

GLASNOST AND MINORITIES

In September 1987, the Tatars of Kazan organized a meeting in support of the Crimean Tatars in the city park. To begin with, the militia did not interfere. But then one of the speakers described Soviet policies towards the Crimean Tatars as "genocidal." As soon as the word was uttered, the militia moved in to break up the meeting, to shouts from the crowd of "Where is glasnost?" and "We will complain to Gorbachev -- glasnost is being violated!" (Bookkeeper from Kazan)

A young woman who lived in my block told me that she was an active member of the System society [obshchestvo Sistema]. This society preaches love for humanity, caring for people, spiritual values. Its goal is to provide an alternative to the inhumanity of Soviet society. The society is composed primarily of college students, though there are a few older members too. During their meetings, they listen to lectures and discuss the society's aims. (Engineer from Leningrad)

With the advent of glasnost, Ukrainian nationalism has increased among the students at Kiev University. They speak only Ukrainian among themselves. Speaking Russian is considered to be in bad taste. They have a system of fines among themselves for every Russian word used. A new group called "Druzi kameniary" ¹, modeled on the Russian group Pamyat, has appeared. Many young people read the Bible and argue among themselves about who brought Orthodoxy to Russia. They accuse the Russians of usurping the honor of being the first Christians [rather than the Ukrainians]. Jews are looked on as the betrayers of Christ. Theological arguments sometimes lead to violence. Students have been wounded during brawls, and a physics student was knifed to death. Jews are called "kikes" or "Zionists" and are often submitted to physical abuse. (Student from Odessa)

TRAINING SCHOOLS FOR FOREIGNERS

In the winter of 1985, I visited a friend whose dacha was located near the rail station Zagoryanskaya, on the line between Moscow and Yaroslavl. On the way to the dacha, we passed a military installation and saw a large group of blacks, Cubans and Vietnamese coming out of the gate. My friend told me to look at their shoes -- which were all Soviet army issue. According to him, the installation housed a KGB training school for spies and terrorist groups. Behind the fence, he claimed, were huge military training areas, firing ranges, an airfield, and automobiles from all over the world. I had brought a radio set with me, hoping to tune in Radio Liberty and Israel Radio, but persistent electronic interference caused by all the radar and radio equipment in the camp made it impossible to pick up Western radio broadcasts. (Technician from Moscow)

Chernobyl

There is a training base and airport for students from Syria, Libya, Mozambique and Nigeria in the city of Tokmak, 70 kilometers from Frunze. It takes 3-4 years to train plane and helicopter pilots. The students are involved in selling jeans, watches and radio receivers. Relations with the local population are tense, and there are frequent fights, especially between Russians and Arabs. The militia invariably takes the side of the foreign students. (Engineer from Frunze)

ISLAM IN TAJIKISTAN

As a result of the war in Afghanistan, and the events in Iran, there has been an upsurge of interest in religion in Tajikistan. These days, the Tajiks go openly to the mosque to pray. At prayer time, the city comes to a standstill listening to cassette recordings of the muezzin. And in workshops and ateliers, though not yet in large enterprises, believers get out their prayer rugs and openly perform their devotions. (Barber from Ordzhonikidzebad)

SOME VIEWS OF AFGHANISTAN

In the course of a meeting, one of my co-workers claimed that the war in Afghanistan impedes scientific-technical progress by diverting the resources necessary for research work. He dismissed the idea that Afghanistan is a useful testing ground for new weaponry on the grounds that, in any future conflict, the Soviet Union is likely to be facing highly developed Western nations, who have a huge technical and scientific potential and a highly developed industrial base. Since the Afghans, in contrast, are poorly educated partisans, their training utility is limited to the militia or at most MVD troops. Another engineer listed the negative aspects of the war: 1) Expenditure of enormous material resources; 2) Human and technical losses; 3) Loss of international prestige: the USSR's claims to be a peace-loving country have been discredited, and it is now widely regarded as an aggressor; 4) Consolidation of Muslim fanatics around the Afghan cause; 5) Strengthening of the sense of Islamic identity among Soviet Muslims. (Accountant from Moscow)

WORKERS AT CHERNOBYL SHOW SIGNS OF CONTAMINATION

I was among the medical personnel charged with observing the young Estonians mobilized to clean up at Chernobyl. Three of these men were assigned to me, and I was responsible for reporting any unusual symptoms to my superiors. All three of my patients showed reduced immunity to illness, especially bacteriological infections of the stomach and intestinal tract. They suffered from frequent diarrhoea, indigestion, flu viruses, and abscesses. They also suffered from generalized weakness, sleepiness, sweating, loss of hair, lack of appetite. Most significant was their depressed state of mind. All three saw themselves as being in some sort of limbo, awaiting sickness and death. (Nurse from Parnu)