

Moscow's Red Alert

A Roundtable Discussion
Gorbachev has been in
power for five years.
The future of peres-
troika hangs in the
balance.

In this extraordinary
discussion held in
Moscow for *MT*, it is
clear that *everything* is
now up for grabs



The participants in the roundtable are Alexander Nikolaevich Kraiko, an engineer at the Central Institute for Aviation Engines, who represents the Bauman district of Moscow, the electoral seat which used to be held by Stalin and Brezhnev, in the Congress of People's Deputies. He has never been a member of the CPSU. And Arkady Nikolaevich Murashev, physicist at the Institute of High Temperatures in Moscow and convenor of the Inter-Regional Group of Deputies in the Congress of People's Deputies, which sometimes calls itself a loyal opposition. Murashev was a candidate member of the CPSU, but recently withdrew. The discussion was chaired by Jonathan Steele, Moscow correspondent of *The Guardian*.

Translated by Francis King

It is five years since Gorbachev took over and perestroika began. What do you think have been the most important changes since 1985?

Alexander The greatest change which has occurred over the past five years is the rebirth of what I would call the 'free spirit' in our country. Five years ago, the majority of people had only a very vague impression of their own history, and a very poor idea of how the rest of the world lived. And they would not have expressed any opinion on how they thought we should live here. We could not say what we thought, things were completely different then. There has been a spiritual rebirth, freedom has been achieved. This is the most important thing.

Would you agree, Arkady?

Arkady In general, yes. But the most important thing recently is that perestroika has begun to involve the people. I am thinking of the events in Eastern Europe - that is perhaps the most important event of those five years.

What have you found most disappointing?

Alexander Since I have been a people's deputy I have constantly been trying to get things done, and now I understand how difficult that is. I wish the economy had improved, but that is easy to say. It is very difficult to introduce changes, because people are unprepared for them. For example, many people unfortunately still react strongly against the words 'private property'. Everyone is worried about the possibility of having greater inequality than at present. Maybe there will be, maybe there won't, but even if there were greater inequality those with the lowest living standards should still live better than they do now. Therefore, if you are talking about disappointments, of course, a great deal could be better, but to be honest, I did not believe I would live to see times like these.

Well, Alexander, who is to blame for the slow pace of these reforms?

Alexander I am simply saying that at present these limitations are an objective reality, and not that somebody does not want something to happen. Of course there is the resistance of what we call conservatives, but if these conservatives are so powerful it is not just because they have positions on the politburo, they are powerful amongst the population. Take, for example, the general attitude towards co-operatives. It is conservative without any doubt. And opinions change: if last spring the majority were for co-operatives, now far fewer people favour them.

Arkady, what has disappointed you most?

Arkady My disappointments are connected with events in the last year. If in the first four years we could say that perestroika was going forward, then the events of the last year - not in Eastern Europe but here - can be called the stagnation of perestroika, a braking,

a slowing of the processes which were taking place in the previous years. And this is a disappointment. I do not think it has much to do with the conservatism of the population - here I do not agree with Alexander - because a recent public opinion poll shows that among the electorate private property and co-operation have both been gaining support.

To a large extent, this distorted view has been fostered by the media, which purport to show that the people hate co-operatives, but all the opinion polls show otherwise. The conservative element which is currently holding perestroika back has no basis of support. It follows from this that Gorbachev's policies during the last year could have been more consistent and decisive.

You don't agree?

Alexander I disagree with Arkady. In this last year there have been the most important changes so far. There have been the first real elections for 78 years. Of course, they were not completely free, but they led to the creation of a Supreme Soviet quite different from the Stalin/Brezhnev type, one which works, whose actions are not predictable - and this was never the case before. Therefore to talk of a 'stagnation of perestroika' seems to me to be simply not serious. If we are talking about the press, then for the most part it expresses dissatisfaction with the conservatives. I can count the publications which I would consider genuinely conservative on my fingers.

Arkady, many people now say that the party is the main obstacle to perestroika - would you agree with that?

Arkady Yes, one of the most important brakes on the process of reform is the party structure, and in many respects the main body of communists themselves. They still fail to call a spade a spade, use words ambiguously, use clever phrases to disguise the real meaning of their words, and this cowardly politics bases itself on the fact that in society as a whole the reforms are not happening as quickly as the majority of the population would wish.

Alexander, you were never a member of the party. What are your main criticisms of the party?

Alexander I disagree categorically that the majority of communists can be seen as some kind of brake or as a stronghold of conservative opinion. The vast majority of communists reflect the state of public opinion in the country. It is not as Arkady would have it, that the majority of the people take a radical position. Not at all. They gave out some figures at the time of the Congress of People's Deputies discussion about Article Six in December. If in Leningrad the support for its immediate repeal - not amongst communists, but amongst the whole population, was around 70%, then in Moscow it was 46%.

If there were to be a multi-party system, if the party were to permit competition, what new parties would emerge?

Arkady They are already springing up. At the moment they remain fairly modest affairs, but they have already appeared. We already have social democratic groups, a christian-democratic union, and nationalist groups emerged. In future we will have the full range of parties which are to be found in any Western state. That is quite natural.

And if in two to three years there were to be free elections, with the full range of parties, do you think right-wingers, or left-wingers would win? Which party would turn out to be the largest?

Arkady In two to three years, if the process were to develop at the speed of the last few years, I think it is certain that some kind of 'left bloc' would win, which in the terminology of the rest of the world would mean 'right bloc'. Without a doubt, I think.

What do you mean, 'left' and 'right' blocs?

Arkady In our country, the terms have come to have the opposite meaning to that used in the rest of the world. We call the reformers 'left', who argue that a greater proportion of the social product should not be distributed by the state, but should go directly to the people. And 'right' denotes the conservatives who continue to adhere to the principle of state provision. In the rest of the world it is the other way round - our 'rights' are their 'lefts' and vice versa.

The role of the state in the economy is an extremely important issue. What does 'left' mean in that respect?

Arkady What distinguishes a totalitarian society from one with a normal economy is that the major part of the social product does not go to the producer of the social product, but is distributed through the state, among the population, the enterprises and the work collectives - that is the main difference. We are now moving towards a situation of greater independence both for collectives and individuals, so that a greater proportion of what is earned remains with those who earned it. Over the whole world the process started from the other end and proceeded in the opposite direction: from pure capitalism to the introduction of social regulators, a social programme, and the Left, of course, stood for the transformation of society, just as it did here at the beginning of this century. We are now starting from the other side - our 'lefts' demand the same as, let's say, your 'rights'.

Alexander, do you think that, if there were a multi-party system, the 'left' would win?

Alexander For a start I would define 'left' and 'right' somewhat differently. 'Lefts' want changes, 'rights' do not want changes, irrespective of what these changes might be. In this respect I see no inversion in relation to the West.

Now, unfortunately, although I am an optimist, I am aware we face certain dangers. Everything depends to a great extent on how the economic situation in our country develops. If it deteriorates, then public opinion will tend more towards those we call 'right-wingers'. That is beyond doubt.

As for the multi-party system, that is developing irrespective of whether there are laws permitting it or not. But if you are talking about a genuine multi-party system - and a genuine multi-party system is one where there are not just many parties, but also two or three main contenders - the only strong contender for the mantle of the radical party is the Soviet Communist Party (CPSU), though it might call itself socialist or something. For the time being it seems to me that the party that we now have is moving towards radicalisation, and the imminent 28th congress will further accelerate this process. Its opponent will be a conservative party. It will unite Pamyat and the conservatives we have at the moment in the party and outside, and it will be a very powerful force. But, who gets the majority of the votes, that will depend on the situation within the country, including the economic situation.

Many people say that Gorbachev and the leadership should convert the CPSU into a social-democratic party, or else they will lose all their authority. Do you think there should be such a split in the party?

Alexander It is in our interests that this split should occur as late as possible. All the time that Gorbachev and his team remain in charge, it is best that the split be delayed. But sooner or later the conservative forces will show themselves - they are doing so already. They are often party members.

Yesterday I saw an election debate on television which showed the candidates for one of the regions of the Russian Federation, including some thoroughly right-wing comrades, probably Pamyat members, although they could not say so openly, but they were all party members, a whole row of them. There are a fair number of such people. I would not like to see a situation where Gorbachev found himself in the minority and the conservatives in the majority after a congress or after some split. There is always such a danger.

The people have become very tired. The people remember that everything used to be in the shops - whether they could afford them is another matter - but the things were there to be bought. They can remember especially when it was possible to get red and black caviar. I lived through that time and we never had it in our house.

Do you think that the people are so conservative that they would support a 'conservative-communist' party led, say, by Ligachev?

Alexander First, it would not be under the leadership of Ligachev. Ligachev is not the conservative you



Moscow deputy Arkady Murashev



Alexander Kraiko: Never a party member

make him out to be. Of course he is a person with a fairly conservative outlook, but he will not oppose Gorbachev, without a doubt. There could be new leaders: former factory directors and so on, people who are very unhappy about perestroika. And they are people who would support chauvinist views, certainly not the people you would find in the current politburo.

Does this mean that you think that the population does not dislike the CPSU apparatus and the party as much as it did in Eastern Europe?

Alexander You know, the situation here is somewhat different. In Eastern Europe, those governments were all imposed from abroad, if you don't count Yugoslavia. Our regime created itself. We beat Hitler, some people considered we had conquered half the world, there was a large socialist camp. Some people are now apportioning blame - we had all this, and now we are throwing it away. And the people getting blamed are those who are now in charge. What is happening now? The Poles will not listen to us, the Germans will not listen to us - many people resent this. We had this empire, and what is left now? Not much of an empire. Therefore the situation here is quite different.

Do you agree with this distinction between Eastern Europe and the USSR?

Arkady There certainly is a difference, although it is difficult to say precisely how great. Overall, I think their criticisms of the old party apparatus hold true here too. A public opinion poll posed the question thus: 'Would you vote for the representatives of the old *nomenklatura*?' And in various towns only 2% to 5% of the population said they would. The overwhelming majority said they would not.

I quite agree that in Eastern Europe the regimes were to an extent imposed from abroad, whereas in our country it developed itself. Maybe this is why they have overtaken us in the reform process. But I would differ from Alexander's appraisal of the mood of the electorate. The electorate's mood is much more progressive than Alexander believes. The conservative element - and Ligachev is their leader, the views of Ligachev and Gorbachev are certainly opposed as you can see by analysing any of their speeches - will not find support among the population. Certainly not more than 10% or 15%. The absolute majority would vote for democrats, and the greater the democracy advocated, the more support it would get. As far as I can tell from the opinion polls, people have become more radical.

There is a form of Russian nationalism, and it is possible a Russian nationalist party would emerge. What is the basis of Russian nationalism, what do you think it means, Alexander?

Alexander You have to take into account that although the government's policies were supposedly introduced in

the name of the whole Soviet people, in fact they were a continuation of the policies of the old Russian Empire. Take the extension of our frontiers: this was clearly a continuation of the policies of old, and was done in a way which the Russians could look upon as their own.

On the other hand, the main victims in this process were also the Russians. In the war, for example - not in proportion to the whole population, but in absolute numbers - the Russians suffered most. The Russian countryside suffered most of all in collectivisation - Russian, Ukrainian and Byelorussian. Of course half the Kazakhs died due to a huge famine, but they were just a small nationality. The greatest destruction of monuments and cultural items took place in Russia. This was often carried out by illiterate, uneducated and embittered Russians. Russians themselves destroyed churches, villages and settlements.

So, this resurrection of nationalism which is taking place all over the USSR takes the form in Russia of thinking that Russians are the injured party, they suffered more than any other people, and this gives a basis for a certain exclusivity, the uniqueness of the Russians' position. This explains the insensitive attitude to many other peoples, and a search for scapegoats amongst other peoples: 'Look out for the Jews, there they are, they are to blame for all our troubles.' This national resurgence is not based on the strong points of our national culture, but on a search for scapegoats among other peoples. That is the danger.

Do you not think there is a contradiction between the ideas of the Russian nationalists as portrayed by Alexander and their opposition to other republics seceding from the USSR? If they think that Lithuanians and Moldavians should be punished, why do they want them to remain in the USSR?

Arkady It is certainly a remnant of this imperial thinking, as Alexander was saying. Nonetheless, it seems to me that those who are totally opposed to the secession of Moldavia, Lithuania or other republics are not so numerous. Many more people, who would not object to the secession of various republics, would say, 'If they don't like it they can get out,' but would still proclaim the exclusiveness of the Russian people, the uniqueness of its destiny, and that is really more dangerous.

If we look at things not in absolute numbers, but proportionately, we can see that many nationalities have suffered much more than the Russians. The small nationalities of the north find themselves in a catastrophic situation. Their whole culture and way of life has been destroyed, their territory has been pillaged. The larger nationalities, like the Tartars and Bashkivs, have also had a great deal destroyed. The Russian people only feels its loss because of its size and the absolute numbers involved. But personally I don't think that the

Russians were the main victims amongst all the nations of the Russian Empire.

Alexander, if the majority of Lithuanians voted for secession, would you support this or try to hamper it?

Alexander Of course, I could not hinder it at all. I am not even a member of the Supreme Soviet. But I would say this: when a great mountain crumbles, everything gets covered with debris. If the Baltic states voted for independence now, this would be grist to the mill of the Russian conservatives. I am convinced that a free Baltic cannot exist alongside an undemocratic Russia. Therefore if they want to be free, they should devote their energies not just towards getting up and going, but also towards ensuring this mountain does not just crumble.

It may suit the Lithuanian Communist Party to leave the CPSU, it is nonetheless a huge blow to the reformers within the party. I think it would be a very good thing if they were to support the reformers in the party at the 28th congress. But they have absented themselves from it.

Do you agree, Arkady, that it is too early for them to go?

Arkady I do not agree that they have struck a blow against the reformers. I think the opposite, that the position of the Baltic deputies to the congress and the Supreme Soviet and what is happening there is, on the contrary, a great stimulus to the process within Russia. Their position helps us to go faster. One can say the same thing about Eastern Europe.

Arkady, do you see any difference in the Russian people's attitude to the Baltic republics and the Caucasus? I mean, would the loss of Lithuania be more traumatic for the Russians than, say, the loss of Azerbaijan or Kazakhstan?

Arkady It is much too early to talk of the secession of Kazakhstan. The democratic process there is far from having reached that level. I don't think it would make any difference to the ordinary Russian person's sense of loss whether it were Azerbaijan or the Baltic which seceded.

Do you agree with that?

Alexander The population has been so conditioned that the majority of it would never welcome the secession of any part of the union. Eastern Europe is a completely different question. Eastern Europe was never a part of the USSR. When they tear down statues of Lenin, or attack our representatives, people here are not particularly alarmed, it does not really affect them.

I don't think it would be a tragedy if Azerbaijan or Lithuania were to secede, and many patriotically-minded Russians may also welcome it, since they think, 'Well, we have been feeding these people, now we will not have to'. But nonetheless, nobody would put this down to Gorbachev's credit.



**Arkady:
"We are now starting from the other side - our "lefts" demand the same as your "rights"**



**Alexander:
"To be honest I did not believe I would live to see times like these"**

On this matter too I disagree with Arkady's suggestion that everything the Baltic comrades do assists the changes taking place here. Unfortunately, some things are far from helpful. What they are doing with regard to economic autonomy is undoubtedly helpful. But the discriminatory measures they are introducing in Estonia and Latvia against the local Russian population will cause a negative reaction in Russia, although the most advanced strata of Russian society have a highly internationalist outlook.

Arkady, what about private property: should people have the right to buy and sell land, for example?

Arkady It is a perfectly normal state of affairs and without it we won't make any progress. This should be recognised, and people should have the right to private property in land. Certainly there can and should be some kind of social regulation, to prevent the waste of land and to limit the size of land holdings. Just as a year ago the multi-party system was the big bone of contention, and now most people favour it, the issue now is private property. And the greater part of the population, according to opinion polls, is now firmly in favour of private property.

Do you think that with private land ownership agriculture would develop more rapidly?

Arkady To change from our existing system of ownership to complete privatisation, both in land and other forms of property, is impossible. There should be an extended period in which property changes hands from the state to the collectives.

But the significance of giving people the right to private property is not so much economic as legal. The fact is that I am convinced that property rights are the basis of any democratic society. In that respect we can say that private property is the basis of a democracy. It is another matter that over the rest of the world democracy is now creeping in at the grassroots of the productive process. We can follow a different trajectory to that followed elsewhere. Instead of passing through a stage where one person or one family controls a large amount of productive forces, we can proceed directly to these forms of collective ownership.

Alexander, what do you think of private ownership of land?

Alexander All over the world the presence of private property has been very successful, in agriculture, industry and everywhere. Therefore I am convinced that we should have all forms of ownership including private. How the people would react to it now is another question. It is not simply whether, say, 59% of the people favour private property. If 41% are categorically against it, then for the moment we have to take account of this one way or another. In our conditions, individual ownership of any large factory is

simply impossible. Therefore I would favour all sorts of ownership - shareholdings, leasing of enterprises and so on. On the other hand, we would also have state ownership, just like in developed capitalist countries. For example, I do not know who owns the nuclear power stations in England, France or America, I imagine they don't belong to individual capitalists, although they may have shareholders.

There is a lot of talk about companies with shareholders. Do you think shareholdings should be restricted to an enterprise's workers, or would you favour a Western-style stock exchange?

Alexander I am for the stock exchange. But it is not just a question of what I think. You need to take account of what other people think. For example, my own colleagues at work will say they are for private property, especially joint-stock property. But they argue that there are many people who have accumulated vast amounts of money and other riches, and these people are quite amoral, and so therefore we cannot at present allow them to control shares.

How are we to have primary capital accumulation? If you cannot convict these people of any crime, surely it is better that their capital was put to work for society's benefit? But, if the population is not yet ready for this, let us have certain limits at first. We should not proceed from ideals, but from realities. If at present people are worried that things may fall into the wrong hands, or that it is all somehow not right, let us for the moment say that only employees of an enterprise can hold shares. In time we will see the need to abolish the restrictions.

Arkady, formerly Soviet propaganda always claimed that in the USSR there were not the large income differentials which we have in the West. Of course, we know that there are some very rich people here, and a large number of poor people, but do you think it would be possible to turn the Soviet economy into a market economy without greatly increasing these inequalities?

Arkady It is difficult to give a definite answer because according to the economists who have worked on this question there are only around 400 legal millionaires - mainly artists and cultural figures - and around 30,000 illegal millionaires. The property of the whole population is worth about 400 billion roubles, and the property of the 30,000 is worth around 200 billion. As you can see this is quite a sharp differentiation. Unfortunately, nobody can actually verify these figures and so we cannot say whether inequality would increase or decrease, because we do not know the present situation. But I agree with Alexander that in the final analysis the poor will become richer even if inequality increased - I have no doubt about that - and the most important thing for economic policy now is to encourage business activity, give people incentives to work.

ives to work.

How do you think an enterprise culture can be created?

Arkady We can create it by introducing key economic measures which enhance the independence of collectives and enterprises, enabling them to decide what to produce, how to produce it and so on. We must immediately abolish the whole system of state orders in all spheres, whether it be for diamonds from Irkutsk or oil from Tyumen. A given proportion of any work collectives produce should be freely disposed of by the collective itself. And, most importantly of course, a currency reform. Without a currency and price reform, no other economic measures can work. A proper currency is essential to get the economic mechanism working.

At the moment we do not have real money, we only have some rudimentary means of exchange, but no real currency circulation. This is where we should be going. At present the government is not doing anything about this, but the majority of our leading economists think this should be started this year. Academician Abalkin's team is working out an alternative to the government's programme which postpones the introduction of a currency reform until the economic situation takes a turn for the better. But the economy will not improve if we maintain the existing situation.

Alexander, do you see any role for central planning in the future?

Alexander I have a fairly sceptical attitude to all-embracing plans. I am well aware how, for example, the Americans plan. They work things out scientifically, in a way we could not even dream of. Certainly we need some kind of plans, but these should be prognoses, not directives, if you are talking about the economy as a whole. As far as individual projects are concerned, these are planned the whole world over. They may be quite large-scale plans, but this is still not all-embracing planning.

I would also like to add something to what Arkady said about the question of social stratification. If we take the poorest pensioners on 30 roubles a month on the one hand, and the millionaires of the informal economy on the other, there could hardly be any greater inequality. But whether there are 30 or 300 underground millionaires is not important. The fact is that there are rich people.

Anyhow, if these people start to invest these sums in production, whether they buy shares or whatever, it will mean that they are consuming a much smaller proportion of their wealth. At the moment they can only really spend their money on a luxurious lifestyle. But then they will be able to use this money to expand their business interests - individual or collective - in order to gain even greater rewards later. The difference between the lifestyle of an American worker and an American capitalist



Alexander: 'If the Baltic states voted for independence now, this would be grist to the mill of the Russian conservatives*'

is by no means as great as the difference in their incomes. It should be like this here too. If a restaurant manager receives a very large income, he will spend it all on over-eating, over-drinking, women and jewellery, not on building a new restaurant. And this sort of luxurious lifestyle is what constitutes our stratification.

Do you think perestroika is now irreversible Arkady, or is there still a possibility of reversion to the 'strong-arm'?

Arkady I do not think that danger is very likely. After everything we have learned, and after what has happened in Eastern Europe, I think the processes here have become quite irreversible. If strong-arm methods were attempted, they would lead to violence and bloodshed, but, in the final analysis, they would not succeed.

You mean, if there were to be a coup here - either by the military or the conservatives in the party - the new leadership could not remain in place for long?

Arkady There is a lot of evidence to suggest this. The top levels of the army are very conservative-minded, but in the ranks and among the junior officers the mood is quite different, very radical, very democratic. So an attempt at a coup would not be able to rely on the army. Many officers would simply refuse orders. The same situation exists in the KGB. Therefore an attempt at a coup or a neo-dictatorial regime strikes me as unlikely.

What do you think, Alexander?

Alexander In our country there is no tradition of military coups. Like Arkady, I see no likelihood of a classical military coup. Nonetheless, things do not always proceed in a straight line, and it is possible that for a certain period conservative forces could be victorious. Set-backs are possible. Nothing in the world is irreversible. Look at what happened in China last summer. But it is unlikely.

There is the possibility that Gorbachev himself could turn into a Brezhnev, could roll perestroika back, for fear of losing his grip on power. Do you think this likely now?

Alexander I don't think Gorbachev would be able to turn into a Brezhnev. Brezhnev was like that from the beginning. And I knew immediately Brezhnev assumed power that this was a step backwards.

Arkady Personally, I would consider that danger to be somewhat greater. Gorbachev does not react well to criticism. On many questions he considers himself to be absolutely correct and genuinely the supreme arbiter. Of course he has not yet made any great blunders, moreover on balance his positive services far outweigh his mistakes. But precisely because of this I think it is essential to maintain a consistently critical attitude towards Gorbachev, despite my great respect

for him. An uncritical attitude, regarding all his actions as good, or welcoming his every move, would also make it much more likely that he would be unwilling to surrender power when the time comes.

Perestroika began about five years ago. What do you think things will be like in five years' time? Will Gorbachev and the CPSU still be in power?

Arkady To stick my neck out, I think the country will have changed a great deal in five years' time. I don't think the current Congress of People's Deputies or Supreme Soviet will continue for its full five-year term. In a year or two the Congress and Supreme Soviet will have to dissolve themselves or change in some way. This may be preceded by work on a new constitution. And once the new constitution is in place, without waiting for the expiry of its term, new elections could be held, far freer than those held last year.

The CPSU will undoubtedly break up - this is already happening now - into a conservative wing, as Alexander suggested, and most probably two democratic parties. One party would be more of a bourgeois party, and the other more of a left social-democratic party. The Communist Party in five years' time will not be contending for power, and power will be held by a coalition of the social democrats and, to use the old terminology, bourgeois circles.

As far as Gorbachev personally is concerned, his chances of remaining in power are very good, because he is fairly well trusted. Whether he retains that trust depends to a considerable extent on how he behaves in the immediate period ahead. If he has the courage and decisiveness to continue to stand at the head of the reform movement, and he makes the distinction between himself and the orthodox communists clearer, then his energy and authority will suffice for five years. So he will survive the elections in two to three years' time and win two national presidential elections. His chances are very good.

Will he be a social-democratic or a communist president?

Arkady He will be one of the leaders of the social democrats. I don't think he will continue to take this centrist position. But the bulk of his support will be personal support. In 1995 Gorbachev will still be head of state.

Alexander I do not really understand the position taken by some of our comrades, including Arkady, who continually encourage the people to remove our current Supreme Soviet as quickly as possible. For the first time in our history we have at last created this body, which is radically different from the Stalin/Brezhnev Supreme Soviet.

I hope the Supreme Soviet last out to the new elections in 1994, which I am convinced will take place in a multi-party system containing one strong party led by Gorbachev. I don't know what

it will call itself and do not really care to be honest. I see communism as just some kind of ideal dream and not as a reality to be striven for. I have always regarded it like that. Whether they call their party communist or socialist is up to them.

In 1995, how many republics will make up the USSR?

Arkady In 1995 the empire will not yet have broken up into a number of republics. Unfortunately those processes do not occur as quickly as the restructuring of the political system. To be optimistic, I hope that the new constitution will lay down the principle that every nation in the union will have the right to its own statehood, to take that decision. 1995 will be an era of mass referenda, of choices about statehood. After 1995 a commission will be set up to adjust frontiers and share out the assets. It will be a period where the old structures are being broken up. How many republics there will be in total is difficult to say - probably around the same number as there are now.

Alexander, would you be so bold as to predict how many republics there will be?

Alexander If we can turn the economy round in a couple of years, and if we do not collapse before 1995, then this community of nations will survive without any coercion from the centre, and will be much more cohesive than the British Commonwealth. We are far more interconnected in many respects. Those Baltic republics which are in many ways far ahead of us in Russia are nonetheless a long way behind Western Europe. They would not be accepted into membership of the EC, not for political reasons, but because of their level of economic development. We all need each other a great deal. Take Azerbaijan for example. It produces around 60% of our oil industry equipment. But they could not sell that stuff anywhere else in the world. Nobody else would purchase it, only us. And it is like that in all respects, virtually. As the Swedes told the Latvians: 'Nobody could eat your pork except in central Africa, and you would not get it there!'

But we should reorganise our federation so that it becomes a genuine federation. Any party wishing to represent all the republics should have its politburo or executive committee made up of representatives from every republic, not like now. So in that respect I think things would not be unlike the way they are now. Well, maybe Lithuania or Estonia would try to secede completely, become totally independent, but this would depend on many factors, including the policies of the Western countries. They could of course artificially create conditions so that Lithuania could leave without experiencing any economic difficulties, but I do not think they would do this. I understand that in the USA they are not interested in this. Five years ago they would have been, but not now.



**Arkady:
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