

## SOVIET UNION REPORT

Sponsored by the Komsomol (Young Communist Party)

My companions on the trip were Muriel Tillinghast, Dwight Williams and Vernon Crutchfield.

During our stop over in Warsaw, Vernon and Dwight met the ambassador from Mali to Red China. They talked, but only haltingly for the ambassador did not speak much English.

On arriving in Moscow, a man with a movie or T. V. camera kept running in front of us and taking pictures. This is the only incident we had as far as someone seeming to check us out. In the airport, a brother from Mali came over to us and shook our hands. He said, Brother or sister as he shook each of our hands. It really was a good feeling. I would feel that the trip was worth it, even if we had not gone any further. To feel the closeness of that handshake was worth the distance I had come.

As we were driven into Moscow, we noticed block after block of apartment buildings. These were built during the past five to ten years and are still going up. I was told that upwards of 1000 new apartments are made available each day throughout the Soviet Union.

We were driven from the airport in a government car with a chauffeur. In each city we visited, all our transportation was in government owned vehicles. Many times we felt quite uncomfortable riding around in limousines and the drivers taking advantage of other drivers and pedestrians alike. Most of them had a sort of immunity from tickets since they were government cars.

While in Moscow, we stayed in a youth hotel. It was built five years ago and is used mainly for foreign visitors. This hotel was built by the Young Communist Party youths. It was built of pre-fab materials and was kept in good condition. There we learned of our schedule. We were to travel to Alma Ata, Baku, Leningrad, Kiev, Riga and then back to Moscow. An average of three days would be spent in each place with the exception of Moscow. We remained there three days and on our return would spend the same number of days.

In each city we met the top men in the Komsomol. Then we were taken on a tour of the city. We visited a couple of universities and kindergartens and primary schools in those cities. It was just amazing to see new apartment buildings all over each city we visited. Site after site of construction work was going on. The government wants to move everyone out of private houses and into apartments. Our interpreter said that the houses are old and many have no electricity or running water. We never had a chance to enter any of these old houses, but we did go into one of the apartments. It seems that all of the new constructions is done with pre-fab materials. This includes hotels, office buildings, plants, etc.

We asked the guide if it would be alright to visit one of the apartments. He said it was. We walked up to a building where a man was sitting on his balcony. The guide asked if we could view his flat. Then we went in. Living there was a couple about 40 or 45 years of age and they had one small child.

They lived in a two room flat. The baby shared their bedroom. It was like any other overcrowded flat, I imagine anywhere in the world. The flats are dished out with two rooms for three people. This is fine, but what happens when the child grows older and it is no longer suitable for him to share the room with his parents. This building was only two years old and looked ten. The hotels we stayed in while in Alma Ata and other places were in excellent condition compared to that flat and one of the hotels was about 50 years old. On the average, the hotel rooms were larger and more roomier than the flat we visited.

Many of the old houses were very attractive. If I were Russian, I'd rather stay in the old house, but then, I'm not Russian.

I'll probably never make a good diplomat for many reasons. While in Kiev, our guide asked what my impression was of the Soviet Union. I began by telling him that I had seen many good things and also some bad things but would only speak on one point and that was pre-fabs. Then I went on to say that I dislike them. That my reason for this was because they were usually made of cheap materials, therefore, they fell apart very quickly. That I realized they were being used, because they are cheap and can be put together very quickly and that the Soviet Union seems to be doing a top-notch job of housing the people. I went on to say that at least his country was attempting to do the impossible, whereas in our country, nothing was being done in comparison with the needs of the people. As I continued my dissertation on pre-fabs, the guide's forehead formed a wrinkle that lasted for several hours. I later realized that the Communist do not like to hear anything bad about their country. They seem to feel that it is next to perfect or perfect.

As most of you know, rubles is Russian money. It seems that the ruble does not have too much value. There are stores and bars in which you can't purchase merchandise for Russian money, only foreign currency. I asked our interpreter the reason for this and he stated that these places existed for the comfort of the tourist. I don't believe this is true. That in order to obtain as much foreign currency as possible, they save the tourist the trouble of going to an exchange. Therefore, the tourist will spend more money since he already has it on him.

The average Russian does not make much money, but then things are not as expensive as they are in the States. Still, they cannot walk into certain places of business and purchase merchandise, since their money would not be accepted. I'm sure the average Russian does not walk around with French, Dutch or American currency in his pocket.

Today, while in Leningrad, I met more students from the African continent. We met in my room and talked for about three hours regarding the Soviet Union and the United States. They emphasized many of the things I had learned previously from talking to other African students. They were extremely dissatisfied with the living conditions there. One stated that before he left Kenya to come to the Soviet Union, he was told that each student had a private room and things were very comfortable for them. He stated that other promises were made, but when he arrived,

to his dismay, there were four students to a room and no adequate study rooms were available. He went on to say that many of his friends had married Russian women and had a difficult time finding living accommodations after doing this.

They told me that foreign students are paid 90 rubles per month. Students from the Soviet Union are paid about 40 rubles, but that a stipend is taken out for various things pertaining to the State and by the time they receive their rubles, it is in the amount of 25 rubles. Forty rubles is hard enough to live on from day to day, but 25 is infinitely worse. One of them stated that many of the Russian students live on tea, water and bread for weeks at a time. That if you don't eat it's hard to study and because of this, many of the Soviet Union students make low grades. When this happens, they don't even receive their monthly pension. The other student said that quite often they loan the Russian students money in order for them to eat and make passing grades. He went on to say that quite often they go to the opera or ballet. When they first arrived in the country, they would wear their best clothes, but so many people would approach them and ask to buy a necktie from around their necks or the jacket they were wearing or other apparel that soon they stopped wearing their best. "We sometimes look rather shabby in our dress, but we decided to dress like the people. In this way we were able to just go out and enjoy ourselves without people approaching us in this manner."

These same two predict that less students will be coming to the Soviet Union to attend school. They stated that conditions were very bad. He went on to say that, "Last summer about 100 of us (African Students) went to the summer resort of Baku and about 49 students ran away to other countries. Many of them went to the United States or Britain to continue their studies."

The only student hostel that we had the opportunity to go into was in Kiev. It is an extremely old building and very dilapidated. There were four students to a room on the average. The room we went into housed three African students. There was one table and no shelves for books. Those that had shelves built them themselves.

There was also a T. V. room and you sat on long wooden benches without backs. As we were leaving, we passed what appeared to be a student kitchen. It had a stove and sink. It was filthy. Two Russian students were coming out of this kitchen with a large pot of food which they were carrying to their room. I asked the student we were with why these young men were doing this, since the state supposedly paid each student enough to live and exist on at regular intervals. He said, "The food is so terrible here that many of the students can't eat it. Therefore, they cook their own and eat it in their rooms."

It was made quite evident to us that our guides did not want us to talk to the brothers. Whenever we came in contact with them, there would be many melodramatic scenes. Once we invited an African student to have dinner with us in Kiev. When we asked that another dinner be ordered for our guest, the interpreter said it was too late to do this. So we told him the student could have our dinner and he changed his mind and said they would do as we asked... He went on to say that it would cost



us about five rubles. This was quite alright with us. Dwight paid the three rubles for the dinner. The dinner was very tense and almost uncomfortable. The interpreter and guides were quite against us having a brother for dinner. They would not speak to us during the dinner and could not say too much to each other, since the student spoke perfect Russian. After dinner the student asked if we had felt the tenseness and of course, we said yes. That evening we went out for a walk and were going to visit the hostel where this student lived. We went to the bus station where there is also a cab stand. About 10 or more cabs were parked there and the drivers were standing around talking to each other. The student spoke to the drivers in Russian and attempted to secure a cab, but was told they were all going in the opposite direction. As in other cities, African students say it is hard to get a cab if you're black, unless they think you are some sort of diplomat. One student said that it is very bad for them in the Soviet Union. They are not permitted to exchange money, therefore, they would obtain a go-between, Russian, who would change their rubles into foreign currency.

The one African student whose hostel we visited owned a combination record player and radio. He was given a lot of trouble about this set, because he was told by authorities that it was capitalistic to want to own such a set. He was also told he already had a radio in his room. This was true. All students hostels and hotels have a radio by which music and other programs are piped into rooms. The only control on this radio is the volume and the on and off knobs.

One evening while sitting in a hotel lobby in Leningrad, I met some students from Ghana, Kenya and various other places. Also two brothers from New York who were on a cruise ship, The Amsterdam, out of the New York Harbor. While talking to one of these students, a Russian girl came over to speak to him. They began speaking in Russian and while they were conversing, two young men, looking like exiles from the American Nazi Party, came near and just stood and stared. They never said anything, but it wasn't love I saw in their eyes.

Since we have been in the Soviet Union, we've been spoon fed love, peace and friendship, but I'm not naive enough to believe everything I'm fed is good for me. Everywhere we go, people follow us and stare. Some with friendliness, others out of curiosity and some with hatred. At first my feelings were that I was becoming a little paranoid but am now convinced this is not so. Friendship and curiosity are not hard to read in another's face and hatred is twice as easy and much longer remembered. Our guides do not like for us to go out alone, but each time we do, new things are discovered.

On another occasion, we invited the previous student back to dinner and this time Muriel and I paid the three rubles. After dinner, I went to bed and the other four went down to the cafe to relax and maybe drink a few beers. About two hours later, Muriel came bursting into the room and she seemed very upset. She said that Misha (Interpreter) had come into the cafe with the guide and sat at their table; that they were tense and seemed to be checking on them. Soon everyone felt quite uncomfortable and the party broke up. Muriel said that the guide had

followed the student to the door of the hotel. It was almost ridiculous and possibly impossible to describe the changes they, the guides, would go through each time we came near any of the brothers.

#### Education:

There seems to be a very good school system in the Soviet Union. It seems to be uniform throughout their country. Most exams are held at the same time, even though the schools may be thousands of miles apart. Also, the courses taught are very similar and the books are the same. At least this is what we were told in each city we visited. Parents are not permitted to keep children out of school and train them at home. In Alma Ata, there is one teacher per every nine children. If a child does not want to study or makes too many problems for the school, it is considered a case of emergency and they are expelled. Before the child is expelled though, the teacher must have the approval of the Minister of Education. We were told that education, all phases, is free in the Soviet Union and that if an expelled child later wanted to return to school, he was able to do so.

Before the revolution, only 2% of the Kossactani people could read and write their language. Now it is 100%. Teachers at high establishments or universities receive the same pay as teachers at primary schools. Those with Science Degrees equal to our Bachelor Degree get larger salaries. The more the teacher works, the more he is paid. He or she also makes more money if they prepare class literature, or is the leader of a club. If a teacher wants to continue his/her education, he may take evening or correspondence courses.

Many of the children learn or begin to learn languages in the early grades, such as the fifth grade. Those who want to study ballet or art, are able to do so when they are seven or eight years of age and all of their activities are centered around their chosen professions. In most cities, a new area of apartment houses is called a "micro district". Each district has it's own kindergarten and some have primary schools. Each kindergarten has it's own doctor and nurses. We were told they all had facilities whereby children could live there throughout the week. The ones we visited did have these facilities and they were immaculate. Many of the children remain at school and spend the full week there. Their parents come by for them on the weekend.

As the children enter the primary schools, they eventually join the Pioneer Clubs. These children and their clubs are like a better version of the Boy Scouts. They have their own palaces, camps and full-time teachers. The palaces are used mostly by them during the hours after school. The one we went to in Kiev was outlandishly equipped. The children there studied chemistry, ballet, photography, cinema, astrology, biology, painting and home economics.

There was a very elaborate playroom for the small children with wall to wall carpets and toys from almost every country. You name it and I would be willing to bet they had it in that building. We were shown a movie that some of the older boys and girls had put together. Yes, there was a movie studio also. By older boys, I mean between the ages of 12 and 14.

Each summer the Pioneer children go to camps. At these camps they are instilled with their national history, taught Communism and are taught to be pro-communist, and to love Lenin. Wherever we went, there were pictures of Lenin throughout the city and statues in every city and hamlet. You never ceased hearing "Before the Revolution and After the Revolution."

When these children become 14 years of age, they leave the Pioneers and join the Komsomol. When they are 28 years of age, they apply for membership to the Communist Party. They have to have strong recommendations from about three top members of the Komsomol. Then they are thoroughly checked out. If qualified, they are permitted to join the Communist Party and if not, then they don't belong to any party since there is only one.

We asked if there were any revolutionaries in the USSR. We were told, "No."

We asked if those persons not belonging to the Communist Party had any say in the government since they were in the majority. Each time we were told, "These persons are represented fully and have the same rights as those belonging to the Party and that everyone throughout the Soviet Union is treated equal."

#### Example:

While in Alma Ata, we were at dinner this one evening when the waitress brought a note to the table. It began, "Dear Friends, We would like to meet with you by the entrance to the restaurant." Vernon and Dwight went to speak to the girls who had written the note and invited them in. They would not come in, but said they would wait outside until we finished eating. I went up to my room because I wasn't feeling well and the other three went out on the town with the girls. They showed them around the city and took them to their homes. Muriel said she had a great time.

The next day, the same two girls came to the hotel and stayed with us until nearly dinnertime. Just before dinner, Misha and Tyrel, our interpreters came into the room. (Maybe I'm still paranoid, but that was the first and only time they ever came into our room and sat down when I was there.) The girls were not members of the young communist part and they became very nervous. So Muriel went onto the balcony with them. They told her they were afraid and were going to leave. Muriel came into the bedroom and said, "I keep forgetting where I am."

To my knowledge, none of us ever saw them again.

#### Factories, Plants and Mills:

The above named usually have their own kindergartens and technical schools. This enables many workers to attend school in the evening. The kindergartens insure that a mother will continue to work on a full-time basis.



These schools also seem to insure that the plants, etc. will always be adequately staffed. Many of the children will grow up, go to these schools and work in these same plants when they become old enough. Also, many of these plants have their own "micro districts" or housing areas and bring their people to work by bus. The plants also, in some areas, supply the "micro district" with heat and water.

### Perfection:

The Russian people laugh and sing quite a bit. They sing mostly when drunk and they seem to drink all the time. (I was reminded of San Francisco in that respect). A person seeing this would say, gee, these people are certainly happy-go-lucky. In my limited experience, everyone that sings is not happy and everyone that laughs is not light of heart.

I asked one of our interpreters if there is much of a problem with alcoholism. He said no, that it does not cause any problem. With mine own eyes, I've seen men so drunk that they would try to hold on buildings for support. Some of them get as bad as the man I saw who reminded me of a large beetle. He was laying on his back and every once in awhile he would get up enough energy to reach for this fence post. His fingertips would touch the post and then he would fall back once again, to gather more energy and make another attempt. Now to see someone in this condition is definitely not new to me. My point is that here in Russia, they seem to be unable or afraid to talk about their own faults or to believe they have any. Hell, since I'm no authority on Russia or the Soviet Union, after being there for three weeks, who knows, they may be perfect.

While in Kiev, this one evening, we were at dinner and I asked the interpreter about Israel and the discrimination towards the Arabs. He was doing his thesis on International Law and apartheid, therefore, he had done a lot of research on various countries and their policies. For no reason at all, Vernon bounces out with, I hate all Jews. They're all a bunch of racists. To me it was a stupid remark. To you it may be funny, but our guide who was dining with us happened to be a Jew.

Muriel and Dwight have begun to call Vernon "God", which I think is unfortunate. He explained what he felt God was and it seemed sensible, to me, but it seemed inane to call him by this nickname.

### Women:

We saw women doing construction work, tarring highways and operating machines in steel mills. When we were told that the Soviet woman is treated equally, take my word for it, they are. Two thirds of the doctors are women. One of the universities we visited seemed to have twice as many women as they had men. In the chemistry lab, there were no men at all.

### Moscow:

We took the train from Leningrad to Moscow and it was quite a pleasant change from those too-crowded airplanes we had been jumping in and out of. The four of us shared a room with berths. We slept most of the

way. I began to think how much American railroad companies miss out on by not having comfortable trains and charging exorbitant prices for the few berths they do have. Oh well, later for trains.

When we arrived in Moscow, I met a man from India and another from Ceylon. They asked why our organization wasn't represented at the Socialist Conference in Bulgaria? I told him that we had sent a representative there. He then asked, "Was it undercover"? I told him no and that possibly Bill Hall and he had never come in contact, but that I had since met several people that came to our table and said they had met him.

Later we stated we'd like to visit Friendship University (Lumumba U.). We spoke to a medical student in his sixth year and another student that had just graduated and was now a lawyer. The lawyer would be returning home in about three weeks to the African continent. His brother is the ambassador to the Soviet Union from his country. I've forgotten what country that was. The medical student took it upon himself to answer all our questions. He was very happy in the Soviet Union and never felt that anything was wrong with anything. To make a long story short, he was living in a Soviet Union Paradise. He is married to a Russian girl and has one more year before he returns to Nigeria. Maybe it was because one of the Russian instructors and our interpreter were present, or (and I don't mean to be redundant) he really felt the way he spoke.

One of the questions we were often asked is why didn't our organization, SNCC, work with the Communist Party in the United States, since we are both working for the same cause and towards the same goals. Most of you probably know our answers already. We tried in our own limited way to tell what we thought of the U. S. Communist Party and why we did not work with them.

#### Diplomatic Relations:

Once in awhile, our interpreter and I wouldn't hit it off too well. I remember when we were at one of the many airports that I asked him how much time we had before boarding the plane. He said about 15 minutes. So Muriel and I went next door to get some pastries. About 10 seconds later he was standing next to us and as he started to talk to Muriel, I continued on, to the pastry counter. I turned around to leave and he was standing behind me. Muriel, I assumed, had returned to the other room. I asked him, "Are you following me?" He gave a noncommittal answer and I politely told him in many and varied words that I did not appreciate being followed, especially from room to room.

He and I had had a few previous spats, because this was not the first time we had words. I think we both realized that one could very well do without the other.

#### Home:

It is nearly time for us to return to the states and I am happy. It is very interesting being in the Soviet Union, but they lie just about as much as our government. At least in the states, I know many of the issues and when someone lies, I can call a spade a spade.



It is very interesting, but I can never remember being called an American before I came to the USSR, but other touring Americans would come over to our table and ask, "Are you Americans?" Sometimes we had to grope for an answer. It would be funny if it were not so sad.

At the present time, Muriel and Dwight, along with Vernon are attempting to write up a press release on our tour. They are trying to write on four subjects:

Nationalities,  
Education,  
and Restoration. The fourth has slipped my mind.

Muriel just entered the room and said they were cracking up with laughter, because all they could think of was one sentence. I personally am not taking part in the drawing up of this release about the trip. I don't feel that I could be truthful without causing anxiety to various people. If I took part in this little venture, I'd definitely like to speak about the things I was told by the various African students we'd talked with. I would like to speak about pre-fabs and women doing construction work and hard labor. I would like to speak about the steel tube plant we visited where both men and women operated the machines and that these people had no shields for their eyes or feet and there were no guard rails to protect them from that hot metal. I would have liked to talk about the two Russian girls we met in Alma Ata and question why they were afraid, etc.

Well folks, I have to sign off now. My fingers are tired.

Fay D. Bellamy  
SNCC  
Atlanta Office  
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