

USSR TRIP REPORT #4

May 21st – 30th, 1990

The trip was associated with a group of nine individuals from MEDA traveling to the Conference of Christian Businessmen held in Moscow May 25th through 26th. The entire time was spent in Moscow. The additional members were Neil Janzen, Ron Braun, Al Doerksen, Jim and Bev Penner, Bob Thompson, Fred Wall and Leroy Troyer.

The Conference was held in the Congress Centre at the Mezhdunarodnaya complex. These are excellent facilities with translation equipment. A total of 38 cooperatives were represented with a total of approximately 80 Soviets and 15 foreigners. John Lapp and Paul Landis of MCC were also in attendance. The main objective of the Conference was to establish an “Association of Christian Businessmen” of the USSR. This was successfully accomplished with Mr. Yevgeny Filev of Maikop as the First President. He is Chairman of a cooperative with 200 members manufacturing bricks and wood components. He is 38 years old and a member of the Baptist Church. A total of 6 board members were selected with a vacant position held for a representative of the Baltic Republics. The other board members are:

Alexander Semchenko – Moscow
Pavel Maslov – Kishenev (Moldavia)
Alexander Melnikov – Novosibirsk (Siberia)
Hans Warkentin – Schuchinsk (Kazakhstan)
Wladimir Prit – Rovno (Ukraine)

Melnikov is an academic (economist), while the others are all chairmen of sizable cooperatives.

The process was somewhat ragged at times but there was basic agreement on the directions. The articles of the association created substantial discussion as well as the selection of directors. There was concern about a Moscow location but a majority felt that Moscow must be the centre during the preliminary stage. Filev and others felt that at least some of the activities should be centered in a second location such as Kiev.

Many of the cooperatives are anxious for concrete assistance and some expressed impatience that this conference was mainly organizational in nature. The next conference has been called for February 8th-9th 1991 again in Moscow. It is essential that the church and businessmen in the West are prepared to become involved in specific ways by that date or severe disillusionment will set in. Many of the cooperatives are unrealistic about what to expect - they frequently ask for an undefined amount of equipment. Hopefully there will be some careful study on both sides to determine the most appropriate forms of assistance. It is hoped that each business person who has been to the Soviet Union on any of the trips since August, 1989, will be willing to undertake at least one direct involvement before the February, 1991 conference. This could be to host a visitor or assist in solving a technical or equipment problem. Finances may also be involved.

We stayed in two hotels. Part of the group stayed at the Peking Hotel, a major and centrally located hotel with an excellent Chinese restaurant. Unfortunately, the ruble section was always crowded and the valuta (dollar) section was available but expensive. The rest of the group (including myself) stayed at the “Soyuz

Pisateley” a writers’ union guesthouse. The facilities were very adequate – especially at 3 rubles per night!

Upon arrival I went directly to the Canadian Embassy for a reception with the Royal Winnipeg Ballet (sponsored by Central Canadian Structures). The following night we attended the ballet along with the MEDA group, Mr. and Mrs. Reinhard Schaefer of the West German Embassy and Mr. and Mrs. Vitaly Ozira of the Commission on Economic Reform. Both are friends from earlier days. After the ballet we had arranged for a private dinner for 26 persons at the “Café Vereniki”.

In addition to the formation of the association, the main purpose of the trip was to establish a wide range of contacts at senior government levels, especially with regard to the development of economic policy related to small enterprises. Substantial progress was made in this regard. Following is a list of contacts during this visit:

- 1) Harry Giesbrecht – Discussion re possible joint ventures with the Council of Unions.
- 2) Alexander Semchenko – Essentially my host during this visit and we had a number of meetings. Alex is involved with the arrangements for showing the Jesus film on National Television. The first showing cost 50,000 rubles (DeFehr Foundation). Since then the first half has been shown two more times and the second half one more time. The first two showings were fully national in scope. Nothing was paid for showings beyond the first full showing.

The Bible project to print 100,000 Bibles in Kiev is proceeding and they are expected to be delivered around the end of June.

The DeFehr Foundation has also agreed to provide funds toward the costs of an evangelistic campaign in Siberia to be held by Victor Hamm in August, 1990.

Semchenko showed us the new offices for “Protestant” which involves the renovating of six apartments on the first floor of an apartment building. This will include a recording studio. They are requesting technical assistance and would like to get in touch with Geoff Smith of Toronto in this regard.

- 3) Alexander Melnikov – Light of the Gospel. (Rovno)

The DeFehr Foundation agreed to provide funding for a 280 person church in Yakutia (extreme East). This will be the first Protestant church in the whole region. We also provided funding, including some designated gifts from friends, to purchase 5-6,000 New Testaments for Yakutia.

- 4) Igor Kuznetsov – Book Chamber International

We discussed the idea of a “Business Centre” related to “Protestant” to provide services to various foreign Christian organizations.

- 5) Central Union Organization for Tourism

Victor Pagiev – President

Grigory Ostrobrod – Vice President

Alexander S. Voznessenski – Head of Construction

Medwed – Chief Engineer
Alexander P. Ivashenko – external relations

We discussed various business opportunities including the marketing of their tourist services in Canada as competition to Intourist. They are also very interested in a joint venture to build furniture for their various hotels.

6) Vitaly Ozira

Special Advisor on State Commission on Economic Reform. Variety of discussions regarding the new reform policies. He also arranged important meetings in Government.

7) Alexander Zaichenko

Consultant to State Commission on Economic Reform. He is a Christian and member of the Baptist church. His training is in economics and philology and he has a strong interest in moral questions regarding society. We had a lovely lunch in his home on Sunday.

8) Fjodor Jagodkin – Riga

Professor of Management of Institute of Management who would like to exchange training at a Senior Management level. We suggested it was unlikely that Western managers would want to spend 2-3 months learning about Soviet management systems.

9) Hans Warkentin

Schuchinsk – Kazakhstan. Mennonite who has a 500 person cooperative. He has just arranged for a 13,000 m² factory which he is renovating for use as a furniture factory. He will visit Winnipeg during and after the World Conference to look at our factories. There may be opportunity for some kind of joint venture.

10) John Lapp – MCC

Shared information regarding Seven Day Adventist Seminary and agricultural centre. Could be of interest (Zaokske). John also wanted to arrange for the purchase of 3,000 New Testament Bibles for delivery to the Adventists.

11) Sergei Bizhko

Vice-President of International Children's Academy "Garden of the Arts". Discussed War Requiem as well as a musical "Jardono Brun", which he suggests should be staged again.

12) Sue Simpson – CBC Moscow Chief

Gave her copy of press releases and established contact.

13) Dmitriy G. Levchuk – (Abalkin Commission)

Head of Deputy Prime Minister's Executive office. Very useful discussion regarding small enterprise policy. They expressed strong support for the idea of a special private bank for small

enterprise. He was also most interested in the idea of a TV series to promote ethical values in relation to business.

14) Jurij Khachaturov

Section Head – Abalkin Commission.

Especially interested in small enterprise, legal and structural issues.

15) Gevork A. Egiazarjan

International Centre for Development of Small Enterprises. This is a joint venture between the Italian Chamber of Commerce and eight Soviet Institutions. Very supportive and cooperative.

16) Dr. Igor Bagdanov

Senior person re sciences and television. Very interested in access to Canadian TV programs but no money.

17) Mary Mosser / Chuck Andeel – Canadian Embassy

We reported on our visit and made arrangements for access re visas.

Art DeFehr
June 1, 1990