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RÓSA MAGNÚSDÓTTIR

***“BE CAREFUL IN AMERICA,
PREMIER KHRUSHCHEV!”¹***

**Soviet perceptions of peaceful coexistence
with the United States in 1959**

As the year 1959 came to an end, the American division of the Union of Soviet Societies for Friendship and Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries (Soiuz sovetskikh obshchestv druzhby i kul'turnoi svyazi — SSOD) issued its verdict over this first full year of official Soviet-American cultural relations. The year 1959, according to the SSOD report, was a “turning point” in Soviet-American cultural relations.² Indeed, the year 1959 did in many ways mark a decisive change in Soviet-American cultural and diplomatic relations. Ever since the mid-1950s, the Soviet mission of spreading its socialist worldview in the language of peaceful coexistence had been paid due notice on both sides of the Atlantic, and in 1959 the focus of the mission was on the United States.

In addition to reciprocal visits of delegations and an increased flow of tourists between the two superpowers, 1959 was a year of national exhibitions and official visits. Starting in January, Anastas Ivanovich Mikoian, Khrushchev's deputy and

Several people took the time to read and comment on earlier versions of this paper. I would like to thank Donald J. Raleigh, Maike Lehmann, Eva Maurer, and Susanne Schattenberg for their time and thoughtful observations.

1. The title of the paper is taken from E. Cherepanova's letter, written on August 4, 1959 on the occasion of Premier Khrushchev's pending trip to the United States. Cherepanova's letter ended by wishing Khrushchev good health and a long life. Then, she said: “Take care of yourself, for us, for the people. Be careful in America. Have a good trip.” Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Rossiiskoi Federatsii (GARF), f. 5446, Sovet Ministrov SSSR, op. 93, d. 1320, l. 106. In this article, America (or “Amerika”) only refers to the United States of America.

2. GARF, f. 9576, Soiuz sovetskikh obshchestv druzhby i kul'turnoi svyazi s zarubezhnymi stranami (SSOD), op. 8, d. 27, l. 158-174.

close friend, visited Washington, New York, Chicago, and Los Angeles. He was in America as a guest of the Soviet ambassador to the United States, Mikhail Menshikov, but Khrushchev had sent him there with the task of easing relations with Americans.³ In July, a Soviet Exhibition displaying art and technology was opened in New York City by Frol Romanovich Kozlov, another one of Khrushchev's deputies. In the same month, US Vice President Richard M. Nixon traveled to the Soviet Union to open the American National Exhibition in Sokolniki Park in Moscow and some two weeks after the Exhibition closed Premier Nikita Sergeevich Khrushchev embarked upon a tour of the United States of America.⁴

This article explores a collection of letters written by Soviet citizens on the "joyous occasion" of Khrushchev's promotion of peaceful coexistence with the United States. It considers how those who wrote the letters understood the Soviet Union's relationship with the United States, arguing that while many of the letter writers expressed themselves in what we might call official Soviet discourse, the atmosphere of 1959 contributed to a comparatively open discussion of the nature of Soviet-American relations. For this reason, the year 1959 marks a turning point in the way that the Soviet public perceived of peaceful coexistence with the former archenemy and how they articulated their thoughts on the relationship between the superpowers. To a certain extent, this shift in public perceptions may have had more lasting significance than changes in Soviet-American relations at the official level.

Peaceful coexistence with the United States of America

Soon after Stalin's death, Khrushchev started his ventures into foreign policy. He showed much more nuance in his understanding of world politics than Stalin, who had seen the Cold War as a prelude to another great war — this time against America — and cultivated a strong fear of a renewed conflict among the war-torn Soviet population. Khrushchev, however, drawing upon Lenin's NEP-era pronouncements, stated that a war between the imperialist and the socialist camps was not inevitable — they were capable of competing and coexisting at the same time.⁵ In Khrushchev's version, as in Lenin's, socialism would indeed prevail but when Khrushchev took armed conflict out of the equation he also removed the fear of another war — much to the relief of Soviet citizens.

3. William Taubman, *Khrushchev: The Man and His Era* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2003), 409.

4. For some literature on the 1950s and the cultural dimension of peaceful coexistence, see Frederick C. Barghoorn, *The Soviet Cultural Offensive: The Role of Cultural Diplomacy in Soviet Foreign Policy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1960); J. D. Parks, *Culture, Conflict, and Coexistence: American-Soviet Cultural Relations, 1917-1958* (London: McFarland, 1983); Walter L. Hixson, *Parting the Curtain: Propaganda, Culture, and the Cold War, 1945-1961* (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 1997).

5. Vladislav Zubok and Constantine Pleshakov, *Inside the Kremlin's Cold War: From Stalin to Khrushchev* (Cambridge, Ma.: Harvard University Press, 1996), 184.

The purpose of peaceful coexistence was multifold. Firstly and maybe most importantly, Khrushchev wanted the Soviet Union to be taken seriously as a global superpower, and he wanted to be recognized as a leader of historical significance. He played the role of the peacemaker, ready to reconcile with the United States and to serve as a proverbial middleman between the socialist and anti-Soviet bloc. Khrushchev emphasized soft power and to that effect, he strengthened personal contacts and personal exchanges with Western countries. This was illustrated, for example, by an official visit to England in 1956 as well as the signing of cultural agreements with Norway and Belgium in 1956, and England and France in 1957.⁶

Peaceful coexistence also had a domestic purpose. In order to implement the social projects he had planned, Khrushchev needed to divert resources from the Soviet war machine and advance the socialist economy and lifestyle at home.⁷ Thus, Khrushchev promoted the policy as a part of his de-Stalinization campaign and the return to Leninism. Selling peaceful coexistence as believable to an audience that had for over a decade considered war with America inevitable may seem like a difficult project, but, as will become clear, the Soviet public embraced the opportunity to recount and remember the times when the United States was an ally in the Great Patriotic War. With the major steps in Soviet-American relations taken in the mid to late 1950s, evident in increased interactions on both the cultural and political level, the discourses of peaceful coexistence had started to take on a tangible meaning.

Early in the summer of 1957, Khrushchev started advocating publicly for an official exchange agreement with the United States.⁸ He felt that the conclusion of such an agreement would confirm the Soviet Union’s superpower status on a par with the United States and he felt confident about the Soviet Union’s ability to show off its accomplishments. Intertwined with all of this was his continued emphasis on peaceful coexistence. The American authorities were reluctant and did not immediately jump on Khrushchev’s offer but, later in the year, they agreed to start discussions, which lasted for three months and resulted in the Zarubin-Lacy agreement on January 27, 1958.⁹ The “Agreement Between the United States of America and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics on Exchanges in the Cultural, Technical, and Educational Fields” entailed exchanges in multiple fields, such as science, technology, agriculture, radio and television, film, government, publication, tourism, and exhibitions. The agreement was a first of its kind for the US State Department, which had been sending delegations to the Soviet Union

6. Yale Richmond, *Cultural Exchange and the Cold War: Raising the Iron Curtain* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003), 15.

7. Zubok and Pleshakov, *Inside the Kremlin’s Cold War*, 174-175.

8. Hixson, *Parting the Curtain*, 151.

9. Formal discussions between the United States and the Soviet Union started on October 28, 1957. The agreement is often called “the Zarubin-Lacy agreement” after its negotiators Soviet Ambassador to the US, Georgii Zarubin and William S. B. Lacy, head of the new State Department section called the East-West contact desk. Richmond, *Cultural Exchange and the Cold War*, 15; Barghoorn, *The Soviet Cultural Offensive*, 7; Hixson, *Parting the Curtain*, 151-155.

since 1957.¹⁰ Private individuals, mainly impresario Sol Hurok, had worked since the mid 1950s to send Soviet artists and performers to the United States, and many American entertainers and performance companies, perhaps most famously the cast of *Porgy and Bess*, had visited the Soviet Union since 1955. About half of these events had been at least partly sponsored by the American government,¹¹ but the cultural exchange agreement brought with it new channels for cultural exchanges. The following years saw many cultural events and mutual visits of delegations but the most successful outcomes of the first two years of the cultural exchange agreement were beyond doubt the mutual national exhibits in the summer of 1959, a Soviet National Exhibition in New York and, more importantly, the American National Exhibition in Moscow.¹²

Owing to its huge scope, the American National Exhibition made the United States an even more than usually present theme in the Soviet Union. Early in the preparation stage, it became clear that the Soviet agitprop department would respond with all its might to crank out counterpropaganda as it became clear what the Americans were planning to exhibit in Moscow.¹³ The Soviet media had, since the mid-1950s, recognized American technological superiority but emphasized socialism's potential for catching up. Displays of cars and shoes at the American National Exhibition, however, interested visitors more than technological displays, and the Soviet propaganda machine was hard pressed trying to mediate and control the responses of Soviet people to elements of American material life on exhibit. While Khrushchev himself would have preferred to make outer space the playing field of the Cold War, as there the Soviet Union was a player of superpower status, the Cold War of the late 1950s boiled down to issues of consumerism and living standards.¹⁴ By promising improvements in housing and lifestyles to the Soviet people, Khrushchev himself was partly to blame for this development, particularly as his 1957 slogan to "overtake and surpass America" in the production of meat and butter by the early 1960s had literally directed attention to bread and butter issues.¹⁵ In the context of both the cultural Cold War and the discourse of peaceful coexistence, the relationship with the United States of America was of vital importance as both the Soviet state and to some extent ordinary people openly measured Soviet progress against "the American way of life."

10. Richmond, *Cultural Exchange and the Cold War*, 15 and 17.

11. Barghoorn, *The Soviet Cultural Offensive*, 317.

12. A protocol agreement from September 10, 1958 called for the reciprocal exhibits. GARF, f. 9518, Komitet po kul'turnym sviaziam s zarubezhnymi stranami pri Sovete Ministrov SSSR, op. 1, d. 595, l. 131.

13. The US organizers used many features from their successful display at the 1958 Brussels World Fair.

14. Susan E. Reid, "Cold War in the Kitchen: Gender and the De-Stalinization of Consumer Taste in the Soviet Union under Khrushchev," *Slavic Review* 61, 2 (Summer 2002): 211-252.

15. Iurii Aksiutin, *Khrushchevskaya "ottepel'" i obshchestvennye nastroyeniia v SSSR v 1953-1964 gg.* (M.: ROSSPEN, 2004), 350.

SSOD, however, accredited the revolutionary effects of 1959 mainly to Nikita Khrushchev's visit to the United States of America, “the results of which were general changes in international relations and colossal influences on the minds of millions of ordinary Americans.”¹⁶ Khrushchev's visit was considered a significant event by everyone who had been following developments in Soviet-American diplomatic relations, crystallized in such processes as the Geneva talks. The Geneva conference was conducted in July 1955 with President Dwight D. Eisenhower, Prime Minister Anthony Eden, French Prime Minister Guy Mollet, and Khrushchev present. In terms of hard agreements, the leaders did not accomplish much but the summit definitely opened up a dialogue that helped to reduce tensions.¹⁷ With the 1956 invasion of Hungary still fresh on people's minds, many justifiably doubted the integrity of peaceful coexistence but the “Spirit of Geneva” and Khrushchev's insistence on friendlier relations made President Eisenhower reluctantly decide to accept the Soviet leader as his guest.¹⁸

The Eisenhower administration, while enthusiastic about official cultural exchanges, was hesitant in accepting the Soviet discourse on peaceful coexistence. To send out a sign of good will, however, Vice President Nixon did attend the opening of the American National Exhibition in Moscow in July 1959 and traveled around the Soviet Union in July and August. Since the mid-1950s, many important Americans — politicians and performers alike — had visited the Soviet Union, but 1959 represented the highpoint of available Americanisms in the Soviet Union and certainly the Soviet Exhibition in New York and Khrushchev's America trip brought much attention to the Soviet Union in the United States. Statesmen's visits and national exhibits surely caught more people's attention than any delegation or tourist group had ever succeeded in getting as the mass media in both countries feasted on these events.

Khrushchev's performance obviously received unanimous praise in the Soviet coverage of the American trip and the media generally described the American reception of the Soviet guests with great enthusiasm, emphasizing Khrushchev's competence in dealing with the Americans. The SSOD report even stated, that

it would not be an overstatement to say, that for the first time since the war, upon hearing the earnest truth about the Soviet Union, the absolute majority of Americans changed their minds about the USSR [...]. In hundreds of letters they expressed the admiration of the fruitful work, delivered by Comrade

16. GARF, f. 9576, op. 8, d. 27, l. 158.

17. For more on the 1955 Geneva Summit, see Richard Crockatt's *The Fifty Years War: The United States and the Soviet Union in World Politics, 1941-1991* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), 125-129. With the Federal Republic of Germany admitted into NATO in May 1955, the German question was a big issue at the meeting.

18. Taubman, *Khrushchev*, 415-416. A second Geneva Conference was held in the summer of 1959. Andrei Gromyko participated on behalf of the Soviet government. See Zubok and Pleshakov, *Inside the Kremlin's Cold War*, 200.

Khrushchev in the USA, and many asked to receive information about the Soviet Union, not believing the official American sources.¹⁹

It is fairly safe to assume that SSOD's estimate of Khrushchev's popularity in America was strongly exaggerated but the perceived positive impact of the Khrushchev visit on Americans was considered a great success among all of the Soviet institutions involved in spreading the "truth" about the Soviet Union.

SSOD was only one in a series of organizations whose mission included the promotion of the socialist way of life abroad.²⁰ Nevertheless, the mission of encouraging and spreading knowledge about the socialist system abroad was often uphill, as the Western public remained relatively indifferent toward Soviet culture and way of life. Khrushchev's visit to America was therefore a great opportunity to convince skeptic audiences in the West. Contrary to SSOD's estimates, however, the year 1959 likely provided a more important turning point in Soviet society than in the "minds of millions of Americans." There is no doubt that the Soviet population, fixated on "things American,"²¹ paid due notice to the big events of 1959: over a four-month period, from mid-August to mid-December 1959, the Soviet leadership received numerous letters and telegrams in relations to Khrushchev's travels but also about the promising developments in Soviet-American relations.

The act of public letter writing in 1959: "Bon voyage, Nikita Sergeevich!"²²

Public letter writing was common in the Soviet Union and an enormous number of letters are preserved in Russian archives.²³ All of these letters, however, are a part of a continuing form of correspondence between the Soviet public and government, with roots in pre-Revolutionary times and extending way beyond the year 1959. The letters examined here were written partly in response to the American National Exhibition but mostly the letter writers took out their writing paper in order to express their thoughts on Premier Khrushchev's visit to America. Most of the letter

19. GARF, f. 9576, op. 8, d. 27, l. 158.

20. Other institutions and organizations involved in assisting foreigners in the Soviet Union and sending Soviet people abroad were, for example, Intourist and the Committee for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries at the Council of Ministers. The Soviet Information Bureau was also very involved in the Soviet mission of spreading the socialist way of life to foreign countries and trade unions actively participated in this mission.

21. Dmitrii Bobyshev, *Ia zdes' (Chelovekotekst)* (M.: Vagrius, 2003), 210.

22. "Schastlivogo puti" was the most often cited sentence of the letters and describes well the reason most of the letters were written in the first place — Khrushchev's trip to the United States.

23. My analysis has benefited from Sheila Fitzpatrick's article "Suplicants and Citizens: Public Letter-Writing in Soviet Russia in the 1930s," *Slavic Review*, 55, 1 (spring 1996): 78-105. Fitzpatrick analyzed several genres of public letter writing in the 1930s and while some of her analyses only apply to the pre-WWII period, many can be applied to the letter collection at hand.

writers only expressed their wishes for good luck and Godspeed but some of the authors delved deeper, touching upon issues concerning Soviet-American relations. Many of the letters duly replicated the themes and formulations found in *Pravda*, yet some of the letter writers acted within a perceived era of relaxation; the subjects of their letters go beyond pure endorsement of the regime's goals. The languages of de-Stalinization are clearly prevalent — crystallized in praising the return to pure Leninism and the total silence on Stalin.

The act of public letter writing in 1959 has to be analyzed within the context of de-Stalinization. The risk of expressing an opinion in a letter to the authorities was nowhere near as high as it had been under Stalin and letter writers of the late 1950s acted within this different atmosphere. In form, the letters were public — these were not private communications between lovers, friends, or family members — and the letter writers, full of optimism and good advice, all seem aware of the public nature of the act of writing to Khrushchev. Because some of the letters discussed here were published in late 1959 in a popular book entitled *Face to Face with America: The Story of N. S. Khrushchov's Visit to the USA, September 15-27, 1959*,²⁴ their authors thus entered a public space. Some, however, especially those who gave explicit advice based on experience with Americans or articulated opinions about Soviet policy and relations with America, were not published while other letters were published only in part.

The letters in *Face to Face with America* were sent either to the Central Committee of the Communist Party or to the Council of Ministers.²⁵ The unpublished letters discussed here were all found in the archives of the Council of Ministers where at least eleven *dela* comprise letters and telegrams “in connection with the reciprocal visits of Khrushchev in the USA and Eisenhower in the USSR.” The earliest letter was written in early August 1959 but the correspondence continued throughout the year. A large majority of the letter writers directly addressed Khrushchev (“Dear Nikita Sergeevich”) but some also wrote to President Dwight D. Eisenhower (“Mister President”), Vice President Richard M. Nixon, or Harold McLellan, organizer of the American National Exhibition. The published letters were largely addressed to Khrushchev although a few also directed their words to Nixon and Eisenhower.

It is not clear whether the letter writers took it upon themselves to write the letters but since some of the telegrams came from groups such as factory workers and kolkhozniki, it is likely that at least a part of the letters were engineered by Communist Party officials. Judging from the commonality of the practice of letter writing in the Soviet Union, however, it is also probable that many people took it upon themselves to craft a letter. Khrushchev's America trip was announced on August 4, 1959, and the visit immediately assumed enormous weight. Even before

24. The Russian version of the book, *Litsom k litsu s Amerikoi. Rasskaz o poezdke N. S. Khrushcheva v SShA. 15-27 sentiabria 1959 goda* (M.: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo, 1959) was published in 250,000 copies.

25. *Face to Face with America: The Story of N. S. Khrushchov's Visit to the U.S.A. September 15-27, 1959* (M.: Foreign Languages Publ. House, 1960), 474.

the trip took place, it was taken as a given that Khrushchev's discourse on peaceful coexistence had prevailed and the visit was described by the Soviet media as a historical mission. World peace and peaceful coexistence depended on Khrushchev being received in the United States.

Although Khrushchev was not scheduled to leave Moscow until September, the America visit was one of the main stories in *Pravda* throughout the month of August. *Pravda* emphasized the historical importance of this latest development in Soviet-American relations and the visit was eagerly anticipated in the Soviet Union. Many people wrote letters to the *Pravda*, similar in content and form to the letters published in *Face to Face with America*. There is no way of knowing how many letters and telegrams Soviet citizens sent to the various media and governmental organs on the occasion of Khrushchev's America visit, but judging from the amount preserved in the archives of the Council of Ministers it is safe to assume that hundreds, if not thousands, of people put down a pen on this occasion.

People from all walks of life wrote to Premier Khrushchev and President Eisenhower. The presentation of self, however, is generally through "conventional social stereotypes,"²⁶ such as the mother, the veteran, the peasant, the worker, and the engineer. Some letter writers claimed, in good socialist fashion, to represent a Soviet collective and speak on behalf of millions of people, such as a 22-year-old male from Tambov, who penned: "I cannot hold back the emotions which fill my soul at present and which I can confidently say fill the hearts of millions of people like me."²⁷ It is worth noting that these people were not dissidents and their goals were never to malign the Soviet authorities. Rather, these were mostly ordinary Soviet citizens, who used the discourse of peaceful coexistence to elaborate on issues of importance to them.

People of different generations wrote to Khrushchev, but the majority of people identified themselves as elderly pensioners or invalids. The pensioner frequently took out his or her pen — often contrasting earlier backwardness with the technological achievements of the late 1950s or reminiscing about the horrors of the Great Patriotic War. The common experience they usually draw upon is the Second World War and the letter writers' enthusiasm for peaceful coexistence may thus often be explained by their sincere hopes never to experience another wartime situation. At a Kremlin press conference on August 5 where Khrushchev answered questions about the invitation and the purposes of the trip, he also reminded the Soviet people of the wartime alliance with the United States, indicating that they were capable of cooperating and working together.²⁸ As we shall see, many of the

26. This is borrowed from Sheila Fitzpatrick, "Supplicants and Citizens", 81. It is also worth noting that in comparing the concerns and topics to those discussed by Fitzpatrick's letter writers new themes are prevalent in 1959. This is mostly due to the occasion of the letter writing (Khrushchev's visit to America) but also because since the 1930s, World War II had replaced the Civil War as a major traumatic experience that people referred to when discussing their experiences and support and sacrifices for the regime.

27. *Face to Face with America*, 529-530.

28. *Pravda*, (August 6, 1959), 1-3.

letter writers jumped on this opportunity to finally be able to incorporate the American ally into the myth of the Great Patriotic War.

The 1959 letters to Khrushchev can roughly be divided into two main categories. The first consists of endorsement letters, i.e. telegrams and letters wishing Khrushchev well or, after his return, congratulating him on the successful outcomes of the trip. Endorsement letters are laden with praise and admiration for the Communist Party, the Soviet government, and Premier Khrushchev and, not surprisingly, the language of these letters relies on the official formulations and tropes presented in the mass media. Letters in the second category, opinion and advice letters, also draw on official rhetoric, but many of the letter writers express their (mostly positive) view of the events of 1959 as well as the processes leading up to them. Within the second category, one finds letters that address Christian values, some even discuss a civilizing mission. One also finds optimism about “catching up with and surpassing America,” and advice on how to best achieve that goal. What these topics have in common is that they are framed within a discourse of peaceful coexistence and a positive focus on personal exchanges. Furthermore, advice letter writers sometimes used their own experiences with Americans, such as living and working in the United States, to explain how they thought Soviet-American relations should develop. Ranging from extreme to everyday situations, the letter writers often drew upon their wartime experiences and everyday life in the newfound, post-Stalin socialist reality. Generally, there is definitely a feeling of living through historic times — not just in terms of the importance of the Soviet socialist project, but also in terms of the perceived acceptance and recognition of the post-Stalin Soviet Union as an equal player on the world stage.²⁹ Finally, after years of isolation, Soviet participation in broader international life seemed like a real possibility — and so did reconciliation with the former American ally.

Breaking the ice of the Cold War: Public presentations of peaceful coexistence

For the endorsement letter writers, two themes recurrently arise as defining moments of the year 1959. Most importantly, the “twin achievements”³⁰ of Soviet scientists: the launching of *Lunik*, the Soviet space rocket to the moon, and the construction of *Lenin*, an atomic icebreaker were much celebrated as a clear sign of the supremacy of the Soviet way of life:

The sending of our space rocket to the moon, the trials of the atomic ship which bears the great name of Lenin, arouse a feeling of pride in our country, our Communist Party, thanks to which backward Russia has become the advanced Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.³¹

29. *Face to Face with America*, 533.

30. *Ibid.*, 500.

31. *Ibid.*, 504.

Furthermore, Premier Khrushchev's successful promotion of peace in America was viewed as a monumental move toward world peace and melting "the ice of the 'cold war.'"³² With this metaphor, Khrushchev was credited with the task of introducing to the hostile Americans the simple logic of peace and friendship that would magically solve all tensions and end the Cold War. Relying on the language and propaganda of de-Stalinization, not only *Lenin*, but also Khrushchev, became an icebreaker of colossal significance.

The endorsement letter writers parroted official language and policy. This is evident in the emphasis on the twin achievements of *Lunik* and *Lenin*. Two days before Khrushchev arrived in the United States *Pravda* celebrated the success of *Lunik* on the front page and *Lenin* on the third page. Not much else was discussed in the day's issue and surely, the timing of these stories was calculated to strengthen the image of the Soviet Union as a worthwhile competitor, with an advantage in the area of technology.³³ The endorsement letter writers often showed an enormous amount of belief in Soviet technology. In 1957, the success of Sputnik had certainly increased Soviet people's confidence and now *Lunik* and *Lenin* helped to validate the patriotic feeling that no one, not even the United States, could beat the Soviet Union in outer space.

When discussing the United States of America, the endorsement letter writer often distinguished between ordinary Americans and American policy as was common in the Soviet press — expressing sympathy for individuals but not for the government.³⁴ An anonymous writer using the pen name "Leningrader," suggested that Khrushchev would praise

Americans themselves, while, as for the U.S.A.'s technological level, you had expected to see something quite different from what you actually saw, that all you did see makes you say in good Russian: "It seems the devil is not so bad as the cold warriors painted him."³⁵

The "Leningrader" continued:

I realize very well how silly it is for a passenger to be a back-seat driver. Still, what I want to do is not advise you — oh, no! — but simply ask you not to feel admiration for anything in America. To see the flaws in everything, even the best, and to say with an air of disdain when you see something we don't have: "Yes, perhaps we ought to use that."³⁶

32. *Ibid.*, 544. This kind of language was also commonly used in the Soviet media. The *Pravda*, for example, always wrote about the Cold War in this ironic way, putting quotation marks around the term.

33. *Pravda*, (September 13, 1959): 1 and 3.

34. *Face to Face with America*, 492.

35. *Ibid.*, 498.

36. *Ibid.*

This sort of advice on how to deal with the perceived preeminence of American progress in both technology and comfortable lifestyle went hand in hand with the Soviet party line of the late 1950s. The Soviet line was to accept that — for now — the Soviet Union was lagging behind America but in order to catch up, the Soviet people would pick and reject whatever they felt America did or did not have to offer them and would eventually surpass it.

All of the published letters aim at showing how grateful and satisfied the Soviet people are with their way of life and how they cannot live without peace and friendship with other nations:

Why do we live so well? Because the Party and the Government are constantly concerned with our well-being, with the well-being of all us ordinary Soviet people [...] We live wonderfully. We need peace.³⁷

Expressing blind adoration of the Communist Party was a standard feature of these letters, as was congratulating Khrushchev on following Lenin's teachings.³⁸ Many authors, especially women,³⁹ often identified themselves as "simple" people and then recounted their advancements in life, which the Communist Party had made possible for them.⁴⁰

Many also compared life in pre-Revolutionary times with life under Soviet power. People writing about survival issues were often very patriotic and usually parroted the official propaganda of the Soviet media, proud to be Soviet and proud of the Soviet "way of life."⁴¹ The endorsement letter writer also recalled the suffering of the Great Patriotic War to place emphasis on how Soviet socialism had now succeeded in providing the Soviet people with a better life. Their lives had turned out much better than they had dared to hope, and for that they expressed their deepest gratitude to Comrade Khrushchev. Indeed, thanking Khrushchev for "everything" he had done, for his "dignity" and "for the difficult, tremendous job you are doing"⁴² were common formulations. Some also revealed their definite need for a father figure in the leadership role, reminding Khrushchev to take care of himself "for us, for the people."⁴³ And his role as leader was reinforced as enthusiastic Soviet citizens described his speeches in America, which were published on the front page of the *Pravda* everyday during the visit, with flattery: "never in my life did I read anything more interesting, wonderful and sharp-witted."⁴⁴

37. *Ibid.*, 538.

38. *Ibid.*, 525 and passim.

39. *Ibid.*, 531.

40. *Ibid.*, passim.

41. *Ibid.*, 528.

42. *Ibid.*

43. GARF, f. 5446, op. 93, d. 1320, l. 106.

44. *Ibid.*, d. 1316, l. 96-97.

Earlier in the summer, on July 25, Nixon's opening speech at Sokolniki had also been published in *Pravda*. Nixon's claims about the well-being of American workers attracted much attention in the Soviet Union and over the next couple of days *Pravda* deconstructed the speech, word for word. Nixon had stated that American workers could easily own a television set and afford a car but the Soviet press countered his arguments by, for example, citing Americans who did not recognize the comfort of the American life presented in Moscow at the Exhibition.⁴⁵ Several people took it onto themselves to echo the counterpropaganda in the *Pravda*. Semyonov from Leningrad had read Nixon's speech "but it made no impression on our people at all."⁴⁶ Others were more polite, such as V. A. Zavadskii from Orel who found the achievements Nixon spoke of to be "marvelous," but explained that the Soviet people felt no greed or envy:

We have firm faith in our Government and our Party and in our toil-hardened hands. If we haven't got fifty million cars today, we'll have as many as we need tomorrow. If we haven't got fifty million TV sets today, we'll have a hundred million tomorrow. And so on and so forth.⁴⁷

The American National Exhibition was a major event and many of the letters mentioned it in passing. A typical endorsement letter writer would adopt the tone of Soviet counterpropaganda to describe the Exhibition:

Our workers thought it was not at all what we expected. Either you are afraid to show what you've got, above board and frankly or for some reason you simply don't want to. It is a fact, though, that we thought your exhibition weak. We've got to be frank and let you know that we expect more in the future.⁴⁸

Not surprisingly, the editors of *Face to Face to America* claimed that the published letters bore witness to the "political maturity of the Soviet people, their active participation in matters of great state importance. What they say is but one more proof of the real democracy of our socialist system, of the unbreakable bonds between the Party and the people."⁴⁹ The Cold War historiography of the Khrushchev period has sought to emphasize the initial willingness of the regime to reform itself and overcome the crimes of the Stalin era. Clearly, people allowed themselves to reflect upon current events in the Soviet Union and abroad, but as it became increasingly clear, however, that those who were overenthusiastic about

45. Nixon claimed that fifty million American families had a private car, and that fifty million television sets and 143 million radios were in circulation. *Pravda*, (July 27, 1959). For Soviet counterpropaganda see for example *Pravda*, (July 28, 1959): 4: "O chem govoriat fakty: Po stranitsam sbornika faktov o trude v SShA" by Vl. Zhukov. Also *Pravda*, (July 30, 1959): 4: "'My s etim ne soglasny'. Pis'ma iz Ameriki."

46. *Face to Face with America*, 541.

47. *Ibid.*, 495.

48. *Ibid.*, 483.

49. *Face to Face with America*, 478.

Khrushchev's Secret Speech or interpreted it 'incorrectly' were purged, playing it safe was perhaps preferable.⁵⁰ It was only in 1959 that the state dramatically reduced political persecutions and called upon the Soviet people to take responsibility for themselves — and others. Thus, “the real democracy of the socialist system,” as the editors phrased it, was neither a stable nor a trusted thing in those years and partly helps explain the public presentation of peaceful coexistence.

The endorsement letter writers often showed some enthusiasm for warmer relations with the United States, but highlighted Soviet accomplishments and superiority. *Pravda* language of peaceful coexistence was unmistakably parroted in endorsement letters. When the authors talked, for example, about the Second World War, it was in order to emphasize the improved quality of life since then or to stress the proven capability of the Soviet and the American people to cooperate — they did not go as far as to embrace the opportunity to renew their friendship with Americans. The published letters were chosen because they emphasized the general accomplishments of the Soviet state in general, and in particular, the two accomplishments, *Lunik* and *Lenin*, designed to minimize the effects the visit to the West might have in the Soviet Union.

Experiencing America: The possibilities of peaceful coexistence

What the advice and opinion letters have in common is that the letter writers went as far as they thought possible with the new languages of the Khrushchev period and flavored their endorsements with thoughts on the possibilities of peaceful coexistence.⁵¹ The advice letter-writer thus went beyond the language of *Pravda* and elaborated on issues of Soviet-American relations. They hardly mentioned the “twin achievements” but focused on how the Soviet and American peoples might happily coexist in the future.

Several letter writers offered Khrushchev advice based on their experiences with America and Americans. Often didactic in tone, such letters were unlikely to be published, and in a way, it is extraordinary that people would detail their interactions with Americans. Soviet letter writers always had to keep in mind what the recipients wanted to hear and what the consequences would be if those on the receiving end would not like what they read. As there is no indication that the letter

50. On the failed experiment in information policy following the Secret Speech, see Susanne Schattenberg's article, “‘Democracy’ or ‘Despotism’? How the Secret Speech was translated into Everyday Life” in Polly Jones, ed., *The Dilemmas of De-Stalinization: Negotiating Cultural and Social Change in the Khrushchev Era* (London: Routledge, 2006). About the renewed intensity in political purges after the 1956 Secret Speech and the Invasion into Hungary, see Elena Papovian, “Primenenie stat'i 58-10 UK RSFSR v 1957-1958gg. Po materialam Verkhovnogo suda SSSR i Prokuratury SSSR v GARF” in *Korni travy: sbornik statei molodykh istorikov*, ed. I. S. Epechinaia and E. V. Shemkova (M.: Memorial', 1996), 73-87. See also Miriam Jane Dobson, “Re-fashioning the Enemy: Popular Beliefs and the Rhetoric of Destalinisation, 1953-1964” (Ph.D. diss: University College London, 2003).

51. The letters I chose generally bore these qualities. I did not select many endorsement letters in the archives, as the published letters satisfactory represent that genre.

writers in question were persecuted, one may assume that writing these letters had no serious consequence. It is telling though that letters containing advice or opinions were not published, most likely as they often revealed too much knowledge of the United States and mediating the responses of readers to such information would have been an impossible task.

Nikolai Andreevich of Moscow was one of those writers who enthusiastically described his longtime “experience with the American people” to Premier Khrushchev. Nikolai Andreevich had lived in the United States for seven years as a political émigré after the 1905 Revolution⁵² and then associated closely with Americans in the Soviet Union for two years during the years of “the restoration of the national economy; when we invited foreigners, including Americans, to help us.” He had mingled with American workers and students, and this gave him “a basis to form a few ideas about the average (middle, as they say) American, representative of the American people.”⁵³ He listed the qualities of the people he had known — especially their hospitality and how “they love to receive and entertain.” Qualities and traits of the American people, such as responsiveness, cheerfulness, optimism, cordiality, and how free they were of pettiness also made his list: “I could tell you many interesting things about my individual and business contacts with them,” Nikolai Andreevich said, but he assumed that Khrushchev had already been briefed on such things.

What he wished for was that Khrushchev would have the “full possibility of seeing America and her ‘natural greatness,’ as they say, from within, the way she actually is.” For that to be possible, Nikolai Andreevich recommended that Khrushchev visit an old friend “of ours,” that is, a participant in the October Revolution and “a close friend of Lenin himself:” Albert Rhys Williams. Williams, a congregational minister from Boston and a member of the American Socialist Party, had visited Russia in the aftermath of the 1917 February Revolution.⁵⁴ He had throughout the years been a staunch supporter of the Soviet Union and had, for example, spent April-August 1959 in Moscow as a guest of the Union of Soviet Writers. He would be the right man, said Nikolai Andreevich, to tell Khrushchev about America — “in a way no other man could.”⁵⁵ Clearly, friends of the Soviet

52. Khrushchev’s biographer, William Taubman, recounted the following story that happened during the visit to America: “When Khrushchev encountered Governor Nelson Rockefeller in New York City in 1959, Rockefeller needled him by saying that half a million Russians had emigrated to New York at the turn of the century seeking freedom and opportunity. ‘Don’t give me that stuff,’ Khrushchev replied. ‘They only came to get higher wages. I was almost one of them. I gave very serious consideration to coming.’” Taubman, *Khrushchev*, 40. His source is Joseph E. Persico, *The Imperial Rockefeller: A Biography of Nelson Rockefeller* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1982), 5.

53. GARF, f. 5446, op. 93, d. 1309, l. 137-139.

54. See Albert Rhys Williams, *The Bolsheviks and the Soviets: The Present Government of Russia, What the Soviets Have Done, Difficulties the Soviets Faced, Six Charges against the Soviets, the Soviet Leaders and the Bolsheviks, the Russians and America* (New York: The Rand School of Social Science, 1919).

55. GARF, f. 5446, op. 93, d. 1309, ll. 137-139.

Union — i.e. fellow travelers or people who sympathized with socialism would be able to present America “the way she actually is” — as a country where racial and social inequality were carefully hidden from the visitor unless he had the right kind of guide with him. Nikolai Andreevich felt safe in painting a positive picture of the ordinary American — but for an “accurate” picture of America he recommended a socialist American.

Another author Tsukerman, who had also lived in the United States but in the late 1920s, wrote about his experiences. In 1927 and 1928, he was one of the first Soviet workers involved in trade relations with the United States. He had worked and negotiated with Americans during the years of the First Five-Year Plan (1928-1932) and considered it his duty to share with Khrushchev some facts about his work in America. “Maybe these pieces of information will in some way be helpful.” First, Tsukerman said, it is nothing new that the State Department considers the Soviet Union a “potential enemy.” In 1928, it was already clear in dealing with Americans that they were skeptical and put up many obstacles for the Soviets to do business in America. Still, in this distant time of non-recognition, American firms showed great interest in trading with the Soviet Union and considered it advantageous to do so.⁵⁶ Tsukerman emphasized how some American companies, namely General Electrics, Hercules Powder, Thomas Edison Co., Henry Ford, and a considerable number of businessmen “strived for cooperation with us and they willingly offered technical help to us in different branches of production.” According to Tsukerman, Americans were helpful and favorably disposed toward the Soviet people.

Furthermore, Tsukerman claimed that he and his coworkers, “a large group of Soviet workers,” had labored to enlighten Americans, as they knew very little about the Soviet Union. They worked hard to refute State Department propaganda, claiming that the Soviet Union was not and never would be an enemy of the United States: “As our brotherly relations with the United States of America during World War II show, we never betrayed Americans.”⁵⁷ This kind of advice was meant to demonstrate that while the battle was seemingly uphill for the Soviet authorities, with the State Department skeptical of Khrushchev’s true intentions, some Americans were already sympathetic to the Soviet cause. One needed only to find them and spread the message among them: reminding them of the wartime alliance with the Soviet Union would surely benefit the Soviet campaign. This is exactly why the Soviet media emphasized the importance of getting to know the “real” American people — the problem being, that “real” Americans were not representative of those Americans who were still skeptical of anything that had to do with the “Commies.”

This idea of briefing Khrushchev was a particular genre within the advice letter. One man connected to the oil industry for over thirty years offered to brief

56. The United States withheld diplomatic recognition of the Soviet Union until 1933. Increased trade between the two nations expedited the recognition process.

57. GARF, f. 5446, op. 93, d. 1313, l. 126-128.

Khrushchev for his many upcoming conversations comparing the socialistic and capitalistic economic systems:

I selected numbers and facts, which with clarity and persuasiveness show the supremacy of our socialist economic system [...] If you would find the time to meet with me, I could in 20-30 minutes familiarize you with my accurate numbers and facts. I am convinced that these materials would be very helpful to you. That is why I consider it my duty as a citizen to send you such a letter.⁵⁸

In line with the constant — and not always favorable — comparisons between the socialist and capitalist camps, this man wanted Khrushchev to maximize Soviet accomplishments when confronted with American supremacy. In cases where the Soviet “supremacy” was not obvious — such as in the oil industry — people offered their expertise so that Khrushchev would be able to back up his claims with “accurate numbers and facts.”

Related to the briefing genre is the offer to travel with Khrushchev and represent ordinary Soviet people and thus connect to Americans sympathetic to the socialist cause: the “real” Americans. Among the several people who asked to be taken with Premier Khrushchev on the trip, some offered special knowledge or qualifications that might be of help to him en route. For example, a young man who spoke English offered his services as an interpreter during the trip, and with the same goal in mind of reaching out to and appealing to ordinary Americans people sent photographs of themselves and wanted them to be given to Americans.⁵⁹

A woman called Chistiakova wrote a very sentimental story of a photograph depicting a Soviet and American soldier in Berlin at the end of the Second World War, and her letter was marked by a reader at the Council of Ministers as “deserving of attention.” She wrote: “if our countries can fight together against the general enemy of fascism, how can they not together strengthen peace?” Chistiakova concluded that, in her opinion, this photograph would come in handy for reminding American statesmen of the former alliance and reconfirm the need for peace and friendship, but since this photograph of her childhood friend and his American friend was very dear to her, she asked for it to be returned after the trip.⁶⁰ The Second World War was discussed in many of the letters as a defining event but the inevitability of a renewed global conflict had been deleted from the official discourse: “The future, in Khrushchev’s opinion, would be a cold peace perhaps, but hardly the Cold War.”⁶¹ The Soviet people were clearly acting on this when they offered photographs of ordinary Soviet citizens or Soviet and American allied soldiers — realizing that the “cold peace” would be sustained with “soft weapons.”

58. *Ibid.*, d. 1311, l. 7.

59. GARF, f. 5446, op. 93, d. 1316, l. 98-99.

60. *Ibid.*, d. 1314, l. 136, 136b. The photograph is not in the file but that is no indication that it was returned. The letters are mostly copies of the originals although probably about half of them are originals. Sometimes both the original and a typed copy is on file.

61. Zubok and Pleshakov, *Inside the Kremlin’s Cold War*, 184-185. Quote on p. 185.

Nevertheless, this realization was only possible because fear of a renewed war was no longer present. Literally providing Khrushchev with soft weapons such as photographs, drawings, and poems thus represented a form of active participation in the campaign for peaceful coexistence. Some of the letters reveal, however, that instead of fearing a new war, people worried about doomsday and drastic consequences should peaceful coexistence between the United States and the Soviet Union fail.

For example, a letter written to President Eisenhower by Kulikova, a seventy-three-year old pensioner in Tajikistan, recounts the events leading up to the latest developments in Soviet-American relations. Kulikova wrote about Soviet-American cooperation during the war, she recounted Cold War tensions between the two former allies, and then claimed: "it is worthless to think of why that happened" as "now we are embarking upon a time where the faith of human kind is in your hands."⁶² This is a common feature of many of the letters – Khrushchev had offered Americans peaceful coexistence and it was up to them to accept it: "After all, Comrade Khrushchev will do everything he can in order to assure success and benefit humankind." Now that Eisenhower had agreed to meet with Premier Khrushchev in the United States, there was hope that Eisenhower would react to Khrushchev's offer of peaceful coexistence: "Only you two can say: peace — and there will be peace." And should Eisenhower fail to accept the extended hand of friendship: "Your cold war will change into a warm one, you will drown humankind with tears of blood, people caught in the crossfire will curse you and compare you to Hitler, and God will prepare darkness for you." Kulikova not only predicted a day of judgment and an afterlife in hell, but she also asked him to listen to her, a "simple woman," because after all, he was her "brother in faith (*brat po vere*)" and she his older sister.⁶³

A few of the letter writers touched upon religion as something they had in common with Americans. Thus, Pedchenko, a kolkhoz worker from Ukraine, pointed out that the "creator of life" loved all people equally, and should be glorified. Pedchenko focused on the "primitive," and "bestly" nature of the Cold War conflict: "we, Mr. President, live in an epoch of civilization, in an era of the dawn of reason of human kind." He continued, "you both need to direct all of your thoughts and energy to establishing peace and friendship between our great nations, peace and friendship in the whole world. The countries — and their people, are children of one peaceful planet."⁶⁴ Turning the campaign of peaceful coexistence into a civilizing mission also goes hand in hand with the long-term tasks of Soviet cultural and political organizations — the Soviet mission was always to spread a civilized and modern way of life to other countries. Now for the first time the mission extended to the United States, which until the mid to late 1950s had been

62. GARF, f. 5446, op. 93, d. 1309, l. 110.

63. *Ibid.*

64. *Ibid.*, l. 182-183.

unthinkable, as America as such stood for bourgeois greed and imperialist aggression against which the Soviet cultural mission campaigned.

Coexisting with the United States and Americans did not, of course, mean that the capitalist world was better than the Soviet way of life. Soviet successes in science and outer space had increased the Soviet people's self-confidence but consumerism, where American supremacy was acknowledged, was always a sensitive topic that the authorities tried as they could to mediate. Ivan Aleksandrovich from Kazan wrote a letter addressed to Harold MacLellan, organizer of the American National Exhibition, and copied it to President Eisenhower and Premier Khrushchev, where he discussed living standards of Soviet and American workers in great length. His neighbor had recently visited Moscow and went to Sokolniki Park to see the American Exhibition. The neighbor had much praise for the cars and the elegant American shoes but most of all, "he liked how the Americans talked about friendship with the Soviet people."⁶⁵

Like the endorsement letter writers, opinion and advice letter writers also reacted to Nixon's speech and the Exhibition of American life in Sokolniki. In his letter, Ivan Aleksandrovich recounted the American propaganda about workers; how American workers get paid a hundred dollars per week, how they could buy two suits for that money or 420 kg of white flour, and how they could own two cars. This was precisely the kind of propaganda that the Soviet leadership worried about the most, but some Soviet citizens wanting to give the impression of loyalty took it upon themselves to refute this as is clear in Ivan Aleksandrovich's fifteen-page letter where he recounted the details of his life as an ordinary Soviet man. Opposed to the endorsement letter writer, however, Ivan Aleksandrovich offered his advice on how to deal with this and emphasized the need for personal exchanges in order for the two nations to be able to happily coexist:

We, the Soviet people are happy if blue- and white-collar workers are financially taken care of and live very well in any country of the world. We want to live even better, we also wish the American people a better life, and if we are to become your friends, then there is never going to be a war. Send us your workers, pensioners, scientists and engineers, sportsmen, artists, farmers. We want them to see how we work and to observe our way of life, and we will come to you to see how your blue- and white-collar workers live, to see your way of life and then there will never ever be a war.⁶⁶

Ivan Aleksandrovich then narrated in detail how he had lived during tsarist times and how he lived now — comparing prices of white flour and general living circumstances. The increased comforts were of course all due to Soviet power: "And if there are still people abroad who say that some of us, Soviet people, want to return to the earlier ways," they should rest assured that "nothing can affect us, because we do not want war, and we will never give up Soviet power or the banner

65. *Ibid.*, d. 1311, l. 102-187.

66. *Ibid.*

of Lenin to anyone.”⁶⁷ Ivan Aleksandrovich’s poorly written letter contains grammatical errors, flawed syntax, and run-on sentences — but his command of the language of *Pravda* was flawless, not only in the way that he believed in Soviet capabilities to catch up with and surpass America but also in how highly he valued personal interactions as a means to an end.

Another letter writer also voiced his belief in personal exchanges as a way of correcting the Soviet image abroad and, following the languages of peaceful coexistence, he sent “a friendly note” to all the people of the United States of America:

We have heard much about America and about the American people, and the Russian people have always been sympathetic to your people. But from the American side the wind has always been cold toward the Soviet Union. American people think we are a red plague. They look at communists as their bloody enemy. But you, American people, are profoundly mistaken in this. Communist — it is the greatest word in the world.⁶⁸

Many letter writers expressed a similar sentiment. If the American people could only see for themselves how the Soviet people lived and worked, they would immediately stop fearing them and support their ideas for peace in the world.

As previously mentioned, Khrushchev’s visit to America was the occasion for writing the letters and explains the way they are categorized in the archives. Many authors, however, also took the opportunity to inform Khrushchev about their personal life and request something for themselves or for family members. I. S. Tretiakov, a pensioner in Gorki, was one of those people who complemented Khrushchev on his success in dealing with Americans and emphasized Soviet technological supremacy. But his long letter concluded with an appeal on behalf of his imprisoned son. Tretiakov had been widowed in 1943 and had therefore raised his son alone. He confessed to Khrushchev that he had “screwed up his son,” who, in 1958, had been convicted to a five-year prison term for stealing 127 rubles.⁶⁹ It is a shame, Tretiakov, wrote, that “while all youth are actively building something, the son of an old communist sits in prison.”⁷⁰ He claimed responsibility for his son having lost his way, testing the grounds for his son to be rehabilitated.

Another letter writer wrote with a special supplication directly related to Khrushchev’s visit. Before getting to the request, Dzhavakov from Rustavi delivered a long rhapsody for Khrushchev:

I only want to point out that among the nation — and a nation consists of separate individuals, just as the ruble comprises kopeks — there are different forms of love for one’s leader, one’s boss. Some people love him in one way,

67. *Ibid.*

68. *Ibid.*, d. 1319, l. 50-54.

69. *Ibid.*, d. 1309, l. 169-171.

70. *Ibid.*

others people just love him simply, a third group loves him deeply, a fourth group, to which I also proudly belong — and not without reason — loves him warmly, fanatically. That is why even a prison sentence would give me joy, if I were sent there at your command. I say this not because of fear, not out of a wish to indulge you, but with full reason and warmth. I repeat that with me there is an important reason for loving you fanatically. But enough about that. Please excuse me for letting the introduction take so much of your time.⁷¹

The request that needed all this build-up was no small one. Dzhavakov's wife had an aunt and an uncle living in America and he was writing to see if Khrushchev would take his eighty-seven year old grandfather-in-law with him to America so he could see his children one last time. He claimed that while some might think this could harm Khrushchev's mission — the son and daughter having taken refuge in the United States — he thought otherwise and offered his opinion of why this would "have the opposite effect." He claimed that "this will be of interest and in all of America, news spreads fast." Dzhavakov went on to assure Khrushchev that his father-in-law was "still very strong, and he could drink Kaganovich under the table." Furthermore, he knew "many old soldiers' songs", and spoke good Russian. Moreover, Dzhavakov made sure to ask that his grandfather-in-law, "father of two American citizens," would be returned to them unharmed and intact. "We have no one besides him."⁷²

Despite its tragicomic tone, this and other such letters reveal much about the Soviet people's belief in the value of personal interactions. The abstract term "friendship between nations" was given a personal twist as they thought up ways of making the American people sympathize with ordinary people. The opinion and advice letter writers often showed believe in personal relations and cultural exchanges and many based this belief on former experiences with Americans. This sort of advice would have been unthinkable under Stalin and shows that people adopted the discourses of peaceful coexistence with the United States and, by relating experiences and relations with Americans, wanted to show that peacefully coexisting with them was a real possibility.

Peaceful coexistence and the legacy of 1959

When Premier Khrushchev's visit to the United States took place, it was generally believed that the visit was to be repaid by President Eisenhower. This was celebrated in the Soviet Union — and in the letters — as an opportunity to display both technological progress and traditional hospitality to the outside world. But after the downing of the American U-2 spy plane on May 1, 1960, the visit was called off and the Paris talks planned for Eisenhower's European trip were

71. *Ibid.*, d. 1311, l. 33-34.

72. *Ibid.*

cancelled. Then, in 1962, the Cuban Missiles Crisis dealt peaceful coexistence between the Soviet Union and the United States the final blow.

In 1959, however, the Soviet letter writers embraced the discourse of peaceful coexistence and its possibilities seemed endless. The letter writers wholeheartedly supported the idea that if only Americans would realize that the Soviet people were peace loving, ordinary people, peaceful coexistence would readily come into practice and the "two great nations" would be able to understand each other with the help of personal exchanges and individual contact. In spite of the panegyric and parroted texts that some people wrote, the letter writers seem sincere in their hope for a permanent thaw in superpower relations. Furthermore, some of their stories addressed recently lifted taboos of real political significance such as stories of working abroad, émigrés, production and industry, even consumerism, and show that the atmosphere had considerably changed in the Soviet Union.

Khrushchev's 1959 visit to the United States was meant to advertise and celebrate the accomplishments of the Soviet Union in the United States and thus impress the Red scare fearing American public. Khrushchev's personal goal was to establish that the Soviet Union was an equal of the United States. The country might be lacking in the availability of consumer products but was ahead in the space race and in education and should thus be taken seriously. As early as 1957, however, it had become clear that Soviet leaders had underestimated the power of the cultural Cold War and the role living standards, convenience, leisure, and fashion were to play in it. Thus, Khrushchev's visit made more of an impression on the Soviet public, which enthusiastically responded to the trip in official tropes, in this case, in the name of peaceful coexistence with America.

Still, judging from the tone of the letters, it is likely that the letter writers exercised strong self-censorship.⁷³ What shines through is vigorous self-fashioning accommodating the trope of peaceful coexistence and adapting to the relative relaxation of the post Secret-Speech era. The style of the letters reflects the changed tone of the Soviet media and official discourse in the post-Secret Speech era, which people seem to have intuitively co-opted as their own. Considering how many elderly people wrote to Premier Khrushchev on the eve of his trip to America, it is also likely that they were relieved not to have to worry about another war — they wanted to have peace of mind as well as peace and friendship between the two nations. The return to Leninism also marked a return to the times when the United States was — in some areas — seen as a model in production and industry and many letter writers also seemed to long for the time when the Soviet Union would eventually catch up with and overcome America.

The memories of the year 1959, particularly the memories of Sokolniki and Khrushchev in America, became important reference points as the Soviet people later looked back on their discovery of America and the West. Peaceful coexistence

73. Like Jochen Hellbeck's diarists, the letter writers "situated their personal, and particular, existence with respect to the general public interest" (357). Jochen Hellbeck, "Working, Struggling, Becoming: Stalin-Era Autobiographical Texts," *The Russian Review*, 60, 3 (July 2001): 340-359.

succeeded in changing the official discourse about the United States and it brought new ways of experiencing America to the forefront. The Stalinist image of the former American war ally as a warmonger and potential aggressor receded and instead, a well to do, inviting America was presented. Soviet citizens thus contributed to the campaign for peaceful coexistence. They may have done so purely out of patriotism, but they may also have embraced the concept of peaceful coexistence because it seemed reasonable to them. The repeated references to the Second World War suggest that at least some people were relieved that they were allowed to include the alliance with the United States in the powerful myth of the Great Patriotic War in the Soviet Union. They also indicate that hopes for peaceful coexistence between the two countries were earnest-people wanted to live without the fear of a war between the Soviet Union and the United States. What is clear is that in 1959, new images were added to the postwar representations of the United States. When relations cooled again, newfound memories of the former friend could not easily be distinguished. Despite the failure of peaceful coexistence as such, Soviet-American cultural relations of the post-Stalin period and above all, the changes in the discourse about the United States had a deep impact on the Soviet people and their perceptions of America.

University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill

rosa@email.unc.edu