

The Roots of Reform:

The Environment in the Age of Glasnost

by Moira McDonald
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Soviet environmentalism serves as a union of my two fields of study: environmental issues and Soviet studies. In addition to encompassing my two predominant academic interests, the issue holds personal significance for me. I see environmental cooperation between the US and the Soviet Union as the paramount issue for the superpowers in the post-Cold War era. It seems to me that useful cooperation can become a reality, only with mutual understanding. Both sides must strive to understand not only the environmental problems in each country, but also the development of public and governmental concern environmental for environmental protection.

Furthermore, I come to this project with personal experience. I have spent time in the Soviet Union and as a result am deeply concerned with many of the problems that the Soviets are facing. While studying at Leningrad State University, I participated in the activities of grassroots environmental groups in the city. In fact I still correspond with several environmental activists. I hope, therefore, that my thesis might be a tool in developing understanding of the Soviet environmental movement. While I realize that the final copy will probably never leave the Rockefeller library, I hope that the document might be useful to American environmentalists trying to gain a broader understanding of Soviet environmentalism.

I hope that by proving the longstanding existence of a conservation movement, and the public's concern for environmental issues, that the grassroots activity of the last five years will gain the respect of American environmentalists. Because the Soviet Union will probably be in a position of asking the US government and environmental protection groups for organizational and technological help in the next few years, it is important that the Soviet environmental movement be taken seriously by the environmental establishment in this country. Finally I hope that in explaining the state of the environment and the role of the West in both the current environmental movement and the long-term ecological crisis, I will elucidate some of the best ways for Western countries to aid the Soviet Union.

I also believe that we as Americans have much to learn from the grassroots democracy movement in the Soviet Union. Unlike your own citizens' activist groups that serve watchdogs over governmental policy, the non-governmental groups in the Soviet Union are active in governmental activities. They are currently forming a political power base, putting candidates in office and changing the priorities of government. In America, a country based on the ideals of democracy, electoral politics have become expensive and exclusive. The principles that the Soviets have incorporated into the emerging governmental system could also be used to revitalize our own system.