

# Soviet foreign policy examined

by Michael Burns

The controversial subject of Soviet Foreign Policy under Brezhnev was recently examined at a lecture given by Dr. Frederick Starr, Secretary of The Kennan Institute for Advanced Russian Studies in Washington, D.C. As the icy Stalin era at last shows signs of thawing out, Starr explained, the Soviets are flooding the world with information about themselves. Like all nations, the U.S.S.R. is in a constant state of change, and if the West is to come to terms with and understand this important world force, its motives and designs, then this enormous volume of information must be tackled, sorted and sifted in a highly rational and organized manner.

As we approach the twenty-first century, said Starr, there will be considerable debate concerning the character of both Soviet Society and Soviet Foreign Policy. The controversy is largely the culmination of several facts of international life, including the widespread evidence that the U.S.S.R. is actively engaged in strengthening its military. This has "raised eyebrows", so that the implementation of active foreign policy around the globe has been characterized as both "adventurous" and "opportunistic". The broadening debate, said Starr, in part represents the effect of greater contact between the West and the Soviet Union. This is manifest in such

diverse areas as housing and technology exchanges, business contacts and the upcoming congressional visit to Russia in April. It seems, he went on, that as the two orbits increasingly collide, the many "newcomers" are actively engaging in a process of sorting out mutual impressions.

There are many sides to the debate, but according to Starr, three important issues stand out. First, to what extent is the U.S.S.R. likely to be a stable and predictable actor in the international forum? Second, what are the domestic pressures, needs and demands of the Soviets in terms of technology and consumer goods, and how will these influence foreign policy? Third, will the

U.S.S.R. hesitate to use force as a tool of foreign policy?

Starr has isolated two schools of interpretation which have polarized to a large extent around the cliché of a "hardline-softline" dichotomy. Although the two sides are often at variance with one another, it is well established that both are highly-informed and have advanced convincing arguments in support of their respective positions.

If the Soviets are releasing much more information about themselves, it is because they have developed into a sophisticated society, and because they themselves need information and recognize that information flow is a two-way channel. The fact that the

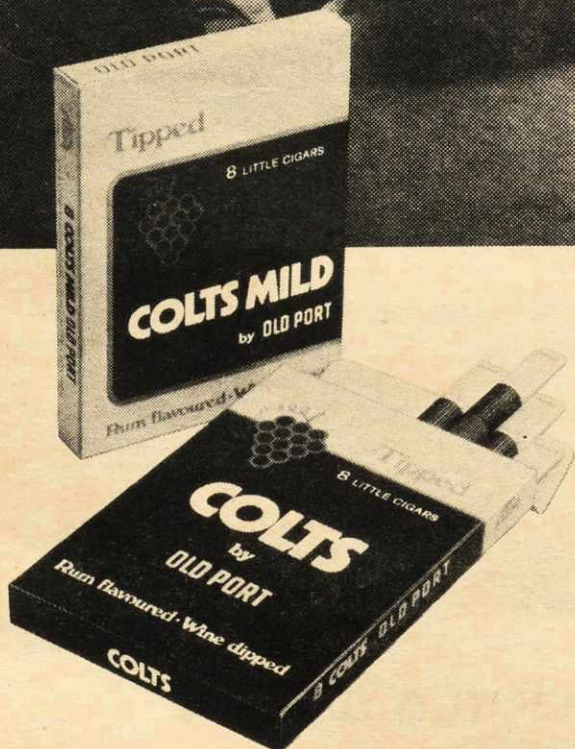
Soviets can no longer supply their own labour demands is one such piece of information which has emerged. The Softliners have proposed that the Soviets are intent on a drive to advance the nation's technology, so that labour will become more productive. The Hardliners, Starr proposed, have interpreted the same information flows somewhat differently, arguing that instead the Soviets will increasingly expand their sphere of influence to incorporate a greater pool of labour.

A second important fact has become clear. Demographic evidence suggests that by the year 2000 AD, one third of the Soviet population will be Muslim. This comes as a surprise, Starr said, since, under Stalin, Islam was "savagely attacked", and the number of Mosques was slashed from 1500 to 300. However, he went on to say, there exists a huge, organized undercover movement within the U.S.S.R. The two schools ask how these facts affect foreign policy. Hardliners hold that the Soviets can present themselves as the "brothers" of Muslims in Afghanistan, or Iran, and so wield influence in these areas. Softliners, however, having established that the U.S.S.R. took Ayatollah Khomeini seriously as early as 1970, (describing him as a "dangerous fanatic"), hold that the Soviets, in part activated by their own Muslim unrest, will exercise restraint in those areas. Thus again, contends Starr, one may observe two sidely differing interpretations of the same data.

Even as the several controversies rage in the West, Starr said, a very similar debate is going on within the Soviet establishment itself. The Hardline position in the U.S.S.R. holds that Foreign Policy is more important than Domestic Policy, and this is often argued historically. Since Napoleon's ill-fated thrust into Russia, the Soviets have felt it necessary to "arm themselves to the teeth". This has resulted in considerable military influence and the tradition of a militarized society. On the other hand, the Softline position within the U.S.S.R. emphasizes the role of Domestic Policy, with restraint on Foreign Policy. A second important issue where Starr has observed the two sides to oppose diametrically is worthy of attention. Hardliners argue that the Russia created by Stalin is still very much intact, and although a number of his excesses have been universally denounced, his institutional structures have survived. Their position is grounded in the nation of continuity, and cites the assimilation of Stalin by the young generation as evidence. Typically at variance, the Softliners stress the break with Stalin. Like Maslow, they argue that people can not always be "motivated by a stick", and in fact are in need of "carrots", or higher-order motivators to produce the desired increase in G.N.P. Starr points to Britain, where

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