Social History

ISSN: (Print) (Online) Journal homepage: https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rshi20

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To cite this article: Robert Hornsby (2023) Engineering friendship? Komsomol work with students from the developing world inside the USSR in the 1950s and 1960s, Social History, 48:1, 65-86, DOI: 10.1080/03071022.2023.2146900

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/03071022.2023.2146900

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Published online: 20 Jan 2023.

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SOCIAL HISTORY
2023, VOL. 48, NO. 1, 65–86
https://doi.org/10.1080/03071022.2023.2146900

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

Engineering friendship? Komsomol work with students from the developing world inside the USSR in the 1950s and 1960s

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ABSTRACT
Following the death of Stalin in 1953, the Soviet Union under Nikita Khrushchev again began to embrace internationalism not just with rhetoric but also in practice. Much as in the West, Soviet authorities used higher education as a means to build influence and strengthen relationships. This article explores the ways in which the USSR's Communist Youth League (Komsomol) worked with and responded to incoming students from the developing world, both in mainstream universities and at the Central Komsomol School in Moscow. It shows that key dynamics of the Cold War contest both shaped and undermined this facet of internationalist activity, and that institutional interests and competencies remained important in understanding the idiosyncrasies of Soviet internationalism.

KEYWORDS
Soviet Union; youth; student mobility; higher education; internationalism

Looking back on his February 1960 visit to Indonesia, Nikita Khrushchev recalled swarms of mosquitoes as well as extraordinary heat that left him and his colleagues struggling to breathe during the daytime and unable to sleep at night.[1] After a couple of days on the island of Bali, where Khrushchev had declined to keep up with host Sukarno's all-night revelries – directing staid foreign minister Andrei Gromyko to dance until the early hours in his place – the party moved on to Java. There, at a rally in Jakarta, Khrushchev read out a recent Soviet decree establishing a new university in Moscow especially for students from the developing world. Met with long and loud applause from the audience, Khrushchev later described his announcement of the forthcoming Peoples' Friendship University as 'a moment of triumph'.[2] When applications for the new institution opened soon after, a reported 43,000 individuals from across the world competed for the initial 600 places available.

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[1]S. Khrushchev (ed.), *Memoirs of Nikita Khrushchev, Volume 3: Statesman* (Philadelphia, PA, 2013), 787.
[2]*ibid.*, 803.

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This was by no means the first time that the Soviet regime employed education as a means for interacting with the developing world. The Communist University of the Toilers of the East had operated in Moscow from the early 1920s until the late 1930s – albeit primarily as an institution for officials and activists of overseas communist parties.[3] After Stalin's death in March 1953, the USSR soon began to expand the small number of students from allied communist regimes across Eastern Europe and Asia that were being admitted to study inside the Soviet Union. After that came new inflows of students from capitalist countries and from the developing world. This was the product of new Soviet thinking on international relations, which effectively voided the Stalinist worldview of countries being 'either with us or against us' (where 'with us' typically meant 'under Soviet control'), thus making it ideologically acceptable and even desirable to engage more fully with the outside world. From the mid-1950s to the second half of the 1960s – from which point relationships continued and even expanded but Soviet attitudes became rather more business-like – this rejuvenation of internationalism constituted a major plank of Nikita Khrushchev's vaunted 'return to Leninism', after years of Stalinist insularity and deepening xenophobia.[4] Education was to be a central facet of the new bid to connect with the developing world. Once the Soviet Union had joined the United Nations Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization (UNESCO) in 1954, Khrushchev began touting his country as a place where young people from across the globe could gain access to high-quality higher education, and the first trickle of students from the developing world began to appear.[5]

Bringing foreign students to the USSR, Khrushchev reckoned, was the best way to cut through pervasive and hostile bourgeois propaganda about the Soviet Union.[6] By the end of the 1950s, a total of around 2000 foreigners had graduated from Soviet institutions. From about that point, the process moved into a higher gear. Over the next three decades, around 130,000 students from the developing world graduated from a plethora of Soviet educational institutions, including but not limited to the new People's Friendship University.[7] Some of them arrived as idealistic members of

[3]On the Communist University of the Toilers of the East, see I. Filatova, 'Indoctrination or scholarship? Education of Africans at the Communist University of the Toilers of the East in the Soviet Union, 1923–37', *Pedagogica Historica*, 35, 1 (1999), 41–66. A separate institution primarily trained Europeans: see G. Cohen and K. Morgan, 'Stalin's sausage machine: British students at the International Lenin School, 1926–37', *Twentieth Century British History*, 13, 4 (2002), 327–55.

[4]On this broad theme, see 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, 2014); and Y. Aksyutin, *Khrushchevskaya 'ottepel' i obshchestvennye nastroeniya v SSSR v 1953–1964gg*. (Moscow, 2010).

[5]Y. Krasovitskaya, 'Vvedenie' in Y. Krasovitskaya, Z. Vodop'yanova and T. Domacheva (eds), *'Vozvratit' domoi druz'yami SSSR': obuchenie inostrantsev v sovetskom soyuze, 1956–1965* (Moscow, 2013).

[6]On this theme, see R. Hornsby, 'The enemy within? The Komsomol and foreign youth inside the post-Stalin Soviet Union', *Past and Present*, 232, 1 (2016), 237–78.

[7]C. Katsakioris, 'Burden or allies? Third World students and internationalist duty through Soviet eyes', *Kritika*, 18, 3 (2017), 540.

fraternal parties and their youth movements. As time passed, though, growing numbers came not out of any ideological sympathy with the USSR, but simply to obtain access to a valued foreign education wherever they could.[8]

Multiple arms of Soviet officialdom – including government ministries, the Communist Party and the KGB – had input into matters relating to incoming students. Although it tended not to be involved in the decision-making process at the highest levels – and was essentially obliged to act upon any and all directives from the Party and the KGB in particular – another of the key institutions in this sphere of activity was the Komsomol (Communist Youth League). As Matthias Neumann has noted, internationalism had long been an ideological point of emphasis for the Komsomol.[9] This was especially true from about the mid-1950s. Across the post-Stalin era, Komsomol volunteers were (at the direction of the Party) giving vaccinations and teaching about hygiene in Angola, setting up sports clubs in Afghanistan, constructing roads and housing in Syria and much more besides.[10] The Fourteenth Komsomol Congress in 1962 made plain that one of its key duties was to 'strengthen friendship and co-operation with all progressive youth in the fight for peace, national independence, against colonialism and fascism, and for democracy and socialism'.[11] The Komsomol's notion of internationalism, then, also involved a wider expectation that young people in the USSR would show solidarity with anti-imperialist struggles across the globe, developing in the process an ideologically appropriate worldview on Western imperialism and an appreciation of Soviet global prestige, with the corresponding aim that sympathy for the Soviet Union and respect for its achievements would grow accordingly in Africa, Asia and Latin America.

Already an established pillar of higher education for Soviet students (who were often almost all members, at the best universities especially), the Komsomol occupied a place as a kind of conduit between incoming students and officialdom. Overt involvement by the Party and KGB was hardly admissible in everyday circumstances, since Khrushchev repeatedly assured that incoming students would not be in any way indoctrinated in the USSR. Nonetheless, conditions inside the USSR – primarily meaning the lack of regime tolerance for political and cultural plurality – meant that this whole sphere of activity required rather more careful 'management' there than was

[8]M. Matusevich, 'An exotic subversive: Africa, Africans, and the Soviet everyday', *Race and Class*, 49, 4 (2008), 57–81.

[9]M. Neumann, 'Youthful internationalism in the age of socialism in one country: Komsomol'tsy, Pioneers and world revolution in the interwar period', *Revolutionary Russia*, 31, 2 (2018), 279–303.

[10]M. Mukhamedzhanov et al. (eds), *My internatsionalisty: dokumenty i materialy s"ezdov, konferentsii i TsK VLKSM, AKSM i KMO SSSR ob internatsional'nikh svyazakh sovetskoi molodezhi i mezhdunarodnom molodezhnom dvizhenii* (Moscow, 1970); and R. Hornsby, 'The post-Stalin Komsomol and the Soviet fight for Third World Youth', *Cold War History*, 16, 1 (2016), 83–100.

[11]RGASPI (Moscow), f.m-6, op. 14, d. 16, l. 4.

the case in those Western countries that also invited in large numbers of foreign students, such as the USA, France and West Germany. This was partly rooted in the desire to impress incoming students (Soviet authorities were aware that this could not be relied upon to happen automatically), and partly also in the aim of using the peoples and struggles of the developing world to mould the attitudes of Soviet youth. Most important, though, was the fact that foreign students brought with them all manner of ideas and influences (and often also goods) that seemingly threatened to destabilise the carefully curated socio-political ecosystem that existed inside the USSR. Their presence thus carried potential benefits but also domestic risks, and, from the perspective of the Soviet authorities, those risks had to be minimised. Komsomol activity on the ground, then, covered an array of duties: from supervising the progress of foreign students' academic studies and keeping an eye on their political views, through to providing 'appropriate' recreation opportunities and more.

The present article seeks to expand the rich body of literature on students from the developing world inside the USSR by exploring the ways in which the Komsomol handled these key duties, and the kinds of results these efforts yielded. As with Khrushchev's new People's Friendship University (soon renamed in honour of the murdered Congolese leader Patrice Lumumba), the outcomes were often mixed at best. Soviet students, and especially the Komsomol activists in their midst, were expected both to guard against the 'harmful' influences that foreigners carried and impress and entice them at the same time. In practice, though, the approach was often one of 'safety first', and this typically resulted in a lack of integration, which could facilitate a range of tensions that undermined the whole purpose of the exercise, leaving visitors alienated from their environment and locals short on enthusiasm for what was presented as their 'internationalist duty'. While by no means the only factor at play – numerous studies provide compelling evidence of racism as a fundamental feature of the Soviet experience for many Africans in particular – the Komsomol's (not unreasonable) inability to fulfil satisfactorily the duties demanded of it from above was partly behind this approach. The last part of the article focuses on interactions with students from the developing world at the Komsomol Central School – an institution that has scarcely figured in previous studies of educational internationalism in the Soviet Union.

At one level, the evidence from the Central School indicates that Komsomol engagement with foreign students was more effective when conducted on a smaller scale and with more explicit political focus. In other respects, however, this material also reinforces another observation: Cold War dynamics very clearly shaped Soviet activity in this sphere, and often for the worse. Preferential treatment afforded to incoming students – most commonly in the form of higher stipends and better living conditions –

aroused resentment among locals, while worries about international scandal could hamper efforts to exert meaningful political influence and discipline. As both parts of this article demonstrate, expanding inflows of students over the years were not matched by increased resourcing – in terms of both the political work that was undertaken and the material provision for those who came – making the fulfilment of key goals steadily less likely as the years passed and the number of students grew.

Developing-world students and Soviet higher education

In March 1958 a Communist Party Central Committee decree demanded measures at all levels to 'widen cultural and social links with the countries of Asia and Africa'. Soon, annual stipends were established specifically for students from Argentina, Nepal, Sudan, Lebanon and elsewhere.[12] In 1960, the new People's Friendship University opened its doors in Moscow, and the Central Asian State University in Tashkent also took steps to expand its capacity for foreign students. Indeed, following his murder in 1961, the new university was named in honour of Congolese leader Patrice Lumumba as the Soviet regime attempted to emphasise its support for African struggles against colonialism.[13] Records for the 1960–1961 academic year showed hundreds of students coming to the USSR from the developing world, including 370 from Iraq, 300 from the United Arab Republic and 300 from what was recorded only as 'Black Africa'.[14] By the summer of 1964, students from 115 countries were studying in 296 institutions spread across 76 cities of the USSR. The largest number were in Moscow, with other cities including Leningrad, Kiev, Odessa, Baku and Tashkent all hosting substantial contingents. Most common in terms of nationality at that point were Ghanaians, Indonesians, Iraqis, Sudanese, Somalians and Afghans.[15] From a total below 2000 during the 1959–1960 academic year, there would be more than 17,000 students from Africa, Asia and Latin America registered with Soviet academic institutions for the 1967–1968 academic year.[16]

Those who had already completed some formal schooling in their home countries could potentially attend high-prestige institutes in major Soviet cities to study subjects such as medicine or chemistry. This was rooted in

[12]Krasovitskaya, Vodop'yanova and Domacheva (eds), *op. cit*., 81–83.
[13]See C. Katsakioris, 'The Lumumba University in Moscow: higher education for a Soviet–Third World alliance, 1960–91', *Journal of Global History*, 14, 2 (2019), 281–300.
[14]Krasovitskaya, Vodop'yanova and Domacheva (eds.), *op. cit*., 158. Other contingents were far smaller than these three. The next largest were 50 Indonesians and 25 Guineans.
[15]*ibid*., 534.
[16]C. Katsakioris, 'Soviet lessons for Arab modernisation: Soviet educational aid to Arab countries after 1956', *Journal of Modern European History*, 8, 1 (2010), 96. Katsakioris shows these numbers to be made up of 1331 from Arab countries, 154 from Sub-Saharan Africa, 287 from Southeast Asia and 25 from Latin America in 1959–1960. For 1967–1968, the figures were 3273 from Arab countries, 4309 from Sub-Saharan Africa, 7632 from Southeast Asia and 2086 from Latin America.

a desire to show off the high academic standard in the best Soviet universities, but it meant that the visitors studied alongside students who were either already part of the Soviet elite or else would potentially become so in time. Other incoming students went to a range of vocational schools to acquire agricultural or industrial skills: Moscow's Automobile and Road Construction Institute, for example, boasted almost 400 foreign students from more than 40 countries of the developing world by autumn 1965. Most numerous in terms of national representation were students from Nepal (40), Indonesia (35), Afghanistan (26), Sudan (20), Syria (20), Kenya (19), Iraq (15), Nigeria (15), Ghana (13) and Benin (11).[17]

The connection between the composition of the foreign student body and the USSR's diplomatic relations was exemplified by the fact that Chinese students went from easily the largest group of all to being almost entirely absent following the Sino–Soviet split. Conversely, in 1962, with the Cuban Revolution still reverberating across the region, the head of the Komsomol (Sergei Pavlov) noted how important burgeoning connections with Latin America were becoming, and asked that he be allowed to ring-fence a further 15–20 stipends for Latin Americans. As he stated, this step was to help the fight against American imperialists and for independence in the region, insisting that the encounters engendered through such study helped to develop friendly relations and cooperation.[18] Similarly, the Algerian struggle against French rule saw Soviet officials raising the number of stipends available for students from North Africa during the early 1960s.[19]

The number of students from the developing world entering Soviet institutions climbed sharply because there was both demand from outside and pressure to expand from inside the system's upper echelons.[20] An August 1961 report to the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) Central Committee – signed jointly by the Soviet UNESCO affairs chairman, the Minister of Health, the Minister of Higher and Specialised Middle Education, and the Vice President of the Soviet Academy of Sciences – lambasted how far behind its Western rivals the USSR was in terms of using education to boost ties with the developing world. It reported that over 22,000 students from Asia and Africa were currently studying in the US, before describing Soviet activity in this sphere – which amounted to around 2300 African and Asian students in Soviet institutes at the time – as 'completely insufficient'. The target figure, the report insisted, ought to be immediately

[17]State Archive of the Russian Federation, Moscow (hereafter GARF), f. 9576 r, op. 17, d. 14, ll. 88–89.
[18]Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History, Moscow (hereafter RGASPI), f. m-1s, op. 1s, d. 3s, l. 66.
[19]Krasovitskaya, Vodop'yanova and Domacheva (eds), *op. cit*., 185.
[20]In regard to directions from the Party leadership to expand the student cohort from the developing world, see, for example, the Central Committee Secretariat decree 'Postanovlenie sekretariata TsK KPSS o meropriyatiyakh po rasshireniyu kul'turnykh svyazei so stranami Azii i Afriki' in Krasovitskaya, Vodop'yanova and Domacheva (eds.), *op. cit*., 81.

raised to 10,000–12,000 students at least.[21] It would not be long before that target was comfortably exceeded.

Life and study inside the USSR

The Soviet bid to compete in terms of numbers of students admitted had problematic effects. Almost from the outset, numerous institutions were operating at or beyond what they felt was their capacity when it came to hosting foreign students effectively. This was especially true because many African and Asian students came with no knowledge of Russian and sometimes only the most rudimentary level of prior education. In October 1964 the Ministry of Higher and Specialised Middle Education wrote to the Central Committee noting the unprecedented number of foreign students in the country and the ongoing growth in applications, although it then asked for admissions to be paused in order to tackle expanding challenges in terms of time and resources for work with incoming students.[22] No pause followed, but demands from above for Komsomol organisations and others to pay more attention to the foreign students in their midst kept coming.

There seems little hard evidence of incoming students actively refusing to integrate – indeed, there is much more to suggest they were frustrated at the lack of integration. Many foreign students complained of feeling detached from the rest of the student body and the wider Soviet environment. The *Znanie* (Knowledge) society chairman complained that foreign students 'do not feel part of political life in USSR' and 'their questions are not being answered', leaving them to 'turn to the BBC'.[23] In 1965, for example, the Nepalese students' organisation in Ukraine communicated its desire for closer interaction with the Komsomol and with Soviet organisations more broadly but seemingly got nowhere.[24] There were also some within the Komsomol who complained that not enough was being achieved in regard to work with foreign students because they were kept at a distance and consequently 'did not leave as friends'.[25] In part, this was a reflection of the enduring perception – reflected in both Komsomol and KGB materials – that foreigners represented a potentially dangerous influence on a social group (students) that was already deemed one of the most likely sites of ferment (along with former prisoners and members of the creative intelligentsia).

The lack of integration has usually been attributed to hosts' indifference (or worse) towards students from the developing world. The far greater

[21]Krasovitskaya, Vodop'yanova and Domacheva (eds), *op. cit*., 237–44.
[22]*ibid*., 571.
[23]*ibid*., 28–29. The *Znanie* society was broadly dedicated to public education, organising lectures, publications and more for a general audience.
[24]Central State Archives of Public Organisations of Ukraine, Kiev (subsequently TsDAGO), f. 7, op. 20, d. 50, l. 5.
[25]Hornsby, 'The enemy within?', *op. cit*., 262.

interest among Soviet students in interaction with Western visitors does tend to support such a conclusion.[26] It is also important to note, though, that many institutes and their Komsomol organisations were hard pressed to meet the demands that stemmed from hosting foreign students (in terms of policing their behaviour, fulfilling their expectations and helping with their studies). Reports rightly worried that the growing number of foreign students who were struggling to keep up with their studies (some were barely prepared for higher-level study on arrival) was liable to generate rising political discontent among that cohort. Komsomol organisations were thus expected to keep an eye on visitors' academic performance, too, and to step in as and when they struggled.[27] In practice, though, this was not always possible, since Soviet students typically already spent a huge amount of time in class every day, and fitting in meaningful Komsomol work (of which involvement with incoming students was only one facet) was often a substantial additional burden that got pushed to the edges or else ignored.

Keen to attract foreign students and knowing full well that many countries of the developing world were wary of having their young people 'brainwashed' in the USSR, Soviet authorities made a notable concession in exempting them from the mandatory political classes that locals faced. This not only aroused jealousy: it also reduced the means for exerting appropriate political influence. Because opening up access to Soviet higher education was construed as a facet of the competition with the West, and since Khrushchev had made consumption a territory on which the USSR promised to compete, stipends awarded to foreign students were usually pegged against those on offer in the capitalist world, rather than inside the USSR.[28] They were consequently much higher than those available to the average Soviet student, who typically lived close to the poverty line and often relied on family support to make ends meet. One Iraqi student writing in the 1963 propaganda publication *We Study at Moscow State University*, for example, boasted how his stipend was sufficiently generous that he could often dine in restaurants.[29] Local students, and even workers in many different occupations, rarely had the money for such things. In the early days especially, international students often also stayed in single-occupancy rooms, which were a great rarity for home students.

This kind of preferment was clearly intended to impress visitors, but it could stoke serious tensions between Soviet and incoming students that could at times boil over into violence (as discussed further below). Of

[26]On interest in student visitors from the US, for example, see W. Taubman, *View from the Lenin Hills: An American student's report on Soviet youth in ferment* (London, 1968).

[27]Krasovitskaya, Vodop'yanova and Domacheva (eds), *op. cit*., 538.

[28]On the Khrushchev era and consumption as territory for competition, see, for example, N. Lebina, *Povsednevnost' epokhi kosmosa i kukuruzy: destruktsiya bol'shogo stilya: Leningrad, 1950–1960s gody* (Saint Petersburg, 2015); and P. Vail' and A. Genis, *60-e:mir sovetskogo cheloveka* (Moscow, 2013).

[29]See *My uchimsya v MGU (inostrannye studenty o svoei zhizni i uchebe v SSSR)* (Moscow, 1963), 23–27.

course, attacks on students from the developing world – physical, verbal or otherwise – were not solely driven by resentment at higher stipends and better accommodation. Certainly, there was little trace of students from Western Europe or North America facing comparable manifestations of hostility.[30] Nonetheless, with a narrative of Soviet internationalist 'duty' towards the developing world, this imbalance doubtless helped to generate both scepticism and resentment.

David Gurevich, who originally came from the Russian provinces but studied at the prestigious Moscow Institute of Foreign Languages, recalled that many Arab and African students there in the 1970s wore Levi jeans, smoked Winston cigarettes and drank 'Western booze', all of which he and other Soviet students deeply resented them for.[31] Even so, when Gurevich finally saved up the funds to buy a pair of jeans for himself, he knew exactly where to buy them: from an African course-mate. In this case, then, students from the developing world served as a point of access to Western goods, rather than as testimony to the pernicious impact of imperialism. This raises a key issue that Komsomol branches in universities and elsewhere struggled with: they were not just supposed to help and to impress incoming students from the developing world, but also to ensure they did not impact negatively on the existing ideological ecosystem within the Soviet student body. As Maxim Matusevich and others have shown, with the passing years more and more of the students who came to study in the USSR were quite privileged and worldly, having already studied or travelled in Western Europe and the US, and they thus became important conduits to uncensored knowledge and ideas about the outside world.[32] Often, these visitors were more willing to criticise Soviet authorities, since officials were reluctant to impose upon them the kind of tough disciplinary measures that they might with troublesome locals.[33] As such, Soviet students could turn to their foreign counterparts for information, goods and more that did not always flow through the regular channels.

Although not at its worst until the later part of the 1980s, when Soviet economic woes intensified and African students became particular scapegoats for public anger at the billions 'wasted' on the developing world, racism was at least an occasional feature of life for many African students from the outset. For example, Tobias Rupprecht's research suggests that an implicit hierarchy emerged in which Africans were most frequently subjected to racism, followed by Asians and lastly Latin Americans.[34] For locals who shared dormitories with Africans, it seems that some of the

[30]See, for example, Taubman, *op. cit*., and J. Gooding, *The Catkin and the Icicle* (London, 1965).
[31]D. Gurevich, *From Lenin to Lennon: A memoir of Russia in the sixties* (New York, 1991).
[32]Matusevich, *op. cit*., 55.
[33]L. Silina, *Nastroeniya sovetskogo studenchestva, 1945–1964* (Moscow, 2004), 118.
[34]See T. Rupprecht, *Soviet Internationalism after Stalin: Interaction and exchange between the USSR and Latin America during the Cold War* (Cambridge, 2015), 212.

antagonism stemmed primarily from cultural frictions – such as widespread claims that they did not clean and tidy living space as others did, or that they were too quick to complain about discrimination. Reviewing work with African students in Kiev (of which there were over 1800 in 1965), Komsomol authorities pinpointed Somalis in particular as having a record of getting into fights and causing scandals when drunk.[35] Romantic relationships between African men and Soviet women could also prove a source of much controversy and conflict.[36] On the streets, there was often a degree of public curiosity that could prove unsettling, even when well-meaning in sentiment, with people staring openly, or wanting to touch skin and hair.[37] Julie Hessler in particular has highlighted multiple cases of racist violence against African students in the USSR.[38]

Even though they were supposed to have been raised to be internationalist and anti-racist in outlook, it tended to be young people, according to reports, who were involved in such abuse.[39] Clearly, the Komsomol was falling short in this field. As Constantin Katsakioris argues, the extant evidence suggests that Soviet students typically had a limited grasp of events in the developing world and not much interest.[40] Occasional reports showed that for at least some Soviet youth, aid to the developing world was indelibly linked to shortages at home.[41] Certainly, there is little clear sign that the presence of African, Asian and Latin American students on Soviet campuses increased support for foreign causes among Soviet students. Indeed, Sean Guillory convincingly argues that perceptions of visitors' inferiority and locals' superiority were reinforced by the regime's paternalistic narratives about 'helping' incoming students from 'downtrodden' and 'underdeveloped' countries.[42]

Much to visitors' frustration, the police, university authorities and others were notorious for failing to take complaints of racism seriously. In fact, foreign students' claims of racism could generate a great sense of insult and anger among Soviet peers.[43] When instances of racist abuse or violence actually prompted the Soviet authorities to action – typically only when the prospect of negative foreign publicity or serious diplomatic friction loomed – the Komsomol was liable to be called upon to help engineer a solution. A May 1965 report following a spate of attacks on African

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35. TsDAGO, f. 7, op. 20, d. 50, l. 33.
36. On this theme, see, for example, Matusevich, *op. cit*., 69.
37. J. Alexander and J. McGregor, 'African soldiers in the USSR: oral histories of ZAPU intelligence cadres' Soviet training, 1964–79', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 43, 1 (2017), 49–66, here 62.
38. J. Hessler, 'Death of an African student in Moscow: race, politics and the Cold War', *Cahiers du Monde russe*, 47, 1 (2006), 33–63, here 37–38.
39. Krasovitskaya, Vodop'yanova and Domacheva (eds.), *op. cit*., 412.
40. Katsakioris, 'Burden or allies', *op. cit*., 548.
41. National Archive of the Republic of Belarus (NARB), f. 63, op. 19, d. 32, l. 221.
42. S. Guillory, 'Culture clash in the Socialist paradise: Soviet patronage and African students' urbanity in the Soviet Union, 1960–5', *Diplomatic History*, 38, 2 (2014), 271–81.
43. See, for example, Hessler, *op. cit*., 57.

students, for example, demanded that Komsomol organisations in institutions where foreign students studied start to undertake additional work in explaining to home students the importance of Soviet aid to the developing world.[44] Similarly, a couple of years earlier, an order from the Party Central Committee instructed key Komsomol newspapers *Komsomol'skaya pravda* and *Moskovskii komsomolets* (along with *Pravda* and *Izvestiya*) to publish more material about incoming students: their lives, their studies and their friendship with the USSR, to help stem hostility towards them.[45] Komsomol organisations were also directed to hold friendship evenings, and festivals of music, dance and poetry, where incoming and Soviet students, as well as local workers and others, would come together to build positive relationships.[46] Such directions could still fail to translate into concrete action, however. Following a December 1964 mass brawl involving around 20 Soviet and Nigerian students at a Leningrad State University dorm, a team from the Komsomol Central Committee was sent to investigate and found that not only had tensions clearly been building there (and elsewhere) for some time, but also that almost none of the expected work on 'internationalism' and building friendly relations had actually been taking place.[47]

While by no means all Komsomol members were informers, links with the KGB were strong at the level of officialdom, and especially in places such as the new People's Friendship University. Rupprecht, for example, states that it was 'an open secret on campus' that Komsomol members (which meant practically all of the Soviet students there) were expected to inform on the academic, political and private behaviour of their student colleagues from abroad.[48] Indeed, numerous incoming students complained of surveillance by Soviet colleagues, which at times was not at all discreet. Komsomol officials in any given institution also watched over the local *zemlyachestva* (national organisations into which visiting students were grouped), shutting them down when they proved politically troublesome.[49] As Maoism became an increasingly powerful influence among many African students in the USSR during the 1960s, the Komsomol worked harder both to keep tabs on student moods and to improve its own ideological work to counter sympathy for China.[50] In September 1969, for example, a request came from above for Komsomol

[44]Krasovitskaya, Vodop'yanova and Domacheva (eds.), *op. cit*., 415.
[45]*ibid*., 379.
[46]V. Desyaterik (ed.), *Komsomol i vysshaya shkola: dokumenty i materialy s"ezdov, konferentsii tsentral'nogo komiteta VLKSM po rabote vuzovskogo komsomola, 1918–1968gg* (Moscow: Molodaya gvardiya, 1968), 260.
[47]Krasovitskaya, Vodop'yanova and Domacheva (eds), *op. cit*., 580–83.
[48]Rupprecht, *op. cit*., 200. There is no overt evidence of foreign students being recruited as informers, although this likely happened in some instances.
[49]See, for example, Hessler, *op. cit*., 43.
[50]C. Katsakioris, 'Students from Portuguese Africa in the Soviet Union, 1960–74: anti-colonialism, education and the socialist alliance', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 56, 1 (2021), 142–65.

workers to include in their propaganda work explanations of the proper Leninist conception of 'cultural revolution' in order to clarify for foreign students that the contemporaneous use of the term in China was not ideologically correct. This reflected the fact that, once the Sino–Soviet split emerged, political authorities in the USSR were set on fighting the spread of political influences not only from the capitalist camp but also from Mao's China.

Komsomol officials were tasked with reminding students from the developing world about Soviet expectations of their behaviour after problems with drunkenness and fighting.[51] When scandal flared on any given issue, the Komsomol's massive media operation meant that it was soon able to propound an appropriate narrative on any given event or group – a common tactic was to use accusations of alcoholism and homosexuality against 'troublesome' students, or to decry their 'ungratefulness' – although this was by no means limited to students from the developing world.[52]

As noted above, while Soviet students sat through countless hours of interminable political classes, their counterparts from abroad were for many years excused from such activities. When it came to political work, then, the Komsomol had to target foreign students' time outside the classroom (which was in itself rather limited). Komsomol organisations across the range of Soviet institutes were increasingly held responsible for ensuring that foreign students participated in the recreational events and programmes laid on for them at the House of Friendship (*Dom druzhby*). In March 1965, for example, representatives of the House of Friendship demanded greater attentiveness to this issue, citing as a negative example Moscow's Institute of Fine Chemical Technologies, which hosted 83 foreign students, none of whom attended House of Friendship events.[53] They duly asked every institute to nominate one Komsomol representative to liaise with the House of Friendship on the matter and then sent out a questionnaire asking that Komsomol branches in higher education institutes across Moscow update them on the number of foreign students they hosted, and on these students' interactions with the House of Friendship, including explanations for any lack of contact.

In addition to boilerplate lectures on themes such as 'Lenin: his life and activity' and 'Lenin in Soviet theatre', the House of Friendship also put on a plethora of quasi-recreational events such as cinema clubs, lectures, meetings with esteemed Soviet citizens (such as film directors, writers and actors), celebrations of foreign countries' national holidays (some Komsomol agitators' handbooks included lists of national holidays around the world) and sporting contests. There were also seminar cycles for visiting

[51]Krasovitskaya, Vodop'yanova and Domacheva (eds), *op. cit*., 414.
[52]See Hessler, *op. cit*., 57–58. For examples of such slanders used against students from the West, see V. Andreev (ed.), *Nauchnyi obmen i ideologicheskaya diversiya* (Leningrad, 1972).
[53]GARF, f. 9576 r, op. 17, d. 14, ll. 14–17.

students, on themes such as 'The Soviet Union and New Africa'. Under this umbrella, the House of Friendship hosted talks on health-related issues, including advice on tackling malaria, tuberculosis and venereal disease.[54] The narrative and analysis was of course entirely Soviet – such as linking early death rates in the developing world and colonial politics, noting that the USSR had more doctors per capita than England [*sic*], and boasting of how the number of Soviet-trained doctors in Africa was growing at a particularly rapid rate.[55]

Aside from evenings and weekends, another major opportunity for the Komsomol to exert influence came during the holidays, in particular the long summer breaks. While some of those visitors with the funds to do so left the country to visit home or travel in Europe – often returning with Western records, clothes and more to sell on to eager Soviet students – many others remained in the USSR and at loose ends. For these people, a series of 'wellness camps of work and rest' were created. Operated by individual universities but organised by their respective Komsomol organisations, attendees typically headed out of the cities to warmer climes in the south where they spent a few hours per day at a nearby collective farm on chores like picking fruit, before dedicating the rest of their time to sports, learning about each other's culture and more.[56] Alongside these camps, foreign students also took trips on Komsomol 'friendship trains', in which they travelled to different Soviet republics and regions, learning about their successes and meeting locals.[57]

As the years passed, foreign students were also being roped into doing what lots of Soviet students did during the summer – heading off to work on 'volunteer' building projects across the country. By the late 1960s, students from the People's Friendship University began going to work on the Nurek Dam project in Tajikistan, for example, seeing 'Soviet brotherhood' in action as Central Asia modernised with the help of the wider Soviet 'family'.[58] Even when they joined in with such activities, however, it was not uncommon for foreign students to be allocated to distinct 'foreign' construction brigades separate from their Soviet counterparts. In Ukraine, for example, the 1978 'construction semester' had foreign students from the developing world working in the 'Gagarin' brigade, while those from Eastern Europe joined the 'Druzhba' (friendship) brigade.[59] Again, this segregation was seemingly driven by the desire to insulate Soviet students – as far as was practically

[54]A 1968 seminar on healthcare in Sudan also made note of the need to tackle the practice of female circumcision in that country. GARF, f. 9576 r, op. 17, d. 9, l.36.
[55]GARF, f. 9576 r, op. 17, d. 9, ll. 2–23.
[56]Such camps were established outside Rostov, Tbilisi, Yerevan, Baku, Yalta, Sochi and elsewhere.
[57]Krasovitskaya, Vodop'yanova and Domacheva (eds.), *op. cit*., 261–63.
[58]A. Kalinovsky, *Laboratory of Socialist Development: Cold War politics and decolonisation in Soviet Tajikistan* (Cornell University Press, 2018), 132.
[59]TsDAGO, f. 7, op. 20, d. 2226, l. 3.

possible in the circumstances – from potentially harmful influences. KGB reports from 1984, for example, noted that many of the 12,000 foreigners working on Komsomol construction projects that year were proving disruptive. Some had apparently turned into speculators, selling off foreign goods among their workmates.[60] Others brought transistor radios and openly played foreign broadcasts. Such behaviours were said to be going without a suitably strict response because the individuals in question were foreign and therefore any attempt to subject them to discipline raised unwanted complications.[61] Whether or not these volunteer labour expeditions ever helped develop 'internationalism from below' among the participants remains unclear – at least some foreigners felt such work far too demanding, and soon found themselves at loggerheads with hosts – but the overseas parties and movements that sent students to the USSR seemingly did appreciate the labour skills and discipline that such duties inculcated.[62]

Komsomol training for students from the developing world

Where accounts to date have overwhelmingly focused on students from the developing world in mainstream Soviet education, much of the remainder of this article centres upon a rather different form of training that drew young people to the USSR. The Central Komsomol School (renamed the Komsomol Higher School in 1969) was founded in 1944 as an institution to train the Soviet youth cadres who would lead the rebuilding of the shattered organisation after the Second World War. Beginning with an initial 260 students, the school was essentially an arm of the Komsomol Central Committee, which trained specialists in key areas of activity such as youth media and work with Young Pioneers. As with the rest of the Komsomol's organisational infrastructure during the post-Stalin years, the school soon grew. In a pattern that mirrored developments in other education institutes, the Central Komsomol School first began to accept a few foreign students – from East European communist youth movements – in 1948. Unlike other institutions, however, this one made no bones about its ideological purposes. As a 1958 school review asserted: 'All our work has one aim – to form in pupils a Marxist-Leninist world view'.[63]

From 1960, the Komsomol school also began to take in Africans, and the flow of students from the developing world then grew at pace. In the three years leading up to 1964, more than 350 Africans and 160 Latin Americans

[60]Lithuanian Special Archives, Vilnius (subsequently LYA), f. 1-k, op. 18, d. 189, l. 106.
[61]LYA (Vilnius), f. 1-k, op. 18, d. 189, l. 106.
[62]On students from Eastern Europe clashing with Soviet hosts while participating in such 'holiday labour', for example, see R. Hornsby, 'Strengthening friendship and fraternal solidarity: Soviet youth tourism to Eastern Europe under Khrushchev and Brezhnev', *Europe-Asia Studies*, 71, 7 (2019), 1205–32. On sending organisations and volunteer work, see Katsakioris, 'Students from Portuguese Africa', *op. cit*., 20.
[63]RGASPI, f. m-24, op. 1, d. 157, l. 10.

passed through.[64] By the late 1960s, the school reported that it was welcoming more than 300 foreign students every year. In 1967, for example, it accepted 60 new students from Latin America and 125 from Africa (plus 110 from other socialist countries and smaller numbers from capitalist countries).[65] In the mid-1970s, it boasted 685 foreign students from a total of 52 countries, and could claim to have trained almost 7000 foreign youth cadres from more than 90 countries during the preceding quarter-century. This figure included over 1000 from Latin America (excluding Cuba) and almost 1400 from Africa.[66] The numbers, then, were much smaller than those who went to the USSR for mainstream education, but they were far from insignificant.

As with other institutions, home students (who were mostly Komsomol workers) and those from abroad were to some extent separated – there were, for example, different faculties for each. Nonetheless, the school actively encouraged interaction between the two. As with mainstream higher education, a sizeable majority of those students who came from the developing world were male. In terms of background and qualifications, the intake was still diverse. Reports from 1964, for example, spoke of how some Latin American students varied considerably not only by age (from 17 to 32 years on arrival) but also in their educational backgrounds, with a few having undertaken some kind of higher training at home, while others had virtually no prior schooling at all. Some Latin Americans, it was noted, had a poor grasp of even Spanish grammar.[67] It was lucky, then, that the staff-to-student ratio at the Komsomol school tended to be no higher than one to five: clearly an expense of some substance for the Komsomol to meet, and a world apart from the situation in regular higher education institutions.

As ever, concrete achievements at the school remain hard to quantify. The above reports characterised the incoming African students as particularly weak in their knowledge of Marxism-Leninism and stated that they ‘do not know much but are eager to learn’, adding that in time they tend to ‘pick up a decent knowledge of world politics’.[68] The new students’ health was another pressing issue for the Soviet hosts. During the 1974–1975 study year, for example, almost 16% of new students were discovered on initial examination to suffer from gastro-intestinal diseases; 11% had problems with their nervous system; 10% carried either skin diseases or venereal disease; 7% suffered gynaecological ailments and 5% had respiratory problems. Of those specifically from Asia, Latin America and Africa, a total of 90% reportedly had intestinal worms and numerous

[64] RGASPI, f. m-24, op. 1, d. 218, l. 1.
[65] RGASPI, f. m-3, op. 5, d. 202, l. 17.
[66] RGASPI, f. m-1s, op. 1s, d. 1010s, l. 27.
[67] RGASPI, f. m-24, op. 1, d. 218, ll. 2–6.
[68] *ibid*.

others brought with them conditions including malaria and nephritis. Such was the potential challenge posed by these conditions that the Komsomol leadership asked the Ministry of Health to set up special quarantine facilities for new arrivals.[69]

Life and study for developing-world students at the Komsomol school

The fact that the Komsomol Central Committee set, or at least signed off on, study plans was indicative of the importance it ascribed to the school. In contrast to mainstream education, where many sending countries and organisations resisted attempts to vet the candidates they put forward, foreign students at the Komsomol school were scrutinised and approved by the KMO (the Committee of Youth Organisations), which oversaw Komsomol youth activity across the globe.[70] In theory at least, this reduced the need to police incoming students' behaviour so closely. Befitting of the Soviet worldview, study plans for foreign students were divided into three basic streams: those for students from capitalist countries, socialist countries, and developing countries. Students from capitalist countries were most likely to see their studies centre upon 'the historical experience of the CPSU', according to a 1964 Komsomol *spravka*, while African students tended to focus on the theme of 'imperialism today and movements to liquidate colonialism'.[71]

An outline of the curriculum for students from the developing world during the late 1960s reveals seven broad themes of study, under the titles 'Komsomol and Pioneer work', 'USSR – the country of victorious socialism', 'the international youth movement', 'fizkul'tura' (physical education, which included gymnastics, basketball, football, athletics and shooting practice), 'Russian language', 'basic problems of scientific communism' and a final subject referred to in documents only as 'special discipline'. Studies also involved screenings of classic Soviet propaganda movies such as *Battleship Potemkin*, *Chapaev* and *Lenin in October*, readings of historic documents from party congresses, visits to the likes of the Central Lenin Museum and the Armed Forces Museum, along with lectures on topics including 'The struggle of the USSR against the aggressive policy of neo-imperialism', 'Neo-colonialism: the main obstacle to the socio-economic progress of African countries' and 'Help from socialist states to the developing countries of Africa, and its role in providing them with independent national development'.[72]

[69]RGASPI, f. m-1s, op. 1s, d. 1010s, ll. 36–39.
[70]See, for example, R. Hornsby, 'The post-Stalin Komsomol', *op. cit.*, 85; Mukhamedzhanov et al. (eds), *op. cit.*
[71]RGASPI, f. m-24, op. 1, d. 214, ll. 5–9.
[72]RGASPI, f. m-3, op. 5, d. 202, ll. 43–87.

Details on the more overtly subversive aspects of work with students from the developing world at the school are naturally harder to come by, although there are scraps to be gleaned from reports. For example, internal communications from 1967 mentioned that African organisations were happy at the standard of training in 'both legal and illegal party work' there.[73] In calling for greater secrecy around the Central Komsomol School (a need that its director blamed in part on African students mixing with compatriots at the People's Friendship University), another report from that same year noted that more than 80 students were there as members of parties illegal in their homeland. The school's director, Viktor Pogudin, then went on to propose that a new establishment for 200–250 students be founded in complete secrecy about a kilometre away from the existing complex, with a focus on teaching 'theory, discipline, partisan struggle, how to conduct work among the masses and disseminate propaganda'.[74] While the existing Central Komsomol School was to be given greater publicity in order to draw attention, the new one would be given the cover of a zonal Komsomol school and shut off entirely from the public gaze, for purposes of subterfuge rather than segregation. Some of Pogudin's proposals for the new, more secretive, school indicated the scope of his vision. In addition to lecture halls with facilities for simultaneous translation into five different languages, it included screening rooms, microfilm rooms, a foreign-language library of 50,000 books and a photography dark room, along with a fully equipped sports hall and a canteen able to serve up to 3000 meals per day.[75]

Since the aspiration was for foreign students under Komsomol training to rise through the ranks of their parent organisation at home, rather than serve in a more general capacity as a conduit of soft power, the Soviet need to impress was arguably even more direct at the Komsomol school. The smaller numbers of students involved also made this easier to accomplish. Conditions at the school seem to have been somewhat austere in the 1950s – there were virtually no vital amenities such as shops available at or near the school – but improved markedly thereafter. By the 1960s, cultural figures, such as composers, writers and artists, came to hold talks for students. Members of the Komsomol Central Committee, cosmonauts, war veterans, Old Bolsheviks, sports stars and heroes of labour also visited. There were football pitches, tennis courts, a swimming lake, a photography laboratory, a fruit garden and greenhouses, a car available for students to learn to drive, and cinema projection halls. Providing such facilities for the far larger number of visiting students in mainstream education was simply not possible. Celebrations were organised for visiting students' national holidays, and trips were also laid on for visits to the ballet, to galleries and the opera,

[73]RGASPI, f. m-3, op. 5, d. 202, l. 14.
[74]RGASPI, f. m-3, op. 5, d. 202, ll. 18–20. It remains unclear whether Pogudin's proposals were ever put into action.
[75]RGASPI, f. m-3, op. 5, d. 202, ll. 23–26.

to the Kremlin and more, with key services such as dry-cleaning, a bathhouse, a hairdresser, a polyclinic and a newspaper kiosk all on site.[76] In March 1966, Komsomol first secretary Pavlov even authorised the opening of an evening cafe at the school, enabling Soviet and foreign students to socialise in their free time.

With each overseas movement or party facing a specific set of circumstances (some were already in power; others were operating in underground or only semi-legal conditions), there was also a responsive and bespoke element to the training. One 1962 report to the Komsomol Central Committee from the State Film Institute, for example, noted how a number of African students had asked to be taught film projection skills during the summer holidays, with the institute in turn seeking money and resources (which were subsequently approved) to satisfy their request.[77] In the mid-1960s, students from Guinea, Ghana and Mali in particular (where the Soviet authorities hoped to showcase the achievements of socialism for the rest of the African continent to see) requested and were granted classes in subjects such as cinema, photography and film-making.[78] Soviet willingness to respond to the wants and needs of their foreign guests at the Central Komsomol School was seemingly far greater than that on show in mainstream higher education. This could also be seen in matters relating to food – with the Soviet diet a consistent bugbear for many foreign students. School officials acknowledged that African students in particular did not like what was being made available to them in the canteen and decided that it was worth the additional effort and expense to source and prepare items more suited to their tastes.[79]

All of the above seems to support recent findings by Jocelyn Alexander and JoAnn McGregor, who recorded oral testimonies from Zimbabwean cadres who undertook military intelligence training in the USSR during the 1960s and 1970s. The cadres' recollection of the experience was on the whole much more positive than it was for those who travelled for academic or vocational study, with interviewees finding the material situation more acceptable, the teaching they received effective and valued, and their hosts willing to listen to them.[80] Perhaps the key point here was having smaller numbers of people in a more concentrated space, which made it easier for officialdom to manage the students and their experience.

Many Komsomol officials argued that their interactions with the developing world, as typified by the Komsomol school, were beneficial to the

[76]RGASPI, f. 24, op. 1, d. 213, l. 62.
[77]RGASPI, f. m-24, op. 1, d. 192, l. 5.
[78]RGASPI, f. m-24, op. 1, d. 214, ll. 5–9. On Soviet aims for Guinea, Ghana and Mali, see in particular A. Iandolo, 'The rise and fall of the Soviet model of development in West Africa, 1957–1964', *Cold War History*, 12, 4 (2012), 683–704.
[79]RGASPI, f. m-24, op. 1, d. 192, l. 24.
[80]Alexander and McGregor, *op. cit.*, 54–57.

Soviet Union's international position. Leonid Brezhnev seemingly confirmed this sentiment with a 1967 speech in which he declared Komsomol international activity 'a vital part of Soviet foreign policy as a whole'.[81] In his 1967 review of recent events at the school, Pogudin asserted that the inflow of foreign students 'undoubtedly helps to facilitate wider links between the VLKSM (Komsomol) and foreign progressive youth'.[82] Others wrote to the Central Committee telling of how convinced about communism their African students had become during their time there, how the visiting students declared themselves delighted at the welcome they received, how they had become lifelong friends of the USSR and how sure they were that 'the Soviet regime is now building communism in the town and the village'.[83] A 1964 review of school activity noted that several of its Nigerian alumni now occupied 'responsible posts' back home.[84] Similarly, another report proudly cited how a group of Peruvians had originally arrived displaying pro-Chinese attitudes, but had since been successfully turned around by their Komsomol hosts.[85]

Of course, officials like Pogudin had institutional interests to advance. The school had a vested interest in showing Komsomol bosses that its work was producing the desired results. In turn, the Komsomol leadership was no less eager to show the Party leadership that it was making a substantial contribution to the wider Soviet effort with the developing world. This was particularly true in regard to justifying the large and growing costs associated with the school. As early as 1953 (before it enrolled any students from the developing world), then Komsomol first secretary Aleksandr Shelepin had demanded the school show greater financial discipline.[86] With its students from the developing world being almost entirely bankrolled out of Komsomol finances, costs climbed rapidly as they were admitted in ever-greater numbers. Records from the mid-1960s showed that the school was spending over 460,000 roubles annually on foreign students' stipends and more than 220,000 roubles on their travel costs, with teachers' wages and site maintenance combined costing over 200,000 roubles. At that point the school also employed 58 translators (in addition to teachers and other professional staff), at an annual cost in excess of 80,000 roubles.[87] By the end of 1975, the number of translators on the school's staff had climbed to over 80.[88]

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[81] L. Brezhnev, *Molodym stroit' kommunizm* (Moskow, 1970), 207.
[82] RGASPI, f. m-3, op. 5, d. 202, l. 17.
[83] See RGASPI, f. m-24, op. 1, d. 218, l. 10.
[84] RGASPI, f. m-24, op. 1, d. 218, l. 1
[85] RGASPI, f. m-24, op. 1, d. 218, l. 12.
[86] Shelepin found cases of staff over-claiming on hours worked, money wasted, and debts not being called in. Both the school director and its bookkeeper were sacked. RGASPI, f. m-24, op. 1, d. 86, l. 59.
[87] RGASPI, f. m-24, op. 1, d. 232, ll. 1–6.
[88] RGASPI, f. m-1s, op. 1s, d. 1010s, l. 28.

Already by 1962 the school was looking to cut its expenditure by reducing monthly stipends from 120 to 100 roubles, spending less money on equipping visiting students with winter clothes and refusing to pay excess baggage charges for students when they travelled abroad – all of which went down badly with the students in question. One group from Tanganyika, for example, reportedly grew extremely angry when told that the cost of the winter hats they were provided with would be taken out of their stipends.[89] By the mid-1970s, school officials had already begun to plead poverty to the Komsomol leadership, arguing that student numbers had been growing for years but the material base had not kept up, resulting in a growing shortage of space in the dorms, too few places to study and relax, and auditoriums that were no longer big enough to hold classes.[90] The apparent success of the school, then, was also to become an important source of its declining fortunes, stripping away much of what had helped to make it more successful (from the Soviet authorities' perspective) than mainstream education.

Numerous problems that concerned Komsomol and university authorities in mainstream education were increasingly also replicated at the Central School. A report on the 1965–1966 academic year talked of several (unnamed) foreign students having been ejected for organising drinking binges and behaving rudely. Of the African cohort (220 students at that point), the report stated that many arrived up to three months late, described some as 'accidental people' (in that they showed little sign of political conviction) and said of others that they did 'not represent the aims and character of the school'.[91] Similarly, visiting students to the Central School were still liable to encounter at least some sides of Soviet life that authorities did not want them to see. The head of the school complained about beggars in the local area approaching foreign students to ask for money and cigarettes, and there were also occasional cases of drunk and aggressive locals causing problems. It was, for example, reported that some students from Mali and Nigeria had been beaten up in 1963, with another attendee from Guinea assaulted and robbed in a nearby park.[92]

It was not only the Soviet side that grew frustrated at times. Eduardo Mondlane, head of the Mozambique Liberation Front (FRELIMO), complained to the Soviet embassy in Tanzania that he was dissatisfied with the level of discipline and organisation at the school, claiming that party representatives were being negatively affected by the lack of discipline there and opting not to send students for the 1967–1968 year. Further investigation into the matter revealed that school alumni were progressing well within FRELIMO, and Mondlane had previously always been happy with the results

[89] RGASPI, f. m-24, op. 1, d. 192, ll. 17–18.
[90] RGASPI, f. m-1s, op. 1s, d. 1010s, l. 28.
[91] RGASPI, f. 24, op. 1, d. 227, l. 12.
[92] RGASPI, f. m-24, op. 1, d. 218, l. 15.

of their study. The key difference in 1967 apparently centred on the fact that five of the seven Mozambicans at the school were women. As the school acknowledged, having five women in such a heavily male-dominated environment 'led to complications' – and two of them had fallen pregnant and were thus recalled home.[93] It seems, however, that Mondlane's wider concerns may have had at least some substance. A 1975 report, for example, complained that the rectorate had not heeded repeated Komsomol advice on questions of discipline and consequently faced persistent problems with drunkenness, 'breaches of communist morality', theft and hooligan behaviour among students.[94] Clearly, although seemingly less liable to turn problematic than was the case in mainstream higher education, for hosts, students and the organisations that sent them, the experience at the Komsomol school could still prove challenging.

Conclusions

The policy of bringing young people from the developing world to study in the Soviet Union was clearly a product of Cold War competition, but it could not have happened without the substantial domestic changes that followed Stalin's death. Although the contexts of mainstream education and specific Komsomol training for students from the developing world were clearly different, they also had much in common. Many problems, such as encounters with the more undesirable facets of life in the USSR, like racism, poverty and day-to-day shortages, were to be found in both forms of education, but foreign students at the Central Komsomol School tended to be somewhat better insulated against these failings. Even so, one of the key trends that developed as the post-Stalin era progressed – that of over-reach – could be seen in both cases. Indicators of apparent success – namely the number of students who came, or else who wanted to come – seem to have over-ridden the limited capacity for working effectively with those people. Indeed, the growing inflows of students may well have proven this field a success to those at the top, but it did not necessarily look that way for those at the ground level, in classrooms and dorms.

The dynamic of Cold War competition, which suffused this field of activity, rarely had positive outcomes at the Soviet end of things. Preferential treatment of visiting students riled their Soviet classmates, and the desire to compete with the West in terms of the number of students coming to the USSR made it harder for the Komsomol to fulfil the (already difficult) responsibilities expected of it from above. In large part, this field of

[93]RGASPI, f. m-3, op. 5, d. 202, ll. 14–16. As Katsakioris points out, pregnancies were problematic for the sending parties because the parties often wanted students to return home and participate in their cause as quickly as possible: Katsakioris, 'Students from Portuguese Africa', *op. cit.*, 159.

[94]RGASPI, f. m-1s, op. 1s, d. 1010s, ll. 1–2.

activity replicated a picture seen more widely in Soviet interactions with the developing world, where aid and expertise were not just welcomed by recipients but eagerly sought out, yet Soviet ideological impact often proved stubbornly elusive.[95] Of course, there were some individual successes, and many remained forever grateful for the education they received in the USSR. Nonetheless, there is limited evidence to suggest that key aims – such as bolstering Soviet soft power in the developing world, or strengthening an anti-imperialist worldview among Soviet students – were met in any substantial way.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

[95]On this theme, see in particular O. Sanchez-Sibony, *Red Globalisation: The political economy of the Soviet Cold War from Stalin to Khrushchev* (Cambridge, 2014).