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COMMITTEE ON INFORMATION AND CULTURAL RELATIONS

JOURNEY OF BELGIAN PARLIAMENTARIANS TO USSR. SEPTEMBER, 1955

Memorandum by the Belgian Delegation

A delegation of Belgian Parliamentarians comprising representatives of the various political parties, led by Mr. C. Huysmans, Chairman of the Chamber of Deputies, visited the USSR from the 5th - 28th September, this year. Their very heavy programme included some days in Moscow and Leningrad, and a visit to Riga, which is in a forbidden zone banned for many years to all foreigners, as well as visits to Gerki, Stalingrad, Kiev, Dniepropetrovsk, Tiflis, Sotchi, in the course of which they saw factories, schools, hospitals, kolkhozes, museums, etc.

2. The contacts which the Belgian Parliamentarians had during their voyage with the official authorities and the Soviet people were characterised by extreme cordiality on the one part and a mixture of curiosity and friendliness on the other. The widespread kindness and generous hospitality combined with a strongly asserted desire for peace, were features which apparently impressed the Belgian Delegation quite as much as the reconstruction effort and the major achievements of the Soviet regime which were, of course, shown to them. The impression was given that everything was a "bed of roses" and some of the Parliamentarians tended to forget about the other side of the picture and disregarded things such as housing conditions and the terrific cost of living which struck the rest of their colleagues.

3. Most of the time, little reference was made to the role of the Communist Party, nor was any stress laid on its true importance. The omission was regarded by most of the Belgian Parliamentarians as an illustration of the desire of the Soviet authorities to keep political problems out of the discussions.

4. At a Press Conference, the Parliamentarians were able to meet Pervoukhine, Souslov and Malenkov, among other officials. Owing to the absence of M. Krutchev, who generally succeeds in livening up such discussions, this Conference took a somewhat academic turn. M. Souslov nevertheless gave several Parliamentarians the impression that he was one of the coming men of the regime.

5. The Parliamentarians have published several accounts of their trip and some have even lectured on it; in general they are discriminating in their descriptions of what they saw. The conclusions they draw is that the development of contacts and exchanges can help to improve mutual understanding and attenuate differences between the East and the West.

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