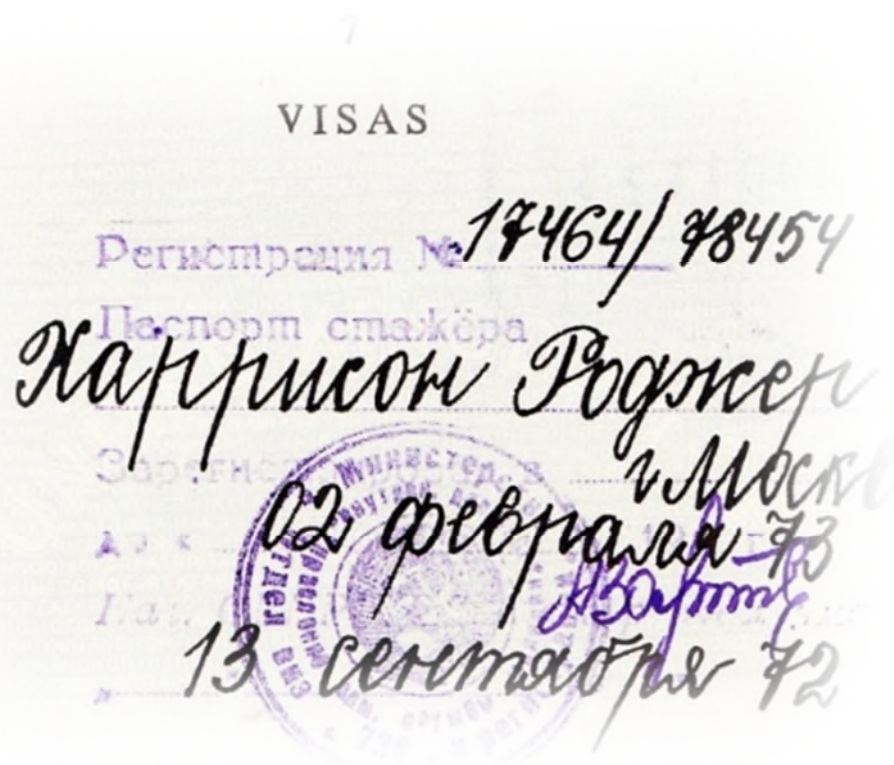


There Was a Front, but Damned if We Knew Where: Moscow, 1972/73

Mark Harrison



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Abstract

This is an essay in autobiography. I describe my time as a graduate student of economic history in Moscow in 1972/73, at a tense moment in the Cold War. I write about my preparations, my induction into academic and non-academic aspects of Soviet life, some short journeys that I made into the provinces, and my confusion on coming home. I tried to see the Cold War from both sides. I conclude by contrasting what I understood then about the Soviet economic system and political order to what I know now. Three appendices reproduce items that are of relevance to my theme but distinct from the narrative.

JEL Codes: B24, H56, N44, Z13

Keywords: Cold War, communism, counterintelligence, collective farms, cultural exchange, economic history, economic thought, higher education, security, Soviet Union, surveillance, trust

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Introduction: A normal country?

An old anecdote describes a day in the life of a Soviet diplomat in Britain (Mel'nichenko 2014: 153 (#414)).

One of the Soviet embassy staff in London rings the Foreign Office and requests permission to travel to Manchester. "No need for permission. Just catch the train and go," is the reply. "But I want to drive." "Then enjoy the drive." "What about petrol? I have no fuel coupons." "Why coupons? Any filling station will sell you as much as you need." "Impossible country," sighs the Soviet diplomat. "Total anarchy."

In this story "Britain" was a place that most Soviet people could only imagine, a country where ordinary people were free to have a normal life, and to travel and trade as they wished, and where the government did not interfere. I think many citizens of the USSR would have been happy enough to live under any government and any system if only they could have lived normally, without the restrictions and intrusions that pervaded their lives under Soviet rule. They could dream of this as long as they thought people lived like that anywhere on the planet, in a place that might as well be called "Britain."

The real Britain of the 1970s was not exactly the normal country of the anecdote. The British market economy was troubled. British society was divided and conflict-ridden. Before the decade was out, electric power would be rationed, and filling stations would run out of petrol. In the summer of 1972 this was still to come.

Meanwhile, I was due to leave the normal world and go to Moscow for five months, working there as a graduate student. My timing was poor. British-Soviet relations were in bad shape. Just a year before, the British government had expelled 90 Soviet diplomats and barred another 15 from returning. They were accused of espionage and planning sabotage and infiltration of the Royal Navy. The Soviet side retaliated with more expulsions of embassy personnel. Two British economists, Alec Nove and Philip Hanson, were barred from returning to the Soviet Union. A British student was also expelled around the same time. The Cold War was going strong.

When I decided to do research on Russia, I understood that I would need to go there myself to study. Indeed, I had already been there once before. ("The Mushroom Incident," in Appendix 1, tells the story). But on that occasion, I visited as a tourist and only for a few days. This time would be different.

Having decided to do research on Russia, I had no idea how one might get there. At that time, no one could “just go” to study on their own initiative. It turned out that there was a single channel, a government-to-government cultural exchange provided under a series of British-Soviet treaties and administered for the UK by the British Council. I applied to visit for half the academic year, September 1972 through January 1973, and I was selected.

The process was called cultural exchange and we were called exchange students. The other side of the exchange was a similar number of Soviet students visiting the UK. Each side paid the travel costs of their own students and the living costs of the visitors. The Soviet visitors to the UK were typically natural scientists and engineers. This expressed the beliefs of the Soviet authorities: they expected to gain most from learning about Western achievements in science and technology. They did not expect much good to come from exposing young Soviet minds to Western developments in the humanities or social sciences. On the British side, it was the other way around: the British exchange students were largely specialists in Russian language, literature, and history. I was one of these.

I. Preparations

Some circumstances of my application: I could have asked to go for longer, for the full academic year. I chose the shorter period for a reason that I later regretted: I did not want to leave my girlfriend of the time for so long. I was scared of the separation, which was far more total than it would be today. No email or instant messaging. No dial-up telephony; the technology existed in the West, but it was implemented in the Soviet Union only within each city. From Moscow, you couldn't dial a call to the next town, let alone to another country. International flights were still priced for the elite. By rail and ferry crossing, a one-way journey from London to Moscow took two full days, and anyway visas were required. Our only contact would be by letter, and letters were often opened and sometimes lost at the Soviet border. Even if my girlfriend and I had been perfect for each other, would our relationship have survived a year's separation?

Another circumstance: I had to mask the true purpose of my research. I had picked a topic in the history of economic thought, a field in which I lacked training. (I had studied economics and economic history, but I knew little about the challenges of the history of ideas.) I was interested in the writings of Aleksandr Vasil'yevich Chayanov, a pioneering Russian economist, born in 1888, who was arrested and imprisoned in 1930 (he was executed in 1937, but this was kept secret until 1987). His status as a purge victim would have made him unacceptable to the Soviet side as a subject for research. Therefore, I made out that I was interested not in Chayanov but in a topic to which Chayanov had contributed, the inequalities among Russian peasantry households in the late nineteenth

and early twentieth centuries. This was general enough that it would comfortably overlap my true focus. It was an advantage that Lenin had also written extensively on the topic.

My preparations were extensive. I obtained a passport (1), followed by the necessary visa (2).

(1) British passport no. 886689, issued to Roger Marcus Harrison on 24 May 1972

2		3	
DESCRIPTION SIGNALEMENT			
Bearer Titulaire		★Wife Femme	
Occupation Profession	STUDENT	Bearer Titulaire	
Place of birth Lieu de naissance	CAMBRIDGE	Wife Femme	
Date of birth Date de naissance	6th APRIL 1949	(PHOTO)	
Country of Residence Pays de Résidence	ENGLAND		
Height Taille	6 ft. 3 in.		
Colour of eyes Couleur des yeux	GREY		
Special peculiarities Signes particuliers	NONE		
★CHILDREN ENFANTS			
Name Nom	Date of birth Date de naissance		
Usual signature of bearer Signature du titulaire			
Usual signature of wife Signature de la femme			

(2) USSR entry visa issued to Rodzher Kharrison, valid from 13 September 1972 to 2 February 1973

Регистрация № 17464/48454

Паспорт стажера

На Harrison Роджеру

Москва

12 февраля 73

13 сентября 72

Виза с сроком действия

17464

30 января 73

To the documents were added warm clothing and a clever device, a keyhole blocker, obtainable only from a specialist locksmith in the London suburbs. In Moscow University I would have my own room with a

lock and key – a great privilege, except that the locks were known to be easily picked. The blocker fitted the keyhole snugly and could be removed only by a special key that I would carry with me all the time during my stay. Warm clothing meant a sheepskin jacket, thermal underwear, and lined leather boots. I also went to London to have my hair cut by Vidal Sassoon. My hair was normally thick and unmanageable, but at least for a few weeks it looked stylish. I didn't have it cut again until I returned.

For reading I packed the novels of Jane Austen and Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*. As far as I knew, they were guaranteed to pass scrutiny at the Soviet frontier. For work, I took several boxes of blank index cards; that's what I relied on for note-taking. It was a great system. Later, it turned out, note-taking was one of those things that computers made less efficient, not more.

I needed above all to improve my Russian. I spend many pleasant afternoons chatting with Halina, the wife of my Oxford supervisor, Harry Willetts. Halina was a charming and kind-hearted conversationalist. She had been in the Soviet Union in wartime as a child; the food shortages had left her with lifelong digestive problems. Harry and she had met at a refugee camp in Wales after the war. Harry was popular with the Poles in the camp because he was the first Englishman they met who was willing to try to dance the polka.

In the late summer, the outgoing British exchange students met at the British Council. There were Patrick Miles and Patrick O'Meara, studying the nineteenth century writers Chekhov and Gogol respectively. In appearance they both strongly resembled the subjects of their research, one neat and the other wildly romantic, so inevitably they became known as Patrick Chekhov and Patrick Gogol. Patrick Chekhov had already been in Moscow for a year. With the authority of his experience, he was chosen to lead the group of us that was bound for Moscow. (In line with the long-established communist principle of a unified chain of command, our Soviet sponsors required each national group in each city to have one leader, responsible for channelling all information and requests from both sides and to answer for the group as a whole.) Judith Pallot was closest to my own field of study. She was investigating the agrarian reforms of the period before World War I and the Revolution, and she too had already spent time in Moscow the previous year.

Others were Greville Corbett, a linguist; Derek Offord, a historian of the Russian revolutionary movement; Dorinda O'Reilly, a student of Russian language and literature; Natasha Ward, a student of Soviet film; and Patrick Wilkinson, another historian. This Patrick's hair was silvery grey, so we quickly named him Patrick *Sedoi* (the Russian word for grey). The one scientist was Miles Reid, who came to study Soviet mathematics.

One of our obligations was to attend the Foreign office for a briefing. The essence of it was: "Be safe." Safe from what? A pleasant chap in his forties told us that we would be objects of interest to the KGB. Among the people we would meet, he said, would be informers who had been

instructed to keep tabs on us. We might be watched or followed. For most of us there would be little or no risk and we would never see or hear the KGB around us. However, we should assume we were being observed and we should avoid behaving badly or breaking the law.

In the worst case, our adviser went on, there might be an attempt to compromise us by using alcohol, drugs, or sex. Apparently, a pretty young woman might take her clothes off and climb into my bed late at night. Judith asked if this might happen to her too. Our adviser had to think before conceding that he had considered only the men. He went on: this might be a prelude to blackmail or intimidation, leading to our recruitment as an informer or spy. If anything like that happened, the best thing was to go straight to the embassy; the staff would do its best to get us safely home. It was fatherly advice, delivered with patronizing hauteur. We innocents listened carefully but sceptically. Wasn't this all a little paranoid?

That's it for now, but the matter of our Foreign Office briefing was not over. Forty years passed before I would understand it fully. I'll return to it at the end.

Then the journey. At the end of August, we gathered at the London docks. We travelled by sea to Leningrad, stopping in Copenhagen. The sea journey took several days. The time was intended, I believe, to encourage us to bond before our arrival. Because we were a mix of students returning from the previous year and newcomers like me, a lot of our conversation was devoted to trying to share what it was really like. We bonded and we learned. It was a pleasant interlude, full of interest, but I also knew that the journey would end with arrival. Playtime would be over. We would be parachuted into a strange and puzzling environment and I would have no choice but to live and work in it. Suddenly, to travel seemed better than to arrive.

Our vessel steamed into the port of Leningrad on a sunny September afternoon. As we prepared to face the Soviet border checks, dread came over me. I shouldn't exaggerate. I had no real fear that I might not return safe and well. I could see for myself that other students such as Patrick Miles and Judith Pallot had been there and survived, had had a wonderful, fascinating time, and were now excited to return. But I did not feel their confidence, and I worried that I might not acquit myself well. The continual discussion of the precautions that we should all take to avoid getting into trouble left me anxious. I've always had to force myself into new situations, and I did not feel ready for this one.

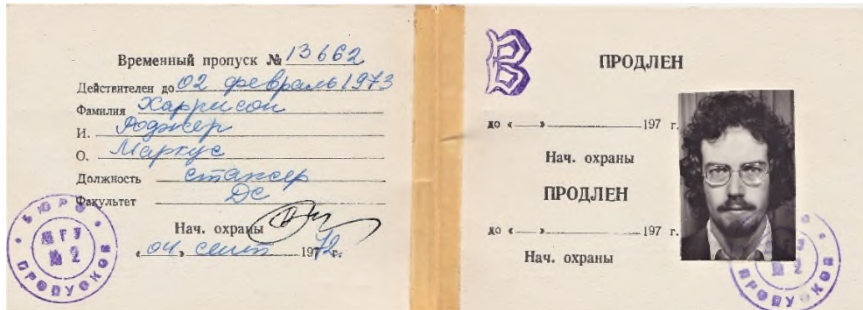
II. Inductions

Moscow University

We arrived in Moscow on the overnight train from Leningrad. We began our inductions into Soviet life. Our first call was to the Moscow University

foreign department, which was charged with responsibility for us. We were issued with passes to be shown every time we entered and left our accommodation. Mine showed off my stylish haircut (3).

(3) *Moscow University pass issued to Rodzher Kharrison on 4 September 1972, valid to 2 February 1973*



We were also issued with the first of our monthly allowances: 180 rubles each. This was a lot, roughly equal to the average wage of an ordinary worker in the state-owned economy at that time. We had no family responsibilities, we were housed without charge, and local transport cost us almost nothing. Even in Moscow, desirable goods were often unavailable. So it would be hard to spend that amount of money. But there was no point saving it either; the ruble was not convertible into pounds, so when we left the country we would lose whatever was unspent.

After what was free or unobtainable was ruled out, we were left with dining out and wine and spirits. Dining out was all very well as long as you understood that good places to eat were generally packed out; it was best to avoid mealtimes for this reason. At other times, however, they were often closed (to give the workers a break in this workers' state). So, you had to take your chances. As for wine and spirits, these were always acceptable when friends invited you home. We bought all the Russian books and records we could find, which were cheap in Moscow and hard to find in England. And there was travelling, which I'll come to.

We were accommodated in the tallest and most imposing of Moscow's seven Stalin-era skyscrapers, the main building of Moscow State University on the Lenin Hills above the Moscow River. This was a truly colossal building. It did not reach the heights of the New York or Chicago skyscrapers, but it coiled and sprawled with great wings that extended over many acres (4).

The Moscow University building's expanse was so great that it was divided for convenience into zones, labelled by letters of the Cyrillic alphabet: *Zona A, Zona B, V, G, D*, and so on, in that order. Many years later I learned that the whole edifice had been a forced labour project of the Gulag in the late 1940s. The prison camp administrators divided the building site into zones for security, to contain the prisoners and prevent

them from wandering freely. When it was completed and handed over, the Moscow University administration simply took over the Gulag zones and their designations, which remain unchanged to the present day.

(4) *Moscow University, early 1950s*



Source: http://englishrussia.com/images/old_moscow/6.jpg.

Zona A was the central block, reserved for the university offices. The British students were housed on the seventh and eighth floors of one of the wings close to the centre, Zona V. Doors opened left and right off long, dimly lit corridors. Behind each door were two rooms, each with a window (5), a narrow single bed, a desk and lamp, chair, and radio. The paired rooms shared a toilet and shower. Hot and cold water were generally available for washing (although not for drinking). There was a kitchen at the end of the corridor. This was luxury by the standards of the time. At other institutions, and especially in provincial towns, all students shared communal dormitories, and hot water might be rationed or turned off for days at a time.

Although the design of the building was grand, the standard of construction was not high. I found this out on a wet Sunday afternoon as I sat quietly in my room with my index cards. There was a knock at the door. Outside was an agitated young man, who immediately burst out: "Please stop making that racket!" I was nonplussed. I told him that I was just sitting quietly at my desk. "Show me!" he commanded. I sat down at the table and explained to him, in what I hoped was a calming voice, that I was doing nothing more than looking through my cards and making

notes. As I talked, without thinking, I tipped my chair back an inch, and let it drop gently back to the floor. "That's it!" he shouted. Seeing my bewilderment, he calmed down and explained. His room was immediately below mine. The floor of my room, and the ceiling of his, was a single sheet of concrete. There were no joists and no space to separate floor from ceiling. The effect was that of a drumskin, one that automatically amplified the smallest vibrations, which travelled freely up and down the building. After that, I never tipped my chair, and I took care to pad around my room only in socks or with bare feet.

(5) Moscow, November 1972: the view from Zona V, room 806



Credit: Mark Harrison.

The rooms were paired, but none of us British exchange students was paired together. Each of us was allocated to a stranger. The stranger was a critical factor in our lives over the months to come. The stranger was always of the same sex as the British student, and generally either a Soviet student, or another foreigner, but never a foreigner with good English. This had the interesting effect that the default language of conversation between the paired neighbours was generally Russian. If the security police saw a need to eavesdrop, perhaps this made eavesdropping easier; as I learned later, the KGB personnel that knew foreign languages were usually allocated to foreign intelligence, while those who eavesdropped

on us would have been domestic counter-intelligence personnel with few language skills. It's a guess, of course – but an informed one.

Regardless, every neighbour quickly faced each of us with two questions that would be critical for our private lives in the coming period. Would we get on? And, whether or not the personal chemistry was there, ought we to get on? For it was generally thought that the neighbours, at least those who owed their citizenship, loyalty, and place at university to the Soviet state, would have been obligated in advance to gather information about us and report it to the authorities.

My own neighbour was a Japanese graduate student, Suzuki-san (not his real name). According to his own account, he was in his sixth year of a dissertation about Dostoyevskii. This seemed ridiculously prolonged to me, but his studies had been extended by two things. He had married a Russian woman, from whom he was currently separated. He also drank and this had led to illness.

Suzuki-san and I got on well and became good friends. We shared our life stories and his stock of terrible Soviet brandy. His Russian was heavily accented and mine was mediocre, so we chatted slowly but effectively. He quickly gave me some useful advice. When he first arrived in Moscow, he told me, he tried to achieve six things every day. But this was impossible, because of universal bureaucracy and a Russian indifference to the value of time. Frustrated, he turned to alcohol and ended up in hospital. On discharge he lowered his aspirations and aimed to achieve only one thing every day. His life became calm and leisured. He continued to drink; I once found him sitting on the floor of the hallway outside his room, key in hand, completely unable to find the keyhole. There was no malice in him, even when drunk.

Was Suzuki-san an informer? I could not know. As a foreigner with a Soviet wife and a drink problem he was certainly vulnerable to pressure. Yet there was a natural discretion between us: he never told me what he was up to from day to day, and I never told him what I was up to, and he never asked. So, I think not.

The faculty

Our induction continued. My next journey was to the faculty. Or, the “*fak*,” as the Russian students abbreviated it. This once put me in an embarrassing situation, meaning that everyone else within hearing distance roared with laughter while I blushed and stammered. I was introduced to a young woman, whom I was sure I had seen before. (Yes, truly.) Where might that have been, she asked? I replied: “Probably in the *fak*.” It turned out that that sounded as bad to Russian ears as to English.

Anyway, my visiting appointment was to a sub-unit of the Moscow University Faculty of Economics, to its Department of Economic History and Economic Thought. The faculty building was a stone's throw from the wedding-cake monstrosity I was living in, so that was convenient. In the faculty I met Polyanskii, the head of department, and my supervisor,

Dmitrii Dmitrievich Stolyarov. Polyanskii had few words for me. Maybe in other company he might have been an old rogue or a closet liberal, but to me he was expressionless and unbending, with a mouth like a rat-trap. Who knows what he thought of me: having a foreign student might be an intellectual opportunity or a source of prestige to the department, but if I behaved badly or caused a scandal I might bring terrible trouble upon everyone. Given that, it's not surprising if a lot of people treated me with caution and reserve.

Stolyarov, my supervisor, was a complete contrast: he listened to me carefully, spoke slowly, and was never less than kind and courteous. He turned out to be a specialist in the economic thought of classical Greece and Rome, so it seemed like I knew nothing about his work and he knew nothing about mine, but this did not seem to be a problem.

The first assignment Stolyarov gave me was completely unexpected: to compile a scholarly plan for my visit. For this was the Soviet Union, with a planned economy and a planned society, and every unit had to have a plan with aims and objectives that were approved and would later be verified by higher authority. I did not keep a copy of my plan, and I have no recollection of what was in it, except in one important respect. Stolyarov asked me if I wished to go on a *komandirovka*. This too was completely unexpected. What was a *komandirovka*? It turned out to mean a mission or expedition, in the same sense as "Mission to Mars."

I was taken aback. After explanations, I gathered that I could suggest some travelling, as long it was loosely connected with my work. Because I was working on the pre-Soviet peasantry, I said I'd like to visit a modern collective farm and a state farm and see the achievements of the Soviet system. (That form of words was calculated to win approval.) Where could I go? I thought I'd like to see Russia's famous black-soil belt, and I had read a lot about farming in the province of Voronezh, a provincial town 300 miles south of Moscow. So, it was written into the plan for me to visit a collective farm near Voronezh.

As for a state farm, that would have to be nearer Moscow. For either trip I guess I might have nominated somewhere more exotic, like the Caucasus or Western Siberia, but I was not ready for the question, and that was the best I came up with on the spur of the moment. Also, I did not have enough common sense to play for time and seek the advice of others with more experience.

The Leninka

Another induction was to the Lenin Library, now the Russian State Library. This was another huge building, designed in the 1920s and built in the 1930s (6). It was one of Russia's copyright libraries, holding everything published from long before the Revolution through Soviet times, including everything that was now banned and withheld from ordinary scholars and the general public. This was where I would work most weekdays for the next five months.

(6) Moscow, mid-1970s: the Lenin Library,

Credit: Mark Harrison.

I worked there under conditions of considerable privilege. The British students were admitted to Reading Room no. 1, which we shared with professors and academicians. The room was large and airy, with pleasant outlooks onto the Kremlin and the Moscow river. Ordinary users worked in more cramped conditions and with slower service. For Reading Room no. 1, I acquired another pass to be shown daily to the armed police who granted entry.

Friends

My last induction was to friendship. This took time and could not be rushed. I was wonderfully helped by Judith Pallot, who had gained a circle of trusted friends in the previous year, and now introduced me to some of them. I learned in the process how pockets of trust could form privately and persist, even in a low-trust society that was managed by mass surveillance.

These friends were universally kind to me and took me in despite my poor Russian and my immature political views. I kept on trying to look for the good side of communism and the Soviet Union. This was in spite of the facts, as I gradually became aware: it was the communists who had sent my new friends' parents and grandparents to prison or worse, and who now stopped them from travelling to see the world, from learning the truth about their own past and present, and from reading the beloved giants of their own literature Akhmatova, Pasternak, and Solzhenitsyn.

My friends often invited me home. Home, not going out, was the focus of social life for most Russians, because everywhere but a few hotspots in the centre of Moscow closed down at the end of the working day. (In the summer evenings you could walk or go to the park, but I'd mistimed that

completely.) On home visits, the first thing I learned was an absolute rule: to remove shoes and outer coats immediately at the threshold. But it didn't only apply to home. When I visited any office or library or college building, I found that the same applied: every building had its cloakroom and everybody, without exception, left their outer coat there, even just for five minutes. If you tried to slip past, they'd call you back: "Young man! Leave your coat in the cloakroom!" If you were naïve enough to ask why, the answer was always the same: "It's dirty!" I thought this was a bit odd; I'd only been in the street, not in a farmyard. I was puzzled by the universality of the rule, and also by the vehemence with which everyone enforced it.

Decades passed before I understood. The historian Donald Filtzer (2010) explains that in the early years of forced Soviet industrialization, Soviet cities outgrew their sanitation systems. They overflowed with raw sewage. Stalin preferred not to waste resources on urban infrastructure; he had armies and missiles to build, and these came first. The only remedy was found in rigorous public education. Every urban resident was drilled in the understanding that the streets were full of shit, and that this was a source of deadly danger. Every child learned the precautions required to avoid bringing the danger into the home or anywhere that food might be prepared. The most important carriers of contamination were shoes and outer garments. Shoes off! Coat off! Leave them at the door!

Just about everyone I ever visited had a "two-room" apartment. The two rooms were a living room and a bedroom. Since most families consisted of at least two generations, and often three, the bedroom was usually taken by children and grandmother. The living room would have a bed in the corner or a sofa bed and a dining table, so at night it became another bedroom. These rooms came off a tiny vestibule with coat hooks, a stock of slippers large and small, a floor brush made of twigs, and one of the most important things in the home: the telephone. Local calls were free and everyone I knew would spend hours on the phone every evening, whether guests were present or not. Across the vestibule would be a "sanitary unit" and a kitchen. The sanitary unit, also tiny, had two doors side by side, one for the toilet and the other for a shower. The kitchen would just accommodate a cooker, fridge, cupboard, and table.

If male friendship floated on beer and vodka, female friendship was sealed over the cooker. All these friendships came together over the dining table and the giving and receiving of food, followed by many cups of black sugary tea. On the wall over the table my closest friends had a map of England on the wall to mark the homes of the dinner guests that they dreamed, without expecting, of one day visiting back. Every family that I visited had a few precious heirlooms. Every living room I ever saw had one or more glass-fronted bookcases, which were not just for books but also for the showing of family photographs, letters, and postcards.

My Russian friends shared their time with me as freely as they shared their homes. They showed me around Moscow and educated me in its complex and moving history. They tried to improve my Russian. They shared jokes and rumours with me, took me in, fed me, and told me their family histories, which were too often darkened by war and repression. There was little I could give in return. Perhaps it was enough that I offered a link to the forbidden world of foreign fashions and cosmopolitan values. One of the few things I could do was provide access to the works of Akhmatova and Pasternak (although not of Solzhenitsyn). These were printed by the Soviet state in editions designed solely for export and sold to foreign tourists in hard currency stores. You had to know where they were; the currency stores were not signed from the street, and whatever happened behind the windows was veiled from passers-by with curtains and screens. But with a Western passport and pounds in my pocket, I could go in, browse the shelves, and buy what my friends wanted.

In fact, it was hard to locate anything in Moscow if it was not a famous landmark. Moscow had no A-to-Z directory or street map. I was tremendously proud that I once found a rare public transport map for sale at a street kiosk and I guarded it jealously for many years.

My friends shared so much time with me, and often money too, that I would compare their lives with mine. In England my life was busy and time-poor. As a student I had a grant and I lived comfortably, but with little money to spare. I would think to myself: if my friends were ever able to leave the country and visit me at home, how would I repay their generosity? How could I ever find the time and money to take them around and show them my city and my country, as they had shown me? Then I would think: don't worry, it'll never happen.

After a while I realized that my friends had so much time and so much money because Soviet society was time-rich and money-rich. People were money-rich because there were few things they wanted to buy. They were time-rich because there was little incentive to work. There was truth in the old Soviet joke: "We pretend to work and they pretend to pay us." While my friends pretended to work, they had plenty of time to spare for me, and while they were paid in money that they couldn't spend on themselves, they could spend it on me. The asymmetry between our lives was objective; it wasn't just in the mind.

To my surprise, a time did come at last when my Russian friends were able to visit me. Communism had collapsed and Russia was turning to a market economy, so those of my friends who made it to England now had a new appreciation of the value of time and the value of money. They understood.

The Russian language

My first moments out on the street, without a friend or a guide, were terrifying. I felt like a baby antelope on the plains of the Serengeti. There

were predators out there, and one of them would get me. Gradually my Russian improved and my panic subsided.

One friend was Sasha (not his real name), a tall, good-looking young man with a wife who was as good-looking as he was and as short as he was tall (7). Sasha was cheerful and unreflective, and never said anything to suggest unorthodox opinions, but he was also friendly, inviting, and not unduly curious.

(7) *Moscow, 1972: Sasha and his wife*



Credit: Judith Pallot.

The gift Sasha gave me was how to improve my Russian. The Russian language is one that declines nouns and conjugates verbs by varying the endings. So, for proper Russian, the ending of words is key. In my experience, Russians either speak their own language properly, by enunciating every syllable, right to the ends of the words, or they move on to the next word without finishing the one before. In that case the ending of every word is swallowed by the one that comes after. Let's call these two types the enunciators and the swallows. For listening to, the enunciators are wonderful. Enunciated Russian is slow, and you can work out every word as it is spoken. But many or most Russians are swallows. They never finish a word, so they rattle along at a fast trot, while you struggle to catch up, hoping against hope that eventually you'll work out what's going on. For a listener like me, this was terrible. I was

always trying to catch up, and never quite getting there. I had to get used to it, but it was hard.

Sasha was a swallower. When I came to know him, I was in the middle of trying hard to improve my own spoken Russian, and I was trying to get the ending of every word right. My aspiration was to be an enunciator, and this made me really, really slow in conversation. But I listened hard to the way Sasha spoke, and suddenly it dawned on me: I could be like him! I too could swallow the end of every word! I stopped trying to enunciate, and I began to swallow the end of every word. It was my breakthrough. Suddenly, I could rattle along. Even better, everyone could understand me.

There was a limit to my new strategy. I could be a swallower, but the whole thing fell apart if my conversation partner was a swallower too, because I still couldn't understand what they were telling me. And most Russians were swallowers. But my best friends were enunciators. Most foreigners, including my friend and neighbour Suzuki-san, were enunciators. So, in my little circle, I was fine, and that is how I got along.

III. Moscow life

In the faculty

I spent most of my working time in the Lenin Library. As a rule, I attended the faculty only when required to meet my supervisor. On rare occasions there were faculty seminars where graduate students presented their work. At those that I attended, one student presented on Keynesian economics, another on the economics of Mao Zedong. This was a time when relations between the Soviet and Chinese communists were bitter, and the two countries were often close to war.

Each of these ways of thinking about the economy presented difficulties for Soviet orthodoxy. According to Marxism-Leninism, all ideas expressed the interests of one or another social class. The ideas of free-market economics were supposed to express the interests of the capitalist class. Marxism-Leninism expressed the interests of the working class. The ideas of Keynes and of Mao Zedong were contrary to free-market economics, and they were also contrary to Marxism-Leninism. Then whose class interest did they express? Once the capitalist class and the working class were eliminated, what other class was left?

For Keynesianism and Maoism alike, the solution was to assign them to an in-between class: the "petit bourgeoisie." What was that? The capitalist class was apparently just the "haute bourgeoisie" – the owners of the great firms and banks in the Western economies. Those with nothing, who obtained their income by working for hire were the proletariat. The "petit bourgeoisie" was everyone else, originally the self-employed farmers and artisans, nowadays extending to the small-business owners and salaried professionals who served the great

capitalist corporations. In fact, almost any heterodox idea, if it was neither capitalist nor proletarian, had to be petit-bourgeois.

In the seminars there was limited discussion, mainly in the form of question and answer. Only in retrospect did I understand that there might have been a difference between the text and the subtext of these exchanges. The text was to classify these two approaches as incorrect and to establish the type of incorrectness. The subtext may well have been to explore the interesting detail. If so, I did not really take it in.

I do recall that the topic of Mao's ideas gave rise to a chilling exchange. The presenting student said: Maoism is an anti-working-class ideology. A student in the audience said: But Mao claims his ideas are anti-bureaucratic, not anti-proletarian. Potentially, this might have been a mark in favour of Mao, because the Soviet communist party also regularly complained about excessive bureaucracy in Soviet life. So the student's remark was disruptive: it threatened to take the discussion in an unscripted direction. Also in the audience was a youngish professor who had previously seemed to me to be quite a decent, good-humoured person. Before anyone could respond, he asked sharply: "Well. What do *you* think?" The questioner said nothing; there was an awkward silence and the discussion was moved on.

At the end of my visit, I had to give a report to a faculty meeting. I handwrote it carefully, not trusting my fluency without a script. I don't have a record. I'm sure I tried to avoid saying anything controversial; I didn't expect anyone present to learn anything from my work and I did not expect to receive any useful feedback.

I remember one thing. After I had spoken, there was a short discussion. I was caught completely off balance when Polyanskii seemed to ask my opinion about Stalin (*po Stalinu*), whose name had certainly not passed my lips. I imagine that my mouth opened and shut a few times. Then I asked: was he really asking me to talk *po Stalinu*? No, not at all, he explained. I expect he was as surprised as I was. He intended to enquire about my view of the British economic historian Mark Postan (*po Postanu*, but he had placed the emphasis on the "stan" syllable of Postan's name, so I heard *po Stalinu*). I had absolutely no opinion about this and no idea what to say. Somehow or other the discussion was brought to a close.

Commuting

Commuting daily to the library from the Lenin Hills meant a 50-minute journey by bus or subway. The architectural grandeur of the subway stations was an eye-opener. As the train pulled into the station it was generally difficult to quickly spot the signs that said where you were, but all the stops were announced over a PA system, and by listening hard I learned a lot about pronouncing those long, tongue-twisting place names. Our favourite stop was Lenin Hills (now closed), where the train to the university briefly emerged from underground to a spectacular view from half way up the high escarpment over the Moscow River.

The alternative commute was the 111 bus, which was practically door-to-door, and you could see the city roll by, but it was slower and less comfortable, whether or not you could get a seat.

In crowded trains and buses I learned a lot about Russian manners, and especially the importance of giving up one's seat to elders. Russian elders then as now were disproportionately women, often carrying small children or heavy shopping. If you, an obviously fit young man, stayed seated when others were standing, the first thing would be the hostile stare. If that didn't prise you out of your seat, some little old lady was likely to move over and dump her heavy bag in your lap.

Smiles were generally absent from any setting where there was competition for resources or status. To smile in such a situation implied submission or invited humiliation. No one smiled in the street or without introduction. Yet kindness and generosity were the rule as soon as the ice was broken. In the right circumstances, ordinary people welcomed foreigners and treated them with respect and warmth. This was especially the case outside Moscow, where foreigners were rarely encountered. As a foreigner I generally felt very safe, even hitching a lift in lonely city streets in the small hours of the early morning.

One part of this reflected the natural warmth of kind people. Another part reflected a kind of privilege that was quite unmerited. There was the privilege of western citizenship, which gave a mantle of protection. There was the fact that for a Soviet citizen to rob or assault a West European visitor would most likely invite endless trouble. Not every foreigner would have felt it; I would not have felt the same immunity if I had been from Africa or East Asia. North Vietnamese students were often looked down on because they were poor and reliant on Soviet aid, which was widely resented. African students were often mistreated, and sometimes assaulted because many Russians regarded them as less than human, while the police did not care. There was a lot of racism, but we were white British and so we were spared it.

On money

We had rubles to spend – too many rubles. It was hard to find desirable goods in the shops; if they were available, you needed the patience to stand in long queues. If the queue was long enough, it was often hard to work out what lay at the other end. I had an Indian friend, of an elite family, with many cousins in their country's embassies around the world, including the one in Moscow. He claimed that, with a cousin, he used to look for a street kiosk that was closed. The two of them would start a queue. Soon, passers-by would fall in behind, believing that something in short supply would be on sale in a few minutes or an hour or so. Once the line was established, a few minutes apart, he and his cousin would fall out, leaving a growing number of people destined for frustration. Perhaps this tale does not speak well of my friend. Nor does it speak well of the lot of most Soviet consumers – even in Moscow, where the average citizen had

more privilege and better supplies than in any other city of the Soviet Union.

Our good fortune was to have hard currency, which could be spent without standing in line. We spent it in various ways, all of them legal. One was in the British Embassy commissariat, which would supply us with anything but alcohol, tobacco, and chewing gum. I don't remember buying much there – mainly milk chocolate and cans of condensed milk. Condensed milk was for the sugar rush on days when the temperature fell below minus ten (on the Centigrade scale); you couldn't empty a can in one sitting, but I would store it half-opened in the space between the inner and outer glazing of my window, which made an excellent fridge.

Judith Pallot showed me one of the best uses of hard currency, to buy show tickets from the Intourist office on Gorkii Street next to the Intourist hotel. Judith was a huge fan of opera and ballet; she would have been a dancer, but she grew too tall. Tickets to the Bolshoi (8) were rarely available to the public; they were mostly allocated to favoured groups, and it was very hard for ordinary Russians just to buy them for roubles. Westerners were a favoured group, and tickets were always available for Western tourists. These were absurdly cheap, probably a tenth of the price of a seat at the opera at that time in London or New York. So we went a lot. Judith knew all the stars and all the plots, so it was an education for me.

(8) Moscow, mid-1970s: the Bolshoi Theatre



Credit: Mark Harrison

A night at the Bolshoi Theatre (or in the Kremlin Palace of Congresses, where the Bolshoi company also performed) was a real occasion. There was the spectacle itself, which was always gorgeous; the surroundings

were also splendid. At the Palace of Congresses, the intermission saw tables laden with caviar sandwiches and champagne, for which queues quickly formed – an incentive for hungry spectators to skip out of the auditorium as soon as the applause began. We were young and hungry, so we skipped.

What to wear

The wardrobe I had brought with me was adequate for Moscow but in some ways quite unsuitable. I should have brought several pairs of cheap grey trousers from Woolworths. Instead, I had one pair of slightly flared trousers and a couple of pairs of jeans.

I soon found that jeans, although very popular with young people, were frowned on by everyone else. Denim cotton was regarded as labouring attire, so it fell under the same strictures as an overcoat, but of course you couldn't take your jeans off in the foyer of a restaurant and hand them in to the cloakroom attendant. More than once I was close to being denied entry to a restaurant because of my jeans, and I was waved through only because I was an obvious foreigner.

I learned to wear the flared trousers. I had only one pair, and I had no idea how to get them cleaned, so I can't imagine what condition they were in after five months. It can't have been pleasant, but I had no idea because at the time I had lost my sense of smell; I had taken up smoking again. Or had I ever really stopped? I first took up smoking at a scout camp when I was 16 or so, and I smoked off and on until my late 20s. Like many ex-smokers, including me now, my parents were strongly anti-smoking, so at their home I had to smuggle cigarettes and matches into my bedroom. I used to sneak away to the toilet, puff the smoke out of the open window, and then suck a mint. I completely believed that this would cover the smell of tobacco smoke, and that my parents would never guess that I was a secret smoker.

(9) *The best and the worst: "Tu-144" and "Belomorkanal"*



Credits: "Smoking not allowed" at aeroflotarchives.com; "Belomorkanal" at wikipedia.org (both accessed on 19 June 2019). The "Tu-144" brand was launched to celebrate the

fiftieth anniversary of Aeroflot in 1973. The Tu-144 (the plane, not the cigarette) first flew at the end of 1968 (just before its rival, Concorde), crashed at the Paris Air Show in June 1973, entered service only in 1977, and was withdrawn from passenger service after another crash in 1978. The “Belomorkanal” brand goes back to 1932; it celebrated one of the giant projects of the Soviet first five-year plan. The White-Sea Baltic Canal was built by a hundred thousand imprisoned forced labourers between 1931 and 1933. Because of the forced pace of its construction, deaths among the labourers ran to tens of thousands. The canal was intended to join the White Sea (in the Arctic) to the Baltic Sea but, because of the pressure for its hasty completion, the canal’s draught was too shallow for seagoing vessels. The packet contained unfiltered cigarettes known as *papirosov*; half the tube contained the tobacco, while the empty other half was used as a cigarette holder.

Smoking in Moscow was different in the sense that cigarettes were cheap and just about everyone smoked, so not to smoke would have been much the harder option. But we were not allowed to buy Western cigarettes through the Embassy store, and even the best Soviet cigarettes were abominable. The worst were something beyond (9).

In addition to getting my clothes cleaned, I should also have got my hair cut, but I didn’t. If I was older than my biological years intellectually, I was considerably younger in common sense, and I couldn’t be bothered to work out how to get a decent trim (10).

(10) Moscow, late 1972: Mark had not had a haircut since August



Credit: Judith Pallot.

On food

At the bottom of Zona V was a vast student cafeteria. The best of the food was the variety of dairy products: various kinds of sour cream, buttermilk, and yogurt. The bread was wonderful when freshly baked, but it went stale in the blink of an eye. For the rest, the food was adequate to awful. There was grey, sloppy soup. Overboiled pasta was plentiful, as were pickled cabbage, and “meat”: mincemeat (*myaso rublennoye*), real

meat (*myaso natural'noye*), and meatballs (*bifshteks*). Meat of what animal was generally not revealed.

Later I would think, often, of the apocryphal customer who complains to the restaurant staff about finding a metal bolt in his soup. "Comrade!" the waiter replies. "Don't you know that in the Soviet Union we have completely replaced the horse by the automobile?" There were also, from time to time, rubbery frankfurters (but some of us remembered them with pleasure, and certainly they were not the worst). There were aluminium forks and spoons, which bent easily, but never knives. If the meat was a chunk that required cutting, you could try hacking it with a spoon, but most stabbed the whole thing with a fork and ate around it.

Another feature of the Zona V cafeteria was the queue. Arriving at a mealtime, one joined the rear of the queue and gradually moved backwards. The reason was that other students, arriving late, quickly found friends who had arrived earlier and joined them at the front. Those with more connections moved forward, pushing those with fewer friends towards the rear. It was a tribute to the power of networking.

Because we could afford to, we took every opportunity to eat out. Around the corner from the Leninka, the beautiful old university buildings on Manezhnaya (11) had a decent staff cafeteria.

(11) Moscow, mid-1970s: Square of the Manège, with the old Moscow University buildings on the right



Credit: Mark Harrison. The official name of the space shown here in the photograph was the Square of the Fiftieth Anniversary of the October Revolution – a mouthful in any language. Before 1967, and again from the time of perestroika, it was the Square of the Manège – the former riding academy. Even in the 1970s, the only people to use its official name were the bus drivers who had to call out the stops; everyone else still called it Manezhnaya. From left to right, the photo shows the old building of the riding academy, by now used as an exhibition hall; the corner of Herzen Street (now Bolshaya Nikitskaya), with the oblong hulk of the Lenin Library behind; the old buildings of Moscow University, lit by the setting sun; and the rear corner of the Hotel Natsional.

Less often, we would visit the restaurant of the Hotel Natsional, on the corner of Gorkii Street. This was more difficult; the problem was not to get a reservation but to find the restaurant open, since it tended to close around mealtimes to give the staff a break. The service was usually slow and surly and much of the menu was usually inoperative but whatever was available was very good value. Potato salad and Kiev cutlets followed by ice cream were my favourite. And we could wash it down with vodka.

On being safe

In Moscow, and specifically in Moscow University, I never encountered any crime of the ordinary variety. (But crime stories and crime statistics were strictly censored, so one would find out about real-life crimes only from first or second-hand experience or from rumour.) I felt generally safe, even out in the deserted city streets after midnight. We all shared the sense that someone was watching over us, making sure that the Western students were safe from street accidents and street crime.

Were we also safe from the watchers? There was one episode that I found extremely disturbing. Late one night, there was a knock at my door. A young man, a stranger, who claimed to be a French student, said he was locked out of his room. He did not want to be detained for being in the wrong place; could he stay the night with me? (He added some supporting detail to make this somewhat more plausible than it seems now.) I felt sorry for him and I let him in.

During the night my uninvited guest complained about back pains and asked me to massage him. Yes, I was nearly that stupid. A conversation followed, which ended in my telling him to shut up and go to sleep. In the morning he went. Nothing came of it, then or later. What do I think about this now? While there must be a small chance that he was telling the truth, more likely is that the KGB wished to find out if I was gay or bisexual. Given the risk I took by allowing the stranger into my room in the first place, I was ridiculously lucky to get away with it.

On privilege

I have used the word privilege much more than I expected when I thought of writing this short memoir. I was privileged from birth by my English middle-class origins. I was educated at a private boarding school, at Cambridge, and then at Oxford. I was fortunate to be chosen for the British-Soviet exchange. In Moscow I lived and studied in relative luxury, untouched by most street-level risks and shortages.

Nowhere was I more privileged than in the apartments of my friends. I was welcomed and told to sit down in the comfort of the living room. Others – the women in my circle – worked over the stove in the kitchen. Soon I would be fed. I never lifted a finger, before or after dinner. It suited me; even at home, I was naturally lazy about the house. But I was also aware that this was not how it was supposed to be. For this was not long after the dawn of women's liberation in the 1960s. Pricked by my

conscience, I got up from the sofa, opened the kitchen door, and offered to help, to be shooed away. I was intruding in the female sphere.

Later, I asked my hostesses what they thought about the “double shift” endured by Soviet women, nearly all of whom worked a full day and then returned home to do at least 99 per cent of the housework and childcare (as illustrated by the time budget surveys compiled at the time by the Soviet statistical administration), regardless of whether or not a husband was present in the household. They told me – and these were well educated, liberal-minded, professional women in responsible positions – that it was a woman’s job to make the home. If a woman wanted a paid job as well, it was her choice.

I disagreed – in principle. But in practice I quite enjoyed being waited on hand and foot.

Some years later I became acquainted with a moderately well-known Russian dissident who was often described as a democratic socialist. His wife was a scientist in a responsible position. I visited them in their apartment a few times. Once, he greeted me at the door: “Do come in. Sorry I can’t offer you a cup of tea. My wife is unwell.”

On tough love

We did our best to see the sights (12). We visited the Kremlin, its palaces its and crown jewels. We travelled out to some of Moscow’s beautiful parks and stately homes.

(12) Moscow, late 1972: the British exchange students out and about in Moscow.



Credit: Judith Pallot. Left to right, an Australian exchange student (face half hidden; Australians were counted in with the British for the purposes of the exchange); Derek Offord (back to camera); Patrick Miles; Patrick Wilkinson; Dorinda O’Reilly; unknown (face hidden by the pompom of Dorinda’s hat); and Mark (standing at the back).

Autumn turned to winter. The days shortened and the temperature dropped below anything I had experienced. Beyond a point, the Russian winter became magical. If the days were dark, the snow picked up every scintilla of light and scattered it everywhere. People cheered up: little old ladies would pick up their skirts and slide over the ice. Everyone became healthier, because the temperature fell too low for airborne infections to be passed around. I discovered my body had its own thermometer: after a few minutes outside, I could judge the temperature by which of my body parts was hurting – first my nose, then my toes, then my knees, and so on. There was a point below which ice crystals began to form in the air, and you could hear them singing as they scraped together.

Before the frosts came, however, Moscow was dark, damp, and dreary. My spirits drooped. My Russian was improving, but always fell short of true fluency. My work became unexciting and repetitive – I was gathering lots of statistics that all seemed to say the same thing. I spent much of my leisure time reading. Jane Austen provided a perfect escape, but I had worked my way through her novels and was now well into *The Lord of the Rings*. At first this too provided a pleasant distraction, but soon Frodo Baggins was deep in Mordor. Mordor, it seemed clear to me, was the Soviet Union, with forced industrialisation, blast furnaces smelting armaments, border guards, spies, and slave labourers. There was no escape for me, even into fantasy. I missed home comforts. Letters from home became infrequent. I was unwell and stayed in my room with a slight temperature.

Returning from an evening out with her friends, Judith Pallot knocked on my door. Faced with my sorry state and self-pity, she ripped into me. Here was I in one of the world's greatest and most fascinating cities, on the edge of untold experiences that I would never have if I sat in my room and fretted about home. I had little time left. I should get over myself; I should cheer up, get out of my room, and open my mind to the world around me before it was too late. This reprimand hit me hard. It was tough love of the truest kind. I cheered up, changed my ways, and plunged back into Moscow.

IV. Travelling

Mission to Voronezh

December brought my first *komandirovka* – my mission to Voronezh. It turned out to be a big deal. I'm fortunate that I made extensive notes of the whole thing not long after, and I typed them up when I got home. You can read them later (in Appendix 2, "Who decides what is wrong?"), so I'll try not to repeat too much.

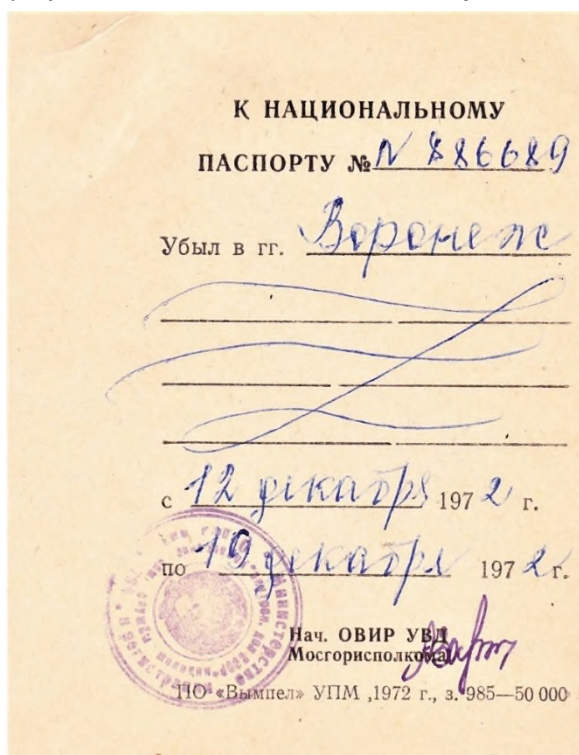
I made two preparations, only one of which had much value. I worked out a questionnaire for my day on the kolkhoz (reproduced in the Appendix). Also I bought a camera and a single black and white film.

The camera was a fabulous acquisition, a Zenith-E single-lens-reflex with a Leica lens. Cameras like that were completely unavailable to Soviet citizens; they were produced for export, so I was able to get one by going to a currency store. Judith Pallot had bought one the previous year in the currency store in the Hotel Rossiya, so that's where she took me. I kept it and used it for many years after.

How I wish I had bought it earlier, had bought more films, and had used it more while I was in Moscow! But at that time, I was only beginning to learn what a camera could do. Besides, as I already knew at first hand, the Soviet Union was notoriously unfriendly to casual photography. (See Appendix 1, "The Mushroom incident.") Anyway, things were what they were, and this memoir includes all the photographs I took then.

Our residence permits as exchange students did not allow us to travel freely; we were limited to a 40-kilometre circle around Moscow. For Voronezh I requested and obtained a visa, which set the limits of my stay in Voronezh to a week in mid-December (13).

(13) Voronezh, December 1972: my visa



I did not go to Voronezh alone. Boris, a graduate student from my faculty, was detached to be my travelling companion. We travelled south by train. Boris was an amiable young man, just a year older than me, apparently devoid of either humour or curiosity. But then he was, I am sure, very much on guard: if I got lost, suffered a mishap, or had the opportunity to misbehave, he would be held responsible. Arriving in Voronezh, we were met by a young lecturer of the Voronezh University languages department, Vadim Arkad'evich. So everywhere I went in

Voronezh, I had not one but two chaperones, both answerable to their respective authorities for my safety and conduct (14).

(14) Voronezh, December 1972: Boris and Vadim Arkad'evich



Credit: Mark Harrison. Boris is on the left, Vadim Arkad'evich on the right.

We stayed in Voronezh a few nights. The first day we looked around the town. It was cold and the rain was freezing. Voronezh itself was a bit of a disappointment. It had been bitterly contested and fought over several times during the Soviet-German war, and not much of the old town was left standing after that. I spotted a few art deco facades in the city centre (15), but the rest was mostly concrete and glass (16, 17).

(15) Voronezh, December 1972: a city centre street with passers by



Credit Mark Harrison.

(16) Voronezh, December 1972: “We will reach the victory of communist labour!”



Credit: Mark Harrison.

(17) Voronezh, December 1972: the statue of Lenin.



Credit: Mark Harrison. Across the square, the large building has a slogan on its roof: “We will realize the decisions of the XXIV congress of the CPSU!” The poster celebrates “50 years of the USSR”; the Soviet Union was officially constituted in December 1922.

It was grey under the sleet. Only the ubiquitous party banners provided colour. A few traditional wooden buildings were left standing down by the river. When we passed them, I was politely but firmly discouraged from taking pictures of them. The explanation was that they were “old” – in other words, they were the past, not the future, and my camera should show the future. In the evening we went to the theatre – a comedy that I mostly failed to understand. Overnight Boris and I shared a room in a student hostel. That’s where I learned to appreciate the luxury of my life in Moscow.

A full day was set aside for our visit to the collective farm, which was a few miles outside the town. On the way we made a stop so that I could take a photograph of the famous black soil (*chernozem*) (18).

(18) *Voronezh, December 1972: the black soil*



Credit: Mark Harrison.

Soon we arrived at the “Semilukskii” collective farm. Two main things. One, they reasonably assumed that a western economist who wanted to visit a collective farm would know something about agriculture. Specifically, about agriculture in the UK, of which I knew nothing – nothing at all! They asked me questions – lots of questions – about British farming. They asked about the size of farms and livestock herds and stock management. I had absolutely no idea. I was mortified. I made up lots of stuff. I lied for England. They were clearly surprised by some of my answers. I’ve never been a good liar, and I suppose that at some point they saw through me. But they were very polite and did not try to embarrass me.

(Besides, if the topic is lying about agriculture, the Soviet state had considerable form, given that it was still covering up the agricultural disasters of the 1930s and 1940s, the consequences of which were far more serious than my own little inventions.)

Two, if I was lying my head off, I don’t think they cared much. The main thing about my visit was not the exchange of knowledge; rather, it was the exchange of toasts. My visit was party time! The entire farm management got the day off. The farm director, the deputy director, the chief economist, the editor of the farm newspaper, and various assistants and deputy assistants, gave me their full attention for many hours. During those hours, we were abundantly supplied with food and drink. The quantities set out on the table – first for lunch, then for dinner – would

have fed an orphanage for a month. And the wine, beer, and vodka . . . we floated through the day on toast after toast to the friendship of peoples and the achievements of farmers everywhere, real or pretended.

My notes indicate that, towards the end of our visit, as I became more comfortable in the company of Boris, I relaxed the self-censorship that we all imposed on ourselves among strangers. On our last evening in Voronezh, he and I chatted privately. I asked him how the party justified checking the mail, censoring the press and literature, and restricting political activity, if Soviet society was as united and free from internal contradictions as the party claimed. His reply stood my argument on its head: because the Soviet people is united, there is no point in bothering to publish viewpoints which everyone knows are wrong. How do they know it's wrong? Marxism-Leninism, he told me. It wasn't really a discussion.

Boris and I also touched on Czechoslovakia after the suppression of the Prague Spring in 1968. At home, I'd been thinking about joining the Communist Party (I did this later, as I discuss in Appendix 3), but this was in spite of my feelings about the Soviet Union rather than because of them. In Czechoslovakia the persecution of reform-minded communists was continuing. In Britain this had provoked public condemnation from the Communist Party. I mentioned this to Boris to support my case. He didn't debate with me; he just said something like: "With due respect to the British comrades, such a standpoint is regrettable and dangerous." The conversation ended and sleep followed.

We returned to Moscow. I'd given Boris plenty to write down about me. His handling officer might well have regarded my late-night questioning as classic *obrabotka* – the cultivation or grooming of a potential recruit. There I was, trying to find out what Boris *really* thought. If Boris had gone along with me, how then might our conversation have continued? Would I perhaps have tried to lure him into some nefarious, anti-state enterprise? Wasn't that exactly how a professional spy would have behaved? And me: who was I? A young scholar, or something else perhaps? Was I perhaps a spy?

Perhaps not. Reviewing my case, the KGB officer might well have reached a different conclusion. Harrison couldn't possibly be a real spy. He's too young, too immature, too naïve, and far too untrained. He's not a spy, just an idiot.

Back in Moscow, I went on one more expedition. This was to a state farm just outside the city in the suburb of Lyubertsy. The atmosphere was business as usual: no food or drink, and no more lies, at least on my part.

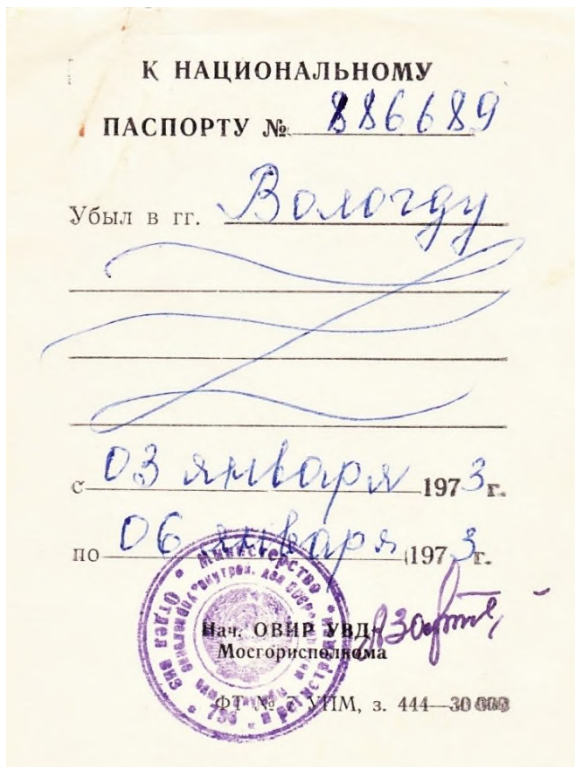
Journey to the North, and further North still

The New Year was a big holiday. Derek, Dorinda, Natasha, and I decided to go away, but where? We decided to go to the frozen wastes of the North. We checked a map. Vologda, 300 miles north of Moscow, came out top. This was for several reasons. Vologda was an ancient city, so remote that in the nineteenth century (Derek said) it was considered a suitable place

of exile, like Siberia. Stalin was sent there before the Revolution. It was one of the agricultural provinces I had studied. Now it was on a direct trainline from Moscow. Those were the things that decided us.

We applied for visas: we needed police permission to travel more than 40 kilometres from Moscow. Our first request, to go there over the New Year holiday, was rejected on some arbitrary excuse – something to do with the Finnish New Year. This was not uncommon, for such requests were often refused on grounds that were transparently made up. But we were offered permission if we would postpone by a few days. On that basis the visas were issued (19), and we took the train.

(19) *Vologda, January 1973: my visa*



Arriving in Vologda in January, we had six hours of daylight. In those six hours we tramped the streets and viewed the river and the churches, which were all closed (20, 21).

Just out of town on a bend in the river was the beautiful Spaso-Prilutskii monastery (22). This was Russian's northern forest region, where everything was once made of wood and stone. Returning to town, we passed a striking and very solid-looking timber house (23).

(20) Vologda, January 1973: the church of St Dmitrii Priluzhskii



Credit: Mark Harrison

(21) Vologda, January 1973: the cathedral of St Sophia



Credit: Mark Harrison

(22) Vologda, January 1973: the Spaso-Prilutskii monastery



Credit: Mark Harrison

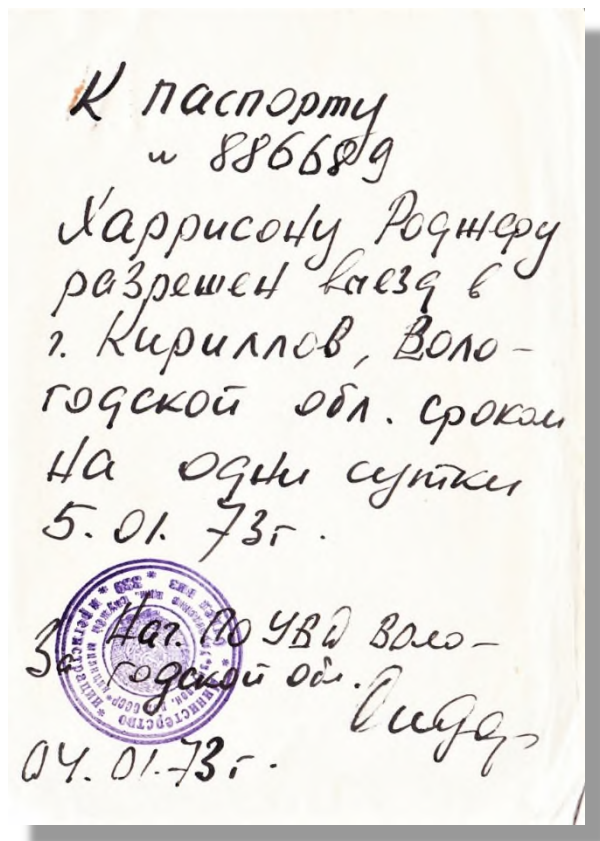
(23) Vologda, January 1973: a timber house



Credit: Mark Harrison

That was Vologda. By 3pm it was dusk, so we went back to our hotel. We had seen Vologda; what should we do tomorrow? We checked the map again. Another 80 miles north of Vologda lay the town of Kirillovo beside Belaye Ozero – the White Lake. At the edge of the lake stood the famous Kirillo-Belozerskii monastery, now a museum. Our visa did not allow for this. The proper procedure for obtaining permission to travel further would surely have required us first to return to Moscow and apply from there. Amazingly, the hotel and the local police defied our expectations. We were issued with bus tickets to continue our journey with handwritten police visas issued on the spot to make it legal (24).

(24) Kirillovo, January 1973: my visa



That was the end of the afternoon. It was dark. What was there to do in Vologda through the long evening in front of us? You could go home, if you had one. If not home, then where? One place was open, our hotel. What could you do there? You could eat and you could drink.

From late afternoon through late evening, we four visitors sat in the hotel restaurant. We ate and we drank. So too did the Vologda town elite. Prolonged eating and drinking turned out to take the assembled company different ways. Some got up and danced, climbed on the tables, and fooled around. Others sat primly at the table and maintained a serious standard of conversation. The division between the two groups went like this. If you were local, you were in the group that was fooling around on the tables. If you were conversing earnestly about history and society, you were with the visitors.

There was some interaction between the two groups, all good humoured. From time to time, the locals would come to check up on us to see just how short the English women's skirts were, how much we'd drunk, and whether we were still sober. The answer to the last question was yes, apparently. This had a further benefit. The ones who were manifestly drunk kept on being refused further alcohol. Not us: each time we ordered another bottle of vodka, one of the hotel staff would check our demeanour and sign off that we were not drunk yet. More vodka arrived. During that long evening we got through four bottles of vodka, or half a litre each. It's the most spirits I've ever drunk in one session.

We paid the price the next morning. We had to get up at 5am to catch the bus to Kirillovo. The darkness was total. The roads were icy and the bus was primitive and uncomfortable. I was not in too bad a state; the evening before, returning to my room very drunk, I had immediately thrown up in the bathroom. After that, I went to bed and slept soundly. Not everyone was so lucky. In the bus next morning, long before dawn, one of our number was discreetly sick into a borrowed handkerchief. It was completely dark, and the bus was being thrown from one side of the road to the other, so nobody noticed. Well, we hoped so.

Dawn broke. On the shores of the White Lake under a leaden sky, the monastery was a bewitching sight (25). We walked out onto the White Lake, which was vast and entirely frozen (26). We explored the monastery as the snow fell. The monastery was famous for its collection of wooden architecture – cabins, chapels, and windmills, built in the forests of the far North without the use of metal of any kind – no nails, screws, or braces (27, 28).

(25) Kirillovo, January 1973: the Kirillo-Belozerskii monastery



Credit: Mark Harrison.

As we explored the monastery in the falling snow, we realised that we had a companion, a gentleman who had travelled with us from Vologda in the bus and now circled us throughout the day, maintaining a hundred yards' distance. It did nothing to spoil the transcendental beauty of the scene or our good humour. On the contrary it reassured us: whatever happened, we would not be allowed to miss the bus home.

(26) Kirillovo, January 1973: Derek, Dorinda, and Natasha on the White Lake



Credit: Mark Harrison

(27) Kirillovo, January 1973: in the grounds of the Kirillo-Belozerskii monastery, Derek standing before a wooden chapel



Credit: Mark Harrison.

(28) Kirillovo, January 1973: in the grounds of the Kirillo-Belozerskii monastery, Dorinda, Derek, Mark, and Natasha (left to right) standing below the sales of a wooden windmill



Credit: my camera, but some friendly bystander must have taken the photo.

We lunched in the town cafeteria, where we were made welcome. According to the serving staff, we were the first foreigners to visit in more than a year.

Kolomenskoye

From Moscow we went on a few other journeys. I remember an outing to Yaroslavl' in the early autumn, and an enchanting trek through deep snow near Pereslavl'-Zaleskii. And, in January, to Kolomenskoye, my last outing with Yuliya, who had been my friend and guide to Moscow and all its history (29).

Kolomenskoye was an abandoned estate built on a wide curve in the Moscow river. In winter it was bare and beautiful (30, 31). I returned there in 2011. Forty years on, it had become a theme park: I could barely recognize it. Its street address today is *ulitsa Andropova* (Andropov Street). Yurii Andropov was the last party leader and head of state but one before Gorbachev, and the last to be a true believer in the old Bolshevik ideals of dictatorship, discipline, and sacrifice.

(29) Kolomenskoye, January 1973: Yuliya



Credit Mark Harrison

(30) Kolomenskoye, January 1973: the church of the Ascension



Credit: Mark Harrison

(31) Kolomenskoye, January 1973: the church of the Ascension, seen through an archway



Credit: Mark Harrison

Homecoming

It was time to leave. I booked a train ticket on the direct service from Moscow to London, three days and two nights via Warsaw and East Berlin, including a Channel crossing by boat from the Hook of Holland to Harwich. Out of interest, I added on a 24-hour layover in Warsaw – my only visit to another East European country under communism. I fixed up the necessary transit visas (32).

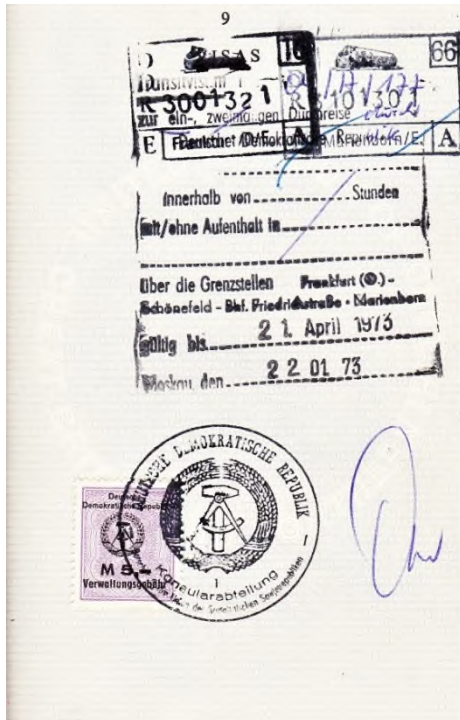
I was sad to leave but I was also tired and ready. It was a long journey and I would sit the whole way in a shared compartment. There was some small talk in the carriage, but the countryside was flat and monotonous, and the hours of daylight were few.

At the Soviet border, the whole train was raised off the track while the broad-gauge bogeys were removed and replaced by standard-gauge for the remainder of the journey. While this was done the carriages were inspected inside and out, under and over, by the Soviet border troops, looking for contraband manuscripts and Soviet citizens who for any reason did not want to live out the rest of their lives in the socialist paradise.

In Warsaw, I wandered around the old city, meticulously restored after the war. The only language I had in common with most Poles was Russian, which did little for friendship.

Berlin was shocking. The train rolled through the divided city in the middle of the night. I blinked at the sudden passage from the darkened East to the bright lights of West Berlin. We did not stop, and the lights went out again after a few minutes because West Berlin was an island, and the train rolled back over into the Eastern zone.

(32) Transit visas across Poland and East Germany, issued to Roger Marcus Harrison on 22 and 23 January 1973



As with the journey out, it was better to travel than to arrive. Adjusting to home life was hard. It was hard for me and I'm sure I did not make it easy for others. Time had not stood still while I was away. My friends and loved ones had as much stored up to tell me as I had to tell them. The Britain to which I returned was not the normal country of the anecdote; it was preoccupied with its own class struggle. Many of my friends were warriors for social justice, and I aspired to be one too. To some the Soviet Union was a distraction; to others, it was "my enemy's enemy" and therefore perhaps a friend. Their appetite for my stories was limited.

For weeks I dreamed about Moscow night after night. In my dreams Moscow was dark, confusing, and utterly strange; I was lost in it and could not find my way back. I saved myself by pouring everything into finishing my dissertation (Harrison 1974). Looking back, I am reminded of the words that Joan Littlewood (1967) put in the mouths of the soldiers returning from the Great War:

And when they ask us,
How dangerous it was,
Oh, we'll never tell them,
No, we'll never tell them:
We spent our pay in some café,
And fought wild women night and day,
'Twas the cushiest job
We ever had.

And when they ask us,
 And they're certainly going to ask us,
 The reason why we didn't win
 The Croix de Guerre,
 Oh, we'll never tell them,
 No, we'll never tell them
 There was a front,
 But damned if we knew where.

The Cold War was not the Great War, and we were not soldiers. In Moscow no rockets flew nor bullets winged. The hazards we faced were only moral. Still, I had been to the other side, and I had returned, and I couldn't explain it, even to myself. It changed my life. I spent the decades from then to now trying to understand where I had been and to come to terms with it. I am still trying. The only ones to whom I had nothing to explain were the former comrades-in-arms who had been there too, whose lives were also changed, just as surely as mine. So, I was not alone.

Nothing to explain? That's not entirely true. As I already mentioned, within a year of my return, I joined the Communist Party of Great Britain. I was an active member – a “card carrying communist” – for around a decade. After that I had a family and that came first. I did not turn in my party card until 1991.

Joining the Party took a lot of explaining, to myself and to others. Quite a few people were a little shocked, most of all my friends in Moscow, who did not break with me and indulged me (I think) because they had decided I was a good person although a little soft in the head. In my own country I considered myself a socialist, and in the Communist Party that I joined I found much to admire and many people for whom I could have deep respect. There were others that I found less likeable, but I had expected that. Rather than dwell on it here, I'll paste in a few lines from something else I once wrote (see Appendix 3, “Capitalism and communism”):

I had lived and studied in Moscow; I knew it was a police state and didn't much like it, although there were other things I was ready to admire. But the voices from the Soviet bloc that I listened to were the Czechoslovak and Polish reformers (some of them now exiled to Britain) and, in the Soviet Union, democratic Marxist dissenters like Roy Medvedev. This was the now forgotten era of Eurocommunism which germinated in the 1960s and blossomed briefly during the 1970s. Italian and Spanish communists put forward the daring view that Soviet socialism had something missing from its makeup. The Russian Revolution of 1917, although not a mistake, had driven a wedge between democracy and socialism. In Britain some communists, but by no means all, took this up. It was our job to put democracy and socialism back together. (We failed.)

V. The Cold War from both sides

Was I a spy?

Our Russian friends showed us how life was lived at the street level. They also taught us discretion. The scholar Geoffrey Hosking (2013: 21) has written:

Those of us who recall Soviet life from the 1960s onwards will know how much trust and distrust meant at least to intellectuals and the employees of universities and research institutes. In order to meet people not envisaged in one's official study plan, one had to arrange one's life according to semi-conspiratorial routines. One should not tell anyone whom one was meeting; to ask friends about their friends was highly improper, guaranteed to arouse distrust. I was exhorted only to phone friends from street telephone booths, never from the university telephones which, it was assumed, were being monitored by the KGB. Telephone conversations should be brief and to the point, and contain a minimum of information . . . Such precautions might be thought paranoid. In fact, however, they were fully justified.

My experience was exactly that. In case it seems to anyone that I, or we, were unduly suspicious, I'll add a few things, based on knowledge that I gained much later from time spent working with archived KGB documentation from the Baltic republics that escaped from Soviet domination when communism collapsed. In the early 1970s, at the time I studied in Moscow, we had no idea of any of this stuff, so of course we ourselves were quite uncertain how suspicious we should be, and we earnestly debated the extent to which our fears were just Cold War paranoia. But KGB documents of that period show that the KGB regarded all foreigners, and especially students, without exception, as potential spies.

"Are you a spy?" Sheila Fitzpatrick (2010) was asked during her time as an exchange student. At the time, I was quite sure that I was not a spy. Many years later, I began to wonder. Perhaps my idea of a spy or foreign agent was too narrow when compared to the viewpoint of the Soviet party leaders and the KGB. In the West, we thought of spies as professional safe-crackers and assassins like George Smiley or James Bond. We were not safe-crackers or assassins. But we might have been something else that did fit within the very broad Soviet concept of espionage.

After plots and leaks, what the Soviet rulers feared most was the import and dissemination of foreign ideas, values, fashions, and habits that might unsettle or disrupt the good order of Soviet society. The good Soviet citizen was supposed to respond to the plans and directives of the party, and nothing else. The Soviet concept of espionage simply flipped

this coin. Anything that unsettled the citizens or led them away from the party's vision served the interests of the foreign adversary. Those who deliberately worked to that end were spies. Disruption was something that we students could easily bring about. When we showed off our western fashions, or defended our freedoms, or asked provocative questions about Soviet history, or discussed Solzhenitsyn with our friends, was this not the work of agents of influence? When we did it, whose instructions did we follow? We might be spies, and therefore the KGB watched us.

How did they watch us? As we now know, there were many informers in Soviet society, but they were not evenly spread around. Rather, the KGB focused its recruitment on the places where young, educated people gathered, such as schools and colleges. In Soviet Lithuania in the 1960s the density of informers amongst the working population as a whole was less than one per hundred. But in the Lithuanian capital Vilnius, among every 100 employees of the state conservatory could be found 7 informers; at the university, there were 8 to 9; at the teacher training college, 11; and at the art college, 21 (Harrison and Zaksauskienė 2016: 143). This was natural: it was exactly young, educated people who needed to be watched most intently because they were most susceptible to ideological disruption and most exposed to dangerous foreign influences.

We were foreigners, and we were young and educated. Those who were exposed to us, with whom we lived, studied, and made friends were young and educated. It would be utterly unsurprising to find that the environment of foreign exchange students was saturated by informers.

Was it paranoia on the Soviet side? Today when I discuss Soviet official attitudes to western students, western literature, and western ideas, I often hear that the Soviet authorities were paranoid, in other words, that they were frightened of nothing, or that they were suspicious to the point of absurdity. I think that is wrong. They were right to be suspicious. It was only unremitting vigilance that protected their power. When they let their guard down, everything collapsed.

A perfect illustration is the story of the American historian Sergei Zhuk, who began life in Soviet Ukraine. He told me: he was a patriotic young man, who happened to love the Beatles and other Western bands of that era. It was hard to get access to their music; only a few were released in bootleg versions on Soviet labels. Sergei would stay up at night when the atmospherics were right for Western radio signals to get past the Soviet jamming stations, waiting for the chance to catch their music on tape. This was strictly against the norms of conduct of a loyal citizen, but what harm could it do? The answer is that the harm was extremely serious: while listening to the Voice of America, waiting for some band or other to play, Sergei also heard about many other things, such as the writings of Alexander Solzhenitsyn about the Gulag archipelago. As a result, he was infected by Western ideas and values and he became a critic

of Soviet reality. (The same story appears, but with fuller cultural and biographical context, in Zhuk 2018: 200).

Sergei's story shows the KGB was right to respond sharply to the most petty misdemeanours and minor transgressions and to intervene at the first signs in order to nip them in the bud. Even such an insignificant step as listening to the Beatles on Western radio could be a precursor to treason.

Anniversaries

A few weeks after we arrived, there was an important anniversary, the 55th anniversary of the Bolshevik Revolution in October 1917. The officially sanctioned title of that event was "The Great October Socialist Revolution." This distinguished it from the "bourgeois" revolution that overthrew the Russian monarchy in February of the same year, defined its class character, and fixed its world-historic importance. In the days before the anniversary, our leader Patrick Chekhov (Miles) received a request from the foreign department: please would the British students submit a message to be published on the university noticeboards to mark the occasion? We conferred and wrote a short text, something like:

The British exchange students of Moscow University congratulate the Soviet people on the anniversary of the October Revolution.

Our words were carefully chosen. The Revolution had certainly happened in October. But we were not sure if it was truly Great or really Socialist, so we left those words out.

It turned out that our words fell short. A message came back: please would we reinstate the missing words, giving the event its proper title and due significance? We discussed the matter anxiously. We understood that offence would be caused if we refused to fall in line. Other problems might follow. We were hostages to the situation. We filled in the missing words. Our hosts were happy.

The important anniversaries were public holidays. There were parades and celebrations, but we were not invited. Another anniversary came soon after Revolution Day. This was the 70th anniversary of the day the USSR was constituted in 1922. Until then the country had been called the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic ("Soviet Russia"), but once it had reabsorbed Ukraine and the Trans-Caucasus, the country needed a new name – the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics ("Soviet Union").

Here's the main thing I remember about the anniversary. Late one dark winter evening a few days beforehand, I came out of the main doors of the Lenin Library to be transfixed by a surreal vision, a giant face that floated with misty brilliance high up in the clouds over the Kremlin. It was the head of Lenin! There was no body, however. After a few minutes I made out the technology: I was looking at a vast banner, suspended from

a barrage balloon that was barely visible in the darkness above. The banner shone in the beam of a searchlight controlled by a military unit positioned at the far end of the Manezhnaya, to which the balloon was tethered by an invisible cable.

Every such anniversary, major and minor, was the subject of intense preparation and management by the KGB. It was essential that anniversaries went smoothly, free of disruption by naysayers and cynics, providing a clear space for citizens to demonstrate their loyalty and enthusiasm for the regime. Of this, however, we knew absolutely nothing.

A life in Soviet science

Steve Wheatcroft had been on the British-Soviet exchange in the year before me. During the autumn he revisited Moscow and we met for the first time. He and I turned out to have many common interests, although 45 years would go by before we finally wrote something together.

It must have been through Steve or Judith that I met Leon and Ira Bell. A Soviet scientist, Leon turned out to speak fluent English with a strong American accent. One afternoon, he told Steve and me his fascinating story. While I recall few details from that time, I have been helped by Jane Gatrell, whose family were old friends of the Bells. Her information is drawn from Leon's memoir, which is in her possession.

Leon's father, Nathan Bell, was born in Russia. He left for the United States in 1910. By 1931, married with three children, he was working in an insurance office. In that year he returned to the Soviet Union to help build socialism. In Moscow he taught English. After a year, he sent for his wife and three children, and they joined him in Moscow. Leon, the middle child, was then aged 13. Leon was angry to be uprooted from his home and his friends – but he was just a child. What could he do?

In 1938, along with many other foreigners, Nathan was arrested as an "enemy of the people." He was sent to Kzyl Orda in Kazakhstan, where he remained in exile until his death (of heart disease) in 1943. Leon and his younger brother, Davie, being children of a supposed traitor, now faced great obstacles in obtaining access to education and work. By sheer determination and persistence, Leon was eventually accepted as a physics student at Moscow University, but he remained under a shadow.

Oddly enough, the stigma saved Leon's life. He was not allowed to join the Komsomol (communist youth league) because of his family background. In the autumn of 1941, as the German Army approached Moscow, the party sought student volunteers for the defence of the capital. Leon was rejected. Had he been accepted he would most likely have been killed, for the volunteer militia was untrained and ill-equipped and suffered appalling casualties. Later he wrote that the rejection "sentenced me to live." He added: "Some of the boys did survive and returned to their studies, but not many."

The war was won, and Leon was accepted as a doctoral student in nuclear physics at the Lebedev Physics Institute. In 1947, preparing to

write his doctoral dissertation, he was expelled from the institute. The Cold War was under way. The Soviet effort to build an atomic bomb was in full swing. With his American antecedents and “contacts with foreigners” (he was also Jewish, which surely didn’t help), Leon was classified as a security risk. He had to change his research field to biophysics, in which he eventually acquired a worldwide reputation.

The druzhina

An unpleasant aspect of life in Moscow University was the periodic appearance of the *druzhinniki*. These were volunteer detachments of young people – usually, young men with a bullying air – who wore red armbands and pushed people around under the pretext of enforcing public order. From time to time they would show up at choke points in the Moscow University building and demand everyone’s ID. One wished to ignore them, but this was not possible, because they had powers of citizen’s arrest. The authorities were concerned about outside elements and criminal types getting into the building and hiding out in the vast community of some 15,000 residents, and the *druzhinniki* were employed to root them out.

It was not that difficult to get into the building. You were supposed to show your pass to an old lady sitting in an outhouse on the perimeter. At busy times, the lines built up. At such times the level of scrutiny dropped and it was possible to put on a show of assurance and slip through in the crowd. I knew this and put it into practice a few years later when I revisited Moscow with the Oxford girlfriend from my time as an exchange student. She had never fully believed my account of the awfulness of the Zona V cafeteria. The only way to prove it was to get her into the building. We sneaked through the checkpoint in a crowd, and down into the basement cafeteria, where we joined the backward-moving queue.

Who were the informers?

It was rumoured that a couple of Russians in our circle of acquaintance were informers. One was the “neighbour” of one of us Brits. Tatyana (not her real name), ethnically Russian, was the daughter of a senior academic in one of the national minority republics. She, like us, was a graduate student; she had some kind of research interest in British politics. Tatyana also had a younger brother who was an undergraduate. As I heard, the mother had set the brother and sister to keep tabs on each other and write regular reports home – good Soviet practice.

Tatyana was very interested in the comings and goings of the British students, who quickly learned to tell her nothing. She was interested in me and she proposed a trade: for half an hour a week, I would teach her to read English, and for half an hour in return she would teach me to talk in Russian. We met a few times. She would bring a copy of the *Morning Star*, which was the only readily available English-language reading matter with a focus on current affairs. Everything went well until we chanced on

a news item about Irish feminists who had locked themselves in the men's toilets of the Irish Parliament building in Dublin as a protest against the lack of contraceptive means in the Irish Republic. Tatyana, like many young Russian women at that time, had almost no knowledge of sexual matters and was extremely prudish. Our lessons came to a sudden end.

The general suspicions about Tatyana were confirmed afterwards in a rather odd way. I had little contact with her after the end of language classes, and none at all after I left Moscow. Several years went by. I became a junior lecturer at the University of Warwick. I applied for a return trip to Moscow to do some more research and was accepted. In the weeks before I travelled, a postcard arrived from Tatyana. The postcard was correctly addressed to me at my work address and it was written in surprisingly affectionate terms. Tatyana had not forgotten me; she remembered me with kind feelings. Perhaps, in the remote possibility that I might find myself in Moscow at any point in the future, I would like to look her up? And an address and a phone number. It was very unconvincing. Poor tradecraft, I thought, even at that time.

Another young woman who hung around us was Katya (again, not her real name). We all found her sweet and likeable. She took me to visit a stately home in the suburbs and then back to her communal apartment. That was an experience in itself: the front door was under constant surveillance by a little old lady of Bolshevik rectitude. She said to me: "You're not one of us." Katya told her I was an Estonian priest. Being a priest explained my long hair and beard, and being an Estonian explained my bad Russian.

Katya was uncovered by another of the British students when a photograph of one of us fell from her purse. She claimed to have been given it, but none of us had given it to her. So, probably she was an informer. It might have been easy for the KGB to recruit her because she was vulnerable to pressure; she was a single mother, having had a child with a foreign student – or that is what I heard.

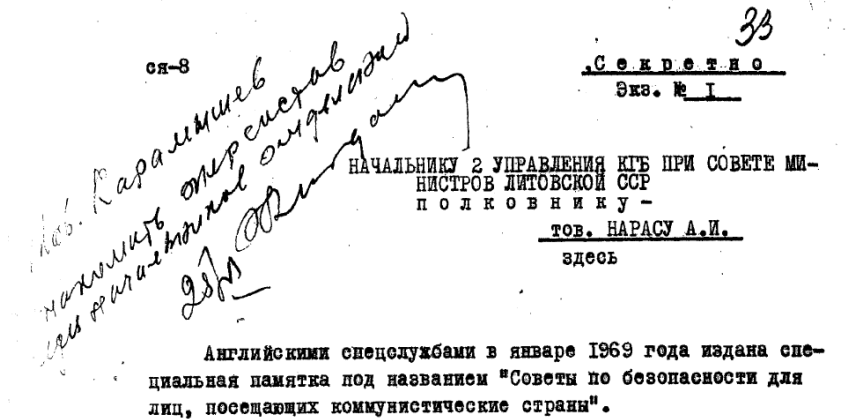
The Foreign Office and its advice

Earlier I mentioned that, before we travelled out to Moscow in 1972, we attended a briefing at the Foreign Office. We were able to travel only because of an intergovernmental treaty and the exchange was administered by the governments on each side, so it was inevitable that our own government would have advice for us. As I mentioned, the advice we received was essentially as follows: Traveling to communist countries, and especially the Soviet Union, we were likely to meet people who had been commissioned to keep tabs on us. They would be interested in any personal weaknesses that might help to trap us. For most there would be little or no risk but it was a good idea to behave legally and sensibly. In the worst case there might be an attempt to compromise us by means of alcohol, drugs, or sex. This might be a prelude to recruitment as an informer or spy by means of blackmail or intimidation. If that happened,

the best thing was to go straight to the embassy; the staff would do its best to extract us safely. We listened, but we wondered whether this wasn't just part of the Cold War, which had nothing to do with us.

Forty years later, I came across an archived memorandum (33) that was circulated around the republican KGB of Soviet Lithuania in the summer of 1969 – just three years before my own visit. The report began with a problem: the British security service – MI6, I suppose – had issued new “advice on security for persons visiting communist countries” (for background see Harrison 2016: 163–183).

(33) *To Lithuania KGB counterintelligence chief, colonel Naras A. I. (24 June 1969)*



Source: Hoover/LYA, K-1/3/673: 33–38 (from Lithuania KGB “secret” department chief, Lt.-Col. Zenyakin A.).

The KGB summarized the new advice from MI6: Travelling to communist countries, and especially the Soviet Union, you were likely to meet people who had been commissioned to keep tabs on you. They would be interested in any personal weaknesses that might help to trap you. For most there would be little or no risk but it was a good idea to behave legally and sensibly. In the worst case there might be an attempt to compromise you by means of alcohol, drugs, or sex. This might be a prelude to recruitment as an informer or spy by means of blackmail or intimidation. If that happened, the best thing was to go straight to the embassy; the staff would do its best to extract you safely.

It sounded familiar. Reading down the page, I began to wonder how the report would end. With a denial? With indignation? No. Lithuania KGB “secret” department chief Lt.-Col. Zenyakin concluded (34):

(34) To Lithuania KGB counterintelligence chief, colonel Naras A. I. (June 24, 1969)

В работе с эмигрантами и иностранцами нужно учитывать факт знания ими данной статьи и некоторых методов работы советской разведки и контрразведки.

Сообщается для сведения.

НАЧАЛЬНИК I ОТДЕЛА КГБ ПРИ СМ ЛИТОВСКОЙ ССР
П О Л К О В Н И К -

А. Венякин
(А.ВЕНЯКИН)

"24" июня 1969 года

№ I/1595

Source: as (33).

"When working with emigrants and foreigners, we will need to take into account the fact that they have knowledge . . . of some of the methods of work of Soviet intelligence and counterintelligence."

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Appendix 1. The mushroom incident

This column was first published as “The Mushroom Incident: Expedition to the USSR, 1964” on Mark Harrison’s Blog at https://blogs.warwick.ac.uk/markharrison/entry/the_mushroom_incident/ on 30 December 2018.

My parents said I’d better go. A letter from my boarding school advised them that in the summer I could travel with my class mates, under the supervision of a teacher, across Scandinavia to Finland and over the Soviet frontier to Leningrad and Moscow. The return journey would take three weeks. The cost was £70, which may not sound like much, but this was 1964 and the purchasing power of that sum would be between £1,000 and £1,500 in today’s money. I was lucky they could afford it.

The whole business was an unusual experience for a British teenager, and it had a marked effect on my life. This is how it came about.

In those days you could take O-levels twice a year, in December and June. (O-levels were the forerunner of the GCSE.) My French class had taken the exam early, in December, and somebody’s rules obliged us to continue to learn a foreign language until the school year ended in July. In those six months our teacher, Richard Armstrong, introduced us to the first rudiments of the Russian language: a new script, the pronouns and a few verbs, and some basic greetings. We began to read stories by Pushkin and Lermontov.

The class was most amused by the Russian vowel ы (transliterated to English as the letter y). “I was” in Russian is spoken “ya byl.” My class included Hugh Beale, later a distinguished legal scholar, whose parental home was in Edgbaston in Birmingham. We decided that the easiest way to the correct rendering of “byl” was to speak Hugh’s family name with what passed among us for a strong Birmingham accent, and we all did this frequently and loudly, whether required to or not. Such was the dog-eat-dog humour of our community.

We set off in a people-carrier of the day, a Commer space van. As I recall there were half a dozen of us schoolboys and three drivers: Richard Armstrong, our leader; a friend of his, of a similar age; and a younger adult, a recent former pupil, much admired for his Minolta 16mm spy camera (that’s what we called it) (35). I had the family camera, something like a Kodak Instamatic. I took some pictures, or so I thought, but when the film was processed later there was nothing on it. So I have no photographic mementoes.

We took a ferry across the North Sea from Newcastle to Gothenburg. The weather was blowy and the seas were enough to unsettle the inexperienced stomach. I was queasy but not sick. I looked out to sea on the windward side of the lower deck. Above me on the upper deck, another passenger did the same – and threw up into the wind. The

products ended up in my hair. In the ship's refectory I discovered Scandinavian brown cheese and ate so much of it that to this day I have never wanted to try it again.

(35) *The Minolta 16 (1960)*



Credit: John Kratz at <https://www.flickr.com/photos/kratz/890884358/in/set-72157600855940068/>.

We drove from Gothenburg to Stockholm. It was Scandinavian noir: empty roads and dark woods.

We took another ferry from Stockholm to the Finnish port of Turku overnight. The boat pitched and yawed in heavy seas (or so we thought). The passengers threw up everywhere. No one slept. By dawn the sea was a flat calm, and the vessel glided into port through an archipelago of green islets in a blue sea lit mistily by the rising sun.

We travelled by road from Turku to Leningrad, crossing the border at Vyborg. At the border, the guards went through our baggage item by item, giving special attention to books. We all brought paperbacks to read and we shared them round. Among them was Ian Fleming's *From Russia With Love*, first published in 1957, which had just been made into a film. But James Bond's reputation had not yet reached Russia. The guards were intrigued by the title, which they spelled out carefully. They considered briefly, decided the book must be harmless, and returned it to us wreathed in smiles.

Our route across Soviet territory and all our stopping places were pre-booked and pre-approved; our visas required us to stick to it and not deviate by a day or a kilometre. We stayed in campsites near the major towns; these were well set up and crowded. The weather was fabulous: dry, sunny, and hot. Unlike home, the temperature did not fall when the sun went down, so the evenings were warm and convivial. Our first night in the Soviet Union was spent in a large tent; we slept on wooden bunks. In the late evening, harsh male voices were heard approaching, apparently going from tent to tent; perhaps they were looking for

unoccupied spaces. When they came to us, they barked: “Male or female?” Richard Armstrong responded in a high, quavering voice: “Ne znayu” (I don’t know). There was a puzzled silence; the voices went away.

Of Leningrad I remember the Neva embankment and the golden needle of St Isaac’s Cathedral, majestic in the sunshine. Probably we went to the Hermitage and did stuff like that.

We journeyed across Russia. By day, we drove down long straight roads through endless pine forests. There was little traffic, mostly lumbering trucks. We overtook them with difficulty because the driver of our British vehicle sat on the wrong side for driving on the right. The driver asked: “mozhno?” (May I?) The front seat passenger, with better forward vision, would reply: “mozhno!” (You may!) At night, a problem was that Soviet vehicles did not have the facility to dip their main beams, which were dazzling. In traffic they drove on sidelights, even on unlit roads, which made them barely visible. Driving on dipped beams, we infuriated them, so that they flashed us repeatedly until we submitted and went over to sidelights only.

(36) The Kremlin at Novgorod



Credit: unknown artist.

In every town and settlement that we passed through, we saw party banners and slogans. Most memorable was “Miru mir” (Peace to the World), which we endlessly repeated to each other. In Novgorod we saw our first Kremlin. This was Great Novgorod on the Volkhov River – not the better-known Nizhnii Novgorod, which lay far to the East on the Volga. I learned that every town of any significance has a Kremlin (fortress). I bought a print of the Kremlin at Novgorod for my parents, which I still have (36).

Nearing Moscow, we visited the Tchaikovsky museum in the small town of Klin. This led to "the Mushroom Incident, or, 'How we Nearly got Sent to Siberia all because of Mr Armstrong's Insistence on Taking Pictures of Things he Shouldn't,'" as related anonymously, a few weeks later, in the columns of my school magazine (*The Leys Fortnightly*, 23 October 1964, pp. 29-31). I defer to the narrator of that account; he's bound to have captured the details better than I can more than half a century later:

On the way to Moscow we gave a man and a basket of mushrooms a lift into a town with the sinister name of Klin.

After all that time I still recall that the man was uncomfortable in our company. This was hardly surprising. Most likely he was taking what he had gathered in the woods to sell in the town market. When we picked him up, he probably had no clue that he'd accepted a lift from a bunch of foreigners. By sitting down with us he was enjoying "unauthorised contact with foreigners," a violation of the government's code of conduct for Soviet citizens in the regions where tourists were permitted. This was a misdemeanour, if not a crime. The trouble that ensued was inevitable:

As a memento, Mr Armstrong took a photo of him. At our next stop, Tchaikovsky's house, Mr Armstrong was interviewed by two secret policemen who had been told by an upright Russian tovarisch that we had taken a photograph of a strategic object, which we afterwards concluded to be a few electricity pylons. The police expressed their desire to have the film, which Mr Armstrong in his characteristically pleasant manner declined to give them, and so we eventually went off with another tale to tell.

We were told (I recollect) that the farmer had also been detained, and Richard Armstrong bravely protested against this, but of course I did not witness his conversation with the police.

We made it to Moscow and Red Square. On the approach to Red Square we made an illegal turn, were stopped, paid a fine, and blew a tire. I had played with Meccano as a child, but I had no other mechanical knowledge or experience, and I was physically lazy, so I took no part in the repair. We visited Red Square, the Lenin Mausoleum, and GUM, the State Universal Store. I remember the summer heat and cloudless blue of the sky. I also remember the queues for everything. In GUM I waited in line to buy a red Young Pioneer scarf. Did I buy a balalaika? Maybe. Some of us did, and I might have been one of them. If so, it was never played, but hung around at home for a few years. Ordinary people were friendly and curious, I guess, but I was a bit of a Young Sheldon. If anybody spoke to me, I was probably scared to death. I do remember someone tried to buy the jeans I was wearing. I'm pretty sure they were my only trousers, so I

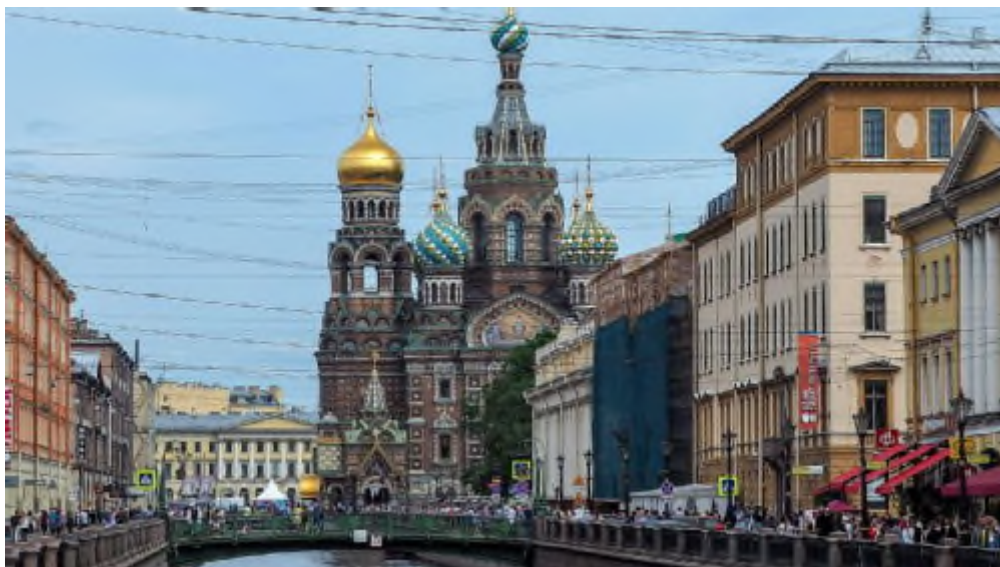
have no idea what I was expected to do on selling them, but I didn't. The official reporter notes that, in Moscow and Leningrad alike:

We were often confronted by children demanding ball-point pens, chewing gum and stamps in return for badges often depicting Lenin or the Heroes of the Cosmos. Once two of our members were confronted by a Russian when the conversation went as follows: "English?" – "Yes, English." Pause. "Beatles?" – "Yes, Beatles!"

Food and drink loomed large in our travel experience. Food: I discovered the indispensable vegetable of Soviet times – pickled cabbage. Drink: at that time the Soviet consumer was just beginning to thirst for Coca Cola. What they got was street vending machines that dispensed sweet fizzy sodas of no particular flavour. A glass, chained to the machine for everyone to drink from, was supposed to be washed between users, but rarely was. We all used it, and as far as I know we suffered no harm.

From Moscow, we turned back to the West. As we drew near to Leningrad, we made our only deviation from the permitted route: Richard Armstrong and one or two others paid a clandestine visit to the suburban home of an Orthodox priest of his acquaintance (how the acquaintance arose I never found out). Of our return visit to Leningrad I remember only coming across the Church of the Saviour on the Spilled Blood, built on the spot where Alexander II was assassinated in 1881. The church was not in the splendid condition of today, which you can see in a photo (37) that I took of it in 2017.

(37) Church of the Saviour on the Spilled Blood



Credit: Mark Harrison

In 1964 the church was in a sorry state, in use as a warehouse and closed to visitors.

The Soviet highway system was not in such good shape either. Near the border, after 1,500 kilometres of ruts and potholes, our faithful Commer van ran into the ground. A rear spring collapsed. One of us got underneath and counted the number of steel leaves in the spring to compare with a nearby Soviet vehicle of comparable size. Ours had seven leaves; the Soviet equivalent was thirteen, so roughly twice as many.

At last we said farewell to the Soviet Union. Driving slowly and with great care, we limped our way to the Soviet border. Nearing the border, we stopped for a roadside comfort break. This was understood to be the right way to say good bye to Soviet rule. At the border we held our breath. After inspection, we were waved through to Finland and freedom.

From Finland we returned to the UK in comfort, by rail and boat. No doubt there was some extra expense, of which I knew nothing. In Oslo I strolled around the harbour and visited the Vasa, a wooden warship recently recovered from the waters of the bay. Our van, now barely drivable, was emptied of boys and baggage, and one of our drivers was detached from the party to bring it home.

There were lasting consequences, for me at least. Judged on appearances, I returned home safely and without consequences. Inside me, though I did not know it yet, something had changed. I had contracted an incurable infection: a fascination with Russia that would never leave me.

I'll finish with Richard Armstrong. He was one of the few teachers that seemed to me to be a genuinely kind person. He was slightly built with a sharp, intelligent face. He did not seem to have any particular age; I suppose he was in his thirties. He was physically tough; he helped to establish and coach the school rowing club and to lead school expeditions into the wilderness. His manner was normally gentle and good humoured; he was sharp only in the face of rudeness. He did not shape my way of thinking about the world, but his Russian class and the adventure that he made for us triggered my interest in Russia and set the course of my research for life.

Appendix 2. Who decides what is wrong?

I submitted the following report to the British Council, my sponsor in Moscow, in early 1973, following my return to England. I kept a copy, of which this is a cleaned and corrected OCR version. I reproduce the original format as closely as possible.

VISIT TO A KOLKHOZ

Mark Harrison
Private –
please do not quote
etc.

These are notes which I made during and shortly after a visit to the kolkhoz "Semiluksky", Semiluksky raion, Voronezh oblast' on 15th December, 1972. The visit was arranged through the Economics Faculty of MGU, kafedra of the History of the National Economy and of Economic Thought, where I was studying at the time. I had expressed the wish to see something concrete of the achievements of Soviet agriculture, and it had been agreed with my supervisor (a) that I should visit the town and university of Voronezh, and a kolkhoz in the oblast', and (b) that later I should visit a sovkhos of Moscow oblast'. We chose Voronezh for the first visit because it was the centre of an area which before the 1930s had been marked by extreme rural backwardness; now it is an area of agricultural and industrial progress, and Voronezh State University is one of the leading universities of the Soviet Union.

I was accompanied by an aspirant from my kafedra in MCIU. He was called Boris; his given duties were to help out my unreliable command of the Russian language and social graces (although he spoke scarcely a word of English). In Voronezh we were joined by a temporarily disengaged junior lecturer, Vadim Arkad'evich, of the preparatory faculty for foreign students of Voronezh State University. These two were my constant companions for the six days which I spent in Voronezh.

The three of us spent a single day, from eleven in the morning to eleven at night, on the kolkhoz; I had originally hoped for more, but found twelve hours interesting – and exhausting – enough. I seemed to have the status of a guest of honour. The entire management of the farm (the chairman, deputy chairman, editor of the farm newspaper and the chief economist, together with some lesser persons) devoted their day to me, and I was lavishly wined and dined. I was taken by car on a lengthy conducted tour of the farm, and introduced to many of the farm workers. In addition we had several hours of discussion, which were partly based on the rough programme of inquiry which is appended here; afterwards some of the points raised were pursued by my companions.

ECONOMICS OF THE KOLKHOZ

1. Organisation of labour.

The kolkhoz has a labour-force of about 900 men and women, divided into six brigades with relatively specialised activities.

I asked about individual plots (lichnye uchastki). The kolkhozniki have almost completely abandoned farming their individual plots (one peasant I met said he had 0.3 hectares).

This is because (a) the relative payment of labour (oplata odnogo rabochego dnnya?) is greater in the collective than on individual plots, hence individual-plot farming fails the relative profitability test; (b) the kolkhoznik may satisfy all his needs from working on the kolkhoz, and when he gets home in the evening he prefers leisure to working to enlarge his gross income on his individual plot (leisure preference); (c) the kolkhoz is prigorodnyi (located around the village of Semiluki, only 15 km. from Voronezh), and its main specialisation is vegetables. Hence, kolkhozniki may buy tomatoes, potatoes, cucumbers and so forth from the kolkhoz (15% of vegetable production is consumed by the workers themselves). If this were not so, i.e. if the kolkhoz were distant from the urban market and had a more land-extensive specialisation, it would not grow its own vegetables and the supply of vegetables from the distant urban centre would likely be costly and uncertain. Under these circumstances, the "tendency towards contraction of individual-plot farming" would be weakened, because the peasants would want to grow their own vegetables.

Further enquiry of the newspaper editor prompted him to observe that a psychological or moral change was also involved in the move away from individual plots.

As it is, peasants either use their plots to grow flowers or whatever they want; or the land, being collective and not private property, may be appropriated by the kolkhoz, or reallocated to another household. When I referred to individual plots as "private" (chastnye) I was firmly corrected; the land is not private property, but is simply utilised on an individual basis. (Conversations with the newspaper editor and deputy chairman)

Distribution of labour through the year. The market-gardening (sadovodcheskii) brigade is fully employed the year round. Women employed in field cultivation in summer are employed in winter feeding livestock. Of the men, perhaps 10% spend the winter working near Voronezh in a vegetable storage plant, to make up their working days per year. This example of migrant by-employment (otkhozhie zarabotki) is carried out as a collective initiative (po initsiativu kolkhoza). In winter the mechanics are fully employed with repairs and servicing of machinery. (Chairman)

2. Organisation of capital.

The abolition of MTS occurred in due course of the planned development of agriculture, and was very useful, because under the MTS regime the farm couldn't get enough tractor drivers. This was particularly significant considering the kolkhoz "Semiluksky" was served by no less than four MTS while others had none. Their abolition had the advantage of unifying and centralising farm administration – there was now a edinyi khozyain. (Chairman)

3. Farm profitability.

In Soviet terms the farm was a "millionaire", its net income (chisty dokhod) exceeding two million roubles per year. The rate of rentabl'nost' exceeds 90%. This "profitability" is measured by Marxian $s/(c+v)$, chistvi dokhod divided by

sebestoimost' (cost of production including labour), i.e. profit margin or profit per unit output.

4. Production problem-solving and decision-making.

Of the relative roles of the Ministry of Agriculture of the USSR, party organisations and local democratic organisations in production decisions, solving production problems and introducing new techniques, I was barely able to get a sensible answer, probably having asked the wrong questions. What I heard was as follows.

- (a) The basic plan is the FYP. We also look continually to the resolutions of the XXIV Congress of the CPSU. (Newspaper editor)
- (b) Planning occurs as an activity of all the different levels, and in the lowest levels as in the highest is a creative activity. (Newspaper editor)
- (c) The role of party organisations in this creative activity is extremely important. The komsomol is the "vanguard of youth" (peredovoi otryad molodezhi). (Chairman)
- (d) In the creative activities of planning of production and of production alike, moral incentives are all-important, and are stronger than the rouble. After the bad harvest of 1972, a successful (by implication) contest (sorevnovanie) was organised, in which the prize was – a bunch of flowers. In addition, the carrot of pochetnye gramoty (certificates of honour) and the titles of udarnik kommunisticheskogo truda and zasluzhennyi kolkhoznik (the latter being for long and faithful service) are extremely potent moral incentives. (Chairman and newspaper editor)
- (e) However until we achieve communism we cannot do without material stimulus to labour [note for example the material privileges attached to pochetnye gramoty, in the form of bonuses, longer holidays and holidays at the kolkhoz rest-home, higher pensions and so forth, free provision of various services such as electricity and so forth]. Hence unequal incomes in Soviet society. (Supper conversation with the chairman, newspaper editor and Boris)
- (f) Khozaschet was introduced in 1964, and is appropriate to the status of the kolkhoz as an independent enterprise. (Economist)
- (g) Regarding investment and the introduction of new techniques: the obshchii sobranie kolkhoza (general meeting) is the sovereign authority of the collective. In the case of the new dairy complex (molochnyi kompleks), (a) the need for raising milk sales to the state became apparent, (b) a number of variants were presented to the sobranie of methods of doing this, (c) the sobranie chose from these variants the molochnyi kompleks now under construction. (Chairman) Thus a democratic choice would appear to have been made from a number of alternatives. However, as Boris said, such a choice is simply a matter for the criteria of khozaschet. Silence. (Economist)

- (h) There are credit loans from the state to finance innovation.
- (i) An important factor in the introduction of new techniques is the availability in the farm library of current literature, Soviet, East European and Western, on the subject.

LIFE OF THE KOLKHOZNIKI

1. Demographic features.

No easily available data on demographic changes during the existence of the kolkhoz.

2. Mobility of the farm population.

- (a) On the question of mobility, especially between town and country, there is roughly a stable korennoe naselenie (population native to the farm). Most people are born, live and die on the kolkhoz. (The company) This proposition was then contradicted, by the two following.
- (b) There is gross but no net mobility between town and country. (The company) Departures are cancelled out by returnees, and those who leave say they want to come back. (Chairman)
- (c) There is a fundamental law of industrialisation whereby industrial employment grows and rural employment falls. This explains the movement to the towns of any part of the population of the kolkhoz. After all in the U.K. only 4 of the population remains on the land. (Newspaper editor)

These contradictory statements may be explained as a defensive reaction against my presumed intention to prove that life in the country was miserable materially and culturally, and that in consequence peasants, especially young people, were leaving the kolkhoz in droves to get away to the towns. Therefore they desired to show that (a) no one was leaving the kolkhoz, (b) if they were it was counterbalanced by a reverse movement, (c) that if there was a net loss it could be explained by the normal evolution of an industrialising and progressive economy.

In fact, between 1961 and 1970 the trend of total working population. had been as follows:

Year	Working population
1961	1447
1965	1451
1966	1460
1967	1404
1968	1295
1969	1034
1970	910

Source: G. A. Sklyarov, Dostizheniya i perspektivy razvitiya kolkhoza "Semiluksky", M. 1972, p. 16.

The period of the most rapid decline in population was also that of a rapid increase in productivity, output and incomes. (Dostizheniva . . ., p. 117)

Between 1962 and 1972, 280 kolkhozniki went through adult middle and higher education at the expense of the kolkhoz, not counting those who received a state stipend. At present 31 are so engaged. (Chairman)

There are six schools on the territory of the kolkhoz, so no children go to the towns to be educated.

Owing to the general abandonment of individual-plot farming, no one goes to the collective farm market to sell produce on his own account. (Chairman)

In winter 10% of the men work on vegetable storage near Voronezh, for the sake of full employment, po initsiativu kolkhoza (Chairman).

3. Schools.

I was shown round a junior school, with 38 to a class, pioneer room, music room, theatre and canteen; each class was studying its own Union Republic, in anticipation of the 50th anniversary of the USSR.

There was a friendly 24-hour nursery for children under 7.

4. Peasants.

I was shown the home of a typical kolkhoznik. He was on good terms with the chairman and company. The chairman referred to him and his family as "peasants" (krest'yane). I asked him what he counted himself - as krest'yanin or kolkhoznik. The answer kolkhoznik.

The term krest'yanin is used only because of its traditional association with rural cultivators, and has a completely different significance from before collectivisation. (Chairman)

It even has a different significance from just a few years ago. It used to be thought that the people of the USSR was composed of different nationalities and different classes (peasants, workers, intellectuals). But as Brezhnev said at the XXIV Congress of the CPSU these differences have been superseded and merged in a new entity, commensurate with the present level of development of socialism - the soviet people (sovetsky narod). (Newspaper editor)

It's not true that, as Alec Nove once said, peasants are incomprehensible - the ones that I met were on the whole articulate and communicative, if not exactly well-informed. They wanted peace and friendship, wanted to know about my family and position, and seemed on the whole to be of a happy outward disposition.

5. Attitudes to women.

- (a) There appeared to be fairly sharply defined division of manual labour between the sexes. In particular, the job of stall-feeding cattle appeared to be exclusively a female

role, while mechanics were all men. There did not seem to be any reason to suppose that stall-feeding cattle was particularly dirty or degrading work. The question of equal pay remains in doubt; I was indignantly assured that equal pay for equal work is the rule, but it turned out that the daily "wage" differed in different sectors of farm work, so that the types of work reserved for women may have been defined as less equal than others.

I asked a group of 20 or 30 women working in the cattle sheds why there were no men among them (in company of the chairman, deputy chairman and newspaper editor). Answers: eto zhenskii trud (it's women's work) . . . zhenshchiny bolee sposobnye (women are more capable).

- (b) In the higher reaches of the farm administration, the only visible woman was the chief economist. She accompanied us but kept in the background and said little, even on purely economic matters. Later, Boris said he thought this was probably because she was not used to foreigners.
- (c) The chairman of the farm repeatedly made pointed comments about devushki (girls), and how I should return in summer when the girls were really good; how good the girls were in Voronezh, in Czechoslovakia, and so forth.

6. Personalities.

The collective farm chairman, Sklyarov, was small and fleshy with an equivocal smile. He was very articulate, and had all the facts and figures of kolkhoz life committed to memory. His book (Dostizheniya . . .), of which everyone seemed very proud, turned out to be well-written and clearly expressed (he was about to submit it as a candidate thesis at the agricultural institute in Voronezh). This sometimes impeded discussion, since in answer to my questions a common reply was "it's in the book". He tended to quieten down at meal times. His general manner was somewhat combative, assertive concerning the virtues of his farm and the defects of capitalism. Under a jocular tone, he seemed to take the cut and thrust of argument rather seriously. It seemed generally accepted that he was responsible for the remarkable progress of the kolkhoz which is recorded in his Dostizheniya . . .

His deputy was a thin man of medium build with spectacles and a vaguely intellectual forehead. He seemed anxious to please, and particularly when drunk became distinctly talkative. He had a friendly if ineffectual air, and I quite liked him.

The newspaper editor had strong rock-like features and a barrel-chested physique to match. He had likewise a strong slow voice, and liked to gesticulate while he declaimed. He like to go into the philosophy of historical materialism and science. Ideologically very orthodox, he was well able to argue his point; he seemed truly anxious to enlighten me, and I didn't take against him.

The economist (see above) didn't say much.

7. Relative status of the kolkhoz.

They all said it was just an average farm, nothing out of the ordinary. But it turned out that (a) it had already been the subject of articles in journals either printed in or directed towards the U.S.A., Japan and Canada; (b) it had exhibited at VDNKh, and (c) had received numerous All-Union awards and honours, both to the kolkhoz as a whole and to many individual members. (Conversations, also see Dostizheniya . . ., pp. 7-8)

MISCELLANY

1. The war.

. . . made a big impression around here. For six weeks in 1942, Voronezh was the front line; 90% of the town was completely destroyed, and the kolkhoz itself was the scene of bitter fighting. The local partisan movement is legendary around here. I was shown a short film about the dedication of a war memorial to a woman who saved the life of a Soviet pilot and who was executed with her entire family by the Germans in reprisal. The film – a recent one – showed many men and women of an age to remember the war, in tears before the list of names of the dead; this compares with Derek's experience, when his class of middle-aged Russian teachers of English was quickly reduced to tears by the mention of VE day and the remembrance of 'the war dead.

In 1970 the kolkhoz population was 3520, and the working population was 910. Of this latter (abnormally low) figure, only 30% were men. (Dostizheniya . . ., p. 107) Boris ascribes this to the war; all the men who would now be between 50 and 60 were killed off.

It was repeatedly emphasised to me what the effort of post-war reconstruction had been – as in the university and the town of Voronezh, so on the kolkhoz – and what might already have been created, had there been no war.

The roles of Britain and of Churchill are chiefly remembered for the delay in opening up the Second Front, which cost so many Soviet lives.

Later, some research students of the Faculty in MGU told me that they thought the war was insufficiently propagandised (from the point of view of avoiding another one) in the West.

2. Political discussions.

The kolkhoz was better than a private farm because:

- (a) it had a well balanced production structure and while large enough to reap all possible economies of scale was not excessively specialised;
- (b) its production structure was determined by plan and not by the whim of private profitability;
- (c) it was able to realise social goals for members of the cooperative – from its own resources it grew flowers, built schools and children's nurseries, cinemas and so forth. It could send people on holiday or to further education;

- (d) it could never go bankrupt. Even with the disastrous harvest of 1972 no one had suffered and the state had maintained the material provision of their consumption needs. In capitalist Britain, all the farmers would have gone bankrupt and the agricultural workers would have been thrown out of work. (Chairman)

Inequality of incomes must be considered from the point of view of the present level of development of socialism. The acquisition of skills and undertaking extra responsibility required material stimulation. At the same time I was not to suppose that anyone did anything for the love of money, since labour in the Soviet Union was morally stimulated. (Newspaper editor and Boris)

The chairman of the kolkhoz earns six hundred roubles a month and his deputy 350. When I suggested that the chairman should take a cut of R.200 he thought it was the biggest joke in the world.

Even under communism there would not be complete equality, since as Marx emphasised different people have different needs. "My" idea of levelling incomes was a petty-bourgeois mistake. (Newspaper editor)

To rectify this I ought to live in the Soviet Union for the next 10 years. (Newspaper editor)

As Boris correctly pointed out later, in the Soviet Union people cannot use accumulated wealth to buy the means of production.

In general it was incorrect that the political activity of the working class was repressed. I mustn't think that there wasn't any political activity, just because there were no strikes. In the Soviet Union the absence of contradictions made it impossible for any worker to want to strike, and all problems were ironed out in the most profound and penetrating self-criticism at party and soviet meetings . . . In what other country did so many workers attend patriotic and political rallies like that of 7th November? (Newspaper editor)

I asked whether the Soviet Union, by inviting Nixon to Moscow, hadn't damaged the cause of the Vietnamese people by helping Nixon to electoral victory in the Presidential election. Well, (a) the course of the Vietnam war wasn't determined by Nixon, and (b) it was a choice of lesser evils, since nuclear disarmament was at stake; anyway (c) the position of the USSR on the Vietnam war has remained unchanged, i.e. fully behind the Vietnamese revolutionaries. (Newspaper editor)

In general the tone of the discussion was friendly but rather polemical, as though mine was a deviant point of view which none the less it was worth trying to correct through re-education. They assumed that (a) I was anti-Soviet and anti-Marxist in principle, (b) I wanted to prove that the kolkhozniki were still petty bourgeois and clung to the land as their own private property, and (c) I wanted to prove that kolkhozniki were leaving in droves, because life in the countryside was so poverty-stricken materially and culturally.

They were all disappointed at how little I knew about British agriculture. Pressed to give information about average sizes

of farms, sizes of cattle herds, regional and national specialisations, yields and intensity of fertilisation, I made up many figures out of my head, may I be forgiven.

3. Time and historical judgements.

In conversations on the kolkhoz and separately with Boris and Vadim Arkad'evich, observations were repeatedly made concerning the passage of time and the permanence of judgements about historical significance. They were heightened (either for me personally or for them too in general) by the approaching 50th anniversary of the foundation of the USSR. What has been achieved in 50 years?

- (a) The war destroyed practically all the material wealth of the region and much of the population itself. Look at what has been achieved just since the war. (But it appeared to me that the period of 30 years since the war is a considerable interval; references to what we could have achieved without the war seemed also to have an ambiguous ring.)
- (b) When I called attention to what I observed as shortcomings or even simply peculiarities of the most trivial sort in Soviet society, in the company of Boris and Vadim Arkad'evich, part of the answer was usually how young I was, how long I had lived in a capitalist society, and what a short time I had lived in the Soviet Union; what a pity it was that I wasn't staying for a year or even for several years. It seemed to them that only time and direct personal experience could give me a true perspective on Soviet society.
- (c) It was frequently emphasised that time was on the side of Soviet society - "posmotrim".
- (d) Boris was a year older than me; he had been a political economist for six years and a loyal member of Soviet society all his life. This obviously gave him some feeling of moral authority over me, quite apart from the responsibility which he felt as my travelling companion. When I argued with the proposition of Vadim Arkad'evich (who was several years older than both of us) that women had an innate and unconscious urge to have children and ultimately could not be happy without them, Boris felt quite able to tell me that I was still very young and would see things differently in a few years.

4. Sovetsky narod.

In private I asked Boris why, if Soviet society was united and free from internal contradictions, it was felt necessary to protect it from divisive influences by checking the mail, censoring the press and literature and putting administrative constraints on political activity.

His reply stood my argument on its head - because the Soviet people is united, there is no point in bothering to publish viewpoints which are already known to be wrong. Thus for me, the unity of the Soviet people ought to make the police state unnecessary, and for him it simply makes it expedient.

who decides what is wrong? Marxist-Leninists, on the basis of Marxism-Leninism.

I told him I thought that people with a given political standpoint ought to be allowed to express and pursue them by political means, and that wrong political standpoints should be combatted politically and not administratively. I said that many British communists, and the Morning Star as well, criticised the recent punishment of Czechoslovak comrades for trying to express their unorthodox views, and considered such legal processes as anti-socialist. Boris said that with due respect to British comrades such a standpoint was regrettable and dangerous.

VISIT TO THE SOVKHOZ "IMENI MOSSOVETA"

On 25th January, 1973 together with my former companion Boris I visited the sovkhov "imeni Mossoveta", Lyuberetsky raion, Moscow oblast' (on the Eastern boundary of the Moscow city perimeter). Our visit took the comparatively conventional form of some three hours' conversation with the Chief Economist, who seemed well able to take my appearance in his stride. Our more matter-of-fact reception was in consequence less productive in terms of opportunities for social observation, but allowed us much more readily to discover the economic and social data of the farm. In general my notes do not yield much that might be considered unexpected.

(38) My Voronezh questionnaire

ECONOMICS OF THE KOLKHOZ

1. Organisation of production and the role of khozaschet
 - labour
 - supply of labour on the kolkhoz
 - distribution between sectors and times of year
 - organisation of brigades
 - payment
 - land
 - expenditure on individual plots
 - area of kolkhoz
 - distribution between types of usage
 - organisation of fertilisation and irrigation
 - projects of improvement
 - means of production, distribution between sectors
 - distribution between livestock and equipment
 - effect of the abolition of MTS
2. Production and income
 - destination of product, between sales to the state and self-consumption
 - exchange of agricultural for industrial commodities
 - sales to collective farm market
 - profitability of production
3. Role of the Ministry of Agriculture of the USSR in the solution of production problems
 - role of party institutions, komsomol, rural soviet and general meeting of kolkhozniki
4. Introduction of new techniques
 - which, when, on whose initiative

HISTORY OF THE KOLKHOZ

1. From collectivisation to the Patriotic War
2. Under the fascist occupation
3. The post-war period
4. Lessons of the past year 1971/2
5. The kolkhoz in the future

LIFE OF THE KOLKHOZNIKI

1. Demographic changes among the population of the kolkhoz during the period of its existence
2. Origins and recruitment of the existing population
 - were they born on the kolkhoz or not
 - what proportion of the children of the kolkhozniki remain on the farm for their entire working life
3. Movement of kolkhoz workers to the town and back for the purposes of
 - adult specialist technical education
 - education of children at school, institute and university
 - trading
 - external employment and by-employment
4. Internal education and democracy on the kolkhoz

Appendix 3. Capitalism and communism

This column was first published as "Capitalism and communism: a few things I changed my mind about" on Mark Harrison's Blog at https://blogs.warwick.ac.uk/markharrison/entry/capitalism_and_communism/ on 19 August 2009.

I sat over lunch under an apple tree with some old comrades. We reminisced about the U.K. referendum on EEC membership back in 1975. At the time, we all campaigned for a No vote. I mentioned that since then I had changed my mind. Why? Because, I offered, the EU had done more to spread and consolidate democracy in central and eastern Europe than any other factor or force. I'm not sure, but I think someone close to my right ear muttered "Shame!" That, and a few other remarks, made me realize that some of those I was sitting with might not have changed their minds about much, despite the passage of a third of a century.

Some things I have kept. I was brought up in a high-minded atmosphere of nineteenth-century rationalism. Now, I would not recommend this for everyone. It was not a lot of fun. I did not really learn how to party, for example. However, I did absorb a lot about the sanctity of truth and the beauty of logic. As for politics my mother, a lifelong Liberal, imbued me with the notion (from Gulliver's Travels by Jonathan Swift) that:

Whoever could make two ears of corn or two blades of grass to grow upon a spot of ground where one grew before would deserve better of mankind and do more essential service to his country than the whole race of politicians put together.

That was the "rationalism" side of my upbringing. The other side of it was the "nineteenth-century" optimism that came with it. I had instilled in me a belief in the possibility of progress -- that we, the human race, could learn from experience and reasoning to make things better for everyone.

These things I still believe, sustained for example by the knowledge that today fewer people live in extreme poverty than ever before; fewer mothers die in childbirth; fewer children die before they reach their teens; fewer children reach adulthood without literacy; fewer girls go without education; and more adults live longer, healthier lives. Most people don't realize it, or they don't believe it. Yes, terrible things continue to happen. But evil is always salient in our lives, while good comes about stealthily, away from the headlines. That imbalance feeds our pessimism. I try to rise above it, although it's hard sometimes, today more than a few years ago.

But some I don't. One thing I used to believe was that the government could always fix things -- at least, if not the government, then some other government.

I lost faith in this idea gradually, a bit at a time. To begin with, I believed it wholeheartedly -- as did we all (this was those of us that were studying economics in Cambridge, England, in the late 1960s). The only problem would be if the government was mistaken in fact or logic. If so, it was our job to put it right! We all saw government service as the highest calling of a professional economist. I nearly went that way, but I got bitten by the economic history bug.

A little later, my view of politics had darkened. I no longer trusted the government -- our government, the capitalist government, that was. I became a revolutionary socialist, and then a communist. (By this point I had forgotten about the two blades of grass.) It was still the government's job to fix things, but it had to be a government of the people, by the people, for the people. This outlook wasn't anarchistic, but it was libertarian. I wanted a world, foreshadowed by Marx in the Communist Manifesto of 1848, where,

In place of the old bourgeois society, with its classes and class antagonisms, we shall have an association, in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all.

What kind of government would that be? Well, although a communist, I did know it wasn't the Soviet government of the day. I had lived and studied in Moscow; I knew it was a police state and didn't much like it, although there were other things I was ready to admire. But the voices from the Soviet bloc that I listened to were the Czechoslovak and Polish reformers (some of them now exiled to Britain) and, in the Soviet Union, democratic Marxist dissenters like Roy Medvedev. This was the now forgotten era of Eurocommunism which, germinated by the 1960s, blossomed briefly during the 1970s. Italian and Spanish communists put forward the daring view that Soviet socialism had something missing from its makeup. The Russian Revolution of 1917, although not a mistake, had driven a wedge between democracy and socialism. In Britain some communists, but by no means all, took this up. It was our job to put democracy and socialism back together. (We failed.)

We debated the mistakes and crimes of Stalinism. This debate turned out to have some unexpected twists. In the Great Terror of 1937, Stalin had murdered a million people. No one really wanted to defend this. Those who wanted to support the Soviet Union on principle generally divided into two. One lot went into denial: some real enemies had been justly executed, and the rest was a fabrication. Others accepted the truth, but stuck to the line of Khrushchev in 1956: it was the fault of Stalin and a few leaders, who had died or been got rid of, and everything else was basically healthy, so that made it okay.

More disturbing, if anything, was the problem of the far more numerous victims that Stalin didn't intend, but killed anyway: for example, the five to eight million deaths resulting from the famine of the

early 1930s. There was no plan to kill them, but they died because Stalin's drive to industrialize the country took too much food from the villages, leaving not enough to keep the rural population alive. Their bones were buried in the foundations of socialist construction. This was harder for some to face up to than premeditated mass murder. If a death was a crime you could convict the murderer, but killing by mistake placed the whole Soviet system on trial.

We wanted to heal the rift between socialism and democracy. We were failing, but we didn't know it yet. For the mid-1980s saw the coming to power in the Soviet Union of a leader who walked and talked like us: Mikhail Gorbachev. Like us, Gorbachev wanted to put socialism back together with democracy. The Soviet Union could become a free, democratic society! We were re-inspired, briefly.

It wasn't all philosophy and infighting. While disagreeing on history and the Bolshevik Revolution, we lived in our own country in the present. Putting differences aside, we engaged in many campaigns. We fought for jobs and full employment, opposed racism, supported strikers, marched for peace, campaigned for votes, and worked to enliven and empower our local communities.

Some other beliefs that I still held at that time mirrored my faith in political action to put things right. One was that fairness matters more than efficiency. In the late 1980s, shortly before his final illness, I became friends with Peter Wiles. We soon understood each other pretty well. Given our different starting points -- in many ways he was a classic liberal -- he was exceptionally kind to me. But even when he was no longer quite sure who I was or why I was there, he would turn to me suddenly and say: "Efficiency! You've never paid enough attention to efficiency! Efficiency is very important!" And he was right. Because, the more efficiency you have, the more blades of grass and ears of corn you have, and the easier it is to be fair. At the time, this was something that I was still thinking about.

Then the Soviet experiment came to an abrupt end, a complete and total failure. Sometime early in 1991, I decided that the era ushered in by the Bolshevik Revolution was over. It was time to move on. I didn't know where, but I knew I couldn't stay where I was. I turned in my party card, and that was it.

A few years later, I was still stuck with nineteenth century rationalism, but I had changed allegiance from Marx and Engels to Smith, Ricardo, and Mill. In economics and politics I had become a liberal. I was happy -- as most liberal economists are -- with progressive redistribution through taxes and benefits, and tax-financed health and education services. I still had an optimistic belief in progress. But I no longer thought the government could drive progress, or fix everything, and I didn't even want it to do these things any more.

Political economy and the study of bureaucracy helped me to this view. Politicians and government officials, I realized, are not to be judged by their high-mindedness. Whether capitalist or socialist, under

democracy or a dictator, political leaders and civil servants are self-interested. If the incentives align their private interests with those of society as a whole, well and good. Mostly, however, this is not the case. I ceased to believe that good government needed only correct facts and correct logic. I began to grasp the possibility that governments could fail systematically, perhaps more often than markets could fail.

From there it was a short step to the idea that a good way to organize society is to place the government under strict constitutional constraints, and let the citizens govern themselves as much as possible.

There were plenty of things I struggled with then, and still do today.

One is climate change. When climate change is (in the words of the Stern report) "the greatest market failure the world has ever seen," it is clear that without some kind of political action there is no solution. (You can actually read me struggling with this in my first and only article about climate change, written way back in 1991. I had figured out the political action problem, although in a crude and overdramatic way, but not yet the coordination problem that goes with it.)

Another is military intervention. I still thought military force had a purpose in the modern world and, to be perfectly honest, I still do. That doesn't mean I know exactly what that purpose is. Here's an example. I was in favour of the U.S. led invasion of Afghanistan in 2001, and less surely in favour of the invasion of Iraq two years later. What do I think now? There is a lot of evidence now to suggest I was wrong. I still think Saddam Hussain brought defeat on himself by pretending to have weapons that he wanted to have, and had tried to develop, but did not in fact possess. Also, I think the full consequences will not be known for many years, and could well differ greatly from what seems obvious now. Still, that is to anticipate hindsight that we don't yet have.

More to the point is this. I never forgot a conversation about Iraq with an American friend and fellow economic historian. I visited his university in November 2004 when Bush had just won his second term. Depressed and angry, Tim exploded at me: "You ex-coms are all the same!" (I wondered how many he knew.) "When it comes to military intervention you still think the state can fix everything." I think he had me just right. I was skewered.

A third thing I struggle with is who gets my vote. I favour policies that are economically conservative, socially liberal, tolerant and generous in international affairs, interventionist when forced but always reluctant and mindful of the perils of selective intervention. The only party that would be all these things is a party that is not interested in power. No party is all of these things in any country that I can think of. But if we don't vote, I believe, they will take our liberties anyway.

The last thing I want to mention is what it has meant to me to have spent the last eighteen years working in and with the Soviet state and party archives. First, a wonderful privilege: what luck, that I was granted such an opportunity. I have used it to work on a wide range of topics --

statistics, economic planning, growth and development, wartime mobilization, defence planning and procurement, decision making, information, secrecy, lying, cheating, whistleblowing, and repression. There is so much to study! This was a state of 200 million people and one sixth of the world's land surface that recorded everything of note in millions upon millions of documents over 70 years.

And second, a strange voyage of discovery, hard to define in a few words -- but I'll try. In general, no great surprises. The documents show a vast, centralized dictatorship with a mailed fist and a decaying metabolism. But we knew that, already. The fact is that academics and writers older and better than me, the dissidents and scholars of Peter Wiles's generation, had already worked out the main dimensions and characteristics of the Soviet system, its politics and economics. This was a state that just had too much power.

In specifics, though, my sense of shock, accompanied by a full span of emotions from grief to laughter, is continually renewed by the opening of each new file. Two examples: First, how did I get interested in secrecy? I was working on Soviet military procurement. Every year the government gave the Red Army a cash budget to buy new equipment. Soldiers toured the factories to work out what weapons were available and at what price. Industry was supposed to sell weapons to the military at cost price. So, the officers' first question tended to be: "How much does that cost?" And the standard answer? "We can't tell you. It's a military secret." It sounds ridiculous! But it worked! Year after year and decade after decade, it worked. That told me there was something interesting and remarkable in the operation of Soviet secrecy that needed to be understood.

Second example: Earlier in the summer I took a first look at the files of the Lithuania KGB, newly acquired from Vilnius by the Hoover Institution archive. Every year the KGB second administration, responsible for counter-intelligence, made a plan of work and a report of work. They enumerated the thousands of "objects" that, in the course of the year, they would aim to monitor, intercept, warn off, compromise, recruit, blackmail, or arrest, and the hundreds of informers they would deploy to achieve the plan. This is what the KGB did in Lithuania year after year, right up to the end of the 1980s. The term "object" is no mistake; they coldly manipulated "the lives of others" with casually understated brutality. Suddenly at the end of the 1980s the endgame arrived, and a hundred thousand people were on the streets, demonstrating for independence -- half of them, party members! They were taken completely by surprise! They'd been watching the wrong people! (Or had they? Again, there's a story in this.)

And finally, an inner struggle between the calls of science and morality. As a social scientist, my first duty must be to understanding. Understanding comes from new knowledge, and there is so much new knowledge in those dusty files and blurred microfilms! Judgement should come later. But there is also a feeling that spreads involuntarily from my

gut, a voice that I can't shut out: Reagan was right. This was an evil empire.

Do I regret my past associations or activities? No. I believed or did many things that seem silly or misguided with hindsight, but I did not betray anyone or do anything really wrong. Many good people belonged to the communist party who inspired me both as idealists and as activists. From them I learned about how to translate ideals into action, and how to work with people of differing views, build cooperation, and get things done in the face of criticism and opposition; it is hard to imagine that I could have learned these things in any other way. One thing I learned was always to start from the world as it is, not as you would like it to be. This was one reason I did not write off the Soviet Union at the time. Which bring us to mistakes. Well, they are supposed to help you learn. I made many, many mistakes and this just gave me plenty of scope to learn from them. Of course, I probably did not learn all that I should and I probably made many more mistakes than I ever recognized.

No doubt there is some degree of self-serving fiction in my story. The way I tell it, I remained true to the values I got from my mother: truth and reason before everything else. The facts changed, so I changed my reasoning. The world changed, and I moved on. But there could be other versions.

My children might say: In his youth, Dad was a free thinker. He got older and more established, put on weight, and settled for a comfortable life in an armchair.

The old comrades I lunched with might not go along with that. After all, they got older too, but they did not settle for comfort or accommodate to new times. They remained true to the cause. Among them, some might tell a story of treachery and betrayal, in which I began with my heart in the right place, but eventually sold out the cause in return for academic status and reputation. Others might wonder if I wasn't always a middle-class revisionist, just playing with politics, an enemy within from the start, never a true comrade. Somewhere in this tangled tale lies the golden thread of truth -- but where? You choose.