

## Eye on Washington by Nicholas F. Benton

### Press blackout of Pentagon report

One of the most blatant cases of a media conspiracy of silence attended the release by Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger of the Pentagon's *Soviet Military Power 1987* report March 24. Unlike any of the previous five springs, when the report was issued to standing-room-only crowds of reporters jammed into the Pentagon briefing room, this time the room was half-empty. Not even the cable channel of record, C-Span, was on hand.

That night's network news programs dismissed the report as revealing "nothing really new," and shifted focus to the examples of Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachov's *glasnost* deception campaign. The *Washington Post* followed suit, reporting briefly on the Pentagon study, and offsetting it with a full-page layout on Soviet *glasnost*, leading off the "Style" section of the same day's paper.

Weinberger cut the Q&A short in order to go on to a USIA Worldnet broadcast, and then up to Congress to testify before the House Armed Services Committee that morning. Three consecutive questions accepted by Weinberger from this reporter constituted a full 25% of the question period he allowed.

The media blackout was welcomed (if not encouraged) both by the appeasement faction in the administration and the anti-Strategic Defense Initiative Democrats in Congress. Weinberger's grim report decimated the credibility of a "zero-option" treaty

with the Soviets, on the one hand, and of any restraints on U.S. SDI development, on the other.

### The real purpose of 'glasnost'

Translated "openness," or "candor," *glasnost* is the term coined by Gorbachov to describe a new domestic policy he claims is aimed at loosening up Soviet society. Credulous congressmen like Sen. Dale Bumpers (D-Ark.) have described this new policy in glowing terms, and urged leaders in the West to "help Gorbachov out" against resistance from hard-liners in the Soviet bureaucracy.

Former Soviet physicist Dmitri Mikheyev has confirmed that *glasnost* represents no thaw, but, instead, a clever strategy to upgrade productivity for the massive Soviet military buildup described in the just-released Pentagon report.

Mikheyev, who was held in Soviet hard labor camps for six years as a dissident before leaving the U.S.S.R. in 1979, told a Center for Peace and Freedom seminar on Capitol Hill in February that the real purpose of *glasnost* is to crack the massive, stagnated middle management bureaucracy that has suffocated Soviet productivity.

"*Glasnost*," Mikheyev noted, "really means 'voice your grievances,'" and is an invitation by Gorbachov to the nation's grassroots of workers and farmers to snitch on their cynical, lethargic managerial superiors, who conspire with each other to keep their bureaucratic posts with coordinated lies to their superiors about outputs levels, morale, and so forth.

Therefore, newspapers are opening up to criticisms of party officials, but only at the middle management level, and never higher up. Also, some carefully-chosen dissidents, like phy-

sicist Andrei Sakharov, are being released in order to inject morale into a demoralized scientific community.

The Soviets, he said, are concerned about this stagnation. In a recent case, based on productivity estimates given to them by middle-level managers, the Politburo projected a timetable for construction of a chemical plant, only to find it 40% completed by the deadline. Hence, the productivity capability in the area was 60% below what the bureaucrats had reported.

Mikheyev said the middle-level leadership in the Soviet Union is "utterly cynical," and has accommodated to a double life, subordinating a public role to a different, hidden private life. An entrenched network of peer support protects this. "The Soviet citizen is crippled by a sense of personal powerlessness which is impossible to describe if you have not experienced it," he said. "It is utterly different from the idea that an individual can make a difference."

Poverty-ridden communal living, with daily fights over sharing bathrooms and kitchens with other families, overcrowded mass transit, and standing in at least two lines each time you buy food, add, he said, to animosity and paranoia in the Soviet population. "To a Soviet citizen, you are a crook until you prove otherwise," he said. "He feels about himself, even, that if he is not restrained, his evil will come out uncontrollably. This tends to make him passive in the face of totalitarian repression."

Addressing the negative consequences of these attitudes for the Soviet war mobilization is what Gorbachov's *glasnost* is really all about—designed not to relieve the tension and paranoia, but, on the contrary, to unleash a new series of brutal purges and productivity drives to push the war machine harder.