

# Grim shadows fall on glasnost

“Stalinism is coming back.” That was the prediction made to me in a hushed voice by an exceptionally reliable Soviet contact who has never, so far, been wrong. Other sources, whose contacts run right up to the top party and government leadership, have been giving me equally ominous news.

A great storm of reaction may be brewing in the hidden recesses of the Soviet Union. These sources say the growing shortages and lengthening lines that make life misery for Soviet consumers are being purposely created. Two weeks ago, there was no milk at all to be had, even in Moscow.

My sources claim that consumer products are being diverted, stored or held off the market. At the same time, crime is soaring in all parts of the Soviet Union.

I saw on my last trip to Moscow just how active and visible the Soviet mafia had become. Now, violent crimes — robberies, rapes, burglaries — are bringing fear to once safe Soviet cities. Where are the police, ask Soviet citizens? They just don't seem to be around.

For the good reason, my sources claim, that the police may have been ordered to permit an upsurge of criminal activity. Why? To turn angry Soviet citizens against the present leadership and prepare the groundwork for a Stalinist restoration.

This will mean a clampdown on free speech, strict censorship, repression of all dissidents and nationalists in areas like the Baltic or Armenia. It will also mean a return to centralized planning and the end to limited free enterprise.

Senior Soviet spokesmen have made no secret of the fact that there is powerful opposition to glasnost and perestroika. But what I am now hearing suggests that



## Eric MARGOLIS

this faceless opposition may strike soon. What's more, highly placed Soviet citizens are growing very frightened by what they see coming. Some even whisper that the gulag may be reopened.

Western journalists and Soviet watchers have utterly failed to see the dramatic upsurge over the past three years in the power and reach of the KGB. After the recent government reorganization, the KGB has emerged with new authority. Another singular fact missed by the western media: The new KGB chief is an ultra-hardliner who formally headed its department of “wet” affairs — the top-secret section which deals death to the enemies of the Soviet Union.

But what about perestroika and glasnost, the enormous burst of freer speech and freer thought that has so enchanted and charmed the West?

My Soviet sources tell me something extremely disturbing. They insist that all of the freer speech in the newly liberated press, all of the openness and candor, is not only contrived but carefully controlled by the party leadership. Added to this murky, confused situation is the question of Gorbachev's real role. In the West he is seen as a daring reformer who is “trying to drag” and push creaky old Mother Russia into the modern world

in a decent, humane way. That is how I want to think of Mikhail Gorbachev and generally how I do. But there's a good deal of circumstantial evidence to also suggest that Gorbachev may represent forces that we in the West do not see.

I will examine this startling theory in a subsequent column. For now, suffice it to say my Soviet sources are torn between viewing Gorbachev as either a true reformer or the spokesman for some of the most hardline elements in Soviet society.

Of one thing there is no doubt. Political power in the USSR, which was widely decentralized after Stalin, is now being once again concentrated by Mikhail Gorbachev. In a few years he has come from nowhere, seized the party leadership, ousted all of his rivals, purged the mighty armed forces and has now taken effective control of the government.

To do his good works, perhaps he will need such powers. But what if his works are not good? What if he decides that persuasion cannot work and that only force or terror will? Soviet citizens are growing fearful.

Some sense that a severe winter storm is gathering beyond the horizon. The Baltic and the Caucasus are seething with rebellion. Reports are coming in of growing unrest in Ukraine and Central Asia. East Europe is like a time bomb.

I hope these grim thoughts are wrong. My earnest desire is to see Gorbachev, a leader whom I greatly admire, turn his nation into a well-off, humane place. But try as I may, it's impossible to ignore the telltale signs of sinister developments. Or to catch some of the nameless fear that my Soviet friends so clearly feel.

In spite of the warm sunshine of glasnost, they are shivering.