

Anti-Semitism and nationalism at the end of the Soviet Era

A documentary exhibition on microfiche prepared and co-ordinated by the Institute of Humanitarian Political Research and "Memorial" (Moscow), the Second World Center and the International Institute of Social History, (Amsterdam).

The material was collected by the Institute of Humanitarian Political Research and "Memorial" (Moscow).

138 microfiche (positive silver halide)
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The problems of nationalism in the former USSR were not unique to the Gorbachev era. During the whole of the Soviet period official nationalism in one form or another crept out of the cheerful slogans which praised friendship amongst peoples and promoted Soviet internationalism. The borders between republics and autonomous regions were shaped and re-shaped, their administrative status was arbitrarily changed; local national communists, were declared servants of the national bourgeoisie; the Latin and Arabic alphabet were replaced with the Cyrillic; whole peoples were deported; first show-trials were set up against anti-Semites, then "cosmopolitans", (that is, citizens with Jewish names) were harassed; and citizens were threatened with international Zionism.

Few anticipated then that the national rather than the social policies of the Soviet regime would suffer the first blow. But the process of democratic reform in the USSR was accompanied by the growth of national consciousness and the yearning of people for a national system as a basis of social life. Under conditions of social crisis and political instability, however, this process was accompanied by an expansion of inter-ethnic conflict and the destruction of civil peace. On the one hand, the national movement played a great role in the destruction of the totalitarian state; on the other hand, nationalism and chauvinism became real factors in the destabilization of society. The

mismanaged process of development of inter-ethnic and inter-national conflicts in many regions of the former USSR has led to protracted bloody wars. The task of our exhibition is not to present a retrospective look at the theme of nationalism in all the years of the Communist regime. Instead we will focus on the events of the past five years.

We are examining the problem as an established fact. We shall show how perestroika provided the opportunity for

nationalism to surface and thrive. It acquired paper, printing presses, public squares and microphones and, finally, arms. In the past 'Beat the Yids' could only be read on bathroom walls or whispered in the streets, on public transportation or in waiting lines; but today anti-Semitism may be openly declared in the press and in full public meetings. Numerous leaflets, newspapers, posters, documents, photographs make up what is called, in legal terms, material evidence. In the



preparation of this exhibition we collected approximately 1,000 pieces of such material evidence. This exhibition will display a number of them.

Since 1988 the M-Bio Archive of the Institute of Humanitarian Political Research (IGPI) and the library of 'Memorial' have collected an enormous

amount of material on social, political and national movements. We have thousands of newspapers, leaflets, photographs and other documents on nationalism in the former USSR etc. This material is unique in many ways. It gives an insider's view of the complicated world of Soviet society in

the period of perestroika and post-perestroika.

Extract of the introductory text of the catalogue of the exhibition 'Beyond the Friendship of the Peoples' by Boris Belenkin, Mikhail Guedovsky and Marina Razozenova, August 1992.

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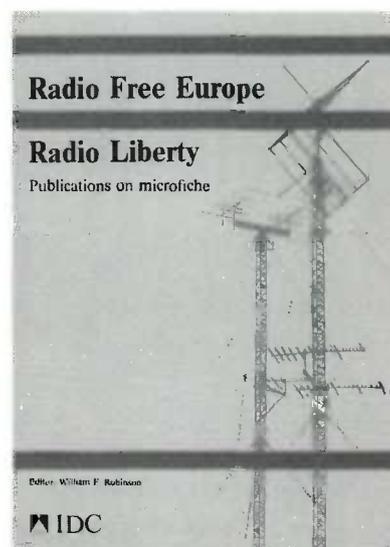
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