

demands of diplomats conversely, and their own desires for civility and retention of their dignity. OK managed it better than any - with the gentlemanly skill and politeness of the master diplomat, which he has always been. For me, it was an unwelcome introduction to the part vodka played in Soviet culture, and of the beautiful masks ~~was~~ attitude which seemed to equate provens with the quality of alcohol imbibed.

We saw other aspects of the vodka culture in the few days we had in Moscow. Our hosts ~~had~~ ^{had} agreed when we ^{had} arrived, our hosts agreed what we wanted to do or see. I wanted to see a building site in normal urban routine, carrying out the construction of a large building using prefabricated concrete parts. I had spent my life in construction; but large scale prefabrication had been outside my experience. Our hosts agreed to organize it. But somehow along the way, the request became subverted into a visit to a large, very complex ~~two~~ apartment complex, where there was none of the usual clutter and noise of a building site; only neat houses, tidy well kept public spaces between the blocks, contrast so sharp with the squalor and neglect, the part of similar spaces in British housing complexes. But in the gardens, benches for sitting out. And everywhere, drinks on the benches taking the sun; and empty beer or vodka bottles left under the benches, as mementos to yesterday's occupants. From there we were taken to meet the Moscow City Architect - an elderly man, who quite amiably took time off from master-minding one of the fastest developing areas in the world, to play host to a pretty low-level party of foreign visitors. He showed us a short documentary film of the history of Moscow's development, compiled from historic movie-records taken over the years since cinematography began. It was fascinating, sitting in the vast ~~two~~ complex of Moscow, with its 8 lane highways and skyscrapers amidst apartment blocks & offices, to watch flicker scenes of the city at the time of the Revolution only 50 years before. Moscow came to life as a large and rather disorderly village - rutted, mud streets in the town centre, single and two storey buildings and sheds, mainly rather decrepit and of wood, where the Stalinist wedding cake towers blocks of the Min. of ?? and of ?? now stand. Horse carts, rickshaws, and mud. It put into perspective the heroic proportions of the city we had seen the day before from the Lenin hills - tower blocks stretched away and away in all directions to the horizon; and all built in ~~the~~ less than 20 years since the war. We were taken from the cinema to ~~an office~~ a small waiting-reception room. The City Architect went through what we were being to expect - the obligatory ^{particular} official 'address-to-a-city-delegation' - including a short description of the ^{particular} institution's operational field. In this case, it was fairly ~~frutest~~ - population statistics, growth projection, and an outline of ~~these~~ ^{reasonably} self-contained micro-districts which were proliferating, ameba-like, in Moscow's growth. And then the vertebrae end of the talk: 'Any questions?'

It was clearly expected that the delegation would respond. Somehow - ~~perhaps~~ ^{probably} because of my recent Russian trial notoriety, the others seemed to expect that the responsibility was mine. Perhaps it was also appropriate that the reply to one ambited should be made by another - the only one in our group. Diplomatic speech has never been my forte. I demanded up a few barrels of thanks, of appreciation for the vast constructional feats in evidence and so on. And then the question: 'While the ~~low~~ ^{new} micro-districts and their public housing achievements were certainly impressive, did the Comrade architect feel satisfied with the environment for living which was being created there?' I was not vainly ~~blinded~~ ^{blinded} in those angels' fear to tread. I was ~~very~~ ^{very} ~~seriously~~ ^{seriously} searching for the answer in order to understand the motivation and aims of my Soviet co-practitioners. I expected a dogged defence and justification. He was, after all, the official directly responsible for the built environment, and in the manner of officials everywhere could be expected to defend the world he had developed as the best of all possible worlds. He did not. I was both surprised and impressed by his answer - both by the substance and the openness of it. The quality of the ~~long~~ ^{long} answer for

for him, he said, was a matter of considerable on-going debate amongst Moscow artists. He himself, he said, was ^{inadequately} far from satisfied: He proceeded to savage some of the areas of failure - ~~failure~~ to the ~~lack~~ ^{inadequacy} of any real district centre where entertainers, commercial activities, sport etc. could compensate for renderers from the bright lights of the city centre; the almost total absence of stimulation for the house-bound - the aged, young mothers and so on. It was not that there was anything very profound or new in what he said. But what impressed me tremendously, that he - the chief bureaucrat of the whole process - was open enough and confident enough to ~~say~~ ^{voilà} an unforced self-criticism.

We found similar repeated openings in other such formal sessions, which we tried to avoid, but ~~the~~ the system seemed unbreakable. The rector - or was it the Principal - of Moscow University - gave us the catalogue - X,000 miles of corridor, X,000 students, X million roubles a year etc - all very dull except perhaps to University administrators, whom I did not feature in my group. But these delegate-welcoming speeches ~~seem~~ ^{must} to be pretty frequently called for; and so must tend to become as routinized as any tourist guide's patter. Questions? ~~Though~~ I had never questioned in principle the build of Moscow Stalin era skyscrapers of which the University was one. They seemed to me, for all the waddling cable detail and ornamentation, to serve a useful purpose as orientational beacons, landmarks in the vast undifferentiated flatness of central Moscow. 'But, if you had to build another University, would you design it after this model?' Explosive laughter from the rector. 'Never! Unthinkable.' And he proceeded now to talk without the routine spiel. He explained some of the social and some of the educational consequences of skyscraper university planning, including, for example, that the physics labs had had to be moved out to another location, because the ponds of 1000's of dead-end feet at the end of lecture periods threw delicate instruments out of calibration. Again an unexpected openness and self-criticism where a rugged defence had been expected.

The same could not be said of all the officialdom at the official reception ceremonies. In Leningrad, the home and heart of the Revolution, we were invited to the District Party Secretary. Here, I imagined, we would learn something of the spirit and organizational skills which made the revolution, defused the city from the Nazi armies in its outer suburbs, and rebuilt it as the showpiece of Russian Stalinistic cityscape. No such luck. We ~~was~~ would be given, he told us, a picture of the Leningrad Party. We were, in every trivial organizational detail - how many regional divisions divided into how many districts, into how many areas, branches etc. How many delegates each one was entitled to send to what conference; and so on, and so on. ^{Not} ~~Not~~ of the least interest; not of the life, activity, purposes of the Party; not that could be ^{not} least better by reading the rule book. Questions? 'With such a large mass membership, how is it that the Party does not utilize the people to tidy up, repair or repaint - how can they and work quarters?' Leningrad, for all its beauty was superficially rundown, today with peeling paint and craky, pecky plaster. Answer: 'There is a shortage of paint and other chemicals.' Not our fault, he implied. All the responsibility of others. I found myself muttering inwardly: What a bloody bureaucrat - an admin man, contented, uninterested in what he was doing, or why. I read recently that in the 1989 elections to the Supreme Soviet, the secretary of the Leningrad Party failed to get elected, even in an uncontested constituency! I like to think that it was the same bureaucrat getting him long, delayed come-uppance. But perhaps it was only a spiritual successor.

We were taken to a large cloth factory in Estonia, and shown over its substantial social ~~side~~ appendages - social centre, holiday club, youth centres and so on. The managing director was a young, executive type, product of a business management school - efficient, obviously competent, and quite different from the ideologues of the revolution' who had received us in most other places. ~~After~~ His address confirmed what our guides and interpreters had told us beforehand -

Collection Number: A3299

Collection Name: Hilda and Rusty BERNSTEIN Papers, 1931-2006

PUBLISHER:

Publisher: **Historical Papers Research Archive**

Collection Funder: **Bernstein family**

Location: **Johannesburg**

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