

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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**Sarah Miller Harris**

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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.<sup>1</sup>

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

## 2 Introduction

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

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.<sup>3</sup>

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.<sup>4</sup>

After a rocky start, the Congress flourished. It sponsored over thirty magazines worldwide.<sup>5</sup> *Encounter*, its most prestigious title, counted British Prime Minister Anthony Eden and U.S. President John F. Kennedy among its readers.<sup>6</sup> Even critics conceded that “it must have provoked more cocktail-party conversation than any comparable magazine of our time.”<sup>7</sup> *Preuves*, the Congress’s French-language magazine, fought against the headwinds in France, where the Soviet peace campaign had made its greatest inroads.<sup>8</sup> *China Quarterly* and *Soviet Survey* published smuggled manuscripts from dissidents behind the Iron Curtain and became noteworthy sources of reporting on conditions under Communism.<sup>9</sup> And, in Nigeria, *Black Orpheus* published and supported writers Chinua Achebe and future Nobel Prize winner Wole Soyinka.<sup>10</sup> 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.<sup>11</sup> 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”).<sup>12</sup>

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.<sup>13</sup>

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.”<sup>14</sup> 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.<sup>15</sup>

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.<sup>16</sup> 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.”<sup>17</sup> 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.<sup>18</sup> 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.”<sup>19</sup> To Director Helms, Josselson’s success in “keeping the congress intact and focused on its original missions” bordered on the incredible.<sup>20</sup>

#### 4 Introduction

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.<sup>21</sup>

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.<sup>22</sup> 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.<sup>23</sup>

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.<sup>24</sup> 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.<sup>25</sup>

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.<sup>26</sup> 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.<sup>27</sup>

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.<sup>28</sup> 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.<sup>29</sup> 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.<sup>30</sup> “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.”<sup>31</sup> 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.<sup>32</sup>

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

## 6 Introduction

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.<sup>33</sup> 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."<sup>34</sup>

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