In the modern world regional problems are intensifying at a growing rate. On the one hand this is an effect of the scientific and technological revolution, which erases distinctions between developed and underdeveloped regions. On the other hand it is a result of the shifting of strategic balances between colonies and parent states and between the socialist and capitalist worlds. The aspirations of peoples to free themselves from the heritage of the past and to achieve new stages of progress are not realized without sharp conflicts taking place along various lines: East-West, North-South, center-periphery, and so on. As a result we see the collapse of old empires, changes in the character of relations between obsolete and newly emerging state structures, and the formation of new centers of growth.

World tendencies manifest themselves at different levels of intensity in individual countries. In the Soviet Union the vastness of the territory, combined with a natural, climatic, economic, and ethnic diversity unlike that of any other country, promotes regional problems. Such problems have always existed, but they have reached their highest level of tension under the conditions of Perestroika. Why? First, they were not completely resolved during the October Revolution of 1917 and the period of its reforms. Second, they were aggravated by the mistakes of a command-administrative system which, in the euphoria of total unification, lost sight of the micro-level of regional distinctions in the macro-level of national problems. Third, the crisis sweeping the country is being exacerbated by the specific developmental difficulties of its outlying areas in the minority republics. All these factors taken together have made regional problems of
paramount importance, threatening the territorial integrity of the state and its political system.

In Soviet historical science up to now regional problems have been seen primarily in terms of their ethnic or regional (i.e., "local") aspects. This view cannot be accepted. The problems of Central Asia are not purely ethnic in nature, and of course the development of Siberia, especially the construction of its fuel-energy industry, is hardly merely a "local" issue but is of national and even international significance. Likewise, events in Abkhazia, Fergana, Vorkuta, and the Kuzbass cannot be viewed from just one angle, either national or social. These form a tight knot of different problems; however, they all have one feature in common: the unadjusted mechanism of interaction between the center and the provinces, between the state as a whole and its constituent parts.

The study of this problem demands a systematic approach, but first an understanding of the political factors which have prompted regional development and determined its course is necessary. The Soviets inherited a huge empire from the tsars with all its economic, social, and ethnic conflicts customarily resolved by means of domestic and foreign policy. From the first days of Soviet power a leitmotif of its domestic policy was the principle of equalizing the levels of economic development of different regions, helping those which were less advanced to catch up, and guiding previously backward minorities to make a direct transition to socialism bypassing the capitalist stage.

However, those achievements did not decrease but rather increased a number of problems. The new economic and cultural development in previously backward regions and a strengthening of the position of their ruling and intellectual elites led to a rebirth and heightened sense of national dignity. Since the former outskirts of Russia did not go through the capitalist stage in their development and had preserved a lot of feudal [sic ed.] survivals, the process of obliterating ethnic distinctions was not completed there, and that became a cultural medium for nationalism.

In general, today's difficulties in solving the nationalities problem in the USSR are linked to the tension between two powerful and absolutely opposed forces: the tendency towards separation and that towards integration. These tendencies have characterized different historical periods but have been chronologically combined in the Soviet Union. The incompleteness of some im-