

INTERVIEW WITH

Alexander Tikhomirov

His post is that of a political observer. He used to cover the space program. Now he covers the social and economic problems of Soviet society. He was on a team of journalists traveling before the 27th party congress reporting on the deeds and misdeeds of local politicians around the country. (1986) He observed the general viewpoint changing during the trip. After the Plenum it became more critical. We are now in the first stage of a transformation, doing away with self censorship and psychological inhibitions. There is an opportunity for criticism without limit -- but also a risk.

The second stage is to make the critical viewpoint a mass movement. The risk is both personal, and societal. Legislation is needed to guarantee the new freedoms but that legislation is not all in place yet. The job of a political observer can be complicated. Governments can change and declare all this a mistake. Media can be easily reversed. Only legislation will guarantee the gains.

The character of top government determines the general trend. The famous A. letter, I paid no attention to it until after I read all the talk about it. Until then I didn't know: & was it important or just another opinion. It's only when some party leaders took it as a symbol of opposition that it became important. It reflected a Stalinist point of view -- desire for clear and simple posture: & capitalists, Trotskyists, vs. good communists. But that attitude bears no responsibility for the economy and for the future.

We have been told that if we don't move ahead now, we will become a Third World Country.

I define socialism as ownership of the means of production. Anything else is flexible.

The political observer has a right to his own opinion but must remember that he is always a representative of government. I am a member of the party and express my own opinions; if somebody says I am not right, I ask them to show me where. I agree with the leadership on the new trend.

There are 20 international political observers and 4 domestic. That is because until now all was supposed to be clear domestically. This will change. I work for any and all editorial departments of radio/TV. If they accept my proposal (or I accept theirs) they furnish a crew and all technical help and I get an honorarium in addition to my pay, my regular salary. The editorial work works on a plan drawn up one or two months ahead. I can initiate or a department can initiate.

Each editorial board has its own correspondence. They are respected because of their ability. The editorial department responsible for a particular program that I create reviews it before airing and may ask me to make some changes. If it is not a question of principle, I agree. If it is a question of principle, I can say no. (Of course the chief editor may have the last word.)

There is a current controversy, which started in February 1988. An article in the magazine "Soviet Industry" accused the cooperative firm Artel of mismanagement. Our investigation found out that their management was indeed very good (they are producing gold) much better

than the socialist industry doing the same work. We exposed the article as an attempt to oppose or pressure a competing firm or possibly even to blackmail them. We invited the representative of Socialist Industry to defend its position and also the minister of metallurgy in charge of the state owned enterprise. He claimed that the reason for their losses was that they had made large investment. We also interviewed the chairman of the Supreme Soviet and others and found that the methods of Artel were excellent, even though some people had been convicted of stealing gold. The controversy is still continuing and we are airing the views of both sides, but I believe that Soviet Industry is self-serving, and Artel is doing a good job.

We are expecting a law about press fairness in airing controversial issues. We hope that future press laws will guarantee the freedoms gained during perestroika. Even now if a ministry refuses to answer our questions, we say so on the air. If I am wrong, I can be taken to court and pay a fine. That has happened in the past.

I report to the first deputy of Gostelradio.

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