

Reds in Blue: UNESCO, World Governance, and the Soviet Internationalist Imagination. By Louis Howard Porter. Oxford University Press, 2023. 299 pp.

In recent years, a growing body of scholarship has turned toward internationalist perspectives in the study of the Cold War, the rise of international organizations after World War II, and the gradual formation of what we might now call the foundations of global governance. Works such as Sandrine Kott's *A World More Equal: An Internationalist Perspective on the Cold War*, W. John Morgan's *Cultural Cold Wars and UNESCO in the Twentieth Century*, and the collective volume *International Organizations and the Cold War: Competition, Coordination, and Convergence*, for instance, have demonstrated how international organizations have bridged ideological divides by promoting shared objectives and shaping common scientific or cultural knowledge. In this literature, UNESCO occupies a particularly distinctive place. Its broad mandate, which encompasses education, science, and culture, provided a relatively neutral platform on which East-West collaboration could unfold, even as more politically charged UN bodies such as the Security Council remained battlegrounds for superpower confrontation. Against earlier interpretations of the Cold War as a rigid bipolar conflict between the Soviet Union and the United States, these newer studies foreground the practices of international cooperation and the role of "middle-sized actors," including Eastern European states and countries of the Global South. Louis Howard Porter's *Reds in Blue* brings the focus squarely back to the Soviet Union, examining Moscow's complex and evolving relationship with UNESCO from initial rejection to becoming one of the organization's most energetic supporters.

Drawing on rich archival holdings from both Russian and UNESCO archives, Porter reconstructs the entangled histories of UNESCO's internationalism and Soviet internationalism from the era of de-Stalinization and decolonization in the 1950s through the eve of détente in 1967. The book is organized into two parts. The first part, titled "Converging Internationalism," provides a chronological overview of the Soviet positioning towards UNESCO during the two decades following the foundation of the organization in 1945. Here, Porter explores how Soviet officials shifted from viewing UNESCO as a largely irrelevant, Western-dominated organization to fully embracing its potential to undermine Western dominance in international politics, especially in relation to so-called developing countries. During the 1960s, Soviet officials

adopted a proactive strategy to safeguard UNESCO's leading role in multilateral diplomacy and technical assistance, while simultaneously seeking to shape its agenda according to Soviet priorities. Although this first section offers a compelling, top-down view of Soviet diplomacy and the normalization of engagement with non-communist international organizations, the book's most original and engaging insights are found in the second part.

The second part, titled "Everyday World Governance," shifts the focus from high politics to the lived experiences of Soviet UNESCO employees stationed in Paris. Porter examines issues that were simultaneously mundane and revealing: logistical obstacles, inadequate housing, and the daily negotiations of Soviet experts who found themselves embedded within an institution largely staffed and dominated by colleagues from capitalist countries. Through four tightly argued chapters, he demonstrates how Soviet and UNESCO internationalisms converged around shared notions of world governance, civic responsibility, and the transformative possibilities of scientific and cultural cooperation. While their ultimate political visions diverged, both the Soviet Union and UNESCO were animated by a utopian belief in knowledge and exchange as tools for shaping a more equitable global order.

One of Porter's most illuminating contributions is his analysis of the "dual lives" led by Soviet UNESCO personnel, who often had to navigate their international duties and loyalties to the Soviet state while facing strict scrutiny and distrust from their capitalist colleagues. As a historian specializing in Czechoslovakia's involvement in UNESCO, I found particularly striking the comparison of bureaucratic practices across socialist countries. Porter shows, for instance, that the Soviet government secretly appropriated surplus earnings of Soviet UN staff and harmonized their salary grades with those of the diplomatic service as early as the late 1950s. In Czechoslovakia, by contrast, the system of double taxation for UN experts was not introduced until 1982. Such differences reveal how formally similar "socialist-style" mechanisms could function quite differently in practice and over time.

Another major strength of the book lies in Porter's use of extensive archival material to show how Soviet citizens appropriated UNESCO's emancipatory rhetoric to formulate their own understandings of international civil service. Participation in UNESCO's *History of Mankind* project, along with other major programs and the conferences, seminars, and symposia attached to them, opened a space in which "collective dreams" of a better future could be shaped through sustained intellectual exchange.

Among the most striking details presented by Porter is the extraordinary number of regular Soviet subscribers to *The UNESCO Courier*, which reached into the tens of thousands. Soviet readers not only consumed the magazine's content but also wrote letters to its editorial office in Paris, requesting information on Western art and health services and even raising environmental concerns. For this relatively small yet engaged readership, the *Courier* became more than an information channel connecting them to developments abroad. It offered a forum in which they could position themselves as "world citizens," articulating views framed in terms of "public interest" at the international level. Porter thus shows how UNESCO's publications helped foster a sense of global citizenship that transcended the ideological boundaries of the Cold War.

The book concludes with a brief reference to Mikhail Gorbachev's "new thinking," highlighting the value placed by the new Soviet leadership on UNESCO in shaping a post-Cold War order. Porter juxtaposes this legacy with public opinion polls from the 1990s onward, which show a declining regard within the Russian Federation for both UNESCO and the UN system more generally. Yet the reasons behind this decline (and the broader shift in attitudes toward UNESCO and the UN) remain insufficiently addressed. Given the institutional heterogeneity of the UN, a more sustained analysis could have clarified how UNESCO, once central to Soviet internationalist aspirations, came to occupy a far more marginal position in the priorities of post-Soviet policymakers.

Similarly, the 1970s, identified by Porter as the peak of Soviet engagement with UNESCO, receive surprisingly limited attention. Although this decade lies outside the book's stated chronological boundaries, a more substantial discussion would have enriched the reader's understanding of how Soviet strategies and perceptions evolved during the late Soviet period. Even a brief sketch of the decade's developments would have helped bridge the narrative between the 1960s and Porter's concluding reflections on Gorbachev.

Despite these minor shortcomings, *Reds in Blue* stands as an insightful and carefully researched contribution to the history of Soviet internationalism and its strategies of engagement in world governance from the end of Stalinism to the beginnings of détente. Porter's nuanced analysis will appeal not only to scholars of Cold War internationalism and specialists in Soviet foreign policy but also to historians of international organizations and students seeking an accessible introduction to UNESCO's complex political terrain. It is a welcome addition to the secondary literature and a valuable resource

for anyone interested in the intersections of ideology, expertise, and global governance in the twentieth century.

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