

Where Once He Knew Humiliation

WITH THE PRESIDENT — This must be a soul-satisfying trip for Richard Nixon. The last two times he was in the Soviet Union, the leaders who had deposed his old sparring partner, N.S. Khrushchev, wouldn't give him the time of day.

On those two occasions, Nixon was representing his New York law firm and its client, PepsiCo. He was given only the routine Intourist treatment afforded visiting business and professional people.

During his first trip to the U.S.S. R., 1959, Nixon was treated quite atrociously by Khrushchev and others.

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ON HIS FIRST morning in Moscow, where President Eisenhower had assigned him to open the American exhibit in a trade fair, Nixon took a walk with a Secret Service man and was attracted by a large grocery store known as Danilovsky's.

He dropped in, waved to the clerks and customers, looked around and was ready to continue when a customer complained he and his friends were unable to obtain tickets to the American show. The man was trying to tell him that the Russian officials had limited the number of tickets available so as not to make it sorely evident that the Muskovites preferred the American show to all others.

But the then Vice President assumed the man was saying he and his friends didn't have enough money to buy tickets. So he borrowed 100 rubles from his guard and offered it as a gift to the griper.

Pandemonium. The griper indignantly turned on his heel. The manager of the store made a speech, denouncing the distinguished visitor for suggesting that Russian workers didn't make enough money to buy a simple ticket to a fair. It appeared the next day on the front page of the Moscow News, an English-language blatt.

Nixon arrived at the fairgrounds about noon that day, just before Khrushchev drove up with his party, which included Anastas Mikoyan. When introduced to the Armenian, Nixon complimented him on his great reputation as a trade specialist. "Then why couldn't he sell anything while he was in your country?" Khrushchev barked, and led his party through the gates. Nixon turned to John Daly and me and said, "I guess I shouldn't have said that."

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THE FAMED "kitchen debate" was a two-rounder, actually. The growling and the finger poking began in RCA's color television exhibit. It was ridiculous but vigorous: First, a debate on which of the two nations had invented color TV, followed by how much of the videotape that was rolling would be shown to U.S. audiences and how much to the Russian people.

What started the second round, after the combined group moved into the kitchen of a model American home, was a simple misinterpretation. Nixon used the word dictate in some context or another. Khrushchev decided he had just been called a "dictator." He got red in the face and hot with temper.

In the relative cool of late afternoon, Nixon made his official speech opening the American pavilion. Khrushchev tried to interrupt him at one point. Nixon told him to sit down. "I have the floor," he said icily, then smiled somewhat nervously. His boss, Ike, had not given him very substantial credentials for that trip.

Elsewhere, during that strange visit of a dozen years ago, Nixon was confronted by obviously coached "workers." The plugs were pulled on two of the three cameras on his TV address to the nation. And Frol Kozlov, deputy premier, was still angrily answering him on the public address system when Nixon took off in his big jet.

Going back, and walking on the reddest red rugs, as befits a President of the United States, he must feel like a poor rejected lad who returns one day to the scene of his humiliation — in a Rolls-Royce.