

INFORMATION REPORT INFORMATION REPORT

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

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C-O-N-F-I-D-E-N-T-I-A-L

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SOURCE: US national studying for an advanced degree in foreign languages.

Source has traveled widely abroad, and in 1958 he was a member of a student group which made an extensive trip in the USSR. In 1959, he served as a guide at the US Exposition in Moscow.

1. In 1958, I spent several weeks in the USSR as a member of a group of US college students. We visited Leningrad, Kiev, Yalta, Sochi, Kharkov, and Moscow. In 1959, I served as a guide at the US Exhibition in Moscow, and had an opportunity to visit Riga and Tbilisi.
2. I found very little anti-regime sentiment as such, but found that there was a tremendous interest on the part of the younger people I met in practically all things Western, including radio broadcasts, books, records, clothing, etc. In a number of cases, Soviet young people told me that they listened regularly to the Voice of America, but only to hear US jazz.
3. On one occasion I heard a broadcast of VOA about 11:00 PM in Riga, but as soon as the voice transmission started, the jamming rendered the broadcast absolutely unintelligible. Practically everyone I talked to indicated that they liked the BBC better than the Voice of America, saying that the programs were much better, of higher quality, and the news could be considered more reliable than VOA. I never heard a mention of Radio Free Europe, and possibly many thought that this was the VOA.
4. The younger people I met were particularly interested in literature, and many asked me if I could send them art books from the US. Art books command a very high value because many young painters are copying Western art on the sly.
5. Others borrowed all the records I brought with me and made tapes of them, which I understand likewise have a very high value. I heard a couple of tapes of VOA jazz broadcast, which were of very poor quality, primarily because of atmospheric conditions and distance. The younger people were most happy to have a chance to tape a high quality 33 RPM record.
6. Although in a group, Soviet young people bitterly criticized the works of emigre Russian writers, I had some interesting experiences with some copies of "Mosty" (Bridges) that I had brought with me. This is published by a Russian emigre living in New York, and a group of three young Soviets criticized "Mosty" as being terrible because it was "so full of lies about the USSR." However, each one of them separately asked me if I had an extra copy which I could give him.

Effectiveness

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7. The same thing is true of "Dr Zhivago". There is a tremendous desire to read this book, and although Pasternak is criticized bitterly in public, his book is being bootlegged very extensively in the USSR, and I was asked on a number of occasions, "By any chance do you have a copy of 'Dr Zhivago' I can borrow?" I also found that "Novy Zhurnal", published in Munich, was criticized bitterly in public but in great demand privately.
8. I received many questions about the conditions of life of Russian emigrants in the US, and obviously my answers were believed, because I never experienced any backtalk. The younger people in the USSR know that our standard of living is far higher than theirs, and that life is much more interesting in the US. There is a tremendous amount of boredom among the young people in the USSR, but when I asked many of them if they would like to change places, they replied in the negative, and I believe they were speaking sincerely. The current regime has gained great support of the Soviet people through use of nationalism. Soviet scientific achievements, plus the terrific prestige which Khrushchev gained through his trip to the US, have made the Soviets quite satisfied, even in spite of the many inconveniences.
9. The young Soviets were invariably interested in Western clothes, and there was also a thriving black market in US currency. Rather surprisingly, the going rate is much better in Riga than in Moscow. A US\$100 bill will get 45 to 50 rubles to the dollar in Riga, but only 40 rubles to the dollar in Moscow. The reason for particular interest in bills of US\$100 denomination was said to be that Jews getting exit visas are required to leave everything behind, but find it possible to hide anything as small as US\$100 bills, to take with them.
10. The US\$10 bill has been bringing generally no more than 30 rubles to the dollar, or 25 rubles to the dollar in the street in Moscow. I sold a wool shirt in Tbilisi for 150 rubles, and I was told that Italian shoes of a flashy type are worth three to four hundred rubles on the black market. A US wool suit is worth one thousand rubles practically anywhere.
11. There is obviously no particular effort to control the black market, even though the black marketeers appear somewhat jittery. However, I believe that the police could stop it easily if they actually wanted to.
12. Although the Soviet people have had a taste of more freedom since Stalin's death, I do not believe there would be any particular difficulty if repression were again clamped on the populace. There would undoubtedly be resentment, but the control of the regime is so absolute that I do think that it would not go beyond that.
13. I was told that it is quite easy for persons of influence to get their children in universities regardless of poor grades, or the availability of more promising students. I did not, however, get any details as to how this was done.
14. The younger generation has a lot of jokes about things which would never have been thought of a few years ago, such as Khrushchev's personality, his looks, catching up with the US, etc. However, unfortunately, I do not recall any examples.

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