Note from Chairman of the Foreign Policy Commission of the Central Committee of the VKP (b), V. Grigorian[[1]](#footnote-1), to V.M. Molotov, enclosing a note regarding the exchange of delegations between public organisations of the Soviet Union and Britain in 1950, 28 February 1951

To Comrade V.M. Molotov

Hereby I present a note “On exchange of delegations between the public organisations of the Soviet Union and Britain in 1950”.

Chairman of the Foreign Policy Commission, Central Committee of the VKP (b) [Signature] (V. Grigorian)

ON EXCHANGE OF DELEGATIONS BETWEEN THE PUBLIC ORGANISATIONS OF THE SOVIET UNION AND BRITAIN IN 1950

In 1950, invited by the Soviet public organisations, six delegations of British workers visited the Soviet Union. Altogether there were 67 delegates. The delegations stayed in the Soviet Union for periods of two to three weeks.

Eight delegations of Soviet public organisations visited Britain. In total, there were 23 delegates. Soviet delegations stayed in Britain for the same periods as their British counterparts, from two to three weeks.

On delegations of the British workers that visited the Soviet Union

Most of the British delegations which visited the Soviet Union last year were invited as a result of the wishes expressed by the British progressive organisations. Delegates were typically elected by committees of shop stewards, trade unions and other public organisations. Members of the British workers’ delegation were elected at the workers’ general meetings.

The British delegations which visited the Soviet Union in 1950 included 36 workers, 16 office workers, 12 intellectuals and 3 housewives. Among the delegates there were 25 Communists, 28 Labour, one Conservative, one Cooperative, one member of the national party of Scotland, one leaguer of the Irish workers and 10 non-partisans.

In addition to Moscow the delegations visited Stalingrad, Kiev, Tbilisi and Sochi. They visited Soviet enterprises, collective farms, cultural-domestic institutions and public organisations. Delegates were mainly interested in salaries, social insurance, Soviet trade unions and their role in the management of enterprises, cultural-domestic and health services for workers, the social standing of women in the Soviet Union, education, etc. Many questions from the delegates were connected with the campaign for peace conducted in the Soviet Union.

Some delegates, having been under the influence of anti-Soviet propaganda in Britain, were very mistrustful and suspicious during the first few days of their stay. However, after better acquainting themselves with the Soviet reality and carrying out their work, they changed their wrong, prejudiced points of view.

Before their departure to Britain all of the delegations held press conferences at which they issued positive sentiments and denied the anti-Soviet bourgeois propaganda.

While in Moscow, most of the delegates delivered radio speeches and articles in the Soviet press, in which they truthfully told what they observed in the Soviet Union.

Upon their return to Britain, the British delegates exposed the anti-Soviet slander and actively supported friendship between the British and Soviet people. For example, members of British workers’ delegation delivered speeches at 250 public meetings with 17,000 attendees, members of the British women’s delegation conducted over 100 meetings, members of incorporated delegation of the British-Soviet Friendship Society and the “Scottish-Soviet” Society delivered speeches at 30 meetings. Some local British newspapers have also published interviews with the delegates.

Along with the speeches at the meetings, some delegations have published reports about their visits to the Soviet Union. For example, the workers’ delegation issued and disseminated 86,000 copies of a photo report and sold 21,000 copies of a brochure entitled, “The Russia That We Saw.” The delegation of electricians has also published its official report, and 10,000 copies of the women’s delegation report will be published in February of 1951.

The content of the British workers’ delegation brochure is typical. In the brochure, delegates reported that having seen the life of Soviet people, they were convinced that “the Soviet Union is a country where the working class rules”, that “the Soviet workers follow the right way of creating an economy which will provide for all their material and cultural needs”, and that “the socialist system existing in the Soviet Union is justified” because there are “visible tremendous successes and achievements” throughout the country. The brochure specifically notes the friendship between Soviet workers and the British people, and highlights the “general striving for peace among the Soviet people”. The delegations reported that “the efforts of the Soviet Union for peaceful work and the preservation of peace deserve support from all of the progressive people of Britain”.

In 1950 the Soviet public organisations conducted much work in hosting and receiving the British delegations. However, it should be noted that this project also had serious drawbacks. In 1950 the AUSCR[[2]](#footnote-2), the AUCCTU[[3]](#footnote-3) and the Antifascist Committee of Soviet Women had no predetermined plans to invite the British delegations because of the present British political situation and the activities of British civic organisations.

Invited delegates were often anonymous until their arrival in Moscow, which caused considerable difficulties in the process. The organisations working with British delegations had no prepared propaganda materials to address their inquiries.

The number of places intended for delegates’ visits was extremely limited; all the delegations mainly visited the same cities, enterprises, cultural and educational establishments, collective farms, etc. The public organisations responsible for the work with the delegations did not always take the necessary measures to ensure that the local trade-union organisations and heads of the enterprises were adequately prepared to receive the delegates.

The formal receptions arranged before the departure of the delegations were, in some cases, not very well organised. The same people were invited to receptions (mainly executives of the AUCCTU and of the AUSCR) and during the receptions, no work was conducted with the delegates.

Reports on press conferences in most cases contained just the [basic] information. Too few articles, speeches and delegate statements were published. Since the delegations visited the same places, the delegates’ speeches on the radio very often appeared similar.

After the delegates’ departure to Britain their links with corresponding Soviet organisations effectively ceased. The reports on the work with the delegations are often formal and do not contain deep and sophisticated conclusions. AUCCTU, AUSCR and other organisations have not yet generalised their experience with foreign delegations.

About the Soviet delegations’ visits to Britain in 1950

Soviet delegations that visited Britain in 1950 generally accomplished their tasks. Delegates visited over 30 British cities and delivered speeches at meetings and trade-union conferences and talked to workers, trade-unions and public figures.

Despite the fact that the Labour government and reactionary circles in Britain took every possible measure to isolate the Soviet delegates from the working masses, the Soviet delegations have carried out considerable work in Britain. Members of the Soviet delegation delivered speeches at 39 meetings attended by over 8,000 people, and the delegation of Ukrainian trade unions conducted 37 meetings and conversations with workers in their flats.

Most of our delegates in Britain testify to the extremely low British awareness about the actual situation in the Soviet Union and their great desire to learn the truth about the life of the Soviet people. The British had questions that were mostly varied, but mainly focused on the economic conditions of the Soviet workers, the activities of trade unions, Soviet national education and public health services, etc. Occasionally there were also loaded questions such as: whether the Soviet workers would go on strike and why the Soviet Union took Greek children and forbade them from leaving, whether there was really a split in the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, etc. However, there were not many such questions.

Often, at the end of each meeting, some listeners delivered speeches. They thanked the Soviet delegates for the information and urged the meeting participants to expose anti-Soviet fabrications of bourgeois propaganda and to promote more active friendship between British and Soviet people. At a meeting of electricians in London (on 21 May 1950) all of the speakers asked the Soviet delegates to send their best regards to the Soviet workers and assured them that the workers of Britain would never be at war with the Soviets, and that if the Labour government waged war against the Soviet Russia, British workers would declare a general strike.

After returning to the Soviet Union some delegates shared their experiences at workers’ meetings, on the radio and in the press.

However, along with the benefits from sending the Soviet delegates to Britain in 1950, there were some serious drawbacks as well.

During their stay in Britain our delegations collected little information on the work of British progressive organisations, and they did not adequately study the Birtish organisations beforehand. This largely explains the superficial conclusions and lack of insightful suggestions for improvement of Soviet propaganda in Britain in their reports.

There were cases in which some delegates did not manage to follow the directions issued prior to their departure to Britain. Mr. Grivkov, Chairman of the Central Committee of the RSFSR[[4]](#footnote-4) trade union of high school employees, was responsible for speaking at the annual conference of the National Union of British teachers to invite British teachers to the Soviet Union. He failed to get the floor at this conference.

The organisations that sent the Soviet delegations to Britain in 1950 often did not receive reports from the delegations, and did not generalise their work experience. Almost all of the delegations delivered their written reports with considerable delays. The Soviet Peace Committee delegation (Comrades Simonov[[5]](#footnote-5) and Kabalevsky[[6]](#footnote-6)) did not present any report at all.

Some delegates’ presentations, in the press and on the radio, were poorly organised and occasionally haphazard. After the delegates returned to the Soviet Union, their contact with the British organisations that received them practically ceased.

Conclusions and suggestions

The exchange of delegations between the public organisations of the Soviet Union and Britain in 1950 have shown that direct dialogue between Soviet and British workers is an effective means in the struggle against slanderous anti-Soviet fabrications in British propaganda.

In order to improve future exchanges of delegations between the Soviet Union and Britain, it would be wise to do the following:

To ask AUSCR, AUCCTU, the Soviet Peace Committee and other organisations connected with British progressive public organisations to urgently present well-founded suggestions to the Foreign Policy Commission of VKP Central Committee, in preparation for an exchange in 1951.

To order the Sovinformburo (Soviet Information Bureau) to prepare the necessary informational materials for delegations coming to the USSR, taking into consideration suggestions from the previous exchange.

To consider increasing the number of places intended for foreign delegates to visit.

[RSASPH, f. 82, inv. 2, file 1145, pp. 67-73]

Keywords: Post-war USSR, Trade unions

1. V.G. Grigorian (1901/1902-1983) – Chairman of the Foreign Politics Commission of the Party Central Committee - the commission of the Central Committee responsible for relations with foreign Communist parties (1949 – 1953). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. AUSCR – All-Union Society for Cultural Relations abroad, the body uniting and coordinating the activity of all the Soviet “friendship societies” with foreign countries since 1925. In 1958 it was renamed USFS – the Union of Soviet Friendship Societies. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. AUCCTU - All-Union Central Council of Trade Unions, the central body managing the activity of all the USSR trade unions (1918-1991). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Russian Soviet Federal Socialist Republic. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. К.М. Simonov (1915-1979) – Soviet poet and prose writer, Deputy General-Secretary of the Union of Soviet Writers of the USSR. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. D.B. Kabalevskii (1904-1987) – Soviet composer. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)