

# ISSA Proceedings 1998 - The Final Days: The Development Of Argumentative Discourse In The Soviet Union



The value of argument in the public sphere and its relation to social change is a concept that is shared by most communication scholars: the idea that argument in some form is an intrinsic part of democracy or at least that it is a necessary concomitant to democracy. In Johnstone's words, "[d]emocracy rests upon the use of discourse as an instrument of political change" (1974:320). Indeed, the very attempt "to marshal public opinion or public support for some policy" implies acceptance of "forms of political action that prevail in a democratic society" (Johnstone, 1974:318). Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca (1969:55) take this position a step further: "[t]he use of argument implies . . . that value is attached to gaining the adherence of one's interlocutor by means of reasoned persuasion." We suggest that the Western tradition of democracy entails the notion of doing the public's business in public. This is an important concept, one that marks a fundamental distinction among societies. While recognizing that even in the most stable democracies little of what is considered the public business actually is conducted in the open, one must nevertheless keep in mind the fact that in many authoritarian or totalitarian states there has existed no concept of the public's business apart from the government's affairs, so there is no thought of addressing concerns in the open. This notion **[i]** that some essential portion of civic business should be played out in public is the concept that provides the philosophical ground upon which policy argument may occur: in a real sense it creates space for policy argument to exist. Argument, then, may be seen as a necessary part of the process of doing the public's business; where the ground for that argument does not exist, it must somehow be created.**[ii]** But where there is no history of such a process, how does the concept develop, how does the tradition take root?

Many of the observations made in reference to Western pluralist societies assume even greater significance when applied to the role argument has played in the

socio-political changes that have in recent years transformed the former Soviet Union. In this paper we intend to explore some of the ways in which social change and argumentation interact: in particular, we will consider the way governmental information policies, accepted argumentative structures, and the whole notion of public discourse develop as society undergoes fundamental transition.

By way of background we shall review the beginnings of pluralist public policy argumentation in a specific society where none had existed previously: the Soviet Union of the pre-disintegration period. Before turning to more contemporary events, we will concentrate on two critical media incidents: the 1983 downing of the Korean airliner and the 1986 Chernobyl explosion. One must keep in mind that, all other differences notwithstanding, most political communication in the former USSR, as in the USA, was and is a mediated phenomenon that relies on mass dissemination. For that reason we will focus on the media as the purveyor of the readily available accounts of the transmission of information and opinion formation. Our methodology is historical/critical, and our corpus is drawn primarily from official print media during the period 1983 through 1991.

Of particular relevance to this discussion is the process whereby public argumentative space comes to be created. In this presentation, we explore at least one of the ways this may happen: in the movement from an authoritarian to a pluralist form of government, the space for public argument arises from the citizens' loss of faith in the existing governmental structure.<sup>[iii]</sup> As this loss of faith intensifies, the ground for argument begins to expand and continues expanding until the process becomes self-sustaining. At this point, every incremental change in the amount of public argument intensifies the loss of faith that initiated the process, because groups and individuals begin seriously questioning the ability of their government to secure the welfare of the people. The process is recursive: opposition becomes more influential as it becomes more frequent, providing ever greater opportunities for the continued extension of argumentative ground.

Significantly, an authoritarian government's best course is to ignore the opposition. For if government participates in the discussion it legitimates the whole notion of argument as part of the process of governing. Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca (1969) state that "[t]o agree to discussion means [a] readiness to see things from the viewpoint of the interlocutor." Thus, merely by participating in the argument, government sanctions the concept of oppositional debate, including the risk of losing. Moreover, "the use of argumentation implies

that one has renounced resorting to force alone, that value is attached to gaining the adherence of one's interlocutor by means of reasoned persuasion." Consequently, authoritative regimes typically do not engage in public argument; they neither justify nor provide a rationale for the actions they take. Rather, "by the use of such measures as censorship, . . . [political leaders] will try to make it difficult, if not impossible, for their opponents to achieve the conditions preliminary to any argumentation." Obviously, denying access to the state controlled media constitutes a significant restriction of the ability to engage in argumentation.

That certainly was the traditional mode in the old Soviet Union. As an example, consider the plight of Soviet dissidents. Virtually everyone in the society knew they existed; many may have even thought they had a point. Nevertheless, they continued their protests - including underground publication, or "*samizdat*" - in obscurity; the only public acknowledgment emanating from the government was the occasional arrest and trial of a writer, followed by imprisonment or exile. With no access to the media - including nearly total news blackout of court proceedings - dissidents had no means at their disposal to engage the state in public debate. Thus, their efforts had little social impact within the borders of the Soviet Union.

It is our claim, however, that the Soviet government was forced into a public debate first over Chernobyl, then over the issue of nuclear power, a situation which was unique in the history of that society. Further, at the point the state felt constrained or compelled to engage in argument, the upheaval that occurred in 1991 became inevitable.**[iv]** Although the rapidity with which events transpired and their specific form was unpredictable, over time some sort of fundamental change had become necessary. Nor should one be misled by the rapid, almost precipitous, nature of the transformation, for no movement of this magnitude occurs without the seeds having been planted many years before.

There has been much commentary both in the media and among scholars about the Soviet Union's economic problems and the role that those problems played in all subsequent events. In fact, Steven Cohen (1980) had predicted that if something was not done about the Soviet economy it was only a matter of time before the structure would collapse.**[v]** But there were other factors one must keep in mind, and economic problems should not become magnified as a causal factor in the break-up of the Soviet Union. In the international arena, the Soviet government experienced continuing problems in negotiations with the United

States. Domestically, the Soviet people were grappling with the impact of the war in Afghanistan; and, in addition to other factors, they were deeply affected by the aftermath of the nuclear accident at Chernobyl.

On the other hand, it is important to keep in mind the way those factors interact with the economy. For example, the war in Afghanistan was a drain on the Soviet economy much as the war in Vietnam was on the US economy. As for Chernobyl, the economic impact of that disaster still has not been measured accurately, but surely the social and financial costs will continue to burden the people of Belarus and Ukraine through many generations to come. With all of this as prelude, one must realize that prior to 1986 there was very little social activity in the public sphere of Soviet life that scholars would recognize as argument. Within the Soviet system, the postulate that underlay all other considerations was the very notion of information itself, which was perceived as the inextricable bonding of fact to interpretation. No fact was presented on its own; rather, it was explicitly linked to some political interpretation. Traditional Soviet rhetoric stemmed from universal principles; its purpose was to move towards greater wisdom, thus contributing to the goal of perfecting the communist state. Since true knowledge of historical processes was provided by Marxist ideology, the function of the information dissemination system created by the Bolsheviks was not to search for knowledge but, instead, “to bring the fruits of Marxist analysis to the people” (Kenez, 1985:6).

It may be difficult to remember in 1998, but even at the beginning of the 1980s, Soviet theories of mass communication were still imbued with this ideological conception. The Leninist ideal for an information system was reiterated most succinctly by Evseev (1980) in a semi-official publication, “The press, television, radio or propaganda and education must assist the Soviet citizen in orienting himself in domestic life and in international events” (18).

Hence, in a way, the whole system was a propaganda network designed to interpret selected events in the world. In the wry comment of one observer, Soviet television newscasts were described not as a “mirror” but as a “magnifying glass” (Matuz, 1963; Hollander, 1972). We would maintain that, in a system like this, the news itself gains an even greater rhetorical function than it would ordinarily have, for example, in the United States **[vi]** and that it becomes the equivalent of public oratory in a society which has no traditional forms of oratory. Even during much of the Gorbachev era, news was not presented for its own sake, but as an interpretation and as proof that the postulates of the socialist state

generally, and the current administration particularly, were correct.

Political and social crises always test the strength of such systems, and there have been a number of particularly significant events in the preceding fifteen years. What is most striking about such crises is the greater – rather than lesser – reliance on traditional communication mechanisms. In the traditional mode, crises, tragedies, disasters were typically not reported until an appropriate interpretation could be provided. Many incidents, particularly natural disasters and man-made tragedies, were never reported; on the other hand, political and social crises were given the interpretation most in tune with current policy goals of the state. Moreover, despite some fundamental changes that had occurred in Soviet media, news delivery remained a bonding of events to policy, with policy rather than events more instrumental in determining the nature, the extent, and even the timing of news coverage. The traditional response pattern exhibited by the Soviet information apparatus was so ingrained that its development can be followed quite clearly through six stages: initial silence; attacks on Western media sources; a burst of rhetorical activity setting forth the government's position (interpretation); a public statement by the head of government; decrease in the volume of rhetorical activity; and elevation of the official interpretation into the long-term memory of the state.[vii]

In our opinion the process of change – or the beginning of the end, in terms of our analysis – really started with the 1983 Korean airliner incident. Sometimes it is difficult to remember that when this tragedy occurred fifteen ago, Russia – the USSR – was still operating under the old system. Indeed, that incident illustrates the way in which the old Soviet system operated whenever a factual event occurred—understanding that until the 1986 Chernobyl nuclear accident, a disaster of that type was typically not reported in the Soviet press at all. One of the unique things about the airliner incident was that ultimately it was discussed at great length.

Each of the six stages of the traditional pattern of response to crises was illustrated very dramatically in the KAL incident. First there was an initial period of silence, that is no response at all, no indication that anything had occurred, while facts were gathered and interpretations were considered. Then there was a typically reflexive response to Western news sources including the various government supported radio stations that were broadcasting into the Soviet Union telling the populace that these events had occurred; this response was critical of Western sources for raising a “ruckus” and generating anti-Soviet

hysteria. The third stage would be development of the government interpretation of the event; at this point there would be a burst of rhetorical activity characterized by well-defined starting and ending points. Fourth, there would be a culmination of the interpretive process via a public statement by the head of government, after which the rhetorical activity would dramatically drop off; finally that official interpretation moved into the canon of public culture to be brought out again at appropriate times as proof that the interpretation of the new event was, and remained, correct. This last is the process of historical analogy which Hinds & Windt (1991) argue is the essential characteristic of rhetoric.

Typically, the US has engaged in very similar behavior every time an administration submitted a treaty with the Soviets for Congressional approval and opponents would bring out all the past treaties that the USSR had allegedly violated. One can conclude that the phenomenon is probably not culture-specific; nevertheless, it was very noticeable in Soviet rhetoric.

As we have indicated, the KAL incident follows the traditional pattern very clearly. In a month's time, the incident progressed in stages from a non-event which was completely ignored (initially there was a three line statement in *Pravda* followed by virtually the identical statement in *Izvestiya*), to a deliberate provocation designed to entrap the Soviet Union into destroying the Korean intruder (Launer, 1989). The development of those arguments is clearly traceable in the Soviet press through a number of iterations (Young & Launer, 1989). Yuri Andropov's published statement on September 28, 1983, provided the final, authoritative interpretation of that event:

The sophisticated provocation masterminded by the United States special services with the use of a South Korean plane is an example of extreme adventurism in politics. . . . The guilt of its organizers, no matter how hard they may dodge and what false versions they may put forward, has been proved (*Pravda*, September 28, 1983: 5).

The official Soviet government position was never completely believed by the Soviet people. Radio Liberty polls found that over 50 percent of Soviet citizens traveling in the West did not believe the government version of what happened to the Korean airliner (RFE/RL, 1983). That was a high percentage, an indicator of the beginning of erosion. From this tragedy, the Soviet information apparatus learned a bitter lesson regarding its vulnerability to Western propaganda. In this case, the government chose to target domestic propaganda at an incident that might never have been mentioned in the media at all. The incident also

demonstrated that in a crisis situation, because of the need to interpret events ideologically, the Soviet propaganda mechanism was largely reactive rather than proactive (Jameson, 1986): the lag time in the response simply allowed others – specifically the West – to get their interpretation in first. And, this episode underscored the importance of public image – something Gorbachev was able to take advantage of later on.

Finally, and for this analysis, most significant, Soviet rhetoric in the aftermath of the KAL tragedy took on a justificatory tone that was an early sign of the need to engage in public argument. The debate itself must have seemed very strange to much of the Soviet public, because the state-controlled mass media were responding to allegations available only via short-wave radio.

Nearly three years later on April 26, 1986, the Chernobyl nuclear accident again challenged the constraints of the Soviet information system. Once again an event that had occurred within the borders of the Soviet Union was generating extensive coverage worldwide as a catastrophe of international proportions. Like KAL, Chernobyl presented a true crisis of information and information policy for the Soviet Union both domestically and internationally. Once again, the initial response of even the progressive Gorbachev government was to follow the traditional model. Nearly everyone undoubtedly remembers the delay before the accident was announced: the reactor blew up at 1:04 am on Saturday, April 26, 1986 (2204 GMT on April 25) but was first reported by the Swedes on Monday afternoon. Editors at the central newspapers in Moscow were initially forbidden to publish any reports, and no reporters were dispatched to the scene for several days. Local radio and television did not cover the explosion or the fire. Soviet national television did not even show a still photo of the accident site until May 1, and the first news film was presented only on May 4 (Young & Launer, 1991:105-107).

It is now apparent that the Soviet information apparatus had lost control of the situation almost from the beginning. Nevertheless, despite the fundamental changes that would ultimately be wrought in the Soviet news dissemination system, the government persevered in attempting to interpret the event to political advantage. Chernobyl was said to demonstrate the horrors of nuclear war. In this way, the accident could be linked rhetorically to the Soviet testing moratorium, each day of which was numbered in Pravda, and to Mr. Gorbachev's proposal for the elimination of nuclear weapons by the year 2000.

The impact of Chernobyl as a rhetorical event, as an event that forced the government to justify its actions to a disbelieving public, has not been analyzed

fully and certainly has been under- appreciated. The amount of material that was generated by the Soviet media with regard to this one incident is almost overwhelming. And the behaviors that were manifested by the Soviet government were unprecedented in the country's history.

Because there was no institutionalized means for the kind of justificatory rhetoric that was necessary in the aftermath of the disaster, the government found itself engaging in a wide range of efforts to re-focus the people's perceptions of what had happened. In dozens of published interviews ordinary citizens complained that they had not been warned of the danger. These comments reflect a startling realization among the populace that the government wasn't interested in protecting them, but was much more interested in smoothing things over and making it appear as if nothing was wrong.

This crisis was the sort of jolt to public trust that can easily cause an erosion of faith. It occurred in a society much different from societies familiar to Western scholars. Forty five thousand people lived within three miles of the Chernobyl nuclear station, the lives of most of them inextricably bound to the plant itself. Reactor unit No. 4 exploded with a force sufficient to completely destroy the huge building that housed it. A concrete cover for the reactor vessel head, weighing about one hundred thousand pounds, was blown off to one side, landing on edge. Yet no one reacted. All the next day, despite the fact that smoke was billowing up from the disaster site, life seems to have gone on as usual, with mothers hanging out laundry and doing their shopping, with children playing outdoors, and teenagers and adults sunning themselves on apartment house rooftops in the early spring warmth (Marples, 1986: 14-15, 27). One can only speculate about the degree of trust - or fear - required for people to ignore the dramatic events occurring nearby, but it is difficult to imagine such passivity anywhere in Europe or the United States, for example. And some measure of the social compact between the people and the government of the USSR - the faith that they would be taken care of—can be measured by the utter panic that ensued once the people of Ukraine realized the magnitude of the accident. Over and over again in interviews people said “they didn't tell us,” “they didn't tell us we were in danger.”

Still, Chernobyl forever changed the way information is handled in the states of the former Soviet Union. The news reporting of the explosion ultimately became almost immediate. There were television cameras on the scene of the accident after the first week; there have been movies made about it; there have been



documentaries; there are plays, there are poems, there are novels. And while some of that was unofficial, much of it was also official. There was a whole series of documentary films that came out after Chernobyl, at least two of which, *Warning* and the *Chronicle of Difficult Weeks*, constituted a type of ideological advertising for the government's political message.**[viii]** At the same time, the government was constrained because it didn't really have an institutionalized way of making its arguments; the films represented an attempt to change people's perceptions indirectly. It does not appear that they were very successful.

Chernobyl inspired debate, not just about the relationship between citizen and state with respect to the danger resulting from the accident itself. It also spawned an entire debate about the environment and the role of the individual in ecology. In many ways this was a safe debate – or so officials thought – for the government to engage in and the first step towards true public discourse. Gorbachev had opened the door with his policy of Glasnost', announced just one year earlier; while Glasnost' signaled a change in the relationship among the citizen, the state, and the public realm, it was never intended to address a situation such as a nuclear accident. Thus, Chernobyl and its aftermath became an argumentative wedge, a wedge that separated the state from its control over public information and knowledge.

The aftermath of Chernobyl illustrates the point that where ground for debate can be created, it will gradually expand. For, in the period following the accident, there seemed to be almost an explosion of discussion about ecological issues. To a great extent, debates over ecology served as a convenient and legitimate battleground for expressing center-periphery tensions that already existed in Soviet society but which had no discursive outlet.**[ix]** An example is the decision taken by the Khmel'nitsky oblast soviet in the Ukraine to halt construction of the nuclear station being built there. This was an unprecedented action that was replicated across the republic: "Suddenly people demanded the right to make their own decisions on such critical questions as whether they wanted a nuclear power station in their area" (Dawson 1996: 94).

Nevertheless, through the second anniversary of the Chernobyl accident, official descriptions and interpretations of the tragedy predominated in Soviet media. Dawson (1996) notes:

[A] detailed survey of the Soviet and Ukrainian press during the 1986-87 period indicates that information on the accident was still highly restricted and published reports were often intentionally falsified to obscure the true magnitude

of the disaster. While the high-circulation press permitted publication of articles dealing with the progress of the accident cleanup and investigation into its causes, no articles were published which questioned Moscow's competence to safely operate nuclear power stations or the government's plans to dramatically expand nuclear power facilities in Ukraine. . . . (68-69)

However, in mid-1988, expressions of public pressure in Belorussia, Russia, the Ukraine and the Caucasus Republics turned very negative, reaching the point of attributing blame to the Soviet system itself rather than to specific individuals or organizations.[x] Then, starting in mid-1989, mainstream national media began to echo the dissatisfaction that initially had been expressed only in the regional press. Coverage of Chernobyl remained a prominent feature of the Soviet media for five years. Even today, each anniversary of the event spawns features in all the mass media.

Also after the second anniversary, an intense argument was waged on the pages of the national press over scientific authority, bureaucratic privilege and official indifference to public welfare. The public, of course, believed little or none of the tranquilizing rhetoric emanating from the authorities; one of the first signs of how little effect this unprecedented barrage of information was having was the development of a government-sponsored campaign to paint growing fear of nuclear power among the population as mere "radio-phobia." At about the same time a movement was forming among the intellectual elite in the Ukraine, Russia, and Belarus against nuclear power and the nuclear mafia that had become entrenched within the nation's ministry structure. And, to the extent what Gorbachev called *establishmentarianism* was one of the crucial stumbling blocks to economic reform, the rhetorical thrust of nuclear power opponents resonated ideas that the central government wished to promote. In other words, the anti-nuclear forces successfully linked their appeals to the *perestroika* reforms. But the government's national energy policy, which was based on rapid development of all forms of electrical generating capacity, including nuclear power, put the ministries in an ambivalent position *vis-à-vis* conservation, fuel efficiency, and pollution control – all programs advocated by the Soviet "Greens."

One of the singular achievements of the anti-nuclear group was its ability to create symbols that appealed to a broad audience. Indeed, by attaining such success, the anti-nuclear movement succeeded in passing beyond the bounds of dissidence, emerging as the first legitimate locus of unofficial political culture. In an article entitled "Honest, They Won't Blow Up Anymore" Oles Adamovich spoke

of himself as a non-specialist (non-expert), and as such he challenged the bureaucratic insistence that the public and particularly dilettante writers had no right to question the authority of scientists, engineers, and ministry officials.[xi] These terms became code-words for a completely new phenomenon in Soviet political culture – a concerted attack on the institutions of power, on a major political and economic policy, and on the legitimacy of the system itself. Remarkably, all of these features found expression in the mainstream print media beginning in late 1988. They soon led to a fundamental reassessment of Soviet energy policy, at least with regard to questions of design adequacy, siting requirements, and enhanced operational safeguards, leading to a moratorium on new construction and the abandonment of several sites then being built. In the opinion of one prominent scholar, it would no longer be possible to propose any site for a new Soviet nuclear power plant without generating intense opposition from the local population.[xii]

Despite the anti-intellectual tenor of much movement rhetoric, in many places scientists joined the chorus of critics. One such place was Gorky [now Nizhny Novgorod], where the government was constructing a nuclear-powered heating plant. A group of scientists from the physics institute led the opposition, convincing their audience that “the absolute safety of the Gorky AST could never be achieved” (Dawson 1996:104). In July 1988, other scientific institutes joined in a publicity campaign against the heating plant that, after some resistance, ultimately received extensive local television coverage (see Dawson 1996: 104). This 1988-89 period is particularly interesting because it demonstrates the unprecedented extent to which popular pressure from below affected public discussion of a vital issue – the future development of nuclear power production – and the extent to which the “official” establishment was incapable of maintaining rhetorical control of public perception or even of continuing to define the parameters and limits of the discussion. As a consequence, Chernobyl had a substantial effect on the social fabric of Soviet life – even ignoring the radiological and economic consequences of the accident. Leadership of the ecological movement[xiii] broke through the rhetorical shackles of dissidence – its isolation from society’s information dissemination system – becoming the first legitimate expression of unofficial political culture opposed to *policy* goals established by the party and government hierarchies. In this way, the movement challenged the very legitimacy of Soviet institutions – particularly centralized planning and party control of civic society.

Writers such as Adamovich even succeeded in creating rhetorical icons around which the population at large could rally:

1. the citizenry as hostages to nuclear power;
2. the nuclear bureaucracy – ministries, design bureaus, and research institutes – as arrogant defenders of bureaucratic privilege who dismiss the opinion of the masses and ignore their welfare;
3. this same nuclear bureaucracy as the last bastion of incompetence protected by laws enforcing secrecy in the nuclear industry; and
4. anti-nuclear advocates proud of being non-specialists because that meant they were not corrupted like the bureaucrats and technical experts.

As a result, in the aftermath of Chernobyl an argumentative wedge emerged into which the Greens movement moved, developing an argument of ecology that provided the basis for a growing lack of trust in the institutions of government, which provided in turn more ground for argument to occur. And ultimately it foreshadowed the events of August 1991.

The crumbling of the Soviet empire, of course, began two years earlier, with the breaking away of Eastern Europe and the destruction of the Berlin wall. Perhaps, these events, too, are the direct descendants of changing information policy in the USSR; certainly, these incidents did little to bolster the Soviet people's faith in the ability of their government to secure the common welfare; rather, circumstances signaled the continued erosion of the authoritarian Soviet state. But surely no one could have predicted the events of August 1991. Indeed, the coup attempt itself indicated just how far change had already penetrated the Soviet state. The attempted deposing of Gorbachev was thwarted in part because the new freedom of information enabled the domestic and foreign press to carry the story immediately, with no intervening period for interpretation and analysis. The bumbling ineptitude of the coup-plotters was no doubt to some degree the result of a lack of understanding about how to deal with the new situation. Their initial – and traditional – tale of Gorbachev's "illness" was not only disbelieved, it was ridiculed in the world media. The world, which was suddenly on their doorstep looking in, was horrified at the turn of events. The plotters hesitated; and into the breach rushed Boris Yeltsin. The rest, as they say, is history.

Yet, one cannot imagine these events playing out in the same way even five years earlier. The rhetorical situation had changed dramatically in the Gorbachev years following Chernobyl. The press had begun using the national media to discuss

issues of significance. New outlets were springing up daily, despite the chronic shortage of paper. Television was flexing its muscle; even the now defunct *Vremya*, once the most watched television news program in the world, took on a new look, with modern graphics and on-location reporting. Talk shows that criticized the government became popular fare. In short, there was an information revolution, not in the technological sense, but in terms of content and control. In the process, the ground for public discourse continued to expand, until it encompassed and challenged the existence of the state itself.

In the 1960's, communication scholars in the United States talked about "body rhetoric" and activists talked about putting your self on the line in the civil rights and anti-war movements. During those same years, Soviet citizens used nonverbal communication to avoid drawing attention to themselves: visitors from the West were struck by the unwillingness to make eye contact, people looking at the ground, shrinking within themselves to avoid notice. Remembering that period, which continued until only a few short years ago, the vigorous ecological debates following Chernobyl become all the more remarkable. And the rhetorical behavior exhibited in the streets of Moscow and St. Petersburg in August 1991 demonstrates the extent of change.

Debates about ecology are silent now, overshadowed by other (largely economic) concerns. Interestingly, it appears that the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the achievement of independence on the part of the Republics, dissipated the fervor of the anti-nuclear debate; now decisions about nuclear power were in their own hands and this, coupled with the economic crisis, put the issue in an entirely different perspective.

Now the debates are about the economy and the constitution and a balance of power between the president and the parliament: how much socialism, how much capitalism, what sorts of social safety nets should there be. And there are still threats of censorship. But the discussion about policy goes on – in public media and on the street as well as in the privacy of the halls of government. It is still only the beginning of a civil society and it may yet fall apart under the weight of economic collapse. Many of the rhetorical choices sound disturbingly familiar, from reactionaries' open yearnings for the days of communism to reformers' inability to shake off their deterministic roots. It is still difficult to predict whether there ever will be anything truly resembling a Western-style democracy in any of the states of the former Soviet Union. But things will again never be the way they once were.

## NOTES

- i.** The authors are grateful to Alexander I. Yuriev, St. Petersburg (Russia) State University, David Cratis Williams, University of Puerto Rico, and Bruce Gronbeck, University of Iowa for their advice and support. Scott Elliott, our research assistant, also provided invaluable help. Russian materials cited in the text were translated into English by M. K. Launer.
- ii.** In American society, this sometimes is manifest as an exposé or, in its milder form, an investigative article that reveals previously hidden information about governmental decisions, plans, expenditures. In totalitarian or authoritarian states, such materials usually emerge as part of a coordinated effort to implement specific governmental policies.
- iii.** It is important to keep in mind that governments in many of the nations deemed by Westerners to be the most pernicious nevertheless enjoy the support of an overwhelming majority of the citizenry.
- iv.** Even by 1990 rhetorical conditions within the country had changed to such an extent that all sessions of the new Soviet parliament were televised live throughout the nation “from gavel to gavel,” with deputies openly challenging the policies of the Gorbachev administration.
- v.** Prof. Alexander Yuriev, a political psychologist at St. Petersburg University, made a similar prediction at a Party Congress in 1982. Private communication, October 1996.
- vi.** One might argue that the current histrionic tone adopted by even the mainstream media in the U.S. has altered the traditional rhetorical function of the press.
- vii.** For an extended discussion, see Young and Launer, 1989.
- viii.** For an extended discussion, see Young and Launer, 1991.
- ix.** For a thorough discussion see Dawson, 1996. Dawson focuses her discussion on principles of resource mobilization and ignores the role of discourse, except in passing.
- x.** There is a striking resemblance here to the developmental steps of radical organizations in the US, for example, Students for a Democratic Society. A turning point in the evolution of that organization occurred in 1965, when its leadership “named” the established social mechanisms for making policy decisions and according status as the inherent cause of society’s ills. Much of that rhetoric, albeit in a milder form, was subsequently reflected in the mainstream press, and echoes of that era remain today in references to “the system.” Perhaps it should not be surprising that the Russian ecological movement would follow a similar

path, for within the constraints of the Soviet system, they were clearly becoming radicalized and losing faith in the system is an essential step in that process.

**xi.** This argument is reminiscent of similar claims made in American rhetorical studies to the effect that on many issues technical elites have eliminated public opinion from policy formation.

**xii.** Academician N. N. Ponomarev-Stepnoi, Deputy Director of the Kurchatov Institute. Personal interview, June 1990.

**xiii.** Significantly, this leadership was drawn from both humanist intellectuals and scientists, a pattern to be seen throughout Eastern Europe in subsequent years.

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