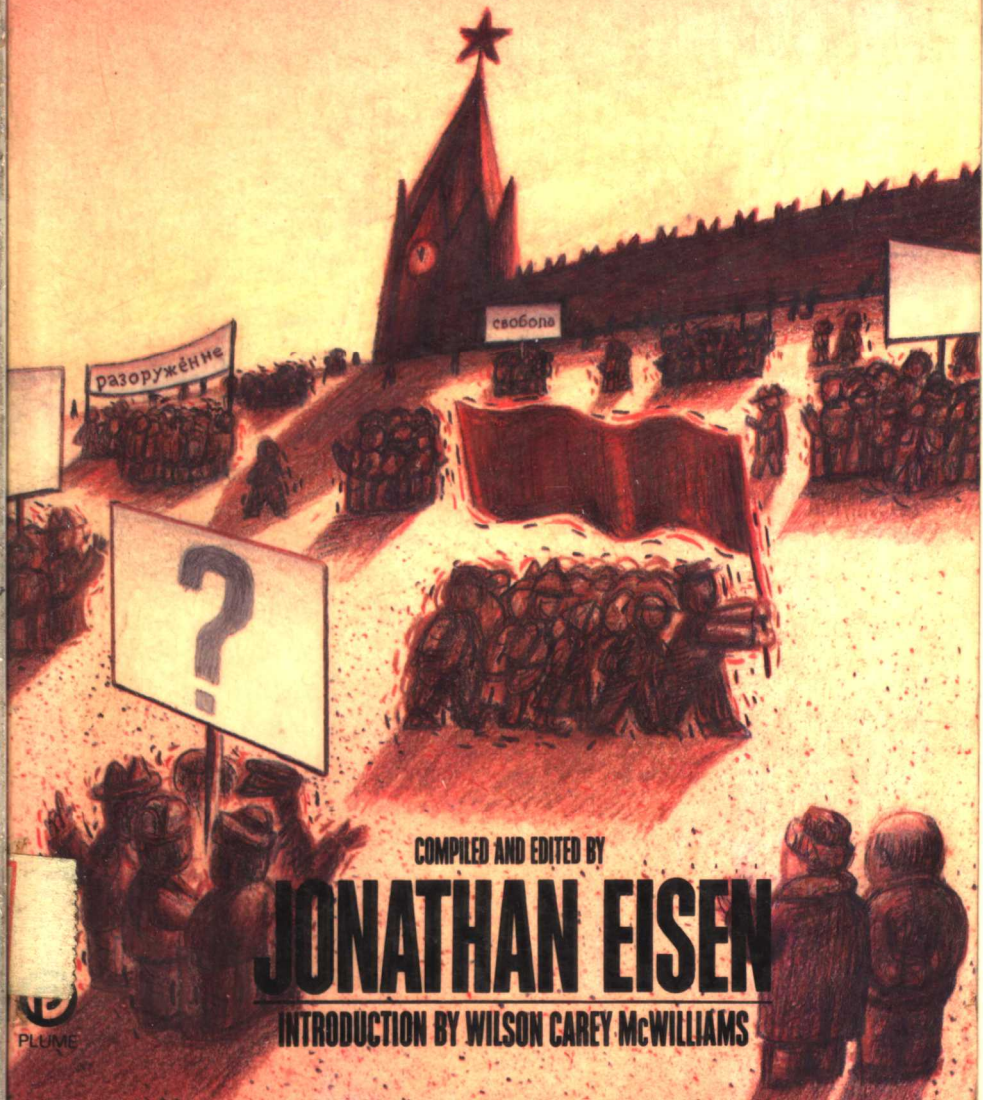


# THE GLASNOST READER

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Selected writings from Soviet citizens—bureaucrats, union members, dissidents, housewives, and more—including fiction, non-fiction, letters to the editor, cartoons, poetry, and political and social commentary...



COMPILED AND EDITED BY

**JONATHAN EISEN**

INTRODUCTION BY WILSON CAREY McWILLIAMS

PLUME

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# THE GLASNOST READER

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Compiled and Edited  
by Jonathan Eisen

With an Introduction by  
Wilson Carey McWilliams



A PLUME BOOK

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## PREFACE

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You hold in your hands a representative sampling of writings from what is arguably the most hopeful social revolution of our time—the outpouring of an entire people learning to breathe and think freely, to exercise their democratic rights.

Perhaps the words of poet Naum Korzhavin sum it up: “The meaning of language has been restored. Words now mean what they really mean. People are communicating again. The line by Mandelshtam, which recently expressed the reality of our everyday existence—‘We live without sense of country’—does not express reality today. Freedom of thought is returning to our country. I don’t believe that we have achieved full democracy, but we have gained some intellectual freedom, a substantial amount.”

Although one could argue that “historical necessity” required that this revolution should happen, this argument can be made only after the fact. Certainly economic pressures threatened across-the-board disaster, and certainly major dissatisfaction with the Communist Party had reached unprecedented volatility. But still, major reform was not a foregone conclusion. “History” cast Mikhail Gorbachev as instigator and initiator, emancipator and catalyst—the one who returned to his people *the meaning of language*.

Since his ascendancy to power in 1985, Gorbachev has prodded not only his own country but in many ways the entire world out of its period of “stagnation.” Indeed, the measure of his success is counted in numerous ways, not the least of which is that people are actually coming to grips with the fact that the Cold War appears to be coming to an end—with neither bang nor whimper but with the joyful, hopeful, yet still cautious celebration of a world that can scarcely believe that it’s true.

This is not to imply that Gorbachev’s policies have an instantaneous success on all levels. As the world’s news media have testified and as you will find in these pages, *glasnost* and *perestroika* have unleashed decades’ old frustrations and anxieties, age-old animosities and blood feuds. Being able to express the truth for the first time in recent memory, the Soviet people

are whelmed in revelations, many of them very unpleasant. Still, all this is undertaken with the spirit of exorcism and expiation, set against the backdrop of hope. Regardless of the backsliding into "command and administer" forms of administration, the society as a whole seems to be lurching, sometimes kicking and screaming, into the strong light of reality, beginning to find its legs again after so many, many years of being tossed about in the sickening swells of Stalinism.

Much of the backsliding is quite understandable. People tend to look for anchors of certainty, sometimes not minding the harshness in which that certainty is often clothed. Stalinism was unmitigated brutality, governance by threat and intimidation, and for millions, unimaginable horror and death. Still, as we have learned from landmark studies of concentration camps and other "total institutions," there is often a tendency on the part of the inmate to identify with the captor, and we find this having occurred in Stalinist USSR. Years after his death, the institutions of repression created by Stalin continued his legacy. Finding the right combination to unlock this legacy has been the major challenge facing Mikhail Gorbachev—and he seems to be succeeding.

More than anything else, *The Glasnost Reader* is a chronicle of this unlocking process, and the reader will be both shocked and delighted by what is revealed about the struggle for freedom in this tormented country, where perhaps 40 million people perished by the hand of "Father" Stalin, leaving the survivors cringing in fear or numbed for the duration of their lives, accommodating wherever they could to the exigencies of the times. The one notable exception, of course, were the refusniks, the dissidents—those for whom cringing and accommodation were worse than jail or torture or "psychiatric" incarceration. The words of many of them are represented here, though we have passed over much of the underground writing so important in the pre-*glasnost* era since this is primarily a book about what's happening now.

Where *glasnost* is leading is anybody's guess at this point, but even so, the real question is not the end goal, but the continuing legitimation of the process of *glasnost* and, with it, true democracy. The Soviet Union, along with much of the rest of the world, seems to be acknowledging, albeit slowly, that the cure for a little democracy is more democracy. And the country seems to be developing its long-dormant democratic instincts with an enthusiasm and vigor both sincere and refreshing to cultures such as our own, which seem to be jaded and often paralyzed in

the face of real and present dangers. We can only cheer a society that seems to have learned that it's all right to speak out and create a democracy—and has gone ahead and *tried* to do so.

Gorbachev is the helmsman in all this, and perhaps it's a good thing that he, like Stalin, is a father figure. The Soviet Union is a profoundly conflicted society, without a strong tradition of political compromise. Power in the Soviet Union has historically been an all-or-nothing proposition, and learning the virtues of toleration and mutual respect, compromise and pluralism, with civic institutions that exist independently alongside the political institutions, is a slow process. But reform *is* continuing, though the lessons are being learned with difficulty.

Without the father figure—the strong leader—the Soviet Union and the movement in general would lose its moral leadership; and *glasnost* and *perestroika* are, if nothing else, a lesson in morality. Gorbachev is trying to teach his country that Stalinism was an aberration, a radical departure from the teachings of Lenin, who is increasingly portrayed as the true father of *glasnost*, a humanist who would never have condoned the brutality that followed on his death. Whether that is objectively true or not, saying so was the only logical choice for Gorbachev to have made, since his radical reforms could then be presented as the true legacy of the founding father. He thereby has been able to accomplish the twin goals of rousing the opponents of communist rule at the same time that he preserves it. The analogy might be to Franklin Roosevelt, who preserved capitalism at the moment of its worst crisis by adopting some of the lessons of socialism.

In all, *glasnost* has been a success, and the world eagerly awaits its codification—the recognition of *glasnost* and democracy as *inalienable rights*, set down as law and upheld by the courts. Already we can see signs that this is coming, and the results of the remarkable elections of 1989 indicate that this is precisely where the momentum is taking the country.

What *The Glasnost Reader* portrays is a veritable sea-change in history. What you will read is what the Soviet people themselves are reading—and writing—as this debate proceeds, and the questions you will be left with are the same ones that they are asking. And some of those questions have no answers but are, in a way, answers themselves.

—JONATHAN EISEN  
New York City  
May, 1989

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## INTRODUCTION

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Like most Americans, I am no expert on Soviet politics or culture, but for years I could get by. Americans learned to regard the U.S.S.R. as a land of menace, full of dreadful secrets but also predictable, a totalitarian bureaucracy colored gray. Today, all of those givens are shaken. The Soviet Union has become mercurial and astonishing, a place of political prodigies and the source of paradox.

Glasnost, John Le Carré has written, is "an hour in history as momentous as 1917," and this book lets us feel the sand in the glass.\* *The Glasnost Reader* lets Soviet citizens speak for themselves, in the full diversity of their political vocabularies, which is as it should be. A revolution in speech, glasnost is an effort to reconnect words and meanings, a quest for the recovery of politics.

Politics is shaped by words, and *political* power depends on authority, the right to rule. A state enjoys a "monopoly of the legitimate use of force"—Max Weber's definition—only when it is regarded *as* legitimate; totalitarian regimes aim to control the very source of legitimacy, the distinction between political right and wrong. As Solzhenitsyn sought to remind the Soviet intelligentsia, "violence quickly grows old; a few years and it is no longer sure of itself, and in order to hold its ground, to look decent, it has to adopt Lie as an ally." Since this is true, glasnost could begin with a refusal to say "what we do not think." However, a refusal to lie falls short of telling the truth. Along with Gorbachev, Soviet officialdom is "learning a new tongue"—and the same is true of Soviet citizens. Democratic dialogue is an art unpracticed in Soviet experience. Relative freedom of speech is "heady" for Soviet citizens, as Daniel Bell has observed, but for that reason dangerous, uncertain of the limits of prudence or civility.

The stakes and the difficulties are both titanic. The sounds of glasnost are discordant, and any reader of this book will hear a

\**The New York Times*, September 29, 1989, p. A35



cacophony of clashing memories, cultures and aspirations. Despite that, glasnost rests on the conviction that it will be possible to find or forge a public language, a common way of talking about political things. In this respect, glasnost is on the battle line of contemporary philosophy as well as politics.

Democracy relies on the doctrine that all citizens are, in some decisive respect, the same and that deliberation can transcend differences of interest and experience—in other words, that speech can rule culture. Relativism, the cultural countercurrent, denies this, holding that human beings are shut into their distinct cultures or selves, imprisoned by uniqueness, so that language itself is only an imposition forced on us by others. Rule, in this view, is at bottom force, and cultural hegemony, constraint overcoming the anarchy of things. It is in that tradition that Nina Andreyeva, Stalin's defender, appeals to "Great Russian national pride" and attacks "cosmopolitan tendencies." Struggling on behalf of speech, glasnost upholds the possibility and dignity of both politics and philosophy, democracy and reason.

But if speech and law can transform a political society, they do so slowly, and glasnost and Gorbachev do not have much time. Even friends of reform are inclined to think that perestroika will fail and Gorbachev will be ousted. For that matter, Gorbachev—both Luther and the pope, as one observer described him—could feel compelled to lead his own counter-revolution.\*

Everywhere, nationalism seems to threaten Soviet unity. In the Baltic republics, the Caucasus, the Ukraine and Moslem Central Asia, people suddenly sense an opportunity to overcome captivity and subordination. Nationalistic vitalities, so apt to become virulent, confirm the fears of hardliners that freer speech will lead straight to Babel. And the strength of separatist sentiment may tempt Gorbachev to postpone the local elections scheduled for February and March, 1990. Meanwhile, Pamyat and its imitators are always ready to offer their sewer-broth of antisemitism and Russian chauvinism.

Economic success, of course, could moderate discontent and even ease old resentments. So far, however, perestroika has not significantly reduced shortages or eased the perception that Soviet consumer goods are generally second-rate. Moreover, unemployment is escalating—over 27% in some regions and republics. Economic gains are bound to come slowly. The Soviet Union

\*Michael Dobbs, "Eliminating Excuses Along With Opponents," *Washington Post National Weekly*, October 2-8, 1989, p. 16.

needs entrepreneurial skills and habits; it must heal the weakness in agriculture that began with Stalin's decimations; it will have to enter into the "information revolution." As Leonid Albakin remarks, reform in the Soviet Union requires the building of an economic culture, creating and nurturing the "social forces" necessary to growth, a "social humus" that can be accumulated only over years or generations.

The pressure for economic results is doubly troubling because it is not at all clear that democracy is inherently linked to economic growth. The success stories of recent years have been regimes which combine a market economy with political authoritarianism, using state power against any popular effort to soften the market's rigors. In the Soviet Union, the slow pace of economic gain—combined with strikes, disorders and the unsettling of old securities—inevitably inspires some nostalgia for the totalitarian dynamism of Stalin's era. Even defenders of glasnost sometimes reinforce this mood. General Dmitry Volkogonov, Stalin's most recent biographer, contends that Stalin "recklessly forced the pace" of development, paying a price so high that even Stalin's defenders "would not agree that the success which is so eagerly desired should be achieved by using his methods." Perhaps not, but more than one Soviet citizen probably sympathizes with the assertion that "Stalin issued orders only once."

It does not help that Soviet society is unaccustomed to excesses and irresponsibilities of liberty familiar in the West. Even routine Western practices undermine or endanger glasnost: commercial advertising, now beginning to appear in Soviet life is yet another form of speech in which words do not say what they mean, and even polling emphasizes private expressions of opinion rather than public deliberation.\* Solzhenitsyn is not alone in harboring the dark suspicion that political democracy may be inseparable from degeneracy.

For glasnost and perestroika, nothing will come easily or quickly. Soviet reform can rely on few external sources of support, especially if America's leaders persist in their tepid response. Glasnost depends on inner resources, the strength of commitment and the force of ideas. As Sigmund Krancberg observes, while Westerners are apt to see glasnost as part of the "decline of ideology," from a Soviet point of view, ideology is

\*And polling obviously upsets Soviet officials. On October 18, 1989, *The New York Times* reported that Gorbachev, disturbed by a mildly critical poll, had called for the resignation of Vladislav Starkov, editor of *Argumenty i Fakty*.

critical. Hence the importance of efforts to develop a *socialist* basis for perestroika, like Aleksandr Yakovlev's relatively orthodox appeal to Marxist humanism or, more imaginatively, Lavroskiy and Skoptsov's shrewd contention that bureaucratic control over property alienates workers quite as much as capitalist ownership. The strongest voices of glasnost recognize, however, that its promise does not rest on ideology but in the soul, on moral virtue rather than the laws of history. As Aleksandr Levikov wrote, "A moral person goes into battle—even a dangerous and hopeless one—guided by his conscience and convictions."

Yet "conscience" is a relatively insubstantial term, and the courage of one's convictions can lead to fanaticism, imprudence and repression. Ultimately, glasnost will depend on beliefs and souls that are specifically democratic. As Fazil Iskander contends, the Soviet public needs to learn democratic habits of speech and mores of self-government. The idea of legitimate and loyal opposition is unfamiliar; in Russian and Soviet history, the stakes of dissent have regularly been mortal. Civility requires longer practice and greater security than can be provided by *Izvestiya's* sermons on moderation. Above all, the supporters of glasnost—and its critics, for that matter—need assurances that they will not be the victims of the next swing to repression. The immediate goal of Soviet politics is not democracy but the rule of law, the indispensable ground of civil speech.

The constraints of Soviet experience and culture, Andranik Migranian maintains, argue for authoritarian rule as a step toward the development of democracy, a personal dictatorship limited in term and held to standards of accountability.\* At least partly conned from Jeane Kirkpatrick, this line of argument aims to create civil *society* as a kind of preparatory school for a future democratic state. But this authoritarian version of Madison's *Federalist Number 10* walks a tightrope, since the powers necessary to enforce civil speech are obvious dangers to it. And it is not at all clear that the widespread eagerness for liberty and self-government in the Soviet Union admits of any extended period of tutelary rule.

As Sergei Zalygin points out, habit is the foundation of civility in Western democracies (although, if our recent experience is any test, that foundation may be showing signs of wear). By contrast: glasnost is exciting precisely because it is new, at odds with the old Soviet habits of secrecy and suspicion. Soviet citi-

\* *The New York Times*, Sept. 11, 1989

zens will learn to trust the law to protect their personal and political security only if the law proves trustworthy. For generations, Soviet civility will be as fragile as sobriety among reformed alcoholics, depending on the conscious commitment of leaders and citizens.

The very idea that law can and should rule requires a revolution in Soviet thinking. It presumes that some principles and rules of right are superior to history and to will. It implies the subordination of socialism to the human, the historical to the perennial.

Accordingly, the mayor of Moscow warns that the appeal to universal values suggests the disparagement of "socialist values." Glasnost and perestroika may, in fact, be attempting to square a political circle, abandoning Leninism while clinging to Lenin as the founder and symbol of Soviet political legitimacy. The debunking of his successors may actually have increased Lenin's relative stature; at any rate, the indignation at the suggestion that Lenin's body be buried is an indication of his still-sacred status. At the same time, it is now possible to observe that Lenin failed to see that capitalism had not yet exhausted its possibilities. But public discussion of Lenin's errors of judgment may invite sharper critique. In symbol as in substance, Gorbachev is a fiddler on the roof, precariously playing for time and hoping to be justified by results.

Americans have a stake in the success of glasnost that goes beyond calculations of great power politics. From East Germany to China, glasnost and perestroika have unleashed a yearning for democracy that stands as a challenge to our own weak ardor. Beyond calling for our sympathy and support, the difficulty of the struggle for democratization and its uncertain prognosis ought to remind us that democracy is embattled, threatened by bureaucratic and technological power and dependent on human devotion. *The Glasnost Reader* helps us see that the Soviet Union, racing to establish civility and citizenship, is running for our future as well as its own.

—Wilson Carey McWilliams  
Professor of Political Science  
Rutgers University

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**THE  
GLASNOST  
READER**





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## ADVERTISING

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### **MOSCOW Radio Offers Advertising Slots Moscow Domestic Service in Russian, November 3, 1988**

Attention, directors of enterprises: Mayak [Moscow radio second program] is opening a new advertising and information slot: Enterprise Seeks Partner. You have changed to financial autonomy and have started counting your money. You need a customer for marketing your output, to get rid of surplus equipment, or you need to buy materials. From Vladivostok to Brest, Mayak will announce this to your future business partners. If your offer is announced on the radio, it reaches an audience of millions throughout the country instantly. Send your advertisement by registered mail, the envelope marked: Mayak—Enterprise Seeks Partner, to the following address: 127-427 Moscow Radio Mayak. The telephone number for information is: 217-90-29.

So, by means of a paid advertisement on Mayak and other radio channels, enterprise heads can establish commercial and scientific-technical contacts with partners in any sector. The same applies to the development or introduction of inventions and projects. If you wish, advertisement offers can be broadcast several times a day on six channels.

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## AFGHANISTAN

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### **A Lesson Which Should Be Learned by V. Skosyrev, *Izvestiya*, May 4, 1989**

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FOR ALMOST TEN YEARS, Afghanistan, for us, has been a wound that would not heal. But let us be honest with ourselves. Though the Soviet soldiers, sent over the Amu-Dar'ya, selflessly carried