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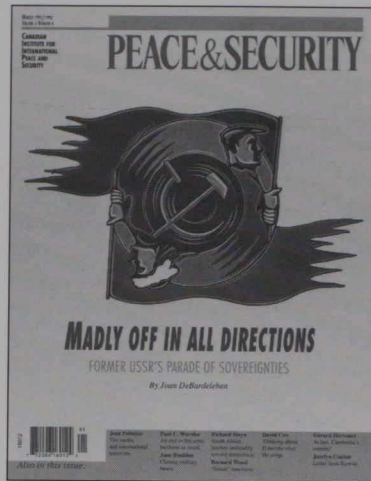
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NOTE FROM THE EDITOR



■ “Madly Off In All Directions,” our lead story this time (with appropriate acknowledgements to Stephen Leacock for the title) is a less starry-eyed appraisal of the USSR’s alarmingly rapid political decomposition than we are used to. Apart from “chaos,” the words used most commonly in association with Soviet events of the last year seem to have been “democracy,” “freedom,” “independence,” “self-determination” – affirmative, hopeful words all of them.

Joan DeBardeleben reminds us that like other places in the world, “the people” don’t have very much to do with what is going on in several corners of the former Soviet nation. In some cases local members of far-flung bits of the old communist apparatus severed ties with the centre for fear of being dragged down with the Moscow communist party ship after the August coup. Elsewhere, demagogues continue to exploit ancient ethnic fears and widespread deprivation in order to settle scores with enemies new and old.

Then there are the enormous disparities in power and resources between Russia, and the other much smaller republics. In the final days of November, the government of Russia announced that it had given up on trying to pursue economic reform in concert with other republics. “They can get on the train with us or stay behind – it’s up to them” was the tone of press reports about how Russian republic negotiators felt about the other eleven. But Russia can afford to play the bully. A year before the coup, a Russian economist, Vassily Silunin, told me in

a voice that left no doubt about how he viewed economic relations between the republics:

All we have to do is look through USSR foreign trade statistics. Half of this profit comes through selling oil – *Russian* oil. The next most important export is natural gas – *Russian* gas. Then there is gold – *Russian* gold. Then wood – *Russian* wood. Until now, all this income from Russian goods has been distributed across the Union.

Ethnic differences aside, the smaller republics are torn between on one hand, staying in a union and, in DeBardeleben’s words, finding “themselves underlings in a revised edition of the former Soviet empire,” and on the other, taking the chance that they can make their way in the world on their own. It is still very early days of what will continue to be an intricate political dance among the twelve.

– Michael Bryans

Canadian Institute for International Peace and Security

360 Albert Street
Suite 900
Ottawa, Ontario
Canada K1R 7X7
Telephone (613) 990-1593
Fax (613) 563-0894

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