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The Enemy Within?

The Komsomol and Foreign Youth inside the Post-Stalin Soviet Union, 1957-85

'I like the people, man. The people...are something else, if you can just get away from the guides'.¹

After the deep isolation of post-war Stalinism, by the late 1950s foreigners headed to the USSR in far greater numbers than they ever had before. During its first six months in operation, beginning in June 1958, the Komsomol (Communist Youth League) Bureau for International Youth Tourism (BMMT) brought almost 1,600 youth tourists from capitalist, socialist and developing countries to the Soviet Union. The following year that figure stood at just under 10,000. In 1960 it topped 14,000.² By then, the number of foreign students studying in Soviet institutes already approached 10,000 and was still growing.³ In 1964 over 7,500 young people

¹ Conversation with an unnamed member of BB King's backing band during his tour of the USSR in 1979. A. Lee, *Russian Journal* (New York, 1984), 170.

² RGASPI (Russian State Archive of Social-Political History, Moscow), f. m-5, op. 1, d. 1, ll. 1-45. It should be emphasised that these figures relate only to BMMT operations. The two 'adult' tour operators, Intourist and the Trade Unions (VTsSPSS), also brought their own tourists, and did so on a larger scale than BMMT.

³ On foreign students in Soviet higher education institutes, see T. Yu. Krasovitskaya et al eds, *"Vozvratit' domoi druz'yami SSSR": obuchenie inostrantsev v sovetskom soyuze, 1956-1965* (Moskva, 2013).

from capitalist countries alone went to the USSR.⁴ All of this seemingly reflected the bullish optimism of the Khrushchev years: an ideological rejuvenation following the 1956 condemnation of Stalinist atrocities, a concomitant liberalisation of political controls, a revived focus on internationalism and a series of astounding successes on the world stage, most notably the launch of Sputnik in October 1957 and Yuri Gagarin's pioneering journey into space four years later.

The flow of foreigners, however, kept on coming to the USSR well beyond the heady rushes of de-Stalinization. In 1965, the year after Khrushchev was ousted from the kremlin, BMMT brought in almost 36,000 youth tourists from thirty-one countries.⁵ Soon enough there were over 15,000 foreigners in Soviet higher education. Between the XV (1966) and XVI (1970) Komsomol congresses 218,000 foreign youths came to the USSR with BMMT. Between the XVI and XVII (1974) congresses that figure climbed to 427,000.⁶ At first restricted to only a handful of the biggest Soviet cities, like Moscow, Leningrad and Kiev, by the late 1960s foreign tourists were visiting dozens of Soviet cities, from Tallinn to Tashkent via Donetsk and Dushanbe, while overseas students had appeared at higher learning institutes from Minsk to

⁴ I. Orlov and A. Mashkova, 'Inostrannyi molodezhnyi turizm v SSSR v 1956-64 godakh', Rossiiskaya istoriya, No. 6, 2011, 159.

⁵ NARK (National Archive of the Republic of Karelia, Petrozavodsk), f. 779, op. 47, d. 3, l. 14.

⁶ RGASPI, f. m-6, op. 17, d. 571, ll. 1-2. The XVII congress then set a target of 513,000 foreign visitors in the four-year period before the XVIII Komsomol congress, in 1978.

Tbilisi.⁷ By the early 1980s BMMT boasted of operating over 2,500 tour routes that included 500 Soviet towns and cities.⁸ All of this had happened not just with the Soviet leadership's blessing, but on the basis of their repeated demands to keep expanding the flow of incoming visitors.

Beyond clashing somewhat with the long-standing notion of the USSR as a fundamentally closed country, what makes all of the above data so interesting is that within the Soviet leadership (whether that of the 'liberal' Khrushchev or the 'conservative' Brezhnev) there was still near-universal acceptance of the tenet that foreign, and particularly Western, influence represented a potentially dangerous force that had to be prevented from poisoning society. This was especially true in regard to the perceived need to 'protect' young people from Western propaganda in its various forms. As the KGB asserted in an early 1970s pamphlet on East-West academic exchange: 'our young people are of interest to them (the West) because they are the very future of our country'.⁹ When even the rather moderate (by the standards of those around him) Leonid Brezhnev addressed the XV Komsomol congress in May 1966 he cautioned his audience to remember that the imperialist West 'was and still is a treacherous and dangerous

⁷ Nonetheless, just as some parts of the Soviet Union were opened up to foreigners, other towns were being declared 'closed', both to foreigners and Soviet citizens alike. See, for example, K. Brown 'Plutonium Enriched: Making Bombs and Middle Classes' in N. Klumbyte and G. Sharafutdinova eds. *Soviet Society in the Era of Late Socialism, 1964-1985* (New York, 2012).

⁸ *Metodicheskie rekomendatsii po organizatsii molodezhnogo turizma*, (Leningrad, 1983).

⁹ V. Andreev ed. *Nauchnyi obmen i ideologicheskaya diversiya*, (Leningrad, 1972), 61. I am grateful to both Sheila Fitzpatrick and Stephen Wheatcroft for providing me with this document.

predator'.¹⁰ Nowhere was this kind of attitude more prevalent than among the Komsomol elite. They fretted endlessly about the impact of outside influences on Soviet youth and showed themselves entirely willing to respond to the proliferating signs of cultural Westernisation with distinctly authoritarian methods on occasion.¹¹

While they were clearly overstated at times, Soviet concerns on this front were not entirely unfounded. Rival powers were seeking to 'win over' Soviet youth just as the Soviet authorities pinned great hopes on winning the affinity of youth in other countries. Western cultural icons quickly gained traction as the country cautiously began to open up to the outside world after Stalin. Ernest Hemingway became one of the key intellectual idols of 1950s youth, and foreign films often proved disconcertingly popular when screened in Soviet cinemas.¹² William Taubman even recalled of a mid-1960s spell at Moscow State University (MGU) that he was 'subjected to more of the Beatles' music in Moscow than I ever heard in the US'.¹³ In the 1970s confidential Komsomol research suggested that up to 70 per cent of young people in the USSR were listening to foreign radio broadcasts.¹⁴ By 1971 even the very provincial Belorussian Komsomol was submitting reports that complained about the anti-social behaviour of 'so-

¹⁰ L. Brezhnev, *Rech' na XV s"ezde VLKSM i privetstvie TsK KPSS XV s"ezdu VLKSM*, (Moskva, 1966), 3-18.

¹¹ On the political views of key Komsomol elites, see in particular N. Mitrokhin, *Russkaya partiya: dvizhenie russkikh natsionalistov v SSSR, 1953-1985 gody*, (Moskva, 2003).

¹² See, for example, *P. Vail' and A. Genis, 60-e: mir sovetskogo cheloveka*, (Moskva, 2013).

¹³ W. Taubman, *The View from the Lenin Hills: An American Student's Report on Soviet Youth in Ferment*, (London, 1968), 70.

¹⁴ RGASPI, f. m-1s, op. 1s, d. 1096s, l. 13.

called hippies' and other youths wearing Western shoes and clothes, badges, logos and crucifixes.¹⁵

Numerous documents spoke unambiguously about the consequences of incoming foreign guests. A January 1977 conference held in Ukraine on methods of struggle against bourgeois propaganda heard that 150,000 foreigners visited Odessa every year, and every year border forces seized many thousands of items of ideologically harmful literature from them.¹⁶ Tashkent Komsomol obkom reported to Moscow in September 1977 that 'imperialist powers are using our international connections in their attempts to undermine the USSR', adding that foreign agents had been discovered trying to gather information and to turn unsuspecting young people there against Soviet power by inculcating bourgeois views, stoking nationalist sentiment, and promoting religion.¹⁷ Another Komsomol report that year from the Transcarpathian *oblast'*, in the far West of the country, stated that the 80,000-100,000 foreign tourists who visited the area annually accounted for half of the pornography and half of the religious propaganda seized by the authorities there.¹⁸ Bluntest of all, the Lithuanian KGB repeatedly stated to republican Communist Party bosses that foreign visitors were a key source

¹⁵ NARB (National Archive of the Republic of Belarus, Minsk), f. 63, op. 19, d. 32, ll. 221-229.

¹⁶ RGASPI, f. m-1s, op. 1s, d. 1096s, l. 10.

¹⁷ RGASPI, f. m-1s, op. 1s, d. 1096s, ll. 18-20. An obkom was a regional (*oblast'*) committee in both Komsomol and Communist Party hierarchies.

¹⁸ RGASPI, f. m-1s, op. 1s, d. 1096s, l. 27. KGB chairman Yuri Andropov in particular seems to have taken a strong line on pornography, viewing it as a cause of moral decay within society.

of ‘harmful moods’ among youth, and that some supposed tourists were actually serving as emissaries of hostile émigré organisations.¹⁹

The crux of this paper, then, centres upon the evident incongruity of the two themes outlined above: a regime that founded and continually expanded foreign travel to the USSR at the same time remained deeply anxious about the influence that the outside world was having upon Soviet youth. In the first part of the paper I highlight a number of the most substantial grounds for why the Soviet authorities not only allowed the flow of incoming foreign youth to continue, but actively demanded that it grow: even once negative consequences of increased interaction with the outside world had already started to become manifest. Thereafter, the paper goes on to discuss the ways in which the Komsomol worked to safeguard against the impact that foreign visitors had upon the country’s socio-political ecosystem. Torn between the desire to draw the varied benefits of international interaction and the need to insulate Soviet youth from the dangers that posed, the regime never came down decisively on either side. Simultaneously ‘opening up’ and ‘keeping closed’ became the compromise answer. As with so many other facets of the post-Stalin regime’s attempts to proffer an alternative socialist modernity without enacting truly fundamental social-political reform, the results showed that they had gone both too far and not far enough at one and the same time.

The Lure of Interaction

¹⁹ See, for example, LYA (Lithuanian Special Archives, Vilnius), f. k-1, op. 14, d. 25, l. 24.

The majority of the literature on the proliferation of Western cultural influences among Soviet youth has traditionally focused upon either Western ‘penetration’ of the country’s public sphere through the likes of Radio Liberty and Voice of America or on young people’s remarkable capacity to circumvent and ignore official proscriptions on foreign fashions, music, literature and more besides.²⁰ What should be added to these important dynamics, however, is the fact that the Soviet authorities also opened the door to a surprising extent, and they had some compelling reasons for doing so. With the Cold War in progress, decolonisation in full swing (which meant there were many new states keen to learn from Soviet Union’s dramatic rise to superpower status), and with a new international rival in the form of China, the period in question represented an opportunity not to be missed in terms of consolidating and expanding Soviet influence right across the world. Whether trying to spread a more positive image of the USSR abroad, seeking to raise funds for the regime’s international activity, or to prove to a domestic audience that the Soviet system was fundamentally on the side of ‘right’, there was always a pressing need to bring the outside world in.

The first major influx of foreign youth into the post-Stalin USSR came when the VI World Festival of Youth and Students was held in Moscow in the summer of 1957. The fact that it had taken a full decade before this showpiece event of world leftist youth, which saw 34,000 visitors arrive in the USSR for a week-long celebration of peace and friendship, was staged at

²⁰ See, for example, Y. Richmond, *Cultural Exchange and the Cold War: Raising the Iron Curtain*, (Pennsylvania, 2003); and G. Sosin. *Sparks of Liberty: An Insider’s Memoir of Radio Liberty*, (Philadelphia, 1999).

the epicentre of the socialist world was particularly telling about Soviet anxieties on this front.²¹ Khrushchev era ‘opening up’ did not just mean opening up to the capitalist world, but to the rest of the socialist world, too: a process that sometimes proved riskier than it might at first sound. The bulk of the responsibility for preparing and supervising the youth festival fell to the Komsomol, though, as always, the demands and advice of both the Party leadership and the KGB had to be accommodated. Komsomol committees taught Muscovites about the cultural and political situation of countries from which visitors would be coming, they coached guides and interpreters as to what details of Soviet life to impress upon guests and how to deal with potentially difficult lines of questioning, as well as elucidating which kinds of behaviour were and were not acceptable for Soviet citizens interacting with outsiders. Only the ‘best’ Soviet youth – mostly meaning those who excelled in their place of work or study, as well the most active Komsomol members from the country’s fifteen union republics – won the right to attend the festival in person.

All the main points of entry to the Soviet Union were readied to show guests an unforgettably warm welcome, with local youths waiting at train stations and ports singing and cheering, giving out flowers, badges and embraces. Orders had long since gone out from the Komsomol Central Committee to all Russian regions and non-Russian republics to provide a set quota of ‘local’ gifts to be handed out as souvenirs to festival participants from the young people of the

²¹ In this context it is worth noting that the Soviet side had sufficient sway over the festival organisers (the World Federation of Democratic Youth) that they could have staged the event whenever they wanted to. Komsomol first secretary Aleksandr Shelepin had proposed that the 1955 festival be held in Moscow but the idea was rejected by his superiors in the Communist Party and the event was held instead in Warsaw.

USSR.²² Truly vast sums were spent on building new facilities or refurbishing old ones, central Moscow was bedecked in decorations, the top men of the Communist Party leadership turned out to celebrate the event, and a huge amount of propaganda literature was disseminated, both at home and abroad.²³ Komsomol patrols were given responsibility for much of the public policing at the event, and Komsomol guides led excursions around factories, farms, monuments and museums, while visitors participated alongside Soviet youth in all manner of friendly competitions and get-togethers, from poetry readings, choral singing and athletics contests through to circus visits and tree plantings.

For those present the festival immediately felt like an epoch-making moment.²⁴ Vivid descriptions left by the likes of saxophonist Aleksei Kozlov – who managed not only to meet with but also to play alongside foreign jazz musicians for the first time – tell of Soviet youth delighted and fascinated by their guests from all over the world.²⁵ The majority of visitors proclaimed themselves broadly, if not always unreservedly, impressed by what they saw of the USSR and its young people in particular. The most egregious Western propaganda myths and

²² NARK, f. 779, op. 33, d. 18, l. 1.

²³ See P. Koivunen, ‘The 1957 Youth Festival: Propagating a New Peaceful Image of the Soviet Union’, in M. Ilić and J. Smith eds. *Soviet State and Society under Khrushchev*, (London, 2009). Koivunen estimates that the total cost of the Moscow festival was almost one hundred times greater than that of the preceding festival, in Warsaw.

²⁴ See, for example, E. Gilburd, ‘The Revival of Soviet Internationalism in the Mid to Late 1950s’, in E. Gilburd and D. Kozlov eds. *The Thaw: Soviet Society and Culture during the 1950s and 1960s* (Toronto, 2013).

²⁵ See, for example, A. Kozlov, *Kozel na sakse*, (Moskva, 1998).

Orwellian visions of life in the Soviet Union were to a considerable extent dispelled. One Irish participant recalled that ‘it was unexpected that I could move freely everywhere, and even answer eager questions in public about life in the West, and about the Hungarian rising of 1956’.²⁶ Coming less than a year after the Soviet military action in Hungary had badly alienated so many who were sympathetic to the socialist cause, including plenty of angry young people inside the USSR itself, these positive responses to the festival certainly represented an impressive achievement. Soviet youth at the festival for the most part behaved according to expectations, and the Komsomol and Communist Party leaderships quickly proclaimed the event a tremendous success.

Of the festival’s multiple legacies, the most tangible was the creation of the Bureau for International Youth Tourism (BMMT), soon known by the nickname ‘Sputnik’.²⁷ Funded by money left over from the public lotteries that had been held to help pay for the festival, and operating alongside the country’s two ‘adult’ tourist agencies, BMMT was established in June 1958 under the auspices of the Komsomol’s Committee for Youth Organisations (KMO),

²⁶ See P. Koivunen, ‘Performing Peace and Friendship: the World Youth Festival as a Tool of Soviet Cultural Diplomacy, 1947-1957’, Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Tampere, 2013, 234. As Koivunen notes, some guests were still rather disparaging of the living standards that they encountered inside the USSR.

²⁷ The ‘Sputnik’ name actually followed some months after the founding of BMMT. The first mention of it appears to have come in a March 1959 letter from the Bureau to the Komsomol Central Committee in which it was noted that the organisation needed a catchy nickname. Suggestions put forward included ‘Kontakt’, ‘Sputnik’ and ‘Druzhba’ (friendship). RGASPI, f. m-5, op. 1, d. 28, l. 24.

which handled all manner of international youth work, both open and clandestine.²⁸ The KMO was quick in posting notice that the Bureau was open to accept foreign youth tourists, and it immediately began receiving expressions of interest.²⁹ Having already become a member of UNESCO in April 1954, some particularly vocal boasting from Khrushchev about the academic quality and accessibility of Soviet higher education had also ensured that thousands of foreign youth were starting to appear in dormitories and classrooms around the country by the mid-to-late 1950s.

At the outset, propaganda purposes were unmistakably the top priority when it came to expanding interaction. While the Communist Party's March 1954 decision to expand incoming tourism to the USSR placed some considerable value on the benefits this offered to the Soviet economy, the evidence suggests that was not initially a fundamental motivation for specialised youth tourism which began four years later. Losing too much money was a concern voiced from the start, but increasing revenue was barely mentioned. Some trips were heavily subsidised and many overseas students studied at Soviet expense. Limits were also placed upon how much currency foreign tourists were allowed to exchange, and thus how much they could spend while inside the country. More importantly, for its first few years BMMT most often operated on a 'non-currency basis'. This meant that something approximating to like-for-like

²⁸ On the establishment of BMMT, see in particular A. Mashkova, 'BMMT "Sputnik" v 1958-68gg.: stanovlenie i razvitie inostrannogo turizma v SSSR', Unpublished PhD dissertation, Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi universitet turizma i servisa, Moskva, 2011. BMMT Sputnik eventually became a department of the Komsomol Central Committee in its own right.

²⁹ See, for example, RGASPI f. m-5, op. 1, d. 49, ll. 1-49, in which early enquiries were sent from India, China, Korea, and Egypt, among others.

exchange with partner organisations abroad, with little money ever changing hands, was the preferred model. This, though, rather presupposed a rough parity between incoming and outgoing international tourism which political conditions inside the USSR dictated would never be the case.³⁰ The volume of foreigners coming to the country comfortably outstripped the number of Soviet youth allowed to go abroad, so financial transactions more and more often came into the equation. The price of a tourist visit to the USSR was by no means cheap for Westerners (for whom prices were pegged to the cost of travel in ‘comparable’ countries like France and Germany), and was usually well beyond the reach of the working class youth that should have been among BMMT’s ideal target audience.³¹

Although the precise financial arrangements of BMMT remain somewhat opaque, there is considerable circumstantial evidence to suggest that the money raised did become highly valued in time. In particular, this new and growing income stream helped the Komsomol to fund a notable expansion in the scope of its Cold War international activity. For example, when an international conference-cum-propaganda-event entitled ‘For a Peaceful and Happy Future for all Children’ was held in Moscow in 1979, 40,000 rubles toward the cost came from

³⁰ In 1958 (which naturally represented a low starting point) there were 263 fewer outgoing BMMT tourists than incoming. In 1959 that figure stood at 3,563, then at 4,655 in 1960. This discrepancy would continue to grow over the years, though a surprising number of Soviet youth did get to go abroad during the period. RGASPI, f. m-5, op. 1, d. 1, ll. 1-45.

³¹ Indeed, one of the first British groups to express an interest in travel to the USSR with BMMT was the Oxford University Conservative Society, though they, too, felt the cost to be prohibitive. RGASPI, f. m-5, op. 1, d. 14, ll. 19-20.

BMMT's financial reserves.³² When the Komsomol Central Committee agreed secretly to donate 110,000 rubles to fraternal (and, mostly illegal) youth movements in Latin America the following year, another 40,000 rubles came out of BMMT funds.³³ As Soviet participation in the Cold War came more and more to centre upon such largesse during the 1970s and 1980s, the financial benefits of incoming foreign tourism naturally grew more substantial, and its scale continued to grow accordingly. Here one's thoughts are drawn to a point made recently by Sergei Zhuk, who noted that even though they helped diffuse foreign influence among Soviet youth, events like disco nights and screenings of Western movies brought so much money into Komsomol coffers that they were all but impossible for the organisation to resist holding as it sought to bolster its financial reserves.³⁴

As Roger Bartley has shown in regard to the use of Western academia during the Cold War, bringing foreign youth into Soviet higher education was viewed as a valuable means of building good will towards the USSR and showcasing intellectual prowess. Granting foreigners access to Soviet universities and institutes was also intended to help embed Soviet ways of thinking about and describing the world: presenting Soviet interests as universal interests, and setting

³² RGANI (Russian State Archive of Contemporary History, Moscow), f. 89, op. 31, d. 12, l. 1.

³³ RGANI, f. 89, op. 39, d. 24, ll. 1-2.

³⁴ See S. Zhuk, 'Hollywood's Insidious Charms: the Impact of American Cinema and Television on the Soviet Union during the Cold War', *Journal of Cold War History*, Vol. 14, No. 4, 2014.

semantic and discursive parameters, especially in matters political.³⁵ A September 1969 request from the President of the Academy of Pedagogical Sciences, for example, asked Moscow city Komsomol and the House of Friendship (which put on cultural events for visiting foreigners) to ‘include something on the Leninist meaning of “cultural revolution” in their upcoming educational work with foreign students because some were ‘being penetrated by Maoist ideas on this theme’.³⁶ The Komsomol’s move to start offering Russian language courses for foreign students in 1961 was (in internal documents) explicitly aimed at expanding the global audience for Soviet propaganda through extending the base of Russian speakers.³⁷ Accordingly, when foreign youth came to learn Russian, their study materials centred upon Komsomol achievements and ideological positions and their conversation partners had been trained by Komsomol committees.³⁸

With the decolonisation process came substantial interest in the USSR’s remarkable rise from a backward peasant-based society to superpower status. Delegations came from all over the developing world in particular to study Soviet methods of working with young people, often at Komsomol expense. Indeed, the Komsomol Higher School in Moscow (which trained both Soviet and foreign specialists in youth political work) must have been among the most cosmopolitan seats of learning on the planet for a time. A 1975 memorandum showed that over

³⁵ See R. Bartley, ‘The Piper Played to Us All: Orchestrating the Cultural Cold War in the USA, Europe and Latin America’, *International Journal of Politics, Culture and Society*, Vol. 14, No. 3, Spring 2001.

³⁶ GARF (State Archive of the Russian Federation, Moscow), f. 9576, op. 17, d. 69, l. 37.

³⁷ See RGASPI, f. m-1s, op. 1s, d. 1161s, l. 1.

³⁸ See, for example, RGASPI, f. m-5, op. 2, d. 1090, ll. 1-205.

the previous quarter century the school had trained almost 7,000 foreign cadres from 91 countries: the vast majority of them since the end of the 1960s.³⁹ Numerous foreign graduates of Komsomol training were reported to have subsequently taken up important Party and state posts, or else headed up local youth organisations, upon their return home: seemingly a clear validation of the decision to bring them to study in the USSR.⁴⁰

Youth exchanges like tourism and study opportunities were also a significant element of Soviet efforts at increasing cohesion within the wider socialist bloc. Strengthening solidarity among fraternal youth unions was regularly hailed as a top priority in international work and visitors from the People's Democracies of Eastern Europe were always the most numerous.⁴¹ Stimulating interaction on this front not only aimed at strengthening the Sovietisation of Eastern Europe but also, as Anne Gorsuch has pointed out, making the region a part of the Soviet domestic imaginary: reinforcing popular understanding of Soviet power and prestige on the international stage.⁴² The Komsomol thus became the driver behind a plethora of regular and occasional interactions with youth from the countries of the bloc, ranging from sporting tournaments and cultural festivals through to scholarly exchanges and 'friendship weeks'. The all-union Komsomol built relationships with other national communist youth movements, but

³⁹ RGASPI, f. m-1s, op. 1s, d. 1010s, ll. 7-34.

⁴⁰ 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.

⁴¹ See, for example, E. Tyazhel'nikov, *Soyuz molodykh lenintsev*, (Moskva, 1978), 198.

⁴² See A. Gorsuch, *All this is your World: Soviet Tourism at Home and Abroad after Stalin*, (Oxford, 2013), 87.

republican, regional, and city-level Komsomol organisations also began to partner-up with their East European colleagues, as did some primary organisations in factories, schools and universities. The Georgian republican Komsomol, for example, boasted of its strong links with the Slovenian Union of Socialist Youth and held a regular ‘friendship cup’ chess tournament with Romanian youth.⁴³ Belarus and Croatia held exchanges of youth construction teams.⁴⁴ The Tallinn city Komsomol organisation reported that it enjoyed a close relationship with the Hungarian Young Communist League organisation in Szolnok, while Komsomol youth at the Estonian capital’s Vol’ta factory had established their own links with Czech youth at Prague’s Electro-Mechanical Factory.⁴⁵ Such connections were replicated thousands of times over, right throughout the bloc. History may well have proved that they failed to create anything like a cohesive and stable socialist (or, pro-Soviet) youth across the region, but they were perhaps the only way that such a thing might have been possible.

Lacking a mouthpiece as internationally effective as Radio Liberty or the BBC, bringing foreign youth to the very centre of the socialist world was a key way of projecting the Soviet side of the Cold War argument. It gave a chance to showcase socialist achievements in science and culture, to convey the country’s peaceful intent, and to demonstrate Soviet parity with the West by combating hostile propaganda about the USSR. As an official in charge of incoming tourist operations made clear in 1976: ‘it is especially important that foreign tourists are freed from the pre-judgments formed under bourgeois propaganda, and take away with them the most

⁴³ MIA (Georgian Ministry of Internal Affairs Archive, Tbilisi), f. 96, op. 26, d. 143, ll. 2-3; MIA, f. 96, op. 20, d. 34, l. 34.

⁴⁴ NARB, f. 63, op. 19, d. 34, l. 58.

⁴⁵ ERAF (Estonian State Archives, Tallinn), f. 31, op. 112, d. 4, ll. 1-10.

positive impressions about our country'.⁴⁶ During the early years of youth tourism to the USSR, feedback left by guests certainly suggested BMMT were not entirely without success in this respect, with much of it proving very positive and at times highly effusive.⁴⁷ In short, according to BMMT, by far the best way to break the stranglehold of the imperialist propaganda apparatus was to bring foreigners to the Soviet Union to see 'the truth' with their own eyes.

The external benefits outlined above seem to have been the main focus of Komsomol attention, but incoming visitors could have their uses in a domestic context, too. Like many other public organisations in the Soviet Union, the Komsomol often cited the number and strength of its international connections as an explicit testament to the respect it commanded abroad. Claims that it had established 'links' to over 1,300 foreign youth organisations by 1971 feel rather fanciful, though records do show a clear proliferation of international ties over the period. There was, for example, continual growth in the number of foreign delegations at Komsomol congress: from 38 at the XII congress in 1954 to 140 by the XIX congress in 1982.⁴⁸ The

⁴⁶ V. Bagdasaryan et al ed., *Sovetskoe zazerkal'e: innostrannyi turizm v SSSR v 1930-1980 gody*, (Moskva, 2007), 101.

⁴⁷ BMMT records certainly include plenty of positive responses, though some are so positive as to induce caution in the reader. Perhaps the best example was the Hungarian youth who, less than two years after Soviet troops had invaded his country, wrote 'it is even better here than at home, thanks to the constant attention of our Soviet friends'. RGASPI, f. m-5, op. 1, d. 7, ll. 6-9.

⁴⁸ See 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, 1918-1971*, (Moskva, 1972), 5.

presence of foreign participants at any kind of Komsomol event was studiously noted and eagerly broadcast. When the aforementioned conference ‘For a Peaceful and Happy Future for all Children’ took place, reports exulted in the fact that guests came from 120 different countries, were drawn from a wide spectrum of political parties, and even included some religious and pacifist groups. Most loudly heralded was the fact that respected (and clearly non-co-opted) international bodies including UNESCO, UNICEF, and the WHO all sent representatives, a move which was presented to domestic audiences as testimony of Soviet standing in the world.⁴⁹ As the American Quaker Irwin Abrams surmised after attending a 1961 Moscow youth forum on peace: ‘they wanted us there not to hear what we had to say, but so they could announce that we were there, so they could “count us in”’.⁵⁰ If they supported (or, more likely, coincided with) a regime position such as opposition to the Vietnam War or to the stationing of US nuclear weapons on European soil, the less affiliated these foreigners were to the Soviet system, the better for propaganda purposes. Best of all was the chance not only to bring in distinguished foreigners but to ‘prove’ Soviet superiority over them: a fact that made holding the Olympic Games and all manner of other international contests such a high priority for the Brezhnev administration even in spite of all the complications it would present.⁵¹

⁴⁹ RGANI, f. 89, op. 46, d. 44, ll. 1-14. For outline figures on foreign delegations to Komsomol congresses see RGASPI, f. m-6, op. 12-19.

⁵⁰ I Abrams, ‘The Moscow World Youth Forum of 1961: an American Friend’s Experience of Quaker and Soviet Peacemaking’, *Quaker History*, Vol. 84, No. 2, Fall 1995, 138.

⁵¹ It was telling in this respect that even the deep isolation of the late Stalin years was breeched by the first entry of a Soviet team into the Olympic Games at Helsinki in 1952. On the strenuous efforts of the Brezhnev regime to win the right to host the Summer Games, see N. Tomilina ed.

Even though they were first and foremost a potential source of trouble, foreigners' remarks could serve as an important source of validation for official discourse. Interviews with selected visitors were not infrequently carried in youth newspapers and on television.⁵² Komsomol celebrations to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the October Revolution, for example, gave great prominence to visitors' speeches. A Spanish delegate spoke to the media of how impressed she had been recently to see 'beautiful' Novosibirsk and to meet its friendly Komsomol members. Another told interviewers that the global historical significance of the October Revolution and its achievements in all fields of life were acknowledged and respected the world over.⁵³ What the authorities wanted were usable independent voices to deploy as affirmation of the state controlled public sphere's own narrative. This included supporting a powerful moral discourse on the Soviet Union as a fighter for the oppressed and a force for good in the wider world. Komsomol 'skaya pravda and other media outlets were instructed to provide extensive coverage on students in the USSR from the developing world, emphasising their sense of gratefulness to the Soviet people, their academic successes and their 'cultural growth': using foreigners to demonstrate Soviet benevolence.⁵⁴ Occasional dissenting remarks from Soviet citizens about

Pyat' kolets pod kremlevskimi zvezdami: dokumental'naya khronika Olimpiady-80 v Moskve, (Moskva, 2011).

⁵² See, for example, LVA (Latvian State Archive, Riga), f. 201, op. 19, d. 75, ll. 1-96.

⁵³ RGASPI, f. m-3, op. 3, d. 207, ll. 9-21.

⁵⁴ See T. Krasovitskaya et al eds. *"Vozvratit' domoi druž"yami...*, 189.

‘working in order to feed “unlucky” negroes’ while they went without bread themselves, however, testified that this trumpeted ‘benevolence’ was not always appreciated by all.⁵⁵

Visits by all manner of leftist and anti-imperialist youth political delegations could also serve as a means of connecting young people to the regime’s foreign policy activity. Vietnamese and Laotian youth spoke to Komsomol audiences across the USSR about their countries’ suffering under US aerial bombardment, Chileans told of political repression under the Pinochet regime and South Africans, Angolans and others spoke of the fights against colonialism, neo-colonialism and Western-backed racist regimes. Such events naturally carried far greater resonance than endless thundering and formulaic condemnations of imperialism in the press. Reports filed by KGB agents embedded within the student body, for example, often showed that, regardless of what else they thought, many did feel strongly opposed to US intervention in places like Vietnam and Cuba.⁵⁶

As the genuinely radical impulses faded from Soviet domestic activity, ‘internationalism’ and the global revolutionary movement could still serve as a useful and safe locus toward which the ideological energies of youth might be directed. It also gave a chance for backwoods provincials within the Soviet system to become teachers of communism themselves. Thus, the Chechen-Ingush Komsomol recalled with pride 1970s visits to Grozny by youth delegations from Syria and Congo, which came ‘to learn about our youth and their achievements’, while

⁵⁵ See R. Hornsby, *Protest, Reform and Repression in Khrushchev’s Soviet Union*, (Cambridge, 2013), 160.

⁵⁶ See, for example, LYA, f. 1-k, op. 3, d. 623, ll. 1-181.

the Uzbek Komsomol proudly hosted visiting Cubans, Guineans, Bulgarians, Peruvians and Chileans, teaching them of local and national achievements in the construction of socialism.⁵⁷ This, in turn, served the purpose of displaying the ‘export credentials’ of Soviet-style socialism. In addition to the ‘multiple points of attraction’ for foreigners that Michael David-Fox has already pointed to (such as centrally planned industrialisation, peace rhetoric, discourse on gender equality and welfare provision), one can also add the multiple contexts of socialism that the regime tacitly presented to visitors, such as ‘socialism in an Islamic context’ and ‘socialism in an industrialised context’. It was thus no accident that when delegations to the 1957 youth festival were invited to spend a little more time seeing the rest of the country after the completion of the Moscow events, West European and North American parties were mostly taken to Leningrad and Kiev, while visitors to the likes of Baku and Stalinabad (now Dushanbe) included groups from Sudan, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Senegal, Somalia, Nigeria and Libya.⁵⁸

The urge to instigate and to expand interaction with the outside world within Soviet borders, then, was certainly compelling. The continuing expansion of incoming youth travel across the period in question clearly tells us that we cannot simply associate ‘opening up’ with greater political liberality, and that the traditional contrast of optimistic Khrushchevian liberalism with staid Brezhnevite conservatism looks problematic in this context, since the trend was basically one of consistent growth. It is undoubtedly still useful to think of the Soviet Union as a ‘closed’ system, but it was by no means watertight: and this was not just because wily youths evaded

⁵⁷ See V. Deriglazova and T. Pleshanova eds. *Checheno-Ingushskaya oblastnaya komsomol'skaya organizatsiya, 1920-1984: tsifry i fakty*, (Groznyi, 1985), 129-132; and *Komsomol Uzbekistana: ocherki iz istorii komsomola Uzbekistana*, (Tashkent, 1978).

⁵⁸ NARK, f. 779, op. 33, d. 15, ll. 23-24.

established cultural norms, or because the country's rivals proved especially adept with their propaganda. Key regime priorities – and these could only have been set at the highest level – also militated against desires to keep Soviet youth insulated against outside influences. Indeed, it is not easy to picture how the post-Stalin Komsomol could have conducted its affairs effectively without such substantial foreign interaction. Both domestic and foreign goals created a new onus for international activity. Young people had to be a key part of this since so much of the country's export propaganda was aimed at youth. In this context it is important to remember that while it has long been established that the regime fretted over the naivety of its young people in the face of Western propaganda 'lies', they were not just the 'soft underbelly' of the system. They were also its cutting edge: the latest and best evidence to show the outside world what the socialist path of development could produce in human terms. The key question, then, was one of how to exert the proper control over the whole process.

Opening up

Right from its earliest days the Soviet regime had brought at least some foreign citizens into the country to see the progress made since the revolution, though the flow all but stopped in the mid-to-late Stalin period. As Michael David-Fox has shown, this was always a process riven with potential problems and insecurities for the Soviet side, but there were now crucial differences of scale, context and constituency compared to the 1920s and 1930s.⁵⁹ These were

⁵⁹ David-Fox estimates that around 100,000 foreigners came to the USSR across the 1920s and 1930s. M. David-Fox, *Showcasing the Great Experiment: Cultural Diplomacy and Western Visitors to the Soviet Union, 1921-1941*, (Oxford, 2014), 1. For purposes of comparison, the

no longer the high-profile intellectuals and fellow travellers of old who could almost single-handedly shape public opinion back home, and nor were they always individuals sympathetic to the cause of socialism. The sheer volume of guests and the diversity of locations they visited meant that it was less and less possible for their presence to be managed so closely as before, both in terms of what they saw of the Soviet system and how they entered into contact with the local population. Furthermore, coming in the wake of Khrushchev's denunciation of Stalinist terror, visitors during the post-Stalin years could hardly be so naïve about the nature of Soviet socialism as some of their predecessors were.

As the director of the Moscow branch of BMMT informed a seminar for tour guides in April 1967: 'We are a political organisation but we cannot forget that we are working with tourists...if we meet them at the train platform with fists instead of flowers, within a couple of years we will not have any tourists at all from capitalist countries'.⁶⁰ The aim was to generate positive propaganda for the Soviet system, not for its enemies. Important as it was, exercising control was not quite the alpha and omega of work with incoming foreigners: a balance had to be struck between exerting the desired influence on visitors and 'protecting' Soviet youth. The perceived benefits of interaction, as outlined above, were closely aligned with top regime priorities and thus were still pursued even as they clashed with the Komsomol's key domestic duty of raising a 'communist' youth.

total number (adults and youth combined) who came to the country in 1973 alone stood at just under three million.

⁶⁰ I. Orlov and A. Mashkova, 'Inostrannyi molodezhnyi turizm...', 163.

Interaction between Soviet and foreign youth took many forms, from officially sanctioned events with Komsomol members, through furtive encounters on the streets and in cafes to drinking bouts in university dorms. As several memoirists have noted, the foreigner inside the Soviet Union almost always stood out by both their dress and their manner: Sheila Fitzpatrick went so far as to say that the sensation of living there for a time in the mid-to-late 1960s was akin to that of being ‘a cosmonaut on the moon’, even in spite of her establishing friendships with a number of locals.⁶¹ All kinds of sources – from classified KGB reports to the latest secondary literature – testify that many young people in the USSR were extremely interested in these exotic foreigners, especially those from the West. Indeed, visitors, too, were usually keen to have some interaction with locals and to get a view of the country and its people beyond the propaganda images that were served up to them. Encounters could be rather stilted by language difficulties and laden with cultural misunderstandings, but they were typically enthusiastic and warm. While the KGB lurked in the background, it was most often the Komsomol that had to regulate this burgeoning relationship, though the new responsibility was by no means a simple task. When they were informed from Moscow about incoming tourist groups in the summer of 1958, for example, the Belorussian Komsomol complained that they had neither the material resources nor the practical experience for work with foreign visitors.⁶²

There were at least some problems with interaction between visitors and locals right from the beginning. In autumn 1956 Hungarian and Polish students tried to stir up protests in Moscow

⁶¹ S. Fitzpatrick, *A Spy in the Archive: A Memoir of Cold War Russia* (London, 2014), 4.

⁶² NARB, f. 63, op. 19, d. 15, l. 40.

and Leningrad in response to the violent events taking place in their home countries.⁶³ While the 1957 youth festival had mostly gone according to plan, there had been a few scattered problems, and anecdotes of illicit couplings in parks and alleyways between guests and locals were rife. Chinese students in the capital began distributing hostile political leaflets once relations between the two countries soured in the early 1960s, and a number of Western students and tourists showed themselves willing to bring illicit samizdat materials into and out of the country once the Soviet dissident movement began to blossom from the late 1960s.⁶⁴ In 1968 Komsomol tour guides complained about ‘disrespectful’ Czech visitors and their attempts to propagandise among Soviet youth the liberalising reforms taking place inside Czechoslovakia.⁶⁵ Western dances and songs were taught to Soviet youth by visitors from both socialist and capitalist countries while new fashions and musical styles grew popular at an alarming speed. Foreign visitors routinely tried (and plenty succeeded) to break away from their tour group and wandered the streets un-chaperoned, often entering city districts that were meant to be closed to them. They also increasingly came prepared to challenge their hosts’

⁶³ On volatility within the Soviet student body relating to events in Hungary and Poland, see L. Silina, *Nastroeniya sovetskogo studenchestva, 1945-1964*, (Moskva, 2004); and B. Tromly, *Making the Soviet Intelligentsia: Universities and Intellectual Life under Stalin and Khrushchev*, (Cambridge, 2013).

⁶⁴ On Chinese students distributing leaflets, see R. Hornsby, *Protest, Reform and Repression*, 168-70. On Western students transporting samizdat, see, for example, S. Fitzpatrick, *A Spy in the Archives*.

⁶⁵ See R. Applebaum, ‘A Test of Friendship: Soviet-Czechoslovak Tourism and the Prague Spring’, in A. Gorsuch and D. Koenker eds., *The Socialist Sixties: Crossing Borders in the Second World*, (Bloomington, 2013).

pronouncements on a range of political questions.⁶⁶ Even after they left the country, lots of foreigners subsequently wrote letters and sent parcels to people whom they had met on their travels in the USSR.⁶⁷

Despite an official emphasis on inculcating in youth a sense of internationalism, almost any outside sources could offer some challenge to Soviet orthodoxies. When newspapers from the likes of Bulgaria and Czechoslovakia went on open sale in major Soviet cities from the mid-1950s lots of young people seized upon them as a valuable source of information about the outside world since they were often less heavily censored than the Soviet press. Similarly, Lev Krasnopevtsev met, and later corresponded with, like-minded non-conformists on a Komsomol trip to Poland.⁶⁸ As ties between the Belorussian republican Komsomol and the Union of Polish Youth began to flourish in the second half of the 1950s, the former expressed deep concern to Moscow about the Poles' ideological propriety, noting that 'they let anyone join who wants to...so they have lots of (religious) believers and children of kulaks'.⁶⁹ Several of the People's

⁶⁶ V. Bagdasaryan et al eds., *Sovetskoe zazerkal'e*, 160-162.

⁶⁷ Whether or not it reflected state anti-Semitism, plenty of KGB reports focused on foreign Jews trying to maintain such contacts and to agitate among Soviet Jews in this manner. See, for example, RGASPI, f. m-1s, op. 1s, d. 1096s, ll. 9-27.

⁶⁸ Krasnopevtsev was the ringleader of a Khrushchev-era underground group. See 'Vlast' i intelligentsiya: delo molodykh istorikov', *Voprosy istorii*, No. 4, 1994.

⁶⁹ NARB, f. 63, op. 19, d. 13, ll. 99-101.

Democracies also developed budding jazz and rock music scenes which began to make their influence felt inside the USSR by the 1960s and 70s.⁷⁰

The yearning to interact with foreign guests did not necessarily have a fundamentally ideological basis. Many young people were simply curious after years of Soviet solitude, and they were anyway meant to be growing up to be ‘committed internationalists’. Elena Gorokhova recalled of her youth in Leningrad that the key reason she had been eager to meet a visiting party of high school pupils from the UK was for a chance to practice her English language skills.⁷¹ Soviet girls were reprimanded for ‘trying to get close’ to foreign boys at their hotels, while crowds of both boys and girls proved keen to indulge in whatever private commerce they could. Trade was often a key point of focus in furtive encounters, plenty of which were engineered for the chance to buy almost anything foreign. Polish visitors in particular were repeatedly noted for their eagerness to conduct private transactions with Soviet customers. One group of Poles had the temerity to set up a makeshift market stall from which to sell various ‘imported’ goods whilst in Sochi, and another even managed to sell what were described only as ‘ladies things’ to their Komsomol guide-interpreter.⁷² KGB reports from Vilnius in 1961 spoke of local youth frantically buying up tourists’ chewing gum, cigarettes, ties and records.⁷³ The *fartsovshchik* (black market dealer) soon became a staple feature of

⁷⁰ On this theme see A. Troitsky, *Back in the USSR: the True Story of Rock in Russia*, (London, 1987).

⁷¹ E. Gorokhova, *A Mountain of Crumbs: A Memoir*, (London, 2009), 164.

⁷² RGASPI, f. m-5, op. 1, d. 7, ll. 1-8.

⁷³ LYA, f. 1-k, op. 3, d. 623, ll. 1-181.

foreign visitors' accounts of trips to the USSR.⁷⁴ As Andrea Lee noted during her time as an exchange student at MGU in the late 1970s: 'Wherever I go, people eye my ordinary outfits with rapacious interest and try to buy things off my back...'.⁷⁵ Without practically imprisoning foreigners, there was simply no way to keep them fully separated the whole time. Natal'ya Lebina, for example, wrote of a fartsovshchik quietly sidling up to her husband while he stood at the urinal of a restaurant bathroom in order to try and purchase the jumper he was wearing.⁷⁶ To give some idea of the scale involved, Natalya Chernyshova cites figures of over 4,000 young people temporarily detained in Moscow and Leningrad for 'harassing foreigners' in 1973 alone: a figure that surely represented only a fraction of the real total seeking to talk and to trade.⁷⁷

The most common sites of extended interaction between visitors and locals were the meetings organised by the Komsomol for almost all incoming tour groups. At their core, these were meant to be propaganda events and generally consisted of some kind of entertainment, intended to showcase the high cultural level of Soviet youth, followed by a lecture and a themed discussion or question and answer session: most often organised along a principle that saw

⁷⁴ See RGASPI, f. m-5, op. 1, d. 3, ll. 1-35 and f. m-5, op. 1, d. 7, ll. 1-8.

⁷⁵ A. Lee, *Russian Journal*, 22.

⁷⁶ Lebina adds that the would-be buyer was bitterly disappointed to find out her husband was actually a Russian. N. Lebina, *Povsednevnost' epokhi kosmosa i kukuruzy, destruktziya bol'shogo stilya: Leningrad, 1950-1960e gody*, (Sankt Peterburg,, 2015), 412.

⁷⁷ N. Chernyshova, *Soviet Consumer Culture in the Brezhnev Era* (London, 2013), 95.

visitors meet with their Soviet counterparts by profession.⁷⁸ While there seems to have been at least some enjoyable and relatively unfettered interaction during the early days of incoming visitors – and especially at the 1957 festival – this did not last very long beyond the earliest days of incoming tourism. The broad change in approach can be seen in two separate recommendations on organising and conducting these sessions. A BMMT review of the 1958 tourist season found the meetings to be too dry and thus ineffective at ‘showing what the revolution has done for our young people’. It then suggested that they be made happier occasions, with dancing and a greater sense of festivity.⁷⁹ A February 1965 BMMT training seminar, on the other hand, recommended that wherever possible foreigners’ questions at these meetings should be dealt with by different categories of youth successively (i.e. by workers, farmers, then students, then young professionals) in a bid to demonstrate the unity of opinion on any given matter.⁸⁰ This unity of opinion, of course, could seem distinctly Orwellian at times for visitors. As Ronald Hingley noted following a visit to Moscow at the start of the 1960s, such events often turned out to be an opportunity for intolerable boasting by local officials rather than a chance for any friendly interchange of ideas.⁸¹

The Soviet youth who participated in these officially sanctioned meetings with tourists did not just turn up at random, nor were they run-of-the-mill Komsomol members. They represented a

⁷⁸ Examples from Latvia included talks on themes like ‘the role of Komsomol organisations in raising the professional skills of young workers’ and an evening of organ music laid on for guests from the USA. LVA, f. 201, op. 10, d. 62, l. 13; LVA f. 201, op. 18, d. 103, l. 1.

⁷⁹ RGASPI, f. m-5, op. 1, d. 3, l. 7.

⁸⁰ RGASPI, f. m-5, op. 1, d. 313, l. 7.

⁸¹ R. Hingley, *Under Soviet Skins: An Untourist’s Report* (London, 1961).

second rung of Komsomol specialists who had been coached for extended interaction with foreign youth. Known as ‘groups of ideological influence’, teams of around 15-20 Komsomol activists were formed in at least one district of every city that hosted foreign visitors and were given responsibility for carrying out social encounters.⁸² This naturally required extensive training, usually conducted by both the Komsomol and KGB. A group of 50 people designated as conversation partners for British and Dutch students on a Russian language course at Kuban State University in 1976, for example, had to undertake three months of seminars and lectures before the visitors eventually arrived for their one month stay.⁸³ In theory at least, this kind of preparation should have granted control over information and goods flowing in both directions (from Soviet youth to foreigners, and vice versa). In reality, though, such measures hardly provided an effective seal between foreigners and Soviet youth since even the Komsomol activists trusted and trained for such work were not ‘communist drones’. Both primary and secondary sources speak of even highly orthodox Komsomol members accumulating and taking great pride in all manner of Western knick-knacks, from branded shopping bags through to old magazines and empty drink bottles.⁸⁴ As a number of authors have argued, these kinds of markers linked to the West were not necessarily a sign of protest at anything Soviet, but indicators of domestic stratification. Foreign clothing, drinks, music and more (and especially

⁸² Bigger cities like Moscow would have many such groups. It was indicative of their importance that each group was to be headed by the raikom (district Komsomol organisation) second in command.

⁸³ RGASPI, f. m-5, op. 2, d. 1090, ll. 70-82.

⁸⁴ See, for example, A. Yurchak, *Everything was Forever until it was No More* (Princeton, 2006); and C. Booker, *Games War: Moscow Journal*, (London, 1981).

travel to the West) became a way of standing above ones peers by establishing hierarchy of social status and taste.⁸⁵

The use of groups of ideological influence was anyway a system which had its flaws, since the Soviet regime was not nearly so omnipresent as notions of totalitarianism used to suggest. Reports from Lithuania, for example, complained that the BMMT branch there was often misinformed (or simply not informed at all) about the composition of visiting groups, so careful preparations for interacting with them were wasted. One case described how the Komsomol in Vilnius had located and prepared a party of construction workers to meet some incoming Polish builders, only to find out that not a single member of the tour party actually worked in construction.⁸⁶ Similarly, other reports from Lithuania spoke of some local Komsomol activists who were expected to attend such events not bothering to prepare for them or else simply not turning up.⁸⁷

The continual growth in the numbers of young people who headed to the Soviet Union testified to the fact that BMMT was, in a business sense, something of a success story, even though several other countries of the socialist bloc achieved far greater results in attracting foreign tourists. It was, however, rather less successful at achieving its propaganda aims. All manner

⁸⁵ See, for example, G. Tsipursky, 'Living "America" in the Soviet Union: the Cultural Practices of "Westernized" Soviet Youth, 1945-1964', in E. Stolberg ed. *The Soviet Union and the United States: Rivals of the Twentieth Century* (New York, 2013).

⁸⁶ LYA, f. 4421, op. 26, d. 95, l. 16.

⁸⁷ LYA, f. 4421, op. 26, d. 95, l. 11.

of incidents could undermine attempts to demonstrate Soviet parity and good will. Many foreign partners had to cancel trips when travel documents were not returned to them in time. Guests were left stranded on train platforms when guides failed to turn up to meet them. Staff at BMMT hotels were reprimanded for rude behavior toward customers and poor service culture.⁸⁸ Records of questions put to guide-interpreters show queries raised about why there were so few fruit and vegetables available in shops, why the newspapers featured no criticism of the Communist Party, and whether it was considered that the country was facing a problem with alcoholism.⁸⁹ Bagdasaryan notes that by the end of the 1970s growing numbers were expressing dissatisfaction at the end of their trip, including 75 per cent of Hungarian visitors; 69 per cent from the United Kingdom; 64 per cent of Italians; and 64 per cent from Yugoslavia.⁹⁰

There were also indications of institutional conflict inside the USSR, with the KGB repeatedly insisting that contact with foreigners was a clear source of domestic trouble, while BMMT continued to argue that the best way to make visitors' programmes more effective (thus making the USSR more secure in the long run) was for greater direct contact between visitors and locals.⁹¹ Both touched upon top regime priorities. The same tension between 'positive' policy

⁸⁸ On problems at Hotel Yunost' see, for example, RGASPI, f. 31, op. 1, d. 239, ll. 1-246. Disciplinary issues raised herein include one staff member caught stealing from guests, restaurant patrons being served short portions and maintenance staff turning up for work drunk.

⁸⁹ RGASPI, f. m-5, op. 2, d. 1090, ll. 15-19; LVA, f. 201, op. 18, d. 103, l. 32.

⁹⁰ See V. Bagdasaryan, *Sovetskoe zazerkal'e*, 155.

⁹¹ See, for example, LYA, f. 4421, op. 26, d. 95, l. 11.

aims and the need to protect the domestic status quo was also true to some extent with foreign students, though here the approach was rather more differentiated. Put briefly, those from socialist countries were largely left to their own devices, those from capitalist countries were mostly left in peace but not really encouraged to interact either, while those from the developing world were the target of the most strenuous efforts at interaction through participation in all manner of seminars and groups, since it was perceived that they were more likely to be won over.⁹² Because of the amount of time that they spent in the country, and because of their closer proximity to ‘real’ Soviet life (by living among local youth, speaking the language, attending social events in student dorms, wandering freely about town and further afield), foreign students presented both greater opportunities and greater challenges. They could at times puncture a few idealised notions about life in other countries and might well be impressed by academic standards at top Soviet institutes. While many from developing countries in particular were grateful for the opportunity to study, it seems that few visitors were fully won over. Plenty of formerly convinced socialists from all parts of the world found their belief wavering once inside the USSR. Furthermore, as Julie Hessler has noted, the student body was to prove one of the key apertures through which Western influences entered Soviet society.⁹³

⁹² On the work of Dom družhba (the House of Friendship), see, for example, GARF, f. 9576, op. 17, d. 14, ll. 1-93. As well as urging university Komsomol organisations to ensure students from the developing world were sent to the House of Friendship, it was noted in passing that ‘students from European socialist countries almost never come to our events’. It seems there was very little expectation of winning over capitalist students, though they did hope to gain respect at least.

⁹³ J. Hessler, ‘Death of an African Student in Moscow: Race, Politics, and the Cold War’, *Cahiers du Monde russe*, vol. 47, no. 112, 2006, 61.

Those from the capitalist West in particular tended to study at the country's very top universities, such as Moscow State University (MGU) and Leningrad State University (LGU) where virtually all students were either Komsomol or Communist Party members and future generations of the Soviet elite were being trained.⁹⁴ Again, the unspoken link between foreigners and prestige took on an official dimension. While Komsomol organisations and university authorities remained suspicious, they generally regarded the foreigner students in their midst as something of a nuisance rather than an outright danger. One's dorm neighbour would most likely be a straight-laced Komsomol member with a duty to keep the KGB informed of any dubious behaviours, though it is by no means clear that they all did so with any great diligence. Nonetheless, declassified KGB materials show that the organs had plenty of regular informers dotted throughout the student body. Worried about foreigners' impact but unwilling or unable to police their everyday behaviour with real proximity, Komsomol organisations instead aimed the bulk of their policing at local youth: reminding Soviet students that they had a duty to look out for their classmates and dorm-mates, and urging them to take action if anyone seemed to be wandering astray.⁹⁵ Wary Komsomol organisations in universities that hosted overseas students also formed their own ideological groups to hold talks and conduct counter-propaganda.⁹⁶ However, the downside of such caginess was that already by 1963 some of the more eager Komsomol activists at MGU were rueing the fact that many

⁹⁴ Students from the developing world were more likely to study at institutes with a greater vocational focus or at the Patrice Lumumba University of People's Friendship.

⁹⁵ See V. Andreev, *Nauchnyi obmen*.

⁹⁶ See, for example, TsAOPIM (Central Archive of Social and Political History of Moscow Oblast', Moscow), f. 635, op. 1, d. 3619, ll. 32-34.

foreign students did not leave as friends of the USSR because ‘we play it very safe in our work with them’.⁹⁷

Even though few groups faced heavier pressure to conform politically than did Soviet students (a Komsomol reprimand could quite conceivably lead to being expelled from one’s institute and barred from entering another), plenty of enduring and fairly open friendships sprang up. Most Westerners who wrote about their experiences in this milieu were broadly positive about the ordinary people they encountered, though some Africans and Asians did complain of racism on the streets. It was not all that uncommon for foreign students to take Soviet boyfriends and girlfriends whilst in the country (indeed, several have noted that this could be a big part of gaining a true mastery of the Russian language). It seems that such liaisons were usually without real consequence for the Soviet party, though they could nonetheless arouse suspicions, like the MGU student who was accused by the university Komsomol leadership of marrying a Polish course-mate solely in order to dodge military service by relocating to Poland with his new bride.⁹⁸ There is little indication in the source material, however, that foreign students generally had an immediate or quantifiable impact on their peers in a directly ideological sense: there was undoubtedly some considerable cynicism in the student body, but (a couple of short spells aside) little sign of outright unrest. Even so, the truth was that under both Khrushchev and Brezhnev the discursive world of Soviet authority was so narrow and rigid that any kind

⁹⁷ TsAOPIM, f. 6083, op. 1, d. 58, ll. 6-8.

⁹⁸ The young man rejected the accusations and stated that he was already seeking a divorce from his Polish bride. At this he duly received a Komsomol reprimand for ‘showing an unserious attitude toward his marriage’. TsAOPIM, f. 6083, op.1, d. 6, l. 20.

of international interaction – even be it with sympathetic Westerners, fellow socialists or others – could not but offer some kind of challenge to established ways and norms.

Much as they consistently spoke of a need for young people to be ‘internationalist’ in outlook, the commotion over visitors from the West in particular was clearly a source of considerable embarrassment and a propaganda setback for the authorities. It was not just excitable young people who made a great fuss over foreigners, however. In a bid to impress, visiting tourists and students were often provided with conditions, like bigger and more modern rooms, hot showers, fresh food and better service, that were some way superior to those enjoyed by locals. The KMO even handed out stipends to students from developing countries indexed to those awarded in the West, rather than on a par with what Soviet students received.⁹⁹ Major international events, most famously the Olympics in 1980, suddenly saw the quantity and range of goods in the shops grow dramatically (one Muscovite noted that locals generally did not bother the foreign visitors during the games because they were all too busy taking advantage of the temporary shopping opportunities). Foreign delegates at conferences and visiting performers were treated with all manner of little niceties, from flowers and free metro tickets through to haircuts, special food and meetings with important dignitaries. This was not only an attempt to impress, but also a way of engineering a sense of gratitude that might prompt visitors to remark fondly (or at least not so negatively) of their Soviet experience. Unsurprisingly, though, the preferential treatment afforded foreign tourists and students was at times a source of resentment for locals who quite clearly came off second best in their own country.

⁹⁹ T. Krasovitskaya et al eds, *“Vozvratit’ domoi druz”yami*, 36-37.

A party of Soviet youth just returned from an international camp in the Caucasus mountains complained bitterly that once the foreigners had gone home the food on offer immediately became outrageously bad, while the camp staff quickly took to spending the remaining days sat around smoking and drinking.¹⁰⁰ The arrival of a party of British and American Quakers in Karelia in 1966 was met with great pageantry by the local Komsomol: a troupe of thirty Young Pioneers was assembled to greet their train at the (newly decorated) station, an orchestra was hired for the event and local Party leaders and cultural figures gave fulsome welcome speeches in front of an assembled throng.¹⁰¹ This was a very visible display of high regard for what was ultimately a group of capitalist religious believers: two key targets of Soviet scorn. It is also worth noting in this context that visitors from the capitalist and developing worlds tended to receive markedly better treatment than those who came from fellow socialist countries: apparently leaving many of the latter with the impression that they were of only secondary importance to the Soviet Union.¹⁰² Scholars have recently noted this kind of discursive ambiguity in a number of important contexts (such as officials boasting about growing levels of consumption and then in the next breath criticising those who ‘lust after goods’) during the post-Stalin years.¹⁰³ Alexei Yurchak in particular has made the point that such ambiguities

¹⁰⁰ RGASPI, f. m-5, op. 1, d. 28, ll. 4-7. As one complainant noted, ‘nobody could explain to us how our trip was worth 44 roubles per day’.

¹⁰¹ NARK, f. 779, op. 49, d. 61, ll. 6-7. Added to these public displays, the local Komsomol leadership also saw to it that the camp where the foreign guests would stay was refurbished, sports equipment was brought in for their use, grounds were tended, private buses were provided, security arranged, and a hairdresser was brought in to serve their needs.

¹⁰² V. Bagdasaryan et al eds, *Sovetskoe zazerkal’e*, 160.

¹⁰³ See, for example, N. Chernyshova, *Soviet Consumer Culture*.

helped to facilitate an evolution of youth behaviours and attitudes by virtue of blurring the boundaries of desirable and undesirable conduct.¹⁰⁴ The clear friend-enemy international divide which Michael David-Fox wrote of as an important facet of domestic ideological work in the 1920s and 1930s thus became much less applicable when groups like that in Karelia were met with such fanfare by the authorities.¹⁰⁵ This official embrace of ‘the enemy’ was unavoidable if new friends were to be won, but it did cut across important messages for domestic consumption.

While it was by no means the only catalyst for growing Western cultural influence among Soviet youth – foreign radio broadcasts reached a far greater audience, though they arguably did so with much less immediacy – tourism clearly was an important factor in the changing tides of youth fashions, musical tastes and the introduction of myriad foreign artefacts. This, rather than any kind of outright subversive activity, was always the real challenge posed by interaction. The Soviet authorities, like some eager Western commentators, were liable to exaggerate the ideological significance of this highly visible Westernisation of youth culture at times, but young people did not always reflect on their own behaviour in the same way that such observers did. For example, on informing New York Times Moscow correspondent Hedrick Smith that wearing Western clothes was not a mark of protest but a symbol of ‘the good life’, one Western-dressed acquaintance (apparently a dissident youth) stated ‘if you are looking for some kind of counter-culture against parents or against the authorities and you think jeans are part of this, you are wrong’. Smith, too, came to the view that the absorption of Western pop culture often carried little overt political meaning for the individual

¹⁰⁴ See A. Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever*.

¹⁰⁵ See M. David-Fox, *Showcasing the Great Experiment*.

involved.¹⁰⁶ Nonetheless, in the USSR the prerogative to decide what was ‘political’ and what was not ultimately always belonged to the authorities rather than the individual involved. **Keeping ‘closed’**

The fear that young people could be somehow corrupted and ‘lost’ to the communist project by interaction with the outside world meant that arguably the most promising resource the authorities had for achieving the goals of incoming youth travel – the young people of the country – always remained under-utilised. Did unfettered contact with foreign youth really pose such an existential threat to the Soviet system? It is of course tricky to say anything concrete on this matter but, on balance, the answer probably has to be ‘yes’. This is not to suggest, as the likes of Yale Richmond have, that a glimpse of the capitalist good life and a sniff of Western-style freedom steadily turned the country’s young people into opponents of communist rule: central tenets of the system such as the importance of social fairness, disdain for unabashed materialism and a strong degree of state direction remained deeply embedded. It is, however, to say that the Soviet system of the time would have required such fundamental changes before it could absorb the various social and political impacts of full interaction as to be inconceivable, be that under the stewardship of either Khrushchev or Brezhnev.

With the Soviet authorities keen to avoid generating damaging headlines abroad, and unable to stymie locals’ desire to talk and to trade with foreign guests, the considerable ‘openness’ of the 1957 Youth Festival did not last. In fact, despite the plaudits which at first rained down on the propaganda success of the festival, it was not too long before Komsomol and Communist Party

¹⁰⁶ H. Smith, *The Russians*, (London, 1976), 235.

bosses came to conclude that the event had done lasting damage to the country's social fabric.¹⁰⁷ Some of the primary literature suggests that this was indeed the case. The dissident Vladimir Bukovsky wrote that these early contacts with the outside world were comparable to the exposure of Stalin for young people, while Maurice Hindus (a less damning commentator than Bukovsky) recalled meeting an Armenian youth at the end of the 1950s who insisted that 'the Youth Festival changed everything'.¹⁰⁸

The on-going tasks of dealing with a constant and growing flow of incoming foreigners proved rather different from staging even a huge one-off event, and the dynamics of interaction soon changed. Some considerable time before the coming to power of the Brezhnev clique, the openness of summer 1957 was curtailed. As has already been outlined above, more effort was made to choreograph interaction and to maintain a greater degree of separation between visitors and locals. We can say that this was to some considerable extent successful, since the vast majority of Soviet youth never met any foreigners in person, and most channels of communication with the outside world were either blocked or else closely supervised right into the Gorbachev years. However, among the youth elite in particular, such exposure to the outside world was not nearly so hard to come by.

¹⁰⁷ A 1972 volume on Komsomol international activity, for example, released by the Komsomol's own 'Molodaya gvardiya' publishing house, eulogised about previous and subsequent World Youth Festivals but managed barely a couple of lines about the biggest one there had ever been: in Moscow. See M. Mukhamedzhanov et al eds. *My internatsionalisty*.

¹⁰⁸ V. Bukovsky, *To Build a Castle: My Life as a Dissenter*, (London, 1978), 113.; M. Hindus, *House without a Roof*, 76

BMMT guests went from riding on regular city buses and passenger trains to using designated tourist facilities. Fewer and fewer locals were entrusted with free access to foreigners. The eminent Russian sociologist Vladimir Shlapentokh described a 1959 train journey in which the guard told him to switch carriages after a foreigner (a Frenchman) entered and sat alongside him.¹⁰⁹ Rada Adzhubei recalled that by the mid-1980s rumours were being spread from on high that one could catch AIDS simply by shaking hands with foreigners.¹¹⁰ More and more of visitors' interactions were with representatives of officialdom rather than ordinary youth. Again, though, all this proved far from decisive, since the number of visitors to the country only continued to grow and their boldness increased. The result was that many foreigners no longer marvelled at how much freer things were in the USSR than they had been led to believe back at home, but there was still not enough control exerted that Soviet youth were properly insulated against their presence. Already at the end of a 1961 visit to the USSR Ronald Hingley reported that 'upon arrival in the country the foreigner at once comes under the control of officials whose job it is to ensure that he sees as little as possible of the country and the people'.¹¹¹ While in reality this was not quite the case, it was clearly important that it had come to seem that way.

¹⁰⁹ Cited in S. Lovell, *The Shadow of War: Russia and the USSR, 1941 to the Present* (London, 2010), 303.

¹¹⁰ See 'Interview with Rada Adzhubei' in M. Ilic, *Life Stories of Soviet Women* (London, 2015), 67.

¹¹¹ R. Hingley, *Under Soviet Skins*, 187.

The key points of contact were the guide-interpreters whose job it was spend almost every waking minute with guests. This was a coterie of tourism specialists variously drawn from the most ideologically orthodox, the most skilled propagandists or simply the best connected young people. Usually meeting incoming foreigners as they entered by train at the border and staying with them until they left the country, their responsibilities were vast: ranging from picking up tickets and dealing with complaints about hotel rooms through trying to stop group members from sneaking off on their own, trumpeting Soviet successes in the cosmos, presenting the correct narrative on global political developments, smoothing over cultural misunderstandings or insensitivities and explaining away the country's lack of political and cultural freedom. The duties they faced were onerous, their performance was closely scrutinised, and not all that well remunerated, but this was undoubtedly attractive and prestigious work in a country where access to foreign goods and peoples was increasingly a prime marker of status.¹¹² Guide-interpreters dined in the same restaurants as their guests, they often received small gifts from them, and some formed friendships that endured for years afterward. As Gorokhova noted of her own experience, though, they also got to see at first hand some of the special privileges that were reserved for visitors and for the Soviet nomenklatura, such as hard currency shops with shelves full of French cognac, all manner of foodstuffs long absent from the diets of everyday

¹¹² Professional guide-interpreters in Leningrad were paid 400-450 roubles per month in 1959. RGASPI, f. m-5, op. 1, d. 7, l. 4. For purposes of comparison, a thirteen-day trip to the GDR with Sputnik cost 950 roubles (plus train fare to and from the Soviet border) that same year. ERAF, f. 31, op. 74, d. 44, l. 3. On the link between contact with foreigners and social status, see, for example, N. Mitrokhin, 'Elita 'zakrytogo obshchestva': MGIMO, mezhdunarodnye otdely apparata TsK KPSS i prosopografiya ikh sotrudnikov', *Ab Imperio*, 4/2013, 146.

citizens, and banned literature.¹¹³ Those granted this kind of access to visitors from the outside world, therefore, also came face to face with some of the key unfairnesses that prevailed in their own country.

If the Soviet traveller abroad was ‘more than just a tourist’ (he or she was also meant to be a propagandist for Soviet activity), the guide-interpreter was also much more than their title suggested. They were classified by profession as ideological workers. Initially recruited primarily from students at specialist foreign language institutes, which were both few and prestigious, they began as a slightly ramshackle cohort but became a much more tightly-drilled group with time. Some Komsomol guides, of course, were also in the service of the KGB. This was by no means always the case, but the security organs might still be encountered in some form. Hasanli reports that in Azerbaijan the KGB managed to get its spies embedded in groups of American tourists and habitually placed agents in places (like parks, museums, and theatres) often frequented by foreigners.¹¹⁴ Much the same thing is revealed in the documents of the Lithuanian security organs. When an American tourist visited relatives in Trakai, for example, the local KGB managed to have an undercover agent befriend the family in question, gain entry to their socialising with the foreigner and report back on what was said.¹¹⁵

¹¹³ E. Gorokhova, *Mountain of Crumbs*, 172.

¹¹⁴ J. Hasanli, *Khrushchev's Thaw and National Identity in Soviet Azerbaijan, 1954-59* (New York, 2015), 369.

¹¹⁵ In this instance the agent reported only that the American had shown his hosts a US newspaper featuring a ‘slandorous’ article on Lithuania under Soviet rule. LYA, f. 1-k, op. 10, d. 300, l. 58.

Training courses and seminars laid on for guide-interpreters, often run jointly by BMMT and the KGB, showed that both propaganda and the ‘protection’ of Soviet youth were vital. In many ways it was here that the ‘open’ and ‘closed’ facets of work with foreigners came together most obviously. Indeed, this was essentially a closed clique of specialists employed to present Soviet ‘openness’ to the world. BMMT Tour guides in Latvia were read preparatory lectures on themes including ‘the growth of living standards in the USSR’, ‘the achievements of Soviet Latvia’, and ‘bourgeois-nationalist propaganda and ideological diversion against the USSR’.¹¹⁶ The extensive paperwork that guide-interpreters had to fill out about their groups was similarly telling. Much of it was political, but not all. Aside from requesting biographical details of guests, there were questions about whether any of the visiting tourists were members of political parties, whether, where and for how long the tourists had been ‘prepared’ for their trip (it was not uncommon for visitors to attend some kind of security briefing before going to the USSR), what was their basic world view, what were their attitudes toward Soviet foreign and domestic policies, and whether anyone had attempted to distribute anti-Soviet materials or engage in ‘manifestations of anti-Soviet propaganda’.¹¹⁷ The other, more traditional, side of incoming tourism was very much intertwined with this political work. The same form that required all of the above information also asked about guests’ responses to the food they were served, the accommodation they stayed in and the transport they travelled on.

¹¹⁶ LVA, f. 201, op. 18, d. 103, ll. 31-32.

¹¹⁷ See, for example, RGASPI, f. m-5, op. 2, d. 1088, ll. 1-50.

There were still deep insecurities about visitors' potential perceptions of 'Soviet backwardness', as Michael David-Fox has described for the 1920s and 1930s. Before BMMT opened for business a team of Komsomol workers travelled to the UK and West Germany to study the youth hostel networks there, learning what 'normal' standards for youth travellers looked like advising on and what practices should be replicated or adapted for the Soviet Union. In her memoir of the period Gorokhova spoke of how training as a guide-interpreter included being taught how to distract guests from various unedifying sights that might unexpectedly catch their eye (one specific example included a lengthy queue for toilet paper).¹¹⁸ Guides and hotel staff were meant to be scrupulously turned out, and they were expected to conform to higher service standards than the notoriously low Soviet norm. City districts that were closed to foreigners were often more likely to be dilapidated and war-damaged slums than centres of secret activity.

Whether or not they did so to provoke, visitors asked some difficult questions of their guides at times, and these were assiduously recorded and analysed. French students studying Russian in the town of Vladimir, for example, wanted to know whether there were still labour camps for political prisoners.¹¹⁹ Visitors to Riga asked why living standards in Russia were lower than in Latvia and what the current situation was in regard to the rights of non-Russian nationalities.¹²⁰ In Vilnius they simply asked outright why Russia had invaded and occupied Lithuania.¹²¹ Even though they were given all the advice in the world on how to field questions

¹¹⁸ E. Gorokhova, *Mountain of Crumbs*, 173.

¹¹⁹ RGASPI, f. m-5, op. 2, d. 1090, ll. 15-19.

¹²⁰ LVA, f. 201, op. 18, d. 103, l. 32.

¹²¹ LYA, f. 4421, op. 26, d. 95, l. 7.

like these – panels made up of scholars, journalists and other political workers were assembled to formulate ideologically correct responses to guests’ most common questions – dealing with tourists so directly could still be a source of considerable unease for guides. Some felt embarrassed and ashamed to find out details of their country’s past and present that were widely known to outsiders but had been kept from Soviet citizens. Although they were not infrequently left deflated by their guests’ lack of knowledge about the USSR, few could see more clearly how visitors from other countries tended to be better dressed than their Soviet contemporaries. It was anyway not just foreigners’ appearances that marked them out as different. Guides were often disconcerted by their failure to acknowledge all kinds of unspoken rules that governed public conduct in the USSR. As one off-duty guide told Andrea Lee in Moscow in the late 1970s: ‘it’s painful for me to mix with the foreigners on those tour groups...they’re all so rich and free and casual about life’.¹²² It was perhaps for all these reasons that BMMT also ran training seminars on ‘psychological preparation of guide interpreters’.

Rather than enforcing conformity simply by diktat and social pressure, one of the key instruments with which the post-Stalin Soviet system sought to manage society and to shape young people in particular was through management of free time: ensuring that they were occupied by a continual stream of sports, study, political activity and labour.¹²³ This was both a means of exerting desirable influence and a way of closing off opportunities for them to wander from the straight and narrow. It was entirely evident in work with foreign visitors, too. Ludmila Koehler recalled traveling with a group of Russian language students from America

¹²² A. Lee, *Russian Journal*, 104.

¹²³ See, for example, G. Tsipursky, ‘Having Fun in the Thaw: Youth Initiative Clubs in the Post-Stalin Years’, *Carl Beck Papers* (Pittsburgh, 2012).

who were allotted ‘exactly one and a half hours of free time in four weeks’.¹²⁴ When a party of Quakers visited Karelia in summer 1968 the schedule put together for them by the Komsomol ran from 07.00 to 23.00 hours every day, with free time (two and a half hours of it) granted on only one day of the twelve they spent there.¹²⁵

Georgian BMMT documents show that visitors to the republic from elsewhere in the socialist bloc were given some licence to mingle with local youth in their spare time, while those from capitalist and developing countries were provided with a far busier schedule of visits to farms and factories, meetings with Komsomol activists, and receptions with local officials.¹²⁶ Even those from allied states were still kept fairly busy, though, and this caused resentment. A group of Czechoslovak youth tourists in the Caucasus in 1964, for example, eventually ran out of patience with their packed schedule and refused to board the bus for their latest excursion, insisted that they had come to the mountains to relax, and added that they could ‘sit around in factories at home if they wanted to’. Later that same summer a party of East Germans visiting the region also balked at the intensity of their itinerary and eventually refused to go on any further excursions except, it was noted with some disdain, for a trip to a local cognac factory.¹²⁷ In fact, as the Georgian branch of BMMT reported, the lack of free time afforded them was a

¹²⁴ L. Koehler, ‘A Cultural Encounter: US Students Visit the USSR’, *Russian Review*, Vol. 29, No. 4, 1970, 433.

¹²⁵ NARK, f. 779, op. 49, d. 61, l. 1.

¹²⁶ MIA, f. 96, op. 21, d. 51, l. 5.

¹²⁷ MIA, f. 96, op. 21, d. 51, l. 5. The East German group in question was branded ‘the most undisciplined to come to Georgia in 1964’ after members’ apparently boorish behaviour and frequent complaints repeatedly offended their Soviet hosts.

recurrent complaint among incoming foreign tourists.¹²⁸ Few harboured any illusions as to why they were being kept so busy. This naturally shaped the impression of the Soviet Union that they took away with them at the end of the trip, thus undermining its whole purpose, but was nonetheless deemed essential to prevent ‘contamination’.

Along with practices that sought to limit personal interactions to only those who had been trained for such work, basic geographical separation of foreign and Soviet youth was another form of ‘closedness’ central to the whole process of minimising outsiders’ influence. When BMMT’s own *Hotel Yunost*’ (Youth) opened for tourists in Moscow, visiting locals were allowed only in the public hall on the first floor.¹²⁹ It seems that in subsequent years they were not allowed inside foreigners’ hotels at all. Ahead of major events like the 1957 youth festival and the 1980 Olympics, ‘undesirable elements’ would be removed from city centres.¹³⁰ In response to locals’ attempts to trade with guests at the BMMT hotel in Leningrad, the city Komsomol stationed a permanent patrol there to keep them away.¹³¹ Again, though, there were failings in such measures. Owing to overbooking and a chronic shortage of hotel rooms in Vilnius, for example, the BMMT branch there reported that it had had no option but to

¹²⁸ MIA, f. 96, op. 21, d. 51, l. 10.

¹²⁹ RGASPI, f. m-31, op. 1, d. 239, l. 57.

¹³⁰ The future dissident Aleksandr Esenin-Volpin, for example, was forcibly detained in a psychiatric unit ahead of the youth festival.

¹³¹ RGASPI, f. m-5, op.1, d. 7, l. 4.

accommodate some visiting Poles (who were of Lithuanian heritage) at the homes of relatives across the city.¹³²

During the 1980 Moscow Olympics around 15,000 members of Komsomol Operative Detachments (a volunteer police force) carried out raids looking for black market traders along tourist routes, travel restrictions into the city were put in place and many local schoolchildren directed to summer camps beyond the capital.¹³³ These measures were ostensibly justified by the additional demand placed on supplies, security and transport by the estimated 300,000 visitors to the city, but the emptiness of Moscow during the Games did not go unnoticed by foreign commentators.¹³⁴ International youth camps were often especially remote, and anyway tended to feature only a few Soviet participants: something that could be witnessed by a 1959 agreement on exchange between Soviet and American youth organisations in which the American party (the USA Council on Student Travel) insisted on a clause stating that Soviet youth must constitute at least 30 per cent of the population of any international camp to be visited by Americans.¹³⁵ The Soviet response to this, also enshrined in the final contract, was to restate their inalienable right to eject from the country anyone found to be breaking their rules. After having refused to permit a US delegation to attend the 1957 festival in Moscow, it was now clearly the American rather than the Soviet side which felt most confident in its young people.

¹³² LYA, f. 4421, op. 26, d. 95, l. 14.

¹³³ See TsAOPIM, f. 635, op. 1, d. 3619, ll. 19-21 and RGANI, f.89, op. 31, d. 9, ll. 1-2.

¹³⁴ See, for example, C. Booker, *Games War*.

¹³⁵ RGASPI, f. m-5, op. 1, d. 11, ll. 89-91.

In universities, initial attempts at deploying the kind of separation methods used to help manage tourists' impact on those around them could also prove both ineffective and counter-productive. As early as June 1956 university officials were warning that because foreign students did not feel themselves part of political life in their new environment, questions and concerns were going unanswered, prompting them to 'turn to the BBC'.¹³⁶ Refusal to encourage proper integration could also contribute to growing hostility toward foreigners in some quarters: especially on a racial basis. One Ethiopian in Moscow, for example, told of how he and most of his friends had come to hate living in the Soviet Union thanks to the living conditions and the racism they encountered there.¹³⁷ It was reported by the Komsomol in November 1962 that some Soviet citizens were showing 'unhealthy attitudes' toward foreign students, manifested in a number of unprovoked physical attacks. This, the report lamented, 'harms our ability to achieve our aims (with the students) and provides ammunition for hostile propaganda by some students and capitalist embassies'.¹³⁸ The Komsomol investigation that followed a December 1964 gang fight between Soviet and African students in an LGU dorm showed two key facets of the problem. Noting that trouble had been brewing for some time in the dorm, the report concluded that the problems which underpinned the tensions there were not at all unique to that university. Among other things, local students were resentful that the Africans enjoyed superior living conditions (most had a room to themselves, unlike their Soviet counterparts), failed to meet expectations about maintaining cleanliness and received markedly higher stipends than they did. On their part, the African students complained that they felt alienated from their

¹³⁶ T. Krasovitskaya et al eds. *"Vozvratit' domoi druz"yami*, 27.

¹³⁷ A. Lee, *Russia Journal*, 104.

¹³⁸ T. Krasovitskaya et al eds. *"Vozvratit' domoi druz"yami*, 378.

environment, had few or no Soviet friends and were at times subjected to racist abuse.¹³⁹ With both Soviet and African parties showing a lingering sense of injustice at what had happened, representatives from the Komsomol Central Committee had to be dispatched to the university to smooth things over with both sets of students in order to avert the potential propaganda fallout that otherwise awaited.

During times of heightened international tension, such as around the Cuban Missile Crisis and the 1968 intervention in Czechoslovakia, the number of people arrested for ‘suspicious’ interaction with foreigners seemingly did rise markedly.¹⁴⁰ In the most troubled of circumstances the ultimate step toward ‘closedness’ could be enacted by sharply restricting the number of visitors, though this was not at all a common occurrence. As Zbigniew Wojnowski has shown, the Soviet authorities were deeply worried about the potential impact that Poland’s Solidarity movement might have inside the USSR, especially in neighbouring Ukraine.¹⁴¹ Tourist exchange between Poland and the Soviet Union was quickly and heavily curtailed. As of November 1980 swingeing cuts were applied to the large number of Polish youth coming in

¹³⁹ T. Krasovitskaya et al eds. “*Vozvratit’ domoi druz’nyami*”, 580-583. To give an idea of the importance attached to this event, the report sent to the Communist Party Central Committee was written by Sergei Pavlov – the presiding Komsomol first secretary.

¹⁴⁰ See, for example, V. Iofe, *Granitsy smysla: stat’i, vystupleniya, esse* (Sankt Peterburg, 2002).

¹⁴¹ As Wojnowski shows, the authorities went out of their way to show greater attentiveness to the wants and needs of their own working class and ramped up their patriotic rhetoric as the crisis in Poland peaked. Z. Wojnowski, ‘Staging Patriotism: Popular Responses to Solidarnosc in Soviet Ukraine, 1980-81’, *Slavic Review*, Vol. 71, No. 4, Winter 2012, 824-848.

and the number of Soviet youth heading to Poland. There can be little doubt that such exchange was therefore seen as a potential source of ‘contagion’ at a dangerous moment. Nonetheless, even during this most serious crisis to hit the bloc in over a decade, the number of Poles coming to the Soviet Union after the cuts were imposed still stood at over ten thousand per month.¹⁴² Whether this clear reluctance to act decisively was rooted in foreign policy considerations (meaning a belief that more interaction would help ‘straighten out’ the Poles) or in the allure of tourist receipts as the Soviet economy headed for ever-deeper troubles, it unmistakably showed a fundamentally conflicted approach to the question at hand.

Conclusions

Even as the Second Cold War reached just about its most fractious and dangerous stage in the early 1980s, when Western trends had all but saturated Soviet youth culture, the case was still being made that the flow of foreign visitors offered desirable benefits. As a 1983 report by BMMT insisted: ‘the present aggressive situation in the world makes our work all the more important. It (bringing foreign youth to visit the USSR) enables us to increase security through our information-propaganda activity’.¹⁴³ In terms of its own performance BMMT was clearly one of few remaining economic success stories in the USSR, having regularly fulfilled and exceeded its plan targets, but one could hardly say that it had been a clear political success: the

¹⁴² RGANI, f. 89, op. 46, d. 67, ll. 1-5. Figures cited in CPSU Central Committee materials order BMMT to make cuts from 105,000 to 66,000 visitors from Poland during the first six months of 1981.

¹⁴³ LVA, f. 201, op. 18, d. 103, l. 1.

Westernisation of youth culture had proved singularly unstoppable and, by the 1980s, fewer guests than ever were going home enamoured by what they had seen in a country that was quite visibly becoming mired in social and economic malaise. A few nuances aside, any concise assessment of whether the gamble of bringing so many foreigners to the USSR paid off, must surely be answered in the negative.

Opening up to the outside world has long been viewed as one of the key markers of Khrushchev's liberalisation programme, but a more panoramic view of the three decades following Stalin's death shows little sign of substantive change between the 'liberal' Khrushchev and 'conservative' Brezhnev eras in this context. As a result of the conflicting desires both for interaction with the outside world and insulation from it, the post-Stalin system needed to be 'open' and 'closed' at the same time. Once foreigners were inside the country, there were goals for the Komsomol to achieve and threats to forestall. This meant finding an appropriate balance between being open enough to impress and sufficiently closed to protect. Ultimately, the desire to reap the varied benefits of international interaction undermined the element of control that the Soviet authorities managed to exert. Conversely, the control that they did exert prevented them from maximising the potential benefits of interaction. As the quote which opened this essay encapsulates, foreign visitors to the USSR often spoke warmly of their encounters with the ordinary citizens they met. Few, though, had anything positive to say about Soviet officialdom, and the practices outlined above meant that they encountered the latter far more frequently than the former.

Clearly the physical presence of foreigners inside the Soviet Union was only one of several factors that contributed to the Westernisation of youth culture there: Western broadcasting and

the appearance of stilyagi (1950s adherents of a ‘Westernised’ youth subculture) predated incoming tourism by several years, while young people even in closed cities like Dnepropetrovsk and Sverdlovsk also proved hugely susceptible to foreign cultural influences.¹⁴⁴ Nonetheless, visiting foreigners certainly influenced the process, not least in the material markers of the West that they left behind. However, the extent (and it is surely a question of extent) to which Western influences damaged the viability of the Soviet system in the eyes of its citizens remains a subject of debate. Some Soviet youth became entirely besotted with an idealised vision of ‘the West’. Many, though, were still capable of accommodating admiration for certain aspects of Western civilisation and acceptance that important elements of the Soviet system were superior or else justifiable.¹⁴⁵ To draw a direct link, as some have, between the growing Westernisation of Soviet youth culture from the 1950s onwards and the eventual demise of the regime in 1991 feels like too much of an oversimplification, since this is a theme that must take its place within the panoply of other factors which played a major role in the ultimate Soviet collapse, such as economic decline, rising nationalisms, and botched reforms.

In accordance with BMMT’s line of argument about the benefits of interaction with the outside world, one last major opportunity for information-propaganda activity presented itself at the very end of the period in question. Bookending the post-Stalin era, Moscow was to play host to the World Festival of Youth and Students a second time, in the summer of 1985. Mikhail Gorbachev had come to power only a few weeks before the festival took place, but this was

¹⁴⁴ See in particular, S. Zhuk, *Rock and Roll in the Rocket City: the West, Identity and Ideology in Soviet Dnepropetrovsk, 1960-1985* (Baltimore, 2010).

¹⁴⁵ See, for example, J. Millar, *Politics, Work, and Daily Life in the USSR* (Cambridge, 1987).

very much still an endnote of the previous, increasingly dysfunctional, period. Preparations were much as in 1957, with the Komsomol Central Committee sending out booklets of questions and answers for propagandists, seminars held to explain Soviet domestic and foreign policy, myriad souvenirs produced, and vigilance urged against ideologically hostile elements. Gorbachev spoke at the festival opening of how valuable such events were for ensuring peace, security and mutual understanding in the world. The post-festival reports overflowed with platitudes about how the event had won the country many new friends and had enabled Soviet youth to shine in front of the whole world.¹⁴⁶ One of the British artists who performed at the festival painted a very different picture, however. Noting that her left-leaning group – ‘Everything But The Girl’ – had gone to Moscow hoping to ‘bring back news of a thriving society with which to deflect clichés of Evil Empire’, Tracy Thorne found conditions such that ‘...to say the experience was a strange one would be a criminal understatement’, adding that ‘we played gigs to rooms full of middle-aged Party officials, went on sight-seeing trips with clearly censored and near-mute translator-guides, were followed round our hotel and in the streets by anonymous-looking green-suited men and were fed an enervating diet of watery cabbage’.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁶ See, for example, MIA, f. 96, op. 28, d. 60, ll. 1-14.

¹⁴⁷ T. Thorn, *Bedsit Disco Queen: How I Grew Up and Tried to be a Pop Star* (London, 2014), 167-169.

