

We were told of many obstacles to reform ranging from the resistance of the apparatchik to the lack of trained personnel, but two points stand out in our minds.

First, we did not fully appreciate the depth and breadth of the changes required to move the Soviet Union to a market system. To take the case of agriculture, the Soviet journalist Igor Abakumov described the crisis—"everything has changed but nothing changes"—as traceable back to Stalin's forced famines and mass deportations of the Russian peasants in the 1930s. "The Russian farmer was destroyed as a personality type. It is necessary to recreate a way of thinking that was destroyed. First we must change the brain."

Abakumov was frankly pessimistic that the system could reform itself. He acknowledged that Gorbachev understood the need to encourage the farmer by permitting private ownership, but claimed that the President was deterred by the fact that every problem was connected to every other problem and that "if you take an axe and chop it all apart, you will have a catastrophe." In these circumstances, and speaking again only of the agricultural sector, Abakumov thought that the most promising approach was "to win beachheads from the existing system and thereby create models for others to use." He offered, as an example, various schemes to encourage foreign farmers to set up colonies on land provided by the state under long-term leases. He urged Canadians to get involved, although he added this warning. "One hundred Canadians should come and lease some land. If one came alone, he would be crushed."

The second point we would make about economic reform is that it is partially a victim of political reform—glasnost. The right to dissent includes the right to oppose change and there is considerable evidence that many of the people in the Soviet Union are doing exactly that. When polled about the choice between rationing (the present system) or higher prices (the result of eliminating subsidies on the way to the market), a majority of Soviet citizens said that they preferred the line ups, particularly during working hours. In fearing the wrath of the people, Mr Gorbachev may only be illustrating that his shortcomings as an economist arise from his skills as a politician.

To summarize the debate about economic reform, everyone agrees that the Soviet Union must move towards a market system, the only questions being what kind and how quickly? A top figure in the Communist Party of the Ukraine, Vitold Fokin, explained his opposition to drastic medicine by comparing it to teaching a child how to swim by throwing it into deep water. He asked rhetorically, "But what if it is your child?" These and other indicators suggest to us that Mr Gorbachev is not going to opt for the Polish solution, but instead pursue a more gradual approach to the market. The economist Vladimir Popoff, offered an explanation as to why: "In Poland there is a consensus for sacrifice but not here."