
Soviet Economy

NEP, environmentalism, and military industry: a contradiction?

by Luba George

On Oct. 28 the Soviet party newspaper *Pravda* published an article marking the 65th anniversary of Lenin's October 1921 speech "On the New Economic Policy." This is only one of a number of recent Soviet articles that have referred to the New Economic Policy, or NEP.

In the past few months, Mikhail Gorbachov has spoken openly about the relevance of the NEP experience for the U.S.S.R. today. In his speech in the Soviet Far East city of Khabarovsk at the end of July, he called for "bold new policies" to solve the Soviet Union's problems and spoke approvingly of NEP.

The Western press, all aglow with these new signs of NEP as alleged signs of a "new period of de-Stalinization," described Gorbachov as a "reform-minded advocate," who has brought about Soviet "political pragmatism" and "economic liberalization."

Raisa's role

The campaign to popularize the NEP goes hand in hand with the recent creation of a Soviet "Culture Foundation," promoted by Mikhail's wife Raisa Gorbachov, who is on the 10-member executive board of the Foundation. The NEP resurrection has been spearheaded by the "Culture Foundation's" literary friends of Raisa Gorbachov. Soviet writer Sergei Zalygin, whom Alexander Solzhenitsyn placed second on his list of "true Russian writers," was the first to set the tone when he wrote: "NEP is not a tactic but a strategy of socialism." Over the past 10 years, Zalygin has written and, with some difficulty, published his novel about the advantages of NEP—*Posle buri* (After the Storm).

Zalygin, a leading founding member of the Soviet Culture Foundation—to which the old American magnate and Kremlin friend Armand Hammer generously contributes—is a top Soviet propagandist for the New Economic Policy (NEP), under Raisa's benevolent protection and guidance. His role as a leading Soviet expert on NEP, and the content of his writings, have been monitored by Radio Liberty. Raisa herself is not only the wife of Mikhail Gorbachov, and the

real power behind the Culture Foundation, she is the daughter of the oldest surviving high-ranking official of the New Economic Policy (NEP) under Lenin, Maxim Titorenko.

Zalygin is often referred to by the younger Soviet writers as the father of *novoe myshlenie* (the new thinking) or the "New Age," pioneered by the "village prose" movement of the 1970s, which glorified the Russian countryside as the repository of raw spiritual values. Out of this "village prose" movement, came the U.S.S.R.'s present-day "ecology" movement including authors of the Raisa Gorbachov salon—like Valentin Rasputin, Sergei Zalygin, Chinghiz Aitmatov, Grigori Baklanov, et al.—responsible, among other things, for the "Save Lake Baikal" campaign and other demands that Mother Russia be protected from the ravages of pollution and mining. The huge "Project of the Century"—the River Diversion Project, which would have channeled the water of the main Siberian rivers into arid Muslim Soviet Central Asia—was sacrificed, thanks to this campaign.

The monthly party theoretical journal *Voprosy filosofii* (No. 4 1986) writes: Zalygin "threatened to shatter preconceptions, to destroy the stereotypes of cliché, ignorant judgments about the most complex period (NEP) in our history, which has perhaps been least illuminated by science and art. Zalygin is the first . . . Soviet writer to devote attention to the NEP period . . . seriously, as an interested scholar, historian, sociologist, and artist."

Zalygin was recently appointed the new chief editor of *Novy Mir* (New World)—with half a million circulation—which has, since his appointment on Aug. 10 this year, been spearheading Gorbachov's "glasnost" (openness) drive—on such themes as the growing drug problem in the U.S.S.R., environmental issues and the NEP theme. In reporting the appointment Aug. 10, the Yugoslav news agency Tanjug drew attention to the fact that Zalygin is probably the only chief editor of a Soviet journal who is not a member of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union.

The first part of Zalygin's 300-page novel *Posle buri*, was completed while Brezhnev was still General Secretary,

but it got the green light only in May 1982 (in the journal *Druzhba narodov*) when the former KGB head Yuri Andropov was effectively already in power. Following its publication, in March 1983, *Literaturnaya Gazeta* proclaimed that Zalygin was singing the praises of the “energy of NEP. . . . The novel provides a splendid reply: NEP is not simply a tactic but a strategy of socialism.”

The second part of the novel was published in the issue of *Druzhba narodov* for July, August, and September 1985, only after Gorbachov was already in power, and after Gorbachov’s protégé, Alexander Yakovlev, had been appointed head of the Central Committee’s Propaganda Department. *Pravda* gave the official evaluation of the novel on May 30, 1986: “Sergei Zalygin has taken it upon himself to explore on a fundamentally new artistic level a phenomenon, the essence of which, let us not forget, was conceived as a program by Lenin. NEP . . . was not simply an economic measure. The experience of NEP also provided special conditions for the social and spiritual transformation of man. . . . That’s what Zalygin’s novel is about: about man, about his fate at a critical time. . . . About how ‘a new energy in thinking’ must be discovered in man, without which rational life and the improvement of life is impossible. The latter, in turn, is the only means to save the world and oneself.”

Zalygin, together with Grigori Baklanov, the editor of *Znamia*, is a member of an eight-man special commission created by the Soviet Writers’ Union which is responsible for stepping up the publication of works along the Gorbachov-Yakovlev “new thinking” line.

The military-industrial angle

How does this movement representing the “new thinking,” so often referred to by Gorbachov in his speeches, fit in with Soviet Marshal Ogarkov’s and the “Russian Party” of the Soviet leadership’s drive for world hegemony? The NEP and the “democracy” that goes with it, as well as the “ecological” side of its campaign, in no way hinder the Soviet military from doing what it has to in the period ahead to attempt to achieve absolute military superiority.

Russian Party “environmentalism” is in no way comparable to the Green radical-environmentalist Jacobinist plague sweeping the West. Raisa Gorbachov’s NEP “ecologists” are not opposed to nuclear power, and *never* express any opposition to programs of either the Soviet military or the Russian military-industrial complex. Furthermore, their campaigns in the literary world, such as attacking certain big projects, are fully in tandem with the massive tilt in Soviet investment policy under Gorbachov. Under the Gorbachov priorities of modernizing Soviet industry, there has been a vast increase in investments to modernize existing industry, making it both more efficient and less polluting; to accelerate the construction of non-polluting nuclear power plants; increase railway electrification; and so on down the line.

There is another facet to this investment tilt under Gor-

bachov. One must bear in mind that about two-thirds of the Soviet Union’s industrial output comes from the Russian Republic (as recently stressed at the session of the Russian Republic’s soviet, or parliament). Thus, the bulk of investments going to modernize existing industry means that investment policy is focused on the Russian Republic. Similarly, the bulk of the abandoned new big projects—typified by the Siberian rivers water diversion to non-Russian, Muslim Central Asia—hit the subject populations of the Russian empire. The demands of the military high command and the industrial modernizers, lead to the same results as those of the Russian Party environmentalists.

The same is true concerning the resurrection of the NEP. The NEP of Gorbachov envisages employing productively—in a private sector—strata of the population such as pensioners, housewives, or students, who are not engaged in any labor for the state. Why not set up a mechanism whereby these groups of the population can help solve critical bottlenecks in the horribly inept service, repair, and handicraft-manufacturing sectors of the Soviet economy?

From the first days after the Bolshevik Revolution, Soviet military and defense doctrine has been guided by the “Frunze principle” (named after one of the leading Soviet military theoreticians, Mikhail Frunze, whose writings still influence Soviet commanders like Marshal Nikolai Ogarkov and Soviet defense policy) that the economy, particularly industry and its technological base, takes precedence over even the building up of the arms arsenal; in this way, the horse leads the cart. Frunze was noted for having called on industry to be more responsive to the requirements of the military for R&D and for faster technological change in all sectors, not just the arms sector. Thus when defense options are considered, all Soviet political *and* military leaders support the continuing growth of the economy and raising the level of technological capacities as first priority.

This dual-strategy—prioritizing the development of the U.S.S.R.’s technological base, while resurrecting NEP—could be seen at the VI Congress of Writers of the R. S. F. S. R. (Russian Federation of the U.S.S.R.), where in his keynote address the president of the union, Sergei Mikhalkov asked: “Is man morally prepared for the headlong acceleration of technical progress by leaps and bounds, and is the writer himself up to date with the current state of the scientific-technological revolution and its future?”

The U.S.S.R.’s “poet laureate” and one-time “angry young poet” of the 1950s, Yevgeni Yevtushenko, in his speech de-coded some of the NEP’s hidden Russian chauvinist elements: “Spiritual progress,” said Yevtushenko, means having the courage of Lenin, “to attack the new Soviet bureaucracy and communist arrogance . . . [to] fearlessly put the country onto the footing of the New Economic Policy.” But it also would mean for “the people . . . to analyze its own errors and tragedies, “so as to become ‘spiritually invincible’. . . . For us, mankind begins with the Motherland.”