1 Stalinist Youth Festivals, 1947–51

Contemporaries did not know it at the time, but the socialist world had struck gold. In the summer of 1947, the Soviet-sponsored World Federation of Democratic Youth introduced a new kind of international event that immediately resonated with the young generation. After the years of darkness, despair and misery, this new celebration, which promised togetherness, joy and hope, seemed to respond to the needs of young people, mentally and physically drained by the devastating and total war. During the first gatherings in Prague (1947), Budapest (1949) and Berlin (1951), this new international event developed into a recognizable concept, a socialist cultural product, which became acknowledged both within the socialist orbit and in the "free world". At the emergence of the Cold War, misgivings about communist domination over the festival made Western, non-communist youth organizations boycott the event, which soon turned into a battleground of the cultural Cold War, where two blocs projected their competing narratives about youth and the future world.

Prague 1947: The Stage for Postwar Hope

The first World Festival of Youth was held in Czechoslovakia's capital Prague in July-August 1947. Approximately 17,000 young people from 71 countries gathered together with around 62,000 locals in a hopeful atmosphere. The cheering crowd marched through the city centre with portraits of Stalin and other communist leaders, they enjoyed ballet and folk-dance performances, fooled around in a carnival, saw a large exhibition of the role of youth in the war, took excursions to historical monuments in Prague, and paid visits to Lidice village, a site destroyed by the German army in June 1942. Some foreign participants had already taken part in voluntary reconstruction work in Czechoslovakia prior to the festivities.[1] During those ecstatic summer days, young people were neither bothered by President Winston Churchill's "Iron curtain speech", which had already proclaimed the division of Europe in March 1946, nor were they worried about the devolving relations between the Soviet Union and its former Western allies due to the Marshall Plan having been

1 RGASPI, f. M-4, op. 1, d. 504, ll. 114–117. World Federation Democratic Youth, 29 August 1947, World Youth Festival; RGASPI, f. M-4, op. 2, d. 5, 1–63; RGASPI, f. M-4, op. 1, d. 4, l. 1. World Youth Festival, No. 2, Prague, Czechoslovakia July 20 to August 17, 1947.

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introduced in June 1947.[2] In Prague, as one of the participants, Ele Alenius, later penned in his memoirs, "young people were still friends with one another".[3]

Alenius, a Finnish student activist in the Academic Socialist Association of the University of Helsinki, Minister of Finance in 1966–70 and the leader of the People's Democratic Party of Finland in 1967–79, was fascinated by the principal idea of the festival – that young people would gather together in order to advance mutual understanding. Alenius' passion for peace work came from a leftist family background and his personal experiences at the front. He had only been 17 when he was called to war against the Soviet Union within the youngest age group in 1943. "For many years European youth had been on the opposite sides and killed each other as enemies, but now they would meet in a completely different spirit. It was something that I had been dreaming of", he reminisced.[4] Many young Europeans shared his dream and felt strongly about doing something tangible in order to secure world peace at a moment when the fear of a new global war had not completely vanished with the signing of the Paris peace treaty. Between the end of the war and the epoch-making year of 1956, numerous Western fellow travellers, intellectuals, artists and scientists gave their support to Soviet peace work, most often being active in the World Peace Council.[5] Young workers and left-leaning students found a channel for these sentiments in the WFDY or the IUS, and in the World Youth Festivals.

Organized only two years after World War II, this massive four-week gathering with a large cultural and sports program can be regarded as a success for its main organizer, the WFDY. The summer of 1947 was a busy time in terms of youth events: in late July, the World Christian Youth Conference met in Oslo, in August, over 24,000 scouts began their traditional camp Jamboree at Moisson, France, and the University Summer Games brought student athletes from all around the world to Paris. Still, this new and unknown event managed to attract to thousands of European young people from all over the political spectrum. The majority came from the ranks of the communist and "democratic" youth leagues; however, there were also notable numbers of social democrat and labour-party youth, members of

2 For Soviet reactions to Marshall aid, see Roberts, Geoffrey, *The Soviet Union in World Politics. Coexistence, Revolution and the Cold War, 1946–1991* (London: Routledge, 1999), 24–25.

3 Alenius, Ele, *Salatut tiet* (Helsinki: Painatuskeskus, 1995), 112.

4 Alenius, *Salatut tiet*, 108–109; Interview with Ele Alenius, 21 November 2007.

5 Hollander, Paul, *Political Pilgrims. Travels of Western Intellectuals to the Soviet Union, China, and Cuba 1928–1978* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), 102–117; Caute, David, *The Fellow-travellers. Intellectual Friends of Communism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 298–299, 312–313, 316–318, 340–341.

scout organizations as well as some conservatives and liberals.[6] One of the non-communist attendees was a British Conservative Party member, Gordon Grant, who reviewed the festival in rather positive terms in a letter to the editor of *The Manchester Guardian*. Grant had "entered into discussion with people from many countries, and these were conducted on a friendly basis, politics entering the conversation only on rare occasions".[7] Only a few Global South organizations managed to send their people to Prague, yet the WFDY secretariat reassured "that these countries have a prominent place in the program of the Festival."[8]

The idea of the World Youth Festival had been born at the founding congress of the WFDY in London in November 1945. The initiative was announced at a special commission on youth cooperation, which suggested that the WFDY should hold a festival to widen cultural contacts between countries and to provide a way of creating pen pals and working camps amongst young people.[9] The discussions for planning the World Youth Festival started in early 1946 in the WFDY executive committee. Besides Prague, Copenhagen, Paris and Vienna were among the candidates, but Vienna was soon dropped because both Austrian and Soviet representatives were categorically against it. Yet it was only thirteen years later, in a very different international situation, that the seventh World Youth Festival was celebrated in Vienna in 1959.[10] Copenhagen and Paris were considered at much greater length; however, the unstable political climate between Eastern and Western Europe finally prompted the WFDY officials to choose Prague. Both French and Danish governments refused to endorse the festival, because they were unable to ensure that the event was not a communist enterprise.[11] Moreover, Paris

6 RGASPI, f. M-1, op. 3, d. 512, l. 7. Ob itogakh festivalia 1947; Bresslein, Erwin, *Drushba! Freundschaft? Von der Kommunistischen Jugendinternationale zu den Weltjugendfestspielen* (Frankfurt am Main: Fisher Taschenbuch Verlag 1973), 86; Viitanen, Reijo, *SDNL 50 vuotta* (Helsinki: SDNL, 1994), 117–121.

7 *The Manchester Guardian*, 28 August 1947, 4, "Serious Politics".

8 World Youth Festival, a letter to WFDY member organisations, Vidya Kanuga for the secretariat, November 1946, 1, Box WFDY 1945, Reijo Viitanen's collection, KansA.

9 Moshniaga, V. P., *Molodoe pokolenie internatsionalistov* (Moscow: Molodaia gvardiia, 1972), 46. The initiative might have come from the Chinese delegation. Kotek, Jöel, "Youth Organizations as a Battlefield in the Cold War", in *The Cultural Cold War in Western Europe, 1945–1960*, edited by Giles Scott-Smith and Hans Krabbendam (London: Routledge, 2003), 188–189 (note 10).

10 RGASPI, f. M-4, op. 1, d. 344, l. 71. Executive committee meeting, plenary session 29 July 1946.

11 Kotek, 1996, 112; Mikhailov, Nikolai, *Pokoi nam tol'ko snitsia*, Moscow: Molodaia Gvardiia, 1982, 236; RGASPI, f. 17, op. 128, d. 1049, l. 136. Spravka o Mezhdunarodnogo festivalia molodezhi. V. Ivanov, E. Fedorov.

was already going to be crowded, hosting Students' University Games.[12] For the Soviet Union and the socialist bloc, organizing the first World Youth Festival in the Western half of Europe would have served as an indicator of the WFDY's non-partisan nature and would have helped to present the Festival as a fete of the whole world. According to similar thinking, the WFDY and many other Soviet peace movement organizations had their headquarters in Paris and in other West European capitals up until the early 1950s.[13]

Prague was a fit and safe choice. Unlike many other capitals in Central Europe, it had not been as seriously damaged in the war and, most importantly, state support was ensured.[14] The national committee of Czechoslovak youth took a very positive attitude toward hosting the festival and later the Czechoslovakian government expressed their approval in informal discussions.[15] At that time communists still enjoyed wide public support in Czechoslovakia and rose to power through democratic elections in 1946.[16] Government cooperation guaranteed that public buildings, venues for mass meetings and accommodation services were available for the festival guests. Furthermore, public transportation, which during the period of reconstruction was not an easy task to deal with in every European country, would run smoothly.[17] The only thing that the foreign minister of Czechoslovakia Jan Mazaryk (1886–1948) demanded from the WFDY was that the event be strictly non-political.[18] Disagreement on the overly political nature of the youth festival was to be one of the central topics that came to divide Soviet and Western youth leaders during the years to come. Many Western European youth leaders did not like the Soviet way of mixing youth activities with high politics and wished to see the youth festivals purely as cultural events, completely detached from political agendas.[19]

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12 RGASPI, f. M-4, op. 1, d. 344, ll. 69–71. Executive committee meeting, plenary session 29 July 1946.

13 Clews, John C., *Communist Propaganda Techniques* (London: Methuen & Co, 1964), 287–288.

14 Berend, Ivan T., *Central and Eastern Europe 1944–1993. Detour from the Periphery to the Periphery*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 4–6.

15 RGASPI, f. M-4, op. 1, d. 344, l. 3. Executive meeting of the WFDY, 26 July 1946.

16 Kocian, Jiři, "Czechoslovakia Between Two Totalitarian Systems (1945–1948)", in *A History of the Czech Lands*, edited by Jaroslav Pánek and Oldřich Tůma (Prague: Charles University in Prague, 2009), 465.

17 *World Federation of Democratic Youth*, Bulletin No. 4 September 1946, 6.

18 RGASPI, f. 17, op. 128, d. 1049, l. 29. Vsemirnyi festival' na Prage (no date); see also Kotek, Jöel, *Students and the Cold War* (London: Macmillan, 1996), 112.

19 See RGASPI, f. 17, op. 128, d. 248, l. 14. Bogatyrev i Mishin Mikhailovu, Ivanovu i Voinovoi, 20.12.1947; RGASPI, f. 17, op. 128, d. 247, l. 212. Sekretariam TsK VKP(b) tov. Zhdanovu,

For the Komsomol and the Soviet cultural establishment, the World Youth Festival stood for more than just an international cultural event: it was an arena for promoting the USSR as a cultural super power and for selling the socialist future wrapped up in the rhetoric of peace and friendship. A Komsomol report on the Prague festival eulogized how the Soviet delegation had "demonstrated before the youth of the world the predominance of Soviet socialist culture, showed the high ideological level of our arts and high virtuosity of our musicians."[20] These young virtuosi, competition laureates in arts and sports, who had brought fame to their socialist Motherland, were celebrated on the pages of *Komsomol'skaia pravda* and other central newspapers and introduced as the rising stars of Soviet culture and sport for the domestic audience.[21] The demonstration of Soviet culture at the World Youth Festival was not only a question of showing the "achievements of the Soviet Union" but was part of the plan to become "a world center of culture".[22] This endeavour was based on the view, inherited from the Tsarist era, that Russia was the true custodian of Europe's classical cultural heritage originating in ancient Greece. While culture in the West had fallen into moral decadence, Soviet socialist culture represented the most avant-garde of civilization.[23]

Soviet festival participation was not simply a matter of the youth league, but, like any endeavours outside Soviet borders, a state project. The Komsomol with its head Nikolai Aleksandrovich Mikhailov (1906–82) was responsible for the Soviet festival arrangements. Mikhailov was born in 1906 to a family of handicrafts. He joined the Communist Party during Stalin's cultural revolution in 1930 and worked as a journalist in *Pravda*. He became the head of the Komsomol in the

Kuznetsovu, Suslovu i Popovu, N. Mikhailov, 4.9.1947; RGASPI, f. M-4, op. 1, d. 499, ll. 1–22. Materialy ispolkoma VFDM 1947.

20 Ob itogakh uchastiia delegatsii sovetskoi molodezhi v mezhdunarodnom festivale demokraticheskoi molodezhi, iz postanovleniia TsK VLKSM, 20.8.1947, in *My – internationalisty. Dokumenty i materialy s'ezdov, konferentsii i Tsk VLKSM, AKSM i KMO SSSR ob internatsionalnykh sviaziakh sovetskoi molodezhi i mezhdunarodnom molodezhnom dvizhenii (1918–1971 gg.)* (Moscow: Molodaia gvardiia, 1972), 162.

21 *Komsomol'skaia pravda*, 9 August 1947, 3, "Molodye mastera iskusstva i sporta – pobedim konkursov i sorevnovanii na mezhdunarodnom festivali molodezhi"; *Pravda*, 27 July 1947, 4, "Mezhdunarodnyi festival" demokraticheskoi molodezhi".

22 Reid, Susan E., "Toward a New (Socialist) Realism. The Re-Engagement with Western Modernism in the Khrushchev Thaw", in *Russian Art and the West. A Century of Dialogue in Painting, Architecture, and the Decorative Arts*, edited by Rosalind P. Blakesley and Susan E. Reid (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2007), 219.

23 Clark, Katerina, *Moscow, the Fourth Rome: Stalinism, Cosmopolitanism, and the Evolution of Soviet Culture, 1931–1941* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011), 10–12.

darkest times of Stalinist terror in 1938 and led the youth league until 1952. Later, Mikhailov was involved with the Warsaw and Moscow festivals in the capacity of Soviet ambassador to Poland in 1954–55 and as the minister of culture. The Komsomol and the Anti-Fascist Committee of Soviet youth (AKSM),[24] the official Soviet representative at the WFDY and the IUS, enjoyed the full support of several state bodies in the preparation of delegates, including the Art Committee of the Council of Ministers (artistic performances), the Ministry of Cinematography (films), Sports Committee of the Council of Ministers (athletes), and the Minister of Trade (food for the Soviet delegates during the preparation period). The Ministry of the Textile Industry provided costumes, and the respective ministers looked after the transportation of the delegates. Finally, Mikhailov kept the party leadership, Malenkov, Molotov and Zhdanov, and sometimes even Stalin, updated about the results of the festival and how the money – 2.2 million roubles allocated for the expenses of the Prague event – were spent.[25]

A typical Soviet delegation comprised a cultural group, a sport group, political leadership including people from the Komsomol Central Committee and the Communist Party, as well as a group of young workers and peasants from different republics and smaller regions of the country representing a variety of professions.[26] Every Soviet delegate had a special duty: to win a sporting or cultural competition, to tell foreigners about socialism and the successes of the Soviet Union, or to supervise the other delegates and make sure that they were doing the right thing – in effect, their task was to serve as missionaries of the socialist way of life – a responsibility that every Soviet citizen crossing the border or having contact with foreigners was expected to fulfil.[27]

24 The Anti-Fascist Committee of Soviet Youth (*Antifashistskii komitet sovetskoi molodezhi*, AKSM) was set up in 1941 to manage international relations of Soviet youth during the war. Using the AKSM instead of the Komsomol was part of the Soviet strategy to eliminate direct links to communist organizations. The AKSM was administratively subordinate to Sovinform, but in practice it was directly linked to the CPSU and the Komsomol central committees. The AKSM was renamed the Committee of Youth Organizations (KMO) in 1956. *Slavnyi put' Leninskogo Komsomola*, tom 1 (Moscow: Molodaia gvardiia, 1974), 195. Petrova, N. K. "Antifashistskie komitety v SSSR v gody kholodnoi voiny", in *Sovetskoe obshchestvo: budni kholodnoi voiny. Materialy "kruglogo stola"* (Moscow: Arzamas, 2000), 234–253.

25 RGASPI, f. M-4, op. 1, d. 473, ll. 29–33. Postanovlenie no 2531–771s ot 15 iiulia 1947, Moskva, Kreml; RGASPI, f. 17, op. 128, d. 247, ll. 7–8. Smeta raskhodov delegatsii sovetskoi molodezhi na Vsemirnyi festival' molodezhi v Prage. 15.2.1947.

26 See for example RGASPI, f. M-1, op. 3, d. 870, ll. 4–5.

27 Gorsuch, Anne, *All This Is Your World. Soviet Tourism at Home and Abroad after Stalin* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 106–108.

One of the Soviet cultural delegates to the early World Youth Festivals was the prima ballerina from Moscow's Bolshoi Theatre, Maya Plisetskaya (1925–2015). Plisetskaya belonged to the group of "future hopes" and was chosen to the Soviet team in the ballet competitions at the Prague, Budapest and Berlin festivals. In her memoirs, Plisetskaya poignantly describes her experiences as a pawn in the Kremlin's propaganda spectacle, which, in her words, "was supposed to become a grandiose Hollywood show, to impress the world with the luminous joy of those living in the Stalinist people's prison."[28] Written at the time of perestroika and published in Russia in 1994, Plisetskaya's memoirs accentuate her bittersweet relationship with the Soviet system which provided her both with a long, successful career at the Bolshoi theatre as well as with various limitations on international mobility and creative work. Plisetskaya's account offers us a rare chance to take a look behind the public facade of Soviet cultural delegations, to read something that Komsomol and party reports or print media do not tell: what being a Soviet delegate felt like at a time when the USSR was largely isolated, even from the socialist Eastern Europe.

Plisetskaya moved among the very privileged group of people. During the late Stalinist years, only a very few selected political and cultural delegations travelled abroad, while the masses of ordinary citizens were encouraged to enjoy domestic tourist destinations.[29] The Soviet contingents to the World Youth Festivals included 500 to 1,000 members, and other Soviet youth delegations abroad numbered even fewer (see Table 2). According to a report on the exchange of youth delegations, a total of 22 Soviet delegations and 1,170 people travelled abroad in 1953.[30]

Plisetskaya, as all the Soviet delegates, had to go through a selection process where the most suitable individuals were chosen to represent their socialist motherland. Every Soviet citizen was obliged to fill out a form, or a short biography (*kharakteristika*), to prove that one's background was both suitable for a model communist and that there was not a risk that the person might emigrate during the trip. Besides biographical information and Komsomol/party membership, Plisetskaya recalls that the forms listed "a good fifty questions about everybody and everything. Were you ever prisoners of war, did you live in territories occupied by

28 Plisetskaya, Maya, *I, Maya Plisetskaya* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 95.

29 Gorsuch, *All this is*, 28–48, 82; Gorsuch, Anne E., "'There's No Place like Home': Soviet Tourism in Late Stalinism", *Slavic Review*, 62, No. 4, 2003, 760–785; Caute, David, *The Dancer Defects: the Struggle for Cultural Supremacy During the Cold War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 20–24, 395–396.

30 RGASPI, f. M-4, op. 1, d. 1737, l. 7. Otchet ob obmene molodezhnymi i studencheskimi delegatsiiami mezhdu AKSM i zarubezhnymi organizatsiiami v 1953 godu.

Tab. 2: Festival Participants and Countries 1947–1989.[31]

City	Year	Countries	Participants	USSR	Finland	The UK
Prague	1947	71	17,000	497	9	10
Budapest	1949	82	10,371	630	60	449
Berlin	1951	104	26,000	756	1,300	1,061
Bucharest	1953	111	30,000	960	2,416	1,100
Warsaw	1955	115	26,000	1,090/1,144	2,000	1,000
Moscow	1957	131	34,000	3,044	2,100	1,590
Vienna	1959	112	18,000	802	459	*
Helsinki	1962	137	13,140	*	2,259	209
Sofia	1968	138	20,000	900	600	*
East Berlin	1973	140	30,000	*	800	*
Havana	1978	145	18,500	1,000	350	*
Moscow	1985	157	20,000	*	1,500	*
Pyongyang 1989	162	15,000	1,000	150	*	

Sources: RGASPI, f. 17, op. 137, d. 544, l. 106; RGASPI, f. 17, op. 137, d. 546, l. 102; RGASPI, f. 17, op. 137, d. 44, l. 84; RGASPI, f. M-1, op. 3, d. 794; *Festival mondial de la jeunesse et des étudiants*, Budapest: Fédération mondiale de la jeunesse démocratique, 1949; RGASPI, f. M-4, op. 1, d. 473, ll. 29–33; Krekola, Joni, "Kuumia tunteita ja kylmää sotaa nuorisofestivaaleilla", in *Työväki ja tunteet*, E. Katainen & P. Kotila (eds), Turku: Työväen historian ja perinteen tutkimuksen seura, 2002, 253. *Information not available.

the Germans, your parents' background, your mother's maiden name, her employment record, and of course, everything about your father". Suspicion of those among the population who had lived in the western regions was rooted in the Stalinist fear that people who had been in contact with Germans or other foreigners during the war, might not be loyal to the Soviet Union. The possibility of a festival trip could also be blocked because of difficulties with the Komsomol or the Party, or, as in Plisetskaya's case, because her father, a rising apparatchik in the coal industry, had been shot in 1938 as a class enemy. "It was impossible to hide anything about my father", Plisetskaya wrote, having feared that she would never be able to travel outside the country again. After intense questioning in front of the

31 The figures on Soviet Festival participants for the Berlin and Bucharest festivals are taken from a separate notebook on Soviet festival participants and honoured guests. The notebook is not attached to any official fond, but is kept in RGASPI's reading room 3 (Komsomol archive) in Moscow. The participant figures for each delegation are collected from various sources. Often sources give different numbers, which makes it difficult to compile accurate statistics. So it needs to be noted that these figures are only suggestive.

Komsomol central committee, she nevertheless was allowed to travel to Prague, a few days later than the other delegates.[32]

Prague was especially unforgettable for Plisetskaya because it "still looked prosperous that year. Private stores, small shops, and markets did not lack for goods. But we didn't have any money. We were fed Komsomol-style, in a herd. And so we only got to look and lick our lips."[33] The prospect of seeing a foreign country and a widespread appreciation of the World Youth Festivals in the Soviet Union made the festival trips desirable and the ability to secure a spot in one very difficult. Young musical and athletic talents saw in this a great opportunity to test their skills in the international arena and many future stars, such as violinist Leonid Kogan, and singers Èdita P'ekha and Sofia Rotaru, began their careers abroad at the World Youth festivals.[34] Cellist Mstislav Rostropovich became the star of the Prague Festival in 1947 after winning the cello competition with marvelous reviews. The successful competition made him famous beyond the Soviet borders, especially in Czechoslovakia. A year later Rostropovich represented his country again at the Budapest festival, and again won the first prize with his compatriot Daniil Shafran. At the Bucharest festival in 1953, Rostropovich was on the jury.[35]

A similar cavalcade of top Western musicians and artists was not seen at the festival. The United States and Great Britain, then still formally Soviet allies, had strong reservations concerning the Prague gathering. Unlike with the founding congress of the WFDY in London in 1945, which had been supported by such names as President Harry Truman, Mrs Eleanor Roosevelt and Prime Minister Clement Attlee, the Western governments chose a different strategy toward the festival.[36] The US State Department had been informed about its communist links and adopted a policy of not sending an official delegation to the gathering, fearing the consequences if an authoritative US delegation should be implicated in anti-US resolutions. The US embassy in Prague saw things differently and suggested sending a delegation, which "could have played a leading role in the festival and

32 Plisetskaya, *I, Maya*, xii, 95–99.

33 Plisetskaya, *I, Maya*, 95–99.

34 Plisetskaya, *I, Maya*, 96; MacFadyen, David, *Red Stars. Personality and the Soviet Popular Song 1955–1991* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001), 83, 138–139; Ewen, David, *Musicians since 1900. Performers in Concert and Opera* (New York: H.W. Wilson company, 1978), 407.

35 Wilson, Elizabeth, *Rostropovich. The Musical Life of the Great Cellist, Teacher, and Legend* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2008), 45–46, 113.

36 Cornell, Richard, *Youth and Communism. An Historical Analysis of International Communist Youth Movements* (New York: Walker and Company, 1965), 75; Kotek, *Students and the Cold War*, 76–77.

seriously jeopardized Soviet use of [the] festival as [a] vehicle of Communist propaganda".[37] In similar fashion, American and British newspapers still preferred the way of cooperation, although hints and informed guesses about communist dominance in the WFDY and the IUS were in the air. They remarked on Soviet preparedness to utilize this new forum in the promotion of the USSR, while maintaining that the USA had missed a golden opportunity to showcase American life to Central East European youth.[38] *The New York Times* lamented that "Soviet Russia had 'stolen the show' because of the quality of their exhibits and performers". While the Soviet exhibition had demonstrated "a giant statue of Stalin" and propaganda on the achievements of Soviet youth, "the American display emphasized lynching, racial tensions and 'worried-looking' veterans of World War II".[39] In *The Washington Post*, William Attwood similarly mourned the missed opportunity to use the festival for American ends: "these [youth festivals] provide the best opportunities for meeting the ideological opposition on its own grounds". Attwood regarded the lack of American participation in the festival "a striking example of how American apathy, ignorance and stinginess is helping communism win the battle of ideas in Eastern Europe".[40]

The most vigorous adversary of the Prague festival was, however, the Catholic Church, which viewed the Soviet way of appealing to young people as especially dangerous because it was itself undertaking missions against the same target group. The Vatican and the Catholic Church had opposed communism since the late 19th century and this fight was only accelerated by the Soviet Union's success in World War II. Pope Pius XII, whose papacy lasted from 1939–58, was especially afraid of the fact that the Catholic countries in Eastern Europe were falling under Soviet dominance.[41] According to Soviet monitoring report, Pius XII advised young people not to choose communism on Radio Vatican: "Do not betray yourselves by travelling to Prague; this is indeed the way that leads to Moscow".[42] Pius XII was

37 Ninkovich, Frank A., *The Diplomacy of Ideas. U.S. Foreign Policy and Cultural Relations, 1938–1950* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 157–159; Kotek, *Students and the Cold War*, 112–117, 120.

38 *The New York Times*, 24 July 1947, 7, "World Youth Groups Converge on Prague"; *The Washington Post*, 20 August 1947, 8, "Czech Detains U.S. Delegate to Youth Fete".

39 *The New York Times*, 7 October 1947, 5, "Red Issue Splits Youth Delegates".

40 *The Washington Post*, 14 September 1947, B6, Attwood, William, "U.S. Snubs a Youth Show and Russians Steal It".

41 Phayer, Michael, *Pius XII, the Holocaust, and the Cold War* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008), 134–140.

42 RGASPI, f. 17, op. 128, d. 247, l. 43. V TsK VKP(b), sekretariam Zhdanovu i Kuznetsovu, N. Mihailov, E. Fedorov, February 1947; *Komsomol'skaia pravda*, 25 July 1947, 3, M. Tiurin, "Prazdnik demokraticheskoi molodezhi mira".

on target. In September 1947, only a month after the end of the Prague festival, Stalin's chief ideologist Andrei Zhdanov announced that the world had divided into two opposing camps in a speech given at the founding congress of the Cominform. Both the speech and the establishment of a new international communist organization marked the Soviet leadership's decision to abandon the path of cooperation with the West.[43] The division of the world had become a reality.

Propaganda Spectacle, Socialist World's Fair, or Stalinist Olympics?

When the World Youth Festival entered the scene on July 1947, very few contemporaries knew what this new event was all about. During its first years, the festival was called a "congress", a "jamboree", its exhibitions were described as being akin to a "world's fair in miniature", and the sports activities compared to the Olympic Games.[44] Later, the festival was even considered Stalin's "counter-Olympic boycott".[45] It did not take long before the epithets like "communist", "red", and "Soviet-sponsored" became the dominant labels for the festival in non-communist Western media. Given that the USSR had created an alternative Olympics, the Spartakiads, in the 1920s, it was tempting to think that the rationale behind the World Youth Festival was to make it a competitor to existing international events. Rather than attempting to create a Stalinist Olympics or a Socialist World's Fair, the organizers of the youth festival managed to put together a completely new kind of international event that combined elements from the Western mega-events as well as from socialist celebration traditions. While many of the contemporary youth events, such as the Scout Jamborees and Christian and student organizations' events were for a limited audience, the World Youth Festival attempted to become a globally recognized gathering for all young people. Moreover, like the Olympic Games and the World's Fairs, which contributed to the formation of international public culture,[46] the designers of the World Youth Festival intended to do the same. A widely

43 Roberts, Geoffrey, *Stalin's Wars. From World War to Cold War, 1939–1953* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 318; Roberts, *The Soviet Union*, 26–30.

44 *The Washington Post*, September 14, 1947, B6, William Attwood, "U.S. Snubs a Youth Show and Russians Steal it"; *World Student News*, 12/1954, B. L. Gupta, "Student Olympics"; *World Student News*, 5/1957, 16, Readers' letters: Ihaddaden Hafid, "To Clarify Student minds".

45 Hoberman, John, *The Olympic Crisis. Sport, Politics and the Moral Order* (New Rochelle: Aristide D. Caratzaz, 1986), 18; For a critique on Hoberman's argument see Murray, Hugh, *Journal of Sport History*, 16, No. 1, 1989, 108.

46 Roche, Maurice, *Mega-events and Modernity: Olympics, Expos and the Growth of Global Culture* (London: Routledge, 2000), 21–22.

appreciated cultural event would facilitate the authority of the WFDY as the speaker of world youth, help recruit new members, and, above all, it would support the USSR's self-proclaimed position as the world leader in culture.[47]

In terms of its contents, the World Youth Festival was an ambitious undertaking. Its programme combined cultural activities (classical and folk music, ballet, artistic competitions, theatre and dancing performances, film screenings, exhibitions), sport games, leisure activities (visits to tourist attractions, camp fire evenings, get-togethers) and political functions (meetings, seminars, visits to local factories and schools).[48] In the festival designers' desire to cover every human endeavour from culture to sports, from political and educational to recreational and entertaining activities, the World Youth Festival was a unique enterprise. Yet its institutional structure and message had roots in the existing forms of celebration traditions in both the capitalist West and the socialist East.

While the available sources do not illuminate the initial and developing thinking behind the festival, the vast amount of materials produced by the Komsomol, the CPSU, the WFDY, the IUS and national youth organizations consulted for this study widely illustrate its resemblance to the largest international events of that time. Before the Prague festival, the organizers keenly followed the Scout movement's Jamboree, a large international summer camp held regularly in different parts of the world from the 1920s onwards.[49] Such elements as singing round a campfire, a special scarf for each festival, and national uniforms might have been borrowed from the scout movement.[50] Much more than the jamborees, however, the World Youth Festival resembles the World's fairs and the Olympic Games.

The World's Fairs, especially in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, can be seen as manifestations of Western technological modernity and dominant Western cultural values. Similarly, the World Youth Festivals promoted an idea of modernity; however, it was an alternative view largely shaped by the Soviet way of envisioning the future. Especially the national exhibitions and the artistic competitions

47 Reid, "Toward a New", 219; Clark, *Moscow, the Fourth*, 10–12.

48 Preliminary Programme, World Youth Festival, 18 November 1946, 1–4, Box WFDY 1947, Reijo Viitanen's Collection, KansA.

49 Parsons, Timothy, *Race, Resistance, and the Boy Scout Movement in British Colonial Africa* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2004), 57.

50 Especially in 1946–47, the WFDY bulletins keenly followed what was happening in the Scout movement. *World Federation of Democratic Youth Bulletin*, No. 2 May/June 1946, 26, "Girl Scouts and Girl Guides"; *World Federation of Democratic Youth Bulletin*, No. 1 April 1946, "World Festival of Youth".

at the festivals resembled the World's Fairs in their attempt to demonstrate the best qualities of each nation's cultural traditions but concurrently provided forums for the organizers to disseminate their dominant cultural ideas.[51]

The closest capitalist model for the World Youth Festival was, however, the Olympic Games. Exactly like the Olympics, and modern sport in general, the World Youth Festival simultaneously emphasized national representation and a transnational, universal agenda of bringing peoples together in the spirit of friendship and mutual understanding.[52] Both events occurred in regular cycles, teams wore national uniforms, organization was taken care of by the International Festival/Olympic Committees, they used recognizable symbols and shared similar quasi-religious rituals (torch/festival relay, the opening ceremony, releasing doves, and a special hymn).[53] At the early festivals, the organizers used either the white dove designed by Pablo Picasso for the World Peace Congresses or a picture where male and female figures held hands around a globe – using the same idea as the United Nations' globe symbol.[54] In contrast to the thinking of the father of the modern Olympics, Pierre de Coubertin, who embraced the idea of mixing intellectual and physical arts, in practice the Olympic Games came to be understood principally as a sporting competition. The World Youth Festival, conversely, better managed to embrace every part of human culture, and was therefore closer to the conception of both the ancient and Coubertin's Olympic ideals, in that it combined "sports, the arts, technology and culture as mutually enriching and interrelated aspects of human life".[55]

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51 Munro, Lisa, "Investigating World's Fairs: An Historiography", *Studies in Latin American Popular Culture*, 28, 2010, 80–94; Hoffmann, David L., *Stalinist Values. The Cultural Norms of Soviet Modernity, 1917–1941* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003); Kelly, Catriona and Shepherd, David, *Constructing Russian Culture in the Age of Revolution: 1881–1940* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998); Clark, *Moscow, the Fourth*.

52 Keys, Barbara, *Globalizing Sport: National Rivalry and International Community in the 1930s* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006), 2.

53 Gold, Margaret and Revill, George, "The Cultural Olympiads: Reviving the Panegyris", in *Olympic Cities. City Agendas, Planning, and the World's Games, 1896–2012*, edited by John R. Gold and Margaret M. Gold (London: Routledge, 2007), 62; Hill, Christopher, *Olympic Politics. Athens to Atlanta, 1896–1996* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996), 5–33.

54 On the origins of the dove as a symbol of the peace movement, see *The Guardian*, 12 September 1981, 9, "Painting Picasso Red"; Deery, Philip, "The Dove Flies East: Whitehall, Warsaw and the 1950 World Peace Congress", *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, 48, No. 4, 2002, 449–468.

55 Gold and Revill, "The Cultural Olympiads", 59–83; John R. Gold and Margaret M. Gold, "Introduction", in *Olympic Cities. City Agendas, Planning, and the World's Games, 1896–2012*, edited by John R. Gold and Margaret M. Gold (London: Routledge, 2007), 2–3.

Fig. 1: Releasing doves at the opening ceremony of the Bucharest festival in 1953. Photographer: Yrjö Lintunen, People's Archive, Helsinki.

Given that the organizers, the WFDY and the IUS, had their organizational roots in the international communist movement and that most of the representatives in their decision-making bodies were either communists or sympathizers, it is obvious that the World Youth Festival leaned on socialist models of mass celebration. Festivals and other forms of public celebration played an important role in implementing the new Soviet culture and in legitimizing the new rule in the 1920s and 1930s. Public celebrations, as James von Geldern notes, "become particularly meaningful during times of revolutionary change, when societies not only must project themselves into the future but must grapple with the legacy of their past".[56] Soviet public mass festivals embodied myriad ends. On one hand, public celebrations sought to bring the state and its people closer to each other, while on the other, they were used in propagandizing the correct values.[57] The World Youth Festival drew on Soviet mass culture tradition in many respects, yet it also differed from it a great deal. Like the May Day parades, Women's day celebration, International Spartakiads, or the

56 von Geldern, James, *Bolshevik Festivals, 1917–1920* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 5–6.

57 von Geldern, *Bolshevik Festivals*, 1–13; Petrone, Karen, *Life Has Become More Joyous, Comrades. Celebrations in the Time of Stalin* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), 15 (quotation); Rolf, Malte, *Sovetskie massovye prazdniki* (Moscow: Rosspen, 2009).

physical culture parades, the World Youth Festival was organized top-down, and the mixture of cultural and political dimensions, as well as the centrality of visual propaganda, constituted an essential part of it. The festival programme was based on the Soviet conception of culture as a mixture of high (classic arts, ballet, fine arts) and popular (folk music and dancing, film, mass events).[58]

The first international celebrations arranged by the communist youth movement were an International Youth Week and International Youth Day that were celebrated annually from the 1910s to the early 1940s. Both were established by the Second Youth International, and continued to be organized by its successor, the Communist Youth International.[59] During World War II, the World Youth Council (the predecessor of the WFDY) revived this tradition by launching World Youth Week and World Youth Day. Both remained part of the WFDY's annual calendar in the post-war period; however, they never received as much attention as did the World Youth Festival.[60] Compared with these earlier international events of the communist youth movement, the World Youth Festival was far larger: instead of one week, the World Youth Festival lasted approximately two weeks, it gathered thousands of participants and the scope of combined events of culture and sport was something never seen before. Furthermore, while International and World Youth Weeks had been celebrated separately in each country, the World Youth festival provided a common place for young people from different countries to party together.[61] A festival that demanded travelling abroad made the participation much more limited than that of World Youth Week, which everybody had been able to celebrate equally at home. Therefore, the WFDY and the IUS encouraged national and local associations to arrange national and local events prior to each festival in order to highlight the forthcoming global celebration, create possibilities for wider masses to manifest peace and friendship, and select the best of the best to represent one's country at the *World* Youth Festival. As a WFDY circular reminded, "our Festival must be representative of the best members of the youth movement and not merely of those who can afford a vacation abroad." Indeed, the World Youth Festival was meant to be

58 Grant, Susan, *Physical Culture and Sport in Soviet Society. Propaganda, Acculturation, and Transformation in the 1920s and 1930s* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 124–131; Naimark, Norman M., *The Russians in Germany. A History of the Soviet Zone of Occupation, 1945–1949* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1995), 398; Hoffmann, *Stalinist Values*, 2003.

59 Cornell, *Youth and Communism*, 17; Luza, Radomir, *History of the International Socialist Youth Movement* (Leyden: A.W. Sijthoff, 1970), 26–27.

60 *Pravda*, 21 May 1952, 1, "Molodye bortsy za mir".

61 World Youth Day 1946, Report 2, end of November 1946, 1–7, Box WFDY 1945, Reijo Viitanen's collection, KansA.

the highlight of the "democratic" youth movement, a special forum to perform peace and friendship.[62]

Fig. 2: Finnish participants mingling with new friends at the Bucharest festival in 1953. Source: The Finnish Labour Museum Werstas.

As a cultural mass event of the refashioned communist movement, which strove for a world-wide audience and recognition, the World Youth Festival followed the tactics of the Soviet peace project. Any direct references to communism or the USSR were avoided and instead the event was marketed with such key terms as internationalism, progress, democracy, peace and mutual understanding.[63] *World Youth* and *World Student News*, the organs of the WFDY and the IUS, as well as local communist papers, repeated the core idea of the festival in textual and visual representations that, during the early festivals, formed a specific narrative, which gave the festival its agenda, shape and recognizable image. The "peace and friendship narrative" depicted the World Youth Festival as a universal cultural

62 Letter from the International Festival Committee, signed by Peter Varga (MINSZ, Hungarian youth organisation), Luiz Azoarate (IUS), Kutty Hookham (WFDY), 21 February 1949, 2, Box 1949-, Reijo Viitanen's collection, KansA.

63 Similar remarks in Behrends, Jan, "Agitation, Organization, Mobilization. The League for Polish-Soviet Friendship in Stalinist Poland", in *The Sovietization of Eastern Europe. New Perspectives on the Postwar period*, edited by B. Apor, P. Apor and E. Rees (Washington: New Academia Publishing, 2008), 183.

forum, which united young people all across the world.[64] The idea of universalism was emphasized in the public representations of the festival, for example by listing the international youth and student organizations that had officially taken part.[65] Each World Youth Festival was planned and designed by an International Preparatory Committee (IPC), which was formed for each festival by the WFDY council. The IPC consisted of political activists of the democratic youth and student movements, artists, athletes, young revolutionaries from Global South countries and well-known figures of cultural and political life, often Western fellow travellers.[66] Each IPC dealt with the festival program and with practical matters in cooperation with local youth organizations and communist parties, such as accommodation, transportation and visas.[67] The Komsomol and the CPSU operated in the IPC through AKSM representatives, who pushed through Soviet aims.[68] None of the World Youth Festivals were fully dictated by the Komsomol and the Communist Party; however, they had the ultimate power to control which elements, emphases and political slogans were chosen for each festival. As much as the World Youth Festival aspired to represent universal values and serve as global platform for cultural exchange, it was predominantly a Soviet cultural product.

Budapest 1949: Cold War Cultural Frontlines Take Shape

Preconditions for a global event promoting world peace shattered soon after Prague and the second World Youth Festival held in Budapest, Hungary between 14 and 28 August 1949 was celebrated in a very different world. The earlier hope for cooperation between the US and the USSR had gone and the former allies had turned into two antagonist blocs, sealed by the establishment

64 RGASPI, f. 17, op. 137, d. 544, ll. 46–47. Direktivnye ukazaniia predstaviteliam sovetskogo studenchestva na sessii ispolkoma IUS v Pekine 27.3.–3.5.1951.

65 RGASPI, f. M-1, op. 3, d. 512, ll. 7–10. Ob itogakh festivalia 1947.

66 On fellow travellers, see Caute, David, *The Fellow-travellers*, 1988, 285–346; Stern, Ludmila, *Western Intellectuals and the Soviet Union, 1920–40. From Red Square to the Left Bank* (London: Routledge, 2007), 10–34, 121–122, 128–129, 204–205; David-Fox, Michael, *Showcasing the Great Experiment. Cultural Diplomacy & Western Visitors to the Soviet Union, 1921–1941* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

67 RGASPI, f. M-4, op. 1, d. 499, ll. 1–22, Materialy ispolkoma VFDM 1947 god; Cornell, *Youth and Communism*, 145–146.

68 See e.g. RGASPI, f. 17, op. 128, d. 247, ll. 183–184. Direktiva predstaviteliam sovetskoi molodezhi na zasedanii ispolkoma Vsemirnoi federatsii demokraticheskoi molodezhi v iiune 1947 v Moskve; idem., ll. 187–189, Ivanov Zhdanovu, Kuznetsovu i Suslovu, 26.6.1947.

of the Communist Information Bureau (Cominform) in October 1947 and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in April 1949.

The same wind blew within the international youth and student world, where the frontline settled between the Soviet-sponsored "democratic youth movement" and the defenders of the "free world". After the Prague festival, Soviet dominance and behind-the-scenes manoeuvring began to narrow the possibilities for voicing oppositional views within the WFDY and the IUS. This resulted in resignations and led to the scandalous expulsion of a WFDY secretary, the Danish Svend Beyer-Pedersen, and four Scandinavian organizations from the WFDY in 1948. The WFDY leadership accused Beyer-Pedersen and the organizations of harming the federation with their talks; however, Soviet reporting on the matter shows that the underlying reason was an irreconcilable disagreement on the role of youth and student organizations and Soviet officials' refusal to tolerate any oppositional voices.[69] European and North-American liberal and conservative youth and student groups, which had left the Soviet dominated organizations or had not been involved with them at all, felt they needed to create competing international organizations to challenge WFDY-IUS dominance. During 1946–1950, the WFDY and the IUS gained three rivals. Socialist youth had followed their own path already in 1946 by establishing the International Union of Socialist Youth (IUSY). Non-communist youth and the student bloc gained new members as the World Assembly of Youth (WAY) was founded in 1948 and the International Student Conference (ISC) with its Coordinating Secretariat (COSEC) a year after the Budapest festival in 1950. All three organizations aimed at offering a free and independent alternative to the communist WFDY and IUS. As was revealed two decades later, these organizations were not as independent as they claimed to be: the IUSY and ISC/COSEC received funds from the CIA, and the WAY functioned in association with the British foreign office.[70]

The growing understanding of the Soviet and communist dominance of the WFDY and the IUS made non-communist organizations boycott the festival and caused a significant drop in participant numbers. Whilst the Prague festival had appealed to over 17,000 foreign youths, the Budapest celebration gathered only roughly 10,000 young people from abroad. The clear majority of the attendants, as

69 RGASPI, f. 17, op. 128, d. 429, ll. 2–12. Otchet o rabote ispolkoma VFDM 18–27.2.1948. B. Buriakov, I. Voinova.

70 Kotek, *Students and the Cold War*, 73, 107–108, 168–173; Paget, Karen, "From Stockholm to Leiden: The CIA's Role in the Formation of the International Student Conference", in *The Cultural Cold War in Western Europe 1945–1960*, edited by G. Scott-Smith & H. Krabbendam (London: Frank Cass, 2003), 136–137; van Maanen, Gert, *The International Student Movement. History and Background* (The Hague: International Documentation and Information Centre, 1967), 89, 93–94.

much as 82 per cent, were communists, and approximately 90 per cent of them were from Europe.[71] Around 10,400 official delegates represented 82 countries, including 1,760 from Czechoslovakia, 1,143 from France, 1,100 from Austria, 770 from Germany, 680 from Poland and 449 from Great Britain.[72] Even though the attendance met the organizers' goal, which had been 10,000 delegates, the drop in 7,000 compared to the attendance in Prague did not look good as a signifier of the prestige of the event. In fact, a later Soviet publication enhanced the number of participants to 20,000 in order to show linear growth in participation figures.[73]

The division of the world radically shifted the festival rhetoric. The drive for universalism, still so central in Prague, was replaced by open antagonism towards the Soviet Union's new enemies, which in Ted Hopf's terms was embodied in "the discourse of danger".[74] "The meaning of the festival is", elucidated the Komsomol head Nikolai Mikhailov in a press conference in Budapest "that it once again helped the democratic youth of the world to see its friends and its foes, to understand, which path for youth is the right one."[75] Articles in *Komsomolskaia Pravda* draw the line between "the peace forces" (pro-Soviet group) and the fascist/imperialist aggressors (those who did not support the Soviet policy). Festival participants now constituted a more definite group, which no longer consisted of just any young person: they represented "the progressive youth of the world", whose peace activism translated into the fight against fascism and "reaction".[76] Shrewdly, the peace and friendship rhetoric focused more on an active fight against the enemy than on actual ways of progressing peace. This was a characteristic feature of the Soviet peace agenda and separated it from "the passive spirit of bourgeois pacifism".[77]

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71 Bresslein, *Drushba! Freundschaft?*, 86–87.

72 RGASPI, f. 17, op. 137, d. 44, ll. 84–99. N. Mikhailov Stalinu, avgust 1949.

73 Plan for the work of the Secretariat for the Festival, 3, Reijo Viitanen's collection, KansA; Proposals for Festival, Executive committee of WFDY, December 1948, Paris, 2, Reijo Viitanen's collection, KansA. For fixed numbers, see *Saliut, festival'! Reportazh o XII Vsemirnom festivale molodezhi i studentov!* (Moscow: Molodaia gvardiia, 1986).

74 Hopf, Ted, *Reconstructing the Cold War. The Early Years, 1945–1958* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 254.

75 *Izvestiia*, 20 August 1949, 1, "Zaiavlenie rukovoditeli sovetskoi delegatsii tov. Mikhailova na press-konferentsii".

76 *Komsomol'skaia pravda*, 14 August 1949, 1, "Boevoi smotr sil demokraticheskoi molodezhi" (editorial); *Molodoi Bol'shevik*, nro 16, August 1949, 8, M. Pesliak, "Pered vtorym kongressom demokraticheskoi molodezhi mira"; *Komsomol'skaia pravda*, 30 August 1949, 1, Iu. Doriakov, "Moshchnaia demonstratsiia edinstva molodykh bortsov za mir".

77 Johnston, Timothy, *Being Soviet. Identity, Rumour, and Everyday Life under Stalin, 1939–1953* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 156.

In Soviet society, the shift in rhetoric towards the outside world was followed by a series of anti-Western campaigns until the end of the Stalin era.[78] These campaigns aimed at uprooting Western influence in arts and science, resulting in a xenophobic atmosphere and spy mania that particularly targeted pro-western artists and scientists, slandered as "rootless cosmopolitans" who "kowtowed to the West".[79] The spy-mania also affected Soviet-led international organizations and their member organizations. In between friendship meetings and peace demonstrations, the Komsomol leadership was occupied with locating possible foes inside the foreign festival delegations. Nikolai Mikhailov and other Komsomol bureaucrats were on the alert for suspicious talks and behaviour that was not in line with the ideal performance of peace and friendship. In a report to Stalin, for example, Mikhailov estimated that the US, French, British, Canadian and Italian delegations had included suspicious elements, possibly even spies. One of the indicators of the existence of "reactionaries", the report stated, had been that French sportsmen wanted to carry out the sport competitions without any political slogans.[80] In Soviet bureaucrats' understanding, culture and politics were intertwined aspects of state-organized youth activity, where apolitical culture or individualistic approaches to life would not help the common cause. The World Youth Festival was no exception to that.[81] It was seemingly hard for the Komsomol servants to understand why members of communist or "democratic" organizations, who, they thought, shared the same political and ideological goals, were not willing to use the World Youth Festival for promoting these political agendas.

The most egregious indicator of the growing connection to Soviet foreign policy and the changing situation within the WFDY-IUS was the treatment of the Yugoslav youth organization before the Budapest festival. The background to this was the break between Stalin and the Yugoslav leader Josip Broz Tito, who had decided to build socialism without copying the Soviet example. As a result, Yugoslavia was expelled from the Cominform in 1948 and its relations

78 Gorlizki, Yoram and Khlevniuk, Oleg, *Cold Peace. Stalin and the Soviet Ruling Circle, 1945–1953* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 31–35, 70.

79 Azadovskii, Konstantin and Egorov, Boris, "From Anti-Westernism to Anti-Semitism: Stalin and the Impact of the Anti-Cosmopolitan Campaigns on Soviet Culture", *Journal of Cold War Studies*, 4, No. 1, 2002, 66–80; Johnston, *Being Soviet*, 176–177.

80 RGASPI, f. 17, op. 137, d. 44, ll. 86–94. Ob itogakh festivalia v Budapeshte, N. Mikhailov tov. Stalinu; RGASPI, f. M-4, op. 1, d. 862, l. 1–19. Ob itogakh vtorogo kongressa vsemirnoi federatsii demokraticheskoi molodezhi i mezhdunarodnogo festivalia molodezhi i studentov, 1949; RGASPI, f. M-4, op. 1, d. 862, l. 21–24. Postanovlenie plenuma AKSM, ob itogakh vtorogo kongressa VFDY i mezhdunarodnogo festivalia molodezhi i studentov, sentiabr, 1949.

81 Fürst, Juliane, *Stalin's Last Generation. Soviet Post-war Youth and the Emergence of Mature Socialism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 73, 200–201, 235.

with the USSR were not restored until 1955.[82] One target of the deteriorated Soviet-Yugoslav relations was the People's Youth Organization of Yugoslavia (*Narodna Omladina Yugoslavije*).

In July 1949, shortly before the start of the Budapest festival, Nikolai Mikhailov suggested to Georgi Malenkov, a member of the Soviet Politburo, that they should not issue more than five visas to Yugoslavs in order to prevent them from organizing any provocations in the name of Tito at the festival. Mikhailov envisaged that in the best-case scenario Yugoslavians might completely skip the festival.[83] In the end, only one Yugoslav representative, a member of the international preparatory committee of the festival, Dževad Midžič, was issued a visa to Hungary. Midžič was arrested upon his arrival, taken under guard to the border and expelled from Hungary. The reason given for this procedure was that his visa and passport were not in order. As a consequence, Yugoslavia was not represented at the festival and the organizers did not even put their national flag on display.[84] This had long-lasting repercussions. The Yugoslavian youth and student organizations did not participate in the World Youth Festivals again until the Moscow 1957 event.

The WFDY's official explanation claimed that the Yugoslav Youth organization had not participated in the Budapest festival because Yugoslav officials had denied them the right to travel. They also claimed that Yugoslavs had not given transit visas to Albanian delegates. The Yugoslav organization attempted to demonstrate their version of the story in a leaflet entitled *Why the Yugoslavian Youth did not Take Part in the International Youth and Student Festival in Budapest*. According to the leaflet, the Yugoslav youth organization had prepared for the festival but Hungarian officials had not issued their visas in time. Furthermore, they stated that Albanians had never even requested transit-visas from Yugoslavian officials.[85]

The Yugoslav case ended speculation on the nature of the World Youth Festival. On 21 August 1949, M.S. Handlers used the treatment of the Yugoslav youth organization at the Budapest festival as an example of the changes in

82 Hopf, *Reconstructing the Cold War*, 106–110; Zubok, Vladislav, *A Failed Empire. The Soviet Union in the Cold War from Stalin to Gorbachev* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 73–74, 118–119; on the People's Youth of Yugoslavia see Cornell, *Youth and Communism*, 163–164.

83 RGASPI, f. 17, op. 137, d. 44, l. 70. N. Mikhailov tov. Malenkovu, 19.7.1949.

84 RGASPI, f. M-4, op. 1, d. 1005, ll. 9–27. Why the Yugoslavian Youth did not Take part in the International Youth and Student Festival in Budapest, 18 August 1949; Kotek, *Students and the Cold War*, 148–149, 154–156.

85 RGASPI, f. M-4, op. 1, d. 1005, ll. 9–16.

Soviet foreign policy.[86] Two days later *The New York Times* reported on the Budapest festival simply by publishing a photograph of the opening ceremony at the Pest Stadium, portraying the march of the national delegations to the stadium with a massive picture of Josef Stalin. In the background the huge portraits of Lenin, general secretary of the Hungarian Communist Party Mátyás Rákosi and, once again, Stalin decorated the stadium.[87] *The Washington Post* described the Budapest festival bluntly as communist[88] and *The Manchester Guardian* noted only the results of the World Student Games, organized by the IUS concurrently with the World Youth Festival. The writer believed that the political character of the festival would diminish the meaning of the World Student Games in the future.[89] The difference in the scale of the coverage between the Prague and Budapest festivals was huge. While in 1947 some US newspapers had considered not sending an official delegation a weakness, in 1949 they only shortly remarked the communist gathering.

The decision of major non-communist organizations and Western governments to boycott the Budapest festival meant that the USSR had unlimited possibilities for showcasing its supremacy there. The idea was no longer to show Soviet greatness vis-à-vis capitalist culture and sport, but to demonstrate its position as the bloc leader – the first among equals. This was the case especially at the festival's cultural and sport competitions. Because there were no state-sponsored teams from the capitalist countries, the competitions were diminished into intra-bloc battles between the Soviet Union and its socialist little brothers. Whereas the USSR and other socialist countries allocated vast resources to their lavish cultural program, Western festival groups were on their own, lacking state resources and unable to get the biggest stars to compete in the artistic competitions. While the Soviet cultural representatives included world-famous names such as composer Vano Muradeli and long-distance runner Vladimir Kuts, Western cultural delegations and sport teams were mostly full of unknown names.

"There were no foreigners", commented Maya Plisetskaya on this bizarre situation in her memoirs: "With whom were we going to compete? In addition to the dancers from Moscow, there were dancers from Leningrad, Kiev, Tbilisi, and Tashkent – some 'friendship of peoples'!"[90] Plisetskaya's recollection incisively describes the supreme Soviet presence at the festivals and the way in

86 *The New York Times*, 21 August 1949, E5, M. S. Handlers, "What Will Stalin Do? The Question for Tito".

87 *The New York Times*, 23 August 1949, 14, "At the Opening of the Budapest Youth Festival".

88 *The Washington Post*, 29 August 1949, 3, "World Youth Festival Ended by Communists".

89 *The Manchester Guardian*, 5 October 1949, 2, "World Student Games".

90 Plisetskaya, *I, Maya*, 96–98.

which Soviet supremacy was performed. At the early festivals the Soviet competitors won almost everything there was to win, making Soviet superiority a commonly known condition at the competitions.[91] "The first prize went to the USSR, of course, it was always like that", bitterly commented a Finnish ballerina Elsa Sylvestersson on the ballet contest at the Bucharest 1953 festival.[92] It was not until the Warsaw 1955 festival that the Komsomol leadership questioned the value of organizing the cultural competitions without serious participation from the capitalist countries.[93]

For Hungarians the Budapest festival appeared as one of the few international gatherings with Western attendees in many years. Hungary had been allied with Nazi Germany and was occupied by the USSR at the end of the war. By the time of the festival, the country was already in the hands of the communists, who utilized the youth festival to make the image of the Party more appealing to locals and showcase Budapest as a prime example of a good socialist society. Popular opinion about the Soviet impact on Hungary varied: while some considered it as a liberator, others were more sceptical about the new communist-led regime. Although the festival was a Soviet export and a communist undertaking, the local population probably viewed a cheerful youth celebration much more positively than the previous Soviet presence they had experienced: plundering and raping soldiers at the end of the war.[94] In an account published in 1960, Hungarian poet and writer Tamas Aczel (1921–1994) and journalist Tibor Meray (1924–2020), both of whom later emigrated to the West, describe the festival and the general atmosphere in Budapest in the summer of 1949 still with fairly positive terms. "The young people exchanged ties, took snapshots of each other, and pledged never again to take up arms against each other. [. . .] The town lived and vibrated and was happy as it has never been since the war. This was the golden era. It was the epitome of the new system."[95] Aczel and Meray maintained that some people were already suspicious of the glamorous festivities and shops full of things to buy, calling it "a 'Potemkin prosperity'", but many Hungarians were still fascinated by the new system

91 *IV-yi Vsemirnyi festival' molodezhi i studentov za mir i druzhbu*, 1954, 8–19.

92 Sylvestersson, Elsa and Puromies, Anu, *Elämäni piruetit. Primaballerinan muistelmat*, Porvoo: WSOY, 1995, 133.

93 RGANI, f. 5, op, 28, d. 265, l. 83. Sekretar' TsK VLKSM, A. Shelepin v TsK KPSS, 9.12.1954.

94 Kenez, Peter, *Hungary from the Nazis to the Soviets: The Establishment of the Communist Regime in Hungary, 1944–1948* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 38–39, passim.; Klenjánsky, Sarolta, "'Világ fiataljai, egyesüljetek!' Az 1949-es budapesti Világifjúsági Találkozó és a francia fiatalok részvétele a fesztiválon történeti kontextusban", *Múltunk*, 61, No. 1, 2016, 207–232.

95 Aczel, Tamas and Meray, Tibor, *The Revolt of the Mind. A Case History of Intellectual Resistance Behind the Iron Curtain* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1960), 69–70.

and "since there was no sudden change in sight, such misgivings fell on deaf ears".[96] Aczel's and Meray's account probably echoes the views of some Hungarians but not the whole population, who held varying opinions on the new regime.

The sharpened tensions in world affairs, the ubiquitous Stalin cult or even the conflicts in the youth and student organizations did not necessarily resonate with foreign participants in Budapest. Also fascinated by Budapest was Pekka Kanerva, a regional secretary of the Finnish Democratic Youth League, who had dreamed of traveling to a socialist country. Kanerva, who worked in a local textile factory, journeyed to Budapest as a member of a communist youth choir. Kanerva, who did not know any foreign languages, found a way of communicating with other foreign delegates via singing internationally known labour movement songs, folk tunes and new pieces specially composed for the World Youth Festivals, like the hymn of the democratic youth.[97] *The hymn of the democratic youth*, composed by Anatoli Novikov and written by poet Lev Oshanin for the Prague festival, was an essential element in the soundscape of the World Youth Festivals. Novikov's hymn became familiar to young peace activists and everyone recognized the tune even if people were singing in different languages. For many attendees, singing and marching together formed an empowering experience and reinforced their feeling of solidarity. "The lyrics told about the lives of young people, they resonated with us", explained a Finnish participant. Singing together with like-minded people formed an experience of acceptance for capitalist working-class youths, whose political activism was often questioned or criticized in their home countries.[98] What was empowering for some, sounded like propaganda to the others. John Clews, a contemporary American writer on communist propaganda, considered the WFDY hymn a powerful song with lyrics acceptable for any young person. "It is sung as the climax to rallies, with everyone holding hands, a technique that draws in the most reluctant".[99]

Maya Plisetskaya's experiences with, and the context for, group singing tells a different story. In her recollections, singalongs and other festival related rituals appeared as coercive, even oppressive practices from which a Soviet delegate could not escape. She felt that one was obliged to participate in rituals not only in public events but also within the Soviet delegation. Every time

96 Aczel and Meray, *The Revolt of the Mind*, 70.

97 Kanerva, Pekka, an unpublished memoir, 2006.

98 Koivunen, Pia, "A Dream Come True. Finns Visiting the Lands of Socialism at the World Youth Festivals in the 1940s and 1950s", *Twentieth Century Communism*, 2012, 133–158; Myrdal, Jan, *Maj. En Kärlek* (Stockholm: En bok för alla, 1999), 30.

99 Clews, *Communist Propaganda*, 29.

Soviet delegates sat in a bus being transported to a concert or a meeting, Plisetskaya reminisces,

> we sang Novikov's hymn to youth, 'we are the children of different peoples and we live inspired by the dream of peace', a hundred times, out of tune, but with dedication. There were many spies. If you didn't burst into song, you were considered incompatible, unreliable. So whether or not you had a good voice, you'd join in the singing

Group singing, the Novikov hymn in particular, would follow Plisetskaya at different occasions in all three festivals she attended. She describes the festivals as repetitions of state orchestrated performances with ballet competition, concerts, meetings and factory visits all ended with speeches and "a show of brotherliness", where all "the participants would hold hands in friendship and sing the same Novikov hymn, ecstatically chanting, 'Stalin, Stalin, peace, peace, friendship, friendship'".[100] Plisetskaya's description is an incisive portrayal of what was expected of Soviet artists when they participated in the performance of peace and friendship. It was not only at the concerts, performances and shows, where the Soviet delegates represented their socialist motherland; rather, anytime they were present in public, or, as in the citation above, when they were assembled as a group, they were supposed to perform the Soviet way of living. "Half of the delegation [. . .] were eavesdropping escorts", Plisetskaya writes. "There were ears and eyes all around you. One small misstep and they'd send you home. You'd never get to go anywhere again. And they did send people home!" Sadly for Plisetskaya, after the trips to the youth festivals she missed the first episode of the opening of cultural exchange between the USSR and the West and the first foreign tours of the Bolshoi theatre because she was banned from travelling abroad until 1959.[101]

Plisetskaya and other Soviet delegates were admired by young communists from capitalist Europe eagerly wishing to meet with representatives of the Soviet Union. "People leave their places and run to the green field to be able to see the ambassadors of Soviet youth" is how *Komsomol'skaia pravda* described the welcome the Soviet delegates received at the opening ceremony at the Budapest festival.[102] To the disappointment of young people from Northern and Western Europe, personal contact with Soviet youth was often not possible since the only places Soviet delegates seemed to appear in public were the concert halls, sport stadia or other venues of the official program. Therefore, Soviet

100 Plisetskaya, *I, Maya*, 97.
101 Plisetskaya, *I, Maya*, 99 and passim.
102 *Komsomol'skaia pravda*, 16 August 1949, 1, "V Budapeshte otkrylsia mezhdunarodnyi festival' molodezhi".

delegates often remained distant, leaving youth from other countries looking out for the rare chance for informal encounter.[103] This was a crucial point at which Soviet cultural diplomacy failed to utilize its full potential: namely the great enthusiasm Western young people felt towards the Soviet peace project in the early Cold War. Instead of allowing free face-to-face contact, the Soviet strategy was to demonstrate the successes of the country and the socialist system with superior but distant ambassadors of Soviet socialism.

Berlin 1951: The Cultural Battle between Socialism and Capitalism

The first two World Youth Festivals had gone more or less peacefully, but the third one in Berlin in August 1951 became an unparalleled cultural clash between the Soviet Union and the United States. The Korean war that was underway during the festival had already brought the world to the brink of World War III, but placing the festival in Berlin, a divided city and the most heated spot in Cold War Europe, guaranteed the event the flavour of a battle between the superpowers. Western governments who had either ignored or boycotted the earlier rallies were forced to react now that the Soviet-sponsored celebration was taking place right under their noses. What followed was a propaganda battle, where both sides used soft and hard tactics in order to show one's own system in a favourable light.[104]

In Berlin, Western governments were well prepared to challenge Soviet efforts to influence the opinion of world youth. Prior to the festival, some governments denied visas to young people willing to participate in the festival and West European countries forbade transit travel through their territories, including Western occupation zones in Austria. The biggest media spectacle grew around the British delegation, which faced serious difficulties during their journey to Berlin; especially in the US occupation zone in Austria, where some 300 British delegates were halted for several days before they managed to travel on to Berlin.[105] In the end, the group only managed to get there by the time of the closing ceremony. Back home, they published a leaflet entitled *The Innsbruck Story*, which criticized the US and French policies of hindering travel to the festival.

103 Interview with Finnish participants, 16 March 2006; RGANI, f. 5, op. 28, d. 363, l. 189.
104 Viitanen, *SDNL 50*, 209–219; Kotek, *Students and the Cold War*, 189–200.
105 Branson, Noreen, *History of the Communist Party of Great Britain 1941–1951* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1997), 226–227.

> The strongest protest must be made at the gross infringement of travel rights, and at the brutal and humiliating treatment of these young people. For underlying the denial of the right to travel freely to Berlin, is the wider, deeper issue of the right of young British people to establish friendship with the youth of other countries – not only those with which we may agree, but also those from precisely the countries with which it is most necessary to reach understanding to-day.[106]

The Western counter-measures and travel bans left lasting memories in participants' minds. In comparison with the other festivals, the Berlin festival narratives more often focused on the juxtaposition of East and West, "the peace-loving Soviet bloc" versus "the capitalist warmongers". The hardships that the British delegation faced during the trip to Berlin exemplified the inconsistency between rhetoric and practice in the Western governments. A British communist Denis Hill, a member of the communist youth league and later a worker for the IUS paper *World Student News* in the 1950s, confronted Western counter-measures in France. All the traffic through Western Germany had been cancelled, and so the special trains booked for the British delegation never appeared. Hill and his party were rescued by the ocean liner MS *Batory* sent by the Polish government, and in the end, thanks to this "magnificent act of solidarity", Hill missed only a few days of the festival.[107] Peter Waterman, another British worker in the *World Student News* in the 1950s, travelled on the same boat with Hill to Berlin. Waterman had just become a member in the communist youth league and was heading towards his first foreign adventure at the age of fifteen.[108] An interviewee from Birmingham was not as lucky. He was in the British contingent travelling through the allied and Soviet occupation zones in Austria, was stuck in the US zone for days and finally got to Berlin only to see the closing ceremonies. He could not remember much about the festival itself but the thrilling journey left a lasting memory of the Western governments' way to handle the red danger.[109] Before the Berlin festival had even begun, the Western governments had turned the question of free democracies vs totalitarian regimes upside down. Now it seemed that it was actually the Western democracies which were creating barriers to free mobility, not those states accused of erecting the iron curtain in the first place.[110] We now know what the socialist regimes did to restrict travel from Eastern Europe, but the thousands

106 *The Innsbruck Story* (London: British Youth Festival Preparatory Committee, 1951), 3–25.

107 Hill, Denis, *Seeing Red, Being Green. The Life and Times of a Southern Rebel* (Brighton: Iconoclast Press, 1989), 208. Another British participant, Walter Lassally, travelled to Berlin by a Polish ship Jaroslaw Dobrowski.

108 Waterman, Peter, autobiography, chapter 1.

109 Interview with a British man, 12 December 2007.

110 Rutter, Nicholas, "The Western Wall: The Iron Curtain Recast in Midsummer 1951", *Cold War Crossings. International Travel and Exchange across the Soviet Bloc*, 1940s–1960s, edited

of young workers and leftist students on their way to Berlin were not all aware of this in August 1951. What they experienced went hand in hand with the festival organizers' narrative about the corrupt and demoralized Western governments, who, instead of building bridges, were blocking free movement. What kind of states forbid their citizens from travelling to a peace festival?

The Berlin festival was carried out in cooperation with the Free German Youth (Freie Deutsche Jugend, FDJ),[111] the Socialist Unity Party of Germany (Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands, SED), the Berlin city administration, different state bodies, including the state security policy, Stasi, the international preparatory committee of the WFDY and IUS and the Soviet Control Commission. The main organizer was FDJ head Erich Honecker, who as leader of the GDR again welcomed world youth to the Berlin World Youth Festival in 1973.[112] While the first two World Youth Festivals had primarily displayed Soviet cultural achievements, the Berlin festival became an unparalleled showcase of Soviet geographical and cultural power. The CPSU and the Komsomol paid substantially more attention to the Berlin gathering than any other festival held outside the Soviet Union before and after 1951. Usually the Komsomol officials took care of the reporting from the festival, but in the case of Berlin, the Soviet Control Commission took the leading role. For the USSR, Berlin and East Germany were in many ways exceptional. Unlike the other people's democracies, the Soviet Union controlled only part of Germany and part of Berlin, both of which were divided between the former allies. This made Berlin a continuous scene of political, diplomatic and also cultural Cold War, the most well-known incidents being the Berlin blockade in 1948 and the erection of the Berlin wall in 1961.[113]

Given the special status of Germany in the Cold War, the Komsomol and the Party had considerably brighter prospects for using the World Youth Festival to consolidate Soviet cultural influence in the GDR, and they utilized that opportunity. Soviet cultural strategy in East Germany was to make a break with the Nazi past and to guide German culture toward a Soviet type of socialist culture.[114] The World Youth Festival with parades, demonstrations and friendship meetings appeared as

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by Patryk Babiracki & Kenyon Zimmer (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2014), 78–106.

111 McDougal, Alan, *Youth Politics in East Germany. The Free German Youth Movement 1946–1968* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004), 2.

112 RGASPI, f. 17, op. 137, d, 234, l. 204. Tov. Malenkovu, N. Mikhailov, 30.12.1950; Naimark, *The Russians in Germany*, 4, 11–23, 349; Zubok, *A Failed Empire*, 61–93.

113 Judt, Tony, *Postwar: A History of Europe since 1945* (London: Pimlico, 2007), 146, 156, 250–254.

114 Naimark, *The Russians in Germany*, 399, 467, 468.

an excellent opportunity to "re-educate" East German youth, to enhance Soviet influence in the country. Berliners, according to Soviet reporting, worked "voluntarily" at construction sites where new stadia, swimming pools and sport halls were being built, and approximately 100,000 Berliners gave their homes to foreign visitors for accommodation – free of charge.[115]

With 26,000 official delegates from 104 countries, and around two million East German young people, the Berlin festival became the first among the grandiose celebrations of the 1950s and started a golden age of the festival.[116] During the two-week festivities, peace and friendship symbols covered the centre of Berlin, along with political portraits of communist leaders Stalin, Mao, Kim Il-Sung, and the GDR bosses prime minister Otto Grotewohl, president Wilhelm Pieck, and SED first secretary Walter Ulbricht (see Figure 3). Above all, the Berlin festival

Fig. 3: Posters of political leaders decorated the venues in Eastern Berlin.
Photo: Raili Laitinen.
Source: The Finnish Labour Museum Werstas.

115 RGASPI, f. 17, op. 137, d. 643, l. 119. TsK VKP(b) tov. Simnovu A.A., podpol'kovnik Liul'ka, 5.9.1951.

116 RGASPI, f. 17, op. 137, d. 544, ll. 106–112. Otchet delegatsii sovetskoi molodezhi ob itogakh sessii soveta WFDY v Berline avguste 1951; Bresslein, *Drushba! Freundschaft?*, 89–95; Krekola, Joni, "Kuumia tunteita ja kylmää sotaa nuorisofestivaaleilla", in *Työväki ja tunteet*, edited by Elina Katainen & Pirkko Kotila (Turku: Työväen historian ja perinteen tutkimuksen seura, 2002), 254.

witnessed the peak of the Stalin cult. Not a single article in the socialist papers went by without mentioning the gratitude and love festival youth felt towards Stalin. One of the examples of his mighty position was a greeting from German youth with four million signatures asking comrade Stalin to help reunite Germany.[117] The program, which started with a pompous opening ceremony at the newly built Walter Ulbricht stadium, consisted of 150 daily events, including the usual cavalcade of ballet and folk-dance performances, theatre spectacles, the University Summer Games, visits to factories, schools and historical monuments, such as the Soviet war memorial, as well as meetings between national delegations.[118]

War-torn Berlin was a powerful space to stage a peace festival. Despite the huge building project for the festival, there was still much left from the destruction of World War II. Peter Waterman describes Berlin at the time of the festival as "a real mess of bombsites and swirling sandstorms".[119] The concurrent presence of ruins and bomb shelters and the newly built shining edifices, such as *Haus der Weltjugend* (House of World Youth), brought the past and the future together, implying that by embracing the socialist way of supporting peace one could help build a better future. The temporal proximity of the war is evident in the photographs taken by festival attendees. Young people pose next to ruined houses and damaged streets (see Figure 4), which together with a shabby general outlook illuminate how destructive the war had been in Germany. Maya Plisetskaya, who had seen Berlin with her father in the 1930s, was shocked to witness the city again. "My new meeting with Berlin in 1951 at a youth festival was a striking contrast. Horrid ruins gaped everywhere. There was no city."[120] Ruins also carried symbolic meaning, reminding of the war and the defeat of fascism, the core reason why such a festival was established.

Fascinated by the new course of the Eastern part of Germany, Anni Mikkola, a rank-and-file member of the Finnish Democratic Youth League, wrote in her travel diary that she felt like visiting a real democratic country, which was building a new society amidst the ruins.[121] Mikkola, a passionate communist and a young mother, recorded her perceptions throughout her festival journey. The predominant narrative

117 RGASPI, f. 17, op. 137, d. 643, ll. 118–133. TsK VKP(b) tov. Simnovu, podpol'kovnik Liul'ka, 5.9.1951; *Komsomol'skaia pravda*, 14 August 1951, 4, "Privetstvennoe poslanie nemetskoi molodezhi I. V. Stalinu".

118 RGASPI, f. 17, op. 137, d. 544, ll. 106–107. Otchet delegatsii sovetskoi molodezhi ob itogakh sessii soveta VFDM v Berline 23–28 August 1951; Kotek, *Students and the Cold War*, 195–196; Anni Mikkola's diary of the Berlin 1951 festival, Tauno and Anni Mikkola's collection, KansA.

119 Waterman, autobiography, chapter 1, 32–33.

120 Plisetskaya, *I, Maya*, 18.

121 Mikkola's diary.

Fig. 4: A Finnish couple posing amid ruins in Berlin in 1951.
Source: The Finnish Labour Museum Werstas.

in her diary is that of empowerment: seeing a socialist society in action, feeling solidarity with European and colonial youth, and realizing that the future belonged to communism. One of the most notable events for Mikkola, and for many other participants, was a military-style parade of FDJ members that went past the Marx-Engels Platz and was reported to have lasted up to eight hours.[122] "The spectacle was so huge", wrote Mikkola in an ecstatic passage, "I will never forget it. Hoorays and fraisaf, fraisaf [Freundschaft] sang in my ears for the whole eight hours. Children and elders waved with tears in their eyes".[123] British communist Denis Hill, too, devoted a passage in his memoirs for this "amazing event", in which "for hour after hour the youth of East Germany paraded before their country's leaders and all the foreign visitors". It was not simply peace and friendship, though, Hill notes, as many of the marchers were "chanting the name of the S.E.D. leader: Wilhelm Pieck. Also conspicuous were giant portraits of Josef Stalin. But then – we were all Stalinist in those days. It is dishonest to pretend otherwise."[124] Keijo Savolainen, a Finnish participant

122 RGASPI, f. 17, op. 137, d. 544, ll. 106–107. Otchet delegatsii sovetskoi molodezhi ob itogakh sessii soveta VFDM v Berline 23–28.8.1951; Kotek, *Students and the Cold War*, 195–196; Mikkola's diary.
123 Mikkola's diary.
124 Hill, *Seeing Red*, 212.

to Berlin, considered the mass events in retrospect to have been similar to collective religious rituals and called himself and his group as "peace believers", so strongly did they support the festival's agenda.[125]

While Soviet reports considered the march an indicator of the strength and desire for peace among German youth, Western newspapers equated the parade with the state-sponsored youth activities of the recent Nazi regime, so as to underline the totalitarian nature of the youth rally. *The Manchester Guardian* taunted that "the communist-led movements with their bands and uniforms and above all, their sense of comradeship and purpose, must be attractive to those who miss (if unconsciously) the ordered energy of the Hitler Youth".[126] Referring to the Nazi era touched an open wound, as the FDJ and the GDR were trying to build its new identity. Because of the recent past, the FDJ was admitted to the WFDY only in 1948 and the IUS in 1949, and Germans were not even invited to the first World Youth Festival in 1947. In the eyes of the winners of the war, the FDJ first needed to show that they did not continue the Fascist line but were wholeheartedly committed to the peaceful and democratic development of Germany. The opportunity to hold the festival therefore symbolized the acceptance of the FDJ as full members of the Soviet-led youth movement.[127]

During the festivities, Western non-communist groups organized cultural activities, whose purpose was to break the consensus among festival guests and to attract both foreigners and East German youth to the Western side of the city to view the wonders of capitalism. Besides free meals and cultural activities, West Berlin offered visitors a Marshall Plan exhibition, which demonstrated the latest entertainment technology with over a hundred of black-and-white TV sets spread around the city's shop windows and with two open-air colour television projection screens at Potsdamer Platz and near the West Berlin town hall.[128] In order to prevent East German youths from visiting West Berlin, the FDJ leadership and authorities closed metro stations and circulated rumours that festival delegates who crossed the border were given poisoned food and jailed by West Berlin police. Despite the warnings from the FDJ leaders it was estimated that half a million East

125 Interview with Keijo Savolainen, 10 August 1998, by Tauno Saarela, KansA.

126 RGASPI, f. 17, op. 137, d. 643, ll. 118–133. TsK VKP(b) tov. Simnovu, podpol'kovnik Liul'ka, 5.9.1951; *The Manchester Guardian*, 7 August 1951, 4, "Youth in Berlin".

127 Rossow, Ina, "'. . . alles nett, schön und gefühlsbetont, mit viel Absicht'. Die III. Weltfestspiele der Jugend und Studenten 1951 im Kalten Krieg", in *Fortschritt, Norm und Eigensinn. Erkundungen im Altag der DDR* (Berlin: Ch. Links Verlag, 1999), 18; Viitanen, *SDNL 50*, 210; Honecker, Erich, *From my Life* (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1981), 160, 187–188.

128 Castillo, Greg, *Cold War on the Home Front. The Soft Power of Midcentury Design* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), xvi–xvii.

Germans and festival guests went and enjoyed the capitalist counter-spectacle.[129] Anni Mikkola only admitted having been on the border between the Soviet and allied sectors, where she been able to see to the Western side of Berlin, but Peter Waterman could not resist the enticement of capitalist Berlin. "Without telling a friend, or my brother David, I broke ranks and went by U-Bahn two stops into West Berlin".[130] Western press took full advantage of "the exodus" to West Berlin in its propaganda. *The New York Times* wrote about East Berliners who sneaked into West Berlin to see shop windows and buy things that were not available on their side.[131] The British and US newspapers estimated that between 450 and 2,000 people from East Germany and the other people's democracies asked for asylum in West Germany during the Berlin gathering, but apparently these figures were exaggerated.[132]

The hardest measures were utilized at the end of the festival, on 15 August, when West Berlin mayor Ernst Reuter specially invited festival guests to the West. Erich Honecker and the FDJ cadres, who had failed to halt East Germans on their own side, orchestrated "a peaceful demonstration", which at the right moment turned into a fight between the FDJ and West German police.[133] The Soviet version of the events told that festival delegates who had peacefully passed the border were harshly beaten by the police, resulting in arrests and more than 400 wounded. This, the report stated, more than anything, demonstrated that while the East Berlin authorities put much effort into peace work, West Berlin had instead turned into a police state. For the FDJ and the festival organization, this not so spontaneous clash was a necessary incident for propaganda purposes, and it provoked a massive media campaign in East German newspapers.[134] To

129 Krekola, "Kuumia tunteita", 263, 267; Kotek, "Youth organizations", 179.

130 Waterman, Peter, "Hopeful Traveller: The Itinerary of an internationalist", *History Workshop Journal*, 35, 1993, 173.

131 *The New York Times*, 13 August 1951, 3, Kathleen McLaughlin, "3 East Zone Boys Like West Berlin".

132 *The Manchester Guardian*, 11 August 1951, 5, "Excitement of Berlin begins to pall" (450 asylum seekers); *The New York Times*, 11 August 1951, 1, Drew Middleton, "Berlin Reds Curb Youth Trips West" (1,100 asylum seekers); *The New York Times*, 14 August 1951, 8, "Berlin Youth Rally Exposes Soviet Strength, Weakness" (2,000 asylum seekers). Reijo Viitanen estimates that only 81 people defected during the Berlin festival. Viitanen, *SDNL 50*, 216.

133 Kotek, *Students and the Cold War*, 197–198.

134 RGASPI, f. 17, op. 137, d. 643, l. 84–117. TsK VKP(b) tov. Grigorianu, nachal'nik otdela informatsii SKK v Germanii, pol'kovnik Kiiatkin, 21.8.1951. A later report informed that 800 were hurt in the conflict between participants and West German police, of which 150 seriously. RGASPI, f. 17, op. 137, d. 643, l. 121. TsK VKP(b) tov. Simnovu, podpol'kovnik Liul'ka, 5.9.1951; Rossow, "'. . . alles nett", 31–32; Kotek, *Students and the Cold War*, 197–198; Krekola, "Kuumia tunteita", 266–267.

boost their narrative, the organizers arranged foreign festival youth visits to the hospital, where the wounded were kept. Anni Mikkola was among the visitors and wrote a heart-wrenching entry to her diary about this horrendous clash, which, in her view, was orchestrated by the enemies in West Berlin and which was directly linked to the Cold War between the US and the USSR. "We could not help weeping, even if gritting one's teeth, when thinking about the brutality of American gangsters. This visit was the most memorable and a living proof of Truman's love for peace".[135] According to another eye-witness, US participant Vincent Tortora, the clash between East German youth and West German police was less dramatic and the number of wounded exaggerated.[136]

In comparison with its predecessors, the Berlin festival received much publicity in international media. Western non-communist newspapers dug up every little unpleasant detail about the gathering, which was referred to as "a grandiose propaganda brawl", "reds' youth festival" and "a mammoth communist rally".[137] According to *Time*, festival guests were offered rancid food and "a red commissary officer was jailed for allowing 380 tons of meat to rot".[138] While Western newspapers were unanimous on the need to provide alternatives to communist sponsored youth activities, they were divided on the question of methods. *The Manchester Guardian* pondered whether it was worth fighting communism "in such a negative way" by preventing people from attending the festival. "To erect barriers against free movement goes against liberal principles. It augers a distrust in the majority of our own people. And it is no substitute, especially in dealing with German youth, for providing an attractive alternative to the Communist allure."[139]

Contemporary accounts and oral history show that the anti-festival measures proved to be counterproductive. Young workers from capitalist countries, who ate well at the festival canteens and did not witness any large epidemics, were angry at non-communist press for their unfair coverage. Free and democratic societies were expected not to employ oppressive methods, but fully to support

135 Mikkola's diary.

136 Tortora, Vincent R., *Communist Close-up. A Roving Reporter Behind the Iron Curtain* (New York: Exposition Press, 1954), 118–121.

137 *Time*, 13 August 1951, 58, Issue 7, 36, "The Doves of Berlin"; *The New York Times*, 4 August 1951, 3, "Erecting Stadium for Reds' Youth Festival in Berlin"; *The New York Times*, 14 August 1951, 8, Drew Middleton, "Berlin Youth Rally Exposes Soviet Strength, Weakness"; *The New York Times*, 13 August 1951, 1, Drew Middleton, "Million red youth parade for 'peace' in Eastern Berlin"; *The Manchester Guardian*, 20 August 1951, 4, "The Berlin Youth Festival. 'Why We Believe In This'".

138 *Time*, 20 August 1951, 32, "The Blueshirts".

139 *The Manchester Guardian*, 7 August 1951, 4, "Youth in Berlin".

individual freedoms. Therefore, using exactly these means seemed to confirm the story that Soviet propaganda repeatedly told about suppressive Western governments. According to Jan Myrdal (1927–2020), Swedish communist and journalist of the French edition of *World Youth*, the picture that Swedish correspondents disseminated about the festival, for example about a cholera epidemic and disputes inside the Swedish delegation, was simply "one big lie".[140] Anni Mikkola laughed at the claims made by Finnish newspapers about rotten meat and noted having shaken her fist to an American helicopter that flew over the sky during a mass demonstration, joining the chant of the festival crowd: "ami go home".[141]

Fig. 5: "Ami go home" was a common response to anti-festival activities at the Berlin festival in 1951.
Source: The Finnish Labour Museum Werstas.

The Soviet report paid much attention to the festival's impact on local youth. According to the report, the festival had aroused feelings of pride, stimulated productivity among workers in the GDR, and cultivated "love towards Stalin" among German youth.[142] The festival itself drew about two million young Germans, and it

140 Myrdal, *Maj. En Kärlek*, 30.
141 Mikkola's diary.
142 RGASPI, f. 17, op. 137, d. 643, ll. 122–133. TsK VKP(b) tov. Simnovu podpol'kovnik Liul'ka, 5.9.1951.

was highlighted that 25 percent of these people did not belong to the FDJ, indicating that young people from different backgrounds, not only the official youth, were interested in the event. In addition, 25,000 West Berlin youths visited East Berlin during the festival, which was, however, far from the estimated 100,000 visitors.[143]

Typically for Cold War propaganda rhetoric, both sides claimed they had won the battle in Berlin.[144] The West focused on counting how many East Germans had defected and how many festival participants and locals had visited West Berlin, implying that instead of socialist propaganda, the youth of the world was more fascinated by capitalist prosperity. The large Western media coverage devoted to the event, nevertheless, implied that the World Youth Festival was not at all insignificant in the eyes of the Western political leaders. The Soviet side had indeed managed to create an appealing enterprise, a powerful tool to mobilize young people that could not be just ignored. As long as the West could not offer anything similar, its main weapon in the fight for young minds was trying to struggle against the success of the festival. The Western anti-festival tactics could not put an end to the celebration; they only managed to push the event into the socialist orbit. The festival continued as the largest international youth event also after Berlin, and the WFDY and the IUS remained the biggest organizations in their respective fields. In fact, the largest and the most spectacular instances of the festivals were about to come.

A New Event in the Socialist Celebration Calendar

During the early Cold War, the World Youth Festival evolved into a well-known cultural brand and a mass movement among communist and socialist youth in Europe. For Eastern Europeans, the festival came along with the process of cultural sovietization that exported Soviet cultural values, symbols, rituals and the socialist celebration calendar to people's democracies. Since 1947, in addition to May Day, the October Revolution Anniversary and Victory Day, the World Youth Festival became part of a common shared experience and cultural tradition.[145] The festival primarily targeted young people, but its high visibility, with decorations, posters of political leaders and slogans of the peace movement

143 RGASPI, f. 17, op. 137, d. 643, ll. 118–133; RGASPI, f. 17, op. 137, d, 234, l. 204. Tov. Malenkovu, ot N. Mikhailov. 30.12.1950.

144 Kotek, *Students and the Cold War*, 199.

145 Rees, E. A., "Introduction. The Sovietization of Eastern Europe", in *The Sovietization of Eastern Europe. New Perspectives on the Postwar Period*, edited by Balazs Apor, Peter Apor and E. A. Rees (Washington: New Academia Publishing, 2008), 16.

seen on the streets, in public places, and in host countries' media, assured the public that the whole society was aware of the celebration. Furthermore, the impact of a World Youth Festival did not vanish after the festival was over but, especially during the post-war years, the youth festivals left tangible cultural imprints in local architecture and city landscapes, with newly built stadiums, concert halls and other public buildings.

Outside the socialist bloc countries, the youth festival became a new form of activity for leftist youths. The festival as a movement with a message and a goal united young people who had lived through the war, who were motivated by the need to contribute to securing the world peace and who saw the Soviet Union and its social system as a solution for the future of the mankind. The ideological foundation was not all that mattered, however. The secret ingredient of the World Youth Festival was that it offered something that working-class youth could not get elsewhere: an easy and inexpensive way of travelling abroad at a time when mass tourism had not yet brought cheap holidays within everybody's reach. The Komsomol together with the WFDY and IUS made sure that the festival trips were affordable, and local youth organizations took care of travel arrangements. All a young person had to do was sign up for a local festival delegation, obtaining travel documents and collecting some money for the trip. Another key reason why the World Youth Festivals became so popular among young Europeans was that in contrast to the usual meetings in the local youth association, with their endless political campaigns, the festival promised something very different: unforgettable cultural spectacles, massive parades, new friends from the other side of the globe and a chance to witness real, functioning socialist societies. The World Youth Festival thus gave a forum for those who were not interested in ordinary political activity, like British folk singer Ewan MacColl, who never used to work in the cultural committees of the Communist Party, but took part in several World Youth Festivals, since the idea of peace and friendship was so dear to him.[146]

Festival participants' narratives often stressed the importance of the World Youth Festivals as a place where young leftist people could openly support communist and socialist ideology without the fear of being disgraced because of their political convictions. In Western and Northern European countries, communist views could make life difficult in the early years of the Cold War. Denis Hill recalled the 1950s as a time when Cold War tensions sharpened and "the communists were hounded. Many lost their jobs, others found their records marked and,

146 Harker, Ben, *Class Act. The Cultural and Political Life of Ewan MacColl* (London: Pluto Press, 2007), 109.

forever after, lost any prospect of promotion".[147] Likewise, some of the Finnish interviewees considered that losing their job sometime after a festival trip must have had something to do with participating in a communist event.[148] In socialist countries, Western youths were warmly welcomed and, like the fellow travellers in the 1930s, they were pampered in luxurious settings, fed well and sometimes accommodated even in fabulous hotels.[149] Western delegations were received like special guests by hooraying crowds of local people, brass bands playing marches and folk dancing groups entertaining.[150] Experiences of being united for a common cause crystallized in mass gatherings, where the crowd of young peace enthusiasts multilingually chanted peace and friendship and sang the songs of the workers' and communist movements. As Peter Waterman put it: "I might have been English, Jewish and middle-class but I was also a member of an international community of classes, nationalities and races."[151]

Personal narratives, while emphasising the peaceful aspects of the youth festivals, are often silent about the relation to Stalinism, although it was hardly possible not to notice the omnipresence of the Soviet dictator. Some say they did not understand the propagandistic nature of these events or that they did not carry Stalin's posters themselves. The overwhelming hospitality could be one reason for the silence concerning the negative aspects of socialist societies that young visitors witnessed during their journeys. Contemporary observations reveal an almost entire lack of criticism for the socialist system. For example, Anni Mikkola's diary dogmatically followed the Soviet narrative of peace forces fighting against imperialist warmongers.[152] Post-Cold War memoirs and interviews more often reflect upon perceptions of the darker sides of socialism. Peter Waterman reminisced that it was hard to express one's negative feelings towards the socialist system. For him, the Berlin 1951 festival "was a unique and confusing experience, though in those days of cast-iron certainties, *confusion* was something Communists did not discuss or even admit to themselves."[153] Denis Hill portrays a similar kind of self-censorship that made it difficult to realize what was happening around him. "The truth is that I did not detect such. I cannot pretend that it did not exist. I can record only the impressions which I had at the time. It is usually the case that the individual sees what he wants to see. The ideologically-committed person has a

147 Hill, *Seeing Red*, 197.
148 Interview with Finnish delegates, 16 March 2006.
149 Stern, *Western Intellectuals*, 121–122, passim.; David-Fox, *Showcasing*, 207–246.
150 Interview with Finnish delegates, 16 March 2006; Mikkola's diary.
151 Waterman, autobiography, Chapter 1, 35.
152 Mikkola's diary.
153 Waterman, autobiography, Chapter 1, 32–33.

sort of in-built censoring mechanism."[154] The lack of criticism towards the socialist system in contemporary accounts can also be explained by the fact that the polarized Cold War world forced people to take sides. Young festival delegates might have felt that travelling almost for free was such a great opportunity that ignoring a few negatives would be a small price to pay in return, and obviously they did not wish to do the capitalists' job for them by criticizing the very system that they supported. In a divided world, finding an acceptable third path between communism and capitalism was not an easy task. Another reason could be that processing one's own Stalinist past is far too difficult, and therefore many have chosen to emphasize the peace-work aspect the event, thus enabling one to construct an acceptable narrative of one's past.

For portions of the Western youths, the festival journeys were perceived as ideologically-flavoured tourist trips that were often more about having a fun time abroad than representing one's delegation. In fact, many Western communists and leftist young people became so enthusiastic about the possibilities of these trips that they ended up attending the World Youth Festivals several times. This phenomenon was so widespread that we can talk about youth festival participation as tourism. "Youth festival tourism" refers to those young people for whom the festival trips became a way of touring around East European capitals with low costs and high-quality entertainment without any specific duty within one's delegation. The idea of youth festival tourism comes close to the concept of "event tourism" – a form of traveling where a location is marketed with a special event, such as the Olympic Games, World's Fair, or a religious carnival like Mardi Gras, famously celebrated in Rio de Janeiro and New Orleans.[155] Similarly, the World Youth Festival functioned as a way of attracting travellers to festival locations and formed a travel network with communist and socialist youth organizations. By employing the festival for tourism, young people adapted the event for their own needs, in contrast to the organizers' ideal of representing the best talents of each country for the world.

In terms of cultural Cold War, the USSR was quicker to realize the potential of global youth and student activities than the West. Together with the WFDY and the IUS, the Komsomol created a wide network of national and local organizations, a control tool that gave the USSR a great advantage in global youth

154 Hill, *Seeing Red*, 211.

155 On event tourism, see Connell, Joanne and Page, Stephen, "Introduction. Progress and Prospects – An Overview of Event Tourism", 1–18; Getz, Donald, "Event Tourism. Definition, Evolution, and Research", 21–69, both in *Event Tourism. Critical Concepts in Tourism. Volume I: The Evolution of Event Tourism: Concepts and Approaches*, edited by Joanne Connell and Stephen Page (London: Routledge, 2010).

affairs in the early Cold War. At the time it seemed as if the USSR had gained the upper hand in global youth movement, especially as the anti-communist policies of Senator McCarthy in the US refused to employ methods that required facing and talking with communist organizations. Therefore, non-communist rival organizations, the IUSY and the ISC were covertly financed by the CIA, and the WAY was supported by the British foreign office.[156] Despite the polarization of the youth and student world, the international youth and student arenas were still dominated by the Soviets and the Eastern bloc until the early 1950s.[157] The WFDY and the IUS remained the only such organizations recognized by United Nations agencies until early 1952, and actually, even as late as 1949 the WFDY was granted consultative status B by UNESCO, which gave it an officially sanctioned mandate to speak for world youth.[158]

It may seem paradoxical that the xenophobic and anti-cosmopolitan Stalinist dictatorship began to organize such an international and multicultural event. At the same time, as the World Youth Festivals promoted unity among young people in the name of peace and friendship, the Soviet press saw articles on Soviet patriotism and the superiority of the USSR proliferate. It was also a time of when the majority of Soviet citizens were denied access to any concrete forms of internationalism, such as travelling abroad or contact with foreigners, and even those who could travel were hardly allowed free face-to-face contact with their foreign peers. Instead of being an exception, the existence of these two incompatible dimensions, internationalism and suspicion of foreigners, was and had been characteristic of the USSR already since the 1930s and continued to be throughout the existence of the country.[159]

The central role of internationalism in the project of building socialism in the USSR and in Eastern Europe enabled limited international mobility even in the first decades of Cold War. Therefore, in spite of restrictions on travelling and international encounters in Soviet controlled Eastern Europe, the early World Youth Festivals stimulated global communication within the socialist world, thereby constituting an exception to Akira Iriye's claim that the Cold War period marked a break in the globalization trend that had begun in the 18th Century.[160] Before the

156 Kotek, *Students and the Cold War*, 73, 107–108, 168–173; Paget, "From Stockholm", 136–137.
157 Kotek, "Youth organizations", 169.
158 Cornell, *Youth and Communism*, 114–115; Kotek, *Students and the Cold War*, 189; van Maanen, *The International Student*, 121.
159 Gilburd, Eleonory, *To See Paris and Die. The Soviet Lives of Western Culture* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2018), 5–6.
160 Iriye, Akira, "Global History", in *Palgrave Advances in International History*, edited by P. Finney (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2005), 331.

appearance of a television in every household, as Maurice Roche has argued, international mega-events served as forums of cultural globalization "in terms of the exchange, transfer and diffusion of information, values and technologies".[161] The World Youth Festival can also be seen in this framework, as a socialist mega-event, which fostered internationalism in concrete ways despite numerous restrictions on mobility imposed by the governments on both sides of the Cold War conflict. During the early Cold War years, the World Youth Festival became a shared collective tradition, a socialist jamboree or Interrail, where European communist and leftist youth experienced new cultures, met with foreign peers, exchanged gifts and views and simply had fun, performing their own versions of peace and friendship.

161 Roche, *Mega-events and Modernity*, 7.