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GORBACHEV, CHORNOBYL AND THE WRITERS' CHALLENGE

Gorbachev takes over but Shcherbytsky remains

After Gorbachev's election as general secretary of the CPSU in March 1985, all the signs seemed to indicate that despite the new, and considerably younger, leader's emphasis on revitalizing the USSR's stagnant economy, as far as the Kremlin's nationalities policy was concerned, it would be a case of more of the same.

What was particularly disconcerting for those Ukrainians who were hoping for change, though, was what occurred when, barely three months after he took over, Gorbachev visited Ukraine. On 25 June, in an extemporaneous conversation with residents of Kyiv that was later shown on Soviet television, Gorbachev, with Shcherbytsky at his side, twice referred to the Soviet Union as 'Russia'. He made matters even worse when he attempted to correct himself by saying: 'Russia — the Soviet Union, I mean — that is what we call it now, and what it is in fact. . .'.^{*} His general message to the Ukrainian public seemed to be that their 'huge' republic, with its 'more than 50 million inhabitants', would be crucial for the success of overhauling the Soviet economy. Ukraine's contribution, Gorbachev stressed, 'makes itself felt everywhere' and 'if there are any bad things in Ukraine, this also makes itself felt everywhere'.

There was also no hint from Gorbachev that Shcherbytsky or his style of running Ukraine needed changing. In fact, during Gorbachev's visit to Kyiv, two things stood out about the new leader. On the one hand, there was the stark contrast between the vitality of the new man and his old and ailing predecessors; and, on

^{*} See Bohdan Nahaylo, 'Gorbachev's Slip of the Tongue in Kiev', RL 221/85, 3 July 1985.

Moscow television, 26 June 1985.

the other, how deferential Gorbachev was towards Shcherbytsky.³ It was almost as if the new leader was looking up to Shcherbytsky as an elder statesman and wanting to show in public that he had the Ukrainian Party boss's full backing.

The apparent harmony between the Moscow and Kyiv leaders was demonstrated again on 23 August when *Pravda* carried an article by the CPU's ideological secretary, Oleksandr Kapto, which echoed what Gorbachev had said a few months earlier about ideological tasks. Kapto stressed that as the CPSU prepared for its Twenty-seventh Congress, it was necessary to intensify the struggle against nationalism and the 'malicious propaganda offensive against the gains of developed socialism' purportedly being waged by 'right-wing and left-wing revisionism and foreign bourgeois nationalist, Zionist and clerical centres'. Ukraine's scholars, he noted, had done much in recent years to improve work in this area and were paying special attention to 'criticism of modern bourgeois "Ukrainian studies"'.

When, in October 1985, the draft of the new Party programme was published, it reiterated the Kremlin's commitment to promoting the 'steady drawing together' of the nations of the USSR and solidifying the 'Soviet people'. There was nothing in the document to indicate that the Gorbachev leadership might be prepared to allow some decentralization of economic decision-making to the republics and expansion of their rights.

The policy towards dissent and the treatment of political prisoners remained just as harsh as before. Between April and November 1985, three Ukrainian dissidents — Mykola Horbal, Yosyf Terelya and Petro Ruban — were given sentences of between twelve to fifteen years. Moreover, during the first six months that Gorbachev was in power, the Ukrainian dissidents suffered two other heavy blows: in the summer of 1985, a publication aimed at Ukrainians abroad published what was purportedly a recantation written by the fifty-one-year-old son of the UPA commander Taras Chuprynka, Yurii Shukhevych, who had spent most of his adult life in imprisonment and internal exile;⁴ and, on 4 September, the outstanding Ukrainian poet and national rights campaigner Vasyl Stus died in a Soviet labour camp.

Although Gorbachev soon began talking of the need for *glasnost*

³ Author's interview with Kuras.

⁴ *Vhti z Ukrainy*, no. 28, July 1985.

in public life and the press, and recognition of the 'human factor' in the social and economic spheres, he also made it clear that he was not contemplating inaugurating political liberalization or a new wave of de-Stalinization. In an interview which he gave in February 1986 to the French Communist Party daily *L'Humanite*, which was also reproduced in the Soviet press, he denied that there were any political prisoners in the USSR and branded the most famous of them—Andrei Sakharov—a criminal. When asked whether the 'vestiges of Stalinism' had been overcome in the Soviet Union, he replied: 'Stalinism is a concept thought up by the enemies of communism and widely used to discredit the Soviet Union and socialism as a whole.'⁵

Gorbachev's more dynamic and assertive style of leadership, emphasis on *glasnost* and initial moves to weed out the inefficiency and conservatism associated with the Brezhnev era nevertheless gradually fuelled speculation that Shcherbytsky would be replaced by someone more in the 'Gorbachev mould'. In December, the Moscow Party organization boss Grishin was sacked and the following month Fedorchuk was removed from his position as head of the MVD (Ministry of Internal Affairs). The republican Party congress and the Twenty-seventh Congress of the CPSU were scheduled for February 1986, and the appearance in *Pravda* in mid-January of criticism of local officials in the Kharkiv region and Kyiv seemed to indicate that Shcherbytsky's days were also numbered. Intriguingly, in the middle of January it was also suddenly announced that the CPU's ideological secretary, Kopto, had been appointed ambassador to Cuba.

At the end of the month, however, when the CPU Central Committee held its pre-congress plenum, it became clear that Shcherbytsky would be staying on as the Ukrainian Party leader. Indeed, the pre-congress Party conferences in Ukraine's twenty-five *oblasts*, or regions, as well as of the Kyiv city Party organization, left the leadership of their Party organizations virtually as they were. At the Twenty-seventh Congress of the CPU itself there was plenty of self-criticism in the new Gorbachev style, but the Ukrainian Party organization, now numbering almost 3.1 million members and 105,600 candidates, did not undergo any shake-up. The important vacancy created by Kopto's departure was filled by Volodymyr

Ivashko, a secretary of the Kharkiv region Party committee. While the congress focused most of its attention on economic matters, Shcherbytsky, who again spoke in Russian, also stressed that there could be no let-up in the ideological sphere and reminded the cultural intelligentsia that its function was to contribute to 'the development of the single multinational Socialist culture'. Echoing this, the poet Boris Oliinyk, who was the secretary of the Party organization of the Kyiv branch of the W U U and a good political weather-vane, declared that there could be no 'economizing on ideology' and called for the opening of a museum in Pereyaslav-Khmelnytsky that would 'sanctify' Ukraine's reunification with the Russian brother'.⁶

The first glimmers of glasnost

The Twenty-seventh Congress of the CPSU, at which the new edition of the Party's programme was adopted, did not bring any major changes in the Kremlin's nationalities policy. The only apparent departure from the general line in this sphere was the statement by the new Politburo member, Yegor Ligachev, who had assumed responsibility for ideology, that the Party: 'highly values and supports the upsurge in patriotic feeling, of which we are all aware and the increased public interest in the homeland and the wealth of our age-old, multinational culture'. Ligachev also praised efforts to preserve 'all that is dear to the people's memory' and declared that the Party would not condone 'the neglect of national shrines'.⁷

Initially, however, it appeared that it was mainly the Russians who would be given more freedom to affirm their history and cultural values. Already at the end of 1985, Russian writers were voicing their opposition to the northern (or Siberian) rivers diversion scheme - on which the parched Central Asian republics were depending - as well as their concern for the preservation of Russian culture, historical monuments and Russia's environment. In fact, leading Russian writers began to express their national feeling quite openly. Valentin Rasputin, for instance, declared at the RSFSR Congress of Writers in December 1985: 'There is no life for us, and

See *Radyanska Ukraina*, 7, 8 and 9 February 1986.

⁷ *Pravda*, 26 February 1986.

we have nothing to say, apart from Russia.⁸ At the beginning of March, the Russian writers won an important victory, for it was announced that the northern rivers diversion scheme had been shelved.

With the Russian cultural intelligentsia becoming the first beneficiary of Gorbachev's relaxation of censorship and loosening of controls in the cultural sphere, some Ukrainian writers sought to circumvent the enduring tight restrictions in Kyiv by turning for help to colleagues in Moscow and Leningrad. At the beginning of 1986, *Literaturnaya gazeta* published an article by the Ukrainian writer Sava Holovinsky, the aim of which seemed to be to remind readers that censorship in Ukraine remained more severe than in the RSFSR. Ukrainian writers, he stressed, still needed special permission from the authorities in Kyiv to publish a work in Moscow in Russian translation if it had not yet been published in Ukrainian.⁹

One book which had been published in Ukrainian, but then 'suppressed', was Honchar's *Sobor*. A symbol of the stifled Ukrainian revival of the 1960s, it had been effectively proscribed now for almost two decades. As Ukrainian writers cautiously began to follow the lead set by Russian intellectuals and probe the new limits, this novel became an early rallying point for them. In the early part of 1986, the editors of the liberal Moscow literary monthly *Druzhba narodov*, the deputy editor of which, Oleksandr Rudenko-Desnyak, was a Ukrainian, helped out by finally obtaining permission to reissue the novel in the Soviet capital in Russian.¹⁰

By the spring of 1986, the first signs of measured *glasnost* started to become detectable in the Ukrainian press, though it was restricted to the exposure of inefficiency, wastage or corruption. Among them were two candid articles about the serious problems with labour, morale and chronic supply shortages at the Chornobyl nuclear power station. The first, in the March issue of the literary monthly *Vitchyzna* revealed that because of all the difficulties, the plant's chief of construction management had gone to Moscow in 1984 and succeeded in reducing the schedule for the construction of the fifth reactor from three to two years. The second, by Lyubov Kovalevska,

Literaturnaya gazeta, 18 December 1985.

⁸*Ibid.*, 8 January 1986.

The announcement was made by the editor of *Druzhba narodov*, Sergei Baruzdin, in *Kyiv*, no. 1986, p. 6.

which appeared in *Literaturna Ukraina* on 27 March, provided even more disturbing details about 'unsolved' construction problems which had been passed on from one reactor to the next, defective supplies, the disorganization caused by the change in the construction schedule, the demoralization of the work force and shoddy workmanship. The article implicitly made the point that though rapid building methods and improvisation might work elsewhere, they were hardly suited to the construction of nuclear reactors. Kovalevska also reminded readers that by 1988, when its sixth reactor was due to come on line, the Chomobyl atomic power station would be the 'most powerful' in the world.

Of course, Kovalevska's article would not have acquired the significance which it did if the terrible tragedy had not occurred only a few weeks later at Chomobyl. In her warning, she had not been able to question openly the safety of nuclear energy nor raise the issue of the Chomobyl plant's proximity to the Ukrainian capital. This did not mean that people were not concerned about these questions. For instance, Academician Aleksandr Alymov, who had headed the Ukrainian Academy of Sciences' council for the study of Ukraine's productive forces had 'categorically opposed' the building of the Chomobyl nuclear power station, and this was apparently why he had been replaced in 1985.ⁿ And just before the disaster, on 18 April 1986, the president of the Ukrainian Academy of Sciences, Boris Paton, had proposed that the republic's scientists make a study of safety procedures at nuclear power plants and review how sites for them were selected.¹² Though subsequently it was also claimed that public anxiety about the construction of nuclear power stations already existed at this time in Ukraine,¹³ the republic's press did not let on.

In any case, the nuclear power stations in Ukraine were directly subordinated not to Kyiv but to Moscow, in other words, the USSR Ministry of Atomic Energy had more say in these matters than the Ukrainian government. The situation as regards the Chomobyl

ⁿ Tabachnyk, 'Last of the Mohicans', *Ranok*, no. 5, 1991, pp. 27-8.

See Roman Solchanyk, 'Pre-Chernobyl Premonitions at the Ukrainian Academy of Sciences', RL 343/86, 10 September 1986.

The claim was made by the head of the Cherkasy *oblast* branch of the WUU, Mykola Nehoda. See Paul Quinn-Judge, 'Soviets Feel Nuclear Heat: Work Halted on Ukrainian Nuclear-Power Station', *Christian Science Monitor*, 4 February 1988.

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nuclear power plant was subsequently described by Oleksandr Lyashko, who was the chairman of the Ukrainian Council of Ministers at this time. He stressed:

The plant . . . was not under our control. During the entire fourteen years I worked as the head of the Council of Ministers I visited it only once . . . All the documents concerning the various experiments and tests there . . . did not reach us.¹⁴

The Chornobyl nuclear disaster and the political fallout

On the night of 26 April 1986, the world's worst nuclear accident occurred at the Chornobyl nuclear power station, situated only 80 miles north of Kyiv, on the border between Ukraine and Belarus. It was three days, and only after the Swedes had registered high levels of radiation from the fallout and protested about Moscow's silence, before the first terse official announcement was made, acknowledging an 'accident' and 'damage' to 'one of the atomic reactors'. The Gorbachev leadership continued to withhold information and sought to minimize the scale of the disaster. At the height of the danger and uncertainty, the May Day celebrations went ahead as usual in Kyiv, with Shcherbytsky and other CPU leaders pretending before tens of thousands that everything was normal. It was only on 8-9 May that full emergency measures were undertaken in Kyiv and not until 14 May that Gorbachev finally made a television address about the disaster, after which more detailed information began to appear.

Initially, two people were said to have been killed outright but the number of victims steadily rose, reaching twenty-six by the end of June, and thirty by the beginning of August. About 135,000 people were evacuated permanently from a 30-kilometre (18-mile) danger zone around Chornobyl, 90,000 of them Ukrainians, and the rest Belarusians. The subsequent temporary evacuation from Kyiv of about 250,000 children, pregnant women and mothers with infants, as well as of many inhabitants from the Gomel region in Belarus, raised the minimal overall figure of evacuees to well over half a million. While it appeared that countless people had been subjected to radiation and faced the threat of radiation-induced

See the major interview with Lyashko in *Ukrainska hazeta*, no. 8, 10-23 June 1993.

cancers, the full extent of the damage to health and the environment was something that would take years, and even decades, to assess.

The Chornobyl nuclear disaster became a turning point in more ways than one. After attempting a major cover-up, the Gorbachev leadership was forced to review its policy on handling information and ended up giving fresh impetus to the development of *glasnost*. The accident also raised awareness and concern about environmental issues among the Soviet population. For the non-Russians, it sharpened sensitivities about the extent of Moscow's control over them and the power of the central ministries.

In Ukraine, the accident first traumatized the population and then galvanized it. After the initial confusion and panic, the disaster brought home the extent of the bureaucratic indifference not only of the central ministries but also of the authorities in Kyiv and especially of the servility and self-interest of the latter. The cynical way in which Kyiv's officials had staged the May Day celebrations while secretly evacuating their own children appalled even those who had learned to live with the Shcherbytsky regime.¹⁵ Shcherbytsky's aide recalls that the Ukrainian Party leader had been well aware during the crisis that he could have become a 'national hero' had he put the interests of his people first and 'taken a position at the time which was independent of the centre' — but 'he simply could not rise to this'.¹⁶

Instead, Chornobyl came to be seen as a great national tragedy for Ukraine and all of its people and, as Roman Szporluk noted, although it was equally so for Belarus, it was only in Ukraine that the population 'reacted to it on a scale commensurate with its importance'. Here, 'writers, artists, scientists and students' viewed it as a 'Ukrainian issue' and it became a point of departure for them,

The writer Yurii Pokalchuk echoed a widely held view when he told David Marples in an interview on 27 September 1989: 'Ever since they pressed ahead with the 1986 May Day parade in Kyiv, one week after Chernobyl, I have regarded both Shcherbytsky and Ukrainian president Valentyna Shevchenko [she was the Chairman of the Presidium of the Ukrainian Supreme Soviet at the time] as *ipso facto* criminals.' See Roman Solchanyk (ed.), *Ukraine: From Chernobyl to Sovereignty: A Collection of Interviews*, London, 1992, p. 31. Independent Ukraine's reformation minister for the environment, Yurii Kostenko, told a Western correspondent that the Chornobyl accident 'shattered my final illusions about the totalitarian system'. Chrystia Freeland, 'Waiting for the Next Chernobyl', *Financial Times*, 21 April 1993.

⁶ *Ukraina* interview with Vrublevsky, p. 14.

inspiring 'what in the end would grow into a popular national movement'.¹⁷ Chernobyl also acquired a broader symbolic meaning for Ukrainians. As Roman Solchanyk explained,

In the aftermath of the nuclear catastrophe, Ukrainian writers and journalists began to talk in terms of a 'linguistic Chernobyl' or a 'spiritual Chernobyl' when discussing the consequences of the seventy-odd years of the Soviet experiment for the Ukrainian language and culture. In short, for Ukrainians, Chernobyl became identified with the duplicity and failure, indeed the complete bankruptcy, of the Soviet system as a whole.¹⁸

As the gravity of what had befallen their nation sank in, leading Ukrainian writers began to face up, as Honchar put it, to the 'responsibility' that Chernobyl had placed on them,¹⁹ and began speaking out. This inevitably meant attacking the Shcherbytsky team and its record, albeit only implicitly at first. The first opportunity to do so was at the Ninth Congress of the WUU, which convened in Kyiv on 5 June 1986. It met in the chamber of the Ukrainian Supreme Soviet, in which the Ukrainian quasi-parliament held its sessions. The symbolism is apparent only with the aid of hindsight: delegates to this congress, at which the latest Ukrainian national renewal can be said to have been launched, could hardly have foreseen that in only a few years time some of them would be sitting in the same hall as members of the parliament of an independent Ukraine.

Honchar, the most senior Ukrainian literary figure of the day, set the tone at the congress with his rallying address. In the presence of Shcherbytsky, he reminded the delegates that Gorbachev's new course called for 'principled behaviour, truth and new thinking'. Proceeding in this spirit, he stated that the Chernobyl disaster had 'shaken the world' and there was no pretending that Ukrainian writers, as representatives of their people, could ever look at things in quite the same way. The catastrophe had concentrated their minds

Roman Szporluk, 'National Reawakening: Ukraine and Belorussia', in Uri Ra'anani (ed.), *The Soviet Empire: The Challenge of National and Democratic Movements*, Lexington and Toronto, 1990, pp. 78-9.

See in Solchanyk's introduction to his *Ukraine: From Chernobyl to Sovereignty*, p. xiii.

See the interview with the Ukrainian writer Yurii Shcherbak conducted by Lyubov Kovalevska in *Literaturnaya gazeta*, 2 September 1987.

and helped them see which values mattered above all. Drawing on the example being set by Russian writers, Honchar maintained that just as it was necessary to protect the natural environment, it was also crucial to safeguard the nation's cultural and linguistic 'environment', or heritage. There would have to be more civic engagement by the writers and they would have to take the fight to -the 'philistines' and cynics who had no time for such notions as 'conscience, patriotism or spiritual values' and who considered that the Ukrainian language had 'no future'. The latter had to be told 'that to hold the language of one's people in contempt' means, above all else, to reveal 'one's own narrow-mindedness', and had to be shown that 'having survived all the tsarist bans', the Ukrainian language had and would have a future.

Other writers raised issues as diverse as the damage that had been done to Ukraine's ecology, the sorry state of the Ukrainian theatre and cinema, and the lack of attention being paid to the Ukrainian communities in the Eastern European countries. What was also apparent from some of the speeches was the recognition that, with the relaxation of censorship and the new opportunities which Gorbachev's policy of economic and social 'restructuring' (*perestroika*) seemed to offer, the WUU, with its 1,095 members (two-thirds of whom belonged to the Communist Party) was potentially quite a force. The new spirit that was taking hold of the writers was captured by the poet Dmytro Pavlychko. 'Today, as never before', he told the delegates, the writers needed 'to close ranks and realize that only together, and not individually' could they serve as a 'needed support' for their people and as a source of 'spiritual strength'.²⁰

But the highlight of the congress was an explosive speech by Ivan Drach, who brought the delegates to their feet with a devastating indictment of the Soviet system and its consequences for Ukraine. The poet not only blamed the CPU leadership for the Chornobyl disaster, but also reminded delegates that Ukraine had lost more people as a result of Stalin's man-made famine in Ukraine than during the Second World War. He also argued that under Soviet rule Ukraine had been subjected to a policy of virtual ethnocide, and that through forcible Russification, cultural engineering and repression, the nation had suffered a spiritual Chornobyl. Although

" For details, see *Literatuma Ukraina*, 12 and 19 June 1986.

Literaturna Ukraina provided only a very sanitized version of his speech, which did not reveal its significance, many of Drach's colleagues were later to describe his fiery improvisation as the first trumpet call in the Ukrainian national revolution.²¹

The new boldness of Ukraine's writers was demonstrated later that month by Oliinyk at the Eighth Soviet Writer's Congress in Moscow. The poet, a secretary of the Boards of both the W U U and the Writers' Union of the USSR, a deputy to the Ukrainian Supreme Soviet, and a candidate member of the Central Committee of the CPU, delivered the most forthright speech by a non-Russian representative since Gorbachev had taken over. He informed the gathering that Ukrainian writers had every reason to be concerned about the situation of the Ukrainian language. 'The problem of the native language in the school, in the theatre, in the kindergartens', he argued, 'is already a question of Leninist nationalities policy, and the violation of its principles is very painful.' Rather than blame 'the hand of Moscow', however, Oliinyk denounced 'local, native, home-grown enthusiasts of our political orthodoxy' who as a result of their 'servile psychology', and 'in the name of the Russian people', acted as 'great-state-chauvinists' and Russifiers to the point of 'forgetting who they themselves are'.

Oliinyk also spoke candidly about the lessons of the Chernobyl disaster. With Moscow still apparently determined to push on with its ambitious nuclear energy policy, he argued that the accident demanded from the writers that they 'convince the scientists that sometimes they are confident to the point of cocksureness, seeming to know everything but in reality [knowing] far from everything'. The poet also referred to *Sobor*, noting that it had taken eighteen years to get permission to publish the novel in Russian translation even though, as was now apparent, the novel had raised issues concerning 'the protection of nature, the linguistic environment and memory', as well as the problem of 'careerism', the importance of

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Author's interview with Dmytro Pavlychko, Kyiv, 23 June 1993. The writer Roman Ivanychuk provides a vivid description of the congress and of Drach's speech in his memoirs. See *Bcrezil*, no. 1, 1993, pp. 102-7. It is worth noting that even the official 'internal' transcript of Drach's speech, which the author obtained from him in the summer of 1993, was expurgated. According to Pavlychko, the Party authorities subsequently attempted to depict Drach's address as an 'emotional outburst' provoked by the fact that his son Maksym had been one of the medical personnel sent to the Chernobyl disaster area.

which was now acknowledged. Interestingly, *Literaturnaya gazeta* published an expurgated sanitized version of Oliinyk's speech on 2 July, whereas *Literaturna Ukraina* ran it in full on 3 July.

Oliinyk, it should be noted, was a complex and ambiguous character. A quasi-'Sixtier', he was both a Ukrainian patriot and, it seems, a genuine Communist. While remaining to all intents and purposes a conformist, he had nevertheless helped to broaden the cultural thaw that ensued after Malanchuk's removal. He had not been exceptional in following this path: Drach, Pavlychko and many others had done the same. Oliinyk, however, was increasingly to be perceived as wanting to have it both ways: to keep on good terms with the Shcherbytsky regime in Kyiv while at the same time playing up to liberals in Moscow and projecting himself as a radical supporter of restructuring.²² What was important at this stage, though, was what Oliinyk had begun saying out loud, not his motivation.

The campaign to rehabilitate *Sobor* continued, but in the new defiant tone. In early August, at a meeting of the Kyiv writers' Party organization, the critic Vitalii Koval demanded that those responsible for the 'vulgar interpretation' that had been given to the novel, or who had been accomplices through silence, should be exposed. 'Let's name names', he urged, 'the names of those who simply remained silent at the time, and whose conspiracy of silence brought so much damage to all of literature'.²³ The mounting pressure was successful: the novel was rehabilitated *de facto* and in November the Ukrainian press confirmed that it would be republished in Ukrainian. This was the first battle to be won by the resurgent Ukrainian cultural intelligentsia in its new undeclared struggle with the Shcherbytsky regime.

In the meantime, Moscow carried out an investigation into the causes of the Chernobyl disaster. Evidently not wanting to risk undermining the future of nuclear power in the USSR, it settled on finding a number of scapegoats among fairly low-level Party functionaries, leaving it to the CPU Central Committee to deal with them. The result was that in the summer a number of dismissals were

For instance, Yelchenko considers that Oliinyk sought to ingratiate himself with Gorbachev's team, while in Pavlychko's view, the poet and leading Communist representative within the W U U (Drach described him in his speech at the previous W U U Congress as our 'commissar') in fact sought to moderate the attitudes of his literary colleagues.

Literaturna Ukraina, 6 August 1986.

made and reprimands issued but the CPU leadership, and the key officials in the Kyiv region and Chornobyl area, escaped any serious consequences. In fact, though from time to time criticism of the work of Ukrainian Party officials was to be voiced in Moscow, Shcherbytsky and the CPU organization continued to run things much as before, paying only lip service to *glasnost* and 'restructuring'.

The writers broaden their campaign

Though Chornobyl had goaded Ukrainian writers into action, this did not mean that they still did not have to contend with the old problems and constraints. It was not only that Shcherbytsky and his 'home-grown' Russifiers remained in place, but also that Moscow itself continued with much of its 'old thinking', and on the very issues that were of such concern to the writers sent mixed, if not discouraging, signals.

During the summer and autumn of 1986, it became increasingly clear that *glasnost* and *perestroika* were not being extended to the area of nationalities policy except in the case of the Russians. While a leading Soviet expert on the nationalities question stressed that there could be no return to the 'indigenization' policies of the 1920s²⁴ and *Pravda* issued new warnings about 'nationalistic delusions' and 'the role of religion in inflaming nationalistic passions',²⁵ it was announced that classics of Russian tsarist and imperial historiography were to be published again.²⁶ A similar double standard was also evident in the official attitude towards the forthcoming millennium in 1988 of the Christianization of Kyivan Rus. Not only had the Russian Orthodox Church been given a complete monopoly on the preparations and celebrations as far back as 1983, but also the jubilee was being depicted as marking a thousand years of 'Russian' history, statehood and culture. No specifically Ukrainian or Belarusian elements were acknowledged; on the contrary, the Ukrainian press stepped up its attacks in this connection against Ukrainian emigres, the Vatican and Catholic activists in Ukraine. In July, the Russian Orthodox Church held a major international

Eduard Bagramov, in an interview broadcast by Radio Moscow on 13 August 1986.

Pravda, 14 August 1986.

Radio Moscow, 6 August 1986.

historical conference in Kyiv which was repeatedly referred to by the official Soviet news agencies in their English-language reports as dealing with the 'Christening of Russia'. The following month, *Radyanska Ukraina* announced that the leading Ukrainian Catholic activist Terelya had recanted and confessed to his 'criminal activities'.²⁷

It is therefore not surprising that after the language problem, the next issue which the Ukrainian literati began to raise was that of the erasure of national memory. The Ukrainian scholar Mykola Zhulynsky led the way with an article published in *Literatuma Ukraina* on 18 September 1986 in which he emphasized that the problem 'of the loss of national memory' had become 'especially acute and alarming'. He even introduced a new name for this phenomenon into the Ukrainian language — *mankurtstvo*, from the *mankurts* described by Chingiz Aitmatov in his novel *The Day Lasts More than a Hundred Years*. These were slaves who had been tortured by their captors until they lost all sense of their identity.

With Ukraine's 'official' historians and their monthly journal *Ukrainskyi Istorychnyi Zhurnal* (Ukrainian Historical Journal) still very much under the CPU's strict ideological control, however, it was left to the writers and literary scholars to begin the difficult task of retrieving Ukraine's suppressed history. They began by taking advantage of the relaxation of censorship to begin pushing for the rehabilitation of proscribed Ukrainian literary and cultural figures, and by demanding that the full and uncensored works of Ukrainian literary classics be published. An important role in this process was to be played by the Institute of Literature of the Ukrainian SSR Academy of Sciences, of which Zhulynsky was the deputy director. Pavlychko pointed to the changing atmosphere in this important institute when he announced in *Literatuma Ukraina* on 11 September that its leadership had taken *glasnost* and *perestroika* to heart and decided to throw away their censors' scissors.

As the year drew to a close, the writers broadened their offensive. In November, the tighter censorship and restrictions that had been imposed on Ukrainian cultural life after Shelest's removal were mentioned by Volodymyr Yavorivsky in an article in *Literaturnaya gazeta*. How did one begin assessing the damage that had been caused by Malanchuk (his career was described but he was not actually

named) and his like, the writer asked.^{2H} That same month, the Ukrainian writers' weekly discussed the damaging effect of the tsarist edicts banning the Ukrainian language.^{2I} And on 18 November, at a meeting of the Board of the WUU, the prose writer Volodymyr Drozd made the first of the new calls for a return to the Ukrainization policies of the 1920s. Appeals to respect the Ukrainian language were not enough, he argued. What was needed were 'decisions by the state' which would make the Ukrainian language 'fundamentally indispensable in everyday life, in the theatre, in scholarship and in institutions of higher learning'.³⁰

Another sign of the changing times was the return to Kyiv from Moscow of the innovative theatre director Les Tanyuk and his appointment in July as the chief director of the Kyiv Youth Theatre. Over twenty years before Dzyuba had reported in *Internationalism or Russification?* that this talented 'Sixtier' had been 'forced to leave Ukraine'. In an interview which appeared in November, Tanyuk declared not only that he saw himself as a follower of the traditions of the modern Ukrainian theatre that had been founded in the 1920s by the director Les Kurbas and playwright Mykola Kulish — both of whom became victims of the Stalin terror — but also that he wanted the Kyiv Youth Theatre to assume the kind of role which the Club of Creative Youth had played in the early 1960s as a cultural centre 'for the new generation' and all those who wanted 'to think and act in a new way'. The director also revealed that he intended to stage plays based on Honchar's *Sobor* and a work by fellow 'Sixtier' Lina Kostenko set in the Cossack era. — *Marusya Churai*.^A Tanyuk and Drach wasted no time in translating Mikhail Shatrov's powerful play in the new *glasnost* style, 'Dictatorship of Conscience', into Ukrainian, and Tanyuk's premiere production of it in Kyiv at the beginning of 1987 was a sensation.³²

The CPU's conservatism comes under fire

The year of Chornobyl ended with a major shock and a pleasant

^{2K} *Literaturnaya gazeta*, 26 November 1986.

^{2I} *Literaturna Ukraina*, 6 November 1986.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 27 November 1986.

^A 'Teatr ityme dali' [The Theatre Will Go Further], *Ukraina*, no. 45, 1986, p. 6.

^B For some of the reactions, see *Literaturna Ukraina*, 5 February 1987.

surprise. In Kazakhstan, ethnic riots erupted after the republic's veteran Party chief Dinmukhamed Kunaev was abruptly replaced on 16 December by a Russian, Gennadii Kolbin. On this occasion the Soviet media seemed to respect the need for *glasnost* by promptly announcing that rioting had occurred in Alma-Ata. But as new conflicting reports began appearing in the Western press about the scale and causes of the unrest, the Gorbachev leadership itself made news: it decided to free Andrei Sakharov from internal exile and, though this only became evident a few weeks later, to begin releasing political prisoners.

During the last few months, Gorbachev had taken the political fight to the strong conservative forces within the CPSU by shifting the emphasis to the need for political reform, or 'democratization', as a precondition for the success of economic restructuring. At the important Central Committee plenum on 27 January 1987, he raised the stakes by proposing the introduction of multiple-candidate balloting for local government positions and multi-candidate, secret balloting for Party posts. But when it came to the Party's nationalities policy, Gorbachev remained intransigent. He declared that the Soviet leadership would remain 'firm and principled'. 'Let those who would like to play on nationalist or chauvinistic prejudices,' he warned, 'entertain no illusions and expect no loosening up'.³

At least the cause of *glasnost* and 'democratization' appeared to have been further advanced, even if not as fully as the non-Russians would have liked. This again raised the question of the survival of Shcherbytsky and his team. Early in January, the Ukrainian Party leadership was embarrassed by Moscow's handling of an affair involving the unlawful arrest in July 1986 of a journalist, Viktor Berkhin, by local authorities in Voroshilovhrad. In a brutal style reminiscent of the years when Fedorchuk had headed the KGB in the republic, Berkhin had been detained and mistreated (he died in July 1987, after apparently failing to recover from the ordeal³⁴) for exposing the abuse of power and corruption. On the very day that the Ukrainian press published the report of the CPU's investigation into the matter, *Pravda* ran an article by the head of KGB, Viktor

³³ TASS in English, 27 January 1987.

See the report by V. Plekhanov in *Meditinskayagazeta*, 16 October 1987, which also revealed that a doctor and his brother had been 'framed' and imprisoned for refusing to consent to a scheme to incriminate Berkhin.

Chebrikov, identifying the main culprit as the regional KGB chief, a fact not admitted in Kyiv's account.³⁵ This was the first time since the early 1950s that the Soviet secret police had been criticized in the Soviet press and the action was widely interpreted as a calculated blow against the CPU leadership.

The scandal was followed by what appeared to be the beginning of a purge in the CPU. In mid-February, Shcherbytsky himself announced in the pages of *Pravda* that the Party boss of the Voroshilovhrad region had been sacked. The following month, the Party chiefs of the Dnipropetrovsk and Lviv regions, both products of the 'Dnipropetrovsk group', were fired.

The *New York Times* reported on 22 March that the dismissals had been engineered by Gorbachev in an attempt to 'gain control' of the CPU but that the sixty-nine-year-old Ukrainian Party leader, by now the longest serving member of the Politiburo, was 'strenuously' resisting efforts to remove him. The newspaper cited unnamed 'Soviet officials' as reporting that Gorbachev and Shcherbytsky 'had quarrelled' at the January Central Committee plenum and that the Soviet leader had 'made no secret of his desire to remove' the Ukrainian Party boss.³⁶ When, however, on 24-5 March, the CPU Central Committee held a plenum, Shcherbytsky engaged in a measure of self-criticism, accepting responsibility for the republic's economic problems, but retained his post.

Shedding light on the real situation in the republic, Shcherbytsky admitted at the plenum that 'restructuring' was 'proceeding slowly' in Ukraine and that the main obstacles were 'conservatism, inability, and even unwillingness to work in a new way'. He also acknowledged that 'the main reason' why the three regional Party bosses had been dismissed was 'the absence of genuine democratism and *glasnost*, the absence of criticism and self-criticism'.³⁷

The sackings set in motion a number of important personnel changes. In April, Ivashko took over as the Dnipropetrovsk region Party chief and his position as ideological secretary was filled by the Kyiv city Party boss, Yurii Yelchenko. He in turn was replaced by Kostyantyn Masyk. Another CPU Central Committee secretary,

³⁵ *Pravda*, 8 January 1987.

Philip Taubman, 'Gorbachev Encounters Party Resistance in Ukraine', *New York Times*, 22 March 1987.

³⁷ *Radyanska Ukraina*, 25 March 1987.

Yakiv Pohrebnyak, took over as first secretary of the Lviv region and his place in the Secretariat was filled by Stanislav Hurenko, who was also elected a candidate member of the CPU Politburo. The following month, the republic's KGB chief, Stepan Mukha, was retired and replaced by Mykola Holushko. With Ukraine's economic performance still coming under fire from Moscow,³⁸ in July there was also a shake-up of the Ukrainian government. A number of key officials were retired, including the chairman of the Council of Ministers, Lyashko, who had held the post for fifteen years. He was replaced by Masol.

The struggle for greater glasnost

During this period, when it did indeed seem as if the Shcherbytsky era in Ukraine was finally coming to an end, the Ukrainian literati kept up their pressure for change. In January 1987, the writers nominated Lina Kostenko for the Shevchenko State Prize for Literature, the republic's most prestigious award. The uncompromising poet had been proposed for the prize in 1981 but, hardly surprisingly in view of the political climate at that time, had not won it. This time she was put forward as a representative of an unvanquished Ukrainian literature and a model for her contemporaries. The article by Anatolii Makarov in *Literaturna Ukraina* nominating her stressed her commitment to 'concepts such as civic conscience, patriotism, devotion to the national cause and to national culture'. The time had come, he argued, 'for precisely such socially active poetry . . . which tells us the truth, no matter how bitter it may be'. The nomination was successful: in early March it was announced that Kostenko had won the award.

Another candid, though indirect, reminder to the literary community about what their role should be was delivered by a senior literary scholar from the Institute of Literature, Hryhorii Syvokin. In a round-table discussion organized in Kyiv in January by three journals and published in April in *Kommunist Ukrainy*, he stressed that literary work had also to be judged from the standpoint of Ukrainian nation-state building. He called for a more purposeful

³⁸ For example, in May the CPSU Central Committee criticized Ukraine's key ferrous metals industry. Reuter, 17 May 1987.

approach from the cultural intelligentsia aimed at safeguarding and developing 'national' values in a 'wise, tactful and delicate' way.

A good example of this approach was to be set by Ivan Dzyuba, who from about this time began to regain his former authority with his thoughtful contributions to the growing debate about the state of Ukrainian culture. In February, for instance, he added his voice to the calls for the full rehabilitation of leading Ukrainian writers and cultural activists from the nineteenth century and the 1920s; he also mentioned Drahomanov as an example of an important figure whose activity was still distorted.³⁹ Behind the scenes, other writers and literary scholars began pressing for the rehabilitation of Khvylovy and of Volodymr Vynnychenko, a leading Ukrainian writer, who had also been a prominent political activist and a prime minister during Ukraine's shortlived period of independence.

An important initiative was taken by a group of leading literary critics who in May formed the Creative Association of Critics of the Kyiv Writers' Section. Anxious to adapt literary life to the new conditions, restore the writer's authority and contribute to democratization, they established their own unregimented club for discussion and elected Syvokin, a non-Party member, to head it. Its leadership, or *bum*, included, among others, Dzyuba, Vyacheslav Bryukhovetsky and Mykola Ryabchuk. The Association invited economists, philosophers, historians and culturologists to its monthly discussions on topical themes and thereby created one of the earliest forums for democratically and nationally minded intellectuals. Describing the atmosphere at this time, Syvokin recalls: 'We didn't know where all the changes were leading to and where we would end up. But we knew we had to do something . . . Without our having foreseen it, our initiative turned into a civic action and our meetings became a school for civic and political activity.'⁴⁰

The growing ferment also became visible in other cultural spheres. In May, sharp criticism was voiced at the inaugural congress of theatre workers of some of the 'classics' of Soviet Ukrainian drama and their legacy. The playwright Yaroslav Stelmakh, the son of a

Literaturna Ukraina, 26 February 1987.

Author's interview with Hryhorii Syvokin, Kyiv, 19 March 1993. On the Association's activity, see the collection of documents compiled by Syvokin entitled *Avtorytet. Literatura i krytyka v chas pmbudovy: Statti, cse, informatsiya* [Authority. Literature and Criticism in the Time of Restructuring: Articles, Essays, Information], Kyiv, 1989.

famous Soviet Ukrainian writer, was the most outspoken. He told the participants that they had to choose between creating a new union in which careerists and bureaucrats would predominate, or breaking with the past and uniting all those who genuinely wanted the renewal of Ukrainian theatre and culture generally. This was also echoed by Tanyuk who argued that what was needed was a transformation of social consciousness, and he called upon his colleagues to display greater civic courage and truthfulness.⁴¹

This was still very difficult for many to do, though. Tanyuk himself pointed out during the above-mentioned round-table discussion published in *Kommunist Ukrainy* that the authorities were uncooperative, obstructive or openly hostile to attempts to revitalize and democratize social and national life.⁴² In his own case, although he did manage to transform the Kyiv Youth Theatre into an important centre of Ukrainian cultural renewal which was supported by 'the flower of the city's creative intelligentsia', he ran up against considerable opposition from local Komsomol officials and other conservative elements.⁴³

An important new opportunity for promoting Ukrainian cultural renewal through semi-official channels presented itself, however, at precisely this time as a result of an all-Union initiative which had been launched by pro-Gorbachev Russian patriotically minded intellectuals. This was the creation of a Soviet Cultural Fund, the aim of which was to promote restructuring in the cultural sphere and preserve the cultural heritage of the peoples of the Soviet Union. It was headed by Academician Likhachev, and Gorbachev's wife, Raisa, was on its board. Realizing the dividends that such a body could bring them, representatives of the Ukrainian cultural elite lost no time in offering their support: on 11 April the Ukrainian section of this new organization — the Ukrainian Cultural Fund — held its inaugural conference in Kyiv and Oliinyk was elected its head. During the next months, the Ukrainian Cultural Fund proceeded to work out its goals and strategy and to establish a republican network.⁴⁴

See the reports on the congress in *Kultura i zhyttya*, 31 May 1987 and in *Teatr*, no. 10, 1987, pp. 113-17.

" *Kommunist Ukrainy*, no. 4, 1987, p. 71.

See Oksana Telenchi, 'Zapytai u svoyei sovisti' [Ask Your Conscience], *Lyudyna i' svit*, January 1988, pp. 43-6.

The fact was that as far as *glasnost* was concerned, because of the different political climates in Moscow and Kyiv, in most respects Ukraine continued to lag behind Russia.⁴⁵ Nevertheless, in one especially sensitive area, a Ukrainian newspaper helped to break a taboo. In January 1987, the republican Komsomol daily *Molod Ukrainy* published a letter from the mother of two draftees expressing criticism of the Soviet role in Afghanistan and the way that it was depicted in the Soviet media. On 5 May, the newspaper followed this up with an article by Oleksandr Klymenko which not only confirmed how strongly readers felt on this subject, but also indicated that there was considerable opposition to the war and that the official media were widely mistrusted.

Though Klymenko's article broke new ground, it was itself a good example of selective *glasnost* in practice. It pointed to a problem, described some of its salient features, but stopped far short of telling the full story. Klymenko, however, alluded to the constraints within which even the boldest pioneers of *glasnost* in the official press still had to operate. As he explained to readers:

Today we no longer remain silent. But, if one is to be frank, we still haven't learned to speak forthrightly. This is clear from our newspaper and your letters. We still look over our shoulder, are frightened, [and] hint at things.⁴⁶

The writers defy the CPU leadership

The writers continued to concentrate on the language issue and, after the boost which Gorbachev had given *glasnost* at the January Central Committee plenum, became more radical. At a meeting in Kyiv on 10 February, they reopened the debate about Thesis 19 of the 1958 Education Law (the provisions of the draft Statute

See the interview with Oliinyk on this subject in *Visti z Ukrainy*, no. 19, May 1987, and his article 'Cultural Fund' in *Ukraine* (Kyiv), no. 1, 1988, pp. 16-17.

Interestingly, the Ukrainian poet and W U U member Vitalii Korotych, who had moved from Kyiv to Moscow in the summer of 1986 to become editor of *Ogonek*, was at this time successfully transforming this formerly conservative weekly into a flagship of *glasnost* and boosting its circulation.

For further details, see Bohdan Nahaylo, 'Ukrainian Mother Protests Soviet Media Coverage of the War in Afghanistan', RL 34/87, 22 January 1987, and 'Ukrainian Mother's Protest Attracts Numerous Letters on the Afghanistan Theme', RL 188/87, 18 May 1987.

on the Secondary Education School had just been published and Section Four of the document continued to give parents the right to decide which language their child was taught in⁴⁷) and demanded that the study of Ukrainian be made obligatory in all of the republic's schools. Honchar pointed out that writers in Belarus, the Baltic republics and Turkmenistan had also launched campaigns in defence of their mother tongue and he attacked the 'falseness and hypocrisy' which called into question 'the need to learn one's native language'. Such a question, he maintained 'cannot arise in any civilized country'.

The problem, the writers emphasized, was not simply the sharp reduction of Ukrainian-language schools. Assimilationist pressure had restricted the 'social functions' of the Ukrainian language and led to a drastic decline in its prestige, especially in the Russified eastern regions of the republic. As Drach put it, the Ukrainian language and literature had 'become a subject for derision and mockery, where gentrified Philistines, with a chauvinistic deviation, hiding behind the shield of pseudo-internationalism, frequently scoff at the roots whence they came'. Another speaker, Pavlychko, warned quite bluntly that unless the official policy towards the non-Russian languages changed, there would soon be 'no friendship of peoples' left in the Soviet Union. 'The unjust, condescending, and thoughtless attitude towards the Ukrainian language' had to be eliminated, he urged, stressing that 'responsibility for learning the native language' had to rest not with parents and pupils, 'but with our state'.⁴⁸

This point was also made in a letter to the education workers' newspaper *Radyanska osvita* from Zhulynsky and three other senior figures at the Institute of Literature, Bryukhovetsky, Vitalii Donchyk and Leonid Novychenko, who proposed that the education law be changed to require all students in the republic 'to study both Ukrainian and Russian with equal respect and dignity'.⁴⁹ Their position was supported in letters from readers.

In mid-March, the writer Serhii Plachynda sharpened the debate by publishing an article containing far-reaching proposals on reversing Russification and bolstering the status of the Ukrainian language.

⁴⁷ See *Radyanska osvita*, 6 February 1987.

⁴⁸ *Literatuma Ukraina*, 12 March 1987.

⁴⁹ *Radyanska osvita*, 3 April 1987.

He suggested, among other things, that in every non-Russian republic the native language and Russian be designated as 'state languages'. The recognition of Ukrainian as a state language was to become a key demand of the writers, especially after they managed to obtain the first hard data on the existing state of affairs.

At the end of 1986, Drach had called for the creation of a working group to monitor the study of the Ukrainian language and literature in the republic's schools. Such a special permanent commission was set up in February by the Presidium of the Board of the W U U under the chairmanship of Pavlychko. By now the Ukrainian authorities were under pressure to be at least seen to be responding to the writers' campaign and opening some sort of dialogue with them. Both the Ukrainian minister of education, Mykhailo Fomenko, and the official responsible for education in the Ukrainian capital, attended the first meeting of the WUU's new commission; moreover, they provided the kind of information that had hitherto been kept secret. Fomenko revealed that 50.5% of the republic's pupils were being taught in Ukrainian (a drop of about 11.5% since the 1960s) and 48.7% in Russian. In Kyiv, however, the percentage of pupils being taught in Ukrainian was only about 23%, even though the 1979 census had shown that Ukrainians constituted about 68.7% of the city's population and that 52.8% of the inhabitants had named Ukrainian as their native tongue.⁵⁰

This manifestation of 'statistical *glasnost*', welcome as it was, did not mean that the Shcherbytsky leadership was changing its general line. At the beginning of February, for instance, it was announced that the Ukrainian Ministry of Culture had adopted a series of measures designed to promote the further 'internationalization' of Ukrainian youth.⁵¹ Shcherbytsky himself showed no 'new thinking' when he spoke about 'nationalism' and religion on 25 March at the end of the CPU Central Committee plenum. As in the *pre-glasnost* era, he warned against showing any complacency in ideological work, especially when it came to dealing with historical themes and religion, and demanded that 'more consideration' be shown for 'the objective process of internationalization'.⁵²

Ibid., 9 April 1987. For more details, see Roman Solchanyk, 'Statistical *Clasnost*. Data on Language and Education in Ukraine', RL 152/87, 15 April 1987.

Kultura i zhyttya, 1 February 1987.

⁵² *Radyanska Ukraina*, 29 March 1987.

This was precisely the time when interest in history, or more precisely, in the forbidden themes, or so-called blank spots or pages, was growing. Not only was the approaching millennium of the Christianization of Kyivan Rus stimulating interest in the past, but also the work that was being done in the West on Stalin's man-made famine in Ukraine in 1933. Listeners in Ukraine to Western radio stations, such as Radio Liberty, could learn about the recent publication in the West of Robert Conquest's book on this subject, *The Harvest of Sorrow*, as well as the study of this tragedy which had been undertaken by a commission appointed by the US Congress. At home, the issue of the famine had been cautiously raised in a story by Vasyl Zakharchenko which had appeared in 1986 but, as Dzyuba pointed out in a review in the March 1987 issue of the literary monthly *Kyiv*, it had left a great deal unsaid. The official line, however, remained that no such famine occurred and that this was all an anti-Soviet fabrication thought up by Ukrainian emigres and Western anti-Communists.

The frustration with the unforthcoming attitude of the Kyiv authorities was apparent in the unusual step taken by Oliinyk during his next appearance in Moscow at the end of April. Addressing a plenum of the Board of the Soviet Writers' Union, the Ukrainian poet called on 'Russian brothers' to help the Ukrainians restore what he euphemistically called 'Leninist norms' in their republic, in other words to reinstate the principles on which the nationalities policy of the 1920s had been based. The situation had got so bad, he informed the delegates, that in some of Ukraine's regional centres 'the number of Ukrainian schools' was 'approaching zero'. Oliinyk also called for the lifting of the ban on 'most' of the works of Vynnychenko and the publication of Dmytro Yavornytsky's works on the history of the Zaporozhyan Cossacks.⁵³ Another writer, Oleksandr Pidsukha, lashed out at the 'Little Russian' mentality of Shcherbytsky and his officials in a satirical 'pamphlet' which appeared in May in *Radyanska osvita* only a few days before Shcherbytsky was scheduled to address a congress of the republic's teachers.⁵⁴

At the teachers' congress on 15-16 May, it suddenly seemed as if all the pressure was beginning to have an effect. The minister of

⁵³ *Literaturnaya gazeta*, 6 May 1987.

⁵⁴ *Radyanska osvita*, 12 May 1987.

education, Fomenko, surprised the delegates by expressing his support for some of the demands being made by the writers. He acknowledged 'the uneasiness on the part of teachers, writers and the public' about the way in which the Ukrainian language had been effectively downgraded in the republic's educational system and the 'indifferent and irresponsible attitude towards this problem' on the part of some school teachers and local educational authorities. While rejecting the idea of making the study of Ukrainian compulsory, he conceded that proposals about amending Section Four of the Draft Statute on the Secondary General Education School deserved attention. He called on the Soviet Ministry of Education 'to take them into consideration'.

Shcherbytsky's speech, which followed that of Fomenko, however, not only did not mention the protests and demands which the writers were making, or the issues to which the Ukrainian minister of education had devoted his address, but emphasized 'the need for students to further improve their study of the Russian language'. Almost as if they were overruling the minister, the Ukrainian Party leaders insisted that the Soviet authorities had created for each nation 'the most suitable conditions for developing national culture and the national language'.⁵⁵

One other major problem that both the Shcherbytsky leadership and the authorities in Moscow preferred not to address during this period was the growing opposition in Ukraine to the further development of nuclear energy in the republic, a campaign in which the writers were also providing the leadership.

The Chornobyl theme figured prominently in their works and helped shape public opinion on the issue of nuclear power. But there were problems, even for the most prominent of the writers. Oliinyk, for instance, complained in his speech at the plenum of the Board of the Soviet Writers' Union that 'for some months now' he had not managed to get anything published in the central press on the subject of Chornobyl and nuclear power. At the end of March, though, the republic's scientists also took a stand. At a discussion of specialists which had been convened in Kyiv by the authorities, more than sixty of the scientists, from various fields, voted against continuing with the construction of the fifth and sixth reactors at the Chornobyl plant; only two voted for.⁵⁶ This was one of the first

genuine victories for independent public opinion, for in May it was announced that work on the new reactors would stop.

But elsewhere, the Moscow and Kyiv authorities were determined to continue with their ambitious nuclear energy programme. One of the new plants was supposed to be constructed near the city of Chihirin in the Cherkasy region. Not only would the new atomic power station be located in a densely populated area which had a special historical significance for Ukrainians, but also it would stand on the banks of the Dnipro, which is Ukraine's main water supply. Local opposition was supported by leading writers in Kyiv: in June, Honchar condemned the idea of building 'another Chornobyl' on the Dnipro,⁵⁷ while Oliinyk pointed out that Ukraine, which comprised 3% of the area of the USSR, already had about 25% of the Soviet Union's reactors located on its territory.⁸

On the eve of a plenum of the Board of the WUU, the CPU's leadership appears to have decided that it was time to draw the line. The occasion was a meeting on 11 June of the Party organization of the Kyiv branch of the WUU. This time, Oliinyk, the overseer of this group, in effect donned his Party uniform and sought to call his colleagues to order. After a few words of warning to younger writers to avoid 'speculative hysteria' when dealing with 'the most sacred things' (as an example, he singled out the iconoclastic speech by Stelmakh at the recent Congress of Theatre Workers) and condemnation of 'demagogues and speculators' who he said were trying to abuse democracy, he turned his attention to the newly formed independent association of Kyivan critics. Oliinyk strongly criticized this group for trying to evade supervision by the Communist Party by failing to set up its own internal Party committee. He also castigated the critics' association for allowing non-writers to attend its discussions. 'What is this', he asked, 'a variant of Hyde Park?' The Party, he stressed, would not allow groups 'using the banner of democratization' to splinter the 'monolithic' and Party-guided unity of the WUU. During this period of 'democratization', the Party's 'leading role', he said, was becoming even more important, and the critics' association would have to have an internal 'Party organization' whether it wanted to or not.

⁵⁶ *Uteratumaya gazeta*, 27 May 1987.

Literatuma Ukraina, 18 June 1987.

Uteratumaya gazeta, 1 July 1987.

Ironically, compared to what Oliinyk said, the speech by the new ideological secretary, Yelchenko, in which he set out the CPU leadership's position, actually sounded more moderate. He acknowledged that there had been 'a certain restriction' in the use of the Ukrainian language in recent years and that this was eliciting 'justifiable complaints'. Announcing a number of modest concessions — mainly measures to improve the teaching of the Ukrainian language and literature — he made it clear, however, that the CPU leadership was not prepared to budge on the key questions.¹⁹ 'Whether one likes it or not', he told the writers, the 'spirit' of the provision in the education law giving parents the right to choose the language in which their children were taught was 'democratic'. The CPU leadership, he declared, would not deviate from the principles of 'internationalism' and the general Party line, and remained committed to fostering Russian-Ukrainian bilingualism in the republic. Rejecting the call to make the study of Ukrainian obligatory, Yelchenko did not even address the question of recognizing Ukrainian as a state language.

The ideological secretary also indicated a similar unbending attitude as regards historical research and rehabilitations. Although he stated that the 'practice of administrative bans and voluntaristic

Hardly surprisingly, when interviewed by the author in 1993 about the CPU leadership's policy at this time, Yelchenko denied that he, Shcherbytsky, and others, had been hostile or unresponsive to the writers' campaign in defence of the Ukrainian language. The language issue, he acknowledged, had been the 'most acute' question, indeed the 'alpha and omega' in the sphere of nationalities policy and the Party had had to tread carefully. The question was how to solve the language issue in Ukraine 'so that the restoration of the Ukrainian linguistic environment did not cause a social explosion'. Shedding some light on what went on behind the scenes, Yelchenko says that in response to the changing political conditions and pressures, the Shcherbytsky team decided to prepare a 'broad programme to improve the situation of the Ukrainian language'. Responsibility for this task was entrusted to Yelchenko himself and the head of the propaganda and agitation department under him, Leonid Kravchuk. 'Shcherbytsky didn't leave us in peace', Yelchenko claims. 'He kept asking me: "When will you have the draft ready for the Politburo to examine?"' The former ideological secretary also concedes that although a 'programme' of sorts was eventually produced, 'we didn't manage to keep up with the pace of change'. Of course, there was another factor which Yelchenko did not mention. Shcherbytsky's team continued to take its cue from Moscow's general approach to nationalities policy. And, for all of Gorbachev's emphasis on *glasnost* and democratization, there was still no indication of any real restructuring in this crucial sphere.

decisions' was no longer acceptable, he stressed that 'ideological responsibility' and 'Party-mindedness' were still imperative. Yelchenko singled out the cases of Khvylovy and Vynnychenko and emphasized that even the 'uncontroversial works' of these writers had to be approached from this standpoint.⁶⁰

Demonstrating just how much the climate had changed during the last year, the writers refused to accept these limitations. Honchar took the floor after Yelchenko and reiterated that the Education Law was 'anti-democratic' and directed at 'destroying the language of our people'. He also announced that he and a group of his colleagues had appealed to the writers of Russia to support the principle that all pupils have to learn both Russian and their national language in school. This time, *Literatuma Ukraina* published only a short summary of Honchar's response to Yelchenko which did not convey its spirit.⁶¹

The plenum of the Board of the Writer's Union held on 16 June was largely devoted to the language question and turned into a demonstration of defiance and reviving national assertiveness. In their forthright speeches, most of the writers seemed to be saying that the time had come to dispense with pretenses about internationalism, the equality of the peoples of the USSR and their rights, and to see things as they really were and no longer put up with the injustices and discrepancies. Several of the speakers emphasized, however, that it was crucial that the writers did not limit themselves just to words, but turned to deeds and hard work. 'We are living in truly revolutionary times', Volodymyr Drozd reminded the writers, 'and our descendants will not forgive us if we squander our opportunity'.

The writers raised a broad range of issues that challenged in one way or another the existing state of affairs. For example, implicitly responding to the Russian usurpation of the historical and cultural patrimonies of the Ukrainians and Belarusians,⁶² Drozd affirmed the Ukrainians' link with Kyivan Rus and emphasized the need for a

Literatuma Ukraina, 18 June 1987.

Ibid, On Honchar's reaction to Yelchenko's speech, see Vitalii Koval's article on *Sobor* and its author in *Molod Ukrainy*, 2 April 1993.

See, for example, the article by the Russian imperial nationalist Oleg Trubachev in *Pravda* of 27 March 1987 in which the corresponding member of the USSR Academy of Sciences, among other things, insisted that the language and literature of Kyivan Rus be called Russian.

full picture of the Ukrainian nation's cultural and spiritual development over the last thousand years. Drach pushed for the rehabilitation of Khvylovy and also asked why all official efforts were concentrated on combating 'nationalism' when what was needed, in his view, was an intensification of the struggle against 'great-state chauvinism'. Partly answering his own question, he commented sarcastically that the Ukrainian authorities had gained international notoriety for their zealous ideological vigilance. 'When fingernails are being trimmed in Moscow', he declared, 'they chop off fingers in Kyiv'. Another speaker, Pidsukha, among other things asked why the Soviet Germans living in the Altai had their own schools, press and radio while 'the millions of Ukrainians living in the same Altai', or in the Russian Far East or the Kuban, 'do not have anything'.

The most dramatic moment at the plenum came when Pavlychko provided the participants with 'catastrophic' new data about the situation of Ukrainian-language schools in the republic's major cities. The percentage of Ukrainian schools in Ukraine's regional centres, he revealed, had been reduced to about 16%, and there were large cities, such as Voroshilovhrad and Chernihiv, which no longer had any Ukrainian schools. This, he pointed out, was the result of twenty-seven years of an education law which, though camouflaged as democratic, had worked only in one direction — against the native language. It was also the fault of the 'republican apparatus', which had been instilled, as Pavlychko put it, with indifference to the Ukrainian language and fear 'that love of the mother tongue could be construed —and we've experienced this! —as nationalism'.

Stressing the need for urgent remedial measures, Pavlychko announced that the newly established Commission for Ties between the WUU and Educational Institutions had sent a letter to the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the Ukrainian SSR calling on it to amend both the existing republican educational legislation and the Draft Statute on the Secondary General Education School in two crucial respects, so that: the Ministry of Education, and not parents, determine the language of instruction in schools according to the national composition of a given region; and, in the Russian-language schools in the non-Russian republics, the language, literature and history of the titular nation be made obligatory subjects.

Even more significant was the fact that the plenum adopted a resolution which read not only like the outline of a programme for Ukrainization, but also like a call for the mobilization of the public.

Demanding 'radical changes in the functioning of the Ukrainian language in the republic's state institutions, scientific and educational establishments and production collectives', the resolution declared that the writers wanted to focus the attention of 'all men of letters and the Ukrainian public generally' on 'the struggle against manifestations of national nihilism' and 'disrespect for the national language and culture'. The writers themselves were urged to support actively the policies of 'restructuring' and to oppose 'stagnationist features in the development of the economy and culture' and combat 'bureaucratism, protectionism and corruption'. Specifically, the resolution charged the leadership of the W U U to appeal to the Presidium of the Ukrainian Supreme Soviet with a request to accord the Ukrainian language the status of a state language within Ukraine and to amend the educational legislation to make the study of the Ukrainian language and literature obligatory in all of the republic's schools. The document also proposed that the W U U take up with the various ministries a variety of fundamental issues, including increasing Ukrainian-language television and radio programming; dubbing foreign films into Ukrainian (this had stopped under Malanchuk in 1974); improving Ukrainian-language training for theatre and cinema workers; and expanding the use of Ukrainian in business and official life.⁶³

Following up on the plenum, on 20 June Honchar sent a letter to Gorbachev, along with a copy of the Russian edition of *Sohor*, in which he described the alarming situation into which the Ukrainian language had been forced and the campaign that had been launched in its defence. He stressed that at various recent meetings in which thousands of representatives of the Ukrainian creative intelligentsia had participated, such as the teachers' congress, a session of the Ukrainian Academy of Sciences and the plenum of the W U U, grave concern and dissatisfaction had been expressed. The Ukrainian cultural intelligentsia, he informed Gorbachev, was united in considering that what was needed was 'constitutional protection' for the Ukrainian language and reform of the education law that would make the study of both Russian and Ukrainian compulsory in the republic's schools. Implicidly aiming at the Shcherbytsky regime,

Litemtuma Ukraina, 9 July 1987. For English translations of excerpts from some of the speeches delivered at the plenum, see *Soviet Ukrainian Affairs* (London), no. 3(1987).

Honchar also argued that the 'continuing discrimination against the Ukrainian language' was linked to the enduring 'stagnation', 'corruption, violations, careerism, bribetaking and other negative features' in Ukraine. The republic's most senior man of letters concluded with a virtual appeal to Gorbachev to intervene by stressing that Ukraine was 'very hopeful of assistance' from the Soviet leader.⁶⁴

Thus, a year after their memorable Ninth Congress, Ukraine's writers passed another milestone: they had defied the CPU leadership and in effect set out an alternative agenda for restructuring and democratization in Ukraine. During the year, the W U U had developed into a forceful patriotic pressure group with its largest section, the Kyiv region branch, acting as a spearhead and the writers' weekly *Literatuma Ukraina* as its mouthpiece. In the absence of independent national institutions or associations, the Ukrainian literary intelligentsia had become the main promoter of *glasnost*, democratization and national renewal in Ukraine. Placing their hopes on Gorbachev and the liberal course which he had ushered in, leading representatives of the Ukrainian literary elite had begun appealing directly to the Soviet leader not to tolerate any further the reactionary Kyiv leadership. But just as the confrontation between the writers and the Shcherbytsky regime was opening up, new independent Ukrainian voices began to be heard.

At the time, however, the press did not mention *this* letter. It was not published until six years later in the above-mentioned article by Koval in *Molod Ukraina*.