

# PERSPECTIVES

## Soviet stagnation goes on

By Louis Menashe

**T**HE DEATH OF YURI ANDROPV a scant 15 months after he assumed office evoked genuine grief among ordinary Russians, according to reports from Moscow. When his predecessor passed away, dry eyes were the norm; Leonid Brezhnev, whose restoration of a sense of stability after the tumultuous Khrushchev years had turned into a depressing immobilism, was scarcely loved or respected. He had come to symbolize a system running out of steam—his very appearances in public suggested weariness and infirmity. Economic performance and morale were down, corruption in official circles was up. Abroad, a pistol-packing zealot in the White House was given to alarming rhetoric about the Soviet Union and to even more alarming military postures. Detente became a dirty word in Washington. As a peaceful framework for managing Soviet-American rivalry, detente, like Brezhnev, was dying.

Andropov revived hopes for dramatic turnabouts both domestic and foreign. After 15 years as head of the KGB, the Soviet internal and external security agency, Andropov had earned a reputation for hard work, honesty and a quality much admired by Russians, a business-like, practical approach to things. Dissidents and other sections of the intelligentsia despaired, and with good reason. Andropov was no political reformer, no votary of ideological pluralism. As KGB boss he had systematically decimated the ranks of the dissident movement and assaulted its *samizdat* and other networks. Now, as boss of party and state, he continued what amounted to a mopping-up operation. One interesting by-product of both detente and the dissident movement, Jewish emigration, was virtually shut down completely.

For others not particularly concerned about the democratic promise of Soviet socialism there were other priorities—getting more food on the table, tightening up standards among the ruling cadres that made up the comfortable coterie around Brezhnev, putting a stop to a policy of drift and to the erosion of national pride.

Here Andropov fulfilled some of the hopes, if only symbolically in some cases. He said he favored "actions, not...noisy slogans." His speeches were shorter; he eschewed the trappings of the leadership cult; he appeared promptly at his desk in the morning and put in a full working day. Within months of his accession, Andropov launched a law-and-order, work-discipline campaign that had militia men scouring the streets and the Turkish baths for idlers who should have been at their desks and shop-floors. Workers and personnel at the Ordzhonikidze Machine Tool Plant in Moscow were startled by a visit from the General Secretary himself in January 1983—toward the end of the work day. Andropov told them, "The main problem for us is to increase production efficiency," and that "millions of man-hours" were lost "because of time off taken during working hours, smoking breaks, absenteeism and slipshod work." Visible production pay-offs would come not from grander capital inputs but from a little Protestant ethic at the workplace: "The absentee, the botcher and the loafer damage not so much themselves as the collective and the society as a whole." This ethic, he assured his audience at the end of his visit, "doesn't apply only to workers and engi-

neering and technical personnel. It applies to everyone, starting with Ministers."

And he meant business; Andropov assaulted laxity and corruption in high places, continuing policies he started at the KGB and that had even touched the Brezhnev family. In June 1983 Gen. Nikolai Schelokov, a long-time Brezhnev associate, was one of two figures dropped from the Party's Central Committee on corruption charges, and was relieved of his duties as Minister of Internal Affairs. (Whether he goes on trial will be an index of where Konstantin Chernenko stands in these matters.) He was replaced by another KGB stalwart with a reputation for toughness, Vitaly Fedorchuk. Still another energetic KGB man (in his native Azerbaijan), Geider Aliyev, was ushered into the political limelight by Andropov shortly after Brezhnev's death. Brought into the Politburo as a full member and made a First Deputy Prime Minister, Aliyev is clearly a man to watch. He has been entrusted with trouble-shooting tasks, including trips abroad (he had been scheduled to visit Syria before Andropov died) and responsibilities for transport and consumer goods, where bottlenecks are a byword.

All of this—plus good weather—had a positive impact on overall Soviet economic performance for 1983. Gross national output increased by nearly 4 percent, just about doubling the rates for 1981 and 1982. Natural gas and petroleum production continued to rise and the grain harvest is expected to yield more than 200 million tons after four very bad years. Meat, milk and eggs production were also up, on the average of just over 6 percent. All in all, it was the best industrial and agricultural year since 1978.

Small wonder that Andropov was mourned. Still, the Andropov policies were little more than cosmetics applied with KGB elan. The problems of Soviet society and the economy run deeper than work discipline, itself a symptom not a cause of stagnation; they are not tractable to para-Stalinist methods of the cracking of the whip sort. Even if he had more time, better health and greater charisma, Andropov was not equipped to relieve the Soviet system of its encrusted burdens. The same may be said of the men of his generation and general outlook. (Although surprises are always possible: who could have predicted the dynamism of a Khrushchev?) One modest start in this direction, in the area of industrial organization, was actually begun in January of this year. In certain sectors, local managerial autonomy has been broadened, with the intent of loosening the grip of the Moscow bureaus and encouraging production innovations from below.

A real measure of the depth of Soviet problems comes from a confidential critique, circulated last summer, by the economist Tatiana Zaslavskaya. Excerpts reaching the West read like analyses of "bureaucratic deformations" made by Marxist critics going back to Bukharin and extending to contemporary Eastern European theorists. Entitled "Problems of Improving Socialist Production Relations and the Tasks of Economic Sociology," the paper attacks the "outdated nature of the system of industrial organization and economic management" and its inability to "insure complete and efficient utilization of the working and intellectual potential of society." The system "has been repeatedly amended, renovated and perfected, but it has never undergone a qualitative transformation," something for which "purely administrative methods are futile." The paper of-

fers sophisticated explanations for low worker morale and shoddy workplace practices, as well as for the mushrooming of "executives who...occupy warm places...with quite respectable salaries." Both conditions are system-generated and require basic reforms, not administrative tinkering.

Needless to add, reforms involving decentralization, autonomy and local initiative have enormous political implications. The Andropov regime's response to the paper was instructive as to the persistence of old habits. Instead of publishing it and encouraging public discussion of its analysis and recommendations, the government asked the KGB to track down those who had leaked the document to American newspapers.

Several things about the Chernenko

with the regular laws of bureaucratic functioning tend toward consensus, stability and continuity.

Third, Chernenko's appointment offers genuine possibilities for easing East-West tensions. Andropov was compelled to react in kind to Reagan's tough talk and provocative military gambits. If Soviet communism was the "focus of evil in the modern world" and would end "on the dust heap of history," then, as Soviet journalists put it, Reagan was "the Fuhrer's heir," a liar, a murderer and a hypocrite. (Andropov himself refrained from such coarse denunciations, as if to stress how far Reagan had sullied the discourse.) If Cruise missiles and Pershing IIs were deployed in Europe, then the USSR would break off arms negotiations and deploy advanced systems of their own in East Germany and Czechoslovakia.

In all probability, no Soviet leader could have swayed the Reagan administration from its course of overcoming the "Vietnam syndrome" of timidity abroad, especially in the Third World, or its drive to shut the alleged "windows of vulnerability" to Soviet nuclear attack. Now that Washington is buoyed by the glorious Grenada invasion and by a strategic weapons buildup, it's time to consider an opening of diplomatic opportun-

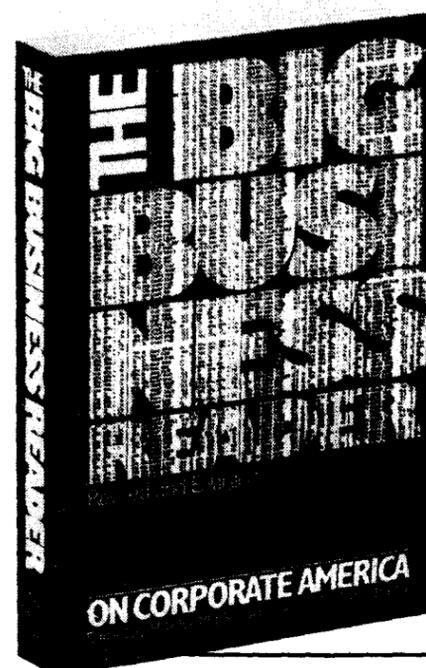


succession ought to be kept in mind. First, that his appointment represents no dramatic shift in weight from "younger" to "older" political figures. The fact that Brezhnev was virtually incapacitated for many of his final years in office and that Andropov was gravely ill during his last six months suggests that a collective leadership embracing old and young groups has been in place, making policy and running things. Chernenko is now its chief figurehead and little may be expected by way of change.

Second, even if Chernenko were reform minded (an unlikely possibility), or a reactionary, it would require many months and years to realize changes. A new Soviet leader does not simply install a new administration, as in the American political system, with some "mandate for change." Soviet political structure, with its self-appointing oligarchy, together

ity. Chernenko allows Washington to save face, to consider the harsh mood of the Andropov period as a bygone, particularly since the new leader's early pronouncements have been on the conciliatory side. This is, at any rate, the view of some leaders in the Atlantic alliance. Europeans (and Canadians) have a higher regard than Washington for the way the balance of forces has shifted in the recent past. The USSR cannot be consigned to pariah status. Its power has to be recognized and integrated into some broad, peaceful and mutually acceptable pattern of East-West relations. We have had a New Cold War. Perhaps the moment is at hand for a New Detente. ■

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## DIALOG

# Rosenbergs' sons dispute findings

On September 13, James Weinstein reviewed *The Rosenberg File*, by Ronald Radosh and Joyce Milton. The following is a response to the review and the book by Robert and Michael Meeropol, the children of Ethel and Julius Rosenberg.

By Robert and Michael Meeropol

Since 1974 we have often publicly cited the facts behind our firm belief that our parents, Julius and Ethel Rosenberg, were framed. Simply put, they were not guilty of "conspiracy to commit espionage." We remain convinced that they did not conspire and that they did not commit espionage. These conclusions are not based on our emotions, to which we readily admit, but rather on a careful sifting of the fruits of over 30 years of investigative work.

The evidence is overwhelming and remains uncontroverted in spite of Ronald Radosh and Joyce Milton's book, *The Rosenberg File*. The chief prosecution witnesses, David and Ruth Greenglass, and Harry Gold, repeatedly lied during the trial. These lies were critical to establishing the government's case. It also remains uncontroverted that key pieces of evidence were either fabricated or did not prove what they purported to show. We will concentrate here on five crucial examples, elaborating on each.

- David and Ruth Greenglass lied when they said our parents' console table had been a gift from the Russians. Ruth Greenglass lied when she said it had a hollowed out section so it could be used for microfilming. The table was not introduced at the trial, but was found later. Testimony established it had been purchased at Macy's as our parents had testified. It had three drill holes, but no hollowed out portion. The table is of critical importance because it is one of the only pieces of physical evidence that third parties could view in order to determine who was lying. In a conspiracy trial, where the case boils down to the defendant's word against the prosecution witnesses, credibility is the key.

- The Greenglasses lied when they said that our father convinced them to have passport photos taken. Walter and Miriam Schneir in *Invitation to an Inquest*, proved these photos, introduced at the trial, were family snapshots. Readers of the Radosh-Milton (henceforth R-M) book are never informed that the Greenglasses ever gave this testimony, let alone that it has been proven false.

- David Greenglass lied when he said our father had stolen a proximity Fuse from Emerson Radio where he worked during World War II. In our book, *We Are Your Sons*, we showed that our father could not have done this. The government, in fact, learned that no whole proximity Fuse was missing, and we provided evidence that our father could not have pieced a new fuse together from discarded parts while on a garbage detail. (*Sons* . . . pp. 190-192.) R-M reiterate the charge of theft but ignore the government's statement and our evidence.

- The Greenglasses lied when they said, "Ethel did the typing." R-M admit that the FBI got the Greenglasses to concoct that critical evidence against our mother only two weeks before the trial. But, R-M ultimately conclude that our mother probably was involved anyway.

- Like the Greenglasses, Harry Gold has been exposed as a liar. R-M admit that Gold had a long history of lying. They

admit that he created a fictitious life and once stated on the witness stand, "I lied so often it's a wonder steam did not come out of my ears." Yet they chose to believe most of what he said at the trial. The files show that Gold was putty in the FBI's hands. They show that his statements, just like those of the Greenglasses, changed in key ways between his arrest and the trial. R-M note that one such change occurred because Gold "corrected himself." (p. 45.) They ignore the pattern of changes in the course of the government's "development" of this testimony.

R-M claims to rise above the debate and describe their effort as an uninvolved "search for the truth." James Weinstein concludes in *In These Times* (9/83) ". . . any reader not encumbered with an ideological axe to grind would find Radosh's and Milton's conclusions convincing. . . ." *In These Times* readers should be skeptical of such statements. No doubt many readers noted the arrogance behind Weinstein's pronouncement that reasoned conclusions other than his own are impossible.

Because a conclusion supporting our father's guilt cannot be established from the trial testimony or evidence, R-M focus on data in the government files that was not used at trial. They claim that there is extensive circumstantial evidence of a second spy ring that our father voluntarily organized. They then rely on the existence of this spy ring to conclude that Gold and the Greenglasses told the essential truth.

What is distilled from almost 200,000 pages of government documents depends on the perspective of the researcher. Perspective provides the basis for determining what is important and what is not. Since the FBI has been known to fabricate evidence, a perspective also helps figure out what in the files to believe. We admit our perspective, but R-M fail to admit theirs. We view the McCarthy period as the government's effort to gather support for U.S. global economic and military expansion. We believe the government used a series of spy trials to help convince the public that its international post-war poli-

## Radosh and Milton take much of what the FBI says in the files at face value.

cies were defensive, as well as to "prove" that domestic communists were really agents of Stalin. The revelations of the Vietnam War period, Watergate, and CoIntelpro have shown a police pattern of political frameups, harassment, and assassination. The government's files were also designed for prosecutorial purposes. Thus, we are extremely skeptical of what is in the files.

R-M, on the other hand, take the position that the American Communist Party's blind support for the Soviet Union would naturally lead young zealots into espionage activities. As a result, R-M take much of what the FBI says in the files at face value. However, they claim to have believed in our parents' innocence in 1974. While this may be true, it was Radosh's conclusion that our father was guilty of "something" that led him to start working on this project. Far from an objective search for the truth, his work is an effort to marshal all the facts possible to bolster a set of preconceived ideas. Thus, his use

of the files not only reflects his perspective, but his determination regardless of the facts to reach the "right" conclusion.

Here are a few examples of how R-M misused the files. There are many more that space limitations will not permit us to cover.

**J.** Edgar Hoover, writing during the Korean War, asked if the activities of William Perl (a scientist and supposed member of the "other spy ring") had resulted in the Soviets

using American designs to build the MIG-15. The *World Telegram* ran this story as proof of the damage done by the spy ring. R-M include this story. However, in the FBI files are statements from three government agencies that there was no evidence of any American design in the MIG-15. R-M ignore these files.

A key argument in the book is their acceptance of the credibility of Jerome Eugene Tartakow, a jailhouse informer incarcerated with our father. Why would our father confess to this man in a presumably bugged cell, and then go to his death proclaiming his innocence without a word to his family and lawyer? R-M's acceptance of Tartakow has two parts: his supposed friendship with fellow inmate Eugene Dennis, head of the U.S. Communist Party, and accepting that Tartakow's stories "checked out." Simply put, he could not have known some of the things he told the FBI if our father had not told him.

R-M, echoing earlier work by Sol Stern and Radosh, use an uncorroborated (and subsequently denied) interview to make their arguments. They write that Dennis' friendship with Tartakow is proved by the fact that Dennis wrote a recommendation for him to Emmanuel (Manny) Bloch, our parents' lawyer. Bonnie Brower, who at the time was one of our attorneys working on our Freedom of Information Act lawsuit, is supposed to have told Radosh and Stern this. She denied it and called them liars. Her denial aside, how could she have known, she was a child at the time? Have R-M any other evidence to support this charge? No. Only Tartakow corroborates Tartakow. There is nothing in the FBI files about such a letter.

Tartakow suggested to Stern and Radosh that the reason our father confided the details of his espionage activities to him in jail was so that Tartakow would relay the messages to Dennis. Yet the FBI files show Tartakow telling the FBI that Eugene Dennis was among our father's friends in the prison. Thus, there was no reason for Tartakow to relay messages. The files are consistent with the memory of Dennis' widow, Peggy, whose arguments are dismissed by R-M because they ignore this crucial document. Here, the confirmation of Tartakow is torpedoed by Tartakow himself!

James Weinstein is very impressed that Tartakow independently corroborates his (Weinstein's) meetings with our father in Ithaca. However, the FBI had the basic outline of the trip to Ithaca before Tartakow mentioned it. Our father testified at the trial that he made at least one trip in an effort to borrow money. Revealingly, Tartakow's "independent corroboration" of this story was not given to the FBI until well after the trial. R-M ignore these facts. They also ignore Tartakow's more outrageous statements, including the evidence that led the FBI to believe that Weinstein himself was part of the spy ring.

R-M ask in reply, "Why would the FBI stuff untrustworthy material into its own files? What would have been the purpose of such an exercise?" The files show that the prosecution warned the FBI in February of 1951 that the judge might grant any defense motion demanding to see a record of all bureau statements that could be used as background to trial testimony. Thus, if the FBI ever wished to use any of the "Tartakow tales" against our parents, they had to have a record of them. The same is true for any material given after the trial in the event that a new trial was granted. R-M ignored this document and never considered this possibility.

In addition to abusing documents, R-M

misuse interviews. Two key individuals they quote extensively are John Gates and Junius Scales, former officials of the Communist Party. Walter Schneir recently re-interviewed them. Scales stated that the quote, "I had no doubt about the involvement of the Rosenbergs," does not apply to his knowledge in 1950. Scales stated that a third party told him in the 1960s that the manner in which our parents' *Daily Worker* subscription was cancelled was evidence of their guilt. Meanwhile, John Gates reiterated that he had indeed said: "Julius Rosenberg was very active . . . and one fine day he disappeared. We knew there was only one explanation. . . ." (Here R-M added that Gates made it clear that espionage was the only explanation.) But when Schneir asked if Gates had ever heard of our father before 1950, he said he had not. In fact, he had never heard of a Rosenberg subscription to the *Daily Worker* being cancelled. "I was an editor, what did I know about circulation?"

The key issue is whether these men had been in a position in 1945 or 1950 to know anything that would support the R-M hypothesis that our father and mother dropped out of the Communist Party and cancelled their subscription to the *Daily Worker* in order to become spies. Neither Gates nor Scales knew if they had dropped out or if they had cancelled a subscription. So what do the interviews with Scales and Gates prove, except that they believe 30 years later that our parents were guilty?

## Have Radosh and Milton any other evidence to support this charge? No. Only Tartakow corroborates Tartakow.

What about James Weinstein's two meetings with our father? We can't prove no espionage was going on. The files are incomplete and so is our knowledge. However, R-M provide absolutely no evidence that those meetings had anything to do with espionage.

Why is James Weinstein so easily convinced that *The Rosenberg File* "is a thoroughly and carefully researched book?" Weinstein claims his opponents have an ideological axe to grind, but he admits to none. Is it merely coincidence that his conclusion that our parents were "spies and victims" bolsters his already articulated views of the American Left? There is also an unadmitted personal involvement. Weinstein and Radosh have been personal friends for years. Radosh is a "sponsor" of *In These Times*. It was Weinstein's personal story that set Radosh in motion. Perhaps Weinstein believes *The Rosenberg File* is a thoroughly researched, objective book because Radosh told him so.

Weinstein also finds the fleeing to the Soviet Union of alleged spy ring members convincing "proof" that the espionage ring existed. However, *anyone* associated with our parents was harassed during this American inquisition. Does flight prove guilt? R-M claim that if those who chose to run were not guilty, they would have returned. Why? Those who left the U.S. developed successful careers in the Soviet Union, while those who stayed had their careers, reputations and lives ruined.

Is *The Rosenberg File* solely motivated by a search for the truth or is it a fraudulent attempt to stretch the data to reach exciting conclusions while bolstering previously held political beliefs? After all, a scholarly review of the files that concludes that doubts remain about the credibility of the Greenglasses, Gold and Tartakow, would never make the best seller list, would it?