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The Smile behind the Sales Counter: Soviet Shop Assistants on the Road to Full
Communism

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Abstract

The article explores the role of sales assistants in Soviet retail trade in the 1960s, who were overwhelmingly female. It investigates the causes of and remedies for what was widely perceived to be rude and grudging service. Soviet customers and officials felt entitled to a positive consumer experience, and managers and trade union officials agonized over the ways to promote and incentivize “service with a smile.” In addition to the poor performance of Soviet manufacturing, which produced goods that were difficult to sell, other factors included poor training and minimal education, low prestige, and low pay. The article also highlights the continuities in retail sales culture from the 1920s to the 1960s, but emphasizes the increasing role assigned to “emotional labor” as important and necessary work by sales workers.

The Smile behind the Sales Counter: Soviet Shop Assistants on the Road to Full Communism

In late 1964, a correspondent for the Soviet literary weekly, *Literary Gazette* (*Literaturnaia gazeta*), published an open letter to three shop assistants at the state-of-the-art “Moscow” department store. Alongside candid photographs of two scowling young women dressed in the store’s uniform white blouses and vests, the writer pronounced his distress with their appearance. “What’s the matter with you, you poor little devils? Why such sullen brows? Why do you meet every shopper like a personal enemy, like a tiresome supplicant?” The correspondent went on to claim that, posing as a sales assistant of women’s hats at a neighboring counter, he treated each customer with such attentiveness and curiosity that “not one woman left my counter without a purchase.” Smile, girls, and your customers will smile back, he advised.¹

The reluctance to provide willing and courteous service by Soviet shop assistants and other service workers was widely acknowledged in the Soviet press, remarked upon by foreign visitors, and regularly bemoaned behind the closed doors of trade unions and economic agencies. The explanations for this behavior and the ability to correct it lay deeply embedded in the failures of the Soviet economy to produce enough consumer goods to meet demand and in a status system that privileged the production of goods over the delivery of services. Nonetheless, I argue that Soviet customers and

officials felt entitled to a positive customer experience, and managers and trade union officials agonized over ways to promote and incentivize “service with a smile.”

This article focuses on the Soviet consumer economy in the 1960s, a critical period of transition in Soviet economic practice and consumer culture, one marked by increasing awareness of international trends and opportunities, by an idealistic commitment to creating communism as a morally *and* materially superior alternative to capitalism, and by a conviction that consumption and communism were inextricably linked goals. This was the moment when the Cold War broadened the field of engagement into cultural and consumer arenas as well as military and technical. The launch of the first Sputnik in 1957 and the 1961 orbital journey of Yuri Gagarin signaled to the world that the Soviet Union dared to outperform its Western rivals in science and technology.² Tours by the Bol’shoi Ballet and other Soviet virtuoso musicians alerted Western audiences to the outstanding achievements of Soviet high culture.³ The famous kitchen debate between U.S. Vice President Richard Nixon and Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev in 1959 brought the competition down to earth and into capitalist and communist homes. The Soviet Union and its communist partners would win the Cold War not by annihilating their military opponents, but by demonstrating their superiority as economic engines of welfare.⁴ As Susan Reid writes, “The promised abundance that would win the Cold War for socialism was to be attained by harnessing the achievements of modern science and technology.”⁵ The West, and particularly the United States, provided the measure of success, the standard to be equaled and overtaken, as Khrushchev repeatedly reminded his compatriots.⁶ The stakes of the Soviet consumer experience resonated both domestically and internationally. If the Soviet Union wanted

to achieve a communist utopia that would win over the growing numbers of nonaligned nations and peoples, it had to deliver the goods.⁷

Taking a “long sixties” approach to the decade, I suggest that it began with the Moscow Youth Festival of 1957 and adopted as its credo the Communist Party program of 1961, which promised the delivery of a fundamentally communist society by 1980.⁸ Space flight symbolized the technological leap forward achieved by the Soviet system as well as the threat of military superiority. The replacement of Khrushchev by Leonid Brezhnev in 1964 as Communist Party leader was less important than the accompanying reforms intended to modernize the expanding economy, to create a truly “red plenty,” in the words of the author Francis Spufford.⁹ The long and idealistic 1960s petered out by 1973, symbolized by the broadcast of the television serial *Seventeen Moments in Spring* and its celebration of Soviet patriotism, and by the expulsion of Alexander Solzhenitsyn that signaled the regime’s final rejection of heterodoxy and debate.¹⁰ Between those two end points—1957 and 1973 -- emerged a “Soviet sixties” society that was urban, educated, cosmopolitan, and committed to the building of the communist utopia. If the economy failed to satisfy a communist revolution of rising expectations, it was still a far more robust and diverse economy than had emerged from the war in 1945. The economy was managed by a new generation of red experts who dared to look abroad for models in order to improve its working at home.¹¹ They believed that they could combine collective values and economic rationality to fulfill the promise of socialism. They were motivated by the international comparisons accentuated by Cold War rhetoric, but their domestic aspirations also possessed an independent logic and appeal. As Reid has

written, “It was an article of faith – and not only of Cold War polemics – that socialism would guarantee the best possible conditions of life for the largest number of people.”¹²

As the Soviet economy on the road to full communism re-imagined itself as the provider of consumer satisfaction, material goods – things -- still enjoyed pride of place.¹³ Yet the way in which consumers accessed these things – whether fashion or groceries or televisions or meals – required the active intervention of sales people, cooks, and waiters. The value added by these service workers turned out to be difficult to measure, especially so in an economy that had been founded on contempt for the market and its middlemen. “We sales workers don’t create material wealth, our task is to politely and with culture deliver this wealth to the consumer – the builder of communism,” said a Vitebsk trade employee in 1963.¹⁴ The goal was a satisfied consumer, placed at the center of attention and care, like the editor of the industry’s newspaper, *Soviet Trade (Sovetskaia torgovlia)*, who thanked his waitress for serving him four courses. But I gave you only three, she said: soup with dumplings, beefsteak, and fruit compote. No, said the editor, the fourth course was your smile.¹⁵

In looking at Soviet retail shops and department stores, I seek to interrogate the efforts of the Soviet planned economy to deliver smiles as well as “material wealth” to its people, and I focus on the role played by the devalued link in the planned economy chain: sales workers, almost all of them women, many young, poorly educated, and miserably paid. These young women were the public face of the economy of shortages, scapegoats for the shoddy goods they were given to sell, if indeed there were any to sell at all. Their unwillingness to smile for the customer was attributed to poor training, a lack of socialist consciousness, a low level of “culture,” and lack of social status. Did they also withhold

their smiles because the “emotional labor” of such effort was too great and not sufficiently compensated? By emotional labor, I mean the work performed in jobs that require face-to-face contact with the public, the work done to produce an emotional state in another person, and the monitoring of this work by supervisors.¹⁶ Since the 1983 publication of Arlie Hochschild’s pathbreaking study of emotional labor, *The Managed Heart*, historians and sociologists have sought to extend her analysis to many sectors of the capitalist service economy, emphasizing the ways in which women are perceived to be especially suited to perform emotional labor in the marketplace.¹⁷ Its applicability to the socialist economy has not been explored. It has been widely observed that smiling in public is not a part of Soviet culture, and we need not assume that politeness requires a smiling face. But it was Soviet commentators who made that equation, praising smiles when they were given and complaining when they were not. They distinguished honest Soviet smiles from the artificial capitalist smile: one was a genuine product that came from the heart, and the other was bought and paid for.¹⁸ Soviet trade officials acknowledged that emotional labor was hard work but insisted that it was the civic duty of those in sales “to bring joy to the customer.”¹⁹ In their continuing efforts to create modern, socialist, “cultured” trade, Soviet officials and shop assistants emphasized that under socialism, emotional labor was not a burden, but a calling.

The Soviet Problem of Cultured Trade

Manifestations of poor service in Soviet retail trade had been noted and their solutions recommended since the 1920s. In her study of Russian and Soviet department stores, Marjorie Hilton documents that rudeness was the most common source of

customer complaints in the late 1920s.²⁰ Amy Randall points to similar concerns in her book on Soviet retail trade in the 1930s. That decade's campaign for "cultured trade" aimed to introduce modern rational methods to replace the holdover ethics of the Asiatic bazaar: "If you don't cheat you won't sell." Recruiting more women into the Soviet sales force was part of this campaign, since women were naturally "more polite and cultured" than male sales clerks, and they possessed innate moral integrity.²¹ Shop assistants were encouraged to become Stakhanovites (model workers) by creating new methods for serving customers, soliciting their opinions, organizing special sales exhibitions, and holding conferences with shoppers.²² These shoppers increasingly "demanded that trade workers treat them with the same respect as that which befits a Soviet citizen."²³ Julie Hessler observes the continuation of these policies and problems into the late Stalin period. Faced with an "epidemic" of petty pilfering and the hardening of public attitudes against "scoundrels behind the sales counter," the regime renewed its campaign for "culturedness, an agenda that once again included improved customer service, better-trained employees, greater efficiency, wider selections, and better-quality goods."²⁴ Instead of "methods of the thirties" (dismissal or prison), the post-war regime appealed to honor rather than fear, a campaign that "proved popular with the salesclerks' union and with civic-minded employees. It made them feel valued," writes Hessler.²⁵ These transformations accompanied a broader postwar shift in popular discourse, gendering the consumer space as female on both sides of the sales counter.²⁶ Yet despite the long history of efforts to promote cultured trade and the continuing inroads made in the sector by supposedly more cultured women, the problems of unsatisfactory sales culture still remained in the 1960s, as the *Literary Gazette* letter confirms.

Retail trade employed 1.1 million workers in the USSR, according to the 1959 census, nearly doubling to 2.1 million in 1970.²⁷ Of these, women comprised 87 percent in 1959, and 91 percent in 1970.²⁸ (The service profession of waitering was even more starkly gendered female: 96 percent of all waiters in 1970 were women.) Male sales assistants, judging by anecdotal evidence, were concentrated in the selling of men's wear and hard goods like cameras.²⁹ (The undercover journalist with whom this article began might have been so successful selling hats because it was so unusual to find a man selling in a women's clothing department.) Women were much less represented at higher levels of the service sector. In 1970, they comprised only 56 percent of directors, managers, and department heads in retail trade and public catering.³⁰ In 1959, some 44.5 percent of female sales workers were under the age of 29; 23.7 of these women had only a primary education, and 51.5 percent had completed basic secondary school.³¹ By 1970, 74.7 percent of all (male and female) sales workers had received a basic secondary education.³²

Despite the growth in numbers and in educational attainment, sales work was widely stigmatized as a career. A study of high school graduates in the city of Novosibirsk in 1963 revealed that careers in physics (for boys) and medical sciences (for girls) were the most highly valued. Sales ranked in sixty-ninth place for girls, and seventy-first place for boys.³³ The Russian Federation Minister of Trade Dmitrii Vasilievich Pavlov acknowledged in 1962 that it was difficult to recruit staff into the sector: "People are reluctant to admit they work in trade, we get lots of letters about this."³⁴ Exploring the status of shop assistants for a trade union audience, authors Aleksandr Kozlov and Evgenii Kanevskii offered more examples, including the nineteen-

year-old Minsk sales clerk, a member of the Young Communist League. When the interviewer suggested that her medical student fiancé must be proud of her, she revealed that she was afraid to admit to him her line of work, and she was at a loss on how to continue their relationship. Parents likewise warned their daughters against sales work – better, if dirtier, in a factory.³⁵ Journalist Maurice Hindus, visiting the USSR in the early 1960s, confirmed this picture:

Incompetent service personnel is still the rule. The poor pay, the hard work, and above all the low status of store clerking –as low as that of housemaids, porters, doormen, barbers (as distinguished from women’s hairdressers) – rouse for it the disdain of ambitious young people and, what is especially noteworthy, of their mothers.³⁶

The sources of these attitudes, trade union and economic officials asserted, arose from shoppers’ continuing encounters with rude, indifferent, and often dishonest sales personnel, despite the decades of attempted reforms and the Party’s reaffirmed commitment to consumer satisfaction. Throughout the 1960s, delegates to trade union conferences and trade enterprise meetings universally lamented the problems in trade, and ways to improve the image of service occupied a prominent place on every official agenda. In 1967, for example, a director’s conference at the “Moscow” department store heard reports about one Stepanova, a shop assistant who insulted her customers and her supervisor, quarreled with her co-workers, and rejected all criticism.³⁷ And the director admitted there were too many sales women who were not interested in helping their

customers, answering them monosyllablicly and rudely. “They think that to offer polite service demeans their dignity.”³⁸ In another department at the “Moscow,” two shop assistants hid out in the fitting rooms, combing their hair while their customers waited impatiently for service.³⁹ A Moscow party organizer admitted in a 1965 conference that “we often see this picture, when a shop assistant stands at her counter and carries out her own personal ‘production conference,’ completely ignoring her customers.”⁴⁰

The organs of popular culture also called out the stereotypically rude, indifferent, and inattentive sales assistants and paid continual attention to the prevalence of cheating, especially the practice of short weighting in food stores. The *Literary Gazette* letter cited above caused consternation to the management of the “Moscow” department store: we can’t meet the plan if the sales clerks are rude, they worried.⁴¹ The humor magazine *Crocodile (Krokodil)* depicted these traits in its cartoons throughout the 1960s. For example, a 1960 illustration portrays a row of mannequins with one real assistant, all of them scowling. The caption reads, “I can’t tell which ones are the mannequins and which are the shop workers.”⁴² Another portrayed a shop assistant behind her counter as a huge and impregnable Sphinx, with the intimidated shoppers pleading, “Answer us, please.”⁴³ Films also put shop assistants in a bad light: “Usually the cinema shows how trade employees get caught stealing, that’s what they put in films,” asserted an inspector at a Moscow shoe store, to applause.⁴⁴ To be sure, not all images of sales women were negative. Many more *Crocodile* cartoons depicted female shop assistants as attentive to their customers, neither smiling nor frowning, and dressed in modest fashion. And overt corruption was depicted as primarily a male attribute, particularly in food stores.⁴⁵

Archival sources confirm that petty crime was prevalent in the retail trade sector, an ongoing irritation to the “cultured service” that managers struggled to promote. And women were well represented. Trade union documents offer numerous examples of young women who improperly helped themselves to deficit goods, or female cashiers who short-changed their customers. A survey done in 1962 of trading firms in twenty-one oblasts revealed that one store in four cheated their customers by short-weighting or short-changing.⁴⁶ In one Moscow district, a similar survey showed that more than half of the stores there reported cases of cheating.⁴⁷ Judging by the internal records of the “Moscow” department store, the most common forms of cheating were buying goods without paying full price, or reselling goods at a higher price. In one example, the sales worker Smirnova bought a handbag for 20 rubles, but a week later (claiming she needed the money), she asked a co-worker to sell it to a third sales worker for 25 rubles. The same sales assistant claimed to sell a gift coat to another colleague for the same price that was paid, on the grounds that the coat was too small for her. But in fact, the gift had been purchased by the assistant’s father for 70 rubles, and resold at 100. In these cases and many others, the “speculative” sales occurred among friends and family; such behavior could be understood as an element of the Soviet informal economy rather than criminal conspiracy.⁴⁸

More concerning was a 1962 case at Moscow’s department store No. 55, in which a sales woman stole one hundred meters of fabric, a value of 10-15,000 rubles. People noted that the thief drank cognac at lunch, something for which a shop assistant should not normally have the funds. “Maybe Churchill can afford it, but not her.”⁴⁹ A 1970 discussion of the extent of embezzlement from state trading enterprises documented a

pervasive culture of theft: sales people found their occupations so lucrative that they readily paid bribes to the supervisor to be taken on or to look the other way as state property vanished out the door.⁵⁰ It is significant that the discussion of theft and cheating appears only in the archival sources and not the press. These and the jabs in *Crocodile* suggest that dishonesty was widely acknowledged, one of the open secrets of the Soviet economy, but its extent is almost impossible to quantify.

The Ideal Soviet Shop Assistant: The Yardstick

Trade union officials and model shop assistants alike possessed a very clear idea of the positive attributes of sales workers, an ideal they had been developing since the original campaign for cultured trade in the 1930s.⁵¹ Indeed, the goal continued to be described as “cultured service” in trade. Culture began with clean and attractive dress, whether a shop uniform, a smock, or her own clothing.⁵² Exemplary saleswomen greeted their customers, willingly and with a smile, selecting goods for them to inspect or try on. Varechkina, a sales assistant from a Sverdlovsk department store, reminded her fellow delegates at a 1964 union plenary meeting that nothing was as cheap to provide or valuable as politeness. Simple words like “thank you, please, thanks for your purchase, and come back again” were easy to say and were rewarded with smiles and good feeling. Every profession has its demands, she reminded her audience, and politeness is what ours calls for.⁵³

A 1962 manual for shop assistants emphasized that these workers must be able to read the moods of their customers, to judge by their body language and facial expressions what their needs might be.⁵⁴ No two shoppers are alike, wrote a trade school

instructor in 1973. The skilled sales person needs to find the correct approach to each individual, holding her own emotions in check. “To introduce joy into every home, to be the magician of mood – here, if you like, is the formula of the sales person’s work.”⁵⁵ In other words, emotional labor was part of the job description, and its emotional cost was acknowledged. A sales assistant in the candy section of the “Moscow” department store echoed this commitment: “Trade workers are called to create a good mood for people, to bring joy, to take care of others each and every day, and to satisfy their urgent requests.”⁵⁶ The ideal sales worker went the extra mile for her customers, bringing samples to their homes for them to select, providing home delivery for birthdays and special occasions, taking telephone orders, and keeping a list of customers' requests with telephone numbers so that they could notify them when the goods became available.⁵⁷

Ideal shop assistants were not only smiling presenters of goods, they developed expertise in design, production, and consumer research, another set of attributes that had been already idealized in the 1930s.⁵⁸ They took pride in the visual look of their shops, from the way potatoes and carrots were displayed in the bins in a greengrocery to the dressing of mannequins in shop windows to modeling new fashions themselves.⁵⁹ They were knowledgeable about their wares, able to explain to a customer the origin or quality of fabric or shoes, the workings of an electric shaver or a telephone.⁶⁰ They went to great lengths to find out what their customers wanted, using Sunday consultations, regular shoppers conferences (another innovation of the 1930s), and even random conversations with customers to elicit preferences and suggestions.⁶¹ They worked directly with manufacturers to persuade them to produce the styles the customers wanted, from

children's toys to women's coats.⁶² This of course was more than emotional labor, it was professional, expert service.

The Problem Shop Assistant: Causes

In every speech at trade union meetings, from directors to trade union organizers to sales assistants, and in the pages of trade publications, the goal was “cultured service,” polite, attentive, honest, and customer-oriented. Delegates from the sales floor described their own approach to the job and how they measured up to the cultured ideal. So how did officials explain the failure to reach this goal? Why were complaints in the 1960s so similar to those of the 1920s and 1930s? Finger-pointing began with the point of production: managers and sales people alike blamed the lack of high quality *material goods* for their failure to satisfy their customers. The inspector at the Moscow shoe store cited earlier also lamented the problems created with the limited choices of goods: no evening shoes for men, children's boots that no adult would buy. “What kind of culture can we provide if there is no assortment?”⁶³ A Leningrad official admitted to a large number of complaints received, both about service and shoddy goods. He personally witnessed this exchange at a haberdashery counter: the customer asked how many times the Sputnik electric shaver would work before breaking, and the sales woman answered either honestly or cynically, “Ten.” Others actively discouraged their customers from buying a product.⁶⁴ A trade union official at Moscow's Central Department Store recounted his firm's efforts to convince their suppliers to provide customers with the things they deserved: “The Soviet person has learned to build marvelous cities, to produce huge harvests, to fly in a space ship to the stars, but also how to dress well and

handsomely, they want to surround themselves at work, at home, and on vacation with attractive and useful objects.”⁶⁵ And if the products for sale were defective, no amount of smiles and politeness would make a customer happy. “You can say ‘please’ and ‘be so kind’ a hundred times, but if the customer goes away without purchasing what he came for, you have to realize you’ve been firing blanks.”⁶⁶

Even when the goods appeared, there was no wrapping paper to make a cultured package for the customer, and no string to tie it up. “We are living in a time when we must not only sell nicely, but wrap nicely,” said the chairman of the Moscow branch of the trade employees union in 1960.⁶⁷ How much extra effort had to be expended to smile at a customer when saying that the goods they wanted were not in the store? The 1962 manual prescribed scripts for such encounters. Don’t just say “no” or “sometimes,” when asked if a good would be available: amplify. “We used to have them, but they’ve been sold. We expect a shipment next week.” Or, “We used to have lots, but they’ve all been sold, and we don’t expect any more.”⁶⁸

Faulty merchandise meant that shop assistants could not meet their sales targets, lowering their bonuses in an already low-wage sector. In 1960, the average monthly wage for a worker in trade and public catering was 58.90 rubles, rising to 74.20 rubles in 1965. By contrast, the average production worker earned 91.60 rubles in 1960 and 104.20 in 1965, a construction worker 92.40 and 112.40. Joining sales workers at the low end of the wage spectrum were health workers and those engaged in communal services: all were employed in service sectors whose work forces were largely female, a statistic acknowledged as matter-of-fact.⁶⁹ At such wages, complained one union member, sales assistants could not afford to buy the clothing they needed to present a cultured demeanor

to their customers.⁷⁰ Long work hours (twelve-hour shifts for three to five days a week in some cases) combined with an absence of mechanization made sales work a drudgery: in food stores the assistants themselves had to haul gigantic barrels of products from the warehouse to the sales floor.⁷¹ The sector lagged in providing spaces for child care, vouchers for vacations, and access to housing.⁷² And when new housing was built, its apartments went to the bosses, not the workers, admitted the trade union chair Antonina Grigor'evna Shalaurova in 1964.⁷³

All of these conditions led to rapid turnover of shop assistants, who fled their underfunded and disrespected jobs in favor of more rewarding work in industry, leaving their counters to be staffed by a continually revolving door of new and inexperienced school leavers. In shops run by the rural Cooperative Union, officials reported losing 40 to 60 percent of their staff in 1962.⁷⁴ A Leningrad union official claimed in 1964 to have hired 17,000 shop employees in a six-month period, while losing 12,000. Most of this turnover took place in food and vegetable stores, notorious because of their difficult work conditions.⁷⁵ Others reported leaving because of the psychological pressure of dealing with unpleasant customers (emotional labor), because their job did not allow them to pursue further education at night, and above all because of the difficulty of combining work with family without access to child care.⁷⁶ The segregated nature of the work also made it difficult for young women to meet future marriage partners.⁷⁷

With so little to attract ambitious young women to work in trade, managers continued to recruit girls straight out of school, who arrived with inadequate skills and limited opportunities to acquire them. Amplifying the census aggregates cited above, a Leningrad union official reported to the 1963 trade union congress that 47 percent of

managers and 84 percent of shop workers had not completed high school.⁷⁸ Four years later the rector of the Plekhanov Commercial Institute admitted the persistence of these levels. Overall, 75 percent of employees in retail trade lacked a high school diploma; of these, 56 percent of managers had failed to complete school, so the share of high school drop-outs among women at the counter must have been much greater.⁷⁹

The problem with shop assistants, in summary, boiled down to three interrelated factors: low prestige, low preparation, and low pay. Unlike the contemporary commentators, I would argue that the prestige factor was the most important: sales people could not shake the age-old negative stereotypes about the inherent dishonesty of people in trade. As historian Marjorie Hilton has documented,

The proverb, “If you don’t cheat [someone], you won’t sell [anything] (*ne naduesh’ – ne prodash’*) captured the long-standing assumption that the *kupets* (merchant or trader) was a swindler and the retail trade, a degraded, parasitic profession.⁸⁰

Nineteenth-century writers also portrayed merchants as “obese, wily, tyrannical, and narrow-minded shopkeepers.”⁸¹ In the Soviet 1960s, in a society whose value system was structured on the production of *things*, the providers of human services (including smiles) – as shop assistants themselves acknowledged – found themselves marginalized in the public mind. Medical work, similarly dominated by women and similarly poorly paid, enjoyed much greater prestige.⁸² Once defined as marginals, the laboring

population in sales found themselves at a competitive disadvantage for funding, whether for wages, benefits, or educational resources.

The Problem Shop Assistant: What Is To Be Done?

It was the pattern of Soviet trade union bureaucracy first to identify a problem and its causes, often singling out bad apples for particular censure, and then to discuss the paths toward a solution.⁸³ In this tradition, the union of trade and public catering employees worked together with their counterparts on the economic management side to resolve the problem of badly performing shop workers. Their remedies included eliminating the reliance on shop assistants altogether, but also to motivate, educate, discipline, and remunerate them.

Since the mid-1950s, the trade sector had loudly trumpeted a transition to “progressive forms of trade,” which included a greater reliance on mechanization (including automatic vending machines as well as labor-saving devices for heavy lifting) and self-service. In the brave new world of progressive retailing, things would replace people: these included more racks and shelves for the shop floor so that customers could handle goods directly instead of relying on the mediation of the shop assistant.⁸⁴ In food stores, pre-packaged goods would eliminate the need for those behind the counter to slice and to weigh out to the customer’s specification, also reducing the opportunity for cheating.⁸⁵ Self-service would simplify shopping for the customer, who could freely browse the merchandise, assess quality, and make her selections without waiting to be served. “In these days,” said sales worker Sokolova from the “Moscow” department

store, “customers want to spend their time not shopping but studying, satisfying their cultural needs, or engaging in useful leisure.”⁸⁶ But self-service placed new demands on the remaining shop clerks, requiring them to be advisors and consultants about the goods in their sections, expecting them to monitor inventory and consumer preferences.⁸⁷ With respect to automation, supply lagged behind demand as everywhere else in the Soviet economy. As one sales assistant put it, “We live in a century of *avtomatiki* and *telematiki*. Why can’t trading labor be mechanized? When will this happen?”⁸⁸

Modern progressive retailing would also employ scientific methods in order to utilize sales workers more efficiently and better serve the customer.⁸⁹ Sales assistants were encouraged to study the psychology of shoppers to understand their habits and needs. One seller noted that customers were more likely to believe a food product was fresh when the shelves were full. A sales clerk should begin a sale by showing the customer something in the middle price and quality range, and then recommend a more or less expensive alternative depending on her reading of the customer’s response. Stores conducted regular shoppers’ conferences to receive feedback and understand their customers’ needs.⁹⁰ Careful study of retailing patterns led to increasingly specialized departments at Leningrad’s “Passage” department store, allowing shop assistants to more carefully monitor demand.⁹¹ By the late 1960s, lessons in psychology had entered the curriculum in trade schools, and academic psychologists also lent their expertise to transform sales work.⁹²

Modern *socialist* retailing continued to rely on what economists have called socialist incentives: rewards for correct collective behavior. Socialist competition had been a staple of Soviet labor relations since the 1920s, and it remained in force in the

1960s. The trade union head Shalaurova insisted in 1972 that socialist competition remained the basic method for improving service. In this sector, departments, stores, warehouses, or whole regions would “compete” with their counterparts to achieve a stipulated set of goals: plan fulfillment, improved quality and assortment, efficient labor, progressive forms of trade, and “high culture” of service.⁹³ Such competitions had produced the slogan in Moscow that then spread to other retail centers: “Outstandingly made, outstandingly sold.” Leningrad sales people countered with “Every sales person is a public quality control inspector.” Shop assistants at the “Moscow” department store decided in 1967 to hold a competition for the “Best March 8 Gift” that they would promote for their customers seeking to honor the women in their lives.⁹⁴ In these campaigns, good service was inextricably linked with material things, and blame for consumer dissatisfaction could also be shunted to the manufacturing sector. As with the 1930s Stakhanovite movement described by Amy Randall, individuals also competed against one another. Those who excelled were named “outstanding” (*otlichnik*) at their jobs and earned money prizes as well as admiration (or resentment).⁹⁵

Still, the basic unit of service remained the collective. Speaking at a 1971 trade union conference, a sales worker at a Moscow region department store praised the example of veteran medal winner Gurova, whom all the younger shop girls emulated, but as a group, not individuals. “We work under the slogan ‘One for all and all for one.’”⁹⁶ Working in a “communist spirit,” the best collectives celebrated weddings, birthdays, and the birth of children together;⁹⁷ their social lives also revolved around the collective. As an Irkutsk shop assistant testified at the ceremonial “Day of the Sales Woman,” “We live by the interests of our collective, go to the cinema, museums, theaters, engage in sport.

Every member of the collective has a civic [*obshchestvennyi*] assignment.”⁹⁸

Interviewing a head shop assistant at the flagship State Department Store (GUM) during his Moscow tour of duty in the early 1960s, the Italian journalist Alberto Ronchey confirmed these practices: Anna didn’t read much, but she was active in collective entertainments organized through work: company outings, dances, picnics, movies, and choirs.

In Moscow there exists an enormous network of organizations in which the real social life takes place and of which we visitors are unaware.... The city has a double bottom. Behind the scenes there exists a collective life that is practically closed to us. It is there that weddings and anniversaries are celebrated, that people talk and get to know each other.⁹⁹

At work, the solidarity forged by these collectives could translate into conscientious service and lead them to adopt the identity of “communist brigade.” Bakery worker Makarova explained that her brigade worked together to raise up all members to the appropriate level of service.¹⁰⁰ Brigades shared their social lives and their earnings, which gave them an extra incentive to monitor and vouch for the honesty of every member.¹⁰¹ A particular example of brigade responsibility emerged at Moscow’s “Children’s World” department store. Having hired one Natasha Gordeeva, the collective was appalled at her harsh and rude shop floor demeanor. But rather than turn her out, the collective looked into her home life. Discovering that her mother was seriously ill and her brother an alcoholic, they took Gordeeva under their tutelage,

attached her to a senior sales worker, and watched over her for an entire year. And now, they said, she was one of the best, most accomplished sales assistants in the department, and she had enrolled in evening courses to improve her skills.¹⁰² In capitalist economies, management monitored the performance of artificial smiles, but socialist smiles could be more authentic because they were encouraged by one's fellow workers and not the boss.

Specialized training also emerged as a solution to the problem of unmotivated and incompetent shop assistants, and union officials argued that the unavailability of training was one of the factors driving young women out of the sector and into production, where educational resources were more robust.¹⁰³ Most training in Soviet retail took place on the job, with veterans passing on to the newcomers the secrets of window dressing, smiling, and wrapping.¹⁰⁴ To compensate for the limited number of technical schools, the trade union chair Shalaurova called in 1966 for the expansion of voluntary "people's universities" for the economics and culture of trade. Part of the club movement, these universities offered evening courses on work-related topics, taught by volunteers drawn from the work force.¹⁰⁵ But increasing the availability of places in technical schools was also a goal in the 1960s. By 1968 Shalaurova could boast that 10,000 shop assistants had completed specialized courses in the previous year, and 10 percent of the sector's workers were now "diploma'd specialists."¹⁰⁶ A technical school in Moscow reported that it was now graduating 1,500 specialized sales assistants a year through its ten-month courses.¹⁰⁷

Cultured service could only be performed by cultured individuals. And so trade union discussions suggested that the best solution to the problems of uneducated,

underperforming, and unwilling shop assistants was to bring them to culture. As two trade union officials wrote in their tribute to the sales clerk occupation in 1968,

It is hard to imagine that a person who the night before had held their breath hearing the magical music of Tchaikovsky could the next day at the counter insult someone or behave without tact. You would hardly hear a word of abuse from the mouth of someone who had been able, transfixed with rapture, to spend hours standing before Repin's painting, "The Barge Haulers," or a Levitan landscape.¹⁰⁸

Kristin Roth-Ey has noted that Soviet "mass culture" meant high culture for the masses, which "aimed to elevate everyone to connoisseurship and artistry." Culture "was the royal road to the radiant future" for the Soviet everyman.¹⁰⁹ It was assumed that Tchaikovsky and Repin would do their civilizing work almost automatically for the listener or viewer.

To perform this civilizing mission, work place trade union committees organized monthly collective outings to theaters, cinema, and museums. In Leningrad, the demand for tickets to Moscow's visiting Taganka Theater was so overwhelming that only half the requests could be accommodated. Trade union officials called on members of the nongovernmental Knowledge society to give lectures to sales workers on political and cultural topics.¹¹⁰ Some activists emphasized the importance of reading and the libraries that supported this habit. Cultured and grammatically correct speech could best be learned through reading, advised the 1962 shop assistants' manual.¹¹¹ Moscow union delegate Goldobina insisted at a 1965 meeting that to improve the culture of service, you

needed to raise the “spiritual” level of the shop clerk, and that this could be done only through books. “You can’t buy culture for money in a store, it’s acquired in the quiet of a library.”¹¹² To that end, trade enterprises and trade union clubs were encouraged to develop their own libraries. The progressive “Moscow” department store boasted a collection of 4,500 volumes, with 600 of its 1800 workers as subscribers.¹¹³

Passively acquiring culture was good, whether in a library or a museum, but even better was to learn to make one’s own culture. Amateur artistic work enjoyed a long history in socialist societies, and it was promoted in the work place and in places of leisure.¹¹⁴ Trade union clubs and palaces of culture created circles devoted to performing folk and popular music, both choral and instrumental. The director of Moscow’s Central Department Store insisted on the direct relationship between these groups and cultured service: the goal was not just making music for its own sake, but so that shop assistants would come to work with happy faces and would greet their customers with song.¹¹⁵ Some of these groups took their music so seriously they became almost semi-professional. The Tbilisi retail trade network had generated twenty-one artistic collectives with 1,300 participants, who gave regular performances of dancing, popular music, and pantomime all over the republic. They even had a Kurdish song and dance troupe that had traveled to Armenia to perform.¹¹⁶ At the “Moscow” department store, shop workers organized holiday-time entertainments dubbed “Little Blue Flame,” after the popular television program. Their concerts featured reading, singing, and dancing, with young shop assistants (male and female) performing on the piano, guitar, and accordion.¹¹⁷

The discussions that accompanied such prescriptions raised some doubts about how effective they really were. The ills of rudeness, indifference, slovenliness, and dishonesty continued to distress Soviet shoppers and retail managers. The soft power of cultural uplift needed a corresponding strict application of discipline, although managers and officials often found it difficult to be as tough as they wanted. Their disciplinary power, in any event, was limited: they could issue reprimands and warnings, or withhold bonuses, but it was difficult to dismiss an employee for malfeasance.¹¹⁸ The preferred social method of discipline was the comrades' court, a formal hearing in front of one's peers, where the outcome could be reduction in rank, reprimand, public censure, or a strict warning.¹¹⁹ But not dismissal.¹²⁰

A continual challenge to the culture of Soviet trade were crimes of theft and ill will. Responding to the theft of 21 rubles by the nineteen-year old Ignatkina, her department invited the girl's parents to the comrades' court where her crime received careful attention. The collective feared the publicity would harm their chances to win the Banner of Communist Labor, but discipline was the right thing to do. The outcome was unclear: Ignatkina had left work for maternity leave, and they hoped the lesson would make her a "good mother and good worker." The brigade won their banner.¹²¹ The case of Stepanova at the "Moscow" mentioned earlier illustrates the process of discipline and again the level of patience that management and the trade union allowed in dealing with such cases. Her case was heard first in an ordinary production meeting of her department, sparked by her request to her supervisor for money to help her out of a jam. The supervisor refused, because Stepanova was regularly rude to customers, she quarreled with her co-workers, and systematically violated store rules. Others testified to

her irritable nature, her sullen attitude to her job, and to the fact that this behavior had been going on for years. Coming to her new department, she had promised to reform, but her behavior remained the same. She insulted her customers: “Why are you choosing this skirt, dearie, it looks terrible on you.” Her behavior affected her co-workers, upsetting them so much they could not serve their customers either. In the end, the store director decided to refer the case to a comrades’ court consisting of shop assistants from both of her sections, “since for three years it’s been the same thing.”¹²²

It is hard to determine whether the frequency of crime was growing. Certainly the level of concern on the part of the trade union had increased: they worried that culture and collective responsibility had failed to dislodge old habits of self-interest and dishonesty. In any event, the trade union’s admission of cases of theft and embezzlement increased toward the end of the 1960s and into the 1970s. Some people called for tougher discipline: one anonymous critic suggested a return to the “methods of the 1930s as more effective and more humane [sic].” Although this call for a revival of Stalinist methods of arrest and imprisonment was rejected (“the writer doesn’t know what decade he’s living in”), the trade union chair Shalaurova herself suggested that management was too lenient.¹²³ The Minister of Trade, A. I. Struev, was more blunt in speaking to a trade union congress in 1967: if someone failed to provide polite, cultured, and honest service, “sacrifice that one and keep the others. Therefore, comrades, we here don’t have to be liberals.”¹²⁴ Some managers adopted a “one-strike” policy, dismissing an employee after “one honest mistake,” something sales assistants found too draconian.¹²⁵ It is not clear that stricter measures were widely adopted, in part because the expansion of retail trade

meant that it was difficult enough to recruit and retain sales workers: liberalism prevailed.¹²⁶

Our own market orientation might suggest that higher pay would address many of these problems and eliminate the temptation to steal. But solving the problem of sullen shop assistants through improving the material rewards for their work did not occupy a prominent place on the list of remedies. As a shop assistant Ermilicheva at the “Moscow” department store insisted, practice showed that workers were best motivated by both moral and material incentives: money was not enough.¹²⁷ This had been true in the USSR in the 1930s and 1940s when the title “Stakhanovite” conveyed respect and celebrity while also providing material benefits.¹²⁸ It was true for capitalist retailers, as well, according to historian Susan Porter Benson. American department stores also employed collective forms of reward, for example giving banners to the store sections for outstanding sales achievements.¹²⁹ Still, money mattered. The Minister of Trade assured a trade union gathering in 1967 that basic wage rates had grown by 30 percent since 1964, and factoring in the standard 10 percent “bonus” for fulfilling the plan, he claimed the sector was more or less equal to other branches of industry.¹³⁰

The economic reforms devised by the economist Evsei Liberman in the mid-1960s aimed to incentivize not just plan fulfillment but setting realizable plans, making the whole economy more efficient. The new goal was “profitability,” rather than quantities of goods sold.¹³¹ In retail trade, this meant that every employee and not only the director would be looking out for the bottom line, asserted Mariia Fedorovna Korshilova, the director of the “Moscow” department store.¹³² The reforms gave individual enterprises much more autonomy in deciding pay rates, the balance between

base pay and bonuses, and how the “bonus fund” would be spent.¹³³ At the “Moscow,” a certain percentage of profit was paid directly to employees, and another percentage supported social-cultural spending, including apartment blocks, child care facilities, summer camps, and cultural activities. Results were promising, reported Korshilova in 1967. Sales had increased by 18 percent and profit by 6.5 percent, resulting in individual bonuses for workers that were 24 percent higher than under the previous system.¹³⁴ A rising tide lifted all boats.

The social fund benefited everyone collectively, and in their official conferences and congresses, shop workers insisted on their need for more housing, more nurseries, and more access to vacations. With respect to nurseries, Moscow trade officials reported good progress. Whereas in 1964, there were 3,000 families on the waiting list for child care places, by 1967, the number had been reduced to 300, resolving a critical need in a sector that employed so many young women of childbearing age. Similarly, the number of apartments available for employees had also grown in this period.¹³⁵ Access to medical vacations was more problematic. Their work was hard, insisted a buyer from Leningrad; standing at the counter for seven or eight hours a day “stresses our nerves, our energy, and our will. After such work a person needs medical treatment.”¹³⁶ But the trade sector received short shrift in the allocation of vouchers to sanatoriums and rest homes: they were entitled to 11 sanatorium vouchers for every thousand workers, compared to 16.5 per thousand given to the food industry (whose employees were also predominantly female). And for rest homes, trade workers were allocated 20 vouchers per thousand workers, while in light industry, another female-dominated sector, the allocation was 48.5.¹³⁷ In the old days, said the Leningrad buyer, you could buy

additional vouchers with money from the bonus fund, but not any longer. Many would agree with me, she said, that “independent of where a comrade works, whether in a plant, a factory, a mine, in construction, or in retail, if this person is sick, he wants and ought to be treated and buy a voucher at full cost, this desire needs to be satisfied!”¹³⁸ Here in these lines is the familiar gesture to the second-class status of workers in trade.

Socialist incentives rather than market incentives remained the lever of choice in promoting cultured Soviet trade, but whether it was merchandise to be sold, or rest home vouchers to be enjoyed, the economy could not satisfy the demand.

Conclusion: Toward a Communist Consumer Society

The road to a fully communist consumer society was a long one, and the ultimate goal was never completely mapped out. Cultured service, full application of technology, protecting the time of the consumer, and abundance and variety of quality goods constituted the key parameters of this consumer utopia. These goals had been on the agenda of communist trade policy since the beginning of the Soviet experiment. There were never any sharp deviations from this road, only an emphasis on more and better in every dimension, subject as always to the capacity of the economy to produce and supply the goods and services required.

In the sphere of consumer culture and socialist sales work, the 1960s emerges as a critical moment of transition to a more materially conscious and materially secure urban population. The imperatives of Cold War competition laid bare the urgency of the consumption project, and the promise of peaceful coexistence could enable the

reallocation of resources from military defense to social investment. What did it mean now in the sixth decade of the revolution to engage in “socialist trade?” There were rockets in space, there were more products for Soviet consumers to buy, even if never enough, and there were more sales people to help them buy the goods. Trade unions and economic agencies worked closely together to manage and improve the retail trade sector. They relied on the familiar appeals to communist enthusiasm but also increasingly employed the knowledge of experts in economics, education, and psychology to more rationally organize the delivery of goods to the people.

To be sure, prejudice toward work in sales persisted. Poor Natasha K., who also loved her job “because it brought people happiness,” wrote to the trade journal’s editors for advice because her boyfriend insisted that she leave her occupation if she wanted to continue their relationship. The editors acknowledged that there were still many “grouchy trade haters” like him out there, despite the happiness that the sector’s millions of employees provided.¹³⁹ Another sales worker from Tomsk complained that hers was still an “unappreciated profession,” despite the hard work that a sales assistant performed in order to treat her customers like guests in her own home.¹⁴⁰

The problems described in this article persisted throughout the 1960s. In 1972, union chair Shalaurova acknowledged as much in front of the Seventh Congress of the union. Progressive sales methods spread only slowly, the culture of trade remained low, young people continued to leave the profession; those who remained fell “under the influence of cheats and thieves [*zhuliki i khapug*]” and committed crimes.¹⁴¹ The Minister of Trade A. I. Struev argued that the drumbeat of criticism in the press had increased in the last years, not because retail trade was becoming objectively worse, but

because of rising expectations among Soviet consumers. “What yesterday we could bear with patience, today is already impermissible.”¹⁴² And therefore, we need to drive out these ill-doers, “like pestilent sheep,” in order not to infect the others. Taking a much harder line than trade union officials, the minister continued, “We are a very humane people, and we should be humane, but when we speak about creating dissatisfaction for the people, the rulers of our country – there is no place for humanism. We need to punish that person so that dozens of others will take notice and behave so that they will not be punished.”¹⁴³ She who does not smile should not eat.

Notably, it was humanism that most appealed to Soviet shop assistants in their choice of careers and humanism that motivated their smiles. “From childhood I’ve wanted to be a sales worker, because I could engage with people. I wanted to stand on the other side of the counter so that I could bring joy to people,” wrote Valia K.¹⁴⁴ Larisa from Moscow’s “May 1” department store concurred: “I love my job because our work is creative. To interact with people every day, and to make them happy – brings me great joy.”¹⁴⁵ Successful sales assistants willingly signed up for the work with people precisely because of the emotional satisfaction that it could bring, not only joy and happiness but the creative challenge of responding to customers’ psychological individuality. If sales assistants in the Stalinist 1930s were encouraged to become paragons of rationality, cleanliness, and culture, then by the 1960s, emotional labor in a positive sense had become an acceptable and even attractive element of the job.

The Western critique of emotional labor, launched by Arlie Hochschild, assumed that capitalist labor relations required service workers to display emotions that were not privately felt, estranging them from their own selves.¹⁴⁶ Soviet critics also noted that

Western smiles were merely “bought and paid for.” Yet other research on capitalist economies has countered these arguments, producing studies that demonstrate how people find joy and fulfillment in service work.¹⁴⁷ Women in particular, suggests Amy S. Wharton, having been socialized to provide empathy and attentiveness to others, find more satisfaction in work roles that allow them to deal with the interpersonal demands of front-line service work. Similarly, Soviet sales assistants aspired to treat their customers like “guests in their own homes.” Communist consumer culture would allow ample space for the exercise of emotions and feelings, drawing on the special aptitude that most women were believed to have for such roles. “Cultured service,” already assigned to the women’s sphere in the 1930s, now included emotional work as well as neatness, cleanliness, and honesty.

By the 1980s, negative attitudes about sales workers may have begun to change. Natalya Chernyshova writes that “a growing number of people in the late 1970s and the 1980s saw a job in retail as prestigious.”¹⁴⁸ Vladimir Shlapentokh notes that Soviet sociologists had recorded a “miraculous leap in appeal” of occupations in sales in the 1970s and 1980s.¹⁴⁹ Chernyshova and Shlapentokh both attribute this shift to a rise in consumerism and to the sales worker’s direct access to scarce commodities. The standard of living of sales workers exceeded that of factory workers by the 1980s, attracting young women no longer only for the privilege of bringing happiness to others but of bringing home coveted goods to their families. According to James Millar’s classic formulation of the “little deal” between Brezhnev and Soviet consumers, the relaxed rules about the informal economy allowed sales workers to profit from their position with less fear of

reprisal than in the 1960s.¹⁵⁰ Pestilent sheep had become normalized, and individual consumerism was edging out collectivism as a dominant principle of Soviet culture.

Soviet consumer relations and moods would continue to be shaped by shortages. Women on the sales floor knew how difficult it was to maintain a welcoming and helpful disposition when their customers could not find the goods they wanted to buy. As the Leningrad sales clerk insisted, standing at the counter for eight hours a day “stresses our nerves, our energy, and our will.”¹⁵¹ She did not add that it was not only the standing that was such hard work, but the emotional toll of dealing with frustrated customers.

Remember the shoe store inspector who mourned, “What kind of culture can we provide if there is no assortment?”¹⁵² Moreover, in an economy of shortages, sellers did not need to resort to feigned politeness to convince customers to buy a product. Soviet consumers had long followed the unwritten rule of Soviet shopping: “If you see it, buy it.” Some Soviet sales women may have found it unnecessary to expend effort to put on a performance of cultured service when neither their pay nor their job security depended on how much or little they smiled. A young male McDonalds trainee in post-Soviet Moscow expressed the essence of the Soviet consumption junction: “Why do we have to be so nice to the customers? After all, WE have the hamburgers, and they don’t!”¹⁵³ To the end, the persistence of the negative stereotype of the Soviet way of selling may have been due less to the failures of the trade union and management to provide appropriate training and incentives than to the planned economy’s inability to supply the population with enough of the goods that they desired.

End Notes

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⁴ Susan E. Reid, “Cold War in the Kitchen: Gender and the De-Stalinization of Consumer Taste in the Soviet Union under Khrushchev,” *Slavic Review* 61 (2002): 211-252; Susan E. Reid, “The Khrushchev Kitchen: Domesticating the Scientific-Technological Revolution,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 40 (2005): 289-316; Susan E. Reid, “Khrushchev Modern: Agency and Modernization in the Soviet Home,” *Cahiers du Monde russe* 47 (2006): 227-268. See also David Crowley and Susan E. Reid, eds., *Pleasures in Socialism: Leisure and Luxury in the Eastern Bloc* (Evanston, 2010); David F. Crew, ed., *Consuming Germany in the Cold War* (Oxford, 2003); Paulina Bren and

Mary Neuburger, eds., *Communism Unwrapped: Consumption in Cold War Eastern Europe* (Oxford, 2012).

⁵ Reid, “Khrushchev Kitchen,” 290.

⁶ For example, as quoted in Marshall I. Goldman, “Living Standards and Consumer Goods,” *Problems of Communism* 8 (1960): 32-41, quote 32.

⁷ On second world--third world relations, see for example, David C. Engerman, *The Price of Aid: The Economic Cold War in India* (New Haven, 2018); and David C. Engerman, “The Second World’s Third World,” *Kritika* 12 (2011): 183-211.

⁸ An alternative starting point might be the 1956 Twentieth Party Congress, when Khrushchev opened the door to Communist self-criticism. See Vladislav Zubok, *Zhivago’s Children: The Last Russian Intelligentsia* (Cambridge, MA, 2009); Polly Jones, *Myth, Memory, Trauma: Rethinking the Stalinist Past in the Soviet Union, 1953-70* (New Haven, 2013); Polly Jones, ed., *The Dilemmas of De-Stalinization: Negotiating Cultural and Social Change in the Khrushchev Era* (London, 2006); Kathleen E. Smith, *Moscow 1956: The Silenced Spring* (Cambridge, 2017). On the youth festival, see Eleanory Gilburd, *To See Paris and Die: The Soviet Lives of Western Culture* (Cambridge, MA, 2018), ch. 1.

⁹ Francis Spufford, *Red Plenty* (London, 2011).

¹⁰ See the papers in Anne E. Gorsuch and Diane P. Koenker, eds., *The Socialist Sixties: Crossing Borders in the Second World* (Bloomington, 2013), and in particular Stephen Lovell, “In Search of an Ending: *Seventeen Moments* and the Seventies,” 303-21.

¹¹ Zubok, *Zhivago’s Children*; G. S. Batygin, ed., *Rossiiskaia sotsiologiia shestidesiatykh godov v vospominaniakh i dokumentov* (St. Petersburg, 1999).

¹² Reid, “Khrushchev Kitchen,” 290. See also William N. Turpin, “The Outlook for the Soviet Consumer,” *Problems of Communism* 9 (1960): 30-37.

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¹⁴ Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Rossiiskoi Federatsii (hereafter GARF), f. 5452 (Trade Union of Workers in State Trade, Public Catering, and Consumer Cooperatives), op. 37 (1957-1973), d. 482 (IV Congress, September 5-6, 1963), l. 189.

¹⁵ GARF, f. 5452, op. 37, d. 739 (Leningrad union electoral conference April 9, 1965), l. 100.

¹⁶ Arlie Russell Hochschild, *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling* (Berkeley, 2d ed., 2012), 148, 156.

¹⁷ Elaine J. Hall, “Smiling, Deferring, and Flirting: Doing Gender by Giving ‘Good Service,’” *Work and Occupations* 20 (1993): 452-471; Elaine J. Hall, “Waitering/Waitressing: Engendering the Work of Table Servers,” *Gender and Society* 7 (1993): 329-346; Kristina Abiala, “Customer Orientation and Sales Situations: Variations in Interactive Service,” *Acta Sociologica* 42 (1999): 207-22; Robin Leidner, “Emotional Labor in Service Work,” *The Annals of the American Academy of Political*

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¹⁸ E. Kanevskii and A. Pereslavitsev, "Iz peredovogo opyta. 'Vesna' na prospekte Mira," *Sovetskaia torgovlia* 12 (1965): 29-33.

¹⁹ N. Belova, "Prodavets i pokupatel'. Trud privlekatel'nyi i pochetnyi," *Sovetskaia torgovlia* 7 (1973): 37-40.

²⁰ Marjorie L. Hilton, *Selling to the Masses: Retailing in Russia, 1880-1930* (Pittsburgh, 2012), 251.

²¹ Amy E. Randall, *The Soviet Dream World of Retail Trade and Consumption in the 1930s* (Basingstoke, 2008), 75, 77.

²² *Ibid.*, 93.

²³ *Ibid.*, 136.

²⁴ Julie Hessler, *A Social History of Soviet Trade: Trade Policy, Retail Practices, and Consumption, 1917-1953* (Princeton, 2004), 310-311.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 317.

²⁶ Philippa Hetherington, "Dressing the Shop Window of Socialism: Gender and Consumption in the Soviet Union in the Era of 'Cultured Trade,' 1934-53," *Gender & History* 27 (2015): 417-45; Reid, "Cold War in the Kitchen."

²⁷ *Itogi vsesoiuznoi perepisi naseleniia 1970 goda* (Moscow: 1972-74), vol. 6, table 2, 19.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, vol. 6, table 18, 166.

²⁹ This is based on articles in the monthly periodical of the Ministry of Trade, *Sovetskaia torgovlia*, for the period 1958-1973.

³⁰ *Itogi vsesoiuznoi perepisi naseleniia 1970 goda*, vol. 6, table 18, 169.

³¹ *Itogi vsesoiuznoi perepisi naseleniia 1959 goda*. table 43, 145; table 40, 128.

Comparable figures for age distribution are not available in the 1970 census.

³² *Itogi vsesoiuznoi perepisi naseleniia 1970 goda*, vol. 6, table 68, 627.

³³ V. N. Shubkin, ed., *Trudiashchiasia molodezh': obrazovanie, professiia, mobil'nost'*

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³⁴ GARF, f. 5452, op. 37, d. 387 (III Congress, March 29-30, 1962), l. 254.

³⁵ Aleksandr Gavrilovich Kozlov and Evgenii Markovich Kanevskii, *Po tu storonu prilavka* (Moscow, 1968), 153-54.

³⁶ Maurice Hindus, *The Kremlin's Human Dilemma: Russia after Half a Century of Revolution* (Garden City, NY, 1967), 71.

³⁷ Tsentral'nyi Arkhiv Goroda Moskvy (hereafter TsAGM) (Post-1917 section), f. 2275 ("Moskva" department store), op. 1, d. 62 (meetings with the director, 1967), ll. 40-42.

³⁸ TsAGM, f. 2275, op. 1, d. 62, l. 59.

³⁹ TsAGM, f. 2275, op. 1, d. 114 (general meetings and union election meetings, 1969), l. 3.

⁴⁰ GARF, f. 5452, op. 37, d. 744 (V Moscow city electoral conference, May 26, 1965), l. 130.

⁴¹ TsAGM, f. 2275, op. 1, d. 25 (meetings with the director, 1965), l. 101.

⁴² *Krokodil'* 8 (1960): 6.

⁴³ *Krokodil'* 2 (1967): 2.

⁴⁴ GARF, f. 5452, op. 37, d. 473 (meeting of Moscow sales workers, October 11, 1962, on the theme of “cultured service to the shopper”), l. 53. For a later example of such films, see “Beregis’ avtomobilia” (dir. El’dar Riazanov, 1966).

⁴⁵ *Krokodil’* 26 (1957): 15; *Krokodil’* 5 (1965): 6.

⁴⁶ GARF, f. 5452, op. 37, d. 387, l. 248.

⁴⁷ GARF, f. 5452, op. 37, d. 473, l. 17.

⁴⁸ TsAGM, f. 2275, op. 1, d 19 (meetings of union local committee, 1962-1963), l. 12. On Soviet informality, see Alena V. Ledeneva, *Russia’s Economy of Favours: Blat, Networking, and Informal Exchange* (Cambridge, 1998). On everyday corruption and its acceptance in Soviet public consciousness, see James Heinzen, *The Art of the Bribe: Corruption under Stalin, 1943-1953* (New Haven, 2016).

⁴⁹ TsAGM, f. 32 (Moskovskii torg universal’nykh magazinov [Mostorg]), op. 1, d. 158 (meeting of activists, May 15, 1963), l. 20. This is based on an article in *Vecherniaia Moskva*, May 14 or 15, 1963. It was “common knowledge” in Moscow in 1973 that Winston Churchill preferred Armenian cognac – and Queen Elizabeth II smoked Belomor Canal cigarettes (personal recollection.)

⁵⁰ TsAGM, f. 216 (Food Stores of Moscow Retail Trade), op. 1, d. 1657 (meeting of activists, December 16, 1970), throughout.

⁵¹ Randall, *Soviet Dream World*; Amy E. Randall, “Legitimizing Soviet Trade: Gender and the Feminization of the Retail Workforce in the Soviet 1930s,” *Journal of Social History* 37 (2004): 965-990; Hessler, *Social History of Soviet Trade*.

⁵² GARF, f. 5452, op. 37, d. 473, l. 15; d. 690, l. 139.

⁵³ GARF, f. 5452, op. 37, d. 651, l. 110. Yet one (male) critic objected to saying, “Thanks for your purchase,” and “Come back again.” This was Western fawning, an “insincere politeness that is alien to our origins.” I. Ivanov, “Bol’she tvorcheskoi mysli,” *Sovetskaia torgovlia* 4 (1962): 3-8, quote 4.

⁵⁴ N. I. Strogov, *Kul’tura obsluzhivaniia pokupatelei* (Moscow, 1962), 11-15.

⁵⁵ N. Belova, “Prodavets i pokupatel’. Trud privlekatel’nyi i pochetnyi,” *Sovetskaia torgovlia*, 7 (1973): 37-40, quote 39.

⁵⁶ TsAGM, f. 2275, op. 1, d. 50, l. 22.

⁵⁷ GARF, f. 5452, op. 37, d. 473, ll. 35, 51; d. 482, l. 252; d. 955, l. 162; d. 651, l. 176; TsAGM, f. 32, op. 1, d. 274, l. 109.

⁵⁸ Randall, *Soviet Dream World*, 40, writes of the shop clerk as advisor and educator.

⁵⁹ GARF, f. 5452, op. 37, d. 690, l. 93; d. 1107, l. 73; d. 1513, l. 206; Georgia National Archive, f. 2006 (Georgian SSR Ministry of Trade), op. 1, d. 1421 (report on the work of the Tbilisi trade-culinary school, 1959), l. 63. Sales girls as models: GARF, f. 5452, op. 37, d. 258, l. 89; d. 327, l. 46; d. 387, l. 87; d. 651, l. 112.

⁶⁰ GARF, f. 5452, op. 37, d. 651, l. 112; d. 1513, l. 311; TsAGM, f. 32, op. 1, d. l. 76.

⁶¹ GARF, f. 5452, op. 37, d. 690, l. 94; d. 651, l. 175; d. 1513, ll. 310-11 (Dushanbe); TsAGM, f. 32, op. 1, d. 274, ll. 109-110. With the spread of self-service, the role of consultant and advisor became even more important: TsAGM, f. 2275, op. 1, d. 130, l. 3. Shoppers conferences had been introduced in 1934: Hessler, *Social History of Soviet Trade*, 218; Randall, *Soviet Dream World*, 145-48.

⁶² GARF, f. 5452, op. 37, d. 482, l. 250; TsAGM, f. 32, op. 1, d. 274, l. 71; f. 2275, op. 1 d. 50, ll. 4, 14.

⁶³ GARF, f. 5452, op. 37, d. 473, ll. 52-53.

⁶⁴ GARF, f. 5452, op. 37, d. 621 (conference of shockworkers in Leningrad trade and public catering, May 21 – June 5, 1963), l. 56.

⁶⁵ GARF, f. 5452, op. 37, d. 892 (VII Congress, December 12-13, 1967), ll. 199-200. “Moskva”’s manager M. F. Korshilova used almost identical words to describe the same problem.

⁶⁶ An odd metaphor for sales work! E. Kanevskii and A. Pereslavitsev, “Iz peredovogo opyta. ‘Vesna’ na prospekte Mira,” *Sovetskaia trgovlia* 12 (1965): 29-33, quote 32; TsAGM, f. 2275, op. 1, d. 50 (meetings with the director, 1966), ll. 4-5.

⁶⁷ GARF, f. 5452, op. 37, d. 258 (II Congress, April 19-21, 1960), l. 104. See also d. 739 (Leningrad electoral conference April 9, 1965), l. 72, and d. 892, l. 164.

⁶⁸ Strogov, *Kul'tura obsluzhivaniia*, 18-19. In my own shopping experience in the 1970s, I often encountered “We used to have it, but we don’t anymore.”

⁶⁹ *Narodnoe khoziaistvo SSSR v 1969 g. Statisticheskii ezhegodnik* (Moscow, 1970), 539-40.

⁷⁰ GARF, f. 5452, op. 37, d. 28 (I Congress, May 19-21, 1958), ll. 178-79.

⁷¹ Work hours: GARF, f. 5452, op. 37, d. 744, l. 84; warehouse: TsAGM, f. 2275, op. 1, d. 19, l. 8.

⁷² Child care: GARF, f. 5452, op. 37, d. 28, l. 181; GARF, f. 5452 op. 37 d. 258, ll. 142-43; GARF, f. 5452 op. 37 d. 744, l. 54; GARF, f. 5452, op. 37, d. 955 (Moscow city electoral meeting May 26, 1967), ll. 114, 208; TsAGM f. 2275, op. 1, d. 68 (trade union election conferences, 1967), l. 5. Vacations: TsAGM f. 2275, op. 1, d. 68, l. 8; TsAGM f. 2275, op. 1, d. 114 (trade union election conferences, 1969), l. 17; TsAGM f. 2275, op. 1

d. 130 (meetings with the director, 1970), l. 66; GARF, f. 5452, op. 37, d. 387, l. 311; GARF, f. 5452, op. 37, d. 651, l. 116. Housing: GARF f. 5452, op. 37, d. 28, ll. 66, 180.

⁷³ GARF, f. 5452, op. 37, d. 651, l. 87.

⁷⁴ GARF, f. 5452, op. 37, d. 387, l. 228.

⁷⁵ GARF, f. 5452, op. 37, d. 651, l. 97.

⁷⁶ GARF, f. 5452, op. 37, d. 473, ll. 37-38; GARF, f. 5452, op. 37, d. 1384 (VII Moscow oblast electoral conference December 22, 1971), ll. 129-131.

⁷⁷ Observation of an undergraduate student from Russia at a discussion on gender in Slavic studies, January 19, 2018.

⁷⁸ GARF, f. 5452, op. 37, d. 482, l. 110.

⁷⁹ GARF, f. 5452, op. 37, d. 892, ll. 193-94. These estimates for incomplete education are significantly higher than those reported in the official census figures.

⁸⁰ Hilton, *Selling to the Masses*, 24. The adage “If you don’t cheat...” continued to be attributed to bourgeois commercial culture in Soviet discourse. L. Ivanov and M. Petrova, “Tribuna prodavtsa. O kul’ture obsluzhivaniia,” *Sovetskaia torgovlia* 7 (1961): 41-44, quote 42: “I remember being in Vienna... Its shops are smart, its sales women treacly-polite, on their lips an ingratiating, pasted-on smile... Everything is clear: they are ruled by that old principle shared by the whole unprincipled bourgeois world: if you don’t cheat, you won’t sell.”

⁸¹ Hilton, *Selling to the Masses*, 26.

⁸² Shubkin, *Trudiashchiasia molodezh’*, 80.

⁸³ This observation is based on three different research projects I have conducted, each employing trade union sources.

⁸⁴ GARF, f. 5452, op. 37, d. 621, l. 46; d. 473, l. 42, 45. Replacing people in trade with machines was proposed already in the 1930s: Randall, *Soviet Dream World*, 49-66.

⁸⁵ GARF, f. 5452, op. 37, d. 71 (Moscow city conferences, 1958), l. 149. Yet even by 1969, after years of self-service propaganda, only 10 percent of food stores operated in this way. GARF, f. 5452, op. 37, d. 1107 (Union central committee plenum, April 3, 1969), l. 65. On packaging in the 1930s, see Randall, *Soviet Dream World*, 51.

⁸⁶ TsAGM, f. 2275, op. 1, d. 130, l. 2.

⁸⁷ TsAGM, f. 2275 op 1 d. 130, ll. 2-3.

⁸⁸ GARF, f. 5452, op. 37, d. 473, l. 39.

⁸⁹ TsAGM f. 2275, op. 1, d. 114, l. 4.

⁹⁰ GARF, f. 5452, op. 37, d. 1513 (VII Congress, February 9-10, 1972), l. 207; Strogov, *Kul'tura obsluzhivaniia*, 12; d. 690 (VI Congress, December 1-2, 1965), l. 94; d. 744, l. 41.

⁹¹ GARF, f. 5452, op. 37, d. 892, ll. 61-62.

⁹² I. Berger, "Kul'tura obsluzhivaniia i psikhologiiia pokupatelia," *Sovetskaia torgovlia* 10 (1967): 34-35; M. Smirnova, "NOT v torgovle. Vyavlenie professional'nykh kachestv prodavtsa," *Sovetskaia torgovlia* 1 (1970): 30-31.

⁹³ GARF, f. 5452, op. 37, d. 473, l. 10; Shalaurova in GARF, f. 5452, op. 37, d. 1513, l. 99.

⁹⁴ TsAGM, f. 2275, op. 1, d. 62, l. 10.

⁹⁵ Amy E. Randall, "'Revolutionary Bolshevik Work': Stakhanovism in Retail Trade," *Russian Review* 59 (2000): 425-441; GARF, f. 5452, op. 37, d. 28, l. 34. The trade union boasted of 25,000 "outstanding in Soviet trade" individuals in 1958.

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- ⁹⁶ GARF f. 5452, op. 37, d. 1384, l. 105.
- ⁹⁷ GARF, f. 5452, op. 37, d. 621, l. 67.
- ⁹⁸ GARF, f. 5452, op. 37, d. 651, l. 72; also GARF, f. 5452, op. 37, d. 327, l. 55.
- ⁹⁹ Alberto Ronchey, *Russia in the Thaw*. Trans. Raymond Rosenthal (New York, 1964), 42-43.
- ¹⁰⁰ GARF, f. 5452, op. 37, d. 473, l. 49. l. 34.
- ¹⁰¹ GARF, f. 5452, op. 37, d. 1049 (Union central committee plenum, October 7, 1968), l. 60.
- ¹⁰² GARF, f. 5452, op. 37, d. 548, ll. 158-59.
- ¹⁰³ GARF, f. 5452, op. 37, d. 1384, l. 129.
- ¹⁰⁴ GARF, f. 5452, op. 37, d. 327, l. 34; TsAGM, f. 32 op. 1, d. 158, l. 8.
- ¹⁰⁵ GARF, f. 5452, op. 37, d. 804 (Union central committee plenum, February 18, 1966), l. 37; d. 651, l. 94; d. 955, l. 109; d. 1384, l. 36.
- ¹⁰⁶ GARF, f. 5452, op. 37, d. 651, l. 54; GARF, f. 5452, op. 37, d. 1049, ll. 51-52.
- ¹⁰⁷ GARF, f. 5452, op. 37, d. 1049, l. 151.
- ¹⁰⁸ Kozlov and Kanevskii, *Po tu storonu prilavka*, 21.
- ¹⁰⁹ Roth-Ey, *Moscow Prime Time*, 4-5. See also Gilburd on the Soviet way of “reading” art, *To See Paris and Die*, ch. 5.
- ¹¹⁰ GARF, f. 5452, op. 37, d. 327, l. 55; d. 548, l. 194; d. 744, l. 83; d. 804, l. 40; d. 950, l. 154 (Taganka); d. 651, l. 72.
- ¹¹¹ Strogov, *Kul'tura obsluzhivaniia*, 27.
- ¹¹² GARF, f. 5452, op. 37, d. 744, l. 134.

¹¹³ TsAGM, f. 2275, op. 1 d. 44, l. 27; also “Biblioteka univermaga,” *Sovetskaia torgovlia*, [newspaper] April 2, 1957: 4.

¹¹⁴ On the value of popular folk music-making in Russia and Bulgaria, see respectively Laura J. Olson, *Performing Russia: Folk Revival and Russian Identity* (New York, 2004), 46-49, and Donna Anne Buchanan, *Performing Democracy: Bulgarian Music and Musicians in Transition* (Chicago, 2006), ch. 4. The monthly journals produced by the Central Council of Trade Unions, *Klub* and *Khudozhestvennaia samodeiatel'nost'*, provided extensive instruction and guidance for these activities.

¹¹⁵ GARF, f. 5452, op. 37, d. 804, l. 98.

¹¹⁶ GARF, f. 5452, op. 37, d. 883 (meeting of club workers to plan 50th anniversary of Great October, August 23, 1966), ll. 61-62.

¹¹⁷ TsAGM, f. 2275, op. 1 d. 44, ll. 6, 28; d. 68, l. 8. On the television program, see Christine E. Evans, *Between Truth and Time: A History of Soviet Central Television* (New Haven, 2016), ch. 3.

¹¹⁸ GARF, f. 5452, op. 37, d. 1197 (Union central committee plenum, October 22-23, 1970), l. 56; TsAGM, f. 2275, op. 1, d. 44, l. 25.

¹¹⁹ TsAGM, f. 2275, op. 1, d. 44, l. 25.

¹²⁰ TsAGM, f. 2275, op. 1, d. 19, ll. 9-10.

¹²¹ GARF, f. 5452, op. 37, d. 1197, ll. 102-103.

¹²² TsAGM, f. 2275, op. 1, d. 62, ll. 40-42. The outcome of the case is unknown.

¹²³ Kozlov and Kanetskii, *Po tu storonu prilavka*, 152; GARF, f. 5452, op. 37, d. 1049, l. 68.

¹²⁴ GARF, f. 5452, op. 37, d. 892, l. 293.

¹²⁵ E. Vas'kin and V. Usov, "Bol'she zaboty o molodykh rabotnikakh prilavka,"

Sovetskaia torgovlia 10 (1966): 44-47.

¹²⁶ Kozlov and Kanetskii, *Po tu storonu prilavka*.

¹²⁷ TsAGM, f. 2275, op. 1, d. 62, l. 12.

¹²⁸ Randall, "'Revolutionary Bolshevik Work'."

¹²⁹ Susan Porter Benson, *Counter Cultures: Saleswomen, Managers, and Customers in American Department Stores 1890-1940* (Urbana, 1986), 163.

¹³⁰ GARF, f. 5452, op. 37, d. 892, l. 290.

¹³¹ Philip Hanson, *The Rise and Fall of the Soviet Economy* (London, 2003), ch. 4.

Interestingly, reforms aiming to decentralize planning had also been attempted in the 1930s: Hessler, *Social History of Soviet Trade*, 218.

¹³² GARF, f. 5452, op. 37, d. 955, l. 172.

¹³³ GARF, f. 5452, op. 37, d. 892, l. 67.

¹³⁴ GARF, f. 5452, op. 37, d. 955, ll. 172-73.

¹³⁵ GARF, f. 5452, op. 37, d. 955, ll. 107-108.

¹³⁶ GARF, f. 5452, op. 37, d. 950, l. 153.

¹³⁷ GARF, f. 5542, op. 37, d. 892, ll. 359-360.

¹³⁸ GARF, f. 5452, op. 37, d. 950, l. 153.

¹³⁹ V. Malykhin, "Sovetskii prodavets," *Sovetskaia torgovlia* 8 (1972): 2-4

¹⁴⁰ "Blagodarnoe delo – sluzhit' cheloveku," *Sovetskaia torgovlia* 7 (1973): 2-4, quote 4.

¹⁴¹ GARF, f. 5452, op. 37, d. 1513, ll. 97, 137-38.

¹⁴² GARF, f. 5452, op. 37, d. 1513, l. 339.

¹⁴³ GARF, f. 5452, op. 37, d. 1513, l. 340.

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- ¹⁴⁴ Vas'kin and Usov, "Bol'she raboty," *Sovetskaia torgovlia* 10 (1966): 45.
- ¹⁴⁵ Belova, "Prodavets i pokupatel'," *Sovetskaia torgovlia* 7 (1973): 38.
- ¹⁴⁶ Hochschild, *Managed Heart*; Wharton, "Affective Consequences of Service Work," 225; Martin B. Tolich, "Alienating and Liberating Emotions at Work: Supermarket Clerks' Performance of Customer Service," *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 22 (1993): 379.
- ¹⁴⁷ Abiala, "Customer Orientation and Sales Situations," 208.
- ¹⁴⁸ Chernyshova, *Soviet Consumer Culture*, 85.
- ¹⁴⁹ Vladimir Shlapentokh, *Public and Private Life of the Soviet People: Changing Values in Post-Stalinist Russia* (New York, 1989), 80. According to G. A. Cherednichenko and V. N. Shubkin, *Molodezh' vstupaet v zhizn' (sotsiologicheskie issledovaniia problem vybora professii i trudoustroistva)* (Moscow, 1985), 58, the status of sales assistants reached fifty-second place for girls in 1973, up from sixty-ninth ten years earlier.
- ¹⁵⁰ James R. Millar, "The Little Deal: Brezhnev's Contribution to Acquisitive Socialism," *Slavic Review* 44 (1985): 694-706.
- ¹⁵¹ GARF, f. 5452, op. 37, d. 950, l. 153.
- ¹⁵² GARF, f. 5452, op. 37, d. 473, ll. 52-53.
- ¹⁵³ Quoted in Peter Frase, "In Defense of Soviet Waiters: Sometimes Bad Service Is Class Struggle," *Jacobin* (2013), jacobinmag.com/2013/02/soviet-waiters-emotional-labor-customer-service; last accessed 5 October 2019. For a glimpse of how these traits continue into post-socialist Minsk, see Emily Curtin, "Emotsional'nyi aspekt publichnykh prostranstv Minska," *Urbanist* (Minsk), 2018, trans. Liudmila Slivinskaia

and Andrei Voz'ianov; urbanist.by/teplyj.sportzal/; last accessed 29 October 2018. Many thanks to Andrey Vozyanov for this reference.