

# The 1958 US Trade Mission to Yugoslavia and the United States' "Wedge" Policy

*A Technocratic Connection*

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## Abstract

This article examines the 1958 US trade mission to Yugoslavia through the lens of technocratic internationalism, which is—borrowing Gabrielle Hetch's definition of the term—a “less visible, but sometimes more powerful means of shaping and reshaping” international relations during the Cold War. This article examines how trade fairs, personal relationships, and international business networks functioned as sites of technocratic internationalism and considers mid-level bureaucrats from the United States and Yugoslavia who believed that expertise and technical advice in areas such as transportation, industrial management, travel, and marketing could bridge political differences between Cold War actors. The article focuses in particular on Fred Wittner, an important figure in American advertising who was part of the trade mission. Utilizing Wittner's personal papers, housed at the Wisconsin Historical Society, this article explores how technical expertise served as a conduit through which the United States attempted to strengthen ties with Yugoslavia and reveals the political importance of personal relationships and networks, even within a framework that encouraged seemingly “apolitical” information exchange and expertise.

## Article

The Cold War is often imagined as a period of political rigidity and isolation, mediated through terse diplomatic initiatives, armaments escalation, and explosive international crises. Hungary 1956, the Space Race, and the Prague Spring dominate conversations about Europe and the Cold War, buttressed by traditional political and diplomatic histories of the period. In recent years, this top-down narrative has been challenged by historians who study the Cold War from the perspective of cultural exchange and transnational connection. As historian Vladislav Zubok writes, a new wave of scholars has “begun to link traditional political questions about the Cold War with transnational experiences,” creating cultural analyses that have a “renewed focus on individuals, as opposed to the emphasis on

the state and state structures.”<sup>1</sup> In the same vein, historian Patryk Babiracki highlights the importance of transnational analysis, writing that it has become “increasingly difficult to understand” the Cold War “without thinking about networks of people, flows, circulations, and exchanges.”<sup>2</sup> Influenced by new trends and innovations in the field of transnational history, this article analyzes the 1958 US trade mission to Yugoslavia and its outcomes. A transnational analysis of the 1958 trade mission, with a specific eye towards US foreign policy, sheds valuable light on technocratic information exchange and the mid-level bureaucrats who participated in cultural and economic diplomacy during the Cold War, forming a clearer picture of both the Cold War and the US-Yugoslav diplomatic relationship.

To begin, it is important to briefly sketch the early history of socialist Yugoslavia and its unique relationship with the United States. Historian Elidor Mëhilli once wrote that the Cold War “created unexpected possibilities for small states to make big claims.”<sup>3</sup> This was especially true of Yugoslavia, a country which, according to historian John B. Allcock, existed in a “constant dialectical movement between internal events and their international environment.”<sup>4</sup> While this could be said of nearly every country in an increasingly globalized world, Yugoslavia’s unique and important place in the Cold War makes this claim especially meaningful. Following the country’s acrimonious break with the Soviet Union in 1948, Yugoslavia began to pursue a policy that the US State Department described as “seeking to avoid alignment with either the Soviet bloc or the Western Alliance,” taking independent positions on foreign policy, trade, and domestic reform.<sup>5</sup> This policy would eventually culminate in Yugoslavia’s prominent role in the Non-Aligned Movement, founded in 1961.<sup>6</sup> While Yugoslavia pursued this policy of informal non-alignment, the United States sought to strengthen ties with the country, hoping that it could “serve as a beacon to the satellite states” in East-Central Europe and provide the “wedge it needed to dislodge the Soviets’ control there.”<sup>7</sup>

The diplomatic relationship between the United States and Yugoslavia in the early years of the Cold War is complicated and of exceptional importance to the history of the Cold War, the United States, and Yugoslavia. Scholars such as Ivo Tasovac, Lorraine Lees, and John R. Lampe, among others, have thoroughly investigated US foreign policy towards Yugoslavia during the Second World War and in the subsequent decades. Lees, in particular, has investigated the United States’ “wedge policy,” first articulated and studied by John Lewis Gaddis in his 1988 book *The Long Peace: Inquiries into the History of the Cold War*. This

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<sup>1</sup> Patryk Babiracki and Kenyon Zimmer, eds., *Cold War Crossings: International Travel and Exchange across the Soviet Bloc, 1940s-1960s* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2014), 1.

<sup>2</sup> Patryk Babiracki, “Interfacing the Soviet Bloc: Recent Literature and New Paradigms,” *Ab Imperio* 4 (2011): 380.

<sup>3</sup> Elidor Mëhilli. *From Stalin to Mao: Albania and the Socialist World* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2017), 9.

<sup>4</sup> John B. Allcock, *Explaining Yugoslavia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 240.

<sup>5</sup> Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS) 1958-1960, Eastern Europe; Finland; Greece; Turkey, vol. X part 2 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1958-1960), 474.

<sup>6</sup> For an analysis of the history of the Non-Aligned Movement, see Jürgen Dinkel, *The Non-Aligned Movement: Genesis, Organization and Politics (1927-1992)* (Boston: Brill, 2018).

<sup>7</sup> L. M. Lees, *Keeping Tito Afloat: The United States, Yugoslavia, and the Cold War* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997), 235.

wedge policy, as Lees writes, “was the focal point of an attempt by the United States to promote fissures within the Communist world,” receiving “its most sustained application in U.S. policy towards Yugoslavia.”<sup>8</sup> At face value, the policy seems contradictory at best and self-defeating at worst. Following the 1948 Tito-Stalin split, both the Truman and Eisenhower administrations, buttressed by the likes of George F. Kennan and John Foster Dulles, sought to encourage the independent-minded Tito in an attempt to “sustain the damage” that the 1948 split left in its wake.<sup>9</sup> In a case of sublime Cold War irony, the United States sought to contain the spread of Soviet communism by encouraging the growth and development of another communist state. This policy, as Lees writes, “raised questions about the ties that could exist between communist, noncommunist, and neutral states,” a fact that finds evidence in the complicated outcomes of the 1958 trade mission.<sup>10</sup>

As a fundamental component of the wedge policy, economic relations between Yugoslavia and the United States “broadened significantly” in the early 1950s, as Yugoslavia became a major recipient of monetary aid, foodstuffs, and loans from the United States.<sup>11</sup> Total trade between the two nations saw consistent growth throughout the decade, though it fell as a percentage of total Yugoslav imports and exports.<sup>12</sup> As a part of the United States’ wide ranging efforts to improve economic and diplomatic relations with Yugoslavia, trade missions were sent in the years 1956, 1957, and 1958 to provide technical expertise to the country’s burgeoning heavy and light industries. These trade missions, though ultimately serving the United States’ interests, operated under the mystique of technocratic internationalism, something that historian Gabrielle Hecht describes as a “gesture toward transcending Cold War politics.”<sup>13</sup> In other words, advocates of technocratic internationalism believed that cooperation in issues such as transportation, industrial management, and marketing could bridge political differences between Cold War actors.

The case of American trade missions and the expertise they provided are examples of—to build on Hecht’s observations—“less visible, but sometimes more powerful means of shaping and reshaping” international relations during the Cold War.<sup>14</sup> Though archival information on the 1956 and 1957 missions has proven to be elusive, the two missions’ main objective was to provide technical expertise regarding the development of Yugoslavia’s heavy industry.<sup>15</sup> This article focuses on the 1958 trade mission, which took

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<sup>8</sup> Lees, *Keeping Tito Afloat*, xiii.

<sup>9</sup> Lees, *Keeping Tito Afloat*, xiii.

<sup>10</sup> Lees, *Keeping Tito Afloat*, xv.

<sup>11</sup> John R. Lampe, Russell O. Prickett, and Ljubiša S. Adamović, *Yugoslav-American Economic Relations since World War II* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1990), 73-75.

<sup>12</sup> The period following the Tito-Stalin split saw an entrenchment of central planning and a turn towards a policy of “extreme self-reliance” as Yugoslav economists sought to bolster domestic industry in the face of political and economic isolation (See Lampe, Prickett, and Adamović, *Yugoslav-American Economic Relations*). Workers’ self-management, which can be seen as a reaction to the failure of these semi-autarkic policies, helped open the Yugoslav economy to international competition. Thus, from the mid-1950s onwards, there was a fairly large expansion of foreign investment and trade with both Europe and the United States.

<sup>13</sup> Gabrielle Hecht, “Introduction,” in *Entangled Geographies: Empire and Technopolitics in the Global Cold War*, ed. Gabrielle Hecht (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2011), 9.

<sup>14</sup> Hecht, “Introduction,” 3.

<sup>15</sup> “Report of the 1958 U.S. Trade Mission to Yugoslavia,” Fred Wittner Papers, Box 2, Folder 4, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison.

place from August 18 to September 26 and was composed of experts in the fields of advertising and marketing. Of these experts, the primary focus will be on Fred Wittner, an important figure in American advertising who ran a successful firm in New York City. Before founding the Fred Wittner Company in 1939, he was the publicity manager for aviator Amelia Earhart and a sports journalist, contributing to such magazines as *The New Yorker*, *Sports Illustrated*, and *The American Golfer*.<sup>16</sup> Wittner carried his lifelong passion for magazines and writing into the advertising industry, molding the Fred Wittner Company into something of a pioneer in industrial advertising by focusing on international business publications and technical literature, something Wittner called the “backbone of overseas trade missions.”<sup>17</sup> Utilizing Wittner’s personal papers, archived at the Wisconsin Historical Society in Madison, Wisconsin, it is possible to analyze the functions of trade missions, technical expertise, and information exchange in the United States’ foreign policy towards Yugoslavia during the Cold War. This technical expertise served as a conduit through which the United States attempted to strengthen ties with Yugoslavia, amid the broader context of competition with the Soviet Union. This type of analysis also sheds light on the political importance of personal relationships and networks, even within a framework that encouraged seemingly “apolitical” information exchange and expertise.

### **“What Happens at a US Trade Mission”**

The year 1958 was a pivotal moment for the United States’ relationship with Yugoslavia. In that year, international developments threatened to derail the United States’ wedge policy as Yugoslavia and the USSR seemed to be moving towards something of a political rapprochement. Domestically, criticism of the US relationship with Yugoslavia mounted, as some members of Congress went as far as to threaten resignation over a proposed Yugoslav diplomatic visit to the United States.<sup>18</sup> It was within this context that the Department of Commerce sent a trade mission to Yugoslavia, tasked with the ultimate objective of improving economic and political relations between the two countries. For six weeks in the late summer of 1958, Fred Wittner, accompanied by Robert C. Gordon of *Time* magazine and several other American diplomats and businessmen, completed a trade mission tour of Yugoslavia. The mission visited over twenty-five cities in the six republics of Yugoslavia, meeting with a variety of local industrialists, government agents, and tourism officials. The trip followed on the heels of two previous trade missions to Yugoslavia, hoping to expand on the work of the preceding missions and venture beyond advice for heavy industry. The mission’s express purpose was to provide technical expertise to Yugoslavia’s growing industrial economy and tourism industry, with the hope of ultimately “encouraging two-way trade” between Yugoslavia and the United States.<sup>19</sup> It is important to understand that the US government, and non-state actors operating within it, crafted a very specific image of the work done by trade missions. A 1958 Department of Commerce pamphlet described the work of these missions as a “patriotic

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<sup>16</sup> “Fred Wittner of Ad Agency Dies Expert on Industrial Accounts.” *The New York Times*, July 7, 1972, 35.

<sup>17</sup> “American Business Publications Serve as Prime Support for Overseas Trade Missions Program,” Press Release, August 12, 1959, Fred Wittner Papers, Box 2, Folder 2, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison.

<sup>18</sup> Lees, *Keeping Tito Afloat*, 214-215.

<sup>19</sup> “United States Trade Missions Overseas” Pamphlet, U. S. Department of Commerce, 1959, 1, Fred Wittner Papers, Box 2, Folder 4, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison.

duty” wherein businessmen “promote world friendship and expand two-way trade.”<sup>20</sup> Fred Wittner echoed these sentiments in a 1959 *Industrial Marketing* article entitled “What Should Trade Missions Do?” For Wittner, trade missions spread “goodwill of inestimable value,” so much so that he could “conceive of no more valuable contribution by private enterprise to better long-term international relations.”<sup>21</sup> In his article, Wittner utilizes several foils against which he defines the value of trade missions. The first of these foils is ironically Americans themselves. For Wittner, American tourists often act as “illwill ambassadors” who are welcomed for their hard currency but end up contributing “hostility instead of understanding.”<sup>22</sup> Trade missions, with their focus on sharing “knowledge and self-sufficiency,” correct the bad impressions that American tourists had left in Yugoslavia.<sup>23</sup> Additionally, Wittner defines US trade missions as a fundamentally different enterprise than the missions of countries with “state-controlled industries.”<sup>24</sup> For Wittner, countries with non-capitalist modes of production, acting in their own self-interest, emphasize import/export negotiations in their trade missions. This contrasts with US missions, which, as Wittner said in a 1959 speech to the Fourth Annual Circulation Seminar for Business Publications, “bring only information.”<sup>25</sup> Wittner’s consistent focus on the spread of knowledge and information as a “patriotic duty” highlights the importance of technical expertise and technocratic information exchange for the United States’ policy towards Yugoslavia. In this regard, the focus on bringing “only information” functions as a way of transferring agency from United States’ diplomats onto the information and expertise itself. In doing so, trade missions are able to transcend the usual confines of Cold War politics and discourse.

For the United States Department of Commerce, trade fairs played a similarly crucial role in the creation of international business relationships and the establishment of new trade networks. US trade missions utilized these fairs to “tour the principal commercial centers of a country” and “confer with businessmen, public officials, and organizations.”<sup>26</sup> These trade fairs could also be sites of intense Cold War competition and spectacles of consumption, as was the case in 1957, when the American pavilion displayed a true-to-life model of an American Way grocery store at the Zagreb fair.<sup>27</sup> As for the 1958 trade mission to Yugoslavia, the Belgrade and Zagreb international trade fairs provided the mission with an avenue to disseminate information, give “group and individual consultations,” and answer “several hundred questions” from Yugoslav businessmen.<sup>28</sup> At the Zagreb International Trade Fair, exhibitions were centered around various themes, ranging from

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<sup>20</sup> “United States Trade Missions Overseas,” 1.

<sup>21</sup> “What Should Trade Missions Do?,” reprinted *Industrial Advertising* article, 1959, 2, Fred Wittner Papers, Box 2, Folder 1, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison.

<sup>22</sup> “What Should Trade Missions Do?,” 2-3.

<sup>23</sup> “What Should Trade Missions Do?,” 3.

<sup>24</sup> “What Should Trade Missions Do?,” 4.

<sup>25</sup> Fred Wittner, “U.S. Trade Missions and Expanding World-Wide Circulations of American Business Magazines,” Circulation Seminar for Business Publications, Pick-Congress Hotel, Chicago, August 12, 1959, Fred Wittner Papers, Box 2, Folder 1, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison.

<sup>26</sup> “United States Trade Missions Overseas,” 1.

<sup>27</sup> Tracey Deutsch, *Building a Housewife’s Paradise: Gender, Politics, and American Grocery Stores in the Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 192.

<sup>28</sup> “United States Trade Missions Overseas,” 1.

contemporary Yugoslav architecture to international literature and the family. Over twenty-five countries participated in the Zagreb International Trade Fair, several of which established pavilions to showcase exhibitions that were based on these themes. Most notably, the Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia, Poland, the United Kingdom, and the United States were all present, representing several sides of the Cold War.<sup>29</sup> The US exhibitions were exceptionally popular, attracting some 70,000 visitors on one single day. These exhibitions were praised by President Tito for their show of “technical developments” and specific “interest [in] Yugoslavia.”<sup>30</sup> The US exhibitions at the Zagreb fair featured displays on the manufacturing of cellophane bags, blue jeans, and ice cream. The travel and recreation exhibit featured a model motel, which, according to local reports, greatly impressed President Tito. The Belgrade fair, taking place from August 23 to September 2, featured exhibits on various new technologies, including radio, television, and telephones. The Belgrade fair saw an overall attendance of over 600,000 and was praised by local press and news. The 1958 trade mission built upon the previous involvement of the United States in Yugoslav trade fairs, choosing to emphasize “how we produce rather than what we produce” and prioritizing the fields of manufacturing and tourism in their exhibits.<sup>31</sup> A Yugoslav magazine, *Privredni Pregled*, emphasized the importance of the 1958 trade fairs in an article entitled “Les Foires Internationales Yougoslaves,” written by Olga Divac. Tellingly, Divac writes that Yugoslavia was in a moment of “economic and geographic bifurcation” and that international trade fairs served as a meeting place where new economic and ideological paths could be forged.<sup>32</sup> A similar opinion prevailed in the United States, as investment in international trade fairs was solidified with the 1958 construction of a permanent American pavilion in Belgrade, encompassing some 45,000 square feet of indoor space and 20,000 square feet of outdoor space.

### **Personal and Professional Relationships**

Upon his return from Yugoslavia, Fred Wittner maintained a personal correspondence with several professional and private individuals that he met during the course of the 1958 trade mission. These contacts were, as historian Igor Tchoukarine writes, part of “growing professional and transnational networks of tourist and advertising experts” between the United States and Yugoslavia.<sup>33</sup> Among Wittner’s professional contacts were businesses such as *Yugoslav Export*, *Interpublic*, and *Dalmacija Cement*. *Yugoslav Export* was an English-language trade and business publication, headquartered in Zagreb. Wittner became acquainted with the commercial manager of *Yugoslav Export*, Gosporden D. Liebhardt, at the 1958 Zagreb fair. Through the next decade, Wittner maintained a correspondence with Liebhardt and several other staff members involved with *Yugoslav Export*. In these letters

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<sup>29</sup> Olga Divac, “Les Foires Internationales Yougoslaves,” *Privredni Pregled* (Belgrade: Privredni Pregled, 1958), 2.

<sup>30</sup> Sinclair Weeks, “U.S. Production Highlights Fall International Trade Fairs,” U.S. Department of Commerce, 1958, 1, Fred Wittner Papers, Box 2, Folder 1, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison.

<sup>31</sup> Weeks, “U.S. Production Highlights Fall International Trade Fairs,” 2.

<sup>32</sup> Divac, “Les Foires Internationales Yougoslaves,” 2.

<sup>33</sup> Igor Tchoukarine, “Playing the tourism card: Yugoslavia, advertising, and the Euro-Atlantic tourism network in the early Cold War,” in *Tourism and Travel during the Cold War: Negotiating Tourist Experiences across the Iron Curtain*, eds. Sune Bechmann Pedersen and Christian Noack, Routledge Studies in the History of Russia and Eastern Europe, (London: Routledge, 2019), 159.

Wittner provides American industrial contacts to *Yugoslav Export* and networks with advertising and tourism agents in Yugoslavia. Wittner sent American trade publications to *Yugoslav Export*, commenting that he “read[s] each issue” of their publication.<sup>34</sup> This relationship, according to *Yugoslav Export* editor-in-chief B. Bucalo, provided Yugoslav businessmen with “invaluable assistance.”<sup>35</sup> The tone of these correspondence reveals the personal quality of the acquaintance, as both Fred Wittner and his Yugoslav counterparts habitually invited one another to visit and stay in their respective countries. Wittner maintained similar contact with *Interpublic*, another Yugoslav advertising publication. Wittner took personal interest in establishing a relationship between *Interpublic* and the New York-based advertising agency *Gotham*. Wittner, in correspondence with editor-in-chief Stipe Vojnovic, established a “gentlemen’s agreement” with *Interpublic*, in which both American and Yugoslav agencies would mail one another their “most serious” information and advice on prospective partners, future advertising plans, and industry data.<sup>36</sup> Wittner’s relationship with Dalmacija Cement followed a similar trajectory. Wittner served as an intermediary for Dalmacija Cement and several American and international businesses. In this role, Wittner introduced Slavko Zvezdic, a head manager at Dalmacija Cement, to representatives of cement companies in locations ranging from New York to Belgium.<sup>37</sup> Wittner’s relationship to these three companies hints at a larger network and nexus of exchange between American and Yugoslav businesses. Wittner’s contacts emphasized the importance of knowledge around advertising and tourism in these exchanges. These relationships and the transnational exchange of information that they fostered were an integral part of a growing nexus of trade and exchange between the United States and Yugoslavia, which was a key component of the US wedge policy.

Alongside these professional contacts, Wittner maintained a personal correspondence with private Yugoslav citizens that he met during his time in Yugoslavia for several years. Of these correspondences, two stand out as particularly important, one for its demonstration of the sometimes politically fraught nature of trade missions and another for its deeply personal quality. The first case is Wittner’s correspondence with Nenad. D. Popovic, a Yugoslav economist and statesman turned dissident and defector. Popovic was instrumental in several successful loan and credit negotiations with the United States and, in the early 1950s, represented Yugoslavia at both the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank.<sup>38</sup> In 1961, he came to the United States as a visiting professor in international finance at Syracuse University, choosing to defect to the United States in that same year. Wittner had met Popovic in the course of his trade mission tour of Yugoslavia, visiting with Popovic in his capacity as undersecretary of state in Yugoslavia. Popovic corresponded with Wittner in the days following his defection, writing that he fondly

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<sup>34</sup> B. Bucalo, Letter to Fred Wittner, May 14, 1959, Fred Wittner Papers, Box 2, Folder 2, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison.

<sup>35</sup> Stipe Vojnovic, Letter to Fred Wittner, April 6, 1959, Fred Wittner Papers, Box 2, Folder 2, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison.

<sup>36</sup> Vojnovic, Letter to Fred Wittner, April 6, 1959.

<sup>37</sup> Slavko Zvezdic, Letter to Fred Wittner, May 27, 1959, Fred Wittner Papers, Box 2, Folder 2, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison.

<sup>38</sup> Associated Press, “Ex-Belgrade Aide Tells of Defection: Difficult Decision,” *The Christian Science Monitor*, December 29, 1962, 11.

remembered meeting Wittner in Yugoslavia, and inviting him to Syracuse for a visit.<sup>39</sup> Popovic's rationale for defecting from Yugoslavia was complicated and mainly based on an ideological opposition to Communism, reflecting that "in a Communist country, one feels that he should not be allowed to have personal integrity," as "the only rule of behavior is to always conform."<sup>40</sup> In 1968, Popovic published a scathing critique of Yugoslav politics in a monograph entitled *The New Class in Crisis*, taking much inspiration from Milovan Djilas's 1957 work, *The New Class: An Analysis of the Communist System*. In his critique, Popovic writes that Tito's government had "produced a mutilated, servile, and pliable pseudo-democracy in its politics" and had "formed a moral vacuum everywhere."<sup>41</sup> Though Popovic never explicitly connected his defection and critique of Yugoslavia with his contacts in the United States and Western Europe, his relationship and later correspondence with Wittner reveal that, for as much as the wedge policy sought to avoid explicitly political diplomacy, contacts between the United States and Yugoslavia nevertheless came with political risks. High-profile defection, followed by ruthless and public critique, posed a risk to the United States' attempt to strengthen ties with Yugoslavia. Additionally, Wittner and Popovic's friendship is especially interesting, as their written correspondence occurred some three years after the trade mission, providing insight into the length and substance of the relationships and networks that the trade mission helped create.

The second important case is Wittner's correspondence with Aleksander "Sasha" Ozerovic, a Yugoslav citizen working for the United States Information Service (USIS) in Belgrade. Throughout their correspondence, Ozerovic and Wittner discuss the quality and performance of Yugoslav tourism and business publications. What is remarkable about this correspondence is its personal and candid nature. In his correspondence, Ozerovic writes about the kind and "gentle" nature of his relationship with Wittner.<sup>42</sup> Additionally, Ozerovic frequently confides in Wittner as a friend, often writing about his grief. In several letters Ozerovic describes his attempts to receive compensation from the West German government and his "tragic memories" of the Holocaust, in which his father and ten others in his family were murdered.<sup>43</sup> These relationships speak to the type of personal connections that were forged between Americans and Yugoslavs during the 1958 trade mission. Some of these contacts were friendly and genial, falling under the "apolitical" category of technocratic internationalism. Others, such as Wittner's friendship with Popovic, reveal that for as much as US policy attempted to avoid it, complicated and public political negotiations were also taking place.

## **Within the Cold War Framework**

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<sup>39</sup> Nenad Popovic, Letter to Fred Wittner, October 24, 1961, Fred Wittner Papers, Box 2, Folder 4, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison.

<sup>40</sup> "Ex-Belgrade Aide Tells of Defection," 11.

<sup>41</sup> D. J. R. Scott, "Reviewed Work: *Yugoslavia. The New Class in Crisis* by Nenad D. Popovic," *Soviet Studies* 21, no. 1 (July 1969): 121-122.

<sup>42</sup> Aleksander Ozerovic, Letter to Fred Wittner, December 14, 1959, Fred Wittner Papers, Box 2, Folder 4, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison.

<sup>43</sup> Aleksander Ozerovic, Letter to Fred Wittner, June 29, 1961, Fred Wittner Papers, Box 2, Folder 4, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison.



Despite a professed interest in “information alone,” the US relationship with Yugoslavia and the 1958 trade mission were inextricably tied to the broader conditions of the Cold War. In an article published in the American business magazine *Industrial Marketing*, Fred Wittner asked a question that he thought may be on the minds of many Americans: “Why should the United States send a trade mission, at taxpayers’ expense, to a Communist-controlled country such as Yugoslavia?”<sup>44</sup> Wittner’s answer to this question was complex, portraying Yugoslavia as a country that occupied a unique position within the framework of the ever heightening Cold War. For Wittner, Yugoslavia was “*not* behind the iron curtain” but was a country in which Communism could be molded and adapted, unlike the “monolithic structure” of other Eastern European countries.<sup>45</sup> Yugoslavia was of tremendous strategic importance to the United States, offering an “important window” from which the West could “watch the satellite bloc.”<sup>46</sup> In this regard, Wittner’s statements mirror almost the exact same language as the US State Department. As historian Lorraine Lees writes, “the United States had a large investment in Tito,” and senior members of the State Department, such as Secretary of State John Dulles, believed that Yugoslavia could “lead the satellite states to a greater degree of independence.”<sup>47</sup> Wittner’s statements shed valuable light on his perspective towards the 1958 trade mission and more broadly on his perspective towards Yugoslavia itself. In addition to the country’s strategic importance, Wittner writes that Yugoslavia’s people were, among other things, “markedly brave” and “tenacious,” always responding to Westerners with “surprise and pleasure.”<sup>48</sup>

For Wittner, the specter of the Cold War weighed heavily upon his understanding of the trade mission to Yugoslavia and of Yugoslavia itself. In an unpublished article entitled “Two Americans look at Economic Propaganda in a Communist Country,” written shortly after his return from Yugoslavia, Wittner expounded upon his view of the atypical socialist country. The title of the article itself is revealing in its language of the Cold War, and in it, Wittner and Robert C. Gordon, a sales manager at *Time* magazine who would later become director of corporate relations for the Council on Foreign Relations, analyze both the advertising industry in Yugoslavia and their own personal experiences on the trade mission. Throughout the article, Wittner and Gordon associate “salesmanship” with American values and capitalism. The authors were pleasantly surprised to find evidence of these “American” values throughout Yugoslavia. With the exception of portraits of Marx, Lenin, and Tito, Wittner and Gordon compliment the lack of “Communist propaganda” in Yugoslavia.<sup>49</sup> Here, Wittner and Gordon echoed a rising sentiment within the popular press in the United States. Just one day prior to the trade mission’s arrival in Yugoslavia, *The New York Times* published an article that seemed to challenge traditional Cold War narratives about the country. In an article entitled “Yugoslav Laxity Surprises Visitor,” Paul Underwood wrote that, to his surprise, Yugoslavia exhibited no “evidence of a police

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<sup>44</sup> “What Should Trade Missions Do?,” 2.

<sup>45</sup> “What Should Trade Missions Do?,” 4.

<sup>46</sup> “What Should Trade Missions Do?,” 4.

<sup>47</sup> Lees, *Keeping Tito Afloat*, 223.

<sup>48</sup> “What Should Trade Missions Do?,” 4-5.

<sup>49</sup> Robert C. Gordon and Fred Wittner, “Two Americans Look at Economic Propaganda in a Communist Country,” unpublished manuscript, 1958, 1-2, Fred Wittner Papers, Box 3, Folder 11, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison.

state.”<sup>50</sup> Despite the fact that the Communist party “dominates every aspect of Yugoslav life,” the average citizen attended “Western plays, operas, and movies” and bought “Western books, newspapers, and magazines... freely.”<sup>51</sup> This article is of interest for multiple reasons, not the least because it highlights a change in American cultural representation of Yugoslavia. The article also represents an understanding of freedom based on consumption, especially of “Western goods”—something that Wittner and Gordon consider a highlight of Yugoslavia.

Wittner and Gordon continue along similar lines in their assessment of Yugoslavia’s tourism industry. The industry was ripe for development as the “average tourist from the West must constantly remind himself ... that he is not in a Western democratic country.”<sup>52</sup> In fact, in the eyes of Wittner and Gordon, Yugoslavia had spent the last decade trying to “emulate and identify” with the West.<sup>53</sup> A robust advertising industry was already in existence. Posters were found throughout the six republics advertising soft drinks, soap, and electronic devices. State-controlled radio and news media were laden with commercials for consumer products and some 10,000 television sets were found throughout the country. Cooperation with private companies in the United States, like RCA, promised to greatly expand this growing industry.<sup>54</sup> There was even evidence of market competition in the advertising industry, with window dressings being adapted to public interest and demand in Sarajevo and Belgrade.<sup>55</sup> Hotels, “built to Western tastes,” were being constructed in Belgrade, Macedonia, and Croatia.<sup>56</sup> These hotels featured air-conditioning, night clubs, and fine architecture, “comparing favorably to the most luxurious new Miami Beach hotels.”<sup>57</sup> Mirroring the “Westernization” that was occurring in the economic sphere, the average Yugoslav citizen found themselves identifying more and more with the West: listening to rock music, learning “American-style dancing,” and mingling with US Marines.<sup>58</sup>

For Wittner and Gordon, Yugoslavia’s tourism and advertising industries were making impressive developments and strides in the right direction. Advertising agents in Yugoslavia were moving in the direction of “salesmanship and competition,” basing their product design on popular demand and quality.<sup>59</sup> This behavior was in sharp contrast to the previous method of “simply having labels with general instructions concerning use, content, and quality.”<sup>60</sup> Wittner and Gordon trace these changes back to the early 1950s economic reforms in Yugoslavia towards the establishment of workers’ councils and

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<sup>50</sup> Paul Underwood, “Yugoslav Laxity Surprises Visitor,” *The New York Times*, August 17, 1958, 29.

<sup>51</sup> Underwood, “Yugoslav Laxity Surprises Visitor,” 30.

<sup>52</sup> Gordon and Wittner, “Two Americans Look at Economic Propaganda in a Communist Country,” 3

<sup>53</sup> Gordon and Wittner, “Two Americans Look at Economic Propaganda in a Communist Country,” 3.

<sup>54</sup> “Yugoslavia finds ads are a capitalistic ‘must’ even in a Communist nation,” *Printer’s Ink*, October 31, 1959, 2, Fred Wittner Papers, Box 2, Folder 4, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison.

<sup>55</sup> For more on this issue, see Patrick Patterson, *Bought and Sold: Living and Losing the Good Life in Socialist Yugoslavia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011).

<sup>56</sup> Gordon and Wittner, “Two Americans Look at Economic Propaganda in a Communist Country,” 5.

<sup>57</sup> Gordon and Wittner, “Two Americans Look at Economic Propaganda in a Communist Country,” 5.

<sup>58</sup> Gordon and Wittner, “Two Americans Look at Economic Propaganda in a Communist Country,” 3.

<sup>59</sup> Gordon and Wittner, “Two Americans Look at Economic Propaganda in a Communist Country,” 9.

<sup>60</sup> Gordon and Wittner, “Two Americans Look at Economic Propaganda in a Communist Country,” 7.

workers' self-management. For Wittner and Gordon, this "complete break from the Soviet version of Communism" allowed for the creation of markets and competition in Yugoslavia.<sup>61</sup> Velimir Kovacic, manager of the advertising agency, *Ozeha*, agreed with Wittner and Gordon, writing that though "living with workers' councils ... hasn't always been easy," it has increased the "interest in the processes of advertising, publicity, and sales promotion."<sup>62</sup>

## Conclusion

Ultimately, in their final report, representatives from the trade mission presented Yugoslavia's tourism industry as suffering mainly from an image problem. The largest obstacle that this "Western-facing" country came up against was the popular image they possessed in the United States and in the West at large. Despite Yugoslavia's developing consumer culture and growing advertisement industry, Americans, by and large, saw Yugoslavia as "behind the Iron Curtain."<sup>63</sup> Members of the Department of Commerce sought to solve this problem by creating "a greater understanding" between citizens of the United States and of Yugoslavia.<sup>64</sup> The answer to these problems lied in the creation of a new "mind picture of today's Yugoslavia," a country that, "although Communist in ideology, has dedicated itself to sharing the American traditions of independence and friendliness with other peoples."<sup>65</sup> To achieve this goal, the trade mission laid out a series of steps for Yugoslavia to take, from the rehabilitation of existing hotels to the establishment of a ground floor tourist office in New York City.<sup>66</sup> These recommendations were not unexpected or out of the ordinary. As historian Igor Tchoukarine writes, "the increasingly interconnected world of tourism favoured the creation of networks and spaces," which is reflected in the emphasis on solidifying ties between American and Yugoslav business ventures.<sup>67</sup> These networks and spaces were important to the members of the 1958 U. S. trade mission and were an integral part of technocratic internationalism. Professional contacts between publishers in the United States and Yugoslavia, such as those between *Interpublic* and *Gotham*, serve as just one example of a broader trend. Personal contacts, such as the relationship between Wittner and Popovic, highlight the sometimes politically fraught nature of international development and trade projects between socialist and nonsocialist nations during the Cold War.

Furthermore, the 1958 US trade mission to Yugoslavia enriches understandings about the role of technical expertise and information exchange in the United States' policy towards Yugoslavia. The trade mission accomplished several of its goals through the establishment of professional ties between advertising agents and industrialists in Yugoslavia and the United States and personal connections between local Yugoslavs and private American

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<sup>61</sup> Gordon and Wittner, "Two Americans Look at Economic Propaganda in a Communist Country," 9-10.

<sup>62</sup> Gordon and Wittner, "Two Americans Look at Economic Propaganda in a Communist Country," 10.

<sup>63</sup> "Report: The 1958 United States Trade Mission to Yugoslavia, August 18-September 26, 1958," United States Department of Commerce, 1958, 9, Fred Wittner Papers, Box 3, Folder 4, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison.

<sup>64</sup> "Report: The 1958 United States Trade Mission to Yugoslavia," 1.

<sup>65</sup> "Report: The 1958 United States Trade Mission to Yugoslavia," 2.

<sup>66</sup> "Report: The 1958 United States Trade Mission to Yugoslavia," 9.

<sup>67</sup> Tchoukarine, "Playing the tourism card," 166.

citizens. Trade fairs, as well as exhibitions and production displays, were also reaffirmed as an important vehicle for the transnational circulation of expertise and information. As explored in this article, the trade mission, and especially the experience of Fred Wittner, provides insights into the changing nature of US-Yugoslav relationship and showcases the oftentimes personal and political nature of international trade and information exchange during the Cold War.