

EDITORIAL NOTE

“More Pluribus than Unum”

By 1989 seven decades of appeal to commonality by the Communist Party to the USSR's multiethnic population seems to have failed. The veneer of Soviet “society” has been shattered by ethnic nationalism and grassroots civil forces. Gorbachev's relaxing of the coercive reins of state has unleashed a Pandora's Box of responses from below, a veritable risorgimento of social and national consciousness, inundating the contemporary scene of the Soviet Union with a tidal wave of social organizations and political movements. Since March 1985, the peoples of the USSR have persistently called for ever more autonomy from the central government and emphatically voiced their separateness from it and from one another, often violently.

Four years since Gorbachev's exhortation for ‘restructuring,’ the harvest of perestroika has been an explosion of social and political activities which has not only successfully challenged the Party's monopolistic rule but seriously put the very integrity of the USSR into question. Decades of state-imposed conformism to a Marxist vision of single peoplehood has turned out to be a sham, a shallow artificial construct beneath which lurked powerful contradictory social tendencies and political aspirations, now giving birth to a multitude of civil societies and a constellation of ethnic nationalism.

Nationalities Papers is pleased to devote this issue to a discussion of the interaction between social and political forces that have spontaneously burst onto the scene in recent years. The simultaneous rise of civil (non-state sponsored) movements and republican nationalism was the central theme of a recent symposium held at Columbia University. One conclusion arises from the varied discussions: whether writers or workers, poets or peasants, in the Soviet Union any social stratum today finds itself more and more coalescing with other strata along ethnic lines. Despite other unifying trans-ethnic or trans-republican issues—economic or ecological—the ethnic factor seems overwhelming. Even the Communist Party of the Soviet Union has not been immune to the erosive power of ethnic sectarianism and Republican particularism.

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H.R.H