

H. SHUKMAN, Nottingham member of the N.U.S. delegation to Russia this year, writes the first of two articles on

# A JOURNEY TO SOVIET

FIRST DAYS IN MOSCOW  
April, 1954

## RUSSIA

Twenty young men and women stepped thankfully from the aeroplane which had brought them from Prague to Moscow. Their hands were shaken, and they followed some people across tarmac, along a path and into a building. They were shown into a room, where they stood for a while nodding and smiling and pronouncing their names carefully. Gradually, as they became more sure that, yes, they were on land, they began to take an interest in what was happening to them. They looked at the people who had met them at the plane with smiles and flowers and good wishes. They noticed that these people were mainly of their own age, and rightly assumed that they were students of Moscow University. They liked these people a lot; their kind faces and open approach. And they felt that these people liked them.

The twenty young men and women were members of a delegation representing the N.U.S. They were from different universities in England, N. Ireland and Wales. The leader of the delegation was Fred Jarvis, the N.U.S. president at the time. Their aim was to study the system of higher education in the U.S.S.R.

### HOSPITALITY

From the airport they were taken to Moscow and installed in one of the capital's best hotels, the Metropole. Shortly after their arrival at the hotel they had their first real experience of Soviet hospitality. Their hosts had thoughtfully arranged for a light meal after such a long journey: Hors d'œuvres, soup, fish, cutlets of veal and rice, fruit, wine and, of course, vodka. At this point everyone began to look like everyone else in the writer's eyes, so he'd better speak for himself. Having already had a little experience of Russian hospitality, I thought I had some idea of what to expect: having to refuse another helping of fish, insisting that my glass is still half-full, and so on. But the Soviet Russians are past-masters at endurance tests, and I am afraid more than once I brought disgrace upon half the delegation by having to join the other half under the table.

The Russians are very easy to make friends with. At least it is easy to talk to them, and they will talk of themselves much more readily than will most Englishmen, and it was not long after the beginning of the meal that we were all chatting freely and loudly.

### WISHES GRANTED

As is always the custom, the visiting delegation has a say in deciding the programme and itinerary which it will follow, and so, on the next day, we were taken to the Moscow offices of the Anti-Fascist Committee for Soviet Youth, which was, in fact, the host organisation. Everyone had his say and a number of proposals was left with the secretary. Later, we were told of the proposed itinerary, based largely on our requests. We were to stay in Moscow for about a week, visiting various institutes of higher learning, schools, a theological academy, an art gallery, library and places of touristic interest in the city. The majority of our evenings were to be spent at the theatre. After this time we would fly to Kharkov in the Ukraine, and after four days in Kharkov, with a similar programme to that planned for Moscow, half the delegation would fly, via Moscow, to Tashkent in Uzbekistan, one of the Central Asian Republics, while the other half would fly direct to Yerevan, the capital of the Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic. I decided on Armenia because the flight to Tashkent took almost twice as long as the flight to Yerevan, and in consequence only half as much time could be spent

there. After our visit to Tashkent and Yerevan, we would return to Moscow for about two days in order to see the May Day demonstrations, and then go on by train to Leningrad for about four or five days. It was not fixed as to whether we would go home to England from Leningrad or Moscow. In fact, an invitation from the Trades Union Organisation to a banquet in the Kremlin put paid to our five days in Leningrad, as we had to spend an extra two days in Moscow in order to attend the banquet. It was later decided that we should fly home from Moscow via Prague to London.

### UNDERGROUND

On our first day in Moscow, after the conference at the Anti-Fascist Committee, we were taken on a tour of the Metro, about which you have no doubt heard a great deal. I was greatly impressed by the sheer architectural achievements in the Metro, although many of the decorative elements employed in some of the stations I found lacking in taste. We travelled in a number of trains which were well lit, comfortable and somewhat larger than those in the London Underground or the Paris Metro. The stations, too, were excellently lit and in every case richly decorated. The Moscovites by now seem quite at home in these underground palaces, but one worker, aged about fifty, with whom I had a few words, remarked, with a shrug of the shoulders and a philosophical spread of the hands: "Oh, yes, it's marvellous and all that, but..." he glanced over his shoulder at the official-looking guides who were with us and asked where I was from. I told him. He smiled pleasantly and moved off. Another worker chatted amicably with me about the Metro and compared it with all Soviet enterprises: "Everything in the Union is marvellous," he told me, and nodded reassuringly at the guide who had joined us.

After lunch we were taken on a bus tour of the city. Judging by the amount of construction which is going on in Moscow, it is not in the least surprising that pre-revolutionary emigrés cannot recognise the town. A large number of buildings which were put up during past regimes have been completely demolished to make way for new ones; many large buildings have been moved one way or another and turned round on new foundations in order to fit in with the new plan of Moscow.

Work seems to go on at a tremendous pace, and because of this the quality of the work seems to suffer. The tour of the city included a look at the outside of the new university. During later visits we were shown a great deal of its interior. It is an exceedingly striking building of immense dimensions, as most of the publicity devoted to it shows. Basically, it is functional in form, but a number of traditional Byzantine features have been added, for example, the crowning pinnacles and brick columns superimposed on the facade. Whether these embellishments improve its appearance is, naturally, a matter of taste.

### MINISTERIAL

As we were primarily interested in the higher educational system, we were taken to meet and talk with the Minister of Higher Education. We seated ourselves at two long green baize-covered tables and listened with interest to the Minister's illuminating account of Soviet education. This lasted perhaps twenty minutes. Then for approximately three hours the delegation put questions—many of a distinctly difficult nature for a

Minister of Education—debated, and in general kept things going without giving the Minister much breath. His assistants, however, professors of Moscow University, did their best to back him up, and delicious lemon tea, good cigarettes, cakes and chocolates did a great deal towards soothing frayed tempers.

Before being admitted to a Soviet University a Russian student must qualify on three counts: (1) knowledge, (2) age, and (3) health. The first qualification implies having gone through a ten-year school successfully. There are two types of secondary education in U.S.S.R., (1) seven-year schools, (2) ten-year schools. In both cases the starting age is seven. Those who have completed seven-year school do not qualify for a university entrance, and invariably go into industry or agriculture. All those who have finished the ten-year school qualify to apply for university entrance. Although there are 33 universities and more than 500 institutes of higher learning, places have to be competed for. There are certain categories of students, however, who gain entrance without competing. Among these are gold and silver medallist graduates from ten-year schools, students from the Far Eastern and certain Central Asian Republics and ex-soldiers who have served at the front. The second qualification limits the age of students at 35, rising from 17½. The third qualification means that a student can be turned down by a certain faculty if he is suffering from a certain disease. He may be permitted to apply to a faculty which does accept students in his condition. The diseases vary with the faculty. Not more than 1 per cent. of applicants are totally rejected on grounds of ill-health.

We were unable to learn anything about the standards achieved at universities because although we asked many times for specimen examination papers, and were always promised them, none were ever produced. All lectures are compulsory, and even where art students are concerned may add up to more than thirty hours a week.

### GRANTS WATCHED

A student's grant does not depend on his parents' income, but on his faculty, length of course—between four and six years—and progress during the course. If he fails a terminal examination, to which every student is subjected at the end of every term, his grant is discontinued until he does pass an examination. During the period when he is without a grant, the student can find work through either a student work organisation or through a Trade Union. If he fails three terminals in a row he just finds some regular job somewhere and says bye-bye to his student friends.

After our meeting with the Minister we went again to the new University for lunch and to meet students. Wishing in no way to sow seeds of discontent among the students of this University, I must, however, say something of the refectory at Moscow University. It is a large marble hall, dotted with tables for four, covered with white tablecloths. There are menus on all tables, and neat waitresses take one's order with somewhat more enthusiasm than the average shopgirl in Moscow. The food was first-class and priced specially for students' pockets. In fact, a student at Moscow University pays for his room and food just over the amount a student pays in one of our Halls of Residence. The students' rooms are in the main part of the building and are small by our standards, though well furnished and efficiently laid out. Many of the students are from Moscow and live at home.

### NO BOHEMIA

The students themselves seem content to let their University buildings and furnishings look smart. It is probably due to lack of money, but also undoubtedly due to a particular attitude of mind that the Russian student is, to put it diplomatically, careless in his dressing habits. The Chelsea artist has no place among the Russian student's heroes. For him the factory worker or collective farmer.

(To be concluded)

### BASE CRIME

Latest reports suggest that the rumour that Nottingham were responsible for the appropriation of Loughborough's mascot, a propeller, is unfounded. Newcastle have been whispered as the culprits.

All work and no Player's makes Jack a dull boy



# A JOURNEY TO SOVIET RUSSIA (2)

H. SHUKMAN continues his report of the N.U.S. delegation's visit to the U.S.S.R.

**K**HARKOV, the capital of the Ukraine, presents a very different picture from Moscow. In its present state it gives the impression of being half-built. During the war it was three times occupied and liberated, and the Kharkovians remember with bitterness how their city was almost entirely destroyed during the devastating artillery and aerial bombardments. But, being Ukrainians and therefore optimistic by nature, they prefer to think not of the past but of the present and the future. Rightly, they point with pride to the immense amount of new building that has been done, and to the tremendous projects which will shortly come into being. Remembering the banquets, meetings with students and ordinary people in the street, one has the impression that Ukrainians are more humorous and less intense than Russians. The object of the banquets put on for us in Kharkov seemed to be to see how much vodka we could get down, and keep down, rather than to promote Anglo-Soviet friendship and understanding. The students we met were interested much more in how we live in England, what we do during the vacation and what books we like, than in what we are doing towards attaining peace and the banning of the hydrogen bomb, which was more commonly the theme in Moscow University.

## Implemental

During our stay we visited, among other things, one of the two most important tractor factories in the U.S.S.R.—the other being at Ghelyabinsk; a stocking factory, where kapron, the Russian equivalent of nylon, is used for high-grade stockings; a State farm, and the Musical Academy. The rate of production of tractors at the Ordzhonikidze factory is about forty per eight-hour shift, with three shifts per day. Workers leaning idly on their machines may well be a feature of industry in the more sophisticated Leningrad; they certainly are not in evidence at the Kharkov Tractor Factory. And the same thing is even more true of the Stocking Factory. There, where the majority of workers are girls, one could hardly see their hands at all because of the speed with which they moved. At the State farm we were taken on a most interesting tour of cow-sheds and bull-sheds (?), pig-sties and granaries and other places which no doubt meant a great deal to the agronomists in the delegation.

Personally, I found the sight of huge, smooth cows guzzling the cud slightly disconcerting so soon before lunch, and having to pick my way through a dozen or so bulls, at least six feet tall and twenty feet long, not a little trying on my already shredded nerves. However, my morning was brought to a gay, civilised conclusion with a ride on a tractor.

However many seventeen-year-old geniuses the Royal Academy of Music in London may produce, my admiration for the young musicians at Kharkov Academy will never diminish. A concert of professional standard was put on for us by the students themselves, and for two hours or more we listened to a programme comprising mainly Russian music. I felt that it would be from these musicians that the Oistrakhs, Elmans and Rubinsteins of the next decade would surely come. Yet I was assured that Kharkov's most promising young musicians go to the Conservatory in Moscow!

## Monumental

Armenia has been one of the autonomous Republics in the Soviet Union since 1922, when the "Great Soviet Russian nation took her under her wing and by doing so rescued the

Armenian people from Western capitalists and corruptions. For this," continued the Head of the Komsomol Organisation in Yerevan, raising his glass still higher, "and for the material help and practical advice the glorious Soviet Russian Government has given us during our development, we are eternally grateful." A manifestation of this gratitude is always in view in



MEMBERS OF THE N.U.S. DELEGATION OUTSIDE MOSCOW UNIVERSITY.

Yerevan in the form of a monument of Joseph Stalin, at least 150ft. tall and standing on a peak overlooking the city. The figure of Stalin himself is no more than 50ft. tall, but I think even that produces a considerable impression of domineering majesty on the tourist. I would venture to suggest that the citizens of Yerevan are now accustomed to the recently-finished monument and only look up when the sun isn't in their eyes.

For me personally, and I think for most of those delegates who also came to Armenia, our stay there was the pleasantest part of the whole tour. Armenia could hardly lose, when one remembers the warm sun, after Kharkov's rather cold spring, when one recalls the pale green foliage on slender trees, the white peak of Ararat in the distance, the Oriental style of buildings in pink and yellow stone, and the exotic food and wines on which we were fed. The Armenians, too, provided a good reason for our preference of Armenia. Only very rarely did we discuss politics in anything but an atmosphere of friendliness and tolerance. Not so in Moscow University and later in Leningrad University. But, generally speaking, politics took a small part in our associations with the Armenians. They perhaps sensed we were rather fatigued by arguments, always inconclusive, with students in the cities we had been visiting.

## Wine Trusting

The outstanding features of our stay in Yerevan were undoubtedly our visits to the Ararat Wine Trust and to a collective farm four kilometres from the Turkish frontier.

Of the first, Maxim Gorky wrote, "It is easier to climb to the top of Mount Ararat than out of a cellar of the Ararat Wine Trust." Although I did not attempt to prove his point, I would nevertheless imagine there is something in what he said. After a wine-tasting session which lasted two hours, during which time the caviare sandwiches ran out, the Director of the Trust sang delightful songs in Armenian, the delegation multiplied itself by two, and muscat was voted the best thing in the world, we found it took a considerable amount of self-control, strength and a sense of direc-

tion to get out of the tasting-cellar. On the collective farm, called the "Paris Commune," we were shown cotton-fields, the clubhouse, stables, and so on, and as we were walking along a street of neat adobe houses a middle-aged farmer invited us into his house for some refreshment. We met his wife and charming daughter, who served us with wines, cakes and sweets at a small table in the living room. From his house we were taken to the Director's house, where a ban-

## DRINKS ROUND THE HOUSE

THE Beer Racing Association is holding that traditional function of this University, the Beer Race, on Tuesday, 7th December.

For the information of the Freshers, this exciting event consists of teams representing faculties, societies, halls or clubs (not necessarily affiliated to the A.U.) endeavouring to carry off the two valuable prizes awarded.

The general idea of the race is as follows. A lady or gentleman sits in a vehicle specially constructed to comply with B.R.A. regulations, and is pulled by not more than six fit but unfortunate persons of either sex from West Court to East Court via the Main Entrance (i.e. round the lake!). At five points on the course the vehicle is brought to a complete standstill and the rider is required to consume one half-pint of brown ale from the bottle.

The number of drinking points on the course was once six, but the B.R.A. have decided that owing to the general decline in capacity of the present-day student the number should be reduced.

The first team to complete the course wins a prize, but there is also a prize for the best-dressed team with the most elegant vehicle.

Technical Committee has promised the B.R.A. enough equipment to give a number of on-the-spot interviews among the teams and spectators, and also to give a running commentary on the race.

The race starts at 1.40 p.m. but the vehicles will be inspected before this time by B.R.A. engineers to ensure that regulations are complied with.

The start is Le Mans style and it is hoped that the President of the Union, or her representative, will start the race and also judge the vehicles for the Concours d'Elegance at the end of the race. (The race should end at about 2 p.m.).

The B.R.A. hope that a large crowd will gather to watch the proceedings and to give vocal support to the teams and financial support to the Association to help to defray expenses.

Full details and regulations can be seen on the Engineering Society Notice Board on Lower Corridor.

**DON'T FORGET — TUESDAY, 7th DECEMBER, at 1.40 p.m.**

**J. B. SHEARER,**  
President, B.R.A.

The University of Virginia's radio station has inaugurated a new programme which is an innovation for this student-run station. For the first time it will present a show which has been both written and directed by student personnel of the station. The programme will feature songs and novelty tunes written and sung by University of Virginia students.

—"Student Mirror."

All work and no Player's makes Jack a dull boy

