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ARTICLE

Expanding the Pool of Knowledge: Learning from the Soviet Economy at the UN Regional Commission for Europe and Beyond

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This article explores how staff at the UN Regional Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) tried, with mixed success, to incorporate Soviet knowledge and experts into their activities and how these challenging efforts, paradoxically, created a space in which economics could be a shared language of communication across the Cold War divide, both within UN spaces and in adjacent academic networks. This conceptual move allowed economics knowledge to pool between East and West, even though the divide between the blocs was originally expressed in economic terms. In the 1960s, with the global transformations of decolonisation, the ECE's experts, including those embedded in British academic networks, worked to export their shared knowledge beyond Europe, using the triangulated international space of the UN to promote – and continue gathering – economic information from the Soviet Union.

In 1948, staff at the temporary United Nations (UN) headquarters at Lake Success, out on New York's Long Island, lamented an almost total absence of materials concerned with the Soviet economy.[1] The UN library acquired the three Soviet newspapers with the largest distribution, *Izvestiia, Pravda* and *Trud*, each of which included economic news only occasionally, and haphazardly. Staff also enjoyed access to a few individual issues of Soviet technical journals that happened to find their way into the library, along with a small number of official Soviet texts describing the current five-year plan in basic detail. In order to do serious work on Soviet economic matters, UN staff had to get in their cars or board the Long Island Rail Road and head into Manhattan. Once in the city, they would visit the once-legendary Slavonic Division of the New York Public Library (NYPL), which held, and still holds, an extensive collection of Soviet industrial and technical journals, or the library of Columbia University, then as now an important centre for Russian and Soviet studies, in order to access necessary data from inside the Soviet Union that was required for their work.

UN officials needed these journals as the twentieth-century project of international organisation was animated not only by a desire to avoid war but also to improve economic and social conditions for all. In the post-war years, it was understood that each of these goals required the participation of the whole world, including the communist superpower. This recognition was a change as compared to their predecessors at the League of Nations who, back in the inter-war period, imagined that the revolutionary Bolshevik regime would need to be overturned before the new Russian state could

[1]'Information Available on the Economy of the USSR . . . in the United Nations (no date, 1948)', S-0932-0009-02, United Nations Archive and Records Management Section, New York, (hereafter UN ARMS).

be admitted to their organisation.[2] By the late forties, however, the Soviet Union had taken on a greater international role through significant participation in the Second World War, contributed to the founding of the UN and claimed a permanent seat at the UN Security Council. The Soviet economy had grown impressively, and Soviet officials along with other socialist representatives to the founding UN conferences insisted on the inclusion of economic and social rights in the new institutions' mandate – precisely at the moment when Cold War divisions over visions for alternative economic organisation began to fracture Europe and the rest of the world. In these circumstances, as officials at the Department for Economic Affairs in New York began working to understand the global economic situation, they found themselves looking to the Soviet Union, to their scarce library holdings, and beginning to struggle.

In Geneva, meanwhile, the site of the former headquarters of the League, officials worked to establish the new UN Regional Economic Commission for Europe (ECE). This institution aimed to rationalise post-war reconstruction, in part by gathering and sharing economic, technological and statistical data across Europe. The ECE was explicitly and uniquely pan-European from the very start, and its first executive secretary, Gunnar Myrdal, saw overcoming Cold War divisions as a key part of the Commission's mandate. This commitment to cross-bloc cooperation has resulted in a powerful narrative metaphor, the 'Bridge between East and West', that has shaped histories of the organisation. Former staff members Yves Berthelot and Paul Rayment have published chapters under that name in two separate works, while historian Daniel Stinsky, writing more recently about the ECE's first decade, employs the bridge metaphor to argue that the ECE should be understood as an early institution of European integration.[3] Stinsky's framing of the ECE as a forerunner of the current European Union (EU) builds on earlier work by historians of technology who point to the ECE as one moment in a longer history of technical and infrastructural integration in Europe, making the word 'bridge' an even more fitting metaphor.[4] In both cases, the European historiographical frame leads to a focus on the actions of the smaller countries of western and eastern Europe, rather than the Soviet Union, when the presence of the superpower was a crucial determinant of the shape of the 'bridge' the institution sought to build.

In this article, I examine how (western) UN staff in Geneva and elsewhere worked to incorporate Soviet knowledge and experts into their work during the ECE's first decade, how their efforts to do so intersected with networks of academic knowledge and how these challenging processes, paradoxically, created a space in which economics could be a shared language of exchange and communication across the divide. Although painfully cognisant of real political and personal cleavages across Europe, experts at the ECE and in adjacent academic communities began to understand economics itself as being so quantifiable as to be separable from ideology. This conceptual move allowed economics knowledge to pool between East and West, even though the gulf between these geopolitical regions was originally expressed in economic terms. In the 1960s, as the global transformations of decolonisation redirected the economic focus of the UN towards development in the postcolonial world, the ECE's experts exported their shared knowledge beyond Europe; in the process they used the triangulated international space of the UN to continue gathering economic information from the Soviet Union. The analysis thus highlights the complex place of state socialist ideas at the UN ECE

[2]The Soviet Union did eventually join for a brief five years, always remaining somewhat marginal within the institution. On this period see Ingeborg Plettenberg, 'The Soviet Union and the League of Nations', in *The League of Nations in Retrospect / La Société des Nations: Rétrospective*, ed. Arnold Angenendt (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1983), 144–81.

[3]Yves Berthelot and Paul Rayment, *Looking Back and Peering Forward: A Short History of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, 1947–2007* (New York: United Nations, 2007); Yves Berthelot and Paul Rayment, 'The ECE: A Bridge Between East and West', in *Unity and Diversity in Development Ideas: Perspectives from the UN Regional Commissions*, ed. Yves Berthelot, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), 51–131; Daniel Stinsky, *International Cooperation in Cold War Europe: The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, 1947–64* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2021).

[4]Vincent Lagendijk, *Electrifying Europe: The Power Europe in the Construction of Electricity Networks* (Amsterdam: askant, 2008); Frank Schipper, *Driving Europe: Building Europe on Roads in the Twentieth Century* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2009).

as an internal matter of knowledge-making and European integration, *and* as a form of practice and outreach in the world beyond.

Dwelling on the cross-fertilisation of Soviet knowledge across and beyond the networks of the ECE contributes to recent moves to understand the complexity of ideas moving through the UN during the period of Cold War and decolonisation. Historians of Europe such as Sandrine Kott, Vlad Pasca, Ljubica Spaskovska and Katja Naumann have revealed how the international spaces of the UN provided a certain freedom to experts from the eastern European socialist countries to sidestep the power of the Soviet Union and United States.[5] As these works show, intellectual traditions developed in the region in the first half of the twentieth century coupled with participation in social democratic networks created a foundation that helped enable action and relative independence in international settings. At the same time, scholars focused on other regions, such as Christy Thornton, Lydia Walker, Alanna O'Malley and Vineet Thakur, have pointed out that many of the ideals and practices that characterised the UN had diverse origins in countries and movements based in Latin America, Asia, Africa and the Pacific, challenging the idea of the UN as a liberal western institution.[6] Yet understanding the superpower(s) in these settings still matters, not least to help make sense of the terrain in which eastern European experts found agency and escape.

Within the vibrant body of work exploring the UN, investigation of the Soviet Union is surprisingly poorly represented. Two classic works, one now six decades old, examine security issues, disarmament and crisis management in the UN's first two decades, while Louis Porter's recent book on Soviet membership of the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) uncovers the complex social and professional world of Soviet international civil servants in Paris during the 1950s and 1960s, as well as their contributions to cultural policies, heritage preservation and UN publication practices.[7] The present article builds on the foundation of these works to begin to reveal the circulation of Soviet knowledge within Europe, and how this process of discovery became linked to development efforts further afield. In doing so, the work extends the insight of recent economic histories of the Soviet Union that have shattered older assumptions of economic autarky to highlight transnational entanglements of the Soviet economy and Soviet economic thought alike. Yakov Feygin and Oscar Sanchez-Sibony in particular have emphasised how Soviet economists and policy makers actively responded to innovations in the West, in both practice and intellectual life, with the latter stressing the role of the Soviet energy trade in the global transformation to neoliberalism in the late

[5]Sandrine Kott, *A World More Equal: An Internationalist Perspective on the Cold War*, trans. Arby Gharibian (New York: Columbia University Press, 2024); Katja Naumann, 'International Research Planning across the Iron Curtain: East-Central European Social Scientists in the ISSC and Vienna Centre', in *Planning in Cold War Europe: Competition, Cooperation, Circulations (1950s–1970s)*, ed. Michel Christian, Sandine Kott and Ondřej Matějka (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2018), 97–122; Vlad Pasca, 'A Détente Equation: The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe and Socialist Experts before Helsinki (1947–1975)', *East Central Europe* 45 (2018): 160–83; Ljubica Spaskovska, 'Constructing the "City of International Solidarity": Non-Aligned Internationalism, the United Nations and Visions of Development, Modernism and Solidarity, 1955-1975', *Journal of World History* 31, no. 1 (2020): 137–63.

[6]Christy Thornton, *Revolution in Development: Mexico and the Governance of the Global Economy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2021); Alanna O'Malley and Vineet Thakur, 'Introduction: Shaping a Global Horizon, New Histories of the Global South and the UN', *Humanity* 13, no. 1 (2022): 55–65; Alanna O'Malley and Lydia Walker, 'A Revisionist History of the United Nations', *Past and Present* 266 (2025): 264–88. See also the articles within O'Malley and Thakur's special issue, especially Emma Kluge, 'A New Agenda for the Global South: West Papua, the United Nations, and the Politics of Decolonization', *Humanity* 13, no. 1 (2022): 66–85.

[7]Alexander Dallin, *The Soviet Union at the United Nations: An Inquiry into Soviet Motives and Objectives* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1962); Ilya V. Gaiduk, *Divided Together: The United States and The Soviet Union in The United Nations, 1945–1965* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2012); Louis H. Porter, *Reds in Blue: UNESCO, World Governance, and the Soviet Internationalist Imagination* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023). Gaiduk planned to write a two-volume series, but unfortunately died before he could complete the second. See also Alessandro Iandolo, 'Beyond the Shoe: Rethinking Khrushchev at the Fifteenth Session of the United Nations General Assembly', *Diplomatic History* 41, no. 1 (January 2017): 128–52; Elizabeth Banks, 'The Ruble Lever: Soviet Development Knowledge and the Political Economy of the UN', *Journal of Global History* 20, no. 1 (March 2025): 103–20; Siobhan Hearne, 'Between Moscow and Geneva: The Soviet Red Cross and the International Red Cross Movement', *Journal of Global History* 20, no. 1 (2025): 61–81.

twentieth century.[8] Focusing on the UN, I emphasise how western economists in international spaces similarly sought to respond to Soviet economic developments, and how their efforts to learn from the Soviet Union further facilitated the global circulation of Soviet ideas that coincided with that state's increased participation in trade and development during the 1950s and 1960s.

The article draws on materials from the UN ECE archive at Geneva, Soviet Union country files at the UN archive in New York and selected files from the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) archive in Rome, along with UN publications and correspondence in the private archive of former ECE employee Michael Kaser, held at Oxford University. I begin by narrating the foundation of the ECE in 1947, Gunnar Myrdal's fraught attempts to hire Soviet experts and the recruitment of its first Soviet specialist, Evgeny Chossudovsky, who was living and working in London. I show how the inter-war experience of mass terror in the Soviet Union affected that country's trajectory of international life, setting it apart from that of its (later state socialist) neighbours. The next section introduces two more British specialists on the Soviet economy who came to work at the ECE, Nita Watts and Michael Kaser, and charts the movement of experts and expertise on Soviet affairs between international and academic spaces. Highlighting Watts alongside Chossudovsky and Kaser as a key intermediary figure in these UN–academic networks contributes to recent efforts to recover women as economic experts, in international spaces and beyond, even when their male colleagues are more well known.[9] As Kaser travelled to attend cross-bloc social science conferences organised by UNESCO, he and his colleagues came to conceptualise economic knowledge as inherently more translatable than sociology, political science or law. The final section of the article explores how, as decolonisation transformed the world, Kaser and his academic colleagues began musing out loud how Soviet techniques could be applied in developing countries. His old friend Watts, still at the ECE, meanwhile set to work organising training seminars inside the Soviet Union that promoted Soviet techniques to the many, while UN staff and academics alike continued their efforts to see and know the Soviet economy in Europe and beyond.

Seeking the Superpower at the UN Regional Commission for Europe

In 1947, when the UN ECE was set up in Geneva, the institution boasted a breadth of European membership that would only be matched by the European Football Association, UEFA, established in 1954.[10] The Soviet Union was an ECE member from the very beginning, as were the emerging people's democracies of the eastern bloc, despite the Stalin-era suspicion of capitalist-dominated international bodies and the deepening acceleration of Cold War divisions in Europe. Cooperation across the Cold War divide was central to the vision of the ECE's first executive secretary, Gunnar Myrdal, and a key part of the institution's mission. Yet events at the ECE in the earliest years, and existing narratives of them, reveal the challenges of bridge building across the Cold War blocs. Myrdal insisted that a Soviet citizen be recruited as his deputy, in recognition of his ambitions for the organisation. In

[8] Yakov Feygin, 'Reforming the Cold War State: Economic Thought, Internationalization, and the Politics of Soviet Reform, 1955–1985' (PhD thesis, University of Pennsylvania, 2017); Oscar Sanchez-Sibony, *The Soviet Union and the Construction of the Global Market: Energy and the Ascent of Finance in Cold War Europe, 1964-1971* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023). See also Chris Miller, 'Economic Ideas Crossing Borders: The Transnational Turn in Soviet Economic History', *The Soviet and Post-Soviet Review* 46, no. 1 (2018): 1–12.

[9] See for instance Cléo Chassonnery-Zaïgouche, Evelyn L. Forget and John D. Singleton, eds., 'Women and Economics: New Historical Perspectives', a special issue of *History of Political Economy* (2022) 54 (S1); Rebeca Gomez Betancourt and Camila Orozco Espinel, 'The Invisible Ones: Women at CEPAL (1948–2017)', in *Routledge Handbook of the History of Women's Economic Thought*, ed. Kirsten Madden and Robert Dimand (Basingstoke: Routledge, 2019): 407–27; and Johanna Gautier Morin, 'The Women's Faces of Development in Latin America and the Caribbean: The First Generation of Cepalinas (1960s–1980s)', *Journal of Global History*, firstview 2025.

[10] Stinsky, *International Cooperation in Cold War Europe*, 7.

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their history of the Regional Commission, insiders Berthelot and Rayment stress the significance of this appointment, further suggesting that Soviet 'interests lay in having as great an influence as possible' at the new ECE.[11] Yet curiously, these same authors do not even name the man who took up this post; it was Nikolai Petrovich Koktomov, a Soviet diplomat at the London embassy with prior experience in the mining sector, who came to occupy this key position in 1948.[12] Myrdal's biographer William Barber names Koktomov but similarly says very little about what he actually did. In any case, Koktomov's tenure was short-lived, and he returned to Moscow in 1951.

Myrdal's ambition for Soviet participation in the ECE's work led him to make repeated attempts to encourage other Soviet experts to take up posts and participate in committees, with relatively little success. Over a month in autumn 1947, Anatolii Georgievich Kulazhenkov, the Soviet diplomatic representative in Bern, communicated the Soviet decision to decline participation in at least four important sub-committees of the ECE – those for fertiliser, internal transport, coal and industry and materials. The only hint of a reasoned excuse comes from the apologies he sent for the internal transport committee, in which he refers to their 'technical particularities' – that is, a uniquely sized railway gauge – that would make cooperation in that area unfruitful.[13] Otherwise Kulazhenkov's letters remained sparse, formal and imprecise in their refusal to take part. Two years later, when economists from the ECE countries met informally for the first time, not a single expert from the socialist countries turned up.[14]

One reason for the lack of Soviet presence at the ECE was a shortage of qualified personnel who could occupy such posts. In the Soviet Union, the purges of 1937–8 had decimated the foreign service to such an extent that as the United Nations was being set up in the late 1940s, over 80 per cent of senior Soviet diplomats had been in service for less than ten years, and so were relatively inexperienced.[15] The number of trained diplomats was so low that the country struggled to staff their own missions to the UN headquarters, let alone fill the professional positions it was eligible for at the growing institution. In 1951, there were just fourteen Soviet citizens among over 1000 professional staff across branches of the UN; by 1955, the total had only risen to nineteen.[16] Soviet underrepresentation at the UN only came to be seriously and successfully addressed in the 1970s; in the organisation's first years, Soviet experts could not fill posts because there simply were not enough of them. This paucity of experts set the Soviet Union apart from the other major European countries, whose specialists and bureaucrats swelled the ranks of the UN's mid-level through the 1940s, 1950s and into the 1960s,[17] and from their closer eastern European neighbours, whose inter-war experience of social democracy coupled with their own intellectual traditions gave their experts a relative advantage in the new environments of post-war international organisation.[18] The absence of Soviet experts is striking given common assumptions of superpower domination during the Sovietisation of eastern Europe and

[11]Berthelot and Rayment, 'The ECE: A Bridge Between East and West', 57.

[12]William J. Barber, *Gunnar Myrdal: An Intellectual Biography* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

[13]'Letters from Kulazhenkov to Myrdal, 18 October, 31 October and 17 November 1947 declining participation in the fertilizer, internal transport, coal, and industry and materials committees'. GX 10/2/1/16, UN archive at Geneva (hereafter UNOG).

[14]Pasca, 'A Détente Equation', 165.

[15]Sabine Dullin, *Men of Influence: Stalin's Diplomats in Europe, 1930–39*, trans. Richard Veasey (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008), 213. Dullin further specifies that during the late thirties 62 per cent of all diplomats were executed, 14 per cent left the profession or died of other means, and that so much information is missing about others that we can only be sure that 16 per cent of diplomats survived in post. Some of these survivors then likely died during the Great Patriotic War, along with around 15 per cent of the total Soviet population.

[16]Dallin, *The Soviet Union at the United Nations*, 101.

[17]Writing about UNESCO, Porter makes the point that as so many British and French staff who joined the bureaucracy in the early years had permanent contracts, the western dominance of the bureaucracy remained solid even into the 1960s, when new members from the post-imperial world were shifting power dynamics at the General Assembly, and elsewhere. It seems to me that a similar phenomenon is happening at the ECE. Porter, *Reds in Blue*, 63.

[18]Naumann, 'International Research Planning across the Iron Curtain'; Kott, *A World More Equal*.

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likely helped enable eastern bloc experts to assert their own agency, even in these first tense years of the Cold War.

The Soviet absence was so marked that ECE staff saw little reason to invest in Russian translation in committee meetings. This debate flared up in summer 1948, when Amazap Arutiunian, the head of the Soviet delegation at the ECE, demanded that Russian be treated on an equal level to English and French, and that equipment be installed in ECE committee meeting rooms that would allow for simultaneous interpretation into Russian – rather than just the more time-consuming consecutive interpretation that was being provided at that time. In his response, Gunnar Myrdal agreed that while consecutive interpretation was indeed much slower than simultaneous, the equipment and staffing costs required for the latter were much higher. Myrdal noted that (unnamed) others in the organisation opposed the higher costs of simultaneous interpretation into Russian since representatives of the Soviet Union did not generally attend meetings other than the main sessions. Myrdal closed his letter asking Arutiunian to confirm Soviet presence at the upcoming meeting of the committee on industrial development and trade, noting that an affirmative response would enable him to make a case for simultaneous interpretation into Russian at this session at least.[19] This does not appear to have happened. The following year, Myrdal wrote to Kulazhenkov, at the Soviet embassy in Bern, suggesting that the Soviet Union might consider naming one of their diplomats as the specific representative to ECE, in line with the practice of other countries. These representatives, Myrdal explained, met every other Tuesday at 9.30 am for a broad discussion of important ECE issues. Myrdal imagined these meetings and 'some form of continuous representation of the Soviet Government at the Commission' would be 'doubly valuable' since the Soviet Union was not participating in the technical committees at that time.[20] This suggestion was eventually headed and such a representative was in post at least by 1952.

Knowing the 'Enemy'

Collecting information about the economic situation in Europe was a key activity for the ECE in its early years. The Commission's terms of reference listed knowledge gathering, creating studies of economic and technological problems across Europe, evaluation of statistics and disseminating economic and technological information as crucial activities. It was understood that compiling and sharing economic knowledge in this way would later support other institutional goals, including active economic reconstruction and the strengthening of European economic relations. This focus on gathering information mirrors the initial efforts of other UN agencies such as the FAO, which spent its first years until 1949 focused almost exclusively on accumulating data, before later developing a massive programme of agricultural and development projects.[21] These post-war efforts to collect knowledge built on previous efforts to understand the global economy initiated by officials at the League of Nations and the International Labour Organization during the inter-war period. Understanding the Soviet economy posed a particular challenge, in both periods. In a pan-European institution, knowing the Soviet economy was just as crucial as knowing the others, yet in the Soviet Union, economic knowledge was effectively a state secret, with the result that published data was not comprehensive or freely available.[22] Another challenge was that statisticians in the Soviet Union

[19]'Letter from G Myrdal to A Arutiunian, 11 August 1948', GX 10/2/1/16, UNOG. For more on the technicalities, costs and politics of interpretation at the UN, see Jesus Baigorri-Jalón, *Interpreters at the United Nations: A History* (Salamanca: Ediciones Universidad de Salamanca, 2004).

[20]'Letter from G Myrdal to Koulagenkov, 8 March 1949', GX 10/2/1/16, UNOG.

[21]Martin Bemmann, '"Nazi Agent" and Development Pioneer: Johann Albrecht von Monroy, National Socialist Europe and Unknown Origins of FAO's Forest Related Development Activities', *Journal of Contemporary History* 58, no. 3 (2023): 443.

[22]This issue is mentioned in 'Information Available on the Economy of the USSR . . . in the United Nations (no date, 1948)' as well as 'Memorandum from E M Chossudovsky to Joel Gordon, 18 February 1948', S-0932-0009-02, UN ARMS.

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and other state socialist countries calculated and grouped their data in unfamiliar ways, such that comparing or using these numbers was less straightforward. Staff at the League of Nations seeking to gather data on the Soviet economy in the inter-war years had struggled with this same issue; as Patricia Clavin writes, the Soviet economy had 'confounded the League' at every turn.[23]

In the post-war period, a new generation of staff at the ECE and elsewhere in the UN system engaged a variety of methods, with mixed success, to overcome these older difficulties, to gain accurate information and compile it into usable studies. UN staff concluded that the published statistical data available for the Soviet Union did not allow outsiders, such as themselves, to understand the Soviet economy in as precise or detailed a manner as was typically possible using other countries' published data.[24] Research on the Soviet Union was therefore understood to be more challenging and more time-consuming than that on other countries, requiring 'continuous perusal of the chief Soviet daily newspapers, numerous technical, industrial and agricultural periodicals'; it also necessitated attention to occasional articles on economic affairs that appeared in one of the many other Soviet magazines,to theoretical pieces and relevant speeches given at meetings of the Supreme Soviet and then published in the press.[25] These challenges in even obtaining basic information contrast with the relative success ECE staff had in working with Czechoslovak and Yugoslav experts on electricity standardisation projects in the same years.[26]

The Soviet economy and its experts operated with increased secrecy and methods that were more unfamiliar to UN staff members, causing them to adopt a different approach. Understanding the Soviet economy required careful bricolage and piecemeal construction from a multiplicity of materials that was impossible for UN staff based in at Lake Success, as their libraries were woefully under-resourced with respect to Soviet journals and economic texts. The situation in Geneva was much better, directly thanks to the heritage of the League. The UN library in Geneva regularly procured copies of technical periodicals, including *Planovoe khoziaistvo* (The Planned Economy), which contained crucial detail on economic matters.[27] Nonetheless, staff in Geneva sought to expand their holdings by asking Soviet representatives for better access to non-secret materials that were hard to obtain.

One of the key players in these early efforts to understand the Soviet economy was Evgeny Chossudovsky, a Russian-born economist who was recruited to the ECE by Myrdal himself as one of the original 'nuclear team' of four economists who were deeply involved in the foundational years of the ECE.[28] But while Chossudovsky's UN employment records list him as a Soviet citizen, his individual history was quite complicated. Chossudovsky was born in 1914 to a wealthy Russian-speaking Jewish family in Rostov-on-Don that left the country in the wake of the revolutions of 1917 and settled in Berlin. Meanwhile, a decree from the Council of People's Commissars in Moscow denaturalised all former subjects of the Russian Empire, like the Chossudovsky family, who had fled the territory since the revolution, as well all those who had fought against Soviet power. This decree, coupled with

[23]Patricia Clavin, *Securing the World Economy: The Reinvention of the League of Nations, 1920–1946* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 194. Despite these challenges, ILO were able to collect information, in part through select visits. See for examples Lewis L. Lorwin and A. Abramson, 'The Present Phase of Economic and Social Development in the USSR', *International Labour Review* 33, no. 1 (1936): 5–40, 7–8.

[24]'Information Available on the Economy of the USSR . . . in the United Nations (no date, 1948)', S-0932-0009-02, UN ARMS.

[25]'Information Available on the Economy of the USSR . . . in the United Nations (no date, 1948)', S-0932-0009-02, UN ARMS. Quote p. 5.

[26]Lagendijk, *Electrifying Europe*, 171–86. Yugoslav officials were keen to work with the ECE precisely because of their country's split with the Stalinist USSR.

[27]'Information Available on the Economy of the USSR . . . in the United Nations (no date, 1948)', S-0932-0009-02, UN ARMS.

[28]Václav Kostelecky, *The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe: The Beginning of a History* (Göteborg: Graphic Systems AB, 1989), 50.

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restrictive citizenship laws in many of the countries where emigres settled, left around 1.5 million former Russian imperial subjects stateless. Individuals could petition for the return of their lost Soviet citizenship only if they returned to the Soviet Union.[29] A decade or so later, the rise of Nazism spurred Evgeny Chossudovsky to flee, this time alone, to the United Kingdom. Chossudovsky earned a PhD in economics in Edinburgh, before marrying and settling down in London in various roles in the British civil service until he joined the UN as one of 'an outstanding group of economists' Myrdal attracted to the new ECE.[30]

One of Chossudovsky's first tasks at the European Commission was to gather more information about the working of the Soviet economy. He began by asking for stenographic reports of budgetary debates that were theoretically available to the general public as well as copies of specialised economic monographs not typically available overseas.[31] As Chossudovsky's requests began to find some success, his colleagues in New York judged that it would be inefficient to duplicate his work. The collections of Soviet materials at the Geneva library grew and grew, while the UN in New York continued to rely on the library of Columbia University and the NYPL. With the UN system, Geneva rather than New York became the centre for economic knowledge of the Soviet Union. This shift was likely associated with growing anti-communist sentiment at the New York headquarters, which was itself linked to Joseph McCarthy's investigations of anti-American behaviour across the United States and the dismissal of some American UN employees on such grounds.[32] Geneva did not suffer from this same scrutiny. Within this geography of knowledge and paranoia, the ECE became an even more significant node for research on economic matters beyond the Iron Curtain.

Efforts to acquire more and more Soviet materials at Geneva intensified. As Myrdal explained in a 1952 letter to G.P. Arkadiev, then the representative of the Soviet Union at the ECE, the Commission needed access to books, journals and newspapers not currently available through the standard overseas publisher and distributor *International Book* (*Mezhdunarodnaia kniga*). As befitting its name, *International Book* sold mostly books, while the ECE was more interested in technical journals and regional newspapers such as *Truth of Ukraine* (*Pravda Ukrainy*), *Leningrad Truth* (*Leningradskaia pravda*) and *Mining Journal* (*Gorny zhurnal*').[33] The ECE staff were also keen to receive copies of specialised books and economic studies they heard about through reading the press and from contacts in Moscow that likely did not appeal to the average *International Book* customer and, as such, did not appear in the distributor's catalogue. Myrdal pointed out that these types of publications, which contained useful economic data that were not included in the major papers, were generally available to the public in Moscow, including members of the diplomatic community, thus implying that their contents ought not to be considered off limits.

Myrdal's involvement in these efforts for Soviet information highlight their importance for the functioning of the ECE. It seems unlikely that Myrdal himself had produced the careful descriptions of the types of materials that were theoretically available that appear in these letters, nor that he personally had developed such strong and detailed opinions about the types of economic texts that the library required. But behind Myrdal's signature stood a group of engaged specialists working on Soviet issues. In the early 1950s, Chossudovsky's team at the ECE was joined by two British economists with Soviet expertise, Nita Watts and Michael Kaser, who both later circled out of the

[29]Eric Lohr, *Russian Citizenship: From Russian Empire to Soviet Union* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), 146–50.

[30]Berthelot and Rayment, 'The ECE: A Bridge between East and West', 69.

[31]'Information Available on the Economy of the USSR . . . in the United Nations (no date, 1948)', S-0932-0009-02, NY ARMS.

[32]Gaiduk, *Divided Together*, 202.

[33]The names *Pravda Ukrainy* and *Leningradskaia pravda* reference the name of the main Soviet newspaper, simply called *Pravda*.

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international sphere into British academia.[34] A cluster of librarians that supported these researchers held precise knowledge of what was in their collection, what was missing and what would enrich their holdings; then as now, librarians carried out crucial intellectual labour that enabled the more visible outcomes of academic and policy research. This cohort of economists and librarians who presumably drafted the requests Myrdal later signed were highly well informed, revealing the likely existence of more informal channels of information exchange between Moscow and Geneva, and beyond. One letter contained a clear hint towards this background infrastructure, as Myrdal – or his ghost writer – closed with a request to agree on a certain person who could serve as the ECE's librarian contact inside the Soviet Union, who could help ensure access to these kinds of publications over the longer term.[35]

The situation regarding Soviet publications did improve following this request. I.V. Schunkov at the *Akademiia nauk* (Academy of Sciences) got in touch with the ECE leadership and sent sample journal issues and themed book lists that would help improve the ECE's Soviet holdings. Thirty-six new journals with classically utilitarian names – including *The Chemical Industry, The Energetic Bulletin, Coal, Foreign Trade, Questions of Economics, Collective Farm Production, Machine-Tractor Stations* and so on – began arriving in the UNOG library.[36] These titles arrived while Myrdal was away on ECE business, offering Chossudovsky a chance to step out of the shadow and write back to Schunkov on the Executive Secretary's behalf. The economist thanked Schunkov for increasing their access to publications and emphasised the types of economic works that were the most useful to experts at the ECE. Chossudovsky and others then used these and other newer materials to produce studies of the Soviet economy that were published in the ECE Economic Survey and contributed to the growing internal knowledge of Soviet affairs.

Circulation of Knowledge between Academic Economists and the UN

The careers of two of Chossudovsky's British colleagues at ECE, Nita Watts and Michael Kaser, helped the internal research work of the ECE to circulate out of the international organisations, into academic environments and back again. This biographical and institutional cross-fertilisation highlights the porosity of UN knowledge-making and points towards the multiple origins of economic knowledge seen as international. The first of these experts, Nita Watts, was born in 1920 and studied economics at the London School of Economics (LSE) in the late 1930s, graduating with her BSc in 1940. The following year she went to work as an economic advisor at the (British) War Cabinet, moving into the Treasury when the war ended. She remained there until 1955, when she moved to Geneva to work in the Research Division of the ECE, alongside Chossudovsky, Kaser and others. By 1962, she had risen to the post of deputy director of the Research Division, serving at times as the acting director of this section until she left the Commission in 1965. Michael Kaser, meanwhile, was born in London in 1926 to a British mother and a Swiss father. He studied economics at Cambridge during the war, graduated in 1945 and went on to work in the economics section of the UK Ministry of Works on the post-war housing programme. In 1947 he moved to the economics section of the Foreign Office, which included stints at the British Embassy in Moscow. After writing a paper on Soviet price reform in 1950, he was invited to join the research staff of the UN ECE, where he worked from 1951 to 1963.

[34]Kaser published over 350 articles and seven books, including Micheal Kaser, *Comecon: Integration Problems of the Planned Economies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967); Micheal Kaser, *Healthcare in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe* (London: Oxford University Press/Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1976); Micheal Kaser, *Soviet Economics* (London: World University Library/Weidenfeld & Nicolso, 1970). Watt's publications include Nita Watts and Alec Cairncross, *The Economic Section 1939–1961: A Study in Economic Advising* (London: Routledge, 1989); Nita Watts, ed., *Economic Relations between East and West* (London: Macmillan, 1978).

[35]'Letter from Myrdal to G P Arkadiev, 15 March 1952', GX 10/2/1/16, UNOG.

[36]'List of Soviet journals sent to the UN Geneva library, from Basic Library of the Social Sciences, Undated (1954)', 'Letter from Schunkov to Myrdal, 14 May 1954'. See also 'Letter from Chossudovsky to Schunkov, 1 June 1954', and 'Note from Chossudovsky to the UNOG librarians, 26 May 1954'. All in GX 10/2/1/16, UNOG.

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Both Watts and Kaser moved on to Oxford after leaving Geneva, where they continued to write and publish.[37]

Kaser was already plugged into academic communities discussing contemporary Soviet affairs during his time in Geneva, a sure sign of the circularity of international and academic knowledge on the subject of the Soviet economy. He enjoyed an extensive correspondence with Alec Nove, then at the LSE, a Russian-Jewish emigre and the author of several well-known histories of the Soviet economy that are still read today.[38] Kaser took care to attend the annual meetings of British-based academics working on Soviet themes in alternating years, beginning with the second such gathering in January 1957.[39] In a letter about his experiences, he wrote that he enjoyed taking part in informal discussions with economist colleagues such as Francis Seton and his correspondent Alec Nove and learning from the papers presented by non-economists. He did not learn from the economics papers, he wrote, as he found himself to be the most well-informed attendee in this subject matter thanks to his work at the ECE. His co-attendees praised the analysis of the Soviet economy available in the ECE annual surveys, compiled by Kaser, showing the value of UN research for the academic community.[40] When asking permission to attend the 1959 meeting as part of his official duties at the ECE, Kaser explicitly evoked the potential benefits of intellectual cross-fertilisation at the meeting. The subject of his paper, the new Soviet seven-year plan, overlapped significantly with his responsibilities for the next edition of the ECE Survey; presenting a draft to his academic colleagues, he argued in a letter to Watts, would give him feedback that would help improve the text before the upcoming internal deadline for the ECE publication.[41]

A key turning point in the ongoing efforts to understand the Soviet economy came in the late 1950s, when the ECE selected Kaser as their representative economist at a series of meetings of social scientists organised by UNESCO. These gatherings had their origin at the eighth session of UNESCO in Montevideo, where delegates voted unanimously in favour of creating formal opportunities for social scientists from the communist East and non-communist West to meet. These gatherings, which had the official name of 'The Social Sciences and Peaceful Co-operation', brought together political scientists, sociologists, lawyers and economists from different economic systems with the aim of improving academic relations in these disciplines. A considerable amount of often delicate preparatory work led to a first interdisciplinary workshop in Geneva, held during the summer of 1956. This initial meeting spurred several disciplinary gatherings that took place in the next year and a half or so, in advance of a second joint event in Prague in September in 1958.

The economists' disciplinary meeting, held in Bursa, Turkey, at the end of March 1958, was entrusted to one Soviet and one British economics professor: Dyachenko of the Institute of the Economy in Moscow and E.A.G. Robinson in Cambridge, who wrote a report of the meetings for the UNESCO Social Science Bulletin. Dyachenko was one of a new generation of Soviet social scientists who, after the death of Stalin, began contributing their disciplinary expertise in the development

[37]Their obituaries are available online at https://www.st-hildas.ox.ac.uk/content/nita-watts-obe-has-died and https://www.sant.ox.ac.uk/about/news/michael-kaser-emeritus-fellow-1926-2021/. Accessed 15 May 2023.

[38]These works include Alec Nove, *An Economic History of the USSR* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969); Alec Nove, *The Soviet Economic System* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1975). For more on Nove and his publications see Archie Brown and Alec Cairncross, 'Alec Nove, 1915–1994: An Appreciation', *Europe-Asia Studies* 49, no. 3 (1997): 487–97; Ian D. Thatcher, 'Alec Nove: A Bibliographical Tribute', *Europe-Asia Studies* 47, no. 8 (1995): 1383–410. A portion of the correspondence between Kaser and Nove can be found in Ms. Eng c. 4680, folder 1, Bodleian Archive, Oxford (hereafter Bodleian).

[39]'Letter from Kaser to Baykov (Birmingham University), November 1955', Ms Eng c.4680, folder 2, Bodleian. In his later life Kaser served as the president of the British Association for Slavonic and East European Studies, which is the successor organisation to the meetings described in this section.

[40]'Letter from Kaser to M Boserup, January 1957', 'List of attendees at the Second Conference of Research Workers on the Soviet Union', Ms. Eng. c. 4680, folder 1, Bodleian.

[41]'Letter from Kaser to Nita Watts', Ms. Eng. c. 4681, folder 1, Bodleian.

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of Soviet economic policy inside the Soviet Union.[42] The growth of Soviet social science in this era was part of a greater expansion of higher education in the post-war years that saw the establishment of new and innovative research centres for economics, in both Moscow and Siberia.[43] This transformation of Soviet academic life occurred in concert with changes in Soviet foreign policy that brought about greater closeness with international organisations, including that country's entry into UNESCO itself.[44] Together, these changing dynamics helped make it possible for Dyachenko to take a prominent role at the UNESCO meetings and for economic knowledge to circulate in that setting.

In Bursa, a European core of participants was joined by a handful of scholars from Japan, Egypt, India and Turkey and one observer from Michigan State University in the United States. Under Dyachenko and Robinson's joint lead, the economists sought to create a conference format that allowed them to focus on shared economic questions. Together, they called these 'the principles governing the working of the economic systems of the communist and non-communist countries' as well as the 'methods by which similar problems were handled and decided in their respective economies'.[45] The goal was to avoid debating the possible merits of either economic system and rather to focus on explaining how and why each worked in the ways they did.

The academic economists and international experts like Kaser sought a shared lexicon of economics that could transcend the divides between them. In his report of the meetings, published in the UNESCO Social Science Bulletin, Robinson explained that even coming up with a pair of adjectives to describe the meetings was challenging, as they wanted to give representation to 'the immense divergence and the immense range of compromise in ideas and in practices of the countries that make up the world'.[46] In the end, the group settled on communist versus non-communist as their structural frame. At the same time, however, they aimed to allow participants to emphasise the variety of arrangements within each of these systems, as well as important ideas and practices that were shared among nearly all participants.

Robinson's report of the Bursa gathering reveals a continued fascination with the Soviet economy among western academics and the ongoing use of UN spaces to learn and share knowledge about that subject. His report of proceedings, later published as a UNESCO document, did not address all papers equally, but instead prioritised those presented by socialist colleagues. The presentation given by his co-director Dyachenko on the specificities of the Soviet conceptual approach to planning was given special attention. Robinson explained that he would not go into great detail about the papers presented by western economists on the grounds that those perspectives were already well known. Robinson's choice, along with his explanation, displays an anxiety that he and those like him suffered more from the Cold War obstruction of information exchange than those on the other side of the Iron Curtain. Indeed, his choice to focus on Dyachenko's paper signals a lack of empathetic imagination towards his colleagues from across the Iron Curtain with whom he had just so happily exchanged

[42]Kristy Ironside, *A Full-Value Ruble: The Promise of Prosperity in the Postwar Soviet Union* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2021), 14; Artemy M. Kalinovsky, *Laboratory of Socialist Development: Cold War Politics and Decolonization in Soviet Tajikistan* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2018), 68.

[43]Adam Leeds, 'Dreams in Cybernetic Fugue: Cold War Technoscience, the Intelligentsia, and the Birth of Soviet Mathematical Economics', *Historical Studies in the Natural Sciences* 46, no. 5 (2016): 633–68; Paul Josephson, *New Atlantis Revisited: Akademgorodok, the Siberian City of Science* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997); Ksenia Tatarchenko, '"The Computer Does Not Believe in Tears": Soviet Programming, Professionalization, and the Gendering of Authority', *Kritika* 18, no. 4 (2017): 709–39.

[44]Porter, *Reds in Blue*.

[45]E.A.G. Robinson, 'Report on The Economic Problems of Peaceful Collaboration, Bursa, Turkey, 24th March–2nd April 1958, and The Interdisciplinary Conference on International Understanding and Peaceful Co-operation' (UNESCO/SS/Coop/Inter 1 Annex 6), 2.

[46]E.A.G. Robinson, 'Report on the Economic Problems of Peaceful Collaboration, Bursa, Turkey, 24th March–2nd April 1958, and the Interdisciplinary Conference on International Understanding and Peaceful Co-operation' (UNESCO/SS/Coop/Inter 1 Annex 6), 2.

ideas, and dinners. He imagined that these colleagues did not read the UNESCO journal, even though it was likely more available in the Soviet Union than other strictly western publications since it was distributed by the 'neutral' UN. As Louis Porter has shown, UNESCO publications were actively read across the Soviet Union as a permitted source of information about the outside world.[47] As Soviet social scientists sought to respond to the West in their policy making, Robinson's paper *could* have provided crucial knowledge.[48] Instead, Robinson prioritised his own perceived lack of information and wrote for a western readership like himself who used Dyachenko's UNESCO paper as part of a concerted effort to gain more knowledge about the Soviet economy.

When all the disciplinary collectives reunited in Prague, the groups enjoyed mixed levels of success in their discussions. According to an overview report, later published in the UNESCO journal, the lawyers found much common ground thanks to their shared position that legal systems were inherently comparable, even across very different societies, and their propensity for discussions with a 'technical slant'.[49] The sociologists fared less well, as their conversations veered abruptly towards fundamental issues, including debates over the validity of Marxism. Unsurprisingly, such a topic produced division rather than exchange. As the report put it, with great understatement, 'the sociologists of the East and those of the West disagreed on this point'.[50] The political scientists' meeting in Munich at the end of 1957 was even more fraught, failing completely thanks to the scholars' tendencies to focus on 'vague, hazy ideological discussion on the relationship between East and West' rather than analysis of common problems.[51]

The economists, by contrast, found ways to speak to each other. They were more able than most of their colleagues to investigate problems in the abstract and could find greater shared interest in the discussion of technical minutiae.[52] Participants found that the most fruitful moments of exchange came when the comments made were the most concrete, emanating from their personal direct experiences of how their economic systems functioned. While their sociologist and political scientist colleagues spent time debating Marxism with people who had already made up their mind, the economists withdrew into technical detail where, according to a report of the meetings, 'it became clear that some problems are basically the same, whatever the system'.[53] Whether or not we believe this to be true, this assessment of neutrality saved the economists from the ideological pitfalls that befell their sociologist and political scientist colleagues. Participants had a sense that it was easier to focus attention on shared technical issues in economics than it was to hold a discussion of politics or sociology without referring to ideology at all.

Such an understanding of economic issues as inherently more abstractable anticipates the general homogenisation of the economics discipline through quantification that occurred towards the end of the twentieth century after the ideological challenge of the Cold War had been rendered irrelevant.[54] The early success of this approach in the UNESCO meetings in the 1950s points to the paradox that in the very first decade of Cold War, in a moment of intense and rapidly deepening geopolitical division rooted in economic ideas, those working at international organisations created spaces that allowed economics to be a language for fruitful exchange across the Cold War divide. Such open possibilities for economic discussions in UN spaces mirrors, in the intellectual sphere, recent discoveries of

[47]Louis H. Porter, '"Our International Journal": UN Publications and Soviet Internationalism after Stalin', *Russian Review* 80 (Oct. 2021): 641–60.

[48]Feygin, 'Reforming the Cold War State'.

[49]Jean Meynaud, 'Introduction: The Social Sciences and of Peaceful Co-operation', *UNESCO International Social Science Journal* 12, no. 2 (1960): 168–9.

[50]Meynaud, 'Introduction', 169–70.

[51]Meynaud, 'Introduction', 170.

[52]Meynaud, 'Introduction', 173.

[53]Meynaud, 'Introduction', 168.

[54]Marion Fourcade, 'The Construction of a Global Profession: The Transnationalization of Economics', *American Journal of Sociology* 112, no. 1 (2006): 145–94.

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the persistent material entanglements of the Soviet economy with those of the West,[55] revealing a convergence of language and practice that continued inside and outside UN spaces throughout the next decades.

Knowledge for the World

From 1960, the UN's focus when it came to economic activities shifted away from managing post-war reconstruction, mostly in Europe, to development in the rest of the world.[56] This change in emphasis came about as the global transformations of decolonisation spurred the entrance of dozens of new countries into the UN. The first wave of new independent states coincided with a change of leadership in the Kremlin, which led to increased Soviet participation in international life, both in bilateral relations and through institutions like the UN.[57] The Soviet Union went against the western powers to support measures that simplified the entry of newly independent states into the UN, helping to facilitate the institution's growth as well as the concurrent transformation in composition.[58] In this way, the shift away from post-war Europe and towards the postcolonial and developing world occurred in tandem at the UN and in the Soviet Union.

At the UN, the turn towards development was communicated officially through the adoption of a resolution on economic development at the General Assembly in 1960 and an accompanying report from the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) that set out some of possible responses to the resolution by various branches of the UN.[59] Each of the agencies were asked to suggest ways in which they could contribute their expertise and programmes towards the goal of economic development in the newest member states. The ECE's proposal focused on employing the breadth of technical knowledge that had been gathered from across Europe – from both market and planned economies – to create training programmes in collaboration with the Extended Program of Technical Assistance (EPTA), a body that provided expertise and training to the developing world.[60] The suggested programme went far beyond a shared interest in planning.[61] By contrast, the proposal promoted this course of action on the grounds that the ECE region had a uniquely wide experience of studying 'every type of technique [. . .] both in mature and poorer countries', under a diverse range of political systems. This singular breadth of knowledge of economic development in plan-based and market economies – both of which contained elements of the other – was mobilised as a rationale for the ECE to take up a role as knowledge broker for planners and experts in less-developed countries. This aim would be achieved not only through more studies and more research work but also a complete restructuring of the in-house training scheme, previously focused on European economists,

[55] Sanchez-Sibony, *The Soviet Union and the Construction of the Global Market*; Oscar Sanchez-Sibony, *Red Globalization: The Political Economy of the Soviet Cold War from Stalin to Khrushchev* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

[56] Corinna R. Unger, *International Development: A Postwar History* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018).

[57] This 'international turn' in Soviet policy has generated an 'international turn' among Soviet historians. For some examples of this literature see: Eleonory Gilburd, *To See Paris and Die: The Soviet Lives of Western Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018); Elizabeth Banks, Robyn d'Avignon and Asif Siddiqi, 'Introduction: The African-Soviet Modern', *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 41, no. 1 (2021): 2–10; Alessandro Iandolo, *Arrested Development: The Soviet Union in Ghana, Guinea, and Mali, 1955–1968* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2022); Porter, *Reds in Blue*; David Engerman, *The Price of Aid: The Economic Cold War in India* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018); Kristin Roth-Ey, ed., *Socialist Internationalism and the Gritty Politics of the Particular: Second–Third World Spaces in the Cold War* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2023).

[58] Gaiduk, *Divided Together*, 212–14.

[59] *Five-Year Perspective, 1960–64* (Geneva: UN DESA, 1960) (E/3347/Rev. 1).

[60] 'Memo from Strauss to Executive Secretary, December 1961', 'Action of Assembly Resolution on Regional Services for Development Planning', Ms. Eng. c. 4682, folder 1, Bodleian.

[61] The cross-systemic agreement on planning is well established in the literature. For instance, see Michel Christian, Sandrine Kott and Ondřej Matějka, eds., *Planning in Cold War Europe: Competition, Cooperation, Circulations (1950s–1970s)* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2018).

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in order to welcome 'a substantial number of fellows from less-developed regions' from 1963 onwards.[62]

Through these efforts, the pool of research on socialist economies that had so animated Chossudovsky, Kaser, Myrdal, Watts, their UN colleagues and a whole cohort of academic Sovietologists burst its banks. What had begun as an exercise in sharing information between East and West channelled into a wider global practice. Michael Kaser brought this possibility to the 1961 meeting of UK Sovietologists in a presentation given jointly with his LSE colleague Alec Nove. Their paper began in a classic fashion with a discussion of the creation of centralised planning methods in the Soviet economy in the late 1920s and an assessment of their modification in the years since. The key elements of this paper – the role of the peasants, the role of the Party and the use of trade monopolies – were common themes in the discussions held at the same meeting in previous years. But the final aspect of their paper was new. Reflecting the change in perspective that had taken place at the UN ECE, where Kaser was still employed, the previous year, their session would 'conclude on an enquiry whether any, and if so which, of the present techniques' found in the Soviet Union 'would be suited to the political, economic and social structure of underdeveloped countries today'.[63]

As they mused about the global applicability of Soviet experience, Kaser and Nove explored the same question that Soviet experts and new leaders in the developing world were beginning to ask themselves. As a new generation of nations emerged from empire, many turned to socialism as an alternative model for growth and rapid development that contrasted explicitly with former imperial models. In Africa, the attraction was so great that two thirds of emergent countries adopted socialist policies, at least for a time.[64] In the Soviet Union, meanwhile, the post-Stalinist leadership broadened its international vision to include *any* anti-imperial group, not just communist parties, as possible allies in revolution. New institutions began research and outreach work aimed at postcolonial governments, creating a distinctive style of Soviet development that emphasised state ownership and technical education that enjoyed mixed success in West Africa in particular.[65] This dynamic was mirrored at the ECE by its shift from internal cross-bloc research to externally facing development – and expressed in the final section of Nove and Kaser's paper. As the two British experts sought to uncover which aspects of the Soviet economic experience would be applicable in development work, they revealed that despite the Cold War, and despite the very recent challenges in information sharing each had experienced, a convergence of economic approach and development thinking nonetheless was taking place.

Over the course of 1960s, the ECE, the FAO and other UN agencies began hosting and funding training seminars for experts from the developing world inside the Soviet Union. These tours, each of which were several weeks long, covered a wide range of practical development topics including construction, mining, animal husbandry, fisheries, cotton production, food preservation, airport management, metalworking, statistics, accounting and the ever-popular topic of planning. Soviet experts led almost all the sessions, gave almost all the lectures, served as tour directors and guided participants through on-site visits that complemented the more academic work. The initial demand for such events had come from experts in the developing world themselves who approached local UN

[62]Quote from 'Memo from Strauss to Executive Secretary, December 1961', Ms. Eng. c. 4682, folder 1, Bodleian. See also 'Action of Assembly Resolution on Regional Services for Development Planning', Ms. Eng. c. 4682, folder 1, Bodleian. The European version of this training programme is discussed by Pasca, 'A Détente Equation', 166.

[63]'Sixth Conference of Research Workers on the USSR, January, 1961', Ms. Eng 4682, folder 1, Bodleian.

[64]Allison Drew, 'Communism in Africa', in *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Communism*, ed. Stephen Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 285; M. Anne Pitcher and Kelly M. Askew, 'African Socialisms and Postsocialisms', *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 76 (2006): 1.

[65]Iandolo, *Arrested Development*. See also Abena Dove Osseo-Asare, *Atomic Junction: Nuclear Power in Africa after Independence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019).

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officials to ask for opportunities to learn from the latest Soviet techniques.[66] By 1966, the FAO hosted around two dozen of these seminars per year, and numbers continued to grow.[67] These tours, which provided an international frame for Soviet development outreach, signalled the continued pooling of Soviet and UN knowledge.

The ECE's programme of similar events was much more modest than that of the FAO, yet of five ECE seminars that provided training for participants from the developing world in 1964, two were hosted in the Soviet Union.[68] Nita Watts played a key role in organising these seminars behind the scenes; this more hidden work, like that of many other lesser-known women, played a crucial role in facilitating the international movement of economic ideas.[69] In late 1962, she began making arrangements for a ten-day programme for forty-five participants from the developing world to learn from Soviet planning methods in Moscow and at new research centres in Novosibirsk. Watts intended for the seminar to focus attention on technical methods of economic planning that would avoid discussion of larger systemic questions.[70] 'The seminar is not intended', she wrote, 'to take up criteria for formulating the major constituents of economic development' or to discuss any 'eventual reforms of economic and social institutions'. Similarly, 'micro-economic implementations of the programmes [. . .] [would] fall outside the scope of the seminar since the instruments used depend largely upon the ruling economic mechanism'. The seminar would instead focus on techniques and allow officials to '[program] output on a national and on a regional basis so as to ensure consistency with direct and derived demand' and ensure 'the optimal use of resources'.[71] In other words, Watts's vision for the study tour was based on the same distinction between political, economic and technical knowledge that had been so powerful at the UNESCO meetings. When the time for the tour came around, Watts continued to benefit from the circulation of knowledge between ECE and British academia as she wrote to her old friend Michel Kaser, by then at Oxford, for advice and later asked him to join the tour as an external expert consultant.

Technical officers from among the UN staff as well as developing world participants learned from these study tours. As the report on one early seminar on irrigation techniques put it, the objective of the six-week event was 'to obtain for the participants *and FAO* first-hand information on the state of irrigation and reclamation in the Soviet Union and on the main features and trends of recent development' in related areas.[72] Staff also gathered and shared such information informally. In the summer of 1964, to give one example, Jerzy Berent at the ECE wrote to a colleague working on population affairs in NYC alerting him that one of the papers submitted in advance was particularly interesting as it represented a sea change from previous Soviet approaches to population; it argued for limiting family size through policies rather than Malthusian methods and proposed that each socialist state be allowed to make its own choices.[73] Three years earlier, FAO staff members who had attended a fisheries

[66]'Letter from B R Sen, Director General of FAO to representatives of various governments, 6 July 1958', 14-FI-137 (Fisheries Study Tour in USSR 1958), Archive of the Food and Agriculture Organization, Rome (hereafter FAO Archive).

[67]Andrew de Vajda, *Adventure, Achievements, Altruism: Andrew de Vajda: The Story of My Life, 15-7-1893 - 29-10-1981* (Rome: Friends of Andrew de Vajda, 1983), 117. 'Director General's visit to the USSR, Brief on Study Group Tours in the USSR', 14-FI-55 (Office Files of Mr. Jackson, Trip to USSR 1966-68), FAO Archive. For more on these tours, see also Banks, 'The Ruble Lever'.

[68]UN ECE Annual Report 1 May 1964–8 May 1965 (New York, 1965), 33. (E/4031 E/ECE/581).

[69]Betancourt and Espinel, 'The Invisible Ones'; Gautier Morin, 'The Women's Faces of Development in Latin America and the Caribbean'.

[70]Letter from Nita Watts to Professor Bor, 11 Dec. 1962, plus enclosures, GX 18/8/1/98, UNOG.

[71]'Inter-Regional Seminar on Planning Techniques' (undated, no named author, can assume Nita Watts), GX 18/8/1/98, UNOG.

[72]Emphasis mine. Andre de Vajda, 'Notes on Irrigation and Drainage Training Centre and Study Tour – USSR, Aug–Sep 1956' (1956), 14. Accessed at the David Lubin Memorial Library, FAO. For more information on de Vajda and his work at FAO, see Banks, 'The Ruble Lever', 113–14.

[73]'Letter from Jerzy Berent, at ECE Research and Planning Division, to John Durand, Director of the Population Branch of the Social Affairs Bureau at UN NYC, 24 June 1964', GX 18/8/1/98, UNOG. The paper in question is by B.T. Urlanis,

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training seminar in the Soviet Union shared summaries of the Soviet lectures with American embassy attachés based around Europe, disclosing details of Soviet methods as well as their plans to exploit newly discovered concentrations of fish in areas of the North Atlantic and North Pacific previously fished by American crews.[74] These incidents highlight how individuals actively used these training seminars to gain and share information from inside the Soviet Union. The institutional practice of including copies of all the papers in reports of these seminars supported these efforts, as it created a repository for Soviet knowledge that would then be kept in UN libraries in Geneva, Rome, New York and elsewhere, ready for research staff to come and explore – a stark contrast to the bleak situation at Lake Success.

In each of these cases, UN staff *and* western experts beyond the UN actively used seminars like these to gain economic information from inside the Soviet Union. This approach was the latest phase of a dynamic process of seeking knowledge about the Soviet economy seen during the UNESCO meetings, in Kaser's academic and international work and in Chossudovsky's careful efforts to improve the UN library. Each of these examples highlights keen and persistent efforts to use international spaces to collect information that dated back to the very first years of the UN, when ECE staff had tried unsuccessfully to invite Soviet specialists to join their committees, and when experts based in Lake Success who complained about their library holdings had to take the train to the public library to complete their work. In Soviet–UN tours, these efforts at data collection came full circle; by inviting and accompanying specialists from the developing world to the Soviet Union, UN staff gained access to Soviet ideas they could store for their international work.

Conclusion

As the UN was founded, the task of gathering information from the socialist economies in Europe fell to the ECE, whose staff worked hard to gather technical knowledge from across the continent. When it came to the Soviet Union, such work required more imagination, more sources and careful bricolage due to greater secrecy and a lack of shared experience in the inter-war period. Staff at the ECE like Chossudovsky, Kaser and Watts strove to increase their knowledge of the Soviet economy through creative use of publications, statistics, academic meetings and eventually seminars held inside the Soviet Union. Through these activities, they and other ECE staff members developed a conceptualisation of economic knowledge as strictly technical and that could be separated from ideology, even when the ideology itself was first based on economic division. Following the lead of the ECE's first executive secretary Gunnar Myrdal, the institution's staff approached their economic work as if building a bridge to the other side, yet as they struggled to do so, their actions produced a pool of shared knowledge that transcended geopolitical and ideological divides. As time went on, tensions between East and West began to intersect with the growing developmental divide between North and South, and with increasing socio-political demands in the wake of decolonisation. This profound change in global circumstances provided the ECE an opportunity to convert technical knowledge from across Europe, including from the USSR, into training for experts from the global south. By transforming their training programme to include more and more activities in the Soviet Union, UN staff worked alongside Soviet and developing world experts to promote Soviet knowledge and practices as suitable solutions for developing states engaged in a post-imperial struggle for economic independence. In doing so, western staff within the ECE and beyond found new ways to leave the bridge for the pool and learn for themselves.

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