



Invitation card to the 60th anniversary celebration of the founding of the USSR.

USSR (1982): CIS (1992)

*Hugo B. Margáin**

Vasili Kuzmick Okulinsev, Sergei Nikiforov and Yuri I. Yurov, representatives of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, met me at the Moscow airport.

We got into the automobile that had been assigned to me and was at my disposal during my entire stay in Moscow. We started off on the 60 kilometer trip to the capital, on a dark, foggy afternoon. The new fallen snow lay on the fields and forests, as the thermometer dropped to minus 7 degrees Celsius.

The wide highway, in excellent condition, was flanked by young forests. "The old ones —I was informed— were burned down during the war. As you know, during our history, we have suffered the constant devastation of the capital and its environs. The aggressors have caused countless fires and mutilations."

A guard saluted, every 500 meters, as we passed. They were posted all along the route and I could see them communicating by portable radio.

Thick fur lined uniforms and heavy boots insulated them from the cold.

The Rossiya Hotel, close to Red Square, is enormous and considered the largest in the world. It takes up an entire square block and, on each of its four streets, there is an entrance to its four different buildings. For reasons of administration and upkeep, each of the four sides has its own services. Public rooms and dining halls are in the central tower.

Hugo B. Margáin was twice Mexican Ambassador to the United States. As senator, he was appointed Mexican congressional representative to the 60th anniversary celebration of the founding of the USSR, in December 1982. At that time, no one imagined there would be no 70th anniversary celebration. The Soviet Union was dissolved in 1992. These are his impressions of that historic journey.



The Palace of Congresses.

* Editorial Director.



I had a small but comfortable suite on the eleventh floor. The foyer had armoires against the wall on the right, and on the left, a comfortable roomy bathroom. Next, a dayroom with a small desk, refrigerator, television and a long couch, that could be converted into a bed. The center table held fruit and drink. A large window facing the street gave me a view of the illuminated city through the night mist. A door led to a small bedroom, with two narrow beds, an armoire, desk and nightstand, also with a large outside window. Simple unadorned wooden furniture gave the impression of sobriety.

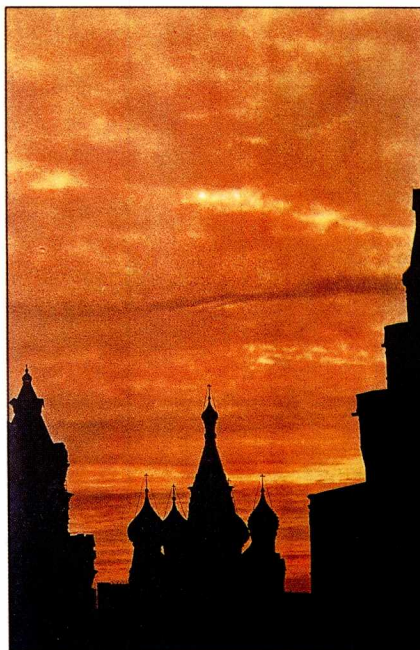
We arrived tired from our twenty-four hour trip, including close to twenty hours of flight time. However, I went down to the lobby at 7 pm to go to the theater. They had planned for us to go to the Bolshoi. We saw three excellent ballets with contemporary Russian music of the highest quality.



The ballerinas and ensembles were equal to their great prestige. During the intermission, people went to various salons in the spacious theater for refreshment. There were special tables for invited guests. Everything there came from the fifteen republics of the union.

Opening ceremonies

Celebrations for the 60th anniversary began officially on the morning of Monday the 20th. Representatives of foreign countries, accompanied by their interpreters, were called to Red



*The twilight of a system...
an uncertain dawn.*

Square to place a floral wreath on the mausoleum where Lenin lies. At 11 am, we could see groups of twenty guests file by to pay homage to the founder of the Soviet Union. Accompanied by high-ranking military officers, floral wreaths were placed against the mausoleum, covering its entire façade.

Next, we went inside, where the embalmed body of the leader is displayed, guarded by soldiers from the various armed services. We returned outside by the stairway leading to the Kremlin's red-brick wall, at the foot of



which are the tombs of the most important dignitaries of Russia's recent history. Bedecked with flowers and still without tombstone or bust, we could see Brezhnev's tomb. Having recently passed away, he was not far from the tombs of Stalin, Kalinin and other high ranking members of the Soviet hierarchy.

We continued along the wall, heading toward the adjoining garden. In the Square of the Revolution, there is a monument to the Unknown Soldier, some 500 meters from the mausoleum. There we waited for the changing of the guard. Our group went in to lay a floral offering on the Unknown Soldier's simple tomb. Heading the group, an officer and two soldiers carried the wreath, marching up to the monument to the cadence of a band playing a funeral march.

The program of celebrations that had brought us together began with these ceremonies.





Interview with deputy Shitikov

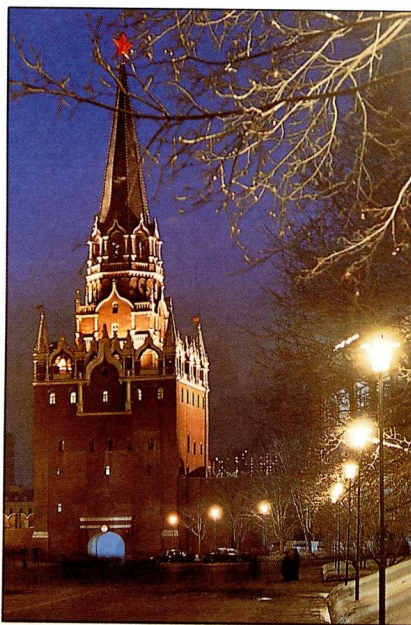
On the same day, December 20, I had a talk with deputy Shitikov. It was held jointly with the delegation from the Republic of Syria. As officials of the Soviet explained to us, this was due to the large number of delegations they had to receive during the celebrations.

Shitikov opened the talk with some words of welcome and spoke broadly on the political-administrative structure of the USSR, composed of individuals of one hundred nationalities with their own language and dialects in fifteen Soviet socialist republics, twenty autonomous republics and ten autonomous districts.

The two-chamber system consisted of the Chamber of the Soviet of the Union and the Soviet of Nationalities, both constituting the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, with soviet meaning council.



The explanation given for the two chambers is the need to have one representing the populace in general, in which deputies are elected from their electoral districts—one deputy for every 350,000 inhabitants—making up the Soviet of the Union. The second chamber balances quantitative differences between different ethnic groups in the USSR, varying in number from several thousand to tens of millions, as is the case of the Slavs, Ukrainians and White Russians. The Chamber of the Soviet of Nationalities fulfills this function, thirty-two



CIS: Ethnic flowering of 15 republics?

deputies being elected per republic, five from each autonomous region and one from each autonomous district.

Passage of a law requires the consent of both chambers, helping to balance differences among ethnic groups involving their specific weight in the legislative branch.

The Presidium of the Supreme Soviet is elected at a session of the Supreme Soviet. It is made up of a president, fifteen vice-presidents—one for each republic—, a secretary and twenty-one members, that is, a total of thirty-eight members. One



of the vice-presidents is the first vice-president, the one who carries out the functions of the president in his absence, incapacity or death. After the death of Brezhnev, the post of president remained vacant, with his functions being exercised by V.V. Kuznetsov, current first vice-president.

It was explained to us that there are no “professional deputies.” Rather, they must continue their everyday jobs. They receive 200 rubles a year for mail expenses, in addition to having free transportation within the USSR.

The meeting lasted from 5 to 5:30 pm in Shitikov’s office in the Kremlin’s Soviet building. They presented mementos of the anniversary being celebrated and some informative material in Spanish on Soviet parliamentary organization and a list of republics making up the USSR, along with the autonomous republics, autonomous regions and

autonomous districts. Current policy tends to accelerate rapprochement between different parts of the immense Soviet territory and to achieve more balanced development which favors equality.





The Rose Throne.

The Palace of Congresses

On Tuesday the 21st, the solemn sessions of the 60th anniversary of the USSR were inaugurated at the Palace of Congresses, located inside the Kremlin. A modern unadorned rectangular building, the main hall holds 6,000 spectators.

Several floors with wide hallways permit groups to move easily. There are escalators, several smaller meeting rooms, and a good air conditioning system. Lighting could be called excessive: thousands of ceiling lights produced a radiance that was brighter than our cloudy day.

Among the well-dressed people attending, the women stood out in particular, with their thick winter coats and fur hats. Foreign friends pointed out how carefully their hair and make-up were done, highlighting their facial lines, something not so customary previously. The band gave the impression of any grand party in the best capitals of the world.

Outstanding were the uniforms of the different armed services. High-ranking officers were everywhere, showing off their numerous decorations and medals on both sides of their chest, for heroic deeds during the last war.

Those distinguished for numerous activities that serve as examples for others are also awarded medals: such as producing the best crops in each region; outstanding industrial production, as well as outstanding composers, artists and intellectuals. Add to all this, the Lenin Peace Medals and those awarded by the united republics, in addition to foreign ones, suggests the spectacle to be seen in the passageways,

vestibules and hall during the celebration.

Seating for invited delegates was close to the stage, with enough staff for simultaneous translation to some ten different languages. Each seat, comfortable and wide, had a small folding table for note-taking. On the stage were representatives of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet and the chiefs of state of allied countries. Before us were around 300 people. Behind and above them was a huge head of Lenin in white marble. The size of the face, from chin to forehead, may well have been four meters.

Upon arrival, like all participants, we left our coats in a great hall divided into numbered sections for quick service. The strictest discipline was evident in every detail. It is noteworthy how crowds are avoided when the public rushes to pick up its coats. There is no bottleneck when cars leave and, throughout the city, traffic flows unhindered because of the wide avenues and strict traffic laws. There is

military-like organization, especially where crowds are involved.

The Soviet national anthem, played by a huge military band, brought us all to our feet. At exactly the appointed hour, top Soviet leaders came in and took their seats on the stage, to the applause of the public. Not a single seat in the great hall was vacant.

When an invited head of state went up to the stage, he was given a standing ovation. And so, for example, the heads of Poland, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, Hungary, socialist Germany, Bulgaria and Rumania filed by. The head of state of Poland, General Jaruzelski, was particularly applauded. From Asia came, among others, North Korea, North Vietnam and Kampuchea. Several African countries also went up to the stage. The representative of the Afghan Parliament also received a huge ovation.

Speeches

The structure of the speeches can be summarized as follows: czarism was the oppressor and the prevalent plutocracy, clergy and noblemen



Yuri V. Andropov.

propaganda, and close-knit mutual help among the group of united republics.

Lenin—he said—placed special emphasis on avoiding domestic conflicts provoked by rivalry between different nationalities. For him, this was the major obstacle to union. Justly—Andropov emphasized—Lenin strove to instill mutual confidence among different republics.

Afterward, Andropov examined what had been achieved in the sixty years of the union of the fifteen republics. Along with the achievements, he pointed out its errors and deficiencies. Analysts underscored, as something new, the objective and bold examination of the achievements and failures in the address. The political tendency in the past was to reiterate successes and, if

errors were not concealed, at least they were not manifested publicly.

Andropov went on to delineate the large headings of “what still has to be done” to reach “developed socialism.” In the economic order, he said, it will require “a more sensible use of natural and labor resources.” With that, he touched one of the evident defects of the system: low productivity.

The most important part of the address, because of its international relevance, was when Andropov made a double declaration: one pacifistic and one of preparedness for war. The arguments used contain a parallelism, an undisputable symmetry with those of US leaders, but the other way around.

Bipolar powers declare themselves to be peace loving and, at the same time, they arm themselves. Instead of destroying accumulated nuclear arms, they increase them and do not stop investments in new and improved weapons.

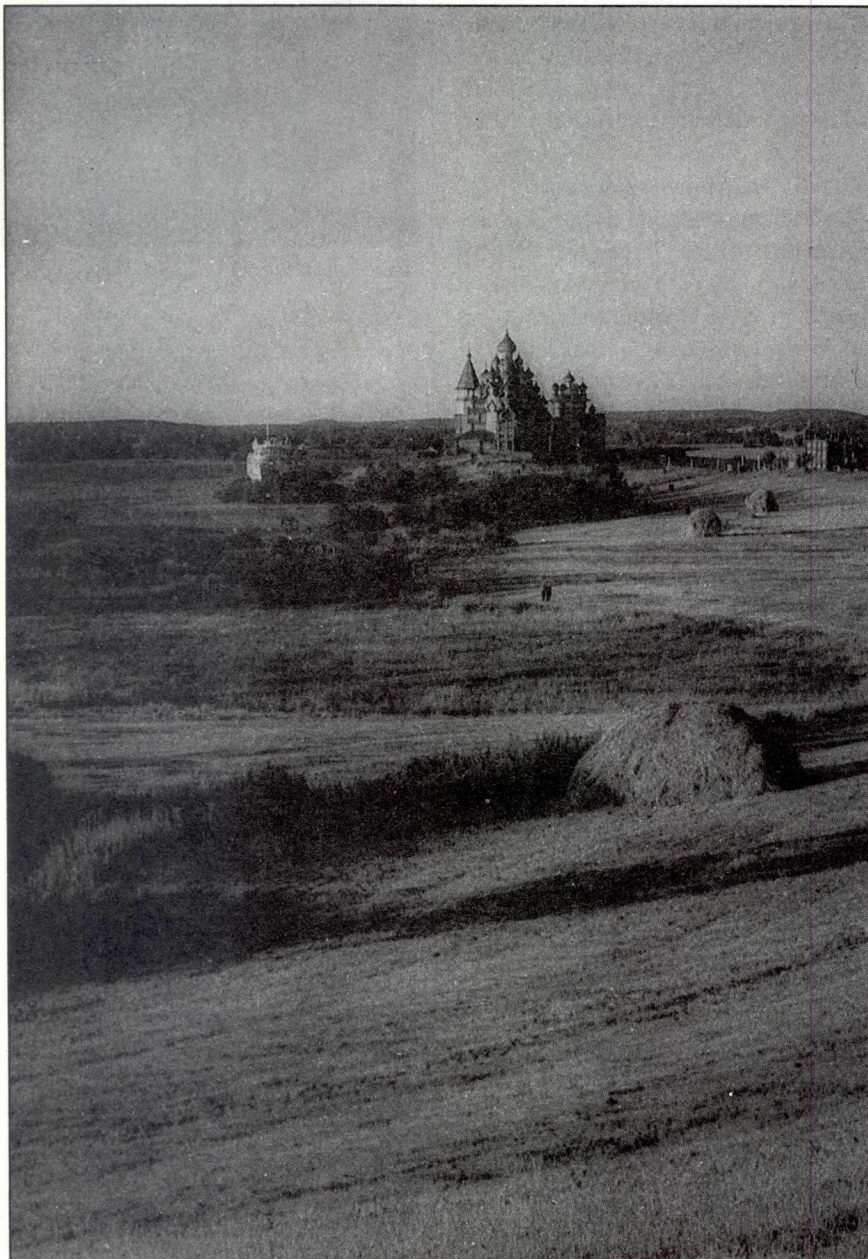
They mutually accuse each other of being imperialists and oppressors, of expansionism, and of having obsolete and inoperative systems. Each side accuses the other of adopting war-like attitudes, without giving an inch to the universal desire for peace. They say the opposite of what they do.

The threat hanging over humanity since the end of the Second World War has not abated. We should redouble our efforts at pacifism and, as the task is arduous, the 1982 Nobel Peace Prize awarded to Mexican Ambassador Alfonso García Robles takes on all the more meaning.

Participation of young people

At midday, the speeches were halted. We went to the dining hall on the upper floor of the Palace of Congresses where we were offered a splendid luncheon.

Speeches continued in the afternoon, all in the same mode:



Andropov underscored the voluntary association of the republics.

exalting the progress of this enormous country and, at the same time, manifesting their adherence to Andropov's address. All of a sudden, as if it were an intermission, the band struck up a snappy march, and the passages to the grand hall were completely filled with youngsters of both sexes, some fifteen or twenty years of age, representative Soviet students from all the republics.

The leaders of the group, likewise youngsters, filled the lower part of the presidium. All good looking, dressed in almost military uniformity. As everyone sang choruses allusive to the ceremony, the girls walked up the ramps of the presidium with bouquets of flowers and handed out red roses to the dignitaries amidst applause.

The spectacle was stirring and the confidence of the youngsters in their system was evident. They sang with obvious patriotic enthusiasm for being able to participate in a political act of such importance.

The stationary marches, the songs and the presence of youngsters relieved the monotony of the inevitably tedious repetitive speeches and left a air of pleasant surprise in the hall when they left.

Participation of the military

The following day, Wednesday the 22nd, during the solemn session at the very same Palace of Congresses, something similar happened: speeches were interrupted and, this time, the various armed services, the backbone of the system, made their appearance in the great hall and filled the passageways and the area right in front of the presidium with marching.

Several military bands sounded triumphant marches composed for the occasion. Soldiers carrying flags and pennants filled the air with color. They gave short speeches in support of the government. At the end of the program, the services there present swore loyalty to the institutions guiding them.

When the chief of the army called for them to swear loyalty, the response of the young soldiers was earsplitting. They swore to defend socialism inside and outside the Soviet Union, in the midst of applause by the participants. We could distinguish the uniforms of the different armed services and we could see they were made up of youngsters of both sexes. They departed the huge hall, leaving the air electrified. Routine speeches from the most renowned participants continued afterward.

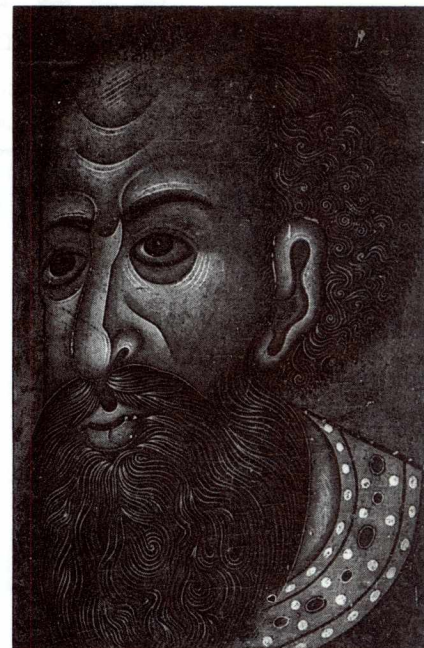
Cultural activities

There were special programs every night celebrating the 60th anniversary, with select performances in many theaters. We saw the Bolshoi and regional dances from the fifteen republics, and visited the most outstanding museums, according to the visitors' wishes.

I visited the Kremlin on Thursday the 23rd. The former bed chambers of the czars, with paintings covering the walls and ceiling in Oriental style. The czar's chambers looked out on the patios open to the public, so they could deposit their complaints in a suggestion box lowered directly from his bed chambers through a window decorated with the imperial coat of arms. "Communication with the people was theoretical and insubstantial, as we now know," said our guide.

We also went through the famous Hall of the Facets, the Grand Salon of St. George, where the czar received foreign dignitaries; the most modern apartments of the last czar; and the Plaza of the Cathedrals.

They told us of the close tie between religion and politics in the past, which explains the profusion of churches within the Kremlin: "The clergy served as an instrument of submission. In the face of misery, they asked the people for resignation. We reject resignation as a response to injustices and suffering of life. This



Ivan the Terrible (16th century portrait).

great country was produced by demanding justice and respect for human dignity. From being backward and poor, it has become a great power," our guide explained to us in these or similar terms.

He recalled the descriptions of how religious people were in *The Brothers Karamazov*, one of so many examples of past fanaticism. The cathedrals—we saw all five—are covered with exquisite icons and, where there are none, are painted with frescoes of religious scenes, still well preserved.

I visited the Pushkin Museum and the Tretyakov, where most of the different schools of Russian painting are displayed. The painting of Ivan the Terrible, at the moment he beat his son to death over a minor argument, is extraordinary. The dying son lies stretched on the floor, covered with blood, and the czar, realizing his horrendous crime, hugs him and raises his supplicant gaze toward the horizon.

Peter the Great also watched his own son Alex die as he succumbed to torture applied to discover the conspiracy he lead. Tragedy has been Russian history's assiduous bedfellow **M**