCF Minutes, November 28, 1955, (noting fundraising meeting with former Eisenhower senior advisor C.D. Jackson), Folder 2, Box 7, ACCF; see generally Hugh Wilford, *The Mighty Wurlitzer: How the CIA Played America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008), pp. 91–3.
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- 54 John Hunt interview, June 9–10, 2007, Lyon, France.
- 55 *Ibid.*; Josselson to Nabokov, February 17, 1956, Folder 10, Box 244, Series II, CCF.
- 56 Michael Josselson to Nicolas Nabokov, December 14, 1953, Folder 2, Box 288, Series II, CCF. Josselson's comment concerned a previous CIA-affiliated assistant, Warren Manshel, but reveals his general views.
- 57 John Hunt interview, June 9–10, 2007, Lyon, France.

14 A revolution of intellectuals

Hungary, 1956

After Milan, the “end of ideology” prompted deep anxieties within the Congress over what new premise could keep its disparate participants together. “In our rejection of the ideologies we must study what can be salvaged from them, and what in them should be kept alive,” and in formulations that “will do justice to the situations of the new countries of Asia and Africa and South America,” Shils proposed just after Milan.¹ Josselson believed “[i]t is perhaps the truest function of the Congress to become the organizing center for the worldwide discussion of the great moral and intellectual issues of our time.”² But neither Josselson nor anyone else had a clear or concrete program for doing so.

What held the Congress together, at least in the short term, was the sense of being proven correct. After Milan, the “end of ideology” looked like an increasingly apt description of events behind the Iron Curtain as much as in the West. The growing pace of the thaw, and accompanying signs that Communism was no longer credible even behind the Iron Curtain, seemed, for a time, to augur the end of Communist regimes as well. On February 25, 1956, at the end of the first Party Conference since Stalin’s death, Khrushchev convened an impromptu secret session. For four hours he enumerated Stalin’s crimes: torture, extracting false confessions, mass executions, and the destruction of Soviet agriculture. Stalin, Khrushchev proclaimed, had been a tyrant, a megalomaniac, and a coward.

Khrushchev’s “secret speech” was no secret for long. Within a month, practically every Party cell in Poland had read it. By April, the CIA had it, and by June, the entire speech ran on the front page of the *New York Times*. Khrushchev wanted a partial break with the past to assert his own leadership; the speech, he belatedly realized, had gone too far. By late June, after thousands of Georgians took to the streets to denounce him and lay thousands of flowers at the Stalin memorial in Tbilisi, Khrushchev’s speech was “revised” to only chastise Stalin mildly.³

It was too late to curb its impact. In Poland that spring, Party members rehabilitated victims, released prisoners, and denounced the regime’s favored writers as craven ideologues.⁴ In Hungary, Stalin Prize-winner Tamas Aczel published a story deriding the dachas and decadent lifestyles of the Party’s leaders. The *Literary Gazette* ceased printing propagandistic literature, becoming such a best-seller that black market copies commanded huge prices until the next week’s

issue arrived.⁵ Alexander Fadeyev, who had chaired virtually every Soviet front congress since the war, killed himself after official demotions.⁶ In late June, workers in economically depressed Poznan, Poland, rebelled against the state leadership, demanding better wages and sparking confrontations across the country.⁷ In September, Julius Hay, chairman of the Hungarian Writers' Association, proclaimed, "The best Communist writers have decided – after many troubles, grave errors, and bitter spiritual struggles – that never again, under any conditions whatever, will they write lies in the future."⁸

Within the Congress, these developments seemed like further validation: even intellectuals behind the Iron Curtain now proclaimed that Communism really was a flawed creed, as the Congress had long maintained. "Terror is now simply terror – nothing more, nothing 'higher,'" Kristol wrote in an editorial, and "this demythologization, and its inevitable if still inscrutable consequences, is what we *wanted* to happen; and that this, moreover, is what we should have expected to happen, had we real confidence in our own ideals and ideas."⁹

With the barrier of ideology lifted, dialogue between intellectuals of East and West suddenly seemed possible. In January 1956, Silone, Spender, and others in the Congress planned joint discussions with Eastern European writers and editors, hopeful that their counterparts would be able to do more than repeat pre-approved lines. In September, editors of Congress magazines and counterparts from the Soviet bloc met in Zurich; while the Soviet delegates were low-level factotums, dialogue with the others created a tentative rapport.¹⁰

The thaw also convinced many in the Congress of an unsettling conclusion: Communism was never as potent an idea as many anti-Communist intellectuals had believed. Koestler, Orwell, and Milosz had persuasively detailed how intellectuals fell prey to the seductive logic of Communist ideology. Now, "with the end of the Stalin myth, two myths created by anti-Stalinist analysis have also ended: the myth of the 'New Faith' and the myth of Rubashov," wrote Polish émigré Kot Jelenski, the man in charge of Congress initiatives for Eastern Europe. Koestler and Milosz had argued that "even in a police state which no longer retained the least connection with the Communist ideal, a certain belief in the revolutionary myth should persist." But, with new information about circumstances behind the Iron Curtain, "we discover that the prestige of that myth stands a great deal lower than we had thought."¹¹

After a visit to Moscow, British political writer Nora Beloff was struck "that its intellectual elite should remain at the end of it all so very unsubdued ... Orwell may well have been wrong."¹² Likewise, Peter Wiles, the noted expert on Soviet economics, wrote that Polish intellectuals had never succumbed to dogma; they "just ducked under for six years," and re-emerged as "ordinary Western people with a straightforward Western understanding of events in their own country and abroad, and normal Western tastes."¹³ Intellectuals behind the Iron Curtain now stood at the vanguard of demands for change, yet "[s]omehow, one didn't expect it," wrote Kristol. "They were, presumably, converts to the New Faith, supple in accommodating themselves to the latest turn of doctrine" – but, in fact, "one of our clichés took on body and life. That free human spirit,

whose praises we in the West dutifully mumbled ... has in fact turned out to be something precious and inextinguishable.”¹⁴

The question was how far demands for liberalization could go. “In the end, surely only terror can save the day,” Wiles predicted: “either the security police must be re-activated, in flat contradiction to present policy, Khrushchev’s speech, and everything else, or the Red Army must be called in, which is a violation of Titoism.”¹⁵ Events in Hungary soon bore him out.

On the crisp, sunny afternoon of October 23, 1956, some 12,000 Hungarian students congregated on both sides of the Danube, some in Buda, some in Pest, circulating demands for the return of Imre Nagy, the ousted, moderate Prime Minister. An actor cried out the long-banned lines poet Sandor Petofi had penned to inspire the 1848 revolution: “Arise Hungarians, your country calls you. Meet this hour, whate’er befalls you./Shall we be free men or slaves?/Choose the lot your spirit craves.” Within ninety minutes, the crowds had doubled, joined by intellectuals, then the elderly, and the workers finishing morning shifts. Their demands escalated: an end to Soviet rule in Hungary, they shouted. They ripped out the hammer-and-sickle symbol on Hungary’s Soviet-designed flags, and defiantly brandished the mutilated remainders. Contingents split off; Parliament was surrounded at dusk. Radio Budapest was besieged. Down at Heroes’ Square, thousands encircled Stalin, 14m tall and bronze-cast, as welders hacked him apart with torches until nothing but his boots remained.¹⁶

Hungarian security units had tracked them all day, but had refused to fire. Overnight, 6,000 Soviet troops quietly arrived, invited by the leadership and instructed to restore order. Tanks fired on unarmed protestors outside Parliament; the protestors – now rebels – responded with well-aimed Molotov cocktails and slipped into police stations to steal weapons. Children loosened cobblestones from the streets and pelted soldiers. The revolt spread to the countryside, then the whole country. On October 28, after three days of fighting, Nagy negotiated a ceasefire: the Russians would leave. Hungary would remain part of the Soviet bloc, but with greater freedoms.

The tanks withdrew; crowds cheered, then demanded more. Citizens stormed Party headquarters on October 30, lynching members of the secret police in the streets. Floods of prisoners were sprung from the jails. Nagy, acceding to demands, declared the end of the one-party state. Budapest was swept up in an impromptu festival; long-banned gypsy music floated through its parks.¹⁷

On November 2, the Hungarian Writers’ Association gathered for a triumphant meeting. François Bondy was there: “[T]heir literary centre was functioning as a kind of brains trust for Prime Minister Nagy,” he reported. “We writers have always thought of ourselves as the avant garde in the struggle for freedom,” playwright Julius Hay told Bondy, confessing that he had been shamed by university students into abandoning doctrinally safe answers to their questions.¹⁸ By November 3, traces of prior skirmishes were gone; cafes bustled, public transit resumed, and workers returned to factories.

Then 150,000 Soviet troops and thousands of tanks came in the night. The assault began before dawn. Entire blocks were razed. Nagy barely had time to

appeal over the radios. Badly outnumbered Hungarians fought for two days with improvised weapons.¹⁹ Bondy, safely in Vienna, heard over the radio the “desperate and pathetic appeal for help by the same Hungarian Writers’ Association” whose “mood of revolutionary confidence” he had observed just days before: “This is the appeal of the Federation of Hungarian Writers to every writer in the world, to all scientists, to all writers’ federations, to all scientific associations, to the intellectual elite of the world,” they called out. “There is but little time. You know the facts. There is no need to give you a special report. Help Hungary. Help the Hungarian people. Help the Hungarian writers. Help! Help! Help!”²⁰

For the CIA, the Hungarian Revolution began as a pleasant surprise and ended as a debacle. For years, Frank Wisner had sent heavily armed groups of émigrés back behind the Iron Curtain to foment rebellion. They had never been heard from again – not least because Kim Philby, the British liaison on these joint operations, was a KGB mole.²¹

As of 1956, the Agency had a single agent in Budapest. Its only means of reaching Hungarians was Radio Free Europe, which the Soviets never managed to jam completely; Cord Meyer now oversaw the operation.²² Radio Free Europe’s Hungarian operators kept hopes alive in Hungary. And, while nothing in the broadcasts actually promised American assistance, Hungarian listeners, who heard only snatches of broadcasts, were inclined to believe what they wanted.²³ When demonstrations in Budapest began, Allen Dulles and Wisner were en route to London. Until then, their attention was on the Middle East. Israel had unexpectedly invaded Egypt; Britain and France were about to seize the recently nationalized Suez Canal and attempt to oust Nasser from power; and America’s allies had kept it in the dark.²⁴

Once Hungarians began fighting off the first wave of Soviet troops, Radio Free Europe rebroadcast communications from local stations taken over by small groups of fighters, who used it to coordinate across Hungary. Radio Free Europe became the CIA’s only source of on-the-ground reports, but its usefulness came at a terrible price.²⁵ Khrushchev and the Soviet leadership were also rapt listeners; Radio Free Europe convinced them that Nagy was unable, and perhaps unwilling, to quell the protests. Khrushchev decided to swiftly and brutally end the revolution.²⁶

The CIA was powerless to stop it. Wisner rushed to the Austrian border, but could merely observe the exodus as some 200,000 refugees fled. Deeply distressed, he departed for Greece, consumed raw, hepatitis-infested clams, lay gravely ill for days, and never recovered from the psychological shock.²⁷ In the ensuing years, over 10,000 Hungarians were interned and 20,000 sentenced to lengthy prison terms for their alleged roles in the revolt. Nagy was hanged.²⁸ Further hopes of liberating Eastern Europe were abandoned. Hungary, Eisenhower concluded, was “a bitter pill for us to swallow” – but he was unwilling to risk war over it.²⁹

For the Congress, Hungary was “the greatest moment in [its] whole history,” John Hunt felt. “This was an intellectual event, as far as I was concerned, the moving forces were ideas. And I thought, this is it, this is why we are in

business.”³⁰ The Suez crisis incapacitated the Eisenhower administration. But Suez was irrelevant to the Congress, which considered attempts to oust Nasser far afield from the cause of intellectual freedom. Hungary was exactly the opposite: “it was a ‘revolution of truth,’” Nabokov wrote, “an explosion of the human spirit against the iron control of a totalitarianism which many of us thought had actually succeeded in forcing men into total submission.”³¹

Hungarian intellectuals called on the Congress by name, and the Congress responded. Its national committees and magazines united in messages of support and protest. Lasky collected firsthand accounts and published a White Book on the Hungarian Revolution. The Congress’s assistance to Hungarian refugees, and its support for the Hungarian Symphony Orchestra, sustained a fractured émigré community. The Congress, reflected Tamas Aczel, one of those refugees, “performed an important and successful human, moral and organizational function in regard to a very large number of Hungarian intellectuals ... when it was most needed.”³² Years later, Josselson was still receiving letters of gratitude.³³

Most of all, the Hungarian Revolution ended the Cold War that intellectuals had waged since a young Lasky strode to the podium of the German Writers’ Congress nearly a decade before. There was never any real hope that the Congress’s protests or petitions would secure the kind of physical or material support that might have changed the outcome in Hungary. The fate of the revolution, once set in motion, was well beyond anything that a group of intellectuals could control, no matter how prominent they were.

For the Congress, what mattered more than the revolution’s success or failure was the fact it had happened at all. Intellectuals associated with the Congress had sympathized with Communism in the thirties, repented, and now wondered if they had misjudged Communism’s postwar appeal. Their one article of faith was that “whatever the claim of a social creed to moral superiority, the demand for liberty – the right to pursue truth, and to subject any of its claims to free and open criticism – remains paramount in human aspirations.”³⁴ The Hungarian Revolution was proof.

In other realms – the missile race, economic productivity, and the respective spheres of influence – the Cold War remained intractable. But to the intellectuals associated with the Congress, the war of ideas seemed to have been won. Communism had failed to colonize intellectual life. “All those who found the intellectual atmosphere of Stalinism suffocating; all those who speak again the language of humanity, whether they think of themselves as Marxists or not – these are our friends and intellectual companions,” Polanyi concluded. “We can enter the next stage of history together, in the consciousness that it presents both sides with the same problems.”³⁵ And, as the Congress continued searching for new directions, Josselson had to address the intractable personnel conflicts that threatened its success.

Notes

- 1 Edward Shils, "The End of Ideology?" *Encounter* V (November 1955), p. 57.
- 2 Comment by the Secretariat on Point (2) of the Agenda ("General Orientation and Future Tasks of the Congress") January 24, 1955, Folder "Executive Committee Meetings," Box 1, TAM 023, American Committee for Cultural Freedom Records, Tamiment Library/Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives, New York University ("ACCF").
- 3 William Taubman, *Khrushchev: The Man and His Era* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2003), pp. 270–5, 283–8.
- 4 Johanna Granville, "Poland and Hungary, 1956: A Comparative Essay Based on New Archival Findings," in Kevin McDermott and Matthew Stibbe (eds), *Revolution and Resistance in Eastern Europe: Challenges to Communist Rule* (New York: Berg, 2006), pp. 58–92.
- 5 Victor Sebestyen, *Twelve Days: Revolution 1956 – How the Hungarians Tried to Topple Their Soviet Masters* (London: Phoenix, 2006), pp. 82–3.
- 6 "Fadeyev, a Top Soviet Novelist of Stalin Era, Commits Suicide," *New York Times* (May 15, 1956).
- 7 Granville, "Poland and Hungary, 1956," pp. 58–60.
- 8 Quoted in Michael Polanyi, "The Magic of Marxism," *Encounter* VII (December 1956), p. 5.
- 9 Editorial, "1985?" *Encounter* VII (August 1956), pp. 1–3 (written by Kristol).
- 10 Peter Coleman, *The Liberal Conspiracy: The Congress for Cultural Freedom and the Struggle for the Mind of Postwar Europe* (New York: Free Press, 1989), pp. 127–32.
- 11 K.A. Jelenski, "The Polish 'Earthquake,'" *Encounter* VII (August 1956), p. 38; see also Peter Wiles, "In a Land of Unwashed Brains: A Polish Scrapbook," *Encounter* VII (October 1956), pp. 15–17.
- 12 Nora Beloff, "Eastern Variations: Moscow Impressions," *Encounter* VII (August 1956), pp. 30–31.
- 13 Wiles, "In a Land of Unwashed Brains," pp. 15–17.
- 14 Irving Kristol editorial, "1985?" *Encounter* VII (August 1956), pp. 1–3.
- 15 Wiles, "In a Land of Unwashed Brains," p. 17.
- 16 Sebestyen, *Twelve Days*, pp. 117–19.
- 17 *Ibid.*, pp. 126–227.
- 18 François Bondy, "A Moment in Budapest," *Encounter* VII (December 1956), pp. 2–3.
- 19 Sebestyen, *Twelve Days*, pp. 1–2, 254–81.
- 20 Bondy, "A Moment in Budapest," p. 3.
- 21 Kim Philby, *My Silent War* (New York: Random House, 2002), pp. 156–9; Peter Grose, *Operation Rollback: America's Secret War Behind the Iron Curtain* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2000), pp. 204–12.
- 22 Charles Gati, *Failed Illusions: Moscow, Washington, Budapest, and the 1956 Hungarian Revolt* (Washington: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2006), pp. 95–7; Cord Meyer, *Facing Reality: From World Federalism to the CIA* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1980), pp. 110–38.
- 23 Gati, *Failed Illusions*, pp. 102–4; Meyer, *Facing Reality*, pp. 125–9.
- 24 Tim Weiner, *Legacy of Ashes: The History of the CIA* (New York: Doubleday, 2007), pp. 126–8; Peter Grose, *Gentleman Spy: The Life of Allen Dulles* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1994), pp. 433–5, 439–43.
- 25 Meyer, *Facing Reality*, p. 126.
- 26 Granville, "Poland and Hungary," pp. 58–68.
- 27 David A. Nichols, *Eisenhower 1956: The President's Year of Crisis – Suez and the Brink of War* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2011), p. 261; see generally Evan Thomas, *The Very Best Men: The Daring Early Years of the CIA* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995), pp. 142–52.

- 28 *The 1956 Hungarian Revolution: A History in Documents*, Csaba Bekes, Malcolm Byrne and Janos M. Rainer (eds) (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2002), pp. 274–5.
- 29 *Ibid.*, pp. 378–81.
- 30 John Hunt interview, June 9–10, 2007, Lyon, France.
- 31 Nicolas Nabokov memorandum [n.d., late 1956], Folder 4, Box 4, Series II, International Association for Cultural Freedom (Congress for Cultural Freedom) Papers, Regenstein Library, University of Chicago, Chicago, Illinois (“CCF”).
- 32 Coleman, *Liberal Conspiracy*, pp. 134–7.
- 33 Michael Josselson to Jayaprakash Narayan, August 9, 1967, Folder 4, Box 26, Michael Josselson Papers, Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, University of Texas-Austin, Austin, Texas (“MJ”).
- 34 Daniel Bell, Proposal, “Tradition and Social Change,” n.d. [1956–7], Box 11, Edward Shils Papers, Regenstein Library, University of Chicago, Chicago, Illinois (“ES”).
- 35 Michael Polanyi, “The Magic of Marxism,” *Encounter* VII (December 1956), pp. 5–6.

15 The most famous article that *Encounter* never ran

By 1958, *Encounter* was an institution, the Congress was expanding its reach to Africa and Latin America, and Josselson and Hunt had settled into their routines of sharing the Congress's managerial burdens and the secret of its financial arrangements. But beneath these seemingly placid waters was perhaps the greatest crisis of Josselson's tenure. Once again, the explosive dynamics between *Encounter*'s editors were to blame – but, this time, the spat became public, and very nearly cost the Congress its reputation.

During the 1955 Milan Congress, Josselson had made the fateful decision to hire Dwight Macdonald to join Kristol and Spender as an editorial triumvirate. Josselson had hoped that hiring Macdonald while keeping Kristol on would placate all the factions involved, and for the duration of Macdonald's editorship, Josselson's gamble seemingly paid off.

But in February 1958, shortly after Macdonald's editorship concluded, he submitted his essay "America! America!" to *Encounter* expecting carte blanche. When Spender and Kristol accepted the piece, wavered, then rejected it, Macdonald publicly blamed the "front-office Metternichs" in Paris who valued toadying to the Congress's putative foundation sponsors over preserving editorial freedom.¹

There was some truth to Macdonald's claim: Josselson was unambiguously behind the decision to axe Macdonald's piece. But Josselson's motive was not to preserve a rosy picture of America or to please his employers in the Agency. Rather, Josselson persuaded Spender and Kristol to axe "America! America!" for quite a different reason: to preserve his longstanding plans to extricate the Congress from the CIA.

In retrospect, hiring a man whose self-proclaimed "greatest vice is my easily aroused indignation" to edit a magazine whose self-proclaimed function was to serve the aims of the Congress was bound to end badly.² *Encounter*'s editors, the Executive Committee, and the Paris office had agreed the magazine's purpose was to make inroads against neutralism in Asia. But Macdonald was temperamentally incapable of embracing any cause for long.³ In two decades, he had run through Communism, Trotskyism, anarchism, pacifism, anti-Stalinism, nudism, hedonism, and elitism. "At any particular moment, he is completely cocksure of his position," Bell wrote. "But then, like Heisenberg's particle, he is off in the

next historical moment on a new, erratic tack, and often as dogmatic in the new stance as in the old.”⁴

Also auguring poorly was Macdonald’s career-long talent for provoking editorial disputes and resigning with a bang. “Nature and man had conspired to give Macdonald the voice of a North American screech owl, the beard of a Russian Revolutionist, and the iconoclastic mind of a *Fortune* magazine writer,” observed novelist Harry Roskolenko. Macdonald quit the latter when Henry Luce (whom he dubbed “Il Luce”) asked him to revise a story on steelworkers to omit Lenin and add more sympathy for management.⁵ When Macdonald’s comrades in the Socialist Workers’ Party refused to keep more than 4,000 of the 30,000 words in his planned article on Nazism, he became the only ex-Trotskyite to have abandoned the cause over the rigidity of its word count limits.⁶ He quit *Partisan Review* in 1943 when his fellow editors rejected his calls for more pacifist politics and less literary criticism. Macdonald shut down *politics*, the small, influential magazine he had started with his wife’s trust fund, when he claimed to have tired of politics.⁷ Friends promised he had changed; by 1955, he had been on the anti-Stalinist bandwagon for a decade, and had settled down at the *New Yorker*.⁸ But his résumé suggested a man who found conflagrations irresistible.

Yet, for a time, Josselson was convinced that Macdonald was Kristol’s perfect replacement, and for the same reason as many a publisher before him: he was the liveliest essayist and editor of his generation. In the forties, Macdonald’s “The Root is Man” became the battle-cry of radical individualism.⁹ Macdonald’s reviews famously filleted everything from the *Webster’s Third New International Dictionary* to the King James Bible by mocking offensively modernized sentences with a vim verging on bloodlust.¹⁰ “The amount of verbal pomposity, elaboration of the obvious, repetition, trivia, low-grade statistics, tedious factification, drudging recapitulations of the half-comprehended, and generally inane and laborious junk that one encounters,” another Macdonald essay observed of American academe, “suggests that the thinkers of earlier ages had one decisive advantage over those of today: they could draw on very little research.”¹¹

The Paris office sought someone “brilliant” with “a capacity of fitting oneself into the British frame of reference.”¹² Under those criteria, Macdonald made certain sense, and Nabokov, Muggeridge, and Spender pushed him hard. Extreme eccentricity, Muggeridge advised, was just the quality to endear an American writer to deeply anti-American British intellectuals; it was the trait they least expected to find.¹³ (A fringe benefit was the implausibility that any outfit really connected to the CIA would ever hire anyone as unstable and iconoclastic as Macdonald.¹⁴)

By early 1955, Josselson planned to sound Macdonald out quietly. “I beg you not to let anyone know that your inquiries have been prompted by me,” Nabokov told Schlesinger, who made the initial approach, for “the soreheads might, if they get wind of it, fire a nuclear weapon at Paris.”¹⁵ Spender was so sold on Macdonald that he coached him on how to win over Josselson.¹⁶ “Mike will be anxious about your attitude to the Congress,” Spender cautioned. As for “their

attitude to us, I think the answer is that they expect us to keep in touch with them, and they keep in touch with us, and Mike in his brusque way, will tell us that there is not enough about Asia.”¹⁷ To Macdonald, this “hands-off policy” was “positively idyllic,” though he knew “very little of what the Congress has been up to.”¹⁸

Rumors soon ran rampant. “Your pal Irving Kristol is getting booted out of the Congress,” Philip Roth told Bell at a party. Bell alerted Kristol (who responded “To hell with it,” and told Nabokov to worry about Macdonald’s “past reputation of political instability and bohemianism”), then informed Hook.¹⁹ Hook confronted Macdonald. Macdonald asked Spender to explain the decision to a “sore” Hook.²⁰ Spender asserted that Kristol “is not really a very suitable collaborator” because he was not “deeply concerned with human values,” only “the wickedness of communists.”²¹ An irate Hook retorted that “precisely because of our own concern with human values Irving should not be characterized unjustly,” and forwarded Spender’s letter to an apoplectic Kristol.²²

Thus, when Josselson arrived in mid-June to negotiate with Macdonald, two continents were abuzz with Kristol’s rumored firing. Hook warned that Macdonald risked “serious trouble” for the Congress. Still, Josselson believed that, within days, “I will have succeeded in creating a sufficiently friendly atmosphere and come to an agreement with Dwight.”²³ Macdonald, too, was keen. “I’ve had a very long and agreeable talk with Michael Josselson, whom I liked very much,” he wrote Spender. “We discussed the Congress’s general ‘line,’ or rather he outlined it and I kept saying I agreed, as I do.”²⁴

More meetings with Macdonald instead convinced Josselson that he had disastrously rushed to judgment. “I absolutely refuse to hire Dwight at this point,” he told Nabokov. “The more I see of him, the more convinced I am that he may indeed be an ideal editor of his own and independent magazine but that he probably is the worst possible choice for editing *Encounter* for the Congress.”²⁵ He told Spender and Muggeridge that Macdonald was a mistake, cabling, “lone wolf lacks teamwork gifts and will tend monopolize magazine for own writings also completely lacks knowledge and feeling for anything outside American scene.”²⁶ But they were set on him, and Josselson returned to Europe deeply concerned.²⁷

At first, Josselson thought he could persuade Kristol to stay on and make enough concessions to placate Spender. But Kristol was in no mood to be wooed back.²⁸ “I have been badly let down by the Paris office, for if they had backed me up, Stephen – being what he is – would have quickly backed down,” he felt.²⁹ Now he insisted on a late September departure.³⁰ Spender deemed any further partnership with Kristol “impossible.”³¹ Muggeridge professed himself “impenitently of the view that Dwight Macdonald would be far and away the most suitable co-Editor with Stephen.”³² Koestler “exploded that he would never submit an article to a mag edited by Dwight M,” reported Lasky.³³ Letters flooded in from New York. “All of us are very disturbed by the fact that this exhibitionist may become the spokesman for us,” wrote *New Leader* editor Sol Levitas.³⁴ Macdonald would “literally shorten your life, if you are on the scene, and ruin the Congress, if you are not,” Hook told Josselson. “Remember also that most

people who make recommendations for possible editors do not understand the specific qualities required for this post with special reference to the purposes of the Congress."³⁵

Josselson took the only out he had, deferring a decision until the Milan Congress. "In view of the doubts which exist as to whether editing a magazine which is tied up with an organization such as ours would not run counter to your strongly ingrained independence," Macdonald was to come to Milan to "get a better understanding of the Congress and its aims."³⁶ Spender backed down after a frank discussion with Josselson. Kristol softened; Josselson reopened negotiations.³⁷ "I would be willing to go to bat for [Kristol] by speaking up in his favour versus Dwight to all the members of the Executive Committee," Josselson told Hook, if Kristol would acknowledge "he made mistakes, and that he will make a determined effort not only to get along with Stephen but also to make use of our advice and assistance." If so, "you and I can get together and discuss how we will fight this battle out in Milan. Of course it is by no means sure that we will win." The problem was Muggeridge. Josselson confided to Hook, "Malcolm is strongly in favor of Dwight, and as you know he is also responsible for British financial contributions to the magazine. I am not at all sure that Malcolm will accept the idea of Irving staying on."³⁸

By Milan, Josselson was coming to reluctant terms with the fact that there were too many certain votes on the Executive Committee to avoid Macdonald's appointment entirely.³⁹ The situation was at an impasse. "Wranglings went on for days and nights and nights and nights before we could arrive at the compromise solution which was acceptable to everyone here," Josselson wearily recounted. Keeping Kristol for two more years and adding Macdonald for a year, was, Josselson felt, the best that could be negotiated. "Dwight Macdonald is quite happy about it," he told Muggeridge, "and Irving has received such a heavy dose of frank treatment bordering on brutality that a salutary change in his attitude can be expected."⁴⁰

Thereafter, Kristol still aggravated Josselson; their correspondence was as uncomprehending as ever. ("I don't know where you draw the line between editorial criticism and issues of principle," Josselson complained, adding, "I would not bite your head off if you would not stick your neck out."⁴¹) Josselson still pushed on Asia – "I would like to know what progress, if any, you have made in securing some articles by Asian writers for the next few issues" was a perennial refrain – but was content with modest headway in circulation.⁴² At Muggeridge's suggestion, "Tri-Editorial Meetings" with the editors of *Encounter*, *Preuves*, and *Der Monat* (now under Congress sponsorship) began; Josselson predictably asked Lasky to push for "a greater contribution, especially as far as *Encounter* is concerned, from Asian writers."⁴³

Matters improved. Complaints from the New York old guard continued, but Kristol now considered them out of touch.⁴⁴ Spender and Kristol mended fences.⁴⁵ "Things are going quite well so far in London and I can assure you that I shall do whatever I can to keep them that way," Josselson told Bell, "though I sometimes feel that Irving will change his ways when shrimp learn to whistle."⁴⁶

Nancy Mitford's tongue-in-cheek "U and Non-U," a survey of "upper-class" and "lower-class" English usages, became a sensation and netted hundreds of new *Encounter* subscribers. "There is no likelihood at present that Mr. Irving Kristol will go home," reported the *Manchester Guardian*. "Mr. Spender says he will not change horses in the middle of such a successful stream." Kristol would stay on another three years, until he was offered the editorship of *The Reporter* in New York.⁴⁷

Even Macdonald was not as difficult as Josselson expected. To be sure, Macdonald's first submission, "No Miracle at Milan," devoted as many words to mocking the luxurious hotels and superficial differences between Western and Asian delegates as to discussing the debates. But protests from Herb Passin, the Congress's Asia expert – "you sound as if you consider only Westerners capable of understanding the subtleties and complexities of the problems of freedom" – convinced Macdonald to accept severe edits.⁴⁸ Shils's laudatory account of Milan ran in the meantime, and Macdonald's piece was seen as "amusing and trivial," Kristol reassured Josselson.⁴⁹

Indeed, rather than acting as a provocateur, Macdonald was uncharacteristically silent at *Encounter*, and professed to suffering from a severe case of writer's block after having written over 500,000 words at the *New Yorker* the previous year.⁵⁰ Spender later accused him of "treat[ing] your *Encounter* year as a sabbatical, doing work for us so strikingly inferior to what you do for the *New Yorker* that it would have seemed almost contemptuous, had we not all made the sympathetic effort to understand that after all you were bound to treat your year in London as a holiday."⁵¹ Josselson grouched, "By our standards, we paid him a lot of money, for which he did not produce a single first-rate article."⁵² Still, disaster was seemingly avoided. As Macdonald's London idyll drew to a close, he thanked Josselson profusely for a happy year, promising fifteen pages of his next submission gratis.⁵³

"We are an unhappy people, a people without style, without a sense of what is and what is not humanly satisfying," began Macdonald's submission to his former co-editors in February 1958. "There is a terrible *shapelessness* about American life. These prosperous Americans look more tense and joyless than the people in the poorest quarters of Florence. . . . Why is this?" Macdonald ticked off his reasons. The British and Italians had superlative manners; "our manners are either bad or non-existent." Italians were "excitable and passionate" but harmless; the *New York Times* crime report listed numerous child rapes, assaults, and murders committed for fame alone. (Macdonald added: "It's true I live in New York, where there are many Negroes and Puerto Ricans whose crime rate, for understandable reasons, is exceptionally high" – but numerous "'good Anglo-Saxon names'" committed crimes too). Europe venerated individual taste; the "really awful thing" about Americans was that they actually *liked* what "650 taste-makers produce." Europe's rigid class system, with "each person differentiated by status and function," guaranteed "an orderly social structure," while American equality of opportunity bred a national ethos of "I've got mine and screw you Jack."

Macdonald then castigated America's "post-1945 imperial role" – for lacking its predecessors' swagger. "When we come into contact with other peoples," Macdonald charged, "we don't impress them." America was imperialism's milquetoast, "gross and sentimental, immature and tough, uncultivated and hypocritical." Britain and France had done better – they "weren't popular with their wards" (this, in light of the bloody, recently ended Mau Mau uprising, was quite an understatement) – but "they weren't laughed at." And "even the Soviet Russians, for all their ruthlessness ... seem to speak a more common language with other peoples than we do." America embodied what was to Macdonald the one unforgivable sin of empire: a "lack of style."

The *coup de grâce* was Macdonald's take on Eugene Kinkead's recent *New Yorker* piece on Korean War POWs, which Macdonald said was full of "disturbing data on the American way of life." An alarmingly high percentage of American POWs died in the Korean War, Macdonald claimed, because their "defective sense of community" led them to collaborate with the enemy and lose their will to survive. Their Turkish cellmates, whose strong national identity was a source of inner strength, resisted, and lived to see the end of the war. (He overlooked another reason the Turks found it easy to resist collaboration: none of their captors spoke Turkish.⁵⁴) Americans, Macdonald concluded, were so lacking in national character that they would obey "the latest effective authority" – even if Communist.⁵⁵

Spender, the first to read "America! America!," praised it extravagantly.⁵⁶ Kristol was lukewarm, but felt "there are an awful lot of good things in it." The piece was scheduled for May.⁵⁷ Then Spender showed it to Nabokov, who reacted strongly. The piece, Nabokov felt, would be read as a universal comment on America versus Europe based on skewed and unqualified comparisons. Spender reread it, saw the point, and sent off a hurried request for a rewrite before decamping for Tokyo. In light of Nabokov's views, Spender explained to Macdonald, he now felt "[i]t is not enough to distinguish America from Europe by producing a rag-bag of American statistics."⁵⁸ Macdonald refused, arguing that the editors had already accepted the piece and that belated consultations with "General Secretary and Grand Master of International Decorum Nicolas Nabokov" were no way to run a magazine.⁵⁹

As Macdonald's reply made its way across the Atlantic, Kristol consulted Josselson about a further response. "Nicolas was terribly mad because his appearance before the Ford and Rockefeller Foundations in New York would have coincided with the publication of Dwight's piece," Josselson told Kristol.⁶⁰ Neither Josselson nor Kristol wanted the section on Korean War POWs, but Josselson apparently had no quarrel with the rest.⁶¹ Kristol's follow-up to Macdonald attributed Nabokov's "over-reaction" to his imminent fundraising trip. After further discussion with Josselson, he wrote, they felt Macdonald's "unhealthily self-lacerating" piece should run – so Kristol made a counter-offer: "we publish the piece as is, except that we end it with the item about Sherman Adams and his 'cultural conference'" – i.e., before the discussion of Korean War POWs. "It is at this point in the piece that one feels enough is enough, and anything more becomes 'self-hatred.'" ⁶²

Macdonald agreed – “I feel like a man who kicks in a door only to find it was unlocked the whole time”⁶³ – and praised Josselson’s “delightful” view that “the only way to run a magazine is to print things the editors, rather than the fund-providers, like.”⁶⁴ So the matter seemed settled. Indeed, as of April 1958, *Tempo Presente*, the Congress’s Italian-language magazine, had already run “America! America!”⁶⁵ Even Josselson assumed the revised version would run in *Encounter*, though he took Macdonald’s effusive letter as an opportunity to impart some frank realities. “You must understand that Irving and Stephen must eat, that you must be paid for your articles, that ENCOUNTER must be able to say the things that it is best qualified to say without jeopardizing its future by saying things that can better be said elsewhere,” that “without tightrope acts by Nicolas and myself, ENCOUNTER and much else would cease to exist” – even if “you are very right about a great many things and we all know it.”⁶⁶

That might have been the end of it, except Macdonald’s new draft arrived with the offending section pared down but still intact. “You are, if I may so, as stubborn as a mule. I do wish you had omitted entirely the New Yorker thing about Korea,” Kristol wrote. “It does make a bad impression when an American, writing for an English publication, seems determined to say the worst about his own country” – and, “by the time one reaches the Korean episode, one feels slightly distressed by the whole performance. I do wish you would take my word over this . . . everyone in the office is of the same opinion.”⁶⁷ But Macdonald, “in affection but with undented armor of Missouri mulishness,” insisted, “It is exactly the note I want to end on – a note of major questioning of the US way of life.”⁶⁸

Kristol turned to Josselson for advice. “Ought we to keep pressing him . . . or can the present version pass? I myself think it can pass, but should like your opinion . . . I must know before the end of next week, whether we are going to use it in our next issue.”⁶⁹

What Josselson thought was that “I really cannot understand how Kristol’s mind works,” since “Macdonald has brushed his piece up stylistically but has made it even worse politically. It is the most blatant anti-American piece I have ever read and belongs in *Literaturnaya Gazeta*,” he told Hunt. “Please don’t lose the galleys. Dwight will probably raise a stink and attack us publicly but I am ready to face it.”⁷⁰

Kristol relayed the news to Macdonald, explaining:

We’re not going to use your piece after all, it having been decided that, in view of the current negotiations for Foundation support, it would be highly inadvisable, and perhaps even fatal to the continued existence of the magazine itself – the Foundations not being much interested in having Europeans and Asians think worse of America than they already do.

Moreover, “Stephen and I would not be living up to our responsibilities to the sponsors if we placed *Encounter* itself in jeopardy, on an issue on which – to be candid – we do not have strong feelings.” Kristol concluded: “We have treated

you too shamefully for apologies to act as anything but irritants. All we can do is throw ourselves on your mercy, not expecting much.”⁷¹

Kristol’s approach was possibly the wrong tack to take with a man who observed of himself, “I can work up a moral indignation quicker than a fat tennis player can work up a sweat.”⁷² It was certainly the wrong tack to take with a man who had just finished an “unauthorized biography” of the Ford Foundation – one of the donors Kristol now wished not to offend – that cast Ford’s “philanthropoids” as the harbingers of dull and corporatized intellectual inquiry.⁷³

Macdonald penned a furious reply – “Those Paris boys! You’d think the USA was Venezuela, such touchy national pride” – thought better of it, and submitted “America! America!” to *Dissent* with a new preface.⁷⁴ *Encounter*’s editors had accepted the piece, wavered, then “definitively rejected it,” Macdonald informed *Dissent*’s readers, because “the people in Paris felt that the Letter was exaggerated, one-sided, unfounded, and in bad taste, and they feared it might cause American foundations to cut off supplies.”⁷⁵

The ensuing storm surprised even Macdonald. American sociologist Norman Birnbaum wrote an open letter to the Congress in the *Universities and Left Review*. Axing Macdonald’s piece, he charged, revealed the Congress’s “Stalinist view of the truth.”⁷⁶ (“I myself find it difficult to believe that the defense of the west is in good hands,” he told Macdonald, “when these consist of those New York Jews whose devotion to America is matched only by their conspicuous want of all the American virtues, aided by that section of the British intelligentsia – a large one, I fear – recruited from boys who weren’t good at rugby at boarding school.”⁷⁷)

After months of recriminatory letters, all the principals wanted a cease-fire. Birnbaum apologized. Nabokov, then Kristol and Spender, publicly defended themselves.⁷⁸ Spender was particularly eager to stop the embarrassing back-and-forths.⁷⁹ Josselson somewhat disingenuously asked Kristol, who had just left for *The Reporter*, to push back against the notion that the piece had been axed over foundation support – “I don’t know how [Dwight] ever got that idea.”⁸⁰

Even Macdonald had come to regret his preface: “Irving has convinced me, as have your letters, that I have no basis for charging that it was a case of the Paris office insisting over the opposition of the editors of *Encounter*,” he told Spender, and “that the final decision was yours and not Josselson-Nabokov’s.” Still, he felt “it was the fear of losing American foundation support that was mainly operative,” not “literary-journalistic” judgment. “That is, it was the ‘anti-American’ slant that caused the trouble.”⁸¹

In the end, Macdonald’s suspicions were partially correct. “America! America!” was axed because Nabokov and Josselson objected to the piece’s virulently anti-American *ad hominem*s. And their motivation was indeed to keep American foundation support – but the situation was far more delicate than Macdonald realized. The Farfield Foundation was a CIA front, not a real foundation. But Nabokov’s impending meetings with the Ford and Rockefeller Foundations were real enough, as was the worry that “America! America” – and especially Macdonald’s section on Korean War POWs – would doom further funding.

These foundations genuinely had little interest in projects that could be construed as anti-American.⁸² Angry congressmen had already held hearings to probe whether the Ford Foundation was frittering Henry Ford's great American fortune on socialist causes. Ford's institutional agenda favored the safer territory of behavioralist studies. To cautious administrators, supporting an organization whose seminal magazine validated the theory that Korean War POWs capitulated to their captors because of a deep-seated malaise among the American people was the equivalent of waving a red flag in front of a congressional bull. Nor was the Ford Foundation likely to miss an article by the man who had written that its "philanthropoid" employees "would deal with the problem of a man trapped in a burning building by subsidizing a study of combustion."⁸³ Or so Josselson likely feared.

The Ford Foundation's displeasure with the Congress would have also brought far worse ramifications than Josselson could acknowledge to his colleagues in the Congress. Ford's support for the Congress was quite recent. Its \$500,000 grant to the Congress in 1957 for a series of seminars, conferences, and study groups on the "Problems of Progress" was its biggest donation to date, after many unsuccessful attempts by Josselson and others.⁸⁴ And alienating the Ford Foundation would have destroyed Josselson's cherished hope of transitioning the Congress away from CIA money. Josselson knew full well the risks of angering Macdonald. But, for Josselson, the prospect of losing the ability to safeguard the Congress made even the price of an ugly public spat over *Encounter's* integrity worth it.

Perhaps most critically, Josselson was able to persuade Spender and Kristol to axe "America! America!" because neither of them particularly wanted to publish the piece. Had either of them fought for it, Josselson would have had far greater difficulties. But Spender invited the Paris office's involvement by showing Nabokov the piece in the first place. And Spender's newfound objections after hearing Nabokov's reaction were the bashful admissions of an editor whose cursory initial skim prevented him from appreciating how vulnerable "America! America!" was to substantive criticism. "I also feel ashamed that I first liked your article uncritically and then had second thoughts when Nicolas got upset," he told Macdonald, but "the value of the thoughts depend on whether they are true."⁸⁵

Kristol, on the other hand, was unenthusiastic from the start, and wanted an easy out. Even Macdonald felt "Irving never liked the piece, would have rejected it but for Stephen."⁸⁶ Kristol was already negotiating his departure from *Encounter*. He believed that flat-out rejecting Macdonald's work on the merits was impossible given that Macdonald was a former editor. He knew Spender, Nabokov, and Josselson all had objections. His co-editor was off in Tokyo. And Macdonald had no intention of complying with the compromise of keeping all but the Korean War POWs section. Macdonald's refusal to make the edits he promised put Kristol in a difficult position. He delegated the final decision to Josselson because he wanted cover – not because *Encounter's* editors were capitulating to an unwelcome mandate.



Figure 15.1 Stephen Spender, one of *Encounter's* two founding editors, sent this photograph of himself to Josselson “with affection and gratitude” in 1960 (reproduced with permission of Jennifer Josselson Vorbach).

For the next nine years, the Congress was spared further controversy. Macdonald, back in America, became a noted film critic and felt fondly enough toward the Congress to ask Josselson about a job for his son.⁸⁷ Kristol settled in at *The Reporter*, found that publisher Max Ascoli “was as difficult as reports would have it,” and left for Basic Books after a year. He went on to found *The Public Interest* with Bell – Josselson’s short-lived, now-wealthy assistant, Warren Manshel, put up the seed money – and eventually became neoconservatism’s founding father.⁸⁸

Josselson soon found a perfect American replacement: Melvin Lasky, who came to *Encounter* in 1958 and never left. Josselson considered his old friend's arrival "probably the best thing that could happen to us."⁸⁹ Critics reported that, while *Encounter*'s early years displayed "a marked anti-Communist temper . . . it is still less noticeable now that communism, both internally and internationally, is in a less desperate stage."⁹⁰ *Encounter* became the house organ of the British Labour revisionists. Circulation climbed to 40,000. Lasky became acclimated to the British literary establishment, but never got along with Spender, whom Josselson advised to "revert to 'smoothing things over,' or, if you prefer, helping straighten out major differences."⁹¹ Spender found a solution, spending much of the year on guest lectureships and visiting far-flung locations on the Congress's behalf.⁹²

In late 1960, Josselson left for semi-retirement in Geneva after another serious heart attack. Hunt was left managing the Congress, though the two spoke incessantly.⁹³ By then, the Congress far exceeded what Josselson and Lasky had imagined a decade before. The Congress's magazines now reached virtually every corner of the globe, and in every major language. The rightness of its early stance against Communism was, after the Hungarian Revolution, undoubted; even Sartre broke with the Party.⁹⁴

Still, everything thereafter had a valedictory air. Now that the Congress had declared victory over Communism as an idea, the Soviet Union was merely a repressive regime like many others, not a regime whose ability to inspire faith in a revolutionary project made it qualitatively different. None of the ideas proposed after Milan – the problems of post-industrial mass society; the search for permanent, universally enduring values; issues of development in Asia and Africa – gained much traction.⁹⁵ Seminars on such subjects as "Industrial Society and Western Political Dialogue" and "Constitutionalism in Asia" attracted prominent names, but with a diminishing sense of cohesion.⁹⁶ In 1962, Nabokov, who no longer felt attached to the Congress's burgeoning programs, quietly reduced his role and effectively ceded the position of Secretary-General.⁹⁷ But Nabokov's replacement, the French writer Pierre Emmanuel, worried that "the Congress is an old and outmoded body that requires rejuvenation," and that "the heyday of the engagé intellectual has passed."⁹⁸

If any idea bound the Congress together, it was an abstract faith in the value of intellectual dialogue. In the immediate postwar years, European intellectuals like Spender, de Rougemont, and Chiaromonte had stressed the stagnancy of European intellectual life and the need to engage with American counterparts to revitalize both sides. Lasky founded *Der Monat* as homage to T.S. Eliot's belief that the cross-fertilization of ideas across national boundaries required transnational magazines. Now, the Congress fulfilled this ideal by "bring[ing] individuals so committed into contact with and awareness of each other," Shils reflected. By removing feelings of isolation and forging a community, intellectuals' "convictions could be reinforced; their susceptibility to Communist and fellow-traveling deception could be reduced."⁹⁹ As intellectuals flocked to universities and segregated themselves within specialized disciplines, the Congress seemed essential to preserving a common culture and identity.

Of course, these descriptions of the Congress's ultimate significance were also reassuring to the intellectuals most involved in it. To believe that the sustained exchange of ideas would lead European intellectuals out of their postwar torpor was to believe that Western culture was something that could be stimulated and saved. And, for many within the Congress, the traditions of the Enlightenment, when transnational magazines were so effective in spreading its values, were the ultimate touchstone. The Congress, under this view, continued that tradition and allowed intellectuals to redeem themselves for their disastrous support for Communism by resuming their perceived role in preserving traditional cultural values – even if those values were abstract and undefined.

Not everyone was a true believer. Some were drawn by the promise of all-expenses-paid travel on the Congress's dime. And many, especially in the Congress's later years, stayed out of loyalty to Josselson. "[I]t is no exaggeration to say that it was regard for you and appreciation of the work you were doing that helped to keep many of us from getting absorbed in other activities and drifting away from the Congress," Minoos Masani told Josselson.¹⁰⁰

Notes

- 1 Dwight Macdonald, "America! America!" *Dissent* 5 (September 1958), p. 313.
- 2 Dwight Macdonald to Dinsmore Wheeler, October 17, 1929, in Michael Wreszin (ed.), *A Moral Temper: The Letters of Dwight Macdonald* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2001), p. 37.
- 3 Michael Wreszin, *A Rebel in Defense of Tradition: The Life and Politics of Dwight Macdonald* (London: Basic Books, 1994), p. 237.
- 4 Daniel Bell, *The End of Ideology: On the Exhaustion of Political Ideas in the Fifties*, new edn (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), p. 306.
- 5 Wreszin, *Rebel in Defense of Tradition*, pp. 30–59, 113.
- 6 Bell, *End of Ideology*, pp. 305–6.
- 7 Wreszin, *Rebel in Defense of Tradition*, pp. 120–73.
- 8 Arthur Schlesinger Jr. to Nicolas Nabokov, February 27, 1955, Folder 2, Box 187, Series II, International Association for Cultural Freedom (Congress for Cultural Freedom) Papers, Regenstein Library, University of Chicago, Chicago, Illinois ("CCF").
- 9 Alan Wald, *The New York Intellectuals: The Rise and Decline of the Anti-Stalinist Left from the 1930s to the 1980s* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1987), pp. 210–18; Bell, *End of Ideology*, pp. 307–8.
- 10 Louis Menand, "Browbeaten: Dwight Macdonald's War on Midcult," *New Yorker* (September 5, 2011).
- 11 Dwight Macdonald, "The Triumph of the Fact," in John Summers (ed.), *Masscult and Midcult: Essays against the American Grain by Dwight Macdonald* (New York: New York Review of Books, 2011), p. 210.
- 12 Nicolas Nabokov to Arthur Schlesinger, February 7, 1955, Folder 2, Box 187, Series II, CCF.
- 13 Malcolm Muggeridge to Michael Josselson, August 25, 1955, Folder 2, Box 243, Series II, CCF.
- 14 Irving Kristol, "Memoirs of a Cold Warrior," in *Reflections of a Neoconservative: Looking Back, Looking Ahead* (New York: Basic Books, 1983), p. 18.
- 15 Nabokov to Schlesinger, February 7, 1955.
- 16 Stephen Spender to Michael Josselson, March 30, 1955, Folder 10, Box 294, Series II, CCF.

- 17 Stephen Spender to Dwight Macdonald, May 27, 1955, Folder 205, Box 50, Dwight Macdonald Papers, Sterling Library, Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut ("DM").
- 18 Dwight Macdonald to Stephen Spender, June 2, 1955, Folder 10, Box 294, Series II, CCF.
- 19 Daniel Bell interview, Cambridge, Massachusetts, July 20, 2006; Nicolas Nabokov to Michael Josselson, June 7, 1955, Folder 6, Box 4, Series I, CCF (relaying Kristol's views on Macdonald).
- 20 Dwight Macdonald to Stephen Spender, June 2, 1955, Folder 10, Box 294, Series II, CCF.
- 21 Stephen Spender to Sidney Hook, June 5, 1955, Folder 5, Box 124, Sidney Hook Papers, Hoover Institution, Stanford University, Stanford, California ("SH").
- 22 Sidney Hook to Michael Josselson, June 13, 1955, Folder 5, Box 124, SH.
- 23 Michael Josselson to Nicolas Nabokov, June 23, 1955, Folder 2, Box 187, Series II, CCF.
- 24 Dwight Macdonald to Stephen Spender, June 20, 1955, Folder 205, Box 50, DM.
- 25 Michael Josselson to Nicolas Nabokov, June 27, 1955, Folder 2, Box 187, Series II, CCF.
- 26 Michael Josselson cable to Stephen Spender and Malcolm Muggeridge, June 25, 1955, Folder 2, Box 187, Series II, CCF.
- 27 Stephen Spender and Malcolm Muggeridge cable to Michael Josselson, June 26, 1955, Folder 2, Box 187, Series II, CCF.
- 28 Josselson to Hook, August 19, 1955, Folder 1, Box 131, SH.
- 29 Kristol to Hook, June 17, 1955, Folder 14, Box 18, SH.
- 30 Michael Josselson to Sidney Hook, August 19, 1955, Folder 1, Box 131, SH.
- 31 Stephen Spender to Michael Josselson, July 10, 1955, Folder 10, Box 294, Series II, CCF.
- 32 Malcolm Muggeridge to Michael Josselson, August 25, 1955, Folder 2, Box 243, Series II, CCF.
- 33 Melvin Lasky to Michael Josselson, July 18, 1955, Folder 5, Box 241, Series II, CCF.
- 34 Sol Levitas to Irving Brown, July 11, 1955, Folder 28, Box 18, Irving Brown Files, George Meany Memorial Archive, National Labor College, Silver Spring, Maryland ("IB").
- 35 Sidney Hook to Michael Josselson, August 14, 1955, Folder 6, Box 135, Series II, CCF.
- 36 Nabokov to Macdonald, July 19, 1955, Folder 15, Box 223, Series II, CCF; see also Nicolas Nabokov to Malcolm Muggeridge, July 20, 1955, Folder 2, Box 243, Series II, CCF.
- 37 Irving Kristol to Sidney Hook, August 15, 1955, Folder 1, Box 131, SH.
- 38 Josselson to Hook, August 19, 1955, Folder 1, Box 131, SH.
- 39 Irving Kristol to Sidney Hook, Aug. 26, 1955, Folder 1, Box 131, SH (counting Executive Committee members who wanted Macdonald).
- 40 Michael Josselson to Malcolm Muggeridge, September 19, 1955, Folder 6, Box 4, Series I; Executive Committee minutes, September 17, 1955 (Milan), Folder 1, Box 4, Series I, both in CCF.
- 41 Michael Josselson to Irving Kristol, December 10, 1955, Folder 6, Box 4, Series I, CCF.
- 42 Michael Josselson to "Stephen and Irving," December 6, 1955, Folder 6, Box 4, Series I, CCF.
- 43 Michael Josselson to Melvin Lasky, March 14, 1955, Folder 5, Box 241, Series II, CCF.
- 44 Irving Kristol to Bertram Wolfe, No. 21, 1955, Folder 31, Box 9, Bertram Wolfe Papers, Hoover Institution, Stanford University, Stanford, California ("BW").

- 45 Irving Kristol to Michael Josselson, September 22, 1955, Folder 4, Box 95, Series II, CCF.
- 46 Michael Josselson to Daniel Bell, October 29, 1955, Folder 2, Box 4, Series I, CCF.
- 47 Irving Kristol to Michael Josselson, October 24, 1955, Folder 4, Box 95, Series II, CCF (enclosing *Manchester Guardian* clipping).
- 48 Herb Passin to Dwight Macdonald, October 1955, Folder 691, Box 26, DM; Kristol to Macdonald, October 7, 1955, Folder 691, Box 26, DM; Spender to Macdonald, October 10, 1955, Folder 276, Box 12, DM; Dwight Macdonald to Stephen Spender, October 18, 1955, Folder 15, Box 223, Series II, CCF.
- 49 Irving Kristol to Michael Josselson, December 8, 1955, Folder 4, Box 95, Series I, CCF.
- 50 Dwight Macdonald to Michael Josselson, June 26, 1957, Folder 276, Box 12, DM.
- 51 Stephen Spender to Dwight Macdonald, November 25, 1958, Folder 3, Box 295, Series II, CCF.
- 52 Michael Josselson to Irving Kristol, October 31, 1958, Folder 7, Box 22, Michael Josselson Papers, Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, University of Texas-Austin, Austin, Texas ("MJ").
- 53 Dwight Macdonald to Michael Josselson, June 26, 1957, Folder 276, Box 12, DM.
- 54 See, e.g., Albert Biderman, *March to Calumny: The Story of American POWs in the Korean War* (London: Macmillan, 1963).
- 55 Macdonald, "America! America!," pp. 313–23.
- 56 Dwight Macdonald note, n.d. Folder 376, Box 15, DM (stating Spender's original reaction).
- 57 Irving Kristol to Dwight Macdonald, February 18, 1958, Folder 376, Box 15, DM.
- 58 Stephen Spender to Dwight Macdonald, April 11, 1958, Folder 376, Box 15, DM.
- 59 Dwight Macdonald to "Stephenirvingnicolasmike or whoever's around and decides things," April 16, 1958, Folder 376, Box 15, DM.
- 60 Michael Josselson to Irving Kristol, October 31, 1958, Folder 7, Box 22, MJ.
- 61 Irving Kristol to Michael Josselson, April 15, 1958, Folder 3, Box 96, Series I, CCF. Only Kristol's side of the correspondence survives.
- 62 Irving Kristol to Dwight Macdonald, April 17, 1958, Folder 376, Box 15, DM.
- 63 Dwight Macdonald to Irving Kristol, April 21, 1958, Folder 376, Box 15, DM.
- 64 Dwight Macdonald to Michael Josselson, April 21, 1958, Folder 5, Box 22, MJ.
- 65 Nicola Chiaromonte to Dwight Macdonald, May 8, 1958, Folder 376, Box 15, DM.
- 66 Michael Josselson to Dwight Macdonald, April 28, 1958, Folder 376, Box 15, DM.
- 67 Irving Kristol to Dwight Macdonald, May 19, 1958, Folder 376, Box 15, DM.
- 68 Dwight Macdonald to Irving Kristol, May 21, 1958, Folder 376, Box 15, DM.
- 69 Irving Kristol to Michael Josselson, May 22, 1958, Folder 3, Box 96, Series II, CCF.
- 70 Michael Josselson to John Hunt, May 27, 1958, Folder 7, Box 22, MJ.
- 71 Irving Kristol to Dwight Macdonald, June 12, 1958, Folder 376, Box 15, DM.
- 72 Dwight Macdonald to Dinsmore Wheeler, October 17, 1929, in *A Moral Temper*, p. 37.
- 73 Dwight Macdonald, *The Ford Foundation: The Men and the Millions, An Unauthorized Biography* (New York: Reynal & Company, 1956).
- 74 Dwight Macdonald to Irving Kristol, June 24, 1958, Folder 376, Box 15, DM.
- 75 Macdonald, "America! America!" p. 313 (introductory remarks).
- 76 Norman Birnbaum, "An Open Letter to the Congress for Cultural Freedom," *Universities and Left Review*, November 1958, Folder 377, Box 15, DM.
- 77 Norman Birnbaum to Dwight Macdonald, January 10, 1959, Folder 376, Box 15, DM.
- 78 Melvin Lasky to Michael Josselson, January 10, 1959; Stephen Spender and Irving Kristol to Editor, *Universities and Left Review*, January 9, 1959, both in Folder 7, Box 96, Series II, CCF.
- 79 Stephen Spender to Michael Josselson, December 11, 1958, Folder 3, Box 295, Series II, CCF.

- 80 Michael Josselson to Irving Kristol, October 31, 1958, Folder 7, Box 22, MJ.
- 81 Dwight Macdonald to Stephen Spender, January 7, 1959, Folder 377, Box 15, DM.
- 82 Ron Robin, *The Making of the Cold War Enemy: Culture and Politics in the Military-Industrial Complex* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), pp. 34–6; Macdonald, *Ford Foundation*, pp. 5, 26–32.
- 83 Dwight Macdonald, “Foundation: The Philanthropoids, Part III,” *New Yorker* (December 10, 1955), p. 68.
- 84 Michael Josselson to Stephen Spender, October 17, 1957, Folder 2, Box 295, Series II, CCF.
- 85 Stephen Spender to Dwight Macdonald, April 11, 1958, Folder 376, Box 15, DM.
- 86 Dwight Macdonald, note, n.d., Folder 376, Box 15, DM.
- 87 Dwight Macdonald to Michael Josselson, November 9, 1964, Folder 276, Box 12, DM.
- 88 Irving Kristol, “An Autobiographical Memoir” (1995), in *The Neoconservative Persuasion: Selected Essays, 1942–2009* (New York: Basic Books, 2011), pp. 337–9.
- 89 Michael Josselson to Sidney Hook, July 22, 1958, Folder 8, Box 135, Series II, CCF.
- 90 “An Encounter with Narcissus,” *Guardian* (December 15, 1961).
- 91 Michael Josselson to Stephen Spender, November 2, 1962, Folder 7, Box 25, MJ.
- 92 John Sutherland, *Stephen Spender: The Authorized Biography* (London: Viking, 2004), pp. 376–7, 412–13.
- 93 John Hunt interview, June 9–10, 2007, Lyon, France.
- 94 Peter Coleman, *The Liberal Conspiracy: The Congress for Cultural Freedom and the Struggle for the Mind of Postwar Europe* (New York: Free Press, 1989), pp. 134–7, 243–4.
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- 100 Minoo Masani to Michael Josselson, December 3, 1967, Folder 4, Box 26, MJ.

16 The 1967 scandal

In 1967, when proof of the CIA's secret involvement with the Congress finally emerged, America was a country divided, and the Cold War had devolved into a series of drawn-out, peripheral conflicts. Twelve years into Vietnam, many Americans had turned against a war they deemed unwinnable.¹

The New Left – defined by sociologist C. Wright Mills as an intelligentsia committed to becoming “a possible, immediate, radical agency of change” to effect a utopian transformation of society – was ascendant.² Students at the University of Maryland and Williams College blocked rooms assigned to CIA recruiters. Oberlin undergraduates trapped a naval recruiter in his car for four hours.³ In the *New York Review of Books*, Noam Chomsky blamed the old-guard intellectual elite – Schlesinger, Kristol, and Bell – for “feigned naïveté about American actions” in Vietnam and for propagating the “self-serving” consensus that “intellectuals in the West . . . have lost interest in converting ideas into social levers for the radical transformation of society.”⁴

American society seemed on the brink of upheaval. Mayors of major cities feared the summer would bring new outbreaks of rioting.⁵ In Geneva, Josselson despaired of the “problem . . . of remaining an American citizen in the face of the war in Vietnam.”⁶ The CIA, too, was a long way from its early, improvised days. It now had a staff of thousands, a budget of billions, and an outsized influence on foreign policy.⁷ On President Johnson's instructions, the CIA was surveilling student movements and civil rights groups, suspecting that the Communists might be sowing domestic unrest.⁸ The Agency had become the professionalized bureaucracy DCI Walter Bedell Smith had hoped, but the public glow of the early Dulles years had faded. Dulles himself was long gone, fired over the Bay of Pigs disaster. Frank Wisner was dead. His firsthand view of refugees fleeing the Hungarian Revolution across the Austrian border, America doing nothing to save them, devastated him, and he fell into ever-worse depressions.

Only Cord Meyer was still at the Agency, and he now headed an expanded Covert Action staff that had swallowed the old International Organizations Division. He adamantly supported the Vietnam War and believed antiwar protesters were subverting the national interest. And the intervening years had been devastating for him personally. His nine-year-old son had died after a car hit him; his

marriage had ended months later, and his former wife, one of President Kennedy's mistresses, was murdered while jogging through Rock Creek Park.⁹

When *Ramparts* magazine – the mouthpiece of the young, radical left – produced incontrovertible evidence that the CIA had long been financing students, intellectuals, and other groups as part of its Cold War efforts, the story went off like a grenade.¹⁰ It “was like the Port Huron Statement. It had that kind of power,” journalist David Weir recalled.¹¹ “The Congress for Cultural Freedom and the magazine *Encounter*,” Mills wrote in his “Letter to the New Left,” originated the “wearied discourse” of the old guard; the “end of ideology” was the “know-it-all justification ... of the cultural and political default of the NATO intellectuals.”¹² That the Congress and the American government were even closer than imagined seemed the ultimate proof to the New Left that the intellectual establishment was as morally bankrupt as alleged.¹³

Ramparts' circulation hit nearly 230,000 – six times that of *Encounter*.¹⁴ The ensuing months brought “one of the worst operational catastrophes in CIA history,” according to an in-house historian.¹⁵ The Congress reeled. For Josselson, it was a “witch-hunt.”¹⁶ At its worst, he was so overwrought that his wife took over his correspondence, confessing “his day-and-night continuous battle under constant strain, trying to save what he can of the Congress's work in some form or another has me in a state of perpetual worry.”¹⁷

The most startling aspect of the 1967 scandal is how easily it might have been avoided. Since the 1950s, the CIA knew its front foundations were vulnerable. By 1964, the CIA and Josselson considered disclosure inevitable, and, by 1966, they knew it was imminent. The high price they paid in the 1967 scandal had as much to do with their miscalculations as with the heated political climate.

Meyer and future DCI Richard Helms had discussed the vulnerabilities of front foundation financing for years: because all fronts gave varying amounts to all CIA-sponsored organizations, if one fell, the rest would follow.¹⁸ At various points during the 1950s, Agency leadership agreed to transition the operations in the International Organizations Division to “open funding from private organizations and perhaps some semi-official government sources,” but repeatedly put it off in the face of more pressing crises.¹⁹ Had a junior CIA legislative counsel not ignored a cantankerous seventy-eight-year-old congressman, these vulnerabilities might have remained dormant. Had a young activist retained his job with the National Students Association, the revelations might have come later, or at least in a more sympathetic forum. Had Josselson played his cards a bit differently, he might have remained at the Congress's helm.

Instead, in 1961, Texan Representative Wright Patman became convinced that American charitable foundations had been abusing their tax-exempt status.²⁰ His eponymous committee investigated. The first installment of their report, released in December 1962, alleged that these foundations were engaged in widespread tax evasion that the IRS had done little to uncover or prosecute. By the time hearings began in summer 1964, the Patman Committee had made public thousands of pages of foundations' finances.²¹

Patman had uncovered more than tax evasion. In a hearing, he pressed a senior IRS official to explain why the IRS “has taken no action on the Kaplan Fund for several years,” and whether “the fund’s operations with the CIA was the reason for the lack of action.” The official was silent. “Why,” Patman followed up, did “the CIA cho[o]se this fund to operate as a conduit for channeling funds”? The official demurred. Patman, irate, announced that an “assistant legislative counsel of the CIA” had “called on me” and “stated that the Kaplan Fund has been used as a conduit for channeling CIA funds, but he knew very little about it.” Patman had “considered it confidential,” he said, but the CIA had “promise[d] information which they never follow through with – then I feel that they are trifling with me and I no longer have any obligation to them.”²²

Duly chastened, the CIA rushed to brief him, and Patman soon announced, “The CIA does not belong in this foundation investigation.”²³ The *New York Times* gave the story a single paragraph. The *Nation* ran an editorial all but announcing the CIA was the Congress for Cultural Freedom’s sponsor.²⁴ Meyer belatedly tried to shore up the front foundations’ vulnerabilities and record-keeping.²⁵

But it was too late. Patman had publicly identified “the Borden Trust, the Price Fund, the Edsel Fund, the Beacon Fund and the Kentfield Fund” as the Kaplan Fund’s purported donors; they were as good as admitted CIA fronts.²⁶ CIA officers henceforth assumed that all of the Agency’s front foundations would unravel, and that the CIA’s covert financing of various private groups would come to light. The only unknowns were who would do it, how long it would take, and how bad it would get. Senior CIA officials ramped up efforts to ensure they knew about – and, with luck, defused – any bombshells before they went to press.²⁷

Josselson rushed to sever the Congress’s relationship with the Agency. *Encounter*, he believed, was already safe. Months before the Patman Committee leak, he had brokered a deal “to safeguard *Encounter* by divorcing it, at least formally, from the Congress” and turned it over to a trust backed by the *Daily Mirror* group. “[M]y concern has been all along to provide Mel with as much protection as possible,” he told Shils, “and I believe that by setting up the Trust and its Advisory Board we are providing him with a maximum of such protection.”²⁸ Josselson tied up other loose ends, cutting off support for *Kultura*, the Polish exile magazine loosely affiliated with the Congress, to mitigate repercussions behind the Iron Curtain.²⁹ He tried to assemble a “consortium of some of the Rockefellers, McCloy, maybe some of the Mellons” to finance a stopgap fund. But, while the Agency reluctantly gave their “blessing in principle to the separation,” the group never materialized.³⁰

When the *New York Times* ran five lengthy exposés of CIA covert operations in April 1966, the CIA was prepared. The *Times* had agreed that former DCI John McCone could review drafts and flag concerns before publication – but rejected McCone’s objections to the disclosure of the CIA’s connections to Radio Free Europe, the Congress for Cultural Freedom, and *Encounter*. The Agency knew what came next.³¹ On April 27, the Kaplan Fund reappeared in the *Times* as the confirmed recipient of \$400,000 of CIA funds in a single year.

“Through similar channels,” the story added, “the CIA has supported ... anti-Communist but liberal organizations such as the Congress for Cultural Freedom, and some of their newspapers and magazines” – including *Encounter*.³²

Josselson, too, was ready. “Mike and I felt that something had to be done at once to counteract this,” Hunt recalled. “I called Robert Oppenheimer,” who had been deeply involved in the Congress since 1959, “and said, I’m sure you’ve seen this, in the *New York Times*, Mike and I feel something must be done, we want to do the right thing, and we want to do it with you.” Oppenheimer told him to take the next plane, and, in Princeton, the two sat together talking it over. “It was collegial, and it was convivial. We were talking about a joint problem,” Hunt reflected. “So he said, okay, first thing we’ll do is write a short letter which will be signed by me, and a small group of friends” – George Kennan, John Kenneth Galbraith, and Arthur Schlesinger Jr., all of whom Oppenheimer promptly called. “He wasn’t in a sense of crisis,” Hunt reflected. “It was just a problem that needed handling.”³³

The ensuing letter to the *Times* addressed only whether “the Congress has been used by the CIA,” and answered: “We have no question regarding the independence of its policy, the integrity of its officials or the value of its contribution.”³⁴ Lasky, Spender, and Kristol added, in a joint letter to the editor, “We know of no ‘indirect’ benefactions.”³⁵ The *Times* backtracked. By July, Hunt was telling Meyer that “[l]ife seems somewhat steadier these days, though it’s probably just the relative calm between rounds. The negotiations [with the Ford Foundation] proceed, but how it will all eventually turn out is far from clear.”³⁶

“It is quite clear that all the old Stalinists and other frustrated self-styled ‘radicals’ will do all they can to exploit the *Times* allegations and attempt to discredit once and for all an organization and its journals that have been thorns in their own guilty conscience,” Josselson told a worried Spender.³⁷ Executive Committee members suggested that “even if it were ever proved that the CIA had contributed money to the Congress, this could not have affected a single word we have ever said or written about or for the Congress.”³⁸ Josselson prepared to fight. He stressed to Spender:

We have some tough times ahead of us, and regardless of whether some of the funds we have received over 16 years may or may not prove to have been ‘dirty,’ the main thing is that never has anyone ... been asked to do anything that was in the least incompatible with their and your own integrity.³⁹

In September 1966, Josselson’s efforts to separate the Congress from the CIA finally succeeded. The Ford Foundation approved a six-year, \$7 million grant on the condition that he and Hunt resign from the CIA.⁴⁰ Hunt recalled feeling “a kind of inner freedom; I was no longer spending most of each day worried about what if, with regard to what might be discovered, what might be disclosed, what would we do then.”⁴¹ Josselson declared it “a solid vote of confidence in both the past integrity and future program of the Congress.”⁴²

Their relief proved premature. “[A]fter all these years of worrying day and night . . . and working ceaselessly to try to get other funds and permit the Congress to be free of a connection with an unsavory reputation,” Josselson wrote, “how ironical that finally the scandal did break after I had at last accomplished that goal.”⁴³

Just as Josselson was finalizing the Congress’s break from the Agency, a young student activist was delivering an unexpected final blow. Back in late March 1966, Michael Wood, the National Student Association’s director of development, had met with Phil Sherburne, the organization’s president, for a heart-to-heart at a Washington steakhouse.

Wood – twenty-three, a member of the New Left Students for a Democratic Society, and head of the group’s fundraising efforts – was frustrated, and on the verge of resigning. Sherburne, a recent graduate of the University of Oregon and close friend, was desperate to dissuade him. Wood’s complaints about his colleagues’ mystifyingly blasé approach to fundraising, Sherburne confessed, had a simple explanation: they knew the CIA would channel hundreds of thousands of dollars through the Independence, San Jacinto, Rabb, and Brown Foundations regardless. Sherburne swore Wood to secrecy and told him he had resolved to cut financial ties to the Agency. Tense discussions ensued; the CIA made substantial budgetary cuts. Vice President Hubert Humphrey promised to help Sherburne raise private funds. But none worked out, and the board blamed Wood for losing the group’s foundation grants and fired him. Irate, he urged Sherburne to publicly announce the CIA funding. When that failed, Wood went to *Ramparts*.⁴⁴

An alarmed Sherburne warned his CIA contacts, but they failed to persuade Wood to stop cooperating with *Ramparts*.⁴⁵ By early 1967, the CIA was in crisis mode. Desmond Fitzgerald, then the head of CIA covert actions, told a subordinate “to try to discredit the *Ramparts* editors any way he could.”⁴⁶ Counterintelligence head James Angleton announced his suspicions that *Ramparts* was a Soviet-directed propaganda outlet.⁴⁷ The IRS prepared to audit *Ramparts*’s tax returns.⁴⁸ Others warned the White House, the State Department, and members of Congress.⁴⁹ President Johnson preemptively established the Katzenbach Committee to investigate the exposed operations and prohibited the CIA from providing “any covert financial assistance or support, direct or indirect” to private American organizations.⁵⁰

In early February 1967, *Ramparts* broke the details of the CIA’s relationship with the National Students Association by running full-page ads in the *New York Times* about its forthcoming “case study in the corruption of youthfully idealism.” The group admitted CIA financing the same day. The ensuing story traced the front foundations Wood had identified back to other organizations, including the Congress, “previously identified in The New York Times as having received CIA funds.”⁵¹ U.S. Congressmen professed outrage at the CIA’s “unconscionable extension of power . . . over institutions outside its jurisdiction” and deemed it “as much a threat to American as to foreign democratic institutions.”⁵²

Withering criticisms of the Congress followed.⁵³ Editor Jason Epstein wrote of his irritation “that the government seemed to be running an underground

gravy train whose first-class compartments were not always occupied by first-class passengers,” but instead by “intellectuals selected for their correct cold-war positions.”⁵⁴ At the other end of the political spectrum was James Burnham’s *National Review* editorial claiming vindication. The non-Communist left, he argued, had conclusively validated his oft-repeated warnings about its unreliability. The organizations exposed as CIA beneficiaries were the very same ones now “undermining the nation’s will and hampering or sabotaging the nation’s security.”⁵⁵

Worst of all were the recriminations resulting from Tom Braden’s early May feature in the *Saturday Evening Post*, “I’m Glad the CIA Is ‘Immoral.’” “The choice between innocence and power,” Braden wrote, “involves the most difficult of decisions. But when an adversary attacks with his weapon disguised as good works, to choose innocence is to choose defeat.” Those who held otherwise “must be naïve,” or “pretending to be naïve.”

Braden had always been inordinately proud of the operations he had overseen. Now he dropped bombshell after bombshell, skewing details in the process. He erroneously implied that he had started all the exposed CIA operations himself. He denounced the U.S. Congress as too unenlightened to understand the value of supporting the non-Communist Left. The Agency knew full well these operations would have been killed if discovered, he said; that was why it hid them. As for his division’s achievements, Braden boasted, “We had placed one agent in a Europe-based organization of intellectuals called the Congress for Cultural Freedom” – presumably Josselson. But Braden then charged, “Another agent became an editor of *Encounter*.”⁵⁶

Newspapers gave Braden’s piece front-page coverage.⁵⁷ Braden had spectacularly launched his new career, alienated his former boss and mentor Allen Dulles, who was reportedly “beside himself” – and had made it impossible to deny the extent of these operations.⁵⁸ “No one had called [Josselson] that word” – agent – “until your article – written by a friend, we thought! came out,” wrote a furious Diana Josselson. “Mike . . . battles ceaselessly to try to save the reputations of the fine and excellent men whom he has involved in the continually great achievements of his organization and who gave him their trust wholeheartedly – and now all has been shattered by a couple of careless phrases written by you.” As for the “agent” in *Encounter*, “your totally false statement clearly implicating Irving K., whom you apparently forgot was completely unwitting, or else, though the date context is wrong, Irving’s successor . . . has created a situation of chaos and personal suffering.” She begged for retractions. “[I]f ever there was a man who was a free agent, who answered only to the dictates of his own conscience, it was [Josselson].”⁵⁹

Braden did nothing. Kristol threatened to sue. In London, the scandal destroyed the already tense relations between *Encounter*’s co-editors; Spender and Lasky publicly turned on each other. For much of the spring, *Encounter* teetered on the verge of collapse. Lasky admitted *Encounter* had received CIA money and that he had known of it since 1963, but said “IF there were an agent planted in *Encounter*. . . it could only have been [Irving] Kristol or Spender.”⁶⁰

Spender pointed to Lasky. Josselson's last-ditch effort to persuade Lasky to "make a career change" fell on deaf ears.⁶¹

Spender resigned, leaving a trail of front-page stories in his wake and Lasky as *Encounter's* only remaining editor.⁶² Within months, Spender announced plans for a new magazine on English politics and culture – pointedly without American counterparts.⁶³ And, upon learning that Muggeridge had secretly arranged for MI6 to pay Spender's *Encounter* salary, Spender donated it to Indian famine relief.⁶⁴

In the meantime, members of the Congress's General Assembly – Minoò Masani, Raymond Aron, Daniel Bell, Edward Shils, Michael Polanyi, Manès Sperber, Ignazio Silone, and, from the Secretariat, President Denis de Rougemont and Secretary-General Nicolas Nabokov – prepared to meet in Paris on May 13.⁶⁵ They were to decide how to respond to the CIA financing revelations and whether Josselson and Hunt could remain. In Geneva, Josselson prepared his account, and hoped he might yet stay.

Despite everything, Josselson's odds of keeping his job looked strong. Polanyi appealed to the others "to ask for your support for saving Mike, the Congress, and our honor." He asked, "Supposing Mike accepted to serve the CIA after the war, and supposing that this was wrong, is it our practice to victimize those who have erred, so as to be free from any blame that may be cast upon them?" He concluded: "Are men like you or me, or like Ignazio Silone, going to declare, that in 15 years we did not notice that we were being manipulated to serve sinister purposes?"⁶⁶

Others voiced their support. "I do not know whether I have any vote in your proceedings," Spender wrote to Josselson, but "if I had I would use it to ask you and Hunt to continue to work for the Congress."⁶⁷ Bell's "strong feeling" was "that the Assembly should refuse to accept any resignations submitted by you and John. To do so would be to accept the import of the charges . . . that the Congress (and even the Ford Foundation) are agents of the CIA."⁶⁸ Josselson professed confidence. "I feel that no matter what Jason Epstein, Dwight, or Ramparts publish, the record of the Congress is such that it can withstand all manifestations of moral indignation, justified as some of them are," he told Spender.⁶⁹ Had Josselson stayed on in the end, he might have yet dissuaded many of the Congress's most prominent figures from resigning. But the stress was taking its toll.

On Saturday May 13, Josselson kept a quick appointment, then headed to the Congress's headquarters at 104 Boulevard Haussmann once more. Before fourteen colleagues and close friends, Josselson delivered his defense. As a "Cultural Affairs officer[]" in the American occupation government in Germany, he said, he was one of the progenitors of the Berlin Congress. In fall 1950, with his "tour of duty" over, he was mulling a career change. "When it was suggested to me that I should take on the task of creating a permanent organization . . . I willingly accepted." Only then, when no other sources of funds were forthcoming, did the CIA become involved. He was assured "there would be no interference on the part of the CIA with any of the activities" and that "the only condition which I

had to accept was that I was not to disclose to anyone the true source of the funds.” He claimed that “[f]rom the very beginning I have had two major objectives: to secure other funding for the Congress . . . and to protect all those associated with the Congress from any damage to their reputations which might result from a discovery of the CIA connection.”

Josselson then submitted his resignation, but added, “I shall be only too glad, if it is desired, to help the Congress get over the present difficulties.” And he begged the General Assembly to spare Hunt, who, he claimed, had only learned of the Congress’s financing “at a very late stage and as a result of my serious illness.”⁷⁰ The accounting only went so far. Josselson had no intention of revealing the CIA’s involvement in the Congress’s founding, or his and Hunt’s CIA employment. “It felt like a rather stormy trial,” Hunt recalled. “There were differing attitudes, and differing degrees of condemnation or non-condemnation.”⁷¹

The General Assembly began deliberations. Eight hours later, it was nowhere. Manès Sperber argued that if their critics wanted to capitalize on the scandal, they could take their best shot; meanwhile, the Congress could survive it, at least if Josselson stayed to guide it.⁷² Silone was withdrawn. And Aron was angry. Long criticized by his neutralist peers as a toady of American power, Aron had the most to lose, and left the meeting furious.⁷³ Late that night, they decided Josselson and Hunt could stay and planned an official statement for Monday.⁷⁴

The next morning, members of the General Assembly opened the *Sunday Telegraph* to discover an interview with Josselson, the man “who kept a secret for seventeen years” only to break his silence to a *Telegraph* correspondent just before yesterday’s meeting.⁷⁵ In the interview, he insisted he was the sole person in the Congress who knew its money came from the CIA. He explained that “[t]he Agency gave money to these things because, to the American Congress, ‘intellectual’ was a dirty word,” and “we would never have found the money otherwise.” He previewed his defense: “the reason for the secrecy . . . was to prevent the American Congress from finding out, not to delude the editors and intellectuals.” He believed that, if intellectuals “did not know where the funds had come from, they could hardly be influenced by the source,” especially since “these editors and others were all people who couldn’t be bought or bribed to do a thing other than what they are doing on their own.” He categorically denied Braden’s claims that there was a CIA agent in the Congress and another editing *Encounter*. As for whether CIA financing was “justified,” Josselson said, “Looking back, I don’t think that it was a good idea. Although we have done nothing sinister at all, people’s reputations are being hurt.”⁷⁶

Josselson never explained his decision to go to the press, but the decision sealed his fate. “I prefer . . . to think that because of the stress, in his weakened condition, he made a decision about how to act which was quite faulty,” Hunt said. “He was choosing a way to assume everything, and to do it in conditions so that nobody could object because no one else would have a chance.” But “[t]here was something irrational and strange about his need to go solo on this,” Hunt felt. “It is unlike Mike to be so far off base in judging what was going to happen. He was not a man who made those kinds of mistakes.”⁷⁷

On Sunday night, Hunt held a party. Josselson, flanked by his wife and daughter, was impossible to confront. But “people did feel betrayed,” and the party was horribly awkward. Going to the press was bad enough; going to the press before he explained himself to his colleagues and closest friends, was unforgivable. It “made old timers like Silone who were not disposed to be angry, angry. They felt that Mike had really betrayed the enterprise by going public with a confession,” Hunt remembered. They were supposed to be the ones deciding what the CIA funding scandal meant. “Throw Mike out in street, give him a medal; all options should have been open, and he closed off the options, by going above all to the press, which was horrifying to these people,” Hunt recalled.⁷⁸

On Monday, the General Assembly’s press statement equivocated. It averred that “its activities had been entirely free of influence or pressure from any financial backers,” yet it “condemned in the strongest terms the way in which the CIA had deceived those concerned and had caused their efforts to be called into question” because “[t]he effect of such action . . . tends to poison the wells of intellectual discourse.” Josselson and Hunt were to be thanked “for the fact that despite the difficulties attendant on the mode of financing of Congress activities they maintained the complete independence and intellectual integrity of the organization.” Their resignations, the press reported, were rejected.⁷⁹

In fact, Josselson’s resignation had been accepted. “I urged Michael Josselson to stay at his post,” remembered Shils, “but he allowed himself to be persuaded not to do so by [Indian political leader] Jayaprakash Narayan and by Ignazio Silone.”⁸⁰ Had Josselson held his tongue and avoided the *Sunday Telegraph*, the outcome, many suspected, would have been quite different. Hunt could remain, but stayed on only until November.⁸¹ “I saw very quickly what it would have meant,” he reflected. “I couldn’t be Mike’s man in Paris, because Mike was also obsessed with losing everything he had built.”⁸² In the ensuing months, no one was interested in the Congress’s administrator, and no one was willing to take his word as to the Congress’s independence. As time passed, Josselson was forgotten.

For the CIA, this was the beginning of a bad decade. Meyer was blindsided. “It will take a long time before we all understand what has happened in the last month and why,” he wrote in his journal. “[T]here is within this country a widespread conviction that ‘the Cold War’ was at best a struggle peculiar to the 1950s,” he felt, “and at worst a confrontation that we ourselves provoked against an innocent Stalin.”⁸³

Meanwhile, the U.S. Congress vindicated Tom Braden’s prediction that it would not look kindly on the Agency’s clandestine support for the non-Communist left.⁸⁴ Congressmen condemned the CIA for “continuing to spend money” on groups that “openly and repeatedly attacked American interests,”⁸⁵ and demanded an investigation into “how much CIA money has been channeled to private organizations which were used for leftist purposes having nothing to do with the conduct of the Cold War.”⁸⁶ Ten years later, the Church Report – composed by staffers for a subcommittee of U.S. Senators – deemed the

Congress for Cultural Freedom another manifestation of the CIA overreaching that had led to attempted assassinations, the Bay of Pigs, and domestic spying. According to the Church Committee, the CIA's covert support for organizations like the Congress had "undermined the crucial independent role of the private sector" and "tended to blur the very difference between 'our' system and 'theirs' that these covert programs were designed to preserve."⁸⁷

For the intellectuals associated with the Congress, the scandal overshadowed everything; the question was whether it mattered. The consequences were real enough for Rajat Neogy, editor of the Congress magazine *Transition*; Ugandan authorities jailed him as a "CIA agent" for months.⁸⁸ In India, the revelation that the Indian Committee for Cultural Freedom had long received CIA funds had a disastrous effect for the Indian figures involved and poisoned Indian views of American influence for decades.⁸⁹ In Britain, Spender professed himself appalled. "When the deception is exposed, the recipient ... appears in the role either of knave or of fool," he told Muggeridge.⁹⁰ "I regard you as a great exception," he told Josselson, "because I think you are like an ambassador who is sent abroad and who becomes more devoted to the country to which he is sent than to his own."⁹¹

To Bell, "the salient point is that these organizations were not instruments of the CIA. These organizations and these men held independent – and divergent – points of view, and expressed them openly."⁹² To Jayaprakash Narayan, accepting CIA funds and then lying about them was unforgivable, notwithstanding his impression that "there was no attempt made to steer the Congress into any other camp than the camp of free intellectual and cultural life."⁹³ To Arthur Schlesinger Jr., CIA money was "wholly justified at the time when [it] began," and "for the United States government to have stood self-righteously aside at this point would have seemed to me far more shameful."⁹⁴ Debates over who knew of CIA involvement fueled further acrimony. "The old Upper West Side Kibbutz is completely busted," Bell reported, "the more so because of the events of the last year."⁹⁵

Hunt left for the Salk Institute, later became executive director of Princeton's Institute for Advanced Studies, and resumed writing novels. "I don't write you or anyone else and come home at night after a frantic day at the big store and drink too much and go over the last six months again and try to figure out what went wrong," Hunt told Josselson a year later. "When it fell apart, it really fell apart for good."⁹⁶

Notes

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- 5 "Race Relations: It May Be a Long, Hot Summer," *New York Times* (April 30, 1967).
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- 10 Sol Stein, "A Short Account of International Student Politics & the Cold War, with Particular Reference to the NSA, CIA, Etc.," *Ramparts* (March 1967), pp. 29–38. See also Peter Richardson, *A Bomb in Every Issue: How the Short, Unruly Life of Ramparts Magazine Changed America* (New York: The New Press, 2009), pp. 68–86.
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- 17 Diana Josselson to Stephen Spender, May 18, 1967, Folder 6, Box 25, MJ.
- 18 Cord Meyer, *Facing Reality: From World Federalism to the CIA* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1980), p. 87.
- 19 Richard Helms, *A Look Over My Shoulder: A Life in the Central Intelligence Agency* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2003), pp. 345–7.
- 20 See generally Nancy Beck Young, *Wright Patman: Populism, Liberalism, & the American Dream* (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 2000).
- 21 Marion Fremont-Smith, *Governing Nonprofit Organizations: Federal and State Law and Regulation* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), pp. 73–6.
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- 30 Michael Josselson to Arthur Schlesinger Jr., April 9, 1965, Box P-35, Arthur Schlesinger Jr. Papers, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library, Boston, Massachusetts ("ASJ").

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Conclusion

Ever since the CIA's long-term support for the Congress for Cultural Freedom came to light in 1967, the question whether the CIA's sponsorship of the Congress was worth the price has loomed large. Michael Josselson, secluded in Geneva, had ample time for reflection. "The first question is: does the end justify the means?... I myself change my mind about it every day and have been doing so, painfully, since the very beginning of this whole business," he told Indian political leader Jayaprakash Narayan, who had headed the Congress's Indian affiliate:

In theory, the answer is certainly No. As far as my own personal experience goes, the answer is also No, for I have paid dearly, both physically and spiritually. But if I had not taken the responsibility of saying Yes, there would have been no Congress nor any of its unique achievements.

And "this long record of accomplishment-does seem to me ... to justify the means in this case," Josselson concluded:

The only thing wrong in the means was the deception I was obliged to practice about the source of the funds... [Still] the anguish I feel about the smirching of your reputation and that of others in India and in a few other places ... is nothing I shall try to describe."¹

Many in the Congress eventually forgave him, but Josselson, the perennial exile, was still cut off from the community he had once led.² Josselson grew apart from Lasky, but defended him to the last – "Of course Mel is anything but lovable, still there is something to be said for the pluck with which he has persevered."³ The Congress's heyday seemed long past. "The U.S. as we knew it," Josselson reflected, "presented perhaps the last ideal in a world which since the dethronement of God has been going downhill with ever increasing acceleration."⁴ Revelations in 1974 about the CIA's domestic surveillance operations and other potential violations of the Agency's charter (the so-called "Family Jewels") horrified him: "Could you or I ever think," he wrote a former colleague, "that the agency we were connected with was as filthy as it turned out to be?" But "it does

bring back memories of moments, hours, days of charm, hilarity, a sense of accomplishment . . . perhaps we should be thankful in spite of everything.”⁵

Josselson devoted his last years to a biography of Barclay de Tolly, the underappreciated Russian Field Marshal whose tactics commanding the army against Napoleon were castigated at the time but were eventually vindicated.⁶ “There was,” Lasky reflected, “an autobiographical element of escapism in Mike’s ten year devotion to this theme.”⁷ Josselson nearly lived to see his work in the pages of the magazine he had watched over so vigilantly. He died of heart failure in January 1978, a few months before *Encounter* ran an excerpt of his book with a hauntingly apt epigram: “There is no correlation between historical significance, measured by the effect of action on events, and historical fame, measured by acclaim or volume of eulogy.”⁸

The Congress itself barely outlived Josselson. The renamed International Association for Cultural Freedom was a pale imitation of the original. Raymond Aron and Ignazio Silone resigned in short order.⁹ Shils followed, writing that “the International Association for Cultural Freedom, like a drunkard with a weak head, staggers from ignominy to ignominy.”¹⁰ The Australian branch considered disaffiliation but stayed on, its head explained to Josselson, “to squeeze money out of them as long as we can get it,” since “it seems incontrovertible that whatever is being done at Paris headquarters is a thinly disguised pseudo-activity to justify the various Foundation grants still being paid out.”¹¹ In 1979, the organization’s governing body voted to dissolve the organization.¹²

Encounter thrived under Lasky’s editorship and folded only in 1990, just as the Cold War itself was ending.¹³ Cord Meyer remained a devoted reader to the end.¹⁴ The last issue of *Encounter* came so unexpectedly that the magazine never had a chance to run Edward Shils’s biographical piece on Josselson’s significance.

Ultimately, whether the CIA’s sponsorship of the Congress was worth the price – to the reputations of the intellectuals involved, to the Agency, and to Josselson himself – is not a question of history, but a moral and political judgment. As a historical matter, what-ifs about the Congress’s relationship with the Agency obscure an important reality. Given the exigencies of the early Cold War, the Agency’s sense of unpreparedness against the Soviet peace campaign, and its determination to find some way of supporting non-Communist intellectuals against their Soviet-sponsored counterparts, it seems inevitable that the CIA would have covertly supported some array of non-Communist intellectuals. Soviet peace congresses were sufficiently successful in broadcasting the names of the litany of writers, artists, philosophers, scientists, and other intellectuals who supported the cause for the American government to have left this field untouched. And the State Department’s public information campaigns in Western Europe were so profoundly unpopular that covert support for non-Communist intellectuals – whether from the CIA or another agency – seems equally inevitable. Had the Congress floundered like all the Agency’s prior attempts to support resistance to Soviet peace congresses, the Agency would, in all likelihood, have simply sponsored individual magazines or counter-congresses on an ad hoc basis.

What was not inevitable, however, was that the Congress would endure as long as it did, or that the Agency would take such a hands-off approach to the relationship. It is here that Michael Josselson made all the difference. Had Josselson not become an accepted part of intellectual circles on both sides of the Atlantic before the Berlin Congress, his behind-the-scenes role in its organization would surely have raised hackles. Had Josselson left the Congress to Irving Brown or especially to James Burnham, the Agency would have had a conduit to the Congress bent on using it to establish cover for other operations, and the Congress itself would have existed as a far more political – and far less stable – group. Had Josselson not attached himself to the Paris office in the fall of 1950 and lent his considerable managerial skills to the business of launching magazines, wooing participants, and opening new outposts of Congress affiliates, the Congress almost certainly would have collapsed before 1952. Had Josselson not built up such reservoirs of trust – or convinced his bosses in Washington that he alone could handle the Congress’s prickly intellectuals – it is hard to imagine that even a man as idealistic as Cord Meyer would have tolerated the blatantly anti-American sentiments expressed by some of the Congress’s most prominent figures and in *Encounter*.

Indeed, the Congress’s enduring ability to attract prominent non-Communist intellectuals and to publish renowned magazines arguably prompted the Agency to support the Congress well beyond the point of any real benefits for American foreign policy. The CIA’s support for a fractious band of non-Communist intellectuals whose publications’ niche audiences numbered in the thousands was an operation lacking obvious metrics for success. But in the early days of the Cold War, when Western intellectuals appeared poised to resume their influential activism on behalf of the Communist cause, mobilizing a counter-offensive had a far more obvious strategic role. As the Cold War evolved into proxy battles between America and the Soviet Union in the Third World, the Congress became an increasingly less obvious proposition for the Agency. By 1955, the Congress had declared victory against Communism in the sphere of ideas, and had become fractured over what new causes to pursue. *Encounter* not only failed to make headway in Asia – despite Josselson’s dogged efforts to improve circulation figures – but espoused views that hardly presented America or American foreign policy in a rosy light. *Encounter* and other endeavors in Africa, Asia, and Latin America may have reached figures that the Agency had no other way of reaching – but whether the Congress dissuaded intellectuals in these areas from embracing neutralism, Communism, or other ideologies hostile to American interests is questionable. Ultimately, the Agency continued sponsoring the Congress because some of the Agency’s most powerful figures, including Allen Dulles, wanted to believe it was a success. Josselson’s ability to foster their faith that his efforts would benefit American foreign policy objectives was – in the face of the evidence – one of his greatest achievements.

If nothing else, Josselson’s singular career suggests that calls for modern-day incarnations of QKOPERA may be a pipe dream. It is easy enough for intelligence agencies to find ways to secretly funnel money to private organizations

that appear aligned with their interests. But few modern-day intelligence agencies are likely to tolerate the degree of independence that Josselson secured for the Congress, especially over the long run. What made the Congress work, what kept it afloat, and what kept persistent rumors of CIA involvement from dooming the Congress to failure, was Josselson's skill at the Congress's helm.

Notes

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