

## **Youthful Internationalism in the Age of ‘Socialism in One Country’: Komsomol’tsy, Pioneers and ‘World Revolution’ in the Interwar Period**

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On the 1<sup>st</sup> of March 1927, two Komsomol members from the Chuvash Republic, located in the centre of European Russia, wrote an emotional letter to Comrade Stalin. Reflecting on the revolutionary upheavals in China, they attacked the inaction of the Komsomol and the party and expressed their sincere determination to self-mobilise and join the proletarian forces in China. ‘We do not need empty slogans such as “The Komsomol is prepared”’, ‘We must not live like this’ they wrote and boasted ‘we guarantee that we are able to mobilise thousands of Komsomol members who have the desire to go to China and fight in the army of the Guomindang.’ This was after all, they forcefully stressed, the purpose for which ‘our party and our Komsomol exist.’<sup>1</sup> These youngsters were not alone in their views. As the coverage on the situation in China intensified in the Komsomol press in March, numerous similar individual and collective letters were received by party and Komsomol leaders.<sup>2</sup> The young authors, all male as far as they were named, expressed their genuine enthusiasm for the revolution in China. The letters revealed not only a youthful romanticism for the revolutionary fight abroad and the idea of spreading the revolution, but often an underlying sense of disillusionment with the inertia of the revolutionary project at home.

A few months earlier, in 1926 during the campaign against the so-called *eseninshchina*<sup>3</sup>, a fellow Komsomol member took a quite different view on the prospect of spreading the revolution around the world. In a letter sent to *Komsomolskaya pravda* he gave a damning critique of the revolutionary project under NEP. ‘A young person living only for the Komsomol cannot be a real living person in my opinion’ he wrote. ‘Instead of looking at literary or scientific questions, we are served up world revolution, which has, incidentally,

already lost three quarters of its significance in the eyes of the masses. (...) All my old convictions, which sustained me in the years of revolution are being undermined and cast from my mind by our present- day ills.’<sup>4</sup> The author captured the pessimistic feelings of a large section of the first generation of Komsomol members at that time when both the rhetoric about constructing socialism in the Soviet Union and the rhetoric about ‘World Revolution’ appeared to have little relation to their actual existence as activists. Komsomol members responded in multiple ways to this widening gap. Many withdrew disillusioned from the league. Others, however, sought to realise and enact their visions of communism within a spatially confined social sphere. The student activists of the ‘Everyday Housing Commune’ at the Herzen University in Leningrad under the leadership of the charismatic *komsomolets* Stepan A. Balezin, for example, addressed this the lack of revolutionary progress at home and abroad, by attempting to organise ‘Socialism in one Dormitory’. They and other fellow communards wanted, as Andy Willimott has shown, literally to get their own house in order before contemplating Trotsky’s vision of World Revolution.<sup>5</sup>

Juxtaposing these letters written in 1927 in which youngsters volunteered to fight for the revolution abroad and those written in 1926 criticising NEP reveals the complex, multifaceted, and often contradictory engagement of Komsomol activists with the idea of revolutionary internationalism and international solidarity by the mid-1920s. While the contradictory world of NEP created a reservoir of disillusionment which made many young activists very receptive to the idea of ‘Socialism in one Country’, the charismatic idea of world revolution continued to have a powerful appeal. The emphasis on internationalist education, Moscow’s central role in the Comintern and the close coverage of developments in Asia and Europe in the Soviet media, particularly the German October in 1923, the events in China and Britain in 1926-27, and the Spanish Civil War in 1936-1939, ensured that Komsomol members remained engaged with the idea of communist internationalism in the interwar period. This

article seeks to reveal the interplay and tensions between the official discourse on revolutionary internationalism, a key concept in Bolshevik propaganda and self-representation, and the idiosyncratic revolutionary identities and beliefs of young communist activists. ‘Revolutionary internationalism’ is understood as the firm belief in the inevitable advancement of World Revolution, the duty to fight for the victory of it, and a commitment to transcend national ideologies and identifications.<sup>6</sup> By examining the shifting rhetoric and discourse on internationalism as well as the ways in which international solidarity was expressed and enacted in the Komsomol during the interwar period, the article will explore the potency of the idea of ‘revolutionary internationalism’ in the communist youth movement and assess its significance in intergenerational discourse.

### **Placing the Russian Revolution in ‘World Revolution’**

The very fact that revolution broke out in Russia forced leaders and rank and file activists alike to position *their* revolution within the global context. Bolshevik leaders firmly believed that events in Russia would spark off further revolutionary upheavals in the more advanced Western countries. Indeed, the revolutionary upsurge in Western Europe in 1918 and 1919 appeared to validate their views that Russia would be part of a global system of equal revolutionary states. In spring 1919, Grigory Zinoviev, Chairman of the Comintern, wrote enthusiastically in the first issue of *Communist International*: ‘At the time of are writing, the Third International has as its main basis three Soviet *Republics*, Russia, Hungary, and Bavaria. No one will be surprised, however, if by the time these lines appear in print, we shall have not merely three, but six or more, Soviet Republics. Europe is hurrying toward the proletarian revolution at breakneck speed.’<sup>7</sup> As Gleb Albert has shown, it was evidently flattering for Bolshevik leaders and activists alike to imagine *their* revolution in such a global context. However, they also took great pride in their own revolution, the first of its kind, which had catapulted them into the

‘vanguard’ position in the revolutionary movement. This was crucial to their self-confidence and self-image.<sup>8</sup> Consequently, as Albert has argued ‘activist discourse on “Russian” vs. “global” as regarded the Russian revolution leaned towards the first from the beginning.’<sup>9</sup>

Long before Stalin’s strategic reassessment, stressing the central role of the Soviet state in world revolution in the mid-1920s, many rank and file activists had few problems marrying the notion of constructing socialism in their own country with the idea of international revolution. Even Lenin, as Erik van Ree has asserted, had developed a growing confidence in the ability of an isolated Soviet Russia to establish a socialist economy in the 1920s, while remaining convinced that the final victory of socialism was ultimately dependent on world revolution.<sup>10</sup> Amongst young activists in particular, these notions of were often perceived as two sides of the same coin. This can be seen from the names, manifestos, and programmes of the youth groups and organisations that sprang up in 1917 – many of them had made direct reference to the ‘Third International’ in their titles. Indeed, the idea of a ‘Third International’ became a central *Leitmotiv* in the emerging communist youth movement. During the summer of 1917 scattered youth groups in urban areas across Russia were merged or founded under the banner of revolutionary internationalism.<sup>11</sup> The idea of the coming World Revolution was tangible at demonstrations in 1917. It resonated with young people and made them feel part of a global movement and community of revolutionaries. Liusik Lissinova, a 19 year old student at Institute of Commerce in Moscow, for example, wrote a letter to a friend recollecting the exhilarating experience of singing the *Internationale* at the Mayday demonstration. ‘The very *Internationale*, which will soon lead the entire international proletariat to the great battle for the entire human race’<sup>12</sup> she wrote. A few week later, Lissinova had become a Bolshevik activist and organiser of the ‘Third International Union of Youth’ in Moscow’s Zamoskvorech’e district.

While many Bolshevik activists clearly relished the role of the vanguard of international revolution, young communists took the idea of vanguardism further. The first programme of the Komsomol, founded in October 1918, stated: ‘Youth, as the most active and revolutionary part of the working class, is the vanguard of the proletarian revolution.’<sup>13</sup> This was a strong expression of self-confidence and faith in one’s own ability and role. The organised youth of Russia was ‘to participate in the revolutionary construction of Soviet Russia and the creation of new forms of life’, in other words, in the construction of socialism at home. At the same time, the programme emphasised the crucial role of the international communist youth movement, i.e. in the arena of world revolution.<sup>14</sup> Many Komsomol members wholeheartedly adopted this programme’s proletarian ‘vanguardism’. Vladimir Dunaevskii, one of the leading activists in Moscow’s Komsomol, forcefully articulated this belief in a speech on the philosophy of the proletarian youth movement, published in *Iunyi kommunist* in autumn 1919. He claimed: ‘Our movement is messianic. We are the avantgarde of the avantgarde.’<sup>15</sup> Such strong views were also buttressed, perhaps not intentionally, by the rhetoric of some of the leading Bolsheviks. Grigory Zinoviev, head of the Comintern, stressed the pivotal role of the proletarian youth in driving international revolution in October 1919, writing: ‘All over the world the workers are forming their councils as the means to the realization of socialism. Against the bourgeois black army we are organizing our own red army, and the working youth shall fight on the foremost barricade for the victory of the Soviet system.’<sup>16</sup>

When the second Komsomol programme was adopted at its third congress a year later, in autumn 1920, hopes of revolutionary uprisings in Western Europe had been severely dented. The new programme reflected this new reality. It reconciled explicitly the vision of international revolution with the immediate task of consolidating Soviet power in Russia. The programme stated in paragraphs 3 and 4:

3) Not just one generation of workers will fight in this struggle. The world Communist Revolution, spreading from country to country, will be realised decisively only in the course of decades. And before the working class, which raises the rebellious banner against capitalism, stands the task of preparing its reserves which will integrate themselves in the ranks of warriors for Communism. (...) 4) In the Russian Soviet Republic state power already finds itself in the hands of the working class, and before it stands the task of strengthening this power, defending it from international embezzlers, the struggle for world revolution, and on the other hand, the selfless construction of a new economy from the chaos and wreckage that the proletariat inherited.<sup>17</sup>

The Komsomol programme clearly managed to merge genuine commitment to revolutionary internationalism with the determination to defend the revolution in Russia and a staunch faith in the possibility of building a socialist economy in a single country. The goal of world revolution was not abandoned. Far from it, because the Komsomol now defined itself as ‘the vanguard of the international army of young proletarians’. However, the realities in the international arena made it an event of the future, while ‘the protection of the new forms of socialist life’ and ‘the creation of new working conditions for young workers’ took primacy and could be achieved in the present. For many young communists, like for Stalin a few years later, identifying the construction of ‘Socialism in One Country’ with the cause of international revolution was not an exercise of squaring the circle. As Silvio Pons has contended in relation to Stalin, it was not a cynical act, but one expressing political faith.<sup>18</sup> This also applied to most Komsomol activists. And their youthful, undifferentiated radicalism and vanguardism were crucial factors in this process.

### **Internationalism during NEP – deeds and phrases**

In autumn 1917, Lenin very forcefully stated ‘internationalism consists of *deeds* and not phrases, not expressions of solidarity, not resolutions.’<sup>19</sup> While the 1920s witnessed the growing routinisation and institutionalisation of internationalism in the Soviet Union, Lenin’s call for deeds was certainly taken seriously by many young and old Bolshevik activists.<sup>20</sup> Many found a champion in Trotsky who enjoyed significant support amongst Komsomol members.<sup>21</sup> For Anatoli Rybakov, born in 1911, Trotsky personified ‘the romantic of the revolution’ with his slogan of world revolution. He remembered how pivotal the ideals of internationalism, equality, brotherhood between the peoples of the world were amongst activists in the 1920s.<sup>22</sup> Indeed, the compromise of the New Economic Policy, which many Komsomol activists perceived as having brought the revolutionary project to a temporary halt, meant that the ‘global’ was an arena where the revolution could be continued.

The Soviet press reported very closely on foreign events in the early 1920s. It was not until the war scare of 1927 that the media discourse shifted decisively to ‘defence’. Until then at least, recurring crises abroad, particularly the German October 1923, gave revolutionary internationalism central currency in Bolshevik discourse. Activists were animated by such events to express and enact their internationalist outlook. Voluntary mass organisations, like the Komsomol and more specifically the MOPR (*International Organisation to Help the Fighters of the Revolution*) seemed to organise internationalist activism and convey its essential place in Soviet politics to the wider population. As transmission belts between the state and society, these organisations were intended to help to integrate a very fragmented population into a cohesive Soviet society. They also offered the state greater potential of control over its citizens, but during the 1920s many of those mass organisations kept a life of their own. For instance, the Komsomol, as I have shown in detail elsewhere, gave young activists an autonomous space for civic engagement, an environment where they could express and often enact their idiosyncratic understandings of the Bolshevik revolutionary project.<sup>23</sup>

Komsomol members engaged in a wide variety of internationalist practices, many of which came particularly to the fore during the ‘German fever’ of October-November 1923. This largely forgotten episode, as Gleb Albert has demonstrated, was a remarkable event in the development of revolutionary internationalism in Soviet Union. It led to an upsurge of genuine enthusiasm and solidarity amongst activists, and its subsequent failure caused serious disappointment.<sup>24</sup> Soviet propaganda campaigns allowed activists to participate in the ‘German October’ as mediators at a local level. Komsomol members took part in rallies and demonstrations, organised fundraising, distributed literature, and set up ‘corners of the German revolution’ in workers’ clubs and youth clubs.<sup>25</sup> The league organised special fundraising activities to support their young comrades in the German Communist Youth.<sup>26</sup> Komsomol cells also sent numerous letters of solidarity with their German comrades. A meeting of the Komsomol organisation of the young sailors of Samara, for example, sent a collective letter to Germany in which they expressed their firm belief in the victory of world revolution. They saw events in Germany as the ‘start of struggle, a fight of the world proletariat’, and declared that they were ready to take up arms to defend the socialist revolution.<sup>27</sup> Such letters were, of course, the product of orchestrated campaigns initiated ‘from above’. However, during the 1920s the central authorities in the Komsomol simply did not have the means to control and micro-manage the actual implementation at the ground level. It left young activists with room to apply their own meaning to these events and enact their internationalism with considerable freedom. During the campaign to show solidarity with the British workers in the General strike of 1926, for example, Komsomol members across the country were able to ‘run wild’, engaging in a wide range of practices to express their solidarity with the British comrades.<sup>28</sup>

The often quite militant internationalism amongst the young activists was most radically expressed in their genuine readiness to go to fight abroad. They asserted their willingness and determination to serve the world revolution with weapons in their hands in



numerous collective and individual letters to the authorities in the 1920s. The student Georgii Starchev, for example, wrote to the Petrograd party leadership that he and 45 of his fellow students had left university and joined the Red Army in anticipation of the outbreak of the German revolution in October 1923. However, instead of fighting for international revolution abroad, they had ended up spending months in the provinces doing dull political and agitation work within the army. 'We dreamt of the Red German universities, of Germany's sovietisation', he wrote, reporting that one bitterly disillusioned student had already killed himself and numerous comrades had handed in their party cards.<sup>29</sup>

In 1926, the war scare and crisis in China, led to a further upsurge in petitioning letters by Komsomol members to the authorities.<sup>30</sup> The tone of these letters was serious but also formulaic. They did not want to be belittled as day-dreaming children, but to appear as earnest and resolute youngsters that were capable of fighting. Many of them sought to demonstrate their political literacy by showing knowledge of the international situation. Indeed, many wrote in 'Bolshevik', referring to the oppression of the proletariat abroad and counter-revolutionary forces in China that had to be defeated. Some also referred to specific articles in *Komsomolskaya pravda*. The letter writers were trying very hard to assert their loyalty and expressed their readiness to sacrifice their lives in order to free the world of the bourgeoisie. While these letters reveal youthful adventurism and day-dreaming of a heroic fight for world revolution, their determination was nonetheless patently sincere.<sup>31</sup> Indeed, several letter writers tried to strengthen their credentials and commitment by mentioning that they had been volunteers in the Russian Civil War. Others, such as a group of students from Odessa, asserted their determination by explicitly stating that they had already contacted various authorities without success.<sup>32</sup> Yet, they were not prepared to give up.

The enthusiasm for spreading the revolution abroad was genuine amongst the Komsomol members in the 1920s, but so was their frustration and disillusionment with the

seemingly stalled progress of the revolutionary transformation under NEP. In many respects one can interpret the eagerness of many Komsomol members to continue the revolutionary fight abroad as an indirect critique of the lack of progress at home. And herein lies the crux. In the understanding of many Komsomol activist there was no direct contradiction between the idea of constructing socialism in the Soviet Union and the idea of revolutionary internationalism. Below the high politics of the ideological power struggle, these notions were not mutually exclusive in the mid-1920s. Many of those petitioning the authorities to be allowed to fight in Germany or China were enthusiastic and frustrated activists who would throw themselves readily into Stalin's great turn a few years later.

The internationalist practices which were internalised by most activists during the 1920s remained an important part of the identity of any serious Komsomol member. While they were subject to the process of growing institutionalisation and ritualisation, activities such as penpalships, the sponsoring of Western class-war prisoners, and the reception of delegations of young foreign workers visiting the Soviet Union facilitated real transnational contacts. Many Komsomol cells and schools had a designated representative and circles that would regularly brief the members on internationalist work and developments abroad. In 1930 there was also a large group of Komsomol members in the first Soviet delegation of 257 activists that toured the capitalist West.<sup>33</sup> Meetings between young communists from different countries, in and outside the Soviet Union, were widely reported in the media and helped to foster a sense of belonging to a genuine international community of young communists across borders.<sup>34</sup> This was naturally an 'imagined community'<sup>35</sup>, but for young Communists across Europe, however, it was a real component of their identity and worldview. The young British activist, Margaret McCarthy, a delegate to the 5<sup>th</sup> Congress of the Communist Youth International, held in August 1928 in Moscow, captured this feeling in her memoir – 'the sense of belonging to a great world movement of young people dedicated at all costs to changing the world, destroying all the old

evils, to rebuilding society anew.’<sup>36</sup> Giving their oath to the defence of the Soviet Union and fight for the victory of world revolution, she recalled the emotional bond created between the delegates at this moment:

It was the love and spiritual sympathy of comrade for comrade, united in deep brotherhood, cemented by blood in the fight of right against atrocious wrong, of day against night, of supreme, absolute good against ancient and pervading evil. We sang our favourite Communist hymns: ‘Whirlwinds of danger are raging around us; o’erwhelming forces of darkness assail’; ‘We are the Young Red Guardsmen of the proletariat’; ‘Blood, blood, blood – blood must flow’; ‘Arise, ye starvelings’ – and we meant every word we breathed.<sup>37</sup>

Such strong feelings were nurtured more widely amongst Soviet young communists through emphasis on internationalist education. Like McCarthy, Lev Kopelev, who was even younger, had been keen to be part of this global movement by joining various societies, including MOPR, in school in 1925 at the age of 13. By the late 1920s he was dreaming of becoming a professional revolutionary, fighting in the underground abroad. With his multilingualism, including Esperanto, and his self-proclaimed detailed knowledge of the Russian Revolution, the Civil War and Soviet construction, he felt himself to be a perfect candidate to become a revolutionary leader and realise his ideals of international brotherhood.<sup>38</sup>

### **Shifting the Centre of World Revolution – ‘Socialism in one Country’**

Many young communists, like Kopelev, became ardent supporters of Stalin’s drive to build ‘Socialism in One Country’ without giving up their dreams of world revolution. This should hardly surprise us, because revolutionary internationalism remained a crucial ingredient in the discourse of the Komsomol despite the clear shift to ‘defence’. At the 8<sup>th</sup> Komsomol Congress

in May 1928, for instance, the Komsomol was awarded the Order of the Red Banner for its services in the Civil War. In celebration the delegates made a special appeal to all members to prepare for war, vowing: 'We give an oath not to lay down our arms until the victorious chorus of the 'Internationale' sounds in every place where flows today the blood and sweat of workers and peasants.'<sup>39</sup>

A year later the Plenum of the Komsomol Central Committee approved a lengthy resolution 'On the Task of Internationalist Education in the Komsomol'.<sup>40</sup> It acknowledged real problems with league's work in this area, which was not unexpected as its rapidly accelerating expansion in those years posed huge challenges to the Komsomol in all areas of its work. Between May 1928 and July 1930 the league's membership increased by almost one million to 2,897,000. Less than two years later, in January 1932, membership was reported to be above 5 million. And by the end of the decade it stood at 10 million.<sup>41</sup> Many of the new members joined the Komsomol through the Pioneer organisation which started to act as a important feeder. However, the drive to extend the membership amongst the young workers on the construction sites across the country also saw a growing mass of ideologically rather indifferent new members entering the Komsomol. They transformed not only the league's social identity, but also created problems regarding the genuine engagement of members.<sup>42</sup> The resolution on 'internationalist education' of May 1929 criticised the fact that links between the Komsomol and young communists from other countries had not achieved a mass character. Penpalships between Komsomol cells and their counterparts abroad were identified as one of the best ways to address this shortcoming. They were seen as a means to engage the mass of members in internationalist activities, by publishing those transnational conversations on wall papers and in newspapers. The Central Committee also sought to improve political education on the work of the Comintern and Communist Youth International. It demanded that

Komsomol members work more actively in MOPR and develop the existing Esperanto movement, while ‘fighting the petty-bourgeois tendencies’ in the latter.<sup>43</sup>

However, it also strongly emphasised a very different, new dimension of ‘internationalist education’. Having to integrate many new members, the resolution stated that one of the best ways to educate youngsters about the fight against nationalism is also to learn about the life and culture of young communists in other Soviet republics and national regions. Exchanges and tourism within the Soviet Union were cited as specific ways to improve internationalist upbringing of the young.<sup>44</sup> This new dimension of internationalism, understood as ‘multiethnic harmony on the domestic front’ was to become a key ingredient of Soviet patriotism.<sup>45</sup>

That said, in 1929, in spite of the domestic drive to build ‘Socialism in One Country’ this understanding was still secondary amongst Komsomol activists. The Five-Year Plan (*piatiletka*) and the collectivisation drive brought the dreams of revolution back home. The Civil-war like atmosphere clearly shifted the revolutionary horizons of Komsomol activists. Their enthusiasm and passion to transform the world was channelled into the project of socialist construction at home. The reminiscences of Nikolai Lunev, who was born in 1904, recall the enthusiasm for the industrialisation drive in the construction of the Kharkov Tractor Plant which began in 1930:

This was a new generation of young people, driven not by hatred of enemies of the Soviet regime, but by a desire to see their country become mechanized and a wish to master technical matters themselves. In the eyes of these boys and girls one could catch the same blind stare as in the eyes of the people of my age during the Civil War.<sup>46</sup>

Whereas many older Komsomol members during the 1920s had dreamt of fighting for world revolution abroad, the younger generation of *komsomol'tsy*, particularly those who had no real

experience of the Civil War, were now dreaming of heroism on the home front. The young Peter Kruzhin, for instance, born in 1921, later remembered he ‘swallowed at one gulp’ the stories in the Pioneer press about Pioneers helping to secure the border of the Soviet Union. He daydreamed about unmasking kulaks, like Pavlik Morozov had done, and was eager to get involved in patrolling his village to catch prisoner fugitives that had escaped the construction side of the Volga-Moscow canal.<sup>47</sup>

At the 9<sup>th</sup> Komsomol Congress in January 1931 ‘defensism’ moved to the forefront of the official discourse. The league ceremonially accepted patronage over the Soviet Air Forces and committed itself to shoulder more military responsibility. The achievements of the first *piatiletka* were celebrated as were the Soviet victories over the Chinese in Manchuria in 1929. A representative of the Far Eastern Army ceremonially handed over a battle flag of the Far Eastern Army. It was proudly accepted by the congress with a pledge that the league would fight ‘in order that the Red Banner may wave all over the world.’<sup>48</sup> This promise was characteristic of the changing rhetoric, combining and harmonising the growing sense of Soviet patriotism with a traditional commitment to revolutionary internationalism. The emphasis was increasingly on the former, which, in turn, was directly bound up with the developing cult of personality.

This ideological shift was perhaps best captured at the opening of the congress on the evening of the 16<sup>th</sup> January by Stalin. According to *New York Times* correspondent, Walter Duranty, Stalin received an ovation from a crowd of 10,000 youth crammed into the Bolshoi Theatre. Duranty, whose reporting from the Soviet Union has been largely discredited for having been uncritical and very unbalanced, clearly exaggerated. *Isvestiia* reported the next day that 3,000 young Bolsheviks had gathered in the theatre, a much more realistic estimate given the capacity of the Bolshoi.<sup>49</sup> However, Duranty’s recollections of the event, albeit they cannot be fully corroborated, are still insightful. Writing for a foreign audience who was

suffering from the effects of the Great Depression, his attention was inevitable drawn to the Stalin's achievements and their significance for the global communist movement. As Stalin walked in, Duranty wrote, Komsomol members rose 'and cheered so loudly that for once the *Internationale*, played by the band was drowned in the tumult.'<sup>50</sup> The 'global', i.e. world revolution, was trumped by the charisma of Stalin's revolution. The former, however, did not completely disappear. Indeed, the singing of the *Internationale*, which at that time is not only the Communist World Anthem but *also* the national anthem of the Soviet Union, at the congress was an emotionally laden ritual. It was an expression of their belief in the strength of the Soviet Union, their pride in the achievements of the socialist offensive under Stalin, but also a clear articulation of their faith that the superiority of the communist system would eventually ensure the revolution must be exported. According to the not-always-reliable Duranty the *Internationale* was sung several times at the opening day: a practice that was not unusual at such meeting.

Kaganovich took the stage and talked about the achievements of the first *piatiletka*. He attacked the deviationists, counterposing their lack of faith in socialist construction to the staunch commitment of the audience. These were 'panickeers and faint hearts', exclaimed Kaganovich, who 'doubt where you believe, who despair where you are hopeful, who shrink and shiver where you rush forward, who are weak where you are strong (...)' This clearly appealed to the sense of pride of Komsomol members in the accomplishments of the socialist offensive. As he ended his attack with a tribute to Stalin, 'Lenin's best disciple' the youngster were brought to their feet again 'cheering madly, and this time the *Internationale* thundered the climax till the foundations of the theatre trembled.'<sup>51</sup> By then Kaganovich was, according to Duranty, in full control of the crowd. He ended his speech reasserting the 'global' dimension of the construction of socialism in the Soviet Union, stressing the crucial role young Communist will play in the final victory of world revolution:

You are the vanguard of the mighty host that fights for socialism – 11,500,000 organised workers, 9,000,000 in the Soviet Air League and the Red Red Cross, 3,000,000 of you young Communists, 4,000,000 Communist Pioneers, and more than 2,000,000 members of the Communist party. You are the future conquerors of capitalism – you will be the masters of the whole world.<sup>52</sup>

Once again the audience responded with the *Internationale*. They ‘shouted’ it ‘until one wondered whether the echo might not reach Geneva’.<sup>53</sup> Capturing the emotions of the audience, Duranty, showed how the ground was laid for the rise of Soviet patriotism amongst the young generation. For them there was no question mark over the viability of a socialist economy in one country. They had proven their dedication to and faith in socialist construction. As they sung the first stanza of the ‘Internationale’, what were they thinking about as they yelled ‘We will build our new world’? Were they thinking about the ‘global’ or the ‘Soviet Russian’? We don’t know. What was, however, evident is that most youngsters present at this large meeting were enthusiastic about the ‘new world’ that was being built in the here and now, in front of their eyes – in the Soviet Union.

The fact the world was sinking into a major economic crisis during this period reinforced the belief of Komsomol activists in the superiority of the Soviet system. It buttressed their conviction that it was possible to construct an autarkic socialist economy, while keeping the flame of international revolution alight. Once again, Lev Kopelev, who had committed himself fully to the socialist offensive provides a helpful example of the janus-faced internationalist identity of young Communists. The conviction that they were creating a new world in the Soviet Union made young communists like him ready to face the human anguish that the policy of forced collectivisation caused. He persuaded himself ‘I mustn’t give in to debilitating pity (...) We were realising historical necessity. We were performing our



revolutionary duty.’<sup>54</sup> However, he never gave up his dreams of spreading the revolution beyond the border of the workers’ state and to play an active role in it. In summer 1932, the growing crisis of capitalism raised the fears of war. Kopelev remembered how the mobilisation drills in his factory caused anxiety amongst his peers but that he also felt ‘joyful excitement’. This was caused, he explained, by their belief that while war was imminent, so was world revolution. Kopelev expected it to kick off in Germany and made serious plans with a young German communist to travel on his friend’s passport to Germany. He happily informed the secretary of the Komsomol of his ‘beautiful plan’, who, not surprisingly, wasn’t happy at all.<sup>55</sup> For Kopelev, as for many of his Komsomol peers, the pursuit of ‘Socialism in One Country’ did not mean abandoning of the aim of world revolution. The idea did not die but continued to appeal to young communists. This was also highlighted in some of the interviews of the Harvard Project on the Soviet Social System. In one example, talking about his experience of attending medical school in the mid-1930s, an interviewee recalled a fellow student’s firm belief in international revolution. He described the student as a ‘very courageous and convinced fighter for the Soviet system’ who ‘detested all the bourgeois past [and] dreamt of world revolution.’<sup>56</sup> Indeed, the dream continued to have a tangible meaning for many young activists.

One of the key reasons for this was, undoubtedly, that the most active new Komsomol members who joined during the late 1920s and early 1930s, those entering through the Pioneer organisation, had been consistently exposed to a discourse, in picture books, magazines and children’s newspapers, that encouraged them to see themselves as guarantors of the revolution at home and heralds of the coming World Revolution. Children’s newspapers and magazines such as *Pionerskaya Pravda* and *Ezh* had not followed the clear shifts seen in the union newspapers such as *Pravda*, *Krest’ianskaia gazeta*, and *Komsomolskaya Pravda* when ‘World Revolution’ gave way to ‘Socialism in one Country’.<sup>57</sup> In 1927, the war scare led to a

significant drop of reports on ‘World Revolution’ in these newspapers.<sup>58</sup> Furthermore, reports on foreign affairs began to focus increasingly on the repression and misery of workers (i.e. the failure of World Revolution abroad), which, in turn, highlighted the successes of the revolution at home. In the children’s media, by contrast, ‘World Revolution’ continued to form a central topic and one that was approached in much more positive terms. *Ezh*, a magazine for 11-13 year olds, the stories of which centred on Pioneers and their activities, for example, published 50 ‘Pioneer articles’ between 1928 and 1931. Almost half of them, twenty-two, focussed on internationalism, with the Second World Pioneer Congress in 1930 receiving extensive coverage. The front cover of the eighth issue of 1930 vividly visualised the anticipated World Revolution for the young readers: red flags were taking over the globe.



Figure 1 Front/Back cover of Ezh No. 8, 1930 (LS Collection Van Abbemuseum Eindhoven)

Articles in *Ezh* and *Pionerskaya Pravda* told Soviet children about the activities of pioneers in capitalist countries, about their economic hardship and plight under oppressive regimes, but importantly they still depicted them as heroic agents of change and stressing the bond between Soviet Pioneers and their foreign counterparts well into the 1930s.<sup>59</sup> In late 1930, for instance, *Ezh* published a letter of German Pioneers to the children and pioneers of Leningrad. The German pioneers announced that they had joined the workers' struggle to create a Soviet Germany, confidently declaring that their fight would be victorious in the very near future. Indeed, they wrote they were already looking forward to welcoming the Soviet peers as their guests in *Sowjetdeutschland*.<sup>60</sup> The direct bond between Soviet pioneers and their European counterparts was a very common theme and encouraged young Soviet activist to see themselves as agents of a world revolutionary process. In another illustrative example, *Ezh* published a letter from German Pioneers about the opening of the first children's worker club in Berlin in 1931. It was accompanied by a letter from the Pioneers and Komsomol members of the 86<sup>th</sup> factory school 'Red Putilov' that finished with the oath 'PIONEERS! Be prepared for the fight for World Revolution!'.<sup>61</sup> World Revolution had also still appeared in new Soviet children's picture books. For example, the book by Iakov Miller *Vostok v ogne*, also published in 1931, powerfully depicted the ongoing revolutionary struggle in the world in colourful illustrations, connecting it directly to the work of young communists in the Soviet Union. The book opens with the scene of a peaceful Pioneer camp salutes the morning sun, rising in the East making them think about the struggles that are happening there. It goes on to portray the violent struggles on the streets of China, where the red Chinese army are fighting the Buddhist rulers; there is fighting in the workers quarters of Calcutta, where factory workers are challenging British rule and the protesting the fact that the magical jungles and tigers are British capital. The last verse pledges that the workers struggle will reach the East.<sup>62</sup>

World Revolution had evidently not come to a halt in the children's literature and media produced by the Soviet state, but while the struggle proved difficult the revolution was still making steady progress. Pioneers, i.e. the Komsomol members of tomorrow, were thus mobilised for Pioneer activities by educating them about the capitalist world, the forthcoming world revolution, and the participation of their young counterparts in those countries.<sup>63</sup> As a result of this emerging disconnect between the internationalist discourse aimed at children and the one aimed at Komsomol members and party activists, with every new cohort of young Komsomol members, youthful dreams and anticipations of 'World Revolution' re-entered the activist base.

### **The Socialist Motherland of the World**

David Brandenberger has shown in his very detailed analysis of the evolution of Soviet patriotism, how the rhetoric identifying the Soviet Union as the fatherland of the international proletariat existed very much alongside revolutionary, internationalist sloganeering in the early 1930s. During that period the emphasis on 'defensism' and 'Soviet patriotism' gradually grew, but not necessarily in a linear fashion. From 1934 onwards the word 'motherland' was pushed into the forefront of the discourse.<sup>64</sup> In the party and the Komsomol the differences between Soviet patriotism and bourgeois nationalism were stressed, emphasising the multi-ethnic character of the USSR. The revolution had to be defended at home. *Komsomolskaya pravda* asserted in 1936: 'Our country is the socialist fatherland of the proletarians of all countries, the shock brigade of the world proletariat. Our victories – are at the same time the victories of the world proletariat – which is why the defence of our socialist motherland is our supreme internationalist duty.'<sup>65</sup> Komsomol instructors were asked to use history and current events to imbue members with the spirit of Soviet patriotism.<sup>66</sup> It also led to a growing militarisation of

‘communist upbringing’ in the Komsomol. Youngsters grew up with the persistent threat of war with the capitalist world.<sup>67</sup>

The ‘World Revolution’, as understood by many Komsomol activists, i.e. revolutionary internationalism, clearly disappeared from the official discourse and its place was taken by the motherland of the world proletariat. Nikolai Ostrovsky, the celebrated Komsomol Civil War veteran and author of hugely influential novel *How the Steel was Tempered*, demonstrated this new way of official thinking in an interview in November 1936. Asked by S. Tregub, the head of the literary department of *Komsomolskaya Pravda* ‘What are your dreams?’, Ostrovsky painted a peculiar image of the socialist paradise:

My dreams – they may sometimes seem fantastic; but they are always of life, of the earth. I never dream of the impossible. (...) If I might multiply my country’s, our Republic’s might! And never is that craving greater than when I begin to dream. If one could take all the capitalists’ billions, all their machines – all that lies useless, motionless in their hands; if one could bring their workers, starving, toilworn, reduced to the extremes of poverty and suffering – *if one could bring them here and give them work and life! I can see the ship, bringing them here to us.* I see the joyful meeting, see the people free and happy. Dreams know no bounds.<sup>68</sup>

He was not (officially) dreaming of the final victory of socialism, even in a distant future. Instead, rather than exporting the revolution, he was keen to bring every worker on earth to the Socialist motherland. Ostrovsky’s answer highlights the extent to which the official discourse had shifted by 1936. However, in that very year this new rhetoric was challenged by the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War.

The Spanish Civil War became the most captivating international event of the 1930s for the Soviet public.<sup>69</sup> In autumn 1936 the Politburo decided to organise mass campaigns in solidarity

with the Republican forces.<sup>70</sup> These, as Timur Mukhamatulin has convincingly shown, were met with genuine support from wide sections of the population. Indeed, the Spanish Civil War became a pivotal event in the ‘golden age’ of interwar Soviet internationalism.<sup>71</sup> Rallies were organised, semi-voluntary fundraising was initiated at work places, youth clubs and in schools all over the Soviet Union, and nearly 3,000 Spanish children were evacuated to the Soviet Union.<sup>72</sup> The national and local press was instructed to provide wide coverage to the campaign and was encouraged to publish letters from children who expressed their solidarity.<sup>73</sup> The war became very quickly omnipresent in the Soviet discourse. Indeed, a participant of the Harvard Project on the Soviet Social System noted that it was one of the few foreign events which were given prominence in the newsreels, which normally were only about the achievements in the Soviet Union.<sup>74</sup>

Komsomol members and Pioneers were once again amongst the most enthusiastic of the Soviet citizens who responded to the campaign. Fundraising started at a very young age and all children were used to it. One popular joke of the time captured this youthful commitment rather well: ‘A young boy of six asked his father for a ruble. His father answered “Why”? He said “For women”. “What do you mean, for women, you are only six years old.” The boy said “For Spanish Women”.’<sup>75</sup> Children were fascinated by the events and followed the press eagerly. It appeared to affirm the narrative of the inevitable advancement of World Revolution they had grown up with. Many pioneers expressed their sympathy with the Spanish people in letters.<sup>76</sup> More dramatically, however, echoing the response to events in China in 1927, the vivid press coverage inspired thousands of young people to write to the authorities in 1936 and 1937 demanding to be sent to Spain.<sup>77</sup> This had not been anticipated when the Spain solidarity campaign was started by the regime.<sup>78</sup> Mary Leder, an American youth who lived Moscow at the time recalled this enthusiasm in her memoirs: ‘The vivid reporting by Soviet journalists like Ilya Ehrenburg and Mikhail Koltsov brought the horrors of the war and

the agonies of the Spanish people into every Soviet home. Thousands of young people volunteered to go to fight for Spain.<sup>79</sup> Perhaps not surprisingly, Lev Kopelev was once again amongst them. Unlike, Ostrovsky, Kopelev had not given up the dream of the triumph of communism throughout the world despite embracing the new official line. He accepted that in the Soviet Union ‘a natural fusion of different peoples and races had already been realised’ and remembered later that it was ‘precisely for this reason our native land had become the fatherland of the laborers of the whole world.’<sup>80</sup> However, infected by what he later called ‘‘childhood diseases’ of Pioneer-Komsomol and Esperanto internationalism’, the Spanish Civil War reignited his old ideals and dreams of international brotherhood. Kopelev and two of his fellow comrades, eagerly studied Spanish and sent letters to Stalin, Voroshilov, and Kolzov begging them to be allowed fight in Spain.<sup>81</sup>

Kopelev and his Komsomol friends were joined by thousands of younger Pioneer and Komsomol activists in their dreams of spreading World Revolution. The childhood disease of Pioneer-Komsomol internationalism was, as it has been pointed out, also a result of the remarkably consistent reporting on foreign events in children’s media. As Orel Beilinson concluded that perhaps reflecting pedagogical conceptions about the young audience, ‘simple messages were conveyed without nuance and almost no impact was felt when ‘World Revolution’ gave way to ‘Socialism in one Country’. By 1935, Pionerskaya Pravda still kept publishing articles on foreign pioneers. The numbers of these articles were declining and a began to focus more on the work of pioneers within other Soviet Republics in line with the shift to emphasise on the new dimension of internationalism on the domestic front. However, the paper did not stop portraying international events in the clear context of the advancing World Revolution.<sup>82</sup> Not surprisingly then, authorities were inundated with letters from young and old people with similar requests.<sup>83</sup> The Komsomol member S.V. Frolov, for example, send a letter to Voroshilov asserting his preparedness for the fight and his credential as an activist:

Comrade Army Commissar! I herewith entreat you to send me to fight on the Spanish Republican front against Italo-German fascism for the independence of the heroic Spanish people. I am a Komsomol member since 1931, a Party candidate since 1937 and in the army since April 1936. The Party and Komsomol have cultivated in me political leadership and given me the opportunity to master aviation mechanics. I want to justify their confidence. Fighting on the Spanish front against fascism will allow me to pay back this debt with honour.<sup>84</sup>

Numerous letters were also sent to the Comintern in 1936 and 1937, which have only recently begun to receive attention from historians.<sup>85</sup> One of them, Gleb Albert, has analysed 39 letters from would-be-Soviet volunteers in great detail, examining the complex motivations behind the authors' requests and the language they employed. All of those letters to the Comintern came from the urban population, and with one exception all were written by men. The youngest letter writer was 18, the oldest was 50, and the average age was 29. Seven of the letter writers revealed their affiliation to the Komsomol and eight to the Party.<sup>86</sup> These letters were written by politically literate activists, a large number of whom had been politically socialised in the 1920s. Albert shows that most of the authors employed the 'internationalist' language of the 1920s in making their case. They referred to 'international class struggle' and 'world revolution', but frequently also combined them with the ideological phrases of the 1930s.<sup>87</sup> This was also the case for some of the Komsomol members amongst the authors. For example, a letter from four Komsomol members, all in their twenties, asked to be allowed to help their 'heroic brothers' in their fight against the 'fascist bandits' in Spain, but also asserted that they were prepared to lay down their lives 'for the idea of international communism'.<sup>88</sup> Some of the writers made references to the Russian Civil War. These were not only by older comrades who asserted their credentials as Civil War veterans, it was also a point of reference for some



Komsomol activists.<sup>89</sup> In the 1920s, the Komsomol was an institution in which the myth of the Civil War was cultivated and preserved amongst its members. This encouraged many Komsomol members of the first and second generation to throw themselves readily into the Stalin's socialist offensive.<sup>90</sup> The solidarity campaign with Spain inevitably revived memories of the Russian Civil War amongst activists. As the history, myth, and memory of the Civil War became intertwined, romantic visions of revolutionary struggle led many activists to express their genuine commitment to international communism by volunteering to fight.

It is important to note that these letters were sent at a time when terror and repression within the Soviet Union was growing significantly. One must consider whether some authors wrote their letters to express their loyalty to the regime, to exonerate themselves for earlier 'errors', or simply in the hope of leaving the country and physically removing themselves from potential prosecution.<sup>91</sup> The authors' individual circumstances are extremely difficult to reconstruct. That said, there is little doubt about the sincerity of the authors' desire to help the Republicans in Spain. Indeed, the impulsive and unexpected response by children and youngsters to the solidarity campaign highlighted not only the success of the Komsomol's military education and its policy of encouraging members to volunteer for service in the army, but also the saliency of the idea of internationalism in its broad and messy understanding. For many of them expressions of solidarity and resolutions were simply not enough. By demanding to fight with rifle in hand, they knowingly or unintentionally lived by Lenin's command from 1917 that 'internationalism consist of *deeds* and not phrases'.<sup>92</sup>

The challenge faced by the regime in relation to the Spain campaign was, as Timur Makhumatulin has shown, how to organise an international solidarity campaign without allowing the Trotskyist idea of 'World Revolution' to re-enter the political discourse.<sup>93</sup> It is in this context the idea of the construction of 'a new type of democracy' in Spain was introduced into the propaganda. After the war the concept of 'peoples democracies' was successfully

applied to communist states in Eastern Europe. However, in the 1930s Soviet citizens still struggled with the idea of ‘democracy of a new type’. The most common question people had about the Spanish Civil War was ‘What will happen in Spain after the Republican victory?’<sup>94</sup>

The response to the solidarity campaign revealed the messy and confused understanding of internationalism and Soviet patriotism amongst the activists of the young generation. Some responded extremely emotionally, such as the young worker N. Sheleyko, from the tractor factory in Khar’kov, who wrote a letter to Kalinin in February 1938. The Spanish Civil War had clearly become a fixed idea, an obsession, which made him write a letter that almost certainly got him into trouble:

What must I do?! My place can only be in the International Brigade. There is no other decision or way out for me. I have fallen victim to my own melancholy, my loathing, and possibly, to violence against my own life, now that things have gone this far.

Life for me has lost its meaning, and this will continue all the time that Spain does not become Spain again with the victory of the Republic. By any means, and even at the cost of my life, I must take my place in the International Brigade in Spain by the end of May. (...). I have lots of ways of getting to Spain, but just one thing has held me back up to now – the fact that I might be considered a traitor to the country. (...) I have lost my appetite, and lost weight. Things are not going well at work; I used to consider myself a good metalworker, but now I make lots of defective items. I look at blueprints and cannot make sense of them, not because I do not know how to read them, but because my thoughts are soaring far beyond the walls of my workshop, far beyond my homeland. (...) I was much in love with a clever, beautiful girl, but I told her that we could not get married all the time there was war in Spain. She could not understand me, and we split up. yes, I put the Spanish question higher than myself, higher than my own well-being and even higher than love.<sup>95</sup>

Sheleyko's admitted himself that he 'may be committing an irreparable act of stupidity in writing this letter', but he nevertheless felt compelled to do so. His letter was messy and was certainly not drafted in neat 'Bolshevik speak'. Sheleyko nevertheless managed to justify his obsession and dreams of fighting in the International Brigades by engaging in a convoluted way with the official discourse. He wrote, for example, that 'the Spanish question is the cause of the entire civilised world, and the fate of Spain (...) will be decided by the advanced, conscious class – the class of the oppressed of the whole world.'<sup>96</sup> Sheleyko, like one Komsomol member who wrote a letter to Georgi Dimitrov requesting to be sent to Spain, repeated Stalin's famous telegram to the Communist Party of Spain from October 1936, which was published in Pravda: 'The workers of the Soviet Union are merely carrying out their duty in giving help within their power to the revolutionary masses of Spain. They are aware that the liberation of Spain from the yoke of fascist reactionaries is not a private affair of the Spanish people but the common cause of the whole of advanced and progressive mankind.'<sup>97</sup> Sheleyko also finished his letter with the reference to his 'duty to the worldwide proletariat', indirectly emphasising a 'global' vision of communism.<sup>98</sup> This was clearly at odds with the current Stalinist discourse, in which references to the international proletariat had become rare and emphasis was put on solidarity with the Spanish *people*.

Sheleyko obsession appears to be by all accounts an extreme case rather than the norm. However, his example nevertheless highlights the power of the discourse of solidarity with Spain. At a time when it was declared that socialism had been officially accomplished in one country and when internationalism was defined as a patriotic defence of the motherland, the solidarity campaigns reinvigorated images of traditional revolutionary internationalism. In the utopian daydreams of many youngsters, the fight for the Republican forces did naturally not end in the establishment of a modest 'peoples' republic'. Their romanticised images of fighting

were regularly linked to the notion of spreading communism. This should not surprise us, because by 1937 Spain was perceived by much of urban population as a country that was directly related to the Soviet Union.<sup>99</sup> Why would Soviet Pioneers and Komsomol members not think that this was going to be a socialist country like their own? The pioneers of a school in Merefá, Ukraine, implicitly highlighted this way of thinking in a collective letter in which they made the connection between the Spanish Civil War and the October Revolution: 'We, the pioneers (...) are very interested in your lives, your learning, and the struggle against fascism (...) our fathers and mothers overthrew the capitalists and established Soviet power in the October Revolution of 1917.'<sup>100</sup> If these children and many Komsomol activists had been asked the same question as Ostrovsky in his interview in November 1936: 'What are your dreams?' what would have been their answer? Of course, we don't know and can only speculate. However, the evidence of the Spanish craze among the young generation makes it likely that their vision of the ideal communist world would have gone beyond the existing borders of their homeland.

The Spanish Civil War and the solidary campaign reinvigorated internationalist engagement among the younger generation in ways that challenged the ritualised forms that had developed since the 1920s. Indeed, in the rapidly expanding youth and children's organisations, the success of the mass campaign suggests that it inspired many young people who had been rather indifferent to their leagues' political activities to take part in internationalist activism. They turned from indifferent, apathetic conformists into more actively engaged members. The idea of being part of a transnational movement was powerful. The fact that many of those pioneers and Komsomol members had, if at all, only rudimentary knowledge of the ideological debate on 'World Revolution' versus 'Socialism in one Country', meant that they engaged with the campaign in their own, often very emotional way. In doing so, they not only embraced the official discourse on brotherly solidarity, but their dedication

went beyond the boundaries of the official line. Indeed, like many activists who had been politically socialised in the 1920s and 1930s, the responses from youngsters to the campaigns highlighted an ambivalent, indeed paradoxical picture. Their engagement was often both in line and at odds with the official discourse of internationalism, because the discourse of internationalism for children, young people and the wider Soviet public was far from coherent. It highlighted that their evolving understanding of internationalism did not necessarily run parallel to the twisted path of the party discourse from revolutionary internationalism, to Soviet patriotism and the rise of russocentric etatism. Stalin, the editor, was able to strip organisations like the Komsomol and Comintern with ease from a prominent role in the story line of the 1938 *Short Course*. He could also remove many of the references to developments in the outside world.<sup>101</sup> Yet, recalibrating the outlook and perceptions of Komsomol activists took more than mere deletions with the Soviet editor-in-chief's beloved blue pencil.

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This article has shown how multifaceted and adaptable the internationalist engagement and beliefs of young communists were in interwar period. Far from accepting a simplified dichotomy of 'Socialism in One Country' versus 'World Revolution', many young activists managed to reconcile these two notions in their belief system. Indeed, from the very start the Komsomol programme reflected this understanding, integrating and stressing both the commitment to revolutionary internationalism abroad and socialist construction at home. The vivid discourse of 'World Revolution' in children's media, the widespread avanguardism of Komsomol members, which often led to undifferentiated revolutionary radicalism, paired with a youthful disposition to utopian day-dreaming, were key factors in this process. The avandgarde-mindset in particular, the firm belief that 'there is no fortress that Bolsheviki

cannot storm', allowed young activists to bridge ideological inconsistencies. In many respect, for young communists 'Socialism in one Country' and 'World Revolution' were two sides of the same coin – the defence of the existence of the Soviet Union, for which the successful construction of a socialist economy was paramount, would pave the way for international revolution. Inverting orthodox internationalism in this way meant it did not have to be divorced from the notion of 'World Revolution', which remained an important anchor of their identity of being a young committed communist. But it allowed young communist to embrace the Stalinist notion of a constructing a socialist internationalism with Moscow as its centre. This did obviously not apply to all young communists. Indeed, the Komsomol included members who identified very closely with Trotsky and his notion of permanent revolution. Most of them fell victim to the intra-organisational purges of the 1920s and 1930s. Furthermore, it must be noted that the discourse on internationalism appeared mainly to have been taken up by the activists and urban members. Perhaps not surprisingly, for most rural Komsomol members 'the world' was the city.

As difficult as it is to generalise about the notions of 'World Revolution' amongst young communists, it is clear that a majority of young activists engaged with internationalism in a rather idiosyncratic, age-defined way – impulsive and emotional. Inspired by internationalist education, revolutionary radicalism, day-dreaming and ideological naiveté they kept an ambiguous idea of 'World Revolution' alive, which came to the surface whenever a revolutionary situation erupted abroad. Indeed, in spite of the shifting rhetoric in the 1930s and the growing routinisation of internationalist practices, responses to events abroad, particularly to the Spanish Civil War, revealed that in the intergenerational discourse young communists were frequently at odds with the official line. While internationalist practices were becoming more Russocentric, their genuine commitment to international solidarity demonstrated the potency of revolutionary internationalism in the epoch of 'Socialism in One Country'. The

feeling of belonging to a transnational movement, which was repeatedly revitalised amongst youngsters during the solidarity campaigns in the interwar period, served as an important reference point in their understanding of communism. Age thus mattered. While adult Bolshevik leaders, activists and publicists may have still talked about ‘World Revolution’ in the mid-1930s, when they had their MOPR or Comintern hats on, they did not believe that these events were imminent or should be taken into account when deciding immediate political questions. Many activists in the Komsomol, in particular the younger members, by contrast, fully embraced their internationalist upbringing. They had faith in the coming victory of World Revolution, having been brought up striving to fight for it. The enthusiastic, emotional, and passionate response of children and youth to the solidarity campaign with Spain highlighted how the regime could use ‘internationalism’ as a mobilisation tool amongst the young. In the end, it was not ‘Socialism in One Country’ and Soviet patriotism that sunk the notion of ‘World Revolution’, but the attack by Nazi Germany in 1941. The Great Patriotic war made defence of the socialist motherland the first *national* duty for all young communists. In so doing, the war changed communist internationalism forever.

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<sup>1</sup> Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv sotsial'no-politicheskoi istorii (hereafter RGASPI ), f.M1, op. 23, d.678, l.1.

<sup>2</sup> RGASPI, f.M1, op. 23, d.507, l.55-57, l.60, l.61; d.678, l.2, l.6-8, l.9, l.10, l.15, l.16, l. 17-18, l.19-20. Some of the letter writers referred to particular articles in *Komsomolskaya pravda* on the support for their Chinese brothers. For example, *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, No.61, 16 March 1927.

<sup>3</sup> Melancholy and self-destructive behaviour amongst Soviet youth that was criticised to have been encouraged by the popular poetry of Sergey Esenin, who committed suicide in December 1925.

<sup>4</sup> RGASPI, f.M1, op. 23, d.507, l.40-40ob. For similar critical letters on NEP see for example: Acton and Stableford, eds., *The Soviet Union*, Doc. 103; RGASPI, f.M1, op. 23, d.315, l.192.

<sup>5</sup> Andy Willimott, *Living the Revolution*, 62-72.

<sup>6</sup> For a typology of different forms of internationalism see Halliday, ‘Three Concepts of Internationalism’, 187-189.

<sup>7</sup> Drachkovitch and Lazitch, ‘The Communist International’, 165.

<sup>8</sup> Albert, ‘From “World Society” to “Fatherland of all Proletarians”’, 105-106.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 106.

<sup>10</sup> van Ree, ‘Lenin’s Conception of Socialism in One Country, 1915-1916’, 168-169.

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- <sup>11</sup> *Slavnyi put' leninskogo komsomola, Tom 1*, 84–91; Koenker, 'Urban Families, Working-Class Youth Groups', 299. This occurred for example in Moscow, Ekaterinburg, Perm, and also in Georgia.
- <sup>12</sup> Lisinova, 'Togda ia zhvoi chelovek ...', 9-10.
- <sup>13</sup> 'Program and Charter of the Communist Youth League, 1918,' in Isabel Tirado, *Young Guard!*, 231.
- <sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 232.
- <sup>15</sup> *Iunyi kommunist*, no. 15 (November 1919), 19.
- <sup>16</sup> Zinoviev, 'To the Proletarian Youth'.
- <sup>17</sup> 'Program and Charter of the Communist Youth League, 1920', in Tirado, *Young Guard!*, 238.
- <sup>18</sup> Pons, *The Global Revolution*, 50.
- <sup>19</sup> Lenin, *Collected Works*, Volume 26, 81. Emphasis in original.
- <sup>20</sup> The process of the growing routinisation (*Veralltäglicung*) and institutionalisation of internationalism in 1920s has been examined in detail by Albert, *Das Charisma der Weltrevolution*.
- <sup>21</sup> Reznik, *Trotsky i tovarischi*, Chapter 2.
- <sup>22</sup> Rybakov, *Roman der Erinnerung*, 57.
- <sup>23</sup> Neumann, *The Communist Youth League*. Further Neumann 'The Communist Youth League and the Construction of Soviet *obshchestvennost*'.
- <sup>24</sup> Albert, "'German October is Approaching', 111-142.
- <sup>25</sup> *Ibid.* 117; Albert, *Das Charisma der Weltrevolution*, 309-310.
- <sup>26</sup> Azarkin, *Geschichte des Leninschen Komsomol*, 373.
- <sup>27</sup> Stiftung Archiv der Parteien und Massenorganisationen der DDR im Bundesarchiv (hereafter SAPMO), RY/1/I 4/1/66, 167-168.
- <sup>28</sup> Albert, *Das Charisma der Weltrevolution*, 137-138.
- <sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 532-533.
- <sup>30</sup> RGASPI, f.M1, op. 23, d.507, l.55-57, l.60, l.61; d.678, l.2, l.6-8, l.9, l.10, l.15, l.16, l. 17-18, l.19-20.
- <sup>31</sup> Kuhr-Korolev, *Gezähmte Helden*, 537.
- <sup>32</sup> RGASPI, f.M1, op. 23, d.678, l.6; l.19.
- <sup>33</sup> Azarkin, *Geschichte des Leninschen Komsomol*, 452-453.
- <sup>34</sup> Neumann, 'Communism, Youth, and Generation', 475-502.
- <sup>35</sup> For the concept see Anderson, *Imagined Communities*.
- <sup>36</sup> McCarthy, *Generation in Revolt*, 134.
- <sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 135.
- <sup>38</sup> Kopelev, *The Education of a True Believer*, 69-70, 136-137.
- <sup>39</sup> Fisher, *Pattern of Soviet Youth*, 174.
- <sup>40</sup> *Tovarishch komsomol*, 403-411.
- <sup>41</sup> Neumann, *The Communist Youth League*, Appendix 1, 227.
- <sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, Part III.
- <sup>43</sup> *KPSS o komsomole*, 406-407.
- <sup>44</sup> *KPSS o komsomole*, 408.
- <sup>45</sup> Brandenberger, *Propaganda State in Crisis*, 107. For a detailed analysis of the changing discourse and notions of internationalism see also idem, 'Proletarian Internationalism, "Soviet Patriotism"', 80-100; idem, 'The Fate of Interwar Soviet internationalism', 1-23.
- <sup>46</sup> Lunev, 'Blind Faith in a Bright Future', 34.



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- <sup>47</sup> Kruzhin, 'False Dawn', 190-192. For a detailed analysis of the generational dimension of the Komsomol's role in supporting Stalin's revolution see: Neumann, "'Youth, It's Your Turn!'", 273-304.
- <sup>48</sup> Fisher, *Pattern for Soviet Youth*, 162, 174-175; Mehnert, *Die Jugend in Sowjet-Russland*, 114-115.
- <sup>49</sup> *Isvestiia*, 17 January 1931, 2; see also *Pravda*, 17 January 1931, 1.
- <sup>50</sup> Duranty, *Duranty reports Russia*, 355.
- <sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 357.
- <sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>54</sup> Kopelev, *The Education of a True Believer*, 235.
- <sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 219-221.
- <sup>56</sup> *Harvard Project on the Soviet Social System*, Schedule B, Vol. 22, Case 1725 (NY) 14.
- <sup>57</sup> Beilinson, 'A World Revolution? Interpreting Current Events in a Soviet Newspaper for Children, 1925-1941, unpublished paper presented at the Annual Conference of the British Association for Slavonic and East European Studies, 13-15 April, 2018. Furthermore, Frances Saddington 'The Soviet Children's Picture Book, 1917-1932', (Phd-dissertation in progress, University of East Anglia). I want to express my gratitude to my PhD-student, Frances Saddington, for sharing her research notes and materials with me.
- <sup>58</sup> Albert, *Das Charisma der Weltrevolution*.557; Brooks, *Thank You, Comrade Stalin!*, 38-42; Brooks, 'Official Xenophobia', 1445.
- <sup>59</sup> Beilinson, 'A World Revolution?', 6-8.
- <sup>60</sup> *Ezh*, No. 21, 1930,
- <sup>61</sup> *Ezh*, No. 3, 1931, p. 13-15.
- <sup>62</sup> Miller, *Vostok v ogne*.
- <sup>63</sup> Beilinson, 'A World Revolution?', 10-11.
- <sup>64</sup> Brandenberger, *Propaganda State in Crisis*, 100-119.
- <sup>65</sup> Glezerman, 'Nashe obchestvo', *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, No. 34, 11 February 1936, 2.
- <sup>66</sup> Brandenberger, *Propaganda State in Crisis*, 109.
- <sup>67</sup> On the militarisation of Soviet youth see: Bernstein, 'Communist Upbringing under Stalin.
- <sup>68</sup> Nikolai Ostrovsky, 'My Dreams', 67 (Emphasis mine).
- <sup>69</sup> Fitzpartick, *Everyday Stalinism*, 171.
- <sup>70</sup> Mukhamatulin, *Formirovanie obraza Ispanii v sovetskom obshchestve*, 57.
- <sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 203; Albert, "'To help the Republicans'", 502.
- <sup>72</sup> Albert, "'To help the Republicans'", 502; Mukhamatulin, *Formirovanie obraza Ispanii v sovetskom obshchestve*, 53-68. Kowalsky, *Stalin and the Spanish Civil War*, Chapter 4 and 5.
- <sup>73</sup> Mukhamatulin, *Formirovanie obraza Ispanii v sovetskom obshchestve*, 57.
- <sup>74</sup> *Harvard Project on the Soviet Social System*, Schedule A, Vol. 36, Case 487/ (NY) 1693, 44.
- <sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, Schedule A, Vol. 1, Case 5, 24; also Schedule A, Vol. 1, Case 3, 32.
- <sup>76</sup> Mukhamatulin, *Formirovanie obraza Ispanii v sovetskom obshchestve*, 181-183.
- <sup>77</sup> Albert, "'To help the Republicans'", 502.
- <sup>78</sup> Mukhamatulin, *Formirovanie obraza Ispanii v sovetskom obshchestve*, 206.
- <sup>79</sup> Leder, *My Life in Stalinist Russia*, 130.
- <sup>80</sup> Kopelev, *The Education of a True Believer*, 121.
- <sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 122-123.
- <sup>82</sup> Beilinson, 'A World Revolution?', 11
- <sup>83</sup> Albert, "'To help the Republicans'", 502; Mukhamatulin, *Formirovanie obraza Ispanii v sovetskom obshchestve*, 176.

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- <sup>84</sup> Kowalsky, *Stalin and the Spanish Civil War*, Chapter 12.
- <sup>85</sup> Albert, ““To help the Republicans”” also Mukhamatulin, ““Ispanii nuzhno svoe TchK”, 33-43.
- <sup>86</sup> Albert, ““To help the Republicans””, 504.
- <sup>87</sup> Ibid., 506.
- <sup>88</sup> RGASPI, *f.495 op.73, d.217a, 27-27ob.*
- <sup>89</sup> Ibid. 30-30ob.
- <sup>90</sup> Neumann, ““Youth, It's Your Turn!””, 296-297.
- <sup>91</sup> Albert, ““To help the Republicans””, 511.
- <sup>92</sup> Lenin, *Collected Works*, Volume 26, 81.
- <sup>93</sup> Mukhamatulin, *Formirovanie obraza Ispanii v sovetskom obshchestve*, 204.
- <sup>94</sup> Ibid., 179-180, 194, 204.
- <sup>95</sup> Livshin and Orlov, eds. *Pis'ma vo vlast'*, Doc. 243.
- <sup>96</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>97</sup> Stalin, “Telegram from the Central Committee of the C.P.S.U.(B) to the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Spain,” *Pravda*, no. 268, 16 October 1936, 1.
- <sup>98</sup> Livshin and Orlov, eds. *Pis'ma vo vlast'*, Doc. 243.
- <sup>99</sup> Mukhamatulin, ““Prisvoenie Ispanii”: Ispaniia v sovetskom obshchestve v 1936-1939 godakh””, 122.
- <sup>100</sup> Mukhamatulin, *Formirovanie obraza Ispanii v sovetskom obshchestve*, 182.
- <sup>101</sup> Brandenberger, “The Fate of Interwar Soviet Internationalism,” 12.

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