

## **Manchester and Leningrad: From Fraternal Allies to Partner Cities.**

### **Abstract:**

This article examines the processes that culminated in the signing of an *Agreement of Friendship* between Manchester and Leningrad in 1962. The signing of such an agreement is both a civic level action expressing the aspirations of ordinary people and politicians within two cities, but it must be placed within the context of developments in intergovernmental relations. This article examines the key actors in this process, the organisation of the process as well as the local, national and international factors that influenced it.

**Keywords:** World War II, wartime alliance, British Soviet Unity, Anglo-Russian Unity, fraternal ties, town twinning, partner cities, Kiev, Kharkov, Leningrad, Manchester.

### **Introduction**

In 1962, Manchester and Leningrad signed a Friendship Agreement and formally became twin or partner cities. The first direct communication between the civic leaders had come on 6<sup>th</sup> September 1941 when the Lord Mayor R. G. Edwards sent a cable on behalf of all political parties to the chair of the Leningrad Soviet. He expressed admiration for the courage of the Russian people and declared that, "The citizens of Manchester have suffered grievously at the hands of the enemy and are doing all in their power to produce the weapons that will enable the united forces of the USSR and Great Britain to defeat the enemy as they surely will."<sup>1</sup> On 12<sup>th</sup> July 1941, Britain's ambassador Stafford Cripps and the soviet foreign minister Vyacheslav Molotov had signed an Anglo-Soviet Agreement in Moscow, then on 24th May 1942 Molotov and the British foreign secretary Anthony Eden signed the Twenty-year Mutual Assistance *Agreement* between the U.K. and the USSR. The year 1944 was a pivotal point in the war: there were definitely tensions in the British-Soviet relationship, the war was not yet won, but the tide had turned in favour of the allies. The British-Soviet alliance was still important to both sides in the prosecution of the war, but it is also clear that the architecture of post-war relations was an increasing concern. The development of close "bonds of friendship" or "fraternal ties" between individual pairs of towns was sanctioned by the British government at first to support and then to build upon the wartime inter-governmental alliance. The people and civic leaders of British cities such as Coventry and Manchester had been particularly active in promoting the British-Soviet wartime alliance.<sup>2</sup> This article examines the key actors, motivations and processes, which culminated in the transformation of the wartime alliance into a longer lasting peacetime relationship for the cities of Leningrad - St. Petersburg and Manchester.

### **British-Soviet Unity and the development of fraternal ties**

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<sup>1</sup> Manchester's Message to Leningrad // The Manchester Guardian. 10 September 1941. p.3.

<sup>2</sup> C. J. Danks. Your Fight is our fight: The Anglo-Soviet Alliance During World War II. ТРУДЫ КАФЕДРЫ ИСТОРИИ НОВОГО И НОВЕЙШЕГО ВРЕМЕНИ. No.15 (2015). pp. 119-138.

In response to the British-Soviet alliance, British-Soviet Unity Committees were set up by civic leaders across the country. Such committees, which were sometimes called Anglo-Russian Unity or Friendship Committees, were not party-political; their members included people from across the political spectrum, business people, trade unionists, church leaders, ex-servicemen, members of educational bodies and unaffiliated members of the public. The local committees set up a National Council for British-Soviet Unity (NCBSU) in February 1942, to promote enduring friendship between the British and Soviet people, "friendship based on knowledge, mutual aid, and complete understanding."<sup>3</sup> The Manchester Anglo-Russian Friendship Committee (MARFC) organised events to raise funds for the Russian Red Cross Society; an Anglo-Russian Friendship Week and promoted Anglo-Russian understanding and friendship. As part of its war-time work the NCBSU was also active in promoting fraternal relations between British and Soviet towns. One of its 1943 pamphlets stated that 41 British towns were endeavouring, "to build fraternal connections with parallel towns in the Soviet Union" and that "some have only recently been liberated by the Red Army."<sup>4</sup>

An undated typed document issued by the NCBSU noted that it was now possible to build ties of friendship between the people of Britain and the Soviet Union by means of fraternal relations between towns. It also stated that the, "National Committee is prepared to allocate a town in the Soviet Union to any Committee in Britain providing such Committee is on a representative basis."<sup>5</sup>, so the NCSU acted as a central point of contact within the U.K. for British and Soviet towns and cities seeking fraternal relations. The NCBSU also stated that as far as possible they would allocate towns that had similar population sizes, industrial and cultural compositions. The document also provided a short how-to guide to developing fraternal relations. It suggested the following steps:

- a) A telegram of greetings signed by the Mayor to the fraternal town on two anniversary dates November 7<sup>th</sup> (Soviet National Day) and June 22<sup>nd</sup> the anniversary of the invasion of the Soviet Union, and the signing of the Treaty of Alliance.
- b) The preparation of an album containing greetings and particulars of the British Town including the part being played in the war effort. This might include a personal message from the civic head on behalf of the towns people, and messages signed by representatives of all organisations, societies, religious bodies, schools, factories and civic bodies in the town. It could be illustrated with photographs, and information about the civic and social life could be included.
- c) This album should be used to secure the maximum publicity and press reports of its preparation, which could also be sent to the Soviet Union.

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<sup>3</sup> Leaflet. The work of the movement for British-Soviet Unity // National Council for British-Soviet Unity. London, (Undated) WCML.

<sup>4</sup> Pamphlet // National Council for British Soviet Unity. 25<sup>th</sup> September 1943. MCL.

<sup>5</sup> National Council for British Soviet Unity. FRATERNAL RELATIONS BETWEEN BRITISH AND SOVIET TOWNS. MCL (undated, but from the context probably late 1943 or early 1944). GB127.M480.

- d) The National Council will make the arrangements for its transit to the Soviet Union with a supplementary request for materials on the life and work in the Soviet town to be sent to Britain.

The document also noted that, "The experience up to date is that Soviet towns are exceedingly anxious to assist in developing good British-Soviet relations and welcome any action of this kind which creates understanding and mutual friendship."<sup>6</sup>

### **Manchester seeks fraternal relations – the untaken road to Ukraine**

It may seem strange to examine Manchester's failed endeavours to develop fraternal ties, first with Kiev and then with Kharkov, but these endeavours provide a useful insight into Manchester's aspirations and the problems encountered in trying to establish fraternal ties. At a meeting of the MARFC on 14<sup>th</sup> March 1944 the suggestion that Manchester should have fraternal contact with a Soviet city was met with, "considerable enthusiasm".<sup>7</sup> The Committee had already received a suggestion from the NCBSU that Kiev would be a suitable fraternal city for Manchester. The Committee recognised that an invitation could only be issued by a "civic representative", rather than the Committee itself.<sup>8</sup> It was noted on 23<sup>rd</sup> March 1944 that the NCBSU had been in touch with the Russian Embassy about the proposed link with Kiev and that the Lord Mayor Leonard Cox was going to contact the Foreign Office to see if they have any objections.<sup>9</sup> On 29<sup>th</sup> March 1944 the Lord Mayor wrote to the Foreign Secretary saying that MARFC had approached him on the question of Manchester having fraternal relations with a soviet city and that the NCBSU had suggested Kiev. He noted that he was, "in sympathy with the proposal and that he was anxious to assist in any way to promote friendship with the Soviet Union and all our Allies", but before taking any action he, "would like to be informed as to whether the proposals of the National Council have the approval of His Majesty's Government".<sup>10</sup> The Lord Mayor also let the Ministry of Information office in Manchester know that he had invited the Soviet Ambassador F. Gusev to visit Manchester in June 1944.<sup>11</sup>

Leonard Cox only approached the Soviet Ambassador about the proposed link with Kiev once he had received a letter from Mr Eden the foreign secretary, saying that he approved, "in principle" the proposal for the development of direct contacts between the local authorities of British cities and those of cities in the Soviet Union. So, on 28<sup>th</sup> April 1944 Leonard Cox wrote to

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<sup>6</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> Chaired by Alderman Wright Robinson, who was lord mayor of Manchester 1941-42 when the committee had been established, its vice-chair was William Jackson who served as lord mayor 1944-45.

<sup>8</sup> Tom Brown (Hon. Secretary) Manchester Anglo-Russian Friendship Committee. Letter to Mr Adcock Town Clark, Town Hall Manchester 15 March 1944. GB127.M480.

<sup>9</sup> Anonymous Untitled hand written notes 23<sup>rd</sup> March 1944. GB127.M480.

<sup>10</sup> L. B. Cox. Letter to Secretary of State, Foreign Office, 29<sup>th</sup> March 1944. GB127.M480.

<sup>11</sup> L. B. Cox. Letter to G. Mould, Ministry of Information, Manchester. 30<sup>th</sup> March 1944. GB127.M480.

the Soviet Ambassador, saying that as lord mayor he had received a suggestion from the MARFC that, "with a view to establishing still closer bonds of friendship between the peoples of Britain and the Soviet Union, Manchester should establish fraternal relations with the Ukrainian city of Kiev." And that, "We, in Manchester, are ready and anxious to establish such relations and freely and regularly to exchange greetings and information about the two cities." He asked the Ambassador to whom he should write in Kiev about the proposal.<sup>12</sup>

It seems that Manchester's bid to approach Kiev had been pre-empted by an approach from Birmingham. On 12<sup>th</sup> June 1944 the MARFC was notified by the NCBSU that they did not know what was going to happen about fraternal relations, "as Birmingham have finally made up their minds that it is Kiev they should be in touch with" and that Birmingham City Council had passed a resolution to this effect the week before.<sup>13</sup> The NCBSU also reported that they had discussed this matter with the Soviet Embassy, which had, "suggested quite definitely that Manchester should contact Kharkov."<sup>14</sup> Manchester's response was to contact Birmingham asking for clarification of the situation between Birmingham and Kiev. Mr Bloor, the Birmingham chief clerk replied that the Birmingham Council for British-Soviet Unity (BCBSU) had raised the issue of establishing civic relations between Birmingham and Kiev nearly a year before, and that Ministry of Information had confirmed that there was no objection from the Government. The Birmingham City Council General Purposes Committee had asked the BCBSU to clarify their resolution about, "the establishment of civic relations". The BCBSU suggested that on 22<sup>nd</sup> June the third anniversary of the invasion of the USSR Birmingham City Council should send Kiev a message of congratulation on the city's liberation from the invader and the wish for the speediest return of normal life to its citizens. Their only other suggestion was that there should be exchanges of information on matters such as post-war reconstruction.<sup>15</sup> The Birmingham Lord Mayor followed these suggestions and on 22<sup>nd</sup> June sent a telegram and letter to the Soviet Ambassador with the request to forward it to Kiev. The telegram stated that, "Citizens of Birmingham send cordial greetings to citizens of Kiev on third anniversary of German invasion of USSR. Letter follows."<sup>16</sup> The letter stated that,

"The Birmingham City Council is desirous of sending to the City of Kiev – a City similar to Birmingham in many respects a cordial message of congratulations upon liberation from the invader and hearty wishes for the speediest return of normal life to its citizens. I should be grateful if you would be so kind as to transmit such a message on our behalf.

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<sup>12</sup> L. B. Cox. Letter to Soviet Ambassador. 28<sup>th</sup> April 1944. GB127.M480.

<sup>13</sup> Assistant Secretary National Council for British-Soviet Unity. Letter to Mr T. Brown, Manchester Anglo-Russian Friendship Ctte. 12<sup>th</sup> June 1944. GB127.M480.

<sup>14</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> C. W. Bloor, Chief Clerk. Letter to R. H. Adcock, The Town Clerk. 11<sup>th</sup> September 1944. GB127.M480.

<sup>16</sup> *ibid.*

We are mindful that it was on this date three years ago that Germany invaded the USSR and of all the suffering occasioned thereby: we hope and trust that before another year has passed the valor and determination of the Allied Forces will have brought victory and peace.”<sup>17</sup>

Mr Bloor noted that the Soviet Ambassador had thanked the Lord Mayor and forwarded Birmingham’s letter to Kiev, but that nothing had happened and Birmingham City Council were not planning any further action.

Leonard Cox then sought clarification and advice from Mr Gusev. He reminded him of his letter of 28<sup>th</sup> April about establishing fraternal relations with Kiev and explained that he had been informed by the Chair of the MARFC that the NCBSU and the Embassy had agreed that Birmingham should establish relations with Kiev and that Manchester should establish relations with Kharkov. He asked the Ambassador if he agreed that Manchester should communicate with Kharkov and for the name of the appropriate person to contact there.<sup>18</sup> Manchester received a positive response from the Ambassador, who declared that, “I have pleasure in informing you that it is quite agreeable to us that Manchester should establish relations with the greatest industrial centre of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic the city of Kharkov.”<sup>19</sup> He offered to forward a telegram or letter via the Embassy to the people of Kharkov and suggested that a letter be sent to the Chairman of the City Council of Kharkov. Manchester Town Hall informed the MARFC about the Birmingham-Kiev link and also what the Ambassador had said about Kharkov; the MARFC unanimously decided to ask Leonard Cox to contact the Chairman of the Kharkov City Council.<sup>20</sup>

In January 1945 two representatives of the Mission of the Union of Societies of the Red Cross and Red Crescent of the USSR in Great Britain met the new Lord Mayor Alderman W. P. Jackson and members of the MARFC. They expressed their support for Manchester’s wish, “to establish liaison with the city of Kharkov” and promised to do all they could to facilitate the speedy exchange of correspondence.<sup>21</sup> The Lord Mayor received a telegram dated 5<sup>th</sup> February from Mr Alexander Selivanov, the Chairman of Kharkov City Soviet, which the Soviet Embassy forwarded with a translation. The telegram stated that, “The desire of the Lord Mayor of Manchester and of the Anglo-Soviet Friendship Committee of Manchester to establish cultural and scientific relations with Kharkov is accepted with great satisfaction.”<sup>22</sup> Then on 11<sup>th</sup> May 1945, the Soviet Embassy forwarded a letter from Mr Selivanov, which had come to the

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<sup>17</sup> C. W. Bloor, Chief Clerk. Letter to R. H. Adcock, The Town Clerk. 11<sup>th</sup> September 1944. GB127.M480.

<sup>18</sup> L. B. Cox. Letter to His Excellency, The Ambassador of the U.S.S.R. 8<sup>th</sup> September 1944. GB127.M480.

<sup>19</sup> F. Gousev. Letter to Lord Mayor Leonard B. Cox, 15<sup>th</sup> September 1944. GB127.M480.

<sup>20</sup> Tom Brown, Manchester Anglo-Russian Friendship Committee. Letter to Town Clerk. 7<sup>th</sup> October 1944. GB127.M480.

<sup>21</sup> Dr. N. Lapteva & Dr. A. P. Kotov. Letter to Mr Jackson, 12<sup>th</sup> January, 1945. GB127.M480.

<sup>22</sup> Selivanov. Telegram to Lord Mayor of Manchester. 5<sup>th</sup> February 1945. GB127.M480.

Embassy via the USSR Society for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries, in Moscow.<sup>23</sup> The letter talked about what Kharkov was like before the war, the suffering and destruction of the war, of Kharkov's heroic resistance and rapid reconstruction since its liberation.<sup>24</sup> Mr Selivanov also wrote, "Allow me to express hopes that this exchange of letters will initiate a regular correspondence between our two cities – Manchester and Kharkov."<sup>25</sup> The Lord Mayor forwarded the letter to the MARFC. On 3rd July 1945, the Lord Mayor wrote to the Chairman of Kharkov City Soviet, sharing his desire for a regular interchange of letters between Manchester and Kharkov. He also included supporting letters from Manchester Chamber of Commerce, the University of Manchester and the Manchester Trades Council, saying that they would be pleased to receive letters from similar organisations in Kharkov.<sup>26</sup>

After the false start of the proposed Manchester-Kiev link, the link with Kharkov looked set to develop. Similar cities had been identified, letters expressing fraternal greetings and friendship exchanged and steps had been taken to draw additional organisations into the fraternal relations. However, there the archive files end, there are no copies of further messages sent to or received from Kharkov; also there is no formally recorded decision to either pursue or not to pursue a relationship with Kharkov in the Manchester City Council records or announced in the press. Coventry and Stalingrad had signed a friendship agreement in 1944, so there was already a precedent for an exchange of fraternal greeting developing into a more formal arrangement. Why this did not happen between Manchester and Kharkov is unclear and at present it is only possible to speculate about why closer fraternal relations did not develop or even continue. One possible explanation is that Kharkov, along with Kiev, Minsk, Archangel, Gorki and others were on a list issued by the Soviet Union on 1<sup>st</sup> October 1948 of cities that foreigners could not visit.<sup>27</sup> Perhaps the post-war reconstruction of the Kharkov was too sensitive an issue for foreigners to see? Among places that could still be visited by foreigners were Leningrad, Odessa, Astrakhan, Stalingrad, Voronezh and Tambov.

### **Manchester Trade Unions and the development of Anglo-Soviet ties**

In February 1949, the Lancashire and Cheshire District Council of the Society for Anglo-Soviet Friendship and the Trade Union Federation of Lancashire and Cheshire held a conference in Manchester. The conference called for peace and the consolidation of friendship with the Soviet Union and was reported in *Pravda* the CPSU's newspaper. The Leningrad Trades Council sent a long telegram in reply and its text was circulated to the delegates of the Manchester and

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<sup>23</sup> B. Karavaev, first secretary. Letter to Lord Mayor. Embassy of U.S.S.R. 11<sup>th</sup> May. 1945. GB127.M480.

<sup>24</sup> Alexander Selivanov. Letter The Lord Mayor. Manchester. Undated, refers to the war still continuing so pre-9<sup>th</sup> May 1945. GB127.M480.

<sup>25</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> W. P. Jackson. Letter to Chairman of Kharkov City Soviet. 3<sup>rd</sup> July 1945. GB127.M480.

<sup>27</sup> TRAVEL IN RUSSIA. Foreigners Not Confined to Moscow. // The Manchester Guardian. 6<sup>th</sup> October 1948. p.5.

Salford Trades Council (MSTC)<sup>28</sup>. The MSTC was heavily influenced by the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB); Jack Munro its secretary from 1934-44 was a CPGB member as was his successor Horace Newbold who served 1944-74. The Leningrad telegram conveyed fraternal greetings to the, “foremost representatives of the working class of Britain who raise their voices on behalf of peace against the war mongers”. It also stated that the, “Soviet Union invariably manifests a sincere desire to strengthen international co-operation, to establish friendly relations with the United States and Britain and develop as far as possible mutual economic ties.”<sup>29</sup> The message attacked NATO and recapitulated the general themes of soviet statements on relations with Western Europe.<sup>30</sup> The 1949 exchange of messages of friendship between trade unionists was an important step in the development of post war fraternal ties between Manchester and Leningrad.

### **The invitation from Leningrad**

The initiative to establish fraternal ties between Manchester and Leningrad came from Leningrad not Manchester. On 20<sup>th</sup> September 1955, Manchester received a telegram from Nikolai Smirnov, the head of the Leningrad City Soviet *Ispolkom*. The telegram was addressed to the “Esteemed Lord Mayor” and not to Tom Regan by name; it invited the Lord Mayor and a party of 6-8 representatives of Manchester City Council to visit Leningrad as guests of the Leningrad City Soviet during the first two weeks of October 1955. Mr Smirnov stated, “We take the liberty of expressing the assurance that the trip to Leningrad will contribute to the establishment of friendly relationship between the citizens of Leningrad and Manchester and also the improvement of mutual understanding between the Soviet and English peoples.”<sup>31</sup> Tom Regan who had already visited the USSR in 1927 as a member of a workers’ delegation on the 10th anniversary of the Russian revolution<sup>32</sup> was, “wholeheartedly in favour of accepting”.<sup>33</sup> As fraternal ties between Birmingham and Kiev had not developed, earlier in 1955 there had already been an exchange of civic visits between Birmingham and Sverdlovsk. Manchester was keen to find out if the British Secretary of State would be prepared to express a view as to whether he did or did not favour the acceptance of the invitation. Philip Dingle, the town clerk was told that, “as in the case of the Birmingham delegation the Secretary of State

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<sup>28</sup> The original Russian document, including the speeches given to the trade union meeting in Leningrad and photographs of the signatories to the above address is available at the Working Class Movement Library, Salford.

<sup>29</sup> British workers demand peace and friendship with the Soviet Union. Declaration on behalf of 950,000 Workers. // Pravda. 21 February 1949. p. 4.

<sup>30</sup> Greetings from Leningrad Trades Council. At The Manchester and Salford Trades Council. // Labour’s Northern Voice. April 1949. p. 6. WCML.

<sup>31</sup> Telegram from Leningrad to Manchester Lord Mayor. 20<sup>th</sup> September 1955. GB127.M480.

<sup>32</sup> Manchester City Council delegation visits Leningrad headed by Lord Mayor Ald. T. Regan. // Moscow News. 29th February 1956, Papers of Bernard Sydney Langton. GB127.M784/6/2.

<sup>33</sup> Tom Regan. Letter to Town Clerk. 23<sup>rd</sup> September 1955. GB127.M480.

would not wish to influence the City Council one way or the other . . .”<sup>34</sup> but also confirmed that the British Embassy would be able to act as agents for the Lord Mayor and supply an interpreter. The Foreign Office did advise against visiting Leningrad in October, partly on the grounds of weather, but also a Royal Navy visit to Leningrad was already planned for 12th-17th October<sup>35</sup> and that an additional foreign visit, “is likely to place quite a strain upon the Leningrad City administration.”<sup>36</sup> For the British Foreign Office such civic delegations were a way of exploring possible openings to the U.S.S.R and so they were prepared to facilitate them, but they did not want to be seen to be directing civic contacts. The Manchester delegation wanted to be well-prepared for their visit and at the request of the Philip Dingle, “a gentleman in the Foreign Office”<sup>37</sup> prepared briefing materials including information about personalities in Leningrad, the senior local government officers and communist party officials, general information about the USSR, the structure of Soviet government, the CPSU, semi-official organisations such as trade unions, and cooperatives, churches, the system of local government, town councils, elections and key dates in Russian history. In a letter to Councillor Langton a member of the Manchester delegation, Philip Dingle explained that the, “gentleman at the foreign office” . . . “is most anxious that you should know that it was at my request [that the materials were produced] so that you will not think that he is imposing upon members of the party.”<sup>38</sup> Other interested parties were also keen to advise and facilitate the trip. For example, Horace Newbold, who had visited the U.S.S.R in 1949 was on hand to give last minute advice. The delegation also received information from the Soviet Embassy in London. Ivan Ippolitov the first secretary and Vladimir Filatov the assistant to the ambassador, travelled to Manchester to answer last minute questions about Leningrad and to attend a special dinner hosted by Tom Regan on the eve of departure.

The civic delegation to Leningrad included representatives of both the Conservative and Labour groups on the Manchester City Council and the decision to send a civic delegation to Leningrad had the support of all political parties. However, the proposal to send a civic delegation was not universally accepted. The anti-civic delegation group was headed by Alderman J. E. Pheasey who opposed the trip on the grounds of its £1,500 cost for the visit to Leningrad and then the costs of hosting a return delegation, “when will it finish?” he asked and at a noisy Council meeting suggested that those who went to Leningrad should have, “one-way tickets”. His fellow Conservative Party Councillor Swan, also objected to the costs, which would also include

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<sup>34</sup> Town Clerk’s Report to the Town Hall Committee. Visit to Leningrad. 10<sup>th</sup> October 1955. GB127.M480.

<sup>35</sup> Leningrad: The Home Fleet Visit. October 1955. // The Navy Review. No.1 Vol. XLIV. February 1956. pp. 45-52. (<http://www.naval-review.com>). Also Pathé newsreel. Royal Navy in Russia. // Pathé News. (1955).  
<http://www.britishpathe.com/video/royal-navy-in-russia/query/Royal+Navy+in+Russia>

<sup>36</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> Letter “Visit Leningrad from Philip B. Dingle to Councillor B. S. Langton”. 21st February 1956, Papers of Bernard Sydney Langton. GB127. M784/6/1. MCL.

<sup>38</sup> *ibid.*

those incurred buying presents for, “the Communists of Leningrad.” Councillor Sharp, for the Conservative Party in the council dissociated his group from these remarks.<sup>39</sup> Alderman Pheasey went on to resign from both the Conservative Party and the Council as part of his campaign against the civic delegation. Lawrence Boyer a local businessman wrote to Philip Dingle the town clerk asking, “by what authority the Corporation spends Public money” on the Leningrad trip.<sup>40</sup> Dingle replied under Section 78 of the Manchester Corporation Act (1954)<sup>41</sup> and sent copies of Section 78 to Mr Boyer and Alderman Pheasey. Pheasey and Swan organised a public meeting of Manchester ratepayers (local tax payers) on 25<sup>th</sup> January 1956 in protest at what they saw as a waste of public money. The meeting was poorly attended and out of tune with general mood of the time, which was to accept the invitation and for a civic delegation to visit Leningrad.

### **Visiting Leningrad**

In 24<sup>th</sup> February-5<sup>th</sup> March 1956 the first civic delegation from Manchester spent ten days in Leningrad. The delegation comprised the Lord Mayor, Alderman Tom Regan; the Lady Mayoress (his daughter) Miss Maureen Regan; the Town Clerk Mr Philip B. Dingle; Alderman R. S. Harper; Councillor Mrs Nellie Beer; Councillor R. E. Thomas; Councillor Miss Rachel Finkel; Councillor Bernard Langton and the Lord Mayor’s attendant Mr Robert (Jock) Esson. The councillors and local press were anxious to record the visit. Before departure Bernard Langton arranged to provide the *Manchester Evening News*, with exclusive reports and was provided with a Cable and Wireless collect card so that he could send a daily message. The Manchester civic visit to Leningrad coincided with the Twentieth CPSU Congress in Moscow and so Nikolai Smirnov was not able to join the delegation until dinner on 28th February. On arrival at Leningrad airport the delegation were met by a large crowd of approximately 400 Russians, including many Leningrad Soviet deputies, led by Mr Yevgeny Strazhalkovsky, the first deputy chairman of the Leningrad City Soviet *Ispolkom*. They were also met by Mr Stanley Ford a third secretary from the British Embassy, who stayed with the delegation until 29th February. Mr Strazhalkovsky welcomed the Manchester delegation and declared, “We Leningrad people have great respect for the British people” and “may your stay here serve the cause of promoting and strengthening friendly relations and cooperation between our peoples and our nations.”<sup>42</sup> In response Regan said that he was in full agreement with what had just been said about such visits promoting friendship between peoples and that he was proud of the friendship that had sprung up between Leningrad and Manchester.<sup>43</sup> Following this formal welcome ceremony on the airport tarmac, the delegation was taken to the Astoria hotel, where they had supper and then went on to the Kirov Theatre.

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<sup>39</sup> Storm over civic visit. // The Manchester Guardian. 8th December 1955 & Manchester Invitation to Leningrad. Mr Pheasey’s fears. // The Times. January 26 1956. p. 4.

<sup>40</sup> Lawrence Boyer. Letter to Town Hall Clerk. 12 January 1956. GB127.M480.

<sup>41</sup> Philip Dingle. Letter to Boyer. 16th January 1956. GB127.M480.

<sup>42</sup> Manchester City Council delegation visits Leningrad headed by Lord Mayor Ald. T. Regan. // Moscow News. 29<sup>th</sup> February 1956. Papers of Bernard Sydney Langton. GB127.M784/6/2.

<sup>43</sup> *ibid.*

The first day which combined a busy work schedule with cultural excursions, set the tone for the visit. Each of the councillors had their own particular interests and were anxious to see how their opposite numbers in Leningrad carried out their work. For example, Councillor Langton was the chair of the Manchester Watch Committee and was particularly interested in the police force and traffic management. Nellie Beer was interested in health and children's welfare while R. E. Thomas was an official of the Transport and General Workers Union (TGWU) and was interested in sport and housing. The councillors reported that during their visit they were shown every consideration and kindness, and that the programme of visits was specifically designed to meet with their wishes and in accordance with their interests.<sup>44</sup> Councillor Harper reported the wonderful hospitality the delegation received, including caviar that he had never tasted before and he was impressed by the indoor plumbing and central heating in homes.<sup>45</sup> The delegation visited the construction sites of blocks of flats, schools kindergartens, orphanages, Police HQ, Leningrad University, the fire brigade and a blood transfusion centre. Langton reported that, "I went to Russia believing that visitors saw only what the Russians wanted them to see, that one could not take photographs, talk freely to the ordinary man in the street and go where one wanted without hindrance."<sup>46</sup> However, he reported that he had twice left the main party and spent several hours sightseeing without a Russian guide and that an official car had been placed at his and Philip Dingle's disposal, that the driver had taken them wherever they wanted and stopped where they asked. Councillor Langton took six rolls of still photographs and five rolls of cine-film during the official visits and when unescorted.<sup>47</sup> Councillor Harper was amazed by the Leningrad underground (metro) system, describing it as "breath-taking" and declaring that, "I don't think there can be another like it in the whole world." And that he thought that, "one of this lavishness and beauty is beyond the reach of Manchester."<sup>48</sup> Other impressions of Leningrad were more mixed. During a visit to a clothing factory the delegation found that quality was excellent and "the girls" were experts and worked hard. However, Councillor Finkel who was also president of the Waterproof Garment Workers' Union, whose HQ was in Manchester, complained to her hosts about the factory's working conditions. She was dissatisfied, "with the safety conditions on machines, general welfare, the weight of the pressing irons and several other matters. She said she expected higher standards from a country, which lays such emphasis on welfare for the working classes. The standards in Leningrad were not up to the level laid down by the factory inspectors in Britain."<sup>49</sup> Her hosts

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<sup>44</sup> Choc-ices at 12 below shock for civic party. // The Manchester Evening New. 28th February 1956.

<sup>45</sup> Kenneth Rathbone. I learn how they tackle freeze in Soviet homes. // The Guardian. 28th February 1956. p.5.

<sup>46</sup> Councillor B. S. Langton. I found friends in Russia. // Manchester Evening News. 7th March 1956.

<sup>47</sup> Prints of Langton's photographs are available in Papers of Bernard Sydney Langton. GB127.M784/6/2, MCL.

<sup>48</sup> Miss Ray gives Russian a rap. // The Guardian. 2<sup>nd</sup> March 1956. Based on an interview with Alderman R. S. Harper, Deputy Mayor of Manchester by telephone from Leningrad.

<sup>49</sup> *ibid.*

said that they would give special consideration to the points she had raised. Councillor Langton reported that, "The people seem healthy but had an air of drabness. The clothing was good but very dull and the women used only very little cosmetics." And that, "Many of the buildings are also drab. In our hotel, one of the best in Leningrad, my bathroom had a badly chipped bath and cracked tiles on the wall and floor. Paintwork generally is in very sombre colours and the displays in the shops are poor."<sup>50</sup> The delegation was also surprised by some of the misconceptions of life in Britain. Councillor Langton described the *House of Culture* as "an incredible place" and that it included a library, but was disappointed to find that it had no modern English books and that the latest ones were by Dickens, and that, "The conception here is of a nineteenth-century England, and we have shaken people by telling them that Dickensian England has gone."<sup>51</sup>

The Lord Mayor presented the City of Leningrad with a tray made from timbers salvaged from the old Manchester Free Trade Hall that had been bombed during the 1940 blitz. In addition to other gifts Mr Smirnov presented the Lord Mayor with a large china vase from the Lomonosov porcelain factory, bearing a picture of the skyline of Leningrad. As the trade unions were so instrumental in establishing the link between Manchester and Leningrad, the Lord Mayor also handed over a goodwill message from the MSTC and conveyed greetings from the Lancashire and Cheshire Trades Federation, which expressed the hope that the visit would strengthen the bonds of friendship and peace. The Leningrad and District Trades Council sent a letter in reply to Manchester trade unionists, expressing the same sentiments.<sup>52</sup> Regan believed that the trip was "worth every penny" of the £1,500 spent on it by Manchester and he stressed that Leningrad people had a "great desire" to associate with Manchester people; he noted that, "wherever you go you can't get away from the 'peace' atmosphere."<sup>53</sup> He also gave a similarly positive report to a Leningrad Night at the Trades Council in July 1956, which was also attended by Mrs M. F. Tolkacheva a textile worker and Mr N. A. Fillipov a brick layer from Leningrad as well as Mr Filatov from the Soviet Embassy and an interpreter from the British foreign office.<sup>54</sup>

### **Friendly ties: business, trade and the cultural agenda**

Britain governments conscious of the need for markets for British goods, were willing to seek out trade opportunities for cooperation with the USSR, particularly through trade. The belief that trade would help to promote peace and be mutually, economically advantageous, was promoted by trade unionists and business leaders alike. Post-war trade between Britain and the USSR was regulated by the 1947 Anglo-Soviet Trade Agreement, under which the USSR exported grain and timber to Britain and could spend their sterling earnings in Britain on

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<sup>50</sup> Councillor B. S. Langton. I found friends in Russia. // Manchester Evening News. 7th March 1956.

<sup>51</sup> The Dickens age: Manchester puts Russia right. It shakes them. // Manchester Evening News. 2nd March 1956.

<sup>52</sup> Letter dated 3rd March 1956 is available at the WCML.

<sup>53</sup> Back from Leningrad. // The Guardian. 7th March 1956.

<sup>54</sup> Leningrad Night at Trades Council. Alderman Regan reports on civic delegation. Leningrad delegates address council. // Labour's Northern Voice, August 1956. p. 2. WCML.

machine tools, capital goods and some raw materials. However, the Co-ordinating Committee (COCOM) set up by Western governments in November 1949 restricted the types of goods that could be exported to the USSR. In April 1956, Nikita Khrushchev, the First Secretary of the CPSU and Nikolai Bulganin, the Chair of the USSR Council of Ministers made a ten-day visit to Britain at the invitation of the Prime Minister Anthony Eden.<sup>55</sup> This was the first visit to Britain by Soviet leaders since the Bolshevik revolution, while the visit was not without its tensions, it did include trade talks. When the visitors' programme was being put together in 1955, there was cross-party agreement in Manchester to ask the British government to include Manchester on their itinerary. The Manchester Chamber of Commerce said they would welcome the opportunity to show the Soviet visitors a few of the modern industrial projects to be found in greater Manchester.<sup>56</sup> In the end, Manchester was not included on the visitors' itinerary, losing out to Portsmouth, Oxford, Birmingham and Edinburgh. The Manchester delegation had hoped to promote trade with Leningrad during their 1956 visit and on his return to Manchester the Lord Mayor was asked if the visit had sown the seeds of a trade agreement. Regan replied that he had put feelers out because he was deeply interested in improving the adverse trade balance. Unfortunately, Soviet foreign trade was conducted through Moscow and the Manchester delegation had only received permission to visit Moscow on 1<sup>st</sup> March once they had arrived in the USSR. Some of the delegation travelled to Moscow on 2<sup>nd</sup>–3<sup>rd</sup> March; where they visited the chair of the Moscow City Soviet, attended a reception at the British Embassy and the Bolshoi theatre, but did not have time to arrange meetings with Soviet foreign trade representatives.<sup>57</sup>

In February–March 1959 British Prime Minister Harold Macmillan and Nikita Khrushchev who was now Prime Minister and CPSU First Secretary, held a series of meetings in Moscow during which both expressed an interest in expanding Anglo-Soviet trade and cultural exchanges. They also discussed more contentious issues such as stopping nuclear testing and arms reduction, and failed to come to an agreement on a demilitarised free city in Berlin or on unifying Germany. Despite these tensions, the visit did mark an improvement in intergovernmental Anglo-Soviet relations. Both leaders expressed their concern to avoid war and agreed a programme of Anglo-Soviet exchanges for 1959–60 between the Soviet Relations Committee of the British Council and the Soviet State Committee for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries (SSOD). On 28<sup>th</sup> March 1959, the first Anglo-Soviet Programme of Cultural, Educational, Scientific and Technical Exchanges, which gave government support for regular cultural exchanges, was agreed in Moscow. This and subsequent agreements provided official support from both countries for exchanges of researchers, teachers, students, orchestras, ballet and theatre companies. In 1959, the British Government created the Great Britain–USSR Society to encourage cultural exchanges between the two countries, promote knowledge and

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<sup>55</sup> Pathé newsreel. B & K Arrive AKA Bulganin and Khrushchev Arrive. // Pathé News. 1956. <http://www.britishpathe.com/video/b-k-arrive-aka-bulganin-and-khrushchev-arrive/query/Bulganin+and+Khrushchev+Arrive>

<sup>56</sup> Letter to Foreign Office on behalf of Lord Mayor. 5<sup>th</sup> September 1955. GB127.M480.

<sup>57</sup> Back from Leningrad. // The Guardian. 7<sup>th</sup> March 1956.

understanding of Britain in the USSR and to encourage the objective study of the USSR in Britain.

### **The final steps towards the Manchester–Leningrad Friendship Agreement**

In July 1956, Manchester had hosted a return civic delegation from Leningrad and in the following few years a number of steps were taken that helped to cement the friendship between Manchester and Leningrad. Gradually the idea of fraternal ties was developing into concrete links and projects. In 1958, a branch of the USSR–Great Britain Society was organised in Leningrad and in 1959 a delegation from Leningrad visited Manchester as guests of the British Soviet Friendship society (BSFS). In 1960, a BSFS group visited Leningrad and the BSFS send a photographic exhibition loaned by the *Manchester Evening News* to Leningrad. The same year saw the first annual telephone conversations between the heads of Manchester and Leningrad. In 1961, Manchester's ha sent a schools' photographic exhibition to Leningrad.

A crucial step in the development of relations between Manchester and Leningrad came in September 1962, when a cross-party civic delegation from Manchester, headed by Lord Mayor R. E. Thomas visited Leningrad.<sup>58</sup> Discussions with the chair of the Leningrad City Soviet led to the drawing up of the friendship agreement between the two cities, which set out the content and shape of the relationship over the following five decades.<sup>59</sup> The Agreement on Further Development of Friendly Relations between Leningrad and Manchester for the period 1962/63 was signed on 20<sup>th</sup> September 1962, by R. E. Thomas and Vasily Isayev, the president of the *Ispolkom*. The Agreement gave form to the concept of fraternal relations and included provision for civic, cultural, educational and scientific cooperation. The Manchester delegation were keen to visit Leningrad State University's student accommodation to find accommodation for Manchester University students visiting Leningrad. They were also very interested in the construction of new flats in Leningrad and especially in how such work was funded. The two cities agreed to exchange local government and economic information. They also agreed to exchange exhibitions and publications; to establish close ties between libraries; to establish educational contacts between schools; to continue to strengthen ties between the Leningrad Industrial-Art School and the Manchester Regional College of Art; to explore the possibility of establishing links between the Pulkovo and Jodrell bank Observatories; to promote a chess competition between two cities; to promote exchange visits of school children and teachers, health and social workers and others. A Leningrad civic delegation made a reciprocal visit to Manchester in May 1963. In 1964 Leningrad acknowledged their friendship with Manchester by naming a principal thoroughfare in a new housing area Manchester Street<sup>60</sup> and Manchester reciprocated with Leningrad Square in Wythenshawe.

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<sup>58</sup> The delegation included the lord mayor who was from the Labour party, his wife the Mayoress; Alderman. Sir. Richard Harper the leader of the Conservative group who had been lord mayor 1954-55; Alderman. Sir. Maurice Pariser leader of Labour group; Philip Dingle the Town Clerk and the lord mayor's attendant Mr H. S. Gilbert.

<sup>59</sup> Manchester City Council Epitome. Vol. 79. 5th December 1962. pp. 540–1. MCL.

<sup>60</sup> Manchester City Council. Epitome Town Hall Committee. Vol. 81. 1st July 1964. p.37. MCL.

**Conclusion :**

In 2017, Manchester and St. Petersburg will be celebrate the 55<sup>th</sup> anniversary of their city partnership. This civic-level relationship has its origins in the wartime alliance between Britain and the USSR and the fraternal ties that developed during a shared fight against a common enemy. The Manchester Anglo-Russian Unity Committee played a crucial role in raising funds for and in promoting knowledge and understanding of the USSR. Fraternal ties between cities were at one and the same time the manifestation of the wartime fraternal ties that already existed between Britain and the USSR and also a means to maintain and extend this friendship into the peace. As the Cold War grew city-level initiatives provided the British and Soviet governments with another level of communication between their countries and a channel through which to project the human face of their country.

**A note on archive sources:**

References starting with the number GB127.M480 indicate that they are from the archives of Manchester lord mayors, covering the period of their term in office. These are their unpublished diaries, letters and memoranda. Until late 2015 these archives and were uncatalogued and unavailable to researchers, they have recently been transferred to the archives of Manchester Central Library (MCL). The Papers of Bernard Sydney Langton a member of 1956 delegation, including prints of his photographs are also in MCL with the number GB127.M784/. WCML in references refers to the holdings of the Working Class Movement Library in Salford next to Manchester.

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