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Soviet Youth on the March: the All-Union Tours of Military Glory, 1965-87

‘To the paths, friends, to the routes of military glory’¹

The first train full of young people pulled into Brest station from Moscow at 10.48 on the morning of 18 September 1965. Over the course of the next couple of hours it was followed by another from Kiev, by buses from around Byelorussia and from the north of Russia. The Byelorussian Komsomol (Communist Youth League) had been forewarned that the event was to be considered one of their most important duties, and the station had been suitably attired for the occasion: adorned with portraits of top Communist Party leaders, patriotic slogans, and giant Soviet banners. Delegations arrived wearing national costume and carrying the flags of their various union republics. They were greeted in the public square outside the train station with fulsome speeches from Komsomol officials, by war heroes and cosmonauts before they all marched in formation to the legendary Brest fortress, following behind an orchestra playing old war tunes and new songs about peace and friendship.²

A tent city immediately sprang up at the fortress, and during the next four days the seven hundred attendees at the rally to celebrate the best participants of the first ‘all-union tour

¹ RGASPI (Moscow), f. m-1, op. 47, d. 557, l. 11. Excerpt from the May 1965 Komsomol Central Committee call for young people to participate in the first tour.

² RGASPI, f. m-1, op. 47, d. 551, ll. 8-16.

around sites of Soviet military glory' saw and heard countless narratives binding together the country's past, present and future, with each of them running, at their centre, through the suffering and heroism of the Second World War. They met with surviving veterans from the stubborn but doomed defence of Brest fortress, they delivered reports and erected photo displays on their recent tours of battle sites, planted trees, marvelled at exhibitions of new military hardware, and woke at three o'clock in the morning to relive the opening moments of the German surprise attack of 21 June 1941. They also passed a Komsomol banner to an attendant cosmonaut so that it might be taken into space on the next mission, they laid wreaths for the dead and swore oaths of loyalty to the motherland, to the Communist Party and the Soviet people. Late on the last night of the rally all electric lights were extinguished so that participants could see only the flickering of a newly-lit eternal flame as an artillery salute boomed overhead. Before they departed for home the next day, each was presented with a small capsule of earth from the fortress that had been 'spattered with the blood of its defenders'.³

Over the course of the next two decades twelve of the all-union tours of military glory took place, with the last one happening in 1987. Each closed with a major rally, like the one in Brest, celebrating those judged to have won in-tour contests on themes like 'best tour photo album' and 'best tour song'.⁴ In terms of participant numbers, these were truly

³ RGASPI, f. m-1, op. 47, d. 551, ll. 8-16.

⁴ The first winners' rally at Brest was followed by similar end-of-hike spectacles in Moscow (1966); Leningrad (1967); and Kiev (1968); before visiting Ulyanovsk

huge in scale. According to Komsomol Central Committee figures, over three million young people took part in the 1965 tour.⁵ Each republican and regional Komsomol leadership boasted to Moscow about the ever-growing numbers of participants, from Central Asia and the Caucasus to the Russian Far East and the Baltic States.⁶ Following the tenth round of tours, in 1982, the figure of 60 million participants since 1965 was mentioned in the newspaper *Komsomol'skaya pravda*.⁷ In both their enormity and tenor, these tours of military glory were classic manifestations of the Brezhnev-era 'cult' of the Great Patriotic War.

(1970); Moscow (1973); Volgograd (1975), and Ivanova (1977), coming to a close with Minsk (1980), Erevan (1982), Tula (1985) and Leningrad (1987).

⁵ RGASPI, f. m-1, op. 47, d. 551, l. 20.

⁶ To cite some official statistics: participation in the hikes in Byelorussia grew from 650,000 in 1965 to two million by 1969. See P. Chigrinov, *Podgotovka molodezhi k zashchite rodiny* (Minsk 1969), 36. By 1967 the Chechen-Ingush Komsomol reported that over one third of its members had participated in tours. D. Deriglazova ed. *Checheno-Ingushskaya oblastnaya komsomol'skaya organizatsiya, 1920-1984* (Grozny 1985), 116. In 1970 the Moldavian Komsomol Central Committee declared that over the preceding two years a total of over a million youths participated in the tours there. *Rezolyutsiya XV s'ezd komsomola moldavii* (Kishinev 1970), 2.

⁷ *Komsomol'skaya pravda*, 26.9.1982, 1-2.

The Khrushchev period had already seen war remembrance regain some considerable prominence after the theme was suppressed from the public sphere during the late Stalin years. Films such as ‘the Cranes are Flying’ (1957) and ‘Ballad of a Soldier’ (1959) were among the most popular of the era.⁸ It was only after the twentieth anniversary of Victory Day, in May 1965, though, that a ‘war cult’ began to develop truly leviathan proportions. From the row of medals gradually expanding across Leonid Brezhnev’s chest, to the vast memorials and museums that were unveiled, war commemoration became all but ubiquitous. Nowhere did this cult take on greater scale than within the Komsomol: an organisation tasked by the Communist Party with raising the young generation to be good Soviet citizens, but also one that had seen over ten million of its own members take up arms in the war against fascism and had accordingly suffered horrendous losses in the process.

The increasingly grandiose style of war commemoration – which was both reflected in and driven onward by actions like the all-union tours – has been presented by many scholars primarily as a ‘substitute’ sustaining myth for the Soviet regime once waning faith in the communist project became pervasive, replacing in the popular mind the (fading) promise of a utopian future with the burnished glory of past victory and heroism. Nina Tumarkin’s assertion that the war cult represented an attempt to ‘produce both an

⁸ Similarly, on the huge popular appeal of several novels set in and around the Second World War, see P. Jones, *Myth, Memory, Trauma: Rethinking the Stalinist Past in the Soviet Union, 1953-70*, (New Haven 2013).

explanation for a pitifully low standard of living and a sustaining myth to maintain support for a failing political system' is fairly typical.⁹ Others have viewed the war cult primarily through the prism of identity politics, whether that be burgeoning Russian nationalism or officials' attempts to build a stronger pan-Soviet identity.¹⁰ Each of these approaches certainly carry some real value for scholars. However, there is still considerable room to broaden out our understanding of this theme. As I demonstrate below, the tours of military glory, and the wider 'military-patriotic upbringing programme' that they constituted a central part of, connected with myriad desirable outcomes for Party and Komsomol leaderships. They provided a pragmatic and occasionally effective solution to all manner of important practical tasks, they offered palliatives for social maladies that extended some way beyond decaying idealism and low living standards, and they (in theory, at least) helped to inculcate an ideologically appropriate worldview among a post-war generation whose attitudes and aspirations were evolving to look ever more questionable to Soviet leaders.

The tours begin

⁹ N. Tumarkin, *The Living and the Dead: the Rise and Fall of the Cult of World War II in Russia* (New York 1995), 8.

¹⁰ See, for example, N. Mitrokhin, *Russkaya partiya: dvizhenie russkikh natsionalistov v SSSR, 1953-1985* (Moskva 2003); and J Brunstedt 'Building a Pan-Soviet Past: the Soviet War Cult and the Turn away from Ethnic Particularism', *Soviet and Post-Soviet Review*, Vol. 38 (2011), 149-71.

The twentieth anniversary of Victory Day, coming just a few months after the ‘palace coup’ that brought Leonid Brezhnev to power in October 1964, has been widely recognised as the critical point from which the nascent war cult developed.¹¹ To begin at this moment, though, is to miss some significant parts of the story, and consequently to misread some important cues in regard to the purposes of the cult. The war had already constituted a crucial reference point in the defining event of Khrushchev’s rise to sole power. One of the most notable, and most controversial, passages from the Secret Speech in 1956 had been his scathing attack on Stalin’s performance as war leader.¹² Re-setting the official narrative on the war – no longer attributing victory to ‘the genius of Stalin’ or foregrounding the heroism of ‘the Russian people’, but celebrating the role of the Party and a supra-national ‘Soviet people’ – was both a fundamental and enduring facet of the de-Stalinization package.

In the first instance one’s mind is drawn to Lisa Kirschenbaum’s argument that the renewed focus on war victory from around the time of the Secret Speech represented an attempt to counter-balance the potential risks that sprang from exposing Stalin’s crimes,

¹¹ See, for example, S. Lovell, *In the Shadow of War: Russia and the USSR from 1941 to Present* (London 2010); and N. Tumarkin, *The Living and the Dead*.

¹² On negative responses to the Secret Speech, see, for example, R. Hornsby, *Protest, Reform and Repression in Khrushchev’s Soviet Union* (Cambridge 2013), 45; and K. Aimermakher ed. *Doklad N.S. Khrushcheva o kul’te Stalina na XX s’ezde KPSS: doukmenty* (Moskva 2002).

by presenting a much more positive discourse on Soviet success for popular consumption.¹³ In regard to the Komsomol in particular, though, there is another matter to be raised. Nikolai Mesyatsev, a member of the Komsomol Central Committee at the time, subsequently made the point that the disgrace of Stalin immediately left a huge hole in Komsomol ‘upbringing work’, since so much emphasis had previously fallen upon urging young people to seek to emulate the great leader, and this hole had to be filled somehow.¹⁴ It seems, then, that while Khrushchev’s first move after the Secret Speech had been to replace the Stalin cult with a new cult around the Communist Party, he also helped create the conditions in which the other great cult of the post-Stalin years would later emerge.

In June 1956, less than four months after the Secret Speech, Komsomol first secretary Aleksandr Shelepin wrote to the Communist Party Central Committee noting that the state of the country’s ‘monument propaganda’ left much to be desired. Pervasive imagery of Stalin had come to obscure all manner of other important personages in the country’s historical pantheon (including even Marx, Engels and Lenin according to Shelepin), and a reorientation of this sphere was declared essential if desirable moral qualities were to be inculcated in the young generation. Shelepin argued that the new monuments should teach young people the names and deeds of outstanding fighters for the revolution, heroes

¹³ L. Kirschenbaum, *The Legacy of the Siege of Leningrad, 1941-1996: Myth, Memories, and Monuments* (Cambridge 2006), 155.

¹⁴ N. Mesyatsev, *Gorizonty i labirinty moei zhizni* (Moskva 2005), 320.

of the Civil War and Great Patriotic War. He made explicit reference to the imposing Soviet war memorial at Berlin's Treptower Park, and others in Czechoslovakia and Bulgaria, contrasting the positive and empowering impression they made upon the observer with the rundown military cemeteries at home that 'neither arouse feelings of pride nor gratitude'. Among the measures Shelepin recommended were the erection of new memorials, busts and museums in a swathe of big cities, the renaming of parks, public squares and streets in honour of those who had fought, acted and died for their country, as well as major war memorials and museums in Moscow and the other Hero Cities that should become 'sites of pilgrimage to Soviet heroism'.¹⁵ It would be some time yet before war commemoration became utterly pervasive in youth work, but by the time of Khrushchev's ouster at the end of 1964, Komsomol organisations had already erected substantial war memorials in Soviet republican capitals including Frunze, Kishinev, Minsk, Moscow and Riga, as well as major provincial cities like Murmansk, Sevastopol, Stalingrad, Sverdlovsk, and others.¹⁶

Once the Khrushchev regime had ended Stalin's suppression of the Second World War as a subject of public discourse, military themes quickly became an increasingly prominent component of the Komsomol's 'upbringing work' that aimed at instilling a sense of patriotism and ideological conviction among Soviet youth, especially in those

¹⁵ RGANI (Moscow), f. 5, op. 33, d. 4, ll. 42-44.

¹⁶ See V. Desyaterik et al, *Pamyatniki geroyam-komsomol'tsam: 65 letiyu pobedy v V.O.V. posvyashchaetsya* (Moskva 2010).

areas that occupied a particularly celebrated role in the war narrative.¹⁷ In Kursk the Komsomol reported that it had been organising excursions around former military sites for young people and holding meetings between local youth and veterans since 1955.¹⁸ By June 1958 the Byelorussian Komsomol Central Committee was repeatedly pressing the Communist Party leadership there to award posthumous medals to fallen members of the republic's youth resistance, and had long been organising hikes around military sites and raising money to build memorials.¹⁹ The budget of the Karelian Komsomol for 1962 showed that, apart from staff wages, the single biggest outgoing of that year went on building statues and memorials to local 'hero-Komsomoltsy' who had died during the war.²⁰ Even the XXII CPSU congress in October 1961 – often regarded as the high-water mark of Khrushchevian political idealism – emphasized the need for the Komsomol to increase its military-patriotic work with young people.

¹⁷ On the theme of Khrushchev-era military-patriotic work, see also J. Brunstedt, 'Building a Pan-Soviet Past'.

¹⁸ V.L. Bogdanov et al eds. *Pamyat', ty dlya serdtsa svyata: deyatel'nost' komsomol'skikh molodezhnykh organizatsii Kurskoi oblasti po geroiko-patrioticheskomu vospitaniyu v 50-90e gody XX veka* (Kursk 2008), 5.

¹⁹ NARB (Minsk), f. 63, op. 19, d. 15, ll. 57-59; NARB, f. 63, op. 19, d. 21, ll. 77-78.

²⁰ The figure cited was 7300 roubles: this was more than the combined outlay on all sporting and cultural measures that year. NARK (Petrozavodsk), f. 779, op. 41, d. 107, ll. 1-12.

By the early 1960s the Komsomol was already engaged in a panoply of military-patriotic upbringing measures with young people around the country, though confidential reports often spoke of fundamental problems like systemic disorganisation, poor resourcing and work dwindling almost to nothing during the long summer months. In Kazakhstan school children kept up pen-pal correspondence with local youth serving in the army, they took walks along the route of the old Chapaev division from the Civil War years, and opened a 'Molodaya gvardiya' ('Young Guard') museum dedicated to the underground youth group made famous in Aleksandr Fadeev's 1945 book of the same name.²¹ In Brest the Komsomol organized hikes around military sites, inducted new members at the fortress and had veterans give out their membership cards.²² In Perm they heard talks on patriotism from veterans (including one who had stormed the Reichstag), worked to raise young people's fitness levels through military-style sports, and broadcast television shows about the lives of local war heroes.²³ Similar examples could be cited for virtually all parts of the country, but it seems that the form of such work often depended on local initiative and was thus of variable quality in the eyes of Moscow. In terms of how the cult was to be manifested from the mid-1960s onwards, though, it was only really the scale and the systematic nature of remembrance that were fundamentally new.

²¹ For purposes of clarity, it is worth pointing out for the reader that 'molodaya gvardiya' was both the name of Fadeev's semi-fictional book about an underground group in the Krasnodon region, the title of a monthly Komsomol ideological journal, and the name of the Komsomol's own publishing house.

²² NARB, f. 63, op. 19, d. 21, ll. 77-78.

²³ RGASPI f. m-1, op. 47, d. 525, ll. 20-24.

After having come under strain during the Khrushchev years, the new Brezhnev regime quickly brought much improved relations between political and military elites, and allowed a stronger voice for veterans' organisations.²⁴ To wide public approval, it was soon announced that the twentieth anniversary of Victory Day (May 9) would once again be a public holiday, having not been so since 1947. Then, on 25 May 1965 the Komsomol Central Committee issued a decree 'on the all-union youth tourist trips around sites of military glory of the Soviet people'. Unfortunately, there is very little in the way of a documentary trail building up to this announcement, so one can say little about exactly where the initiative originated. Numerous authors, though, have pointed to the military establishment and to veterans' organisations as bodies which helped initiate the war cult.²⁵ We can also add that presiding Komsomol first secretary Sergei Pavlov's basic political ethos was entirely in tune with the kind of romanticised militarism that the tours would embody.

²⁴ See, for example, M. Edele, 'Soviet Veterans as an Entitlement Group, 1945-1955', *Slavic Review*, Vol. 65, No. 1 (2006), 111-37.

²⁵ On the role of the military in pushing forward the cult, see, for example, N. N. Tumarkin, *The Living and the Dead*; and M. Edele, *Soviet Veterans of World War Two: a Popular Movement in an Authoritarian Society, 1941-1991* (Oxford 2008).

While emphasis on military facets of youth work had already been growing for some time, the ‘bits and pieces’ approach to military-patriotic work of the Khrushchev years now gained a sense of direction that would prove transformative. A clear chain of command was established for the tours, stretching from Moscow to every town and district in the country, and any shortcomings were to be tackled rigorously. Headed at first by the retired Marshal Ivan Konev, an all-union board (including representatives from the Komsomol, the Army, veterans’ committees, tourism organisations and trade unions) directed and verified the work of regional (*oblast’* or krai) and republican-level boards, which then directed and verified the work of boards at the level of towns and districts. These town and district boards, again made up of Komsomol activists, former soldiers, media workers and others then worked to decide local tour routes and plan meetings with veterans, organise necessary logistics like transport and accommodation, select and talk to group leaders about their responsibilities and subsequently collect the results of the tours.

Declaring young people’s continuing sense of gratitude toward those who had defended the motherland, the decree began by reaffirming that ‘the upbringing of youth in the military and revolutionary heroics of the past was and still is one of the most important directions of the Komsomol’s ideological work’.²⁶ It then called on all young people – not just Komsomol members – aged between fourteen and twenty eight years to take part

²⁶ *O vsesoyuznom turistichestkom pokhode molodezhi po mestam boevoi slavy sovetskogo naroda*, Postanovlenie byuro TsK VLKSM, 25.5.1965.

in the tours: to visit war museums and meet with soldiers, to take ‘the legendary Volokamsk highway’ and the Lake Ladoga ‘road of life’, to walk partisan trails in Byelorussia, and to visit the battlefields at Kursk. These trips could last a day or multiple days, and they could be taken on foot, by bicycle, car or boat. Soon enough, people were also skiing military trails in winter. En route, they were to ‘find new heroes, collect materials for museums, meet with veterans, cultural figures and shock workers, paying special attention to sites where people fell in the war’. Local and national youth newspapers featured exhortations for young people to participate. Board members at all levels appeared on the radio and on television to publicise the upcoming hikes, they advised newspaper editors on how to popularise local events, and liaised with historians and museums to help determine appropriate walking routes.²⁷ Coverage in the media was extensive, to say the least. The Byelorussian Komsomol Central Committee, for example, reported to Moscow that during 1968-69 republican youth newspapers there had carried about 8,000 stories on the tours, accompanied by almost a thousand radio broadcasts and over one hundred and fifty television programmes.²⁸ Several of the biggest stars of the Soviet firmament, like Yuri Gagarin and the writer Konstantin Simonov, added their own voices to the call for young people to pack their bags and hit the road.

The numbers participating in the tours grew quickly, not least because of repeated demands from above for more and more Komsomol organisations to mobilise their

²⁷ RGASPI, f. m-1, op. 47, d. 551, l. 8.

²⁸ NARB, f. 63p, op. 46, d. 16, l. 10.

members and other local youth for the tours. By 1971 the Central Committee was already calling for every one of the hundreds of thousands of Komsomol primary organisations across the country to take part.²⁹ Data from the Lithuanian Komsomol show that by 1980 the vast majority of young people within the Komsomol age range were participating. For the capital Vilnius records show a total of 51,528 out of 56,971 studying youth (students and school pupils) undertaking tours that year. The next largest constituency was young people who worked in industry, with a little over 33,000 out of just under 55,000 in that category participating. For the rather more provincial Rokiškis district the proportions were broadly similar: over 5,100 out of 5,276 studying youth; over 3,200 out of 3,617 youth in industry; and over 900 out of 1,068 collective farm youth.³⁰ In some areas and groups, then, participation was as high as ninety per cent of the age cohort. The fact that such a large proportion of young people within the Komsomol age range participated in these tours clearly indicates that there must have been broadly similar levels of male and female participation.

Across the country, the recommended hiking routes were vast in scale and potent in symbolism. One stretched from Volgograd (formerly Stalingrad) to Moscow, a second from Stavropol to Kiev, while others ranged across routes like Moscow to Minsk; Odessa

²⁹ See K. Bogolyubov et al eds, *Spravochnik partiinogo rabotnika* (Moskva 1972), 382-387.

³⁰ LYA (Vilnius), f. 4421, op. 34, d. 95, l. 1 and l. 28. As ever, one must be wary of the possibility of data inflation in regard to such figures.

to Kiev, and Minsk to Brest. Kazakh youth followed the trail of the famous Panfilovskii division, Odessa youth toured the vast catacombs that had sheltered the city's partisans during occupation. Often covering well over a thousand kilometres, walking routes were usually broken down into individual stages of up to about 200 kilometres, each of which commenced one day after the other.³¹ Each individual tour group, then, formed part of a gigantic moving whole. While the Second World War always predominated, the purposes of the war cult made it vital that such measures were all-union in scope, and therefore different frameworks had to be employed in some parts of the country. In Primorskii krai (around Vladivostok), for example, the fighting with Germany had taken place thousands of miles away. Komsomol members there commemorated the victors and the (Red) victims of the Civil War, tracing the routes of early 1920s Komsomol battalions, erecting memorials and holding meetings in military cemeteries.³² Similarly, in Tashkent the Uzbek Komsomol held meetings on the square outside the city train station at the local monument to victims of the Whites.³³

It was not at all atypical of the Soviet system that the situation in the regions did not always live up to Moscow's expectations. It was a mark of the significance attached to

³¹ RGASPI, f. m-1, op. 47, d. 551, ll. 67-68. There was also some freedom for groups to come up with their own routes.

³² RGASPI, f. m-1, op. 47, d. 553, ll. 40-44.

³³ *Komsomol Uzbekistana: ocherki iz istorii komsomola Uzbekistana*, (Tashkent 1978), 201.

such military-patriotic work, however, that emissaries and inspectors were sent out from the central board in Moscow to ensure orders were being followed in the provinces. One who went out to the Stavropol region in early summer 1965 reported frustration at how little the Komsomol there had done to prepare, saying that local youth were not talking about the tours on the streets and in fact did not know anything about them, that the local Komsomol had simply accepted there were no great heroics there to be showcased, and local boards were doing little except for preparing to ‘make a noise’ about their success after the event had passed. He duly summoned local Komsomol secretaries for a dressing down informed the regional Komsomol leadership that their work was unsatisfactory and had to improve quickly, then communicated the same back to his superiors in Moscow, complaining that they ‘do not understand the significance of the tours for our youth work’.³⁴

Participants usually hiked their stage of the route in teams of around ten people, often friends drawn from their class at school or from the same factories and farms in which they worked, with each team advised to do at least one useful deed to ‘eternalise’ wartime heroism. Along their paths the travellers met with local veterans and recorded their reminiscences, gave performances or held lectures, photographed battle sites and memorials, navigated their way through forests, crossed rivers and recovered the remains

³⁴ RGASPI, f. m-1, op. 47, d. 553, ll. 5-16. The individual in question also noted that his rebuke to the regional officials had led to some of them threatening to cause trouble for him back in Moscow.

of missing soldiers. They also tended graves, played military-style games, undertook fitness training and tests and learned about new weapons and technology. Where possible, they cooked over a fire and spent the night in tents under the stars before picking up their backpack and heading off again in the morning. Participants competed in all manner of contests relating to their journeys, such as best photo album produced; best songs and poems about the war; best amateur film footage of the hikes; best written accounts of the tours; best monuments erected and best museums and corners of military glory established, generating masses of new propaganda as they did so. Newspaper staff and radio workers also competed with each other for prizes on the basis of best coverage of the tours. Photo galleries and memorial boards, along with discovered artefacts (like weapons extracted from muddy fields, Nazi documents and Soviet uniforms) from the war soon began to appear on display in schools, universities and workplaces everywhere.

The post-tour reports showed that in 1965 participants had created over 27,000 museums, rooms and corners of military glory and erected around 6000 obelisks and memorials. The remains of tens of thousands of dead fighters were uncovered and identified and over 80,000 graves were 'brought into order' across the country.³⁵ Striking as they were, such impressive results were quickly eclipsed. The following year the tours created a further 32,000 museums and rooms of military glory, 9000 memorials and obelisks. By 1982 over 3,000 museums, rooms and corners of military glory had been

³⁵ RGASPI, f. m-1, op. 47, d. 551, ll. 20-26.

established in Moscow alone.³⁶ These museums were for the most part pretty rudimentary: most often occupying spare rooms or corners of rooms in schools and factories and displaying an assortment of found or donated items. The memorials, too, were often as basic as a large stone with a dedication plaque, though some were much grander (like the statue of Marat Kazei in Minsk or the large memorial to war veterans from Moscow State University Komsomol, both of which are still tended today) and most likely had to be formally approved by Party and Komsomol officials at a regional level before being erected.

The results were adjudged sufficiently encouraging that participants at the Brest rally in 1965 issued a call for Soviet youth to sign-up next year in even greater numbers, which they duly did. By the end of the 1960s the hikes were already an established and prominent facet of Komsomol work with young people.

‘Soviet youth must be prepared to fulfill their sacred duty’

Throughout the postwar world all manner of regimes and societies at some point came to feel significant unease at the changing dynamics of youth culture and worried that their young people were ‘going soft’: that they might not prove so hardy as their recent

³⁶ TsAOPIM (Moscow), f. 635, op. 1, d. 3811, l. 8.

forebears if the volatile global climate should deteriorate.³⁷ The Soviet Union was no exception to this trend. Compared to the previous half-century, the post-war generation clearly was being brought up in far less testing times than their parents and grandparents had known. Steadily rising living standards and consumerism were exerting a considerable impact upon society, as a substantial component of post-war youth culture was continually evolving in a way that caused alarm among those who populated the Soviet power structures. Part of the background to this concern, of course, was that both the capitalist West and communist China represented the distinct possibility of future apocalyptic struggles that Soviet youth would have to be ready for.

While a growing proclivity for blue jeans and rock music were often the highest-profile sources of concern regarding Soviet youth's fighting potential, there were also other problems to be addressed. Figures sent from the Latvian Military Commissariat to the Komsomol in 1956, for example, showed serious problems with the quality of conscripts coming into the Soviet armed forces. Many of them were in an unsatisfactory physical condition and few possessed any military skills. Twenty-seven of those enlisted were described as entirely illiterate, 612 were only semi-literate, and 600 had no Russian language competence at all (Russian being the lingua franca of the Soviet army). The

³⁷ See, for example, M. Richards, 'The Cold War's "Soft" Recruits', *Peace Review*, Vol. 10, No. 3 (1998), 435-41; E. Avdela, 'Corrupting and Uncontrollable Identities: Moral Panic about Youth in Post-Civil War Greece', *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 43, No. 1 (2008), 25-44.

author complained that the Komsomol should have worked to prepare these young people before they were drafted, and demanded that they make better efforts at doing so in the future.³⁸ Similar examples could be found all across the country, and Komsomol responsibility in preparing young people for military service only increased when conscription rules were changed in 1968.³⁹ The significance of this for the Party and Komsomol leadership can hardly be overstated. As a meeting of Komsomol activists and volunteer military organisations in Moscow declared: ‘the most important criteria of our work in military-patriotic education is the preparedness of our youth at the first call of the motherland to come to its defence with weapon in hand’.⁴⁰

Marshal Ivan Konev – the initial figurehead of the tour movement – spoke of them first and foremost in terms of their military value. He emphasised the importance of young people erecting and then sleeping in tents, trekking on foot for days, finding their way through the wilderness by compass and map. These were, he said, practices that would help develop in young people ‘boldness, bravery, initiative and applied skills’.⁴¹ When Konev’s successor, Ivan Bagramyan spoke of the value of the tours a decade later, it was evident that he, too, saw them primarily through the lens of their benefit to the armed

³⁸ LVA (Riga), f. 201, op. 1, d. 1040, l. 10.

³⁹ See, for example, ERAF (Tallinn), f. 31, op. 1021, d. 15, ll. 1-35.

⁴⁰ TsAOPIM, f. 635, op. 1, d. 3811, l. 9.

⁴¹ RGASPI, f. m-1, op. 47, d. 551, l. 71.

forces.⁴² In some places, such as along the border with China in Amur *oblast'*, the tours became a part of training young recruits for border guard work through activities like weapons training and study of signals codes.⁴³ In 1970 the Byelorussian Komsomol Central Committee evaluated the situation succinctly, describing the hikes as playing 'a big role in the widening of young people's world view, making youth hardier and inculcating comradeship, mobilising them for further and better study, strengthening discipline and above all (*italics added*) preparing them for service in the Soviet army.'⁴⁴

In his address at the opening of the 1966 winners' rally in Moscow, Konev restated his earlier point wholly unambiguously, reminding his audience that all was not calm in the world and warning that US imperialism thirsted for blood, death and suffering, before going on to demand constant vigilance and adding that young people must prove themselves 'the equal of their fearless fathers'.⁴⁵ Also linking past, present and future, Leonid Brezhnev declared much the same thing at a February 1967 Komsomol Central Committee plenum, stating: 'if the severe hour comes, Soviet youth must be prepared to

⁴² *Komsomol'skaya pravda*, 24.9.1982. In an interview with *Komsomol'skaya pravda* Bagramyan declared that the hikes helped create well-rounded youth with enthusiasm for labour and militarily useful skills.

⁴³ The Amur regional Komsomol reported that the Chinese were a source of constant concern in their region. RGASPI, f. m-6, op. 17, d. 581, ll. 61-68.

⁴⁴ NARB, f. 63, op. 46, d. 20, l. 10.

⁴⁵ *Komsomol'skaya pravda*, 9.9.1966, 3.

fulfil their sacred duty – to defend the motherland with weapon in hand. The (Communist Party) Central Committee is certain that our young people will carry out this duty no worse than their fathers did in the years of the Great Patriotic War'.⁴⁶ As we can see, this propaganda discourse on the war also helped create a narrative about young people's duty to lay down their lives for the motherland, just as previous generations had. On exclaiming in 1981 how Western imperialists and the Chinese were again 'rattling their weapons', Komsomol first secretary Boris Pastukhov declared: 'they do not scare our youth, (who are) descendants of those who stormed the Winter Palace...who carried the banner of victory to Berlin, and who consider it their highest duty to strengthen the power of the motherland, always ready to stand to its defence'.⁴⁷

It seems that there were indeed some positive results for the armed forces from the expansion of military-patriotic work with youth. By the time of the tenth round of the all-union hikes, in summer 1982, Moscow City Komsomol reported with some satisfaction that conscripts were coming to the army better educated and better trained.⁴⁸ In addition to the hikes, growing numbers had already been participating in a plethora of Komsomol-run recreation societies and camps that developed physical fitness and taught useful skills like martial arts, radio operating, parachute jumping and first aid. Thanks to constant work aimed at attracting non-members to join the ranks of the Komsomol – including measures

⁴⁶ L. Brezhnev, *Molodym stroit' kommunizm*, (Moskva 1970), 211.

⁴⁷ *Izvestiya*, 27.02.1981, 4.

⁴⁸ TsAOPIM, f. 635, op. 1, d. 3811, l. 11.

like the all-union tours – the proportion of Komsomol members among the conscript cohort continued to grow each year, meaning (to those in authority) that the ‘political steadfastness’ of the armed forces was on the rise.⁴⁹

Military-patriotic work like the tours did not just offer benefits for the armed forces. As a number of scholars have pointed out, many surviving veterans had come to harbour resentments toward both the political authorities and wider society, neither of which were perceived to have done enough to recognise and assist their returning heroes at the end of the war.⁵⁰ While it was not until the late 1970s that an expansive system of financial and legal benefits was afforded to the country’s remaining war veterans, what they started to acquire from the tours in particular were what Mark Edele has referred to as ‘symbolic benefits’.⁵¹ In the first instance this meant being granted both increased social prestige and a public platform: talking to young audiences about their deeds and about their comrades, being given a forum to pass on their knowledge, and becoming a subject of public veneration. In official discourse, the war had made its survivors a veritable font of

⁴⁹ By 1982, for example, Sverdlovsk *obkom* reported that a total of 93% of those entering the armed forces there were now Komsomol members. TsDOOSO, f. 1327, op. 5, d. 27, ll. 1-31.

⁵⁰ See R. Dale, ‘Rats and Resentment: The Demobilization of the Red Army in Postwar Leningrad, 1945-50’, *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 45, No.1 (2010), 113-33; and M. Edele, *Soviet Veterans of World War Two*.

⁵¹ M. Edele, *Soviet Veterans of the Second World War*.

knowledge about life. Some youth newspapers, like *Komsomol'skaya pravda*, came to employ regular open letters from veterans addressed to 'the youth of today' as a standard rubric in their attempts to shape youth attitudes and behaviours. In Byelorussia and elsewhere the hikes included evenings arranged with old soldiers and former partisans on themes like 'fighters remember past days', 'heroism in the face of danger' and 'the glory of those days will not fall silent'.⁵² The importance of this lauding ought not to be underestimated for the subjects involved. As Amir Weiner points out, for many veterans participation in the war became the key marker of their entire biography, and one which could ameliorate or void previous stains, like petty crimes or undesirable class origins.⁵³ As such, plenty were keen to get involved. The editor of the magazine *Sovetskaya molodezh*, ('Soviet Youth') for example, reported to his superiors that he immediately received a great deluge of unsolicited war memoirs after they printed one former soldier's reminiscences.⁵⁴

The benefits were not only of the symbolic kind. The huge number of wounded and invalids left at war's end had been far too great for the state to cope with in anything but a perfunctory manner. The hikes and the various public occasions they entailed served as

⁵² NARB, f. 63p, op. 37, d. 73, l. 6.

⁵³ A. Weiner, 'The Making of a Dominant Myth: the Second World War and the Construction of Political Identities within the Soviet Polity', *Russian Review*, Vol. 55, No. 4 (1996), 655.

⁵⁴ LVA, f. 201, op. 6, d. 25, l. 3.

a chance for veterans to socialise, and to meet with local officials and highlight issues affecting them.⁵⁵ Furthermore, in conjunction with the hikes, town and district-level Komsomol organisations across the country were expected to locate and take patronage over injured veterans in their district. This brought a huge manpower resource to what was undoubtedly a major challenge for the party-state. To mark the start of the 1970 tours, for example, the Byelorussian Komsomol Central Committee mobilised two million volunteers to help veterans at home and to visit them in hospitals.⁵⁶ As far away from the former frontline as Kyrgyzstan, over 20,000 Komsomol youth were mobilised to help care for ill veterans.⁵⁷ Komsomol volunteers did shopping for them, refurbished apartments and ran errands. Others went into care homes or hospitals and performed concerts and short skits or else read newspapers to invalids there. They also collected information for official purposes on each of the veterans in their district: recording details about their health, living conditions and material needs.⁵⁸ All this, of course, both relieved a major burden of responsibility from the state and brought young people into close personal contact with ‘appropriate’ role models. Whether Komsomol volunteers actually provided the kind of year-round help that many veterans surely needed remains unclear, though they did face intermittent pressure to do so and preparing youth for military service (of which interaction veterans became an important part) certainly was a year-

⁵⁵ A. Shitkov ed. *Komsomol'skaya yunost' moya*, (Staritsa 2014), 86.

⁵⁶ NARB, f. 63p, op. 46, d. 16, ll. 1-15.

⁵⁷ TsK LKSM Kirgizii, *Fizicheskoe i voenno-patrioticheskoe vospitanie molodezhi v Kirgizii*, (Frunze 1975), 24.

⁵⁸ NARB, f. 63, op. 46, d. 16, l. 3.

round task.⁵⁹ With state provisions for veterans consistently falling short of what was needed, such volunteers were doubtless appreciated and useful.

Encroaching even further into what would traditionally be considered the work of the party-state, Komsomol volunteers also took on some considerable responsibility for helping needy relatives of dead or injured soldiers. In many places the mothers and fathers of dead Komsomol fighters were brought into Komsomol work, handing out membership tickets to new joiners and prizes to competition winners, or speaking to young audiences about their own children's heroic deeds.⁶⁰ In some places Komsomol construction brigades built or repaired flats for those who had lost offspring or spouses. Parents got to see their dead children venerated with all manner of public ceremonies and symbols, and it seems this could have real meaning for them. The mother of a dead partisan fighter in Byelorussia, for example, successfully petitioned the republican Komsomol to back her application to be assigned a new apartment on the street recently renamed in honour of her Komsomol-hero son, Nikolai Kedyskko.⁶¹ Such things could never make up for lost children, of course, but they probably did help to ameliorate the brusque way in which

⁵⁹ On reprimands for district committees not taking sufficient care of local veterans, see, for example, TsAOPIM, f. 635, op. 1, d. 3811, ll. 3-6.

⁶⁰ See, for example, V. Ryabov eds, *Shagai vpered, Komsomol'skoe plemya: ocherki Kuibyshevskogo Komsomola*, (Kuibyshev 1974).

⁶¹ NARB, f. 63, op. 19, d. 21, l. 38.

authorities had tended to deal with such massive volumes of material loss and personal grief during the initial post-war years.

Lastly on this theme, burgeoning commemoration of the war by the Komsomol could also be a useful way of mobilizing young people's energies in the economic sphere. One example can be seen in the case of a factory Komsomol organization in Sverdlovsk which made a patriotic pledge to fulfill the labour norms of all those men from their own workshop who had not returned from the war.⁶² In Belgorod the Komsomol initiated a drive for young workers to fulfill the production quotas of absent comrades serving their conscription period.⁶³ Such patriotic gestures were naturally held up as an example to be emulated. Elsewhere Komsomol initiatives saw primary organisations across the country competing in all manner of economic tasks (like collecting scrap metal and waste paper) for the right to present reports on their work to meetings of honoured war veterans. They also competed for the right to stand guard at eternal flames and monuments on important state holidays, and for the right to rename their primary organization in honour of specific war heroes and military victories. By the mid-1970s young people were also vying with their peers for the distinction of being photographed alongside the most venerated of all war artefacts: the victory banner that had been planted atop the Reichstag at the end of April 1945.

⁶² TsDOOSO, f. 61, op. 20, d. 209, ll. 23-30.

⁶³ RGASPI, f. m-6, op. 17, d. 581, l. 104.

Love for the motherland and hatred for its enemies

Naturally, with the Komsomol's primary task being to raise youth 'in a spirit of Marxism-Leninism', the tours were also aimed at shaping the attitudes and behaviours of the young generation. As Nikolai Mitrokhin has already pointed out, the two main concerns of the post-Stalin authorities regarding youth were the rise of hooligan behaviour and the proliferation of Western cultural influences.⁶⁴ The romanticised militarism which underpinned events like the tours was very much intended to propagandise more 'traditional' values and in the process stall and even roll back these troubling developments in youth culture. This was also about redoubling influence over the way that young people understood and connected to their country's past and present, as well as their perceptions of the outside world. When the head of the Molodaya gvardiya publishing house reported to the XVI Komsomol congress in 1970 he spoke of the huge number of military-patriotic volumes they published as being intended to help youth 'comprehend great deeds and examples of bravery, to make sure that all young people feel they are the heirs and continuers of the struggle'.⁶⁵ In this respect a July 1972 article in Pravda summed the situation up perfectly when it described the tours and their accompanying work with veterans as 'a way of showing young people how far we have

⁶⁴ N. Mitrokhin, *Russkaya partiya*, 236-40.

⁶⁵ RGASPI, f. m-6, op. 16, d. 364, l. 2. For purposes of context, the report stated that Molodaya gvardiya had published 50-70 books on military-patriotic themes since the last congress, always in huge circulations.

come and how much harder things used to be'.⁶⁶ Explicitly linking the tours to attempts at raising patriotism among youth, one former organiser recently claimed that: 'seeing veterans in their medals gave Komsomol members a feeling of living history, a chance to see real patriots and heroes, to want to be faithful continuers of the older generation's deeds'.⁶⁷

The post-Stalin years saw most Soviet citizens acquiring more and more leisure time (with shorter working hours, more holidays and the growing availability of various labour saving technologies): something that the Party leadership was always keen to claim credit for.⁶⁸ However, they also had a particular interest in shaping the way in which that new wealth of free time was being spent. In countless documents and decrees from the period social problems such as rising criminality and drunkenness, as well as romanticisation of 'the underworld' through prison camp slang and songs, and burgeoning cultural Westernisation, were linked to a perceived failure by the Komsomol to provide 'proper' outlets for young people's energy in their spare time. The summer holidays were a

⁶⁶ *Pravda*, 26.7.1972, 4.

⁶⁷ The same author also noted that this helped young people see that 'anything could be done with unity, faith in success and love for the motherland'. A. Tyapkin, 'po mestam boevoi slavy', in A. Shitkov ed. *Komsomol'skaya yunost' moya*, 86.

⁶⁸ See in particular N.B. Leбина, *Povsednevnost' epokhi kosmosa i kukuruzy: destruktziya bol'shogo stilya, Leningrad 1950-1960e gody* (Sankt Peterburg 2015).

particular source of concern in this respect: precisely the period in which the tours typically took place.

As Gleb Tsipursky has argued, the bid to make young people's free time 'socialist' – through organising and supervising all manner of fun events, sports clubs, amateur cultural groups and opportunities for study – was a major feature of youth work in the post-Stalin years.⁶⁹ The same could be said of the way in which the authorities increasingly used honorific awards, prizes and grandiose public celebrations (like a growing number of anniversaries related to Party history, the life of Lenin, and the history of the Komsomol) to add a slightly more attractive and fun sheen to important political messages. In the case of the tours this included the gala end-of-hike rallies, openings of new museums of military glory and unveilings of memorials, often attended by veterans, youth, local dignitaries and an orchestra. The leaderships of both the Party and Komsomol were well aware that if youth activity could be made enjoyable and memorable, it would most likely be more effective.

Lisa Kirschenbaum has suggested that many young people were 'shamed' into involvement in such facets of the war cult, while Nina Tumarkin's firsthand account from the 1980s tended to push to the fore imagery of bored boys and girls being dragged around

⁶⁹ G. Tsipursky, 'Having Fun in the Thaw: Youth Initiative Clubs in the Post-Stalin Years', *Carl Beck Papers in Russian and East European Studies* (Pittsburgh 2012).

‘heroic’ sites – and one suspects that there was some truth to both of these as participation became all but obligatory with the passing years.⁷⁰ Nonetheless, it is important to remember that this was a period in which a huge proportion of those reaching adulthood were the children or siblings of war veterans and victims, and in many parts of the country were growing up where the physical scars of war remained all too visible. Understandably, some of them wished to see the sites where parents and relatives had fought and died.⁷¹ Similarly, the format of the tours closely coincided with key aspects of the 1960s and early 1970s youth zeitgeist. Outdoor recreation and ‘active tourism’ were increasingly prominent and popular around that time.⁷² The ‘tourism’ element should probably not be underestimated. Would-be participants were promised that ‘you will see our great rivers and mountains, learn about your home region, the beauty of its nature and its heroic past.’⁷³ In their classic work on the spiritual world of 1960s Soviet man, Vail’ and Genis emphasised the powerful lure of romantika: forsaking one’s home comforts

⁷⁰ See N. Tumarkin, *The Living and the Dead*; and L. Kirschenbaum, *The Legacy of the Siege of Leningrad*, 180.

⁷¹ One example from Karelia featured a young man undertaking a ski hike to trace the routes of his late father’s partisan detachment. See Yu Shleikin ed., *Komsomol Karelii v litsakh*, 56-58.

⁷² See D. Koenker, *Club Red: Vacation Travel and the Soviet Dream*, (Ithaca 2013); and A. Gorsuch, *All This is Your World: Soviet Tourism at Home and Abroad after Stalin* (Oxford 2013).

⁷³ *O vsesoyuznom turistichestkom pokhode molodezhi po mestam boevoi slavy sovetskogo naroda*, Postanovlenie byuro TsK VLKSM, 25.5.1965.

and heading off into wilderness with friends, a tent and maybe a guitar.⁷⁴ Even though they fell well within the sphere of ‘official activity’, these trips were also a chance for precisely that kind of adventure. In the travelogues that some participants wrote after their trip one sees time and again a clear reveling in the challenges and hardships that they endured along the path. They wrote at length of descents down cliff faces and challenging river crossings, recorded distances covered and temperatures endured. Hand-written reports from winter ski-hikes in Karelia, for example, were adorned with illustrated icicles, and featured photographs of bleak and snowy scenes with captions of such as ‘it’s not warm, it’s provincial and quiet, it’s not easy, it’s unknown, harsh and far’.⁷⁵ This was not just about commemorating the dead and wounded but also about steeling oneself.

Replete with potted histories of places visited, reports on the weather, photographs of group members frolicking in the sea, posing at local attractions, listening raptly to veterans, cooking over open fires, and observing a minute’s silence at memorials, some of the post-trip accounts looked at times rather like holiday albums.⁷⁶ Unfortunately for the researcher their content was mostly rather anodyne and quite clearly intended for the eyes of officialdom. The accompanying texts were often sparse and revealed little about

⁷⁴ P. Vail’ and A. Genis, *60-e gody: mir sovetskogo cheloveka*, (Moskva 2000).

⁷⁵ NARK, f. 779, op. 49, d. 69, l. 44.

⁷⁶ See, for example, RGASPI, f. 1, op. 47, d. 564, ll. 32-43 which constitutes a report on the 1965 auto-walking tour taking around Crimea undertaken by young workers at the Zaporozhstal’ factory in Zaporozh’e.

how the trips impacted upon the inner world of those involved, but stuck overwhelmingly to existing war narratives, meaning that the heroism of veterans was absolutely without suggestion of blemish, while the darker spots of the war, such as the role of Jewish fighters, mass deportations and the treatment of POWs, remained untouched. Despite the rigidity of the reproduced discourse, seeing battle sites, finding remains and hearing from veterans doubtless did have a powerful impact on many. One of Donald Raleigh's interviewees, after noting that she had never been interested in going to camp or other such officially sponsored youth activities, stated that 'the only experience of this sort that sticks in my mind was a very interesting trip in which we traced the tracks of Bryansk partisans' with four friends and a group of Pioneers.⁷⁷ A participant at the first winners' rally recalled the middle-of-the-night re-enactment of the German surprise attack as an unforgettable moment that caused 'a lump in the throat and fighting to hold back tears'.⁷⁸ One former member of the Komsomol in Karelia described the impression left by trips to military sites in Smolensk and Kalinin as well as meeting locals and veterans there as 'simply unforgettable'.⁷⁹ Respect for the disastrously expensive Soviet victory and admiration for those who fought, though, was not necessarily inseparable from faith in the bright communist future.

⁷⁷ D. Raleigh ed. *Russia's Sputnik Generation: Soviet Baby Boomers Talk about Their Lives* (Bloomington 2006), 196-7.

⁷⁸ G. Usyskin. *Ocherki istorii rossisskogo turizma* (Moskva 2000), 176.

⁷⁹ A. Shitkov ed. *Komsomol'skaya yunost' moyu*, 108-112.

For the authorities, of course, this was not about ensuring that young people had a good time. Indeed, one report from Bryansk at the end of the 1965 tours noted ruefully that some of the trips there had taken on too much of an ‘entertaining’ rather than ‘educational’ character.⁸⁰ Much more important for the Komsomol leadership was the way in which such measures should shape participants’ world view. Many who were involved in organizing the tours spoke of them first and foremost as a means of instilling patriotism.⁸¹ The Latvian Komsomol, for example, wrote of the patronage that its members took over the republic’s thousands of war invalids as both ‘an expression of filial gratefulness to the older generation who gave their health and strength for the happiness of the people’, and as ‘a means of shaping the outlook and attitudes of those involved’.⁸²

This using of the tours for shaping young people’s attitudes was also true of the grisliest task associated with the hikes: uncovering and then identifying some of the vast numbers of bodies left unaccounted for at the end of the war in forests, fields and ditches across the western part of the country. Following the very first round of hikes in 1965 the Byelorussian Komsomol reported that participants there had found 3485 missing bodies, then, as the number of participants grew, in 1971 they reported finding and working to

⁸⁰ RGASPI, f. m-1, op. 47, d. 557, l. 50.

⁸¹ See, for example, A. Tyapkin, ‘po mestam boevoi slavy’ in A. Shitkov ed. *Komsomol’skaya yunost’ moya*, 84-87.

⁸² LVA, f. 201, op. 5, d. 31, ll. 236-7; LVA, f. 201, op. 6, d. 17, ll. 93-94.

identify over 10,000 uncovered bodies: a practice which, they noted, ‘helps to raise young people in a spirit of love for the motherland and hatred for its enemies’.⁸³ This was considered sufficiently important that the number of bodies uncovered became one of the metrics that regional boards reported to their superiors each year, with a clear subtext that more bodies uncovered and names allocated to them was a mark of success. Throughout the post-Stalin years one of the most frequently repeated criticisms that the Communist Party leadership aimed at the Komsomol was that its propaganda work was often dry and too far removed from daily life to inspire young people. That was clearly not something which could be said about military-patriotic work like this, which surely did help to reinforce official messages regarding the war while also fulfilling another practical task that would otherwise have fallen to the party-state.

It is also important to note that the hikes and other military-patriotic undertakings oscillated between two closely related points of focus: the overall Soviet victory, and the Komsomol’s own role in that victory. In regard to the latter there was undoubtedly plenty to celebrate, with vast numbers of members having served as frontline soldiers, underground resistance fighters, couriers, spies, nurses and much more besides. Around 3.5 million Komsomol members had been decorated and given various awards by the end of the war, and 7000 had earned the title ‘Hero of the Soviet Union’. While a substantial number of veterans, many of them decorated, remained within the Komsomol ranks well

⁸³ NARB, f. 63, op. 46, d. 16, l. 9.

into the Khrushchev years, they were all gone by the mid-1960s.⁸⁴ Further, as the organisation more than doubled in size across the post-Stalin years (from under twenty million to over forty million members), the question of reinforcing its moral authority among young people was not infrequently raised. As the post-Secret Speech report from Aleksandr Shelepin to the Party Central Committee suggested, history was to be an important wellspring of this authority in the present. At one end of the spectrum that included engaging with non-members and energising the swelling number of young people who joined essentially out of convenience or careerism and showed little inclination for active Komsomol work. At the other end, though, it was also more than once mentioned within the upper ranks of the Komsomol that some of the more zealous members were frustrated by the organisation's perceived inactivity and unhappy at the declining militancy occasioned by its constant expansion of membership, complaining that all they ever did was pay membership dues and attend the occasional meeting.⁸⁵ Having so many of its members active and making some kind of contribution to society, then, was also good for the Komsomol as an organization.

⁸⁴ Like lots of other Soviet organisation, the Komsomol liked to be able to boast of the number of veterans in its midst. Of the delegates at the XII congress in 1954 the vast majority (over 800 out of about 1300) had joined before or during the war. RGASPI, f. 6, op. 12, d. 30, l. 21. Even in spite of the fact that many congress delegates and officials were beyond the standard Komsomol upper limit of 28 years old, very few members had any direct recollection of the war by the late 1960s.

⁸⁵ See, for example, RGANI, f. 5, op. 31, d. 108, l. 90.

Among the most visible products of the war cult was a plethora of new role models, both male and female; alive and dead. This was one of the great resources that the war offered for domestic propaganda: a seemingly bottomless well of heroes and heroism. While growing Western penetration of the Soviet public sphere – most notably through broadcasts by the likes of Radio Liberty and Voice of America but also through clothing, music and more – might serve to make idols of foreign actors, authors and rock stars while also eroding all manner of officially endorsed myths about matters at home and abroad (such as on questions of living standards and political freedoms), the war proved much more robust as a source of propaganda. Creating secular martyrs and saints of the war dead was a long established trope of European history.⁸⁶ Among measures aimed specifically at using these new role models to inspire young people were all manner of factual and fictional publications for boys and girls, television and radio shows, as well as the Komsomol's all-union 'book of honour' at the Central Committee in Moscow outlining the deeds of the grandest Komsomol war heroes (including the likes of Zoya Kosmodemyanskaya and Aleksandr Matrosov), and regional, town and district books of honour to celebrate the contributions of local youth who fought or helped.⁸⁷ This use of new role models could also be remarkably inclusive at times, as seen in the renaming of

⁸⁶ See, for example, G. Mosse, *Fallen Soldiers: Reshaping the Memory of the World Wars* (Oxford 1990).

⁸⁷ In addition to commemorating the likes of Matrosov, lists of names were also published of those Komsomol fighters who 'repeated his deed' (throwing himself on a machine gun post to save his comrades). RGASPI, f. m-1, op. 47, d. 557, l. 31.

a Petrozavodsk street (with a sign both in Russian and Finnish) in honour of Anna Lisitsyna, a Komsomol fighter from Karelia's Finnish minority, despite the fact that Finnish troops had occupied the city for some considerable time during the war.

The political energy generated by the hikes was not only directed inwards. The 1968 tour displayed a strong focus on participants doing volunteer work to provide material help for the Vietnam Solidarity Fund. Communist youth organisations from across Eastern Europe and beyond were invited to send delegations to several of the end-of-hike rallies, reinforcing official narratives on Soviet liberation of the region from Nazism, on the great service to all mankind that was rendered in the defeat of fascism, and on socialist solidarity between the USSR and its allies. At the Tula rally in 1985, for example, a succession of delegates from the likes of Czechoslovakia, East Germany and Poland took to the stage to make the requisite statements about their people's gratefulness for Soviet sacrifices on their behalf during the war, while in Sverdlovsk the local Komsomol newspaper, *Na smenu!*, established contact with newspapers in towns across Eastern Europe so that local youth could read of the heroics performed by Urals regiments that helped liberate those regions.⁸⁸ Enemies, too, could be incorporated, constructing a clear historical framework through which to view contemporary events. An April 1968 meeting of Moscow Komsomol activists, for example, was told 'the US is practicing sadism (in Vietnam) like the gestapo' and warned that that the West was 'blowing on the embers

⁸⁸ TsDOOSO, f. 904, op. 1, d. 13, l. 71.

from which the Second World War burst into flame'.⁸⁹ Molodaya gvardiya published books on historical links between capitalist big business and Nazi Germany.⁹⁰ Past and present were swirled together in Komsomol propaganda, so weekly lecture cycles would see the following titles bumping up against one another: 'NATO is preparing for war', 'There where it began (on the defence of Brest fortress in June 1941)', 'from a position of revenge' (on the dangers of West German rearmament), '900 eternal days' (on the Leningrad siege), 'the words and deeds of the president' (on US militarisation), and 'the Germans' first defeat before Moscow'.⁹¹

In spite of their heavy focus on military glory, the tours and the wider war cult were still intertwined with trumpeting communism and the Party. Both war memorials and Lenin monuments were sites for homage to be paid. The war cult even served to prop up more overtly ideological work to some extent. In Voroshilovgrad *oblast'* (around modern day Luhansk), for example, participants in the 1971 tours met with war veterans and shock workers and undertook research on both the Young Guard partisan group and on the legendary coal miner Aleksei Stakhanov.⁹² Indeed, the announcement of the third round of tours in February 1967 explicitly requested that places of revolutionary and labour

⁸⁹ TsAOPIM, f. 2907, op. 1, d. 164, l. 15.

⁹⁰ See, for example, RGASPI, f. m-6, op. 16, d. 364, l. 9.

⁹¹ TsDOOSO, f. 904, op. 1, d. 22, ll. 14-15.

⁹² K. Bogolyubov et al eds, *Spravochnik partiinogo rabotnika*, 382-87.

heroism also feature in the trips.⁹³ Often the hikes would double up as celebrations of major political dates, like the 50th anniversary of the revolution, the 50th anniversary of the Komsomol's founding, and the 100th anniversary of Lenin's birth, which featured an end-of-hike rally in his hometown of Ulyanovsk (a town which never saw frontline action). The eighth winners' rally was held at Ivanovo on the basis that the town had been the site of the first ever soviet of workers' deputies. During the Leningrad rally participants gave reports at the Smolny Institute (a key site in the revolutionary days for the Bolshevik Party) and then held a huge meeting at the city's Pisarevskoe cemetery complex.

Victory in the war, then, did not necessarily stand apart from the rest of the Soviet project, but could be interwoven with long established propaganda work on subjects like the international struggle, labour and Lenin. This is a point that has already been made by Amir Weiner, but, based upon the tours of military glory, we can go still further.⁹⁴ The tours were a vessel that could and did accommodate a huge variety of key propaganda themes: on Soviet desire for global peace and disarmament (a product of the huge death toll and suffering that the tours commemorated); on international friendship; on women's equality (many female partisans and others were venerated alongside their male

⁹³ *O III vsesoyuznom pokhode komsomol'tsev i molodezhi po mestam revolyutsionnoi, boevoi i trudovoi slavy sovetskogo naroda*, Postanovlenie byuro TsK VLKSM, 22.02.1967.

⁹⁴ See A. Weiner, *Making Sense of War*.

counterparts); and on links between capitalism and fascism. The war clearly represented a very powerful context in which to present a wide range of political messages to the young generation.

In regard to how successful all this was in shaping young people's worldview, the results were obviously somewhat ambiguous. Doubtless some were bored, some simply took the chance to have fun with their friends, and others were deeply moved. If we are to try and strip away the triumphalist propaganda and boilerplate rhetoric that surrounded such measures, it seems certain that they did help create a genuine reverence for the achievements and sacrifices of the war but were probably less effective at shaping views of the contemporary world. After all, a huge and expanding wealth of evidence still points to the inexorable growth of officially undesirable youth phenomena, such as cultural Westernisation and hooligan behaviour, right across the period in question.⁹⁵

All parts of the country were fronts in the war

Perhaps most important of all were the wider social purposes of the tours – and the cult in general – in a society which, beneath the monolithic appearance presented by officials, was riven with multiple social and political fissures. What the Komsomol did with the war cult from the very start was to create a framework within which virtually the whole

⁹⁵ See, for example, S. Zhuk, *Rock and Roll in the Rocket City: The West, Identity, and Ideology in Soviet Dnipropetrovsk, 1960-1985* (Baltimore 2010).

country could play a part in celebrating and being celebrated. Rather than focusing solely on those Western areas of the USSR where the war was mainly fought, the Komsomol Central Committee's opening decree on the tours from May 1965 had insisted that 'all parts of the country (including the Urals, Siberia and Central Asia) were fronts in the war', stating 'there the units were formed, the steel was forged and the bread was produced'.⁹⁶ Without this kind of scope, the war cult would not have been nearly so effective in youth work. From Tashkent to Minsk, and from Riga to Yerevan, there were local, national and supranational considerations at play in war commemoration.

During the initial post-Stalin years perhaps the most widely noted social split was inter-generational: a second 'fathers and sons debate' which, though all but impossible to prove incontrovertibly, was a regular theme of commentaries on Soviet life around the time and has consistently featured within the literature on Soviet dissent in particular.⁹⁷ Some authors have located the split in the changing aspirations and attitudes of post-war youth (a phenomenon widely observed in both the capitalist and communist worlds of the 1950s

⁹⁶ *O vsesoyuznom turisticheskoy pakhode molodezhi po mestam boevoi slavy sovetskogo naroda*, Postanovlenie byuro TsK VLKSM, 25.5.1965.

⁹⁷ From the primary literature see, for example, V. Bukovsky, *To Build a Castle: My Life as a Dissenter* (London 1979). From the more recent secondary literature, see J. Fürst, *Stalin's Last Generation: Soviet Post-War Youth and the Emergence of Mature Socialism* (Oxford 2010). Both Khrushchev and the Komsomol hierarchy vehemently rejected the existence of such a divide.

and 1960s), though perhaps the most frequently encountered explanation has centred upon the notion that Khrushchev's 1956 revelations about the Stalin years in the Secret Speech left many young people disenchanted at the extent to which the previous generation had either participated in or failed to prevent the terrible Stalinist atrocities that were exposed at the XX CPSU congress.⁹⁸ Merle Fainsod, for example, wrote in 1964 that 'Soviet youth are increasingly disenchanted, politically disengaged at the generation who compromised themselves under Stalin'.⁹⁹ This, though, was essentially also the generation which had defended the motherland in 1941-45.

Both Nina Tumarkin and Lisa Kirschenbaum have noted that the war cult was in part aimed at raising young people's respect for and obedience to their elders.¹⁰⁰ It certainly seems that there is some truth in this. The discourse of Komsomol war commemoration in general, and of the all-union tours in particular, unmistakably centred upon connecting generations. Respect, gratitude, and the continuation of tradition were the key themes. In Karelia, for example, slogans for the 1968 tours included 'the paths of fathers are the

⁹⁸ See, for example, L. Alexeyeva, *The Thaw Generation: Coming of Age in the Post-Stalin Era* (London 1990); and A. Rothberg, *The Heirs of Stalin: Dissidence and the Soviet Regime, 1953-1970* (Ithaca 1972).

⁹⁹ M. Fainsod, 'Soviet Youth and the Problem of Generations', *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, Vol. 108, No. 5 (1964), 429.

¹⁰⁰ See N. Tumarkin, *The Living and the Dead*, 130; and L. Kirschenbaum, *The Legacy of the Siege of Leningrad*, 180.

roads of sons', and local radio broadcast stories about former Komsomol members called 'the youth of our fathers' on wartime heroics.¹⁰¹ In Amur *oblast'* young people were read lectures including 'dead heroes speak' and 'we will be faithful to our fathers'.¹⁰² When the Byelorussian Komsomol marked the thirtieth anniversary of the republic's liberation in June and July 1974 they held a week-long conference entitled 'Dear fathers-heroes'.¹⁰³ In Sverdlovsk the local youth newspaper had a section for young people to write in about their own father's heroics.¹⁰⁴ One can hardly offer an unequivocal assessment of the results in regard to something so nebulous as generational strife, but at least some close observers have claimed that things improved over time. As Valery Ganichev argued recently of the Brezhnev years, 'this was probably the most harmonious period in the country's history (since) there was no conflict between fathers and sons'.¹⁰⁵

In conjunction with the above point, we can see that there was a remarkable striving for authenticity in various elements of Komsomol war commemoration. In the course of the hikes teams of young people often sought to replicate precisely the routes taken by soldiers during wartime: covering many kilometres per day, wading through rivers and

¹⁰¹ NARK, f. 779, op. 49, d. 69, 7.

¹⁰² RGASPI, f. m-6, op. 17, d. 581, ll. 62-64.

¹⁰³ NARB, f. 63p, op. 19, d. 36, ll. 261-264.

¹⁰⁴ TsDOOSO, f. 904, op. 1, d. 27, ll. 1-3. It is worth noting that in the section 'If father was or is a hero', the term 'hero' included both wartime and labour heroics.

¹⁰⁵ V. Ganichev, 'Molodaya gvardiya, 1968-1978', *Moskva*, No. 9 (2013), 128.

descending down cliff faces. They heard and recorded oral testimonies of war and brutal Nazi occupation. The search for authenticity was also something that could be seen at the Brest rally in the early-hours re-enactment of the Nazi surprise attack. When participants met at the Moscow rally the instantly recognisable voice of Yuri Levitan, the radio announcer who had kept the country updated on news from the front during the war, boomed across Red Square. Similarly, participants at the Volgograd rally in 1975 were given specially minted medals reminiscent of those awarded to Heroes of the Soviet Union, and invites (in the name of Marshal Bagramyan) came in the same triangular envelopes that had been used for correspondence from the front during the war.¹⁰⁶ All this can be best understood in the light of Stephen Lovell's claim that the war came to represent a giant historical caesura within Soviet society, dividing all those who had fought from all those who had not.¹⁰⁷ The striving for authenticity in remembrance can perhaps be seen as a response to this worrying divide.

In recent years there has emerged in the historiography on the cult a seemingly intractable divide. On the one hand Nikolai Mitrokhin has presented a case for extensive Komsomol war commemoration to be viewed through the prism of burgeoning Russian nationalism, stating that this was a way for a powerful nationalist clique at the top of that organisation

¹⁰⁶ See, for example, RGASPI, f. m-1, op. 38, d. 880, ll. 4-9 for various artefacts (including posters and invitation letters) relating to the 1975 winners' rally.

¹⁰⁷ S. Lovell, *The Shadow of War*.

to reassert the position of Russians as foremost among all Soviet peoples.¹⁰⁸ Jonathan Brunstedt, on the other hand, has highlighted the extent to which post-Stalin narratives on the Second World War largely suppressed Russian nationalist tendencies and were surprisingly inclusive of non-Russians in the USSR, presenting victory as a point around which the many different nationalities could be brought closer together.¹⁰⁹

Actually, the example of the tours shows that there is little need to choose decisively between the ‘nationalist’ and ‘pan-Soviet’ variants outlined above, since both were possible within the tour framework. It was not by coincidence that the opening ceremony for the rally at Brest in September 1965 had featured participants decked out in their various national costumes and carrying republican banners. When the victors’ rally was held at Volgograd in 1975 one of the most prominent posters featured a constructivist-style flower consisting of the fifteen union republic flags. Similarly, when they held a rally at Mamaev Kurgan in October 1965, the Volgograd Komsomol asked delegates to bring a native plant from their own republic to help create an ‘alley of friendship of the peoples of the USSR’.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁸ N. Mitrokhin, *Russkaya partiya*.

¹⁰⁹ J. Brunstedt, ‘Building a Pan-Soviet Past’; and J. Brunstedt, ‘The Soviet Myth of the Great Fatherland War and the Limits of Inclusionary Politics under Brezhnev: the Case of the Chalmavist Literature’, *Nationalities Papers*, Vol. 41, No. 1 (2013), 146-65.

¹¹⁰ RGASPI, f. m-1, op. 47, d. 557, l. 105.

The assertion that Russian nationalism was not an especially prominent or consistent feature of the official war cult narrative certainly rings true in regard to the tours. However, the fact that Russian nationalism did not feature heavily in the headline message of the tours did not mean it did not lurk in the background. It was not by chance that the hikes began and rapidly expanded while the committed Russian nationalist Sergei Pavlov was Komsomol first secretary. Among the participants at the winners' rallies, peoples of all republics were invited, but Russians consistently predominated.¹¹¹ Both Yitzak Brudny and Aleksandr Yanov have written of a sharp turn toward Russian nationalism at the top of the Komsomol around the time that the hikes began: the former describing a move to emphasise nationalism and militarism as the mobilising power of Marxism-Leninism declined, and the latter noting an apparent Central Committee document calling for a new 'cult of ancestors'.¹¹² Ahead of the XVIII Komsomol congress in 1978 Valery Ganichev (a noted nationalist and head of the Molodaya gvardiya publishing house) even proposed, seemingly unsuccessfully, to include in the tours

¹¹¹ See, for example, RGASPI, f. m-1, op. 38, d. 837, ll. 9-7 which shows a combined total of 465 participants at the Volgograd rally from all the non-Russian republics, and a further 555 participants from the RSFSR.

¹¹² See Y. Brudny, *Reinventing Russia: Russian Nationalism and the Soviet State, 1953-1991*, (Cambridge 2000); and A. Yanov. *The Russian New Right: Right-wing Ideologies in the Contemporary USSR*, (Berkeley 1978), 39-61.

‘routes around places of great spiritual glory of the people’.¹¹³ When the winners’ rally took place at Tula in 1985 events included a special celebration at Kulikovo Field (around one hundred kilometres from Tula), and some of the Komsomol press coverage drew an explicit line from that legendary battle of ancient Rus’ against the Mongol hordes, through great Imperial Russian victories at Poltava and Borodino right up to the battles at Stalingrad and Kursk, putting victory over Nazism in a specifically Russian context of military glory.¹¹⁴ This kind of ‘single-stream’ interpretation of history, which drew a continuous line from pre-revolutionary Russian glories to those of Soviet times to assert the ‘Russian’ nature of Soviet successes, was hardly typical in the officially sanctioned materials on the tours but, like the Ganichev proposal, such sentiments clearly were present and did surface from time to time.¹¹⁵

Thanks to measures like the tours every place had its own heroes to be celebrated, whether all-union, republican or local. This ability to accommodate more than one message was a key dynamic. It also presents a point that has gone largely unexplored thus far in the literature on the post-Stalin regime and its celebration of the Second World War. This

¹¹³ RGASPI, f. m-6, op. 18, d. 453, l. 11. For the uninitiated, it is worth noting that celebration of the Orthodox faith one of the key features of Russian nationalist sentiment.

¹¹⁴ *Komsomol'skaya pravda*, 12. 5. 1985, 1-3.

¹¹⁵ On multiple controversies over this single-stream approach to history, see J. Brunstedt, ‘The Soviet Myth of the Great Fatherland War’.

was very much a moveable feast. It was not just about celebrating the greatness of the entire Soviet Union. It was also about celebrating the individual republic, town, and place of work or study. Amir Weiner has rightly argued in this connection that a big part of the cult's power lay not just in the way it was directed from above but in the fact that it could be interpreted, co-opted and used for local ends.¹¹⁶ As they planned for the 1968 round of hikes, for example, Komsomol bosses in Karelia informed organisers that the focus for that year's tours would be on 'Karelian national traditions, materials and history'.¹¹⁷ Kirschenbaum's work on Leningrad also demonstrates the extent to which natives there were able to express pride in their city through remembrance.¹¹⁸ Because of the war's truly vast scale, and by virtue of the narrative framework around which the cult was structured, it was not at all hard to construct multiple layers of 'pride' and 'glory' that were Soviet, republican and local at one and the same time.

With a steadily rising tide of nationalist sentiment in many parts of the post-Stalin Soviet Union, the war cult offered an avenue which could to some extent accommodate this phenomenon within the bigger Soviet story. Jamil Hasanli, for example, has noted that one of the directions taken by rising Azerbaijani nationalism was a growing clamour (including from the republican Komsomol) for Mehti Huseinzadeh – a wartime

¹¹⁶ See A Weiner, *Making Sense of War*, 9.

¹¹⁷ NARK, f. 779, op. 49, d. 69, l. 1.

¹¹⁸ See L. Kirschenbaum, *The Legacy of the Siege of Leningrad*.

partisan from that republic – to be awarded the honour ‘Hero of the Soviet Union’.¹¹⁹ Young people in Byelorussia competed to write the best essays and stories on the themes like ‘the bravery of the Byelorussian people in the Great Patriotic War’ while the republican Komsomol there loudly boasted of the 33,000 Byelorussian youth decorated for wartime heroics and lobbied for others to be recognized with the title Hero of the Soviet Union.¹²⁰ In Azerbaijan, which never saw frontline action, the Komsomol organised what were essentially pilgrimages to the village where Marshal Ivan Bagramyan had been born, and also raised funds to erect a statue in honour of Hazi Aslanov, an Azeri Major-general during the war and Hero of the Soviet Union.¹²¹ In Uzbekistan the same role was filled by the late Sabir Rahimov, who was posthumously made a Hero of the Soviet Union in 1965 and in Georgia the republican Komsomol Central Committee spent over 20,000 roubles erecting a monument to their own ‘heroic defenders of the Caucasus’.¹²² All this, of course, had to be fit into the wider ‘Soviet’ framework, but there was still plenty of scope to boast of local achievements – something exemplified by a statement from the Byelorussian Komsomol on their republic’s struggle against occupation: ‘Byelorussian people, shoulder to shoulder with peoples of other

¹¹⁹ J. Hasanli, *Khrushchev’s Thaw and National Identity in Soviet Azerbaijan, 1954-59*, (London 2015), 201.

¹²⁰ NARB, f. 63, op. 46, d. 9, ll. 1-16.

¹²¹ RGASPI, f. m-1, op. 47, d. 557, ll. 1-6. It is also worth noting in this context that Bagramyan was an ethnic Armenian born inside Azerbaijan.

¹²² MIA, f. 96, op. 22, d. 25, l. 1.

republics, did this'.¹²³ In short, this was one of relatively few topics with room for both national and all-union patriotic celebration.

Stalin-era fears about commemoration of 'local' aspects and experiences of the war potentially leading to a divisive strengthening of regional identities – a theme best displayed in the early chapters of Lisa Kirschenbaum's work on Leningrad – gave way to encouragement of the 'local' angle.¹²⁴ Here it is worth drawing the link to Victoria Donovan's article on the rapid growth of the late Khrushchev-era 'local studies' movement, which she convincingly asserts was in part an attempt to 're-ideologize' disengaged youth.¹²⁵ As *Komsomol'skaya pravda* wrote of the hikes in September 1966, 'there is no town or village in our country without its own glories in revolutionary, labour or military affairs'.¹²⁶ Similarly, the Byelorussian republican Komsomol said of its 'citadel of bravery' propaganda campaign that 'our aim is to find sites of bravery in every town'.¹²⁷ The hikes, therefore, also served a function some way below the level of national sentiments and the fifteen union republics, allowing individual regions and towns

¹²³ RGASPI, f. m-1, op. 47, d. 557, l. 37.

¹²⁴ See L. Kirschenbaum, *The Legacy of the Siege of Leningrad*.

¹²⁵ V. Donovan, 'How well do you know your krai? The kraevedenie revival and Patriotic Politics in Late Khrushchev-Era Russia', *Slavic Review*, Vol. 74, No. 3 (2015), 468.

¹²⁶ *Komsomol'skaya pravda*, 9.9.1966, 2.

¹²⁷ NARB, f. 63, op. 46, d. 16, l. 3.

to boast of their great deeds. In Gomel the Komsomol produced monthly television shows on local citizens who had distinguished themselves during the war. In Brest they produced photo albums on local war heroes to be handed out to all schools and libraries in the region.¹²⁸ In Tver' Russian school children did research on local hero D.M. Karbyshev, who had refused on pain of death to co-operate with Nazi occupiers, and eventually had their school named in his honour.¹²⁹ The local Komsomol leadership in Sevastopol repeatedly called upon the Molodaya gvardiya publishing house in Moscow to print works on their city's heroic wartime defenders.¹³⁰ Passing years have shown that pride like this was not fleeting. Published almost seventy years after the war's end, a recent work on the history of the Karelian Komsomol proudly displays portraits of the nine local 'Komsomol graduates' granted the title 'Hero of the Soviet Union' for their bravery during the war.¹³¹

At the most local level, schools set up memorial boards about former pupils who went off to war (under the banner 'they studied in our school'), while factories raised money to

¹²⁸ NARB, f. 63, op. 19, d. 23, ll. 10-17.

¹²⁹ G. Bykov et al eds, *Komsomol proletarki: vospominaniya, razdum'iya i razmyshleniya* (Tver' 2014), 45.

¹³⁰ RGASPI, f. 1, op. 81, d. 375, ll. 1-71. The request was approved but failed to materialise on the grounds that there was insufficient paper available.

¹³¹ Yu. Shleikin ed. *Komsomol Karelii v litsakh* (Petrozavodsk 2013), 59.

put up plaques dedicated to former colleagues who perished.¹³² Students at Urals State University erected displays on war themes including ‘we are proud of our university’ and organised rooms of military glory at the institute.¹³³ By the mid-1970s every faculty at Leningrad State University had erected display stands about former students who fought in the war under the title ‘they defended Leningrad’.¹³⁴ Komsomol groups across the country were affixing plaques to denote houses where war veterans lived and newspapers included regular updates about the hikes under banner headlines like ‘Heroes Live Next Door!’¹³⁵ Countless streets and parks were renamed in honour of local people, and especially Komsomol members, who had done heroic deeds for their country. A rich pantheon of heroes now stretched out from the house next door right to Red Square. After several decades of social and political upheaval, in which the past had been condemned as often as it had been celebrated, this was a valuable mechanism for constructing a greater sense of stability and permanence. For good and for bad, these were to be the hallmarks of the Brezhnev era.

Conclusions

Within the Komsomol at least, the Brezhnev-era afterlife of the Second World War added up to much more than just a sticking plaster for dwindling ideological enthusiasm. One

¹³² NARB, f. 63, op. 46, d. 24, ll. 1-28.

¹³³ See, for example, TsDOOSO, f. 5852, op. 1, d. 23, l. 14.

¹³⁴ RGASPI, f. m-1, op. 38, d. 893, ll. 21-25.

¹³⁵ See, for example, *Amurskii komsomolets*, 25.08.1965, 2.

can discern three broad purposes that the Komsomol's all-union tours served. The first centred upon 'upbringing' work: managing the content of young people's free time, creating sites of engagement between system goals and youth, and inculcating a sense of patriotism and pride in the motherland. A second direction was based upon fulfilling more tangible duties that might otherwise have fallen to the state, like increasing and intensifying economic activity, taking care of war veterans, developing the skills and mindsets needed for military service and national defence. The third involved facilitating social cohesion through knitting together generations and celebrating the individual republic, town, village and factory whilst at the same time bringing their achievements into the wider Soviet story of victory. This was an important device through which to remedy, or else to paper over, a series of social maladies stemming from the war, from the Stalinist path of development, and also from the political tumult of the Khrushchev years.

The war was so useful because its sheer scale meant that practically all parts of the country had some kind of share in it: rural and urban; Russian and non-Russian; male and female; frontline veterans and factory workers. It was not only the fact that no other aspect of Soviet history was so un-controversially positive in the eyes of most citizens which made the war so powerful as a propaganda theme, but also that it was presented within a framework which gave virtually every family and every region a chance to be part of the laudatory narrative and to join in with advancing that same narrative even further. Heroes and role models were to be found everywhere, and they were built on much firmer foundations than were promises of material abundance and progress toward communism.

Nonetheless, it was clearly indicative of deep-lying changes within the system that the past – rather than the shining future to come – had taken centre stage in work with young people.

Doubtless, some took the tours as a chance for fun and recreation, or else participated rather reluctantly, while others found them truly moving and formative experiences. While they may not have managed to turn all young people into ‘good communists’, they clearly did help to embed a deep and lasting reverence for the victory and for those who fought. Even the most casual observer of contemporary Russia (and a few other former Soviet republics) will be aware that mass veneration of triumph and suffering in the Second World War remains a powerful socio-political impulse. Indeed, hikes around military sites have again been flourishing in connection with the recent seventieth anniversary of Victory Day. Whether this tells us more about similarities between the Putin and Brezhnev regimes, or about the extent to which the sentiments of officialdom and wider society are largely in tandem on this matter, is a question to be considered elsewhere.