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THE DISPUTE OVER THE RED CHURCH IN IVANOVO: CHANGING RELATIONS BETWEEN PARTY, STATE AND SOCIETY AS ROOTED IN RELIGIOUS POLICY IN A RUSSIAN PROVINCIAL REGION, 1984-89*

Alienation of the state from society has been a characteristic feature of Russian government; it was reinforced in the Soviet era by the rule of the Communist Party in isolation from the rest of society. How was the relationship between the state and the rest of society influenced by the decline of the Communist Party and the rise of independent social activity during the Gorbachev years?

The following analysis addresses this question by tracing a conflict that evolved in 1988-89, when Russian Orthodox believers in Ivanovo demanded the return of the so-called Red Church. The dispute reflected the changing interaction between the Communist Party, state and society as rooted in religious policy in the Ivanovo region (Ivanovskaya Oblast') from 1984 to 1989.

This study will bring the state back into Soviet studies without neglecting society.

1. Ivanovo, situated on the Uvod River 320 kilometers northeast of Moscow, has been a textile center since the middle of the eighteenth century; it became a provincial capital only in 1929. It won a special reputation of glory in Soviet history because the first workers' council (sovet) emerged in what was then Ivanovo-Voznesensk in 1905. Ivanovo became a main supplier of 'female weavers for show' (svadebnye tkachikhi) to the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet and other organizations under control of the Party. See V. M. Kolosov, N. V. Petrov and L. V. Smirnagin, Vesna 89. Geografia i anatomia parlamentskikh vyborov (Moscow, 1990), pp. 242-44.

2. The need to bring the state back into focus has been stressed by for instance Eugene Huskey in his introduction to Eugene Huskey, ed., Executive Power and Soviet Politics: The Rise and Decline of the Soviet State (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 1992), p. xiii. The need to integrate studies of political institutions and society has been pointed out, for instance, by
to provide an opportunity to survey the multidimensional nature of the transformation of political organization and social structures in a systematic way. The time-frame makes it possible to follow the gradual, yet rather dynamic process of ideological and functional disintegration culminating in a moment of more intense conflict.

This analysis is based upon a systematic study of primary sources, including originally confidential documents.

**Ideological Disintegration: The Atheistic Campaign Fades Away:**

In principle, every primary organization and every Communist in the Ivanovo region was obliged to agitate for atheism and to be on guard against believers. In 1981 the regional Party leadership, the Oblastnoi komitet Kommunisticheskoi Partii Sovetskogo Soiuz, obkom KPSS (henceforth obkom), instructed all its city and district committees (gorkomy and raikomy), the executive committee of the regional soviet (oblispolkom) and the regional committees of the trade unions and Komsomol to strengthen the atheistic education of the population, especially women, children and young people; editors of the local papers were to be innovative in their attempts to influence the general public. That instruction was still in force in the mid-1980s.

Available for these efforts was a veritable army of 258 councils for scientific atheism with 1,802 members in industrial enterprises, kolkhozy and sovkhozy, 1,103 agitators and 526 lecturers. Yet the head of the Department for Agitation and Propaganda in the obkom apparat in May 1987 characterized the campaign as a failure; the obkom bureau decided to intensify the campaign, motivated by resolutions at the Communist Party’s 27th Congress and plenary sessions of the Central Committee.  

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3. The population of the city of Ivanovo in 1991 was 482,200; of the region, 1,316,400. By 1988 the Party had 2,227 primary organizations and 110,502 members in the region (IOTsDNI 327,16,765, p. 66). [The figures following the acronym refer to the fund, the inventory and the number of the document.]  

4. IOTsDNI, 327,16,360, p. 1. The instruction was based on a resolution of the Central Committee of 7 August 1981.  