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The USSR's Emerging Multiparty System.

Vera Tolz. CSIS Washington Papers/148.

New York: Praeger Publishers, 1990, 123 pp.

The Making of a Multiparty System

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The birth of a civil society in the Soviet Union has created a new dimension for study. Vera Tolz's compact volume serves as a useful primer detailing the activities of informal groups and their transition from historical societies to popular fronts and political movements. Well-documented, with sources from Soviet media and various *samizdat* publications, Tolz's work concentrates on the essential knowledge prerequisite to delving further into this emerging field.

Informal groups became active in 1986, the same year in which Andrei Sakharov was released from internal exile. While Tolz offers no connection between this significant event and the public's willingness to enter civil society, she does credit *glasnost'*, specifically citing Gorbachev's call for increased public participation. Associations of musicians, soccer fans, and readers of literature were among the first unofficial groups that gathered openly to share what, today, seem rather tame apolitical interests. Tolz marks them as significant, however, because they were the first to be recognized by the Soviet press.

Tolz's monograph concentrates on the period from August 1987, the date of the first officially sanctioned conference of unofficial groups, through the spring of 1990. Although in the era of *glasnost'* unofficial activity has been better tolerated, it was not

until 1988 that informal groups began to direct themselves more openly toward sociopolitical concerns. At that time, the authorities recognized the expediency of directing the various groups' attention to nonpolitical issues and, hoping to manipulate their agendas, created cooperative umbrella organizations in the form of popular fronts. These popular fronts were most successful in the Baltics where they were widely and genuinely supported, even by the local parties. In other republics, Belorussia and the Ukraine are noted as examples, the authorities attempted to block organizations that pursued nationalist goals.

Popular fronts were able to assert themselves over party influence and were established in all republics by the end of 1989. Generally, unofficial movements were more unified and more widely supported in non-Russian republics where cultural and ethnic issues helped to bond a population overshadowed by Russian dominance. Tolz reports that Russian nationalist interests were, until recently, unappreciated by the democratic movements in the RSFSR which tended to frame issues in all-union terms, ever acting the "elder brother," while denying the existence, to say nothing of the political value, of exclusively Russian concerns. Tolz suggests that this played into the hands of conservative Russian groups such as *Pamyat'*, *Otechestvo*, and the United Council of Russia, which were able to proclaim themselves the defenders of Russian national interests. In 1990, the democratic movement, determined to address Russian issues, began to incorporate them into revised platforms.

Increased democratic activity in 1989 inspired the creation of the Interregional Group of People's Deputies, a parliamentary faction of reform-minded communists belonging to the Congress of People's Deputies. Tolz devotes considerable space to the creation, sociological-demographic orientation, and program of the Interregional Group of Deputies. Though willing to voice their impatience with the pace of reforms, many members remained reluctant to act in overt opposition to the CPSU. Thus, a more radical association, the Democratic Platform of nonconformist communists, was established in January 1990.

The Democratic Platform, which includes Boris Yel'tsin, Yuri Afanas'yev and Gavriil Popov, is described by Tolz as an opposition force capable of dividing the CPSU. She elaborates on the group's program which advocated, among other things, not only a multiparty system but a CPSU-sanctioned split of the party dividing liberal-democratic from Conservative-Marxist members. Tolz suggests that the program had significant influence on the CPSU Central Committee Plenum which voted, one month later, to abolish the communist party's constitutionally assured monopoly on power, a victory long sought by many democratic groups. Nonetheless, democratic efforts remained encumbered by the lack of unity in their ranks, bedeviled by the superabundance of groups addressing specific concerns, and unable to organize for or appreciate the benefits of cooperation.

Tolz also discusses conservative informal groups, though not with the same emphasis given to democratic movements. The first active sociopolitical associations were the so-called Groups for the Preservation of Monuments. *Pamyat'*, which has received much attention in the Western press, though significantly less attention in this monograph, belongs in this category and began as an historical society later recognized for its aggressively anti-Semitic views. Tolz asserts that *Pamyat'*, although well-known, is not well-supported. Otechestvo, the Brotherhood of Russian Artists, and the All-Union Cultural Foundation are briefly mentioned as conservative Russian-nationalist groups. Also in this category, and given somewhat more attention, are the International Fronts of International Movements which first developed in the Baltic state in opposition to the nationalist agendas of non-Russian republics. The United Front of Workers of Russia, which adheres to an anti-market position and rejects the nationalist aspirations of non-Russian republics, appears more frequently in Tolz's study and is described in some depth.

Tolz reports that the United Front of Workers of Russia does not receive significant support, noting, for example, that the Kuzbass miners put forth liberal demands in conflict with the aims of the United Front of Workers. She attaches particular significance to the fact that the United Front of Workers emerged at the same time as

another conservative nationalist group, the United Council of Russia, which is suspicious of Gorbachev's reforms and recommends that workers reject economic initiatives. According to Tolz, the emergence of these two groups, both established in September 1989, signaled a growing unity among conservative forces. The creation of two groups, however, would seem to run counter to the notion of consolidation.

Tolz's treatment of the various groups' transition from apolitical, largely social agendas to overtly political behavior, from informal groups to parties, would benefit from a practical description of the process. She suggests that informal groups simply grew into such activity as the climate became less threatening, though she offers only vague references to an historical atmosphere of repression that may account for early timidity. Additionally, though Tolz provides an appendix that names the most significant unofficial movements, a clearer, more substantive abstract of the various groups' platforms would serve as a useful guide to future comparative analyses.

Considering the remarkable rate at which change has occurred in the Soviet Union, it is not surprising that Tolz's effort is so soon in need of revision. Tolz ends her study in the spring of 1990. The 28th CPSU Congress, which convened that July, disappointed members of the Democratic Platform; the split that Tolz saw as a possibility did not occur. Since the failed August coup, the party exists -- if at all -- in a state of exhaustion with a greatly reduced membership, its bankruptcy further demonstrated by Mikhail Gorbachev's decision to resign as general secretary. The revolutionary tide that has recently swept the union has accelerated republican agendas demanding independence. Some republics, while claiming to be on a democratic path, are showing signs of becoming increasingly totalitarian. In the Russian Federation, the post-coup euphoria has been blanketed with post-coup paralysis and Boris Yel'tsin remains frustrated, perhaps by a lack of democratic unity. Such circumstances wreak havoc with forecasts of continued gradual change.

In any event, Tolz's volume provides a solid foundation for further study of a multiparty system that surely must continue to evolve, whether or not it includes development at

an all-union level. Her report on the popular fronts may prove particularly valuable as these organizations continue to play significant roles coordinating factions, leading campaigns, and promoting candidates for popular election to the local soviets where, increasingly, the new power lies.

The precision and clarity with which Tolz presents the emergence of informal groups of the 1980s and the consequent evolution of a multiparty system make this study a valuable contribution to the rapidly changing landscape of Soviet politics.

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