



ARTICLE

# ‘A New Prague Spring, but from Below?’ Socialist Dissent in the Last Soviet Generation and the Emergence of *Solidarność* in Poland, 1980–1981

Natasha Wilson 

School of Historical and Philosophical Studies, University of Melbourne, Melbourne, Australia  
[nwils@unimelb.edu.au](mailto:nwils@unimelb.edu.au)

This article examines the Young Socialists, a left-wing dissident circle of intellectuals from the last Soviet generation, and focuses on their contacts with *Solidarność* during 1980–81. These dissidents, located in Moscow and Minsk, interpreted the Polish strikes as the possible beginnings of a wider move to socialist reform in the Eastern Bloc. Using oral history and samizdat materials from the Russian and Polish archives and the former archives of Radio Free Europe, the article demonstrates how the Young Socialists’ interactions with Poland developed in the wider context of the transnational history of dissent in the Eastern Bloc at the turn of the 1980s. It argues that a combination of internationalist values and bloc-wide dissident solidarities caused socialist dissidents to view nationalist movements on the Soviet periphery and Eastern Europe as potential drivers of socialist reform on the eve of Perestroika.

## Introduction

The September 1980 issue of the left-wing Soviet samizdat journal, *Sotsializm i budushchee* (Socialism and the Future) dedicated substantial coverage to the political crisis that was then occurring in Poland. Its Moscow-based editors’ internationalist leanings spurred them to include an interview with an anonymised Polish socialist. He declared to the journal’s Soviet readers that the national strike movement’s success in forcing the Polish United Workers’ Party (PZPR) to the negotiating table had brought about ‘a new Prague Spring – not from above, but from below’, while emphasising the desire for democratic reform that existed at the party’s grassroots.<sup>1</sup> Conceived as a platform for generating enthusiasm for socialist renewal among a broader public, *Sotsializm i budushchee*’s propagandistic energy bubbled forth as its Soviet editors eagerly quizzed their Polish contact for more information. Inquiring about the causes of the strikes and the reasons for their successes, the strikers’ moods and demands, and the all-important ties between workers and intellectuals, the editors were transparent in their attempts to bring forth guidance for mobilising a similar scenario in the Soviet Union.

The emergence of a powerful workers’ movement in Poland stimulated the hopes of a wider underground network of roughly fifty young, left-wing Soviet intellectuals associated with the samizdat journals *Sotsializm i budushchee* and *Varianty* (Variants). Part of the intellectual elite of the last Soviet generation, their dissident engagement with socialist politics and ideology presents a counterpoint to Alexei Yurchak’s influential culturally driven, apolitical portrait of this generation.<sup>2</sup> United by a mix

<sup>1</sup> ‘Protssess demokratizatsii neobratim: Interv’yu s Pol’skim Sotsialistom’, *Sotsializm i budushchee* no. 2 (Aug.–Sept. 1980): 6. Archive of Dissent in the USSR, Moscow Memorial, F. 128 Collection of Roy Medvedev, box 1, folder ‘melkie zhurnaly nach 80-kh’ (2).

<sup>2</sup> Alexei Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever Until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).

of friendship, everyday professional associations at the Faculty of History of Moscow State University (MGU) and the Institute of World Economy and International Affairs (IMEMO), and conspiratorial connections, they became known in international reporting as the Young Socialists following their arrests in 1982.<sup>3</sup> Led by Pavel Kudiukin (b. 1953) and Andrei Fadin (1953–97), both postgraduate students at IMEMO at the time of their dissent, the circle was attracted to various reform communist, social democratic and Third Worldist positions. They broadly believed that a large-scale economic crisis was visible on the Soviet horizon. When the storm hit, they predicted it would stimulate a popular movement of socialist reform to put pressure on the Soviet leadership to evolve in the direction of democratic socialism. With some excitement, they interpreted the Polish crisis as an affirmation that these dynamics were already in play elsewhere in the Eastern Bloc. Caught up in heady admiration for the Poles' breakthrough, they sent a letter of internationalist greetings to Solidarność's founding congress in 1981.

This article adds to the emerging transnational history of dissent in the Eastern Bloc by examining the Polish events of 1980–81 – a turning point of popular unrest – through the eyes of a new generation of Soviet left-wing opposition. Solidarność's gains inspired dialogue across borders that strengthened feelings of mutual solidarity among Soviet and Eastern European dissidents before 1989. The collective euphoria felt for the Poles in 1980 links the experiences of the national dissident movements and lends weight to the picture developing in the literature of a loose bloc-wide community responding to common developments with interacting perspectives.<sup>4</sup> The connections of the *pravozashchitniki*, or Soviet human rights activists, to Western journalists, NGOs and political leaders inside the transnational human rights network that emerged around the Helsinki process in the 1970s is a well-known affair.<sup>5</sup> By contrast, socialist dissidents, perceived by scholars as an insular current associated with the contested politics of the Thaw, have been left out of the picture.<sup>6</sup> Yet the more deeply entrenched socialist dissident circles located on the edges of Moscow and Leningrad universities throughout the late socialist years were all to varying degrees internationalist in outlook and influenced by foreign leftist thought and movements.<sup>7</sup> I argue that in conditions of stagnation at home, this

<sup>3</sup> Accounts of the Young Socialists' dissident activities have appeared in the following works: Liudmilla Alekseeva, *Soviet Dissent: Contemporary Movements for National, Religious and Human Rights* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1985), 423–6; Il'ia Budraitskis, *Dissidents among Dissidents: Ideology, politics and the Left in Post-Soviet Russia* (London: Verso, 2022), 162–5; Petr Cherkasov, *IMEMO: Ocherk istorii* (Moscow: Ves' mir, 2016), 429–504; Evgeniy Kasakow, 'Dissens und Untergrund: Das Wiederaufkommen der linken oppositionellen Gruppen in der späten Brežnev-Zeit', in *Goldenes Zeitalter der Stagnation? Perspektiven auf die sowjetische Ordnung der Brežnev-Ära*, eds. Boris Belge and Martin Deuerlein (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014), 88–92; Carole Sigman, *Politicheskie kluby i Perestroika v Rossii: Oppozitsiia bez dissidentstva* (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2014), 91–3; Aleksandr Shubin, *Predannaia demokratiia: SSSR i neformaly, 1986–1989* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Evropa, 2006), 17–20; Natasha Wilson, 'Young and Socialist at Moscow State University: Dissident Subjectivities in the Last Soviet Generation', *Cahiers du monde russe* 62, no. 1–2 (2021), 75–100.

<sup>4</sup> Robert Brier, ed., *Entangled Protest: Transnational Approaches to the History of Dissent in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union* (Göttingen: Druckerei Hubert & Co., 2013); Friederike Kind-Kovács, *Written Here, Published There: How Underground Literature Crossed the Iron Curtain* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2014); Kacper Szulecki, *Dissidents in Communist Central Europe: Human Rights and the Emergence of New Transnational Actors* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019).

<sup>5</sup> Mark Hurst, *British Human Rights Organisations and Soviet Dissent, 1965–1985* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016); Sarah B. Snyder, *Human Rights Activism and the End of the Cold War: A Transnational History of the Helsinki Network* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Daniel C. Thomas, *The Helsinki Effect: International Norms, Human Rights and the Demise of Communism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

<sup>6</sup> A notable exception to this is: Tobias Rupprecht, 'The Blazing Continent: Latin American Folklore and Revolutionary Romanticism in the Cold War Soviet Union', in *Making Sense of the Americas: How Protest Related to America in the 1980s and Beyond*, eds. Jan Hansen, Christian Helm and Frank Reichherzer (Frankfurt: Campus Verlag, 2015), 346–9.

<sup>7</sup> For example, members of the Krasnopevtsev circle – a dissident group that was active in the MGU Faculty of History in the immediate post-Stalin years – travelled to Poland as part of a *Komsomol* delegation. The connections that they made with the Polish reformist intellectuals located around *Po Prostu* were later recognised by Soviet prosecutors of their criminal case as 'ties to international revisionism'. See: 'Vlast' i intelligentsia. "Delo" molodykh istorikov, 1957–1958 gg.', *Voprosy istorii*, no. 4 (1994): 106–35. In the mid-1970s, members of the Leningrad Opposition were attracted to Maoism and the Western New Left, although their lack of language skills and connections to samizdat networks restricted

younger generation of socialist dissidents, while remaining influenced by the reformist discourses of the Thaw, more frequently looked abroad – including to Eastern Europe – for the construction of dissenting left-wing identities.<sup>8</sup>

This article conceptualises Soviet dissent as an extra-systemic movement for reform on a continuum with establishment reformers in order to understand the dissident movement beyond the binary framework of opposition and as one part of a larger picture of the attempt to reform the Soviet system after Stalin.<sup>9</sup> This approach brings much needed attention to the movement's search for new methods to generate domestic change from the end of the 1970s, following the decimation of the *pravozashchitnik* current through imprisonment or emigration. The Polish success drove home to many Soviet activists how their own efforts had reached a dead end and pushed forward the re-thinking of tactics that was already underway in samizdat.<sup>10</sup> Through the eyes of the Young Socialists, the Polish example underscored the failure of the project of human rights dissent that had been initiated by the older generation. Socialist dissidents' reformist identities also allow us to consider how lower-level reformist clusters in the political-intellectual establishment responded to the international landscape of late socialism.<sup>11</sup> This contributes to recent efforts to add greater nuance to the stagnation paradigm through exploring how continued engagement with socialist ideology occurred alongside the well-trodden tropes of cynicism and decline.<sup>12</sup>

This article demonstrates how, in the minds of socialist dissidents based in Moscow and further afield in Minsk, internationalist values went hand in hand with the promotion of national cultures on the empire's periphery as a constructive rather than destructive project. The tendency for scholars and Cold War era commentators to treat human rights, nationalist, and socialist views as discrete currents in the Soviet dissident movement means that dissidents who fused the celebration of national cultures with socialist perspectives have remained an under-researched phenomenon. Rather than rejecting socialism in favour of nationalist ideologies, these dissidents maintained that the suppression of national cultures was part of the wider deformation of socialism.<sup>13</sup> Recent explorations of socialist internationalism have highlighted its enlivening effects on late socialist culture and its integrating qualities as an ideological project that drove alternative forms of globalisation.<sup>14</sup> This literature has

---

them to fragmented and romanticised impressions of these ideas. See: Dmitrii Rublev, "Novye levye" v SSSR', *Zhurnalnyi klub Intelros 'Alternativy'* (2) (2012): <http://www.intelros.ru/readroom/alternativi/a2-2012/15622-novye-levye-v-sssr.html>; Evgenii Kazakov and Dmitrii Rublev, "Koleso istorii ne vertelos', ono skatylalos'," *Levye podpol'e v Leningrade, 1975–1982*, *Neprikosnovennyi zapas* 91 (2013): [https://www.nlobooks.ru/magazines/neprikosnovennyi\\_zapas/91\\_nz\\_5\\_2013/article/10655](https://www.nlobooks.ru/magazines/neprikosnovennyi_zapas/91_nz_5_2013/article/10655).

<sup>8</sup> This tendency was reflected in the activities of the Young Socialists and the Leningrad Opposition, and other groups such as the Yellow Submarine Commune in Leningrad (1976–8), Youth for Communism in Moscow, Tula and Yaroslavl (1979–81), and the Pedagogical Kommunar Movement in Moscow (early 1980s), cited in Budraitskis, *Dissidents among Dissidents*, 154–6; Aleksandr Tarasov, 'Otkuda sut' poshli levye radikaly zemli sovetskoi?', *Panorama* (40) (December 1997): 10–12: <http://www.panorama.ru/gazeta/p40lev.html>.

<sup>9</sup> This is a reversal of earlier perspectives developed by some former establishment reformers, who re-imagined themselves as 'in-system dissidents' after the Soviet collapse. See: Archie Brown, *Seven Years that Changed the World: Perestroika in Perspective* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 164–6. See also: Philip Boobbyer, *Conscience, Dissent and Reform in Soviet Russia* (New York: Routledge, 2005).

<sup>10</sup> Elizabeth Teague, *Solidarity and the Soviet Worker: The Impact of Polish Events of 1980 on Soviet Internal Politics* (London: Croom Helm, 1988), 173–8.

<sup>11</sup> This complements the well-studied picture of the views of higher-ranking Soviet liberals, many of whom became influential reformers during Perestroika. See: Robert D. English, *Russia and the Idea of the West: Gorbachev, Intellectuals, and the End of the Cold War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000); Silvio Pons and Michele Di Donato, 'Reform Communism', in *The Cambridge History of Communism, Vol. 3: End Games*, eds. Juliane Furst, Silvio Pons and Mark Selden (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 195–9.

<sup>12</sup> Dina Fainberg and Artemy Kalinovskii, 'Stagnation and its Discontents: The Creation of a Political and Historical Paradigm', in *Reconsidering Stagnation in the Brezhnev Era: Ideology and Exchange*, eds. Dina Fainberg and Artemy Kalinovskii (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2016), xiv.

<sup>13</sup> Budraitskis, *Dissidents among Dissidents*, 148–51.

<sup>14</sup> For the impact of socialist internationalism on late socialist culture, see Peter Ápor and James Mark, 'Socialism Goes Global: Decolonisation and the Making of a New Culture of Internationalism in Socialist Hungary, 1956–1989',

predominantly focused on interactions between the Second and Third Worlds. Shifting the lens to concentrate on dynamics inside the Eastern Bloc itself, I consider how cultures of internationalism provided room for the growth of sympathetic attitudes in Moscow to national movements on the Soviet and Eastern European periphery, and inspired fluid practices of socialist dissent. These solidarities were attached to notions of Eastern Europe as a more advanced laboratory of reform and protest. This included the calculation that the outer empire might show the way to socialist reform, to overcome the growing political decay of the final Brezhnev years. I draw on samizdat materials from the Russian and Polish archives and the former archives of Radio Free Europe, including an interview prepared by the Young Socialists in the summer of 1981 for the left-wing French journal, *L'Alternative*, which was published in Paris a month before their arrests.<sup>15</sup> These sources are supplemented with oral history interviews that I conducted with the Young Socialists in Russia and Poland between 2016 and 2019.

### Socialist Dissent in Moscow in the Late Brezhnev Era

In the summer of 1977, Andrei Fadin and Pavel Kudiukin, both recent graduates of the MGU Faculty of History, began recruiting for an underground socialist organisation. The two future dissident leaders believed in socialism's potential while condemning the growing decline that they observed in everyday life. After a childhood that was infused with the glow of Thaw era optimism, signs of slowdown and corruption spurred them to civic activism. From their university years, they came to believe that the Soviet bureaucracy's evaporating revolutionary idealism had permeated state propaganda and trickled down to influence the level of the everyday, where they saw that socialist ideology was failing to mobilise other youth in their midst. This reality was vividly captured in the routinised activism of the *Komsomol* [All-Union Leninist Young Communist League] – an institution that in their eyes had been repurposed into a career building factory. But the internationalist values promoted through official education gave an alternative vision to seize upon. As was the case for a politicised minority of their generation, their disaffection from the stagnating political culture at home was counterweighted by the idealistic pull of the revolutionary wars and foreign socialist experiments that were taking place in the Global South. Their admiration for foreign revolutionaries acted as a powerful initial impulse for their journey toward dissent. However, this leftism distanced them from the most prominent figures in the Soviet dissident movement, whom they viewed as overly sympathetic to the capitalist West.<sup>16</sup>

Full of youthful radicalism, Fadin and Kudiukin tapped their wider social networks to contact other young intellectuals who shared their left-wing orientation and commitment to underground methods. The first co-conspirator became the mining engineer Mikhail Rivkin (b. 1954), who had been

---

*The Journal of Modern History* 87, no. 4 (2015): 852–91; Péter Apor, James Mark, Piotr Oseka and Radina Vucetic, “We are with you, Vietnam”: Transnational Solidarities in Socialist Hungary, Poland and Yugoslavia’, *Journal of Contemporary History* 50, no. 3 (2015): 439–64; Tobias Rupprecht, *Soviet Internationalism after Stalin: Interaction and Exchange between the USSR and Latin America during the Cold War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015). On socialist internationalism as an outward facing political, economic and cultural project, see: Rachel Applebaum, *Empire of Friends: Soviet Power and Socialist Internationalism in Cold War Czechoslovakia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2019); Rossen Djagalov, *From Internationalism to Post Colonialism: Literature and Cinema between the Second and Third Worlds* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2020); James Mark, Artemii M. Kalinovskii and Steffi Marung, eds., *Alternative Globalisations: Eastern Europe and the Post-Colonial World* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2020); Kristin Roth-Ey, ed., *Socialist Internationalism and the Gritty Politics of the Particular: Second-Third World Spaces in the Cold War* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2023); Chris Saunders, Helder Adegar Fonseca and Lena Dallywater, eds., *Eastern Europe, the Soviet Union, and Africa: New Perspectives on the Era of Decolonisation, 1950s to 1990s* (Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2023); Oscar Sibony Sanchez, *Red Globalisation: The Political Economy of the Soviet Union from Stalin to Khrushchev* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

<sup>15</sup> The interview appeared as ‘L’Almanach “Variantes,” Une interview de membres de la rédaction’, *L’Alternative* no. 15 (Apr.–May 1982): 7–12. It was republished in Russian by Radio Free Europe in their *arkhiv samizdata* collection (Vera and Donald Blinken Open Society Archives (hereafter OSA) f. 300, s.f. 85, c. 9. Published Samizdat, box 111, AS 4619), which is the text I have relied on in this analysis.

<sup>16</sup> ‘Beseda s Pavlom Mikhailovichem Kudyukinyim o s.d. organizatsii rubezha 70-x-80-x godov, besedoval K.N. Morozov’: [http://socialist.memo.ru/1991/kudiukin\\_interview.html](http://socialist.memo.ru/1991/kudiukin_interview.html).

unsuccessfully searching for an active human rights-oriented organisation to join. But when a mutual friend introduced them, Rivkin was left with the impression that Fadin ‘was ready to go to the barricades with whoever wanted to follow him’.<sup>17</sup> This sense of tangible action attracted him into the circle’s orbit, despite his indifference to left-wing ideas. The next summer, the trio were joined by the chemist Vladimir Chernetskii (b. 1950) and engineer Iurii Khavkin (b. 1949), who were school friends that shared social democratic views. The final recruit to the inner circle was the younger State Institute of Theatrical Arts (GITIS) student Boris Kagarlitskii (b. 1958) in fall 1978. These core individuals were the editors and most active contributors to *Varianty* and *Sotsializm i budushchee* and oversaw the circle’s conspiratorial measures. They were at the centre of a larger constellation of roughly fifty people, who were attached to friendship networks of current and former students in the MGU Faculty of History or were researchers at IMEMO, where Fadin and Kudiukin worked from 1978 until their arrests in 1982. This outer circle contributed to the content, preparation, distribution and readership of the samizdat journals and they discussed ideas and exchanged literature in both conspiratorial and everyday friendship settings.

Mainly from families of the party nomenklatura and intelligentsia, the Young Socialists’ privileged status was manifested not only in material surroundings but through their access to the cultural and intellectual resources of late Soviet society. This extended to high-ranking parents sharing restricted information on politically sensitive topics, as was the case in Tatiana Vorozheikina’s family, or the practice of French being the second language spoken at home, as occurred in the classical intelligentsia family of Konstantin Baranovskii.<sup>18</sup> Some were graduates of elite magnet schools with English language instruction where, as Olga Ivanova (later Fadina) remembered, selected teachers were the wives of former Soviet ambassadors to English-speaking countries, who brought toys, books and other materials from the West to their classes.<sup>19</sup> These elite origins assisted in paving the way to MGU, where the Young Socialists were able to cultivate networks that saw them become graduate students at the prestigious IMEMO. Their golden youth pedigree was also essential for instilling the sense of rebellion that was required to contemplate the risky journey into underground opposition. In some cases, families also acted as formative intellectual influences.<sup>20</sup> Kagarlitskii later reflected on the passionate kitchen table debates that his parents and their *shestidesiatniki* [‘people of the 1960s’] friends engaged in.<sup>21</sup> The socialist views of this older generation were transferred and became mixed with the Western neo-Marxist influences that Kagarlitskii sought out on his own.

This dedicated interest in dissident politics and socialist ideology distinguishes the Young Socialists from Alexei Yurchak’s portrait of the last Soviet generation, whom he framed as neither oppositional, nor conformist, but rather drawn to alternative cultures and their private lives. It points to the continued political engagement that occurred among a small yet influential subset of the *semidesiatniki* [‘people of the 1970s’]. More readily visible to the historian’s eye due to the well-publicised nature of their dissident case, the Young Socialists represent the tip of the iceberg of politicised *semidesiatniki*, whose less radical members remain a semi-submerged tendency in the cultural history of the Brezhnev era. Moreover, their case demonstrates how in exceptional cases forms of state-based knowledge production and the academic networks at the top of the late Soviet political-intellectual establishment could intertwine with and inform practices of dissent. This approach contributes to scholarly agendas of breaking down the boundaries separating official and unofficial cultures in the study of late socialism to emphasise dissidents’ embeddedness in late Soviet culture.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Mikhail Rivkin and Andrei Shilkov, ‘Delo Moskovskikh sotsialistov’, *Glasnost* no. 29 (1989): 238.

<sup>18</sup> Interview with Igor Dolutskii and Tatiana Vorozheikina, Moscow, 21 Nov. 2016.

<sup>19</sup> Interview with Olga Fadina, Moscow, 4 Nov. 2016.

<sup>20</sup> For a more detailed analysis of the influence of these dissidents’ families on their political development, see Wilson, ‘Young and Socialist at Moscow State University’.

<sup>21</sup> Interview with Boris Kagarlitskii, Moscow, 28 Nov. 2016.

<sup>22</sup> Benjamin Nathans, ‘The Many Shades of Soviet Dissidence’, *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian Studies* 23, no. 1 (2022): 186; Benjamin Nathans, ‘The Dictatorship of Reason: Aleksandr Vol’pin and the Idea of Rights under “Developed Socialism”’, *Slavic Review* 66, no. 4 (2007): 632–33; Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever*, 4–5.

Over the first two years of the Young Socialists' existence, the radical mood that had sparked the circle's beginnings began to dissipate as they reluctantly concluded that the socio-economic conditions necessary for their ideas to succeed were absent from Soviet society. Their early political programmes had advocated building a popular movement for democratic reform among the Soviet working class. This direction echoed other dissident initiatives at the end of the 1970s focused on defending workers' rights, which have thus far received little attention from historians. The most well-known of these organisations, the Free Inter-Professional Association of Workers (SMOT), aimed to fulfil similar functions to the Workers' Defence Committee (KOR) in Poland that had been established two years earlier, through the provision of legal, moral and financial help to its members, but due to repression and SMOT's limited network, these aspirations remained unfulfilled.<sup>23</sup> This example fits into the overall darkening picture of détente's collapse – from 1979 to 1982, dissident arrests tripled from their levels in the mid-1970s.<sup>24</sup>

In addition to increased state repression, the Young Socialists determined that the greatest barrier to a worker-intellectual coalition was Soviet workers' lack of understanding of their class as a 'subject of historical action'.<sup>25</sup> Without a solution to worker disinterest, the Young Socialists opted to lay low while awaiting the economic crisis that they anticipated would create more favourable conditions for activism, and instead dedicated themselves to the production of *Varianty*. The circle's major project, their samizdat journal was a forum for intellectual exploration that was aimed at developing the group's scientific understanding of Soviet society. *Varianty* was an annually issued theoretical almanac that was passed around by hand within the circle. According to an anonymous source close to the Young Socialists, *Varianty's* ideological influences ranged from 'currents of Western Marxism (from Bernstein to Gramsci, Sartre, Marcuse)' and 'the experience and ideas of the Eastern European reformers (Sik, Brus, Kornai, the reformers of the Prague Spring and *Solidarność*) [and] self-governing market socialism'. Its authors were interested 'not only in revisionism, but also in the reformist traditions of the workers' movement'.<sup>26</sup> *Sotsializm i budushchee* was mainly Kagarlitskii's affair, which he produced out of a desire to publish 'something more frequently issued, activist-oriented, and above all, popular'.<sup>27</sup>

From late-1978, the Young Socialists' thinking was enhanced by access to restricted academic resources as their network stretched into IMEMO. This premier foreign affairs institute was the product of the Thaw era leadership's renewed demand for international relations expertise in the wake of the country's re-engagement with the outside world after 1956.<sup>28</sup> It was one of the free-thinking 'oases' that existed inside state structures, with a research community that operated in conditions of relative intellectual freedom as it produced scientific analyses of the outside world.<sup>29</sup> The hierarchical structure of Soviet research institutes brought different generations together under one roof. As Latin Americanists, Fadin and Vorozheikina worked in the Department of Economics and Politics of the Developing Countries. They formed relationships with senior scholars whom Tobias Rupperecht has called 'desk revolutionaries' – *shestidesiatniki* intellectuals, who remained committed to internationalism and continued to creatively engage with Marxism within their research into the 1980s.<sup>30</sup> This department was also home to Marat Cheshkov and Viktor Sheinis, who had both suffered persecution

<sup>23</sup> Alekseeva, *Soviet Dissent*, 409–10.

<sup>24</sup> Peter Reddaway, 'Soviet Policies towards Dissent, 1953–1985', *Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies* 24, no. 1–2 (2012): 60.

<sup>25</sup> These issues were explored by Kudiukin, who documented his views on the problems faced by intellectuals attempting to create a successful worker-intellectual alliance for SMOT founding member Vsevolod Kuvakin. They were published a year later as: 'Programma ekonomicheskoi bor'by rabocheho klassa, blizhaishie trebovaniia', *Levyi Povорот* no. 2 (Autumn 1979): 2–4. FSO-01-078. Fond of Viktor Sokirko, Forschungsstelle Osteuropa Archiv, Bremen.

<sup>26</sup> Anonymous (likely Boris Kagarlitskii), 'Otkliki', *Problemy vostochnoi evropy* no. 11–12 (1985): 311–12.

<sup>27</sup> 'Delo Moskovskikh sotsialistov', interview of Boris Kagarlitskii by Aleksei Sochnev: <https://rusplt.ru/society/delomolodiyh-sotsialistov-14624.html>.

<sup>28</sup> See Cherkasov, *IMEMO*.

<sup>29</sup> Vladislav Zubok, *Zhivago's Children: The Last Russian Intelligentsia* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2009), 322.

<sup>30</sup> See Rupperecht, *Soviet Internationalism after Stalin*, 230–83.

for their participation in well-known acts of socialist dissent during the Thaw.<sup>31</sup> Together with Fadin's academic supervisor, the eminent Latin Americanist Kiva Maidanik, these senior researchers were readers of *Varianty*, who later became implicated as witnesses in the KGB investigation of the circle. Transmitting elements of *shestidesiatniki* culture to the younger dissidents, their living memories of Soviet socialism's earlier decades of promise and vitality provided crucial emotional sustenance for the younger dissidents in the unappealing environment of stagnation. These elder intellectuals' roles as carriers of reformist and internationalist ideas were critical at a time when these ideas had fallen out of fashion among a wider society.

The scholarly training that the Young Socialists encountered at IMEMO added greater academic rigour to their leftism. Kudiukin's graduate research in the Department of Sociopolitical Problems of Capitalism focused on the Spanish Socialist Workers' Party during the post-Franco transition from authoritarianism. His knowledge of the Spanish context informed the circle's discussions of the possible dynamics of a comparable Soviet liberalisation. Their samizdat projects received additional stimulus from their access to the institute's *spetskhran* ('special collections') that contained foreign scholarship and white TASS (classified Soviet and Western news reports) – information that presented a deeper view of foreign and domestic events than was available to ordinary Soviet citizens. This well-informed picture pushed the circle's thinking in a pronounced reformist direction, as they saw greater application for reform rather than revolution in Soviet conditions, although Third Worldist movements continued to hold an affective sway over their worldviews.

Their perspectives were geographically more expansive than those held by Thaw-era socialist dissident circles, who were responding to the Soviet environment of de-Stalinisation and the uprisings that occurred in Poland and Hungary. It was not just the Young Socialists' heightened access to information that produced the circle's wider range of foreign ideological influences – over the two intervening decades, the shocks set off by the Twentieth Party Congress had rippled through the fraternal communist parties and stimulated reformist directions that made some of them openly critical of the Soviet experience. In 1956, the Soviet Union had been the hegemonic leader of the international communist movement. But by the late Brezhnev years, a number of alternatives to the Soviet model had crystallised that gave the second generation of socialist dissidents a wider pool of influences to draw from. These included the parliamentary road to socialism espoused by the Western European communist parties, new left movements of radical reformism, or cases further afield, such as the democratic socialist experiment in Chile, and the Prague Spring closer to home.

The Young Socialists' first years of dissent were shaped by the rise of Eurocommunism. According to Kagarlitskii, it was encountered by the circle as 'engaging and even radical', compared to the 'over chewed gum that had long since lost its taste of Brezhnevite agitprop'.<sup>32</sup> In similar terms, Rivkin claimed the Eurocommunists were 'cult figures' that they often debated about while walking on the snowy streets of Moscow.<sup>33</sup> The Eurocommunist parties' increasingly critical attitudes toward Soviet communism gave greater authority to the Young Socialists' own conviction that the Soviet bureaucracy was an exploiting class, heading a socioeconomic formation that was post-capitalist yet not socialist, and unanticipated by Marx.<sup>34</sup> While a range of left-wing thinkers, including Leon Trotsky and

<sup>31</sup> Cheshkov (b. 1932) had belonged to the above mentioned Krasnopedtsev circle and served seven years in the camps for his dissident activities; see Robert Hornsby, *Protest, Reform and Repression in Khrushchev's Soviet Union* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 105–6. Sheinis (b. 1931) was expelled from his studies for publishing a Leninist critique of the Hungarian invasion; see Kathleen E. Smith, *Moscow 1956: The Silenced Spring* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2017), 295–7.

<sup>32</sup> Boris Kagarlitskii, 'Epokha tupikovikh diskusii', *Zhurnalnyi klub Interlos 'neprikosnovennyi zapas'* no. 2 (2007): [http://www.intelros.ru/readroom/nz/2\\_52/1284-jepokha\\_tupikovykh\\_diskussijj.html](http://www.intelros.ru/readroom/nz/2_52/1284-jepokha_tupikovykh_diskussijj.html).

<sup>33</sup> Mikhail Rivkin, 'Otvety na voprosy P. Butova, chast' 3', Aug. 2007: <http://igrunov.ru/vin/vchk-vin-dissid/dissidents/rivkin/1199098648.html>.

<sup>34</sup> Citations to Eurocommunists were sprinkled throughout *Levyi povorot/Sotsializm i budushchee*. See, for example: 'Comrade Santiago Carrillo, the leader of the Spanish Communist Party, is obviously correct in saying that the Soviet Union is not a working-class state but is located somewhere between capitalism and socialism' (*Marxism Today*, Oct. 1978, 302). Boris Kagarlitskii, 'Nekotorye predvaritel'nye zamechaniia', *Levyi povorot* no. 1 (Summer 1979): 1.

Milovan Djilas, informed this perspective, their ideas were re-contextualised by the Young Socialists into a critique directed to how Brezhnev-era economic decline emerged from the bureaucratic distortions of socialism.<sup>35</sup> What the Young Socialists broadly concluded was that a concrete programme of social and economic demands to appeal to society was the way forward.<sup>36</sup> This conviction had already crystallised when a powerful strike movement that was achieving victories against the state sprung up in Poland.

### Poland, August 1980: Eastern Europe in the Soviet Dissident Imagination

On the eve of the strikes in Poland, the Young Socialists felt a growing sense of hopelessness toward the state's seemingly sharp grip on society and the worsening international environment. Observing the controversy surrounding the Moscow Olympics, Fadin, Kudiukin and Khavkin remarked that a revealing indicator of the mood of society was its strong backing of the Soviet leadership's condemnation of the US-led boycott of the games. They linked this popular approval to a widespread imperial psychology that reinforced support for the regime.<sup>37</sup> The repercussions of the collapse of détente, embodied by the boycott, were experienced more painfully by the internationally facing parts of the intelligentsia. The prominent Americanist scholar Nikolai Bolkhovitinov remembered the prevailing atmosphere of xenophobia as 'reaction fitting the depictions of the city of Ibansk' – the fictitious town of Aleksandr Zinoviev's brilliant satire of late Soviet reality, *The Yawning Heights*.<sup>38</sup> Creeping economic deficiencies were reported by the dissident historian Roy Medvedev as he asserted that in 1979 the country had entered 'a third period of "the Brezhnev era"' that was characterised by 'renewed social and economic crisis'.<sup>39</sup> In spite of these encircling difficulties and the deep freeze of anti-foreign reaction recorded by critical intellectual observers, at the beginning of the 1980s the Soviet system appeared to many to be indestructible.

The explosion of the Polish strikes in August 1980 altered the political calculus of late socialism. The Young Socialists were shaken out of their growing pessimism by a strong workers' opposition taking shape across the border. Elements of the Polish intelligentsia and the working class had united in nationwide strikes in protest at the rise in meat prices and demanded wage increases.<sup>40</sup> KOR publicised information about the strikes in the face of false reporting from the state media and offered financial and legal support to strikers. After a month, strike leader Lech Walesa called for the right to form independent trade unions; a demand that resulted in the founding of Solidarność in September 1980.<sup>41</sup> The strikes forced the PZPR to the negotiating table and it began to pursue a conciliatory and reformist course. The tactics of an intelligentsia-worker alliance appeared to have generated success. The Young Socialists' ecstatic response to the strikes was balanced by their more measured assessment that the Poles were far out in front of Soviet society in their capacity to develop civic structures from below. Fadin, Kudiukin and Khavkin noted in 1981: 'Of course, to reach the Polish level, we still have to grow and develop – it should be kept in mind that Poland was the least totalitarian society in Eastern Europe.'<sup>42</sup>

The Young Socialists' understanding of the events in Poland were shaped by a longer-term discourse that had developed among Soviet dissidents and within parts of the reformist intelligentsia,

<sup>35</sup> Issues of *Sotsializm i budushchee* referenced Leon Trotsky's *The Revolution Betrayed*, Milovan Djilas' *New Class*, 1960s socialist dissidents Valerii Ronkin and Sergei Khakhaev's *From the Dictatorship of the Bureaucracy to the Dictatorship of the Proletariat*, Mikhail Voslenskii's *Nomenklatura*, Cheshkov's IMEMO publications on bureaucratic class rule in the Third World; on the influence of Trotsky, Voslenskii, and Cheshkhov on the circle see interview with Pavel Kudiukin, Moscow, 1 Dec. 2016.

<sup>36</sup> AS 4619, 19.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>38</sup> Sergei I. Zhuk, *Nikolai Bolkhovitinov and American Studies in the USSR* (London: Lexington Books, 2017), 215.

<sup>39</sup> Roy Medvedev, 'The Soviet Union at the Beginning of a New Era: Stages in the Development of Society and the Political Leadership in the USSR', *The Socialist Register* 20 (1983): 196.

<sup>40</sup> Jan Jozef Lipski, *KOR: A History of the Workers' Defense Committee in Poland, 1976–1981* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 30–41.

<sup>41</sup> 'Chronology of Events', in *From Solidarity to Martial Law: The Polish Crisis of 1980–1981, A Documentary History*, eds. Andrzej Paczkowski and Malcolm Byrne (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2007), xxviii–vliii.

<sup>42</sup> AS 4619, 22.



who saw Eastern Europe as a space of more advanced reformist and oppositional trends.<sup>43</sup> The appeal of this interpretation limited the Young Socialists' appreciation of Solidarność's strong Catholic and conservative elements. Rather, they primarily viewed the independent trade union to be a vehicle for socialist reform. The prospect of Eastern Europe leading the way first emerged during the Thaw, when the *shestidesiatniki* viewed the impulses crystallising in the newly installed people's democracies as potential tools for their own anti-Stalinist project. These Soviet intellectuals of the 1950s and 1960s derived inspiration from ideological trends concentrated around particular thinkers and intellectual circles and the policy innovations that were advanced by Eastern European party reformers. However, by the 1970s and 1980s, Soviet intellectuals' views of Eastern European reformism had shifted. The main remaining advocates of following this experience were isolated groupings of economists in Soviet research institutes.<sup>44</sup> The Young Socialists' fascination with Eastern European revisionism was an unfashionable current of dissent in these later years.

For many Soviet dissidents, reports of intermittent protests, especially in Poland, suggested a stronger social base for opposition that aroused their envy and replaced their admiration for Eastern Europe's earlier promise of party-led reform.<sup>45</sup> Meanwhile, many of the Eastern European socialist intellectuals of the 1950s and 1960s had shed their illusions about Marxism, or their ideas had sharpened in oppositional directions. Jacek Kuron and Karol Modzelewski, who had authored the *Open Letter to the Party* that inspired the Polish student protests in 1968, had become leading personalities of KOR and the Polish strike movement.<sup>46</sup> Gyorgy Bence and Janos Kis, who in the 1960s had been young intellectuals associated with the Marxist philosopher Gyorgy Lukacs and the Budapest School, were prominent figures in the Hungarian democratic opposition by the late-1970s. An awareness that the spiritual journey toward opposition was experienced beyond their own national communities was important for many Soviet and Eastern European dissidents, and spurred declarations of mutual solidarity and proposals of cooperation from the late-1970s between the Moscow Helsinki group, Charter 77, and KOR.<sup>47</sup>

Yet perceptions of the reformist potential of Eastern Europe were passed down to a new generation of socialist dissidents, and this influenced their reception of the Polish strikes of 1980. Aleksandr Skobov (b.1957), a radical socialist based in Leningrad who was interned in a psychiatric facility that year for his oppositional activities, later reflected: 'Each generation of dissidents had one such event . . . [in the Eastern Bloc that] demonstrated that the regime is still vulnerable, and a large opposition movement is possible. If it is possible there, then it is possible with us.'<sup>48</sup> The Young Socialists

<sup>43</sup> Analyses of how Eastern Europe challenged notions of Soviet superiority and was simultaneously able to represent the Soviet past and future in the Soviet imagination can be found in: Anne E. Gorsuch, 'Time Travellers: Soviet Tourists to Eastern Europe', in *Turizm: The Russian and East European Tourist under Capitalism and Socialism*, eds. Anne E. Gorsuch and Diane P. Koenker (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006), 206, and Michael David-Fox, 'The Iron Curtain as a Semi-Permeable Membrane: Origins and Demise of the Stalinist Superiority Complex', in *Cold War Crossings: International Travel and Exchange across the Soviet Bloc, 1940s–1960s*, eds. Patryk Babiracki and Kenyon Zimmer (Arlington: University of Texas at Arlington, 2014), 32. On Eastern Europe as a laboratory for reform that held difficult lessons for Soviet policy makers, see Chris Miller, *The Struggle to Save the Soviet Economy: Mikhail Gorbachev and the Collapse of the USSR* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2016), 12–17.

<sup>44</sup> For the 1970s, see: English, *Russia and the Idea of the West*, 146; for the 1980s, see: Pekka Sutela, *Economic Thought and Economic Reform in the Soviet Union* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 126–8.

<sup>45</sup> Tatiana Kosinova, "'Solidarność': vzgliad s Vostoka': <https://polit.ru/articles/strana/solidarnosc-vzglyad-s-vostoka-2006-09-05/>; Elizabeth Teague, 'The Polish Events Reflected in Samizdat', in *Solidarity and the Soviet Worker* (New York: Croom Helm, 1988), 159–92; Zubok, *Zhivago's Children*, 284–5.

<sup>46</sup> Raymond Taras, 'Marxist Critiques of Political Crises in Poland', in *The Road to Disillusion: From Critical Marxism to Post-Communism in Eastern Europe*, ed. Raymond Taras (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1992), 85–8.

<sup>47</sup> Brier provides a detailed list of the different forms of transnational communication and support that occurred among dissidents. See Brier, *Entangled Protest*, 21. These links were especially concerning to the Soviet authorities and were reported by Andropov to the Central Committee in the lead-up to Sakharov's exile to Gorkii. 'Document 136, Andropov and Rudenko to the Central Committee', 26 Dec. 1979, in *The KGB File of Andrei Sakharov*, eds. Joshua Rubinstein and Aleksandr Gribanov (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 243–4.

<sup>48</sup> Interview with Aleksandr Skobov, St Petersburg, 1991–2, cited in Tatiana Kosinova, "'Solidarność': vzgliad s Vostoka': <https://polit.ru/articles/strana/solidarnosc-vzglyad-s-vostoka-2006-09-05/>.

calculated that the Polish events were a possible signal that another East European communist leadership, this time under society's influence, was moving towards democratic socialism – a process that would have bloc-wide repercussions and could eventually drive the Soviet leaders in the same direction. But in the Polish events, they also saw renewed justification for their own dissent. Vladimir Pribylovskii, a member from the wider circle, positively evaluating *Sotsializm i budushchee's* editors' promotion of independent trade unionism, asserted: 'Poland showed that if you win with anything, you win with this.'<sup>49</sup> The Young Socialists concluded that the Polish authorities' concessions to the workers' movement confirmed the correctness of the tactics of 'reform from above under pressure from below' that they had formulated in earlier theoretical discussions. Yet their leaders remained cautious in this prognosis, remarking to their Parisian *L'Alternative* interviewers: 'There are, of course, reserves [of public support for popular reform in the Soviet Union] but to mobilise them, tremendous work and a change in the general spiritual climate in the country is needed.'<sup>50</sup> The Young Socialists, from the periphery of the dissident movement, called for its use of new tactics to generate change. From the mid-1970s the Soviet authorities pursued a harder line towards opposition, gradually decimating the human rights movement with successive arrests, internments in psychiatric institutions, exile and forced emigration that reached a climax at the end of détente.<sup>51</sup> This increasing repression occurred alongside the movement's growing sense of its own isolation. Symptomatic of this thinking was the appearance of the samizdat journal *Poiski* (Quest) in 1978, which involved the participation of many well-known names of dissent whose discussion was directed to a 'reset' of the movement and a collaborative search for new methods. The Polish strikes brought this trend into even sharper relief, and a conversation occurred within the dissident movement in 1980–81 about the reasons for the Polish success and their own failure. The Young Socialists, contributing to this dialogue, commented:

It is obvious that there is a crisis of dissent in its traditional forms . . . The settings of traditional dissent – the priority of the development of legal and half-legal public organisations – turned out to be low in effectiveness – the human rights movement to an excessively great degree was forced to be a self-defence movement.<sup>52</sup>

The enduring perception that Eastern Europe was a space of comparable dynamics and experience, yet simultaneously a more advanced setting for the trends of reform and opposition, made the wide gulf that separated the turning points reached by the two movements in 1980 a watershed moment for Soviet dissent.

### **From Moscow to Minsk: National Cultures, Internationalism, and Dissent**

Solidarność's strike victories and civil society initiatives in 1980–81 were eagerly followed by the Young Socialists, whose discussions were enhanced by the inclusion of a new participant in their circle. Nikolai Ivanov (b. 1948) made regular journeys to Poland from 1978 under the aegis of Polish-Soviet scientific cooperation at the University of Wrocław. He married a Pole with whom he had a son in May 1980 and formed connections to the Polish opposition following the August strikes.<sup>53</sup> Ivanov was introduced to the Young Socialists in 1979 by his colleague at the Institute of History of the

<sup>49</sup> Vladimir Pribylovskii, 'Retseziia 'O zhurnale *Levyi Povorot/SB*, prednaznachennia dlia publikatsii v samizdat'skom zhurnale *Varianty*', dated by RFE as before Apr. 1982, 4. OSA f. 300, s.f. 80, c.1, box 880, folder, *Levyi Povorot/Varianty*.

<sup>50</sup> AS 4619, 20.

<sup>51</sup> Viktor Voronkov and Jan Wielgohs, 'Country Studies: Soviet Russia', in *Dissent and Opposition in Communist Eastern Europe: Origins of Civil Society and Democratic Transition*, eds. Detlef Pollack and Jan Wielgohs (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2004), 105–6.

<sup>52</sup> AS 4619, 17–18.

<sup>53</sup> 'Kwestionariusz osobowy dla cudzoziemcow: skladajacych podanie o zezwolenie na pobyt staly w Polskiej Rzeczypospolitej Ludowej', 5 Sept. 1984. Institute of National Remembrance (IPN), Warsaw. Personal file of Nikolai Ivanov, IPN WR 237/2642 4, 15–16.

Belarusian Academy of Sciences, Oleg Bukhovets (b. 1949), who had been part of the Young Socialists' *kompaniia* (friendship group) during their earlier MGU years and was posted to Minsk in 1977. During the course of the friendship that developed between the two scholars, Bukhovets sensed that Ivanov shared his friends' critical attitudes, and he told the other Belarusian of Fadin and Kudiukin's dissenting endeavours.<sup>54</sup> Ivanov's own critical views were more novel in the provincial setting of Minsk. At that time, he was a neo-Leninist, believing that Stalinist distortions continued to disfigure the system. In the conditions of the Soviet periphery, he seized on Belarusian national culture and identity as a language of resistance to signal his non-conformism and discontent with Brezhnev era socialism. Symptomatic of the Sovietisation policies that emanated from the centre, its status was declining in the Belarusian public sphere, and had become a reserve for those with critical attitudes.<sup>55</sup>

Ivanov promoted Belarusian cultural identity in his career as a historian. His first book, *Critique of the Falsification of the History of the Construction of Socialism in the BSSR, 1921–1937* (1980), emerged from his postgraduate dissertation of 1977. This work made non-Soviet histories of Soviet Belarus and Western scholarly arguments of the destruction of non-Russian national cultures under Soviet rule more accessible to Belarusian scholars.<sup>56</sup> This practice of engaging with foreign scholarship under the pretext of criticising its ideological perspectives was a typical device for evading censorship and bringing new ideas into circulation in late-Soviet academia. Ivanov found another outlet for his 'other-thinking' as a young associate professor at the Belarusian State University in the late 1970s, through delivering his lectures on the history of the Soviet Union in the Belarusian language.<sup>57</sup>

Ivanov's association with the Young Socialists radicalised his views and took him down the path of dissent. He was introduced to Fadin and Kudiukin in 1979 by Bukhovets during one of their periodic trips to Moscow to carry out research in the state archives. The luxurious setting of Fadin's home on Kutuzovskii prospekt and the delicacies and fine alcohol that accompanied the Young Socialists' kitchen talks impressed the provincial scholar. But what made the greatest impression was the erudition of their political discussions that stemmed from their ready access to Moscow's incomparable intellectual resources.<sup>58</sup> Samizdat production and its reader networks were largely Moscow-centric, while the lengthy lines outside the reading rooms of Moscow and Leningrad libraries attested to the concentration of scholarly literature in the two capitals.<sup>59</sup> The provincial scholar's association with the circle opened a channel for his own access to these materials. Fadin and Kudiukin passed on samizdat that detailed a Soviet past that was hitherto unknown to him as a professional historian. He was deeply affected by the revelations of the Red Terror of the Russian civil war and the establishment of the Solovki camp in the 1920s. Ivanov recalled of the description of the Gulag Archipelago, 'Every single word of this book, it was . . . just a great event.'<sup>60</sup> In Moscow after his days in the archives, Ivanov was introduced to the circle's conspiratorial methods. He would meet Fadin and learned counter-surveillance techniques for evading the KGB from the more experienced dissident, which involved Fadin tailing him and challenging him to escape his surveillance.<sup>61</sup> His experience of dissident life in Moscow emboldened him to create the samizdat journal *Novaia nasha niva* (Our New Cornfield) in Minsk in 1979 with Bukhovets and their older colleague, Zolotnikov. It was written

<sup>54</sup> Interview with Nikolai Ivanov, Wrocław, 19 Sept. 2016.

<sup>55</sup> David R. Marples, *Belarus: A Denationalised Nation* (Amsterdam: Overseas Publishers' Association, 1999), 19–23; Tatsiana Astrouskaia, *Cultural Dissent in Soviet Belarus: Intelligentsia, Samizdat and Non-Conformist Discourses, 1968–1988* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2019), 74.

<sup>56</sup> For example, Ivanov introduced Robert Conquest's work on Soviet nationalities policies to the Belarusian audience; see N. L. Ivanov, *Kritika fal'sifikatsii istorii sotsialisticheskogo stroitel'stva v BSSR: 1921–1937 gg.* (Minsk: Nauka i tekhnika, 1980), 116.

<sup>57</sup> Interview with Nikolai Ivanov, Wrocław, 8 Dec. 2016.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>59</sup> David L. Ruffley, *Children of Victory: Young Specialists and the Evolution of Soviet Society* (London: Praeger, 2003), 154.

<sup>60</sup> Interview with Ivanov, 8 Dec. 2016.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 19 Sept. 2016.

in the Belarusian language and promoted the Belarusian cultural heritage with profiles of notable historical figures and independent accounts of the nation's history.<sup>62</sup>

From Moscow, the Young Socialists assisted by reproducing copies of *Novaia nasha niva* – an act that illustrated how the promotion of national cultures was not exclusive to socialist dissent on the periphery but also had supporters at the centre.<sup>63</sup> Arguments for expanded autonomy for the non-Russian republics were propagated in the Young Socialists' *Sotsializm i budushchee*, as national rights and voluntary inclusion in the union were viewed as natural features of democratic socialism. This particular understanding of the national question was a reflection of the circle's internalisation of internationalist values, where the non-Russian republics appeared as colonised subjects. A September 1980 article addressing the status of the Baltic states declared, 'If Russian [dissident] socialists really want unity, then they should prove that they have nothing in common with the Russian bureaucracy and should be ready to respect and understand the feelings of the representatives of the oppressed nations.'<sup>64</sup> The internationalist structures of thinking that informed these sympathetic views of national aspirations in the non-Russian republics help to account for why there was such little resistance to national independence movements from left-wing Russian grassroots political movements during Perestroika.

From 1980, Ivanov became captivated by the popular momentum of the strikes in Poland, which so visibly contrasted with the seemingly immovable Soviet domestic environment. This led him to extend his activism across national borders through his collaboration with the Polish opposition. His path from dissenting practices connected to his own national culture to sympathetic participation in a neighbouring state's opposition suggests that instead of being conflicting forces, nationalist and internationalist ideologies could be intertwined in a coherent system of values. Ivanov's distinctive outlook came from spending long periods in Poland as a visiting scholar. His experience differed from most other Soviet travellers, whose tightly controlled tourist trips afforded little opportunity for free and open contact with local populations.<sup>65</sup> Despite the large numbers of Soviet visitors to Eastern Europe, the 'outer empire' remained distant, as was revealed by the term *malen'kaia zagranitsa* (small abroad) that was used in Soviet popular parlance.<sup>66</sup> This was a contributing factor to the Polish workers' movement attracting little sympathy or understanding among the Soviet population outside of sections of the intelligentsia. Due to his Polish wife and son, he was permitted to visit Poland even after ordinary Soviet tourism was suspended in response to political unrest.<sup>67</sup> Although his Soviet citizenship made them understandably cautious, Ivanov made contact with Solidarność activists. He formed connections and later a close friendship with Kornel Morawiecki, who was a Solidarność organiser and co-edited *Biuletyn Dolnośląski* (Lower Silesia Bulletin).<sup>68</sup> The Polish independent press had exploded in 1980, when its reach expanded to hundreds of thousands of readers – a publishing capability and audience beyond the wildest dreams of Soviet samizdat publishers.<sup>69</sup> Ivanov

<sup>62</sup> This summary is based on the contents of the second issue of *Novaia nasha niva* no. 2 (Oct.–Dec. 1979): 1–29, personal archive of Nikolai Ivanov. According to Ivanov, a total of four to five issues were published and circulated among trusted friends.

<sup>63</sup> Interview with Pavel Kudiukin, Moscow, 7 Nov. 2016.

<sup>64</sup> 'K baltiiskomu voprosu', *Sotsializm i budushchee* no. 2 (Aug.–Sept. 1980): 6. Archive of Dissent in the USSR, Moscow Memorial, F. 128 Collection of Roy Medvedev, box 1, folder 'melkie zhurnaly nach 80-kh' (2).

<sup>65</sup> Robert Hornsby, 'Strengthening Friendship and Fraternal Solidarity: Soviet Youth Tourism to Eastern Europe under Khrushchev and Brezhnev', *Europe-Asia Studies* 71, no. 7 (2019): 1220.

<sup>66</sup> Andrei Kozovoi, 'Eye to Eye with the "Main Enemy": Soviet Youth Travel to the United States', *Ab Imperio* 2 (2011): 224.

<sup>67</sup> Zbigniew Wojnowski, *The Near Abroad: Socialist Eastern Europe and Soviet Patriotism in Ukraine, 1956–1985* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2017), 187.

<sup>68</sup> Krzysztof Brzechczyn, 'Freedom, Solidarity, Independence: Political Thought of the Fighting Solidarity Organisation', in *The Idea of Solidarity: Philosophical and Social Contexts*, ed. Dariusz Dobrzanski (Washington, DC: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2011), 160.

<sup>69</sup> Siobhan Doucette, *Books are Weapons: The Polish Opposition Press and the Overthrow of Communism* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2017), 13–14.

began to contribute to *Biuletyn Dolnośląski* as its ‘Soviet correspondent’ under the pseudonyms I. Mickiewicz, Jan Mickiewicz, W.S. Sidorow and Polak z za Buga on a schedule that was in sync with his trips to Poland, while his wife also acted as a courier on her own trips to and from Minsk.<sup>70</sup>

### From Moscow to Gdansk: The Young Socialists’ Letter to the First Congress of *Solidarność*, 1981

From Moscow, the Young Socialists closely followed Polish developments. Kudiukin had learned Polish at MGU out of an interest in Slavic archaeology, which had a rich literature in that language. He once again broke out his language textbooks to read Polish language reporting on *Solidarność*.<sup>71</sup> The circle also read detailed news on Poland in the white TASS reporting that was accessible at IMEMO, while the Paris-based Soviet émigré journal *Kontinent* that had close links to Polish intellectuals became another important source of information.<sup>72</sup> These materials informed their discussions on how to apply the Polish experience to Soviet conditions and confirmed the direction of a programme of social demands to build a broad underground coalition. Yet prospects in the Soviet domestic environment seemed no better than in 1978, when they were forced to admit that Soviet workers lacked interest in independent political activism. Moreover, actions to approach the working class contained even greater certainty of arrest in the climate of heightened repression. This intensified their gaze abroad. They seized upon Ivanov’s connections to Poland and selected the occasion of *Solidarność*’s founding congress in Gdansk, where the trade union’s leadership and organisational structures would take formal shape, in order for their internationalist greetings to have maximum impact.

On one reading, the decision to send a letter of encouragement and support to the Poles was the product of the bleak forecast for dissident activities in their own society. Their own inability to affect change from Moscow limited them to contacting *Solidarność* in the hope that change from outside would influence the Soviet leaders. It was an uncomfortable echo of the *pravozaschitniki*’s turn to the West a decade earlier. But it was also based on the Young Socialists’ assumption that the future of the Soviet Union was interlinked with the rest of the Eastern Bloc, and this territory constituted a single political space. Their decision to send a letter was a product of the circle’s location at the intersection of the leftist traditions of internationalism and Eastern Bloc dissent, whose national dissident communities possessed a sense of mutual experience and a shared agenda that was acknowledged through expressions of solidarity from the late 1970s.

The dangers inherent in this action led the Young Socialists to take additional precautions to prevent their discovery. Ivanov’s contact with Fadin and Kudiukin shifted from a regular friendship to the underground. They ceased speaking on the phone and met only in pre-appointed locations, while fellow IMEMO researcher and Fadin’s future wife Olga Ivanova acted as the ‘chief conspiratorial liaison’ between them.<sup>73</sup> On the day the letter was composed, Fadin and Ivanov travelled for hours in the metro, hastily changing their route several times until they were assured that they were not being followed. The letter was drafted in code by the pair in a Moscow park, and Ivanov memorised it before his trip to Poland. Once in Wrocław, he typed the letter up and transferred it to Morawiecki, who translated it into Polish and delivered it. The Warsaw branch of *Solidarność* received the Young Socialists’ letter via Telex in late August 1981.<sup>74</sup> The trade union published it in the week leading up to the congress in their nationwide bulletin that was

<sup>70</sup> He published six articles in *Biuletyn Dolnośląski* between Oct. 1980 and the start of martial law in Dec. 1981: *Biuletyn Dolnośląski*, AO V/469, Archive of the Karta Centre, Warsaw.

<sup>71</sup> Interview with Kudiukin.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>73</sup> Nikolai Ivanov, ‘“Solidarnost” i Sovetskie dissidenty’, *Novaia Pol’sha*: <http://www.novopol.ru/index.php?id=523>.

<sup>74</sup> The British embassy in Warsaw internally circulated quotations from the Young Socialists’ letter after it was reported to them that *Solidarność* had received it in a telex signed by the Founding Committee of Free Trade Unions in the USSR. See: ‘Document 77: Mr Joy (Warsaw) to Lord Carrington, 10 Sept. 1981, 2.05 pm’, in *Documents on British Policy Overseas: The Polish Crisis and Relations with Eastern Europe, 1979–1982*, eds. Isabelle Tombs and Richard Smith (London: Routledge, 2017), 190–91.

distributed to the editorial offices of trade union magazines, regional *Solidarność* structures and its factory committees.<sup>75</sup>

#### Message to the First National Congress of Solidarity

We send you our greetings from a country where the working class has hardly ever known free independent trade unions' firm and consistent championing of the interests of the working masses. We can only dream of what the Polish proletariat has achieved. Our labour movement is still in its infancy, although in today's maelstrom of events and ideologies, only a small spark is needed for a huge fire to burst forth, which will drive out those whom mercilessly exploit the great patience and forgiveness of the Russian people.

Your struggle for the interests of the common people in Poland is also our struggle. Every nail you drive into the coffin of the system of lies, hypocrisy, and neglect of the basic needs of our workers undermines our system as well. Poland will never be free as long as Russia is unfree. Only democratic change on the other side of the Bug [River] will allow you to build a free, prosperous Polish society without looking back.

How we wish that representatives of the Russian free labour movement were also among the guests of your congress. How we would like at this difficult moment to give you all the support you need without any conditions, but not as our government does. So far these are only dreams, but the day will come (we firmly believe this) when Polish and Russian workers will walk hand in hand towards democracy and progress.

Today your 'Solidarity' is a real beacon for us. It is a movement that, having gone through the brutal persecution, the spilled blood and agony of the Polish workers, has succeeded in breaking the chain of the 'police state' trade unions of the socialist countries. Before your congress, we, the Soviet workers and intellectuals (though we are few today) solemnly swear to do everything possible in our own country to support you, to disseminate the truth about you, to expose slander, and to defend you by all available means.

Long live the friendship of the Polish people and the peoples of the USSR!

Long live the international solidarity of free workers!

Let God help you in your historic work.<sup>76</sup>

To increase its authority and impact, Fadin and Ivanov had signed it 'Organisation of the Committee for the Creation of Free Trade Unions in the USSR'. Yet their awareness of this organisation's entirely aspirational character only underscored the weakness of Soviet dissent against the backdrop of the Polish success.

The Young Socialists' letter was part of a larger volume of correspondence sent by Eastern Bloc dissidents to *Solidarność* in honour of its founding congress and in the months beforehand. The scale of attention that *Solidarność* attracted was an expression of the collective euphoria felt by the dissident communities across the Eastern Bloc for the inroads that the Polish opposition had made toward broader change. The Hungarian democratic opposition focused almost entirely on Poland in their major *samizdat/tamizdat* publications of 1980–81. Although leading Hungarian dissidents' passports had been confiscated, younger intellectuals eagerly made contact with the Poles.<sup>77</sup> In late August 1980, Andrei Sakharov and nine other *pravozashchitniki* sent a letter of support to the

<sup>75</sup> 'Poslanie do I Krajowego Zjazdu "Solidarności"', *Agencja Solidarność* no. 34 (28–30 Aug. 1981): 22. OSA LibSpColl\_Pokolenie-00116: <https://catalog.osaarchivum.org/catalog/osa:a32eec4d-fc6e-45ac-9f24-e0eced474150>.

<sup>76</sup> Morawiecki published the Russian original and the Polish translation of the letter in *Biuletyn Dolnoslaski* and reported that it had been received 'from our regular correspondent in Moscow, W.S. Sidorow'. 'Poslanie I vsepol'skomu s'ezdu "Solidarnosti"', *Biuletyn Dolnoslaski* 7–8/26–7 (July–Aug. 1981), 3–4, AO V/469, Archive of the Karta Centre, Warsaw.

<sup>77</sup> Ferenc Laczó, 'Between Authoritarian Self-Legitimation and Democratic Opposition: The Variety of Hungarian Reactions to the Rise of *Solidarność* and the Polish Crisis of 1980–1981', *Remembrance and Solidarity: Studies in Twentieth Century European History* no. 1 (Dec. 2012): 97.

strikers.<sup>78</sup> A few months later the Russian Committee to Aid Polish Workers formed and pledged to agitate among Soviet workers on behalf of Poles. A declaration of solidarity with Polish workers from SMOT was published in the Paris émigré publication *Russkaia mysl'* [Russian Mind].<sup>79</sup> Radio Free Europe played an important role in disseminating these messages in its broadcasts to Poland. The Polish success became a focal point for the mutual solidarity that had crystallised among dissident communities in the Eastern Bloc. On the fourth day of Solidarność's founding congress, an overwhelming number of delegates voted to issue their own provocative call for bloc-wide cooperation:<sup>80</sup> Addressed to the workers of Eastern Europe, their message sought to counter official propaganda by affirming the free trade union's authentic working-class character and ten-million-strong representation. Declaring its support for initiatives to establish free trade unions in other nations of the bloc, it concluded: 'We believe that soon your and our representatives will be able to meet to exchange our union experience.'<sup>81</sup>

As Radio Liberty repeatedly broadcast the appeal into the Soviet Union, Ivanov listened to it with a giddiness, believing that the trade union had acknowledged the Young Socialists' letter.<sup>82</sup> Reportedly Lech Walesa, when questioned about the congress's appeal, simply replied with the rejoinder: 'We didn't invent proletarian internationalism.'<sup>83</sup> But international observers viewed it with alarm. A cable from the British ambassador reported the appeal as a risk to Poland's territorial integrity.<sup>84</sup> It became a turning point that transformed Soviet leaders' initial views that Solidarność contained moderate currents to the perception that it was a uniformly hostile organisation.<sup>85</sup> In the days following the congress, in a telephone conversation with Stanislaw Kania, Brezhnev charged, 'Solidarność . . . is attempting to impose its subversive ideas on neighbouring states and to interfere in their internal affairs.'<sup>86</sup> Archival documents on the Politburo's discussions on Poland from this time demonstrate that fear of anti-socialist contagion reaching the Soviet Union and the other states of the Eastern Bloc dominated their attitudes before martial law began.<sup>87</sup>

The introduction of martial law in Poland in December 1981 drove Solidarność underground and shattered the Young Socialists' already diminished hopes for reform. By this point the circle itself was losing steam. A new issue of *Varianty* had not appeared for over a year.<sup>88</sup> By 1981, Kudiukin had successfully concluded his graduate studies at IMEMO and attained the rank of junior researcher. Fadin, Chernetskii and Khavkin were all fathers to young children. What had begun in their early twenties as a romantic revolutionary adventure seemed increasingly irrational to these more mature intellectuals with professional standing and personal responsibilities, especially set against the dead-end environment of late stagnation. Yet Rivkin later speculated that the Young Socialists' conspiracy continued up to the point of arrest mainly because nobody wanted to be the first to call it off and admit that their

<sup>78</sup> Roman Solanchyk, 'Russian Groups Issue Proclamation of Support for Polish Workers', *Radio Liberty Research* 24 July 1981, OSA, f. 300, s.f., 5, c. 150, box 57, folder: Samizdat.

<sup>79</sup> 'Boriushchimsya rabochim v Pol'she ot imeni svobodnogo mezhproufessional'nogo ob'edineniia trudiashchikhsia "SMOT"'. *Russkaya Mysl'* No. 3325 (Sept. 1980), 3, OSA, f. 300, s.f., 5, c. 150, box 57, folder: Samizdat.

<sup>80</sup> George Sanford, *The Solidarity Congress, 1981: The Great Debate* (Houndmills: The Macmillan Press Ltd., 1990), 68.

<sup>81</sup> 'Message from the Delegates to the First Congress of the Independent Self-Governing Trade Union Solidarity', 9 Sept. 1981, in *Communist Affairs: Documents and Analysis* 1, no. 2 (Apr. 1982): 538.

<sup>82</sup> Ivanov, "'Solidarnost' i Sovetskie Dissidenty'.

<sup>83</sup> Daniel Singer, *The Road to Gdansk: Poland and the USSR* (London: Monthly Review Press, 1982), 262.

<sup>84</sup> 'Document 78: Mr Joy (Warsaw) to Lord Carrington, 11 Sept. 1981, 1.50 pm', in *Documents on British Policy Overseas*, 191.

<sup>85</sup> Mark Kramer, 'Introduction', in 'Soviet Deliberations during the Polish Crisis, 1980–1981' (Washington, DC: Cold War International History Project, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, 1999), 23–4.

<sup>86</sup> 'Transcript of Brezhnev's Phone Conversation with Kania', 15 Sept. 1981, in 'Soviet Deliberations during the Polish Crisis', 141–5.

<sup>87</sup> Kramer, 'Introduction', 24–5.

<sup>88</sup> 'Andrei Fadin (Samizdat)'. Interview by Julia Kalinina on behalf of Metta Spencer, 1994: <http://russianpeaceanddemocracy.com/andrei-fadin-1994/>.

efforts had been pointless.<sup>89</sup> The end came in March 1982, when Article 70 proceedings for anti-Soviet agitation and propaganda were initiated against Fadin, Kudiukin, Kagarlitskii, Chernetskii and Khavkin. The KGB dedicated substantial resources, including a designated taskforce, to the pursuit of the circle.<sup>90</sup> In the absence of a fuller archival picture, the precise background to the timing is unclear, but the Young Socialists' arrests were consistent with state policies of the time that were aimed at the total suppression of dissent.<sup>91</sup>

Although reformist change then seemed a remote prospect, it would arrive just a few years later with Perestroika. In April 1983, the inner circle was released from prison, and following Gorbachev's liberalisation, almost all immediately returned to independent political life. Kudiukin, Fadin, Chernetskii and Khavkin became founders of the Russian Social Democratic Party in 1990, while Kagarlitskii, as a leader of the newly established Russian Socialist Party, re-styled himself as a new leftist. Within the left-leaning milieu that they occupied in these later years, glasnost's shattering of Soviet myths tarred even the reformist currents of communism, which in the eyes of this Perestroika era audience were now viewed as retrograde products of an ideology that had become almost totally defined by revolutionary violence. Due to their earlier dissident explorations, the former Young Socialists were well-placed to embrace alternative left-wing discourses to make sense of a rapidly evolving political landscape. Their earlier admiration of *Solidarność* grew into personal contacts with left-wing Polish intellectuals. In an episode that remains to be fully documented, delegations of Soviet social democratic activists travelled to Poland in 1988–9 to learn from the methods of the Polish opposition, including techniques for large-scale independent publishing and radio broadcasting.<sup>92</sup> The Young Socialists' aspirations to aid independent trade unions were finally realised during late-Perestroika, when Kudiukin served as an expert on a number of organising committees. At the beginning of the decade, *Solidarność* appeared to the Young Socialists to be a vehicle for socialist reform that followed their theoretically developed maxim of 'reform from above under pressure from below'. However, by the decade's end, the trade union instead represented for these newly minted social democratic and leftist politicians a model for how to develop civil society structures to overcome communist rule altogether.

## Conclusion

This article has explored the international character of socialist dissent. Through reconstructing the Young Socialists' hopes that the Polish crisis would mark the beginning of a wider process of socialist reform in the Eastern Bloc, it has argued that engagement with the international landscape was critical for the development of left-wing dissidents' ideas and their identities. While this internationally facing orientation was a feature of left-wing dissent throughout the late Soviet years, it was especially apparent in the transnational activities of the Young Socialists, whose elite status and proximity to intellectual resources, including intra-bloc structures of academic cooperation, allowed them to directly engage with the Polish opposition.

<sup>89</sup> Rivkin, 'Interv'iu Alekseiu Piatkovskomu i Marine Perevozkinoi ot 1990 goda (s kommentariiami M. Rivkina ot dekabria 2007 g.): <http://www.igrunov.ru/vin/vchk-vin-dissid/dissidents/rivkin/1200923212.html>. A notable exception to this is the younger Kagarlitskii, whose *Sotsializm i budushchee* was issued every few months up until his arrest.

<sup>90</sup> Kudiukin, Fadin, Kagarlitskii, Khavkin, Chernetskii and Rivkin were imprisoned for a year until they were permitted to go free after signing a pledge not to engage in further anti-Soviet activities – an outcome that was almost unprecedented in the state's treatment of dissidents. The exception was Mikhail Rivkin, who refused to repent and was sentenced to seven years in the camps and five years of exile. Tragically, Rivkin came to the attention of the KGB through the testimonies of the imprisoned Young Socialists. The wider circle were interrogated as witnesses in the case and suffered unemployment and other personal difficulties. Although the KGB never detected Fadin and Ivanov's authorship of the letter to *Solidarność*'s founding congress, the affair derailed Ivanov's application to emigrate to Poland until 1985.

<sup>91</sup> Reddaway, 'Soviet Policies towards Dissent, 1953–1985', 60.

<sup>92</sup> The Polish opposition's transnational influence on the events of 1989–91 in the other countries of the Eastern Bloc was observed by Padraic Kenney, 'Oppositional Networks and the Transnational Diffusion in the Revolutions of 1989', in *Transnational Moments of Change: Europe 1945, 1968, 1989*, eds. Gerd-Rainer Horn and Padraic Kenney (Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004), 220–21.



Perspectives that originally developed during the Thaw concerning Eastern Europe as a space of more advanced reformist and oppositional trends continued to influence perceptions into the 1980s. For this younger generation of socialist dissidents, the Polish August indicated that reform could emerge as a result of social pressure from below. Thus, the Polish events were interpreted by these actors as creating renewed possibilities for developed socialism in the final years of stagnation. Such evidence aids historians seeking to diversify understandings of experiences of this period beyond narratives tied to the Soviet collapse. Focusing on the Soviet dissident movement during this less examined period of its history foregrounds the uncertainty and sense of crisis that pervaded the movement's final years. Its search for new methods to bring about change, including the possibility of a reset to their relationship with the regime, highlights the reformist tendencies within the movement as it cheered on Solidarność's successes. As a turning point in the transnational history of dissent, the Polish events of 1980–81 brought to light the degree of mutual solidarity that had developed across national dissident communities in the Eastern Bloc. For the Young Socialists, who identified with dissident solidarities as well as the values of left-wing internationalism, this experience fostered sympathetic views of national movements as potential allies of socialist reform on the eve of Perestroika.

**Acknowledgements.** I would like to thank Tom Junes and Zbigniew Wojnowski for commenting on earlier versions of this article and the peer reviewers for their helpful suggestions.

---

**Cite this article:** Wilson N (2024). 'A New Prague Spring, but from Below?' Socialist Dissent in the Last Soviet Generation and the Emergence of Solidarność in Poland, 1980–1981. *Contemporary European History* 1–17. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0960777324000092>