

# Fighting Western Fashion in the Soviet Union: The Komsomol, Westernized Youth, and the Cultural Cold War in the Mid-1950s

by Gleb Tsipursky

## Abstract

This paper proposes that the mid-1950s drive to combat extreme devotion to western fashion constituted part of the endeavor to build a broadly appealing socialist version of modernity in the “Thaw,” the decade and a half following I. V. Stalin’s death in 1953 and the rise of N. S. Khrushchev to power. This Thaw-era drive for a socialist modernity involved forging a society, culture, and a way of life widely perceived at home and abroad as progressive and advanced, and as offering a viable alternative to the predominant western paradigm. The end goals of this post-Stalin endeavor to construct an appealing socialist alternative involved reaching the utopia of communism, a drive that stagnated under Stalin, while also winning the Cold War and in the process spreading the Soviet model of socialist modernity across the globe.

**Keywords:** socialist modernity, fashion, thaw, cold war culture.

“Let’s Talk About Tastes and Manners” was the title of a 1956 youth event at the Labor Reserves Central House of Culture. At this meeting, “all those present condemned the devotion of certain comrades with ‘ultramodern’ fashion”, instead endorsing the opinion that “dressing well means dressing in a tasteful, not flashy, manner”.<sup>1</sup> This report about the meeting comes from *Komsomol’skaia pravda*, the national newspaper of the Komsomol.<sup>2</sup> One among many such articles in youth newspapers in the mid-1950s, it suggests the importance of fashion both to the authorities and to young people alike. In particular, this story highlights the problem of “ultramodern” attire, a euphemism for western-style clothing; it also suggests some of the ways that the Soviet system during these years fought against youth fascination

with such styles, namely through public condemnation. The abovementioned article thus embodies the two central questions at the heart of the present essay. First, why was it important for the Soviet state of the mid-1950s to define appropriate clothing? Second, what methods did it apply to do so? To answer these questions, the essay draws on archives, newspapers, instruction booklets, memoirs, and interviews.<sup>3</sup>

The present paper proposes that the efforts to combat extreme devotion to western fashion in the mid-1950s constituted part of the endeavor to build a broadly appealing socialist version of modernity in the “Thaw”, the decade and a half following I. V. Stalin’s death in 1953 and the rise of N. S. Khrushchev to power.<sup>4</sup> This Thaw-era quest for a socialist

1 “Pogovorim o vkusakh i manerakh”, *Komsomol’skaia pravda*, February 3, 1956.

2 This mass Soviet youth organization was dedicated to socializing young people from fifteen to twenty-eight. In 1958, the Komsomol included about half of those eligible by age. Membership in the Komsomol had substantial benefits for those seeking upward social mobility and white-collar professional careers. For more on the Komsomol, see Juliane Fürst, *Stalin’s Last Generation: Soviet Youth and the Emergence of Mature Socialism, 1945-56*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2010, pp. 32-63.

3 The archives include: Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv sotsial’no-politicheskoi istorii (RGASPI); Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv noveishei istorii (RGANI); Tsentral’nyi arkhiv obshchestvenno-politicheskoi istorii Moskvy (TsAOPIM); Tsentral’nyi arkhiv gosudarstva Moskvy (TsAGM); Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv noveishei istorii saratovskoi oblasti (GANISO).

4 This essay adopts the term “Thaw” to convey the series of thaws and chills in this ambiguous and multivalent, but overall more pluralistic era. For more on this term, see Stephen V. Bittner, *The Many Lives of Khrushchev’s Thaw: Experience and Memory in Moscow’s Arbat*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press,

modernity involved forging a society, culture, and a way of life widely perceived at home and abroad as offering a viable alternative to the predominant western paradigm in the Cold War context.<sup>5</sup>

An essential aspect of building a socialist version of modernity involved creating young model citizens, “New Soviet People”, fit for constructing and living in the upcoming communist utopia. In doing so, the Soviet party-state complex, the combination of government institutions and Communist Party-controlled social organizations such as trade unions and the Komsomol, sought to reshape youth cultural tastes, and thus identities, to fit prescribed notions of appropriate norms.<sup>6</sup> Several recent studies have shed significant light on youth identities and cultural practices in the postwar decades.<sup>7</sup> However, there has been a lack of studies examining the perspective of and efforts by the authorities to remake youth tastes.

My essay also contributes to the field of socialist fashion. Much excellent literature has appeared on the post-Stalin turn to satisfying

consumer desires and tastes in fashion.<sup>8</sup> Still, such works have not undertaken in-depth examinations of the symbolic and physical violence exerted by the party-state to combat the tastes and preferences of those who refused to follow official prescriptions.<sup>9</sup>

A focus on the latter issue enables this paper to make another historiographic intervention, joining the recent scholarship that rejects previous depictions of the Thaw as a time of liberalism by pointing to elements of continuing and even increasing coercion during this era.<sup>10</sup> A number of scholars have pointed to the growing role of collective surveillance and volunteer policing as increasing the prevalence of social control at the daily level under Khrushchev.<sup>11</sup> These

8 Larissa Zakharova, “Dior in Moscow: A Taste for Luxury in Soviet Fashion under Khrushchev”, *Pleasures in Socialism: Leisure and Luxury in the Eastern Bloc*, eds. David Crowley and Susan E. Reid, Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2010, pp. 95-121; L. B. Brusilovskaia, *Kul'tura povsednevnosti v epokhu "otpepli": Metamorfozy stilia*, Moscow: Izdatel'stvo URAO, 2001, pp. 169-74; S. V. Zhuravlev and Jukka Gronow, “Krasota pod kontrollem gosudarstva: Osobennosti i etapi stanovleniia sovetskoi mody”, *The Soviet and Post-Soviet Review* 32.1, 2005, pp. 1-92; Olga Gurova, “The Art of Dressing: Body, Gender and Discourse on Fashion in Soviet Russia in the 1950s and 60s”, *The Fabric of Cultures: Fashion, Identity, Globalization*, eds. Eugenia Paulicelli and Hazel Clark, New York: Berg, 2008, pp. 73-91.

9 Following Dipesh Chakrabarty, this essay defines symbolic violence as coercion via means other than physical force: see his *Provincializing Europe: Post-colonial Thought and Historical Difference*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000, pp. 1-27.

10 Robert Hornsby, *Protest, Reform and Repression in Khrushchev's Soviet Union*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013; Miriam Dobson, *Khrushchev's Cold Summer: Gulag Returnees, Crime, and the Fate of Reform after Stalin*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009; Brian LaPierre, *Hooligans in Khrushchev's Russia: Defining, Policing, and Producing Deviance during the Thaw*, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2012.

11 Oleg Kharkhordin, *The Collective and the Individual in Russia: A Study of Practices*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999, pp. 279-302; Gleb Tsipursky, “Citizenship, Deviance, and Identity: Soviet Youth Newspapers as Agents of Social Control in the Thaw-Era Leisure Campaign”, *Cahiers du monde russe* 49.4, October-December 2008, pp.

2008, pp. 1-13.

5 On socialist modernity, see David L. Hoffmann, *Cultivating the Masses: Modern State Practices and Soviet Socialism, 1914-1939*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011, p. 3.

6 For the role of taste in shaping identity, see Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984, pp. 466-84; Sarah Thornton, *Club Cultures: Music, Media and Subcultural Capital*, Hanover: Wesleyan University Press, 1996, pp. 163-68.

7 Sergei Zhuk, *Rock and Roll in the Rocket City: The West, Identity, and Ideology in Soviet Dnepropetrovsk, 1960-1985*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010; William J. Risch, *The Ukrainian West: Culture and the Fate of Empire in Soviet Lviv*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011; Alexei Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever, until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006; Gleb Tsipursky, *Having Fun in the Thaw: Youth Initiative Clubs in the Post-Stalin Years*, in the series *The Carl Beck Papers in Russian and East European Studies*, No. 2201, Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2012.

works have not yet sufficiently explored the official perspectives on the struggle with “ultramodern” fashion among youngsters. Finally, this paper considers the Cold War implications of Soviet youth wearing styles perceived as western. The historiography on the Cold War’s cultural struggle has made great advances within the last decades, convincingly showing the vital role played by the cultural front in shaping the nature and outcome of this conflict. The large majority of extant literature focuses on the production of western cultural propaganda.<sup>12</sup> Some pioneering works have begun to uncover the complex question of the actual fruits of this propaganda for Soviet daily cultural life.<sup>13</sup> Yet this area requires much more research, enabling my study to expand the available historiography, especially in regard to how the Soviet authorities sought to present an image abroad of Soviet domestic cultural practices as worthy of respect and emulation, an aspect of foreign policy known as cultural diplomacy, as part of the party-state’s effort to offer an appealing socialist modernity to the outside world.

### **The context for and the launch of the mid-1950s campaign**

In the immediate postwar period, young upper-class men and some women in the USSR

became fascinated with western European and American popular culture.<sup>14</sup> The party-controlled press disparagingly homogenized such young people with the label of “stiliagi” (or the ‘style-obsessed’). A notorious 1949 article in the satirical journal *Krokodil* set the standard for the definitions of stiliagi in official discourse. The piece described a male youth clothed in a jacket with an orange back and green sleeves, yellowish-green pants, and socks in colors suggestive of the American flag. The article censured stiliagi for “being familiar with fashion of all countries and times” and for “developing their own style in clothing, conversations, and manners”, where “the main thing is to not be like normal people.”<sup>15</sup> This narrative makes references to the most important signifiers in actual stiliagi cultural practices, most notably fashion. Somewhat surprisingly in the context of the wide-ranging anti-cosmopolitan campaign against western cultural influence launched in 1946, these youngsters drew little attention from the postwar Stalin leadership. Several factors explain this: first, the late Stalinist state was always reluctant to publicize social problems; second, the demands of postwar reconstruction occupied much of its attention; third, many of the early stiliagi were the children of party elites.<sup>16</sup> Though

629-49.

12 Lisa E. Davenport, *Jazz Diplomacy: Promoting America in the Cold War Era*, Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2009; Greg Castillo, *Cold War on the Home Front: The Soft Power of Midcentury Design*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010; Penny M. Von Eschen, *Satchmo Blows up the World: Jazz Ambassadors Play the Cold War*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004.

13 Donald J. Raleigh, *Soviet Baby Boomers: An Oral History of Russia’s Cold War Generation*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2011, pp. 66-267; Anne E. Gorsuch, *All This is Your World: Soviet Tourism at Home and Abroad after Stalin*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2011, pp. 79-167.

14 Mark Edele, “Strange Young Men in Stalin’s Moscow: The Birth and Life of the Stiliagi, 1945-1953”, *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas* 50.1, 2002, pp. 37-61; Gleb Tsipursky, “Living ‘America’ in the Soviet Union: The Cultural Practices of ‘Westernized’ Soviet Youth, 1945-1964”, *The Soviet Union & The United States: Rivals of the Twentieth Century. Coexistence & Competition*, ed. Eva-Maria Stolberg, New York: Peter Lang, 2013, pp. 139-64.

15 “Stiliaga”, *Krokodil*, March 10, 1949.

16 Elena Zubkova, *Russia After the War: Hopes, Illusions, and Disappointments, 1945-1957*, Armonk: M. E. Sharpe, 1998, pp. 1-51; N. I. Nikolaeva, “Nekotorye itogi antiamerikanskoi kampanii v SSSR v kontse 40kh-nachale 50kh godov”, *Novaya i noveishaia istoriia*, eds. A. V. Gladyshev and V. S. Mirzekhanov, Saratov: Izdatel’stvo Saratovskogo universiteta,

some criticism of westernized youth in newspapers did appear with the launch of the antic cosmopolitanism campaign, it likely reached its apogee with the 1949 article, decreasing afterward.<sup>17</sup>

However, soon after Stalin's death the new leadership rapidly launched a new public drive against all sorts of youth misbehavior, including stiliagi-like behavior, most notably targeting fashion. The keynote speech of the 1954 Twelfth Komsomol Congress, in contrast to the lack of criticism at the 1949 Eleventh Komsomol Congress, strongly condemned "young men with Tarzan-style haircuts dressed up like parrots, the so-called 'stiliagi'".<sup>18</sup> Regional Komsomol committee conferences sent similar messages: for example, in contradiction to the lack of criticism of stiliagi in the keynote speech of the December 1952 Saratov Komsomol city conference, the keynote speaker at the December 1953 conference disparaged "young women and men, with so much make-up that they are unrecognizable, garbed in wild costumes."<sup>19</sup> The Komsomol strengthened its anti-stiliagi campaign with an August 1955 closed letter to branch Komsomol organizations that demanded the intensification of the struggle against young people who "lead a party lifestyle", a euphemism for stiliagi.<sup>20</sup>

This new campaign was all the more remarkable owing to the warming relations with non-socialist states in the early Thaw and the accompanying tolerance for elements of western popular culture in Soviet life, unimaginable during the Stalinist

anticosmopolitan campaign.<sup>21</sup> As part of this transformation, outsiders traveled to the Soviet Union in growing numbers. In particular, post-Stalin public diplomacy encouraged western youth associations to send delegations to the Soviet Union, perceiving such institutional ties as helping legitimate the USSR in the eyes of the outside world. However, the outcome of these trips did not always go as planned by the Soviet party-state. In one instance, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs reported that a member of a visiting delegation of English students, after returning home, published an article in the English newspaper *Observer* entitled "Speculators and Hooligans". This story related how a small minority of Soviet youth tried to emulate western ways in a "vulgar and loud" manner and attempted to purchase western products from foreign visitors. The ministry suggested that youth organizations deal with these problems.<sup>22</sup> Nonetheless, western newspapers kept publishing stories about Soviet youth who longed for western material and cultural products.<sup>23</sup> This undoubtedly drew top-level ire as undermining the Soviet Cold War cultural diplomacy efforts.

Still, while the number of young people fascinated with western styles did rise after 1953, the gradual rate of this increase suggests that this factor had no more than a secondary part in the rapid launch of the new measures targeting stiliagi. Instead, the coming to

2004, pp. 100-12.

17 Fürst, *Stalin's Last Generation*, pp. 200-249.

18 A. N. Shelepin, *Otchetnyi doklad TsK VLKSM XII s'ezdu komsomola*, Moscow: Molodaia gvardiia, 1954, p. 48.

19 GANISO, f. 4529, op. 10, d. 6, l. 218.

20 RGASPI, f. M-1, op. 3, d. 878, ll. 76-78.

21 Ted Hopf, *Social Construction of International Politics: Identities & Foreign Policies*, Moscow, 1955 and 1999, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002, pp. 39-82; Aleksandr Fursenko and Timothy Naftali, *Khrushchev's Cold War: The Insider Story of an American Adversary*, New York: W. W. Norton, 2006, p. 5-32; Vladislav Zubok, *A Failed Empire: The Soviet Union in the Cold War from Stalin to Gorbachev*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007, pp. 62-94.

22 RGANI, f. 5, op. 30, d. 179, l. 87.

23 "Moscow's Jet Set Rides High", *The New York Times*, November 4, 1956.

power of the new leadership and its decisive turn toward forging a socialist modernity through re-launching the drive to construct communism and win the Cold War played the central role. The 1955 letter itself presents the motivation as inherently ideological, linking the current “concluding stage of the construction of socialism and gradual transition to communism” to the need for a “decisive struggle with” youth misbehavior.<sup>24</sup> The resolution of the Seventh Komsomol Central Committee plenum of 1957 underscored the need to struggle with misbehavior “with all our might, because it is especially intolerable right now, when the country is coming closer and closer to communism everyday.”<sup>25</sup> In a March 1957 speech at a conference of the Moscow Komsomol city committee, the First Secretary and thus leader of the Komsomol A. N. Shelepin demanded that “Komsomol organizations lead the struggle against blindly kowtowing to all that is western.”<sup>26</sup> Such evidence underscores that the rapid shifts in discourse and policy against stiliagi after Stalin’s death reflect the changes taking place at the top. This indicates the need to nuance the conclusions of those recent publications that consider Thaw-era innovations as primarily structurally-determined policies evolving organically from broader processes associated with postwar reconstruction as opposed to the result of a conscious new course by the post-Stalin Kremlin.<sup>27</sup>

24 RGASPI, f. M-1, op. 3, d. 878, l. 79.

25 Ibid., d. 930, l. 6.

26 TsAOPIM, f. 635, op. 13, d. 546, ll. 13-17, 44-45.

27 Fürst, *Stalin’s Last Generation*, pp. 20-29; Julie Hessler, *A Social History of Soviet Trade: Trade Policy, Retail Practices, and Consumption, 1917–1953*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004, pp. 296-336.

### Enacting the mid-1950s campaign against stiliagi

The anti-stiliagi drive resulted in newspapers deploying symbolic violence as a means of using the power of public censure, humiliation, and shame, a sharp break with the late Stalinist practices of avoiding publicizing social problems. Less than two months after Stalin’s death the Moscow Komsomol city committee’s paper published a mocking poem entitled “Stiliaga” about a young person whose costume “is reminiscent of a peacock’s tail.”<sup>28</sup> The national Komsomol organ published an article that harshly criticized a youth for legally changing his name to Andre Johnson Rockefeller, wearing “narrow pants with zippers”, and harassing women.<sup>29</sup> Newspapers also reproached female stiliagi, as in a published letter from a group of young women ashamed of their friend, Valia. According to this denunciation, Valia wears excessive makeup and shows too much of her body.<sup>30</sup> The publication of a multitude of response letters condemning Valia patently illustrates the intentions of the press to convince readers that all worthy citizens need to participate in the collective censure of misbehaving young women.<sup>31</sup> The press disparaged stiliagi by name, printing their personal information, as in a story about Arkadii and his friends, condemned by the newspaper for illegal trading with foreign sailors “for the sake of striped socks and a dozen packs of chewing gum.”<sup>32</sup>

28 “Stiliaga”, *Moskovskii komsomolets*, April 23, 1953.

29 “Rockefeller iz Noril’ska”, *Komsomol’skaia pravda*, July 11, 1959.

30 “Nam stydno za podrugy”, *Komsomol’skaia pravda*, June 21, 1955.

31 For the responses, see “Net, eto nashe delo”, *Komsomol’skaia pravda*, August 11, 1955.

32 “Okhotniki za podtiazhkami”, *Komsomol’skaia pravda*, July 1, 1960.



Figure 1: “Stiliagi”, *Zaria molodezhi*, February 17, 1957.

Editorial cartoons in newspapers visually illustrated and condemned stiliagi style and behavior. A youth newspaper in Saratov published two caricatures of stiliagi, focusing on their attire (see Figure 1).

Both images exaggerated elements to mock stiliagi styles. A more complex, multi-panel example from *Komsomol'skaia Pravda* bears the title of “What is Good and What is Bad”, with the left side devoted to praiseworthy and the second to proscribed practices (see Figure 2).

The first panel denounces those who spend a great deal of time shopping and buy skimpy, western-style clothing. The second critiques people sitting by themselves at home listening and singing to boogie-woogie music. The third panel most explicitly condemns western fashion. The last panel disparages individualistic separation from the collective.

The wide reliance on public censure links directly to the Thaw-era administration's belief in the power of collective judgment in the struggle to achieve communism. At the 1957 Moscow city Komsomol conference, Shelepin cited a Chinese folk saying that states that if 1000 people point to a thief, he will die: this, according to Shelepin, “is about the great power of the collective.”<sup>33</sup> The newspaper articles set the goal of helping construct a self-surveying, authoritative collective, whose disparaging, shaming voice constitutes the only punishment necessary for correcting misbehavior in the communist utopia.<sup>34</sup> Perhaps the most direct means of using the symbolic violence of public opprobrium to condemn inappropriate tastes came through

<sup>33</sup> TsAOPIM, f. 635, op. 14, d. 240, ll. 44-45.

<sup>34</sup> On surveillance managing behavior, see Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, New York: Vintage Books, 1979, pp. 178-79.

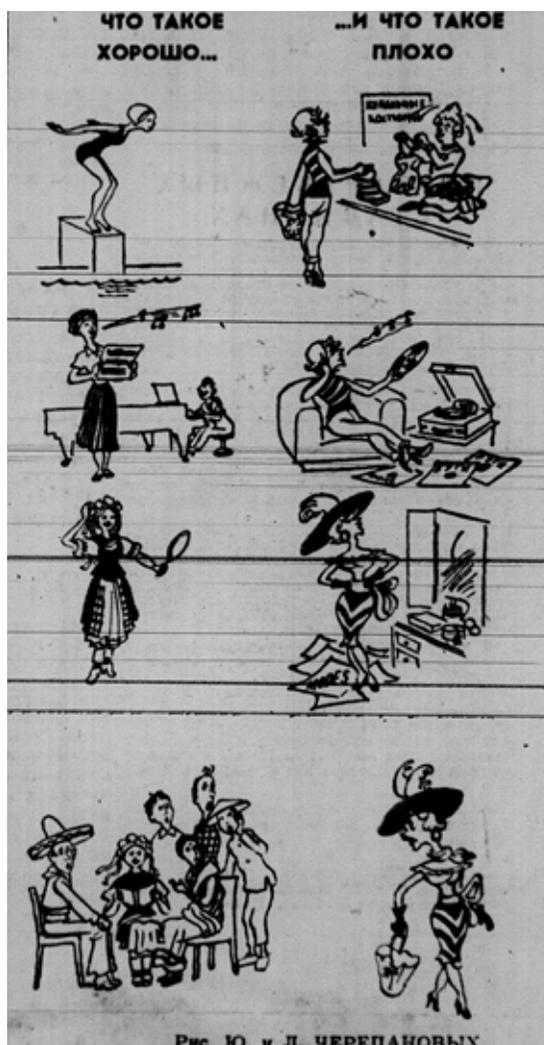


Figure 2: "Chto takoe khorosho i chto takoe plokho", *Komsomol'skaia pravda*, July 12, 1957.

direct censure of Komsomol members exhibiting stiliagi-like traits at Komsomol meetings. The Party Central Committee promoted the employment of this and similar tactics in March 1959.<sup>35</sup> Local Komsomol committee testimony depicts this range of public shaming as an effective technique.<sup>36</sup> Such symbolic violence constituted a necessary basis for mobilizing young Komsomol

35 *Spravochnik partiinogo rabotnika*, Vypusk III, Moscow, 1961, pp. 577-79.

36 RGASPI, f. M-1, op. 32, d. 811, l. 64.

members to deploy both symbolic and physical violence against youth misconduct through Komsomol-managed volunteer militias. The mid-1950s campaign against juvenile delinquency resulted in the quick organization of Komsomol patrols under the auspices of local Komsomol committees across the country. The patrols, consisting of groups of ideologically committed young volunteers, strove to monitor and police the everyday activities of youth in their free time.<sup>37</sup> At a Moscow city Komsomol conference in 1957, the Komsomol secretary of the Likhachev automobile factory described how "[we] help guys get a better haircut, with the help of scissors, of course", a euphemism for cutting off the "western" haircuts of stiliagi.<sup>38</sup> A former patrol member's memoirs relate his dislike for stiliagi: "To our high ideals [they] juxtaposed narrow pants and loud ties", and he recalls a number of fights with them.<sup>39</sup> In a press story, a Komsomol patrol "took a group of girls who danced an improper dance [meaning in a "western" style] outside the capital, and cut the hair off four of them."<sup>40</sup> The patrols deployed symbolic and physical violence to impose horizontal social controls on stiliagi and expunge this perceived deviance, thus removing the roadblocks toward the ideal

37 For more on patrols, see Juliane Fürst, "The Importance of Being Stylish: Youth, Culture and Identity in Late Stalinism", *Late Stalinist Russia: Society between Reconstruction and Reinvention*, ed. Juliane Fürst, New York: Routledge, 2006, pp. 209-30; Gleb Tsipursky, "Coercion and Consumption: The Khrushchev Leadership's Ruling Style in the Campaign against 'Westernized' Youth, 1954-64," *Youth, Rock, and the Soviet Bloc: Youth Cultures, Music, and the State in Russia and Eastern Europe*, ed. William J. Risch, Lanham: Lexington Books, 2014, pp. 82-127.

38 TsAOPIM, f. 635, op. 13, d. 546, ll. 75-76.

39 V. E. Ronkin, *Na smenu dekabriam prikhodiat ianvari: vospominaniia byvshego brigadmil'tsa i podpol'shchika, a pozzhe – politzakliuchennogo i dissidenta*, Moscow: Obshchestvo "Memorial", Izd-vo "Zven'ia", 2003, pp. 71-74.

40 "Vospitanie... nozhnitsami", *Moskovskii komsolets*, February 24, 1959.

communist future and helping manage its Cold War domestic cultural front.

Soviet law enforcement also participated in the struggle against stiliagi. In 1960-61, the government passed more stringent laws against illegal products, including western goods.<sup>41</sup> A booklet describes how the police uncovered a clique of youths who bought goods and currency from foreign tourists for resale in the Soviet Union, and put them on trial.<sup>42</sup>

Still, official discourse and public policy in the Thaw opened significant room for negotiation on the extent of western style allowed in comparison to the late Stalin years. The Moscow Komsomol organ in 1955 ran a letter from a young woman in a prominent position on its front page. The letter stated that:

*Lately, many young women have begun to wear pants. Yet this clothing surprises some passersby, and occasionally one hears "stiliaga" addressed to those women. I think pants are comfortable clothes for industrial work, for housework, and, of course, for sports. If pants are convenient for working with machinery, skating, hiking, and cleaning, then you should wear them, and pay no attention to those who, because of their stagnant mindset, call such a costume stiliaga-like.*<sup>43</sup>

This and other stories in youth newspapers echoed broader debates among Soviet fashion workers and in the pages of specialized magazines on appropriate styles, which

41 Harold J. Berman, *Justice in the U.S.S.R.: An Interpretation of Soviet Law*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1966, pp. 84-86.

42 A. Lavrov and O. Lavrova, *ChP – darmoed!* Moscow: Znanie, 1961, pp. 6-16.

43 "A kak думаete vy?" *Moskovskii komsomolets*, March 10, 1957. For other articles where the letters of readers provide a conflicting definition of stiliagi, see *Moskovskii komsomolets*, March 13, 1957; *Komsomol'skaia pravda*, July 9, 1958; *Komsomol'skaia pravda*, August 6, 1958.

frequently argued over the appropriateness of "western" models. These discussions helped expand greatly the amount of room for western-like fashion allowed to Soviet citizens.<sup>44</sup>

Such discussions within Soviet newspapers and journals emblemize a deliberate opening of negotiating room on the definition of stiliagi and draw attention to the Komsomol's willingness to extend a compromise to the many people tempted by some aspects of western culture yet faithful to communist ideology at heart. These youth, in other words, could still be New Soviet People while adopting a degree of western style.<sup>45</sup> At variance with the tendencies of the postwar Stalin years to totalizing exclusion, this novel Khrushchev-era approach endeavored to excise only the minority of full-fledged stiliagi who were not willing to compromise and expressed a spectacular opposition to mainstream norms. Such repression of small-scale youth cultural groupings that spectacularly went against mainstream norms paralleled some of the practices of western governments in regard to spectacularly nonconformist youth.<sup>46</sup>

44 For such debates, see Zhuravlev and Gronow, "Krasota pod kontrolem gosudarstva"; Gurova, "The Art of Dressing".

45 For similar tensions in regard to other kinds of western cultural influence, see Yurchak, *Everything was Forever*, pp. 164-65.

46 Stanley Cohen, *Folk Devils & Moral Panics: The Creation of the Mods and Rockers*, New York: Basil Blackwell, 1987; Uta G. Poiger, *Jazz, Rock, and Rebels: Cold War Politics and American Culture in a Divided Germany*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000; James Gilbert, *A Cycle of Outrage: America's Reaction to the Juvenile Delinquent in the 1950s*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1986; Steven Mintz, *Huck's Raft: A History of American Childhood*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004, pp. 275-309; John Springhall, *Coming of Age: Adolescence in Britain, 1860-1960*, Dublin: Gill and Macmillan Ltd, 1986; John R. Gillis, *Youth and History: Tradition and Change in European Age Relations, 1770-Present*, New York: Academic Press Inc., 1981, pp. 132-210.

## Conclusion

My essay has made a number of interventions in the current scholarship. It placed the campaign in the mid-1950s against styles perceived by the hierarchy as excessively western within the broader framework of the Thaw-era endeavor to construct an appealing socialist alternative to western modernity, one attractive at home and abroad alike, as a means of winning the Cold War and building communism in the Soviet Union and across the globe. The paper proposed that forging model young Soviet citizens fit to construct communism and carry out the Cold War constituted a key component of making a socialist alternative modernity. As part of a cohesive and holistic identity, this New Soviet Person had to have appropriate cultural tastes and aesthetic preferences, the authorities believed. This meant, among other things, rejecting excessive western cultural influence, including in fashion, while opening the door to a much greater amount of western culture than permissible under Stalin.

To ensure the forging of Soviet youth into model builders of communism, the Khrushchev authorities launched the campaign against youth misbehavior in the mid-1950s, a significant part of which targeted stiliagi and their fashion. The authorities strove mightily to enforce a limit on the boundaries of acceptable clothing. This contrasted with the Stalinist period when official discourse publicly condemned western cultural influence, but the party-state did not undertake any significant and systematic measures to combat westernized youth cultural practices in fashion.

The mid-1950s campaign relied heavily on symbolic violence as expressed via the opprobrium of public discourse and official collectives as its premier tool of social control.

A crucial secondary tool consisted of social mobilization at Komsomol meetings and especially Komsomol patrols, with the latter deploying both symbolic and physical violence. Law enforcement organs provided a third, less important element, owing to the de-emphasis on state policing under Khrushchev. The new mid-1950s initiative underscores the important role that the conscious decisions of the post-Stalin leadership had on the content of central policies and the methods of enacting these in everyday life, thus shaping the frameworks of Soviet youth lives and cultural practices. However, these policies simultaneously responded to the realities of youth desires, including for western fashion, illustrating the complex process of interactions between governing structures and the population in the USSR.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Gleb Tsipursky is Assistant Professor at The Ohio State University. His research focuses on the Soviet Union, and he writes about modernity, youth, popular culture, consumption, emotions, the Cold War, globalization, social control, policing, and violence. He has published over 25 peer-reviewed pieces in venues in the United States, France, Germany, Canada, England, and Russia, including the monograph *Socialist Fun: Youth, Consumption, and State-Sponsored Popular Culture in the USSR, 1945-1970* with the University of Pittsburgh Press (2016). He is currently working on post-truth politics in a global context. He was awarded fellowships by the Kennan Institute, the American Council of Learned Societies, the International Education Program Service, and the International Research and Exchanges Board.