

Kathleen E. Smith, Georgetown University

Abstract

University students in 1956 belonged to a generation that had grown up wholly under Stalinism. They internalized Soviet definitions of virtue—being brave, honest, and loyal to the collective—and expectations that the Party-State was always striving to create a better life for its people. Evidence from Moscow State University (MGU) students in the spring of 1956 demonstrates that as these idealistic young people began to encounter social injustices in their adult lives, they attempted to create their own solutions. They discovered, however, that the post-Stalin Party was not prepared to accept independent actors. The "thaw" only meant that consequences for forming unofficial associations and for public protest were less severe than they had previously been. Though disappointed in their efforts to use boycotts as a tool for justice and to create spaces for free exchange of scientific ideas in 1956, members of this generation would bring their idealism to bear again during perestroika.