

Perestroika and the Nationalities

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The year 1988 will go down in history as the year in which the minor nationalities of the Soviet Union staged mass demonstrations, the protagonists being for the most part the Armenians and the three Baltic peoples. Sizewise, these are populations between one and three million people: a million Estonians live in Estonia, and about three million Armenians live in Armenia, although the total Armenian population in the Soviet Union is presently some 4.5 million.

The sizes of these peoples must be kept in mind in order to estimate correctly the importance of demonstrations with hundreds of thousands of participants. Three hundred thousand people gathered for the "1988 Estonian Song" Festival on September 11 at the Song stadium in Tallin. Five hundred thousand Lithuanians were present on August 2 in Kaunas - the largest mass assembly in the postwar period. In Kaunas it was a question of ecology: the ecological threat to Lithuania. Finally, it must be remembered that these mass demonstrations had begun in February with Armenia, where about one million people had taken to the streets in Yerevan.

Political mobilisation of these dimensions has few parallels in European history, especially considering that the above examples took place either against the will of the central authorities, or in the best of cases, with their grudging patience. Two conclusions may thus be drawn from these unusual events: first, that the Soviet political system is in a state of serious crisis, and second, that the nationalist and democratic forces are growing, and demanding

changes which have the power to break the system in their wake. This is no *perestroika* from above, but the demand for *perestroika* by the masses from below.

Nationalism as irredentism

The political mobilisation of the masses began in Armenia in February 1988, on which occasion the whole world witnessed events that were hitherto unthinkable in the Soviet Union. At first tens of thousands of people, then hundreds of thousands, and finally a million, held peaceful demonstrations for days on end in the streets of the Armenian capital, Yerevan, demanding the annexation of the Nagorno-Karabakh region by the republic of Armenia, territory which at present is part of the republic of Azerbaijan. For some two weeks, life stood still in Yerevan, a city with millions of inhabitants, as well as in the whole of the republic.

From the middle of May to the middle of June, there then followed a second wave of mass demonstrations, hundreds of thousands strong. Finally, during the first half of July, just after the 19th Party Conference had dashed the Armenian hopes, a third wave of demonstrations and strikes took place, taking on the character of a general strike in certain regions, then spread throughout Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh. During the second half of September, public life was interrupted yet again in the Transcaucasian areas inhabited by Armenians.

Expressions of political will involving so many people, blatantly contradicting the directives of the Moscow leadership, had not taken place in the Soviet Union since Stalin's death. The Armenian nation demands the fulfillment of one of its irredentist claims. Clearly this can be linked to the general discontent, "which has been festering for decades. Discontent with social injustice, with corrupt leadership, with a catastrophic ecological situation, and with moral and cultural decadence". These words by a member of the Armenian Karabakh committee, Ambarzum Galstyan, refer to a basic fact which must be understood if the political and social importance of nationalism is to be realistically estimated: nationalism can be linked to cultural movements, social conflicts and political tendencies, but there is no such thing as nationalism in itself. It can enter into coalitions with both liberal emancipation movements and fascist or racist political regimes: its chameleon-like character guarantees its universality.

The outbreak of national solidarity in Armenia is disciplined and decisive, not spontaneous. It certainly did not simply arise out of the excitement of the moment, and this has understandably caused great alarm within the Moscow leadership, as here, for the first time in the Soviet Union, an independent social organisation has developed alongside and in opposition to the Party throughout a whole region. Since February 1988, the authority to act in Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh has largely slipped out of the hands of the Moscow Party leadership. In this connection, three developments are particularly significant: the Karabakh committee, influence over the local Party and Soviet organs, and the peaceful nature of proceedings.

Since February, the real authority in Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh has been the Karabakh committee, which can boast a well organised network of sub-committees, and which has delegates in most of the industrial plants, educational establishments and other organisations. At the top of this autonomous nationalist organisation are well-respected personalities from the cultural world. The most senior representative of the Armenian-Gregorian church, Catholicos Vaghen is closely connected to the Karabakh committee, even though the Armenian church officially plays no leading role in the nationalist organisation. Gorbachev, in effect, recognised the objective power relations in Armenia *de facto* insofar as he received representatives of the Karabakh committee for negotiations on February 26, while seeing the Armenian Party chief Demirchyan, (dismissed from his post in the meantime) only ten days later, when the Karabakh committee had recalled its men and sent them back to their normal jobs.

The fact that the Karabakh committee has since been officially banned has not essentially diminished either its authority or its power. In this sense, a Polish situation has been established in Armenia, the real authority largely belonging to an opposition which has been driven underground.

The Party and Soviet organs in Nagorno-Karabakh and Soviet Armenia have been partly co-opted and partly made ineffective by the nationalist organisation. The nationalist movement as a whole has not developed in opposition to the Party, but rather has bypassed it. It could thus be said that the Party has been defeated without a fight. By February 20, the district soviet in Stepanakert, the capital of Nagorno-Karabakh, had already passed a resolution requiring the republican soviets in Yerevan and Baku to agree to the separation of Nagorno-Karabakh from Azerbaijan, and its annexation to Soviet Armenia.



Fighting the bear.

In the middle of June, the Supreme Soviet in Yerevan agreed, but only two days later, on June 17, Azerbaijan's Supreme Soviet voted against this request. By this time, the central authority in Moscow had already made it clear that it refused any territorial reshuffling in the Transcaucasus, though Gorbachev put off formal justification of the decision for month after month.

This is the first time in the history of the USSR that the Supreme Soviet organs in the individual republics have come to mutually incompatible decisions over the same matter, and in doing so, the Armenian soviet organs in Stepanakert and Yerevan were opposing the central authorities. The contrast went much further here than it did in October 1988, as the Supreme Soviet in Moscow voted no. On July 12, and without waiting for the decision of the Supreme Soviet of the Union in Moscow as the constitution prescribes, the Stepanakert district soviet, in fact, declared the separation of Nagorno-Karabakh from Azerbaijan and its annexation to Soviet Armenia. And in the process, Lenin's formula of "All power to the soviets", already propagated by Gorbachev, was brought to a reality that Moscow had neither foreseen nor wanted.

The political mobilisation of the Armenian people, however, ran a disciplined and peaceful course. Before the devastating earthquake of December 7, the police never had to intervene even once, in demonstrations by hundreds of thousands of persons. This is all the more astounding, considering that it is a land without political pluralism, and that the demonstrations expressly took place in opposition to the political wishes of Moscow. The month-long political mobilisation of a nation, however, naturally needs a minimum of organisation, and the official Soviet mass media could not be counted on to this end. Organisation, then, was furnished by the Karabakh committee, though there had been a certain experience of mass demonstrations in Yerevan for some twenty years, given that since 1965, tens of thousands have assembled on April 24 of each year in order to commemorate the victims of the 1915 genocide in Turkey.

While the strikes and demonstrations in Yerevan ran peacefully as far as the blockade of the airport in July, things in the mixed-nationality areas and in Nagorno Karabakh degenerated into illegality and violence. In particular, the pogroms in Sumgait towards the end of February took their toll of a large number of deaths; and in the vast majority of cases, the initiatives behind this violence were taken by Azerbaijanis, the Armenians being nearly always the victims.

The "Karabakh question" was still unresolved early in December, when the earthquake occurred. Gorbachev and the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet in Moscow have stuck to their August 18 decision which reconfirmed the status quo in the Transcaucasus. What the political consequences of the December's tragedy may be cannot be foretold, but two consequences of 1988's conflicts may be established as certain. First of all, the Armenian nation has emerged from the conflict with even stronger self-consciousness than before, and it will thus be even more difficult for Moscow to control in the future. Second, the trust that the Armenian people have placed in the Russians during the course of history has been appreciably damaged.

Breaking the taboos

In contrast to the conflict between nationalities in the Transcaucasus, the disputes in the Baltic areas also involve the Russians themselves as a nation. The political activism of the Estonians, Latvians and Lithuanians has taken on a new tone since summer 1987. Historical events and nationalist demands that previously it was possible to discuss only in the underground, became the subject of public debate. The 1918 declaration of the national independence of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, the liquidation of this sovereignty by the Soviet Union in the years 1939-40, and Stalinist deportation in the years between 1941 and 1949, had all been taboo subjects before 1987. These historical events have been the fulcrum of the demonstrations which have been taking place since June 1987, demonstrations which have been partly forbidden, partly tolerated, and partly supported by the Party. A further removal of taboos, accompanied by an escalation in political opinion, were introduced by republican organisations of writers and other active intellectuals in spring 1988. With the latter, both the critical standpoint taken on the present, and the resulting massive nationalist demands for the future, exceeded anything which it had been possible to say and write in the Soviet media up to then.

At a meeting of the leading representatives of the various Estonian associations of writers, architects, journalists, musicians, film-makers, artists and actors on April 1-2 in Tallinn, the writer Jaan Kaplinski remarked that "figuratively speaking, our state is ill, and it is making ourselves ill too. They have forced us to get used to living without culture for decades. They have tried to get us used to living like minimal human beings in minimal apartments, without any real culture, without a language, without a national consciousness, without religion, without ethics, without knowledge and without information".

A spokesman for the Estonian theatre operators, Kalju Komissarev, summarised his position as follows: "the people are going in one direction, and the leadership in the other". On April 19, the same author told the newspaper *Molez Estonii* :

"Just think, 90 per cent of our economy is kept out of the control of our republic up to World War II, Finland and Estonia were more or less equally well developed. Now it is written that we are limping on some twenty years behind the Finns. How can a country remain so backward in the course of only forty years?"

The intellectuals' associations in all three of the Baltic republics formulated their demands in the form of decisions designed for presentation during the 19th Party Conference in Moscow in late June-early July, demands then taken up by the republican Party authorities, and presented by the latter before the 19th Party Conference. These may be summarised in four points, the first two applying in principle to all the republics in the Soviet Union, and the last two dealing with specifically Baltic matters.

First of all, the Estonians, Latvians and Lithuanians are asking for a comprehensive decentralisation of the economy and its administration, with correspondingly increased power in the hands of the individual republics. They want the self-administration and self-finance long preached by the Gorbachev leadership to be put into practice in the form of economic autonomy in the republics. Thus, both the economic activities on the territory of each republic, together with their management, should be put under the control of republican authorities. Hand in hand with this goes autonomy in economic planning, as also in financial and credit policy. The economic autonomy vindicated above, then, is to run its own independent course, limited solely by the payment of certain taxes to the benefit of the Union as a whole.

Secondly, cultural and linguistic autonomy should be guaranteed by a series of new laws. In particular, the nationalists are demanding a change in the constitution which would guarantee the national languages the status of official languages in the respective republics. There is no area in the nationalist question which has witnessed so clear a change in political climate, than that regarding the language issue and language policy. Here many of the non-Russian nations have passed from the defensive to the offensive - at least as far as their demands are concerned.

In 1978, the Brezhnev leadership had attempted to eliminate the official-language articles from the constitutions of the three Transcaucasian republics, though the attempt fell through due to the opposition of the Georgian intelligentsia and the skillful tactics of Shevardnadze. Now it is no longer a question of elimination; the demand is for the actual introduction of new official-language principles in the other republics of the Union, given that up to now this kind of article has only existed in the constitutions of the three Transcaucasian republics. It is strongly expected in both the Baltic and elsewhere that the Russians will have to learn the native language in the individual republics - an aspiration which up to now has only been aired in whispers, and in any case, without success. Even a member of the Politburo - Yakovlev - has offered his solidarity with this principle, and in no unclear terms.

Thirdly, the Estonians and Latvians are demanding a stop to Slav immigration. Among other things, this should serve to introduce a special concept of Estonian and Latvian national citizenship. Furthermore, over-industrialisation is being criticised in all three Baltic republics for having led to a crisis-laden deterioration of the ecological situation, as well as for threatening national culture in Estonia and Latvia through massive Russian immigration. Here as in Armenia and elsewhere, nationalist issues are linked to growing scepticism about technical progress and awareness of impending ecological crisis.

Fourthly and finally, the Baltic peoples are demanding the re-admission of national symbols dating back to their periods of national independence. In the meanwhile, the national flags have been allowed back in all three Baltic republics, something which was punishable by lengthy imprisonment up to only a few years ago.

The sovereignty issue

All these nationalist claims, then, can be traced back to the idea of the "sovereignty" of the republics as embodied in the Soviet constitution, and with the resolution of the language issue, the republics would be close to reaching this status. It is only a matter of realising what the Soviet constitution already guarantees. The Baltic republics are thus demanding individual membership of international organisations, and primarily that of the UN. Up to now, only the Ukraine and White Russia have been represented with a seat and a vote alongside the Soviet Union in the United Nations. What is more, the Baltic

republics are also demanding their own diplomatic representatives, especially in the Scandinavian lands, as well as the establishment of Scandinavian General Consulates in the Baltic capitals.

An intermediate achievement was reached by the independent nationalist organisation in the three Baltic republics with the formal founding of "Popular Fronts for the Support of Perestroika" in October 1988. These Popular Fronts had already been developing since spring, and are umbrella organisations coordinating the most varied of groups and clubs; many of these have only developed since 1985, while others relate to dissident activity dating back to the early 1970s. Folklore and folksong societies are part of this movement, as are also environmental groups, historical associations and political circles, and a leading role is played here by writers and other active intellectuals. The



relationship between the Popular Fronts and the Party is ambivalent. On one hand, Party members are invited to collaborate, while on the other, Party and State officials are expressly excluded from the possibility of election into the leading positions of the Popular Front organisations.

The programme of the Estonian Popular Front calls for the transformation of the Soviet Union into a federation of states, with political, economic and

cultural independence guaranteed to the single republics: "The Popular Front will defend Estonian individuality, allowing it to remain the main nation on that territory which historically belongs to it. To achieve this end, it is necessary to prevent the development of the non-Estonian part of the population in Estonia." Furthermore, the Estonian Popular Front is for the separation of the legislative, executive and judicial powers in the country. It demands the liberty to nominate its own candidates in the Soviet elections, and supports Gorbachev's slogan "All the power to the soviets!", that is to say, it stands for a reduction in the sphere of power of the Party.

The president of the Latvian Writers' Association, Janis Peters, played a leading role in the founding stages of the Latvian Popular Front, and during the foundation congress in Riga on October 8 and 9 reiterated his conviction that the central task of the Latvian Communist Party was to protect and develop the Latvian nation. He called for economic sovereignty, cultural autonomy for all the national minorities in the Soviet Union, pluralist freedom of opinion, and the unification of the three Baltic Popular Fronts, "for the benefit of socialism in its new form". The radical wing of the Latvian Popular Front (joined, however, only at the last moment), is led by Eduard Berklavs, who was acting prime minister in Riga in 1959 before being exonerated by Krushchev for representing in a much milder form the same nationalist demands as are now being openly made by the Popular Fronts.

Similarly to the situation in Estonia, and just before the formal foundation of the "Lithuanian Movement for *Perestroika*" - (Sajudis) - a new Party chief, Brazauskas, was installed in Vilnius, and entrusted with the task of improving relations with the Popular Front. Brazauskas was, in fact, able to avoid a vote of the founding congress in favour of the separation of Lithuania from the Soviet Union. How far the erosion of the political landscape in Lithuania has gone, however, is shown by Brazauskas' strategy of retreat when he exhorted the congress to hark to the words of a certain Sladkevicius; the latter, just nominated cardinal, had declared: "Let us learn to wait".

Two further political demands - the introduction of a multi-party system and constitutional separation from the Soviet Union - have not been included in the official programmes of the Popular Fronts, but have been made in the foundation congresses and on many occasions during the preceding mass demonstrations which began this spring. Until only a few years ago, the public manifestation of these opinions was punished by law.

Rediscovering cultural identity

Unlike the situation in the Baltic republics, the police have impeded the formation of supra-regional political organisations in the Ukraine and in White Russia. A "Popular Union for the Support of *Perestroika*" has existed in Kiev since June, and there would seem to be a similar group in Odessa. In July, the representatives of informal groups in the west Ukraine met in Lvov to form the "Democratic Front for the Support of *Perestroika*". Again, these had been preceded by mass demonstrations with the participation of tens of thousands of people. Since August, however, there has been massive repression of the Democratic Front in Lvov, and two of its activists, Ivan Makar and the priest of the united church, Mychailo Havryliv, have even been arrested. They thus belong to the total, so far small, of political prisoners arrested since Gorbachev's assumption of office.

The now well-known platform of the Democratic Front in Lvov is nonetheless milder than the programmes of the Popular Fronts in the Baltic republics. The aim of the Democratic Front is: "to exercise social control over democratic *perestroika* in the government, in society and in the Party organs, to awake democratic consciousness in society, and to spread the idea of *perestroika*".

The Democratic Front calls for the right to present candidates in elections, and many of the informal groups which aspire to join the Front in the Ukraine also represent nationalist matters.

In White Russia, an "Initiative Group of the Popular Front of White Russia" has developed, though its activities have been strongly repressed by the police, and it has been the victim of a slander campaign by the local press. The kernel of the Initiative Group of the Popular Front is in Minsk, and is called the "Society for the Commemoration of the Victims of Stalinism, Martirolog". The society is supposed to deal with martyrs - hence the name Martirolog - and developed after the gruesome excavations in Kuropaty this summer. In Kuropaty, Soviet archeologists are unearthing what is another Auschwitz. This was one of the five large firing squad ranges around Minsk used by the NKVD between 1937 and June 1941. So far, 500 mass graves have been found in Kuropaty, containing more than 100,000 corpses. And this is only a part of the victims shot here, the real total being much higher; the precise number of victims will probably never be made known. People were shot on these sites both day and night between 1937 and June 1941. In general they were

inhabitants of Minsk and the surrounding country areas, but after September 1939, also included deportees from western White Russia, which had been occupied by the Red Army.

In White Russia there is a convergence of two political issues: on one hand, indignation over the Stalinist terror, and determination to discuss it more and in greater detail in the future; on the other, preoccupation for White Russian language and culture, threatened by fusion with Russian language and culture. And even though the most prominent White Russian writers, Ales' Adamovic and Vasil' Bykov, are among the leaders of Martirolog and the Initiative Group, the local authorities are trying to prevent these social groups from working, if necessary with the use of the police.

The national question in the Ukraine and in White Russia, however, is a language issue above all. Moscow's aggressive language policy since the middle of the 1970s has been aimed at extirpating even further the use of the national languages in public affairs, and this fact has provoked opposition both here and elsewhere. And since the beginning of the thaw in cultural policy in 1986, this opposition has also been able to manifest itself publicly. Since 1986, Ukrainian and White Russian writers and intellectuals have thus been able to defend their mother-tongues publicly, and with a vigour which would have been unthinkable some fifteen years previously.

"Despising the language of one's own nation means first and foremost rendering one's own limitations public", declared Oles' Honcar, the best-known contemporary Ukrainian writer, on the occasion of the Ukrainian Writers' Congress in June 1986. During the 19th Party Conference in Moscow at the beginning of July, the Secretary of the Ukrainian and aggregate Soviet Writers' Association, Boris Olejnik, described the situation in the Ukraine as follows, saying that the national languages "... are gradually disappearing as official written languages from use by state and Party organs. What is more, there are many towns where schooling in the native language does not exist. In almost all colleges, the students have been deprived of the possibility of studying in their mother-tongues, not to mention the situation in the kindergartens."

Like many others, Olejnik calls for government measures and legal decisions. "Relations must be established at a government level, in order to create the best possible conditions for the use of mother-tongues in all areas and at all levels

of our society; it is a matter of guaranteeing these ideas by legal norms, including the possibility of summoning before the law any person who hinders the development of individual national culture." Yet the number of complaints which have been aired since 1986 over the lack of presence of national language and culture in public life, together with the numerous public and concrete proposals to help improve this lack, are totally disproportionate when compared to the few changes which have been implemented so far.

The large discrepancy between words and actions - a recurring pattern in the policy of *perestroika* - may thus also be seen in the language issue. And this gap which separates growing aspirations and limited concrete changes will increase the possibilities of conflict in the Ukraine and in White Russia even further.

Nationalism, tribalism and Islam

In Soviet Asia, there has not so far been any political mobilisation or organisation of national autonomy as reported above for the European parts of the Soviet Union. Initially, then, those Western specialists who have always maintained that the national awakening of the European peoples in the Soviet Union is more advanced than that in the East, would seem to be right.

In a wider perspective, however, Central Asia could prove to be the principal danger for the continued survival of the multi-national Soviet empire. Along with the bounding numerical increases in their population, the national self-consciousness of the Asian peoples is also growing. The population growth-rates in the Asian republics are five times higher than those in the RSFSR, and the desire for national self-assertion has developed different forms from the nationalism in the European parts of the Soviet Union. This is also connected to the fact that the Asian peoples derive from an Islamic cultural background, and have not crystallised into individual nations to the same extent as was the case in Europe. Many nations in Asia have only existed since 1917, and this is often the result of Soviet nationalities policy. On the one hand, and especially among the former nomad peoples, tribal divisions and loyalties are still strong, while on the other hand, there is a growing awareness of belonging to the Islamic cultural area, and thus to the *Umma*, the community of all the faithful.

With the protection and approval of an increasingly involved native *nomenklatura*, Islamic nationalism in Central Asia has thus been strengthened

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since the 1960s, and has begun to lead a dangerously independent life in the eyes of the central authorities. Islam as a way of life, as an expression of historical and cultural identity, and as a religious practice, has been getting more and more evident during this time. It has become manifest in the almost 100 per cent circumcision figures for boys, in the celebration of Islamic feastdays, and in Islamic-rite marriages and funerals. Some *sharia* commandments, such as the buying of bread, or *kalym*, are upheld as moral norms even though they are forbidden by law. Rapprochement of the peoples through mixed marriages between Asians and Europeans does not take place.

The main instrument which the central authorities have used since 1983 to combat these dangerous independentist endeavours in Soviet Asia, consists of breaking the ranks of the local *nomenklatura*. Over the past few years in the Soviet Union, no area has been subject to so much reshuffling of jobs, at all levels and to such an extent, as in Central Asia, and the only suitable term for this is a purge. Since 1983, the First Party Secretaries in all the Asian republics have been phased out, in some republics even twice. Not only was the Uzbek Party chief Rasidov, who died in 1983, removed from the mausoleum built for him in Tashkent, but his successor Usman chodzaev was also arrested in October 1988 - actions in clear contradiction to political behaviour as established during the post-Stalin decades. Only 19 per cent of the 177 full members of the 1981 Uzbek Central Committee were re-elected in 1986. Since 1983, four thousand officials have been summoned before the courts, according to the declarations of the Senior Public Prosecutor of Uzbekistan (who for the first time since 1956 is of Russian nationality). And even death sentences have been pronounced and carried out, as in the example of the Uzbek Minister for the Cotton Industry, or the First Secretary of the Bukhara City Party Committee. The number of Russians in key positions in Central Asia has

increased thanks to these purges, the most prominent example being the Kazakstan Party chief Kolbin, who replaced the Kazak Kunaev in December 1986. This latter substitution brought about the Alma-Ata riots, the worst politically motivated street unrest in Central Asia to date.

As far as the Soviet views and justifications are concerned, these measures are presented as a battle against Asian mafia, corruption, protectionism and deliberate plan sabotaging. The central authorities have thus established some law and order on the scene, to combat tribal protectionism, economic criminality and enslavement of the people by the mafia bosses.

There is no need to debate here whether there have been, and still are, widespread and powerful mafia-like groups in Central Asia. The point is that there are also corruption, bribery and deliberate plan failure in other parts of the Soviet Union. The Soviet leadership would thus seem to have decided on pricking a selective ear to the matter. In reality, destroying the local *nomenklatura* in Central Asia is also an efficient means of fighting growing regionalism. In covering for each other and intermingling with each other's functions, the official elites in Central Asia were also expression and protection for the increasingly separate development of this part of the country. The central authorities are afraid of the "Islamisation" of the Soviet system, in the sense that the Islam-influenced republics are asking for more and more development aid and consideration, while at the same time eluding the Russian-influenced Moscow leadership to a greater and greater extent.

The new middle class

How can we explain that in different and distant parts of the immense Soviet empire, among peoples with completely different languages, cultures and histories, the national question has been getting more acute at the same time, and has been manifested for the first time among the masses? Two groups of causes must be distinguished here: first of all, long-term developments which have led to the resurgence of a new nationalism in the Soviet Union; and secondly, the policy of *glasnost*, which has contributed to bringing previously existing conflicts to the surface.

In December 1982, during a speech on the occasion of the sixtieth anniversary of the foundation of the USSR, General Secretary Andropov spoke for the first time of the "growth of national self-consciousness ... of all the nations and

peoples" in the Soviet Union. He said that this was the consequence "of economic and cultural progress", and thus "a predictable, an objective process" in a socialist society. After long hesitation, during the CC Plenum in February 1988 Gorbachev also finally decided to refer to the "growth of national self-consciousness in all the nations and peoples of the country".

The Party leadership is thus reluctantly ready to admit a fact which has been described since the beginning of the 1970s, both publicly by Western specialists, and covertly by Soviet experts: modernisation in the Soviet Union, just as in other societies, leads to the development or reinforcement of national self-consciousness. It furthers the transformation of traditional values into ethnic nationalism, and creates a framework for this nationalism which thus manifests itself more strongly and with greater self-awareness.

The most important consequence of modernisation of the Soviet type is the growth of new educated classes in all the nations of the Soviet Union. These then become the bearers of national self-consciousness. In 1927-28, there were 74,000 non-Russian college students, this number reaching 500,000 by 1959-60 and 2.2 million (including external students) by 1980-81. Contrary to ideologically based expectations, these new non-Russian educated classes have not become indiscriminate parts of a homogeneous Soviet society, but active and aware transmitters of a new ethno-nationalism, and are able to politically mobilise whole nations or parts of them both more strongly and more permanently.

The new educated classes which have grown up in the post-Stalin period have been forcing their way everywhere into the leadership positions in their respective republics. Today, for the first time ever, there are sufficient numbers of Uzbeki doctors, Turkmen teachers and Ukrainian engineers, and these positions no longer require Russian nationals as they did only 50 years ago. In many republics, there has thus been a process of creeping de-colonisation, the consequences of which have appreciably changed political relations within the country. The socio-historical processes of change which have taken place over the last few decades have led to a situation where most of the individual nations today have a firmer sense of social structure, culture and awareness than they did at the beginning of Soviet power.

Apart from the growth of new nationalist educated classes and their ability to mobilise their respective regions, there are also other factors which contribute

to strengthening national self-consciousness. The official Marxist-Leninist world view has collapsed; it has lost its mobilising power in Soviet society and is no longer the source of cultural orientation. A vast cultural vacuum has therefore developed, and nationalist ideas and values have rushed in to fill it. Harking back to national traditions can help find new guidelines of good and bad, given the failure of the revolutionary ethic that "everything is allowed in the name of the great aim of humanity", a failure first evident during the Stalinist terror, and then in the stagnation and corruption of the last two decades.

Frustration and resentment

Crisis-prone economic development since the late 1970s has also reinforced ethnic nationalism. Even during the period of economic growth



The wounded bear.

from the mid-1950s to the mid-1970s, the Soviet Union did not manage to adequately reduce the enormous differences in regional development to be found in the country. Up to today the industrialisation of Soviet Asia has not caught up with the rest of the Union, despite the decade-long struggle of the local Party leaders.

On the other hand, the Baltic republics are way above the national average as far as most production and consumption indicators are concerned. However, shortage of resources and living standards which have been tending towards zero growth since the end of the 1970s, have further increased the lack of motivation to work, and resignation.

Under the limitations inherent in a multi-national state, social frustration has the tendency to transform itself into ethnic resentment. The Baltic nationals complain about their backward development with respect to Scandinavia; the Ukrainians complain about the fact that they have to provide a far greater economic service to the Union than they receive in return; and the Central Asian peoples are discontent because they receive no investment capital to develop their cotton processing industries, a situation they have been lamenting for decades and which is not helping them to emerge from their colonial economic structure. Finally, the Russians themselves rightly point out that Russian villages and market towns have declined to the point of being the poorhouses of Soviet society.

As far as its content and aims are concerned, this new nationalism is obviously extremely diversified in the different nations. Sometimes, concrete and clearly outlined aims become the predominant factor behind nationalist consciousness, as in the case of the Crimean Tartars, who have been fighting for the right to return to their home territory for decades. Language and the preservation of mother-tongue culture are fundamental issues everywhere, but otherwise nationalist aims are often completely different. They range from the desire for better representation in the local soviets (as with the German minority, for example), to separatist demands in the Baltic.

The contents of nationalist consciousness also undergo the most diverse combinations. Nationalism can be linked to regional churches, just as to democratic citizens' rights movements or militant terrorist groups. Russian nationalism is particularly wide-ranging: on one hand, it includes the devotees of medieval Russian spirituality, who hope the latter might bring moral

restoration to Russia, while on the other, there is the anti-Semitic and chauvinist wing of the *Pamjat* society.

Perestroika: impact and prospect

Glasnost', a real relaxation in cultural and media policies, has decisively contributed to bringing the national question to the forefront. Up to the beginning of the 1980s, the national problem was skilfully kept under the carpet. But Gorbachev's claim is that merciless analysis of the present is the prerequisite for shaping a better future, and this transparency must have encouraged national groups to express their pent-up resentment and frustration. Exhortations for justice and curbs on reprisals have thus been seen by these national groups as encouraging *perestroika*.

It must have soon been clear, however, that the Gorbachev leadership had no *perestroika* programme as far as national relations were concerned. The new leadership group limited *perestroika* to the specific sectors it was interested in, and the national question was not among these latter. There are strong grounds to the assumption that Gorbachev himself only gradually became aware of the importance and significance of the national question. He is the first of Lenin's successors not to have worked in one of the non-Russian republics at any time during the course of his political career. It is conceivable that it is the unexpected 1988 outbreaks and mass demonstrations which are forcing Gorbachev to accept the future principle that decentralisation is an undeniable part of *perestroika*.

So far, however, the nationality policy of the new government has been characterised by a remarkable oscillation between flexibility on the one hand, and unexpected harshness and aggressivity on the other. Flexibility is the key note in the *glasnost'* domain, and writers, cultural officials and former dissidents have been able to air nationalist matters and frustrations publicly to an extent previously unknown. The language policy of the late Brezhnev period, based on the repression of non-Russian languages even in private life, has been universally criticised and rejected, and even the Politburo member Yakovlev has partly joined in this criticism. However, the necessary legislative changes - with a few exceptions - have yet to come.

Unlike its language policy, the Gorbachev leadership has from the very beginning used a harsh and clumsy hand in its official appointments policy.

The promotion of the Russian national, Kolbin, to the post of Party chief in Alma-Ata in December 1986, broke a rule which had applied without exception since 1960, namely that the First Secretary in all the national republics was always a native of the region. Since the exclusion of Kunaev and Alev from the Politburo, there has been not one single Asian representative in Moscow, and this is a situation which has not existed since 1956. Gorbachev has thus continued and augmented the appointments policy of the late Brezhnev period, and Russian nationals are now the majority in the Party leadership as a whole, a situation which has previously existed only in the Stalin period. Some 70 per cent of the members and candidates of the Central Committee, some 80 per cent of the members and candidates of the Politburo, and some 80 per cent of the secretaries of the Central Committee, are now Russian nationals, the others being mainly Ukrainians and White Russians: non-Slav nationals have thus practically disappeared from the leading committees of the Party as a national whole.

Two coalition themes of nationalist thinking have come into the foreground stronger than ever since 1985: anti-Stalinism and ecological awareness.

To begin with, the Ukraine has requested, and already partly carried out a merciless investigation and description of the 1932-33 famine. Yet even as late as 1983, Western historians were accused of being anti-Soviet slanderers because they recalled the millions of deaths due to starvation which had taken place fifty years before. In Estonia and Latvia this summer, the secret clauses of the Hitler-Stalin Pact of August 23, 1939, (regarding the two dictators' division of Eastern Europe into spheres of interest), were fully published for the first time ever in the Soviet Union. In the Baltic, there is enormous pressure from the masses to explode the historical lie that the annexation of the three Baltic states to the Soviet Union in 1940 was a voluntary process.

Secondly, protest against environmental destruction, transformation of countryside into industrial wasteland, and continuing construction of nuclear power stations have become an inseparable part of nationalist affairs since 1985. Particularly in the Ukraine, scientists and writers are up in arms against further building of the nuclear power network, and mass protests this past August have stopped construction work for the time being on the Ignalina nuclear power station in Lithuania, at least until reactor security problems have been resolved. The projected construction of a gigantic phosphorite concern in north-east Estonia, which would have turned a whole strip of land into an

industrial desert, will no longer be carried out to the extent planned. The ecological movement has also lent great momentum to the Russian nationalist movement, which was largely formed during the struggle against the pollution of Lake Baikal and against plans for the deviation of Siberian rivers to the south.

How are future prospects to be judged? So far, the ruling class has not allowed *perestroika* in national relations, though there has been great pressure for *perestroika* from the people. It is a fact that there is no social group in the Soviet Union today which has the same degree of autonomous organisation as the nationalist groups. Russian intelligence is certainly an essential factor within Soviet society, but it is much too divided, disorganised and incompetent (so far), to be able to develop a consensual alternative for a new political system for the future. The Russian workforce would not yet seem to be capable of autonomous organisation: will it ever be?

It can be debated whether, and to what extent, the Soviet Union is developing in the direction of political pluralism. From the national point of view, it is indoubtedly pluralistic. And this nationalist pluralism is an impulse to overcome its political system of one-party rule.

Such a possibility seems to exist in two areas. Today, independentist national organisation in the Transcaucasus and in the Baltic has already led to regionalisation within the Party, and with this, the former organisational principle of democratic centralism has partly and intermittently been suppressed. And if the Party leaders of the individual national republics do not wish to gamble away the little trust they still have, they are obliged to adopt nationalist issues as their own, even when this is contrary to the political requirements of the Moscow Party leadership. Secondly, the Popular Fronts in the Baltic and the Karabakh committee in Armenia both offer an opportunity for democratisation, if they are allowed to present their own candidates in the Soviet elections.

Pluralism in the individual nations can thus contribute to eroding an otherwise totalitarian system from the inside. Nationalism, with its elements of democracy and emancipation, has an important role to play in the overcoming of Leninism.