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A Policy of Rock: How Rock and Roll Undermined the Communist Revolution in Cold War Russia

Neal Albright

“Capitalism was the engine of rock’s development as a global cultural phenomenon.”¹

Today, we know how the story of the Soviet Union ends. In 1921, however, at the end of four years of bitter civil war, the future seemed limitless, and Vladimir Lenin was prepared to take full advantage of it. Lenin’s ultimate goals went further than simple competent governance. His party, the Bolsheviks, “took power with an extraordinarily ambitious program aimed...at remaking humanity.”²

As the civil war wound down and Bolshevik victory appeared imminent, Lenin turned his attentions to catalyzing a Russian economic recovery in the wake of four tumultuous and destructive years. In line with his vision for a worldwide Socialist revolution, Lenin sought to modernize Russia into a twentieth century power. Observing the newly ascendent great power in the West, Lenin came to the conclusion that America’s success lay in its technological achievements, especially in its innovative uses of electricity. By co-opting the American focus on technological modernity, Lenin

¹ Thomas Cushman, *Notes from the Underground* (New York: Albany State University of New York Press 1995), 19.

² Peter Kenez, *A History of the Soviet Union from Beginning to End* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 30.

believed that Russia could become an even greater power. As he famously asserted, "Communism = Soviet power + electrification."³

Moreover, modern industry and the electricity it relied on would also be crucial to achieving Lenin's predicted Communist apotheosis. In a 1920 speech, he declared that "...the organization of industry on the basis of modern, advanced technology, on electrification...will put an end to the division between town and country, will make it possible to raise the level of culture in the countryside and to overcome, even in the most remote corners of land, backwardness, ignorance, poverty, disease, and barbarism."⁴ Lenin stressed that "industry cannot be developed without electrification." Consequently, "without reconstruction of industry on lines of large-scale machine production, socialist construction will obviously remain only a set of decrees."⁵ Throughout its seventy years of existence, this theme of technological and industrial modernity remained central not only to the USSR's national goals, but also to its core ideology.

Lenin died in 1924 predicting a coming global Socialist revolution, with urban industrialization and technological prowess as its catalysts. Perhaps he foresaw automobiles replacing horses for personal transport, nuclear weapons threatening the very existence of humanity, or communication technology connecting the planet on an unprecedented scale. However, it is unlikely that the brilliant Socialist could

augur the circumstances wherein, thirty years later and across the world in the United States, a generation of young musicians would plug electricity into guitars and subsequently popularize a new form of music that would in turn emigrate throughout the world, including into Lenin's oft-purged Soviet Union. He could not know that this music would then collectivize societal discontent and contribute to the eventual fall of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. The grand Communist apotheosis, achievable only with technological modernity, would be undone, in part, by the technology that enabled the loud, electric musical stylings of dissatisfied, bored, and rock and roll-obsessed kids.

In the twenty years since the dissolution of the USSR and end of the Cold War, an array of both Soviet and American scholars have studied the effects of Western rock and roll music on Soviet government policy and on the daily lives of Soviet citizens. These scholars generally agree that rock and roll music held a significant role in both improving the standing of America and the West in the minds of Soviet citizens while also distracting from and undermining Communist ideology. Furthermore, a broad consensus emerges throughout Soviet rock studies that the popularity of Western culture contributed to a cultural rebellion that, by its inherent nature, was at odds with Soviet policy and ideology.

Scholars disagree about the exact nature of this revolt. Thomas Cushman argues that rock music created a Russian counterculture which actively protested against Soviet policies, akin to the American counterculture of the 1960s. In contrast, Alexei Yurchak writes that rock and roll merely created a political apathy among the youth, resulting in an

active disinterest and withdrawal from Communism and its tenets. In a country founded predominantly upon the ideal of a citizenry united in solidarity within Socialism, such a profound disconnect would therefore be fatal to the authority of the State's social contract between citizen and government.

This paper argues that the concept of technological modernity was central to Soviet Communist ideology and intertwined with the rock and roll explosion of the latter half of the 20th century. In interesting and ironic ways, serving to undermine its own legitimacy, the Soviet government inadvertently instigated and perpetuated rock and roll awareness, and its harsh reflection on Soviet society. By seeking to contain the ideological power of rock and roll, the regime implicitly acknowledged the techno-superiority of the West. In the end, rock and roll and its related technologies confirmed what most Soviets already suspected: the West had won the war of technological modernity.⁶

1957-1964: Krushchev, De-Stalinization, and a Single Voice

Blank tape was hard to find, but the stores had plenty of tapes with old Revolutionary anthems in stock...on my tapes you could hear bursts of the Red Army Choir between the sides of Sticky Fingers.⁷

Magnitizdat

In 1953, Joseph Stalin suffered a stroke and soon after died. Hundreds of thousands packed Moscow's public areas, jostling for the chance to view his displayed corpse. Stalin had institutionalized a state system whose key tenets included mass murder, forced collectivization, and omnipresent secret police. It was also the only life many Soviet people had ever known, and Stalin's death evoked a deep and uncertain anxiety about the future.⁸

Nikita Khrushchev emerged victorious amid the chaotic power struggle to succeed the dictator. Khrushchev became what Soviet historian Peter Kenez described as, "the last Soviet leader with a firm belief in the superiority of the Marxist-Leninist ideology" and "a fervent Communist...[who] never doubted the justice of the cause." Khrushchev instituted a series of reforms toward this end - including the period of de-Stalinization. Notably, Khrushchev denounced the "cult of personality," the concept of idolizing a political figure in the popular imagination in order to obfuscate controversial (and usually brutal) policies. Under Khrushchev's watch, Soviet Russia charted a more moderate (though still repressive) path.

One effect of de-Stalinization was a resulting "cultural thaw." By the mid-1950s, "many of the old [artistic] restrictions were lifted, and every component of Soviet culture benefited." Kenez asserts that the new society allowed Soviet intellectuals to "distinguish between friends and foes of change." As a result, "from this time on...the Soviet Union ceased to be a totalitarian society."⁹ Still, officially published and distributed

⁸ Kenez, 185.

⁹ Ibid, 191.

works were subject to government approval, and media were always subject to the political whims of the State.¹⁰

In an effort to showcase its post-Stalinist societal transformation, the Kremlin hosted in 1957 the Moscow Youth Festival. The State gathered tens of thousands of teenagers from across the USSR and invited musical acts from both sides of the Iron Curtain to perform, including groups from Great Britain. The British groups brought an array of unorthodox instruments, including electric guitars. What they did with them horrified the older generation in attendance, but “the rock and roll numbers aroused great interest among the youth of the socialist camp.”¹¹ This was not to be an isolated event but a vanguard of not only a new era of popular electrified music, but a new era of how the populace interacted with its government, and each other.

By the end of the 1950s and into the 1960s, public demand for Western rock and roll music had spread. Most of the music was illegal and not available for purchase from official commercial venues. The youth acquired the forbidden tunes anyway, mainly through the emergence of domestic electrical technology that allowed rock and roll music to be pirated and distributed ubiquitously throughout the USSR. This distribution of Western culture was itself illegal and thus an act of protest, and the issue gained traction when underground Soviet musicians began writing their own songs using Russian lyrics and distributing that on

the same networks, creating a collective acknowledgment of status quo discontent. First on discarded x-ray plates that doubled as second-hand 'vinyl' records (known as "records on ribs"¹²), and then on tape recorders, this distribution was primarily possible through *magnitizdat*; literally "tape-recorder culture."

The concept of *magnitizdat* illustrates beautifully the democratizing effect that technology had upon the Soviet masses. Specifically, the release of State-manufactured tape recorders starting in 1960 had hugely significant and unintended consequences on the nature of public communication. The machines allowed the population to spread music and thus ideas that were not officially sanctioned by the state censors. The 128,000 recorders that appeared on the market in 1960 sold out quickly, and by the end of the decade, sales numbered more than a million units per year.¹³ Party leaders and ideological censors seemed to have no conception of the potential impact of the devices, or how they would be used.

As de-Stalinization continued into the late 1950s and early 1960s, social criticism gained in both popularity and government acceptance. Comedy clubs featured acts satirizing the hubris of the contemporary Soviet state, while young singer-songwriters performed protest songs for groups of friends in private areas. A prominent Eastern German musician, Wolf Biermann, achieved exceptional notoriety with his sparse guitar playing, catchy melodies and pointed, political lyrics. Among others, artists such as Vladimir Vysotsky and

¹² Artemy Troitsky, *Back in the USSR* (London: Omnibus Press, 1987), 19.

¹³ Ryback, 37.

Bulat Okudzhava also found success with similar songs. Collectively, these musicians and the others like them became known as the Bards of Discontent.¹⁴

Bulat Okudzhava had direct experience with the terrorism of the Stalin era. Though serving no time in labor camps himself, “his father had been ‘liquidated’ by Stalin in 1937 and his mother banished to Siberia.”¹⁵ After Stalin’s death, many political prisoners had remained incarcerated for years, until by 1956 it was “impossible to keep most political prisoners in the camps any longer.” The Soviet population surely noticed “the return of so many of Stalin’s victims,” making “the Stalinist horrors visible to all.”¹⁶ Perhaps this prisoner return influenced Bulat Okudzhava to write and eventually become the first hero of the *magnitizdat*.

Mr. Okudzhava began composing in the mid-1950s, performing songs in his apartment for the enjoyment of friends. At some point in the early sixties, an audience member with a Soviet-made tape recorder captured a typical performance, which included references to love as well as criticism of the Stalinist years, two taboo subjects. Almost overnight, two things exploded in popularity: Bulat Okudzhava, and the concept of trading in underground music. No longer “was the music of the bards restricted to small groups of ten or twenty people who gathered in private apartments. Tapes with underground songs soon circulated by the millions.”¹⁷

Though the controversial subject matter of Okudzhava's songs surely drew interest in his material, it may have been the very concept of sharing officially unapproved ideas in a conspiratorial manner that appealed to the population. Vladimir Frumkin, a musician who graduated from the Leningrad Conservatory of Music, describes the impact of Okudzhava as larger than its content. Frumkin summarizes the situation:

“Before Okudzhava, the Soviet song industry had virtually no competition from within the country. The state monopoly on songs seemed unshakeable. Suddenly it was discovered that one person could compose a song and make it famous, without the Union of Soviet Composers, with its creative sections and department of propaganda, without help of popular singers, choirs and orchestras, without publishing houses, radio and television, film and record companies, editors and censors.”¹⁸

Okudzhava proved that one person, with the right message and the right means of spreading that message, could profoundly impact the society in which he or she lived. This smacked of individuality in the rigidly collectivist USSR, and revealed that official censorship could be undermined on a mass scale.

Magnitizdat listeners experienced more than music on their pirated tapes. On a typical recording, “one heard...the presence of the audience: chairs scraping across the floor, a bottle knocking against glasses,

¹⁸ Ryback, 45.

muted laughter or quiet applause.” Taken together with the music and the illicit distribution methods, and “legends emerged, faceless legends, recognizable only by their voices, their music, and their lyrics.”¹⁹ As Khrushchev called on the government to end the “cult of personality” of political leaders, his population was very much doing so on their own, forming an appreciation of their own heroes based solely on musical message. Solidarity stemmed from the recorded, audible evidence that across the country, other groups of people were doing the exact same thing.

The *magnitizdat* acted like the Guttenberg printing press, but better. Though Guttenberg’s machine brought the written word to the poor masses, those masses were still constrained by rampant illiteracy. Everyone in the Soviet Union, however, had ears. Whether Western rock music or songs from the Bards, the Soviet-produced home tape recorders allowed nearly anybody to pirate a song, re-distribute it, and be exposed to the messages contained within. Music was an ideal vehicle to spread non-Party approved messages, because of the technological distribution advantages of the time and context.

As outlined in Marx’s theory on the means of production, the State owned the physical machinery necessary to produce large amounts of cultural output, which it could in turn use to propagate ideology. It possessed such tools of cultural production in the realms of cinema, literature, and official music. The State officially owned the labor as well; in the field of music, only those people who had studied at official conservatory levels were approved to produce music,

and only then under the strict boundaries of taste dictated by the censors. With these appropriations, the State felt it could dictate proper popular culture, and thus control the entertainment arena's impact upon ideology.

The phenomenon of *magnitizdat* proved that concept a fallacy. The public produced and listened to the music it wanted to hear, despite and because of the poor sound quality and illegal methods of acquirement. As the classically-trained musician Vladimir Frumkin asserts above, the government controlled the officially trained writers, producers, editors, and necessary equipment to produce top quality music.²⁰ But people preferred the grainy tape recordings because content matters. Bulat Okudzhava, Vladimir Vysotsky, Wolf Biermann and others sang about the daily hardships of Soviet life, which resonated in a way that the officially sanctioned, government-produced music could not.

Radio

“An emphasis on technical progress and technical-scientific education was a main theme of Communist Party propaganda since the first days of Soviet history ...”²¹

Nearly all Western rock and roll music was imported illegally into the Soviet Union. Some records came with visiting Western students, or were brought

²⁰ Cushman, 40.

²¹ Sergei I. Zhuk, *Rock and Roll in the Rocket City* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010), 32.

back by the very small number of Soviet citizens that were allowed to travel abroad. However, a significant amount of this music was imported from Western radio stations.

Soon after the Cold War began, the United States established radio stations in West Germany with the explicit purpose of broadcasting information and entertainment into the USSR. The station, Radio Liberty, broadcast in Russian.²² Interestingly, the West piggybacked on a technological innovation of the Soviet Union. Soviet radio carried the unique distinction of being broadcast almost entirely in shortwave frequency, as opposed to the “medium wave (AM) or FM broadcasts” that did not carry well over long distances. Yale Richmond writes in *Cultural Exchange and the Cold War* that the Russians themselves “pioneered short-wave when Lenin used it in 1922 to address listeners in the far corners of Russia.” Consequently, “Soviet-produced radios, even inexpensive ones, had shortwave bands.”²³ The West then took advantage of these shortwave capabilities to broadcast their own content. In response, the Soviet government “built a vast network of jammers...which made listening difficult.” Despite these efforts, Richmond could pick up Western broadcasts even in the middle of Moscow, where he spent “a tour of duty” from 1967-69. As he puts it, “if a listener had a decent radio, knew something about antennas, and was determined to learn

what was being said in the West, it was indeed possible to hear Western broadcasts despite the jamming.”²⁴

Like Voice of America, Western programs from the BBC, Radio Free Europe, Radio Liberty and Radio Luxembourg contained similar content and were likewise available to many Soviets, especially those in the Eastern European bloc. In a country philosophically isolated by the Iron Curtain and physically isolated by such barriers as the Berlin Wall and intense travel restrictions, radio technology transcended not only geography, but ideology as well. Radio broke “the Soviet information monopoly” and allowed “listeners to hear news and views that differed from those of the Communist media.”²⁵ Many Soviet youth tuned into the Voice of America program for rock and roll music, and stayed for Western news analysis.

Soviet Government pushed technological modernity not only in its ideology, but in its education as well. An “emphasis on technical progress and technical-scientific education was a main theme of Communist Party propaganda since the first days of Soviet history,” resulting in “unforeseen results among Soviet youth.” In the late 1950s and early 1960s, thousands of high-school and college students designed and built their own radio devices, with some students even broadcasting their own radio shows.²⁶ The primary purpose of these home-made gadgets was to acquire and retransmit Western music. Three college students arrested and interrogated by the KGB in 1960 confessed that

²⁴ Richmond, 185.

²⁵ Richmond, 184.

²⁶ Zhuk, 32.

they recorded the popular music of capitalist countries from the radio (presumably using State-manufactured tape recorders!) and then re-broadcast them to local audiences. According to the KGB report, “these students not only listened to the Western radio stations but also spread ‘anti-Soviet information’ among their classmates.”²⁷ Undoubtedly, these students acquired the technical skills required to build relatively advanced electronic devices because of the obsessive focus in Soviet education on science and technology.

What was the appeal of Western music to the Soviets? Memoirist David Gurevich describes growing up in the Soviet Union and listening to rock music with his friends on the “numerous radio stations like Radio Luxembourg or the BBC” because “it was more than a breath of fresh air - it was a hurricane, a release, a true voice of freedom.” Gurevich recalls a friend from school named Sergei, who “seemed to have no life outside his legendary tape collection.” Noting the meticulous arrangement of the collection, Gurevich asks rhetorically “How much of it was an obsession with music? With its message? Was the inaccessibility of records and other rockabilia related to, perhaps, some other emptiness in his life?”²⁸ The same question could be asked about many Soviet youth of the era.

Like the ubiquity of the *magnitizdat*, the enormous popularity of Western radio in the Soviet Union came from two factors: natural curiosity about the forbidden West, and the relatively easy access to information that radio provided. Rock music was the ideal vehicle to spread forbidden information because - as with the

magnitizdat - one did not require expensive and illegal cultural production equipment; just a radio. As Gurevich notes, “you needed...some command of English and the proper connections, to get a hold of and read 1984. You needed friends in high places to see *Midnight Cowboy*. But rock was readily available from the numerous radio stations.”²⁹

The ideological effects of Western rock and roll music cannot be overstated. Yale Richmond, the diplomat, reproduces an email he received from Serge Levin, a Russian native who grew up in the 60s and 70s. Levin credits rock and roll as the “main factor that brought down the Communist regime,” explaining that

It was the cultural dynamite that blew up the Iron Curtain. People were bringing Western records from abroad, and they could be bought on the black market...young people duplicated those records like crazy. And I’m telling you, the smell of freedom radiated by that music had a profound impact on myself and thousands, maybe millions of young people in my country. Very few knew what the songs were about in terms of lyrics, but everyone could feel the energy and was able to figure it out by themselves. So the music was the main factor in “Westernization” of the Russian people, at least in my generation.³⁰

²⁹ Gurevich, 127.

³⁰ Richmond, 206.

David Gurevich, for his part, did understand the lyrics, and describes the effect that Bob Dylan (notable for his unorthodox, nasally singing voice) had upon his psyche. He recalls that he “would not accept for one moment that you needed to be a musical genius in order to stand up to the powers that be, to people who think that their money or nationality or breeding or just plain connections give them the right to look down on you.”³¹

The 1970s: Brezhnev, VIA, and Time Machine

So now you consider us a bourgeois sell-out...musicians, including rockers, need to work professionally...professionalism is the ability to achieve one's desired results.

– Andrei Makarevich³²

Vokal'no-instrumental'nyi ansambl'

Tired of his mercurial mood swings and unpredictable reform attempts, the party elites turned on Khrushchev in 1964, and the political veteran Leonid Brezhnev eventually came to replace him as the chief authority in the Soviet Union. By the end of the 18-year Brezhnev period, culminating with his death in 1982, Brezhnev and his administration were regarded both domestically and internationally as aging and out of touch with the modern world.³³

Brezhnev's rule is characterized by economic stagnation resulting from the difficulties of a central planning approach toward an increasingly complicated national economy, political corruption, and the end of the utopian promise of Communism. The administration publicized Brezhnev's tenure as "real, existing socialism," because, as Peter Kenez argues, "the new leaders felt uncomfortable with a utopian ideology, unconsciously realizing that the promise of a just and affluent society in the distant future had outlived its usefulness: people were tired of waiting." Thus, the Brezhnev "era was one of complacency and conservatism."³⁴

These adjectives stood in sharp contrast from the grandiose promises of Khrushchev and even Stalin concerning the development of high technology. Since its inception, the Soviet Union had consistently guaranteed its citizens a quality of life to eventually exceed that of the West. As late as the Khrushchev era, Soviet officials continued to insist that the technological gap between Russia and the West was closing rapidly, as evidenced by the 1959 launching of Sputnik satellite (and the production of domestic technology, like tape recorders). Yet, by the time of Brezhnev, "Soviet citizens believed that absolutely everything made in the West was superior to its domestic products" and that "even simple Soviet citizens who fully accepted the existing social and political order knew well that people in the West enjoyed a much higher standard of living."³⁵ Though complacent and conservative, the government did not openly acknowledge any techno-

³⁴ Kenez, 216.

³⁵ Kenez, 223.

logical gap between the societies, and increased its attention toward controlling the ideological influences that the Soviet population had access to. This including reigning in increasingly popular home-grown (and illegal) Soviet rock bands.

These bands were formed in the mold of popular Western groups. The Beatles gained massive popularity in 1964, and by 1966 over 250 rock bands had formed in Moscow alone.³⁶ Reacting to the lack of access to quality musical equipment, rock musicians typically assembled their own equipment and sound systems with whatever equipment they could find,³⁷ including components from public pay-phones that they could use to convert acoustic guitars into electric ones.³⁸ Highly desired Western instruments were available on the black market, albeit at exorbitantly expensive prices; most rock bands could not afford such equipment. Nevertheless, even with homemade gear, the bands drew devoted followers.

In the late 1960s, the State took a new approach in its attempts to counter the ideological difficulties posed by the popularity of rock and roll. In 1966 “the Ministry of Culture approved the formation of the first state-supported beat-music ensembles,” entitled Vocal Instrument Ensembles, or VIA’s.³⁹ Cushman describes the relationship as a Faustian bargain: “musicians agreed to temper the content of their music - *first and foremost the lyrical content* - in return for access to the means of cultural production and reproduction...and

money.”⁴⁰ Artemy Troitsky describes VIA music as “a disciplined (or, to be frank, castrated) version of beat music.”⁴¹

The VIA held two concurrent purposes: to drain the ideological challenge of rock and roll by co-opting the musical form to propagate pro-Soviet ideology. In many cases, songs were written by the Union of Soviet Composers. Common topics included “steel production, grain harvests, and antifascist solidarity. One popular song...was dedicated to the trans-Siberian pipeline.”⁴²

Why would underground rock bands compromise their independent voice, which seems so at odds with the original draw of rock and roll in the first place? On one hand, some “amateur bands...had little need or desire for official recognition...young people’s insatiable hunger for live Western rock guaranteed full houses; foreign radio broadcasts and black-market recordings invigorated repertoires with fresh material from the West.”⁴³ On the other, good equipment was expensive, and “amateur status meant you had to hold a regular job and could only play in your space time.”⁴⁴ Furthermore, “using worn out home-made equipment and low quality instruments was both unaesthetic and uncool. But Western equipment...was only available on the black market...A Fender or Gibson electric guitar went for three to five thousand roubles.”⁴⁵ State sponsorship allowed musicians access to superior

⁴⁰ Cushman, 80 (emphasis mine).

⁴¹ Troitsky, 28.

⁴² Ryback, 151.

⁴³ Ryback, 153.

⁴⁴ Ryback, 152.

⁴⁵ Troitsky, 43.

Western equipment, the best State recording studios available, official State venues, and media attention through television and radio promotion. Not incidentally, the job also paid extraordinarily well. Yuri Valov, of the Moscow band Winds of Change, abandoned his study of law when he realized he could make three times more money as a VIA member than as a lawyer. He then continued to play in the underground in his spare time. In this way, he both earned an outstanding living and retained some segment of individuality through rock and roll.⁴⁶

Herein lies the irony of Soviet VIAs. In the continued effort to control the ideological message expressed in its culture, the Soviet Union bribed underground bands to stop producing controversial material with Western instruments and technology. Implicit then is the acknowledgment by the State it could not match the quality of Western goods, a self-defeating admission that belies the whole point of attacking the subversive ideology of rock and roll in the first place. The Soviet population had long suspected that the West was much more technologically advanced than the USSR. With VIA, the State seemed to concede the point as well.

Conclusion - Techno-Irony

“The West was inherently subversive, because the vision of Western affluence undermined the Soviet regime.”⁴⁷

During the period of de-Stalinization, in the years 1957-1964, Bards of Discontent, acting in the historic tradition of the Russian guitar-bard, provided a framework of individual expression and demonstrated the cultural power of *magnitizdat* distribution. Then, from the emergence of the Beatles in 1964, through the early 1980s, millions of (mostly young) Soviets, revolting against official rock bans and State dictums on proper cultural consumption, grew addicted to the culture of the West, primarily experienced through underground rock and roll recordings. The effect was to destabilize the Communist indoctrination of the youth while simultaneously providing an alternative area of collective focus.

The Soviet government aided in this process in a physical way by distributing tape recorders, short-wave state-manufactured radios, and Western musical equipment. There is a key philosophical element in play here, as well. Technological modernity is a central tenet of Soviet ideology, first articulated by Lenin in the early 1920s. This view, in turn, was drilled into Soviet youth as part of their Communist indoctrination. As late as the early 1960s, the government repeatedly promised that within a generation, the Soviet Union would catch up to and surpass the United States. Yet, they never did, and because of the availability of Western culture, predominantly in the form of music and radio broadcasts from abroad, every Soviet citizen became aware by the 1970s of the vast technological advantage of the West. The government appeared to concede this point, if accidentally, in its efforts to co-opt Western rock and roll by promoting VIAs and supplying them with Western instruments and equipment. Could it be that the Soviet population

accepted the Communist premise that the key to a modern, successful society was technological modernity, and then grew to understand that the West had achieved it first? I contend that the Soviet people, exposed to Western culture with lots of inadvertent help from the Soviet government itself, did just that. Consequently, accepting that premise and realizing that the Soviet standard of living was getting farther, and not closer, to the bar set by the West, the Soviet population understood that the Soviet system contained a fatal flaw. They may not have know what exactly it was, or why it existed, but at some point, the Soviet population, with the help of rock and roll, realized the ironic truth: the State had convinced them that technological modernity was key to a successful society, and the West had beaten them to it, handily.

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