

“Good Evening, Comrades!”:
the Revolutionary Role of Soviet Television Journalism Under Gorbachev

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Abstract

The Soviet Union is often envisaged as top-down, totalitarian dictatorship, in which all media, including journalism, was subservient to the aims and goals of the Communist Party, rendering it all propagandist and of little value. However, in reality, the relationship between media and the system of Soviet governance was considerably more complex. One of the primary roles of Soviet mass media was to mobilize the Soviet citizenry through the repetitious use of ideologically-charged reports and depictions. But the media, especially journalism, also served as an arbiter of power, its journalists having significant room to affect the shape of Soviet politics.

This was particularly clear during Mikhail Gorbachev's program of *glasnost*, which aimed to improve media independence and transparency. Creating dramatic shifts in Soviet journalism as well as in the broader media, this program empowered journalists to begin to challenge the *status quo* of Soviet ideology. While this process was most noted in Western academia in print journalism, its effects were also felt in radio, and particularly in television. For the most part this took the form of new programs which were more critical of the Soviet regime. However, even the more conservative programs underwent a metamorphosis, emerging with surprising independence of the Soviet government.

Most notable among these was *Vremia*, the nationwide evening news program. Conservative by tradition, it had the largest audience of any television news program in the world, and thus exerted a considerable influence over the Soviet public. Furthermore, it was produced by journalists who were, at heart, committed Communists, and who believed in the ideology of the Soviet Union. As such, it continued to reinforce the traditional values and principles of the Soviet mass media even as it became increasingly independent of state control and more willing to challenge Soviet authorities.

Thus, *Vremia*'s position was crucial during the 1991 attempted coup, as it was trusted enough by the coup plotters to be allowed to remain on the air, but its journalists were also used to such freedom that they did everything possible to undermine what they saw as an undemocratic and illegitimate *coup d'état*. They broadcast video of the uprisings against the coup in the streets of Moscow and the speeches of Russian president Boris Yeltsin. In the end, this helped to unseat both the coup, and, ironically, the Communist regime altogether. Within months, the Soviet Union would be no more. However, the dissolution of the Soviet state media apparatus caused a substantial decline in the standard of television journalism, including the canceling of both new, radical programs, and more conservative ones, such as *Vremia*.

Introduction and literature review

Surprisingly few scholars have written about Soviet television as their primary subject. For many, it is merely a small part of larger questions about (primarily print) journalism, or about advances in Soviet technology. I suspect that, to some degree, television is languishing as an academic subject in that, for some time, it was not seen as a “serious” subject in the same way that print journalism was in the form of newspapers like *Pravda* or *Izvestia*.

Moreover, studying television journalism, particularly from a historical viewpoint poses unique problems. Many television broadcasts were simply never recorded, particularly before the advent of videocassettes in the 1970s. Those recordings that do exist are often in obscure archives and in a multitude of formats; digitizing them is often prohibitively expensive and complicated. Moreover, the sheer quantity of media poses a serious problem. Historians cannot simply skim through a video recording the way they can a print source. Perhaps this will change in the coming decades as digital distribution and storage technology continues to evolve, but the historian interested in the television of Gorbachev's Soviet Union faces significant challenges.

Still, Western historians began examining the history of Soviet television broadcasting long before Gorbachev came to power. For example, Burton Paulu's 1974 *Radio and Television Broadcasting in Eastern Europe* traced the history and evolution of the Soviet broadcasting network, focusing particularly on the development of technologies and systems which enabled television dissemination throughout the Soviet Union. For instance, Paulu traced the development of mechanical televisions, which, while technically inferior, made clear to the Communist Party the utility of television, influencing its efforts to make television widespread throughout the USSR immediately after the Second World War, even as post-war reconstruction

in other areas was clearly a pressing need.¹

Paulu also noted more contemporaneous developments in Soviet television: the slow introduction of color receivers and programming, the expansion of the Intersputnik satellite distribution system, and the creation of institutes dedicated to the training of broadcasting technicians, journalists, and other professionals.² Additionally, he put a great deal of emphasis on the organizational structure that produced journalism in this time period. For example, he argued that the 1962 creation of the USSR Council of Ministers' State Committee on Radio and Television was significant in that it separated control over radio and television from the authorities responsible for print media.³

However, Paulu also commented on the content of contemporaneous news programs, which was clearly influenced by the ideology and visual culture of the Brezhnevian Soviet Union. He noted that “[a]lmost every program...has at least one film feature reporting industrial economic, agricultural, or scientific achievements. We see tractors and combines in fields; we visit factories; we are addressed by workers as they turn aside from their lathes; we see fishermen pulling fish from a lake...”⁴ Consequently, Paulu concluded that all news presented on Soviet television served what he termed “political education”.⁵ Still, he acknowledged the beginnings of diversification in Soviet television journalism, with occasional stories that fell outside the standard messages produced by the Party apparatus.⁶

However, Paulu's approach is in some respects simplistic. He addresses the topic of Soviet television without much consideration of related questions, such as the direction of

1 Burton Paulu, *Radio and Television Broadcasting in Eastern Europe* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1974), 36–37.

2 Ibid., 73–91.

3 Ibid., 53.

4 Ibid., 110.

5 Ibid., 125.

6 Ibid., 119.

journalism more broadly in the Soviet Union, or the ways in which television broadcasting might enhance or subvert attempts by the CPSU to create Union-wide narratives that downplayed national tensions.

This approach of dealing with television in isolation from broader issues of media and journalism seems to have also been a popular way to deal with the subject for post-Soviet Russian historians. G Kuznetsov's *Televizionnaia zhurnalistika*, published in 2002, reads surprisingly similarly to Paulu's work through the 1970s. However, Kuznetsov also describes some of the programs from the era of glasnost. For example, he notes that *Vzgliad* (*View or Opinion*), during *glasnost*, began showing programs that outright criticized Lenin's actions around the time of the October Revolution. Moreover, he describes the beginnings of non-state television in 1987, although he gives little analysis of the importance of this taking place.

Additionally, a noteworthy study by Kristin Roth-Ey in 2007 analyzed the ways in which television was integrated into Soviet culture. She provided many of the same descriptions of technological progress and the development of infrastructure as did Paulu and Kuznetsov. However, she also noted that many Soviet ministers had initial misgivings about television, as the socially-isolating act of watching television fit in poorly to Soviet ideological norms of leisure time.⁷ Moreover, she argued that Soviet authorities were seldom immediately able to determine the best ways to use the new medium—Party officials often attempted to give formal lectures via television, forgoing any use of visual content.⁸ In short, Roth-Ey paints a picture of television as an uneasy fit into the 1960s-and-1970s Soviet Union, which was adopted mainly due to bottom-up demand from its audience, rather than due to enthusiasm from above.

However, many scholars have not been content to study Soviet journalism in isolation

7 Kristin Roth-Ey, "Finding a Home for Television in the USSR, 1950-1970," *Slavic Review* 66, no. 2 (July 1, 2007): 289.

8 Ibid., 289–90.

from its political implications. For them, the topic is intimately tied into the broader Soviet political system. Many of these authors focus on the links between Soviet journalism and the political power structures that helped to maintain the Soviet regime's political supremacy.

For example, Thomas F. Remington's 1985 article "Politics and Professionalism in Soviet Journalism" focused on problems with the Soviet profession of journalism caused by adherence to official ideology. He identified education as one key problem: too much time in journalism institutes was spent focusing on Marxist-Leninist theory relating to journalism, and not enough to practical training.⁹ Moreover, many young journalists were assigned to far-flung regional media outlets, while more senior members of these papers and stations were often able to use their influence to obtain more desirable positions at more prominent publications. The result was that the quality of journalism at regional media outlets suffered, as young journalists had little mentorship, were not given appropriate information about potential sources, and were instead forced to parrot official reports from a variety of sources.¹⁰

Thomas Wolfe, on the other hand, took the long-term perspective in his 2005 *Governing Soviet Journalism: the Press and the Socialist Person After Stalin*. According to Wolfe, "[t]he task of [Soviet] journalists was to govern people through their own self-understandings; they would become part of the enormous collective effort to ensure that all the texts and images of the newspaper page were ultimately an assemblage of teachings."¹¹ Thus, for Wolfe, Soviet journalism was inherently part of the governing mechanisms of the Party and the state it controlled in that it helped maintain ideological coherence.

Under Khrushchev, then, Wolfe argued that "[n]ewspapers were the stages where the vast

9 Thomas F. Remington, "Politics and Professionalism in Soviet Journalism," *Slavic Review* 44, no. 3 (October 1, 1985): 490–91.

10 Ibid., 493–501.

11 Thomas Wolfe, *Governing Soviet Journalism: the Press and the Socialist Person After Stalin* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005), 18.

talent show of Soviet life was performed.”¹² As such, a great deal of emphasis was placed by newspaper journalists and editors on the high quality of life that had been achieved for the average Soviet citizen. This was a considerable shift from the more overtly-political media under Lenin and Stalin.¹³ Moreover, there was an acknowledgment of progress yet to be made, and even—to some degree—of superior material living conditions in the United States.¹⁴

However, perhaps unsurprisingly, under Brezhnev, the media became a considerably more conservative force, according to Wolfe's analysis. Rather than depicting the building of socialism as an ongoing process, journalists “would supply images and texts that would represent an effective, stable, and prosperous state of 'developed socialism'”.¹⁵ Television, too, would play a considerably role in the continual justification of the status quo. In particular, it was able “to facilitate an endless recycling of patriotic, tragic, and inspiring films about the hardships of earlier decades...”¹⁶

As such, the role of television news was subdued. This led to increasing problems for Soviet media authorities, Wolfe noted, because ham-handed news broadcasts often tried to ignore “bad” news, yielding a popular distrust for the accuracy of news media. This was exacerbated by the increasing ability of Soviet citizen to receive news from abroad (e.g. from the BBC), which, even if highly biased and inaccurate, often seemed more reliable, since it at least tried to appear timely and impartial. In contrast, “bad” news would often only be reported weeks later by Soviet sources, and in a manner attempting to minimize the importance of the story at hand.¹⁷ However, at the same time, Wolfe argued there were signs of positive change. For example, a local Kiev

12 Ibid., 56.

13 Ibid., 35.

14 Ibid., 63.

15 Ibid., 105.

16 Ibid., 127.

17 Ibid., 128–132.

television production entitled *Press-klub* allowed readers to phone in questions to officials being interviewed, who would be forced to answer live. Still, there was not broad-based support for more of this type of journalism.¹⁸

It is notable, however, that Wolfe does not analyze the media under Gorbachev. I suspect doing so may have unseated his central, if rather unspoken, thesis: that the Soviet state's (and, by implication, the Communist Party's) relationship with media and journalism was, in some capacity, essentially the same throughout the history of the Soviet Union—or at least the post-Stalin Soviet Union. However, it seems likely that there may well have been substantial change to the underlying relationship between the state and the media while still retaining some of the traditions and forms that guided Soviet media; Wolfe's structure essentially rejects this possibility.

On the other hand, not shying away from the changes under Gorbachev, Jennifer Turpin's 1995 *Reinventing the Soviet Self: Media and Social Change in the Former Soviet Union* analyzed primarily print media throughout the period of *glasnost*, looking for links between the leader's political aims and the media created. For example, she noted that *Soviet Life* reliably painted political supporters of Gorbachev's program of perestroika in a positive light, while detractors were shown negatively. Additionally, there was an increased emphasis on identifying and solving social and economic policies, in contrast to prior media which emphasized the ever-improving state of the Soviet Union.¹⁹

Turpin also noted measures taken to make publications more accessible to larger portions of the public, including simpler sentence structure and more restricted vocabulary. Finally, she demonstrated a substantial shift in the portrayal of politically-sensitive issues, such as

18 Ibid., 138–140.

19 Jennifer Turpin, *Reinventing the Soviet Self: Media and Social Change in the Former Soviet Union* (Westport Conn.: Praeger, 1995), 56–60.

environmentalism, human rights, and crime, all of which were covered in ways less consistent with traditional Soviet ideology; journalists were slowly becoming more willing to directly confront these issues.²⁰

Still, as insightful as the connections Turpin makes between politics and journalistic styles are, they are highly limited by her choice of English-language publications, obviously (and explicitly) targeted towards audiences in the West, particularly in the United States. Accordingly, one must take her results with a grain of salt, in that they probably represent the ideology Gorbachev wanted to *project* to the exterior world, and not necessarily his own political goals and ambitions within the Soviet Union.

Instead, one might turn to Reino Paasilinna's *Glasnost and Soviet Television*, published in 1995, which examined somewhat more concretely the ways in which Gorbachev's policy of glasnost was translated into changes in television broadcasting. Prior to Gorbachev, he argued, “[t]elevision clearly had a twin task: it was to activate citizens to support the Party objectives, but on the other hand it was to passivate them so that there could be no deviations from the Party line.” Additionally, a somewhat overused visual language of socialism was developed, with reused symbols, such as the sparks flying from metalworks in a factory, representing modern technological economic progress.²¹ As such, Paasilinna generally presaged Wolfe's analysis on broader Soviet journalism, in that media served to reinforce the norm of the status quo more than it challenged it with new information.

Paasilinna argued that television was perhaps the medium the least affected by glasnost—he suggested that this was simply due to the lack of competition between different television stations, as well as the significant economic and human capital needed to create new television

20 Ibid., 101–110.

21 Reino Paasilinna, *Glasnost and Soviet Television : a Study of the Soviet Mass Media and Its Role in Society from 1985-1991* ([Finland]: YLE Finnish Broadcasting Co., 1995), 114–115.

stations.²² Thus, television serves as a key example of Paasilinna's overall argument: that *glasnost* was not so much a political philosophy as it was a set of political relations that were able to create changes to the official ideology.²³ It should not seem surprising that, in Paasilinna's model, different media experienced glasnost quite differently.

Nevertheless, Paasilinna's study clearly was blind-sighted by a lack of historical perspective; in particular, he noted that censorship was still commonplace, and highly state-controlled, in an official capacity.²⁴ Much as Wolfe's analysis is undercut by its insistence that Soviet media *could not* change under Gorbachev, Paasilinna's implicit assumption that it *did not* change, and that it *would not* change under Yeltsin serves to make it less insightful.

Finally, Anna Arutunyan's 2009 *The Media in Russia* aimed to show ways in which the Soviet media landscape influenced post-Soviet realities in Russian media. In particular, she argued that television was always given disproportionately little attention by the Soviet regime. She suggests this may have been, at least in part, because Soviet journalism “followed a strategy of demonstrating just how successful the government's policies were. This was a relatively easy task for newspapermen, who used mostly words to embellish the positive. But television anchors and correspondents often had to go out of their way to 'demonstrate' things that simply did not exist.”²⁵ In other words, whatever television's potential as a medium to convey the Soviet message, it was simply not malleable enough to support Brezhnevian styles.

Still, that very tie to reality was to prove highly important during the August 1991 Moscow coup. While Soviet television mostly resorted to broadcasting cultural programming (including the infamous Soviet strategy of broadcasting *Swan Lake*), some coverage of the

22 Ibid., 133–139.

23 Ibid., 57.

24 Ibid., 136–139.

25 Anna Arutunyan, *The Media in Russia* (New York: Open University Press, 2009), 121.

gathering crowds in Moscow was gathered and broadcast Union-wide.²⁶ While this coverage was limited, it certainly had a great impact, considering the broad audience for television at this point. This may help to explain Arutunyan's finding that, by 1993, more than twice as many Russians watched television news than read print journalism.²⁷ As such, Arutunyan's account begins to unpack the issues surrounding Soviet television journalism under Gorbachev, particularly with respect to the political realities of creating television coverage.

While her account and similar ones do an excellent job of relating the development of Soviet journalism on TV to the broader political changes that took place in the Soviet Union, they are particularly focused on Party politics, official ideology, and “serious” journalism. In other words, they are focused on the actions of cultural and political elites. However, with a medium such as television, which has little barrier to participation (at least in the form of receiving and watching it), the attitudes and opinions of the masses are clearly also crucial. This is particularly true in terms of their opinions towards the use of television.

Unfortunately, there has been relatively little study of the leisure-time habits of the Soviet citizen within English-speaking academia. Perhaps the most insightful work is Richard Stites' 1992 *Russian Popular Culture: Entertainment and Society since 1900*. Although mainly focused on more traditional arts, such as music, theater, and literature, he does provide some insightful notes on television viewing. For example, he notes that VCRs became available in the Soviet Union as early as 1980, through black-market channels; soon, informal video rental became common.²⁸

Additionally, some amount of an understanding of how television fit into most Soviet

26 Ibid., 123.

27 Ibid., 18.

28 Richard Stites, *Russian Popular Culture: Entertainment and Society Since 1900*, Cambridge Soviet Paperbacks 7 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 174.

citizen's leisure time can be gleaned from examining perhaps the most popular subject to watch on television: organized spectator sports. Probably the seminal work on this subject is Robert Edelman's *Serious Fun: a History of Spectator Sports in the USSR*, published in 1993. Although Edelman's focus is primarily on the sports themselves and not the television coverage thereof, or the audiences watching at home, his account still does provide some insights into the nature of this phenomenon.

In particular, Edelman notes that sport was one area in which criticism had always been welcomed: teams and coaches were routinely put in the spotlight and their decisions examined and re-examined. This may help to explain why television coverage of sports, although popular, was not able to displace print media: live television coverage tended to be less critical and analytical than print journalism, written after the fact.²⁹

However, the study of Soviet sports culture also provides insight into what I would term the “leisure culture” of Soviet society. James Riordan's *Sport in Soviet Society: Development of Sport and Physical Education in Russia and the USSR*, although published in 1978, and therefore prior to the period of history on which I am focusing, nonetheless provides some interesting analysis of trends surrounding how Soviet citizens spent their leisure time.

For example, Riordan argues that there were major trends during the 1960s and 1970s of increasing wealth, urbanization, and free time (largely due to the declining average workweek to only 41 hours in 1961), which led many Soviet citizens to be able to spend more time in athletic pursuits.³⁰ However, he also notes that many groups were not converting their new-found free time into a greater interest in sports, such as those in rural areas, college students, and those in

29 Robert Edelman, *Serious Fun: A History of Spectator Sports in the USSR* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 169–200.

30 James Riordan, *Sport in Soviet Society: Development of Sport and Physical Education in Russia and the USSR* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), 183–187.

what he termed “former Muslim areas”.³¹

Another, perhaps surprising, insight into leisure culture is Tricia Starks' *The Body Soviet: Propaganda, Hygiene, and the Revolutionary State*. According to Starks' analysis, Soviet official ideology, from early on, drew a connection between individual health and the health of the society. Therefore, Soviet planners worked to organize the free time of Soviet citizens into “socially useful” activities. Much of this effort was specifically targeted against what the Soviet authorities termed “hooliganism”, including informal gatherings, use of alcohol, and a lack of organized physical exercise.³²

Moreover, Soviet authorities attempted to cultivate a sense that Soviet citizens' waking hours should be fully dedicated to the mission of building communism, in one way or another. To this end, anti-alcohol and anti-tobacco campaigns were intermittently (and seldom successfully) introduced.³³ Still, it is apparent that there was a gap between what Party officials hoped the Soviet citizenry would do in its free time and what actually happened. Television certainly seems to have played a great role in this divide, as it was of questionable “social utility”, and took time away from more organized activities.

An understanding of the audience for Soviet television journalism should also take into account quantitative measures. Surveys to estimate the size and composition of this audience were widely undertaken by Soviet authorities starting in the mid-1970s. Moreover, increased access and connections to the West under Gorbachev allowed Western sociologists to begin studying these audiences. Perhaps the most complete compilation of these surveys is in A. Ross Johnson and R. Eugene Parta's 2010 *Cold War Broadcasting: Impact on the Soviet Union and*

31 Ibid., 297–333.

32 Tricia Starks, *The Body Soviet : Propaganda, Hygiene, and the Revolutionary State* (Madison Wis.: University of Wisconsin Press, 2008), 71–79.

33 Ibid., 162–182.

Eastern Europe: A Collection of Studies and Documents. Most of these studies analyzed the audience for “external” broadcasts—that is to say, those broadcast for Soviet audiences from outside the Soviet Union—most of which were controlled by Western governments and were designed to challenge Soviet news.

Parta's own chapter focused on those factors most important to Western broadcasters. He noted that the audience for Radio Liberty, for instance, was increasingly male, urban, and educated.³⁴ At the same time, he notes a decrease in the overall size of the audience for external radio broadcasts, seemingly displaced by a greater audience for Russian television.³⁵

Elena Bashkirova's chapter in the same book additionally noted a strong correlation between young age and being interested in Western media; many of these young audience members were primarily interested in entertainment not available within Soviet media offerings; news was considerably less desirable. Additionally, most distrusted Western news at least to some degree.³⁶

However, the interaction between media producers and the audience is not a simple one in which media consumers merely passively receive messages from media and integrate them immediately and uncritically into their understanding of the world—what Ellen Propper Mickiewicz has termed the “hypodermic needle model”.³⁷ Rather, a language must be developed to explain the events about which journalists write, complete with its own vocabulary of

34 R Eugene Parta, “The Audience to Western Broadcasts to the USSR During the Cold War: An External Perspective,” in *Cold War Broadcasting: Impact on the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe a Collection of Studies and Documents*, by A Ross Johnson and R Eugene Parta (New York: Central European University Press, 2010), 79–85.

35 Ibid., 73–77, 90–91.

36 Elena I Bashkirova, “The Foreign Radio Audience in the USSR During the Cold War: An Internal Perspective,” in *Cold War Broadcasting: Impact on the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe a Collection of Studies and Documents*, by A Ross Johnson and R Eugene Parta (New York: Central European University Press, 2010), 119–114.

37 Ellen Propper Mickiewicz, *Split Signals: Television and Politics in the Soviet Union* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 180–183.

symbols, metaphors, commonplaces, and clichés. In the case of Soviet journalism, this was tightly bound up in both the official ideological system of symbols as well as the language in which the public at large conceived of politics and current events.

That public vocabulary was studied by V. Kozlov in his 2011 *Sedition: Everyday Resistance in the Soviet Union under Khrushchev and Brezhnev*, which examined the ways in which people expressed political dissent through *samizdat*, or underground self-published materials. Perhaps surprisingly, he found that many of these unofficial, often anti-regime publications still used imagery and metaphors from official Soviet ideology in order to express their ideas.³⁸ Kozlov further noted that people ascribed great power to the image and person-hood of Lenin, as though invoking his name was an act prone to cause supernatural consequences.³⁹ Indeed, Kozlov suggests that one might interpret much of the more personal and less-formal *samizdat* as attempts at “casting a spell with truth”—that the words themselves might have practical and substantial consequences.⁴⁰

Still, the figure who has played the greatest role in creating the secondary literature relevant to my topic is the political scientist Ellen Propper Mickiewicz. She published a series of works on the subject of Soviet television and radio journalism during the 1980s and 1990s, which evolved in parallel with the changing media scene within the Soviet Union. Mickiewicz's first work in this direction was her 1981 *Media and the Russian Public*. This book was not specifically focused on the news media, but rather more broadly on the changing nature of broadcast media and its audience at that time. For example, she notes that the ever-expanding satellite distribution system meant that more and more rural audiences were watching television

38 V. Kozlov, *Sedition : Everyday Resistance in the Soviet Union Under Khrushchev and Brezhnev* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), 105–115.

39 Ibid., 153–155.

40 Ibid., 206–207.

regularly.⁴¹ Moreover, she notes that television news had become a fairly popular type of television and radio program, perhaps due to initial attempts to modernize news and to make it more accessible.⁴²

In 1988, Mickiewicz wrote *Split Signals: Television and Politics in the Soviet Union*, which focused considerably more directly on television journalism. To that end, she included a content analysis of regularly-scheduled television news programs, including *Vremia (Time)*. Like others, she noted an emphasis on “ideologically coherent” programming—in the context of international news, this meant assigning the blame for many international problems to the United States, for instance.⁴³ Moreover, she argued that the choice of which stories to cover comprised a very unique profile influenced by Soviet ideology, including the “military, astronauts and cosmonauts (many of whom are in the military and whose programs are closely linked to the military), agricultural workers, and people in the arts.”⁴⁴

Mickiewicz also examined the apparent goals of those producing television journalism, concluding that Soviet television authorities were increasingly using audience feedback surveys as a method to refine their content and to fit their productions more accurately to their audiences. To that end, she concludes, they had increasingly focused on international news, more detailed analysis of domestic news, and had found a renewed commitment to *operativnost*, or timely reporting of stories.⁴⁵

Finally, Mickiewicz examined the role of changing and improving television technology within the Soviet Union. She noted that the use of satellite systems and other advanced distribution technology had limited local influence over media, causing a greater portion of

41 Ellen Propper Mickiewicz, *Media and the Russian Public* (New York, N.Y: Praeger, 1981), 19.

42 Ibid., 28.

43 Mickiewicz, *Split Signals*, 125–127.

44 Ibid., 145.

45 Ibid., 32–56.

television productions to be filmed within the RSFSR and in the Russian language. Moreover, the Soviet Union was increasingly employing jamming technologies to attempt to block television broadcasts from outside its territory, particularly in Finland and the Baltic republics. At the same time as the USSR was increasing its control over broadcast television, however, the widespread introduction of VCRs meant that content not created by the Soviet journalistic hierarchy was making its way into the homes of Soviet citizens. Moreover, the increased use on state-controlled television of live interviews and reporting meant that controlling the content of television broadcasts became increasingly difficult.⁴⁶

However, Mickiewicz was later to focus more on issues of content and presentation in Soviet television news, as exemplified by her chapter in Remington's 1989 *Politics and the Soviet System*. In "Understanding the World: The Cognitive Grid of Soviet Television", Mickiewicz examined in greater detail the motivations behind how Soviet news was presented, concluding that "[f]ast-breaking news does not command attention simply because of its freshness. Newsworthy is what reveals the underlying reality toward which history is trending."⁴⁷ Moreover, she noted a tendency to divide the world into binary opposites: the United States on one hand versus the Soviet Union on the other, technological progress versus backwardness, and so on.⁴⁸

Importantly, Mickiewicz also collected surveys that indicate that, in 1989, more than eighty percent of adult Soviet citizens regularly watch television news, compared to only an estimated one-third of US citizens at the same time.⁴⁹

46 Ibid., 6–21.

47 Ellen Propper Mickiewicz, "Understanding the World: The Cognitive Grid of Soviet Television News," in *Politics and the Soviet System : Essays in Honour of Frederick C. Barghoorn*, by Thomas F. Remington (Houndmills Basingstoke Hampshire: Macmillan Press, 1989), 16.

48 Ibid., 24–25.

49 Ibid., 15.

Thus, Mickiewicz has made a convincing case overall that Soviet television journalism needs to be evaluated with attention to its cultural, ideological, and political context. Still, in a certain way, even Mickiewicz likely did not understand the importance of her work at the time. The media's role in the 1991 coup attempt was crucial, and has begun to be examined in histories of “the death of the Soviet Union.” Particularly related to my topic is Gladys Ganley's *Mikhail and the Multiplying Media*, published in 1994. She examined the ways in which the changing media landscape under Gorbachev both reflected and influenced the political turmoil during this critical period in Soviet and Russian history.

She noted, as others have, a great number of new, experimental, programs, often critical to existing Soviet institutions, such as *Prozhektor perestroiki* (*Spotlight on perestroika*) and *Vzgliad*, although *Vremia* remained the primary and trusted source of news for most Soviet audiences. Moreover, the all-union channels broadcast from Moscow remained somewhat conservative, with more-liberal programs such as *Piatoe Koleso* (*Fifth wheel*) appearing on Leningrad television.⁵⁰

Still, Ganley also noted that Gorbachev himself began to push back against the trend of media liberalization starting in 1990, naming the conservative Leonid Kravchenko as head of Gosteleradio, the state committee on radio and television. As such, *Vremia*, among others, became somewhat more conservative in coverage than it had been in the preceding few years. However, it still remained considerably changed since Gorbachev's rise to power. Moreover, print media was able to mostly escape this reactionary tendency. In short, Ganley concluded that *glasnost* had prevailed against Gorbachev.⁵¹

Ganley illustrated this by examining the Soviet press' role during the August 1991

50 Gladys Ganley, *Mikhail and the Multiplying Media* (Cambridge, MA: Program on Information Resources Policy, Harvard University Center for Information Policy Research, 1994), 66–70.

51 Ibid., 103–116.

Moscow attempted coup. She notes that, while many broadcasters were shut down by KGB officers sympathetic to the coup, Ostankino (the main television broadcasting center in Moscow, controlling broadcasts throughout the USSR) remained on the air, albeit overseen by a KGB colonel who was directed to disallow any coverage of the coup. While independent radio stations struggled to intermittently broadcast information about the coup, *Vremia* was (somewhat inexplicably) permitted to dedicate some time to covering the coup and the popular uprising against it, including many interviews with those engaged in protests.⁵²

In short, then, by August 1991, it seems clear that even the conservative *Vremia* producers had become accustomed to somewhat-open coverage of politically sensitive issues. Moreover, the ever-increasing audience for *Vremia* and other television news programs, coupled with increasingly efficient distribution networks, means that this coverage had the potential to reach an incredibly large audience. So the question that remains is this: how did this happen? How did *Vremia*, in seven short years, go from being a conservative, Party-controlled media outlet, into one that unwittingly helped to unseat the Communist Party from power?

The most important primary source I used were the broadcasts of *Vremia* itself. The vast majority of those recordings came from the United States Naval Academy Collection of Soviet and Russian Television, currently in the possession of the US Library of Congress. These recordings were contracted by the US Navy to International Video Broadcasts, Inc. (IVB) in the early 1980s. IVB recorded numerous programs from satellite transmissions from central Soviet television located in Moscow. Starting in 1986, copies of these tapes were sent for archival in the Library of Congress.⁵³

⁵² Ibid., 167–177.

⁵³ Karen R. Ploucquet, “The U.S. Naval Academy Collection of Soviet & Russian TV,” *Library of Congress*, August 31, 2010, <http://www.loc.gov/rr/mopic/findaid/soviettv.html>.

The only two programs recorded consistently throughout the USNA collection were *Vremia* and *Mezhdunarodnaia panorama* (*International panorama*), another major news program aired on the First Channel. Other programs were occasionally recorded, but considered of less military importance and such recordings are sporadic at best.⁵⁴ Few tapes are available from 1985, but nearly every broadcast of *Vremia* from 1986 to the end of 1988 is at least nominally recorded and available. Although tapes featuring *Vremia* from 1989 to 1991 were recorded and deposited in the Library of Congress, as of now they have not been cataloged or organized, making finding a selection to watch impossible. Although a card catalog of *some* of these programs exists, it is not currently available to researchers. Therefore, my research was limited to 1985 to 1988.

Unfortunately, many of the recordings in the USNA collection are of poor quality. The video is frequently filled with static, and the tapes themselves, in the obsolete U-matic format, have begun to degrade significantly, particularly the oldest of these recordings. Some are completely unplayable. The audio is recorded at relatively low volume, making picking out the spoken Russian difficult, particularly when there is a good deal of static present. Many recordings have substantial gaps filled exclusively with static, making it difficult to follow the program. Others were not recorded at the correct time, meaning that either the beginning or end of the program was not recorded at all.

Some stories—those dubbed “important” by IVS in coordination with the US Navy—have been dubbed over in English. Fortunately, this often results in much clearer audio quality; unfortunately, it makes analyzing the exact Russian phrasing impossible. Finally, because of the combination of the U-matic tape format and the obscure variant of SECAM encoding used by

54 Ibid.

Soviet television, the Library of Congress currently does not possess equipment capable of playing back these recordings in color; I watched them exclusively in black and white.

Given these constraints, I opted to focus on surveying a broad variety of *Vremia* broadcasts, distributed as well as possible over the four years, over different times of year, and different days of the week. With the exception of 1985, I was able to do so; broadcasts from the first year were of such poor quality on average that I had to view whatever was available. I took notes on the topics and visual style of each episode, allowing me to compare them to note change over time.

I was also able to locate and watch a small collection of *Vremia* on VHS tape. This collection was put together in 1987 by Worldview, and includes a selection of *Vremia* stories from March 1987, dubbed in English, as well as with the superimposition of American Sign Language interpretation. Due to the selectivity of the stories chosen, and the short length of the material present (about one hour), these did not contribute much to my overall appraisal of *Vremia*. However, they did offer me the opportunity to see at least a small bit of the program in color and in good quality.

Chapter 1: Agitation, propaganda, and passivity—the history and role of television

It is important to understand that to Soviet leaders, journalism was merely a small portion of the communications wielded by the state. These communications were termed *propaganda*. The most important role of this *propaganda* was felt to be to inform and educate the citizens of the Soviet Union of the ideology of Marxism-Leninism. For this reason, “ideological correctness” (*ideinost'*) was the most essential component of any state publication. For that reason, almost all media produced by the state in the Soviet Union emphasized material conditions, class conflicts, and the slow but inevitable triumph of socialism.

This ideological understanding was not static and unchanging; indeed, it had changed substantially even before Gorbachev came to power, being negotiated between various political and social elites. Nevertheless, throughout the pre-Gorbachev Soviet Union, the media's role was primarily limited to restating the official ideology that was in place at that time. As such, journalism was seen by both Soviet political elites and by journalists themselves as a way to guide the larger society into accordance and agreement with the direction in which the Soviet leadership wished and directed.

Soviet leaders believed this process of constantly reiterating and reinforcing official state ideology galvanized public opinion around the tenets of Soviet communism, although over time, they developed different explanations of the mechanism by which this process operated. For example, Lenin argued that a broad public understanding of Soviet ideology was essential for Soviet citizens to be able to rectify problems with the imperfect Soviet state and society, while not abandoning the Soviet project. On the other hand, by the time that Brezhnev took power, two full generations had been educated under Soviet rule, and the argument that the masses were ignorant seemed implausible. Thus, the role of state communications was instead described by

Soviet leaders as a way of reinvigorating public interest in politics and the struggle for socialism.⁵⁵

Despite the term “propaganda”, Soviet authorities did not aim to convert citizens to their cause by deception or manipulation; rather, as Benn notes, “the essential strategy of propaganda is to show the masses by patient explanation where their 'objective' interests lie.”⁵⁶ As such, Soviet publications were infused with didactic messages, teaching the “correct” view of their subjects.

Soviet press authorities did not aim to simply indoctrinate Soviet citizens—rather, they attempted to bring these citizens into the process of creating ideologically-correct media. This was particularly clear in the post-Stalin period, when increasing numbers of sociological studies surrounding media consumption were conducted. One goal of these studies was simply to better tailor the media to their audience. Many surveys, for instance, discovered that mass publications such as newspapers used excessive technical jargon, impeding understanding. Yet the Soviet officials undertaking these studies also aimed to discover what issues most concerned the public, what popular opinion was on such subjects, and how the public responded to official positions on these issues.

As such, the cultivation of public opinion provided useful feedback which the centrally-controlled press used to maintain its relevance and appropriateness to its audience. Moreover, the common use of audience feedback in the form of letters-to-the-editor and similar techniques also encouraged Soviet citizens to become politically active, a key goal of these sorts of mass publications. To be sure, the letters published were carefully selected for ideological correctness, but they still allowed Soviet citizens to become active participants in what would otherwise have

55 David Wedgwood Benn, *Persuasion and Soviet Politics* (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1989), 53–67.

56 *Ibid.*, 71.

been state-directed unidirectional communications. This is not to imply that Soviet authorities were interested in changing policies or even the topics on which media focused. Rather, they were interested in having an adequate understanding of the political inclinations of the Soviet public, thus allowing them to better continue to “educate” the masses.

In addition to *ideinost'*, three other principles governed Soviet journalism. *Partiinost'*, or an adherence to official Party positions implied that journalists could not dissent with decisions reached by the Communist Party, as the journalist corps was meant to work in concert with the Party to achieve its goals. *Narodnost'*, or “popular/national character” implied both a focus on the issues concerning the masses and an alignment with what was seen as the “popular interest”. Thus, journalists were expected to become part of the process of advancing the interests of the masses through the building of socialism.

Perhaps most important to Soviet press ideology, however, was the concept of *pravdivost'*. Although most simply translated as “truthfulness”, the concept implied a much more complex idea. Journalists were expected to look through the details of a given news story and, in the words of Mickiewicz, “[reveal] the underlying reality toward which history is trending.”⁵⁷

Almost inevitably, this meant linking news stories to the building of socialism, to the oppressiveness of capitalism, or to class struggles in this process. Accordingly, journalists sometimes had to find ideological implications for a news story when these were not obviously present. Additionally, many editors and journalists found themselves focusing exclusively on stories that could easily be explained in this manner. Thus, *pravdivost'* became an important guiding principle in the journalistic process, deciding which stories were “important” and “newsworthy”.⁵⁸

57 Ellen Propper Mickiewicz, *Split Signals: Television and Politics in the Soviet Union* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 30.

58 Angus Roxburgh, *Pravda: Inside the Soviet News Machine* (New York: G. Braziller, 1987), 51–53.

Still, the structures which the Soviet press adopted varied considerably with time. In the 1920s, little state control was exerted over publications, yielding intellectually and ideologically diverse media. While newspapers and other media outlets were not permitted to print news which directly attacked the legitimacy of the ruling Communist Party or its policies. As such, there was a great deal of debate among journalists as to the proper role journalism should play in a socialist society. This eventually led to the creation of the journal *Zhurnalist* (*Journalist*) which served as a forum for these debates.⁵⁹

However, journalistic style was soon much more constrained and controlled as Stalin consolidated political power. He demanded that the press emphasize the project of “building socialism” and the “superhuman” achievements of individuals working towards that aim. Ensuring that journalists across all the Soviet Union's publications required the construction of a large bureaucracy of journalists, editors, managers, and censors, which was to characterize the Soviet press for the remainder of the Soviet Union's history.⁶⁰

Still, the role of Soviet journalism was further clarified by the Second World War, when the shared cause of depicting the attacking German forces as barbarous, hostile, and dangerous united journalists who originally espoused different ideas of the forms Soviet journalism should take. As such, the structure of Soviet print media was greatly molded by the war, creating the remarkably-efficient, if top-heavy and artistically-stunting, print media bureaucracy that would serve to continue to shape the face of Soviet journalism for the next four decades.⁶¹

In short, the mass media in the Soviet Union served a somewhat different role than it did in the West. Journalism was no exception. The role of mass media reporting of news was not

59 Thomas Wolfe, *Governing Soviet Journalism : the Press and the Socialist Person After Stalin* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005), 24–27.

60 Ibid., 28–30.

61 Ibid., 31.

seen as simply to report on the happenings of the day. Rather, journalists were expected to cultivate this sort of ideologically-correct discourse around current events. While it is true that Western journalists often engage in this same sort of process, an important distinction is that Western journalists seldom receive explicit instructions from the state on how to cover news items in “ideologically-correct” terms. Hopkins aptly likened the Soviet press to “newspapers of the American labor unions or religious organizations” in that they “strive towards particular objectives shaped by a particular ideology” while still maintaining a strong rooting in basic journalistic investigation.⁶²

Because, under Khrushchev and Brezhnev, Soviet journalists were not allowed to tackle large-scale political issues, they turned instead to the focus on smaller, local news stories that could be contextualized within the Soviet ideology. Such smaller stories fit into larger narratives journalists developed about Soviet society and its progression towards a perfected, socialist state.⁶³ This is not to say that journalists in this period were controlled by the official Party ideology *per se*. Party officials and journalists routinely clashed on what was the “proper” way to cover a particular story. Nevertheless, the idea that there was one “true” narrative was accepted by both Party and journalists into the 1980s.⁶⁴

For these reasons, the priorities of Soviet newspapers and other journalistic media outlets differed considerably from those in the West, where “objectivity” in the form of finding and acknowledging a common, undisputed set of facts, and then basing analysis on those facts is more widely accepted, implying that any number of interpretations may be valid, even while core truths are held to be the same.⁶⁵

62 Mark Hopkins, *Mass Media in the Soviet Union* (New York: Pegasus, 1970), 32.

63 Ibid., 35–41.

64 Ibid., 112–127.

65 See, for example, Kieran, Matthew, “Objectivity, Impartiality, and Good Journalism,” in *Media Ethics*, by Matthew Kieran (London: Routledge, 1998), 23–36.

Thus, to the Western observer, the coverage by Soviet news outlets seems unusually analytical, unusually focused on large-scale events, and unusually keen to report on stories that might seem uneventful to the Western viewer. For example, routine stories about economic production were common, not so much because they were exceptionally newsworthy, as because they revealed the “truth” that the Soviet socialist project was continuing to function as intended.

Such coverage helped bolster the regime, although it also helped inculcate an ideological understanding of slow but steady progress—a message typically difficult to take away from Western news coverage. In that sense, the selection of “newsworthy” stories and the choice of how to cover them inherently has ideological implications in Western news today, just as it did in Soviet news in the past; however, Soviet journalists explicitly attempted to cause these implications to conform to the official ideology to which they were beholden.

In these ways, the government-controlled press formed a part of the system of governance. It allowed Soviet authorities to measure, influence, and direct the public discourse on almost all topics. Wolfe has argued that “[t]he task of journalists was to govern people through their own self-understandings...ensur[ing] that all the texts and images of the newspaper page were ultimately an assemblage of teachings.”⁶⁶

On the other hand, starting under Brezhnev, the media tended to focus more on the reinforcement of the ideology which underpinned the Soviet regime and less on activating citizens' own political desires. These changes were muted but noticeable in print media, but rather obvious in radio and particularly in television. Wolfe notes that television was uniquely suited to this, as it could “facilitate an endless recycling of patriotic, tragic, and inspiring films about the hardships of earlier decades and their projection into living rooms from Smolensk to

66 Wolfe, *Governing Soviet Journalism*, 18.

Vladivostok.”⁶⁷

However, television's different audience also contributed to its unique role. Newspapers such as Pravda were still considered the most “serious” news outlets, and thus those readers that preferred a more critical and politically-charged type of journalism primarily read print media for news. Television, on the other hand, appealed to the Soviet citizen who was less interested in the details of journalism, while still wanting to be informed about world events. By necessity, stories could not be treated in as much detail in a brief newscast; the addition of images and video to the news helped make it more engaging. As such, television audiences were likely simply more accepting of the stilted, ideology-driven news coverage that predominated under Brezhnev, as at its core, even this news coverage was informative, engaging, and still appealed to an intellectual understanding of world events.

Thus, television took on a particular role in Brezhnevian culture: it was a force which served to establish the imagery and symbols of mass communication within the regime. In that sense, it was not the ultimate authority on any area of culture or politics—these remained the provenance of other media. Rather, television served as a lens through which many viewed subjects not intimately familiar to them; it is for this reason that its coverage was important. As was ever the case with Soviet media, television journalism served as an educator of the masses, initiating them into the discussions of politics and culture that were occurring among elites, be they Party or state officials, or others.

Still, despite these changes in the function, form, and purpose of Soviet mass media over time, the primary force driving changes in its news coverage seems to have been technological advancements. It should, of course, be no surprise that the Soviet Union would embrace

67 Ibid., 127.

broadcasting technology, given the focus on technological and economic progress in Soviet ideology and culture. However, it is notable that these technical advances often went underutilized due to a lack of understanding on the part of Soviet authorities of how to properly use them.

Of course, the first major instrument of journalism used in the Soviet Union was the newspaper. In addition to putting a great deal of resources into promoting literacy throughout the Soviet Union, the Party also pushed for the training of journalists to produce newspapers that conformed to Soviet ideological goals. Mueller has suggested that some of this early emphasis was due to the large number of Party officials who had been involved in newspapers prior to the Revolution.⁶⁸ However, there was also a certain necessity to this position, as distribution networks for film and radio did not exist, and certainly did not yet cover much of the Soviet Union's territory.

As such, newspapers quickly became the first and most important mass-media distribution network in the Soviet Union, a role that the medium would retain throughout the rest of the USSR's history. Even after the vast majority of Soviet citizens gained access to radio and television, they continued to rely on newspapers as their primary source of news, often trusting them over electronic media. In addition to national papers, most notably *Pravda* and *Izvestiia*, regional and local papers were common, as were publications targeted at particular portions of the population.

Some of the lasting popularity of print journalism can simply be attributed to the culture of the Soviet Union, in which reading remained a very popular leisure activity. Some of this may have to do with the long commutes on mass transit that most Soviet workers endured, but it may

68 Julie Kay Mueller, "Staffing Newspapers and Training Journalists in Early Soviet Russia," *Journal of Social History* 31, no. 4 (July 1, 1998): 850–853.

also point to deeper cultural values. In any event, Soviet citizens remained content to read long newspaper articles even when other media sources were available; it was not until the mid-1960s that radio or television began to displace newspapers in any meaningful quantity; even then newspapers remained popular.⁶⁹

Part of this slow uptake was caused by the degree to which news on radio and television failed to explore the potentials of these new media. Most news simply consisted of articles read out loud, often directly from Pravda or TASS, the news wire service. Interviews were rare, as was the use of on-scene reporting, even after this became technically feasible. Moreover, because these media outlets depended on newspapers and TASS for their content, doing little investigation of their own, their news was often delayed by a day or more compared to print media.⁷⁰

It is not immediately obvious why radio should have languished in this manner, but the inexperience of many Party and state officials with the medium and their consequent fear of the potential disruptive capabilities of the medium seems to be a likely cause. As would occur later with television, many officials were hesitant to make appearances on the radio, fearing that they might say something out of line, without the chance to catch this before publication, as would have been the case with print journalism.

As such, print journalism retained primacy throughout the Soviet Union's history; by 1984, some 8,327 daily and weekly papers were in circulation throughout the USSR. Privileged amongst these was the national paper *Pravda*, which effectively had the final say on many news issues, and was, in general, the only news outlet that was permitted to critique the actions of other journalists. In that sense, *Pravda* served as a central part of the Party's ability to control

69 Hopkins, *Mass Media in the Soviet Union*, 236.

70 Ibid., 238–242.

media, in that it was able to guide other media outlets in the direction of their coverage.⁷¹

At the same time, censorship was also used to shape the nature of news coverage. While the state maintained absolute control over the papers by censorship in the form of the Glavlit[†] agency, most of the actual work of censoring content was delegated to individual news outlets. They, in turn usually delegated this authority to individual editors. Moreover, journalists soon became adept at determining what stories could and could not be published, leading to a great deal of self-censorship, which was, in the end, considerably more efficient and effective than having centrally-run censorship.

Nominally, such censorship was only applied in order to maintain “state security”; however, it was clear to most that politically unfavorable news reports would run fowl of Glavlit if published. Therefore, with relatively little effort, the Party was able to maintain control over the messages of the thousands of papers. The same model was to be used for radio and television publications.⁷²

Radio broadcasting was somewhat slower to take off than newspapers, at least in part due to the economic challenge of equipping most Soviet residences with radio receivers in the pre-transistor era. However, because of the centrally-controlled and -distributed nature of Soviet media, use of wire radio became common. In such a system, a central station has dedicated lines to all receivers (so-called *radio-tochki*), which consist of little more than a switch and volume control.

This, of course, eliminates the possibility of tuning in other stations, but this was not seen

71 Roxburgh, *Pravda*, 55–58.

† General Directorate for the Protection of State Secrets in the Press under the Council of Ministers of the USSR (*Glavnoe upravlenie po okhrane gosudarstvennykh tain v pechaty pri sovet ministrov SSSR*), responsible for censorship of all print media in the Soviet Union. The abbreviation comes from its former name.

72 Zev Katz and Massachusetts Institute of Technology., *The Communications System in the USSR* (Cambridge: Research Program on Communications Policy Center for International Studies Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1977), 19–31.

as a disadvantage by Soviet authorities. Often, central stations broadcast to local re-transmitters (*uzely*), which received the signal and played it back on the *radio-tochka* line. Thus, Soviet broadcasters were able to avoid both the cost of a fully-wired distribution network and the cost of equipping homes with radio receivers.⁷³

Such long runs of copper wiring, combined with poor quality amplifiers and speakers inevitably led to inferior audio quality. Still, it remained popular well into the mid-1960s, likely due to the poor quality of consumer radio receivers produced by the Soviet Union. Accordingly, it was more practical for most Soviet citizens to use wire radio, as the simple receivers were not prone to the common breakdowns of aerial radio receivers. Effectively, the burden for technical maintenance was shifted from the consumer to the state, which was better able to obtain repairs for its equipment. Moreover, even though many Soviet citizens preferred wire radio and did not listen to wireless radio, aerial receivers were seldom produced in sufficient numbers to meet demand, leading to a large black market for the equipment, making obtaining it difficult for most Soviet citizens.⁷⁴

Diversity of programming developed similarly slowly. Through the 1940s, the only common genres of radio newscasting were the *radiogazeta* and *radiozhurnal* (radio-newspaper and radio-magazine). As the names suggest, these consisted merely of a broadcaster reading out news stories, often directly from print media. This monotonous style was occasionally broken up by the practice of bringing in a “visiting correspondent” from another station, who might offer news from their home region or a different style of reporting. Still, there was little to gain by listening to the radio as opposed to reading the newspaper at this point.

Thus, only during the Second World War itself did radio broadcasting gain much

73 Frances Durham and Massachusetts Institute of Technology., *Radio and Television in the Soviet Union* (Cambridge Mass.: Center for International Studies Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1965), 1–4.

74 Ibid., 21–22.

popularity, as newspapers and other print media were unavailable to some audiences. Soldiers at the front and civilians in occupied territory were reassured by radio reports broadcast from Moscow, particularly as they knew their relatives and compatriots elsewhere were listening to the same programming. Moreover, the voice of Stalin and other leaders making occasional speeches seems to have served as a rallying point. Finally, more emphasis was placed on timely news gathering, including embedded field radio reporters.⁷⁵ However, most of these advantages disappeared after the war, and newspapers regained their role as the primary journalistic medium.

The introduction in the mid-1950s of the *tsikl*, or cycle-report, was the first attempt to bring greater aural variety to radio journalism. In such a report, a number of different correspondents' reports would be played, all covering different topics. These reports were linked thematically, however, with the theme varying from day to day. As such, they provided a somewhat more engaging experience than older news programming, both due to the diversity of their coverage and the novelty of news coverage devoted to a particular area of concern.

This led to a broadening of radio genres throughout the 1960s, with the creation of the *radiouniversitety* (radio-universities), and other education programming. Perhaps due to the increasing influence of television, radio increasingly took on this sort of educational role. Still, this did not preclude the coverage of news, as news coverage could often be cast in educational terms, given the Soviet focus on explaining news in a didactic manner.⁷⁶

Soviet planners were quick to see the potential advantages of television in broadcasting propaganda, given the long history of *agitprop* films by the 1930s. Indeed, part of the drive for television under Stalin's direction was to replace the corps of *agitators* who traveled the Soviet

75 Richard Stites, *Culture and Entertainment in Wartime Russia* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 47–55.

76 N. Volkovskii and Sankt-Peterburgskii gosudarstvennyi universitet., *Otechestvennaia Zhurnalistika, 1950-2000 : Uchebnoe Posobie* (Ekaterinburg: Izd-vo S.-Peterburgskogo universiteta, 2006), 262–268.

Union attempting to politically activate citizens (especially in rural areas with lower literacy rates) by performing ideological *agitprop* plays. Replacing these with centrally-produced imagery would allow the Soviet system to perform the same function with fewer resources and, in all probability, with higher quality.⁷⁷

As such, substantial resources were devoted to early experiments with mechanical television, yielding results as early as 1928. Rather than the electronically-controlled cathode-ray tube that would form the basis of later television receivers, mechanical television (as was simultaneously developed elsewhere in the world) used mechanical means to sweep the beam of light across the screen. In order to achieve an acceptable frame rate, the number of lines that could be drawn was quite small; most of the experimental Soviet systems used only about 40 lines (in contrast to the 525-line electronic systems that would later be adopted).

Broadcasts began in October 1934, but the quality was extremely poor by modern standards, and very few receivers were produced, given the extreme cost of mechanical television receivers. Such receivers required bulky moving parts, used a considerable amount of electricity, required constant tuning and adjustment, and were very prone to breakdown. Moreover, such mechanical receivers often featured extremely small viewing areas; one popular receiver had a screen of only 3×4 centimeters. Nevertheless, broadcasts in the Moscow area attracted at least a thousand viewers during this period.⁷⁸

By 1939, modern electronic television receivers had been developed. Broadcasts for these new receivers, with their concomitant dramatic increase in quality and larger screens, began sporadically in Moscow and Leningrad. However, perhaps as few as four hundred receivers were

77 Reino Paasilinna, *Glasnost and Soviet Television : a Study of the Soviet Mass Media and Its Role in Society from 1985-1991* ([Finland]: YLE Finnish Broadcasting Co., 1995), 92–95.

78 A. IUrovskii, *Televidenie : Poiski i Resheniia : Ocherki Istorii i Teorii Sovetskoi Telezhurnalistiki*, Izd. 2-e, dop. (Moskva: Iskusstvo, 1983), 26–30.

manufactured and distributed per year prior to the beginning of the Second World War, when television broadcasts and television receiver production were suspended.⁷⁹

In the immediate post-war period, a massive expansion in television viewership occurred. Although receivers produced in this period were often of exceptionally poor quality, they were still popular purchases. The expansion was also aided by the development of the broadcasting network, including the beginnings of remote relay stations in 1949.

Still, television programming was irregularly scheduled until 1955, when the first daily-operated television station was installed in Moscow. A second station followed in 1956, with a third in Leningrad in 1964. Due to the concentration of much of the population in these and other urban centers, television was able to reach a fairly broad, if exclusively urban, audience even early on.⁸⁰ This broad penetration was also aided by television manufacturing, which had reached over one million per year by 1956.⁸¹

However, these television stations remained under local control and direction, with little programming exchanged between them. News content and quality varied considerably, particularly in smaller stations outside the RSFSR. This was in contrast to the much tighter central control over newspapers maintained by the Party, and the use of pre-recorded radio programming and radio relay stations in order to control radio broadcasts to at least some degree.

Worries that these decentralized stations might undermine the Party's hegemonic control over public discourse led to the slow introduction of a national broadcasting network under the auspices of Gosteleradio[†]. The introduction of the *Molniia* satellite communications system in

79 Burton Paulu, *Radio and Television Broadcasting in Eastern Europe* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1974), 182.

80 Frances Durham and Massachusetts Institute of Technology., *News Broadcasting on Soviet Radio and Television* (Cambridge Mass.: Center for International Studies. Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1965), 29.

81 Paulu, *Radio and Television Broadcasting in Eastern Europe*, 180.

† Government committee of the USSR on television and radio-broadcasting, *Gosudarstvennyi komitet SSSR po televideniiu i radioveshchaniu*.

1965, originally intended for purely military use, allowed selected programs to be re-broadcast to cities distant from the European center of the Soviet Union. This was augmented by laying of television cables across the Urals in the same year. Presaging the role of Moscow as the originator of most television broadcasts, the Ostankino television studio and broadcasting facility was built in the city in 1967.⁸²

This system was continually expanded, including the inception of the Intersputnik system in the late 1960s, which allowed the export of Soviet television (mainly from Moscow) to other states. As would be expected, the primary consumers of these feeds were other Warsaw Pact states. The system was also used to import coverage of foreign cultural and sporting events.⁸³

The satellite distribution system was also expanded to encompass the more remote areas of the Soviet Union, using some 70 satellites, allowing nearly its entire population to receive live television broadcasts from Moscow. Thus, central broadcasts soon came to replace the locally-produced programming that had been the norm until this point.⁸⁴

Color television became increasingly common throughout the 1970s. The Soviet Union's choice of an obscure variant of the SECAM color-encoding scheme, incompatible with the more-common PAL scheme used in Western Europe echoed their previous choice to use the incompatible System D for black-and-white television, making reception of Western stations impossible using unmodified Soviet equipment. Clearly, this demonstrates the importance to Soviet authorities to maintaining complete control over the television to which the Soviet population had access, given the additional cost of the SECAM system over PAL.

As with radio, variety in television news grew only slowly. News tended to be merely

82 Ibid., 37; Hopkins, *Mass Media in the Soviet Union*, 252–254.

83 John Downing, “The Intersputnik System and Soviet Television,” *Soviet Studies* 37, no. 4 (October 1, 1985): 465–467.

84 Ibid., 470–474; Mickiewicz, *Split Signals*, 4–4.

repeated news coverage of what had previously been covered by newspapers. This resulted in poor-quality, uninteresting broadcasts, which was exacerbated by the need to spin stories to make them appear politically-acceptable.⁸⁵

However, in the 1960s, awareness of the potential of the new medium increased, with widely-watched coverage, for example, of the early triumphs of the Soviet space program. Moreover, Soviet media outlets increasingly created educational and cultural programming, realizing the advantages to using a visual medium for these purposes.

Correspondence classes were created which used TV-delivered lectures and demonstrations as a key component, and these were created not only in general fields of study or for use in remote areas, but to keep specialists updated with the latest technology in their field; doctors were shown new surgical techniques, and engineers shown how to maintain new types of machinery. Where televisions were scarce but demand for educational programming high, group showings were organized.⁸⁶

By the 1970s, video depicting the stories covered was becoming at least reasonably common, although these tended towards clichéd and overused imagery; Paulu commented that

Almost every program, whether five, fifteen, or thirty minutes long, has at least one film feature reporting industrial economic, agricultural, or scientific achievements. We see tractors and combines in fields' we visit factories; we are addressed by workers as they turn aside from their lathes; we see fishermen pulling fish from a lake; we see a film report of the Komsomol youth's fiftieth anniversary and are told about their achievements over the years.⁸⁷

Still, these images added interest to otherwise unexciting news broadcasts, and drew greater audiences than previously. Similarly, entertainment programs increasingly adapted to the new medium; dramas were increasingly commissioned expressly for television, rather than

85 Anna Arutunyan, *The Media in Russia* (New York: Open University Press, 2009), 122.

86 Paulu, *Radio and Television Broadcasting in Eastern Europe*, 134–138.

87 Ibid., 110.

adapted from stage plays.⁸⁸

Soviet journalists and leaders saw the potential in the ability to deliver images to broad audiences, and seized on the opportunity. They consciously and openly attempted to make television part of the ritual of daily Soviet life, as well as incorporating it into the rituals of Soviet society. In that regard, it was instrumental in shaping and preserving popular memory of the Second World War, thanks to documentaries and dramas set during the war. Moreover, sports broadcasting allowed the regime to better cement its use of sports as propaganda for the socialist project.

It was in this broad context that *Vremia* emerged as the most important news program. Broadcast on the nationwide First Channel every evening at nine PM ever since 1968, it focused exclusively on news reports, although its coverage was, as might be expected, highly ideologically-driven, and details of news stories were often subjugated to the political and ideological arguments the presenters made.⁸⁹

By modern standards, *Vremia* of the 1980s was of poor quality: Mickiewicz noted poor editing, common use of jump cuts (that is, cuts between one part and another of the interview, leading to a sudden jump of the image), the lack of clip-on microphones, and other factors that made the program seem dated by Western standards.⁹⁰ Still, while other news programs would emerge, often more liberal, and less concerned with ideology, particularly on the less-centrally-controlled Leningrad channel, none had the authority or broad audience that *Vremia* attracted.⁹¹

As such, while *Vremia* never represented the cutting-edge of Soviet journalism, it was, in many ways, the equivalent of *Pravda*: a news outlet that had primacy within its medium, and

88 Ibid., 111–177.

89 Arutunyan, *The Media in Russia*, 123.

90 Mickiewicz, *Split Signals*, 148–151.

91 Arutunyan, *The Media in Russia*, 123–130.

which every Soviet citizen was surely familiar.

Chapter 2: “Business as usual”—the functioning economy and press

When Mikhail Gorbachev came to power in 1985, he inherited a complex and highly-centralized economy, which he sought to reform and modernize in the process of *perestroika*. Similarly, he aimed to reform the system of journalism and its institutions through *glasnost*. Soviet journalism, he felt, could serve as a vehicle for revealing corruption and promoting innovation. However, in 1985, it was closely tied to the political structure of the Party; this limited its ability to operate independently.

It is important to note the close ties that existed between political officials and journalists in the Soviet Union. On the one hand, officials at all levels cultivated relationships with journalists, attempting to influence news coverage of the agencies they headed in as positive a manner as possible. On the other hand, the Party maintained close control over media outlets: the Department of Propaganda of the Party was given broad authority over most media outlets, giving them directives on how to cover particular news stories. Moreover, Party leaders in even higher positions often wrote similar directives.⁹²

Moreover, Remington has noted that a hierarchy of journalists developed, ordered by their status, based on the prestige which different positions offered. In particular, positions at national papers, mostly published from Moscow, were highly sought-after. Highly experienced journalists were able to use their professional networks to acquire these positions, leaving their less skilled comrades to take the less prestigious and poorly-paid jobs in regional and local papers. This resulted in most local and regional papers having few journalists with the experience or contacts needed to properly investigate stories. Instead, they had to rely on the information

92 Zev Katz and Massachusetts Institute of Technology., *The Communications System in the USSR* (Cambridge: Research Program on Communications Policy Center for International Studies Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1977), 8–21.

given to them by officials, making their coverage easily biased or influenced.⁹³

Although these particular problems were not likely to have plagued *Vremia* or other high-prestige, centrally-produced television programs, *Vremia* does seem to have depended on the honesty of whichever Party or state officials might be contacted to write a particular story, yielding reports featuring little independent investigation or analysis.

Additionally, in much the same way as the Soviet economy was planned in a top-down, centralized fashion, so, too, was media coverage. Yearly plans were drawn up, subdivided into quarterly and weekly plans, indicating the topics and themes to be covered. Thus, while journalists still had to react to the events unfolding around them, they were doing so with an understanding of the overall intellectual framework into which they would place these events.⁹⁴

Throughout Soviet rule, positions within the press had been predominantly filled by urban elites. This was, in large part, due to their access to education, as well as the personal contacts to secure jobs within the field of journalism. Therefore, by the 1970s, Soviet planners created numerous institutes for training journalists, particularly focusing on recruiting Soviet citizens from rural/agricultural backgrounds, as well as those whose parents were involved in industrial labor.⁹⁵

However, many of these institutes and academies dedicated to training journalists found themselves in a difficult position. On the one hand, many of those admitted to their classes had poor literacy skills. On the other hand, they were often required to spend much of their class time teaching Soviet ideological theories of journalism and the media, resulting in insufficient practical experience for their students, who were often unable to find posts at the more

93 Thomas F. Remington, "Politics and Professionalism in Soviet Journalism," *Slavic Review* 44, no. 3 (October 1, 1985): 492–493.

94 Angus Roxburgh, *Pravda: Inside the Soviet News Machine* (New York: G. Braziller, 1987), 64–65.

95 Remington, "Politics and Professionalism in Soviet Journalism," 490.

respectable media outlets.⁹⁶

In addition to the structuring influences of journalism training and the establishments which produced journalism, the actual programs and publications which were produced also had an important role in deciding which sort of news tended to be highlighted. During the project of *glasnost*, many new print publications were created to cover subjects that had not previously been acceptable; Ganley notes magazines on “politics, sex, religion, history, ethnic matters, the ecology, crime, culture, love for animals” and other topics.⁹⁷ Others simply represented more radical political viewpoints, such as the newspaper *Nezavisimaia Gazeta* (*Independent Newspaper*), which routinely ran news stories contradicting the Communist Party and refused to report on the mundane activities of the Central Committee, as state-owned media was directed to do. At the same time, there was a push from Gorbachev to adopt *glasnost* throughout all of the existing print press: he replaced personnel in leadership roles throughout the state apparatus dedicated to publishing, and in many major periodicals, including *Economicheskaiia Gazeta* (*Economic Newspaper*), *Sovetskaia Kul'tura* (*Soviet Culture*), and *Kommunist* (*Communist*).⁹⁸

Television was affected in much the same way: while many programs remained on the air in pre-*glasnost* formats, others were created which were more ambitious and took the task of creating a new, semi-independent press capable of critique as their central task. One such program was *Vzgliad* (*View* or *Opinion*), introduced in 1987. Themed to attract youth viewers using rock music, it featured guests that might not often be seen elsewhere on Soviet television, interviewed by young hosts wearing jeans and t-shirts. Memorable episodes included interviews with drug addicts, those who had served time in the gulag under Stalin, and other personalities

96 Ibid., 491–492.

97 Gladys Ganley, *Mikhail and the Multiplying Media* (Cambridge, MA: Program on Information Resources Policy, Harvard University Center for Information Policy Research, 1994), 55.

98 Ibid., 53–54.

that seemed unlikely candidates for Soviet television. Moreover, in an attempt to mirror the letters-to-the-editor columns that were always present in Soviet newspapers, *Vzgliad* accepted phone calls from its viewers, airing their reactions live—a first for any form of Soviet media.⁹⁹ As one might expect, this meant that opinions critical of the regime were aired on national television on a regular basis. This was tolerated by the Party, however. Indeed, Kuznetsov has commented that “*Vzgliad* also imitated the Moscow kitchen—the usual place for open conversations and criticisms of the authorities.”¹⁰⁰

However, the most groundbreaking news coverage often aired on Leningrad television, which was not broadcast to the rest of the Soviet Union. One excellent example was the program *Piatoe Koleso* (*Fifth Wheel*), which was broadcast twice weekly starting in 1988. It featured two-hour documentaries on controversial subjects, such as the mistreatment of children in orphanages, the status of veterans of Afghanistan, and so on, produced by a set of semi-independent filmmakers without much, if any, supervision by the Soviet authorities.¹⁰¹

Still, the most popular and influential program remained the nightly national news program on the First Channel, *Vremia*. By the late 1970s, *Vremia* had become accustomed to presenting news in a standard, formulaic order.¹⁰² Taking the broadcast of March 13, 1985 as an example, first would come domestic news, often focusing on the day-to-day activities of the Central Committee of the Communist Party, in this case describing talks between Chernenko and the political leadership of the RSFSR as well as lengthy reporting on the proceedings of the

99 Ibid., 69; Bernard S. Redmont, “Soviet Television’s New Look: a Veteran Correspondent Takes an Inside Look at Broadcast News, Soviet Style, and Finds Sweeping Changes Under Glasnost,” *Television Quarterly* 24, no. 1 (1989): 34.

100 G. Kuznetsov, ed., *Televizionnaia Zhurnalistika*, 3. izd., perer. i dop. (Moskva: Izd-vo Moskovskogo universiteta “Vyshaiāshkola,” 2002), 80–81 “‘Взгляд’ же имитировал московскую кухню -- обычное место для откровенных разговоров и критики властей.”

101 Katherine Bliss Eaton, *Daily Life in the Soviet Union* (Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, 2004), 276–277; Redmont, “Soviet Television’s New Look: a Veteran Correspondent Takes an Inside Look at Broadcast News, Soviet Style, and Finds Sweeping Changes Under Glasnost,” 38–39.

102 Kuznetsov, *Televizionnaia Zhurnalistika*, 79–80.

Council of Ministers. Next would come a series of short economic reports, on this broadcast including a report on experimental farming organization in Sverdlovsk Oblast, a quick story on the production of wooden furniture in Kiev, a *kolkhoz* in Yaroslavl Oblast exceeding its quota for milk production, and a scientific institute studying the possibility of growing soya in regions that had not grown it before. Following economic stories, *Vremia* anchors would present international news headlines, usually starting with news from socialist countries and then turning to news from the rest of the world. On March 13, these included Andrei Gromyko receiving a delegation from Spain in Moscow, Czechoslovakia sending a delegation to Austria, a Brussels conference on international security in Europe, the president of Nicaragua giving a speech criticizing President Reagan, Syria receiving an ambassador from Yemen, a delegation from East Germany being received in Bonn, a press conference in Moscow given by a youth group working towards promoting international peace, a rally in Iowa by farmers opposed to Reagan's policies, and a strike by Pan American mechanics. As demonstrated by this set of news headlines, often the *Vremia* producers would aim to find a thematic link to structure their choice of international news stories: in this case, diplomatic visits. Sometimes news stories on cultural events or other miscellaneous stories would follow the international news: on this particular broadcast, *Vremia* anchors noted the opening of an exhibition at a war museum in Belgrade dedicated to suffering during the Second World War, the Vega 1 and 2 space probes approaching the planet Venus, and a book being published in the Karelian ASSR which included artwork of its countryside. Finally, the program would be rounded out by updates on sports and the weather forecast.¹⁰³ However, this structure did begin to loosen towards 1988 and 1989 as the project of *glasnost* pushed forward, often omitting whole sections on particular days. Still, this order was mostly followed.

103 *Vremia*. Broadcast March 13, 1985. The U.S. Naval Academy Collection of Soviet & Russian TV, Library of Congress. 1 videocassette (3/4 inch), viewing copy.

This formulaic structure is probably to some degree indicative of the type of planning that was common in media in the Soviet Union at this time. Because many of these stories could be researched somewhat in advance, this sort of rubric likely made it easy to ensure that coverage would be balanced between subject areas.

This repetitive structure, however, greatly constrained *Vremia*'s producers. The program had little room to dedicate more airtime to more pressing news stories, especially given its lengthy coverage on Central Committee activities. Even so, this format was broken only for the most serious news stories, such as the death and funeral of General Secretary Konstantin Chernenko in March 1985.¹⁰⁴ Moreover, news that had the potential to be politically troublesome was often delayed by up to several days so that officials could be consulted to ensure that *Vremia* did not step out of line during its coverage.¹⁰⁵

One of the earliest clear steps towards *glasnost* in *Vremia*'s coverage was the occasional addition of a ten-minute addendum to the broadcast entitled *Prozhektor perestroiki* (*Spotlight on perestroika*), which investigated particular economic problems, often tracing them to political corruption of inept government officials.¹⁰⁶

Still, reform during *glasnost* did bring some changes to *Vremia* itself. Initial changes in 1986 and early 1987 were mostly superficial, consisting of a new logo and title sequence, more cuts between camera angles, and more varied news presenters. Soon, however, *Vremia* began to make considerably more use of photographs, film footage to accompany stories, maps shown on-screen, detailed weather charts. All of these represented attempts to more effectively use the

104 *Vremia*. Broadcast March 12, 1985. The U.S. Naval Academy Collection of Soviet & Russian TV, Library of Congress. 1 videocassette (3/4 inch), viewing copy.

105 Reino Paasilinna, *Glasnost and Soviet Television : a Study of the Soviet Mass Media and Its Role in Society from 1985-1991* ([Finland]: YLE Finnish Broadcasting Co., 1995), 111.

106 Redmont, "Soviet Television's New Look: a Veteran Correspondent Takes an Inside Look at Broadcast News, Soviet Style, and Finds Sweeping Changes Under Glasnost," 36.

visual capabilities of television. There were also cautious but clear attempts to move towards a “*glasnost*-style” program, with interviews becoming more common and some degree of criticism on certain subjects. Furthermore, *Vremia* producers started to break out of the strict format that the program had previously followed, allowing it to more fluidly respond to events of the day. Much of this influence may have come from young, ambitious journalists, including Alexander Nevzorov, whose experimental news programs had been canceled at the beginning of 1987 and found employment with *Vremia*.¹⁰⁷

At the same time, it is possible to discuss many of the types of news stories and how they tended to be covered; many of these reports display a surprising consistency over time, reflecting *Vremia*'s rather conservative position as a media outlet. The most numerous *Vremia* news stories focused on the economy, for several reasons. First, they fit in well to the economic focus the Communist Party had at the core of its agenda. Therefore, demonstrating continual economic progress helped the regime maintain its legitimacy.

Moreover, economic news occurred and reoccurred predictably, which was helpful to journalists trying to complete the sort of preplanned coverage common to Soviet television. Grain, for example, was always harvested at the same time each year, and so television journalists could reliably count on images of mechanized equipment moving through wheat fields, as well as on statistics of how much grain had been harvested, as was present in a September 1987 report from Krasnoyarsk Krai.¹⁰⁸ All this made for simple, easy, and non-controversial coverage which could be easily prepared. Even in the event of difficulties, this could be portrayed as a struggle against natural forces, as in a December 1986 story covering the

107 Ganley, *Mikhail and the Multiplying Media*, 67; Kuznetsov, *Televizionnaia Zhurnalistsika*, 82–83.

108 *Vremia*. Broadcast September 7, 1987. The U.S. Naval Academy Collection of Soviet & Russian TV, Library of Congress. 1 videocassette (3/4 inch), viewing copy.

struggle to plant crops successfully in the arid soil in Kazakhstan.¹⁰⁹ Regardless of the crop under consideration, many stories emphasized that the production exceeded the quota set by economic planning authorities: grain in the case of a November 1987 story and milk products in a March 1985 report.¹¹⁰ Other than the different products and statistical figures, however, these two stories were virtually identical. Still, I do not mean to imply that all coverage of agriculture was repetitive and uninformative; some stories on technological advances within agriculture were also aired, including a report in 1987 which detailed the advantages of newly-designed tractors that could run more efficiently on natural gas than typical tractors could on diesel.¹¹¹

Finally, stories focusing on the Soviet economy allowed for the use of a particular brand of symbolic imagery which had become a common feature of Soviet publications, propaganda, and journalism. In the pre-Stalin period, Soviet propaganda tended to include rather abstract themes and designs.¹¹² By the 1980s, this imagery had an increased verisimilitude, which made it easy to adopt for television's use. Perhaps the most prominent symbol was simply that of the machine. More than half of the economic stories I encountered focused on machines and the role they played in the economy, usually being portrayed as engines of economic power and progress. This was particularly true in terms of large-scale machines: agricultural combines, oil drilling rigs, and trains featured prominently, perhaps because they were obvious symbols of the Soviet economy's power. For example, stories in December 1986 described the workings of a metal

109 *Vremia*. Broadcast December 14, 1986. The U.S. Naval Academy Collection of Soviet & Russian TV, Library of Congress. 1 videocassette (3/4 inch), viewing copy.

110 *Vremia*. Broadcast November 2, 1987. The U.S. Naval Academy Collection of Soviet & Russian TV, Library of Congress. 1 videocassette (3/4 inch), viewing copy; *Vremia*. Broadcast March 13, 1985. The U.S. Naval Academy Collection of Soviet & Russian TV, Library of Congress. 1 videocassette (3/4 inch), viewing copy.

111 *Vremia*. Broadcast September 7, 1987. The U.S. Naval Academy Collection of Soviet & Russian TV, Library of Congress. 1 videocassette (3/4 inch), viewing copy; *Vremia*. Broadcast March 13, 1985. The U.S. Naval Academy Collection of Soviet & Russian TV, Library of Congress. 1 videocassette (3/4 inch), viewing copy.

112 Steven Heller, *Iron Fists : Branding the 20th-century Totalitarian State* (New York: Phaidon Press, 2008), 128–135.

forging factory in the Latvian SSR and a compressor station on a natural gas pipeline.¹¹³ Both stories featured interviews with engineers who explained the importance of their work, and a great deal of film footage of the large machines they were using, including plenty of flying sparks. A similar story aired in February 1987, describing a factory which produced paper for most of the major newspapers in the Soviet Union; the visuals this time included large bales of paper being moved around on forklifts.¹¹⁴ However, smaller products and factories could also produce the same types of visual symbols: a December 1986 *Vremia* report showed a factory in the Tatar ASSR which had just finished retooling to produce a new model of diesel engine, thus allowing *Vremia* to show the factory where engine after engine rolled off the assembly line.¹¹⁵

Another common symbol of Soviet technological prowess was the ongoing missions to Mir; cosmonauts often held interviews with *Vremia* correspondents and talked about the scientific experiments they were undertaking. Moreover, footage of the exterior of spacecraft, as seen in a February 1987 segment describing a resupply mission to the space station, provided striking visuals that reinforced the idea of the Soviet Union as a technological superpower.¹¹⁶

Additionally, news presenters discussing economic statistics and production figures often spoke more broadly on the importance of various technical advances and how they would continue to bring increases in productivity. For example, I watched one story on the introduction of a new type of harvesting equipment to Krasnoyarsk Krai, broadcast in March 1985. This technology would potentially be able to more efficiently harvest wheat, with less waste.¹¹⁷

113 *Vremia*. Broadcast December 14, 1986. The U.S. Naval Academy Collection of Soviet & Russian TV, Library of Congress. 1 videocassette (3/4 inch), viewing copy; *Vremia*. Broadcast December 18, 1986. The U.S. Naval Academy Collection of Soviet & Russian TV, Library of Congress. 1 videocassette (3/4 inch), viewing copy.

114 *Vremia*. Broadcast February 23, 1987. The U.S. Naval Academy Collection of Soviet & Russian TV, Library of Congress. 1 videocassette (3/4 inch), viewing copy.

115 *Vremia*. Broadcast December 14, 1986. The U.S. Naval Academy Collection of Soviet & Russian TV, Library of Congress. 1 videocassette (3/4 inch), viewing copy.

116 *Vremia*. Broadcast February 23, 1987. The U.S. Naval Academy Collection of Soviet & Russian TV, Library of Congress. 1 videocassette (3/4 inch), viewing copy.

117 *Vremia*. Broadcast March 12, 1985. The U.S. Naval Academy Collection of Soviet & Russian TV, Library of

Another, broadcast in 1986, detailed the installation of new machinery in a factory producing string which promised greater productivity.¹¹⁸ Notably, few technical details were given in either story as to how this would be accomplished, even though workers and managers were interviewed for both stories who likely could have provided these details. Instead, here as elsewhere, *Vremia* seems to have reinforced the prevailing belief that technological progress would continually and incrementally bring economic growth, or at least raise the standard of living, as depicted by a December 1986 story detailing new medicines under development which were, at the time, under clinical trials in dogs, thus promising improved standards of medicine.¹¹⁹

Finally, it is worth noting that the vast majority of economic stories focused on heavy industry. I encountered only a handful of stories that discussed consumer goods—and even these were mostly discussed in typically-Soviet style. One gave many statistics about new types of articles of children's clothing introduced in 1986, but gave no actual details of any of those new styles, or what differentiated them from those previously available.¹²⁰ Nearly identically, a September 1986 report outlined new “experimental” designs of clothing, yet refused to explain the new features of these designs.¹²¹ Similarly, *Vremia* detailed the production of furniture in a factory just outside of Moscow in March 1987, yet focused primarily on the machines being used, not the finished product.¹²² Just a week later, a story aired describing a radio and television factory, yet little description was given of the technological properties of the receivers being

Congress. 1 videocassette (3/4 inch), viewing copy.

118 *Vremia*. Broadcast September 16, 1986. The U.S. Naval Academy Collection of Soviet & Russian TV, Library of Congress. 1 videocassette (3/4 inch), viewing copy.

119 *Vremia*. Broadcast December 14, 1986. The U.S. Naval Academy Collection of Soviet & Russian TV, Library of Congress. 1 videocassette (3/4 inch), viewing copy.

120 *Vremia*. Broadcast August 1, 1986. The U.S. Naval Academy Collection of Soviet & Russian TV, Library of Congress. 1 videocassette (3/4 inch), viewing copy.

121 *Vremia*. Broadcast September 16, 1986. The U.S. Naval Academy Collection of Soviet & Russian TV, Library of Congress. 1 videocassette (3/4 inch), viewing copy.

122 *Vremia*. Broadcast March 2, 1987. *Vremya Compendium*, Oakdale, Iowa: Worldview, 1987. 2 videocassettes (VHS), tape 1.

produced there, which *Vremia* journalists surely could have ascertained.¹²³ As such, one wonders just how informative viewers would have found this sort of coverage.

All of these stories had several things in common. They usually focused on a relatively small geographic area or on a particular factory or firm. Moreover, any statistics regarding production were inevitably given without any attempt at contextualization. Therefore, viewers could not reasonably draw inferences as to whether a particular farm's production of wheat was actually newsworthy or not. Instead, the intended impact of these stories seems to have been to merely constantly reassure the viewer that the Soviet economy was continuing to function normally. However, much of that sense of normalcy was to be lost due to Gorbachev's programs of *glasnost* and *perestroika*, as I will discuss in the following chapter.

123 *Vremia*. Broadcast March 10, 1987. *Vremya Compendium*, Oakdale, Iowa: Worldview, 1987. 2 videocassettes (VHS), tape 1.

Chapter 3: The beginnings of *perestroika* and *glasnost*

Political pressure to effect the changes of *glasnost* and *perestroika* came directly from the very top. *Glasnost* was one of Mikhail Gorbachev's primary political programs, which he felt was necessary to help fight corruption within the Soviet system. He aimed to create a press that was not as politically beholden to state and Party officials, in the aim of strengthening the Soviet system by way of gentle critique. For example, in 1988 he directed journalists and editors to “[p]ublish everything. There should be pluralism of opinions. But the thrust should be such that the line of perestroika [and] the cause of socialism are defended and strengthened.”¹²⁴ And, indeed, Gorbachev was able to find great success in this program, especially early on, rooting out corrupt officials, poorly-designed economic and governmental programs, and overall improving the efficiency of the Soviet economy and state, in no small part thanks to the new liberties the Soviet media was given.

At the same time, it is important to understand that *glasnost* was not meant to be destructive of the Communist Party's control over media; rather, Gorbachev's intent was to repair the existing system of media control and make it more useful by increasing the quality of media produced. His intent was not to allow voices that were clearly anti-communist to emerge, as was somewhat demonstrated by his attempts in 1990 and 1991 to push back against such media, as I discuss in chapters 7 and 8.

In 1995, Paasilinna provided a evocative interpretation of the problems facing Gorbachev's administration that *glasnost* attempted to solve. First, he noted the “crisis of content”: journalists were simply not allowed to cover many news stories even if they would have attracted a broad audience for fear of causing political unrest. This resulted in bland and

¹²⁴ quoted in Ellen Propper Mickiewicz, *Mobilization and Reform : Political Communication Policy Under Gorbachev* (Atlanta: Carter Center of Emory University, 1989), 200.

uninteresting news, which caused many Soviet citizens to lose interest in news coverage entirely. Second, the “crisis of reciprocity” meant that fewer and fewer Soviet citizens engaged with the media by taking actions such as writing letters to the editor. Therefore, it was harder and harder to attempt to engage the audience. Third, Paasilinna argued there was a “crisis of power”; that is, that media was losing its power over much of the Soviet citizenry, particularly young people, because they were simply not engaged with it. Finally, he argued that a “crisis of respect” emerged in which journalists were simply not given much credence by politicians and state officials because they had little practical power.¹²⁵

Of course, Gorbachev himself also benefited from the project of *glasnost*. He, unlike many of his comrades in the Communist Party, was comfortable making remarks on live television, often improvising during speeches. Moreover, he had better mastered the art of appearing personable on television, often making off-the-cuff remarks or lighthearted jokes. As such, the progress of his program of *glasnost* helped reinforce his own political power.¹²⁶

Some of the earliest evidence of *glasnost*'s effects on television news took place on Leningrad television. In particular, the program *Obshchestvennoe mnenie* (*Public opinion*), launched in 1987, reported on local news by having journalists present their stories from the locations where they took place. Moreover, it often interviewed citizens on the streets to gauge their reaction. This style of reporting was soon imitated on *Dobryi vecher, Moskva* (*Good evening, Moscow*), bringing this style of reporting to nationally-broadcast television.¹²⁷ This new mode of reportage aimed to serve three important roles in the project of *glasnost*. First, it

125 Reino Paasilinna, *Glasnost and Soviet Television : a Study of the Soviet Mass Media and Its Role in Society from 1985-1991* ([Finland]: YLE Finnish Broadcasting Co., 1995), 67–8.

126 David Remnick, *Lenin's Tomb: The Last Days of the Soviet Empire*, 1st ed. (New York: Random House, 1993), 146.

127 G. Kuznetsov, ed., *Televizionnaia Zhurnalistika*, 3. izd., perer. i dop. (Moskva: Izd-vo Moskovskogo universiteta “Vyshaiâ shkola,” 2002), 81.

provided considerably more audiovisual influence, drawing the audience more strongly into the news stories covered. Second, it more explicitly connected viewers with the issues being discussed, as they could more easily relate to the reactions of “average” citizens. Finally, they provided politicians and others in positions of power with a clearer understanding of popular opinion. In short, by these three methods, this reporting helped unify government and its citizens.

Ganley and others have suggested that one of major impetuses for the spread of *glasnost* was the disaster at Chernobyl on April 26, 1986. The Soviet leadership clearly understood the severity of the situation early on, immediately ordering evacuations of Pripjat.¹²⁸ Nevertheless, Soviet journalists were kept in the dark, as was the public, until scientists in Sweden were able to detect the radiation and publicly confronted Soviet authorities about this on the 28th. Even after this point, the Soviet media response was muted; the initial announcement was made on *Vremia* the following evening, stating rather dryly: “An accident has occurred at the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant as one of the reactors was damaged. Measures are being taken to eliminate the consequences of the accident. A government commission has been set up.”¹²⁹ The first full report of the disaster was in print media on May 6, a full ten days after the disaster itself.¹³⁰

Soviet authorities appear to have been very concerned with the potential for causing panic in the population living near Chernobyl, requiring those involved in the evacuation to sign oaths of silence, for instance, and the annual May Day celebrations in Kiev went on as planned, despite the obvious health risk to everyone involved.¹³¹ Nevertheless, Soviet citizens quickly became concerned at the lack of details that their government was willing to release, leading to wild rumors and speculation, which were widely reported by Western journalists who were

128 Viktor Haynes, *The Chernobyl Disaster* (London: Hogarth, 1988), 193.

129 Arthur T. Hopkins, *Unchained Reactions: Chernobyl, Glasnost, and Nuclear Deterrence* (Washington, DC: National Defense University Press, 1993), 38.

130 *Ibid.*, 40.

131 *Ibid.*, 41; Haynes, *The Chernobyl Disaster*, 194.

unable to ascertain whether they were true or not.¹³²

In response, Gorbachev spoke on television on May 14, attempting to reassure Soviet citizens that the situation was under control and that they were not at risk.¹³³ However, he also used the catastrophe to claim the West was intentionally using this opportunity to denigrate the Soviet Union at large, calling it an “unrestrained anti-Soviet campaign” based on “a veritable mountain of...dishonest and malicious lies.”¹³⁴ Moreover, this and other media reports from this time focused on the heroism that those involved in the cleanup effort displayed, in a standard vein of Soviet reporting aimed to drive Soviet citizens to work harder in their own jobs.¹³⁵ As such, it appears that Gorbachev was attempting to portray the Chernobyl disaster as non-newsworthy, and to dismiss the rumors flooding the Soviet Union as misinformation campaigns from the West.

In short, Gorbachev, his administration, and the Soviet press saw the Chernobyl accident primarily as a question of public relations, and spinning this incident to support their political agenda was their primary focus. However, there was simply nothing the Gorbachev administration could do that would make the Chernobyl disaster appear positively to Soviet citizens. In the end, on the first anniversary of the accident in 1987, the Soviet press was permitted to release much fuller details of the accident, including chaotic evacuation attempts and mismanagement by some officials.¹³⁶ However, in the intervening year, Soviet citizens had little choice but to turn to Western sources to learn about the catastrophe.

The international embarrassment brought on by the Soviet Union's unwillingness to

132 Hopkins, *Unchained Reactions*, 42.

133 Haynes, *The Chernobyl Disaster*, 194–195.

134 Richard F. Mould, *Chernobyl ; the Real Story*, 1st ed. (Oxford, England ; New York: Pergamon Press, 1988), 198.

135 Haynes, *The Chernobyl Disaster*, 195.

136 Ibid., 196.

disclose the full extent of the catastrophe unfolding in Chernobyl, then, graphically illustrated the potential advantages of having a more decentralized and independent press, Ganley argues. This allowed Gorbachev to push more strongly in the direction of *glasnost*; moreover, it served as a catalyst within the journalistic community, causing individual journalists to try to publish more politically risky stories, as they saw that increased penetration by Western media meant that these stories would likely be covered even if they did not publish them.¹³⁷

Within the print media, this move towards more rapid and politically contentious coverage was soon apparent. Ganley argues that this move most notably took place in *Komsomolskaia Pravda*, followed soon, to a lesser degree by *Pravda* itself. Meanwhile, other papers, such as *Sovetskaia Rossiia* actually became more conservative. All these viewpoints were tolerated by Gorbachev's administration, and thus, Ganley concludes that “[b]y 1987 and especially 1988, areas permitted to handled critically by the media included nationality issues, foreign policy, some military topics, the KGB, and even the Communist party.”¹³⁸

As such, Ganley notes that this process began to unseat many of the journalistic institutions of the Soviet Union: *Pravda* began to lose readers, who were attracted by the newspapers carrying out more thorough reforms. Simultaneously, Interfax (the newly-created external wire news service) was able to gain some degree of political independence by refusing state funding and focusing on profits it could make by selling subscriptions to the West. However, most print media outlets were less able to achieve this sort of autonomy because their production facilities were state-owned and more easily shut down by Party members if they tried to print news that was likely to raise the Party's ire.¹³⁹

137 Gladys Ganley, *Mikhail and the Multiplying Media* (Cambridge, MA: Program on Information Resources Policy, Harvard University Center for Information Policy Research, 1994), 51–53.

138 Ibid., 54–55.

139 Ibid., 57–69.

One of the particular important aims of *glasnost* was the principle of *operativnost*, or timely reporting of news. Gorbachev explained the importance of this at the twenty-seventh Party Congress in February-March 1986.¹⁴⁰ This point was then reinforced by the Chernobyl disaster, where politicking over the best way to break the news to the Soviet public led to great delays in reporting.

This focus necessarily required a rethinking of the traditional highly-planned model of Soviet journalism. Mickiewicz noted, for instance, that *Pravda* journalists were often given assignments more than a week beforehand, and that even news that *Pravda* planners felt required being as up-to-date as possible was still often written days before it was to be published.¹⁴¹ As such, the goals of *operativnost* necessarily required decentralizing the process of planning, as well as abandoning some of the rigorous focus on completing quarterly or yearly plans for media.

Simultaneously, Soviet journalists responded to their new-found understanding that they were failing to reach their audience by attempting to make media more accessible to their audiences; journalists often simplified language and style, and focused more on issues that audiences considered important and found interesting.

In Turpin's examination of the external English-language magazine *Moscow News*, she found a sizable shift in the style and grammar in the magazine's articles over the period of *glasnost*. Moreover, there was a substantial reduction in the use of jargon and polemic terms. All in all, the magazine was written to better address its American audience: it was both more easily understandable and more politically palatable.¹⁴²

140 Richard Stites, *Russian Popular Culture: Entertainment and Society Since 1900*, Cambridge Soviet Paperbacks 7 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 182.

141 Ellen Propper Mickiewicz, *Split Signals: Television and Politics in the Soviet Union* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 24.

142 Jennifer Turpin, *Reinventing the Soviet Self: Media and Social Change in the Former Soviet Union* (Westport

At the same time, it was becoming increasingly apparent that the traditional Soviet model of heavy top-down control over media was becoming outdated and ineffective. This model caused inefficiency and delay in reporting stories, as well as a number of ancillary problems.

One of these problems was that television in the non-Russian republics had always lagged behind Moscow in technology, funding, and prestige. While Gorbachev put additional funding into these republic-based television stations, as well as giving them substantial political autonomy, they continued to lag behind in technical quality. Moreover, television produced within Moscow continued to vastly under-represent non-Slavic ethnic groups.¹⁴³

Furthermore, this centralization of news production often led to stories being carried in local papers, television, and other journalistic outlets which were insensitive to the local culture and political scene. Particularly in the European republics, Soviet citizens increasingly had access to broadcast media from outside the USSR. This was particularly problematic because it often broadcast information about news topics while that same information was still being held up filtering through the bureaucracy in the official Soviet media. Broadcasters such as the Voice of America, even if covering a story in a particularly slanted way, tended to make their coverage at least *seem* more balanced. All of this added up to increasing distrust of state media.¹⁴⁴

Still, even the conservative *Vremia* seems to have been enthusiastic about covering the economic and political reforms pushed forward by Gorbachev. Particularly after 1987 or so, many news stories about the economy or about politics were infused with language of reform and its potential benefits.

Some of this coverage talked explicitly about the legal and political processes of

Conn.: Praeger, 1995), 101–106.

143 Ellen Propper Mickiewicz, “Ethnic Differentiation and Political Communication,” in *Soviet Social Problems*, by Anthony Jones (Boulder: Westview Press, 1991), 28–29.

144 Thomas Wolfe, *Governing Soviet Journalism : the Press and the Socialist Person After Stalin* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005), 127–133.

perestroika. For example, the new economic entity known as a *collective* was explained to the public by government officials on a *Vremia* segment airing in March 1987; while this lecture was dry in style, and thus not the epitome of *glasnost*-style broadcasting, the manner in which the speaker tried to engage the audience in the project of reforming Soviet governance was certainly in line with the overall objectives of *glasnost*.¹⁴⁵

In the same broadcast, brief coverage was also given to the meeting of the Union of Journalists, which was discussing how the project of *perestroika* would affect journalism and media. Moreover, the program showed excerpts from a speech by Andrei Gromyko (at that time Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet) regarding the importance of the “human factor in *perestroika*.” Thus, using the traditional Soviet method of presenting thematically-related stories together, *Vremia* appears to have been trying to reinforce the audience's understanding of the importance and scope of Gorbachev's intended reforms.

Moreover, particularly towards the end of the 1980s, *Vremia* routinely broadcast news of Soviet industries and enterprises changing to adapt to the new legal landscape created by Gorbachev's reforms. For example, a July 1987 report documented a clothing store that was aiming to become “self-financing”—that is, no longer supported by state subsidy in any way. This coverage included interviews with apprehensive but cautiously optimistic employees and managers who described the potential risks and benefits to this new arrangement.¹⁴⁶ Other enterprises were beginning to respond to market pressure, as shown in a series of short news segments which *Vremia* aired in late 1988. One showed a cooperative which had formed to sell surplus electronic components from a nearby factory to amateur radio operators, thus finding

145 *Vremia*. Broadcast March 14, 1987. The U.S. Naval Academy Collection of Soviet & Russian TV, Library of Congress. 1 videocassette (3/4 inch), viewing copy.

146 *Vremia*. Broadcast July 01, 1987. The U.S. Naval Academy Collection of Soviet & Russian TV, Library of Congress. 1 videocassette (3/4 inch), viewing copy.

value in products that otherwise would have been scrapped.¹⁴⁷ Another explained how the GAZ truck factory was selling some of its agricultural products directly to farms, bypassing the usual waiting lists and bureaucracy.¹⁴⁸ These were all drastic changes to the Soviet economy, which had functioned almost solely on the basis of top-down planning for nearly sixty years. As such, *Vremia's* coverage was in a certain sense dramatic and pioneering. On the other hand, it also continued to serve the goals of Gorbachev and his administration, as he attempted to improve the Soviet economy. In that regard, these stories were little more than a continuation of the older style of economic reportage.

Stories were also produced focusing on the changes in the broader economy taking place as part of *perestroika*. Earlier on, many of these stories focused on the actions of individual factories, much as was common of economic stories in general. For example, one broadcast in March 1985 included interviews with the heads of several factories, including a new electronics factory. Throughout, great stress was placed on the quality of goods being produced.¹⁴⁹ This was a large departure from the traditional Soviet focus on quantity above all else in economic planning and accounting. This style of story was to be repeated extensively even later on, as in a January 1987 story about increased quality at the KAMAZ factory accounting for increased reliability of the trucks it produced,¹⁵⁰ and in February 1987, when *Vremia* interviewed a newly-appointed manager of a self-financing factory, asking probing questions about his activities.¹⁵¹

Other reports detailed economic reform outside of factories, such as large-scale electrification

147 *Vremia*. Broadcast April 11, 1987. The U.S. Naval Academy Collection of Soviet & Russian TV, Library of Congress. 1 videocassette (3/4 inch), viewing copy.

148 *Vremia*. Broadcast July 15, 1988. The U.S. Naval Academy Collection of Soviet & Russian TV, Library of Congress. 1 videocassette (3/4 inch), viewing copy.

149 *Vremia*. Broadcast March 12, 1985. The U.S. Naval Academy Collection of Soviet & Russian TV, Library of Congress. 1 videocassette (3/4 inch), viewing copy.

150 *Vremia*. Broadcast January 7, 1987. The U.S. Naval Academy Collection of Soviet & Russian TV, Library of Congress. 1 videocassette (3/4 inch), viewing copy.

151 *Vremia*. Broadcast February 23, 1987. The U.S. Naval Academy Collection of Soviet & Russian TV, Library of Congress. 1 videocassette (3/4 inch), viewing copy.

projects in Siberia in March 1987, or the reorganization of offshore drilling platforms allowing higher yields of petroleum in December of that year.¹⁵²

However, towards the end of the period I surveyed, the focus of stories discussing economic reform increasingly shifted towards large-scale organizational changes. For example, a March 1987 story described a furniture factory under “new management conditions”: it was attempting to become self-financing, no longer depending on state subsidies;¹⁵³ a similar report aired in November of that year, describing televisions and radios being sold in Siberia without the use of central planning.¹⁵⁴ Other stories focused on new international ties, such as a short December 1987 segment describing an agreement made whereby a West German printing company would produce magazines for Soviet publishers and an editorial in June 1988 that noted the importance of joint US-USSR commercial ventures that were just coming into being.¹⁵⁵ Additionally, a August 1988 story detailed attempts to reform economic statistics tracking. All of these stories implicitly stated that the traditional Soviet means of running the economy were, in some measure, faulty, a premise that would not have been likely to air on even the most radical news programs in 1985.

At the same time, after 1986 there were a good number of news stories appearing on *Vremia* which called for more progress to be made in various economic pursuits, particularly in terms of agriculture, which remained inefficient by world standards. Perhaps the best example I encountered broadcast in August 1988. It analyzed some of the factors which held back increases

152 *Vremia*. Broadcast March 13, 1987. *Vremya Compendium*, Oakdale, Iowa: Worldview, 1987. 2 videocassettes (VHS), tape 1. *Vremia*. Broadcast December 15, 1987. The U.S. Naval Academy Collection of Soviet & Russian TV, Library of Congress. 1 videocassette (3/4 inch), viewing copy.

153 *Vremia*. Broadcast March 9, 1988. The U.S. Naval Academy Collection of Soviet & Russian TV, Library of Congress. 1 videocassette (3/4 inch), viewing copy.

154 *Vremia*. Broadcast April 11, 1988. The U.S. Naval Academy Collection of Soviet & Russian TV, Library of Congress. 1 videocassette (3/4 inch), viewing copy.

155 *Vremia*. Broadcast December 15, 1987. The U.S. Naval Academy Collection of Soviet & Russian TV, Library of Congress. 1 videocassette (3/4 inch), viewing copy; *Vremia*. Broadcast June 5, 1988. The U.S. Naval Academy Collection of Soviet & Russian TV, Library of Congress. 1 videocassette (3/4 inch), viewing copy.

in grain production at a particular *kolkhoz* (collective farm), concluding that additional mechanized equipment was needed to bring this *kolkhoz* up to par with others in the region. Moreover, the journalist presenting this story used this as an example, arguing that *kolkhozy* in general needed more investment in order to make economic progress.¹⁵⁶ A number of other reports from farms throughout the Soviet Union attempted to find the reasons for their economic woes. One story aired in December 1987, in which the accountant at a *kolkhoz* which was attempting to modernize its economics and being self-financing explained the difficulties he faced: other firms seldom paid on time for products the *kolkhoz* sold them, and thus the farm was saddled with debts which required substantial interest payments.¹⁵⁷ Another report from April 1988 called for the creation of an organization to manage breeds of cattle, as the genetic viability of Soviet milk cows was decreasing with time, calling shortfalls in milk production.¹⁵⁸

There are several ways in which this story typified this sort of call for economic progress. First, it did not ascribe blame to individuals or to specific organizations. Rather, it merely attempted to illustrate the economic problems at hand. Second, it suggested remedial actions which could be taken—in these cases, increased investment in farm equipment, timely payments, and better livestock management. Finally, it attempted to make generalizations from the case at hand to the broader economy. All of these, of course, are in line with Gorbachev's motivations for *glasnost* to begin with, as he wished it to serve as a way of rectifying some of the broad problems with the Soviet system without causing political turmoil.

Additionally, many news stories focused on technological progress, such as an August

156 *Vremia*. Broadcast July 15, 1988. The U.S. Naval Academy Collection of Soviet & Russian TV, Library of Congress. 1 videocassette (3/4 inch), viewing copy.

157 *Vremia*. Broadcast December 15, 1987. The U.S. Naval Academy Collection of Soviet & Russian TV, Library of Congress. 1 videocassette (3/4 inch), viewing copy.

158 *Vremia*. Broadcast April 11, 1988. The U.S. Naval Academy Collection of Soviet & Russian TV, Library of Congress. 1 videocassette (3/4 inch), viewing copy.

1986 story that interviewed the commander of the Far Eastern commercial fleet about the current state of icebreaker technology, which at that time was lagging, negatively impacting shipping in the northeast of the Soviet Union, and then visited a hydrodynamic laboratory which was working on new hull designs for icebreakers.¹⁵⁹ Thus, the viewer was shown how technological progress would address current shortcomings in the Soviet economy. Similarly, an August 1988 story covered improvements to mountain roads in remote regions of the USSR, which would likewise improve commerce.¹⁶⁰ Other reports focused on new technological possibilities that would improve the Soviet economy, such as the construction of a new, technologically-advanced line on the Kiev subway, featured in March 1987.¹⁶¹ Segments airing in September 1987 and April 1988 described new agricultural technologies, particularly in terms of irrigation, which were projected to allow some regions of the USSR to exceed their quotas of agricultural products in the five-year plan.¹⁶²

News stories about technological advances could also serve to allow positive news stories about foreign countries, a priority for Gorbachev as he sought to mitigate hostilities between the Soviet Union and its international adversaries. For example, *Vremia* aired a story in October 1987 about high-speed rail advances in Japan.¹⁶³ This report was presented matter-of-factly, almost as if it was occurring within the USSR. This same style was used in a March 1987 report from Wroclaw which showed computers being used to expedite factory work.¹⁶⁴ In a sense,

159 *Vremia*. Broadcast August 1, 1986. The U.S. Naval Academy Collection of Soviet & Russian TV, Library of Congress. 1 videocassette (3/4 inch), viewing copy.

160 *Vremia*. Broadcast August 8, 1988. The U.S. Naval Academy Collection of Soviet & Russian TV, Library of Congress. 1 videocassette (3/4 inch), viewing copy.

161 *Vremia*. Broadcast March 5, 1987. *Vremya Compendium*, Oakdale, Iowa: Worldview, 1987. 2 videocassettes (VHS), tape 2

162 *Vremia*. Broadcast September 7, 1987. The U.S. Naval Academy Collection of Soviet & Russian TV, Library of Congress. 1 videocassette (3/4 inch), viewing copy; *Vremia*. Broadcast April 11, 1988. The U.S. Naval Academy Collection of Soviet & Russian TV, Library of Congress. 1 videocassette (3/4 inch), viewing copy.

163 *Vremia*. Broadcast November 22, 1987. The U.S. Naval Academy Collection of Soviet & Russian TV, Library of Congress. 1 videocassette (3/4 inch), viewing copy.

164 *Vremia*. Broadcast March 4, 1987. *Vremya Compendium*, Oakdale, Iowa: Worldview, 1987. 2 videocassettes

science and technology served as something that could unite the interests of the Soviet Union with those of the world more broadly, including both countries within the socialist sphere and those elsewhere. (I will discuss this further in Chapter 6.)

At the same time, stories about economic advances started to be tempered with a look into their social implications. For example, a May 1985 story described the construction of a natural gas processing plant, and noted the importance of the social infrastructure that needed to be built around it to support its workers: schools, hospitals, gyms, and so on.¹⁶⁵ Other stories focused on more specific advances in the Soviet standard of living. Reports aired in both March 1987 and April 1988 which emphasized the vastly-improved quality of apartments being constructed in new residential developments, showing pictures of their high ceilings and numerous spacious rooms, and interviewing their new residents.¹⁶⁶

Stories also emphasized education, whether in central Russia or in far-flung regions of the Soviet Union. An April 1988 segment noted an experimental school in Moscow focusing on foreign language education,¹⁶⁷ while a December 1986 report showed the improved educational facilities being built on state-owned farms (*sovkhozy*) in the Kazakh SSR.¹⁶⁸ Of course, focusing on these sorts of social supports was nothing new, nor was the construction of them when building remotely-located factories: all of this had been carried out throughout Soviet industrialization.

What was new under *glasnost*, and increasingly common towards the end of the 1980s,

(VHS), tape 2.

165 *Vremia*. Broadcast May 10, 1985. The U.S. Naval Academy Collection of Soviet & Russian TV, Library of Congress. 1 videocassette (3/4 inch), viewing copy.

166 *Vremia*. Broadcast March 9, 1987. The U.S. Naval Academy Collection of Soviet & Russian TV, Library of Congress. 1 videocassette (3/4 inch), viewing copy; *Vremia*. Broadcast April 11, 1988. The U.S. Naval Academy Collection of Soviet & Russian TV, Library of Congress. 1 videocassette (3/4 inch), viewing copy.

167 *Vremia*. Broadcast April 11, 1988. The U.S. Naval Academy Collection of Soviet & Russian TV, Library of Congress. 1 videocassette (3/4 inch), viewing copy.

168 *Vremia*. Broadcast December 14, 1986. The U.S. Naval Academy Collection of Soviet & Russian TV, Library of Congress. 1 videocassette (3/4 inch), viewing copy.

was the degree to which *Vremia* was willing to comment on the *lack* of such social supports, such as in a story broadcast in August 1988, which investigated a poorly-equipped regional hospital and chided the local officials with underfunding it.¹⁶⁹ Similarly, a February 1988 story praised the construction of an alcoholism clinic in Karagan, Azerbaijan, along with attempts to crack down on *samogoliki* (those who produced illicit, homemade alcohol).¹⁷⁰

Finally, *Vremia* made increasing attempts to be easily accessible to its audience. More graphics, maps, and film footage was used to illustrate the subjects under discussion. A greater number of interviews with ordinary Soviet citizens took place, gauging their opinions on the news stories being reported. Language was simplified somewhat, sentences became shorter, and acronyms were increasingly spelled out. In short, *Vremia* wanted to be sure to keep its audience in this time of changing media, and so made great efforts to be readily useful to every Soviet citizen.

169 *Vremia*. Broadcast August 8, 1988. The U.S. Naval Academy Collection of Soviet & Russian TV, Library of Congress. 1 videocassette (3/4 inch), viewing copy.

170 *Vremia*. Broadcast February 6, 1988. The U.S. Naval Academy Collection of Soviet & Russian TV, Library of Congress. 1 videocassette (3/4 inch), viewing copy.

Chapter 4: Changing culture: television and cosmopolitanism

The importance of Soviet television broadcasting lay not only in its technical features, its programs, and its ideological underpinnings. One of its most interesting features was its audience, which was broad and considerable in size, lending this media the potential to have a great impact on Soviet culture and thinking. In the case of *Vremia*, this impact seems to have been quite high in reality, given the uniquely diverse and plentiful audience it enjoyed, and the trust Soviet citizens placed in the accuracy and relevance of centrally-distributed television news.

The proportion of citizens who owned television receivers was high in Gorbachev's Soviet Union, and had been high for some time. This was true across economic lines: while one might be able to tell a poor family in the 1970s USSR by their lack of a refrigerator or vacuum cleaner, the vast majority owned both radio and television sets. This was not a matter of consumer preference *per se*, but rather a reflection of production priorities over the previous decade, which had favored radios and televisions over other domestic appliances because Soviet economic planners felt that they were more important in the socialist project.¹⁷¹

Thus, by 1989, eighty percent of adults in the Soviet Union not only had access to television sets, but routinely watched television news, compared to only about one-third of US adults at the time.¹⁷² Moreover, television-watching seems to have been demographically distributed more evenly in the Soviet Union. For example, while housewives were the largest group of regular television viewers according to Soviet studies, they still made up only fifteen percent of the total audience, less than in the United States.¹⁷³

171 Walter D. Connor, *Socialism, Politics, and Equality: Hierarchy and Change in Eastern Europe and the USSR* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979), 288–291.

172 Ellen Propper Mickiewicz, “Understanding the World: The Cognitive Grid of Soviet Television News,” in *Politics and the Soviet System: Essays in Honour of Frederick C. Barghoorn*, by Thomas F. Remington (Houndmills Basingstoke Hampshire: Macmillan Press, 1989), 15.

173 Ellen Propper Mickiewicz, *Media and the Russian Public* (New York, N.Y: Praeger, 1981), 23.

Moreover, television appears to have appealed primarily to the “average” Soviet citizen: at least around 1980, college-educated viewers reported high dissatisfaction with television content, perhaps because they could most clearly perceive the stilted and ideologically-driven style of most television broadcasting in the Soviet Union. At the same time, those with the poorest access to formal education often reported similar levels of dissatisfaction, likely because they had difficulty understanding programs due to the relatively advanced vocabulary and constant use of abstract ideological concepts.¹⁷⁴ As such, television's greatest power was over citizens who fell into neither category.

Additionally, Soviet citizens appear to have trusted centrally-produced news media over local outlets, particularly for social and political issues. Mickiewicz has noted that some of this was likely due to audiences' greater familiarity with local events, giving them greater reason and ability to challenge media's presentation of events.¹⁷⁵ However, there certainly were considerable gaps in the quality of news reporting on the national and local scale which might have affected this perception of trustworthiness. Whatever the cause, *Vremia* and other centrally-produced television news programs were likely to hold great sway with the population of the Soviet Union, given these broad trends.

In a certain sense, television was the most universal medium in the Soviet Union, at least by the mid-1980s. This was also aided by the collapse of the ideal of “socially-useful” leisure time, a traditional tenet of official Soviet culture. Early Soviet cultural officials pushed for citizens to spend their time in physical activity, in social functions, in political rallies, or in other ways that seemed to have mass benefits. More than anything else, the emphasis was on “organized” activity, as Soviet officials felt that this would tend to prevent people from taking up

174 Ibid., 133–135.

175 Ibid., 135–136.

“hooliganism” and drinking as pastimes. Thus, many clubs and other organizations were formed to draw Soviet citizens out of their homes and into group socialization.¹⁷⁶ Even those citizens not engaged in “organized” activity tended toward group activities: going to restaurants, cafes, and bars, or merely visiting friends in their homes. Therefore, the wide audience television enjoyed was necessarily a result of Soviet citizens taking less and less time from their day to be involved in this sort of group activity, instead falling more towards Western norms of individual leisure time. This was part of a larger trend towards adopting Western modes of culture; Stites has noted, for example, that there was a “big boom in foreign labels for jeans, buttons, novelty tee-shirts, and other kitschy artifacts...years before perestroika.” Moreover, Western music became extremely popular, particularly among young Soviet citizens. This formed part of a conscious movement towards adopting Western culture wholesale into Soviet youth culture, while still retaining a unique Soviet identity.¹⁷⁷

Indeed, by 1986, television was accessible to some 93 percent of the Soviet population; (as previously mentioned) 80 percent of adults watched television news daily. Considerably more entertainment programming was produced during *glasnost*, and even some religious programming was allowed. As a result, the audience for Soviet television grew in numbers and in diversity, even as Party officials decried the changes in television programming, claiming they threatened to undermine the Party's role in defining Soviet culture.¹⁷⁸

However, Soviet media authorities collected the best statistics relating to audience not on television, but on foreign-broadcast radio. Fortunately, these statistics still can provide some insight into the audience that *Vremia* and other television programs were likely to face. Soviet

176 Tricia Starks, *The Body Soviet : Propaganda, Hygiene, and the Revolutionary State* (Madison Wis.: University of Wisconsin Press, 2008), 71–79.

177 Richard Stites, *Russian Popular Culture: Entertainment and Society Since 1900*, Cambridge Soviet Paperbacks 7 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 182–183.

178 Ibid., 189–191.

authorities discovered that young people made up the vast majority of those listening, and a full 60 percent were seeking entertainment and music, not news. Indeed, the majority of those listening were distrustful towards foreign news, believing it to be intentionally distorted.¹⁷⁹

Meanwhile, outside broadcasters concluded that their programs were mostly listened to by urban, educated populations; when Soviet audiences *did* listen and trust foreign news, it tended to be because they were seeking information not available through official Soviet media, such as information shortly after the Chernobyl disaster. Moreover, these listeners tended to harbor political disapproval of the regime, and most strongly, were opposed to Soviet involvement in Afghanistan (see chapter 6).¹⁸⁰

Therefore, the fact that *Vremia* retained its high viewership in the face of external broadcasting suggests that it must have appealed to both of two groups. On the one hand, it needed to engage this younger, urban, more politically-active demographic, who had abandoned many other Soviet media outlets such as *Pravda*. On the other, it must have not offended the more politically conservative groups in society: the older, the rural, and so on. Moreover, these statistics suggest that the most contentious issues were likely to be culture and foreign policy.

Moreover, the hegemony of broadcast television was beginning to be challenged by new technology. VCRs started to make their entrance in the Soviet Union around 1980. Almost immediately, a black market for recordings emerged, including both Soviet-approved titles as well as those smuggled in from abroad; some even made money by renting out such

179 Elena I Bashkirova, "The Foreign Radio Audience in the USSR During the Cold War: An Internal Perspective," in *Cold War Broadcasting : Impact on the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe a Collection of Studies and Documents*, by A Ross Johnson and R Eugene Parta (New York: Central European University Press, 2010), 110–114.

180 R Eugene Parta, "The Audience to Western Broadcasts to the USSR During the Cold War: An External Perspective," in *Cold War Broadcasting : Impact on the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe a Collection of Studies and Documents*, by A Ross Johnson and R Eugene Parta (New York: Central European University Press, 2010), 73–96.

recordings.¹⁸¹ Notably, this is almost exactly the same time frame in which the home video rental business took off in the United States.¹⁸² By 1988, while only some four thousand VCRs were produced in the Soviet Union, there were some number smuggled in, and illegal imports of Western commercially-produced videocassettes become commonplace.¹⁸³ Moreover, opportunities for Soviet citizens to view these videos were widespread: underground establishments for showing (illegal) Western films, quite often including pornography, became commonplace by 1991. Even state-run facilities such as the House of Culture often showed imported films.¹⁸⁴

At the same time as these changes in technology began to change Soviet media culture, *Vremia's* attitude towards matters of broader culture began to shift. While cultural stories had traditionally focused on the hallmarks of Soviet and Russian culture, *Vremia* increasingly acknowledged new and radical cultural movements. Some examples of those more traditional news stories included a November 1986 report on the birthday celebrations of historical Russian author Mikhail Lomonosov, including the dedication of a special one-ruble coin engraved with his image.¹⁸⁵ A very similar story aired in May 1988, with a ruble coin being created in the image of author Leo Tolstoy.¹⁸⁶ Another, broadcast January 1987, featured the Soviet Minister of Culture recognizing the importance of historical poet Alexander Pushkin, including a brief quotation from his poetry;¹⁸⁷ this was echoed in a December 1986 report on a museum dedicated

181 Stites, *Russian Popular Culture*, 174.

182 Albert Abramson, *The History of Television, 1942 to 2000* (Jefferson, N.C: McFarland & Co, 2003), 190.

183 Ellen Propper Mickiewicz, *Split Signals: Television and Politics in the Soviet Union* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 11–12.

184 Stites, *Russian Popular Culture*, 191–192.

185 *Vremia*. Broadcast November 18, 1986. The U.S. Naval Academy Collection of Soviet & Russian TV, Library of Congress. 1 videocassette (3/4 inch), viewing copy.

186 *Vremia*. Broadcast May 9, 1988. The U.S. Naval Academy Collection of Soviet & Russian TV, Library of Congress. 1 videocassette (3/4 inch), viewing copy.

187 *Vremia*. Broadcast March 2, 1987. *Vremya Compendium*, Oakdale, Iowa: Worldview, 1987. 2 videocassettes (VHS), tape 2.

to literature written by Pushkin and others sympathetic to the Decembrist revolt of 1825.¹⁸⁸

However, perhaps the most common sort involved public assemblages of art of one form or another. Such stories included, for example, a collection of portraits of famous Russian authors gathered for exhibition in the Hermitage in Leningrad in December 1986.¹⁸⁹ These continued throughout the period of *glasnost*, such as those describing a October 1987 folk music festival in the Ukrainian SSR and a February 1988 exhibition of classical Russian art in Moscow.¹⁹⁰

On the other hand, a November 1986 story describing the construction of a new art center in Krasnoyarsk, which included some description of experimental sculpture and other art forms, suggests that *Vremia* was at least willing to acknowledge art which fell outside the norm, even early on in *glasnost*.¹⁹¹ Still, the more notable changes occurred later, as when in August 1988, *Vremia* described in detail a visiting art exhibition of modern Japanese art in Moscow, or a exhibition of work by famous icon painter Andrei Rublev in March 1987, notable for its obvious religious connections.¹⁹² This sort of focus on modern, foreign, and potentially subversive art certainly represented a willingness to showcase more unusual and un-Soviet art. However, the most conspicuous story aired on June 5, 1988, describing a female rock musician on tour in the Baltic republics.¹⁹³ This sort of open acknowledgment of the influence of modern Western culture

188 *Vremia*. Broadcast December 14, 1986. The U.S. Naval Academy Collection of Soviet & Russian TV, Library of Congress. 1 videocassette (3/4 inch), viewing copy.

189 *Vremia*. Broadcast December 14, 1986. The U.S. Naval Academy Collection of Soviet & Russian TV, Library of Congress. 1 videocassette (3/4 inch), viewing copy.

190 *Vremia*. Broadcast November 22, 1987. The U.S. Naval Academy Collection of Soviet & Russian TV, Library of Congress. 1 videocassette (3/4 inch), viewing copy; *Vremia*. Broadcast February 6, 1988. The U.S. Naval Academy Collection of Soviet & Russian TV, Library of Congress. 1 videocassette (3/4 inch), viewing copy.

191 *Vremia*. Broadcast November 18, 1986. The U.S. Naval Academy Collection of Soviet & Russian TV, Library of Congress. 1 videocassette (3/4 inch), viewing copy.

192 *Vremia*. Broadcast August 8, 1988. The U.S. Naval Academy Collection of Soviet & Russian TV, Library of Congress. 1 videocassette (3/4 inch), viewing copy; *Vremia*. Broadcast March 5, 1987. *Vremya Compendium*, Oakdale, Iowa: Worldview, 1987. 2 videocassettes (VHS), tape 2.

193 *Vremia*. Broadcast June 5, 1988. The U.S. Naval Academy Collection of Soviet & Russian TV, Library of Congress. 1 videocassette (3/4 inch), viewing copy.

on Soviet art was certainly a great departure from the earlier, pre-*glasnost* portrayals of Soviet culture on *Vremia*.

Still, more-traditional cultural stories continued to air, which may go some way towards explaining how, at least on the subject of culture, *Vremia* managed to hold on to the more conservative members of its audience: there was still plenty of cultural news which appealed to them, being presented in the same stereotypically-Soviet way, even if newer and more radical culture found its way into the broadcasts as well. And that latter type of story surely appealed to the younger, urban, cosmopolitan viewer, who was dissatisfied with the exclusion of rapidly-changing Soviet culture from the USSR's official media.

At the same time that this sort of change was shaking *Vremia*'s coverage of cultural events, the program did continue to serve its traditional role of helping to foster the sort of organized public celebrations which marked the official Soviet cultural calendar.

Probably the best example of this were the annual May Day celebrations, which typically took about three-quarters of the broadcast time each May 1st. Looking at the broadcast from 1987, most of this time was spent recapping the parade which had taken place that day through Red Square in Moscow, noting various groups that had joined the parade as well as interviews with various foreign dignitaries who had come to observe the festivities. The news presenters also spent some airtime discussing important moments in Soviet history, such as the October Revolution, the victory in the Second World War, and so on; journalists at Red Square interviewed veterans to complement this particular topic. Finally, a slideshow-like series of brief reports showed May Day celebrations from the capitals of the other republics in the Soviet Union, followed by those in capitals of other socialist countries; no real commentary was offered on these and no real detail of the celebrations shown. Rather, the message appears to have been

simply one of unity amongst different national and political groups, all committed to the project of socialism.¹⁹⁴

Other similar stories included Gorbachev's awarding of the Order of Lenin to a number of Soviet citizens in July 1986. This broadcast included nearly a full hour of speeches given by Gorbachev and other Soviet officials.¹⁹⁵ A similar story aired in May 1988, when Gorbachev awarded a handful of citizens the title “Hero of the Soviet Union”; however, by this point, the coverage was substantially shorter and did not include the full lengths of speeches.¹⁹⁶ Nevertheless, the stories still carried the same importance in terms of framing and defining official Soviet culture.

In addition, *Vremia* continued to air segments noting important days in the Soviet official calendar. Examples included short films on the “international day of doctors”, the “day of the Soviet Air Force”, and a concert commemorating the October Revolution.¹⁹⁷ These almost invariably included film footage from past decades, with voice-overs describing the various accomplishments that had transpired since then. As such, these stories helped to reinforce the ritual calendar of Soviet official culture.

As such, *Vremia* appears to have retained its role as the arbiter of official Soviet culture, a fact which may go some distance towards explaining the impact of its broadcasts during the 1991 coup in Moscow.

194 *Vremia*. Broadcast May 1, 1987. The U.S. Naval Academy Collection of Soviet & Russian TV, Library of Congress. 1 videocassette (3/4 inch), viewing copy.

195 *Vremia*. Broadcast July 28, 1986. The U.S. Naval Academy Collection of Soviet & Russian TV, Library of Congress. 1 videocassette (3/4 inch), viewing copy.

196 *Vremia*. Broadcast May 9, 1988. The U.S. Naval Academy Collection of Soviet & Russian TV, Library of Congress. 1 videocassette (3/4 inch), viewing copy.

197 *Vremia*. Broadcast November 2, 1987. The U.S. Naval Academy Collection of Soviet & Russian TV, Library of Congress. 1 videocassette (3/4 inch), viewing copy; *Vremia*. Broadcast August 21, 1988. The U.S. Naval Academy Collection of Soviet & Russian TV, Library of Congress. 1 videocassette (3/4 inch), viewing copy; *Vremia*. Broadcast November 2, 1987. The U.S. Naval Academy Collection of Soviet & Russian TV, Library of Congress. 1 videocassette (3/4 inch), viewing copy.

Chapter 5: Sports and television journalism

One of the most interesting areas of Soviet television during *glasnost* was sports coverage. Lying in the intersection between entertainment and “serious” journalism, it helps illuminate the tensions between accurate, engaging coverage, and the political implications of that sort of commentary. Most crucially, these issues emerged in sports coverage even before the formal program of *glasnost* began, helping drive and inspire later change in television and other media coverage of other subjects. Moreover, the rise of televised sports demonstrates the gradual shift towards Western values that undermined much of traditional Soviet leisure culture, helping propel both television and the project of *glasnost* to the forefront.

Early in the history of the Soviet Union, there was a great deal of debate about the proper role of competitive sports in a socialist society. Many Soviet authorities argued that cooperative sports would better foster the spirit of socialism, and sought, above all, to prevent professional sports from developing, as they felt that it was essential to engage the population at large in sports, just as it was essential to bring them into all elements of the Soviet socialist project. As such, sports leagues were most often created as part of unions or local chapters of the Komsomol[†].¹⁹⁸

At the same time, Soviet authorities were concerned with the practical uses of sports: they identified athletic endeavors as a particular type of “hygiene”, which, if correctly practiced, could increase public health. To this end, they stressed the need for adequate athletic facilities. Additionally, Soviet planners felt it was essential to inculcate an appreciation for sports in new generations of Soviet citizens. Accordingly, the nationwide curricula introduced in 1927-1929

[†] *All-Union Leninist Communist Union of Youth (Vsesoiuznyi Leninskii Kommunisticheskii Soiuz Molodëzhi)*, the primary Party organization for youth throughout the Soviet Union.

198 James Riordan, *Sport in Soviet Society: Development of Sport and Physical Education in Russia and the USSR* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), 82–89.

newly included the subject of “physical culture”—the Soviet equivalent to Western “physical education”.¹⁹⁹

Still, despite these attempts to make sports the domain of all Soviet citizens and eliminate professionalism—including the outright prohibition on paying athletes for their labor—semi-professional sports teams soon began to emerge. The earliest two were the Red Army Club, formed of members at one point employed in the Army (which was, after the Russian Civil War, a considerable proportion of the population) and *Dinamo*. This sports club was originally an athletic and physical training organization formed as part of the secret police (at that time, the *Cheka*). However, it soon opened its recruitment to broad portions of the state apparatus and focused more on fielding winning teams than educating its members in “physical culture”.²⁰⁰ Thus, from even as early as the late 1920s, the Soviet public's interest in spectator sports eroded the Party's ability to dictate what was “proper” Soviet culture concerning sports.

Throughout the post-Stalin period, Soviet culture transformed in ways that helped inculcate this popular interest in sports, both in terms of participating in amateur sports and watching professional spectator sports. The population in the Soviet Union became increasingly urban, allowing for better access to gyms and other sports facilities; at the same time, the burgeoning Soviet economy allowed for greater and greater state investment into these facilities. Moreover, Soviet citizens had more and more leisure time to spend on sports: while the average workweek was some forty-six hours in 1956, by just 1961, this had decreased to forty-one hours.²⁰¹

As a result of these efforts, along with the typically-Soviet enthusiasm for traditional national sports, meant that enthusiasm for sports continued to grow. Investments in rural sports

199 Ibid., 92–116.

200 Ibid., 92–94.

201 Ibid., 183–185.

facilities broadened access as well. Thus, while Soviet women participated in sports less than did their male counterparts, the overall achievements by women were no less impressive than those by men. Moreover, most demographics participated in sports roughly equally, with the notable exception of what were termed “former Muslim areas”.²⁰² Thus, by the 1980s, sports were part of the universal Soviet experience. Moreover, sports was one of the very few areas where outright nationalist sentiment was permitted, as sports teams were often drawn along national or ethnic borderlines; sports thus served as a way of diffusing national tensions in a relatively harmless manner.

Part of this universality can also be attributed to the widespread coverage of sports on broadcast television. However, this coverage was not without its detractors. One critique commonly raised by Western commentators was that, while Soviet television coverage of sports was well commentated and explained, it was also too ideologically- and politically-charged, often blaming biased refereeing and other external factors for Soviet losses.²⁰³ Even Soviet authorities on television had openly identified sports as forming a key part of the propagandistic message of television news coverage since at least the late 1970s.²⁰⁴

Soviet television broadcasting of sporting events started in the 1950s, initially in Moscow, helped by the investment in many larger sporting facilities in the Moscow area: soccer broadcasts started in 1956 and hockey in 1957; these would be the most popular sports for broadcast throughout the rest of the Soviet Union's history. The fact that sporting matches were geographically dispersed was one of the factors that pushed Soviet television authorities to create relay stations and other technology to help broadcasts reach the home audiences of teams elsewhere in the Soviet Union or even abroad; this culminated in the first Soviet broadcast of the

202 Ibid., 306–333.

203 Ilya Gerol, *The Manipulators: Inside the Soviet Media* (Toronto: Stoddart, 1988), 134.

204 Vilen Egorov, *Televidenie i Zritel'* (Moskva: Mysl', 1977), 143.

Olympic Games from Mexico City in 1968, carried on the newly-expanded Intersputnik system.²⁰⁵

Watching sports games on television was a particularly popular pastime in the Soviet Union. As Edelman noted, “Since games usually started as early as six-thirty, there was little or no time to return from work, grab a bite, and then go out to the stadium.” As a result, many sports fans increasingly turned towards broadcast coverage of games. This was, however, to the horror of Soviet athletic authorities, who saw citizen participation in sports (both in the stands and on the field) as an essential component of socialist culture in the Soviet Union. However, to their chagrin, the draw of live sports broadcasts on television was strong and reinforced the importance of spectator sports in the Soviet Union.²⁰⁶ Additionally, sports were not covered in great detail in newspapers or other print media, meaning that the live television coverage was the only way to meticulously follow sports teams' victories and defeats.²⁰⁷

Still, this did not prevent other forms of media from maintaining broad audiences: Stites has noted that in the 1980s, more than nine hundred books and pamphlets were published each year in the Soviet Union on the subject of sports, along with thirty-four magazines and other periodicals. Moreover, ever-increasing quantities of sports coverage were broadcast; by the end of the decade, this constituted some nine hundred hours annually on television and seven hundred on radio.²⁰⁸

Importantly, sports commentators were not hesitant to critique the choices of coaches and players. While outright denouncing of sports teams was not tolerated, negative remarks about

205 Robert Edelman, *Serious Fun: A History of Spectator Sports in the USSR* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 166–168.

206 Ibid., 206.

207 Katherine Bliss Eaton, *Daily Life in the Soviet Union* (Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, 2004), 274.

208 Richard Stites, *Russian Popular Culture: Entertainment and Society Since 1900*, Cambridge Soviet Paperbacks 7 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 175.

particular plays or strategies were no less common than in contemporaneous Western coverage.²⁰⁹ As such, sports formed an important area in which there was relative journalistic freedom, which gave many of those presenting sports games, as on *Vremia*, a taste of speaking openly with little regard for the political implications. Moreover, by the time of the 1980 Olympics, the Party agreed to let in teams of editors and journalists from foreign television stations to cover the Games, perhaps because they had gained an understanding that this editing process was technically necessary and would increase the quality of coverage of what was likely to be a Soviet victory.²¹⁰ As such, the Olympic games served as an important milestone in establishing cooperation between Soviet and Western journalists.

Sports television thus served as an important impetus for developing satellite and terrestrial distribution networks capable of live streaming. There are several reasons why Soviet officials took this potential seriously, as Downing notes. First, widespread distribution of sports matches between teams from different republics within the Soviet Union was seen as an effective way of “dissolving national hostilities...and replacing them with friendly competition between national teams and players.” Moreover, Soviet authorities believed that maintaining interest in athletic pursuits among the Soviet population was a key component of maintaining military readiness in the event of war. Additionally, sports served as an important symbol of Soviet power and prestige, particularly in the international sphere; broadcasting victories by Soviet sports teams abroad on the national networks contributed to Soviet legitimacy. Finally, just as sports allowed for some journalistic freedom, they also allowed citizens to engage in vigorous debates over a publicly-understood and widely-appreciated subject that was, at the same time, inherently

209 Edelman, *Serious Fun*, 169.

210 G. Kuznetsov, ed., *Televizionnaia Zhurnalistika*, 3. izd., perer. i dop. (Moskva: Izd-vo Moskovskogo universiteta “Vyshaiâ shkola,” 2002), 79.

politically “safe”.²¹¹

Under *glasnost*, coverage of sports became even more unrestrained. The national sports newspaper *Sovetskii sport* (*Soviet sport*) served as the vanguard of this movement, but television coverage also became more willing to make large-scale critiques. By the time of the 1988 Summer Olympics in Seoul, Soviet sports television had seemingly acceded to the pressure to put Western-style ads on the air: the 1988 games featured ads for Pepsi. Still, newspapers remained more radical in their critiques of Soviet sport.²¹² This may have been because Soviet television authorities were concerned about increasing ethnic tensions within the Soviet Union, which might be easily inflamed by statements about regional teams on live television.²¹³

This, of course, was in stark contrast to the previous two Olympic Games. The United States chose to boycott the 1980 Olympic Games in Moscow as a protest of Soviet involvement in Afghanistan, which was greeted in the Soviet press with unhesitating condemnation, with many sources even going so far as to call the boycotts “unconstitutional”, and with no real mention of the stated purpose of the American boycott.²¹⁴ In turn, the Soviet Union opted not to participate in the 1984 Summer Games in Los Angeles, officially citing concerns with security and problems with Soviet officials being denied visas. The degree to which the United States aimed to provoke the Soviet Union into a boycott has been a matter of some debate,²¹⁵ but the open participation in the Seoul Olympics, in any case, were a marked change of heart, to say nothing of the style of television coverage.

However, Gorbachev's reforms also brought substantial changes to the sports themselves.

211 John Downing, “The Intersputnik System and Soviet Television,” *Soviet Studies* 37, no. 4 (October 1, 1985): 473.

212 Edelman, *Serious Fun*, 198–203.

213 *Ibid.*, 209.

214 Allen Guttman, “The Cold War and the Olympics,” *International Journal* 43, no. 4 (October 1, 1988): 559–563.

215 cf. James Riordan, “The USSR and Olympic Boycotts,” *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 5, no. 3 (February 15, 1988): 349–345; Guttman, “The Cold War and the Olympics.”

Reforms made as part of *perestroika* resulted in state funding cuts for sports clubs. This hurt many sports that did not attract wide audiences, although state funding had always been spotty at best. Moreover, because the new policies on sports and media allowed for openly professional sports, many popular teams were able to turn a profit by selling tickets and merchandise. Even more strikingly, some Soviet athletes were traded abroad to other teams in exchange for infusions of hard currency, allowing them to continue operating even as the Soviet/Russian economy collapsed along with the Soviet Union itself.²¹⁶

Sports coverage on *Vremia* appears to have remained mostly constant in style and content throughout the period I surveyed. With only a few exceptions, sports stories were handled in a quick and perfunctory manner. Top billing was most commonly given to chess—considered a major and legitimate sport by Soviet authorities. Soccer or hockey, when in season, usually followed, with a rundown of scores from recent games. After this, a handful of minor sports news stories would be quickly presented, ranging from badminton to sailing, from wrestling to cycling. These stories often included international sports competitions, even ones in which no Soviet athletes took part. Indeed, some seem to have been included for their exotic and interesting nature, such as karate competitions in Japan and para-sailing rallies in Mexico.

Occasionally, a commentator from a sports program appeared on *Vremia*, to give a longer analysis of an important game or play, but such appearances seem to have been the exception, not the rule. Towards the end of the 1980s, more and more film footage of sports games was used, along with chess diagrams and other visual aids, keeping the overall style of presentation in harmony with the similar progress of *Vremia*'s audiovisual style.

Unfortunately, many of the sports segments have been cut off of the tapes I was able to

216 Ibid., 216–222.

watch, since they occurred last in the program, the recordings often started early, and the tapes only held one hour of programming. Accordingly, considerably more insightful analysis could be carried out if these programs were examined in their entirety.

However, it does seem clear that *Vremia's* coverage of sports allowed it to experiment with some of the audiovisual techniques it would later use for its mainstream news coverage. Film footage was used extensively even in 1985 (although the proportion of sports stories with such footage appears to have continually increased with time). Moreover, tight cuts between different shots to highlight the action of a sports game were common, presaging the move to more tightly-cut and fast-paced reports from the field that would appear on *Vremia's* news coverage in 1987 and particularly 1988. The combination of film footage with overdubbed narration was commonplace in sports reporting on the program, but appears not to have been used frequently in other segments until 1988.

Still, it is probably fair to conclude that sports coverage was not *Vremia's* highest achievement during *glasnost*. While other programs and media outlets were experimenting with the new freedoms and technologies they now possessed, *Vremia* remained more or less set in its ways. However, it also seems likely that the sports enthusiast would not have turned to *Vremia* as their primary source of sports news, given the small amount of time dedicated to the subject. Rather, its coverage of sports seems to have served mainly to keep the Soviet citizen who was *not* interested in sports more or less up to date on the latest soccer scores and other important sports news, perhaps in an attempt to draw down nationalist sentiment by directing it into sports.

Chapter 6: The Soviet Union and its role in the world

Mikhail Gorbachev inherited a Soviet Union that was deeply entangled in international affairs. It was helping to support many pro-Soviet regimes, particularly in Eastern Europe, but also in Latin America, the Near and Middle East, and elsewhere. Moreover, as one of the two superpowers, the Soviet Union had a great deal of international power and prestige that it had used to affect world events. However, one of Gorbachev's aims as General Secretary was to reduce the role of the Soviet Union's as an imperial power throughout the world, focusing instead primarily on internal affairs, while at the same time not embracing autarky.

At the same time, news coverage of foreign affairs became increasingly detailed and nuanced, allowing Soviet citizens to gain a better understanding of the complex situation in which the Soviet Union was placed. As such, foreign affairs seem to have increasingly undermined public trust in the Soviet regime, helping to destabilize Soviet politics even further.

Vremia's coverage of foreign news reflected this complex Soviet role in the world, usually dedicating at least one-third of its airtime to such news. Such coverage was split between reports undertaken by *Vremia* itself, which usually featured film footage and detailed reports, and headlines merely repeated from the wire news service TASS, often with the phrase “TASS presents” superimposed onscreen. Towards the late 1980s, the difference in this coverage became increasingly pronounced, with TASS reports often more conservative and ideologically-driven, while *Vremia* reports were somewhat more subtle and balanced. As might be expected, international news was varied in its nature and the way that *Vremia* portrayed it; nevertheless, many types of stories and many themes recurred with some regularity.

Perhaps the largest foreign policy issue Gorbachev inherited was the Soviet role in Afghanistan. After the creation of the pro-Soviet Democratic Republic of Afghanistan in 1978,

an insurgency developed which aimed to overthrow the regime, gaining broad support in large portions of Afghan territory. The Soviet Union, on the request of the Afghan government, sent troops starting in 1979 to assist the Afghan government fight the dissidents. In response, the Carter administration authorized the CIA to supply these insurgents with covert funding and supplies. Despite many Soviet offensives, the Afghan government had been unable to gain control of much of the territory sympathetic to the mujahedin.

Vremia's coverage of the Soviet involvement in Afghanistan initially mirrored the official Party position on Soviet involvement.. The program tended to portray the Soviet troops deployed there as civilizing agents promoting the quality of life that Soviet citizens had come to know in a new and untamed territory. For example, one of the earliest reports on Afghanistan I came encountered aired in November 1986; it detailed a campaign to increase literacy in Afghanistan, with Soviet authorities working in cooperation with UNESCO.²¹⁷ Similarly, a report from February 1988 detailed the material ways in which the Afghan standard of life had increased under Soviet occupation.²¹⁸

Vremia's coverage of Afghanistan also emphasized the cooperation between the Soviet forces and the government of Afghanistan. For example, *Vremia* covered a meeting between government ministers from the two countries in Baghdad in May 1986, and described their efforts to find joint technological and economic projects.²¹⁹ The program later reported on a trip by Eduard Shevardnadze in January 1987.²²⁰ He was shown inspecting various infrastructure projects and giving a speech in which he lauded the progress that had been made in the country.

217 *Vremia*. Broadcast November 18, 1986. The U.S. Naval Academy Collection of Soviet & Russian TV, Library of Congress. 1 videocassette (3/4 inch), viewing copy.

218 *Vremia*. Broadcast February 6, 1988. The U.S. Naval Academy Collection of Soviet & Russian TV, Library of Congress. 1 videocassette (3/4 inch), viewing copy.

219 *Vremia*. Broadcast May 19, 1986. The U.S. Naval Academy Collection of Soviet & Russian TV, Library of Congress. 1 videocassette (3/4 inch), viewing copy.

220 *Vremia*. Broadcast January 7, 1987. The U.S. Naval Academy Collection of Soviet & Russian TV, Library of Congress. 1 videocassette (3/4 inch), viewing copy.

Similarly, a June 1988 report showed a Soviet delegation to the United Nations meeting in New York with the president of Afghanistan to discuss the continued Soviet role in the country.²²¹

Other stories focused more directly on tangible ways in which the Soviet Union was benefiting the Afghan people, such as a May 1988 report on public health supplies (such as vaccinations) being shipped to Afghanistan.²²²

Nevertheless, Gorbachev had been quietly critical of Soviet intervention in Afghanistan from the early 1980s, although he was unable to express this opinion strongly due to strong support for the project by Brezhnev, Andropov, and Chernenko. Within the first month of his tenure as General Secretary, Gorbachev ordered a secret review of the possibility of withdrawing from Afghanistan.²²³ The failure of a major offensive in August 1985 near Khost (near the border with Pakistan, about 100 miles south of Kabul), however, gave Gorbachev the political ammunition he needed to begin arguing for a Soviet withdrawal, at least within domestic politics.²²⁴

Interestingly, *Vremia's* coverage of Afghanistan in the late 1980s increasingly contained an underlying sense of shortcomings in the actual impact the Soviet actions were having in Afghanistan. For example, the aforementioned report on increasing standards of life in the country also noted that citizens of Afghanistan seldom appreciated the aid the Soviet Union sent, because it was not clearly labeled as such.²²⁵ Other stories noted the difficulty Afghan and Soviet forces were having in bringing some of the more distant territories under central control.²²⁶

221 *Vremia*. Broadcast June 5, 1988. The U.S. Naval Academy Collection of Soviet & Russian TV, Library of Congress. 1 videocassette (3/4 inch), viewing copy.

222 *Vremia*. Broadcast May 9, 1988. The U.S. Naval Academy Collection of Soviet & Russian TV, Library of Congress. 1 videocassette (3/4 inch), viewing copy.

223 Diego Cordovez, *Out of Afghanistan: The Inside Story of the Soviet Withdrawal* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 187.

224 *Ibid.*, 201.

225 *Vremia*. Broadcast May 19, 1986. The U.S. Naval Academy Collection of Soviet & Russian TV, Library of Congress. 1 videocassette (3/4 inch), viewing copy.

226 *Vremia*. Broadcast September 16, 1986. The U.S. Naval Academy Collection of Soviet & Russian TV, Library

Unfortunately for Gorbachev, it was politically unfeasible to pull Soviet forces out of Afghanistan if it was clear that the pro-Soviet regime of the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan would immediately fall. This was particularly problematic until the resignation of Babrak Karmal as head of government, as he had refused most attempts to broaden the regime's popular appeal so that it could stand without Soviet aid. Karmal's successor, Najibullah, was considerably more willing to find such a solution.²²⁷

At the same time, however, Gorbachev's attempts to pull the Soviet Union out of Afghanistan were made more difficult when the US began supplying Stinger anti-aircraft missiles to the insurgents, allowing them to shoot down Soviet aircraft. This made it considerably more risky for the Soviets to withdraw, as it seemed less likely that the Afghan regime could last for any time against the better-equipped resistance.²²⁸

Vremia reported these attacks with alarm. After a March 1988 shootdown of a airplane carrying civilians, *Vremia* sent one of their foreign correspondents to travel on the same type of transport plane and film the civilian passengers. This footage was shown while he narrated the details of the previous attack, noting that the lives of the civilians around him were now clearly in peril.²²⁹ In addition to this sort of appeal to emotions, *Vremia* correspondents and commentators routinely described attacks by the insurgents during this period as “terrorist acts.”²³⁰ In this way, it is likely that *Vremia* contributed to the political climate which made it difficult for Gorbachev to end Soviet involvement, as the US-backed insurgents were seen not only as threats to the Soviet-friendly Afghan government, but to the security and liberty of the

of Congress. 1 videocassette (3/4 inch), viewing copy.

227 Cordovez, *Out of Afghanistan: The Inside Story of the Soviet Withdrawal*, 229, 245.

228 Ibid., 198.

229 *Vremia*. Broadcast April 11, 1988. The U.S. Naval Academy Collection of Soviet & Russian TV, Library of Congress. 1 videocassette (3/4 inch), viewing copy.

230 See, for example, *Vremia*. Broadcast July 15, 1988. The U.S. Naval Academy Collection of Soviet & Russian TV, Library of Congress. 1 videocassette (3/4 inch), viewing copy.

population of Afghanistan. Thus, pulling Soviet troops out of the country seemed to be abandoning an allied population under attack.

However, in the end, Gorbachev would withdraw Soviet troops even with no real promise from the American government that it would stop supplying the mujaheddin with arms and other support. This was somewhat unpopular among hard-line Soviet conservatives, but the US promise not to try to directly affect regime change was enough to placate most Soviet politicians.²³¹

In response, *Vremia's* coverage of the ongoing withdrawal in August 1988 emphasized the positive reaction of Afghan citizens, showing film footage of them handing flowers to departing Soviet soldiers.²³² Still, the anchor's insistence that these Afghan citizens were thanking the Soviet soldiers for their efforts seemed to be stretching the point. All in all, there seems to have been a tacit understanding that, while Soviet efforts were not unsuccessful, there were still many ways in which they simply had not worked out as well as had been hoped.

Another of the key issues of Soviet foreign policy was the situation in Lebanon. The country had been embroiled in civil war since 1975, with a multitude of factions vying for control of the country. By the time Gorbachev ascended to power in 1985, the situation in Lebanon had begun to stabilize, largely due to Syrian intervention and an agreement signed which promised to reform the constitutional structure of the Lebanese government. Small-scale militias were mostly able to hold on to their own territory but unable to gain additional ground, and this stalemate was enforced by Syrian forces.²³³

231 Cordovez, *Out of Afghanistan: The Inside Story of the Soviet Withdrawal*, 270.

232 *Vremia*. Broadcast August 8, 1988. The U.S. Naval Academy Collection of Soviet & Russian TV, Library of Congress. 1 videocassette (3/4 inch), viewing copy.

233 Matthew Preston, *Ending Civil War Rhodesia and Lebanon in Perspective*, International Library of War Studies 2 (New York: Tauris Academic Studies ; Distributed in the U.S. by Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 34–35, 71.

It seems likely that Syrian intervention was not altruistic, but instead centered in a need to prevent unrest from spreading to its own territory; such unrest could easily have destabilized the al-Assad regime, not to mention the increase in regional power Syria gained as a result from this action. Nevertheless, it did serve to minimize violence, particularly against civilians, and appears to have helped the eventual resolution of the conflict, albeit some years later.²³⁴

The USSR remained mostly uninvolved other than diplomatic maneuvering to attempt to resolve the situation and some military advisers who (along with French forces) acted as liaisons with the Lebanese government. On the other hand, the United States sent troops as part of a multinational force to attempt to keep the regime intact.²³⁵

For the most part, *Vremia's* coverage of the conflict in Lebanon was limited to recurring reports on the violence and its impact on civilians, with little discussion of the politics behind the situation. When such analysis was presented, it usually fell along predictable lines, however. A June 1986 report praised France for helping to provide security to civilians, for example, neglecting to mention that the Soviet Union was actively allied with France in this endeavor.²³⁶ On the other hand, the United Nations taking similar action in February was portrayed in a more neutral light, and Israeli intervention was harshly criticized by a special commentator brought on the air in June of that year.²³⁷ But the strongest criticism was reserved for the former US involvement, described on an April 1988 edition of *Vremia* which recapped the history of the civil war.²³⁸

234 Ibid., 167–168.

235 Ibid., 180.

236 *Vremia*. Broadcast June 5, 1986. The U.S. Naval Academy Collection of Soviet & Russian TV, Library of Congress. 1 videocassette (3/4 inch), viewing copy.

237 *Vremia*. Broadcast February 5, 1988. The U.S. Naval Academy Collection of Soviet & Russian TV, Library of Congress. 1 videocassette (3/4 inch), viewing copy; *Vremia*. Broadcast May 6, 1988. The U.S. Naval Academy Collection of Soviet & Russian TV, Library of Congress. 1 videocassette (3/4 inch), viewing copy.

238 *Vremia*. Broadcast April 5, 1988. The U.S. Naval Academy Collection of Soviet & Russian TV, Library of Congress. 1 videocassette (3/4 inch), viewing copy.

Still, most of the reports focused on the incredible toll to civilian life. Film footage of destroyed buildings and cars routinely appeared on *Vremia*, along with pictures of civilians trying to recover from the damage. Commentators often appeared on the program, criticizing all the parties involved for needlessly causing death and destruction. As such, the coverage of the conflict in Lebanon was, on the whole, more politically neutral than that of Afghanistan, likely due to the much smaller role the Soviet Union had in this conflict.

Besides military conflict, another perennial topic on *Vremia's* foreign coverage was reporting of “manifestations” or protests in other countries. In many cases, these showed causes towards which the official Soviet ideology was at least sympathetic, thus demonstrating that citizens of other states wanted many of the same things as Soviet citizens. Moreover, it helped legitimize the regime by emphasizing its role in opposing what was perceived in official Soviet ideology as the entrenched interests of capitalism. As such, coverage of these in *Vremia* tended to be short and superficial, giving few details of the exact aims of the protest in question; rather, the fact that such protests continued to take place was the important point to be made.

Probably for exactly that reason, the majority of protests shown were in the United States. In some cases, *Vremia* anchors identified specific causes for demonstrations such as a June 1987 feature on an anti-war demonstration outside the Pentagon, including film footage of the signs and slogans the protestors used, which were orally translated into Russian.²³⁹ Another similar story aired in April 1988, showing protests in Washington D.C. against American involvement in Nicaragua.²⁴⁰ Most, however, were not associated with a particular cause, and were merely identified by location. More than two-thirds of those reports I encountered covered protests

239 *Vremia*. Broadcast March 4, 1987. The U.S. Naval Academy Collection of Soviet & Russian TV, Library of Congress. 1 videocassette (3/4 inch), viewing copy.

240 *Vremia*. Broadcast April 5, 1988. The U.S. Naval Academy Collection of Soviet & Russian TV, Library of Congress. 1 videocassette (3/4 inch), viewing copy.

either at the White House or the Pentagon. When protestors clashed with police, as in a March 1987 demonstration in Washington D.C., *Vremia* was more than willing to show this, usually terming such conflict “police suppression”.²⁴¹

This appears to have been an attempt by *Vremia* commentators to demonstrate two facts. First, they aimed to show that the US government, as well as those of its allies, routinely suppressed its citizens' rights to free expression, making Soviet censorship seem less offensive. This echoed a long-standing Marxist critique of Western states: that the police typically acted as agents of property owners and the politically well-connected, repressing the working class in the process.²⁴² Additionally, it built on a tradition, stretching back to the 1920s, of portraying “class enemies” as potentially oppressing forces, against whom the Soviet populace needed protection.²⁴³ Second, it showed that public opinion in the West was not as rabidly anti-Soviet as the official government rhetoric, thus suggesting the potential for peaceful relations with the United States if future governments were more representative of the desires of the American population. Clearly, of course, *Vremia* correspondents selectively portrayed American opinions in doing this, as many Americans did not support the causes in question.

However, protests from other countries outside the Soviet sphere of influence also appeared on *Vremia* from time to time, and presenters usually gave more details on these protests than on those occurring in the United States. Most prevalent in *Vremia*'s coverage were those protests that it described as “anti-dictator”, such as in Chile in May 1988, in Paraguay in May 1986, and in South Korea that same month.²⁴⁴ Moreover, *Vremia* reporters made a point of

241 *Vremia*. Broadcast March 6, 1988. The U.S. Naval Academy Collection of Soviet & Russian TV, Library of Congress. 1 videocassette (3/4 inch), viewing copy.

242 Louise I. Shelley, *Policing Soviet Society: The Evolution of State Control* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 14–16.

243 Jeffrey Brooks, *Thank You, Comrade Stalin!: Soviet Public Culture from Revolution to Cold War* (Princeton N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2000), 21–24.

244 *Vremia*. Broadcast May 9, 1988. The U.S. Naval Academy Collection of Soviet & Russian TV, Library of Congress. 1 videocassette (3/4 inch), viewing copy; *Vremia*. Broadcast May 19, 1986. The U.S. Naval

describing the rulers facing protest as “pro-American” whenever possible. Still, *Vremia* also ran coverage on many protests not aimed at regime change. For example, *Vremia* ran a story in March 1987 showing a protest in Japan against what were described as “*anti-narodnyi* (anti-popular) reforms”;²⁴⁵ a similar report aired in February 1988 detailing widespread union-led strikes and protests in the United Kingdom during which *Vremia* correspondents interviewed some of the protesters to learn their aims.²⁴⁶ Other protests shown on *Vremia* featured more concrete political goals, such as a March 1987 protest in Canada aimed at persuading the Canadian government to object to increasing American nuclear armaments.²⁴⁷

However, the protests that seemed to most interest *Vremia* producers were those that illustrated some way in which world history seemed to be moving in the direction that Soviet ideology would predict was historically inevitable. Probably the strongest example of this was *Vremia*'s coverage of 1987 protests in South Africa, spanning nearly the entire year.²⁴⁸ In January, the *Vremia* anchor explained to his audience that the protests were, above all, “anti-racist” in nature, opposed to apartheid. As such, a positive connection was drawn to the Soviet Union, where legal equality for all races was guaranteed. The anchor explained that this transformation towards a more equitable government was part of the processes of history that would eventually move the rest of the world into line with the Soviet Union's ideals. March coverage focused on the escalating conflicts between the protesters and security forces, as well as the increasing numbers of protesters involved. Finally, by November, *Vremia* commentators began to note the

Academy Collection of Soviet & Russian TV, Library of Congress. 1 videocassette (3/4 inch), viewing copy.

245 *Vremia*. Broadcast March 10, 1987. The U.S. Naval Academy Collection of Soviet & Russian TV, Library of Congress. 1 videocassette (3/4 inch), viewing copy.

246 *Vremia*. Broadcast February 1986. The U.S. Naval Academy Collection of Soviet & Russian TV, Library of Congress. 1 videocassette (3/4 inch), viewing copy.

247 *Vremia*. Broadcast March 3, 1987. *Vremya Compendium*, Oakdale, Iowa: Worldview, 1987. 2 videocassettes (VHS), tape NUMBER

248 See, for example, *Vremia*. Broadcast March 11, 1987. *Vremya Compendium*, Oakdale, Iowa: Worldview, 1987. 2 videocassettes (VHS), tape 1; *Vremia*. Broadcast November 2, 1987. The U.S. Naval Academy Collection of Soviet & Russian TV, Library of Congress. 1 videocassette (3/4 inch), viewing copy.

serious economic problems that were being caused the inability of the South African regime to find a solution that would restore order. Still, they seemed hopeful that the situation would eventually be resolved in a way that would bring equality for black South Africans and thus advance the global cause of historical progress.

As a counterpoint to *Vremia*'s coverage of the United States and the West, some time was usually dedicated within each broadcast to highlight news from within the socialist sphere. On the one hand, this coverage helped to re-affirm the concord between the Soviet Union and other socialist countries. For example, an August 1986 story highlighted the fact that the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Vietnam was in formal correspondence with the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union.²⁴⁹ A similar story noted a diplomatic visit by Soviet Minister of Foreign Affairs Eduard Shevardnadze to Bulgaria.²⁵⁰

The purpose of these stories seems to have been to constantly remind the viewer of the ties the Soviet Union had with the outside world, as few details were ever given of agreements reached or concrete topics discussed. Rather, there was a ritualistic nature to the coverage of these visits, as they occupied nearly the same amount of time on the broadcast every day, and told essentially the same stories.

Other reports similarly reinforced the portrayal of the internal political workings of other socialist countries as functional and useful. For example, a February 1987 story covered the plenary session of the Polish United Workers' Party;²⁵¹ a similar story in April 1984 covered meetings of Socialist Unity Party of Germany at Alexanderplatz in (East) Berlin.²⁵² Some of

249 *Vremia*. Broadcast August 1, 1986. The U.S. Naval Academy Collection of Soviet & Russian TV, Library of Congress. 1 videocassette (3/4 inch), viewing copy.

250 *Vremia*. Broadcast November 18, 1986. The U.S. Naval Academy Collection of Soviet & Russian TV, Library of Congress. 1 videocassette (3/4 inch), viewing copy.

251 *Vremia*. Broadcast February 23, 1987. The U.S. Naval Academy Collection of Soviet & Russian TV, Library of Congress. 1 videocassette (3/4 inch), viewing copy.

252 *Vremia*. Broadcast April 5, 1987. The U.S. Naval Academy Collection of Soviet & Russian TV, Library of Congress. 1 videocassette (3/4 inch), viewing copy.

these stories also reinforced the idea of international socialist cooperation, by describing international meetings which served this aim. One example of this was a September 1986 report on the Congress of Unions occurring in East Germany, bringing together union organizers not only from socialist countries, but from the West.²⁵³ As such, the state apparatus of these various socialist states was exposed in much the same way as machines in factories were shown in *Vremia*. As such, *Vremia* portrayed these states as part of the mechanism that would bring improvements in socialism throughout the world.

Moreover, *Vremia* frequently depicted meetings between high-ranking members of the CPSU and socialist or communist parties in non-socialist countries. Most frequent were reports on meetings with members of the Italian Communist Party (PCI), such as coverage of Andrei Gromyko's visit to Italy in May 1986, when he met with PCI leaders.²⁵⁴ Additionally, the program routinely aired segments in which various foreign diplomats spoke about the friendly relations between the Soviet Union and their home countries, including Canada, Brazil, Nicaragua, and Nigeria. Such speeches often ran five minutes or longer.

At the same time, a small number of stories negatively portraying socialist countries, such as a February 1988 report on pension and benefit shortfalls in Poland,²⁵⁵ an investigation into forged East German passports in April 1988,²⁵⁶ and details of conflicts between Chinese and Vietnamese forces in January 1987.²⁵⁷ Particularly in the case of those stories relating to Eastern Europe, it seems likely that this type of coverage reflected Gorbachev's policy of increased

253 *Vremia*. Broadcast September 16, 1986. The U.S. Naval Academy Collection of Soviet & Russian TV, Library of Congress. 1 videocassette (3/4 inch), viewing copy.

254 *Vremia*. Broadcast May 19, 1986. The U.S. Naval Academy Collection of Soviet & Russian TV, Library of Congress. 1 videocassette (3/4 inch), viewing copy.

255 *Vremia*. Broadcast February 6, 1988. The U.S. Naval Academy Collection of Soviet & Russian TV, Library of Congress. 1 videocassette (3/4 inch), viewing copy.

256 *Vremia*. Broadcast April 2, 1988. The U.S. Naval Academy Collection of Soviet & Russian TV, Library of Congress. 1 videocassette (3/4 inch), viewing copy.

257 *Vremia*. Broadcast January 7, 1987. The U.S. Naval Academy Collection of Soviet & Russian TV, Library of Congress. 1 videocassette (3/4 inch), viewing copy.

separation between the USSR and its traditional “satellite” states; this policy would eventually lead to the collapse of much of the socialist sphere, most remarkably leading to the Fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989.

Still, a constant focus of much of *Vremia*'s foreign news was the continuing relationship between the Soviet Union and the United States. This coverage particularly focused on the continuing evolution of strategic arms technology, portraying the United States' attempts to achieve arms supremacy as a destabilizing and dangerous development. Key in this type of description was the coverage of the emerging Star Wars missile defense program, which *Vremia* consistently reported in stridently negative tones. From the US Congress' initial allocation of funds in March 1985, *Vremia* commentators described the program as a “threat to international security”.²⁵⁸ This phrase was also repeated on a June 1986 broadcast when describing the first plans to launch Star Wars satellites; the commentator also termed this a “potential militarization of space”.²⁵⁹ *Vremia* unsurprisingly reacted with disdain to the announcement in July 1987 similar language was used to describe the conducting of a systems test in December of that same year.²⁶⁰

However, *Vremia*'s concerns were not only limited to Star Wars; many attempts for military expansion by Washington were reported. For example, the introduction of new strategic bombers (likely the B-1) prompted a January 1987 report which claimed the bombers could lead to destabilization of relations between the superpowers.²⁶¹ At the same time, *Vremia* was willing to portray US cooperation on arms reduction, such as during a series of reports on the arms

258 *Vremia*. Broadcast March 12, 1985. The U.S. Naval Academy Collection of Soviet & Russian TV, Library of Congress. 1 videocassette (3/4 inch), viewing copy.

259 *Vremia*. Broadcast June 5, 1986. The U.S. Naval Academy Collection of Soviet & Russian TV, Library of Congress. 1 videocassette (3/4 inch), viewing copy.

260 *Vremia*. Broadcast December 15, 1987. The U.S. Naval Academy Collection of Soviet & Russian TV, Library of Congress. 1 videocassette (3/4 inch), viewing copy.

261 *Vremia*. Broadcast January 7, 1987. The U.S. Naval Academy Collection of Soviet & Russian TV, Library of Congress. 1 videocassette (3/4 inch), viewing copy.

reduction talks in Geneva in mid-1986 which would eventually lead to the 1987 INF treaty.²⁶²

Similarly, *Vremia* commented quite negatively on President Reagan's reaction to the Iran-Contra affair, arguing that this scandal belied the hypocrisy of the Reagan administration.²⁶³

Vremia also examined domestic developments in the West, often drawing negative conclusions about them. For example, stories run in 1986 and 1987 documented the suffering of homeless people in Western Europe, including interviews with many of them.²⁶⁴ Additionally, a November 1987 story ran which criticized the West German government for failing to apprehend former Nazi officers who had committed war crimes.²⁶⁵

However, the strongest focus of this sort of negative coverage was, as might be expected, the United States. Some focused on various sorts of unrest in the US, such as a March 1985 segment explaining how Pan American mechanics' ongoing strike was crippling US air transport.²⁶⁶ Others attempted to portray the United States as a lawless, chaotic country. For example, *Vremia* reported in December 1986 on a large shipment of narcotics which had been interdicted at the US-Mexican border, which the anchor indicated was indicative of large-scale drug abuse in the US.²⁶⁷ Moreover, *Vremia* covered the conclusion of a major organized crime trial in New York with great interest, again using this opportunity to claim that American society was violently lawless.²⁶⁸ *Vremia* also seems to have sought out news of man-made and natural

262 See, for example, *Vremia*. Broadcast August 1, 1986. The U.S. Naval Academy Collection of Soviet & Russian TV, Library of Congress. 1 videocassette (3/4 inch), viewing copy.

263 *Vremia*. Broadcast March 5, 1987. *Vremya Compendium*, Oakdale, Iowa: Worldview, 1987. 2 videocassettes (VHS), tape 2.

264 See, for example, *Vremia*. Broadcast December 14, 1986. The U.S. Naval Academy Collection of Soviet & Russian TV, Library of Congress. 1 videocassette (3/4 inch), viewing copy; *Vremia*. Broadcast February 23, 1987. The U.S. Naval Academy Collection of Soviet & Russian TV, Library of Congress. 1 videocassette (3/4 inch), viewing copy.

265 *Vremia*. Broadcast November 2, 1987. The U.S. Naval Academy Collection of Soviet & Russian TV, Library of Congress. 1 videocassette (3/4 inch), viewing copy.

266 *Vremia*. Broadcast March 13, 1985. The U.S. Naval Academy Collection of Soviet & Russian TV, Library of Congress. 1 videocassette (3/4 inch), viewing copy.

267 *Vremia*. Broadcast December 18, 1986. The U.S. Naval Academy Collection of Soviet & Russian TV, Library of Congress. 1 videocassette (3/4 inch), viewing copy.

268 *Vremia*. Broadcast March 4, 1987. *Vremya Compendium*, Oakdale, Iowa: Worldview, 1987. 2 videocassettes

disasters in the United States, such as the May 1986 derailment of a Norfolk and Western train in Virginia or forest fires in California, Idaho, and Montana in 1987 and 1988.²⁶⁹

At the same time, many positive news stories about events in the United States were also present on *Vremia*. Often, these were stories which showed technological or scientific advances which seemed to benefit the entirety of humanity. For example, a January 1987 broadcast described the new scientific research that was to be carried out with a large radio telescope which had just been brought online in the USA. A story broadcast in September which depicted the separation of conjoined twins at John Hopkins University was highly respectful of American science and technology.²⁷⁰ Even in arenas where national prestige was at stake, *Vremia* tended to respectfully acknowledge US triumphs, as in a October 1987 story which showed the launch of the Space Shuttle and described the mission the crew was to undertake.²⁷¹

Positively-presented reports about other Western countries also increasingly appeared on *Vremia* towards the end of the 1980s. As with those stories relating to the United States, these focused mainly on issues and news stories that were not politically contentious, but instead helped show the potential commonalities between the Soviet Union and those Western nations. For example, a November 1987 report showed Eduard Shevardnadze visiting a memorial to the Second World War and acknowledging the shared sacrifice of Canadian and Soviet citizens during that conflict.²⁷² Additionally, an April 1988 report showed the opening of a new museum in Paris dedicated to aviation history, which included a number of Soviet spacecraft.²⁷³ This story

(VHS), tape 2.

269 *Vremia*. Broadcast May 19, 1986. The U.S. Naval Academy Collection of Soviet & Russian TV, Library of Congress. 1 videocassette (3/4 inch), viewing copy.

270 *Vremia*. Broadcast September 7, 1987. The U.S. Naval Academy Collection of Soviet & Russian TV, Library of Congress. 1 videocassette (3/4 inch), viewing copy.

271 *Vremia*. Broadcast December 22, 1987. The U.S. Naval Academy Collection of Soviet & Russian TV, Library of Congress. 1 videocassette (3/4 inch), viewing copy.

272 *Vremia*. Broadcast November 2, 1987. The U.S. Naval Academy Collection of Soviet & Russian TV, Library of Congress. 1 videocassette (3/4 inch), viewing copy.

273 *Vremia*. Broadcast April 5, 1988. The U.S. Naval Academy Collection of Soviet & Russian TV, Library of

thus echoed the coverage of the US space program as a potential area of international cooperation.

Moreover, *Vremia*'s producers seem to have taken some pains to find news stories that suggested the Cold War was winding down, often those depicting cooperation between the two superpowers. For example, *Vremia* aired an extra-long segment in June 1987 covering a conference of Russian language instructors from the West, mainly from the United States, who had been invited to Moscow to meet with Gorbachev to discuss prospects for promoting peace between the Soviet Union and the West.²⁷⁴ A similar, though somewhat shorter, segment aired in August 1988 showing the collaboration between a US and a Soviet youth orchestra, playing a concert in Moscow of famous American and Russian composers, thus depicting music and culture as a fertile common ground out of which peaceful relations could grow.²⁷⁵ A report from the small community of Moscow, Iowa, showed this same sentiment, depicting a peace march in July 1987 under a banner reading "American Soviet Walk", and interviewing the participants, who explained that they wanted to see friendly relations between the two superpowers.²⁷⁶ Such pro-peace sentiments were also shown by *Vremia* in a December 1987 report which showed that most United States citizens were not in favor of the Star Wars program or other similar anti-missile programs which had been proposed.²⁷⁷ This support for some demilitarization was also demonstrated through a July 1987 report on Soviet arms inspectors visiting the USA's nuclear weapons facilities to ensure they complied with treaties.²⁷⁸

Congress. 1 videocassette (3/4 inch), viewing copy.

274 *Vremia*. Broadcast June 7, 1987. The U.S. Naval Academy Collection of Soviet & Russian TV, Library of Congress. 1 videocassette (3/4 inch), viewing copy.

275 *Vremia*. Broadcast August 21, 1988. The U.S. Naval Academy Collection of Soviet & Russian TV, Library of Congress. 1 videocassette (3/4 inch), viewing copy.

276 *Vremia*. Broadcast July 15, 1987. The U.S. Naval Academy Collection of Soviet & Russian TV, Library of Congress. 1 videocassette (3/4 inch), viewing copy.

277 *Vremia*. Broadcast December 15, 1987. The U.S. Naval Academy Collection of Soviet & Russian TV, Library of Congress. 1 videocassette (3/4 inch), viewing copy.

278 *Vremia*. Broadcast July 15, 1987. The U.S. Naval Academy Collection of Soviet & Russian TV, Library of

Moreover, *Vremia* ran a story in March 1987 which described the production of a Discovery Channel documentary on the Soviet Union. The report seemed hopeful that this program would foster peaceful American-Soviet relations and understanding, and included a brief interview with Ellen Mickiewicz in which she expressed similar opinions.²⁷⁹ This was part of a broader trend of Soviet-American media interactions, including what came to be termed as “spacebridges”: teleconferences between Soviet and American groups concerned about particular issues. The first of these was held in December 1985, and commonly talked about issues that affected both peoples, such as women's rights or arms control.²⁸⁰ Thus, Soviet media officials in Gosteleradio and elsewhere seem to have believed that cross-cultural understanding was important and could be aided by this sort of audiovisual exchanges.

Accordingly, *Vremia*'s coverage of international news and affairs showed with greater nuance the complex military, diplomatic, and economic situation in which the Soviet Union was situated. However, its slow move away from traditional Soviet ideological reporting regarding the role of the Soviet Union with respect to the outside world also seems to have called into question the relevance of the Soviet government. After all, if friendly relations with the United States were possible, and many problems existed in socialist countries, why was the military-economic alliance of the Eastern Bloc a rational choice? Perhaps unsurprisingly, this arrangement was soon to be challenged, as I discuss in Chapter 8.

Congress. 1 videocassette (3/4 inch), viewing copy.

279 *Vremia*. Broadcast March 14, 1987. The U.S. Naval Academy Collection of Soviet & Russian TV, Library of Congress. 1 videocassette (3/4 inch), viewing copy.

280 Michael Brainerd, *Spacebridges : Television and US-Soviet Dialogue* (Lanham: University Press of America ;Citizen Exchange Council, 1989), 14–16.

Chapter 7: The quickening tempo of *glasnost*

Gorbachev sought to reform Soviet law related to media and the press from early in his tenure as General Secretary. However, he faced stiff opposition from political conservatives and progress on this front largely stalled. Only in July 1990 was he able to announce the law “on the press and other forms of mass media”²⁸¹ This was to be a watershed moment in the process of *glasnost*, seriously altering the legal landscape in which media outlets operated. In the end, it would result in a complete erosion of Gorbachev's control over the media, allowing Boris Yelstin to begin carving out a separate and distinct Russian media and political sphere.

Perhaps the most important provision of the new Press Law was that it allowed any Soviet citizen to found a new media outlet, whether in print or electronic media. While registration with the state was required, the new law specifically prohibited the state from interfering with these new, independent stations, except in the case of “calls for the forcible overthrow of the existing state and public system, for national, racial, and religious intolerance or propaganda for war, violence and cruelty.”²⁸²

Moreover, the press law allowed state-controlled media outlets to re-define their ownership, assigning themselves formally to a labor union, cooperative, or other voluntary association. Many periodical print publications took advantage of this opportunity, such as the national monthly magazine *Oktiabr'* (*October*), and the national monthly literary journal *Literaturnaia Gazeta* (*Literary Newspaper*). However, most media remained under more central control.²⁸³

Simultaneously, the Press Law reformed the role of *Glavlit* and related agencies. While

281 Gladys Ganley, *Mikhail and the Multiplying Media* (Cambridge, MA: Program on Information Resources Policy, Harvard University Center for Information Policy Research, 1994), 81.

282 quoted, *ibid.*, 84.

283 *Ibid.*, 146.

some topics were still censored, particularly those relating to military and political secrets, articles and reports no longer needed to be vetted by officials from *Glavlit*. Such officials continued to be employed to “guide” editors in determining which stories might be politically sensitive, but they were no longer empowered to outright censor individual stories. Rather, a lengthy list of “Information That May Not Be Published” was disseminated to media outlets.²⁸⁴

As such, journalists gained a great deal of political independence and power under the new Press Law. They could, with the support of their editors and employers, express most political opinion with little fear of retribution from the state or Party. This became particularly important for journalists from the non-Russian republics, who increasingly called for greater political rights and more autonomy from Moscow, inflaming ethnic tensions throughout much of the USSR.²⁸⁵

Moreover, even citizens gained a new ability to express their opinions of politically-charged subjects. By this time, live broadcasts of citizens' reactions to various news events was becoming common, in much the same way that letters to the editor had previously been used to gauge public opinion. However, there was, of course, much less opportunity for selecting politically-acceptable comments. Additionally, the relaxed censorship laws meant that television producers were willing to take this approach even to news stories where politically-charged comments were likely. Additionally, live broadcasts of political debates, particularly in the Parliament of the USSR, meant that Soviet citizens were increasingly exposed to a wide variety of political viewpoints.²⁸⁶

Perhaps most crucially, however, the Press Law removed most provisions prohibiting

284 Ibid., 82–83.

285 Reino Paasilinna, *Glasnost and Soviet Television : a Study of the Soviet Mass Media and Its Role in Society from 1985-1991* ([Finland]: YLE Finnish Broadcasting Co., 1995), 140–144.

286 Ibid., 145–147.

samizdat, or self-published materials. Press runs of under one thousand copies no longer needed any state permission, and while some fines could still be assessed against Soviet citizens for publishing politically-sensitive material, Soviet prosecutors could no longer seek imprisonment for these offenses.²⁸⁷

Thus, the Press Law was instrumental in fundamentally democratizing and freeing the Soviet press, relinquishing the state's exclusive control over publication and broadcasting. However, there were still a number of factors that tended to prevent an independent media from emerging, meaning that the state-run media still enjoyed near-monopoly on Soviet political and social discourse.

Independent media outlets would need to be self-financing, in contrast to the State-owned and -supported mass media. In a cultural climate not used to advertising or other sponsorship, this was difficult to achieve, particularly for electronic media. Some print media outlets and at least one radio station, *Ekho Moskvyy* (Echo of Moscow) were able to accomplish this, however.²⁸⁸

Moreover, the CPSU maintained control over the equipment and facilities needed to produce most media. Printing presses and related equipment were still controlled by the Soviet state apparatus and subject to ideological control, as were paper mills and ink factories. Independent radio and television were largely stymied by Gosteleradio's control over frequency allocation. The end result of this was the ability for the CPSU to shut down any publication at will, and most media outlets according self-censored even as they were finally free from any legal requirement to do so. Accordingly, most successful and widespread media, both electronic and print, remained under state and Party control.²⁸⁹

287 Ganley, *Mikhail and the Multiplying Media*, 88.

288 Ibid., 112–113.

289 Ibid., 84–87.

However, this climate of rapid media liberalization was challenged later in 1990 as Gorbachev attempted to re-assert more central control over the Soviet Union in what has become termed his “turn to the right.” In part due to the failing policies of *perestroika* and in part due to the increasingly strong political forces from both progressives and conservatives who opposed Gorbachev, he ordered the state-controlled media to return to more conservative coverage in order to “stabilize society”. In response, hundreds of Gosteleradio journalists and editors resigned.²⁹⁰

In December, Gorbachev appointed the highly-conservative Leonid Kravchenko to head Gosteleradio, who almost immediately began rolling back changes that had appeared on Soviet television. He ordered *Vremia* to use its older, more conservative introduction and to refrain from interviewing Soviet citizens on the street; he ordered *Vzgliad* altogether shut down.²⁹¹

Despite Kravchenko's immediate and severe unpopularity within the journalistic community,²⁹² media outlets under the control of Gosteleradio returned to exclusively publishing news which followed the party line, often ignoring politically sensitive news stories just as they had prior to *glasnost*. This process of reversal included Interfax, which was all but shut down in January 1991, having much of its equipment confiscated; it was able to continue operating only due to access to equipment being used at that point by Russian nationalists.²⁹³

Later in 1990, Boris Yeltsin, newly elected chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (RSFSR), began to try to push for the independence of Russian media from central Soviet control, particularly focusing on electronic media. The RSFSR demanded control and ownership over Ostankino and other media production

290 Paasilinna, *Glasnost and Soviet Television*, 176.

291 Ganley, *Mikhail and the Multiplying Media*, 104.

292 Paasilinna, *Glasnost and Soviet Television*, 179.

293 Ganley, *Mikhail and the Multiplying Media*, 105–106.

facilities, which it proposed to lend on a time-sharing basis to the Soviet Union. Needless to say, Gorbachev's administration was not prepared to accept this arrangement.²⁹⁴

Yeltsin, however, was able to profit from Gorbachev's attempts to limit the progress of *glasnost*. When *Vzgliad* was shut down in 1990, the RSFSR hired its entire production crew and cast and produced a highly-similar program entitled *Vzgliad i drugie* (*Vzgliad and others*) which aired on Leningrad TV. This station's managers increasingly responded to the RSFSR's support, becoming more pro-nationalist and anti-Gorbachev with time; it was the only major media outlet to cover a large anti-Gorbachev protest outside the Kremlin in March 1991, for instance.²⁹⁵ However, Gorbachev, wary of Leningrad television's destabilizing potential, had insisted that a kill switch be installed on the repeater which broadcast in the Moscow area, thus allowing him to shut down Moscow reception of these events.²⁹⁶

In the end, Gorbachev yielded to political pressure from nationalist Russian politicians, granting the RSFSR permission to run its own electronic media outlets, and in December 1990 Russian Radio launched in Moscow, followed by Russian Television in May 1991, even including its own evening news program *Vesti* (*News*) which was highly similar to *Vremia* in most respects.²⁹⁷

The Baltic republics soon also created independent electronic media, although with even more resistance from the Soviet regime.²⁹⁸ This, combined with attempts by these republics to secede altogether from the Soviet Union, led to one of the more iconic clashes in the Soviet breakup. In late 1990, Lithuanian political authorities refused to comply with central Soviet

294 Ibid., 94–95.

295 Ibid., 95–97.

296 Paasilinna, *Glasnost and Soviet Television*, 174.

297 Ganley, *Mikhail and the Multiplying Media*, 98.

298 Paasilinna, *Glasnost and Soviet Television*, 160.

orders concerning conscription and restrictive food pricing.²⁹⁹ In response, on January 10, 1991, Gorbachev issued an ultimatum calling on the Lithuanian leaders “to immediately restore the full authority of the Soviet Constitution and the Constitution of the Lithuanian Soviet Socialist Republic, and abrogate earlier adopted anti-constitutional acts.”³⁰⁰ Gorbachev, realizing the importance of controlling media reactions to the impending crisis, ordered military airplanes to drop pro-Soviet pamphlets over Vilnius. When this failed to achieve the desired effect, operatives instigated pro-Soviet demonstrations, giving the Gorbachev regime a pretense for military involvement.³⁰¹

A series of pro-Soviet protests took place on January 9 and 10, in which it appears that KGB provocateurs attempted to goad Lithuanian police into reacting violently, thereby providing a pretense for Soviet military involvement. Nevertheless, no bloodshed occurred. By the 10th, however, Soviet authorities had sent in some 30 tanks and one thousand troops, nominally to help maintain order. Soon, troops from the Soviet Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD) seized railways stations and other key points of infrastructure, predicting possible chaos.³⁰²

On January 13, MVD troops seized the Vilnius television broadcasting tower, killing fourteen and injuring nearly one hundred in the process; video of this military action was taken by Vilnius TV crews, which would soon make its way abroad, shocking Western audiences with the images of Soviet soldiers brutally attacking protesters with the butts of their rifles, running over with tanks those who refused to withdraw, and even using live submachine-gun fire against some.³⁰³

299 Anatol Lieven, *The Baltic Revolution: Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and the Path to Independence* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 245–250.

300 Ainius Lasas, “Bloody Sunday: What Did Gorbachev Know About the January 1991 Events in Vilnius and Riga?,” *Journal of Baltic Studies* 38, no. 2 (2007): 185.

301 Lieven, *The Baltic Revolution*, 250–251.

302 Richard J. Krickus, *Showdown: the Lithuanian rebellion and the breakup of the Soviet Empire* (Washington, DC: Brassey’s, 1996), 139–140.

303 *Ibid.*, 146–152.

In the end, broadcasting soon resumed from Kaunas, making the entire attempt somewhat futile; the Baltic republics shortly thereafter regained unfettered control over their own electronic media.³⁰⁴

It is not entirely clear whether Gorbachev authorized the actions in Riga and Vilnius. Gorbachev himself has claimed that he knew nothing of the attack, and that the operation was independently carried out by Dmitri Yazov, Soviet Minister of Defense. Nevertheless, he called the Lithuanian secession and protests “patently anti-constitutional actions.”³⁰⁵ He must also have been aware of the possibility of violence erupting: in December 1990 a number of high-ranking military and political officials had written an open letter to Gorbachev calling for the use of security forces against “separatists, criminal spectators, and...paramilitary forces.” Moreover, Gorbachev took no action to reprimand or punish any of those involved in the assault.³⁰⁶

Still, Gorbachev did appear convinced to prevent these small-scale assaults from escalating into the sort of repressions that had occurred earlier in Soviet history. After the violence in Vilnius and Riga, Gorbachev appeared on television to call for a halt to police actions against protests in the Baltic republics, and reaffirmed the right (at least in principle) for a Soviet republic to secede from the Union. Additionally, as Brown points out, unlike his predecessors, Gorbachev showed respect for the legal framework of the Soviet Constitution through his actions. Nevertheless, it appears that Gorbachev and his administration simply did not expect the backlash against his actions that occurred. He had underestimated the importance of television and radio in popular perception, and did not anticipate popular uprising to “protect” it from government interference, a confrontation which was to be repeated in both 1991 and 1993 (see

304 Lasas, “Bloody Sunday,” 186.

305 Mikhail Sergeevich Gorbachev, *Memoirs*, 1st ed. (New York: Doubleday, 1996), 574–580.

306 Jerry F. Hough, *Democratization and Revolution in the USSR, 1985-1991* (Washington, D.C: Brookings Institution, 1997), 396–397.

chapter 7).³⁰⁷

Vremia's producers seem to have paid little head to these political developments later in the 1980s, at least. The topic of *glasnost* itself was very seldom mentioned, and little coverage was given to new media outlets emerging even in the period I surveyed—that is, considerably before Gorbachev's turn to the right. As such, particularly paired against *Vesti*, *Vremia* became the voice of moderate conservatism on Soviet television. This may help explain its increasingly-slipping rankings; by 1991, it was ranked ninth among daily news programs in the Soviet Union.³⁰⁸

Still, *Vremia* remained perhaps the most authoritative television news source, because it was the only news program always broadcast nationwide, in the evening, with no other significant programs running in the same time slot. Moreover, its coverage, like that of *Pravda*, represented the most-official version of Soviet events, and was constructed with the most access to journalistic resources such as foreign correspondents. All this rendered its coverage of the 1991 coup all the more important and momentous.

307 Lieven, *The Baltic Revolution*, 254; Archie Brown, *The Gorbachev Factor* (Oxford, England ; New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 286.

308 Paasilinna, *Glasnost and Soviet Television*, 145.

Chapter 8: The coup and the collapse

The Soviet mass media's role in politics and political reform, however, was to be most severely tested during the August 1991 coup attempt. The increased freedom journalists had become accustomed to by 1991 led many of them to defy orders that they cease publication or broadcasting, thus allowing them to play a substantial role in rallying public support against those attempting the coup. However, the media's role after Boris Yeltsin assumed power and the Soviet Union collapsed was to be less certain, particularly in the case of television, as many of the institutions its journalists depended on slowly collapsed.

The greatest issue facing Gorbachev and increasingly weakening his political power was the question of the relationship between the constituent republics of the Soviet Union. In theory, all had voluntarily joined, and all could secede from the Union at will. In practice, the Soviet military and police would never have allowed such secession to take place, as demonstrated by the Hungarian Uprising of 1956 and 1968 Warsaw Pact invasion of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic—both of which were not even part of the Soviet Union.

However, Gorbachev had sent clear messages that he would be unwilling to intervene militarily in the so-called “satellite states”, and by 1990, many had moved away from Soviet-style communism, leading perhaps most famously to the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. The republics within the Soviet Union increasingly began to pushing to be able to remove much of the Soviet Union's influence over their governments, effectively aiming to gain the sovereignty that they, on paper, already possessed. While the Baltic republics were the most vocal about this process, the most significant actor was the RSFSR. While Gorbachev aimed to hold the Soviet Union together with the signing of a new Union Treaty that would delegate much of the state's power to the individual republics, RSFSR politicians, particularly Boris Yeltsin, continued to

push for increased autonomy.³⁰⁹

One major point of contention was over the independent regions *within* the RSFSR, which, by the same logic that would allow Russia to secede from the Soviet Union, ought to have the same option to gain autonomy from Russian control. Yeltsin was unwilling to concede this point, fearing it would lead to an unstable political situation on RSFSR soil. Gorbachev, meanwhile, was more than willing to let the negotiations stall temporarily, as it allowed him to re-consolidate his power as the president of the USSR, rather than as the General Secretary of the CPSU.³¹⁰

Meanwhile, Yeltsin planned to establish (and gain for himself) the post of president of the RSFSR, likely obtaining Gorbachev's quiet agreement to this arrangement in exchange for a promise to sign the new Union Treaty in the "immediate future." The election was clearly set up to allow Yeltsin to win, as there was very little time for any other candidates to register and campaign.³¹¹ After this, Yeltsin set about a campaign to garner public support as well as to take as much power away from the Soviet Union and give it instead to the RSFSR. He criticized Gorbachev's policies of economic reform, leading Gorbachev to attack Yeltsin's policies; this back-and-forth was to continue for the remainder of 1991. Perhaps most crucially, however, Yeltsin was able to seize many state enterprises and claim them as the property of the RSFSR, including the Tiumen oil fields, which would, upon signing the new Union Treaty allow Russia to control oil and natural gas prices within the Soviet Union, giving them incredible political leverage. Additionally, he banned the CPSU from organizing within RSFSR-owned enterprises. Shockingly, Gorbachev failed to respond to either of these acts, perhaps overwhelmed by the

309 Jerry F. Hough, *Democratization and Revolution in the USSR, 1985-1991* (Washington, D.C: Brookings Institution, 1997), 375–377.

310 Ibid., 385–393.

311 Ibid., 404–420.

sheer number of crises ongoing at this time.³¹²

In response to these developments, as well as the impending signing of the new Union Treaty, a group of conservatives hatched a plot aiming to overthrow Gorbachev and revert many of his reforms. Among others, this group included Gennady Yanayev, vice president of the Soviet Union; Valentin Pavlov, prime minister of the Soviet Union; Vladimir Kryuchkov, KGB chairman; and Dmitry Yazov, the Soviet minister of defense.³¹³

As Remnick has noted, signs of disloyalty to the Gorbachev regime were easy to see during the summer of 1991. Conservative journalist Alexander Prokhanov, for instance, had argued that “patriotic forces” would soon need to find “a real leader.” Meanwhile, Kryuchkov was undertaking diplomatic relations with other states, including Cuba, without consulting with Gorbachev, a clear overstepping of his political position.³¹⁴

Kryuchkov began preparations for the coup on August 6, having subordinates in the KGB draw up declarations of a state of emergency. Although the implications of these documents were clear, none of the KGB officers appear to have resisted their creation; although Gorbachev had given the agency relatively unfettered freedom during his reign, Dunlop has suggested that many in the KGB likely feared the breakup of the Soviet Union in the event that a new Union Treaty was signed, as this would substantially decrease the agency's power and importance. In any event, the KGB's resources were key in the initial planning of the coup, which was not necessarily as haphazardly executed as it may have appeared.³¹⁵

The conspirators began the coup attempt itself on the evening of Sunday, August 18,

312 Ibid., 422–428.

313 John B. Dunlop, *The Rise of Russia and the Fall of the Soviet Empire* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1993), 191.

314 David Remnick, *Lenin's Tomb: The Last Days of the Soviet Empire*, 1st ed. (New York: Random House, 1993), 447–448.

315 Ibid., 448; Dunlop, *The Rise of Russia and the Fall of the Soviet Empire*, 193–195.

1991, at Gorbachev's dacha in Foros, a resort town in Crimea, where the president was spending his annual vacation along with family. They cut off all communications in and out of the compound upon their arrival at about 4:50. Some of their members, including Kryuchkov confronted Gorbachev and demanded he sign either a document declaring a state of emergency, or to resign and transfer power to Yanayev. Gorbachev refused to accede to these demands, calling the conspirators “nothing but adventurers and traitors” who dared to “suggest a totalitarian regime in the country,”³¹⁶ and so the conspirators had him detailed within his compound, and left at 7:30. That night, Kryuchkov convened a meeting of the conspirators to plan a takeover of the Soviet government.³¹⁷ Surprisingly, Yanayev was somewhat hesitant to accept power, perhaps having expected Gorbachev to agree to their demands. After some urging by Kryuchkov, he agreed and signed the necessary documents. However, this started to create tensions between the different conspirators which would undermine their rule over the Soviet Union in the following days.³¹⁸

The conspirators' first major action was to attempt to seize control of the press in Moscow. At 6:00 AM on August 19, the conspirators, now calling themselves the “State committee on the state of emergency” (*Gosudarstvennyi Komitet po Chrezvychainomu Polozheniiu*, GKChP) ordered TASS to report that Yanayev had taken over because Gorbachev was medically unable to serve. Further, at 7:00, the GKChP ordered all non-Party media to cease operations immediately. Additionally, fearing that the Baltic states would have more success securing independent television and radio coverage, they ordered military forces in Kaunas to seize the broadcasting facilities there.³¹⁹ They released a statement entitled “An appeal to the

316 Remnick, *Lenin's Tomb*, 455.

317 Stuart H. Loory, Ann Imse, and Cable News Network., *CNN reports, seven days that shook the world* (Atlanta, Ga.: Turner Pub., 1991), 48–49.

318 Remnick, *Lenin's Tomb*, 457–458.

319 Loory, Imse, and Cable News Network., *CNN reports, seven days that shook the world*, 72–74.

Soviet people,” outlining the reasons for which they had seized power, which was to be read on the nationwide news that evening. The statement argued that “a mortal danger has come to loom large over [the Soviet Union]” in the form of an (unrelated) “unconstitutional coup” underway by “those who, grossly violating the fundamental law of the USSR...[strive] for unbridled dictatorial powers.” Moreover, the statement identified a number of problems the GKChP aimed to address, such as “the propaganda of sex and violence...threatening the health and lives of future generations” and “the octopus of crime and glaring immorality.”³²⁰

Almost immediately, the members of the RSFSR Council of Ministers signed a statement condemning the GKChP's actions as anti-constitutional and call for a general strike within the territory of the RSFSR. At 10:00 AM, Yeltsin held a meeting of the Russian Parliament in its building (commonly known as the White House), which concluded with a list of demands to the GKChP, including the release of Gorbachev. Additionally, he immediately issued a decree stating that anyone who obeyed the GKChP's orders would be subject to prosecution under RSFSR law. In response, the GKChP, by way of Yazov, ordered tanks to surround the Russian Parliament building.³²¹

By early afternoon, the confrontation between GKChP forces and those under the control of Yeltsin was beginning to take shape: large crowds of Russian citizens had gathered near the Russian Parliament building. Notably, veterans of the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan began to help construct makeshift barricades around the White House to try and prevent tanks from approaching closely. Although these *afgantsy* were few in number, their organizational skills helped turn a popular protest into a major military obstacle.³²² By the next day, even construction

320 quoted in Remnick, *Lenin's Tomb*, 461–462.

321 Loory, Imse, and Cable News Network., *CNN reports, seven days that shook the world*, 74; Leon Rabinovich Aron, *Yeltsin: A Revolutionary Life*, 1st U.S. ed. (New York: Thomas Dunne Books/St. Martin's Press, 2000), 445–446.

322 Dunlop, *The Rise of Russia and the Fall of the Soviet Empire*, 222–223.

equipment from throughout Moscow would be drafted into the defense of the Russian Parliament building.³²³

Yeltsin made his since-famous address to the crowd from on top of a tank, calling the GkChP a “right-wing, reactionary, anti-constitutional coup d’etat” and asked Russian citizens “to give an appropriate rebuff to the putschists and demand a return of the country to normal constitutional development.”³²⁴ The GKChP ordered Yeltsin and the others away from the White House. In response, Yeltsin called on the armed forces and KGB to obey him and not the conspirators, appealing to their sense of nationalism and arguing that the soldiers' oaths were to the Soviet people and not to its government.³²⁵ It soon seemed that at least some troops had defected. Meanwhile, the GKChP had sealed off Red Square and taken Russian TV off the air.³²⁶

The bureaucracy controlling central Soviet media, however, was entrusted with spreading decrees and positive news of the GKChP's actions. However, even the conservative Kravchenko was unwilling to submit to these orders from what he perceived as an illegitimate authority. He immediately recognized the significance of the documents being sent to Ostankino from the GKChP, and took steps to ensure the safety of his employees, calling them all into the television center and instructing them to use the underground tunnels connecting buildings, assuming there would be tanks surrounding the television studios shortly.³²⁷ This was even more true for TASS Moscow Deputy Chief Gennady Shishkin, who informed his subordinates that the publication of stories was to be at their discretion. Accordingly, TASS simply omitted most of the fluff-filled stories the GKChP ordered them to run.³²⁸

323 Aron, *Yeltsin*, 449.

324 quoted in Remnick, *Lenin's Tomb*, 466.

325 Ibid., 467.

326 Loory, Imse, and Cable News Network., *CNN reports, seven days that shook the world*, 76–78.

327 Remnick, *Lenin's Tomb*, 460.

328 Loory, Imse, and Cable News Network., *CNN reports, seven days that shook the world*, 74–47.

Meanwhile, at Ostankino, Gosteleradio officials had little choice but to shut down most programming, running *Swan Lake* and other cultural classics as had been Soviet tradition during crises such as the political turmoil following the death of a General Secretary.³²⁹ Still, it appeared that Ostankino journalists were chafing at the bit to challenge the GKChP members' control over their journalism. At 5:00 PM, the Committee held a press conference, including Western journalists and the opportunity for Soviet journalists to ask questions of the GKChP members.³³⁰ The conspirators, while aiming to preserve the appearance of normalcy, appeared visibly nervous, particularly Yanayev; Remnick described his appearance as “like a smack addict in need of a fix.”³³¹ This was broadcast live on the First Channel, allowing a *Pravda* journalist to effectively slip through restricted information about Yeltsin's opposition to the entire Soviet Union by asking the following question:

The Russian Information Agency today transmitted an appeal from Yeltsin, Silayev, and Khasbulatov to the citizens of Russia describing the events of the past night as a rightwing, reactionary, anticonstitutional coup. What is your attitude to that statement? And the second part of this same question: That same appeal contained a call for a general indefinite strike. Well, in my view, such appeals could lead to the most tragic consequences. So, in this connection, will any specific actions be undertaken on this matter by the committee?³³²

However, television journalists were not content to serve merely as passive conduits of information. On the evening of the 19th, Leningrad television aired a broadcast which depicted the tanks gathered outside the White House as well as excerpts from Yeltsin's speech atop a tank. Journalists Sergei Medvedev described the protestors, saying that they “organized spontaneous whirlpools, with outbursts of emotion and passionate appeals, the main ones which were to

329 Anna Arutunyan, *The Media in Russia* (New York: Open University Press, 2009), 123–124.

330 Loory, Imse, and Cable News Network., *CNN reports, seven days that shook the world*, 84, 97–98.

331 Remnick, *Lenin's Tomb*, 471.

332 Gladys Ganley, *Mikhail and the Multiplying Media* (Cambridge, MA: Program on Information Resources Policy, Harvard University Center for Information Policy Research, 1994), 127.

defend democracy.”³³³ While these reports did not reach Moscow because of the shutdown of the Moscow relay station, they did reach many cities other than Leningrad. Bolstered by this broadcast, Vladimir Lazutkin, deputy chief of Gosteleradio, asked the *Vremia* crew to produce a report on the ongoing situation in Moscow. A young reporter, Sergei Medvedev, put together a report entitled “Moscow today” which showed the relative calm over most of the city, but also the protestors and tanks outside the White House, and even a clip of Yeltsin atop a tank. Yelena Pozniak, the director who edited the piece, also opted not to remove any of this footage. Finally, a KGB colonel who had been posted at Ostankino to prevent any such reports opted to take no action; Lazutkin later reported that the colonel felt the coup was unlikely to succeed and even drank a shot of vodka with Lazutkin and the other journalists present.³³⁴

When the report on the protests in Moscow aired on the nationwide First Channel, the GKChP was, understandably, incensed. However, Yanayev called for some restraint, calling the *Vremia* coverage a “good balanced report” and did not authorize any action to prevent similar reporting in the future.³³⁵ Nonetheless, at least some number of the protestors interviewed by CNN at the time cited the report as the reason that they were in the street, protesting. Although the degree to which these interviews as representative is unclear, they do suggest that *Vremia*'s report contributed, at least in part, to the protests outside the Russian Parliament building.³³⁶

Moreover, the GKChP was unable to block Yeltsin from using mass media to communicate with the population of Moscow and the broader population of the RSFSR. Most of Gosteleradio's radio jamming equipment had been sold to the RSFSR authorities, who had little interest in blocking foreign radio. Accordingly, Radio Liberty, the Voice of America, and the

333 Ibid., 174–175.

334 Loory, Imse, and Cable News Network., *CNN reports, seven days that shook the world*, 100–102; Remnick, *Lenin's Tomb*, 473–474.

335 Loory, Imse, and Cable News Network., *CNN reports, seven days that shook the world*, 101.

336 Ibid., 129–131.

BBC were all available in Moscow (and to some extent elsewhere in the RSFSR). Moreover, amateur radio equipment that had been smuggled into the Russian Parliament building allowed Yeltsin and his compatriots to broadcast audio to outside the Soviet Union, which could then be re-broadcast by outside broadcasters. Thus, Yeltsin was able to make broadcasts to the population of Moscow. Perhaps most crucially, however, the GKChP failed to disconnect telephone lines to the White House, allowing Yeltsin's staff to send and receive telephone calls and fax transmissions.³³⁷ Yeltsin used these lines to create a shadow Russian government in his home city of Sverdlovsk (today Yekaterinburg), some 1500 kilometers to the east, which could take power over the RSFSR's state ministries in the event he were arrested.³³⁸

Tensions continued to increase on the night of the 19th, as the GKChP ordered troops near the White House to clear protestors away from the building towards noon, but these troops refused to carry this out; it is unclear whether the commanding officers of the troops in question refused to carry out the GKChP's demands or whether the troops themselves refused. In any event, the numbers of protestors and ordinary Muscovites outside the Parliament building continued to grow, even as troops and protestors began clashing near Red Square.³³⁹

By the following day, the disorder had begun to spread from Moscow out to other major cities in the Soviet Union, particularly in the western parts of the country. At 1:00PM on August 20, Soviet troops fired on a van in Riga in unclear circumstances, killing the driver and injuring the passenger, the first casualties of the coup. In an attempt to quell the unrest, the troops also seized Latvian radio headquarters. Nevertheless, the discontent in other cities continued to grow; at 12:30 PM, the mayor of Leningrad, Anatoly Sobchak, (who had met with Yeltsin by chance on

337 Ganley, *Mikhail and the Multiplying Media*, 130–141.

338 Remnick, *Lenin's Tomb*, 472.

339 Loory, Imse, and Cable News Network., *CNN reports, seven days that shook the world*, 94.

the morning of the 19th)³⁴⁰ called for a mass rally to protest the GKChP's actions, and the citizenry of the city headed his call.³⁴¹ In the end, only three oblasts outside Leningrad and Moscow would declare support for Yeltsin outright, but none clearly endorsed the GKChP, either; most simply tried to wait out the coup to see what would happen, often leading to unrest on the streets.³⁴²

The GKChP tried to reassert control over the situation. They disbanded the Moscow Police, believing them to be Yeltsin sympathizers. In the Central Asian SSRs, authorities sympathetic to the GKChP began arresting Yeltsin sympathizers. However, the Committee's grasp on the crisis continued to deteriorate. At 5:00 PM, Yeltsin managed to get a telephone call through to the UK prime minister John Major, asking him and other Western leaders to demand that the GKChP allow Gorbachev contact with the West and to be examined by a Western doctor. Moreover, Yeltsin received assurance from President Bush around this time that the United States would back a Yeltsin-led government in opposition to the GKChP; this was in contrast to only North Korea, Cuba, Libya, and Iraq that recognized the GKChP as legitimate.³⁴³

Meanwhile, the GKChP was finding itself even more unable to control the media which was all but completely ignoring their orders and decrees. Russian Television, unable to broadcast, still filmed and edited programs, and smuggled them out of Moscow on videotape. These were broadcast on a number of regional/republican networks, effectively bypassing the shutdown of the Moscow transmitter. Moreover, the informal cable-distribution networks in Moscow often played back these tapes, allowing many even within the city to watch Russian Television.³⁴⁴

340 Remnick, *Lenin's Tomb*, 462–463.

341 Loory, Imse, and Cable News Network., *CNN reports, seven days that shook the world*, 106.

342 Dunlop, *The Rise of Russia and the Fall of the Soviet Empire*, 199.

343 Loory, Imse, and Cable News Network., *CNN reports, seven days that shook the world*, 108–121.

344 Ganley, *Mikhail and the Multiplying Media*, 112, 189.

At the same time, CNN and ABC reporters in Moscow were able to film without restrictions by the GKChP and exported this footage to their US headquarters without incident. This included an interview with Yeltsin in which he called on Russian citizens to continue to resist GKChP forces and on Russian soldiers to refuse any orders to fire on civilians. In addition to Western audiences, many of the cable distribution networks obtained copies of the CNN interview. Moreover, NTSC televisions in Moscow, often installed in hotels and other places where Westerners might want to watch television, could pick up a CNN relay station that had not been deactivated by the GKChP.³⁴⁵

At the same time, Soviet official media was likewise finding ways to subvert the Committee's control over news. During the 20th, Ostankino staff looked the other way while non-Gosteleradio journalists and crews edited and produced television coverage that was smuggled to cable networks and to regional broadcasters.³⁴⁶ The former hosts of *Vzgliad* (their program had been canceled in late 1990) went on Leningrad radio and reported frankly on the conditions in Moscow, giving the resistance press considerably-better credibility. This broadcast was relayed to Moscow by amateur radio enthusiasts. Moreover, by that evening, TASS began inserting stories covering the resistance as well as the positive stories the GKChP required them to. The Committee appears not to have noticed.³⁴⁷

By and large, the official print media that had been allowed to continue operating printed the GKChP's demands word for word. However, while the GKChP did manage to shut down most unauthorized papers by ordering the state printing presses closed, many newspapers faxed their reports abroad so that at least some could read them. Others, such as *Rossiskaia Gazeta* (*Russian Newspaper*) simply used photocopiers to make small numbers of tabloid-sized

345 Ibid., 143, 190.

346 Loory, Imse, and Cable News Network., *CNN reports, seven days that shook the world*, 116.

347 Ganley, *Mikhail and the Multiplying Media*, 145.

newspapers. However, probably the most significant development was the creation of *Obshchaia Gazeta* (*Common Newspaper*), pooling the resources of eleven banned papers to produce small newspapers on the coup's progress, published from the 20th to the 22nd.³⁴⁸

However, by the end of August 20, the GKChP members, particularly Yazov, were beginning to understand they had lost all control of the political situation and were beginning to search for the best way out of their increasingly-desperate predicament. The crowds in Moscow and elsewhere were increasingly large, with many people camping outside the White House, cooking food, reading poetry, playing music, and so on. In a desperate attempt to reel in the situation, the Committee had *Vremia* announce a 10 PM curfew in Moscow, and instructed troops throughout Moscow to enforce this policy without hesitation.³⁴⁹

Additionally, plans were made to storm the Russian Parliament building, using helicopters landing on the roof, grenade launchers mounted on tanks, and tear gas, water cannons, and blank rounds to disperse crowds outside the building. It seemed unlikely that Yeltsin's forces and the protesters would be able to hold back such a focused and strong attack.

However, the crackdown led to massive clashes between protestors and soldiers, including three civilian deaths around 1:00 AM on August 21. Perhaps in response to this bloodshed, by early morning, Kryuchkov had decided that storming the Russian Parliament building with KGB troops would likely be disastrous. Moreover, the loyalty of KGB troops was coming into question, as some mid-ranking officers were found to be writing letters decrying the coup as anti-constitutional. By 8:00 AM he and Yazov had concluded that withdrawing troops from Moscow and attempting to roll back the attempted coup was their best hope to avoid

³⁴⁸ Ibid., 153–161.

³⁴⁹ Loory, Imse, and Cable News Network., *CNN reports, seven days that shook the world*, 121–131 The program name is not given, but no other program was on the air at the time indicated.

negative consequences. By 11:00 AM the tanks had begun to withdraw throughout the city.³⁵⁰

A number of GKChP members departed for the Crimea at 2:18 PM to bring Gorbachev back to Moscow and return him to power; by 5:00 PM they had been detained by Gorbachev's bodyguards, and by 6:45 Gorbachev had regained access to his communications networks, calling first Yeltsin and then President Bush to inform them he had been returned to power. Moreover, he phoned Kravchenko and ordered him to read a statement on the First Channel (which was also to be distributed by TASS and other media outlets): "President Mikhail Gorbachev said today he is in full control of the situation in the country now and that his communications links to the nation, cut off by adventurist actions of a group of state officials, have been restored."³⁵¹ By midnight, Gorbachev was back in Moscow, flying back on the RSFSR plane, no longer trusting the Soviet pilot with his life.³⁵²

The coup had failed. Dunlop offers probably the most comprehensive analysis of the reasons for this failure. According to his analysis, more than anything else, the members of the GKChP failed to account for the possibility of Yeltsin seizing power. In their minds, the options were simple: either Gorbachev could return to power, or they could successfully take over the Soviet state. However, Yeltsin had successfully seized control of Soviet forces on Russian soil, captured international support for his rule, and been far more willing to act quickly than the GKChP, all of which aided him.³⁵³ Moreover, the conspirators drastically underestimated the political power of Russian youth; although they had largely been apolitical throughout the 1980s, they were surprisingly energized by Yeltsin's calls to defend the new political freedoms they had

350 Remnick, *Lenin's Tomb*, 482–484; Loory, Imse, and Cable News Network., *CNN reports, seven days that shook the world*, 134.

351 Loory, Imse, and Cable News Network., *CNN reports, seven days that shook the world*, 151.

352 Remnick, *Lenin's Tomb*, 487–488.

353 Dunlop, *The Rise of Russia and the Fall of the Soviet Empire*, 212–216.

gained under *glasnost*.³⁵⁴

Some have alleged that this failure was part of a plot by Gorbachev to reassert more authoritarian political command over the Soviet Union, while simultaneously abrogating any responsibility for these actions. Perhaps most vocally, Knight has argued that Gorbachev was not plausibly denied the possibility of reasserting control if he so wanted: his bodyguards outnumbered those trying to detain him, and some telephones in the compound appear to have been operational. Moreover, she notes a number of minor inconsistencies in the accounts of those held at Foros.³⁵⁵ However, many of these inconsistencies seem either to be possible confusion caused by the extreme circumstances, or even not contradictory at all. For instance, she claims that Anatoly Cherniaev, an advisor to Gorbachev also detained at Foros, noted that Gorbachev was on the phone even before the conspirators arrived at Gorbachev's dacha, even though Gorbachev claims he had to argue with them to reconnect his phone lines.³⁵⁶ However, Cherniaev's own diary reveals nothing of the sort, indeed agreeing outright with Gorbachev's story.³⁵⁷

Indeed, it seems quite likely that Cherniaev may simply have not accurately recalled the events in question, which is certainly understandable, given the circumstances. This might account for some of the minor factual discrepancies, but what of Gorbachev's actions? Why did he not attempt to seize power back? One answer may be that he did not want to unnecessarily risk violence against his family, who were with him in Foros. Even if his bodyguards' victory against his captors were assured, the potential was certainly there for Gorbachev or his family to

354 Ibid., 221–222.

355 Amy W. Knight, *Spies Without Cloaks: The KGB's Successors* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1996), 18–27.

356 Ibid., 24.

357 A. S. Cherniaev, “The diary of Anatoly Chernyaev, 1991,” *The National Security Archive*, May 25, 2011, <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB345/index.htm>.

be injured. Another factor may have been Gorbachev's certainty that the coup would fail: he very plainly told the coup plotters that he felt their actions would, at best, lead to a civil war.³⁵⁸ As such, it may be that he simply felt it best to wait out the coup and return to power afterwards.

If this was the case, Gorbachev had also drastically misread the political situation. The Communist Party's popular legitimacy had been greatly undermined by the attempted coup, and Yeltsin's political power and popularity had skyrocketed. By August 24, it was clear that most political power lay with Yeltsin and the Russian Parliament, and Gorbachev resigned as general secretary of the CPSU; on the 29th, Yeltsin banned the CPSU from organizing within the RSFSR, thus decisively ending Communist rule in Russia. On December 25, Gorbachev resigned as president of the Soviet Union; the following day, the Soviet Union's parliament dissolved itself, destroying the (now-hollow) legal entity of the Soviet Union.

Despite the positive implications of these events for the sorts of journalists who had played such an important role in bringing Yeltsin to power, “freedom of the press”, as it is understood in the West, was not soon to come to Russia. Gosteleradio's journalists found themselves under increased scrutiny as Yeltsin attempted to clear out Communist sympathizers from the organization's ranks; he appointed Yegor Yakolev, former editor of *Moscow Times*, to head Gosteleradio, who fired many who had cooperated with Kravchenko's attempts to turn back the clock of glasnost. As such, *Vremia* and other major conservative-leaning news programs found as many as 300 of their journalists and crew members fired and their shows canceled by the end of 1992 as Yakolev replaced them with journalists from outside Ostankino's ranks, apparently in an attempt to solidify his own political power.³⁵⁹

Paradoxically, Ostankino journalists found themselves under greater political pressure

358 Remnick, *Lenin's Tomb*, 455.

359 Ellen Propper Mickiewicz, *Changing Channels: Television and the Struggle for Power in Russia*, Rev. and expanded ed. (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1999), 109–113.

than had been the case at any point in Gorbachev's reign, as the political chaos and instability prompted politicians and bureaucrats at all levels to attempt to buy and negotiate political influence, including attempting to pressure journalists into spinning news to their advantage. Moreover, the increasing dependence of news programs at Ostankino on advertising funding left them vulnerable to political influence in an economic climate where a small number of politically-connected individuals owned the majority of commercial interests that might purchase ads on television and radio; Ostankino had little control over the budgets of individual programs, which also made detecting bribes to journalists all but impossible.³⁶⁰

Meanwhile, there was little public support for continuing funding of Ostankino's First Channel as an international organization (at this point, under the auspices of the Commonwealth of Independent States); public and elite sentiment in the Russian Federation, at least, mostly supported nationalizing the television center and organizing it along the lines of Russian Television.³⁶¹

This allowed the political elite in Russia to gain an increasing hegemony over news coverage; this process was also aided by the increasing difficulty of establishing and maintaining independent media outlets. Television channels, in particular, still depended on government infrastructure for broadcasting, as Soviet household antennas were designed only to pick up signals coming from the location of official broadcasting stations. Short of requiring their listeners to replace their antennas, they had little choice but to secure government cooperation. As such, the government could find an excuse to cut off channels that ran politically-unfavorable programming. On top of this, the regulatory regime around frequency allocation became increasingly byzantine and arbitrary, making even stations that did not use the governmental

³⁶⁰ Ibid., 115, 123–145.

³⁶¹ Ibid., 116–117.

broadcasting stations subject to the whims of the state.³⁶²

This hegemony was demonstrated during the constitutional crisis of 1993; Yeltsin had preemptively ordered troops to surround Ostankino in order to prevent Parliament sympathizers from gaining control over the airwaves. Because of Yeltsin's effective control over the Russian state media, television coverage of the confrontations outside the White House were limited, even though the scale of the violence was considerably higher than in 1991, with more than 150 killed.³⁶³

Perhaps the strongest non-state television broadcaster was NTV, created in 1994, which originally aired a few hours each day on the St. Petersburg state television equipment, though it was eventually able to purchase some time on the nationwide Fourth Channel, previously dedicated to educational programming. Its journalists, airing their own evening news program, *Segodnia (Today)*, were willing to challenge the government's official position, as was most clearly demonstrated during the war in Chechnya, when NTV journalists were able to catch the government outright lying about the scale of destruction and casualties. Nevertheless, there remained some questions about the degree of independence NTV's journalists actually had, given the commercial interests of the station's owners. Moreover, the government of the Russian Federation was still able to force some coverage off the air, as NTV editors decided to self-censor much of their coverage of the conflict after the government threatened to revoke their broadcasting permits, without even the appearance of acting within the law. Finally, NTV journalists portrayed Yeltsin unusually positively during the 1996 presidential election, while denying much coverage to other candidates, fueling speculation that the network might have been paid by Yeltsin for this period of time.³⁶⁴

362 Ibid., 217–218, 225–226.

363 Arutunyan, *The Media in Russia*, 130.

364 Mickiewicz, *Changing Channels*, 9–10, 222–246.

In many regards, the years following this period represented a great decline in the quality and availability of Russian television journalism. Many Russians outside of major urban areas lost access to television altogether in the mid-1990s as the government cut funding for transmitters and relay stations; audiences were too small to make commercial funding viable. At the same time, commercial focus on ratings drove the choice of content in news programming. Domestic news took precedence over international news, in contrast to earlier eras, and analytical stories were largely replaced by political commentary by pundits, with shallow, demagogic coverage. Moreover, news took up less and less time on Russian airwaves, as entertainment television gained more and more popularity.³⁶⁵

365 Ibid., 229–235; Arutunyan, *The Media in Russia*, 131–134.

Conclusion

Perhaps the single central question raised by the August 1991 coup attempt and its coverage on *Vremia* and other official media is this: how was the once-united Soviet political-media system divided against itself, in the end leading to the downfall of the entire Soviet Union? This is a question that, thus far, historians have mostly avoided. For instance, Ganley's analysis of the coup attempt is limited almost exclusively to the *impact* that media had on the situation. Meanwhile, Mickiewicz's approach, while bringing great attention to the details of the coverage that *Vremia* and other television programs produced, does not lend itself to considering the reasons for which that coverage was produced. Indeed, both authors tend to assume that *Vremia's* coverage was a passive reaction to Soviet ideology, even though Mickiewicz provides a much more nuanced analysis of the post-Soviet media landscape in *Changing Channels*.³⁶⁶

On the one hand, the demise of the GKChP was simply a matter of poor planning and execution, as it never seemed likely that the coup would really replace Gorbachev in the long term. However, the role of official media outlets in undermining the coup's legitimacy should not be underestimated, nor should their role in discrediting the legitimacy of the Soviet regime itself. In that sense, the coverage by *Vremia* and other state journalistic outlets was to have an important impact on events in the medium- to long-term.

Fundamentally, the question boils down to this: why did Gosteleradio and Glavlit journalists disagree with the GKChP about the proper course of action to be taken? As I have previously mentioned, the Soviet media landscape was dominated throughout the history of the Soviet Union by its linkage to official Soviet ideology. However, this ideology was flexible and changing over time, though largely dictated to journalists from political elites. However, in the

³⁶⁶ Ellen Propper Mickiewicz, *Changing Channels: Television and the Struggle for Power in Russia*, Rev. and expanded ed. (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1999).

period of *glasnost*, this power structure clearly changed. Journalists at *Vzgliad* and other similar, radical, media outlets were able to directly challenge the official state ideology. Even among political elites, the nature of Soviet ideology was contested: conservative fought back against Gorbachev's programs of *glasnost* and *perestroika*, and nationalists movements gained mass support, in Russia and elsewhere.

Indeed, it was precisely this sort of dispute that led to the coup attempt in the first place, as conservatives feared Gorbachev's newly-imagined role for the Soviet Union would bring the downfall of Communist rule. Clearly, however, journalists even at the conservative *Vremia* had a different view of Soviet ideology, viewing their own role as to expose what they saw as an illegitimate affront to the Soviet system. For them, their actions were not a pragmatic exception to their role within Soviet ideology, but rather a continuation of the role they had played for decades: they aimed to direct the masses in the correct ideological interpretation of events unfolding before them, and thereby lead society in the correct direction. In this case, they perceived the GKChP as a reactionary movement, having themselves embraced, at least to some degree, the ideology of *glasnost*. As such, they felt it was their role—indeed, their duty—to expose this fraud to the Soviet public, which helps explain their willingness to outright disobey the directions coming to them from the GKChP.

While Gosteleradio and its influence over millions of Russians may no longer exist, and while *Vremia* no longer stands as a symbol of official state media, culture, and politics, it would be naive to think that the era of state-controlled television in Russia has come to an end. Just earlier this month, Muscovites gathered outside Ostankino to protest NTV's coverage of the recent presidential election, in which Vladimir Putin swept back into control of the Russian

Federation. The once-radical NTV was acquired by the state-owned Gazprom in questionable circumstances in 2000, and has since become a remarkably-obedient mouthpiece for the Kremlin. Meanwhile, the concentration of ownership of media broadcasting facilities and resources continues to fill the world of Russian television broadcasting with uncertainty and intrigue.³⁶⁷

What are we to learn from the peculiar last few years of *Vremia*'s tenure as the major news program in the Soviet Union, then? First, it demonstrates the remarkably power the Communist Party wielded in the Soviet Union. I doubt many Russians today would choose the 1980s *Vremia* over contemporary news programs, biased as they may be. It was simply not of high quality, and clearly distorted important news stories while neglecting others. But at the same time, it was all that was highly-available, easily-accessible, and universally-recognized in the sphere of television journalism. As such, its audience and impact were immense.

Second, its role in the 1991 coup attempt demonstrates something very important about the process of *glasnost*: even the most ideologically-committed journalists seem to have been yearning to not be forced to deal with the bureaucracy of state censorship, and were willing to risk their personal safety for the sake of telling what they believed to be the truth. *Glasnost*, therefore, may perhaps best be understood as a larger force than Gorbachev's administration, indeed helping in many ways to unseat it.

Finally, the fact that *Vremia* journalists were able to more accurately depict the actions of the government during the 1991 coup than television journalists even from NTV were during the Chechen War, for example, underscores the importance of separation of media outlets from government interference not only in theory, but in practice. *Vremia*'s editors knew quite well that

367 Anna Arutunyan, *The Media in Russia* (New York: Open University Press, 2009), 36–40.

the GKChP simply could not afford to take it off the air, by nature of its official status. NTV, on the other hand, had no such guarantee, and still depended on the state to allow it to broadcast.

What does all this suggest for the future of the media in Russia? It seems unlikely that in the age of blogs, online video sites, microblogging services, social networking sites, and the like that another monolithic journalistic entity like *Vremia* will soon be created. On the other hand, the very technology that tends to fragment the media market into smaller pieces also makes it all the easier to reach the masses without relying on state cooperation. Whether this will lead to a new period of *glasnost* remains to be seen.

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