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***'I didn't understand, but it was funny':
Late Soviet Festivals and their Impact
on Children***¹

While the festivals of the first four decades of Soviet power have been the subject of numerous specialist studies (see e.g. [Petroni 2000]; [von Geldern 1993]; [Lapin 2007: 80, 102-5, 125-7]; [Malysheva 2005]; [Rolf 2000]), those organised during the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s have received relatively little attention.² There seems to exist a kind of unspoken conviction that the festivals of the Khrushchev and Brezhnev eras are not particularly interesting and represent merely a continuation through inertia of what preceded them. Yet beginning from 1956, and more particularly 1961, official festivals went through a significant process of transformation. Certainly, the main 'high days and holidays' [*krasnye dni*] remained the same – 7 November, 1 May, New Year, while Victory Day was reinstated as

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² The studies by [Lane 1981] and [Glebkin 1998] that do depict the period are entirely based on official normative sources, such as pamphlets for festival organisers. The recent study by [Rouhier-Willoughby 2008] draws on a wider range of material, but addresses only the rituals of the life cycle (birth, marriage, and funerals, though not including threshold rituals such as birthdays and entry to the Komsomol, or baby naming rituals).

a public holiday in 1965. However, numerous new festivals was added to the calendar (Soviet Miners' Day, Fishermen's Day, Alphabet Book Day for primary schoolchildren, among many others). Though not public holidays in the strict sense (because they did not bring a day off work), such festivals were widely publicised and appeared in official printed calendars. Alongside new calendar festivals, a large number of new rites and rituals were also invented, such as 'First Pay-Packet Day' [*den pervoi poluchki*], 'Ceremonial Presentation of the First Passport', 'Baby Naming', and others. Both the new holidays, and the new rituals, were described in the voluminous new normative literature dedicated to 'new Soviet traditions'.¹

This article analyses the ideological principles and pragmatic considerations that underlay the development of these 'new traditions', and the way that these traditions were received by the Soviet public, focusing on the 'calendar festivals' such as 'Farewell to Winter', as well as the established public holidays, such as 7 November.² We also examine in detail the way that festivals were perceived by children (a group that was considered to be central in terms of the didactic function of holidays and rituals).³ In the first part of the article, we draw on documents from the archive of the Central Committee of the Communist Party, and Party and Komsomol organisations in Leningrad, as well as published materials, and typescript brochures from the collections of 'culture administrators', to place the development of the Soviet festival against the background of 'new Soviet traditions' in general. The second part of the article addresses the question of children's reactions to festivals (here our main sources are interviews carried out with informants born in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s, and mainly conducted in St Petersburg and Perm).⁴

¹ See e.g. [Benklier 1971]; [Borodkin 1963]; [Bromlei 1981]; [Brudnyi 1968]; [Brudnyi 1985]; [Brudnyi 1988]; [Elchenko 1976]; [Gerodnik 1964]; [Gitazullin 1962]; [Kampars, Zalsovich 1967]; [Kikilo 1969]; [Klimov 1965]; [Klimov 1965]; [Kurantov 1961]; [Lisavtsev 1966]; [*Prazdnik na sele* 1958]; [*Prazdnik nashei ulitsy* 1967]; [Sokolova 1990]. A fuller list of these materials is available on the site www.mod-langs.ox.ac.uk/russian/nationalism/bibliography.

² Drawing a line between 'calendar festivals' and 'rituals' is rather artificial, since both were considered to belong to the category of 'traditions' in normative literature, and also by Soviet citizens themselves. (On this see e.g. our interview with a cultural administrator from Perm below). However, space does not permit the discussion of the entire spectrum of 'traditions' here.

³ See e.g. 'O rabote komitetov komsomola Pskovskoi oblasti po ateisticheskomu vospitaniiu yunoshei i devushek, vnedreniiu novykh obryadov v zhizni', TsKhDMO f. 1, op. 95, d. 371, l. 9-10. 24 March-4 April 1986.

⁴ Interviews from the project supported by the AHRC are cited with the prefix Oxf/AHRC, and those from the project supported by the Leverhulme Trust appear with the prefix Oxf/Lev. The interviews were carried out by Svetlana Sirotinina (Oxf/Lev P), and also by Alexandra Piir (Oxf/Lev SPb AP), Svetlana Amosova (Oxf/AHRC SPb SA), Alexandra Kasatkina (Oxf/AHRC SPb AK), Catriona Kelly (CKQ), and Irina Nazarova (Oxf/AHRC SPb IN) in St Petersburg, by Yuliya Rybina in Moscow (Oxf/Lev M) and by Lyubov Terekhova in Taganrog (Oxf/Lev T). We offer our thanks to everyone for their help. The material cited comprises in-depth semi-structured life-history interviews with 36 informants (16 men, 20 women), and also testimony from 4 teachers and orphanage supervisors and 7 cultural administrators with

The general topic of Soviet holidays embraces a good many issues that are central to the understanding of post-Soviet society more generally. These include the political strategies current in the final phase of ‘democratic centralism’; the relationship between official culture and folk culture; the missionary and didactic ambitions of the political elite and of the intelligentsia; the development of popular entertainments during the so-called ‘era of stagnation’; the struggle between ‘archaists’ and ‘innovators’ in late Soviet culture; and, not least, the conflict between an understanding of ‘happiness’ as a moral phenomenon (‘duty rewarded’) and as a state of mind generated by material well-being.¹

Our particular focus is the ‘privatisation’ of the Soviet holiday (i.e. the shift from national to local significance and more particularly from public to private significance) and the growing importance of pure entertainment in the celebrations, a process that led to the downplaying, or even displacement, of the ritual and political significance of holidays. These shifts in the function of the holiday had an impact on the manner in which children reacted to festivals, and were in due course to influence their understanding of appropriate ways to celebrate holidays when they came to be adults in the post-Soviet period.

Here it is important to clarify the age thresholds and temporal boundaries that have shaped the discussion below. By ‘childhood’ we primarily understand what is often referred to as ‘early childhood’ (i.e. the period from age two to three until about thirteen or fourteen). However, youth or adolescence (fourteen or fifteen to eighteen) also figures at the fringes of the discussion. The 1960s and 1970s were a period at which the population of secondary schools significantly increased, meaning that increasing numbers of teenagers were *in statu pupillari*. Even the older pupils at secondary schools (especially those offering an academic education, the so-called ‘general schools’) were not considered adult either in terms of legislation or of social practices. What they experienced was the so-called ‘extended childhood’ characteristic of family relations in modern societies (see e.g. [Cunningham 1995]).²

experience of organising official holidays. For further details, see the project sites, www.mod-langs.ox.ac.uk/russian/childhood, www.mod-langs.ox.ac.uk/russian/nationalism and www.ehrc.ox.ac.uk/lifehistory.

- ¹ Compare, on the one hand, [Bondarev 1986: 197]: ‘One way or another, freedom is associated with the concept of duty, without which freedom is devoid of any inner moral discipline, and happiness lacks the energy of action’, and on the other, an admiring paraphrase of a lecture given by a visiting activist to the small town of Priozersk (Leningrad province) in 1971, in which he had listed ‘the conditions of a happy existence’ in the following terms: ‘nice things, new furniture, motorboats, how working people spend their summer holidays’ (TsGAIIPD, f. 27, op. 145, d. 3, l. 94).
- ² This broad understanding of ‘childhood’ [*detstvo*] is characteristic of many post-Stalinist Soviet texts: see e.g. the photo-reportage ‘Dvoretz-molodets!’, *Vechernii Leningrad*, 3 January 1990, where the ‘kids’ (*detvora*) depicted having fun in the Tauride Palace included people in their late teens.

A high degree of homogeneity was also evident in temporal terms, since the emphasis on institutions of 'horizontal surveillance', such as comrades courts, the *druzhina* militias, and 'socio-political sessions' in schools and workplaces that characterised the Khrushchev era persisted into the Brezhnev era,¹ as did many of the principles behind the 'revival of traditions' initiated from the late 1950s onwards. Indeed, many elements in the latter, if not the former, are still relevant in post-Soviet Russia. Here we shall discuss how these 'invented traditions' were perceived by members of what Alexei Yurchak [2006] has called 'the last Soviet generation' – or to be more accurate, the last generations to rise to maturity under Soviet power.

“Good traditions make the nation”

The word 'tradition' [*traditsiya*] was used in the late Soviet period to name an imaginative relationship with the past that would be seen by modern historiography as one manifestation of the ideologies and practices of 'cultural memory' or 'historical memory'. Under Soviet power, these carried an explicit political charge. The background to them lay, from the late 1950s onwards, in the need to figure in new terms the patriotic relationship between Soviet subjects and the state (the Party) that had formerly been allegorically represented by verbal and visual portraits of 'the beloved Leader' and his people. On the one hand, there were attempts to fill the vacuum by constant allusions to the sacrifices made by earlier generations, the 'heroic traditions of struggle' of the Revolution and Civil War years, and increasingly also of the Second World War.² At the same time, and rather contradictorily, the attempt to create new social and political glue also led to assertion of 'national/folk traditions' (*narodnye traditsii*) as the basis for the transformation of Soviet life and society.³ The association of 'tradition' and 'festival' was persistent (cf. the citation in the Great Soviet Encyclopedia of 'folk festivals' as a positive example of *traditsii* ['Traditsii' 1956: 90-1]). It was also all-embracing. The most widespread 'folk' festival to become established at this time – 'Farewell to Winter' [Provody zimy], a 'Sovietisation' of the pre-revolutionary Shrovetide festival – included elements that had nothing to do with Shrovetide as such, but which were 'traditional' in the broadest possible sense (characteristic of pre-revolutionary Russian culture) – for example, mead-drinking, fairs and funfairs, driving

¹ See e.g. [Kharkhordin 1999]; [Kushkova 2006b].

² See e.g. [XVII S"ezd II: 215] (on the need to preserve Communist traditions); [XVII S"ezd II: 244] (on the importance of introducing new festivals, for example "Hammer and Sickle"). On the Second World War, see [Tumarkin 1994]; [Weiner 2001].

³ See e.g. [Klimov 1964: 14].

round in horse-drawn sleighs, snowball fights, folk songs, fist-fights and so on.¹

The emphasis on ‘traditions’ conveyed that Soviet festivals were supposed to have collective, public significance (it was most definitely not anticipated that participants in rituals would start making up their own scenarios unaided).² But if this element was very ‘Soviet’, the emphasis on the pre-Soviet cultural past worked in the other direction. The concept of imitable ‘traditions’ was now far broader than in the 1930s and 1940s, when revivalism had concentrated on epic genres, such as the *bylina* and the folk song [Brandenberger, Platt 2006]. At this period, customs had not been assigned a positive value [Hirsch 2005]. In the 1960s, ‘traditions’ in a positive sense came to embrace *byt* (everyday life) as well as *dukhovnaya kultura* (spiritual culture). They were placed right at the centre of post-Stalinist Soviet identity – as in the title of an *Izvestiya* article from 1959: ‘Good traditions make the nation’.³

‘Say goodbye to drunken carousing’

The development of new festivals was shaped not just by the search for unifying social symbolism, but also by other factors. One of these was the desire to combat the influence of Orthodox Christianity. As is well known, the so-called Khrushchev ‘thaw’ had put an end to the fragile concordat with established religion set up in 1943. It initiated forced secularisation on a scale not seen since the early 1930s.⁴ At the same time, unlike their predecessors in the era of collectivisation, Party administrators now preferred to avoid direct conflicts with believers; the general view was that this would encourage, rather than inhibiting, the spread of religion.⁵ An oblique approach was preferred:

¹ See e.g. [Kuranotov 1961: 87], [Kampars, Zalsovich 1967: 87-8]; [Fedorchenko 1962: 20-22]. In the last case, the activists began by asking old people living locally how they had celebrated Shrovetide in the past. This was a widespread strategy at the time.

² The sense of overall social significance was rammed home even when it came to family occasions, such as baby naming days. Cf. the comments of one of the cultural administrators interviewed by Svetlana Sirotinina: ‘That day fixed itself on the memories of families as an even that brought joy not just to a narrow circle of relatives, it was an event for the whole workplace, for the whole district’ [Oxf/Lev P-07 KT PF4A: 1].

³ For a more detailed discussion of the ‘revival of traditions’, see [Kelly 2010].

⁴ Other religions were treated equally harshly. See e.g. the attack on the Ilekskii district Communist Party administration, Orenburg province, for tolerating a situation where a mullah had performed the funeral rites for local Party officials (‘Spravka ob opyte raboty Ileksoi raionnoi partiinoi organizatsii...’, RGANI f. 5, op. 34, d. 96, ll. 1-7), or the note referring to Orenburg province in 1958: ‘Such a degrading custom as circumcision is also widely practised’ (RGANI f. 5, op. 34, d. 57, l. 8).

⁵ See e.g. the secret report (*informatsionnaya zapiska*) of 1959 at RGANI f. 5, op. 34, d. 57, l. 37, in which G. Karpov, the chairman of the Council on the Affairs of the Russian Orthodox Church at the Council of Ministers of the USSR wrote: ‘The clergy must not only be kept in the dark about our intentions and aims; it must not be allowed to have the faintest suspicion of what is planned.’ (Emphasis original). Cf. ‘Spravka o narushenii sovetskogo zakonodatel’sтва o kul’takh v gorode Murmanské’, RGANI f. 5, op. 34, d. 96, l. 101.

it was better to persuade believers that religious festivals were not worth celebrating. The 'backwardness' of such festivals was constantly emphasised:

Every summer, at the very height of the harvest season, our kolkhoz workers used to celebrate religious holidays and for several days they would not show up for work at all. Of course we urged them to say goodbye to drunken carousing, and we did our best to shame those who skipped work. But we were not firm enough about doing this and, when small-scale collective farms were still the norm, we were not able to instigate public opinion against religious holidays.¹

As this document makes clear, anti-drunkenness campaigns were as important as campaigns against religion. If the facts presented here were to be trusted, every year thirty-nine parish festivals, each one attracting around five hundred people, were celebrated; the 'drunken revels' [*razgul*] would last three to four days at a time. The decision to introduce a single festival for the entire kolkhoz (to be held on 18 June), and to make a wages payment two to three days in advance, and 'make it possible for people to buy everything they need for the holiday in the local trading points', was seen as essential in order to curb what would now be termed 'time theft' on the part of the local population. The revels would be strictly controlled (providing people with 'everything needed' did not mean giving them endless supplies of vodka). The drive to promulgate temperance was also widespread in Soviet cities, lying behind, for example, the introduction of the 'First Wage-Packet Festival', which was supposed to replace the *obmyvka* or *magarych* – at which new workers stood drinks for their entire brigade or other work group. A drunken carnival was to be replaced by an occasion allowing rational reflection on what was meant by entry into the work collective [Maslova 1980: 108-110].²

The importance of 'substitution politics' is illustrated by the fact that Perm and Leningrad (the two Soviet cities which, alongside Moscow, saw the most energetic publication of material on 'new traditions') were both considered less than wholly reliable from the ideological point of view at the point when the campaign started. Although Leningrad housed the country's leading 'museum of atheism', the statistics for participation in religious rituals compiled during the early 1960s were, from the Party authorities' point of view, worryingly

¹ [RGANI f. 5, op. 34, d. 96, l. 91]: statement by Kvartalov, the secretary of the Party committee of the 'Soviet' collective farm, Sharinskii district, Kostroma province, 16 July 1961. Cf. [Belov, Pevsner 1960: 3-4].

² The campaign against 'drunken holidays' had begun back in the 1920s, but at this point the emphasis was less on replacement festivals than on 'godless gatherings, speeches, lectures, film showings, sketches, plays, performances' [Sobolev 1932: 18].

high.¹ In Perm, where the local political agitator Evgeny Klimov became one of the most active authors of brochures about new festivals and rituals, the 'lack of ideological rectitude' (*ideologicheskaya nevyderzhannost*) of the local intelligentsia was harshly criticised not just by the Central Committee's Department of Agitation and Propaganda, but also the city KGB.²

The campaign for 'new traditions' was not waged only through the promotion of new festivals and rituals. There was also a search for appropriate material from the past. This process was welcomed by the ethnographic establishment in the Soviet Union, many of whose members were relieved to find themselves in an ideological environment more favourable to their own disciplinary 'traditions' than the one shaped by 'the classics of Marxism-Leninism', according to the canons of which the word 'traditions' was associated with the dread sin of 'backwardness'.³ The term 'traditions' and the term 'ethnos' became locked together at this point in an unbreakable circular argument: if 'ethnos' was defined by the practice of 'traditions', then 'traditions' were primarily of value as an expression of 'ethnos'. [Kelly 2010].

This situation led to the participation of some ethnographers in the creation of new festivals and rituals. Working in collaboration with Party and Komsomol organisations, 'centres of scientific atheism', city directorates of culture and houses of culture, they helped write scenarios, participated in methodological conferences, and published normative texts determining what might and might not be borrowed from the past.⁴ In the formulation of Yu. V. Bromlei, non-Soviet

¹ See [RGANI f. 5, op. 34, d. 100, l. 198]. In 1961, 38% of children in Leningrad province had undergone christening, and in the city itself, 44%. 26% of funerals in the province were religious, and 28% in the city. The estimate for the number of Leningraders attending church on major holidays was around 200,000 (i.e. more than 10 per cent of the adult population). On alternative thinking in Leningrad at this period, see also [Vakser 2005: 307, 313-325]; [Firsov 2008]

² 'Kopiya informatsionnoi zapiski Otdela o nedostatkakh v rabote partiinnoi organizatsii Permskoi oblasti po vospitaniyu kommunisticheskogo otnosheniya k trudu' (November 1960) [RGANI f. 56, op. 34, d. 76, l. 1-12]; 'Spravka o nekotorykh faktakh antisovetskikh i politicheskikh nezdorovykh proyavlenii sredi intelligentsii goroda Permi', 26 maya 1965 (signed by the deputy head of the KGB, Perm province, Colonel Kremlev) [RGANI f. 5, op. 34, d. 113, ll. 203-210].

³ Marx's famous dictum in Chapter One of his Eighteenth Brumaire – 'the traditions of the dead generations weigh like a nightmare on the living' – set the tone for Stalin's 1913 article Marxism and the National Question: 'Imagine this: "preserving" such "national peculiarities" of the Caucasian Tatars as self-flagellation on the Shakhsei-Vakhsei holiday! "Developing" such "national peculiarities" of the Georgians as "the right to blood vengeance"! (Chapter IV). In the first decades of Soviet power, the only positive resonance of the word *traditsii* was in the phrase *revolyutsionnye traditsii* (as manifested in the work of forward-thinking Russian writers of the nineteenth century etc. A clear signal of the new attitudes came in the report [dokladnaya zapiska] of S. P. Tolstov, director of the Institute of Ethnography of the Academy of Sciences, sent to the Central Committee in March 1961 [Tolstov 2006].

⁴ For example, a brigade sent to investigate the state of atheist education in Pskov province (24 March – 4 April 1986) included, along with representatives of the Central Committee and the Central Committee of the Komsomol and of 'centres of scientific atheism', the director of the Leningrad Museum of Ethnography and a deputy head of section in the Institute of Ethnography of the Academy of Sciences [TsKhDMO f. 1, op. 95, d. 371, l. 9-10].

traditions should be revived and fostered if they reflected the norms of Soviet legality, hygiene, ethics, and aesthetics [Bromlei 1981: 16-17].

In official scenarios setting out 'new traditions', there was much purely Soviet material: speeches by the secretaries of local Party committees, appearances by 'heroes of labour', tree-planting sessions, readings of poems about the Soviet motherland, presentations to newlyweds of the keys of their new apartment. But the authors of such normative guides also recommended that wedding guests should perform the ritual of shouting 'Bitter!' to encourage the young couple to kiss, and they took for granted the fact that celebrations would differ according to where they took place. If city brides and grooms were expected to travel to their weddings in a car, in villages it was considered perfectly appropriate for them to use a 'traditional' decorated wagon.¹ Thus, even official guides permitted the employment of a 'differential approach' to ceremonies on a local or personal basis. And while there was a 'model scenario' for the 'evening of celebrations', consisting of songs, official congratulations, recollections of major historical events, and stories from leading workers,² the events recalled could be ones of local significance, and different cities, districts, and even individual neighbourhoods were permitted to organise their own festivals. For example, in Perm in 1988, festivals celebrated included not just Victory Day, New Year, 'City Day', and 'Farewell to Winter', but 'Factory Day', a 'sporting day to mark the opening of the winter season', 'Ski-ing Day', etc. [Iskusova 1988: 37-8].³ The official list of Leningrad 'theatricalised mass festivals' included, alongside 1 May, 7 November, and Victory Day, the 'Day of Knowledge' (1 September), 'Scarlet Sails', 'the anniversary of the founding of Petersburg-Petrograd-Leningrad', and 'the festival of the Petrodvorets fountains' [O provedenii 1986: 2].

'Work for the Public Good'

The evolution of Soviet holidays from the late 1950s was characterised by the tensions that underlay the Khrushchev thaw in a general sense.

¹ More offbeat 'traditions' sometimes figured as well: for example, in a guide to village holidays [Prazdnika na sele 1958], a case was approvingly described where the bride had unwrapped a large many-layered package. 'Everyone laughed' when the contents was revealed – a baby's dummy hanging on a ribbon.

² It is interesting to note that this 'template' has survived into the post-Soviet period as well. See e.g. the unpublished scenario for an 'Evening to Mark the Day of the Defender of the Motherland' (23 February, the new version of 'Soviet Army Day') held on 21 February in the Perm Palace of Culture (personal archive of CK and SS). After a reading aloud of patriotic verses – 'Where does the Fatherland start? / With fields dear to the heart, / Or for some with the harbour / With the cranes that fly over the Kama...' and so on – followed greetings and speeches from war veterans and local dignitaries, etc.

³ Among printed invitations issued by the Kirov Palace of Culture in Perm and held in our own archive are the following: 28 June 1975 – Eighth Farewell Ball for School-Leavers, Kirov District.

On the one hand, as eyewitnesses recall, all activities were strictly controlled by prescript. Every kind of celebration was carefully regulated locally by the Party and Komsomol, the Directorate of Culture attached to the executive committee of the city soviet, the local education authorities, and the managements of palaces and houses of culture.¹ In provincial towns, as those working in the administration remember, ‘what they want in Moscow’ was also an important guiding principle. At the same time, though, a general show of democracy and equality was kept up. For example, in a report sent to the Central Committee in 1959 about the state of the local TV station in Kuibyshev province, the fact that insufficient attention was being paid to local history attracted criticism. ‘For instance, Moscow radio and television produced material on the two hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the founding of Syzran, but the editors of the local TV station didn’t say a thing about their home town.’²

Apart from the importance of local self-assertion (discouraged as this might be by interference from the centre), another *idée fixe* of the thaw years was the importance of getting rank-and-file citizens involved in the political process. This idea was, for example, demonstratively adhered to by the organisers of ‘political enlightenment’ in Leningrad. Among the initiatives listed in a report of 1960 were ‘discussion circles on Party history and current politics for housewives and pensioners, universities of culture, schools of atheism etc. In Vasileostrovsky district, for example, 12 housing administration sections [zhilishchnye kontory] have set up lecture sessions on different subjects, and also women’s councils and clubs’.³

The Stalinist ideal of ‘discipline’ and ‘Party control’ had been replaced by a model of universal, status-indifferent bonhomie: ‘Communist skilled workers and the heads of factory shops, shifts, and brigades visit the cinema and the theatre along with the ordinary workers; they take part in social evenings, pleasure trips, and mass festivals; they discuss political, industrial, and everyday topics with

¹ See e.g. the decree of the Lensovet from 27 June 1969, ‘Obshchegorodnyi prazdnik “Alye parusa” dlya vypusnikov shkol Leningrada’ // *BIKLGs*. 1969. No. 10. P. 8. On houses/palaces of culture, see the recollections of a cultural administrator [Oxf/Lev P-07 KT PF4A]: ‘There were 46 houses of culture, clubs, and houses of culture attached to the trade unions, several in every district, in other words. And they would all evolve their own plan for activities, which took account of local industries, of the territory, and of the state. There were city palaces and there were state palaces’. Scenarios and plans for specific festivals can be found in the archives of city and district Party committees: see e.g. the detailed plan for the celebration of the twentieth anniversary of victory in 1945 at [TsGAIPD, f. 24, op. 137, d. 22, l. 21-9].

² A. Markulov, ‘Spravka o podgotovke televizionnykh programm na mestnom materiale Kuibyshevskoi studiei televideniya’, 12 January 1959. [RGANI f. 5, op.. 34, d. 56, l. 3].

³ ‘Otchet ob itogakh 1959-1960 uchebnogo goda v sisteme partiinogo prosveshcheniya v Leningradskoi partiinoi organizatsii’ [RGANI f. 6, op. 34, d. 95, l. 36].

them.¹ Instead of the Stalinist images of Soviet subjects humbly thanking the Leader for their great happiness, Party documents presented portraits of self-conscious, self-aware citizens:

*In response to a question about the benefits she had derived from her study, T. Shapirova, a milkmaid from the 'Victory' kolkhoz, Cherkushinsky district, replied: 'I will speak frankly: the sessions in the economics school were very useful. Before then neither I nor my fellow workers had any idea of the significance of what we were doing. We didn't even know how much a litre of milk or a kilo of meat cost the kolkhoz to produce. After our studies, we were made to think and to treat our work differently. Now I know exactly how cost price is arrived at and I am doing a lot to raise profits at our kolkhoz.'*²

It is interesting to note that the initiative for the creation of 'new rituals' could come from below (or, at least, be represented as coming from there). The holdings of the Russian State Archive of Recent History include a letter from Aleksei Surkov, then General Secretary of the Union of Writers, addressed to the Department of Culture of the Central Committee:

Citizenness T.I. Kubrakova from Saratov province sent a letter to the Union of Writers in which she raises the question of everyday rituals. The letter was written by an elderly person and at first sight may seem rather primitive and even slightly ludicrous. But the questions raised in it have been of great importance since the days of October. We really have failed to provide the nation with any rituals to replace the beautiful rituals of the Russian church, which are so appealing to the imagination.

The Union of Writers is an organisation with narrowly-defined professional goals, and it is not for us to decide on such questions of national significance. Therefore I consider myself obliged to forward this letter to the Central Committee [RGANI f. 5, op. 34, d. 14, l. 3].

Of course, it was no accident that letters of this kind received the attention of highly-placed officials such as Surkov. Campaigns directed from the top of the line customarily cited such materials as legitimation. But it would appear from the less than wholly enthusiastic reaction that it received from the Central Committee that Kubrakova's letter really had run ahead of top-level policy changes. In a note attached to Surkov's letter written by the deputy director of the Department of Culture B. Ryurikov and Section Head V. Ivanov, it was stated, 'Developing special everyday rituals and

¹ 'O nekotorykh novykh formakh organizatsii vospitatel'noi raboty sredi trudyashchikhsya po mestu zhitel'stva v Moskve i Leningrade' [RGANI f. 6, op. 34, d. 95, l. 36].

² 'Spravka ob itogakh 1960-1961 uchebnogo goda v sisteme partiinogo prosveshcheniya Permskoi oblastnoi partiinoy organizatsii' [RGANI f. 5, op. 4, d. 86, l. 35].

disseminating these by fiat would serve no useful purpose' [Ibid., l. 4]. The proposed solution, rather than developing new rituals, was to organise satirical attacks on old ones: 'We consider it appropriate to assign Literary Gazette and Komsomol Pravda the task of publishing articles on this subject'. [Ibid., l. 4]. However, a year or so later, the first brochures about 'new rituals' began appearing, and in 1959, an entire campaign 'for new rituals' was launched by the newspaper *Izvestiya*.¹ The same year, the first Palace of Nuptials was founded in Leningrad; in due course it became a model for such initiatives all over the Soviet Union. By the start of the 1960s, inventing 'beautiful rituals with an appeal to the imagination' was a standard duty of cultural administrators in the capitals and in the provinces alike.

'Our street festival'

The step in the direction of 'regulated self-expression' was evident not just in 'political education', but in the cultural world as well. A characteristic development of the 1960s was the founding of so-called 'universities of culture' – organisations for bringing educational programmes to the Soviet masses. There were other similar developments as well. A report of 1961 listed libraries and culture parks organised with help from volunteers (*na obshchestvennykh nachalakh*) and also a 'people's museum' in the town of Klin, set up 'by the energies of members of the intelligentsia and pensioners'.² Amateur initiatives in the arts and educational initiatives in people's places of residence were also vigorously encouraged.³ No local talents and achievements were too humble to celebrate. In the words of a manual for culture administrators published in 1966:

So you don't have a hero? So who is a hero? It's not just someone who wears the Gold Star of a Hero of the Soviet Union on his or her breast. Isn't someone who does a wonderful job of work at their collective farm a hero? Isn't a brave member of the people's militia a hero? Aren't children who collect lots of scrap paper or metal heroes?

¹ See ['Byt ili ne byt' 1959]; [Gorinov 1959]; ['Dobrye traditsii' 1959]; [Plyushch 1959]; [Rusanov 1959]; [Tess 1959]; [Usakovsky 1959].

² 'O razvitiu obshchestvennykh nachal v rabote organov i uchrezhdenii kultury', 9 September 1961 [RGANI f. 5, op. 34, d. 96, ll. 108-9]. Once again, we should emphasise the specific character of the *kulturtegerstvo* [mission civilisatrice] that was being advocated: this was not a case of philanthropy in the traditional sense, but of a dialectical process through which the intelligentsia would also find its role in collective life. Thus, in a 'totally secret' decree of the Buro of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the RSFSR made in 1965, it was stated, 'work with the masses is the most important way of shaping the intelligentsia in an ideological sense' [RGANI f. 5, op. 34, d. 113, l. 199].

³ See e.g. 'Kopiya informatsionnoi zapiski Otdela o nedostatkakh v rabote partiinoi organizatsii Permskoi oblasti po vospitaniyu kommunisticheskogo otnosheniya k trudu' (November 1960). [RGANI f. 5, op. 34, d. 76, l. 76]: 'The work of moral education must be taken into people's home districts and settlements, into their places of residence, thus embracing the entire population.'

You don't have any artistes? But don't you enjoy seeing the local milkmaid at your kolkhoz do a folk dance? She loves dancing so much, after all! And how many more dancers like that can you find living near you?

Any of them will agree to take part in your street festival and to talk about their life and work, to sing or dance for you [Prazdniki nashei ulitsy 1967: 11].¹

This text, absurd and even self-parodic as it might sound, paid testimony to significant changes of cultural perception. Under Stalin, 'hero' had in the first instance been understood to mean something close to the word's original significance – a demi-god. The hero's *background* might well be humble – indeed, this was the norm. He or she was also supposed to be modest, unassuming, full of 'spiritual simplicity' [*dushevnyaya prostota*], and so on. But his or her *achievements* had to be extraordinary. By the 1960s, everyone had their right to fifteen minutes of Soviet fame. In turn, the 'democratisation' of expectations meant that the gap between hero and audience was narrowed. In the past, carnivals had been impressive public rituals at which the 'congregation' symbolically enacted its subordinate roles (the physical culture parades on Red Square, with their thousands of precisely regimented figures, being a case in point). While celebrations and holidays still retained the division between elite and masses (there was always a stage, if not a tribune, where the leading figures of the day appeared), non-revolutionary holidays, such as street festivals, were understood to be fairly light-hearted occasions, with a stronger element of participation from the 'masses' than had been possible since the 1920s.

After Khrushchev was ousted, attempts to boost the importance of local politics were dropped. However, emphasis on the importance of local festivals continued. In the Kirovsky district of Perm, for instance, there were regular occasions called 'The House I Live In', at which the lives of the inhabitants of a particular city block would be featured. As a cultural administrator involved in organising these recalled in 2007, they proved very popular:

Inf.: *So, for instance, I'd start the evening by saying, 'you all live in one district, but do you actually know the people you live next door to? [...] We'd get into groups and go round the flats [...] we'd find out who had done what, we'd fix on something interesting and write*

¹ Cf. [Den rozhdeniya doyarki 1963], or the following remark in a report of November 1960: 'In 'Pravda' kolkhoz in the same district [Chernushinsky] honour was paid to the best poultry-keeper, com. Mereshchyakova' ('Nekotorye itogi raboty obshchestvennykh organizatsii [Permskoi] oblasti po provedeniyu v zhizn' printsiipa "Kto ne rabotaet, tot ne est", November 1960, [RGANI f. 5, op. 34, d. 76, l. 105].

a script and then we'd ask them over on a certain day, they'd be given a bunch of flowers, and we'd try to focus on people who'd fought in the war, on families with lots of children... They were interesting stories.

Int.: And did people come along?

Inf: You bet, they couldn't wait! [...] We'd turn up in a particular district, there'd be some big courtyard and houses all round it. We'd bring a bus along, hang microphones outside, and there wouldn't be anybody around at first, but I'd get going, I'd say, 'Attention, in a few minutes our agitforum Messenger, Sputnik, Ruby or whatever will begin work' [...] They put posters up in people's workplaces too, where what was happening, on interesting initiatives [Oxf/Lev P-07 KR PF2].

Notable in the last decades of Soviet power also was a process by which the entertainment content of holidays became increasingly important. For example, great emphasis was placed on collective celebrations such as birthdays and anniversaries in the workplace.¹ While these might include pompous speeches, they also included toasts, affectionate reminiscences, and possibly also poems and sketches. The general assumption was that people should enjoy a celebration, as well as being uplifted by it. It was no accident that the Gaza Palace of Culture in Leningrad published a brochure in 1985 with the title, 'The Palace of Good Moods' [*Dvoret's khoroshikh nastroenii* 1985].

Of course, the 'public' face of state holidays remained unchanged in many respects: parades on Red Square, the tribune with its political dignitaries, speeches on local squares and streets. But some elements of entertainment started to make an impression even on these occasions. For example, on 31 December 1971 the Executive Committee of Leningorsoviet decided to 'conduct annual firework displays on 1 and 9 May and 7 November in the towns of Kolpino, Petrodvorets, Pushkin and Sestroretsk' [O provedenii 1971: 20]. An important point in the development of 'entertainments' was also marked by the decree of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of 1983 setting up so-called 'sporting and cultural complexes', (KSK), which included houses of culture, clubs (among them clubs in individual apartment blocks), sports and music schools, museums, and so on. These 'complexes' were assigned with the duty of 'organising mass political events and universal [obshchenarodnye] celebrations, jubilees, Soviet and civic rituals, holidays, parties' and also 'district festivals, competitions, spartakiads, contests and other

¹ On birthdays see [Kalacheva 2000]; on New Year [Petrova 2000]; on the First and Last Bell [Kelly 2004]; on the Alphabet Book Festival [Loiter 2006].

mass culture and sporting occasions' [*Ob organizatsii* 1985: 10]. Thus, 'mass political events', 'district festivals', and 'universal celebrations' were given equivalent status in a general complex of celebration and entertainment.¹

Children's festivals, festivals for children

A further important stimulus for the inclusion of pre-Soviet elements in the Soviet festival, and for the 'decentralisation' and 'intimatisation' of this, was the issue of how best to provide Soviet young people with a moral education and with rational leisure. On the one hand, types of entertainment that were not related to politics tended to be seen as frivolous and undesirable. Thus, in 1960, a report on Perm province criticised the low quality of evening events for young people: 'At the House of Culture of the Beryozniki Potash Works no less than nine dances were held in October, as well as "Come and Relax with Us" evenings, which in fact were essentially dances as well.'² At the same time, however, the Soviet authorities were forced to recognise that programmes with a purely political content were not popular. In the rueful words of Hero of Soviet Labour Rodionov at a session on patriotic education organised by the regional committee of the Leningrad Komsomol in 1966:

*Patriotic work is by and large limited to major holidays, and is totally unsystematic. We've heard it all: 'The Palace of Labour, the Merchant Seaman's Club, the Officers' Club, our section at the Museum of Leningrad...' It all works fine, supposedly. But actually, comrades, that's just not true. For instance, what happened at the dos arranged for young workers at the Kirov Factory, so they could meet veterans? The first one went fine. But the second one, hardly any young people turned up, because it was at a weekend and the young people didn't want to spend their free time at a meeting like that. And we'd brought along people who'd taken part in the defence of Leningrad, in the Revolution, in the Civil War, people who'd been in the battle of Oreshek, Nevskaya Dubrovka and all that. We'd turned up to meet young people, but they were nowhere to be seen.'*³

¹ This process continued into the post-Soviet period as well. One of our informants, a woman who used to work at the Institute of Culture in Perm and later opened her own company specialising in organising festivals, now discernible is what she termed a 'showisation' (*shounizatsiya*) of festivals, as distinct from their 'ideologisation' in the Soviet period [Oxf/Lev P-07 KT PF3].

² 'Nekotorye itogi raboty obshchestvennykh organizatsii oblasti po vospitaniyu kommunisticheskogo otnosheniya k trudu i provedeniyu v zhizn printsipa «Kto ne rabotaet, tot ne est'". Anonymous report (the author was probably a member of staff at the Dept. of Propaganda and Agitation, Perm City Soviet). November 1960. [RGANI f. 5, op. 34, d. 76, l. 107].

³ 'Stenogramma zasedaniya sektsii VLKSM: Voенno-patrioticheskoe vospitanie i traditsii', 14 April 1966. [TsGAIPD f. K-881, op. 16, d. 8, l. 53].

Simply insisting that youth should display a pious attitude to the history of the Soviet motherland was completely pointless. As A. N. Shelepin, the First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Komsomol, argued at the Thirteenth Congress of the Komsomol in April 1958, Soviet young people 'have never seen a landowner, a kulak, they've no idea what unemployment or exploitation or any of those other social evils afflicting capitalism are. Some of them have very little idea of the high price paid, the blood and sweat poured out to fight for the conditions in which they now live' [XIII S"ezd 1959: 30]. For the younger generations, the 'living thread' of the past had broken, and a sense of the remoteness of the Revolution generated debate about exactly which layer of the past was most useful in the present.

The organisation of special festivals for children and young people was inevitably affected by the contradictoriness of the general ideological tendencies of the post-Stalin years. On the one hand, moral commentators were especially concerned to preserve 'Soviet' values in this age group. In some new festivals – for example, the 'ceremonial presentation of the first passport' or 'Scarlet Sails' (the Leningrad school-leavers' festival), 'revolutionary traditions' were far more important than 'national traditions'. A description of 'Scarlet Sails' from 1972 is significant in this regard: 'The festival will reflect the glorious jubilee of the Pioneer organisation, the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of the USSR, the theme of fidelity to the Motherland, civic duty in the choice of one's life path' [O provedenii 1972: 21].¹

Purely political rituals such as entry into the Pioneers also continued to have significance – indeed, their significance was enhanced at this period. In the 1930s and 1940s, Pioneers had generally been signed up as a class, without any particular formalities. From the late 1950s onwards, however, pupils – or at any rate, the 'best pupils' in a given class – were often welcomed into the Pioneers in some place associated with the high points of Soviet history (such as, in Leningrad, the Museum of the Revolution or the Aurora, or one of the various museums of Lenin in the city).

At the same time, at schools and in kindergartens, such non-political days as Alphabet Book Day, Teachers' Day, the birthdays of pupils and of the institution itself, were more and more widely celebrated.

¹ Cf. the description of 'The Factory's Birthday' by the Secretary of the Komsomol Committee at the Kirov Factory Gennady Reis: 'We also celebrate "The Factory's Birthday" – on 2 April. Last year we started the festivities with a visit to Piskarevo Cemetery, where we laid wreaths to the fallen warriors. Then we held a meeting with an eternal flame [sic.! i.e. in the presence of, CK, SS]. Then we took the flame to the Palace of Culture. All the war veterans and our partner [poshefnye] army brigades were asked along too' [TsGAIPD f. K-881, op. 16, d. 8, l. 33].

The festivals for the start and end of the school year, 'The First Bell' and 'The Last Bell', continued to include speeches and reports by the headmaster and other members of staff, but associated rituals – giving flowers to your teacher, having the honour of ringing the 'first' or 'last' bell – were just as important. In the 1930s and 1940s, only elite schools had organised a 'school leavers' ball': by the 1970s, this was a ubiquitous event.¹ In this way, the personal significance of such events started to matter as much as their political significance.

Normative literature encouraged 'privatisation' of major state holidays, and the creation of new family festivals. For example, parents were urged to turn New Year into a wonderful day for their children and to celebrate children's birthdays. In circumstances where the consolidation of the family was a major state objective (because of anxieties about rising divorce rates), any family holiday was perceived as a positive event – provided it did not have religious connotations.² The official photographs of such mass holidays as 1 May and 7 November were quite differently presented depending on the era when they were taken. In the 1930s and 1940s, it was usual to present children as members of collectives, above all Pioneer troops (see **ill. 1**). While photographs of this kind still appeared in the post-Stalin era (**ill. 4**), it was more typical for children to be represented now as part of family groups (**ill. 2, 3**). Official documents from the first decades of Soviet power, for example, the minutes of a meeting of the Children's Sub-Committee of the Krasnopresnensky District of Moscow held on 13 January 1923, emphasised that children's groups were to be kept separate from adult groups: '*Com. Yakovlev is to be assigned with the task of making urgent corrections to the routes of the processions, so that adult and child demonstrators do not come in contact with each other*' [TsDAOM f. 3, op. 11, d. 131, l. 21]. In the 1930s, senior Pioneers were often expected to man nurseries during demonstrations so that parents were able to march alongside their workmates.³ But by the late 1950s, the 'holiday norm' included mixed groups of adults and young children – if the participants in the demonstration included exemplary Soviet families, so much the better.

¹ See e.g. the memories of Rimma Mamontova about School no. 25 (the so-called 'Kremlin school') in Moscow: the headmistress 'organised a school-leavers' ball in 1937 and 1938, the first in the Soviet Union' [Golubovich 2006: 68]

² Material on 'strengthening the family' and on 'traditions' often appeared together in late Soviet normative texts on the subject of leisure. For example, one 1989 brochure [*Lyubitelskii klub*: 2] describes collecting antiques etc. as 'one of the traditional and interesting ways of spending leisure time in a productive way' which can also be a family form of spending time, embracing several generations at one time, and being transmitted from generation to generation'.

³ 'While their parents march along with all the proletarians of Moscow in the October columns, we will entertain the little ones' ['Vo vremya' 1935].



III. 1. A group of senior school pupils at a demonstration in Leningrad, 7 November 1935. Photographer unknown. TsGAKFFD, St Petersburg. Catalogue Ap 30789



III. 2. Parents and children taking part in a procession at the 1 May 1962 demonstration in Leningrad. Photographer M. Blokhin. TsGAKFFD, St Petersburg. Catalogue Bp 18138



Ill. 3. Spectators standing by the Hermitage on the official birthday of the Young Pioneer organisation. 19 May 1960. V. E. Ritov. TsGAKFFD, St Petersburg. Catalogue Ap 162298



Ill. 4. Senior school pupils at a demonstration in a village in Leningrad province. 1 May 1964. Photographer unknown. TsGAKFFD, St Petersburg. Catalogue Ap 110122

Another stimulus to the new, ‘family’ orientation of the Soviet holiday (a process that sometimes nearly spilled over into its ‘infantilisation’)¹ was the fact that the value assigned to direct participation in the celebrations had also begun to decline. The spread of access to television meant that more and more Soviet families were able to take part in the ‘official’ part of the holiday at long distance. It was in principle possible for the local side of the celebrations to be limited to a party meal shared by relatives and close friends. In such cases, the feeling generated was likely to be less the sense of joyful fusion with a huge crowd (as remembered by the informants of Albert Baiburin and Alexandra Piir when recalling the Stalin years) than pleasure in the chance for some relaxed socialising with people one knew well already.

However, the questions of how far the ‘everyday life’ of Soviet festivals accorded with the ideals set out in normative literature, and of how much these ideals resonated with the Soviet public, was complex. And children were in signal respects a highly specific group of festival participants, whose reactions deserve consideration in some detail.

‘The holiday was very lively and interesting’

If sources such as official reports are to be believed, Soviet holidays, including the newly-invented ones, were always celebrated in high style. For instance, the new ‘kolkhoz’ holiday in Sharinsky district mentioned earlier was described as having delighted the local population. The festivities had gone off enjoyably, but without any hint of bad behaviour:

We should point out that the holiday was very lively and interesting – and all this was, of course, managed without any funds from the general kolkhoz budget being spent. [...] Not only was there no loutish behaviour on the holiday, but there were no public order problems at all – of the kind that had abounded on religious holidays.²

¹ The ‘child-centred’ nature of the late Soviet holiday became especially evident in the late 1980s. For example, in 1988, *Vechemii Leningrad* described the New Year festival thus: ‘In the endless crowds, spreading over the whole Prospekt, here and there are heard the sounds of children’s voices — despite the late hour, they are cheery and wide-awake. You even meet mums and dads out with their prams’ [‘Prazdnik na nashei ulitse’ 1988: 1]. Cf. also the description of the housewarming party organised by those living in the Youth Housing Complex on Leninsky Prospekt, Leningrad, during which a little boy dressed as Buratino handed the symbolic ‘keys of the house’ to the chairman of the complex. The occasion was rounded off with a fair ‘at which children’s toys, sweets, and consumer goods were sold’ [‘Na ikh ulitse – prazdnik’ 1988: 4].

² Kvartalov, Secretary of the Party Committee of the ‘Soviet’ collective farm, Sharinsky district (Kostroma province), ‘Zapiska ob opyte preodoleniya religioznykh prazdnestv na sele’ [RGANI f. 5, op. 34, d. 96, l. 91].

This description was typical: the new holidays are said to have been 'lively', 'cheerful', 'interesting', while entirely lacking noise and disorder. As another Party organiser wrote of the 'Virgin Soil Song Festival' held at Omsk in the autumn of 1961:

Andrianovskaya Woods [...] was richly decorated. Against a background of verdure the portraits of members of the government and leaders of agriculture, and the slogans such as 'We Will Meet the Twenty-Second Congress of the Communist Party with New Achievements in Labour', 'We Will Give the Motherland More Grain, Meat, and Milk!' stood out in sharp relief. The display-boards on show depicted the promises made to the Twenty-Second Congress by the labouring people of the district and their success in improving crop yields.

From early in the morning the virgin steppe was filled with the sounds of music and merry singing. More than ten thousand people took part in the festival of song and dance.¹

Accounts of this kind suggest that the new holidays and rituals quickly found favour with the public. While reports were written to make precisely this point (and so should not be trusted too far), other evidence does suggest that 'new traditions' had some impact. For instance, ethnographers working in some areas of the Moscow region in the 1980s discovered that their informants could tell them almost nothing about Shrovetide celebrations, but had very detailed memories of the 'Farewell to Winter' festivals that had supplanted these [Savushkina 1988: 12–13].² Fieldwork in small towns indicates that many informants recalled 'professional' festivals, such as 'Railway Workers' Day', with warmth and nostalgia [Akhmetova, Lurye 2005: 349].

Some new festivals also became a fixture in big cities. As one of our informants, a woman who had spent many years working as a lecturer in the Institute of Culture and Journalism, recalled:

Back in Soviet days, the system of professional holidays was very elaborately developed: Builders' Day, Agricultural Workers' Day, Light Industrial Workers' Day, Teachers' Day and lots more [...] There was, there emerged a festival of workers' dynasties – we

¹ 'Spravka o rabote kultprosvetuchrezhdenii Omskoi oblasti po propagande i raz'yasneniyu materialov XXII s'ezda KPSS', 30 December 1961 [RGANI f. 5, op. 34, d. 96, l. 137].

² Cf. [Oxf/Lev P-05 PF8B: 16]. This informant also recalled how her Pioneer troop had taken part in celebrating Forestry Workers' Day (ibid.). In the 1920s, on the other hand, the inhabitants of Soviet villages generally celebrated parish festivals, Christmas, Easter, Shrovetide and so on (cf. the abundant 'holiday' material in the children's essays authored by pupils at the Kaluga schools operated by the First Experimental Station of Narkompros, [NA RAO f. 1., op. 1, d. 241, l. 21–25; ibid. d. 246, l. 4, l. 107, etc.].

celebrated dynasties of workers, like the Vagranov dynasty at the Lenin factory [...] and there were others too, dynasties of doctors, for instance [Oxf/Lev P-07 KT PF4].

In Leningrad, people have positive memories of ‘Scarlet Sails’, the festival for school-leavers set up in the 1950s: ‘It all came across as so lively and joyful’ [Oxf/AHRC SPb-07 PF1A SA: 5. F., b. 1944, mother librarian].

Yet at the same time, the effect of the new calendar festivals was, in some respects, limited.¹ None of them, so far as we can tell, was added to the holidays regularly celebrated at home. The ‘new rituals’ – marriages, baby naming rituals, workplace and private celebrations of birthdays and wedding anniversaries, etc. – had far more impact in a general sense.²

To judge by oral history also, the new festivals were not always celebrated as decorously as official reports suggest. Often, they were marked by exactly the ‘backward’ traditions that their emergence had been supposed to oust, such as drinking and ritual bouts of fisticuffs. ‘Well, during the Russian winter, we had this festival called “Russian Winter” [...] It was a kind of farewell, a farewell to Russian winter [...] We used to have fights with the lads from Pikhtovo’ [Oxf/Lev P-05 PF26A: 4-5. M., b. 1962, from a village in Perm province; mother milkmaid, father tractor driver].

Thus, the new holidays did not, after all, prove free from ‘loutish behaviour’ and ‘public order problems’. Indeed, there were cases when the emphasis on ‘traditions’ gave Soviet citizens engaging in behaviour that would previously have been considered ‘uncultured’ a weapon with which to defend themselves. For example, almost 25 per cent of the respondents to a survey of Komsomol members carried out at the ‘Red Dawn’ factory, Leningrad, in 1970 recorded that they had taken part in a religious ritual of some kind, and 30 per cent of these explained their action with a reference to ‘traditions’ [TsGAIPD. f. K-598, op. 27, d. 222, l. 43]. As Albert Baiburin and Alexandra Piir’s article shows, the public holidays that remained at

¹ As cultural administrators of the era recall, the height of city festivals was in the 1990s; at this point, individual street festivals and city festivals began to be celebrated regularly in Perm, for instance [Oxf/Lev P-07 KT PF4: 3]. Even now, things did not always run smoothly: cf. the comment from 1991: ‘The sense that this festival would vanish round the corner as soon as you got near it was hard to shake off’ [Kozhevnikova 1991: 5].

² Cf. the comments of one of our cultural administrator informants: ‘there were festivals that were connected [pause] with the family. For instance, Wedding Day in the Palace of Nuptials [...] We also used to celebrate Baby-Naming Day in the Palaces of Culture attached to different factories, and we had our own special scenario. Mothers and fathers would bring their child along a month after it was born [...] And then there was another kind of festivals that appeared – Family Jubilees. Silver weddings, golden weddings, cloth weddings. So a process of strengthening the family was going on’ [Oxf/Lev P-07 KT PF4: 8].

the centre of the Soviet celebratory system were, by the 1960s, also often celebrated in ways that would not have inspired the warm approval of Party organisers.

*'Louder the ovations instantly thundered':
children and early Soviet festivals*

Before moving to consider the specific role of children in post-Stalinist festivals, it is important to sketch some historical background. During the early years of Soviet power, the expectation was that children would respond to the key event of the Soviet public holiday, the demonstration, in the same way that adults did. 'Parade', a poem by sixteen-year-old Aleksandr Kobelyansky, published in a collection of verse issued to mark Stalin's sixtieth birthday in 1939, represents the Soviet festival as a carnival of colour, sound, and stormy emotions:

*Red Square is festively joyous,
The grey walls of the Kremlin rise up,
With the bright flame of red banners
The flags glimmer, burning in the sun.
With gold the stars on the towers shine,
A loud cry of greeting is heard.
It is our leaders taking their places
On the tribune. Everyone greets them.
And there, rising in his grey greatcoat,
Near, dear, familiar, down-to-earth...
Louder the ovations instantly thundered:
'Long live Stalin – the helmsmen of the country!'*

[Rodina i Stalin v tvorchestve detei 1939: 14].

It is typical of the times that Kobelyansky did not depict the festivities in his own city (Mariupol), but in Moscow. The 'heart' of the Stalinist festival was Red Square, and it was here that all loyal citizens of the Soviet Union longed to be, hoping against hope that they would have the highest happiness of all – a meeting with the Leader himself.¹

Enthusiastic representations of the festivities and the holiday crowds on Red Square pervaded the cultural production of the 1930s and 1940s. Posters, newspapers, documentaries, and feature films all abounded in such scenes. Provincial revels, on the other hand (which in fact constituted reality for the majority of the Soviet population)

¹ See e.g. the bibliography published in *Literatura v shkole* to mark Stalin's sixtieth birthday, which includes, among other sections: 'Stalin – the creator of a new happy life for the peoples of the USSR'. Three quarters of the publications listed relate to meetings between heroes and the leader, e.g. G. Baidukov, *Vstrechi s tovarishchem Stalinym* [Meetings with Comrade Stalin], M. and L., 1938. One of the canonical representations of the demonstration in Soviet propaganda was a view of the tribune with some lucky small child being lifted up to greet the leaders (the earliest example seems to be the picture of Nina Zdrogova in *Pravda*, 1 July 1935).

appeared alongside these as a kind of simulacrum, a pale imitation of what was going on in the capital¹.

Kobelyansky's poem also points to the central role of festivals and material about them in the socialisation of Soviet children. In the first days after the February Revolution, children streamed out on to streets and squares spontaneously, motivated by interest in what was going on, feelings of solidarity with 'the people', or idle curiosity. However, soon attending demonstrations and meetings became part of the official school round, a process accelerated when the Bolsheviks took power.² In the new alphabet books and readers produced for Soviet primary schools, children could read about the May and October holidays and about imaginary Soviet children who took part in political festivals: 'The Red Wagon. We joyfully give the first and most cherished load of grain to the state,' read a text in one of the most widely-used reading primers [*Novyi put* 1930: 23].³ In kindergartens and schools, children drew pictures of firework displays and flags, wrote poems about festivals and demonstrations, and organised their own festivals with songs, dances, speeches, and public readings [*Krasnye zori* 1919].⁴

After the school reforms of 1932, when good school work became the number one expectation of the ideal Soviet child, children started to be assigned a less active role in political life, but their future duties as faithful citizens of the motherland were constantly emphasised. From the end of 1935, the repetition of the slogan '*Thank You Comrade Stalin for a Happy Childhood*'⁵ was used as a ritual affirmation of

¹ On the theme of Stalinism as 'life la Baudrillard', see [Dobrenko 2007: Ch. 1].

² On the February Revolution, see the extremely interesting selection of memoirs by 8-12 year olds from schools in Moscow [Voronov 1927], e.g. 'We went on the street where all the Moscow peoples were walking with their flags and printed materiel and sang about freedom And everyone wanted to shout Hurrah! to the sojers becoss they'd stood up for the Russian people and given us all freedom I was very happy along with everyone else' [Voronov 1927: 6] (punctuation and spelling is rendered to convey the unorthodox character of the original). Cf. [*Deti russkoi emigratsii* 1997: 42, 186]. On organised visits to demonstrations, see e.g. 'Informatsionnoe pismo o provedenii prazdnika', 18 March 1926 [TsAODM f. 1884, op. 1, d. 50, l. 17] describing the celebrations for the Day of the Paris Commune in Serebryanye prudy Komsomol cell: 33 women, 18 men, and 33 children took part in this, and the children's group and the Komsomol put on various shows.

³ Cf. 'Kak ustroit v shkole prazdnik urozhaya' [*Novyi put* 1930: 15; Zak 1926]. It is interesting that holidays and festivals had already had a role to play in teaching at schools before 1917 as well. See e.g. [Ushinsky 1912: 63-64]: '**Holidays:** The Birth of the Mother of God. The Presentation in the Temple. The Annunciation. The Birth of Christ. Palm Sunday. Transfiguration. The Radiant Resurrection of Christ. The Ascension. Trinity Sunday. Pentecost. The Dormition of the Mother of God'.

⁴ See e.g. the essay by Kolya Kapitanov, a schoolboy at one of the Kaluga primary schools run by the First Experimental Station of Narkompros, 'How the Harvest Festival was Organised:': 'We all sang songs in chorus, and then we went to the square where torches were burning, we burned all the kulaks' [i.e. effigies of these]. [NA RAO f. 1, op. 1, d. 245, l. 107].

⁵ This was the commonest variant of a slogan that existed in other variants as well: 'Thank You Dear Stalin...' 'Thank You Dear Comrade Stalin...'; sometimes the leader was thanked for children's 'joyful existence, etc. See also [Kelly 2009].

gratitude for the benefits conferred on Soviet children by the nation, the Communist Party, and the leader [*Detskii karnaval* 1939; Grishin 1939; *Prazdnik na ploshchadi* 1940]. Children were not now expected to make speeches, as they had been in the 1920s; they fused joyously into the huge chorus, the big happy collective:

<i>Bright sun</i>	<i>All for us!</i>
<i>Love and presents</i>	<i>All for us!</i>
<i>New schools</i>	<i>All for us!</i>
<i>Cheery leisure</i>	<i>All for us!</i>
<i>Camps and resorts</i>	<i>All for us!</i>
<i>Brand-new clothes</i>	<i>All for us!</i>
<i>The roads are open</i>	<i>For us!</i>
<i>The canals are dug</i>	<i>For us!</i>
[...]	
<i>The earth is in flower</i>	<i>For us!</i>
<i>The Kremlin stars shine</i>	<i>For us!</i>

[Grishin 1939: 14].

The lives of Soviet children were depicted as a fairy tale, a dream, an unending celebration. And, like all the other inhabitants of the 'broad motherland', children were supposed to revel in their fusion with all the other countless and nameless Soviet people celebrating the festival day. 'The sense of the particular significance of this wonderful day [i.e. election day – CK, SS], the sense of one's unending fusion with the collective, the sense of calm and full joy seized hold of millions of workers, peasants, and intellectuals' [*Velikii prazdnik* 1938: 5].

This was the ideal, the 'socialist realist' vision of the bright future. As Andrei Sergeev has described in his memoirs, the sense of universal love could indeed give little children a pleasant sense of peace and security [Sergeev 1997: 9]. Older children, such as top pupils in the higher classes at school, saw things rather differently: one had to earn one's happiness through exemplary schoolwork and devotion to the 'genius of all nations' and 'best friend of all children' (a case in point was Lev Anninsky, who made vast efforts to write his jubilee eulogy to Stalin in verse, rather than in the prose that had been suggested by his teacher). [Kobo 1989: 54]. For children of this type, such as eighteen-year-old Boris Rodoman, writing in 1949, Soviet festivals were a high point of existence:

I remember the lively and bright demonstrations for the First of May, with their banners and transparencies, their red ties and red scarves, the national costumes, the brass bands, the huge drums and kettle drums, the Red Army caps and helmets, the caricatures of chamberlains¹ on long sticks, the flocks of excited children...²

¹ The diarist has in mind caricatures of Neville Chamberlain (1869–1940), Prime Minister of Britain from 27 May 1937 to 10 May 1940, and the initiator of 'peace in our time' with Germany in 1938.

² B. Rodoman, 'Tetrad po grafomanii byvshego uchenika 1-10 klassov shesti raznykh shkol Moskvy, Omska i Kolosovki Rodomana Borisa'. P. 22-3. Archive of B. Rodoman. We are grateful to him and to Vitaly

Yet there were also children, even in the Stalin era, who celebrated ‘red letter days’ in less admirable ways, for example, the eighteen-year-old schoolboy Yakov Tverdin and his friends:

Today is the Twenty-First Anniversary of the October Revolution. [...] We ended up in a small room belonging to the family of some workman. [...] We started with vodka. I drank half a glass myself. Then I poured the mixture of beer and vodka that I'd been given into a glass under the table, which I'd concealed there so I could pour the booze into it. After my very first glass some idiot came up to me and said, 'You're drunk.' But I wasn't, I was still sober, it was that fool who was drunk himself. After the second glass, we had a third, and then a fourth, and so on. From vodka we moved on to beer, and then to liqueurs, till eventually we were all absolutely legless.¹

It is impossible to tell how many children took a pious attitude to official celebrations, and how many (like Tverdin and his comrades) found the opportunity to ‘relax’ more enthralling – or indeed, how many combined the two roles with no particular sense of split consciousness or ‘cognitive dissonance’.² However festivals were perceived at the time, it is notable that official celebrations, demonstrations, and parades play a relatively minor role in recollections of those who were children in the Stalin era.³ The main theme in their memories is how tough life was, and a ‘holiday’ or ‘festival’ (*prazdnik*) meant anything that signified a break from their day-to-day struggles:

We only ever had this soup stuff. [...] And then one day in this radish brew I suddenly tasted something so unbelievably delicious, something alien and quite amazing. It turned out my mother had managed to find a whole extra potato somewhere and crumble it in. [...] So I'd ended up with a piece of potato. And that was a real holiday for me. [...] And school was a holiday for me too. Because it was so crowded at home. [Oxf/Lev P-05 PF3A: 10. F., b. 1936; parents from the village, moved to Perm in 1928. Our emphasis – CK, SS].

Bezrogov for permission to quote from the text, part of which was published in the collection *Gorodok v tabakerke: Detstvo v Rossii ot Nikolaya II do Borisa Yeltsina*. Ed. V. Bezrogov, C. Kelly, with the participation of A. Piir. Vol. 1. M., 2008.

¹ From the unpublished diary of Yu. Tverdin. Personal archive of Professor Yu. B. Orlitsky. Our thanks to Professor Orlitsky and to Professor V. G. Bezrogov for permission to quote from this text, which was part-published in 2008 in the collection *Gorodok v tabakerke*. Vol. 1.

² Tverdin, for example, was a highly active member of the Komsomol who dreamed of making himself useful in the Far East of the Soviet Union.

³ Of course, if informants from earlier generations are asked directly about holidays, they will talk about them, but most often in a fairly indefinite way. (See e.g [Oxf/Lev SPb-03 PF 36A: 28] (brother and sister, b. 1940 and 1946, Leningrad, working-class background).

People imagine their lives, in retrospect, as a process of *survival*, and any small pleasure seems like a 'holiday' against this background. Special family celebrations for state holidays are seldom, if ever, recalled.¹ Both in Soviet propaganda and in private memories of the Stalin era, the 'holiday', in the sense of a state festival, had the role of a public event. .

**'You walk with your parents and the big crowd...':
the child's eye view of the demonstration in post-Stalinist Russia**

After the denunciation of the 'cult of personality' in 1956, the attitude to children's role in celebrations changed once more. Along with the Stalin portraits, vanished the rituals expressing gratitude; although the 1960s and 1970s witnessed an attempt to boost the Lenin cult in order to help fill the gap left by Stalin, these rituals were not readdressed to him. Holidays and celebrations also occupied a very modest role in children's literature and cinema of the Khrushchev and Brezhnev era. The most significant representation of them – the Pioneer 'Queen of the Maize' festival in Elem Klimov's 1964 film *Welcome – and Keep Out!* – is treated as a comic event.²

Comparison of Stalinist and post-Stalinist alphabet books and readers for primary schools also points to a diminution of the importance of Soviet festivals. In Stalinist books, 'Stalin and Children' was placed at the beginning of the book, while 'The New Year Tree' and 'Summer' (as festival occasions) were placed together in the middle. However, in post-Stalinist primers, the arrangement of texts was according to the ordinary chronology of the year: thus, in the autumn, children read about the 7 November along with mushroom-picking, while New Year was located, along with skating, in the winter section. [*Bukvar* 1963: 3, 37, 60, 82–83].

It is hardly surprising that the memories of informants from 'the last Soviet generations' are also markedly different from those of infor-

¹ On the whole, celebrating things in a family setting is recalled as something exceptional: 'Int.: How did you celebrate New Year? Inf. 1: I remembered the last New Year [i.e. before the War, CK, SS] quite well, we did celebrate that. Inf. 2: We had a huge tree, in Granny's big room from floor to ceiling, just this enormous tree' [Oxf/Lev SPb-02 PF7A: 38. Inf. 1 — F., b. 1908 St Petersburg, working-class parents, grew up in orphanage from 1918; Inf. 2 – F., b. 1931, Leningrad, parents working class; daughter of Inf. 1].

² The scene strikes anyone with some knowledge of the cinema as working like a parody of the 'harvest festival' in Eisenstein's film *The General Line*, although this association would scarcely have struck Soviet children of the 1960s. Another instance where Soviet festivals are parodied is Eduard Uspensky's children's story *The Festivals of Prostokvashino*, the characters in which, Matroskin the Cat, Sharik the Dog and Uncle Fedor wonder why 'there's a Poultry Day, there's 8 March, but there's no Cows' Day'. They accordingly decide to fix up a festival for Murka the cow with a celebratory table of food and slogans reading, 'Long Live Our Dear Moo-Cow!' Unfortunately the object of the revels displays little gratitude: she eats not only the paper tablecloth, but also the banners with greetings to her [Uspensky 2002: 466].

mants from earlier generations. One striking change is the sheer amount of attention given to holidays and celebrations. In the words of a woman who grew up in Perm province in the 1960s and 1970s, ‘holidays [*prazdniki*] were seen as more of an event, all ordinary days were kind of the same’ [Oxf/Lev P-05 PF12A: 1. F., b. 1960, small town in Perm province, parents working class]. Against the backdrop of a way of life that was at once stable and rather monotonous, holidays seemed real ‘events’, where, on the other hand, getting more or less enough to eat had seemed like an ‘event’ twenty or thirty years earlier. In addition, the transformation of official definitions of the holiday (the efforts to ‘decentralise’ and ‘humanise’ this) fostered a tendency in children to ‘privatise’ holidays (that is, to see them as ‘family’ events rather than as ‘public’ ones).

In memories of the Stalin era, it is common to come across recollections of how everyone in the communal apartment celebrated holidays together:

Our apartment was a real international mix. But I remember that we were all friendly, there were no misunderstandings. Our parents even organised joint celebrations for holidays, New Year, for instance, all in the shared kitchen [Oxf/Lev SPb-02 PF8A: 1–2. M., b. 1933, Leningrad; from a Bashkir family, parents working class].

But we were still all friendly, really friendly, and on holidays we’d all go into the courtyard with our spades and rakes and clean up, we’d organise a collective tea party [Oxf/Lev M-03 PF5A: 1. F., b. 1944, mother maid].

In memories of the 1960s and later, this once standard scene of ‘celebrating with the neighbours’ becomes a relative rarity (no doubt the governing sense of the ‘separate family flat’ as the social norm is a factor behind this).¹ Recollections are fixated instead on celebrations in the family circle. Of course guests might turn up, and they are remembered, but on the whole, they are recalled to have been relatives, not neighbours. ‘I can’t remember neighbours coming along to the celebrations... I remember they always had their own festival tables’ [Oxf/Lev P-07 PF13A: 1. F., b. 1961, Perm; parents from the intelligentsia].

Some public holidays are remembered as being ‘just like any other days off’ [*prosto vykhodnye*], but others had more of a significance,

¹ Of course, the family flat was not necessarily an *actual* social norm (in Leningrad, for example, even in the late 1980s, the percentage of those living in communal flats was a minimum of 19 per cent and a maximum of 65 per cent, depending on district. However, in Soviet journalism and behaviour literature, didactic texts, etc., the separate family flat was, from the 1960s, presented as the normal experience: see, e.g. a model sentence from the school alphabet book of 1963: ‘We have a separate flat’ [Bukvar 1963: 80].

and hence play a large role in memories. It is usually the 'family' resonance of such days that is highlighted. Among these, the most important are New Year¹ and Victory Day, which was regularly commemorated unofficially before it was promoted to the status of a public holiday in 1965. Many people considered such days 'special family days' even if the traditions they observed were not peculiar to their family. '9 May was a special day. 9 May was celebrated in our family too. It was a celebration day for us' [Oxf/AHRC-SPb-07 PF 2A SA: 9. M., b. 1977, grew up in Leningrad, mother librarian].

The 'depoliticisation' of the holiday, its shift in the direction of entertainment, is also recorded in informants' memories of details. Certainly, there are exceptions. One informant remembered: 'If there was a holiday, we always had a red flag hanging on our house'. But her narrative was generally constructed so as to emphasise the political propriety of her family. 'My dad worked – he always used to get to work earlier than he had to [...] he took such a self-sacrificing attitude to work [...] he had all the 'Shock Worker' badges, he was a shock worker all the time' [Oxf/Lev T-05 PF19A: 2. F., b. 1968, Taganrog, mother book-keeper, father driver].

On the whole, though, holidays were remembered largely as sources of pleasure and entertainment, not as times when the red flag flew high. Going to demonstrations simply meant having an exciting time:²

Of course, we didn't understand much what the significance of 7 November and 1 May was. What was it all about? What sort of holiday? What kind of 'solidarity' were they talking about? The main thing was, there were lots of people around and they were all

¹ 'Int.: So what festivals did you celebrate? Inf.: New Year, of course, but that was all, really' [Oxf/Lev P-05 PF6B: 13. F, b. 1949, Perm, parents working class]; cf. 'Int.: So did you have any special holidays in the family? Inf.: Well, not really. New Year was traditional – we always had a tree. We bought a ticket in the plantation and my dad cut it down, it cost maybe 50 kopecks, that wasn't too dear back then. It was a real tree, and the toys... The first tree we had, I remember we made the toys ourselves. In fact it wasn't a tree as such, we got hold of this branch, me and my brothers, we still had a small house, an old one, and so we hung up that branch and made some toys and from then on we had a tree [...] we'd have a big tree, and we bought the decorations.[...] And I remember New Year when I was a child because we always got an orange or a tangerine as a present. We were country children, we only got oranges or tangerines once a year, we only saw them when we got that present' [Oxf/Lev P-05 PF8A: 10. F., b. 1959, settlement, Perm province, mother book-keeper, father manual worker]; 'We used to celebrate New year. We'd always make costumes, like everyone. Every New Year you got a new one. An astronaut, maybe, or the Snow Maiden, or once I wanted to be a butterfly, once it was a snowflake...' [Oxf/Lev P-05 PF23A: 7. F., b. 1957, Perm, father in armed forces, mother secretary].

² See e.g. 'Well, when everyone went out, we went out [to the demonstrations]. It was fun, by the way' [Oxf/AHRC-SPb-07 PF 5A IN: 13. F., b. 1969, parents from the intelligentsia]. Memories of not enjoying parades etc. are very rare. One exceptional case is [Oxf/Lev SPb-02 PF25A: 39. M., b. 1960, Leningrad, parents workers: 'Demonstrations? Well... I never went. Or maybe I did watch them now and again. But it just wasn't interesting.' The generally enthusiastic attitude of our informants is shared by the participants in an online forum held to coincide with 7 November 2007: see http://community.livejournal.com/opinion_ru/1140.html.

carrying balloons. It was really a kind of place to meet your friends, see. To gather and to show yourself off and have a look at other people. People would gather in groups and have a drink or two. It was such a big celebration for everyone. For us too. And you'd show yourself off – we'd put on all the best clothes we had, we'd really prepare for it. We'd treat it like a real festival. [Oxf/Lev P-05 PF24A: 8. F., b. 1958, Perm; parents working class].

I remember the demonstrations. We certainly went to those. There are lots of photos of that. I used to like the demonstrations a lot, by the way, because they'd give me this little flag and you had to walk down the street with it. A real little flag, with this smooth stick and a little red banner at the top with a triangle cut-out at the end. I think there was a star on it too. I liked that so much. You'd walk along with your legs stepping out like a real grown up. Everyone would be looking at you thinking what a good girl you were. They always gave out balloons, that was so cool. [...] Before the demonstration everyone would gather at a square somewhere, and that's where they gave out the balloons. They weren't the sort that burst and collapse, they were the sort that last and last. Gel ones. The only time you got those was once a year, at the demonstrations [Oxf/Lev P-05 PF15A: 7. F., b. 1977, Perm, parents working class].

The lack of precision in the second quotation – 'a square somewhere' – is interesting. The informant's sense of the point of the procession is equally limited: it is not the destination, but the motion itself which mattered 'You'd walk along with your legs stepping out like a real grown up'. Thus, the 'decentralisation' of the *prazdnik* in a general sense (the undermining of the canonical status of Red Square) was matched by a 'decentralisation' in the way the procession was experienced locally. Equally, a generational, rather than political, sense of self had started to predominate: the idea was to behave 'like a real adult', not like a Communist hero.

For other informants, the 'live' demonstration made little impact: they and their families traditionally watched the parades file past out of the window, or made use of the new opportunity to witness everything long-distance. 'We used to set the table, watch the parades and the demonstrations on television' [Oxf/Lev M-04 PF24A: 5. M., b.1968, from a small town in Moscow province; father worker, mother teacher]. But even if the family attended the demonstration, the family group would be the main point of orientation for many children.¹ In Sergei Mikhalkov's classic Stalin-era poem 'Uncle

¹ It is worth noting also that the view taken of the demonstration by the informant quoted above is not one of 'joyous fusion' with the collective, but of an egocentric, even narcissistic, sense of enjoyment: 'You'd walk along with your legs stepping out like a real grown up. Everyone would be looking at you thinking what a good girl you were'.

Styopa', the friendly hero lifts children on to his shoulders. In the post-Stalin era, the same experience acquired family, rather than collective associations. Our informants uniformly remember sitting on their own father's shoulders:¹

We'd celebrate all the public holidays at home [...] we even went to Moscow a few times, for the gun salute. We'd stand on Borodinsky Bridge over the river, people... there was just this huge crowd, and I'd sit on my father's shoulders. When the salute flew up into the sky and went rolling round, everyone shouted "Hooray!" even though you couldn't even see it for the clouds, only hear it, everyone would still shout "Hooray", and I didn't understand, but it was funny. [Oxf/Lev M-03 PF25A: 5. M., b. 1968, from small town, Moscow province; father worker, mother teacher].

It was usually less the banners and slogans that made an impact on children than the 'balloons and flags' they carried themselves:²

Inf.: We really loved going to the demonstrations [...] All those little flags, those transparencies. There were all different kinds of balloons and those inflatable... toys and so on. Whistles, all sorts of... those chocolates and things, yes, those little cockerels, those lollies. You could walk right up Nevsky, where the cars usually go. But we could go right up the middle of the street, in broad daylight. And all that... you got this feeling it was a holiday, a celebration. I don't know... I loved things like that [...] It's a holiday feeling, see. Loud music. It was such a wonderful... such a wonderful thing. [Oxf/Lev SPb-02 PF15A-B AP: 51. F., b. 1969, parents manual workers].

'Proletarians of the World Unite around the Easter Table'

Normative materials on 'new festivals and celebrations' presented a standard type of syncretism: 'Soviet plus national (minus religious traditions)'. But oral history suggests that a more complicated situation obtained in reality. As Communist rituals themselves started to lose the 'sacred' content that they had in the Stalin era, they became more and more compatible with Christian traditions. 'We used to go along to the First of May with painted eggs, yes, really! [Laughs]. When Easter fell in early May. We went along with painted

¹ Compare V. Golubovsky's photographs, taken for the Leningrad press in the 1970s. reproduced [Nikitin 2000: 92].

² Cf. 'Oh, it's such a holiday feeling, the First of May, the birches are all out, yes, you can go out really lightly dressed, with balloons in your hands. Mind you, back then they weren't those gas ones, you just blew them up... with your mouth, so they didn't fly off anywhere, but never mind. They were still balloons, and flags too, we even have photographs showing us out on the march' [Oxf/AHRC SPb-07 PF1 SA: 8]; 'Such joyful memories, experiences, it was so good. Balloons, flags, and it was such fun, lots of people having fun' [Oxf/Lev P-07 PF9]. Compare also the photograph by V. Golubovsky of children carrying balloons [Nikitin 2000: 92].

eggs. That was great!’ [Oxf/Lev P-05 PF10A: 8. F., b. 1977, parents manual workers]. At the same time, religious traditions were themselves becoming increasingly secular:¹

Yes, there was Easter... But to call it a religious festival – it was more on the lines, ‘Proletarians of the World Unite around the Easter Table’.² It was a kind of excuse [for a celebration], and not just in our family either, I’d say. [...] No-one saw it as a religious holiday. For a start, it was just an ordinary working day, but we did paint eggs. I painted them with watercolour paints, the drawings had absolutely nothing to do with Easter. I didn’t even know it was a religious festival in the first place. Granny used to dye eggs with onions, I really liked that. But we didn’t do that at home. [Oxf/Lev P-05 PF21A: 10. F., b. 1958; lived at first in Perm, later in Krasnokamsk, parents doctors].

It was common not to know why you coloured eggs or what Easter signified (note, for instance, the informant’s conviction that it fell on ‘an ordinary working day’). The eggs ritual was generally regarded as something you did ‘in the spring’.³ People simply enjoyed the sight of the decorated table with its dyed eggs and kulich loaf, and the chance of a good meal:

All I knew about religious holidays was that if you visited someone, they’d treat you to something they’d cooked [Oxf/Lev P-05 PF8A: 10. F., b. 1959, settlement, Perm province; mother book-keeper, father manual worker].

At Easter – that wasn’t a family holiday, but Granny always used to make these amazing little pies, and paskhas, and do her best to make it this kind of... tasty day, a celebration, she’d dye eggs, yes, for Easter. [...] Eh-eh. And in fact... it was really tasty [Oxf/AHRC SPb-07 PF1 AK: 5. F., b. 1951, born Ukraine, grew up Tatar Republic, parents engineers].

¹ We are describing Christian traditions here, of course. In Jewish families by the 1960s, Jewish holidays were on the whole not celebrated, and sometimes people even coloured eggs and so on for Easter [CKQ-SPb-04 PF1B: 5. M., b. 1967, brought up in Leningrad province, lived in Leningrad from 1972, parents working class]. (On the secularisation of Jewish family life see also [Shternshis 2006: 40, 41, 184].) On the other hand, Tatars in Leningrad, particularly recent arrivals in the city, tended to celebrate religious holidays. ‘Well, you see, Russians have Easter. Right? But that’s got nothing to do with us, so to speak. But people colour eggs. But we have a holiday called Emarkaryama – the egg festival’ [Oxf/Lev SPb-04 PF84B: 31. F., b. 1953, from a Tatar family, brought up in Leningrad and later in Vsevolozhsk; father worked in Leningrad circus, mother was housewife].

² The informant is slightly misquoting a famous song by Yuz Aleshkovsky, ‘Soviet Easter Song’: ‘Today the eggs are cracking/and church bells delight the soul/And proletarians of the world unite/around the Easter table’.

³ Of course, this situation was also fostered by the fact that the new festivals were precisely intended to replace religious ones. Cf. the commentary of one of our ‘cultural activist’ informants from Perm: ‘Say they might rename Easter the First Birch Festival. And the Houses of Culture attached to the technical schools, the regional Palace of Culture of the [name indecipherable] Technical School, they’d celebrate all those festivals’ [Oxf/Lev P-07 KT PF4A].

'All I remember about holidays is the party meal'

The phrase *'it was tasty'* gets attached to both religious and Soviet festivals of the post-Stalin era. It expresses an attitude that can be named using the German word *Fressfrömmigkeit* ('feed-your-face piety', i.e. the observation of only those customary and ritual practices of religious tradition that are connected with food).¹ The 'retreat into the family' of the holiday meant that the party meal, *zastolye*, became more and more important. In the 1930s and 1940s, any food treat had been seen as a *prazdnik*; by the 1960s, the *prazdnik* itself was largely reduced to the status of a feast. In this vein, a woman who grew up in Perm in the 1980s remembers:

All I remember about holidays is the party meal. And here's something else I remember. There was a shortage of everything, including condensed milk. And I remember my mum used to work in some shop where she could get hold of those goods that were short. And she'd always bake 'walnuts' with condensed milk filling.² And she'd only make a few, so there were never enough to go round. If you managed to grab one, you got one. But I'd been brought up not to grab things. [...] And by the time I got round to stretching out my hand, those 'walnuts' were gone. I remember the feeling – I really wanted one, but I haven't got one, and Mum can't do anything to help me [Oxf/Lev P-05 PF15A: 6. F., b. 1977; parents working class].

As here, it was above all food that was short which was associated with celebration meals; it was no accident that the classic party dish, *salat olivye* (Olivier or Russian salad) changed its composition once some of the traditional ingredients you could never get hold of, such as tinned peas, began to be generally available [Kushkova 2006a]³. But it is fairly rare for informants to recall in detail what they ate.⁴ On the whole, memories of the celebration meals of one's childhood are less definite. The main thing is that there was something nice to eat.⁵

¹ The most widespread use of this term was with reference to German Jews in the early twentieth century, in whom the main deviation from German social norms was preparation of ritual foods for Passover etc. See [Roden 1996].

² These 'walnuts' were small pastries made to look like a walnut; in the inside was condensed milk boiled down to a toffeeish consistency.

³ Cf. [Davidson 2006: 94], recording that at the celebration meals she took part in when living in Moscow in the late 1970s, the same friends and relations were always invited, and the same dishes always served.

⁴ One such memory is: *'The cooking always included a fish pie, shangi or pelmeni. For holidays'* [Oxf/Lev P-05 PF4A. C. 26. F., b. 1936, Perm, parents working class]. This memory relates to the late 1950s or early 1960s, when the informant was already an adult. *Shangi* is a local name for what in standard Russian are known as *vatrushki* (which have a plain bagel-like dough and a filling of e.g. sweetened curd cheese in the centre); *pelmeni* are boiled pasta envelopes with meat inside.

⁵ It should be noted that children's concept of what constituted 'festival food' was not always the same as adults'. For instance, an informant of ours who worked as a supervisor in a boarding school in the 1970s, remembered how surprised she was when one of her charges told her how delicious the pickled

‘You only got pocket money on holidays’

It was not just food that made holidays special. Children tended to get particularly indulged on these days:

They’d only let you out on holidays, that is, you only got pocket money on holidays [Oxf/Lev P-05 PF12A: 2. F., b. 1960, small town, Perm province, parents working class].

Maybe Mum used to save up, maybe she’d borrow money from someone, but on big holidays, New Year and my birthday, I’d get something, yes. But on 23 February [Soviet Army Day] it used to be some very small present, for some reason. Why, I don’t know. And that’s probably why I still don’t like 23 February! [Laughs]. [Oxf/Lev SPb-02 PF28B AP: 18. M., b. 1972; mother manual worker].¹

.True, children were still expected to behave properly on holidays. Sometimes they were seated at their own small table away from the adults.² If they did sit at the common table, they were not, of course, given any alcohol:

Inf.: Parents and children, we all sat at the one table.

Int.: Everyone together?

Inf.: Yes, everyone together. Though of course we didn’t get anything to drink. Well, some fruit compote or something... All the daughters-in-law, the younger women, they’d prepare the meal, the men’d sit round smoking, go off here and there...

[Oxf/Lev M-03 PF16A: 11. F., b. 1952, Elektrostal, parents manual workers].

Children not only expected to get presents; they also gave presents themselves:

Well, you’d save up so much, then 23 February would arrive, and maybe I’d buy my stepfather – only I didn’t call him that, I called him ‘dad’ – a book or whatever [Oxf/Lev P-05 PF8A: 6. F., b. 1959, settlement, Perm province, mother book-keeper, father manual worker].

herring and macaroni served to him when he went home for a state holiday had been [Oxf/Lev SPb-04 PF49B: 21]. These were both workaday, indeed cheap, dishes, and her inclination was to pity him; the child, who had never been served ‘proper’ festival food, was very happy.

¹ Cf. [Oxf/Lev SPb-04 PF36B: 28–29. Brother and sister, b. 1939 and 1946, Leningrad, parents working class]. There were also efforts made to give presents to children in orphanages. See e.g. the memories of a boarding-school supervisor in the 1970s [Oxf/Lev SPb-04 PF45B: 34]: ‘Despite our Soviet poverty, despite all that, the children always got presents. Of the simplest kind, the humblest kind: a cockerel [i.e. a sweet shaped like one], a lolly, an apple, a tangerine – we always had that, always.’

² This practice goes back earlier as well: see e.g. [Oxf/Lev SPb-02 PF7A: 38]: ‘**Inf.:** the children never sat at table. **Int.:** So why not? **Inf.:** A separate table, we had our own low table’ (New Year in the 1940s.: F., b. 1931, parents working class).

Often presents were home-made, especially for 23 February and 8 March. They might well be produced during 'labour education' classes at school:

We loved doing that: cutting out a circle of some kind, then you'd stick something on it, a flower, a figure eight [for 8 March – CK, SS], and then you'd hang it on the wall from a piece of ribbon. Mind you, the masterpieces I made weren't really fit to go on a wall, but they [i.e. her parents – CK, SS] used to keep them stored somewhere [Oxf/Lev P-05 PF21A: 9. F., b. 1958, grew up in Perm and Krasnokamsk, parents doctors].

They [i.e. the children in the orphanage where the informant worked – CK, SS] used to embroider things for the holidays. I remember some boys used to draw the designs for the hankies. And then the girls would do the sewing – a dove, say, or an anchor, a star - whatever [for 23 February, CK, SS] [Oxf/Lev P-05 PF19A: 33. F., b. 1936, Perm, worked as senior Pioneer leader in an orphanage].

In some families, making presents was a collective activity:

We'd always put together a home newspaper for the holidays. My dad was an engineer, he'd do the drawings, we've still got them, he'd draw and write, and my mother would write stories, and there'd be big photos [Oxf/Lev SPb-02 PF26A: 17. M., b. 1960, lived in Leningrad from 1961; father civil servant, mother teacher].

Even if the child was not always in the centre of attention, holidays induced a sense of well-being; the family was together, doing things as a group, and the sense of shared happiness was infectious.

'There was a kind of holiday feeling' – celebrations outside the family

For adults, drinking was an essential part of the holiday mood: 'Out in the village people are more straightforward, you might say, and that goes on every holiday' [Oxf/Lev P-05 PF5A: 7. M., b. 1973, Perm; parents workers, moved from the village in the 1960s]. But it was not necessary to have village roots to think that vodka was vital to celebrations: this attitude was more or less universal. Children, on the other hand, were not only unlikely to drink themselves, but often found the sight of adults getting tipsy alienating or even frightening:

Of course, what I remember about kindergarten is also that a celebration really was a celebration. The children were all dressed up, there was a big New Year tree, Father Frost, the Snow Maiden. But at home, if my father came back from work with presents – and they used to give them out back then – then he'd invariably turn up like this [i.e. drunk, CK, SS]. If we had guests, then by the time he got to a certain stage he was quite capable of turfing them out. So there was never a real sense of a celebration at home. Or maybe there was, someone might give you

a toy or whatever, but my father wrecked it all. [Oxf/Lev P-05 PF12A: 4. F., b.1960, from small town, Perm province; parents working class].¹

For children from ‘deprived’ families of this kind, celebrations in schools and kindergartens were likely to be a salvation. Such official celebrations also played a special role in the lives of children who lived in institutions. As a woman who worked as a supervisor in a boarding school during the 1960s and 1970s recalled:

We used all to go to the demonstration for the First of May, we’d go with the organisations that supported us [nashi shefy]. Yes, we’d all go, we’d go across Palace Square, we used to stop there and sing and play, we were so beautiful, we’d walk there. We’d always be asked to take part [Oxf/Lev SPb-04 PF50A].²

But ordinary ‘family’ children also often enjoyed celebrations in the kindergarten.

They used to dress us up and put ribbons on us. All the little boys had nice clothes, shorts and so on. We all tried to dress up for holidays. We’d all learn poems by heart. Almost all of us, anyway [Oxf/Lev P-05 PF24A. P. 8. F., b. 1958, Perm; parents working-class].

School celebrations were equally good fun for many – the ‘First’ and ‘Last Bell’, the school New Year tree, the celebrations for 23 February and 8 March with gifts and cards and so on.³ Even if the official side of things was a bore, the general socialising was a delight:

It [the 1 September, CK SS] was supposed to be a real celebration. But I never liked it all that much. The usual formal assembly [lineika]. They were always so boring. I never liked them. But the effect of the whole occasion, everyone meeting up after a long holiday, well that, that really... Yes, there really was a holiday feeling about all that [Oxf/Lev SPb-02 PF15B FP: 53. F., b. 1969, parents working class].⁴

¹ Compare an anonymous school essay from 1926: ‘Otchet o provedennykh zimmikh kanikulakh’, [INA RAO f. 1, op. 1, d. 245, l. 107]: ‘ONLY WE DON’T LIKE IT WHEN OUR MUMS AND DADS ARE DRUNK WE’RE SCARED OF THEM AND IT’S NOT FUN AT HOME THEN’ [Capital letters in original – CK, SS].

² Cf. the memories of other orphanage supervisors also working at this period: [Oxf/Lev P-05 PF18, 19, passim; Oxf/Lev SPb-04 PF47B AP: 22-23].

³ See [Kelly 2004] on the ‘bell’ festivals and 23 February and 8 March. On New Year celebrations in schools, see e.g. ‘**Int.:** So did you celebrate any holidays in the boarding school? **Inf.:** Yes, them too. New Year, for instance. Not just in the boarding school, in the school generally. We’d put a New Year tree up. [...] A big New Year tree. In the school’ [Oxf/Lev P-05 PF24B: 14. F., b. 1958, Perm, parents workers].

⁴ Many informants also remember with affection the ceremonies by which they were received into the Pioneers: ‘We were initiated in the Museum of the Armed Forces [...] The hall was so very huge, I felt kind of lost there, even though there was a whole troop of us, but that hall, I don’t know... I’m not sure exactly how big it is. But I had this feeling... I couldn’t see the ceiling at all! [...] And I remember stumbling when I was saying the promise, of course I stumbled, I couldn’t control my feelings, and then they tied our ties on us, and we all went off so very happy’ [Oxf/Lev M-03 PF10: 9-10. F., b. 1968, Moscow, mother manual worker]. But this type of initiation comes more into the category of ‘new rite’

A strong 'family' element often inflected these school celebrations as well, not simply because parents might actually attend (as they did, for instance, on 1 September), but because they helped with decorating the school building, buying presents for the teachers, and so on.

'Growing out' of holidays

The issue of how children responded to celebrations is to some extent inseparable from the question of the precise age of the child in question. For very small children, the holiday was a purely family occasion – a kind of funfair or street party with their parents alongside. The effects were very similar to a visit to the 'park of culture and rest' or the zoo. By the time children had started attending school, they were more likely to be aware of the presence of other children the same age – in memories of this age group, the pronoun 'we' becomes more common. Occasionally, people remember celebrating separately from their parents:

Once my parents went away, and I organised a do for the other children on our floor – now I remember, it was Christmas. We all met up and drank tea. But that only happened once, and we were all fairly big by then [Oxf/Lev P-05 PF10A: 8. F., b. 1977, Perm, working-class background].¹

But such independent celebrations were rare. Indeed, the family tended to remain an important point of reference even when holidays were celebrated by children on their own:

And then later, Misha and I went and drank vodka on 9 May in the Summer Garden. And I felt so ashamed, I was thinking, 'God, I used to come here with my mum and collect leaves, and now here I am sitting drinking vodka like some street yob.' I felt so ashamed. It was very unpleasant psychologically [Oxf/AHRC SPb-07 PF2B SA: 17. M., b. 1977, Leningrad, mother librarian].

Among older schoolchildren, from the late 1960s onwards there were signs of the kind of disillusion with the 'routinisation' of the public holiday that one also finds in the adult public of the 'era of stagnation' [Baiburin, Piir 2009].² Even now, however, holidays were still

than of 'calendar festival' (though Lenin's birthday was a popular date for scheduling Pioneer initiations), and is therefore not discussed at length here.

¹ In the same interview, PF2A: 9, the informant recalls one of his school friends who never celebrated 9 May with his family as some kind of 'Martian'.

² See e.g. the comments by participants in an online forum organised by Zhivoi zhurnal in October 2007: http://community.livejournal.com/opinion_ru/1140.html. 'When I was little, I used to love that holiday [7 November], because I went to the demonstration with my parents and the grown-ups let me carry a flag on a long stick. I was so happy!

But at school, by the time you got to the middle school, and they started to send us to the demonstration in lines from school, the holiday just turned into something dreadful, because they didn't give me the

generally seen positively by young people, if only because they allowed you a break from classes:

Int.: So did you attend the demonstration on 7 November?

Inf.: Well, they made us go at school.

Int.: So you didn't enjoy it?

Inf.: Why ever not? Of course we did, everyone enjoyed going on the demonstration. What's more, on 1 May the school would march right to the centre of Ordzhonokidze district. There were all these posters: 'Peace to the World'. 'May', 'Lenin Lives'. I wrote all that out on those red rag things' [Oxf/Lev P-05 PF6B: 13-14. M., b. 1949, Perm, working-class background].

The contradictory phrasing – 'made us' and 'enjoyed' – illustrates the ambivalence of someone who is having a pleasurable experience forced on them.¹

But attitudes also changed over the course of historical time, as well as over the course of an individual's lifetime. In the Stalin era, children were expected to react to holidays with religious awe, to offer them a kind of mystical assent. By the late Soviet era, public holidays were seen more as offering a chance to relax. In turn, this increased the likelihood that the 'social integration' mission of the *prazdnik* would be a failure. Following the classic model of Jan Assmann [Assmann 1992: 17], one could say that the *prazdnik* had ceased to be a form of 'repetition of the past' [Wiederholung] and begun to be a form of 'bringing into the present' [Vergegenwärtigung]. In religious rituals, repetition is not only expected, but is essential to the entire effect (its tranquillising and elevating effects); in entertainments repetition has to be strictly limited, or else a sense of boredom and *déjà vu* will set in. When those who lived through the Stalin years record a negative reaction to *prazdniki*, they phrase this in terms of fear and disgust;² boredom does not come into it. With the

chance to carry the flag, it was the girls and boys from the top class who did that, and it was so dreary dragging over the frost and snow to the central square of Penza.'

¹ This is typical. Cf. [Oxf/AHRC SPb-07 PF1 AK: 9 (F., b. 1951, Ukraine, grew up in Tatar Republic): a lyrical memory – 'Oh, what a happy, holiday mood!' is immediately followed by a reference to 'compulsion': 'They made us go along at the institute, I used to go when I was in Kazan, yes. They just made you. And they made my parents when we were living in Zelenodolsk. They didn't like turning up for that holiday at all.' One of us (CK) recalls from personal experience as a visitor in 1980-1981 that the student population of Voronezh State University treated the demonstration itself with a good deal of contempt (they tried to fob off carrying banners on naive foreigners so that they could leave early, and so on). As Henri Lefebvre has put it, leisure too can be a source of alienation [Lefebvre 1991: 39].

² See e.g. the memoirs of Naum Korzhavin, who recalled his sense of indignation when the 'revolutionary spirit' of the early 1930s was eroded by what he termed 'misty-mystical abracadabra' (*mezhumohnaya abracadabra*) [Korzhavin 1992: 7]. This was not unique to children: Emma Gershtein remembered her feelings in 1928: 'I was glad to be here [out at a Home of Rest in the countryside] and not in Moscow,

rise of the idea that celebrations should be entertaining grew the risk of boredom and disillusion when they were not.¹

‘We weren’t divided by it’: Soviet festivals seen from the present

The representatives of the ‘last Soviet generations’ are in some respects less prone to nostalgia than those ten or twenty years older than them, but the idea of childhood as ‘paradise’ is particularly characteristic of these age groups.² And regret for the past is a frequent motif in their memories. What is felt to have been lost is often a sense of equality, community: ‘Everyone’s parents gave them money, everyone went to the cinema together, then we all ate ice cream on the way back. We weren’t divided by it’ [Oxf/Lev P-05 PF12B: 16. F., b. 1960, small town, Perm province, parents working class].

This emphasis on the *non-commercial* essence of the holiday is typical.³ Holidays represented, by and large, a respite from shortages (because food had been carefully hoarded to prepare for them). In people’s reminiscences days like these get transformed into a myth about the virtues of Soviet reality, when everything was cheap.⁴ Economists generally agree that the low cost of Soviet goods was part

where everyone would be going to the demonstration [...] I could well imagine the impossibility of seeing anybody, because the trams would have stopped and the streets would be full of people, and all those songs, and people tossing each other in the air when the procession had to come to a halt... I couldn’t stand all that’ [Gershtein 1998: 11].

- ¹ In the Stalin era, celebrations did not have to be ‘cheerful’ and ‘joyful’ (*veselye*), any more than comedies necessarily had to be ‘funny’. The grandeur of the occasion was of paramount importance. On the other hand, in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s there was generally a direct link between *prazdniki* and *veselie*: cf. the description of the TV entertainment show KVN (The Club of Cheery and Inventive People) as ‘*prazdnik vseobshchego uchastiya*’ (a holiday/celebration everyone joined in) [Vail, Genis 1988: 133]. The conviction that cultural enterprises should be ‘interesting’ is typical of the final decades of Soviet power, and is, of course, an indication of anxieties that ‘interest’ was actually in short supply. Cf. this vignette from a report made by the Priezorsk city committee of the Communist Party to the Regional Committee of Leningrad Province in 1971: ‘The session consisted of Com. VISHNEV N. M. reading aloud from newspapers in a dreary monotone, which made people in the audience call out, “What’s he reading us the papers for, we can read can’t we, and we’ve read all that already.”’ [TsGAIPD f. 27, op. 145, d. 3, l. 93].
- ² Here we take a slightly different view from L. Goralik [2007], who has seen nostalgia *tout court* as especially characteristic of the ‘last Soviet generations’. But there does not seem to be an easy correlation between sentimental maunderings on one’s childhood and regret for the past as a political position. People may take a ‘child’s eye’ view of Soviet holidays, yet distinguish their own attitudes as adults from what they felt back then. Cf. the following example from the Live Journal discussion cited above (http://community.livejournal.com/opinion_ru/1140.html, where the participant recalls how much his grandmother disliked Soviet holidays: ‘In today’s way of seeing, she was a dissident. And I was completely brainwashed back then, thanks to the kindergarten and school. Thank God I was able to beg her forgiveness for having doubted her before she died.’ That is, we are dealing with an *atomisation* of memory (what a Bakhtinian would term ‘narrative double-voicing’): the child’s view of things comes through as discrete ‘quotations’ that are not integrated into an overall worldview.
- ³ Cf. e.g. the assertion that back in Soviet days New Year trees ‘*were’n’t expensive*’ [P-05 PF8A: 10. F., b. 1959, from settlement in Perm province; mother book-keeper, father manual worker].
- ⁴ Compare the interesting remarks in [Shor-Chudinovskaya 2006] on the stereotypes of post-Soviet autobiography.

of the reason for shortages in the first place, but adults recalling their 'golden childhood' are not much interested in the subtleties of economic theory. Their reveries are driven by memories of deficit and abundance, and each of these qualities is unimaginable without the other. If shortages could be survived more easily when you were looking forward to a holiday, then holidays also seemed much more significant against the background of mild but continuous everyday deprivation.¹ In the 1930s and 1940s, a piece of white bread, or even a piece of bread, could seem a memorable experience; by the late 1960s, nostalgia had richer experiences on which to fixate.

This article has depicted the processes by which the Soviet mass festival was transformed from the end of the 1950s to the beginning of the 1990s. The attitudes of political administrators and Party workers to the *prazdnik*, as in the case of many other cultural phenomena, were contradictory. On the one hand, public holidays and celebrations were seen as instruments of social solidarity that was supposed to weld together the collective and Soviet society in general, while on the other, they were seen as having particular significance in terms of a given locality, and understood as a way of inculcating togetherness in individual families. In another, separate, but complementary process, the ideological function of the holiday became increasingly undermined by its function as entertainment. Even the high days of the Soviet political calendar started to be accompanied not just by military cadets doing drills, tank and aircraft displays, speeches and wreath-layings, but by fireworks, balloons, bouquets, and other such non-political elements.

By the end of the 1980s, some holidays, in particular New Year, had undergone almost complete 'de-Sovietisation'. In its turn, this process had an impact on the role of children and young people in the holidays. Soviet political propaganda and pedagogy continued to emphasise the positive role of Soviet holidays in 'Communist education'. Young people were supposed, in recalling the past, to learn to respect the political status quo and the ideals of the Soviet

¹ Interestingly, in the post-Soviet period this attitude has started to vanish, being replaced by widespread indifference to holidays. See e.g. [Oxf/Lev M-03 PF43A: 27] (M., b. 1956, Moscow, parents technicians): 'I'm tired of the way we keep beating our head on a concrete wall, the way nothing we do is necessary to the country, the way whatever we try to do gets replaced by military and sporting holidays that we need like a hole in the head'; or [Oxf/AHRC SPb-07 PF6B IN: 11] (F., b. 1986, Leningrad, mother typist): 'I've been [at Scarlet Sails], but there are too many people there, you're better off watching it on TV. I can see it's better to see it with your own eyes, but...' However, there are some exceptions. For example, a fifteen-year-old schoolgirl's prize essay in a 2005 collection of essays about national identity [Chto znachit byt' russkim 2005: 289]: 'What magnificence you can see on Red Square when there's a parade taking place. The neatness and smoothness of the soldiers' gestures is quite amazing.'

state. But at the same time the powers that be were secretly anxious that the canons of the Soviet holiday as established in the Soviet period were now obsolete, that the established practices and procedures were not appropriate for today's children and young people and would fail to inspire and attract them. Hence, alongside state and public festivals, there was new attention to 'family festivals', and the 'family' side of state holidays was also emphasised (as in the articles and photographs published by the Soviet press and focussing on family groups).

While some accounts of the popularity of the new holidays and new ways of organising old ones are suspect because they were produced by the same people who were advocating the changes, there is none the less quite a lot of evidence, both from archives and from oral history, that *prazdniki* altered in reality as well as 'on paper', and that attitudes to established state holidays also shifted, especially among children. In the 1930s and 1940s, occasions such as 1 May and 7 November were experienced primarily as times for merging with a collective from one's peer group, and feeling the power of the patriotic crowd. In the 1960s and 1970s, on the other hand, the experience of the *prazdnik* was dominated by the street-party side of the demonstration – the balloons, chocolates, and little flags, the chance to walk down the centre of big city streets – and by the celebrations that took place at home, particularly the chance to indulge oneself on hard-to-find delicacies.

The effects of the changes were as paradoxical as were the changes themselves. On the one hand, informants who spent their childhood in the post-Stalin years recall Soviet holidays with great warmth and with feelings of nostalgia. But on the other hand, they do not link these emotional reactions with the 'Soviet' character of the celebrations, which stays 'outside the frame' of their narratives. For small children, 1 May was not a 'day of international solidarity', but a pleasant parade that marked the start of Spring (and might even get confused in their minds with Easter rituals). Parades were at once strange and entertaining: 'hard to understand' and 'funny', in the child-like formula of one of our informants. For older children, the political content of parades and school celebrations was often simply 'boring': what mattered was the human contact with people one already knew that came with the festivities. Thus, the alterations to Soviet festival culture that took place from the late 1950s did not so much hold Soviet society together as foster the fragmentation of social values; to put it crudely, they contributed to the collapse of the political order that they had been intended to renew.¹

¹ Here we are closer to the views expressed by Ronald Suny, who emphasises the role of cultural differentiation (sponsored by official policy) in the collapse of the USSR [Suny 1993], than to those expressed by Francine Hirsch, for whom such factors had only a peripheral importance [Hirsch 2005].

Abbreviations

- BILGS — *Byulleten ispolnitelnogo komiteta Leningradskogo gorodskogo sojeta deputatov trudyashchikhsya* [Bulletin of the Executive Committee of the Leningrad City Soviet of Deputies of the Labouring People].
- NA RAO — Nauchnyi arkhiv Rossiiskoi Akademii Obrazovaniya [Learned Archive of the Russian Academy of Education (Moscow)].
- RGANI — Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv noveishei istorii [Russian State Archive of Recent History (Moscow)].
- TsAODM — Tsentralnyi arkhiv obshchestvennykh dvizhenii Moskvyy [Central State Archive of Political Movements of Moscow].
- TsGAIPD — Tsentralnyi gosudarstvennyi arkhiv istoriko-politicheskikh dokumentov [Central State Archive of Historico-Political Documents (St Petersburg)].
- TsGAKFFD — Tsentralnyi gosudarstvennyi arkhiv kino-foto-fonodokumentov [Central State Archive of Cinematic, Photographic, and Phonographic Documents (St Petersburg)].
- TsKhDMO — Tsentr khraneniya dokumentov molodezhnykh organizatsii [Centre for the Preservation of Documents from Youth Organisations (Moscow, part of RGASPI — Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History)].

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