

December 10, 1965

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A Tourist Trap, Soviet Style

An American, intent on visiting the Soviet Union, might get the impression that some tourists are more equal than others. He might, for instance, have invested seven cents last summer in *Moscow News*, an English-language weekly, and read a story titled "No Visas Necessary." Detailing the pleasures to be found in a tiny Russian enclave far north on the Norwegian border and in the nearby village of Borisoglebsk, the story quoted an ecstatic succession of tourists who had entered by the only visa-free gap in the country's borders:

"We are returning home with very happy memories . . . we were received in a most hospitable way . . . when I get home I shall tell my friends about this interesting trip."

But unless he read the story's fine print, the tourist might not have realized the invitation referred only to Scandinavians.

One American who didn't make that distinction, Newcomb Mott of Sheffield, Mass., now has 18 months on a Soviet work gang to ponder the logic of borders that open for some and not for others. Mott, on vacation in Norway, was told by three people that he didn't need a visa to visit Borisoglebsk and by three others that he did. He was over the line on the Russian side before he could find a Soviet official to settle the matter, and the answer was 81 days in a solitary cell while his case was investigated.

At his trial in Murmansk, the court ignored niceties of the law that even the Soviet system recognizes—intent and mit-

igating circumstances. A prosecution witness solemnly explained that no tourist had ever mistakenly wandered across the border in that area before. Then the court refused to record for the defense a telegram from the American embassy that listed specifics of seven such cases—tourists who had simply been turned around by the Russians and ushered out.

Our State Department has protested Mott's sentence as "extreme and harsh . . . inconsistent with past Soviet practice in cases of this kind." Protests and appeals won't do much for Mott. He is an example of an individual caught up in a dispute between nations. Mott was simply bitten by the frost that has settled over American-Soviet relations since we started fighting for real in Vietnam.