

Way of Life Propaganda?

The Anglo-Soviet Trade Fairs of 1961

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In May 1961 Britain held a trade fair in Moscow with a reciprocal Soviet exhibition opening in London in July that year. These exhibitions were part of a series of international exchanges that involved Eastern and Western nations along with non-aligned countries and which became part of the Cold War ideological competition.¹ From 1959 British participation in exchanges with the Eastern bloc increased as part of Harold Macmillan's attempt to ease Cold War tensions and increase trade. The Anglo-Soviet fairs of 1961 demonstrated that there were divergent approaches towards exhibitions from Western nations. When Nikita Khrushchev opened Britain's Moscow fair he praised it for focusing on industry rather than being an ideological presentation of the British way of life. This approach contrasted with his combative demeanor when visiting the more overtly propagandistic American National Exhibition, held in Moscow in 1959. However, as this article suggests, the subtle use of pro-British propaganda during both of the 1961 exhibitions undermined the British government's claim that these exchanges were non-ideological and solely about increasing trade.

Exhibitions such as the two examined in this article took place during a period of renewed cultural and diplomatic rapprochement between Britain and the Soviet Union. Since the mid-1950s British prime ministers had sought reconciliation with the Soviet Union. Harold Macmillan's visit to Moscow in 1959 is credited by Brian White with easing tensions over Berlin.² Before the Second World War British officials had been reluctant to engage in propaganda of any form, associating activities to

¹ See David Caute, *The Dancer Defects: The struggle for Cultural Supremacy During the Cold War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 33-51.

² Brian White, *Britain, Detente and East-West Relations* (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 1992), p. 60-1.

promote national ways of life as foreign and linked to misinformation.³ However, by the late 1950s it was widely recognized in Whitehall that the exchange of people, ideas and goods could promote British interests and trade abroad.⁴ The 1961 exhibitions in London and Moscow were part of the Anglo-Soviet 'Agreement on Relations in the Scientific, Technological, Educational and Cultural Fields' that was signed in 1959 and formalized cultural exchanges between the two nations, which had previously taken place on an ad hoc basis.⁵ British policy aimed to increase trade with the Soviet Union and to avoid conflict by normalizing relations.⁶ This approach contrasted with the USA's policy, which primarily used cultural exchanges as a means to 'infiltrate' the USSR with American values whilst trade was a secondary concern.⁷ Britain was at times detached from the more bipolar conflict and its pragmatic political approach has led Antonio Varosi to describe London as 'a bridge between West and East'.⁸ Whilst Varosi argues that this policy failed from 1956, trade, exhibitions and cultural exchanges began in earnest in the late 1950s and became an important part of Britain's diplomatic efforts to increase British overseas influence, especially regarding the Eastern bloc nations.⁹

Initial accounts of Cold War cultural exchanges tended to see the display of technology and national cultures solely as part of the Cold War ideological competition.¹⁰ More recently historians have explored commonality between Eastern and Western cultures especially regarding popular

³ Frances Donaldson, *The British Council: The First Fifty Years* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1984), pp. 11-14.

⁴ The National Archive, London (TNA) F0924/1595/CR6111/27 Richard Speight, 'East West Cultural Contacts 1959-66'.

⁵ Verity Clarkson, 'The Organisation and Reception of Eastern Bloc Exhibitions on the British Cold War 'Home Front' c. 1956-1979, Ph.D, Diss, University of Brighton, 2010, p. 71.

⁶ William Taubman, *Khrushchev: The Man, His Era* (London: Free Press, 2005), p. 410; and White, *Britain, Detente*, p. 37.

⁷ Walter L. Hixson, *Parting the Curtain: Propaganda Culture and the Cold War* (New York: St Martins, 1997), 157-8, 219-220.

⁸ Kitty Newman, *Macmillan, Khrushchev and the Berlin Crisis, 1958-1960* (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2007); and Antonio Varsori, "Britain as a Bridge Between East and West", in *Europe, Cold War and Co-existence, 1953-65* W. Loth. ed. (London: Frank Cass, 2005).

⁹ J. M. Lee, "British cultural diplomacy and the cold war: 1946-61," *Diplomacy & Statecraft*, Vol. 9, No. 1 (1998), 112-134.

¹⁰ Frances Stonor Saunders, *Who Paid the Piper?: The CIA and the Cultural Cold War* (London: Granta, 1999); Robert Haddow, *Pavilions of Plenty: Exhibiting American Culture Abroad during the 1950s* (Washington DC: Smithsonian, 1997); and Jack Masey and Conway Morgan, *Cold War Confrontations: US Exhibitions and their Role in the Cultural Cold War* (Baden: Lars Muller, 2008).

acceptance and contestation of official narratives and ideologies.¹¹ These histories have also increased our understanding of cultural diplomacy: the building of diplomatic relations using formalized transnational exchanges. Several previous accounts examine the reciprocal Soviet and American national exhibitions of 1959, which involved heated discussions between Nikita Khrushchev and the American Vice-President Richard Nixon and became theatrical displays of respective idealized ways of life.¹² Walter Hixson argues that the American display of consumer capitalism in Moscow caused the Soviet population to question communist propaganda, whereas Susan Reid's revisionist account sees the response as more nuanced with Soviet citizens concluding that Americans perceived them as a primitive civilization.¹³ This article similarly examines British and Soviet responses to the Anglo-Soviet exhibitions suggesting that they indicated that both fairs were well received and helped either side to humanize the other.

Previous exploration of British involvement in cultural exchanges has examined individual agreements and the political motives behind them.¹⁴ Mark B. Smith argues that from the mid-1950s improved diplomatic relations and cultural exchanges between Britain and the USSR 'made possible the normalization of the cold war'.¹⁵ This article expands Smith's argument and suggests that the media and the population also began to 'normalize' their relationships with the USSR by depicting them as a modernized state – often negating the Cold War division in the process. Furthermore, Verity Clarkson has built on Susan Buck-Morss's application of Walter Benjamin's concept of the

¹¹ Peter Romijn, Giles Scott-Smith and Joes Segal eds., *Divided Dreamworlds: The Cultural Cold War in East and West* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2012); Hugh Wilford, *The CIA, the British Left and the Cold War: Calling the Tune* (London: Routledge, 2003); Patrick Major and Rana Mitter, *Across the Blocs: Exploring Comparative Cold War Cultural and Social History* (London: Frank Cass, 2004); Lewis Siegelbaum, "Sputnik Goes to Brussels: The Exhibition of a Soviet Technological Wonder", *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol. 47, no. 1, (2012), pp. 120-136; and Miles Glendinning, "Cold-War Conciliation: international architectural congresses in the late 1950s and early 1960s", *The Journal of Architecture*, vol. 14, no. 2 (2009), pp. 197-217.

¹² Shane Hamilton and Sarah Phillips, *The Kitchen Debate and Cold War Consumer Politics* (Boston: St Martins, 2014), pp. 9-12, 23-26; and William Taubman, *Khrushchev*, pp. 416-8.

¹³ Hixson, *Parting the Curtain*, pp. 151-214; Susan E. Reid, "'Who Will Beat Whom?': Soviet Popular Reception of the American National Exhibition in Moscow, 1959", *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History*, vol. 9, no. 4 (2008), pp. 855-904.

¹⁴ For example, Sarah Davies, "The Soft Power of Anglia: British Cold War Cultural Diplomacy in the USSR", *Contemporary British History*, (2013), vol. 27, no. 3, pp. 297-323; and Antonio Varsori, 'Between East and West'.

¹⁵ Mark B. Smith, "Peaceful Coexistence at All Costs: Cold War Exchanges between Britain and the Soviet Union", *Cold War History*, vol. 12, no. 3, (2012), p. 537.

'dreamworld' to the Soviet Union by examining Soviet exhibitions in the UK including their 1961 exhibition in London.¹⁶ Presentation of a national 'dreamworld', or idealized reality, was, as Clarkson explains, a key part of cultural diplomacy, which was often labelled 'way of life' propaganda by the civil service.¹⁷ Clarkson focusses on Soviet exhibitions in Britain but has written less about Britain's Moscow trade fair, stating that it was a commercial venture free of overt propaganda but which offered opportunities for Whitehall to promote its interests abroad. This article expands Clarkson's research by offering the first in-depth examination of that fair. The article argues that not only was there considerable formal involvement by the British government, but that the 1961 exhibitions were organized by a company whose leaders maintained links with the British government and civil service, which therefore formed a British 'state-private network'. Despite attempting to present the 1961 exhibitions as organized by independent British businesses and ostensibly about trade, the British government used subtle propaganda at both to promote their idealized way of life which focused on domesticity, pageantry and the freedom of business.

This article situates the British and Soviet exhibitions of 1961 as attempts by the United Kingdom to build 'soft power': Joseph Nye's concept which refers to a nation's use of persuasion and the building of international influence by showcasing a successful way of life.¹⁸ Previous accounts have examined how soft power shaped the Western bloc's public conversations about Communism and also the attempts to promote the western way of life throughout both the Western and Eastern blocs.¹⁹ The first three sections examine Britain's 1961 Moscow trade fair. Utilizing government documents the article firstly outlines how a British state-private network led by businessmen with close ties to government organized the fairs with businesses and Whitehall

¹⁶ Verity Clarkson, "'Sputniks and Sideboards": Exhibiting the Soviet 'Way of Life' in Cold War Britain, 1961-1979' in Anthony Cross ed., *A People Passing Rude: British Responses to Russian Culture* (Cambridge, UK: Open Book, 2012); and Susan Buck-Morss, *Dreamworld and Catastrophe: The Passing of Mass Utopia in East and West* (London: MIT Press, 2000).

¹⁷ Verity Clarkson, 'Eastern Bloc Exhibitions on the British Cold War "Home Front"', p. 52.

¹⁸ Joseph Nye, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* (New York: Public Affairs, 2004).

¹⁹ Nicholas J. Cull, *The Cold War and The United States Information Agency* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Linda Risso, *Propaganda and Intelligence in the Cold War: The NATO Information Service* (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2014); and Andrew Defty, *Britain, America and Anti-Communist Propaganda 1945-53: The Information Research Department* (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2007).

ensuring that their respective aims were met. The government ensured that the British way of life and national symbols were visible, whilst publically maintaining that the fair was solely about trade. The article then examines reactions by the Soviets and the British press by examining a range of newspapers, which represent different political positions within the tabloid and more serious press, and explores how the British media frequently presented the exhibition as a way of easing Cold War tensions. Responses from the Soviet public, which were written in comment books, were generally positive, reflecting the state-led attempts to improve international relations. The third section examines the organization of Britain's cultural program and the civil service's attempts to ensure that elements of the British way of life were displayed in Moscow. Later sections use the same source base to explore the Soviets' London exhibition, which was visited by Yuri Gagarin shortly after his space flight. The Foreign Office hoped that these exchanges would improve Anglo-Soviet relations but also attempted to reduce the Soviets' propaganda gain from Gagarin's visit by ensuring that it was facilitated by the exhibition hosts rather than a communist sympathizing organization. The British press had, from the late-1950s, begun to extoll the Soviets' technological achievements including their advancements in space exploration. Whilst there was often willingness to accept the Soviets' narrative of being an 'advanced' nation the press were also skeptical about claims of a thriving Soviet consumer society. Overall, the British and Soviet exhibitions of 1961 suggest that whilst the British state and media adopted a cordial attitude towards the Soviet Union, projecting a positive image of Britain at home and abroad remained a key objective.

The State-private Network And The British Exhibition In Moscow

Britain's 1961 Moscow fair was formally organized by Industrial and Trade Fairs Limited (ITF), which was a subsidiary of the Association of the British Chambers of Commerce (ABCC) and the *Financial Times*. The appearance of freedom from state intervention became important in presenting the British way of life to the Soviet people. However, the government played a key role in the

negotiation and facilitation of the Anglo-Soviet trade fairs. Lord Bracken, the chairman of the *Financial Times*, had approached the British government with the idea shortly before his death in 1958.²⁰ A network of businessmen who were either well connected to Whitehall or members of the House of Lords became key organizers. Bracken had served as Minister of Information during World War Two and had connections in the media, government and business worlds, suggesting that the fair was organized by a British version of the state-private networks which W. Scott Lucas argues helped to reinforce anti-communism in American culture.²¹ This network allowed the British government to seem lightly involved in the trade fair, appearing to act as a facilitator with the Soviet government, whilst using the opportunity to project an image which promoted freedom of business as superior to a command economy.

ITF also worked in conjunction with the London Chambers of Commerce (LCC) who undertook negotiations with the Soviets. Prior to the American National Exhibition opening in July 1959 M. V. Nestorov, president of the All Union Chambers of Commerce informed a delegation of businessmen to Moscow that 'The Russians would be interested in seeing the latest of British machine tools, medical, surgical and dental instruments and equipment, scientific instruments, electronic and automation equipment.'²² The British strategy for improved relations involved responding to likely areas of Soviet demand. After the American exhibition closed Nestorov informed the Foreign Office that the Soviets were 'disappointed with the American Exhibition in Moscow [. . .] as it had focused too much on propaganda. Both he and the Soviet Ambassador expected something better from our own exhibition.'²³ The British focus on increasing trade along with improving diplomatic relations meant that private companies were at the forefront of the negotiations and that the fair would differ from the American showcase of their way of life.

²⁰ TNA PREM/11/2369/1863/14/6, British Trade Fair Moscow, 14 June 1961.

²¹ W. Scott Lucas, "Beyond Freedom, beyond control, beyond the Cold War: approaches to American culture and the state-private network", *Intelligence and National Security*, vol. 18, no. 2, (2003), pp. 53-72.

²² TNA FO371/143577/NS1862/16 'Proposed Industrial Exhibitions in Moscow and London, 1961: Report of the Scott Mission to Moscow 3-12th March 1959'.

²³ TNA FO371 143579/NS1862/58 'Record of a meeting between Mr. Allan and Mr. Nestorov on Dec 14'.

The Anglo-Soviet Trade Fairs of 1961

However, certain elements of the British state wanted a national exhibition similar to America's. The Moscow embassy advised that the cost of such a fair made it impractical. On 15 June 1959 the embassy compared the British objectives with the Americans and informed Ralph Murray, head of the Foreign Office's semi-official propaganda unit, the Information Research Department (IRD), that,

We should try to avoid, at all costs, the impression that ours is a poor man's imitation of theirs [. . .] If we are not prepared to go whole hog and spend a considerable sum of money to produce a first-class exhibition, then it would probably be better to content ourselves with a trade fair.²⁴

As the British fair was scheduled to last for seventeen days compared to the Americans' six weeks it would be seen by fewer people. In addition to the high costs, a large scale official exhibition was considered impractical because it would limit the exhibition space available to British firms.²⁵ It was felt that British interests would be best served by improving trading relations. However, the British civil service remained involved with organizing the fair because of their role as facilitators of Anglo-Soviet trade, and ensured that the British way of life was promoted whenever opportunities presented themselves.

The government gave advice to and frequently liaised with the organizing panel, which consisted of members of the ABCC and ITF. Lords Drogheda and Poole played prominent roles in organizing the fairs, further demonstrating the involvement of a network of people whose employment was interchangeable between the state and private business. Drogheda had been Assistant Secretary for the Board of Trade and had produced a 1953 report that had recommended expanding the British overseas information services: the group of organizations including the British Council, the IRD and the Central Office of Information that promoted a positive image of the nation abroad.²⁶ Drogheda was now Managing Director of the *Financial Times* and a director of ITF; at several points civil

²⁴ TNA FO371/143577/NS1862/24 British Embassy to Murray, 15 June 1959.

²⁵ TNA FO371/143579/NS1862/60 'British Trade Fair Moscow 1961'.

²⁶ See Defty *Anti-communist Propaganda*, pp. 236-241.

servants acted to avoid annoying him because he was still deemed to have influence with their superiors.²⁷ Poole had been a Conservative MP and was the party's chair until 1959 before succeeding Bracken as chair of the *Financial Times*. The 'private' nature of the British exhibition meant that, whilst the official reports claimed that the government 'neither sponsored nor financed the fair in any way', various former civil servants or current members of the upper legislature were intimately involved.²⁸ Opportunities for improved diplomacy and trade brought mutual benefit to government and industry. The connections formed by working within the information services helped to facilitate the exhibitions; several members of this state-private network had a foot in either camp.

Both governments, in conjunction with ITF, negotiated the terms of these mutual encounters. The Soviets permitted free entry of material but requested that the British businesses deposit their publications in Moscow one month before their exhibition.²⁹ ITF agreed and they initially requested a reciprocal arrangement in order to dissuade Soviet censorship. Whilst the Foreign Office was keen to preview the Soviet exhibition, they declined this opportunity because the Soviets would be able to claim either that the British 'practiced censorship, although we have always denied this', or that the British government approved of the content of the Soviets' exhibition.³⁰ The British Embassy in Moscow later criticized the Foreign Office because they did 'not say so publically and thereby gain credit for our action'.³¹ Subtle forms of propaganda, in this instance around concepts of freedom of information, were promoted within Whitehall. The British Foreign Office and its Moscow embassy allowed ITF to make the key decisions but regularly sought opportunities to improve the nation's image. Whilst ITF had formal responsibility for organizing the fairs, its interaction with the government showed that the company participated in a network which relied on connections

²⁷ TNA FO371/159600/NS1851/2 'Military Band for Moscow'.

²⁸ TNA PREM/11/2369/1863/14/6, 'British Trade Fair Moscow', 14 June 1961.

²⁹ TNA FO371/159600/NS1861/6, J Bullard, Foreign Office to H. King, British Embassy Moscow, 6 Feb 1961.

³⁰ TNA FO371/159600/NS1861/6, Minute J Bullard, 18 Jan 1961.

³¹ TNA FO371/159600/NS1861/6 (B)/1863/1/15/2, C.M James British Embassy Moscow to J Bullard, Foreign Office, 15 Feb 1961.

between businesses, the civil service and government. This network mediated the experience and ensured that the trade fair took place on terms within the British national interest.

Responses To The British Trade Fair In Moscow

The British fair, which opened on 19 May with 3000 British exhibitors and staff representing British business, facilitated contact between East and West in the spirit of competitive 'peaceful co-existence'. It was part of Britain's objective to develop normal diplomatic, trading and cultural relations with the USSR. New pavilions were erected at Sokholniki Park in anticipation of the British and French fairs (the latter occurred later in 1961). The British architects Jack Howe & Partners designed the pavilions working with the French firm Maurice. D. Gauthier, but they were built with Soviet manpower. This tri-lateral collaboration characterized the co-operative spirit in which the fairs were presented. Most of the 621 exhibiting companies were engineering and industrial firms with some of the larger displays by industrial pump manufacturers Mather and Platt; electronic and locomotive manufacturers Hawker Siddeley Brush; the chemical producers ICI; the photography company Kodak; Standard Electrical Industries; the engine and plant makers Vickers; engine and car manufacturers Rolls Royce; and the alcoholic Beveridge company Distillers. Smaller stalls included the toy manufacturers Meccano, the vacuum manufacturers Hoover, and Gillette, a producer of razor blades. The participation of large British firms which operated internationally allowed the fair to become part of a narrative of the British way of life that highlighted the importance of private industry in creating an advanced economy. The diversity of goods on offer meant that large scale industrial products were showcased alongside toys, white goods and everyday consumables such as razor blades. The goods were accompanied by a tele-printer service offered and maintained by Universal News Services who were able to convey almost instantaneous reports of the fair to London. A small cinema ran by Pearl and Dean showed British films; it was reported that the men running this

stall had to have daily police protection when ending the shows because of the number of people still queuing.³²

The largest stall, however, was a Board of Trade exhibition, one of three British government stands which, alongside the accompanying cultural program, subtly promoted the British way of life. The Stationery Office (HMSO) stand exhibited translated books about industry and British life. All visitors had to pass through the Board of Trade exhibit, which showcased Britain's 'scientific and technological progress', and included displays on Britain's nuclear power and space programs.³³ The stall demonstrated to the Soviets how 'the government, the universities, the hospitals and private industry combine together in the research which leads to the production of modern technological equipment'.³⁴ The importance of private enterprise to Britain's way of life was therefore a central part of the official display and was reinforced by loudspeakers leading to the exhibition center which proclaimed: 'This fair has been organised by one British firm on behalf of British industry'.³⁵

Some areas of the popular press presented the moment as one of reconciliation between Britain and the USSR, despite the increasingly tense international atmosphere. For example the *Daily Mail*, not noted for its support of communist endeavor, contrasted Soviet volunteers who cleared up the exhibition site with the London dock workers, whose strike delayed Moscow bound supplies and manpower. The paper reported that 'students falling over the mounds of earth like ants began to make an impression'.³⁶ Such a comparison suggested that British workers were lazy and unmotivated but it also showed admiration of the Soviet system of centralized organization. This positive attitude towards the Soviet Union, especially from the conservative *Daily Mail*, is unsurprising considering that the trade fair formed part of Macmillan's attempt to extend British trade across the Iron Curtain. The *Daily Mail's* report of the opening anticipated better international relations and warned that

³² TNA BT11/5828, UNS News, London, July 1961.

³³ TNA PREM/11/3269/1863/14/6 No. 34, 'The British Trade Fair, Moscow, 1961', 14 June 1961.

³⁴ TNA BT11/5828 'Anglo-Soviet Five Year Trade Agreement: Second Annual Review'.

³⁵ TNA PREM/11/2369/1863/14/6, 'British Trade Fair Moscow', 14 June 1961.

³⁶ John Mossman "I Wish you could See How the Russians Work", *Daily Mail*, 4 May 1961, 8.

America must 'wriggle free from the habit of seeing every question in the world in stark rigid terms of Communism versus anti-Communism'.³⁷ The *Mail* presented the British approach to the Cold War as more conciliatory than America's approach, which they suggested was preoccupied with depicting two completely opposed worlds. This conservative popular newspaper hoped that exchanges like this might ease Cold War tensions and help the nations to understand each other.

When opening the British trade fair Khrushchev appeared to be brimming with confidence following the Soviets' recent triumph in the space race. He labelled the fair 'A wonderful show [. . .] an exhibition for trade and peace'.³⁸ Khrushchev joked that Aston Villa had been allowed to win a friendly football match played the previous evening against a Soviet XI, and, when shown a display of corsets, said 'what are you trying to do? Shape the curves of our women.' The development of friendship and business also appeared to be important for the Soviets. Khrushchev had invited 300 British businessmen to a dinner party in the Lenin Hills, but on seeing the exhibition he immediately doubled the number of invitations and ended up bussing many more of the exhibitors to the venue. The official Moscow embassy report of the exhibition stated that the guests were 'delighted by the frank and informal atmosphere and by the lavishness of the hospitality, which exceeded the normal A1 class reception at the Kremlin.'³⁹ No expense appeared to be spared in wooing the British visitors and attempting to make them amenable to the Soviet system. Khrushchev's praise contrasted with his more competitive approach taken when meeting Vice President Richard Nixon at the American exhibition in 1959. That televised meeting has been historicized as the "kitchen debate" and has often been situated within a line of exchanges that demonstrate how antagonism between East and West continued almost uninterrupted throughout the Cold War.⁴⁰

³⁷ "Fresh Winds Again", *Daily Mail*, 18 May 1961, 1.

³⁸ John Mossman "Mr K. Jests Way Round Our Fair", *Daily Mail*, 20 May 1961, 1.

³⁹ TNA PREM/11/3269/1863/14/6 No. 34, 'The British Trade Fair, Moscow, 1961', 14 June 1961.

⁴⁰ See Masey & Morgan, *Cold War Confrontations*; Cauter, *Dancer*; Hamilton & Phillips, *Kitchen Debate*, Hixson, *Curtain*, 179; and Taubman, *Khrushchev*, 418-9.

However, East and West were not homogeneous entities, and Cold War flashpoints were punctuated with long periods where more friendly relations emerged. The British Ambassador in Moscow, Sir Frank Roberts, reported that Khrushchev praised the exhibition for the absence of ““way of life” propaganda’, which he stated ‘was exactly right and in accordance with the traditionally “realistic” British approach.’⁴¹ Roberts noted that Khrushchev ‘was most friendly’ and ‘clearly out to make a major Anglo-Soviet occasion of the opening’. Khrushchev’s warm reactions suggest that, despite high international tension, Anglo-Soviet relations appeared almost cordial. Roberts judged the Soviet press coverage of the fair to be ‘good and full by Soviet Standards’, and noted that ‘the fair itself has been crowded with visitors and is making great impact’. The British organizers and authorities, who were responsible for the return event in London, took seriously the principal of reciprocity, under which all Soviet exchanges took place. Khrushchev’s appearance obliged Harold Macmillan to visit the Soviet exhibition.⁴² The positive reception of Britain’s fair meant that in order to maintain good diplomatic relations the British would offer a similar official welcome to the Soviets.

Among the British correspondents covering the exhibition was the politically liberal *Guardian’s* Labor Correspondent John Cole whose reports revealed his impressions of Soviet life. Cole expressed his desire to know his Soviet counterparts and the exhibition provided him with an opportunity to explore the Soviet character. Alongside reporting the delivery of British cigarettes and a CND symbol painted on a British Rail container, Cole presented an inside perspective of the British in Moscow.⁴³ Cole was surprised when his hotel hosted ‘a jam session, in its normally austere dining room that would have rivalled New Orleans’.⁴⁴ Furthermore, he reported that the churches that still existed were thriving – albeit with an elderly congregation. Cole, therefore, expanded his remit beyond reporting the trade exhibition and used his encounter ethnographically to demystify the Soviet people for the *Guardian* readership.

⁴¹ TNA FO371/159602, ‘British Trade Fair’, Sir Frank Roberts to Foreign Office, 19 May 1961.

⁴² TNA FO371/159600 NS 1861/4, ‘Soviet Exhibition at Earl’s Court’, R. H. Mason, 23 Jan 1961.

⁴³ John Cole “Hope of Selling More to Moscow”, *Guardian*, 13 May 1961, p. 1.

⁴⁴ John Cole, “Moscow Jam Session” *Guardian*, 15 May 1961, p. 1.

Cole believed that the possibilities for trade and exchange between East and West had changed the cultural Cold War from something that was perceived to have been waged solely by governments into 'a new phase, conducted by the more or less common man'.⁴⁵ Therefore the fairs allowed respective members of business networks to meet each other and they were intended to increase understanding between participants. When examining Moscow's living standards Cole wrote

what immediately strikes the visitor from Britain is the frightening internal contrast in standards – the fine new blocks of flats in Moscow and Leningrad intended to solve the housing problem within 12 years, and the struggling pre-revolutionary wooden slums a few miles outside the Russian capital [. . .] Gagarin in space and an old woman not ten miles out of Moscow carrying two heavy buckets of water on a yoke.⁴⁶

The inquisitiveness towards the USSR displayed by Cole and other journalists meant that Soviet technological triumphs were tempered by the supposed 'backwards' lifestyle that visitors witnessed. Cole demonstrated how the backwardness that British reports tended to depict coexisted with a picture of a country that was technologically advanced. His statement added mystique to the Soviet Union and suggested to readers that the country remained unknowable despite close examination. Cole suggested there was a contradiction at the heart of the Soviet attempts to achieve modernity by focusing on scientific advancement with living standards lagging in many cases. Cole suggested that material conditions were an important part of the Cold War competition, with Britain remaining ahead of a rapidly improving USSR.

⁴⁵ John Cole, "East-West Dialogues in Russia", *Guardian*, 3 June 1961, p. 6.

⁴⁶ John Cole, "Soviet Wages and Living Standards", *Guardian*, 7 June 1961.

Other press outlets focused on the exhibition's British participants who included builders of the display, business-owners, salespeople and fashion models. The *Mail* reported that fashion models had been given advice about their packing. The list included 'marmalade' [. . .] 'a bathplug' [. . .] 'tinned food' [. . .] 'and hard liquor'.⁴⁷ Some of the items suggested that British comforts needed to be taken abroad, although the need for hard liquor might suggest a pervasive image of an unbearable East. These home comforts, combined with reports of exhibition builders' protests about the scarcity of British cigarettes and their display of the CND symbol, reveals that participants sought to express their own version of the British way of life in the Soviet Union and that this was not always in line with the government's favored interpretation. Moreover, coverage of the trade fair revealed differences between East and West; often restraints on freedom and regular shortages were emphasized as the key characteristics of the USSR. When organizing the fair both sides had agreed that sales would be facilitated by government not through private contacts. Exhibitors were also told not to request enquirers names and addresses because this might contain sensitive information like factory locations. The *Mail*, whilst perhaps not well informed, made this official advice appear more sinister: "the exhibitor is therefore asked to use his utmost discretion [. . .] so as to avoid any unfavourable publicity." Like disappearing overnight'.⁴⁸ This image was reminiscent of Stalin's purges, but remained common beyond his death. Alongside increased openness, areas of the British press continued to reinforce perceptions of a repressive Cold War other. Contradictory images of the USSR were conveyed by the British press: modern and open to friendship but simultaneously repressive and ill-supplied.

Several newspapers depicted the exhibition as a rare opportunity to examine the Soviet people and undertake an anatomical comparison of the two populations. The *Daily Express* reported on a British fashion show held in Moscow, suggesting that 'If all the women lost a stone in weight and all the doors gained a coat of paint it could well be Manchester [. . .] Where a couple of years ago it was

⁴⁷ Paul Tanfield, "Pack a Plug", *Daily Mail*, 10 May 1961, p. 6.

⁴⁸ Paul Tanfield, "No Questions", *Daily Mail*, 12 May 1961, p. 6.

considered a bit decadent to be well dressed, well groomed, today it is considered “unkultured” [sic] not to be’.⁴⁹ The author, Jill Butterfield, repeated the commonly imagined essentialist assumptions about Russian women to confirm readers’ preconceptions. However, she also implied that creeping consumerism was beginning to reduce communist imposed squalor. Butterfield, perhaps relying on earlier stereotypes of the *Stakhanovite*, praised the Soviet work ethic in creating a fashion sector which suggested that the ‘Russians’ have ‘undertaken an operation fashion with all the force, zeal and initiative they give to whatever they do.’ This qualified praise was typical of the compliments that sometimes emerged in relation to the centrally planned system and was common during this period when the Soviets were frequently depicted as catching Western levels of production.

Among the more informative sources about the fair are three reports from an unnamed information officer working at the HMSO stand. During the first week he reported between 75,000-80,000 visitors per day, with many viewing their display. The reports convey his impressions that the Soviets craved information about the outside world but ‘are literally starving for books’.⁵⁰ A week later he recorded slightly fewer visitors, with the stand itself experiencing between six and nine thousand per day. Furthermore, he noted interest in the exhibition from other communist countries: ‘there have been delegations from Rumania, Hungary, Poland and Czechoslovakia.’⁵¹ The British exhibition allowed specialists from across Eastern bloc countries to experience British culture and industry. The author reported great interest in the books, especially those about life in Britain, with a specially produced pamphlet called ‘Britain Today’ being particularly successful. Whilst part of the objective for the stationary office’s stand was to secure an outlet for translations of British books the official believed that the Soviets would refuse to purchase most books, claiming ‘We may sell them science, but we must not give ideas to think about’. Therefore the official believed that the Soviets were willing to buy British technology but wanted to prevent ideology, relayed through certain British books, becoming widely available in the USSR. His comments belie his responsibility for

⁴⁹ Jill Butterfield, “Maytime in Moscow”, *Daily Express* 17 May 1961, p. 5.

⁵⁰ TNA STAT/14/2870, ‘A.D.P.’s First report from British Trade Fair Moscow as at 24 May 1961’.

⁵¹ TNA STAT/14/2870, ‘A.D.P.’s Second report from British Trade Fair Moscow as at 1 June 1961’.

projecting British imagery abroad, but also show that the government used the fair to sell the British Way of Life to the Soviet visitors.

The HMSO stand organizers evaluated Soviet perceptions of British life and presented an image that they believed would be well received. The information officer wrote that, '[t]he interest in the Royal Family, too, is very great, and I have asked the Embassy to let F.O. part and myself to have photographs of the Queen. I have the Annigoni one up now.'⁵² By responding to local interest and displaying a copy of Perter Annigoni's 1956 portrait, the stand used the symbolism of royalty to represent British life. The interest in the Royal Family suggests that many Soviet people imagined Britain as a nation defined by tradition and aristocracy. The official also reported how he felt the fair was affecting the population and his belief that the British 'free' press could change Soviet minds commenting that, '[m]y Times I bring to the stand every day, and it is read from cover to cover not only by my student interpreter, but by visitors. One can do much information work on this stand.'⁵³ The *Times* became another device to sell the British way of life, as presented in this upper-class newspaper. By casually displaying the newspaper, the official hoped to challenge viewpoints on British life. The impact of his actions is difficult to judge and it is likely that interest in royalty was mainly because of its incongruity with the Soviet system and in order to appear welcoming to the British. The official suggested that the British way of life was successfully promoted at the fair: 'our exhibit has been a great success, and its information value from a specific and general point of view is incalculable although we were out there on a commercial basis I feel that, inter alia, we have left a good and lasting impression of what we are really like in Britain.'⁵⁴ Propaganda about the official version of the British way of life was delivered subtly – but remained important to government workers. Whilst trading and diplomatic relations were paramount the fairs allowed people from the different blocs to encounter other cultures and to create mutual understandings.

⁵² TNA STAT/14/2870, 'A.D.P.5's First report from British Trade Fair Moscow as at 24 May 1961'.

⁵³ TNA STAT/14/2870, 'A.D.P.5's Second report from British Trade Fair Moscow as at 1 June 1961'.

⁵⁴ TNA STAT/14/2870, 'A.D.P.5's Third (and final) Report from British Trade Fair in Moscow as at 14 June 1961.'

The Anglo-Soviet Trade Fairs of 1961

Several days after the fair opened HMSO started collecting visitors' comments. Despite the Soviet press publishing several negative stories about British living conditions, the comments suggest that many visitors were pleased with the British fair, especially when compared with the American National Exhibition.⁵⁵ Out of forty-five comments, twenty-eight in Russian and seventeen in English, thirty were wholly positive about the fair. Nine comments contained both positive and negative statements, the latter of which usually referred to the layout of the exhibition. Only two were wholly negative, whilst four were neutral and merely expressed their desire to purchase the books on display. The positive comments often expressed endearment with Britain, including 'Delighted! Wonderful! Will learn English. If I can get a ticket, I will come and see you (Engineer, Assistant at the Ponza Polytechnical Institute)!', 'I received a great impression of your country', and 'The exhibition is wonderful, beyond all comparison with the American one'.⁵⁶ Reid suggests that cultural convention shaped the reactions of commenters at other exhibitions and that comments could be influenced by fear of being observed by communist party 'snoops'.⁵⁷ The British exhibition, because of its commercial nature, contained less overt propaganda than the American one and there was less chance of it affecting Soviet social cohesion. Some of the criticisms of the American exhibition noted by Hixson and Reid related to its focus on consumerism over technological advancements.⁵⁸ Britain's fair was better received than the American one in part because it showcased industrial and scientific products. However the suggestions in some British sources that the machinery on display was being subject to 'nocturnal visits of inspection' and some small-scale theft of items suggests that, perhaps at the official level, the Soviets' desire for an industrial exhibition was driven by the wish to bring about technological transfer, even if it meant using underhand methods.⁵⁹

The Information Officer believed that commenters were frightened, stating that '[n]ot all had the courage to write. Of those who did, some omitted names; others boldly added names and

⁵⁵ TNA PREM/11/3269/1863/14/6 No. 34, 'The British Trade Fair, Moscow, 1961', 14 June 1961.

⁵⁶ TNA STAT/14/2870, 'Visitors Comments at the British Trade Fair Moscow 19 May – 4 June 1961'.

⁵⁷ Reid "Who Will Beat Whom?", pp. 870-876.

⁵⁸ Hixson, *Parting the Curtain*, pp. 210-211; and Reid "Who Will Beat Whom?", 877-878.

⁵⁹ TNA PREM 11/3260/1863/14/6, 'The British Trade Fair Moscow, 1961', 14 June 1961.

addresses'.⁶⁰ Whilst fear might have been a concern for many, his preconceived idea of an oppressive Soviet state affected his comments. As Reid notes, it was common for the Soviet population to write in exhibition comment books. Roberts noted 'there is no doubt that many Russians, either because it did not appear to be propaganda or because it contained more engineering exhibits, really did prefer the British fair.'⁶¹ Whilst the embassy acknowledged that commenters could have been following the party line, these positive statements from the supposed Cold War enemy contributed towards the warm official reception of the Soviet fair in London. The British Embassy in Moscow suggested that the Soviet people's friendly reaction to the British exhibition followed Khrushchev's earlier enthusiasm which was part of his attempt to improve relations with the West. The exhibitions themselves impressed the Soviets but their effects were enhanced by a carefully planned, but small-scale, program of cultural activities.

The Cultural Program

The IRD along with the British Council's Cultural Relations Department were responsible for arranging the supporting cultural events. At the organizational stage they expressed their desire that 'it would clearly be a good thing if the projected exhibition did represent the British way of life, etc.', but accepted that financial constraints might reduce these opportunities.⁶² H.W. King, the Commercial Counsellor at the Moscow embassy, prompted V. C. Sherren, ITF's managing director, to create a series of technical lectures which they viewed as 'an essential element in the success of the fair'. Few businesses were enthusiastic about participating but they eventually hosted a small series of talks.⁶³ British civil servants used their connections with the private company to influence the

⁶⁰ TNA STAT/14/2870, 'A.D.P.'s Third (and final) Report from British Trade Fair in Moscow as at 14 June 1961.'

⁶¹ TNA PREM/11/3269/1863/14/6 No. 34, 'The British Trade Fair, Moscow, 1961', 14 June 1961.

⁶² TNA/FO371/143577, D. C. Hopson to F.R.H. Murray 'Exhibition in Moscow, 1961', 4 June 1959.

⁶³ "Moscow Trade Fair" *Board of Trade Journal*, 26 May 1961.

exhibition according to their interpretations of Soviet wishes. ITF, however, formally retained authority over cultural events.⁶⁴

A planned visit by the Royal Ballet was postponed because of other commitments, leaving a display football match and a prolonged visit by the Argyll and Sutherlands Highlanders military band as the most overt 'way of life' elements of the British exhibition.⁶⁵ This military unit of 62 spent 3 weeks on Soviet soil, performing daily. The British used the pomp and militaristic symbolism of these parades to impress the Soviet population. Several areas of British officialdom had reservations about the visit. Frank Roberts thought that underlying international tensions might cause a last minute cancellation of the exhibition. He warned that 'this "pageantry" of a military band might give the wrong impression of the British army to the Soviet public'.⁶⁶ Organizing the visit was not straightforward: the presence of a foreign military unit appearing daily in public was unprecedented in the Soviet Union. The British Embassy was therefore worried about gaining the Soviets' permission.⁶⁷ The visit required intricate planning, but this did not deter the Foreign Office or the IRD from pushing ahead.

As the major cultural element of the exhibition, the band's visit was deemed important by ITF and the IRD. However, the trepidation of the civil service and slowness of Soviet officialdom delayed the arrangements. ITF used their influence to ensure that the visit proceeded. R. H. Mason from the Foreign Office's Northern Department was anxious about interested parties, with both corporate and governmental influence, who might cause trouble with their superiors, he commented: 'If this too were cancelled, we have reason to believe that [ITF] would put pressure on the Prime Minister through Lord Drogheda and Lord Poole; and if this failed they would create some very unfavourable publicity for the Foreign Office.'⁶⁸ The presence of members of the House of Lords in the organizing

⁶⁴ TNA FO371/159600/NS1861/1 King Memo; King to Sherren 29 Dec 1960.

⁶⁵ TNA FO371/159600, Memo R. H. Marrett, 9 Feb 1961.

⁶⁶ TNA FO371/159600/NS1861/1, R.H. Mason to A. D. Wilson, 7 February 1961.

⁶⁷ TNA FO371/159600/NS1861/2/51 F. Roberts Memo, 7 Jan 1961.

⁶⁸ TNA FO371/159600/NS1861/2', Military band for Moscow', 7 Feb 1961.

companies obscured the differences between government and business and, whilst there were hopes that British industry would benefit from the fair, this meant that the British exhibition was far from being a solely commercial venture.⁶⁹ R. H. K. Marrett of the Information Policy Department, which coordinated British information policy on overseas activity, responded to Mason by stating 'I do not think that the risk of an explosion from Lord Drogheda [...] should be the ruling factor in our decision. Surely the real question which has to be decided by ministers is whether they accept the advice of the Ambassador or Northern Department on what is essentially a political issue.' Marrett defined the fair as a 'political issue' with the implication that private business – in whose interests Drogheda and Poole were acting – was outside this decision making process. At times the organizational arrangements of the exhibition and its accompanying cultural program demonstrated the differences between the objectives of the civil service, for whom maintaining a positive relationship with the Soviets was important for facilitating future trade deals, and private industry, whose focus was on increasing sales. Whilst this state-private network operated under the broad aims of promoting business and the British way of life, it did not always operate harmoniously and different organizations competed to ensure that their own objectives were prioritized.

The band presented a perhaps unexpected vision of British life to Soviet viewers. Moscow's Radio Home Service enthusiastically reported their opening performance calling them, 'a picturesque and colourful spectacle', and stating that 'people are attracted by both the exotic appearance and by the unusual and tuneful music of the Scots players'.⁷⁰ Following the visit Roberts said they were 'a very real success. The public approval of their appearances [. . .] was most empathetic, and even led on one occasion to the militia being unable to control the crowd'.⁷¹ The disruption was

⁶⁹ See Clarkson *Eastern Bloc Exhibitions*, pp. 307-8.

⁷⁰ TNA FO371/159602/NS1861/32, 'British Trade Fair', 20 May 1961.

⁷¹ TNA FO371/159602/NS1861/32 1863/8/7/6, F.K. Roberts to R.H. Mason, 7 June 1961.

due entirely to over-enthusiasm on the part of the spectators [. . .] when an insufficient number of militiamen failed to hold back an extremely enthusiastic and friendly crowd who broke through and followed the band as they marched and countermarched outside the fair. This made it totally impossible for them to finish the performance, and it had to be stopped [. . .] the appearance of a virtually unknown example of what to the Russians is “British Folk Art”, has caused much interest and attention.⁷²

A thank you letter to the battalion’s commanding officer Major General F.C.C Graham stated ‘I am convinced that such visits play a very useful role in showing the Russian people something of our British way of life[...] such unexpected sides of our national traditions can capture the imagination of the Russian man in the street.’⁷³ Whilst the British trade fair focused primarily on improving trading relations, a subtle form of propaganda conveying the favored Foreign Office and IRD interpretation of the British way of life was coded through the performances of the military band as well as through the engagements made between the exhibitors and visitors.

By connecting the Argyll and Sutherlands with the trade fair, the British government helped to increase the nation’s popularity in the USSR. The significance of using a military band as the exhibition’s main cultural component suggests that the British presented a dreamworld, rooted in tradition and pageantry and which remained linked to empire. The band’s performances contrast with the original plan for a visit by the Royal Ballet which would have been less uniquely British and would have competed on an area in which the Soviets excelled. That visit, however, might have proven immensely popular, as demonstrated by the positive reception that the Royal Ballet received when it visited Moscow later in 1961.⁷⁴ Moreover, the official report of the fair noted its effect on increasing British prestige and noted several times that a positive view of Britain had been created.

⁷² TNA FO371/159602/NS1861/32 1863/8/7/6, F.K. Roberts to R.H. Mason, 7 June 1961.

⁷³ TNA FO371/159602/NS1861/32, CM/DJ, F.K. Roberts to Maj-Gen F.C.C. Graham, 7 June 1961.

⁷⁴ Cate, *Dancer Defects*, p. 406.

Roberts noted that many firms did not participate in order to increase trade but to secure deals that were already made and ensure that competitors did not steal their business.⁷⁵ Therefore, as far as the government was concerned the most useful outcome of the fair was its ability to create a positive impression of Britain amongst the 1.25 million Soviet visitors.

The Soviet Exhibition In London

The Soviets' display, which opened in July 1961, used more obvious propaganda than the British fair, but the British still waged the cultural Cold War at the London exhibition. It soon became clear to Foreign Office staff that the exhibition would be a 'propaganda jamboree', which celebrated the Soviet way of life.⁷⁶ However, following high profile political visits to the British exhibition it was decided that it would be 'ungracious of us not to reciprocate', meaning that, despite suspecting ulterior motives, the Prime Minister was obliged to attend the opening with hospitality being provided to welcome the Soviet guests.⁷⁷ The trade benefits of the fairs often appeared less important than improving diplomatic relations. Therefore, the exhibitions, whilst propagandistic had the potential to facilitate improved relations between both the political elites and the broader populations of Britain and the USSR.

The Soviet exhibition was its largest foreign display to date with the Foreign Office briefing that it was 'larger than the Soviet Exhibit at the Brussels fair' in 1958.⁷⁸ The Soviet pavilion at the Brussels World Fair had impressed many with its displays of satellites and was judged the most outstanding stand.⁷⁹ It was therefore unsurprising that at subsequent exhibitions the Soviets presented technological advancements as central to their way of life and they continued to exhibit replicas of technology such as spacecraft, airplanes and atomic ships. The Foreign Office's report of the

⁷⁵ TNA PREM/11/3269/1863/14/6 No. 34, 'The British Trade Fair, Moscow, 1961', 14 June 1961.

⁷⁶ TNA FO371/159601/NS1861/11, R.H. Mason to A.D. Wilson, 2 March 1961.

⁷⁷ TNA FO371/159602, 'Soviet Exhibition in London July 7-29', letter from Bullard, 25 May 1961.

⁷⁸ TNA FO371/159603/81/INTEL Foreign Office Circular 'The Soviet Exhibition, London', 4 July 1961.

⁷⁹ Siegelbaum, "Sputnik", pp. 120-1.

exhibition noted that the 'Hall of Space' was vast, especially in comparison to 'the tiny corner dedicated to art', which 'featured only the most laughable products of social realism'.⁸⁰

However, both the Soviets and British went further than exhibiting science and 'high' culture and showcased their versions of consumerism and home-life. Whilst more ad hoc than America's 'people to people' program of diplomacy, which was launched in 1955 and aimed to promote the American way of life using exchange programs,⁸¹ the British used their vision of home and private citizens to impress the Soviet visitors and increase goodwill between the nations. The Soviet exhibition coincided with British life moving towards what Claire Langhamer terms the 'home centered society'.⁸² The Foreign Office requested that bureaucrats invite Soviet officials to dinner parties in their homes because:

We have found by experience that nothing is as effective as private hospitality i.e. entertainment offered in individual British homes, in removing the prejudices and misconceptions about this country which persist in the Soviet mind.⁸³

British private life and domesticity was tied to a middle-class idea of the home. Whilst this domestic ideal remained unattainable for those at the margins of British society, the more lavish homes of members of the civil service, political and business communities, whose overlapping networks formed the British political establishment, were showcased as part of British national identity. These real homes which were displayed to Soviet guests conveyed a middle-class sense of the British way of life. Moreover, they were a counterpoint to the idealized Marshall Plan houses that the USA had

⁸⁰ TNA FO371/159603/NS1861/60, Foreign Office to British Embassy, 8 Sept 1961.

⁸¹ Cull, *United States Information Agency*, pp. 118-9, 172-3.

⁸² Claire Langhamer, "The Meanings of Home in Postwar Britain", *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol. 40, no. 2 (2005), p. 341.

⁸³ TNA FO371/159603/NS1861/41, F. Hoyer-Millar, 'Entertainment for Soviet Visitors to London', 3 July 1961.

used to showcase the 'classless' lifestyle of consumer abundance throughout Western Europe during the 1950s.⁸⁴

The British used their domestic ideal – represented by warmth, comfort and cleanliness – as part of their effort in the cultural Cold War. Civil servants made fifteen invitations to various Soviet officials. The Foreign Office, however, felt that Moscow discouraged these visits with only ten people attending dinners. The Foreign Office's report stated that the extent of domestic hospitality was 'consequently disappointing'. However, it continued that 'there was a better response to invitations by individual businessmen'.⁸⁵ This unofficial success perhaps referred to newspaper reports that the barrister and former Labour MP John Platts-Mills had entertained 180 Soviets in his home with 'some hearty souls [playing] a game of croquet'.⁸⁶ The British home – in this case those of senior civil servants, and more often of businessmen – was projected as part of the British dreamworld, consisting of the traditional and establishment utopia. However, domesticity also acted to familiarize the Cold War other and allowed a limited space in which to build relationships between certain members of either population.

The exhibition's opening was attended by Harold Macmillan and other cabinet members. As with Gagarin's flight in April, the British press made allusions to Britain's comparative failures in space exploration and the *Guardian* reported that Lord Hailsham, the Minister for Science, was 'discovered alone in the Cosmic Hall staring wistfully into outer space'.⁸⁷ Several newspaper advertisements encouraged readers to 'Learn more about the Soviet people Soviet commerce and trade', suggesting that visitors might see beyond their preconceptions of the Soviet Union.⁸⁸ Moreover, the British press and television duly paid respect to Soviet technological advancement. Polished replicas of satellites and long distance passenger planes shared the hall with an idealized flat, which was a far

⁸⁴ Gregg Castillo, *Cold War on the Home Front: the Soft Power of Midcentury Design* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), p. 26, 61, 67.

⁸⁵ TNA FO371/159603/NS1861/60, Foreign Office to British Embassy, 8 Sept 1961.

⁸⁶ "Any Wolves?", *Daily Express*, 17 July 1961, p. 3.

⁸⁷ "Soviet Exhibition's Prize Attraction", *The Guardian*, 8 July 1961, p. 1.

⁸⁸ E.g. "The Soviet Exhibition", *Daily Express*, 7 July 1961, p. 5.

cry from many of the *khrushchevsky* housing estates, which had been rapidly built to solve urban Russia's housing crisis. Nevertheless, the home on display represented an aspirational ideal, which Reid has associated with Soviet attempts to build 'comfort' into their homes and to allow families their own domestic private space.⁸⁹ The *Daily Mail's* Olga Franklin stated that the Russian 'Spektakl' was 'no Ideal Home Exhibition' but it showed the 'Soviet idea of an ideal homeland'.⁹⁰ Carson Churchill commented on the Russian home that 'a great many British families would be pleased to live in anything as advanced as this and still can't afford to do it'.⁹¹ The focus on a relatively small part of the Soviets' exhibition revealed much about the British dream of the home and how this was applied to examinations of the Soviet Union. In response to increasing Western prosperity the Soviets displayed consumer comforts including cars, dresses, wine and caviar, which the *Daily Express* viewed as a significant change, declaring: 'When it comes to satisfying women's taste, there is no substitute for free enterprise'.⁹² 'Free enterprise' was presented here as an important British value, which the Soviets must adopt in order to modernize. The engagement with Britain's Cold War opposite raised comparisons with its domestic and consumerist ideals; whilst some commentators suggested the two societies were not in fact that different, the Soviets' attempts to emulate that dreamworld drew praise.

The arrival of a group of Soviet fashion models drew attention from several British newspapers, including the *Daily Mail*, who reported that 'One thousand men stopped work in stunned admiration yesterday as these seven girls walked into the Earls Court exhibition hall...and dispelled the notion that Russian women are dumpy, dowdy, and dull'.⁹³ Towards the end of the column the newspaper revealed that 'most of the girls hold degrees and all have jobs they do in addition to modelling'. A workman was quoted: "These women are marvellous. Clever. It isn't much wonder they have

⁸⁹ Susan E. Reid, "Communist Comfort: Socialist Modernism and the Making of Cosy Homes in the Khrushchev Era", *Gender & History*, vol. 21, no. 3, (2009), 465-498.

⁹⁰ Olga Franklin, "Spektakl", *Daily Mail*, 6 July 1961, p. 7.

⁹¹ Carson Churchill, "Before you jeer the Russian Flat", *Daily Mail*, 17 July 1961, p. 8.

⁹² "Woman's World", *Daily Express*, 4 July 1961, p. 6.

⁹³ "Seven Cute Comrades Stop the Work", *Daily Mail*, 3 July 1961, 3; and "Russia brings sputniks and glamour girls", *The Observer*, 2 July 1961.

responsible jobs.” However, the women’s education was subsequently downplayed. The *Mail* evaluated the attractiveness of Russian women stating that ‘the Soviet Union turns on you and takes you by surprise [with] another version of Soviet woman – swinging her hips, delicately turning out her fingers, smiling under her blonde bouffant hair, looking sexy, cosy, and huggable in big furry sweaters and snappy trousers.’⁹⁴ Often the clothes drew less attention than the women themselves, with *The Guardian* reporting: ‘A pigtailed fair-haired girl in a pink nightdress was our introduction to Soviet sophistication [. . .] she was followed by a russet-haired beauty with most mischievous eyes and a most disturbing smile.’⁹⁵ The paper exalted the Russian models and bemoaned ‘If only we could persuade one or two of them to follow the naughty Rudolf’s example and not go back.’ This reference to the ballet dancer Rudolf Nureyev’s defection in Paris reminded readers of the Cold War division and reinforced the idea that western style freedom appealed to many Soviets. Whilst British press depictions of women’s physical attributes were far from untypical during the 1960s, they expressed surprise that Soviet women contradicted their pre-conceived stereotypes. Many newspapers exoticed the Soviets by printing vivid descriptions of female beauty and sexual allure.

Overall the exhibition was warmly received with a curious British public making 600,000 visits during its twenty day duration. The *Daily Mail*’s Peter Lewis described the Soviet display as ‘undoubtedly one of the great exhibitions’.⁹⁶ As Clarkson demonstrates, correspondents were impressed by the technological exhibits but found that the consumer goods failed to reach the expected standard.⁹⁷ *The Guardian*’s John Davy thought that the ‘knockout blow’ was the Sputnik display.⁹⁸ Davy continued that the focus on heavy industry was justified but ‘[b]etween the basic foundations of an industrial economy such as coal, minerals, timber, chemicals, heavy machinery, and power, and the jam on the Soviet consumer’s bread which is just becoming available in the form of better clothes, fabrics and food, the exhibition reveals a gap’. Other *Guardian* reviews described

⁹⁴ Peter Lewis, “Two Tickets to Russia”, *Daily Mail*, 8 July 1961, p. 6.

⁹⁵ “London Letter”, *The Guardian*, 7 July 1961, p. 12.

⁹⁶ Peter Lewis, “Two Tickets to Russia”, *Daily Mail*, 8 July 1961, p. 6.

⁹⁷ Clarkson, “Sputniks and Sideboards”, pp. 294-5.

⁹⁸ John Davy, “From Space to Murals”, *The Guardian*, 9 July 1961, p. 3.

the exhibition as being designed 'to drive home to British audiences the achievements of Soviet technology, but to show them at the same time that the Soviet Union is not all power stations and agricultural.'⁹⁹ Whilst the *Mirror* was critical of the quality of Soviet consumer goods they still claimed that visitors had 'rushed to buy Russian', with an order worth £750,000 placed for goods 'ranging from toys and cameras to liqueurs and "Cosmonaut" after-shave lotion'.¹⁰⁰ The Soviets might not have immediately impressed with all aspects of their exhibition but there was enough warmth and goodwill to ensure a largely positive, though sometimes critical, response.

Whilst the British Embassy was satisfied with most coverage they advised that,

we do not wish to imply that the United Kingdom press should be encouraged to change its tune [. . .] But, as seen from here, we wonder whether the Russians may not have been rather disappointed at the press treatment they seem to have got, and the relatively low figure (compared with our own Fair) of 55,000 admissions in the first three days.¹⁰¹

The memo suggests that press coverage could improve relations between both governments and also the respective publics, but also that the more controlled Soviet media wrote more positively about the British than *vice versa*. The letter continued 'we think that there might be something to be said for discreetly encouraging suitable elements of the United Kingdom press to publish a small number of appreciative articles on some of the more technical and less controversial sections of the exhibition.' Some British civil servants, who acted in a consultative role to the exhibition, saw the media as a tool in their attempts to improve trading relations with the Soviet Union, despite the official presentation of Britain's press being free from state involvement. The Foreign Office politely declined to interfere because they thought that Gagarin's visit generated enough positive publicity for the fair and that "IF [sic] the tone of these [articles] is sometimes ironical, that is only to be

⁹⁹ "Propaganda by Caviar, Wines, and Sputniks", *The Guardian*, 7 July 1961, p. 5.

¹⁰⁰ "A Rush to Buy Russian", *Daily Mirror*, 8 July 1961, p. 2; and "It's Curtain up on Red Fair", *Daily Mirror*, 7 July 1961, p. 2.

¹⁰¹ TNA FO371/159603/NS1861/67/(A)/1867/12/7, Commercial Department, British Embassy, Moscow to Foreign Office, 12 July 1961.

expected, given the nature of some of the exhibits, which can only be described as flatulent.¹⁰² The civil service desired a successful Soviet exhibition because it would maintain good relations and assist Anglo-Soviet trade, even at the expense of deliberately massaging public opinion about the deficiencies of Soviet industry to provide a more positive impression to the British public. However, as the correspondence suggests, the exhibition was unlikely to vastly change the British public's impressions of the standards of Soviet goods because of the mediocre quality on display.

The Soviet Union attempted to demonstrate to British and other Western observers that they were advanced and planned to pass the living standards of Western countries. British commentators were increasingly worried about their nation's perceived loss of dynamism. Michael Shanks's *The Stagnant Society*, which was published later that year, characterized a broader sense that Britain was losing industrial competitiveness, especially when compared to the Eastern bloc.¹⁰³ This feeling became startlingly apparent following Yuri Gagarin's space flight on 12 April, which was celebrated throughout the British press. The *Daily Mirror* unambiguously situated this as a momentous event and could not ignore the fact that this was a Soviet achievement adding, 'Today the *Mirror* salutes the Russians'.¹⁰⁴ Space advancement ran counter to some presentations of the USSR which relied on a folk image of peasant life. Space was linked into the Soviets' self-depiction as modern because of its association with science and technology. However, this idea of modernity was also linked to the creation of abundance through a thriving consumer economy. Many British people believed that the Soviets' use of planning was allowing them to eclipse Western standards of technological achievement. The Soviet display of space exploration prompted renewed comparisons between technological and economic advancement of the Eastern and Western systems.

¹⁰² TNA FO371/159603 Foreign Office to British Embassy, Moscow, 20 July 1961.

¹⁰³ Michael Shanks, *The Stagnant Society: A Warning* (London: Penguin, 1961); and David Kynaston, *Modernity Britain: A Shake of the Dice* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), pp. 121-156.

¹⁰⁴ "Man in Space", *Daily Mirror*, 13 April 1961, p. 32.

Despite the success of the space display many reviews suggested the Russian goods were dated or poorly made. The *Observer* reported that the furs often 'looked like processed bear'.¹⁰⁵ The review continued that the household goods were 'just the sort of thing we were doing [...] twenty five years ago'. The press emphasized the differences between communist production for needs and capitalist production for consumerist desire. As Clarkson suggests, this division in domestic desires and outlooks left many British commentators disappointed that style appeared trumped by utility.¹⁰⁶ The Foreign Office also felt that many goods were 'of inferior quality, and in poor taste'.¹⁰⁷ Whilst Clarkson suggests that many press accounts of the exhibition noted its lack of sophistication, expressions of admiration for the Soviet Union and its attempts to catch the West also emerged. The *Guardian* noted, 'in a world of haves and have nots, Russia is now among the haves and we should be glad to see her there.'¹⁰⁸ Moreover, the Soviets were generally well received with the *Daily Mail* observing that 'Russians "are people"'. This discovery of the 1960s will be a familiar fact by the 1970s'.¹⁰⁹ Whilst some scholars have noted that western preconceptions of the Soviet Union were often of a backward or uncivilized society, these comments suggest that this image existed alongside that of a USSR that used its technological advancements and attempts to increase availability of consumer goods to appear modern.¹¹⁰ When considered alongside the warnings of British national decline, which emerged from certain commentators, it is easy to see how the USSR was perceived to be 'catching' the British economy. The British press expressed the hope that the Cold War was over and that new technologies and increasing consumerism would improve the international situation. The Soviets occasionally impressed the British with their dreamworld which the press compared to their own. However, these preconceptions rarely suggested that the Soviet Union was pulling ahead and, as Buck-Morss points out, 'there was a political as well as an economic motivation behind the

¹⁰⁵ Katherine Whitehorn, "The Fashions", *The Observer*, 9 July 1961, p. 27.

¹⁰⁶ Clarkson, "Sputniks and Sideboards", p. 294.

¹⁰⁷ TNA FO371/159603/NS1861/60, Foreign Office to British Embassy, Moscow, 8 Sept 1961.

¹⁰⁸ "Soviet Display", *Guardian*, 8 July 1961, p. 6.

¹⁰⁹ "They Are People", *Daily Mail*, 7 July 1961, p. 1.

¹¹⁰ Reid "Who will Beat Whom"; Clarkson "Sputniks and Sideboards", p. 303.

West's promotion of consumerist dreams'.¹¹¹ The comparisons between a country whose fashions changed frequently and one focused on utility did celebrate the Soviets' advances, but overall the press emphasized the superiority of the West until the exhibition became associated with the Soviet's emblem of modernity.

The Visit Of Yuri Gagarin

The Soviets' attempted to capitalize on their recent successful space flight by having Yuri Gagarin visit their London exhibition. In the absence of a high-profile political visit Gagarin captured many British imaginations and improved the exhibition's publicity. Following his flight most British newspapers had published photographs of Gagarin with his wife and daughter and his official life story, which the Soviets had prepared and distributed.¹¹² The cosmonaut was initially depicted as a normal human being: a family man with whom British people could associate. The *Daily Mail's* opinion column had described Gagarin as 'a human creature like the rest of us, with a heart, a brain - a soul'.¹¹³ This positive attitude towards the USSR continued with an examination of Gagarin's family. The newspaper declared 'Spaceman Yuri is also typical of thousands of Russians...stolid in appearance, a devoted family man. A man like Nikita Khrushchev. Of and from the earth.' Such depictions of Gagarin as a 'typical' but courageous Russian and a family man, contributed towards a heroic image. Mrs Shirley Turner wrote to the *Mirror* stating that 'To me, a mother, the event was humanised by the fact that he has a two year old daughter called Elena'.¹¹⁴ The family values that Lynne Segal argues were a key part of re-making post-war British masculinity were visible in some newspaper presentations of Gagarin, with many encouraging readers see beyond the Cold War.¹¹⁵ Gagarin became a figure who certain areas of the British press depicted as representing all Soviet

¹¹¹ Buck-Morss, *Dreamworld and Catastrophe*, p. 209.

¹¹² See *Daily Mirror*, p. 1; *Daily Mail*, p. 1; and *Daily Express*, p. 1, 13 April 1961.

¹¹³ "The Choice Before All Mankind", *Daily Mail*, 13 April 1961, p. 1.

¹¹⁴ "Viewpoint", *Daily Mirror*, 18 April 1961, p. 6.

¹¹⁵ Lynne Segal, *Slow Motion: Changing Masculinities Changing Men*, 2nd Ed. (London: Virago, 1997), p. 21.

people. His visit to the London exhibition capitalized on this image and the British population reacted with what might be termed Yurimania.

Several friendship societies and peace organizations, which were allied to the Communist Party of Great Britain, invited Gagarin to visit the UK. These invitations from organizations, which the Foreign Office referred to as 'undesirable', were accompanied by one from the semi-official GB-USSR Association, which was part of the British Council, and another from ITF inviting Gagarin to visit the Soviet trade fair.¹¹⁶ A Foreign Office memo suggested that the Soviets might exploit the visit for propaganda by accepting an offer from an undesirable organization. Therefore, the memo stated that the government's 'principles would require [them] to have nothing to do with him officially while most of the people of this country would probably acclaim him as a hero'.¹¹⁷ The memo also stated that an official visit was unrealistic because it might

rub the noses of the Americans in their comparative failure in the space race so far[. . .] Mr Sherren should be told that we do not think it appropriate to invite Major Gagarin here officially, but see no objection to his inviting him on behalf of Industrial and Trade Fairs.¹¹⁸

The British government recognized the need to provide leadership on Gagarin's visit in order to prevent a Soviet propaganda coup; they therefore made official hospitality conditional on the acceptance of ITF's invitation and ensured that the visit was not associated with the communist sympathizing organizations. Whilst ITF wanted Gagarin to visit in order to promote the Soviet trade fair, the government utilized this invitation for their own purpose of ensuring that Gagarin's visit

¹¹⁶ TNA FO371/159606/NS2311/27 'Invitation to Major Gagarin to Visit Britain', 3 May 1961.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

neither aided the communist sympathizing organizations nor caused problems with the Americans. The state-private network helped to ensure that both objectives were met.

Following Gagarin's acceptance of ITF's invitation the Foreign Office sought to raise the profile of the GB-USSR Association by arranging for them to host a reception. The Soviets were informed that members of the cabinet could only meet Gagarin at this event and also, 'that if he comes as the guest of one of the bodies we do not approve of, this will prevent us from making any official recognition of the visit'.¹¹⁹ Therefore the government's connections with private companies allowed the visit to become semi-official with ITF mediating between the Soviets and officialdom. The government balanced international diplomacy against concerns expressed in the Foreign Office that the popular press were 'already suggesting that H.M.G. [was] not paying adequate attention to him'.¹²⁰ They therefore maneuvered between pacifying the press, who had heroicized Gagarin, and a potential Soviet propaganda coup, meaning that they could not exhibit any 'weakening of our resolution in the face of the coming crisis over Berlin'.

Gagarin arrived on 11 July 1961 and received a rousing reception. Crowds watched as his car passed and The *Daily Mirror* demanded: 'Make him Sir Yuri' reporting that '[t]he people of London gave a roaring welcome to Space hero Yuri Gagarin.'¹²¹ The enthusiasm was greater than the government expected and celebrations transcended both the national barrier and the Cold War division. As Gagarin mingled with the great and good, attending receptions with the Prime Minister and the Queen, the press reported the impressions from those who had met him. A number of newspapers also printed photographs of a 23 year old dental nurse, Olivia Brayden, who had ran up and kissed Gagarin as he was about to be driven to the exhibition. Several newspapers reported Brayden as saying 'he's the most kissable man in the universe. I'm just mad about him.'¹²²

¹¹⁹ TNA FO371/159606, R. H. Mason to A. D. Wilson 'Major Gagarin' 7 July 1961.

¹²⁰ TNA FO371/159606, R. H. Mason to A. D. Wilson 'Major Gagarin's Visit', 10 July 1961.

¹²¹ "Make Him Sir Yuri; Rady Vas Vidjetj", *Daily Mirror*, 12 July 1961, pp.1-3.

¹²² "The Girl Who Gave Yuri a Kiss", *Daily Mirror*, 13 July 1961, 32'; and "A kiss for Gagarin", *Daily Express*, 13 July 1961, p. 1.

Contemporary commentators noted the aspects of Gagarin's visit, including this incident, which drew most press attention: Michael Frayn bemoaned that the *Mirror* was an example of the kind of coverage that had 'taken on an embarrassingly sexual overtone.'¹²³ Some sections of society had changed his image from family man to sex symbol. Similar excitement was visible during Gagarin's appearance at the Trade Fair when a surge of people meant that police had to hold back youthful crowds.¹²⁴ In that commotion one woman lost her shoe and sued the exhibitors for the price of a new pair of shoes and stockings.¹²⁵ For the British, and in particular youthful sections of society, Gagarin's association with 'the space age' generated something approaching fervor.

Throughout Gagarin's visit ITF mediated between the Soviets and government and coordinated his activities. When the Soviets suggested that he lay a wreath at the cenotaph in Whitehall the organizers checked with the Foreign Office that this was appropriate.¹²⁶ This cooperation further demonstrates how the exhibitions were organized by a network of private and public interests who both sought to benefit from the visit whilst ensuring that it progressed without diplomatic incidents. By supporting the ITF invitation and liaising over the visit the British government used its business connections to limit the Soviet's propaganda gain.

The Foreign Office report of Gagarin's visit noted that the crowds had welcomed him so warmly because 'there is in this country a great deal of goodwill towards the Russians as people – almost certainly more than there is towards the Germans East or West.'¹²⁷ The government argued that their hospitality was appropriate but Frank Roberts wrote 'I had not quite expected the hysteria of the British crowds'.¹²⁸ This surprise was echoed by the representatives of the Federal German Republic whose diplomats expressed their worries that Britain was 'not firm' on the Berlin

¹²³ Michael Frayn, "Miscellany", *The Guardian*, 17 July 1961, p. 7.

¹²⁴ See "Yuri Gagarin at Earl's court", *British Pathé*, media Urn: 85560, Film Id. 2982.23, unused footage.

¹²⁵ TNA FO371/159603/NS1861/60, Foreign Office to British Embassy, 8 Sept 1961.

¹²⁶ TNA FO371/159606NS2311/40, J. Bullard to Mason, 13 July 1961.

¹²⁷ TNA FO371/159606/NS2311/34, D. Wilson to F. Roberts, 21 July 1961.

¹²⁸ TNA FO371/159606/NS2311/39, F. Roberts to D. Wilson, 26 July 1961.

question.¹²⁹ The American press also reported Gagarin's 'hero's' welcome. The British Embassy in Washington noted that 'those who are already convinced that the British are "soft on communism" will see this as further confirmation of their view'. The report also noted, however, that 'On the whole, I do not believe that Gagarin's visit will do us harm here'.¹³⁰ Whilst the British approach to the Soviets making the first space flight was more celebratory than that of the Americans, it was not expected that the celebrations of Gagarin would cause lasting division between the Cold War allies.

Gagarin's visit was seen by the civil service as part of the same battle for public opinion of which the exhibitions themselves were part. The Foreign Office felt that despite the Soviets' efforts their exhibition was not effective in improving the British public attitude towards the Soviet Union which, 'could be defined as one of rueful scepticism'.¹³¹ Some areas of the popular press such as the *Daily Mail* were perhaps more receptive to Soviet modernity than the government acknowledged. Moreover, the warmth of Gagarin's reception suggests that many British people saw beyond the Cold War and celebrated his achievement in line with the narrative of domestication that the Soviets and the British press had created between his flight and visit to the Soviet exhibition: he was seen as someone who had advanced humankind. However, the cosmonaut's main effect was to increase the popularity of the Soviet Union with the British public much more than the exhibition itself did.

Conclusion

The British and Soviet exhibitions of 1961 both contained elements of what the British civil service had termed 'way of life' propaganda. The British presented their exhibition as a private venture that was solely about trade, but diplomatic concerns and the involvement of the Foreign Office were also evident throughout. Whilst the British appeared to have 'eschewed blatant propaganda', as Clarkson claims, they showcased their perceived way of life in both Moscow and London, albeit more subtly

¹²⁹ TNA FO371/159606/NS2311/39, E. Shuckburgh.

¹³⁰ TNA FO371/159606/NS2311/37, (A), 'Major Gagarin's Visit to the United Kingdom', 15 July 1961.

¹³¹ TNA FO371/159603/NS1861/60, Memo, Foreign Office to British Embassy, Moscow, 8 Sept 1961.

than the Soviets' exhibition and the Americans' Moscow fair in 1959.¹³² Britain's Moscow exhibit was primarily a trade fair, but the involvement of people who had worked within the British state and regularly consulted with the Foreign Office, allowed the British to introduce examples of its way of life through government stalls and the cultural program. The government was convinced that the Soviet fair did not have a positive impact on the British public. Reaction to Gagarin's visit, however, suggests that British culture in early 1961 tended to express a dualism towards the Soviet Union, the Cold War and Communism: Britons happily celebrated the modernity which many associated with the Soviet Union because of their technological advances linked to space exploration, despite the underlying fear that the conflict might turn hot. Furthermore they desired improved relations with the population of the Soviet Union and expressed a distinct desire to gain knowledge of their everyday life.

At either exhibition the respective nations showcased their perceived national characteristics. The British state-private network worked together to ensure that their version of the British way of life was on view in Moscow and intervened to prevent communist sympathizing organizations from capitalizing on Gagarin's visit. The British use of a marching military band projected its tradition which was rooted in pageantry and royalty. This self-perception contrasted with the modernity and technological advancement in the form of space travel and emerging consumerist ideals that shaped the Soviet's own dreamworld. The reaction of the British press to both exhibitions suggests that, whilst there continued to be some depictions of repression or backwardness in the Soviet Union, very often British newspapers were comfortable with presenting the USSR as making technological and consumer advances. At times the coverage was frivolous or congratulatory. In the context of the Cold War it is an example of how, even as the conflict entered a 'hot' period, it was presented to the British population as normalized – almost as part of their everyday experience. The press were happy to report Soviet advances and many Britons expressed their wonderment to the extent of celebration. The coverage of the exhibitions and of Gagarin's visit demonstrated a desire by many

¹³² Clarkson, "Sputniks and Sideboards", p. 285.

Britons to know and to humanize the Cold War other. Britons' attitudes towards the USSR fluctuated, but in the early 1960s, prior to the Berlin Wall's erection, many were willing to see beyond the Cold War.

Whilst the British government's primary objective at the exhibitions was to improve diplomatic and trading relations with the Soviet Union, the exchanges also helped to achieve other aims such as promoting those values that they felt represented the British way of life and which the Soviet people might appreciate. Transnational networks were formed and reinforced between Britain and the USSR during 1961 and the reciprocal exhibitions facilitated communications between civil servants, business people and members of the respective publics who travelled and worked on each installation or visited the displays. The media coverage of the fairs meant that each public began to learn about the other beyond Cold War crises, which had something of a demystifying effect. Whilst the exhibitions allowed each nation to challenge the preconceptions that had formed within the other country over several decades, the distorting lenses of the media (whether state-controlled or seemingly 'free') limited the ability to change ingrained opinion.