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RUSSIA AS I SAW IT

An interview with DR. GERHARD HERZBERG

We arrived in Moscow by air from Copenhagen, with a complete lack of formality. There was no customs inspection, and the long questionnaires we had filled out on the plane about the value of rubles, jewels, etc., being taken into the country were not collected.

Passports are not treated so informally. Mine was taken to be stamped when I arrived, and was not returned for about ten days. It then contained a sort of visa, duly stamped and listing my departure date. But as the date had been entered incorrectly I had to return the passport for correction. This time it was back in two days. When I moved to Leningrad there was a similar procedure, but it did not take so long.

Scientists in the USSR are anxious to show what they have done: there is no holding back. Our visit to an upper atmosphere observatory was both interesting and typical. Although the building was not at all impressive outside, everything inside was first-rate. We saw a working image converter demonstrated in a most convincing manner by a young astronomer who had worked on its construction. He spoke fluent English, and French, so there was no language problem. He answered every question put to him, and readily removed, and showed us, parts of the apparatus.

The work involved was pure research - not anything secret - but there was absolutely no withholding of information. The scientists are proud of their work, and are quite naturally pleased when visitors are interested and impressed. In another laboratory we enjoyed a typical scientific discussion - complete with objections - after which we all parted on friendly terms.

The laboratories I visited left me with the impression of new work, definitely on the forefront of scientific activity, and of excellent equipment and men.

Moscow, as a city, is serious and glum: there is little laughter or conversation in the streets. Leningrad is much more relaxed, and in fact seems altogether more Western than the capital. In both cities there are a great many trucks, and noticeably fewer cars, but there is not a gasoline station anywhere in sight.

Modern architecture is surprisingly lacking in both cities. There are very few single houses, and unlike most European cities, there do not seem to be areas devoted to private residences. There is much new apartment construction, mostly in bricks laid by both men and women bricklayers, and some work in pre-fabricated concrete blocks. Churches all look newly painted and in good condition - an interesting contrast to the general drabness of the other buildings.

The children everywhere are most impressive. They look better dressed than their parents, and are always clean and tidy. Although very curious about foreigners and anxious to trade small things like coins and stamps, they are polite and well-behaved and give the impression of being thoroughly nice children.

People are plainly dressed through the week, but on Sunday you have the impression that everyone is wearing his best. Clothing, by our standards, is poor and very expensive. I saw an ordinary two-piece suit priced at 1805 rubles: at the 10-1 rate allowed to visitors slightly more than 180 dollars. I also noticed some apples in a fruit-stand priced at 4 rubles, or 40 cents, per pound. A haircut, on the other hand, costs only 2 rubles, and one presumes that the barber does not receive all of this.

We were shown truly elaborate hospitality throughout our entire stay. Hotel accommodation and meals were all provided: aside from personal expenses for stamps or anything one cared to buy, not one penny was needed. The opening session of the IAU meetings included an excellent concert of Russian music by a full symphony orchestra and several soloists. Another entertainment was a lavish reception at the Kremlin, which included a tour of the private apartments of the Czars.

Our visits to Soviet scientists and our discussions with them proved most gratifying. I look forward to renewing these contacts in July of this year when the Executive of the International Union of Pure and Applied Physics meets in Moscow.

#### An interview with DR. PETER M. MILLMAN

~~In August, 1958, we arrived by Russian jet from Prague to Moscow - one of the new TU-104's, travelling at just under 40,000 feet and at 600 mph. The trip was smooth, with little noise, and the service was excellent: cocktails and hot meals were served, although we were travelling tourist class.~~

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