

## Great expectations, greater disappointments

SPECIAL TO THE GAZETTE BY ERIN FITZPATRICK

(Kaliningrad, Russia) - August 19th marked the six year anniversary of Gorbachev's arrest, and the official end of communist rule in Russia. However, in most towns across the country, no celebrations took place.

For some people, like Kolya Andreev, a computer programming student at Russia's Kaliningrad University and son of one of Russia's successful new entrepreneurs, it is simply "too early to be

For others, said Lena Pretona, a literature student and daughter of a naval officer, "Life is worse now. Most people in my parent's generation would even like to see com-

munism return to Russia."

During Russia's 1996 presidential election, Democratic Party leader, Boris Yeltsen, tied Communist Party leader Genady Zuganor's vote 35 to 31 per cent. A second election was required before Yeltsin could be proclaimed president.

Many Russians are unhappy with their situation as a capitalist country. Capitalism hasn't brought the changes everyone expected it

"I guess we kind of thought we would be the United States in a week," said Andreev.

Pretona compares the situation to Leningrad during World War II.

"Do you see all of these starving people in the streets? During communism that was very, very

rare. And last spring, my family had no hot water, no gas, no electricity. When it was communism, you got gas if you paid for gas."

While there is an ample supply of gas in Russia, and in fact, of many other products which would never have been seen here during the communist regime, few people can afford to buy them.

Russians earn an average monthly wage of \$130 (US). Sadly, some people earn as little as \$13 (US). With inflation averaging around 50 per cent and peaking as

high as 200 per cent, most suffer from relatively weak purchasing power.

"Foreign products that no one can afford that's all it is, capitalism in Russia." said Pretona

Andreev agrees that Western style capitalism has not yet developed, "We've got some strange situation between communism and capitalism; I don't know what it is." But he

situation means more than just sion of \$25 (US). As a result most Western labels on store shelves, it Russian pensioners have to find

means opportunity.

sibilities. I believe really clever people can have anything they want...Before, you could not dream about your future because it was planned for you: You are an engineer, your whole

situation as a capi-

talist country.

Capitalism hasn't

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changes everyone

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said Andreev.

life you will be an engineer. You will never be a chief." Pretona is quick to counter that

such certainty about the future is Many Russians are exactly what some unhappy with their people want.

"Now have more freedom but less stabil-

Foreign products

that no one can

afford — that's all

it is, capitalism in

Russia.

Ultimately Russia's decision to stay with capitalism or return to communism will depend on which of these concepts prevails in the upcoming years.

Stability is of more use to the older generation, who must survive

believes, Russia's new economic on Russia's minimum monthly pen-

supplementary income. It is not "Everyone now has more pos- now unusual to see a 70 year-old

woman cleaning out gutters. These people miss the pension they had under communism, which allowed them to live comfortably.

To which Andreev asks,

"Why do people only remember the good things about communism? They are so stupid. These are the same people whose friends and relatives went to Stalin's prison camps. They were afraid to say anything, to do anything... They forgot how bad life was before.'

Freedom, democracy, capitalism — these are abstract concepts in a country where concrete hardships are felt increasingly each day.

"It might have been a bad life under communism," said Pretona. "But at least it was life; Now it is only survival."

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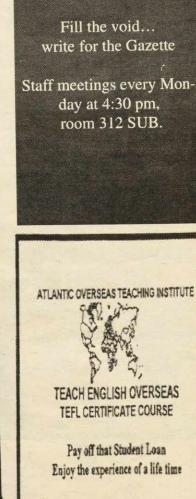
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