



AFPC's Moscow Summer School "Testing the Limits of Glasnost"

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Related Categories: Democracy and Governance; Intelligence and Counterintelligence; Russia

The American Foreign Policy Council traveled to the Soviet Union this past June to co-sponsor the Moscow Summer School. This was an unprecedented, historic event. Robert Reilly, AFPC Senior Fellow, guided the Summer School where, for the first time in 70 years, a private group made its case for a free society in the heart of the Soviet Union. Along with co-sponsor Independent University, AFPC was invited by the USSR Academy of Sciences to present a series of lectures. The topics that were presented by our group covered the subjects of freedom, democracy and the benefits of a market economy.

Lecturers included Senators Phil Gramm (R-Texas) and Robert Kasten (R-Wis.); Commentary Editor-in-Chief Norman Podhoretz; Midge Decter of the Committee for a Free World; U.S. Ambassador to the Holy See, Frank Shakespeare; Academicians Andrzej Brzeski, Charles Dunn and Father Stanley Jaki; Distinguished Soviet émigré sculptor/philosopher, Ernst Neizvestny; and former Assistant Secretary of the Treasury, Paul Craig Roberts.

During the week long Summer School hundreds of Soviet intellectuals, students and government officials attended the numerous sessions devoted to "testing the limits of glasnost" – Gorbachev's term for openness. The Summer School represented an exploratory step toward the possibility of establishing a university in Moscow that would be independent of the state.

Soviet officialdom bent over backwards to accommodate the Summer School entourage. The government allowed the group to use the plush Hotel Oktoberskaya, normally reserved only for Communist Party officials and, even in Moscow, a well kept secret. A fleet of limousines were provided to service all the needs of the Summer School participants. The Soviet hosts obviously had been given the authority to make our visit as pleasant and as positive as possible. The opening "class" was conducted by Senator Phil Gramm. Topic of discussion: "Capitalism, Individual Freedom, and Opportunity". Senator Gramm's candid presentation was well received by our Soviet counterparts, but later we were informed that it was not "radical" enough for many of the students.

A number of lecturers' direct analyses of Western perception of the Gorbachev "reforms" provoked negative reactions from some of the Soviets. But a few of the Soviets appreciated the straightforward and honest insight these American visitors were providing.

Lectures entitled "Why the Soviet Economy Doesn't work: Requirements for a Successful Economic Reform" and "Morality and Economic Progress" provided direct assaults on the lack of private ownership in the USSR.

Attacks on the inability of the Soviets to create a functional command economy drew resounding approval. "If these changes are so obviously necessary," one spectator inquired, "what is stopping us from achieving this reform?" Dr. Roberts replied, "Nothing but the dead hand from the past."

The Summer School concluded with an extended meeting with Politburo Member Aleksandr Yakovlev, whom many ascertain is Gorbachev's right-hand man. Mr. Yakovlev began the session with a prepared statement containing platitudes on Perestroika and Glasnost. Mr. Yakovlev lauded the new level of détente between our two countries and expressed his sincerest wishes that this growing rapport would continue in a symbiotic fashion. He pursued the possibility that the Soviet Union could benefit greatly from the wealth of knowledge the United States possessed regarding economic concerns. In return perhaps the Soviets could broaden our horizons in the political realm. Needless-to-say, many members of our group were somewhat incredulous.

The epic question revolving around the reality of Glasnost was answered by the candid critiques offered by many of the Soviets regarding their domestic peril. But inevitably the "progressive" remarks regarding reform were always followed by the party line.

The meeting with Aleksandr Yakovlev, the formidable head of ideology for foreign policy, illuminated the fact that old line ideology still persists. For when the members of our group queried Yakovlev further, the veneer of benevolence proved very thin.