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The Post-Stalin Komsomol and the Soviet Fight for Third World Youth

Fulfilling their international duty, Soviet youth volunteers joined the battle against fascism, for the freedom of republican Spain. Their strength was seen by the Japanese in the skies over China, and their courage was admired by the peoples of Europe during the Second World War. Today their traditions live on in those (young people) who are raising the Aswan Dam, helping to master new technologies and to liquidate illiteracy and disease in the newly awakened countries of Asia and Africa.¹

Komsomol First Secretary Evgenyi Tyazhel'nikov, October 1968

Komsomol youth do not just observe international life, they take an active part in it.²

Leonid Brezhnev, February 1967

As an organisation whose fundamental purpose was to raise youth in a 'spirit of Marxism-Leninism', the Komsomol was first and foremost entrusted, and closely supervised, by the Communist Party to ensure young people grew up as good communists and loyal Soviet citizens. Accordingly, attention has mainly focused upon domestic themes in Komsomol work, such as its role in struggles against

¹ M.M. Mukhamedzhanov et al eds. *My internatsionalisty: dokumenty i materialy s"ezdov, konferentsii i TsK VLKSM, AKSM i KMO SSSR ob internatsional'nykh svyazakh sovetskoi molodezhi i mezhdunarodnom molodezhnom dvizhenii (1918-1971gg)*, Moskva: Molodaya gvardiya, 1972. p. 266-7.

² L.I. Brezhnev, *Molodym stroit' kommunizm*, Moskva: Izdatel'stvo politicheskoi literatury, 1970, p. 207. Quote taken from Brezhnev's address to the February 1967 plenum of the Komsomol Central Committee.

hooliganism and the growth of Western penetration of the USSR, or the ways in which it worked to inculcate desirable attitudes and behaviours.³ Nonetheless, in line with the wider goals of the Soviet project, it was from its very first stages involved in efforts to spread communist influence abroad. The nascent Komsomol was a founder member of the Young Communist International (or Youth Comintern) that was established in Berlin at the end of 1919, and would thereafter remain its central actor until that organisation was dissolved along with the Comintern, in 1943.

Even while wartime prerogatives necessitated a hiatus in Soviet attempts to drive revolution abroad, the Komsomol's international work did not cease entirely. The Anti-Fascist Committee of Soviet Youth was created in the months following the Nazi invasion of 1941 and sought to publicise both the suffering and the heroic deeds of young people in the USSR in the defence of their homeland: exchanging communications and occasional delegations with foreign youth groups. It was, however, telling of declining Soviet engagement with the outside world during Stalin's last years in power that this body, established for

³ On such aspects of Komsomol work, see, for example, B. LaPierre, *Hooligans in Khrushchev's Russia: Defining, Policing and Producing Deviance during the Thaw*, University of Wisconsin Press, 2012; W. Risch, 'Soviet "Flower Children": Hippies and the Youth Counter-Culture in 1970s L'viv', *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 40, No. 3 (2005), pp. 565-584; G. Tsipursky, 'Having Fun in the Thaw: Youth Initiative Clubs in the Post-Stalin Years', *Carl Beck Papers*, University of Pittsburgh Press, 2012.

the specific conditions of the Second World War, remained largely unchanged and grew increasingly redundant for a decade after the war's end.⁴ However, once Nikita Khrushchev began to revive the international dimensions of the communist project following Stalin's death in March 1953, and young people became an ever more prominent feature of Soviet political discourse, so the Komsomol's foreign activity again grew much more substantial.⁵

Aside from the fact that both Aleksandr Shelepin and Vladimir Semichastnyi both made the switch from Komsomol First Secretary to KGB chairman during the 1950s, the post-Stalin Komsomol has barely registered a mention in the scholarly literature on the Cold War.⁶ One notable exception to this has been Andrei Kozovoi's recent article on Komsomol efforts at mobilising Soviet youth

⁴ On Soviet isolation and youth during the late Stalin years, see, in particular, J. Fürst, *Stalin's Last Generation: Soviet Post-War Youth and the Emergence of Mature Socialism*, Oxford University Press, 2010.

⁵ On the Khrushchev era as a time of re-engagement with the outside world, see, for example, A. Fursenko and T. Naftali, *Khrushchev's Cold War: the Inside Story of an American Adversary*, New York: W.W. Norton, 2006.

⁶ Neither man moved directly from the post of Komsomol First Secretary to KGB chairman, though in both cases the transition was a rapid one. See V. Semichastnyi, *Bespokoinoe serdtse*, Moskva: Vagrius, 2002, and L. Mlechin, *Shelepin*, Moskva: Molodaya gvardiya, 2009. Semichastnyi's successor at the KGB, Yuri Andropov, also had a substantial Komsomol career, having served as First Secretary of the Komsomol in Soviet Karelia during the Second World War.

opinion around the Cuban Missile Crisis.⁷ Like a number of other authors, though, Kozovoi's focus falls upon the domestic, or 'defensive', aspects of the Komsomol's Cold War work.⁸ Such activity was, of course, a crucial facet of Komsomol's remit, but its contribution to the struggle did not stop at the Soviet border.

The reason why the Komsomol does not yet occupy a more substantial place in the historiography on the overseas aspects of the Soviet Cold War is surely anchored in its lack of political agency: this was, after all, an organisation that unashamedly served as handmaiden to the ruling Communist Party, and had precious little scope for its own policy initiatives, especially in regard to foreign activity. Even so, with the Cold War now a quarter-century over we are in an age where agency is no longer the be all and end all of examining the Soviet political system, since there is no longer a pressing need to divine what the USSR 'might do next'. Furthermore, as an institution the Komsomol also represents one of fairly few points at which we can start to knit together more traditional approaches to Cold War historiography with the emerging scholarly attention to the cultural competition that also characterised the period.

⁷ See A. Kozovoi, 'Dissonant Voices: Soviet Youth Mobilization And the Cuban Missile Crisis', *Journal of Cold War Studies*, Vol. 16, No. 3, 2014, pp. 29-61.

⁸ See also A. Kassof, *The Soviet Youth Programme: Regimentation and Rebellion*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1965.

Just as the USA's Cold War campaign utilised myriad offices beyond those of the CIA and the White House, so the Soviet effort incorporated much more than just the KGB and Kremlin.⁹ Leonid Brezhnev was surely issuing a rallying cry as much as he was making a statement of fact when he declared that the Komsomol's international activity was 'a vital part of Soviet foreign policy as a whole', but his message was not wholly without substance.¹⁰ The Komsomol consistently made a substantial and distinct contribution to the Soviet Union's efforts at expanding its influence abroad during the Cold War. It helped to build and to consolidate international relationships, its size and vast resources made the Komsomol able to act on a truly global scale and to seize upon new opportunities with alacrity, and it boasted considerable experience in youth work from which many developing countries were eager to learn.

A number of points raised here also help to flag up noteworthy similarities and differences in the way that the Cold War was conducted by the USA and USSR. As I show, there were multiple dynamics of Komsomol Cold War activity that bore likeness to those of public organisations in the West, such as the Congress for Cultural Freedom (CCF), the American Society for African Culture (AMCAR) and the National Student Association (NSA). Both sides created multi-faceted and sophisticated approaches to winning influence abroad, and both proved

⁹ Other Soviet public organisations worthy of research on their Cold War work include the 'Soviet Women's Committee' and the 'Soviet Committee for the Defence of Peace'.

¹⁰ L. Brezhnev, *Molodym stroit' kommunizm*, p. 207.

themselves skilled at debunking the other's claims to the moral high ground in the international arena. The differences between the two sides were also telling. The Soviet lack of ideological pluralism and the direct ties that linked the Komsomol to the decision-making elite in the Soviet system meant that its Cold War work showed an internal clarity of ideas and purpose that enabled its campaign for world youth to range especially widely: from cultural diplomacy and the embedding of intellectual orthodoxies through to outright ideological and military subversion. Like the US, the Soviet system proved far better at denigrating its opposite number than it did at producing compelling and attractive messages about its own social and political system, but the Soviet failure in this was on a far grander scale: a failure that ultimately extended to a growing number of young people inside the Soviet Union.¹¹

A last, key, theme to highlight is that the Komsomol's Cold War international activity was very much a two-way street, serving important domestic ends as well as foreign ones. The bulk of its international work was conducted by a coterie of elite specialists, but there were important messages to be absorbed by all. In the opening lines of her work on the US Peace Corps Elizabeth Hoffman wrote of how that organisation told Americans what was best about their

¹¹ On the US failure in this regard, see L. Belmonte, *Selling the American Way: US Propaganda and the Cold War*, p. 6. On the failure to propagate a fully convincing view of Soviet modernity, see, for example, K. Roth-Ey, *Moscow Prime Time: How the Soviet Union Built the Media Empire that Lost the Cultural Cold War*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011.

country (its humanitarianism) and helped to frame its global mission as a moral one, before noting that 'the Peace Corps did at least as much for the United States as it did for any country in which its volunteers served'.¹² The dynamics were of course rather different on the other side of the iron curtain, but there is little doubt that the foreign and domestic fronts were very much in conversation with one another there, too. This was, after all, one of only a few areas in which the Cold War competition was genuinely competitive. In fact, in a country where 'internationalism' was consistently hailed as a vital quality to be inculcated in young people, and where utopian promises of abundance manifestly failed to deliver, this relationship between home and abroad was particularly important: offering an alternative discourse on the health of the socialist struggle and an often compelling narrative on the country's chief ideological enemy.

Spreading the word to the developing world

At the beginning of July 1956 the Anti-Fascist Committee of Soviet Youth was finally dissolved and a new body, the USSR Committee of Youth Organisations (KMO), was established in its place under the auspices of the Komsomol Central Committee.¹³ Although very much a facet of the Party-state apparatus, rather

¹² See E. Cobbs Hoffman, *All You Needs is Love: the Peace Corps and the Spirit of the 1960s*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998, pp. 1-9.

¹³ In December 1956 a second body was also created: the International Department of the Komsomol Central Committee. This was specifically for

than a genuinely autonomous body, its specific focus upon youth made this a distinctive part of the Soviet Cold War struggle. As stated in its founding documents, the basic duties of the KMO were to strengthen friendship and co-operation between Soviet and foreign youth organisations, and to provide for the 'international education of Soviet youth'. From the very beginning, then, there was a clear institutional nexus between the Komsomol's foreign activity and its domestic aims. Indeed, official discourse regularly proclaimed that internationalism and love for the motherland were two parts of a single whole.¹⁴ Starting with an October 1956 declaration of Komsomol solidarity with Egyptian youth in the face of British, French and Israeli aggression during the Suez crisis, the KMO spent the next three and a half decades working in open and clandestine operations to expand Soviet influence among young people the world over.¹⁵ That Komsomol howls of outrage on behalf of Egyptian youth came at almost exactly the same time as the brutal crushing of the Hungarian rising,

communication, co-ordination, and study of activity with the various youth movements of fellow socialist countries.

¹⁴ See, for example, E.M. Tyazhel'nikov, *Soyuz molodykh lenintsev*, Moskva: Izdatel'stvo politicheskoi literatury, 1980.

¹⁵ M.M. Mukhamedzhanov et al eds. *My internatsionalisty*, p. 183-184. This declaration of solidarity also included a statement to the effect that Egypt was within its rights to nationalise the Suez Canal.

which caused significant disquiet among Soviet youth, may have been a coincidence, but such coincidences would happen more than once.¹⁶

The Komsomol's first high-profile international propaganda success came with the staging of the 1957 World Youth Festival in Moscow, during which over 30,000 foreign youth visited the Soviet capital for a celebration of peace and friendship: an event that indicated to the Komsomol leadership the power of what they came to call 'soft politics' in attracting to the Soviet side youth from Africa, Latin America and elsewhere.¹⁷ As a number of recent scholars have argued, this was an event that did much to energise both Soviet youth and visitors from abroad.¹⁸ Within a little over a year the Komsomol Central Committee had founded a youth travel agency, known as Sputnik, and was bringing ever larger volumes of foreign visitors to the Soviet Union to 'see what the revolution has given to our young people', and sending more and more

¹⁶ On unrest linked to events in Hungary, see, for example, B. Tromly, *Making the Soviet Intelligentsia: Universities and Soviet Intellectual Life under Stalin and Khrushchev*, Cambridge University Press, 2014; and R. Hornsby, *Protest, Reform and Repression in Khrushchev's Soviet Union*, Cambridge University Press, 2013.

¹⁷ See, for example, RGASPI, f. m-3, op. 3, d. 239, ll. 109-111.

¹⁸ See P. Koivunen, 'The 1957 Moscow Youth Festival: propagating a new, peaceful, image of the Soviet Union', in J. Smith and M. Ilić eds. *Soviet State and Society under Nikita Khrushchev*, London: Routledge, 2009, pp. 46-65; T. Rupprecht, *Soviet Internationalism after Stalin: the USSR and Latin America in the Cultural Cold War*, Unpublished PhD thesis, European University Institute, 2012.

(exemplary) Soviet youth abroad to study, travel and to impress. Travel to other parts of the socialist world would always predominate, but reports were eventually being filed on groups travelling across Western Europe and as far afield as Algeria, Iraq, Japan, Tunisia, Iran and even the USA.¹⁹ This was, as the likes of Anne Gorsuch and Diane Koenker have already noted, 'tourism as international politics': something that both sides were to make wide use of.²⁰ Most succinctly, a December 1958 review of Sputnik's activity declared that 'the traveller abroad is not just a tourist, he is a propagandist for Soviet activity'.²¹

Freed from the shackles of Stalinist isolation, during a period in which the decolonisation process created great political flux across large swathes of the planet, the Komsomol was within a few years active right across the globe: often at the invitation of others.²² A sample of KMO correspondence from February 1964, for example, gives a useful idea of the scope and frequency of Komsomol

¹⁹ See, for example, RGASPI, f. m-5, op. 2, d. 1088.

²⁰ See A. Gorsuch, *All This is Your World: Soviet Tourism at Home and Abroad after Stalin*, Oxford University Press, 2011; D. Koenker, *Club Red: Vacation Travel and the Soviet Dream*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2013.

²¹ RGASPI, f. m-5, op. 1, d. 3, l. 23.

²² When, in February 1964, a KMO group headed off to participate in the Second Congress of Latin American Youth in Chile, the leader of their delegation had already visited fifteen different countries on KMO work over the preceding six years. Another member of the travelling party was about to embark upon his nineteenth such trip. See RGASPI, f. m-1s, op. 1s, d. 224s, ll. 52-55.

activity on the international scene. This included a request from Cuba to send a photo display on Soviet youth; a request to host a trio of representatives from the International Meeting of Solidarity with the Struggle of the People of North Kalimantan; a proposal from Bulgarian communist youth to establish a mutual exchange programme for journalists working in youth media; a party of six KMO staff (three political workers and three translators) setting off for a six-month trip to Mali; an invitation from the ruling Congress party's youth movement to send a delegation to India; a party heading to Florence for a youth conference on peace, disarmament and national independence; and an invitation to attend the III Annual Congress of Nigerian Youth in Lagos.²³ The scope of such activity would have been wholly unthinkable only a decade earlier.

Within and amongst these items of correspondence one can piece together several interesting themes on the place of the Komsomol in the wider Cold War struggle. Included in its invitation for a KMO delegation to attend the Second Congress of Latin American Youth, for example, the Chilean Students' Union expressed an eagerness for Komsomol representatives to 'familiarise themselves with life here and to discuss our struggle with illiteracy'.²⁴ This was just one of many examples in which groups from the developing world showed themselves eager to study the Soviet path of development. Having played a celebrated role in campaigns like the fight against illiteracy, the drive to industrialise the Soviet economy and the fight against fascism, the Komsomol seemingly had much to

²³ RGASPI, f. m-1s, op. 1s, d. 224s, ll. 1-157.

²⁴ RGASPI, f. m-1s, op. 1s, d. 224s, l. 12.

teach those in the throes of deep political and social change: and it was always ready to do so. Young agricultural specialists, doctors, teachers, athletes and more besides were soon dispatched to the developing world to demonstrate good will and showcase Soviet prestige. In fact, the sheer diversity of the Komsomol's experience – from work in the modern metropolitan capital to the less developed Central Asian republics – meant that parts of its programme could be declared applicable to needs almost anywhere across the globe.

Other aspects of KMO activity from February 1964 made plain both the extent to which competition for youth was more than just a sideshow in the Cold War, and the extent to which the Komsomol consciously staked out a place for itself in the on-going struggle. The request from the International Meeting of Solidarity with the Struggle of the People of North Kalimantan, for example, let it be known that their group had recently been received in China – by that time a bitter rival for ascendancy within the communist world. As with warming Indo-Soviet relations, the KMO visit to Mali was a clear outgrowth of (or perhaps reward for) friendly ties between the USSR and the Kaite regime there. Indeed, first secretary Sergei Pavlov had only recently been pressing the Communist Party leadership to sanction an expansion of Komsomol activity in West Africa so that the organisation might act as a counter-weight to burgeoning US Peace Corps activity in that part of the continent.²⁵ While the Komsomol was in no position to

²⁵ S. V. Mazov, 'Sovetskii soyuz i zapadnaya Afrika v 1956-64 gody', *Novaya i noveishaya istoriya*, No. 2, 2007, p. 87. At the time, Pavlov's proposed involvement in West Africa fell through on grounds of finance, but it had

initiate changes in the direction of Soviet foreign policy, its aid and expertise certainly did help to build bridges and consolidate relationships already in progress.

This point can be seen in any number of further examples. As soon as the Algerian war for independence from France drew to a close, the Komsomol dispatched a team of sappers to the country in 1962 to begin the process of removing mines and other dangerous materiel.²⁶ All manner of Komsomol groups were sent to Cuba in the aftermath of revolution there, to help build their fishing industry, to develop agriculture and build railways.²⁷ When, in 1968, the

nonetheless been approved by the CPSU leadership before coming to naught. As Hoffman notes, the Peace Corps took a rather more ambiguous position in regard to its position in the Cold War confrontation.

²⁶ Yu.A. Padornyi and B.P. Zyryanovyi, *Spravochnik komsomol'skogo aktivista*, Moskva: Voennoe izdatel'stvo ministerstvo oborony SSSR, 1972, p. 82. Strenuous efforts were made to cultivate friendship with Algerian Youth, seemingly to little avail. At a Dakar meeting in 1970 the Algerians invited a Komsomol delegation to Algeria; the Komsomol invited the Algerians to the USSR and promised them material help. Nonetheless, over the course of the congress the two parties ended up at loggerheads and the above offers were promptly withdrawn before the KMO had even left Dakar. RGASPI, f. m-3, op. 3, d. 520, ll. 1-95.

²⁷ In October 1961, for example, the Komsomol Central Committee resolved to send 300 young agricultural specialists to Cuba for a year to in order to help

KMO received a request from Kabul University for a Soviet-Afghan basketball exchange, the opportunity was seized upon with some alacrity. As he contacted the head of the 'Burevestnik' sports society to enquire about the feasibility of such a venture, the KMO chairman made the point that 'Considering there is no mass Afghan youth movement, and taking into account the importance of its political impact on Afghan youth at the present time, we would consider it expedient (to approve the request)'.²⁸ The Komsomol Central Committee also sent touring cultural groups to Tanzania and Zambia in 1970 to hold concerts and raise money for 'South African causes' and resistance fighters in the Portuguese colonies.²⁹ Even before the relationship between the Soviet Union and Bangladesh began to develop in the early 1970s, the Komsomol had already been building a relationship with the Union of Students of East Pakistan (as the country was known prior to independence), sending first a mass of propaganda materials in 1969 and then sending a group of professional Komsomol workers for direct agitation work the following year.³⁰

develop agriculture there and to 'learn about Cuban youth'. A thousand Cuban youth would in turn come to the USSR for study. RGANI, f. 5, op. 31, d. 180, l. 47.

²⁸ RGASPI, f. m-3, op. 5, d. 240, l. 69.

²⁹ Cultural groups also travelled within Western Europe, and seemingly proved popular. See, for example, RGASPI, f. m-1s, op. 1s, d. 3s, l. 31 on performances given by Komsomol troupes in Sweden and Iceland during 1962.

³⁰ The collection of Leniniana included 1,500 Lenin badges, 50 bas-reliefs of Lenin, 1,000 postcards of Lenin, 5,000 portraits and 30 busts, along with a

The deployment of doctors and medicines also became a significant feature of the Komsomol's contribution to the Soviet charm offensive in the developing world. Young Soviet medics travelled with donated medicines and vaccines to countries including Congo, Angola and Guinea. Students from across the developing world, many of them in receipt of KMO stipends, also learned about medicine and healthcare in Soviet institutes.³¹ Sometimes trips were in response to specific events, like the sending of volunteer medics and medicines to Peru in the wake of the Ancash earthquake and avalanche at the end of May 1970.³² Following its assessment that the Sudanese youth movement had started to look like a useful partner in the region (see below), a KMO delegation soon visited the country, accompanied by a team of four doctors who would spend the next two months there.³³ A decade later, the KMO reported that Soviet youth were working as doctors in Ethiopia, Angola, and Nicaragua, as well as sending

number of photo albums and written materials on Lenin, as well as four 'libraries of Marxist literature'. RGANI, f. 89, op. 46, d. 10, ll. 1-14.

³¹ In addition to those studying medicine, regular seminars and talks were held on issues relating to healthcare in the developing world, blending practical advice with political commentary. See, for example, GARF, f. 9576-r, op. 17, d. 9, ll. 1-62 on the seminar series 'the Soviet Union and New Africa, 1964-70'.

³² KMO chairman Yanaev wrote that the Komsomol had sent medicines and doctors to help around 45,000 people in Peru. *My internatsionalisty*, p. 13.

³³ RGASPI, f. m-3, op. 3, d. 520, l. 17.

extensive medical supplies to Cambodia.³⁴ In addition to building and reinforcing foreign relationships, this was also a theme with domestic purposes, as Soviet medical aid to developing countries was repeatedly hailed as evidence of the country's status as a force for good in the world. Moscow Komsomol activists, for example, were informed in September 1979 that Komsomol volunteers were helping to reduce the 35,000 child deaths each year in the developing world from disease.³⁵ *Komsomolskaya pravda* and other media outlets were likewise instructed to provide wide coverage on students from the developing world studying in the USSR, emphasising their sense of gratefulness to the Soviet people, their academic successes and their 'cultural growth' whilst inside the country: again, using foreigners to demonstrate Soviet benevolence.³⁶

By its very nature the Komsomol was well-suited to carrying out both short-notice and large-scale international operations as opportunities presented themselves. The (relative) youth of its members and the massive size of the organisation meant that it was never lacking in skilled people able to drop everything and head off elsewhere.³⁷ When a request came in for the USSR to

³⁴ MIA, f. 96, op. 27, d. 182, l. 14.

³⁵ TsAOPIM, f. 635, op. 1, d. 3566, l. 13.

³⁶ T. Krasovitskaya et al eds. *"Vozvratit' domoi druž'yami SSSR": obuchenie inostrantsev v sovetskom soyuze, 1956-1965*, Moskva: Mezhdunarodnyi fond Demokratiya, 2013, p. 189.

³⁷ This was also the case inside the USSR. Calls for young volunteers to up sticks and participate in any given construction project at the other end of the (vast)

send a paediatrician out to Congo-Brazzaville, or an agronomist to Tanzania, the Komsomol could usually find such people within its own ranks with relative ease. All that was needed was for the KMO to contact the Komsomol organisation of any given university department, factory or sports society, asking that they recommend young specialists who might be suitable to serve as translators of Urdu for an upcoming trip to Pakistan, or to help develop the finishing industry in Cuba, for example.³⁸

All of the above bridge-building activity could be seen especially clearly in regard to the Komsomol's activity in Afghanistan following that country's 1978 socialist revolution. Months before the onset of Soviet military action there, the KMO had already sent a delegation to Kabul, and in turn received an Afghan delegation in Moscow, with the aim of utilising Soviet expertise to help the new regime build up the fledgling Democratic Organisation of Afghan Youth (DOMA). In addition to the tens of thousands of Komsomol members who served as soldiers or else worked in civilian tasks like teaching and medicine, more than 150 specialist Komsomol advisers (along with translators, who were mostly drawn from the Tadzhik Komsomol) journeyed out there to help establish a political framework for DOMA, expand its membership base and reinforce its fighting capacity.³⁹

country were by no means rare. See, for example, C. Ward, *Brezhnev's Folly: the Building of BAM and Late Soviet Socialism*, University of Pittsburgh Press, 2009.

³⁸ See, for example, RGASPI, f. m-3, op. 5, d. 240, ll. 1-355.

³⁹ See A.G. Belofastov et al eds. *Mushavery: neizvestnye stranitsy afganskoi voiny*, Moskva: Kuchkova pole, 2013.

Conditions were, of course, especially dangerous and by no means all came back alive, but numerous former Komsomol advisers who served there still speak of a sense of ‘international duty’ as a key motivating factor in their decision to go to Afghanistan.⁴⁰

Lengthy protocols on co-operation arrangements between the Komsomol and DOMA were agreed each year, and testified to a truly substantial drive to win ‘hearts and minds’ among Afghan youth.⁴¹ The Komsomol helped build roads and irrigation works, sent equipment to set up recreation societies and patronised hospitals. It sent tens of thousands of sets of children’s clothes and shoes, sent sports stars and cultural figures to impress and inspire local youth, provided literature (in Pashtun and Dari) and photo exhibitions that detailed the Komsomol’s role in World War Two, as well as material on its contribution to the USSR’s fight to liquidate illiteracy.⁴² Musical ensembles, films and projectors

⁴⁰ See, for example, I.N. Chernyak, ‘Internatsionalisty’, in A.G. Belofastov et al eds, *Mushavery*, pp. 64-81.

⁴¹ Komsomol documents also show some, far more limited, agreements for youth organisations in East Germany, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria, Mongolia, and Yemen to render additional material assistance, though they did not always fulfil their promised contribution. RGASPI, f. m-3, op. 13, d. 21, ll. 1-29.

⁴² To give some idea of the scope of this assistance, a 1981 agreement between DOMA and the Komsomol included provision for the supply of 400 footballs; 400 volleyballs; 250 basketballs; 200 tennis balls; 110 chess sets; 500 leotards; 2 gymnastics mats; 120 tennis rackets; and 100 pairs of dumbbells. Musical

were dispatched so that Afghan youth could see Soviet creativity, while Afghan specialists were invited to Moscow where they could learn from Soviet youth work in television, radio and print journalism.⁴³ All manner of propaganda hardware (from projectors and printing presses through to leaflets, megaphones and radios) was sent for DOMA use, though ultimately to little avail as the Afghan organisation steadfastly refused to take root.⁴⁴ Nonetheless, the resources that were expended on this task, all of which seem to have been drawn from the Komsomol's own budget, were of a scale that clearly marked the Komsomol out as an important player in Soviet efforts at winning the day in Afghanistan.

Central Asian Komsomol organisations were deemed particularly useful for demonstrating to Afghan youth the benefits of Soviet-style socialism in a cultural context broadly similar to their own. Friendly links were quickly established between republican Komsomol branches across the region and Afghan provincial

equipment included 20 accordions; 5 bass guitars; 5 pianos; 15 flutes; 20 clarinets; and a larger number of traditional Afghan instruments RGASPI, f. m-3, op. 13, d. 8, ll. 1-14.

⁴³ The editorial board of the Afghan youth newspaper *Znamya molodezhi*, for example, was invited to Moscow (at Komsomol expense) to learn best practice at the offices of *Komsmol'skaya pravda*. RGANI, f. 89, op. 46, d. 74, l. 1.

⁴⁴ RGASPI, f. m-3, op. 13, d. 8, ll. 1-14. Even as its membership roll grew to over a hundred thousand, Komsomol advisers reported that DOMA failed to carry out basic tasks like collecting memberships dues, and its military formations simply collapsed under pressure.

cities. The Uzbek Komsomol established formal ties to the Kabul branch of DOMA. The Tadzhik Komsomol linked to DOMA branches in Kunduz; the Turkmen Komsomol linked to Herat, and the Kirgiz Komsomol linked to Kandahar.⁴⁵ This is a point worth highlighting. While they did not set any kind of independent line in terms of either who to interact with or how to interact, republican Komsomol organisations could bring specific strengths to work with foreigners, especially those from less developed parts of the world: presenting the most enticing image of Soviet development in any given context. A 1980 KMO report, for example, wrote that the Uzbek Komsomol School in Tashkent was preparing cadres from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, India, Namibia and Ethiopia.⁴⁶ When delegations of Syrian and Congolese youth were brought to the USSR in 1979 to learn about the country's work with young people, they were based not in Moscow, which would bear rather limited comparison to their own situation at home, but in Grozny, capital of the Chechen-Ingush ASSR.⁴⁷ In short, the Komsomol and the Soviet Union had something for almost everyone in the developing world.

At the sharp end of the Cold War

⁴⁵ RGASPI, f. m-3, op. 13, d. 4, ll. 20-25.

⁴⁶ MIA, f. 96, op. 27, d. 182, l. 11.

⁴⁷ *Checheno-Ingushskaya oblastnaya Komsomolskaya organizatsiya, 1920-1984: tsifry i fakty*, pp. 129-131.

Komsomol involvement in the developing world also went some considerable way beyond offering moral support and issuing declarations of indignation. It has already been noted above that the KMO handed out stipends each year for students from the developing world to come and study at Soviet institutes.⁴⁸ Already by 1961 there were around 15,000 foreigners studying in Soviet higher education, and the numbers kept on growing.⁴⁹ In addition to those who entered Soviet education via the proverbial front door, though, there were also a considerable number who entered via the back door, for learning of a rather more clandestine nature. Over the course of the post-Stalin period thousands of students from the First, Second and Third Worlds attended special Komsomol schools for training in conducting political work with young people. Data from 1975 showed that over the previous quarter century the Higher Komsomol School had trained almost 7,000 foreign cadres from 91 countries: around 3,000 of those coming since the turn of the 1970s. The costs for the Komsomol were significant, but the results, it seems, were often desirable. Communiques received from the Mozambique Liberation Front (FRELIMO), for example,

⁴⁸ There was of course a political colouring to these studies. In particular, the House of Friendship (*Dom druzhba*) was set up, with Komsomol assistance, to get students from the developing world in particular interacting with their Soviet hosts' ideological work. See, for example, GARF f. 9576-r, op. 17, d. 14, ll. 1-93.

⁴⁹ T. Krasovitskaya et al ed. *"Vozvratit' domoi druz'yami SSSR"*, p. 264-267. Figures given here show over one thousand students from Africa, almost seven hundred from Southeast Asia, over seven hundred and fifty from the Americas, and over two thousand from Arab lands and the Near East.

showed that they were very happy with the training that their students received in both 'legal and illegal Party work'.⁵⁰ The longer-term value of all this could be seen in the fact that numerous graduates of Komsomol training were reported to have subsequently taken up important Party and state posts, or else headed up youth works, upon their return home.⁵¹

Students were being trained in the usual boilerplate subjects, like 'Marxist-Leninist theory and discipline', 'USSR – the country of victorious socialism' and 'the international youth movement', but also in 'partisan struggle and propaganda work among the masses'.⁵² They attended lectures on topics including 'the struggle of the USSR against the aggressive politics of neo-imperialism', 'neo-colonialism: the main obstacle to socio-economic progress in Africa', and 'help from socialist states to the developing countries of Africa'. The subversive nature of the training on offer could be gauged from the fact that in 1967 the director of the school complained to the Komsomol Central Committee

⁵⁰ FRELIMO leader Eduardo Mondlane did complain that two of the female recruits he had sent to Moscow were found to be pregnant upon their return to Mozambique. RGASPI, f. m-3, op. 5, d. 202, ll. 14-16. FRELIMO had been sending students to the School since 1962, but the relationship seems to have soured following this pregnancy scandal.

⁵¹ RGASPI, f. m-1s, op. 1s, d. 1010s, ll. 7-34. Of the 6,815 foreign cadres trained, 3,617 were from socialist countries, 420 from capitalist countries, 1,004 from Latin America, 1,386 from Africa, and 388 from Asia.

⁵² RGASPI, f. m-3, op. 5, d. 202, l. 18.

that too many people were becoming aware of its existence on the outskirts of Moscow (apparently thanks to its African students meeting up with friends at Patrice Lumumba University in the city). This, he said, was problematic because many of his students were related to prominent figures abroad, were attached to illegal parties or were in the country against their home governments' wishes. The director's proposed solution was a classic of the Cold War genre: since it had already become known, the existing school ought to continue and even receive some media coverage, but a brand new, state-of-the-art, Komsomol school should also be built, away from prying eyes.⁵³

The global reach of the Komsomol's Cold War activity also made the organisation especially notable in the conflict. At the end of June 1980, for example, a report was sent from the Komsomol Central Committee to the Communist Party Central Committee informing that, during the course of recent talks, fraternal youth organisations in Latin America had requested urgent financial assistance, and the Komsomol was willing to help. The following month the CPSU Central Committee Secretariat approved the request. Since a number of the youth organisations in question were operating in underground or semi-legal conditions (the position in Uruguay and El Salvador was described as 'a classic battle situation'), there

⁵³ The director laid out very detailed proposals for the new facility, which he specified should include 10 auditoriums, facilities for simultaneous translation into five different languages, a foreign language library of over 50,000 books, a microfilm reading room, a photo laboratory and a canteen capable of serving up 3,000 meals per day. The projected cost was over 450,000 roubles.

was no ambiguity whatever that this was the Komsomol playing a full part in the most subversive aspects of the international Cold War struggle. Even though permission for the payment had had to be obtained from the Communist Party, but the money came from Komsomol coffers: 111,000 roubles from the funds of BMMT Sputnik (the Komsomol's tourism arm), and a further 70,000 roubles from Komsomol Central Committee reserves.⁵⁴

When they attended international events KMO representatives worked to build connections and to expand goodwill toward the Soviet regime. Dozens of invitations were handed out at such occasions, bringing existing friends and those deemed 'winnable' to the USSR for a little glad-handing. A report following the 1967 International Student Union congress in Mongolia, for example, stated that by the event's conclusion the KMO had handed out forty eight invitations to the USSR to youth groups from twenty six countries.⁵⁵ Leaders of foreign youth

⁵⁴ RGANI, f. 89, op. 39, d. 24, ll. 1-5. This aid was to be distributed as follows: Argentina – 20,000 roubles; Chile – 16,000; Brazil, Venezuela, Columbia, Costa Rica, Peru and Panama – 7,000 each; Bolivia and Ecuador – 5,000; El Salvador and Uruguay – 3,000 and an additional 10,000 for the Sandinista youth movement in Nicaragua. Unfortunately, the available documents do not give any indication of exactly what the requested financial aid was to be used for.

⁵⁵ RGASPI, f. m-3, op. 3, d. 239, ll. 73-75.

organisations were also invited to Soviet sanatoria for spells of rest and recuperation, again at the expense of the Komsomol.⁵⁶

Alongside the networking opportunities that such international events presented, they also proved to be a useful source of intelligence. Indeed, talented Komsomol workers were consistently an important pool for KGB recruitment, including for operatives in its First Chief Directorate (foreign intelligence), and the security organs were anyway intimately connected to any kind of foreign activity by Soviet organisations. In its dealings with youth groups across Africa, Asia and Latin America the KMO regularly fed back to the Communist Party and KGB their insights on the shifting tides within radical political movements across the world.⁵⁷ Following the 1965 Havana meeting on colonialism in Latin America the KMO reported that Cuba had established itself as the leading actor in world student politics, and was showing increasing independence from Moscow in the region: a theme which would soon resound for years to come as Fidel Castro asserted himself in Latin America and Southern Africa.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ See, for example, RGASPI, f. m-1s, op. 1s, d. 1081, ll. 8-9, in which the Komsomol Central Committee requests permission from the CPSU Central Committee to invite youth leaders (along with their wives and children) from 37 different countries to the USSR during the summer of 1977.

⁵⁷ See, for example, RGANI, f. 89, op. 27, d. 33, ll. 1-8.

⁵⁸ See RGASPI, f. m-3, op. 3, d. 74, ll. 1-398; and f. m-3, op. 3, d. 239, ll. 1-241.

Chinese attempts to undermine Soviet positions on any number of issues within the world of youth politics were a regular source vituperative criticism in KMO reports. When divisions opened up within the IUS at its December 1964 congress in Sofia, for example, KMO representatives claimed that China had long been seeking to split the organisation and 'the Chinese are ruining things on purpose', submitting a list of those delegations which supported the Chinese line on any given question and those whose commitment to the Soviet line seemed to be wavering.⁵⁹ From the Pan-African Congress at Dakar in 1975, Komsomol advice was that the Sudanese youth movement was starting to look like a useful partner in the region, and it would be a good idea to strengthen links with both Tanzanian and Zambian youth movements as those countries took their first post-independence steps (both would ultimately move closer to China than to the USSR). As a foretaste of frictions yet to come inside the socialist bloc, it was also reported from Dakar that the Romanian delegation at the Congress had at times sided with the Chinese instead of the Soviet position, had broken rules of congress etiquette and had 'behaved unpredictably'.⁶⁰ While snippets of information such as this did not on their own shape the Soviet foreign policy agenda, they were undoubtedly of value to a Party-state leadership fearful of the

⁵⁹ RGASPI, f.m-3, op. 3, d. 73, ll. 1-4. Those delegations who were reported to have sided with China included Albania, North Korea, Indonesia, Zanzibar, Guadeloupe and North Vietnam. Those seeming to be wavering from a pro-Soviet position included delegations from Colombia, Cambodia, French Guyana, and Surinam.

⁶⁰ See RGASPI, f. m-3, op. 3, d. 520, ll. 1-18. A Komsomol delegation was duly sent to Sudan (see above).

ideological challenge coming from China, concerned about the cohesion of the socialist bloc and aware that it had already backed the wrong horse more than enough times in the developing world, losing considerable resources and no small measure of prestige in the process.⁶¹

As with CIA funding of public organisations aimed at shaping public opinion against communism, the Komsomol had a number of key vessels that it utilised in getting the Soviet message across to foreign youth.⁶² Set up immediately after the Second World War's end, both the World Federation of Democratic Youth (WFDY) and the International Union of Students (IUS) were officially non-aligned organisations that proved central actors in international youth politics on the political left, organising all manner of showpiece events such as the World Youth Festivals and international student congresses. Although the Soviet side repeatedly denied commandeering for itself the leading role in world leftist youth politics, both the WFDY and IUS were intimately connected to the upper reaches of the Komsomol (and through that, the top Soviet leadership)

⁶¹ As Jonathan Haslam has observed, in spite of the condemnation heaped on Nikita Khrushchev in October 1964 for his 'foreign policy adventurism', the blunders of the Brezhnev years were at least as egregious. J. Haslam, *Russia's Cold War*, London: Yale University Press, 2011, p. 270.

⁶² On this theme in the US Cold War, see, for example, F. Saunders, *Who Paid the Piper: the CIA and the Cultural Cold War*, London: Granta, 2000.

throughout the period.⁶³ During the mid-to-late 1950s both Aleksandr Shelepin and Vladimir Semichastnyi held the post of vice-president of the WFDY whilst concurrently serving as Komsomol first secretary.⁶⁴ Even after this very obvious connection was scaled back, both the IUS and the WFDY turned to the Komsomol for financial help at different stages over the ensuing decades, and both duly received assistance totaling at least tens of thousands of dollars.⁶⁵

As with Western attempts to keep hidden CIA funding of seemingly independent organisations like the Congress for Cultural Freedom, there was clear awareness that while organisations like the WFDY should serve Soviet purposes, their effectiveness would be undermined if the link back to the kremlin became too explicit. Internal KMO reports showed that efforts at achieving any kind of unity or backing for Soviet positions were badly hampered by foreign policy events

⁶³ Vladimir Semichastnyi, for example, took to the pages of *Komsomol'skaya pravda* in 1959 to refute claims made by the head of Yugoslavia's youth organisation (the Yugoslav People's Youth) that the Komsomol was 'interfering' in the affairs of fraternal organisations and claiming for itself the leading role among socialist youth. *Komsomol'skaya pravda*, 25 January 1959, p. 5.

⁶⁴ See V. Semichastnyi, *Bespokoinoe serdtse*, Moskva: Vagrius, 2002, p. 384.

⁶⁵ For example, in the mid-1960s, as the IUS hit financial problems once China stopped paying its dues, the Komsomol bailed it out to the tune of \$17,000. RGASPI, f. m-3, op. 3, d. 73, ll. 118-119. In May 1979 10,000 roubles worth of emergency financial assistance also passed from the Komsomol to the WFDY. RGANI, f. 89, op. 31, d. 2, l. 1.

like the invasions of Hungary in 1956, Czechoslovakia in 1968 and the military action in Afghanistan from 1979.⁶⁶ As such, there was a growing awareness that influence ought to be discrete, where possible. When the Sino-Soviet split began to impact upon the world of youth politics in the early 1960s, and representatives of the Labour Union of Youth of Albania publically criticized Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev, the Albanians soon found themselves expelled from the IUS. The KMO was unquestionably the driving force behind the move, with its representative Vladimir Yarovoi drafting the IUS response to the Albanians' attacks on Khrushchev. Yarovoi also noted in private correspondence that 'the key thing now is that this is not discussed at length ... and people do not start to say that the IUS is a "mouthpiece of Moscow" – this would play into Albania's hands'.⁶⁷

In much the same way that the CIA used its secret patronage of the National Student Association in the 1950s and 1960s to ameliorate (and report upon) anti-US sentiment in a range of international youth organisations, the Komsomol worked to do the exact opposite: seemingly with considerable success.⁶⁸ Even when they attended overseas events officially as observers rather than active participants, KMO representatives were working behind the scenes to push the

⁶⁶ See, for example, MIA, f. 96, op. 27, d. 182, ll. 1-26.

⁶⁷ RGASPI, f. m-1s, op. 1s, d. 3s, ll. 6-11.

⁶⁸ On the NSA in the Cold War, see T. de Vries, 'The 1967 Central Intelligence Agency Scandal: Catalyst in a Transforming Relationship between State and People', *Journal of American History*, Vol. 98, No. 4 (2012), pp. 1075-1092.

Soviet line on any given question. It was influence that the KMO exerted in these forums, rather than control, but they did seem to achieve desired results more often than not.⁶⁹ They fought to stifle or rebuff open criticism of the USSR and its allies, and to paper over differences between ideologically diverse parties, often downplaying overt language of socialism and instead foregrounding the importance of unity in resistance to the evils of imperialism. 'Unity', of course, really meant being united behind the Soviet position. At the 1965 Havana meeting on the liquidation of colonialism in Latin America, for example, they fought hard to achieve a resolution which stated that the fight against imperialism in Latin America could not be separated from the struggles going on at the same time in Asia and Africa and declared as martyrs of the cause Patrice Lumumba, Nguyen-Van-Troi and Pedro Albizu Campos.⁷⁰ Particular care was taken to ensure that some kind of condemnation of the US made it into the resolutions and communiqués that would be broadcast to the outside world

⁶⁹ KMO reports repeatedly indicated that anti-communist and anti-Soviet speeches were made at some events. At the 1967 MSS congress in Ulan Bator, for example, 'openly rude and anti-Soviet speeches' were delivered from the rostrum by Brazilian, Puerto Rican, and Ecuadorian delegations, among others. See RGASPI, f. m-3, op. 3, d. 239, l. 2.

⁷⁰ RGASPI, f. m-3, op. 3, d. 74, ll. 1-398. It is worth noting that this trio represented 'one martyr each' for Africa, Asia and Latin America.

from such events.⁷¹ This was far easier than achieving any kind of pro-Soviet statement. The resolution from the end of the 1965 meeting included declarations that Yankee imperialism 'is the worst enemy of the people' and condemned the US for 'resorting every day to more barbarous and inhumane methods' in its 'shameless war of aggression' against Vietnam, and lambasted the economic exploitation of the developing world by large American corporations.⁷² At the end of the 1970 Pan-African congress, the final resolution included the line 'International imperialism – with the USA at its head – is the enemy of all peoples of the developing countries of Africa, Asia and Latin America'.⁷³ Such statements were mere token gestures but it is worth remembering that both sides in the Cold War placed a high priority on being seen to occupy 'the moral high ground' as much as 'providing the good life'.

The Vietnam War in particular gave the Komsomol ample opportunity to stir youth opinion against the US, both at home and abroad. Accordingly, the Komsomol Central Committee did all it could to milk the available opportunities: filling the pages of *Komsomol'skaya pravda* with stories and images of suffering; bringing Vietnamese youth to the USSR to tell of US barbarities; mobilising young people to raise funds; and facilitating pen-pal exchanges between school pupils.

⁷¹ Various documents show that Cuban delegations helped the KMO in securing consensus for such statements. See, for example, RGASPI, f. m-3, op. 3, d. 239, ll. 1-241 on the 1967 IUS congress in Ulan-Bator.

⁷² RGASPI, f. m-3, op. 3, d. 74, ll. 1-21.

⁷³ RGASPI, f. m-3, op. 3, d. 520, l. 7.

Much as events like these were clearly orchestrated from above, it seems that plenty of young people in the USSR did feel passionate in their opposition to the war, just as young people did in other parts of the world.⁷⁴ In such contexts, one did not always have to be a communist zealot to perceive that the USSR was ‘on the side of right’ in global affairs. As William Taubman was told by one of his fellow students at Moscow State University in the 1960s: ‘a lot of us are against American intervention in Vietnam not because of *Pravda*, but in spite of it’.⁷⁵

The implicit link between divisive Soviet action abroad and sharpening Komsomol discourse on its Cold War rival resurfaced in 1968, just as events in Czechoslovakia (and mounting repression against the emergent human rights movement) saw Soviet international prestige plummet and again roused disquiet among young people at home.⁷⁶ The rhetoric on Vietnam grew ever more bellicose. Moscow Komsomol activists were told that, in Vietnam ‘the US is practising sadism like the Gestapo and the whole world sees their racism, like

⁷⁴ See J. Hessler, ‘The Soviet Public and the Vietnam War: Political Mobilization and Public Organizations, 1965-1973’, unpublished manuscript. Thanks to Julie Hessler for sharing this draft article.

⁷⁵ W. Taubman, *The View from the Lenin Hills: An American Student’s Report on Soviet Youth in Ferment*, London: Hamish Hamilton, 1968, p. 164.

⁷⁶ The period following the entry of Soviet forces into Afghanistan showed much the same tendency, though that time the focus fell mostly upon resistance to the US stationing Pershing-2 missiles in Europe.

the murder of Martin Luther King'.⁷⁷ A Komsomol Central Committee resolution approved proposals for a 'month of solidarity with Vietnamese youth', and championed initiatives in which pupils across multiple cities collected school supplies for dispatch to fraternal youth in Vietnam, organised *subbotniki* (voluntary work days) in which young people collected scrap metal and waste paper in their spare time, or else staged cultural events from which proceeds would be directed toward a Vietnam Solidarity Fund.⁷⁸

In January 1973 the Belorussian Komsomol held protest meetings against the massive US bombardment of North Vietnam, hearing first hand from Vietnamese students of the horrors they had experienced and of their gratefulness toward the Soviet Union.⁷⁹ In Georgia Komsomol members held a regular week of solidarity with Vietnamese youth in January each year, staging concerts and mass rallies, and each donating one day's pay to the solidarity fund.⁸⁰ According to official sources, that fund paid for 'tens of cars, hundreds of motorcycles and bicycles, transistor radio receivers, photographic and cinema equipment,

⁷⁷ TsAOPIM, f. 2907, op. 1, d. 164, l. 15.

⁷⁸ See 'O provedenii v ramkakh mesyachnika solidarnosti sovetskoi molodezhi s boryushchimsya narodom i molodezh'yu V'etnama kampanii "pionery SSSR – V'etnamu"' in *Dokumenty TsK VLKSM: 1968*, Moskva: Molodaya gvardiya, 1969, pp. 228-9.

⁷⁹ NARB (Minsk), f. 63, op. 19, d. 34, l. 73.

⁸⁰ MIA, f. 96, op. 25, d. 68, ll. 1-5 (1973) and f. 96, op. 23, d. 157, ll. 1-10 (1969).

medicines and sports equipment'.⁸¹ Aside from the material assistance rendered to the Vietnamese, this was a way for young people to become a functioning part of the Soviet system and the global movement which it stood atop: a chance to participate in national and international political life and to engage with a theme that demonstrably had wide support across the globe. Much the same can be said of strenuous efforts made by the KMO to place Soviet youth in the front row of global campaigns for nuclear disarmament. In the early 1980s, for example, the Komsomol orchestrated a public campaign that saw postcards and letters of protest to the White House, signed by almost 4,500,000 young people.⁸² Similarly, a Komsomol initiative in Estonia had seen over 1,500 postcards sent to imprisoned Chilean communist leader Luis Corvalan to mark his birthday in 1976 while local youth learned Chilean songs and exchanged gifts with Chilean 'patriots' inside the USSR.⁸³ As Gleb Tsipursky has recently noted in regard to all manner of recreation societies on offer for Soviet youth, this was also a way of ensuring that free time was actually 'socialist time', in which positive ideological influences were being embedded.⁸⁴

Television and radio shows on youth abroad highlighted struggles taking place the world over. The pages of *Komsomol'skaya pravda* and other youth press consistently ran images and reports of police violence, protests, poverty and

⁸¹ M.M. Mukhamedzhanov et al eds. *My internatsionalisty*, p. 11.

⁸² MIA, f. 96, op. 27, d. 182, ll. 1-18.

⁸³ AIS (Tallinn), f. 31, op. 127, d. 111, ll. 1-2.

⁸⁴ See G. Tsipursky, 'Having Fun in the Thaw'.

systemic racism in the American Deep South, South Africa, Chile and many others. Indeed, there was never any shortage of themes with which to get involved. At the XVII Komsomol congress in April 1974 the KMO spoke of its solidarity campaigns with embattled youth movements in Guinea-Bissau, Mozambique, Angola, South Africa, Namibia and Zimbabwe.⁸⁵ By 1979 it was running concurrent campaigns of solidarity with young people in Laos, Cambodia, Nicaragua, Palestine, Chile, and Uruguay, to name just a few.⁸⁶ Attacks on extensive political repression under the US-backed Colonels' regime in Greece, in Salazar's Portugal and Franco's Spain were similarly forthright. Moscow Komsomol activists were reminded that 'we must not forget that there are bloody regimes in Uruguay, Chile, Paraguay, South Africa and suffering among the Arabs in Palestine'.⁸⁷ While they very predictably neglected to mention a long and lamentable history of human rights abuses perpetrated by the Soviet regime and its allies, this kind of focus on various 'enemies of socialism' at least made possible a reasonably compelling narrative in which the USSR could situate itself as a force for good in the outside world, even as it was demonstrably failing to overhaul the West in terms of living standards at home.

Discourse on the Komsomol contribution to struggles in the developing world also plugged Soviet youth into their own country's 'heroic past'. Evgenyi Tyazhel'nikov's remarks cited at the opening of this essay made clear that there

⁸⁵ RGASPI, f. 6, op. 17, d. 88, l. 18.

⁸⁶ MIA, f. 96, op. 27, d. 182, l. 14.

⁸⁷ TsAOPIM, f. 635, op. 1, d. 3566, l. 1-2.

was a 'revolutionary' thread that linked aid to the Spanish republic in the late 1930s, the defeat of the Nazis in the 1940s and volunteers who headed out to Africa, Asia and Latin America in the 1950s and beyond. One might even say that the developing world was meant to serve as the last bastion of romanticism during a time of apparently declining communist idealism inside the USSR. All manner of sources have spoken of the rejuvenated sense of idealism that followed the Cuban revolution.⁸⁸ Similarly, the resolution of a meeting of Komsomol activists in Daugavpils (Latvia) in June 1967, during the Six Day War between Israel and its Arab neighbours, declared that 'we are prepared to offer fraternal help to our Arab friends at any time, like our fathers did in Spain'.⁸⁹

Conclusions

One must, of course, take care not to set too much store by such remarks contained in official (though private) Komsomol documents like that cited above. Indeed, there were at least some instances in which citizens showed themselves openly resentful of Soviet resources being lavished on foreigners and foreign causes.⁹⁰ Similarly, one of Donald Raleigh's recent interviewees recalled that young people 'harboured unequivocal disinterest in the Third World', though

⁸⁸ See, for example, A. Mikoyan, *Tak eto bylo: razmiyshleniya o minuvshem*, Moskva: Vagrius, 1999; B. Pastukhov, *Druzei moikh prekrasnye cherty*, Moskva: Molodaya gvardiya, 2012, p. 48.

⁸⁹ LVA (Riga), f. 201, op. 3, d. 28, l. 1.

⁹⁰ See R. Hornsby, *Protest, Reform and Repression*.

this remark might well also be taken as a personal viewpoint being transposed into a generalised one.⁹¹ As noted above, there is every sign that various international issues – such as support for Vietnam and Cuba, opposition to colonial regimes in southern Africa and to the likes of the Pinochet regime in Chile – resonated deeply with lots of young people and won the Soviet regime some genuine credibility in places. What is abundantly clear, however, is that the inexorable growth of Western cultural influence among Soviet youth showed that the Komsomol narrative on the outside world had not produced anything like a comprehensive rejection of Western capitalist modernity.⁹²

In September 1979 Moscow Komsomol activists were assured that ‘revolutions in Angola, Mozambique, Ethiopia, Southern Yemen and Afghanistan have opened a new stage in the development of the world socialist system’.⁹³ In reality, of course, they had done no such thing: though it is certainly curious to note this particularly ill-starred quintet of regimes being proffered to Soviet youth as harbingers of the shining future for socialism. By that stage, of course, it was

⁹¹ D. Raleigh, *Soviet Baby Boomers: an Oral History of Russia's Cold War Generation*, Oxford University Press, 2013, p. 158.

⁹² On this theme see in particular the works of Sergei Zhuk, including ‘Hollywood’s Insidious Charms: the Impact of American Cinema and Television on the Soviet Union during the Cold War’, *Cold War History*, 14: 4, pp. 593-617; S. Zhuk, *Rock and Roll in the Rocket City: the West, Identity and Ideology in Soviet Dnipropetrovsk, 1960-1985*, Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010.

⁹³ TsAOPIM, f. 635, op. 1, d. 3566, l. 13.

much easier to present the benefits and achievements of Soviet socialism with reference to unseen events and processes taking place in the far away developing world, rather than by reference to the ossifying regime that Soviet youth experienced in their everyday lives.

As efforts at moulding a consensus of opposition to the Vietnam War showed, there was some considerable scope for giving the US a bloody nose in the global theatre of youth politics. This, though, was hardly the same thing as 'selling' the Soviet model to the rest of the world. When and where the Soviet regime did enjoy international success, the Komsomol was often involved on some level: whether sending out resources and expertise to build and consolidate relationships or else training up and equipping those who would do the fighting on the ground.