

# AT THE HARRIMAN INSTITUTE

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## How Strong Are The Ligachev Battalions?

A stalemate exists in the current power politics of the Kremlin — a standoff between supporters of the radical brand of *perestroika* espoused by General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev and opponents of drastic reform, who are led by Yegor Ligachev, the number two man in the Politburo. This was the view expressed by Peter Reddaway, Director of the Kennan Institute for Advanced Russian Studies, in a talk with students and faculty of the Harriman Institute September 15, 1988 [two weeks before the Politburo shakeup at the Central Committee plenum].

Reddaway sees a growing separation in the Soviet leadership between these two factions, whom he labels the Gorbachevites and the Ligachevites. On the Gorbachev side, Aleksandr Yakovlev is the only Politburo member supporting Gorbachev one-hundred percent; Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze supports the General Secretary "eighty to ninety percent." Outside the Politburo, the Gorbachev coalition is comprised of reform-minded (often younger) officials in the Party and government bureaucracy, liberal intellectuals and liberally-inclined elements in the general population. The Ligachevites, an amalgamation of center-right forces, include Politburo members Viktor Chebrikov and Viktor Nikonov. In other institutions, many officials whose power and privileges are jeopardized by *perestroika* "see Ligachev as their hope for retaining their position." Reddaway also includes nationalists, reactionaries and conservative intellectuals among the Ligachev coalition.

### Moderate vs. Radical *Perestroika*

Policy differences between the two factions have come into sharper focus in just the last two years. The division was not evident when Gorbachev became General Secretary in March 1985, but roughly coincides with his shift from moderate to radical *perestroika* in early 1987. Indeed Ligachev was an original member of the coalition that supported Gorbachev's accession to power. Reddaway highlighted the salient components of the Gorbachevite program and indicated how these policies might be seen by Ligachevites and other skeptics in Soviet society.

At the lower levels of the bureaucracy "the Gorbachevites want to take away a lot of power and authority from the local party organizations as regards industrial, service and agricultural administration, to be replaced by local Soviets and socialist markets." Moreover, "they seem intent on destroying the *nomenklatura* system" and substituting it with meritocratic procedures for promotion and advancement. The functions of ministries are to be reduced and the power of the Central Committee Secretariat curtailed. Gorbachev's program also entails moving away from the unquestioned priority traditionally accorded to the Soviet security apparatus.

As for the general population, Reddaway noted that under Gorbachev "people have been expected to work harder, but they have not by and large experienced a rise in the standard of living." They are being exhorted to tighten their belts and wait for rewards that are promised for the early 1990s. This situation contains the increasing danger for Gorbachev that if these rewards are postponed, the support of the people will slip away from him. At this point "the Ligachevite *perestroika*, which lies between Brezhnevism and Gorbachevism, may seem the right choice to the *nomenklatura*." The Ligachevite program "is not as well-defined" as its counterpart, but falls under the rubric of moderate rather than radical change. It represents a toning down rather than a reversal of many of the Gorbachev initiatives.

### Skirmishes

"The conflicts over policy have inevitably become conflicts over power," explained Reddaway. He believes that the tide turned more favorably for the Ligachevites with the fall of Boris El'tsin in November 1987. "The El'tsin affair was the first serious blow to radical *perestroika*." In the year preceding it, Gorbachev had been urging the *nomenklatura* to be bold and radical in implementing *perestroika*. El'tsin was merely putting this into action, only to be ousted from the Politburo and his job as Moscow Party chief. "Gorbachev was forced to denounce El'tsin, to disown him. In doing so, he sent a message to others that



they couldn't rely on him to save them if they stuck out their necks."

The letter that appeared in *Sovetskaia Rossiia* in March 1988, supposedly written by a Leningrad professor named Nina Andreeva, started the next skirmish between the two coalitions. "The letter was basically neo-Stalinist, anti-Gorbachevite and amounted to a fundamental ideological and political attack on the Gorbachev program," explained Reddaway. In the reply that appeared in *Pravda* three weeks later, probably written by Yakovlev, the Andreeva article was described as "the political manifesto of anti-*perestroika* forces." But in the three week interim from its publication to the *Pravda* reply, the article was reprinted widely in the provincial and local press. Reddaway believes that the silence by the Gorbachevites was particularly striking. "For three weeks, none of the liberals dared do anything for fear of being on the wrong side. This is indicative of the fine balance that now exists between the two sides at the highest levels of leadership. I don't think it has become any less finely balanced since then."

The Party Conference last June was an overt opportunity for a realignment of power among the coalitions. Reddaway suggested that the selection of conference delegates prior to June was the most telling indication. Before the elections, the Gorbachevites had been optimistic for a substantial turnover of the Central Committee, for the most part a Brezhnevite body. "But when the elections revealed that the Ligachevites had won most of the selections, the Gorbachevites were forced to give up any plan of

a Central Committee turnover." Failing to change the composition of this body has seriously "reduced the chances for a realization of radical *perestroika*." Frustrated in their attempts to accomplish drastic personnel changes, the Gorbachevites have begun to put more emphasis on changing structures. This new strategy, illustrated by reforms of government and party structures approved at the conference, is an attempt to get around obstructionist officials who cannot be unseated from their positions.

### Saboteurs of *Perestroika*?

Reddaway describes Ligachev as a "clever politician and a tactician of the highest order." He hasn't denied involvement in the Andreeva affair or expressed any regret about it, and has been carefully picking up on anti-*glasnost*' feelings. In a recent speech he denounced demonstrations, spelled out his deep suspicion of socialist markets, and put himself on the line as an advocate of a tougher political order.

Reddaway expects the two sides to continue to maneuver for advantage. Gorbachev is in a better position to strike, but even if he were to succeed in ousting Ligachev somebody else would inevitably rise to the leadership of the conservative and traditional forces — "and at this stage, there would be more venom." The Ligachevite forces are not Ligachev's creation, and regardless of his fate, these battalions could become the saboteurs of radical reform.

*Reported by Robert Monyak*

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