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## Soviet and Post-Soviet Environmental Problems

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## Soviet and Post-Soviet Environmental Problems

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With the collapse of Communist power in the Soviet Union, considerable attention has focused on the lessons produced by the experiment with Marxist socialism in the Russian empire and what we might regard as the legacies of Communism. One of the most highly visible legacies of that system is a pattern of environmental neglect that stretches from the Baltics to the Kamchatka peninsula. As a public issue, ecology only emerged in the final years of communist rule in the USSR, initially as part of Gorbachev's glasnost and, later, as a component of the country's increasingly vocal nationalist movements. A radioactive explosion in Toms-7 in April, 1993,<sup>1</sup> served as a reminder that the system which produced Chernobyl had not disappeared but had simply been passed on to the successors of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, who now faced an ecological nightmare inherited from the old regime. This paper is an examination of the appearance of ecological concerns as a public issue, the often inadequate response of the system to those concerns, what that response revealed about the changing Soviet system, and, finally, the environmental situation which faces the post-Communist leadership of what was the Soviet Union.

## The Appearance of Environmental Problems

One of the most frequently asked questions among Western specialists on Soviet affairs during the final years of Communist power in the USSR was whether or not perestroika was an irreversible process. As speculation mounted about the prospects for a crackdown on the separatist and dissident movements which proliferated after the mid-1980s, there was an increase in Western uncertainty about how easily perestroika's consequences might be reversed. Among those who examined specific policy concerns

<sup>1</sup> Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Daily Report, April 7, 1993

which had arisen during the period of perestroika, attention was focused on several policies which were clearly a process of perestroika. One of the most important of these was Moscow's environmental policy, something which was significant not only for what it revealed about systemic change but also because of growing global concern about ecological concerns. This global concern reached the USSR's increasingly skeptical citizens and contributed to the appearance of an active "civil society" which helped undermine the dogmatic foundations of the USSR.

The traditional view of the Soviet policy process was based on the perhaps simplistic assumption that the Communist Party, under the leadership of the Politburo, shaped and guided every aspect of public policy as well as numerous features of private endeavor. In decision-making on economic and industrial concerns, this approach was founded on the Stalinist notion of development in which there was a comprehensive build-up of heavy engineering and weapons enterprises but little or no emphasis on the short-term satisfaction of consumer needs. Enforcement powers, delegated by the Party, were held by a highly centralized bureaucratic apparatus located, for the most part, in Moscow and having little extended, direct contact with those individuals or regions upon which policy had its greatest impact. At this time, the military, which would later be called to account for some of its environmental practices, played a significant part in decision-making and did much to shape the USSR's policies in the development of nuclear energy. In this process there was little place for popular, non-Party activism or for specialist opinion based even superficially on anything other than Marxist-Leninist philosophy as interpreted by the Party leadership.

As part of an effort to understand what happened to the Soviet Union after August 1991, environmental policy is an appropriate one to examine for at least two reasons. First, it was one of the earliest policies to demonstrate the depth of change in Moscow's decision-making process, and therefore enjoyed a longer period of time in which to demonstrate clear accomplishments. Second, the regime's modified approach to ecological concerns was marked by a direct association with the destabilizing tendencies which eventually destroyed the USSR's state structure and, finally, the Soviet Union itself. In short, environmental policy enjoyed the distinction of being significant as an indicator of change, but it was

not directly burdened by the political volatility characteristic of the USSR's ethnic and separatist movements.

#### Traditional Environmentalism: Marxist Dogmatism

The traditionalism of Soviet political concerns was matched by an equally traditional view of environmental issues. In the official Soviet view, ecological problems were simply another measure of the crisis of capitalism and further evidence that the sins of capitalism were being visited on the children of that system. Soviet policies, being ideologically grounded, were, by definition, environmentally sound. Environmental waste, abuse, and mismanagement, according to the public statements of the leadership, simply could not exist in the USSR. According to Article 18 of the Soviet Constitution, the Soviet state was committed to the "scientific, rational use of the land" and was pledged "to preserve the purity of air and water, ensure reproduction of natural wealth, and improve the human environment." In Article 67 of the Constitution, one of the duties of Soviet citizens was "to protect nature and conserve its riches."<sup>2</sup> The Soviet Constitution, unfortunately, was more of a programmatic document than a guide to actual practice. It should not, therefore, be surprising that as these provisions were being written into the 1977 constitution, Soviet authorities were beginning a process of tightening up on the release of information about environmental conditions. With the USSR's declining economic fortunes in that decade, there could be little doubt that official priorities rested heavily on the side of production, something which seemed to enjoy an even higher place in the minds of Soviet officials than the oft-quoted maxims of Marxism-Leninism. When environmental concerns finally became a matter of public debate, the Central Committee of the Ukrainian Communist Party, reeling under the impact of the Chernobyl disaster and offering a candid assessment of the system, complained that, in spite of constitutional claims to the contrary, long-term Soviet industrial practice was mandated that only left-over materials and financial resources were allocated for the protection of nature.<sup>3</sup>

By the mid-1970s, Soviet statements about environmental

<sup>2</sup> *Constitution of the USSR*, Moscow: Novosti Press Agency, 1977, pp. 27-28 and p. 52.

<sup>3</sup> *Pravda Ukrainy*, May 22, 1988, pp. 1-3.

matters acknowledged the existence of a global ecological crisis, but treated it as primarily a concern and product of capitalism.<sup>4</sup> This view, of course, supported official policy with its emphasis upon doing everything possible to enhance the productive capacity of a declining Soviet industrial apparatus. Although the USSR Council of Ministers passed a resolution on air pollution in 1949, authorities consistently maintained that Soviet practices, being ideologically sound, were equally sound ecologically and there was no real environmental problem in the USSR. Yet, according to a Soviet study smuggled into the West, by the late 1970s, for each unit of goods, the socialist economy produced twice as many pollutants of all sorts, and each Soviet automobile was poisoning its environment almost four times as much as each American car.<sup>5</sup>

The turning point in the Kremlin's treatment of environmental questions was the Chernobyl nuclear accident in April 1986, an incident that highlighted the persistent Soviet tendency to reveal little or nothing about sensitive environmental concerns, even those having an impact far beyond the frontiers of the USSR. Coming shortly after Gorbachev's declaration of glasnost, official treatment of the accident seemed to confirm Western suspicions that Gorbachev's policy of "openness" was meaningless in critical situations. In the face of mounting international pressure, the regime provided considerable information about the causes as well as the consequences and costs of the accident. In the aftermath of these disclosures, public discussion of various environmental issues became not only acceptable but was encouraged as scientists, economists, intellectuals and others joined in an open debate. In 1988, a Soviet radio commentary expressed the new official attitude with an observation that "since ecological problems were hushed up for a long time, we now come face to face with those problems." Glasnost and perestroika, according to the commentary, would help in the search for effective ways to improve the environmental situation. This apparently new spirit prompted the CPSU Central Committee to join the USSR Council of Ministers in calling for a "single state ecological policy" and increased public awareness

<sup>4</sup> I. Gerasimov and M. Budyko, "Urgent Problems of Man's Interaction With Nature", *Kommunist*, No. 10, July, 1974, pp. 79-91.

<sup>5</sup> Boris Komarov, *The Destruction of Nature in the Soviet Union*, London: Pluto Press, Ltd, 1978, p. 30

of the significance of environmental concerns.<sup>6</sup>

Official acknowledgment of the Chernobyl incident was followed by seemingly endless accounts about the consequences of what some Soviet scientists have described as the "largest planetary catastrophe suffered at the hands of man." A public that had long been told there was no environmental neglect in the USSR suddenly learned that Soviet industrial practices had produced many ecological nightmares. The Ukraine in particular was the site of numerous environmental crises other than Chernobyl and, according to one study, of the former USSR's fifty most polluted cities, eight were in the Ukraine. Even more important, of fifty-five Ukrainian farms that were observed over a one-year period, thirty-three were found to be suffering from pesticide contamination.<sup>7</sup> Newspaper and other accounts in the popular media informed the public about the basic details of Chernobyl while books such as Zhores Medvedev's *Legacy of Chernobyl* endeavored to look beyond the short-term impact of the reactor's malfunction. A more recent study, published after the collapse of the USSR, attempting to assess the full demographic consequences of Chernobyl, concluded that while almost one million people are threatened with increased radiation risks as a result of participating in the cleanup or living near the nuclear power facility, as many as 18 million people who live in Belarus, Ukraine, and Russia will suffer as a result of the accident. According to the study, these states will feel the effects of Chernobyl not only in the deterioration of public health but also in a negative migration process which will mean a long-term population decline in the affected areas.<sup>8</sup>

#### **Institutional Environmentalism: Structural Adaptation**

A fundamental question about Soviet policy during the final years of the Gorbachev era, one that was central to determining if there was a divergence from traditional policy, had to do with when environmental concerns would finally carry sufficient weight

<sup>6</sup> Radio Moscow World Service, January 18, 1988 and *Pravda*, January 17, 1988, pp. 1-2

<sup>7</sup> David Marples, "The Ecological Situation in the Ukraine", *Report on the USSR*, January 19, 1990, pp. 23-24.

<sup>8</sup> Leonid Leonidovich Rybakovsky, "Demographic Consequences of the Accident at the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant", *Sotsiologicheskiye Issledovaniya*, No. 9, September, 1992, pp. 40-50

to compel authorities to make decisions that entailed significant economic costs. As of the early 1980s, Soviet economists consistently embraced the view that the nation simply could not afford the excessive costs required for environmental protection.<sup>9</sup> However, with the impact of Chernobyl, the regime began to move away from this position and was willing to consider costly decisions in the interest of ecological protection. For the first time, a rigid, dogmatic system seemed willing to adapt to a new situation. Soviet writings began to stress the cost of environmental neglect and emphasized the necessity of exercising greater caution in industrial practice. For example, in 1988, when an oil leak was detected in the Moscow River, authorities denounced the "negligent attitude" that caused the leak and detailed the environmental costs in terms of rubles as well as damage to fish management in the river.<sup>10</sup> Finally, an official tendency emerged in which spokesmen would argue that it was ecological neglect, not environmental protection, that was too expensive.

An important new feature of Soviet environmental policy during this period was the issue of enforcement of legislation. In the past, there had been a comfortable relationship between industries and the administrative agencies responsible for maintaining legal ecological standards. Ecological problems were ignored because production enjoyed the highest priority and environmental standards were loosely enforced. By 1986, authority for enforcement of existing legislation was finally shifting toward police agencies such as the Ministry of Interior (MVD), whose personnel did not share administrative responsibility for meeting production quotas, but simply for maintaining legally mandated environmental requirements. In June 1986, Soviet environmental authorities declared that the monitoring of water resource standards had been unsatisfactory and called upon local Soviets as well as the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD) to play a more assertive monitoring role.<sup>11</sup> In an examination of environmental monitoring practices, the Central Committee of the Ukrainian Communist Party supported those findings and denounced Ukrainian efforts as "unprincipled

and irresponsible."<sup>12</sup> Within a year there were reports of stronger measures to protect special water assets such as Lake Baikal and Lake Ladoga. There were also reprimands and other punishments for officials at the ministerial level who had neglected their enforcement obligations. Announcements of these actions implied that the officials were not simply part of a larger process of replacement of elites but were, in fact, being punished for their environmental failures.<sup>13</sup>

The culmination of these studies was the creation of a new institution for enforcement of environmental legislation. In January 1988, the CPSU Central Committee and the USSR Council of Ministers announced the formation of a new state environmental protection committee with extensive powers that would support its fulfillment of a "long-term national program of environmental protection and rational use of natural resources." The bureaucratic vehicle for this intensified official interest in enforcement of environmental standards was the USSR Union Republic State Committee for Environmental Control or, as it was more widely known, the USSR Goskompriroda. This agency became the central organ of state environmental management and had responsibility for a wide variety of enforcement actions, including the imposition of environmental tests in the development of new technologies and the management of wildlife and hunting preserves. It was also responsible for public education about ecological issues as well as for insuring cooperation with other nations in protecting environmental assets. General guidance on Soviet environmental protection was provided through a public council consisting of scientists, various public figures, representatives of local Soviets, and enterprise directors. Eventually, Goskompriroda's institutional status was elevated to that of a Ministry and the agency was generally referred to as Minpriroda.<sup>14</sup>

Another new aspect of Soviet policy was the environmental legislation itself. Within a year of the Chernobyl incident, discussions of changes in ecological legislation became a routine feature of the Soviet media. In an interview in December 1987, Vladimir

<sup>9</sup> Komarov, p. 29

<sup>10</sup> Moscow Radio Domestic Service, January 13, 1988

<sup>11</sup> *Izvestia*, June 19, 1986, pp. 1-2

<sup>12</sup> *Pravda Ukrainy* (Kiev), May 22, 1988, pp. 1-3

<sup>13</sup> *Foreign Broadcast Information Service: Daily Reports-Soviet Union*, May 19, 1987, p. R1-3; May 21, 1988, p. R1; and May 28, 1987, p. R3.

<sup>14</sup> *Pravda*, January 17, 1988, pp. 1-2

Gubarev, Deputy Justice Minister at the time, indicated that the new USSR Goskompriroda would advance the introduction of a new body of legislation in order to punish ecological offenders and to encourage the correct use of resources. Mechanisms to be employed under the new legislation included the introduction of cost accounting to encourage producers to minimize pollution, a system of heavy fines against violators, the upgrading of purification systems, and a pricing policy that would reward ecologically clean products. The system of fines established an arrangement whereby accumulated funds were to be used for unanticipated environmental work, somewhat like the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency "super fund".<sup>15</sup> As noted earlier, even before implementation of the new legislation, there were clear indications of a new official spirit about dealing with those responsible for environmental neglect.<sup>16</sup> The Ukraine was a national leader in this process and, after taking severe actions against numerous department heads and even a deputy chairman of the Ukrainian Council of Ministers, in 1991 the government, under pressure from environmental advocacy groups, passed legislation that would provide for prison sentences for individuals guilty of negligence in the mishandling of radioactive materials.<sup>17</sup> The enormous costs associated with the mishandling of radioactive waste were dramatically illustrated in 1991 when a town in the Sverdlovsk Oblast had to be permanently evacuated following its designation as a radiation disaster zone.<sup>18</sup> Negligence was also cited as a key factor in the explosion at the nuclear processing plant in Tomsk-7 in April 1993.<sup>19</sup>

As the Ukrainians began their efforts to make the USSR responsive to reality by detailing a program to create a market economy, environmental concerns were reflected in the implementing legislation. Section 8 of the Ukrainian law was devoted to ecological protective measures as well as to steps for the rehabilitation of the republic's environment. The starting point was a declaration of the high "priority of the ecology over other problems of socio-economic development," a radical departure from tradi-

<sup>15</sup> Radio Liberty Research, RL492/87, December 4, 1987, p. 10

<sup>16</sup> *FBIS: Daily Reports - Soviet Union*, May 19, 1987, pp. R1-3.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, February 6, 1991, p. 1

<sup>18</sup> A. Tarasov, "Evacuation 40 Years On", *Izvestia*, January 11, 1991, p. 5

<sup>19</sup> Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Daily Report, No. 69, April 13, 1993.

tional Soviet policies. Another feature of the Ukrainian law was that, finally, public opinion was to be taken into account on questions about industrial production methods, thus transforming a populist environmental approach into policy. As the Ukraine's economy evolved in the direction of a market system, the enterprise itself was held responsible for environmental protection and, where ecologically destructive acts were noted, the corporate officials were to pay the costs associated with environmental damage. Such payments were transferred into a non-budget state fund for environmental protection.<sup>20</sup>

The Ukrainian Supreme Soviet, not the local party, was at the forefront in recognizing the inadequacies of environmental protection in the Ukraine. As reports indicated increasingly dangerous levels of radioactivity in 1991, there was a corresponding effort by the republic's government to deal more directly with environmental threats. New legislation was supplemented by efforts of the Kiev branch of Intourist, which began tourist visits to Kopachi, the dead city of Chernobyl, as a way of commemorating the fifth anniversary of the disaster.<sup>21</sup> Ukrainian authorities also noted the detrimental role of the Soviet military in shaping Soviet nuclear development programs. During his visit to Austria in 1991, the Ukrainian Energy Minister, Vitaly Sklyarov, declared that "...if the military had not interfered, nuclear fission and nuclear energy as a technical invention would still be just in the laboratory" instead of threatening the world's environment.<sup>22</sup>

While many praised Gorbachev's glasnost for advancing discussions of the environmental situation, the difficulties faced by environmental reformers were aggravated by many of Gorbachev's economic reforms. Market conditions, for example, as applied in the Soviet setting, often had a negative impact on ecological standards. An evaluation of the work of the Goskompriroda after almost three years indicated that this institution, presumably valued for its independent experts motivated by a concern for environmental protection, was not above the same pressures that inhibited the work of other agencies. Within a short time, Goskompriroda's activities were linked with entrepreneurial interests,

<sup>20</sup> *Pravda Ukrainy (Kiev)*, November 16, 1990, pp. 1-2

<sup>21</sup> *Izvestia*, February 4, 1991, p. 1

<sup>22</sup> *FBIS: Daily Reports - Soviet Union*, No. 25, February 6, 1991, p. 96

because funds for various nuclear power stations were coming from the same source as Goskompriroda funds. In a dispute over the proposed construction of a nuclear power plant on the banks of the Tsimlyansk Water Reservoir near Rostov, citizens who turned to Goskompriroda for assistance found that the concerns of this agency were coordinated with those of the nuclear power interests. Such an arrangement was, in fact, the intention of Soviet legislation as outlined in the 1990 USSR Council of Ministers resolution "Concerning Urgent Measures to Normalize the Consumer Market, the Circulation of Money, and To Strengthen State Monitoring of Prices." In point 12, this resolution denounced the local practice of interfering with the operations of enterprises that were under Union or central jurisdiction. The "pretext of inadequate ecological safety" was specifically noted as an inadequate reason for limiting operations of Union enterprises such as nuclear power installations. The dominant concern, in the view of central authorities, was to improve Soviet economic output.<sup>23</sup> Failure to subordinate this environmental protection agency to a different institutional interest was an inherent limitation on its independence. This structural oversight (if it was, in fact, an oversight rather than a deliberate decision) seriously undermined institutional environmentalism as a way of dealing with the USSR's deteriorating ecology. It seems obvious that what the Soviet "center" was attempting to do in this period was to use ecological concerns as a rationale for keeping the Soviet Union together in the face of growing disunity. Evidently, elements of the Soviet leadership were willing to allow public oversight but only of the environmental effects of local firms, not of all-Union enterprises such as the nuclear power industry. In short, Moscow's authorities wanted to have it both ways: to play an environmental "card" while also maintaining an official emphasis on enhancing production at the expense of ecological concerns.

### Populist Environmentalism: Democratic Adaptation

Events of the Gorbachev era signalled important changes

<sup>23</sup> P. Penezhko, "A 'Kept' Expert Commission or Who is Paying the USSR Goskompriroda and For What?", *Trud (Moscow)*, November 1, 1990, p. 2 and "The Politics of Environmental Protection in the USSR: The Case of the Soviet EPA", *United States Information Agency Research Memorandum*, September 22, 1989.

in how the leadership would attempt to deal with its increasingly important environmental issue. In 1991, a poll conducted by the Russian State Statistical Office indicated that 74% of the respondents viewed their ecological situation as "intolerable" and that 20% would like to move in order to find better environmental conditions.<sup>24</sup> One of the first consequences of such attitudes was the continuation and even intensification of massive protests in the form of demonstrations and petitions relating to policies affecting environmental conditions. It should be noted that, while 1986 and 1987 were the first years of massive environmental protests, the way had been slowly prepared over decades by the student *druzhiny* or conservation brigades and the activities of Vera Briusova and Sergei Zalygin in opposition to authorities' efforts to reverse the directions of Soviet rivers. These activities, however, were on a relatively small scale, while the activism of this period was exemplified by events such as the call by the Latvian Environmental Protection Club in 1988 for a massive show of popular opposition to the construction of a Riga subway system. On April 27, 1988, over 15,000 people joined in a protest against the subway plan, which was denounced as both economically unsound and environmentally unsafe. That such things were happening was, by itself, significant but, even more important, local officials indicated a willingness to act on the basis of popular sentiment. One of the first examples of this tendency was the 1988 announcement of a change in plans for construction of a pharmaceutical plant in Kazakhstan. Environmental concerns were cited as the determining factor in this decision.<sup>25</sup> These and other similar actions were a clear indication of a restructuring of the Soviet system that had touched both the decision-making process as well as decision outcomes.

The wave of environmental protests was significant not only because it indicated a broadening of the spectrum of society that had an involvement in public issues and a pronounced tendency toward non-Party activism, but also because it was a measure of a new official attitude. None of this would have been permissible in

<sup>24</sup> Moscow Radio Rossii Network, July 1, 1991, cited in *JPRS Report: Environmental Issues, JPRS-TEN-91-015, August 7, 1991, p. 62*

<sup>25</sup> Radio Free Europe Research, Situation Report: Baltic Area, 5/88, May 20, 1988, p. 19



the USSR of Brezhnev, Andropov, or Chernenko. The fact that the Party and the governmental press routinely reported on the efforts of Soviet environmentalists and acknowledged the size of protests reflected official tolerance of such activities. *Pravda*, in reporting on them, acknowledged both the size and purposes of the numerous demonstrations that had spread throughout the nation. The media noted the first steps of this populist environmentalism in 1986 when hundreds of letters were dispatched to the CPSU Central Committee and to various newspapers in the Baltic republics. This early campaign was motivated by popular concerns about the ecological destruction of the Kurskaya Kosa peninsula on the Baltic coast. The Baltic area protests continued in spite of publication of a study in 1987 which claimed that the region enjoyed high environmental standards and had not suffered from the Chernobyl power plant accident the previous year.<sup>26</sup> Popular skepticism was a core element of this form of environmentalism and helped cultivate citizens' willingness to openly challenge other official assumptions about non-environmental issues.

This broadening of that segment of the Soviet population that was actively involved in the policy process resulted in the formation of a Soviet "Green Front" that rivaled those of Western nations in terms of its diversity and intensity. As expressions of populist environmentalism, "Green" organizations became a routine feature of the Soviet political scene. Five groups emerged as the dominant forces among the Soviet "Greens". The largest of these was the Social-Ecological Union, an "umbrella" group consisting of about 200 branches. The Social-Ecological Union was committed to the proposition that environmental problems could be solved only through political change. A split within this organization led to the creation of the Ecological Union, a group with a more limited agenda, the key feature of which was the demand for stricter monitoring of pollution. A third group, the Ecological Foundation, worked to establish a fund that would be collected through the government's levying of fines against polluters. The Foundation stressed its interest in using this money to develop alternative power sources. Closely associated with the Russian

<sup>26</sup> *Pravda*, April 18, 1988, p. 19 and Ann Sheehy and Sergei Voronitsyn, "Ecological Protests in the USSR, 1986-88", *Radio Liberty Research Bulletin*, RL 191/88, May 11, 1988, p. 2

nationalist movement, a fourth group, the Ecological Society of the Soviet Union, advocated many of the ideas of Valentin Rasputin, who argued that Soviet-style "progress" was degrading what was best in Russian life and began to work actively with the nationalist group Pamyat. Finally, the All-Union Movement of Greens, supported by the CPSU's Komsomol, represented an official effort to harness the energies of the USSR's "Green Front".<sup>27</sup>

In the Ukraine, where ecology had become an important and emotional issue, the ecological association "Zelenyi svit" ("Green World") was one of the most effective organizations in the republic. The head of "Zelenyi svit," Yuri Scherbak, claimed that in its first two years the organization was instrumental in blocking further work on the Danube-Dnieper Canal, on reactors in five and six of the Chernobyl power plant, and on a Crimean chemical combine. In its work, "Zelenyi svit" challenged the official function of the State Committee for the Protection of Nature, arguing that the agency failed adequately to protect the endangered Azov Sea. Because of public concerns over the State Committee's work, a "Public Committee to Preserve the Azov Sea" was founded. The success of "Zelenyi svit" came as a result of growing popular recognition of the Ukraine's disastrous ecological state and in spite of the bitter opposition of the State Committee for the Protection of Nature. The persistence of severe pollution-related illnesses and the expanding after-effects of Chernobyl gave this organization the popular support that transformed it into a respected and authentic force in the Ukrainian policy process.<sup>28</sup>

One important aspect of populist environmentalism in the final years of the USSR was popular readiness to accept decisions which were economically disadvantageous. Several cases demonstrated this new tendency in decision-making. One of the earliest was a demonstration in Kazan by residents calling upon authorities to halt construction of industrial enterprises seen as environmentally harmful. Numerous incidents reflected popular willingness to make economic sacrifices in order to protect not only the environment but also their health, the threat to which was increasingly apparent as a result of environmental neglect. Reports about

<sup>27</sup> "The Poisoned Giant Wakes Up", *The Economist*, November 4, 1989, pp. 23-25

<sup>28</sup> David Marples, "Ecological Issues Discussed at Founding Congress of 'Zelenyi svit'", *Report on the USSR*, Vol. 2, No. 5, February 2, 1990, pp. 21-22.

dramatic increases in the incidence of environmentally related diseases heightened public awareness of the full consequences of unchecked industrialization and the development of unsafe energy facilities. The writings of environmentalists such as Valentin Rasputin and the Russian nationalist "village writers" also stimulated popular concerns about this matter.<sup>29</sup>

Official willingness to treat public concerns as a factor in the decision-making process was another component of populist environmentalism. A dispute in Kazakhstan in May 1988, was illustrative of this as, according to the TASS report, public opinion was the decisive factor in the decision by the local executive committee to move a plant site out of the city of Pavlodar to a location sixty kilometers away. Public concern over the environmental impact of the operation of this particular facility within a population center prompted authorities to reverse an earlier decision on the basis of popular sentiment, an unlikely occurrence prior to the appearance of Gorbachev's new policy orientation. A few days later, TASS announced that the selection of Peteris Ziedinsh as chairman of Latvia's environmental protection committee had been determined by the input of popular representatives, scientists, and journalists. According to TASS, this appointment was the first time in the history of Soviet Latvia that a leader of ministerial rank had been chosen by public rather than by Party and governmental bodies.<sup>30</sup> One must also note that the appointment was equally significant because it demonstrated a tendency by regional leaders to take public attitudes into account in the formation of public policy. Even the crucial question of nuclear power was touched by this new tendency and, in response to popular sentiment, in 1991 the Ukrainian government announced that all Ukrainian nuclear facilities would be closed within four years. This announcement was a continuation of a trend seen with the earlier decision to ban the use of toxins for processing cotton and the cancellation of plans to divert the northern and Siberian rivers.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>29</sup> "The USSR This Week", Radio Liberty Research, RL 186/88, April 29, 1988, p. 2.

<sup>30</sup> "The USSR This Week", Radio Liberty Research Bulletin, RL195/88, May 11, 1988, p. 7 RL203/88, p. 15, and *FBIS Daily Report: Soviet Union*, No. 25, February 6, 1991, p. 96.

<sup>31</sup> *Pravda*, May 9, 1988, p. 2.

The targets of populist environmentalism were not limited to civilian nuclear facilities or even the all-important Soviet cotton industry. The once-sacred military establishment, long protected from scrutiny under the guise of national security, was also subject to popular protests because of its environmental record. In 1989, the "Initsiativa" environmental group took its vociferous campaign against the chemical weapons destruction facility, planned for the heavily populated Chapaevsk region, all the way to Moscow. This project was a key element in a US-Soviet agreement to reduce chemical weapons stockpiles. Eventually, a national commission examined the issue and, citing public unrest generated by the plan, recommended that another site be found. In 1990, popular protests against construction of a ballistic missile early warning station in the western Ukraine prompted the local oblast soviet to join in opposition to this project, in spite of the fact that much of the work had been completed. When the military resisted this order, the oblast stationed police officers on the construction site to prevent further work until Moscow finally order termination of the project.<sup>32</sup> In a similar fashion, for years Kazakhs were concerned about the contamination of their pastures by space debris generated as the spent stages of booster rockets, which were blown up over remote Kazakhstan in order to maintain military secrecy. As populist environmentalism gained acceptance, Kazakh citizens began to demand that the military actually pay for the damages to pasture lands, which were estimated as being in excess of 1.7 million rubles.<sup>33</sup> An additional illustration of problems with the Soviet military was provided in 1991 by the experiences of Russia's Arctic population with units of the Soviet Army. When a military unit established its fuel storage facility just 30 meters away from the sole source of drinking water for the village of Amderma, a leak resulted in damage estimated at 3 million rubles. Local residents, with the support of the Arkhangelsk Environmental Protection Committee, demanded that servicemen collect all of the ice and snow which had been soaked in fuel and remove it to a safe place.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>32</sup> D. J. Peterson, "Impact of the Environmental Movement on the Soviet Military", *Report on the USSR*, March 15, 1991, pp. 5-7.

<sup>33</sup> V. Ryzhkov, "Payment for 'Rain'", *Pravda*, January 30, 1991, p. 8.

<sup>34</sup> Moscow Domestic Service, February 17, 1991, cited in *JPRS Report: Environmental Issues*, JPRS-TEN-91-006, March 21, 1991, p. 52.

Widespread concern over the excessive secrecy of Soviet military facilities coupled, with the military's poor safety record, resulted in official action in 1991. In January of that year the USSR Ministry of the Defense Industry placed twenty-seven top secret enterprises, which were producing explosives, under civilian control. The final motivating factor in this decision was an incident in Gorlovka in which miners accidentally came into contact with a defense plant's chemical waste tank. Apparently, neither the plant nor the miners knew about each other's activities and, as a result, there was yet another tragedy in a long series of military related environmental accidents that had claimed dozens of lives in the USSR.<sup>35</sup>

Populist environmentalism, in spite of its broad support and the official endorsements that it received, generated considerable opposition. In considering the declining state of the Soviet Union's chemical industry, critics of the "Greens" denounced the "senselessness" of many of the demands of environmental groups, arguing that while nature needed to be protected, one "must not forget common sense." Accordingly, critics blamed the "Greens" not only for the USSR's shortage of soap, but also for the shortcomings of the pharmaceutical industry, the protein-vitamin concentrate industry, and the motion picture and photographic film industries. It was not the Soviet government, according to the critics of the "Greens" but rather the "Greens" who were responsible for the declining state of the Soviet economy in the final years of the USSR.<sup>36</sup> Moreover, according to some accounts, in spite of the "Greens" accusations, the chemical industry was doing everything possible to improve its operations and protect its workers. In 1991, *Trud* reported that while the "Greens were attacking the 'killer plants' that pollute the environment and destroy peoples' health,... the 'killers' themselves are the biggest victims of all."<sup>37</sup> At the same time, the USSR Cabinet of Ministers cited a 70% increase in hard currency expenditures for chemical imports as evidence of the detrimental impact of popular protests against the chemical

<sup>35</sup> V. Reshetnikov, "Are Catastrophes Really Necessary", *Izvestia*, January 28, 1991, p. 6

<sup>36</sup> V. Antonov, "Are the Greens Always Right?", *Izvestia*, September 18, 1990, p. 1

<sup>37</sup> "Threat of Chemical Industry Catastrophe", *Trud*, February 6, 1991, p. 2.

industry.<sup>38</sup> A similar theme was sounded by *Izvestia* in a letter from the General Director of the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Station Production Association, who complained that environmental protesters were "ruled by emotion" and were responsible for losses which would "run into millions."<sup>39</sup>

The populist approach, however, has persisted well into the post-Soviet era. One eloquent though perhaps isolated and romantic expression of this tendency surfaced in 1993 as the Russian oil industry continued its expansion into the Siberian wilderness. As "modern civilization," with its promises of money, electricity, telephones, and other material benefits, has closed in on the indigenous peoples of northern Russia, many of them have rejected demands that they give up their nomadic lifestyles and the traditional pastures which have supported them. The sight of telegraph poles, paved roads, and prefabricated huts has inspired some of these people to embrace a "back to the forest" movement which glorifies the traditional values of the region and encourages the pursuit of a life founded on native Siberian customs. Realists, however, point out that these people are a minority and that most Siberians seek the comforts that will come as a by-product of the expansion of the oil industry.<sup>40</sup>

#### Journalistic Environmentalism: Glasnost in Action

Another feature of the new policy, something which was a direct consequence of glasnost, was increased attention to the bureaucratic confusion so frequently ridiculed by Western journalists but, throughout most of the Soviet experience, rarely cited by Soviet commentators. As an example, one result of the Chernobyl disaster was the focus of a Radio Moscow commentary in December 1990 when reports surfaced that a train consisting of 29 refrigerated cars filled with meat had been traveling around the USSR for four years. The meat, produced shortly after the 1986 nuclear incident by the Gomel and Kalinkovich meat combines near Chernobyl, had originally been dispatched to Soviet Georgia, where the consignees refused it because of its excessive level of

<sup>38</sup> "USSR Cabinet of Ministers Session", *Pravda*, February 6, 1991, p. 2.

<sup>39</sup> *Izvestia*, August 11, 1990, p. 2.

<sup>40</sup> Michael Dobbs, "Siberian Native Tribes Losing Traditions to Oil Industry", *The Washington Post*, April 11, 1993, pp. A23-24

radioactivity. From there it made other stops, only to be rejected at every station and, finally, sent back to where it started. As various bureaucracies in Moscow, the Ukraine and Belorussia debated the question of responsibility for disposal of this 20,000 ton meat shipment, the seals were broken on several of the rail cars and meat which was not only radioactive but had been frozen and re-frozen was being sold in villages near the railroad facilities. In commenting on this situation, a Radio Moscow correspondent observed that "our country is probably the only one in the world where such dire management is possible."<sup>41</sup>

A consideration of the environmental impact of important industries became a hallmark of the Soviet policy process with the advent of glasnost and perestroika. This tendency was clearly demonstrated as early as 1988 when *Pravda* published a long article dealing with the Kondopoga Pulp and Paper Combine on the shores of Lake Onega in Karelia. This seventy year old facility was one of the largest enterprises in the USSR and produced 40% of the nation's newsprint. Yet, according to *Pravda*, it played a destructive role with respect to the environment and its activities poisoned Lake Onega's Kondopoga Bay, once one of the region's richest areas for fishing and an important source of fresh drinking water. The Combine's efforts to reduce damage to the lake were encouraged by worker suggestions and involved an ambitious plan to use activated sludge as an additive for livestock feed. In spite of such endeavors, the Kondopoga Combine continued to pollute Lake Onega.<sup>42</sup>

Official explanations of the persistent environmental problems posed by the Kondopoga Pulp and Paper Combine illustrated another theme being utilized in connection with the USSR's ecological concerns: that the bureaucratic style of many Soviet ministries resulted in poor economic and managerial performance. In order to minimize ecological damage caused by the plant's run-off, a drying shop costing millions of rubles was built in the purification complex in order to prepare sludge for use as an additive for livestock feed. Yet, the USSR Ministry of the Lumber Industry violated the procedures that were required for

effective operation of the purification works and, as a result, the expensive shop was never operable. The result was not only the waste of valuable resources but the discharge into Lake Onega of ten times as much toxic waste as the plan allowed. In its account of this incident, *Pravda* denounced the bureaucratic style of the Ministry of the Lumber Industry and repudiated the optimistic assertions of the Deputy Minister at that time, Yuri Guskov, that the lake's environmental situation was coming under control.<sup>43</sup>

In 1991, environmental conditions began to receive even more attention with the publication of a national ecological newspaper. Entitled *Spaseniye* or "Salvation", this weekly newspaper was started as a result of a decision by the Soviet legislature and was intended, in part, to bring together the efforts of the forty local ecological publications operating at that time. *Spaseniye* was published by the State Committee for Environmental Protection and had an initial run of 30,000 copies, a rather small figure for a national publication.<sup>44</sup>

The Party's main newspaper also made several contributions to the public discussions about implementation of the new environmental policy. Throughout more than seven decades as a ruling party, during which this party of revolution was transformed into an instrument of order, the CPSU developed a style of leadership based on giving commands. In its treatment of the environmental issue, one could see at least rhetorical indications of a new tendency as the party, generally speaking through *Pravda*, began to speak of a leadership style that stressed appeals based on what might be seen as good conscience or a basic understanding of what constituted correct behavior. In considering the poor administrative record of the Ministry of the Lumber Industry, a *Pravda* article issued an appeal to the Ministry to be more conscientious, reminding its leadership of the "old saying that you get what you pay for."<sup>45</sup> However, as we view this tendency with the benefit of our knowledge of the CPSU's eventual fall from power, it is important to question whether the party's new tendency extended beyond the level of rhetoric. Such rhetorical approaches

<sup>41</sup> *Foreign Broadcast Information Service: Daily Reports-Soviet Union, No. 242, (Supplement) December 17, 1990, pp. 8-9*

<sup>42</sup> *Pravda, June 16, 1988, p. 2*

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> Moscow Domestic Service, March 2, 1991, cited in *JPRS Report: Environmental Issues, JPRS-TEN-91-006, March 21, 1991, p. 37*

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

had a greater utility as part of Gorbachev's long campaign against domestic rivals entrenched within most Soviet bureaucracies than as steps toward implementation of a new policy. It is also important to note that environmental glasnost generated opposition both during and after the Soviet period. Before 1991, critics of glasnost complained about distortions of the USSR's essentially "solid" record on environmental matters, and after the collapse there have been individuals such as the Tomsk oblast administrator who argued that media reports had caused needless panic following the Tomsk-7 nuclear explosion in April 1993. According to the administrator, there were cases of iodine poisoning, especially among children who took unnecessary doses of iodine to prevent radiation sickness.<sup>46</sup>

### Soviet Environmentalism and the Policy Process

As a general rule, Soviet domestic and foreign policies were directly related to each other and were mutually supportive. Given the centralized nature of the Soviet decision-making machinery, this compatibility is not surprising. In spite of the gradual emergence of a more vocal public, there was still one constituency - the Party elite - that had a dominant impact on both foreign and domestic policy. Accordingly, innovations in Soviet environmental policy supported Soviet foreign policy objectives in both Eastern Europe and among the Western nations.

For years, Soviet authorities employed what they presented as their "progressive" ecological policy as a means of appealing to visitors from the West. Tourists visiting the Limnological Institute at Lake Baikal, for example, routinely heard presentations about fresh water as a tool for peace and the USSR's progressive ecological practices as a model for the industrialized states. However, in Gorbachev's final years there was a more ambitious effort to utilize environmental themes as a way of rallying non-Communist support for Soviet foreign policies. The lack of success of the World Peace Council in 1986 led to speculation that, as a propaganda theme, peace had lost its utility and should be replaced by an emphasis on protection of the environment. Evidently, Soviet propaganda specialists believed that an environmental theme would enable them to reach a larger audience and

<sup>46</sup> Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Daily Report, No. 69, April 13, 1993

establish useful contacts with large, well-organized non-Communist groups in Western Europe and North America. The strength of environmental movements in the West, at the time, contrasted sharply with the increasing inability of the peace movement to create a sustained, effective political drive against US military programs. By linking itself to this powerful political force, Soviet public diplomacy would become much more effective in generating a favorable image of the USSR while simultaneously stressing its view of capitalism as a negative environmental factor.<sup>47</sup> In pursuit of this theme, the Soviet Union endeavored to assume the role of a world leader on environmental issues. In 1988, the Foreign Affairs Commission of the USSR Supreme Soviet proposed that Moscow be the site of an international conference on the problems of ecological protection and that the conference give consideration to a Soviet plan to end nuclear confrontation in Northern Europe and the Arctic as a way to reduce "the threat to living nature", thus bringing together the issues of peace and ecology in a setting favorable to the Soviet position.<sup>48</sup> Until the final months of the existence of the USSR, Gorbachev, who consistently spoke of the "interests of all humanity" rather than simply of the interests of the working class, stressed the Soviet desire to host such a gathering.

Well before the collapse of the Communist governments in 1989 and 1990, there was a small though vocal environmental movement in Eastern Europe. This movement, part of the region's emerging civil society, often had an impact in certain limited parallel sectors, such as literature in the final years of the German Democratic Republic, but in the Communist period it was, with a few exceptions, not usually a significant and direct factor in the political sphere. (As a notable exception, the Polish Ecology Club successfully petitioned the Polish government to close several industrial plants that were major environmental hazards.) In the aftermath of the Chernobyl incident, there were indications of a growing concern with nuclear power, especially Soviet nuclear power, among citizens of Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Romania. Anxiety over nuclear power, however, merely added another to a long list of popular as well as official grievances against the Soviet

<sup>47</sup> *Berlingske Aften* (Copenhagen), February 5, 1987, p. 3

<sup>48</sup> *Moscow News*, No. 18, May 1, 1988, p. 5

Union in this period. The list of grievances of East Europeans included numerous instances of air and water pollution emanating from Soviet territory into Eastern Europe.<sup>49</sup> By expressing greater and more genuine official alarm over its environmental problems, the Soviet leadership enhanced, at least to a degree, its tarnished image in Eastern Europe. As that region ventured into the post-Communist era, such an effort became more important, as the Soviets could no longer rely exclusively upon a network of ruling Communist parties striving to win the official favor of the Kremlin.

There were, however, limits to the political gains that the weakening Soviet leadership could derive from a reduction of the USSR's emphasis on nuclear power. A reduced Soviet nuclear power base would mean greater pressure on non-nuclear domestic energy sources. Such a development seriously hampered Soviet efforts to provide energy assistance to several of its East European neighbors. The case of Romania was especially telling in this regard because, before the 1989 revolution, a deteriorating domestic fuel situation in Romania resulted in agreements for increased amounts of Soviet electricity, coal, and gas to be provided to a struggling Communist regime. A rise in Soviet domestic requirements for those fuels had a direct negative impact on the quantity of Soviet assistance to Bucharest and further weakened a Romanian economy already on the verge of collapse before the revolution.

An additional reason for the limited benefits of the new Soviet policy was found in the increasingly contradictory nature of perestroika and glasnost. While the latter helped stimulate a growing environmental movement, it could not sustain that movement through a period of economic change. A fundamental concern of perestroika was the redirection and re-organization of a faltering Soviet economy. In practice, this effort involved a privatization program which encouraged a new conception of the value of land. A victim of the legislative activity of this period was the USSR's important program of park management, an effort that

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<sup>49</sup> John M. Kramer, "The Environmental Crisis in Eastern Europe", *Slavic Review*, Summer, 1988, pp. 204-206 and Anita Mallinckrodt, "Environmental Dialogue in the GDR", *GDR Monitor*, Winter 1986/87, pp. 1-26 and *RFE Research, RAD background Report/74*, May 27, 1987, pp. 2-4

supported a consistent, long-term preservation of valuable Soviet park lands such as those around Lake Baikal. As rights to land were transferred to the soviets, the most basic unit of local government, there was a tendency to redraw the boundaries of parks to transfer park land to various commercial associations and enterprises. With land having a more direct monetary value, profit became a new element in the equation of the preservation of numerous natural resources. Consequently, with increasing frequency land-owners and land-users opposed the establishment of new parks, nature preserves, and wildlife sanctuaries and, in fact, struggled to cut the size of existing facilities. The acquisition of greater power by local units of government, a fundamental part of perestroika, encouraged Soviet republics to make claims against the USSR's political center. One vivid example of this tendency was the Turkmenian Republic's attempts to convert nature reserves, including the unique Krasnovodsk (Gasan-kuli) reserve, into pasturage which could be exploited economically. Working outside the legal system, the Soviet mafia was implicated in the physical assault on leaders of the "Greens" as part of its effort to discourage criticisms of new economic practices in which the Soviet underworld had a stake. Thus, the message of Soviet reforms, initially supportive of ecological interests, in the end became detrimental to those needs.<sup>50</sup>

Recognition of these limits was underscored by the consistent efforts of the USSR's "forces of order" to reassert central control in order to prevent the dissolution of the Soviet Union as a state. Both the substance as well as the process of the Soviet decision-making apparatus were affected by the resurgence of orthodox political forces alarmed by the diminution of central authority. The close linkage between many nationalist movements and a local environmental movement was a serious threat to the substance of Soviet environmental policy. This linkage was illustrated by efforts of the Georgian Supreme Soviet in 1991 to deal with the problem of contaminated food being shipped into the republic. Nationalistic forces in the Georgian government denounced the transfer of these foodstuffs, generally originating from the Chernobyl area, as deliberate acts of radiation and chemical

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<sup>50</sup> K. Smirnov, "Do Not Let Baikal Go for a Pittance", *Izvestia*, November 4, 1990, p. 3

sabotage, and incorporated a Georgian Supreme Soviet commission report on this issue into its secessionist rhetoric.<sup>51</sup> As the independence movements came under increasing pressure, much of it violent as in the Baltics in January, 1991, it became more difficult to voice demands for recognition of the environmental devastation wrought by Moscow's industrial practices. Criticism of central environmental neglect was, by 1991, interpreted as a challenge to central political authority and, as a result, was threatened with official sanctions. Under these circumstances, prevalent in 1991, maintenance of the changes in the Soviet policy process was becoming especially difficult.

### Conclusions and the Past, the Present and the Future

Several conclusions are suggested by this examination of the Kremlin's "new thinking" on environmental issues during the final years of Soviet power. The first relates to the policy process itself and demonstrates the extent of changes in the Gorbachev years. The most important assumption about the policy process was that public participation was more and more a fact of life in the area of environmental policy as well as in others, and helped develop the sort of civic consciousness that eventually helped break the CPSU's monopoly on political power. Demonstrations and petitions became an accepted feature of the decision-making process, while public opinion, with increasing frequency, was at least cited as a factor in decisions. Second, there was a marked reduction in the secrecy that had surrounded environmental data since the mid-1970s. Critical reports were routinely published and, with the new atmosphere engendered by glasnost, became the subject of intense public scrutiny and debate. Finally, the policy process was changed by efforts to adopt a new style in decision-making. Concerns about environmental protection were often linked with denunciations of a "bureaucratic style" of administration that was associated with ecologically destructive policies. This same style, one should note, was also associated with many of those elements of the Soviet system which opposed Gorbachev and his policies. Even *Pravda* joined in appealing for a more effective managerial style, raising hopes that the Party itself might adopt a

different leadership role, one characterized by a more "inspirational" and less "dictatorial" attitude.

Yet, as the policy process changed, the decision-making environment was also altered. In this respect, one of the most important developments was the proliferation of contradictory demands on the system. Environmental demands, in particular, were often inconsistent; calls for a reduced dependency on nuclear energy had to be balanced by demands for correction of ecological problems produced by excessive utilization of soft coal and other fuels associated with severe pollution. It was extremely difficult, if not impossible, to formulate a single and consistent state ecological policy for such a diverse nation as the USSR. The decision-making environment was further complicated by the fact that ecological concerns were often linked with political demands and ethnic grievances, both of which were more sensitive than environmental issues. It is also important to note that, for nationalist leaders, interest in environmental issues faded to a secondary status once they ceased to provide a "political fig leaf" for nationalist independence struggles, which, by the latter years of the USSR, were conducted quite openly. Not surprisingly, within the context of a national crackdown against nationalist or ethnic demands, there was a reduction of the prospects for a continuation of the ecological glasnost that had become a part of journalistic environmentalism. Had the 1991 coup attempt been successful and the USSR itself endured the disruption of that event, it is likely that environmental disclosures would have become much more constrained.

In addition to the prospect of a reassertion of authority by the USSR's "forces of order", Soviet foreign policy was another important variable that affected progress on environmental issues. The reduction of Soviet military requirements had a positive impact on ecological decision-making in that it lessened the importance of the strategic and security interests which so often were motivating forces in dealing with ecological issues. The practice of detonating spent booster rockets of Kazakh pastures was one illustration of the destruction of nature associated with prevailing military priorities. The establishment of new regime priorities allowed greater consideration of environmental values and, as a consequence, enhanced the USSR's standing in those European nations - both East and West - that were alarmed by Soviet environmental neglect. There was, however, a collateral cost

<sup>51</sup> *Foreign Broadcast Information Service: Daily Reports - Soviet Union, No. 26, February 7, 1991, p. 85*



associated with such a transformation in Soviet policies, especially as they related to the production of energy sources. A significant reduction in the USSR's nuclear energy capabilities reduced Moscow's ability to cement its relations with various European states by providing energy assistance. Romania, for example, was clearly affected by this reorientation of energy priorities. There was, of course, the corresponding advantage associated with this policy shift: the prospect of propelling the USSR into a position of leadership in the politically powerful global environmental movement.

In view of uncertainty surrounding the Soviet domestic situation in the final years of the USSR and the unwillingness of the KGB, the military, and the more orthodox Communists to accept the dramatic revisions in the Soviet policy process, it is not surprising that many questioned the extent to which the system itself had really changed. Without a doubt, it is reasonable to suggest that Gorbachev, as CPSU leader until the death of the Party, was determined to make a significant departure from past practices. His approach went well beyond the modest, managerial environmentalism of the mid-1980s, including those cautious steps of the first Gorbachev years. This earlier tendency to relieve ecological pressures without altering social or economic structures was replaced by the efforts of Gorbachev and other more radical reformist elements to bring about changes that would profoundly alter public and official consciousness about the state of the Soviet environment. These efforts became a part of the agenda of the USSR's growing democratic movements and, as such, their fate rose with the fortunes of reformers who wanted to change not only environmental policy but, more importantly, the very nature of the Soviet political and social system.

In the end, however, it was obvious that these endeavors often did little toward abatement of the USSR's environmental problems. Consequently, the USSR's successor states now face severe environmental problems at a time when they have few of the resources needed to face those demands. Consider the dimensions of the following problems: Most water resources of the "Soviet region" are polluted, usually as a result of inadequate sewage treatment facilities. In addition, most of the 220 million hectares of arable land currently in use suffers from a mechanical composition that makes it unsuitable for many crops, while over

80% of the area's grasslands can no longer be used. Meanwhile, public health is showing the effects of this ecological disaster. Throughout the 1980s, there was a 12% increase in the number of terminal cancer cases and, in states such as Kazakhstan and Moldova, both of which have extremely poor drinking water, life expectancies have fallen below the already very low Soviet standard.<sup>52</sup>

One should also note the systemic conditions prevailing in the aftermath of the collapse of the Soviet center. While the Russian Federation adopted an environmental program in 1992, most of the other successor states have made few statements and adopted no policies relating to the treatment of these and other disastrous environmental conditions. What exists is an ad hoc arrangement in which individual nations might or might not conclude agreements with other states to deal with some aspect of the larger regional ecosystem. Estonia, for example, recently concluded an agreement with Finland for the exchange of environmental information, and regional protocols on water quality have been established between some of the Central Asian states.<sup>53</sup> In 1992, most of the CIS members signed an agreement on cooperation in the area of environmental protection, but little has been done to assign a high priority to any of the issues related to environmental protection.

In this new era, environmental concerns hold a relatively low priority because of the region's difficult economic circumstances. First, the area still suffers from the erosion of industrial discipline that was a product of Gorbachev's perestroika. At the same time, the disruption of economic relationships that came with the collapse of the USSR has further aggravated an already troubled economy. Consequently, the enforcement of the few industrial environmental standards which exist within these nations cannot be very rigid. Second, given the failure of perestroika to institute significant industrial changes, most of the new states are still dependent on the extraction of enormous quantities of raw materials for their own inefficient industries and the export of

<sup>52</sup> Georgi S. Golitsyn, "Ecological Problems in the CIS During the Transitional Period", *RFE/RL Research Report*, Vol. 2, No. 2, January, 1993, pp. 33-41

<sup>53</sup> Alo Kullamaa, "Environment Knows No State Borders", *Paevaleht*, January 12, 1993, p. 1



natural resources as a way of acquiring the hard currency necessary for survival in the post-Soviet era.

Therefore, we must conclude that this most enduring legacy of the Russian empire's socialist experiment will persist and perhaps assume even larger dimensions well into the post-Communist era. The reforms of the Gorbachev years did little to abate most of the nation's ecological crises and, in fact, made the situation worse in some respects. The current economic crisis, another legacy of socialism, has exacerbated deteriorating environmental conditions and appears likely to inhibit well into the next century any ambitious measures to alleviate the various forms of environmental degradation which plague the former Soviet republics.

## Entrepreneurship in Post-Communist Hungary

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An anti-entrepreneurial climate exists in Hungary, a climate fostered by decades of Communist propaganda and by the activities of the ripoff-artists and con-men who have appeared in inordinate numbers since the fall of the regime. Yet enterprise is a thing whose time has come. Hungary's new entrepreneurs have to fight an uphill battle against bureaucratic red-tape and entrenched state monopolies, but seem to be winning against both. While the private enterprises they own are usually small, the country already has its first millionaires. A collective portrait of them shows that they have unusual social sensitivity. Their wealth grows in leaps and bounds, even as increasing economic differentiation has left over a third of the population living below the poverty line. Fearing social and political explosions, the new super-rich at first supported moderate, centrist forces within the existing political parties, but more recently they have moved to create a political platform of their own: a party of entrepreneurs.

### "A Nation of Shopkeepers"

The development of a politically conscious entrepreneurial class with a party of its own was very rapid in Hungary. Shortly after the collapse of the Communist regime and the first free elections in August 1990, the American journalist Celestine Bohlen wrote that Hungary was on the verge of becoming a "nation of shopkeepers." Her prediction turned out to be strikingly accurate. By the end of 1991 there were over 400,000 individual entrepreneurs and 10,000 private firms active in a country of just over ten million people. By July 1992 the total number of enterprises stood at 638,275, with a 19% growth rate reported during the previous three months alone. At first glance, Hungarians' reactions to the transformation from a command economy to a system based on private enterprise present a paradox. The majority hope that the free market will lead to an improvement in their lives. A public opinion survey conducted in October 1991 for the European