



Problems of leisure and glasnost

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The new liberalization in the USSR has created legal opportunities for the extreme right (as well as for liberals), opportunities which some young people are using to combat liberalization itself. With some young people there evidently exists a certain nostalgia for the past, for a strong master, for a mixture of patriarchal nationalism and totalitarian traditions. It is similar to what Erich Fromm once called the 'flight from freedom' whereby certain social groups see democracy as a threat to their set traditions, their way of life and security. The emergence of ultra-patriotic groups of 'muscular socialists' and neofascists in Soviet society within the last few years shows the complexity of social change in a society like the USSR, and the problems that Gorbachov has to face in implementing his policies of perestroika, glasnost and democratisation.

Hippies, punks and metallists disgrace Soviet life. We're going to cleanse society of them. (Yakovlev, 1987, p. 20)

Introduction

For several years, as a result of disaffection from official youth organizations and officially-prescribed activities, some young people in the USSR have been forming their own informal groups and clubs. Although initially illegal, since only officially-sanctioned groups have been permitted in the USSR, the authorities seemed unable or unwilling to suppress them. Eventually, on 13 May 1986, these groups won official recognition in the Statute on 'Amateur Associations and Hobby Clubs' (Moscow News, 1987).

The clubs range from groups for lovers of jazz, folk and classical music, philately, sport (especially sports in which the government has been slow to provide facilities – aerobics, yoga, body building, karate and other combat sports) and youth housing committees (set up by young people keen to build their own housing and cultural amenities), to various counter-culture groups. The latter include soccer fans and others who emulate their Western counterparts – like mods and rockers, hippies, punks, skinheads (known as 'British horrors'), Zen Buddhists, heavy metal rock fans, bikers, and the rest (Riordan, 1987). They mostly express group affiliation in appropriate sartorial garb, give themselves foreign names (like Charlie, Sex and Stalker) and meet in 'bunkers', garages, flats, and every now and again 'invading' public places. They are, as a member of 'The System' explains, 'communities of people united by purely friendly, informal relationships, embracing many cities in the country' (Podberezsky, 1987, p. 58).

Soviet youth, nonetheless, is as richly diverse as is youth in any modern society. Not all young people are agitating for change in the same direction or at the same pace. Indeed, much of the youth subculture as expressed by the 'Westernizers'

would appear to be confined to a relatively small group of urban, white-collar youngsters, and it has evinced a passionate and sometimes aggressive reaction from others.

Vigilante bands

In recent years the Soviet media have turned increasing attention to the theme of teenage violence; 'All the papers regularly write about the senseless cruelty of today's teenagers' (Protsenko, 1986, p 47). A relatively new form of 'aggro' is that being perpetrated by vigilante gangs. This is a blanket term for a motley assortment of young people who, disillusioned with official inactivity towards lawlessness and corruption, have been forming their own clandestine vigilante groups to combat what they perceive to be anti-social and, therefore (to them, axiomatically) anti-Soviet behaviour. It would be wrong to classify them all, as one British newspaper has, as 'a uniquely Soviet version of skinhead toughs who attach themselves to the National Front in Britain' (C. Walker, 1987, p. 10). In fact, they differ markedly in their social and political orientation.

Some appear to be responding to Party Secretary Mikhail Gorbachov's appeal to young people to show initiative in rooting out corrupt officials, bureaucrats, embezzlers and speculators. In his call for help in 'overhauling the current state of affairs', Gorbachov said at the Party Central Committee Plenum in January 1987 that we must 'put more trust in young people . . . (give them) more independence in their work, study, daily life and leisure activities, and more responsibility for their actions' (Gorbachov, 1987, p. 2).

The vigilante bands seem to have taken him at his word. A 35-strong band of young men from the Siberian city of Novosibirsk has two main targets; 'inveterate speculators and second-hand dealers' and 'officials who abuse their positions'. The band has chalked up 53 'good deeds' and has another 15 pending investigation. So organized are these guardians of law and order that they keep computer files and were planning to open a Ukrainian branch in October 1986. Once they gain proof of guilt, they destroy the illgotten gains and leave the victim copies of incriminating evidence to dissuade him or her from informing the police (Radov, 1986).

A clandestine Moscow self-styled 'Law and Order' group forces miscreants to help the families of dead Afghan campaign heroes. It also sent four investigators to Moscow Hippodrome horse-race track where they found

Corruption at every step, with bookmakers and money-lenders acting quite openly, fearing no one. A good half of the jockeys were 'bought', races being decided beforehand and profits shared, each jockey making thousands of rubles out of the punters. The management is hand in glove with the criminals and the police turn a blind eye (Radov, 1986, p.2).

Before our local heroes could mete out rough justice to eight of the leading conspirators, one of their members took fright and sent evidence to the papers which brought official intervention.

The awkward dilemma for the authorities is that these gangs regard themselves as good Komsomol members, taking on the mantle of Robin Hood's band (*Robingoodovtsy*) or the author Arkady Gaidar's *Timurovtsy*, helping the good and wreaking vengeance on the bad. A certain Maxim calls his band 'an informal association of Komsomol members'; a Pskov member of Gang X says the aim is 'to



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let all scum know they have to deal with us – the people's will – as well as the law' (Radov, 1986).

How should the authorities react? Are they wrong-doers or heroes? Should the police work with or against them? Some officials admit 'there is no doubt that the groups of noble, I stress 'noble', conspirators have arisen as a reaction to the inactivity and feet-dragging of local police' (Radov, 1986). Another commentator writes; 'They don't trust us older people and even less the police. So they strive to establish law and order for both their own district and the country as a whole' (Yakovlev, 1987, p. 20).

Young people have good reason not to trust the older generation. Tired of being bullied by bandwagon careerists in the Party and Komsomol, lied to about their country's history; denied access to Western periodicals, abused for liking the wrong music, wearing the wrong dress, having the wrong hair style, listening to the wrong radio programme, it is not sufficient for Party leaders to say 'sorry folks, we were wrong'. In fact, the common question being asked of adults today is 'Dad/Mum, what were you doing under Brezhnev/Khrushchov? Why didn't you speak out?'

As one punk, by nickname Charlie, puts it, 'You're going to have to stop telling us lies; we aren't stupid. Just tell us straight: 'Youngsters, we haven't understood you up 'til now' (Kulikov, 1986, p. 4).

What Charlie and the authorities are concerned about more than anything else is another, more sinister strain of vigilantes – the 'Rambo-style' youth cult known as the *Lyubery*.

The Lyubery

The borderline between 'noble' vigilante groups and gangs of 'patriotic' thugs is often thin and mobile. While the common enemy would appear to be 'people harmful to society', the perception of 'villains' differs, as do aims and methods. The above-mentioned groups consist of young people in the context of one locale, teenagers who investigate and punish corruption by relatively peaceful (albeit illegal) means. The Lyubery have more ambitious aims relating to society as a whole and they espouse violence in pursuit of their mission. Furthermore, while the victims of the former are mainly corrupt officials, those of the Lyubery are largely Westernized young people.

The Lyubery impose a strict discipline upon members, requiring initiation tests of neophytes (e.g. beating up punks) and having a hierarchical structure with leaders who are sometimes older ex-servicemen. As a member of 'The Office' (*Kontora*) gang explains,

We are split into groups, each of which has its own leader. It isn't easy to become a member of The Office . . . you have to prove yourself in battle, show you're smart, obedient and mean (Yakovlev, 1987, p. 21).

The name *Lyubery* comes from the Moscow industrial suburb of Lyubertsy, some 12 miles south west of the capital; its teenage thugs have been terrorizing neighbouring urban centres like Moscow, Podolsk and Nakhabino, according to one source, for some 10–15 years (Sergei, 1986). Today they travel farther afield in search of victims (e.g. to Leningrad – some 700 miles away!) (Nosov, 1987), and



they find imitators in and around many Soviet conurbations.

These male teenage toughs are generally staunchly puritanical; 'They don't drink, smoke or take drugs, and they engage in sport in gyms they've built with their own hands' (Yakovlev, 1987, p. 20). Many are dedicated body-builders whose rippling muscles show through their everyday clothing. As one victim says of the gang of four that beat him up, 'All were strong, with well-developed muscles bulging under their jacket' (Shchekochikhin, 1987a). This obsession with martial arts and body building is well documented, although the Lyubery spurn official sports clubs and build their own gyms in the basements of blocks of flats, their 'bunkers'; they are quite proud to show off their 'vast arsenal of barbells and weights'. They boast of their involvement in 'boxing and weight training etc., that make us tough and confident in ourselves' (Sergei, 1986, p. 2).

This macho obsession disturbs the authorities who regard the 'karate, boxing and senseless muscle-building as dangerous' (Shchekochikhin, 1987a). The police have raided basements in Lyubertsy and elsewhere, confiscated equipment, shut down the 'underground' gyms and tried to channel interest into organised sports clubs under specialist coaches without any marked success; in fact, 'the Lyubery are still on the increase' (Yakovlev, 1987, p. 20).

Like gangs the world over, the Lyubery have their own distinctive uniform and give themselves nicknames. Unlike the 'Westernizers', these latter-day 'Slavophiles' take Russian names, like *Zayets* (Hare), *Utyug* (Iron), *Shkaf* (Cupboard) and *Rykhly* (Fatso). They are generally clean-cut and wear white shirts and narrow black ties, unfashionable jackets and wide, clown-like, check trousers. Some even have their own way of walking (in a sailor's roll), with hands smartly behind their backs. They eschew foreign slang and even have their own song,

We were born and bred in Lyubertsy,

Centre of raw, physical power.

We know that one day soon our

Lyubertsy will be the centre of Russia. (Yakovlev, 1987, p. 20).

What are they for, what are they against?

The Lyubery are self-appointed guardians of what they see as genuine Soviet values and way of life. Their 'patriotism' extends to trying to intimidate, and cleanse society of, all alien elements, first and foremost followers of Western fashion. As one 16 year-old Lyuberets puts it, he and his mates are against 'anyone who wears chains or foreign badges, has dyed hair and brings shame on our country ... anyone who looks or acts as a protester' (Sergei, 1986, p. 2). Another young affiliate, in reply to a query as to why he takes the 30 minute train journey to Moscow each night, says 'We come to beat up punks, hippies, heavy metal and break dance fans' (Yakovlev, 1987). When asked why he beats up such people, another young tough replies that 'hippies, punks and metallists disgrace the Soviet way of life. We want to cleanse society of them' (Yakovlev, 1987, p. 20).

The questioner had to admit that when he 'first heard that reply I didn't believe it. But when it was repeated time and again, I was left in no doubt' (Yakovlev, 1987). This is what makes the Lyubery unique and distinguishes them from the housing estate gangs (courtyard *vs.* courtyard) of the 1960s or the *besprizornye* of the 1920s – children lost or abandoned during the Civil War, who lived an anarchic and



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criminal life, developing their own outcast and anti-authoritarian culture.

The principal target of Lyubery ire is the 'Westernizer', the follower of Western youth culture – hippies, punks, heavy metal fans, break dancers – young people whose appearance marks them out as being different. The toughs are not averse to 'foreigner-bashing' and are said to hang around the big hotels looking for victims. It was the Lyubery who were blamed by the Soviet authorities for roughing up Jewish refuseniks and Western correspondents on Moscow's Arbat in early 1987.

Dialogue with 17 year old Yuri from a Moscow suburb;

- 'We go to town for a fight. Against the metallists.'
- 'Why can't you resolve your differences peaceably?'
- 'Peaceably? If that shit were to look normal, maybe.'
- 'How do you mean, "normal"?''
- 'Without their iron chains, hair down to their arses, their painted dreadlocks.'
- 'But surely that's an individual's choice to look as he wants. It isn't your affair.'
- 'Ha! Individual choice. This isn't the West, you know! Take a ride on the metro . . .

Cockscomb head. Makes you puke just to stand next to them . . . ' (Shchekochikhin, 1987a, p. 15).

So speaks the 'not-so-silent majority'. Or does it? It is hard to say. At any rate, many Soviet ideologists now accept that it is their own militant moralizing in the past that has not only spawned these 'muscular socialists' but is hampering the new democratic openness. One Moscow gang that calls itself the 'Menders' (*Remontniki*) tries to mend the minds of 'all who act and think differently to themselves'. A Leningrad gang claims to be 'correcting the views of their peers'. As one commentator admits, 'whether we like it or not, the menders of men's souls have gained from us adults the licence for moral education of those who stand out from the crowd'. In a tacit condemnation of the past (and lingering present), he writes,

Suppression in the sphere of ideas ultimately distorts the ideas themselves and engenders conformists and time-servers, alienates people from independent thinking, brands any fresh idea as alien, which society has to combat by the old 'Cossack methods' (Shchekochikhin, 1987, p. 15).

Well put! Even if it is a bit late. After all, 'to a man, all the Lyubery I've met believe in the importance and social worth of their mission in flushing out the punks, hippies and metallists. Yet when you think about it, there's surely no big difference between a common thug and one acting from ideological conviction' (Yakovlev, 1987; p. 20).

The trouble is that for so long the authorities tried to keep out Western mass culture and branded its domestic adherents as unpatriotic riff-raff. As 14 year old Sergei, a heavy metal fan, complains,

Do you know who's responsible for these 'cleaners'? Not us, not the punks, hippies or break dancers, but Soviet media. For how many years, for instance, have they portrayed rock as satanism, hell bent on causing violence and pornography? So when they read those articles and hear those diatribes, some young people think the only way to respond is to fight it tooth and nail. (Shchekochikhin, 1987a, p.15).

Even now the police are said constantly to harass Western-oriented young people; 'The police stopped me five times in one day to check my papers just



because of the way I look, and they didn't talk very civilly either' (Shchekochikhin, 1987a, p. 15). |

So long-haired Sergei does not bother to complain to the police when he is mugged. Nor did hippy Yevgeny after being halted by five youths on Marx Prospect in Moscow's city centre, forced to his knees and cropped. Either from collusion or, as some suspect, from impotence, the police do not act because 'the hippies, punks and metallists, all Lyubery victims, don't file complaints'. As is now admitted, 'Isn't it us that have created a situation where some young people feel the law won't protect them?' (Shchekochikhin, 1987a, p. 15).

It was police harassment of 'Westernisers' and apparent neglect of Lyubery that recently brought strict instructions from the Soviet Ministry of Internal Security 'to combat law-breakers, *not* long-haired youngsters with bells on their trousers' (Shchekochikhin, 1987a, p. 15). All the same, reports indicate more police success in restraining Lyubery opponents. Like the 500 Moscow teenagers who marched through the city centre one Sunday evening in February 1987 to protest at police inactivity against the Lyubery (Soviet Weekly, 1987). Like the 300 Leningrad youths who marched down Nevsky Prospect in similar protest at the rumoured arrival of the Lyubery (77 protesters were arrested, and two knuckle dusters, two metal belts and two clubs were confiscated) (Nosov, 1987). Yet when the police raided basement gyms in Lyubertsy, of the 500 people they registered, only three corresponded with those on the street gang wanted list (Yakovlev, 1987). Moreover, of the over 200 Lyubery detained in Moscow throughout 1986, almost all were charged with 'infringing smoking, drinking or noise regulations; but virtually none for criminal acts' (Yakovlev, 1987, p. 20).

Many victims of the Lyubery are bound to suspect that individual policemen are sympathetic to their self-styled assistants and champions of moral purity. The police have certainly taken drastic measures to avoid street violence and gang warfare. In early 1987, parents in one Moscow district were summoned to schools and ordered to keep their children home that weekend for fear of street violence. There was even 'panic' talk of sounding an air-raid warning to clear the streets (Shchekochikhin, 1987b).

Fights, muggings and gang battles have become a serious problem in all Soviet urban centres; 'Fights have occurred virtually every evening (between Lyubery and "Westernisers"). Information from various cities has indicated that similar problems exist there too' (Shchekochikhin, 1987a, p. 15).

In almost all cases it is gangs from outside the metropolis, the suburban commuter gangs which descend on city centres, mark off their own 'turfs' or manors, their own cafes and discos. They mug 'aliens' and are even reported to have 'abducted' girls from city discos back to their own suburbs (Shchekochikhin, 1987a). Some confiscate badges, leather wrist bands, bracelets, even stud denim jackets, soccer scarves and 'unpatriotic' cassettes, which later turn up in second-hand stores. Some are said to rob ordinary people not of 'attributes of an alien culture', but of expensive and fashionable items, on the excuse that they are 'surplus luxuries' (Shchekochikhin, 1987a). Statistics show that 22% of gang assaults are, in fact, for fashionable Western clothes' (Smirnova, 1986). Some gangs are said to be run by older 'kings' with criminal records; one such gang boss boasts he can summon over 200 gang members in just a couple of hours (Yakovlev, 1987):



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No doubt, partly because 'nothing like the Lyubery has existed before', rumour is more colourful than reality. But the established facts do demonstrate a serious and mounting problem that the Soviet authorities face as they now try to cultivate a hundred blooms in the new garden. As a Soviet historian explains about the problems of trying to democratize an ossified, despotic society,

We want to free our young people from paralysing over-organization, then all of a sudden we run into the problem of the Lyubery . . . This side-effect is disappointing and repugnant because no one expected it. But it is real and there is no escaping it. It is time we learned the rules of behaviour in democratic conditions. (Pavlova-Silvanskaya, 1987, p. 5).

The trouble with democracy is that it is what leaders say it is! For Lenin, it was 'a state which recognizes the subordination of the minority to the majority – i.e. an organization for the systematic use of force by one class against another, by one section of the population against another' (Lenin, 1964, p. 418). The Lyubery would not disagree.

Afghantsy

The emergence of such 'muscular socialists' as the Lyubery and other unofficial groups partly has its source in the confusion felt by the many thousands of young conscripts who return after their harrowing experiences in Afghanistan. Battle-hardened and prematurely aged by their service, the 'Afghantsy' find it hard to settle back into civvy street and to accept with equanimity the Western youth culture they see around them. 'They talk most about the life they've returned to and in which they can't live as they did before . . . They've come back with such purity in their hearts and clarity in their minds . . . These are the people the Fatherland needs most today' (Korolkov, 1987, p. 5).

One returning conscript, Alexander, says he seemed to have 'landed on another planet. Painted girls totter about, super-fashionable boys meet each DJ's announcement of a tape by a group from "over there" (the West) with squeals of delight, and hiss our Soviet music. Wide-boys in the toilets . . . We are stifling in this dirty little world . . . Something has changed in me, I've begun to look at so many things through different eyes'.

Alexander tells the story of going to a comrade's wedding and seeing a waitress wearing a jumper with a stars and stripes badge with 'Made in USA' motif (reminding him of the mines bearing the same inscription that killed his best friend in Afghanistan); an uproar ensued and the police had to be called. His view of many people is that,

They've forgotten the real value of life. I don't believe that if it came to it all those girls and boys in their fancy clothes with foreign labels would defend the (eternal) flame by the Kremlin wall. It was one such fellow who betrayed us in Afghanistan; we later discovered he had been a disco king back home (Zverev, 1987, p. 15).

Because they find the authorities dragging their feet in dealing with social ills, as well as what they perceive as anti-Soviet conduct on the part of young people, many Afghantsy are setting up their own veterans associations: the 'Green Hats' (after the hats worn by Soviet border guards), the 'Reservists', the 'Marines' and 'Internationalist-Soldier Councils' which all engage in what their members call



military-patriotic education of young people' (Korolkov, 1987, p. 5; Serazhetdinov, 1987, p. 68). This sometimes involves meting out rough justice to those who do not share their patriotic ardour and perception of morality.

It is here that they often overlap with the Lyubery. A vigilante gang called 'Waterfall' in Kazan, whose longterm programme is 'to eliminate all groups harmful to society' confesses to having ex-soldiers as leaders and feels it necessary to act 'as in Afghanistan inasmuch as there can be no victory without military discipline' (Kozin, 1987, p. 2).

When a journalist from the weekly *Literaturnaya gazeta* asked Vadim, ex-serviceman and Lyuberets, whether the hatred (towards 'Westernisers') was being fomented by ex-conscripts, he was told, 'I saw blood, sweat and tears in Afghanistan . . . We did what needed doing. Never forget that' (Shchekochikhin, 1987a, p. 15). But the question went begging. Nonetheless, it is admitted that the 'Ramboesque' teenagers 'will follow the Afghantsy and show an interest in martial arts camps' (Vishnevsky, 1987, p. 2). Perhaps the fury is understandable when the returning servicemen find themselves taunted by groups that call themselves the 'Pentagon' and rename their districts 'California' and 'Washington' (Nekrasova, 1987).

Not a few adults would like to see the returning heroes given their head to try to instil some discipline and respect into dissolute youths. 'Outraged' of Andizhan (Uzbekistan) writes to *Smena*, warning that,

It is only a short step from fetishisation of imported rags to murder, from striving after an easy life to betraying the country.

The writer, a schoolteacher, feels that today's young people need the firm hand of the Afghantsy;

War! Only merciless war on all these things. Instil maximalism in all moral issues. That same maximalism that the lads who call themselves Afghantsy are now displaying, those who have had the whiff of gunpowder in their nostrils and have gone through hell in Afghanistan. (Gurvich, 1986, p. 8).

What often irks the conquering heroes, however, is that society does not always recognize the debt it owes them for doing their 'internationalist-patriotic duty' in Afghanistan, and is wary of giving them responsibility to apply their zeal to civilian life. Thus, Lieutenant Vladimir Kolinichenko complains that only two former internationalist-soldiers have been made Komsomol secretaries in the whole of Moscow's 33 districts. 'They don't welcome people dedicated in deeds not words to the Soviet system'. Why? Because, it seems, 'the Afghantsy stir things up, make people do work they're not accustomed to' (Kolinichenko, 1987, p. 3). From Tadzhikistan comes a letter to the weekly youth journal *Sobesednik* from the President of an Internationalist-Soldier Club, writing that in the face of official hostility the Club has been forced to set up its own 'Komsomol detachment' – 'it's hard to overestimate the help from the Afghantsy', he says, 'they'll go through fire and water for justice' (Zhilnikov, 1987, p. 2).

In the city of Kuibyshev, a 70-strong group of Afghantsy even took over a district Komsomol committee for a month, calling itself the 'Opposition' (*Protivostoyanie*). They took over because of what they claim was 'neglect of military-patriotic work in the district'; and they appointed ex-army man Valery Pavlov as



leader. Surprisingly, the usurpers served out the month without official resistance (Muratov and Sorokin, 1987).

The longer the war in Afghanistan goes on; the more problems the USSR is storing up for itself at home – as the USA found in trying to integrate Vietnam veterans back into the community.

Fascists

It must be shocking for the older generation that suffered so much in the war against fascism to learn of the existence in their midst of Soviet fascist sympathisers. Their fury was evident, for example, when they read the letter from a group of anonymous punks from the Novokuznetsk Youth Cafe to *Sobesednik* in early 1986, expressing their spiritual affinity with fascism and stamping on hallowed Soviet beliefs (Anon., 1986a). Predictably, they drew the attention they desired. Probably like many of the 'stunned' Soviet public, the readers who responded made no distinction between 'rock lovers' and punks, on the one hand, and 'traitors' and 'fascists' on the other. As one of the printable replies put it succinctly, 'the whole lot should be shot at birth'. All the same, the journal's editors admitted that the 'punks' had also had their 'advocates' who pointed out the social injustices of Soviet society that 'spawn fascist yobboes' (Anon., 1986b).

Although information is understandably patchy and the scale of fascist influence uncertain, there is no doubt about the existence of fascist youths and adults. A rock group from the Urals town Chelyabinsk, calling itself by the English name 'Bad Boys', has circulated an underground tape with lyrics that run 'kill all the commies and Komsomol too' (See Walker, 1986a). Letters have appeared in Moscow papers from defiant young gangs who openly call themselves Nazis, confident that in the Soviet Union that is the ultimate obscenity to shock their elders (Walker, 1986a).

Of course, as with Western anarchistic-rebellious rock groups like the Sex Pistols, Black Sabbath and the Beastie Boys, the intention is probably more to shock and draw attention to themselves than actively to propagate fascist ideology. Komsomol Secretary Victor Mironenko is surely near the mark when he says,

I think some youngsters have a simplistic reaction to demagogy and violations of social justice, to red tape and the failure of the older generation to match their deeds to words. The immature mind starts looking for an alternative, even resorting to mysticism or the ugliest ideological systems, such as Nazism. The quest is for an idol, while the Nazi ideology remains alien to them. (Mironenko, 1987, p. 12).

As Mironenko admits, it is the unrelenting moralising, the hypocrisy, the double standards, the rigid monopoly of the mass media that have not only produced apathy among many young people, they have pushed some to extremes: the 'if *Pravda's* for it, I'm against it' syndrome. The British *Guardian's* Moscow correspondent Martin Walker talks of sitting 'in a Moscow cinema to watch "Battle for Moscow" and . . . (having) . . . heard the teenagers cheer every time Hitler appears on screen' (Walker, 1986a, p. 18).

The extent of fascism among Soviet youth is certainly exaggerated by rumour. A *Komsomolskaya pravda* correspondent talks of the 'host of rumours spread about the Nazis' and of the young people who got together one night to deal with them,



yet ended up running round in circles fighting each other. (Shchekochikhin, 1987a).

Nevertheless, the many articles in periodicals exposing and attacking neofascist youths in the West seem to be a salutary warning to domestic imitators; yet they may actually have excited the interest of some young people eager to try the ultimate in heresy and emulate their Western peers.

Reports in the Soviet press talk of clean-cut young people dressed in Nazi-imitation uniform; black shirts, jackboots, black glasses and often sporting home-made swastikas. They celebrate Hitler's birthday on 20 April each year, as a *samizdat* source indicates, by demonstrating at the Moscow Pushkin Memorial (since 1982), marching around courtyards and streets shouting 'Heil Hitler' and 'Sieg Heil'; others have burst into youth cafes and discos chanting the same Nazi slogans; and yet others have staged night parades, some even beating up medal-bearing war veterans.¹

Most of the Nazi thugs seem to be students, especially from the *PTU* technical colleges, though other sources talk of support from 'golden' youth, the scions of privileged Party and state officials. One source talks of the existence of 'quite a few fascist organisations whose members meet in a number of Moscow cafes. They bear Hitler badges under their jackets and sometimes wear black uniforms. School heads and Party secretaries are said to have given warnings about possible demonstrations by 'fascitized elements from among non-politically aware groups of young people'.¹

Much of the above is information gleaned sketchily from Soviet, emigre and eyewitness sources. However, in mid-1987 the unofficial organisation *Pamyat* (Heritage) surfaced, with quite explicit neofascist, Slavophile symbols and ideology. It staged a public demonstration in the heart of Moscow in early May 1987, marching on the City Council and demanding a meeting with Boris Yeltsin, Moscow Party Secretary. This was followed by public meetings 'at which many young people were present' (Losoto, 1987, p. 4). The daily *Komsomolskaya pravda* ran an exposé that condemned the strident, naked anti-semitism, mystic chauvinism and conspiracy (Jews and Freemasons) theory of *Pamyat* (Losoto, 1987). As a British eyewitness at one *Pamyat* meeting (and author of a book on British neofascists) wrote, 'I felt myself carried back in time to those National Front rallies in Britain ten years ago', and, as he rightly concludes, 'the Gorbachov reforms are coming up against the age-old problem, that freedom of speech means freedom for the extremist as well as the liberal. Lifting the stones from Soviet society is allowing some unpleasant things to crawl out'. (M. Walker, 1987, p. 11):

Some conclusions-

1. The conservative reaction to radical expressions of youth culture, particularly those imitating Western forms, has its roots, *inter alia*, in the tenacity of Slav and Islamic traditions, in the historical isolation from and suspicion of the West (following three invasions from the West this century, accounting for at least 30m Russian and Soviet lives) and in the proximity of peasant society. It has to be remembered that on the eve of World War 2, two thirds of the Soviet population lived on the land. When Khrushchov fell from power in 1964, half of the population was still rural. Today, two thirds are urban dwellers. A process that took two and a half centuries in Britain has been crammed into some 40 Soviet years. Even today,



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as many as 40% of young industrial workers were born in the countryside (Sandrigailo, 1986).

The flight from the land, the desperate urban overcrowding and the crash programmes of industrialization effectively turned a land of peasants (liberated from serfdom only just over a century ago) into an industrial working class. It is hardly surprising, then, that the stresses and strains of modernization have produced a polarization of attitudes, first between the generations, and second among young and old alike.

2. The areas with the highest crime rates, drug abuse, teenage vandalism, broken marriages (one out of two) are not the major cities like Moscow, Leningrad and Kiev, nor the urban centres of the relatively affluent Baltic republics or the Transcaucasus, but the medium-size 'smokestack' cities (Chelyabinsk, Vologda, Kurgan, Gorky, Sverdlovsk) and the metropolitan suburbs like Lyubertsy (population 300,000, of whom 80% work in industry) (Anon., 1987). Not only do these areas lack modern amenities and entertainment, have poor public housing and shopping facilities, they are experiencing the withering of the old industries and the retraining of an obsolescent workforce – similar to the problems confronting the depressed industrial northern cities of Britain (minus the unemployment). In fact, the only regions of the USSR that witnessed a net population decline in the 1970s and early 1980s were those in a great swathe around Moscow, with youth the major emigrant (Walker, 1986b).

Both local and central papers are full of cries of despair, of *boredom*, of envy for the great cities from such decaying suburbs and medium-size towns. One Soviet journalist likens such places to 'giant railway waiting rooms' (Yanbukhtin, 1987, p. 11). The disoriented young people who remain, envious of the 'city slickers', seem to seek out scapegoats for their plight and deprivation, taking blind revenge on those who flaunt their conspicuous consumption and possess the cherished 'propiska' (residential permit) to live in the big cities.

3. In the last 20 years Soviet urban society has moved from the six- to the five-day week and has entered a phase of relative affluence and leisure; this has given young people new diversions, new aspirations, and new forms of emotional investment that conflict with the old single-minded focus on self-sacrifice and future-orientation. Very often the new aspirations have outstripped what the authorities have made or been prepared to make available in the way of leisure activities or youth clubs outside the old-fashioned and sometimes suffocating tutelage of the Komsomol.

Some young people have reacted, particularly in the more liberal but disorienting atmosphere of the Gorbachov reforms, by embracing Western youth culture with all the naïve zest that their peers in other modernizing societies round the globe have shown towards US 'cultural exports'. Other young people, particularly those returning from the war in Afghanistan, are as affronted by the apparent lack of patriotism of their confreres as have been the militant young fundamentalists in Iran or some returning Vietnam veterans in the USA. Both sets of Soviet young people are also using their actions as a thinly-veiled appeal for attention from adults, for their sincere, full and honest attention.

4. Finally, a major implication for Western theorists of Soviet society in regard to the 'youth revolution' of the last few years is that they will have to rethink their fundamental assumptions about the Soviet system. They will have to shift from a 'directed society' model that postulates a passive society dominated by an elite to one that encompasses the active and unofficial youth involvement in changing society².

For what we have been witnessing in the USSR for a period that predates Gorbachov's assumption of power by at least ten years is young people taking affairs into their own hands and operating outside the framework of state institutions. It is a situation bordering on the 'dual power' interregnum between February and October 1917. It is not the elite (Party and Komsomol) that has precipitated reform; it has merely acquiesced to a situation that had existed for several years and was rapidly getting out of official control. While the coming of a new man has certainly accelerated the process of change, it is youthful opposition to the old regime and mounting disaffection from official institutions and values that have initiated and carried it forward. Where it is heading and which youth group will prevail is impossible to predict. But that, then, is the uncertainty of glasnost.

Notes

1. See 'Fashizm vs. SSR', *Strana i mir*, (Munich), nos. 1–2, 1984, p. 51; 'Organizatsiya yunykhn fashistov' *Strana i mir*, No. 5, 1985, p. 18; 'Ne tolko v Azii', *Strana i mir*, No. 12, 1986; pp. 10–11.
2. This is the case with the 'totalitarian' model, the 'administered society' model of Kassof, the 'organisational society' of Rigby, the 'ideological system' of Brzezinski and Huntington, even the more participatory 'institutional pluralism' model of Jerry Hough (see Jerry Hough, *The Soviet Union and social science theory*, Harvard UP, Cambridge, Massachusetts).

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