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Soviet industry manufacturing goods polluting environment at frantic pace

By GUNTER HAAF
 (Haff writes on science and technology for Die Zeit, the West German weekly.)

Communist countries have long claimed superiority over capitalist societies in protecting the environment. But now a new book, smuggled out of the Soviet Union and published here in West Germany, reveals that pollution in Russia is just as bad as it is in the West — if not worse.

The difference, though, is that information on environmental conditions in the Soviet Union is a secret tightly held by the government because, as its author says, such data are "state property along with the soil, the rivers, the forests and their inhabitants, including animals."

The author of the book, who signs himself with the apparent pseudonym "Boris Komarow," is evidently a dissident Soviet scientist. Unless his volume is total fabrication, which seems unlikely, he has had access to classified Russian studies and to other dissident Soviet ecologists.

Despite official Kremlin denials of any environmental problems in the Soviet Union, he discloses several cases of crimes committed against nature by man.

At the end of 1977, for instance, black snow fell in Moscow — the result of soot from factory chimneys polluting snow crystals in the upper atmosphere.

Though marine biologists estimate that underwater flora and fauna cannot survive more than two tons of petroleum pollution per year along a coastal stretch of one kilometer, Soviet industries annually spill 50 times that amount of oil into rivers that feed into the Black Sea.

In the spring of 1976, Russian ornithologists banded 300 young wild ducks on a Siberian lake in order to trace their movements. By autumn, all except one had been illegally shot by hunters.

In citing these and other cases, Komarow makes the case that the Soviet ethic in regard to the environment is that Communism is supposed to dominate nature, which is considered to be the enemy of progress. One of the most flagrant examples of natural damage, he asserts, has taken place at Lake Baikal, in the heart of Siberia.

Among the largest lakes in the world, Baikal is notable for its extraordinary supply of fresh water, which is due to its great depth. Nevertheless, Soviet economic planners approved a plant, to be built on its shores, that would process wood into insulation for automobile tires.

By 1967, when the plant was initiated, it was already possible to produce the insulation from petrochemicals. Even so, the installation went into operation, its waste

being dumped into the lake.

Komarow reports that some Russian specialists raised objections at a session of the Soviet Academy of Sciences, to which one distinguished member replied:

"So what if we pollute? Now that we have nuclear power, we can easily blast a big pit, fill it with water and create another Lake Baikal."

According to Komarow, the Soviet authorities feel that they can neglect the ecological balance because they face virtually no pressure from public opinion at home and very little from scientists elsewhere in the world. This is largely due to the fact that the truth about Soviet environmental conditions is restricted to a handful of Russians deemed "worthy of special confidence."

In contrast to the competitive economies of the West, moreover, the Soviet Union is managed by a highly centralized bureaucracy that concentrates primarily on promoting its own projects without regard for the impact they may make on the environment.

And, like Americans of a few years ago, the Soviet leaders are unconcerned about the environment because their land is so vast and its resources so great that they believe its potentialities for development to be limitless.

This sentiment, Komarow contends, has

led them to be indifferent toward the environment. He warns, however, that Soviet rulers are deceiving themselves as he puts it: "We may be sitting on a cushion that is thicker than that of other countries, but that doesn't necessarily mean we are stronger, and it isn't going to hold forever."

In Komarow's view, the problem of the Soviet environment is fundamentally political, since the Kremlin leadership is going to alter its approach as long as it is committed to its present ideology.

The implication of this observation, therefore, is that the problems of the Soviet environment cannot be solved until the Soviet system is revamped.

Thus, in Komarow, we have a new type of Soviet dissident who is different from the ethnic, literary, religious and other dissidents publicized in the Western world. Here, so to speak, is an ecological dissident.

The reason that he smuggled out his book, he makes clear, is to spread the truth about the Soviet environment to the rest of the world, presumably in the hope that international opinion may compel the Kremlin to change.

"If we want to survive we must know the truth," he concludes, "and we must communicate it to others."

OPINION

Carter's speech warns USSR

Taking a hard stance against "terrorism and aggression," President Carter gave his State of the Union address Wednesday night before Congress.

He told Iran that if the 50 American hostages being held in Iran were harmed, they would have a severe price to pay.

He warned the U.S.S.R. that any further aggression in the Mid-East would be met militarily.

And to meet the state of world affairs, Carter said he would introduce legislation next month to begin Selective Service registration again.

Carter did not reinstate the draft, but he made it clear that the draft would be reinstated if necessary.

So the long, anxious wait begins for males between the ages of 18 and 26.

Hopefully, the president will not start the draft again. But given the state of world affairs, it may be necessary very soon. It would be difficult for the United States to sit back and watch further Soviet aggression.

Russia has invaded and conquered Afghanistan. Pulling out of the Olympics and stopping grain shipments may make them pause and think, but it is doubtful these measures will stop them from more invasions.

Carter should work for a peaceful settlement to the crisis, but the United States must begin preparations for war once again.

Reinstatement of the Selective Service system is the first step. Time will tell if more steps are necessary.

With Carter taking the initiative in a bold stance against the U.S.S.R., maybe the people of the United States and the world will realize the seriousness of the situation.

Russia has never taken condemnations by the United States seriously before. Now Carter has said he would take military action against the U.S.S.R. if necessary. This linked with the possibility of strengthening U.S. forces through the draft should make the Soviets take a look at their recent behavior.

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LETTERS

Editor:
 Fellow A&Mers: Thursday evening, at 7:30 p.m. in 301 Rudder, the Texas A&M Emergency Care Team (TAMECT) will hold its first meeting of the spring semester. TAMECT is a service organization that provides first aid care for a wide variety of Aggie functions. We work at rodeos, marathons, intercollegiate football games and other campus activities. We also man the university-owned ambulance.

If you are interested in the field of emergency medical services and are willing to accept the responsibility of dealing with the life and health of students and faculty members, then you are invited to join this

dynamic organization. The activities, both service and social, are rewarding and the friendships numerous. If you have a current certification in some phase of emergency care or would be willing to become certified, then we invite you to join us.

If your club or organization has an upcoming event that may result in injury or that will be attended by a large number of people, TAMECT will provide emergency medical services free of charge. To obtain our services, just fill out the request form in our cubicle in the Student Programs Office about two weeks before the event. If you have any questions concerning the Texas A&M Emergency Care Team's services or

membership, please feel free to call our president, Stephanie Simpson, at 693-1483.

Bruce W. Crooker

RA's copy FBI

Editor:
 How much longer must the students of Texas A&M be subjected to the senseless "thoughts" of Mr. Doug Graham? I had hoped that his graduation last month would bring an end to our daily misery of reading about Cheesworth and the trash can maggot! While I will admit that Mr. Graham is a very talented and creative artist, I must take exception to his cartoon of January 21.

Having been a Resident Adviser for two years, I find Mr. Graham's insinuation that Resident Advisers resemble Gestapo agents to be far from the truth. Quite the contrary, we model ourselves after RA agents, continuously thwarting criminal Aggie and executing political enemies of the University. The only thing we have in common with Gestapo agents is that we occasionally use German Lugers to put down unruly dorm residents. Now that we have shown you the error of your ways, Graham, I hope that you will now respect what you do best — cutting down food at Sbisal! Aufwiedersehen!

Bob Harper

THE BATTALION

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Letters to the editor should not exceed 300 words and are subject to being cut to that length or less if longer. The editorial staff reserves the right to edit such letters and does not guarantee to publish any letter. Each letter must be signed, show the address of the writer and list a telephone number for verification.

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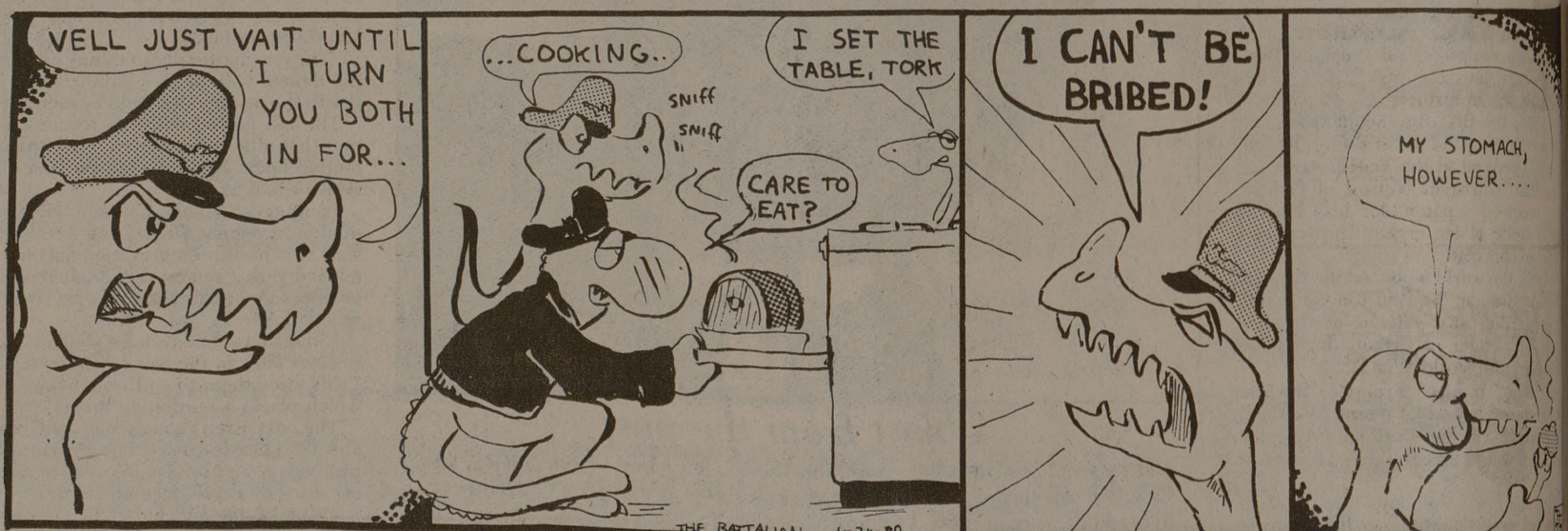
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THOTZ



By Doug Graham

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