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## *Impressions of Soviet Union after a visit*

HAVE YOU ever walked down the street, minding your own business, when a stranger asks you for your shirt, shoes and jeans in exchange for an army uniform or flag? Have you ever offered a taxi driver a pack of cigarettes and have him reduce his fare by 50 percent?

These scenarios are common situations in the Soviet Union where the black market is a fact of life. Along with 28 other students from Texas, Oregon and Ohio, I had the opportunity this summer to carry out President Ronald Reagan's initiative concerning cultural exchanges between the United States and Russia.

I was a member of a People To People Youth Ambassador delegation that toured such places as Moscow, Leningrad, Helsinki, Stockholm, Copenhagen, London, Dublin and parts of Germany with the intention of making international contacts to help achieve world peace. In England, Denmark and Sweden, each member of the group lived with a different European family in order to learn about different cultures.

Perhaps the single greatest experience occurred one night in Moscow when my group met with members of the Young Communist League. After a trivial-type game to break the ice, the

American students began to break off into one-on-one discussion groups with their Soviet counterparts.

For the entire evening East met West in a debate of ideology. We discussed politics, rock 'n' roll, girls, sports, Reagan, Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev, Walt Disney, medicine and anything else that came to mind.

During the conversation, I asked about the recent nuclear accident at Chernobyl. I received an extremely interesting response. Our new-found friends had heard of the accident, but they believed that the increased level of radiation was due to an even more seri-

ous nuclear accident someplace in West Germany. At that moment I became thankful that I live in the United States, where we have a free press that does not play games.

We learned a lot that evening, but the most worthwhile thing that we learned is that people are really good at heart — whether they are American or Russian. The real Soviet Union is far different from the way it is portrayed by Hollywood. Russia does have many problems, but she needs solutions in addition to criticism.

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