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UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

WHITHER THE "NEW SOVIET MAN": PERSONS WITH A PHYSICAL
DISABILITY IN THE SOVIET UNION, 1975-1993

BY

SEAN HOWARD ATKINS



A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and
Research in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree of Master of Arts.

DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY AND CLASSICS

Edmonton, Alberta

Fall 1994



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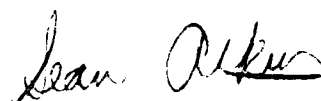
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Abstract

This thesis examines the daily lives of persons with a physical disability in the Soviet Union from the mid-1970's to 1993. The transformation of state and society affected all persons with a disability in many ways. The issues facing persons with a physical disability were not dissimilar from one decade to the next, but the means and methods for voicing them were. Social - security administration reform, pension benefits, education, housing, accessibility, the right to organize and political representation were all brought to the fore during perestroika as a result of the transformation in the information process. Persons with a physical disability also made progress in one area of social life previously neglected - the sporting process.

Through the use of official government sources and the popular press, this thesis reveals how far persons with a physical disability have come and how far they still must go in creating living and working conditions suitable to their needs and by extension rights. In its finality, this work is a commentary on the universality of human existence and toleration, and the stake that we all have in achieving it for our generation and the infinite ones to come.

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Introduction

This study will analyse the daily lives of persons with a physical disability¹ in the Soviet Union from the mid-1970's to the present. A prime indicator in finding out attitudes and values among societies is to study how the respective social groups integrate into several spheres of life deemed vital by the ruling political elite and popular perception alike. Measuring the role that persons with a physical disability play in the process is an integral part of any study.

Some fundamental issues will presently be introduced which will help give the reader a fuller perspective of how the varying levels of Russian society have responded to the interests and values of persons with a physical disability. To begin, it is important to put the question of historical analysis and persons with a physical disability in a general perspective. One may question the validity of the *social-scientific* approach to studying persons with a physical disability. Is it methodologically possible? Evidently the Marxist approach to history in the West has challenged

¹In an attempt to place the individual above his or her abilities, I intend to follow the guidelines set forth by the Government of Canada, Fitness and Amateur Sport in "Words with dignity: Active Alliance for Canadians with a Disability". These guidelines will also be observed in references to previous works on persons with a disability outside of the Soviet Union, even if a different term is provided; however, for the sake of historical accuracy, Soviet terminology and definitions are maintained in all references and sources.

the *medical-scientific* study of persons with a physical disability. Academics now recognize many social groups as makers of history. These groups are part of the 'historical process'.

There is a broad range of differences in terminology and definition of persons with a physical disability from country to country. In addition, attitudes regarding persons with a physical disability vary. These factors have made it more difficult to establish universal criteria on the origin and number of persons with a physical disability.

It is possible, however, to illustrate the importance of the relationship of persons with and the experiences of daily life. More than 500 million people - 10 percent of the world's total population - have a disability. In the majority of countries, at least one out of 10 persons has a physical, mental or sensory impairment, and at least 25 percent of the entire population are adversely affected by the presence of disabilities.² Even these statistics do not fully reveal the immensity of the problem since many persons frequently live in deplorable conditions, owing to the presence of physical and social barriers that prevent their integration and full participation in the community.³ The issue of social activity and persons with a disability

²Leandro Despouy, *Human Rights and Disabled Persons* (New York: United Nations, 1993), p. 1.

³Ibid.

affects us all as human beings.

Clearly, one striking theme of this study has been the sharp disparity between policy and practice towards persons with a physical disability by the ruling elite in the former Soviet Union from the mid-1970's to the mid-1980's. The flowering of social movement groups and nongovernmental organizations under *perestroika*⁵ necessarily affected persons with a physical disability in a profoundly different way from ten years earlier.⁵ *Perestroika* raised a whole new series of questions markedly different than before. Were changing attitudes of the regime a reflection of popular pressure or merely of political pragmatism? How was the attitudinal change reflected in the actual day-to-day living conditions for persons with a physical disability? How have the daily experiences of persons with a physical disability differed in the various regions of the former Soviet Union? How have the experiences of persons with a physical disability in the time period of this study defined the place of the individual in Soviet state and society? The answers to these questions go a long way toward revealing

⁴*Perestroika*, or 'restructuring' was the program adopted in 1987 to revive the Soviet economy through a re-organization of all segments of Soviet society. See Mikhail Gorbachev, *Perestroika- New Thinking For Our Country and the World*. (New York: Harper and Row Publishers Inc., 1st Ed., 1987).

⁵See Judith B. Sedaitis & Jim Butterfield, eds. *Perestroika from Below: Social Movements in the Soviet Union*. (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1991).

the moral fabric of state and society. Indeed, one can judge the spiritual quality of a society by the lifestyle it creates for persons with a disability.⁶

For a balanced study of persons with a physical disability in Russia, one must examine many social activities that are useful as barometers of interaction. Equality of opportunity in education, culture, health care, housing and transportation in addition to participation in decision-making at all levels in society are not just simple criteria for measurement, however; they are the essence of human rights.

If one believes, as this writer does, that social justice and human dignity are inalienable rights, it is important that one becomes aware of what 'human rights' implies in action. In other words, how does the observance (or ambivalence) of certain universal human values by the political elite affect the daily living and working conditions of all people. "Everyday" terms like 'integration', 'accessibility', and 'equal-opportunity' are not simple catch words.⁷ The universality of these ideas transcend the fashionable redundancy of 'politically

⁶See Stephen P. Dunn and Ethel Dunn, "Everyday Life of the Disabled in the USSR", in William O. McCagg and Lewis Siegelbaum, eds., *The Disabled in the Soviet Union*. (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1989), p. 199

⁷For precise definitions of these terms and others used in the text, see the glossary on terminology and definitions.

correct'. They provide the answers to the issues of policy and practice, word and deed. Most importantly, they are measuring instruments of social justice and human dignity.

Part of this study will be dedicated to persons with a physical disability and their place in a broad social activity of our time. Sport promotes the well-being of the individual while simultaneously being used by the ruling political elite to promote the good of the common cause through teamwork. For socialist countries, sport directly served the interests of the state. The reality of a nuclear world meant that the state had to search for the victory of political ideology in places other than the traditional battlefield; sport became a suitable substitute area for conflict.

In addition, individuals benefit greatly from sport; a healthy body and overall outlook are integral, and not mutually exclusive. Sporting competition and athletics are the primary means of gaining individual prestige, which broadens access to opportunity.⁶ Finally, sport can be purely aesthetic and entertaining; it brings mental and/or physical pleasure to the participant.

The Soviet idea of physical culture and sport in particular was predicated on the so-called mass

⁶Gerard A. Brandmeyer and G. Fred McBee, "Social Status and Athletic Competition for the Disabled Athlete: The Case of Wheelchair Road Racing", in Claudine Sherrill, ed., *Sport and Disabled Athletes* (Champaign, Illinois: Human Kinetics Publishers, 1984), pp. 181-182.

participation of Soviet society as a whole. To be sure, the Soviet term *massovost'*⁹, or 'mass participation' implies the participation of everyone in the sporting system. In reality, however, the experiences of persons with a physical disability, among others, did not bear this out. Policy and practice were mutually exclusive.

It is difficult to deny that persons with a physical disability as a whole have made great strides towards integration. Nevertheless, these developments have been uneven, and perhaps selective. Apparently certain categories of persons with a disability have been favoured by the state over others. Societies for persons with hearing and visual were established in the 1920's and, despite constant bureaucracy and financial difficulties, never collapsed. The experiences of persons with visual and hearing disabilities have not been similar for persons with a physical disability. For example, the participation of athletes with hearing and visual disabilities predated the first appearances by persons with a physical disability at international competitions. In addition, it is difficult to detect how persons with a physical disability have been integrated into sport on a purely popular level. One is

⁹The term became a central component of Soviet ideology for many activities. It was continuously contrasted with 'masterstvo' or 'mastery' which was considered the dominant feature of sport in capitalist countries. The distinctions between the two concepts proved to be rather ambiguous. See James Riordan, *Sport in Soviet Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), pp. 131-134; 229-232.

left questioning whether the priorities of state influence at the international level is still held above the health and welfare of all.

An assessment of disability and sport is crucial at this time for several reasons. The gradual transformation of the Soviet sport machine has left the future very unclear. Have the past several years been nothing but a series of political concessions or has there been a fundamental change in values reflected in the sport system? Can old practices be put aside or will the legacy of Soviet Olympic success prove fatal to the voices of social groups that have struggled for the past several years in Russia? What path will the new successor states follow? The movement towards genuine *massovost'* is at a decisive point.

This study has been divided into four chapters followed by a glossary. In the first chapter, a bibliographical review of related works will help establish historiographical context. The second chapter will analyse state attitudes towards persons with a physical disability from the promulgation of the Helsinki Human Rights Accords (1975) and the Declaration on the Rights of Disabled Persons (1975) until perestroika. For the first time, the voices of persons with a physical disability were heard; their tone was distinctively political. This time period is significant in its illustration of the discrepancy between policy and practice, especially after the two declarations

of 1975. Monitoring official Soviet reactions to the International Year of the Disabled (1981) is also significant in analyzing state attitudes towards persons with a physical disability. In addition, for the first time, one gains insight into the living conditions of several people with a physical disability, some of whom have lived in penal and medical institutions.

The third chapter will focus on the impact of perestroika on persons with a physical disability. In addition, this chapter will analyze the living and working conditions of persons with a physical disability during this time. The public media was instrumental in providing an avenue of awareness and opinion for a group hitherto ignored in the official press. Close historical comparisons between reports on persons with a physical disability in the Soviet press in the mid to late 1970's and the following decade reveal not only a change in the regime's view, but may suggest a transformation in the information process as well. Reports on persons with a physical disability in the mid-1970's were restricted to the official press which was strictly controlled by the political elite. All reports on persons with a physical disability and state attitudes were restricted to *clandestine* sources and publications abroad.

Media discussions on persons with a physical disability during and after perestroika have come from a variety of media sources since 1987, including not only the official

press but also the mass and popular media. Newspapers like *Pravda* (Truth) and *Izvestiya* (News) were Party and government run newspapers respectively which stressed ideological issues and (often distorted) international affairs but were virtually silent on daily life in the Soviet Union. The introduction of *glasnost* (openness) in popular magazines like *Ogonek* (The Flame) and the 'revolutionary' re-orientation of newspapers like *Moskovski Novosti* (Moscow News) encouraged everyone to write openly about problems which affected them personally. The trials and tribulations of daily life in the Soviet Union was something a lot closer to home.

The final chapter will be dedicated exclusively to the issue of persons with a physical disability and sport in the Soviet Union. This chapter will analyze closely the question of *massovost'* in the last years of the Soviet Union and the immediate events thereafter. While the inclusion of athletes with a physical disability in international events is significant, the issue of integration and sport for all persons with a physical disability at the popular level is crucial. Therefore, the final section of this chapter will attempt to draw conclusions on the differences between integration at the Olympic and popular level. Finally, it is important to remember that the break up of the Soviet Union has painted a complex picture. Limitations of space have enforced concentration by the author on Russia, as the

largest of the post-Soviet republics, and the Baltic states. Appreciating the distinctions in the geographical, cultural and political makeup of every state is as difficult yet important to understand the heterogeneous components of disability.

Following the conclusion is a discussion of the complexities and ambiguities associated with the terminology and definition of disability. Part of this discussion will include the three-tiered classification of disability used by the Soviet government to administer pensions and other related social safety benefits. This part will also address the universal criteria needed for understanding 'integration', and 'accessibility'.

Chapter I- Bibliographical Review

The interdisciplinary approach to the issue of persons with a disability and social activity in the former Soviet Union enables the researcher to access several sources. Consequently, the source material is disparate. This variation does not necessarily imply, however, that all previous works on persons with a disability in Russia are either appropriate or credible for this work. First, pre-perestroika Soviet literature is ambivalent towards the daily life experiences of persons with a disability. Most Soviet works are purely technical and medical-scientific. There are few case studies and no personal accounts. There are no works on disability and social interaction and virtually no discussion in local newspapers and popular magazines. Indeed, it is hard to gather a picture of life for persons with a disability outside a purely medical-scientific analysis. As far as the relationship between persons with a disability and sport is concerned, Soviet research was largely neglectful of the *massovost'* question. Only with perestroika did opportunities for new research and lively discussion on persons with a disability extend beyond the dry conformity of the medical journal.

1. Literature on Persons with a Disability - 1968-1984

There are many general philosophical and historical works on persons with a disability in the West. There are also several contemporary contributions on programs for

persons with a disability in the world community.¹ English literature on persons with a disability in the Soviet Union from the revolution until 1989 is possible to find, however most significant studies are found in works with a thematically related focus, due largely to the scarcity of Soviet sources. Consequently, with a few important exceptions most notable works have come since the establishment of perestroika.

One of the earliest works in the West to study the place of persons with a disability was Bernice Madison's book on social welfare in the Soviet Union.² This work has stood the test of time by the sheer breadth of its analysis and the importance it gives to social activity. The author spent seven months in the Soviet Union in 1960-61. She based her conclusions on visits she made to the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (RSFSR), Ukrainian SSR and Uzbek SSR. She also consulted numerous archives and sources. Madison visited several social welfare agencies, including institutions and homes for children and adults with a disability. The social services discussed in the

¹See Deborah A. Stone, *The Disabled State* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1984); Gary L. Albrecht, *Cross-National Rehabilitation Policies* (London: Sage Press, 1981); Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason* (New York: Vintage Press, 1973); Despouy, *Human Rights and Disabled Persons*.

²Bernice Q. Madison, *Social Welfare in the Soviet Union* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1968).

book are (1) family and child welfare services, including services for delinquent youngsters; (2) income maintenance programs; and (3) vocational rehabilitation and services for the aged and persons with a disability.³

Madison is more interested in policy implication than technical aspects. Most Soviet studies in the social welfare field are programs for action rather than analyses of existing models, Madison states.⁴ Consequently, she discusses the relation of social services to social change in Soviet society. For the author, principle and policy take precedence over detailed descriptions of the provision and operation of services, although one must not neglect the latter.⁵

Madison identifies the social implications of several social welfare services for persons with a disability. For example, the author draws an important conclusion regarding income maintenance programs. Although the Soviets took a firm stand in favour of the "institutional" approach to social welfare, the "residual idea dominant before the revolution was still evident."⁶

³Ibid., p. xix.

⁴Ibid., p. xxii.

⁵Ibid., p. xxiii.

⁶Ibid., pp. 49-50. "The Soviets did not think of welfare assistance as a sporadic activity to be brought into play in cases of social breakdown, when the "normal market economy and/or family solicitude proved inadequate. Rather, they regarded welfare as an ongoing, comprehensive social

Madison also recognizes the change in state attitudes towards social insurance in the first Five-Year Plan (1928-1933) and the implications it entailed. By the end of 1929, the government declared the overriding purpose of social insurance to be the increase of labour productivity through vocational rehabilitation. Consequently, material benefits in the form of pensions and sick benefits were cut.

The ramifications of this shift were significant, Madison concludes. The emphasis on vocational rehabilitation may have a "successful" short term effect, but this success will undoubtedly be bought at the expense of others. Success in work with persons with a disability has always been measured academically -- how many pass to the next grade, are outstanding students, go on to higher education, and obtain jobs.⁷ Madison questions the need to equip persons with a disability with vocational skills at the expense of those aspects of education that make it possible for an individual to respond to changing work demands. For the graduate of the special school, the difficulties ahead were "life problems" which everyone had to face.⁸

Madison also discusses the disparity between policy and

institution whose major function was to prevent social breakdown, but which made help available as a right to those who qualified if a breakdown occurred."

⁷Ibid., p. 166.

⁸Ibid.

practice as it relates to vocational rehabilitation. Although work was considered a significant aid in the regeneration process, for many, work therapy became a form of pressure rather than treatment. Since production targets were more important than persons with a disability, government guidelines for employment placement of persons with a disability were ignored. In addition, there was no concern about how the campaigns for "productive" labour affected psychological and social adjustment.⁹ Madison also shows the disparity in the Soviet mutual aid system in the countryside.¹⁰ Social welfare reform was constantly lagging among the collective farm population.

By focusing on policy implications, Madison attempts to illustrate how the state has isolated those persons with a disability in its drive towards production objectives. Indeed, the establishment of All-Russian Societies for the Blind (VOS) and All-Russian Societies for the Deaf (VOG), in 1923 and 1926 respectively, served many functions. Although these societies succeeded in centralizing social services for persons with hearing and sight impairments, they represented a dialectic at work in the relationship between social services and social change. These cooperatives were a response to the institutionalized stigma faced by persons with a disability at the political level. Through the

⁹Ibid., pp. 184-186.

¹⁰Ibid., pp. 202-206.

cooperatives, persons with a disability learned that they gained more by relying on themselves and their own collective to the limit of their capacities than by relying on governmental or societal help.¹¹

One work that discusses the modern urban experience in the Soviet Union pays some attention to the experiences of persons with a disability.¹² Mike Davidow, an American Communist journalist and playwright, visited the Soviet Union in 1969. *Cities without Crisis* is based on his experiences.¹³ While Davidow agrees that there are certain shortcomings in the Soviet urban system, he believes that "Soviet life is the most human life yet devised by people." The Soviet system is unique, he believes, because "for more than 58 years a people have lived without exploiting each other and without being exploited."¹⁴ Davidow relies on his

¹¹Ibid., p. 184.

¹²The ambivalence of Soviet authorities to the urban problems faced by persons with a disability is reflected in the scarcity of statistics and other sources. *The Socialist City* (Toronto: John Wiley & Sons, 1979), edited by R.A. French and Ian Hamilton, are a collection of 18 essays by an international team of contributors. The purpose of the book was to examine the planning and management of socialist cities, in particular their *internal spatial structure* (p. xi). Not one essay was devoted to persons with a disability. This does not suggest that the contributors were necessarily ignorant of the issue. Indeed, it is most likely a reflection of the inability or reluctance of Soviet authorities to release figures and discuss policies.

¹³Mike Davidow, *Cities without Crisis* (New York: International Publishers, 1976).

¹⁴Ibid., p. 8.

own experiences to illustrate his argument. Davidow's son had an intellectual disability and was epileptic. Davidow illustrates the potential benefits of the Soviet system for persons with a disability in a chapter on mental health care. Although Davidow's son eventually passed away in 1973, it was the sense that his son was being treated like a "human being" through genuine compassion and concern that separated the Soviet system from the American.¹⁵ Davidow does show the potential of the Soviet system, however his experience as a foreigner was certainly not similar to that of the ordinary Soviet citizen.

In 1981 a panel on Soviet urban problems was conducted under the auspices of the American Association of the Advancement of Slavic Studies, and resulted in the publication of a collection of papers in 1984. This book provided insights into the central role that the urban process played in Soviet life.¹⁶ Nevertheless, there is no focus on persons with a disability in this work. Essays on the paradoxes of Soviet socialized medicine¹⁷ and Soviet

¹⁵Ibid., pp. 80-89.

¹⁶See especially Henry W. Morton, "The Contemporary Soviet City", in Henry W. Morton and Robert C. Stuart, eds., *The Contemporary Soviet City* (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1984), pp. 3-24.

¹⁷Mark G. Field, "Soviet Urban Health Services: Some Problems and their Sources", *ibid.*, pp. 129-56.

education¹⁸ neglect persons with a disability completely. For example, the chapter on Soviet transportation makes scant reference to the difficulties pedestrians with a disability have in the underpasses of Moscow.¹⁹

Several reports in the late 1970's reflected the rising concern in the international community about persons with a disability in the Soviet Union. The accelerated growth of independent Soviet dissent and its connection to human rights after the Helsinki Accords in 1975²⁰ enabled many national, religious and human rights groups to express their views through the underground press. *Samizdat'* (self-published) underground works circulated both within the Soviet Union and abroad. Several of these clandestine

¹⁸Richard B. Dobson, "Soviet Education: Problems and Policies in the Urban Context", *ibid.*, pp. 156-79

¹⁹Sigurd Grava, "Urban Transport in the Soviet Union", *ibid.*, pp. 180-201. Grava's sole reference to persons with a disability is on page 193.

²⁰It must be emphasized that the roots of samizdat literature and the independent dissident movements associated with them can be traced several decades before the Helsinki Human Rights Accords. See Ludmilla Alexeyeva, *Soviet Dissent* (Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1985); Peter Reddaway, ed., *Uncensored Russia: The Human Rights Movement in the Soviet Union* (New York: American Heritage Press, 1972); George Saunders, ed., *Samizdat: Voices of the Soviet Opposition* (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1974); Marshall Shatz, *Soviet Dissent in Historical Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980); Mark Hopkins, *Russia's Underground Press: The Chronicle of Current Events* (New York: Praeger Press, 1983) and Michael Meerson-Aksenov and Boris Shragin, eds., *The Political, Social and Religious Thought of Russian "Samizdat": An Anthology* (Belmont, Mass: Nordland, 1977).

papers reported frequently on the repression of persons with a disability. Almost all reports were limited to conditions of the leaders and spokespersons of the newly founded *Initiative Group to Defend the Rights of the Disabled* (May 1978). *The Chronicle of Current Events*, *Radio Liberty Research Bulletin* and *Samizdat Bulletin* all contained essays and articles on the group and its individual members between 1978 and 1985.²¹

2. Literature on Persons with a Disability - 1985-1993

With the arrival of perestroika, works on Soviet living standards were published.²² In addition, the long forbidden topic of charity in Soviet life was discussed in the popular press and several essays.²³ Discussions on the conditions

²¹In addition, a dissertation was written on the *Initiative Group to Defend the Rights of the Invalid* although it was never published. See Steven Marc Glick, *Disability in the USSR - A Dissident View: A Case Study of the Action Group to Defend the Rights of the Disabled in the USSR*, M.A. Thesis, London School of Economics, 1980. For more on this group, see the third chapter in this study.

²²See Mervyn Matthews, *Patterns of Deprivation in the Soviet Union Under Brezhnev and Gorbachev* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1989); *Poverty in the Soviet Union* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1986); and Horst Herlemann, *Quality of Life in the Soviet Union* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1987).

²³See Mervyn Matthews, "Perestroika and the Rebirth of Charity", in Anthony Jones, Walter D. Connor and David E. Powell, eds., *Soviet Social Problems* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1991), pp. 154-171; and Landon Pearson, "The V.I. Lenin Soviet Children's Fund: Community Support for the Special Child in the Soviet Union?", in John Dunstan, ed., *Soviet Education Under Perestroika* (New York: Routledge Press, 1992), pp. 118-127.

of life for persons with a disability appeared in this context.

The most significant book on persons with a disability (since *Social Welfare in the Soviet Union*) was published in 1989. *The Disabled in the Soviet Union* emerged from a conference on persons with a disability in the USSR and Eastern Europe at Michigan State University in April 1985.²⁴ It is the first and the only volume in English dedicated entirely to the position and treatment of persons with a disability in the Soviet Union.

The format of this anthology mirrors the complexity and unique characteristics of the social make-up of persons with a disability in relation to other minority groups. In the introduction, the editors discuss several historical considerations that are of consequence in work on persons with a disability. First, the place that nature and society play in measuring oppression of persons with a disability is fundamentally different from other groups. In addition, persons with a disability are not a homogeneous group; not only are there different categories of persons with a disability, but within each group some people are born with physical, mental or functional and others acquire after birth. The editors and contributors are sensitive to this fact and do not attempt a synthesis of any kind. They are

²⁴William O. McCagg and Lewis Siegelbaum, eds., *The Disabled in the Soviet Union* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1989).

more interested in providing "informed probes into certain aspects of disability."²⁵

This book succeeds in striking a fine balance between those administrative, medical and political institutions that govern the conditions of life of persons with a disability and the popular attitudes that shape it immeasurably. The general framework of this book characterizes the fundamental difference between Soviet and Western works on persons with a disability and invites the reader to further research. Indeed, the question of the relationship between the etiology of disability and political behaviour is raised in this volume.²⁶

One area of academic research that benefitted greatly during perestroika was the study of the educational system.²⁷ Although work on the special educational needs

²⁵See William O. McCagg and Lewis Siegelbaum, "Introduction", in *The Disabled in the Soviet Union*, pp. 3-12. Many of the factors which shape the content of the book are similar in studying athletes with a disability. See Claudine Sherrill, "Social and Psychological Dimensions of Sports for Disabled Athletes", in Sherrill, ed., *Sport and Disabled Athletes* (Champaign, Illinois: Human Kinetic Publishers Inc., 1984), pp. 21-33.

²⁶See David Joravsky, "The Stalinist Mentality and the Treatment of Schizophrenia", in *The Disabled in the Soviet Union*, pp. 119-150.

²⁷See James Muckle, *Portrait of a Soviet School under Glasnost* (London: Macmillan Press, 1990); and John Dunstan, ed. *Soviet Education Under Perestroika* (London: Routledge Press, 1992). An interesting first-hand observation of the profound changes in the educational system can be found in Landon Pearson, *Children of Glasnost: Growing up Soviet* (Toronto: Lester & Orpen Dennys, 1990).

for children with a disability was not something new,²⁸ the opportunities for discussion and research offered through perestroika and glasnost resulted in several fresh approaches. The approaching Soviet educational reform created a new atmosphere of discussion in journals. The October 1990 edition of *Soviet Education* was dedicated exclusively to discussion on medical and social-scientific aspects of special needs education.²⁹

An interesting article in *Soviet Studies* in 1987 analyzed the education of persons with selected in the USSR

See *Soviet Commitment to Education: Report of the First Official Education Mission to the USSR* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1969): 52-54; and James J. Gallagher, ed., *Windows on Russia: United States-USSR Seminar on Instruction of Handicapped Children* (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1974). In addition, there have been several studies on education for children with an intellectual disability. See A.R. Luria, "Selection of Children for Special Schools", *New World Review* 28 (1956): 23-36; Andrew Sutton, "Backward Children in the USSR: An Unfamiliar Approach to a Familiar Problem", in Jenny Brine, Maureen Perrie and Andrew Sutton, eds., *Home, School and Leisure in the Soviet Union* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1980). Contemporary studies include Jane E. Knox, "The Changing Face of Soviet Defectology: A Study in Rehabilitating the Handicapped", *Studies in Soviet Thought* 37(1989): 217-236; and William O. McCagg, "The Origins of Defectology", in McCagg and Lewis Siegelbaum, eds., *The Disabled in the Soviet Union*, pp. 39-61. Also see Landon Pearson, *Children of Glasnost*, pp. 173-195.

²⁹ See especially, Anthony Jones, "A Conception of Special Education and Upbringing of Children with Impaired Mental and Physical Development", *Soviet Education* 32(10) (October 1990): 5-30. Also see V. Lubovskii, "Some Urgent Problems of Soviet Work with Handicapped Children (Defectology)", *Soviet Education* 31(5), (May 1989): 50-67.

through an analysis of the statistical picture.³⁰ This article adopts a cautious approach towards information published about persons with a disability in the USSR. It also recognizes the issue of regional differentiation in discussions on statistics.

The authors state from the outset that the lack of information on persons with a disability reflects inherent ambiguities or uncertainties in defining what is a disability.³¹ The authors also suggest that one must be aware of the disparity in distinguishing the need for services from the level of provision of services for persons with a disability. Sources for this disparity are found in the regional differences in the Soviet Union. Schooling for children with a disability is much more available in the Soviet regions with a higher level of economic development, though it is unlikely that children with a disability are more prevalent in the more developed regions.³² The authors argue that although Soviet statistics are unable to prove that children with a disability were more prevalent in the Baltic republics than in the Central Asian republics,

³⁰Barbara A. Anderson, Brian D. Silver and Victoria A. Velkoff, "Education of the Handicapped in the USSR: Exploration of the Statistical Picture", *Soviet Studies* 39(3), (July 1987): 468-488. Also see Andrew Sutton, "Special Education for Handicapped Pupils", in Jim Riordan, ed., *Soviet Education: The Gifted and the Handicapped* (London: Billing & Sons, 1988), pp. 70-94.

³¹Ibid., 469.

³²Ibid., 468.

the number of places in special schools in the Baltic republics and the RSFSR is considerably higher.³³ In addition, textbooks published for students with hearing and speech impairments in Russian, Ukrainian, Belorussian and Moldavian were updated every year between 1950 and 1981. Books were also updated yearly in the three Baltic languages except for six years in the same period.³⁴ Meanwhile, books in Armenian, Georgian or Azerbaidzhani were updated only three times since 1964.³⁵ Books were not published for persons with hearing impairments in Kazakh, Kirghiz, Tadzhik, Turkmen and Uzbek until 1961 and since then were updated only five times.³⁶

The authors argue that analysis of regional differentiation in the education of persons with a disability serves to remind the reader that the Soviet Union is diverse. Not only are policy and practice different, but so is the disparity of application in different parts of the Soviet Union. Consequently, if the provision of special schools for children with a disability does not fit into a

³³Ibid., 472-475.

³⁴Ibid., 480. Publications were not revised in 1951, 1952, 1956, 1960, 1963 and 1974.

³⁵Ibid. Publications were revised in 1974, 1979 and 1980.

³⁶Ibid. Publications were revised in 1967, 1968, 1970, 1971 and 1980.

pattern of need in a certain region, the distribution of other social services may not necessarily reflect the actual need either.³⁷

3. Literature on Sport for Persons with a Disability

Perestroika and glasnost have been largely responsible for the initiatives in the educational sphere, both in the Soviet Union and abroad. There have been several contributions to education for persons with a disability in the past several years. This has not been the case for Soviet sport, although previous studies on sport for persons with a disability outside the Soviet Union have offered several perspectives.³⁸

Until the mid-1980's, Soviet literature on persons with a disability and sport was virtually nonexistent. Most works extolled the virtues of a system based on mass participation, while others focused solely on the successes of the Soviet Union at the Olympic level.³⁹ All of them provided impressive well-rounded--and, for the most part undocumented-- statistics. A 1978 essay in the *International Review of Sport Sociology* on the influence of

³⁷Ibid., 485.

³⁸See Claudine Sherill, ed., *Sport and Disabled Athletes* (Champaign, Illinois: Human Kinetic Publishers, 1984); and Sir Ludwig Guttmann, *Sport for the Physically Disabled* (Paris: UNESCO, 1976).

³⁹See Yuri Lukashin, *National Folk Sports in the U.S.S.R.* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1980); and Y.A. Brodsky, ed., *Soviet Sport: The Success Story* (Moscow: Raduga Publishers, 1987).

mass sport and socio-cultural relations in the 'production sphere' offered nothing on persons with a disability.⁴⁰ A study in 1981 in the *International Review of Sport Sociology* suggested that physical culture and sport occupied a relatively small role in the social activities of rural areas, but there are no references to persons with a disability.⁴¹

The organization, character and methods of the Soviet sport program were largely ignored in the West until the mid-1960's when Soviet successes in international competitions attracted attention and helped establish state prestige. Henry W. Morton wrote the first major Western work on sport in the U.S.S.R.⁴² Morton recognized the enormous successes of sport in the U.S.S.R. but was aware of the inherent contradictions in the system. On the one hand, Morton understands the immense appeal Soviet sport had for other socialist systems. On the other hand, political ideology and a centrally controlled state system drove the Soviet sports system. The state institutionalized sport. In addition, claims that everyone had an equal opportunity

⁴⁰Y. G. Krivkov and V. Y. Matioosh, "Mass Sport, Personal Contacts and Integration", *International Review of Sport Sociology* 13(1978): 65-74.

⁴¹J. V. Borisov, "Physical Culture and Sport in the System of Cultural Values of the Rural Population", *International Review of Sport Sociology* 16(1981): 45-55.

⁴²Henry Morton, *Soviet Sport: Mirror of Soviet Society* (New York: Collier Books, 1963).

to make use of equipment and facilities were unfounded. The state favoured gifted and potential athletes over 'average' participants.⁴³

James Riordan has written extensively on Soviet physical culture since 1961. In addition, Riordan has written on the Marxist-Leninist philosophy of physical culture.⁴⁴ In Sport in Soviet Society⁴⁵, Riordan points out that sport is only considered as one-fourth of the complete makeup of physical culture, which in turn is regarded as a component of the total culture of a society.⁴⁶ Nevertheless, sport has proven to be an extensive social activity with great purpose in the USSR, due largely to the functional and plan-oriented role of sport in the USSR.⁴⁷

⁴³"In many respects, the Soviet world of sport is a microcosm of Soviet society, mirroring the Party's success in transforming Russia into a leading power and at the same time its frustration in modelling the New Soviet Man", *ibid.*, p. 212.

⁴⁴See James Riordan, "Marx, Lenin and Physical Culture", *Journal of Sport History* 3(2) (Summer 1976): 152-61 and *Sport in Soviet Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), pp. 42-67.

⁴⁵James Riordan, *Sport in Soviet Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977)

⁴⁶*Ibid.*, pp. 1-8.

⁴⁷The political and social implications of physical culture in general and sport in particular were illustrated in the fierce philosophical and ideological debates about the precise role these two social activities should play during the New Economic Policy (NEP) years. See Hart Cantelon, "The Leninist /Proletkul'tist Debates: Implications for Sport among the Soviet Working Class" in H. Cantelon, R. Hollands, A. Metcalfe and A. Tomlinson, eds., *Leisure, Sport and Working*

Sport in Soviet Society is an authoritative work that displays the immense importance that the Communist Party and, by extension, the Soviet government gave to the socialising role of sport. The coming of perestroika, however, created a shift in the study of sport as a state-controlled, utilitarian system to its effects upon the day-to-day life of different groups in society. Riordan has shown how this change of values and attitudes in Soviet society during perestroika has affected sport as well.⁴⁸

4. Perestroika and Persons with a Physical Disability - Sources

Since the mid 1980's, it has been possible to measure the extent that persons with a physical disability have interacted within the social fabric as a whole and sport in particular. Crucial to this measurement has been the emergence of several disparate sources. Consequently, it is now possible to engage in several new approaches to the living and working conditions of persons with a physical disability, not the least of which is the sporting process.

Class Cultures (Toronto: Garamond Press, 1988), pp. 77-98; Riordan, *Sport in Soviet Society*, pp. 82-119 and Riordan, "Sport and Social Change in the USSR", *Journal of Sport and Social Issues* 6(1) (Spring/Summer 1982): 12-21.

⁴⁸See Jim Riordan, "Playing to New Rules: Soviet Sport and Perestroika", *Soviet Studies* 42(1) (January 1990): 133-145; Riordan, "The Rise, Fall and Rebirth of Sporting Women in Russia and the USSR", *Journal of Sport History* 18(1) (Spring 1991): 183-199 and Riordan, *Sport, Politics and Communism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1991).

A variety of sources have supplemented the standard medical-scientific approach with a more revealing socio-scientific one.

What sources have contributed to this slowly emerging reservoir of information on persons with a physical disability? Perestroika has enabled the popular press and local newspapers to report openly on the living and working conditions of persons with a physical disability. The official press is now a source for information on governmental response to the social, economic and cultural issues concerning persons with a physical disability. The Sixth Session of the Intergovernmental Committee for Physical Education and Sport, held in Moscow in 1988 under the auspices of UNESCO, revealed a long-awaited recognition of the need for genuine mass participation in sport. Session participants also discussed the question of disability and sport during the conference. In addition, the major sports newspapers and journals in the former Soviet Union have reported on persons with a physical disability and sport both domestically and internationally since 1986. Finally, the contributions by nongovernmental and civic organizations to the formation of national and international policy making, not to mention public awareness, have been significant.

**Chapter II- Persons With a
Physical Disability, 1975-1987**

This chapter will focus on persons with a physical disability in the period 1975-87. The first half of the chapter will deal with Soviet policy and practice as they relate to persons with a physical disability in the wake of the Helsinki Final Act (1975) and the UN Declaration on the Rights of Disabled Persons (1975). One of the most telling realities of ambiguous Soviet policy is illustrated in the fate of the *Initiative Group to Defend the Rights of the Disabled*, which was formed in 1978. Samizdat sources not only reveal repression aimed at individual members, but also, for the first time, one was offered the opportunity to observe the daily living and working conditions of persons with a physical disability in the Soviet Union. In addition, the International Year of the Disabled (1981) was completely ignored by the government despite appeals by the Group. The second half of this chapter traces the early changes in state attitudes towards persons with a physical disability in the first three years of Gorbachev's General Secretaryship of the Central Committee of the Communist Party. The irony of the period 1975-87 is that just as the Initiative Group ceased to function through exile and intimidation, official central newspapers began to raise several issues which were earlier concerns of the Group.

1. Human Rights and the Quality of Life: The Initiative Group to Defend the Rights of the Disabled

In 1974, a Soviet journalist remarked on the issues which prevent persons with a physical disability from engaging in any "socially useful activity":

The most acutely painful question for all of us, the handicapped people write, is the lack of opportunity to engage in socially useful activity....

In spite of the universal need for laborers, homebound labor is at present little used; it is extremely difficult to find jobs for the handicapped. But paradoxically if you lack a hand or even both hands and are in addition blind, you can be sure that you will be suitably cared for and that work will be found for you. The All-Russian Society for the Blind (VOS) and the Society for the Deaf (VOG) see as their main task allowing a person to work.

It is quite evident that handicapped people need an organization similar to VOS and VOG. Social security agencies alone are not competent to solve this problem. In the life of a handicapped person there is nothing of secondary importance. Several steps leading from the home in which he lives can cut him off from the external world. And the lack of suitably modified items in everyday use or specially made clothing...and the levered wheel chair only a normal person can use...

Scientists think that 80% of the handicapped can be returned to active life. Special centers should be created for this, where in the process of rehabilitative treatment and prosthetic outfitting, the inclination and gifts of the patients would manifest themselves and the possibility of making them able to do work would be explored. There must be in these centers shops which have many specialties. And the handicapped should study not, as is done at present, shoe repair or punitive bookkeeping, but electronics, precision mechanics, artistic crafts. For the physically disabled person completely preserves his intellect and can master a complicated advanced profession which demands a smaller expenditure of physical labour. And in addition, finding him a job is made easier.

One of the first stages on the road to implementing the complex task of rehabilitation,

it seems to me, should be the creation of homes and boarding schools for young people outfitted with a variety of shops and a network of producing living facilities paid for by working handicapped people.¹

This article is unique in two distinct ways. It illustrates, first of all, how a majority of those with some degree of disability were not reached by corrective and supportive measures other than purely medical ones. Second, it was written four years before the appearance of *The Initiative Group to Defend the Rights of the Disabled* and would foreshadow all the demands of the movement's leaders.² Clearly, the birth of the Group would be affected by the Helsinki Accords, but the roots of its activism could be found earlier even in the official press.

It is useful first to put the establishment of the Group into national and international perspective. Although the Final Act of the Helsinki Accords - which marked the end of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe which had started on July 3, 1973 - contained a section entitled "Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms", it must be kept in mind that the main purpose of this accord was the recognition of the post-World War II boundaries in Europe, in exchange for Soviet promises to observe human rights.

¹E. Razhevskaja, in *Literaturnaia Gazeta* 14 (1974): 12, cited from its English translation, "The Disabled in the Soviet Union," *The Station Relay*, Vol. 1, no. 4 (1986): 19-22.

²Dunn and Dunn, "Everyday Life of the Disabled", pp. 218-219.

Neither the Soviet leaders nor their Western counterparts had counted on substantial changes in Soviet internal politics. The commonly held opinion was that the humanitarian articles of the Final Act were nothing more than a joint gesture by the signatory governments in deference to public opinion in democratic countries.³ In addition, these accords were not intended to be binding in international law.⁴

Nevertheless, the humanitarian articles had a powerful effect on Soviet citizens. In August 1975, the Soviet government published the complete text of the Final Act of the Helsinki accords, including the humanitarian articles.⁵ In May, 1976, the Moscow Helsinki Watch Group was created to promote compliance with the Helsinki Accords in the USSR.⁶ The original declaration of the Moscow Helsinki Watch Group stated that the group would limit its activities to the humanitarian articles of the Final Act. The Group announced that it would accept information on violation of these

³Alexeyeva, p. 336.

⁴James Avery Joyce, *Human Rights: International Documents*, vol. II (Dobbs Ferry, New York: Oceana Publications, 1978), p. 1373.

⁵Alexeyeva, p. 336. Alexeyeva suggests that the only possible reason why the government published the text so widely in 1975 was its belief that the human rights movement had collapsed. On the emergence and development of the human rights movement, see Alexeyeva, pp. 267-400.

⁶*Ibid.*, p. 335. Some of the other republics had similar groups. See Alexeyeva, *passim*.

articles from citizens, compile documents on the articles, and familiarize the public and signatory governments of the Helsinki accords with their contents.⁷ By early 1978, socio-economic issues were being voiced through Samizdat, in addition to national and religious ones. Low standards of living had a marked influence on the programmes of several dissident groups at this time, including trade union groups and the Moscow Helsinki Group.⁸

The creation of *The Initiative Group to Defend the Rights of the Disabled* was announced on October 25, 1978 at a press conference of the Moscow Helsinki Watch Group. At the press conference were the founders and leaders of the Group: Yuri Kiselev, an artist and designer who lost both of his legs in an industrial accident at 16 years of age, and Valeri Fefelov, who also suffered a work-related accident at

⁷Ibid., p. 38.

⁸On the relationship between poverty and political protest, Mervyn Matthews remarks that "with a few exceptions, poverty as such did not generate a distinctive brand of dissidence." Matthews suggests that "the reasons for this are (a) many poor people believe that they are not too badly off, at least in comparison with their fellow citizens; (b) involvement in the dissident movement may provoke accusations of anti-Soviet activity, loss of employment and residence rights or exile; and (c) a greater concern with earning a living, or narrower cultural horizons may dis-incline poor people to struggle actively for betterment." Matthews concludes that "the firmest relationship between poverty and political protest in the Soviet Union is, ironically, an inverse one, in that active dissent of any kind may cause loss of employment, or other repressive action against the individual concerned and his family." Mervyn Matthews, *Poverty in the Soviet Union* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p. 146.

17 years of age and became a paraplegic.' The first *Information Bulletin of the Initiative Group to Defend the Rights of the Disabled*, released in May 1978, coincided with an endorsement by the Moscow Helsinki Watch Committee, which called upon those with persons with a disability in the USSR "not to reconcile themselves to their humiliating conditions" and offered support.¹⁰ The first *Bulletin* was concerned mainly with the rights of persons with a physical disability within the context of the existing system. In the editor's preface, Fefelov remarked: "Having a sufficiently loyal attitude towards the authorities, we make no pretense towards any sort of 'opposition' or 'independent activities' as might appear at first glance."¹¹ Indeed, according to the first *Bulletin*, the Group's basic objectives were (1) to collect and disseminate information on the situation of persons with a disability in the USSR; (2) to petition before competent Soviet organs for the improvement of social security for persons with a disability; (3) to garner help from world opinion in the event that their appeals were turned down; and (4) to

⁹See Paul D. Raymond, "Disability as Dissidence: The Action Group to Defend the Rights of the Disabled in the USSR", *The Disabled in the Soviet Union*, pp. 235-236. Also see *Samizdat Bulletin* 118 (February 1983).

¹⁰Arkhiy Samizdata 3224 (Moscow Helsinki Watch Committee Document 37), cited in Raymond, "Disability as Dissidence", p. 236.

¹¹Arkhiy Samizdata 3511, cited in Raymond, p. 237.

establish contact with international organizations for persons with a disability.¹²

The Group's early documents continuously stressed its non-political orientation. Initially the leaders of the Group clearly viewed themselves above all, not as yet another dissident group, but as the nucleus of a wider and legally sanctioned official association.¹³ In April 1979, the Group once again stated that "it is engaged only in the question of the rights of the disabled and their immediate needs within the framework of the Soviet legal system, and that it has no underlying political motivation."¹⁴

For the next 10 months the Group demanded the creation of an all-union organization and an overhaul of the pension system. In addition, the Group called for the improvement of living conditions for persons with a physical disability. One of the first demands was for improved transport mobility. Entitled "Transport", this pamphlet called for more automobiles and public transport vehicles for persons with a physical disability, for better wheelchairs, increased pedestrian underpasses, street crossings which were safe for persons with a physical disability and easier access to public buildings. The pamphlet also requested the

¹²Arkhiv Samizdata 3482, cited in Raymond, p. 237.

¹³Ibid., p. 236.

¹⁴*Chronicle of Current Events* 52 (1979): 118, cited in Raymond, p. 237.

construction of more ground-level housing for persons with a physical disability.¹⁵

The Group also received support from the dissident community. In April, 1979, Victor Nekipolev, a writer who later emigrated to the West, wrote: "One can only welcome the formation of such a group, for these people, more than any others, need to be united if they are to impress on the state their right to get onto the street and join the stream of life."¹⁶ In addition, the Group openly supported the dissident community. On January 29, 1980, the Group released a statement denouncing the recent internal exile of Andrei D. Sakharov.¹⁷

Despite the Group's declarations of political loyalty, connections to the broader dissident community through mutual support would not go unnoticed by the authorities. As early as October 1978, Fefelov was harassed in his home and had his driver's license temporarily revoked. The authorities in his hometown of Iuriev-Pol'skii, Vladimir Region, also engaged in "street repairs" by digging an open pit in front of his garage. In December 1978, after a two-hour "discussion" between Fefelov, two local officials and two officers from the KGB, the group was labelled an

¹⁵Arkhiv Samizdata 3465, quoted in Raymond, p. 238.

¹⁶Ibid. Also see *Chronicle of Current Events* 52(1979): 119.

¹⁷*Chronicle of Current Events* 56(1980): 89.

"illegal organization", the *Bulletin* an "underground publication", and Fefelov was threatened with persecution.¹⁸

In January 1980, a KGB delegation visited Fefelov, delivering an official warning that "if he should continue his activity in the Initiative Group a criminal case would be started against him." In addition, the authorities visited Fefelov's wife Olga Zaitseva at a play-school where she worked as a nurse. KGB authorities warned Olga that if she persisted in working with the Group she would be deprived of her parental rights and criminal proceedings would be instigated against her.¹⁹

In early April, Fefelov was issued a "warning according to the Decree" and on May 17 the local newspaper, *Za Kommunizm* [For Communism], printed an article titled "Whatever Do You Want, Fefelov?" The article carried the signatures of the Head of the District Social Welfare Office and the Head of the District Power Station.²⁰ Anti-Fefelov denunciations at plants and factory workers' meetings immediately followed.²¹ Fefelov sent a statement to the

¹⁸*Chronicle of Current Events* 52(1979). The authorities tried to restrict Fefelov's mobility by revoking his driver's license numerous times. See *Chronicle of Current Events* 54(1979): 136-137. Kiselev was also harassed in the same manner. See *Chronicle of Current Events* 57(1980): 29.

¹⁹*Chronicle of Current Events* 56(1980): 203-204.

²⁰*Chronicle of Current Events* 57(1980): 26-27.

²¹*Ibid.*

editor of *Za Kommunizm* proclaiming his innocence and asking the paper to publish his reply. The newspaper did not respond.²²

In mid-June, the authorities pressed Fefelov to write a letter of repentance to the newspaper. In reply Fefelov wrote 'What I Want' which demanded that: (1) persons with a physical disability be given permission to have their own association and press; (2) persons with a physical disability should not have to be ashamed of their clothes and their hideous pedal- and motorized wheelchairs, and should have greater access to public transport and streets adapted to their needs; (3) persons with a physical disability should have greater opportunities to obtain a decent education and work corresponding to their peculiar infirmity or disease; (4) persons with a physical disability should have access to all public places like theatres, cinemas and libraries; (5) persons with a physical disability should have the opportunity to purchase a car as an item of primary necessity; and (6) persons with a physical disability should have the chance to obtain medical assistance and access to holiday resorts. Fefelov concluded by demanding the right of persons with a physical disability in the USSR to lead a full life.²³ As a result, the

²²Ibid., 27.

²³Ibid., 28.

authorities again threatened to fire Fefelov's wife.²⁴

An open letter to the emigre newspapers *Russkaya Mysl'* [Russian Muslin] and *Novoye Russkoye Slovo* [New Russian Word] in Paris and New York respectively signified a gradual shift in protest which would eventually dominate the following year. Signed by Fefelov and Zaitseva, the letter attempted to "draw attention to one of the largest and most oppressed groups in the USSR -- the invalids." Fefelov and Zaitseva remarked that:

...the socialist government has brought oppression to man in innumerable ways. A scrutiny of our life reveals the deception of the pledges that were inscribed on the banners of the communist revolution. Having promised every blessing in words, socialism... in practice cannot even guarantee its citizens a normal standard of living."²⁵

The realities of policy and practice were also observed:

The struggle of the CPSU for hegemony in the world communist movement, the policy directed toward the achievement of world supremacy, the extensive spy network and the all-powerful punitive security organs, the maintenance of an army of bureaucrats of all ranks, the ostentatious space race, and so forth, bring irreplaceable losses to the national economy. The country cannot even provide its own citizens with bread: Russia, which was once a granary, has now become a beggar.²⁶

In conducting "a sociological inquiry among the disabled", the authors concluded that:

[persons with disabilities] exist on the brink of

²⁴Ibid.

²⁵*Samizdat Bulletin* 84 (April 1980).

²⁶Ibid.

poverty. They are deprived of the right to education and a profession, to cultural events, to independent movement and deserved rest, to meaningful work, to a good diet, medical treatment, housing, clothing, sporting events...in short, to physical and psychological rehabilitation.²⁷

After reiterating the need for more consumer goods and an organization to protect the rights of all persons with a disability, the letter directly challenged the existing political system:

The essence of our political system is such that dictatorship of the ruling elite that calls itself "the supreme type of economic organization," oppresses the people while using them as an instrument of their own ends under cover of social demagogy. Every undertaking which is not controlled from above is forbidden. Thus, in 1956, the Vsekoopinsoyuz²⁸ -- a network of strong association of invalids- was disbanded...Relatively recently, in 1977, an industrial workshop founded on cooperative principles was broken up in a boardinghouse in Voronezh.²⁹ At the present time the initiative of the disabled to create their own society is under prohibition....

The nature of the socialist system is such that it cannot improve in any way. Its ideas are the exact antithesis of the aspirations of civilized

²⁷Ibid.

²⁸Vsekoopinsoyuz==Vserossiyskiy Soyuz Kooperativnikh Obyedineniy Invalidov=All-Russian Union of Cooperative Associations of Invalids

²⁹This is in reference to the activist and inventor Gennady Gus'kov whose cottage industry workshop in motor parts and other specialized equipment was closed down. It has been suggested that there were bureaucratic and political struggles at work behind the scenes which were not necessarily related to the issue of disability. Consequently, the accuracy of samizdat sources must be questioned. For more, see Dunn and Dunn, "Everyday Life of the Disabled", pp. 220-221.

humanity. "Developed socialism" in its mature form has transformed today's kolkhoz farmers and workers into obedient farmhands of the communist bureaucracy who "by the sweat of their brow" work the Soviet corvee in state-owned fields and enterprises, and the invalids, whose welfare is of little concern to anyone, into a worthless and annoying burden for the country.³⁰

One can question whether the well-being of persons with a physical disability was of no concern to anyone. Certainly one must also take into account the subjectivism of individual members' views.³¹ Nevertheless, what is striking is the gradual shift in the nature of the movement for those who spoke out for the rights of persons with a physical disability. This shift became even more pronounced in the following year.

2. The International Year of the Disabled (1981)

The International Year of the Disabled (1981) was a turning point in the nature of Group protest. Socio-economic commentary gradually gave way to political protest in the wake of regime response or, to be more precise, non-response to the International Year of the Disabled. Issue no. 10 of the *Bulletin* (December 10, 1980) started off with a New Year message addressed to persons with a disability throughout the world. Following the greeting, Kiselev, Fefelov and Zaitseva noted that the United Nations had declared 1981 the International Year of the Disabled. In an

³⁰Ibid.

³¹For example, see Dunn and Dunn, "Everyday Life of the Disabled", pp. 219-224.

open letter to the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR and the Soviet of Ministers of the USSR, the Group appealed to the Soviet government to support the UN's humanitarian initiative and to take part in the activities of the Year of Disabled Persons. The bulletin once again referred to Fefelov's "want" as the core of their program.³² Nevertheless, at this time, the message was still tempered by moderation. In December, 1980, the Group editorialized:

We love our homeland, and we would like to see it in the front ranks of peoples who are realizing humane actions. And it would be shameful to realize that our government has not responded to this UN initiative [to participate in the "Year of the Disabled in 1981"].³³

Indeed, hardly any publicity followed the proclamation of the International Year of the Disabled. The International Year was perfunctorily noted.³⁴ One of the few official statements to inquiries made by international organizations working for persons with a disability clearly illustrated the vague generalities of state attitudes and the discrepancies in policy and practice. In November 1980, an official reply to inquiries from Dr. Louis Claes, the chairman of the European Action for Invalids, written by

³²*Chronicle of Current Events* 58-61 (1980-81): 117. See *Samizdat Bulletin* 98 (June 1981).

³³Arkhiy Samizdata, cited in Raymond, p. 238.

³⁴Raymond, p. 243.

Afanasii Boradyn, the head of the Foreign Relations Department of the USSR State Committee for Labor and Social Problems, stated:

The implementation of the 'International Year' along United Nations lines, i.e. dedication to social problems, always finds support in our country. We also welcome the initiation of the International Year of Disabled Persons [IYDP] on national as well as international levels. We consider that the IYDP must attract the attention of the national powers and public opinion to activate measures in this sphere. We must not let up in our ongoing efforts.³⁵

The letter also stated that persons with a disability are constantly involved in all facets of Soviet society, but was deliberately vague in pointing to specific examples:

In our country great attention is devoted unceasingly to the needs of the disabled, to questions of their treatment, rehabilitation to enable them to work and with the goal that they take an active part in the life of the community. Attention is also paid to material security and organization of services. Only last year the Soviet government made important decisions on measures for future improvement in training, work organization and material social services for the disabled. They were given great privileges in local medical help, improved living conditions, treatment at health resorts, guaranteed means of transport, including city transit, as well as by railroad and air.

They are systematically perfecting forms and methods by recruiting the disabled to socially useful activities. To this end they are organizing enterprises and workshops especially designed to accommodate people whose work capability is below average. They are also

³⁵Samizdat Bulletin 109 (May 1982). Also see Sergei Voronitsyn, "Soviet Observance of the International Year of Disabled Persons", *Radio Liberty Research Bulletin* 24/82 (January 18, 1982).

extending work that can be done in the home.³⁶

Finally, the letter stated that "in order to explain the rights of the disabled, to inform them of their privileges in the different areas of social services, mass media has been widely used."³⁷ Clearly this was not the case. In addition, the broad scope of the letter suggests that it was meant as a reply to *Samizdat* and the Group. The best example is the so-called use of the mass media in the Soviet Union to promote the International Year of the Disabled. This official letter obviously was meant for international consumption only.

An article in *Radio Liberty Research Bulletin* in January 1982 pointed out that there had been an announcement in *Meditinskaya Gazeta* on April 24, 1981 that an orthopaedic prosthesis rehabilitation center had been set up in Leningrad "on the threshold of the Year of Disabled Persons." Four months before the end of 1981, an instructional article on the preparation of lectures on the subject "Combating Disability is Primarily a Matter of Combating Traumatism" was published. Finally, the central newspapers ignored completely the International Year of the Disabled until July 6 when *Pravda* printed a brief item in response to a request from a reader for information on the

³⁶Ibid.

³⁷Ibid.

subject.³⁸ The official mass media, evidently working on the theory that in the USSR persons with a disability are fully integrated in the social system, portrayed the situation as if the measures provided for in the programme of the International Year of the Disabled were only necessary in capitalist societies. The *Radio Liberty Research Bulletin* article concluded by examining the place of people with a disability in an authoritarian society, where "the problem of disabled persons tends to be resolved by their isolation, which can amount to virtual social 'euthanasia'."³⁹

The Group responded to the official silence by publishing appeals on behalf of all persons with a disability in the USSR. *Bulletin* 11 (March 30, 1981) contained appeals to the United Nations and to the 26th Communist Party Congress (February 23- March 3, 1981) for the rights of persons with a disability. It also condemned the regime's silence.⁴⁰ The Group also appealed to Pope John Paul II, and Patriarch Pimen of Moscow in November, 1981.⁴¹ In conjunction with the International Year of the Disabled, the Group planned to invite those with spinal cord

³⁸Voronitsyn, "Soviet Observance".

³⁹Ibid.

⁴⁰Raymond, p. 251.

⁴¹*Samizdat Bulletin* 103 (November 1981). The appeal was dated February 12, 1981.

injuries from various areas of the Soviet Union to visit Moscow. These plans were abruptly cancelled in the face of government intimidation and pressure.⁴²

Group initiatives resulted in issues hitherto neglected rising to the surface. Government bureaucracy, transportation problems and the "resettlement" of persons with a physical disability were discussed in samizdat sources. In addition, the living conditions of persons with a physical disability residing in "city homes" and the lack of wheelchairs and prosthesis devices were illustrated in samizdat.⁴³

The Group began to broaden its base to supporting those persons with a disability who also fought for national rights. The cases of two prominent Ukrainian human rights

⁴²"More on the Disabled in the USSR", *Samizdat Bulletin* 109 (May 1982).

⁴³"A Measure of the Humaneness of "Developed Socialism", *Samizdat Bulletin* 128 (December 1983). Official press reports on daily living conditions were scarce at this time, but an article in *Izvestiya* on February 6 reveals to some extent the ambivalence towards the issue. Entitled "Give More Attention to Retired and Disabled Persons", the article discusses "special homes for the aged and disabled" in Rostov-on-Don. The article is heavy on what should be done, but offers little in terms of what is occurring at that point in time. Interestingly enough, the article does point out that "forty-six therapy-and-production workshops are operating successfully at local homes for the aged and disabled, and another 13 operate under cooperative arrangements with local and light industry." See *Current Digest of the Soviet Press* XXXIV, no.6 (March 10, 1982): 6-7.

activists who had a physical disability were documented.⁴⁴ The conditions of refusedniks⁴⁵ with a disability were also discussed. In addition, the fate of persons with a physical disability who were in prison was illustrated.⁴⁶ Appeals to help those returning from Afghanistan with a physical disability were also voiced by the Group.⁴⁷ The Group also continued to maintain communication abroad, requesting foreign radio broadcasts to provide "periodic information concerning different charitable, private and governmental organizations which provide any kind of support and assistance to the senior citizens and the disabled of various countries." The Soviet press could not be trusted, the Group stated, because "true information about the disabled and their organizations in the international journal *The UNESCO Courier*, like any other Western magazine or newspaper, is branded by the authorities as 'lying propaganda'."⁴⁸

⁴⁴See *Information Bulletin* 12, Document no. 24 (July 30, 1981) and *Samizdat Bulletin* 109 (May 1982).

⁴⁵Refusedniks were Soviet Jews who were denied emigration to Israel.

⁴⁶See *Information Bulletin* 12 (July 30, 1981); *Information Bulletin* 14 (June 20, 1982); *Samizdat Bulletin* 109 (May 1982); *Chronicle of Current Events* 64(1982): 133.

⁴⁷*Information Bulletin* 14 (June 20, 1982); *Chronicle of Current Events* 64(1982): 133.

⁴⁸"Open Letter", *Samizdat Bulletin* 105 (January 1982). Also see "A Letter from the USSR to Russians Residing in the West", *Samizdat Bulletin* 118 (February 1983).

On January 20, 1982 Fefelov sent an open letter to the Politburo and Supreme Soviet of the USSR, contrasting their "special hospitals, sanatoria, dachas...luxuries, and privileges" to their "70 year hysteria about the most humane and just of societies..."⁴⁹ Fefelov summed up his feelings when he wrote that:

...after fifteen years of life as an invalid I have reached the conclusion that being disabled in the USSR is a double, if not greater misfortune. It is not only a physical oppression, but a constant battle for survival against inertia, rudeness, effrontery, poverty...In the future, I shall believe not in evil, violence, boorishness, or mockery but in reason, justice and morality - in other words, not in you.⁵⁰

The state's response was predictable and swift. On April 23, 1982 a search was carried out in Fefelov's home and Initiative Group documents were confiscated.⁵¹ Another search was carried out on May 12.⁵² During the May 12 search, a confrontation ensued between Fefelov and the authorities. Consequently, criminal action was taken against Fefelov under article 191 of the RSFSR Criminal Code for "resisting a representative of the authorities".⁵³ The case file reported that:

...Fefelov is one of the founders and leaders of

⁴⁹Arkhiiv Samizdata 4614, cited in Raymond, pp. 238-239.

⁵⁰Arkhiiv Samizdata 4614, cited in Raymond, pp. 245.

⁵¹*Chronicle of Current Events* 64(1982): 33-34.

⁵²*Ibid.*

⁵³*Ibid.*, 34.

the so-called 'Initiative Group to Defend the Rights of the Disabled', which prepares and distributes within the USSR and abroad the illegal type-written collection called 'Bulletin' and other materials discrediting the Soviet state and social system. The materials prepared by the Initiative Group are used by foreign centres of anti-Soviet propaganda to perpetrate acts of ideological sabotage against the USSR.⁵⁴

On October 20, 1982 Fefelov, his wife and two sons emigrated to West Germany under the threat of trial and imprisonment.⁵⁵

Fefelov's exile meant the end of the *Bulletin*. Nevertheless, articles and reports on persons with a disability continued to filter out of the Soviet Union, and the tone was similar. Toward the end of December 1984, Kiselev published an appeal in *Novoe Russkoe Slovo*. The letter, entitled "The Most Terrible Thing is our Separateness", was addressed to all societies of war veterans and camp prisoners, to all persons with a disability in Western countries, and to pacifist groups.⁵⁶ Kiselev painted a grim picture of everyday life for persons with a physical disability:

We [in the USSR] always hid the disabled, and we continue to hide them from curious eyes. No one needs them. They are a burden to the state, and sometimes they do not hesitate to say so openly. The mass media play down the dark side of the "heroics" of war and labor and do not show

⁵⁴Ibid.

⁵⁵See the October 25, 1982 interview with Fefelov in *Samizdat Bulletin* 118 (February 1983).

⁵⁶Dunn and Dunn, "Everyday Life", p. 221.

disabled with obvious injuries (in the USSR there are no accidents). Soviet citizens make every effort not to think of the cause-and-effect connection of these injuries.

The nation is being taught cruelty towards the weak, the sick and the disabled, which are of no use anywhere. Therefore the regime ignores the most vital needs of the disabled and forbids their organizations and societies. Such societies, organized by the disabled themselves in the USSR, have been broken up several times as "antistate" and contrary to the interests and goals of the leaders of the Communist Party.⁵⁷

In November 1985, Kiselev staged a hunger strike to protest police abuses of persons with a disability and camp conditions for them. He suggested that "in the Stalinist Dark Ages, the disabled were killed off in concentration camps that still exist today, though not on such a scale."⁵⁸ After the Chernobyl catastrophe, Kiselev criticized the state's environmental policies and warned of the physical disabilities this could produce. He also complained that those displaced by the accident had received better treatment than other equally deserving Soviet citizens.⁵⁹ Kiselev was also instrumental in creating a union between

⁵⁷Cited in Dunn and Dunn, "Everyday Life", p. 221. The authors point out that "[Kiselev's] statement that Soviet disabled people are considered useless because they do not work is flatly contradicted in much of the public health literature" and "the charges that Soviet people are being taught callousness and cruelty toward the disabled, and particularly that they practice these things habitually, should rest...on something more than the subjective impression of an interested party."

⁵⁸*Samizdat Bulletin* 156 (April 1986)

⁵⁹Arkhiy Samizdata 5766, cited in Raymond, p. 246.

the Initiative Group and the Group to Establish Trust Between the USSR and USA, an organization formed in January 1982 to encourage a revival of detente. Many Initiative Group documents included the signatures of Trust Group members, and by December 1985 Kiselev himself was identified as a Trust Group adherent and signatory.⁶⁰

3. Signs of Change: The Pre-Perestroika Years, 1985-1987

As mentioned at the outset of the chapter, it seems in retrospect quite ironic that at a point when the fundamental demands of the Initiative Group - increased pensions, better transportation facilities, the right to organize, etcetera - seemed farther away than ever, some of them began to be addressed. The consolidation of Gorbachev's regime in the spring of 1985 brought some fresh initiatives from above. There are some indications that issues concerning persons with a physical disability were being addressed at the government level. In May, the CPSU Central Committee, the USSR Council of Ministers, and the All-Union Central Council of Trade Unions adopted a resolution to raise pensions for persons with a physical disability. The resolution, entitled "On Immediate Measures to Improve the Financial Well-Being of Low-Income Pensioners and Families and to Step Up Concern for Single Citizens",⁶¹ was meant to "achieve a

⁶⁰Arkhiy Samizdata 5455; 5556; 5571; and 5577, cited in Raymond, p. 246.

⁶¹*Pravda*, (May 21, 1985): 1, cited in *The Current Digest of the Soviet Press* 37(20): 11-12.

further rise in the standard of living of low-income categories of the population, especially single non-able-citizens." The resolution was also meant to "develop the social services system for the aged and disabled, and to increase state assistance to families with children."⁶²

On November 1 minimum old-age pensions for collective farmers were increased slightly from 28 to 40 rubles a month and "a corresponding increase in the minimum pensions paid to collective farmers for disability and loss of breadwinner."⁶³ District city Soviet executive committees were given greater control over pension increments and instructed to ensure the registration of single non-abled and aged citizens who were in need of special assistance and to organize social and consumer services for them through consumer service, trade and public catering enterprises, nursing homes and other organizations. In addition, authorization was given to recruit workers and office employees to provide services to the indicated persons and to use pensioners, women doing housework and students for those purposes.⁶⁴

Provision was also made for the development of sponsorship assistance by trade union, Young Communist League and Pioneer organizations to single-aged and non-

⁶²Ibid.

⁶³Ibid.

⁶⁴Ibid.

able-bodied citizens. In addition, general statements were made promising to expand the system of nursing homes for the aged and persons with a physical disability.⁶⁵ Norms for expenditures on meals, medicines and "other needs" in nursing homes for the aged and persons with a physical disability were to be raised by 20 percent on November 1. It was also recommended that the Union Collective Farm Council carry out additional measures for the further development of the network of inter-collective farm and collective farm homes for the aged and persons with a physical disability.⁶⁶ Finally, local Soviets were instructed to "organize the sponsorship of nursing homes for the aged and persons with a physical disability by associations, enterprises and organizations."⁶⁷

In March 1986, further steps were taken by the government to improve the conditions of persons with a physical disability since childhood. Once again the resolutions were general and vague. The CPSU Central Committee, USSR Council of Ministers and All-Union Central Council of Trade Unions resolved to:

increase the benefits granted to [persons with since childhood], give them privileges in obtaining medicines, grant them the right to free travel on urban passenger transport and introduce discounts on travel by rail, air and water and on

⁶⁵Ibid.

⁶⁶Ibid.

⁶⁷Ibid.

intercity buses during the fall and winter...plans call for a substantial improvement in the general education and vocational training of persons disabled since childhood, as well as in their health and living conditions."

Significant provision was also made for persons with a physical disability in the 12th Five-Year Plan, which was made law by the Supreme Soviet in June 1986. Article no. 3, "With a view to fulfilling the program of social development and improving the people's well-being adopted by the 27th CPSU Congress", raised "the minimum old-age and disability pensions for workers and office employees and pensions for the loss of a breadwinner, as well as raise pensions set earlier for collective farmers".⁶⁹ Pensioners who were permanent residents of rural localities and were involved in agriculture were to receive "100% of the established norms." The norms for spending on food, medicine and other needs in nursing homes for the elderly and persons with a physical disability were to be increased. Finally, norms for providing food and medicine in hospitals for veterans with a

⁶⁹Pravda, March 28: 1, cited in *The Current Digest of the Soviet Press* 38(13), April 30, 1986: 19.

⁷⁰In January 1987 the basic pension rates for registered persons with a disability were raised to 30-50 rubles a month (according to age and category of disability) and some free transport was made available. Pensioners could benefit from a reduction of 50 per cent in the charges for them. It has been shown that these changes were extremely cautious and hardly to make a significant difference in the daily life of the recipient. See Mervyn Matthews, *Patterns of Deprivation in the Soviet Union under Brezhnev and Gorbachev* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1989), p. 28.

physical disability from the Great Patriotic War were to increase.⁷⁰

Persons with a physical disability were also included in "The Law of the Union of Socialist Republics on Individual Enterprise" of November, 1986. Persons with a physical disability who were of full legal age were eligible to engage in individual enterprise. In addition, persons with a physical disability, war and labor veterans and individuals suffering from chronic diseases were eligible for "credits in acquiring necessary raw and other materials...preferential rights to the leasing of uninhabited premises [and] the acquisition of necessary property on preferential terms." Individual enterprise in the sphere of consumer services was also permitted in services for "single elderly people, disabled persons and other non-able-bodied citizens", thus helping to open the way for charitable institutions.⁷¹

Some of the first concrete plans in accordance with the May 1985 resolution began to be implemented. Social services providing home visits to meet the everyday needs of single aged persons and persons with a physical disability were being set up in Moscow. The Latvian and Estonian

⁷⁰Pravda, June 20, 1986, cited in *The Current Digest of the Soviet Press* 38(31), September 3, 1986: 16-17.

⁷¹Pravda November 21, 1986: 1,3, cited in *The Current Digest of the Soviet Press* 38(44): 6-8. For more on the work of charitable institutions and persons with a disability, see the following chapter.

Republics had been the first regions to implement the provisions calling for in-home assistance. The Latvian "Bureau of In-Home Services for Older Citizens Living Alone", set up in Riga in 1986 under the city social security department, was based on a paternalistic system where an assigned helper assisted in virtually every aspect of the individual's daily life. Delivering groceries, medicine, newspapers and books in addition to the cleaning, laundry and all medical issues were the assistant's responsibility. The assistant visited the person twice a week. The assistant received 80 rubles a month for the care of four people. The bureau did not require the employee to obtain permission to hold a second job.⁷²

The 'Estonian experiment' was limited to the elderly and veterans with a physical disability, however it stressed that "it is more important to revive people's interest in life and their ability to take care of themselves."⁷³ The household tasks of the assistant were sharply reduced. The nurse was not even supposed to do the cleaning. The nurse's responsibilities were limited to ensuring that the individual was able to access the applicable consumer services.⁷⁴

⁷²*Pravda*, October 5, 1986: 3, cited in *The Current Digest of the Soviet Press* 38(40): 22-23.

⁷³*Ibid.*

⁷⁴*Ibid.*

The Estonian experience was used as a model for the February 1986 resolution of the USSR State Committee on Labor and Social Questions and the Secretariat of the All-Union Central Council of Trade Unions which legislated "the organization of a national experiment to organize in-home social assistance for the elderly and disabled persons."⁷⁵ The resolution covered the development of in-home assistance and specialized polyclinics which would house a cafeteria and a library. After January 1987, Social Help Sections were opened in local offices. Staff were authorized to help those in need at home.⁷⁶ By May 1987 Moscow authorities planned to open 30 administrative offices for in-home assistance.⁷⁷

Increased attention to the Afghanistan War also brought to light the living conditions of those veterans who received a disability in the conflict. The public media had

⁷⁵Ibid.

⁷⁶According to V. Kaznacheev, the RSFSR Minister of Social Security, by 1988 all persons with a disability living alone in the republic- some 170 000- were to be covered by this service. Mervyn Matthews, "Perestroika and the Rebirth of Charity", in Anthony Jones, Walter D. Connor and David E. Powell, eds., *Soviet Social Problems* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1991), p. 157.

⁷⁷*Moscow News* 11(1987): 14. It was estimated by the department head of the Social Security Board of the Moscow City Executive Committee that there were more than two million pensioners and persons with a disability in the city. Of this number, 37 000 lived alone. Just over 8.8 million people lived in Moscow at the time. *Great Soviet Encyclopedia Yearbook 1988*. (Moscow: Soviet Encyclopedia, 1988), p. 142.

remained silent since the conflict began in 1979.⁷⁸ In late 1987 *Moscow News* reported on the daily lives of veterans with a disability in a "rehabilitation sanatorium" in Sochi, the Crimea. Although the residents of the home received excellent medical care, the question of 'mainstream' integration was different. One official frankly admitted that:

many of our patients suffer from shattered nerves in addition to serious physical afflictions. They need more than good medical treatment. What they need is friendly attention, support, and love from the people around them. Unfortunately, most remain indifferent. What's worse, some prompt the lads to drink.⁷⁹

Complaints about official indifference were also voiced. Veterans were forced to go from their village to the nearest town to consult with the commission which allotted disability pensions. Several times the veteran would travel there only to realize that no one could meet with him. Inefficient and outdated prosthetic appliances, if one could even obtain them to begin with, were condemned as well as the inability to secure employment.⁸⁰ Complaints about inefficient housing were also reported in *Pravda*.⁸¹

⁷⁸ See Stephen and Ethel Dunn, "Images: Who Notices the Disabled?", *The Station Relay*, vol. 4, no. 5 (May, 1989): 82-84.

⁷⁹*Moscow News* 50 (1987): 13.

⁸⁰*Ibid.*

⁸¹See "Soviet Afghan Veterans", *The Station Relay*, vol. 3, no. 3 (January 1988): 46-47.

Slowly it became apparent that the initiative for genuine change in the living and working conditions of persons with a disability could not come solely from above. Public assistance was needed to implement government legislation and early signs from the Gorbachev government suggested this was not only possible, but welcome. The V.I. Lenin Soviet Childrens' Fund was established in October 1987. Over 175 million rubles were donated to the Fund from public organizations and private individuals.⁸² Part of the program of this organization was to "offer all-round assistance to orphans, children left without parental guidance and handicapped children."⁸³ Over 800 delegates - teachers and former wards of children's homes, writers, physicians, parents - arrived in Moscow for the founding conference on October 14, 1987. The statute adopted by the founding conference confirmed the Fund's structure as a self-governing organization enjoying tax-free status and capable of receiving funds from the public at large and disbursing them on behalf of children without government interference. One of the Fund's main functions was the task of uniting citizens "in order to carry out concrete social undertakings aimed at protecting the health and interests of

⁸²For more on funding, see "Contributions are Guaranteed to be Made Public", *Moscow News* 47(1987): 9. Also see "Orphans", *The Station Relay* 3(3), January 1988: 28-29.

⁸³See "Soviet Children's Fund Founded", *Supplement to Moscow News* 34(1987): 6.

children and at bettering all aspects of their upbringing and development."⁴⁴

Albert Likhanov, the chairman of the Fund stated that he hoped to build sanatoria for seriously ill children with Fund money. A delegate to the Fund conference from the Kuzbass [a coal-mining region in Kemerovo Oblast] made a plea for a children's city in the Kuzbass, declaring "we have a high index of infant mortality, and morbidity in preschool institutions is declining slowly." It was also suggested that the Fund could play an important role in seeing that homes get the necessary physical therapy and rehabilitation equipment, and special equipment for children with cerebral palsy.⁴⁵

Many areas of life for persons with a physical disability - social assistance, pensions, medical and consumer service benefits, for example - were discussed in the year and a half between Gorbachev's Secretaryship and the end of 1987. Nevertheless, most government initiatives were general and deliberately vague. It remained to be seen whether practice could meet policy. Even more peculiar, however, was the absence in the press of reports on the

⁴⁴From the *Statute of the Lenin Soviet Children's Fund*, cited in Landon Pearson, "The V.I. Lenin Soviet Children's Fund: Community Support for the Special Child in the Soviet Union?", in John Dunstan, ed., *Soviet Education Under Perestroika* (London: Routledge Press, 1992), pp. 118-127.

⁴⁵*Uchitel'skaia gazeta* [Teachers' Newspaper] 17(October): 2, cited in *The Station Relay* (January 1988): 29-30.

establishment of an independent society for persons with a physical disability. A study early in 1987 on the advisability of establishing a society revealed some interesting results. The study looked at the present social-security system and attempted to find out how an independent society for persons with a physical disability could increase employment opportunities and stimulate integration into public life. The first part consisted of polling social-security workers on whether they believed the present system was satisfactory. Of 260 persons polled in Moscow, Riazan and Kishinev, 80.4 percent called the aid only partially satisfactory and 19.6 called it poor. Only 9.7 percent of those that worked directly with persons with a physical disability thought the system was satisfactory.⁸⁶

Five hundred and ninety persons with a physical disability were asked whether they had adequate opportunities for finding a job. From 50 to 76.5 percent, depending on the area, answered negatively. In addition, the professions that persons with a physical disability could acquire in professional and technical schools and specialized secondary schools, were limited in number and lacked prestige; 35.7 percent of the social-security workers

⁸⁶T.A. Dobrovol'skaia, N.A. Demidov, and N.B. Shabalina, "Sotsial'nye problemy invalidov [Social problems for invalids]," *Sotsiologicheskie issledovaniia* [Sociological Research] 4(1988): 79-83, cited in Dunn and Dunn, pp. 225-227.

polled believed this was a problem.⁸⁷

In terms of integration, more than a third of persons with a physical disability polled said they lacked the opportunity to take part in public life. Those persons with a visible disability (primarily of the motor apparatus) believed that the able-bodied related to them with some hostility; 18 percent noted indifference and hostility and 16 percent believed that the cause of their troubles could be found with the persons that were supposed to help them.⁸⁸ Only 13 percent of persons with a physical disability approached their trade union for help, and only 3 percent went to the Party and/or Komsomol organizations.⁸⁹

The study concluded by asking social-security workers whether the establishment of a society would effectively change certain aspects of daily life. Eighty five percent believed that a society could help with employment; 68 percent thought that it could organize leisure and social interaction; 68 percent thought it could be a legal defender; 62 percent believed that it could help with everyday living; 56 percent supplementary medical aid; and 55 percent believed the society could broaden the system of professional training.⁹⁰ Unfortunately, these questions

⁸⁷Ibid.

⁸⁸Ibid.

⁸⁹Ibid.

⁹⁰Ibid.

were not posed to the persons with a physical disability who took part in the study; however the results would be predictable.

The period between 1985 and 1987 can be viewed in two different ways. Persons with a physical disability experienced little genuine change in their daily living and working conditions. Very little progress was made in terms of pensions, employment, accessibility and organization. The day-to-day lives of persons with a physical disability seemed to change little even as the political world was being altered radically. On the other hand, the Gorbachev initiative - though steeped in general and vague terms - proved to be a catalyst for civic involvement. The clandestine, and at times repressed, actions of the *Initiative Group* began to be replaced by a growing public concern. By the end of 1987, certain projects were being implemented. On the eve of perestroika, the experiences of persons with a physical disability were quickly becoming a litmus test for the new orientation of Soviet society.

Chapter III- Perestroika and Persons with a Physical Disability

This chapter will focus on the effects of *perestroika* (1988-1991)¹ on persons with a physical disability. The first section will analyze the administrative and bureaucratic changes of the Soviet government as they related to persons with a physical disability, including social security benefits. The second section will focus on the involvement of persons with a physical disability in governmental and non-governmental social movements. With regard to the latter, this chapter will illustrate how the re-introduction of private and public charity gave rise to state-wide philanthropic associations and influenced the establishment of the All-Russia Society for the Disabled. The concluding section will illustrate how legislative decisions and social benefits, the participation of persons with a physical disability at the government level, and the mobilization of social movements actually affected the daily living and working conditions of persons with a physical disability. The public media was instrumental in mobilizing public reaction, especially the establishment of local and community relief organizations. It also provided an outlet for persons with a physical disability to express their interests. Indeed, *perestroika* signified the beginning of an era of personal and public consciousness; a time of

¹For more on *perestroika*, see Introduction.

social initiative when active individual involvement was expected. Above all, however, the period between the years 1988-1991 revealed just how enormous the task of social rehabilitation would be.

1. Making Way for Public Mobilization: Government Legislation

The success of perestroika depended largely on the involvement of individuals and organizations outside of government. However, the state-centered political culture of Soviet life meant that the impetus for change would come from the political elite. Consequently, government legislation and social-security benefits were instrumental in making way for increased charitable activities and nongovernmental organization.²

a. Social-security administration

One-third of the 552,000 men and women first certified as disabled in 1988 were in what should have been the prime

²Compare this to Despouy's conclusion that "It is....important to point out...while joint responsibility [between levels of government, the community and persons with disabilities] may be the dominant concept....the principal obligation to remove obstacles impeding or hindering the integration and full participation of disabled persons lies with Governments. This means that they cannot be mere onlookers; they must act, sometimes with great vigour, and especially in difficult situations, in order to prevent marginalization and to ensure that equalization of opportunities is not just rhetoric but real and effective.", *Human Rights and Disabled Persons*, p. 29, paragraph #206.

of life.' There are indications that the government was serious about reforming social security administration as it related to persons with a physical disability. The introduction of Social Help Sections in localities in January 1987 had been a significant step.⁴ In December 1986, the All-Union Organization for Veterans of War and Labour had been established with the support of the trade unions, Komsomol, Societies for the Blind, Deaf and Dumb, and the Red Cross. Although the Union had many tasks, part of its program included the integrating of persons with a physical disability and pensioners into acceptable working environments, improving housing conditions, increasing social and medical services, and defending the rights and voices of persons with a physical disability.⁵

An article in *Izvestiya* in April 1988⁶ explained how the changes in social security would benefit those in need. Changes to the social security system would deal with "the broader task of solving the problem of material provision of old people, invalids, and others who cannot work, in a

⁴Murray Feshbach and Alfred Friendly Jr., *Ecocide in the USSR* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers Inc., 1992), p. 190.

⁵See chapter two.

⁶Matthews, "Perestroika and the Rebirth of Charity", Anthony Jones, Walter D. Connor and David E. Powell, eds., *Soviet Social Problems* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press Inc., 1991), p. 158.

⁷*Izvestiya*, April 21, 1988; cited in Matthews, "Perestroika and the Rebirth of Charity, pp. 158-159.

comprehensive manner." Social service efforts were to (1) increase help at home as much as possible; (2) set up territorial social-service centers in which pensioners and persons with a physical disability could stay permanently or temporarily; and (3) construct more homes:

....homes containing 17 000 places could be built from the funds unused in the last three five-year plan periods. The situation is no better with the construction of special houses with all domestic services and work-rooms for single, elderly citizens- only eighteen have been built.

Solving this problem should be a priority for social security organs and local Soviets. We also hope that the press will help....At the present time there are one and a half thousand enterprises, shops and work sectors designed for employing invalids. That's extremely few....As a result of the transition to self-financing and profit making there is a reduction in work-places everywhere....Large enterprises are hardly likely to create special workshops for invalids.

In our view the answer lies in creating small enterprises and employment centers oriented to serving them....Local Soviets should look into the matter...We set great store by the republican Soviets for invalids now being established. They could help not only in finding work and professional instruction, but also in organizing leisure activities..

Take the work of the social security organs in Lithuania. The staff there do not wait for people to come to them with complaints or explanations. They regularly organize outside meetings, and invite the heads of organizations to come along and decide questions on the spot. With the help of the press, radio and television they give information about their plans and new benefits, and they bring up serious problems for discussion. However, this is not done everywhere. There are many complaints of indifference, heartlessness, and formal attitudes to labour veterans and invalids.⁷

⁷Ibid.

This article signified a new approach in the relationship between state and society. It went beyond the mere recognition of increased material assistance. The government invited the public to get involved in the re-organization of social-security administration. A large part of this included the decentralization of the administration from the center to the local levels. Independent societies for persons with a physical disability and more attention to labour rehabilitation was encouraged. A more 'personal' approach to rehabilitation between patient and physician was also stressed. Finally, it invited the media to take part in the information process and, as will be illustrated later, this proved to be significant.

b. Pension reform

Part of the overall changes envisioned by perestroika included a complete overhaul of the system of pensions. The tasks that lay ahead, however, were daunting. Between 1980 and 1987 the total number of pensioners of all kinds increased from 50.2 to 57.7 million.⁸ By early 1987 -- the first time since 1975 figures on the age and sex structure of the population were released -- just over 20 percent of the population were pensioners.⁹ The following year, there

⁸Mervyn Matthews, "Perestroika and the Rebirth of Charity", p. 160.

⁹Moscow News, no. 4(1988): 12.

were just under 60 million pensioners. For every 100 people of working age in 1989 there were 37 pensioners, compared to 32 out of 100 in 1980.¹⁰ Pension payments totalled 55 billion rubles, or an increase of 70 percent in comparison with 1980.¹¹ The prices of goods and services grew by 4.5 percent a year, yet by the end of 1988 there had been no major reform of the social-security system and the basic minimum rates for persons with a disability - between 30 and 50 rubles a month, according to age and category of disability - remained unchanged. The average salary was about 200 rubles a month. Meanwhile, more and more pensioners dropped below the official subsistence level, which was 75 rubles a month in 1986.¹²

The Soviet government recognized the need for change and moved quickly. In early August 1989, the draft law "On Urgent Measures to Improve Pensions and Social Services for the Population" was submitted for discussion.¹³ On August 4, the "Law of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics on Urgent Measures to Improve Pensions and Social Services for

¹⁰*Pravda*, November 3, 1989: 1-3, cited in *The Current Digest of the Soviet Press* 41(45): 15.

¹¹*Ibid.*

¹²*Moscow News*, no. 2 (1989): 10.

¹³*Izvestiya*, August 2, 1989: 1,3; cited in *The Current Digest of the Soviet Press* 41(37): 16.

the Population" was printed in *Izvestiya*.¹⁴ The law contained eleven articles and covered pensions and social services reforms for war and labor veterans, persons with a disability, and families of deceased military personnel. In addition, standard pension conditions for workers, office employees, and members of collective farms were discussed. All measures were to take effect between October 1, 1989 and January 1, 1990.

Pensions for persons with Group I disabilities¹⁵ were to be raised to 85 rubles per month, and to 70 rubles for those with Group II disabilities. The size of monthly state subsidies to people who had received their disability in childhood was to increase to 70 rubles per month for persons with Group I disabilities, 50 rubles per month for persons with Group II disabilities, and 70 rubles for children under the age of 16 with a disability.

Old age pensions paid to veterans with a disability that was the consequence of a wound, contusion or mutilation received in defense of the Soviet Union or in the performance of other military duties, were to increase by 15 rubles per month, without regard for existing limits on old age pensions. In addition, veterans of World War II were to receive, free of charge, all medications prescribed by

¹⁴*Izvestiya*, August 4, 1989; 1; cited in *The Current Digest of the Soviet Press* 41(38): 20.

¹⁵For an explanation of the three-tiered classification of disabilities, see the Glossary following the Conclusion.

physicians. Veterans (and those awarded orders and medals at the rear during the war) were granted the right to travel free of charge on all forms of urban passenger transport (with the exception of taxis) and on public motor transport (with the exception of taxis) in rural areas, within the limits of the administrative district in which they lived.

To finance the expenditures entailed by the adoption of the Law, the social insurance fees paid by enterprises, institutions, and organizations (except for public organizations of persons with a disability and retirees, and their enterprises, institutions, associations and educational institutions) were to increase, on a differential scale, by up to thirty percent.

Prime Minister Nikolai Ryzhkov addressed the Supreme Soviet on November 2, 1989 to explain the new laws on pensions.¹⁶ Ryzhkov recognized the need to overcome the gap between the financial situation of pensioners and the changing standards of living of the working population. The Prime Minister stressed the need to establish a consistent approach to social security for various categories and groups of the population. Ryzhkov promised to guarantee a correspondence between pension levels and the quantity and quality of labour performed for the good of society. Finally, he addressed the basic question of how to bring

¹⁶See *Pravda*, November 3, 1989: 1-3; and *The Current Digest of the Soviet Press*, XLI, no. 45(1989): 15-18.

about a significant upswing in the financial situation of pensioners and a sharp decrease in the number of low-income citizens.

In an attempt to extend the pension system to all of the country's non able-bodied citizens, provision was made for the establishment of two types of pensions: labour-based pensions, which were previously in effect, and newly introduced *social pensions*. Although there were several changes to labour-based pensions - especially in the mechanism for calculating pensions -¹⁷ the inclusion of social pensions signified a fundamental change in state policy and proved to have a direct effect on large numbers of persons with a physical disability.

Proceeding from the principles of universal pension coverage, humaneness, and social justice, Ryzhkov explained, the government and the All-Union Central Council of Trade Unions proposed that social pensions be established for those who, for one reason or another, did not acquire the right to a labour-based pension. Ryzhkov pointed out that among others, those who had a disability since childhood were eligible. Ryzhkov estimated the total number of individuals entitled to pensions of this kind to be about 1.5 million. The size of social pensions would depend upon various factors, including the extent of disability. Group

¹⁷See *The Current Digest of the Soviet Press*, XLI, no. 45 (1989): 16-17.

I persons with would receive social pensions set at 100 per cent of the minimum old-age pension (70 rubles), Group II persons would receive 50 percent of the minimum old-age pension and Group III would receive 30 per cent.

Ryzhkov stressed that social pensions were only a kind of minimum monetary assistance guaranteed by the state. It was meant as a catalyst for increased assistance through participation, concern and all-around support on the part of public organizations, local Soviets, and labour collectives. In addition, Ryzhkov called upon the Union and autonomous republics to utilize their increased freedom in matters related to all pensioners; especially improved living, working and consumer-service conditions.

According to preliminary estimates, 29 billion rubles a year would be required to implement the pension reform, Ryzhkov explained. This amount was in addition to the 6.5 billion rubles channelled into implementation of the already adopted Law on Urgent Measures to Improve Pensions. The increases in expenditures on improved standards of living jumped by 14 billion rubles from the entire 10th Five-Year Plan (1976-1980), and by 13 billion rubles from the current Five-Year Plan.

The proposed pension reform also brought about a reorganization of sources for paying pensions. The draft law proposed to replace scattered funding by financing with a single pension fund for the country, from which all

expenditures on the payment of pension would come. This fund would be formed from money paid in by enterprises, organizations, collective farms, and other cooperatives for social insurance purposes in accordance with established rates, as well as from insurance contributions paid by citizens involved in individual enterprise, and from state budget monies. Finally, increases in the size of pensions and related expenditures meant an increase in the rates for social insurance contributions from enterprises and organizations. Estimates showed that, in order to introduce the new pensions, it would be necessary to increase contributions from 12 percent to 30 percent of the wage fund, on the average.¹⁸

The government plan - like others before it - fell far short of actually affecting the daily living conditions for persons with a physical disability despite its recognition of the need for a different approach. By introducing social pensions alongside labour, the government recognized the inherent right all persons had to the enjoyment of life on equal terms. The utilitarian, state-centered nature of the labour pension was clearly incompatible with the universal people-centered concepts of perestroika.

On the other hand, it remained to be seen whether an increase in contributions from the wage fund was possible when salaries were not keeping up with increases in the cost

¹⁸Ibid.

of living.¹⁹ In addition, the increases in pension payments in no way mirrored the enormous increases in the cost of living. The creation of a single, encompassing pension fund seemed to suggest that the administration of this fund would still be centralized. It was unclear as to how the forthcoming support would be distributed to those who required it. Finally, a comparison of state investment in social security and other areas of the economy reveals that priorities lay elsewhere. The cold-war legacy still lingered. In the first quarter of 1991, a Soviet economist reckoned, defense expenditures were running 50 percent higher than the total revenues of the Soviet government.²⁰ In addition, in 1990 Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze, at a session of the 28th Party Congress in Moscow claimed that the military, monopolizing one-fourth of the national budget, had wasted 700 billion rubles in Cold War spending excesses.²¹ These numbers put the 35.5 billion rubles allotment for pension payments and the 13 billion rubles increase for the current Five-Year Plan into perspective. In this respect, Ryzhkov's measures were not so different from the past. It seemed as though the increases were

¹⁹Compare this with Despouy's argument that "in short, the "needs" of disabled persons and their "specific rights" are simply two sides of the same coin."; *Human Rights and Disabled Persons*, p. 37, paragraphs #258-260.

²⁰Feshbach and Friendly Jr., eds., *Ecocide in the USSR*, p. 160.

²¹Ibid.

merely stop-gap measures created from above for pragmatic reasons.

Government legislation was also aimed at protecting those most vulnerable in the emerging social security system. In October 1990, the USSR Prosecutor's Office created an administration to oversee the observance of citizens' rights in the social security sphere. Social security agencies at the local level were put under closer control by the all-union administration. The administration's first and primary task was to investigate violations of housing laws, especially those for the elderly and persons with a physical disability.²² By the middle of 1990, several articles on the deplorable conditions of homes for persons with a disability had illustrated the need for tighter control over the administration of such homes.²³

2. Persons with a Physical Disability in Government and Non-Governmental Associations

The success of perestroika depended largely on the involvement of all citizens in the social, economic, and political life of the state at all levels. Persons with a physical disability became involved in the affairs of the state to a greater extent than ever before. In the process,

²²*Izvestiya*, October 21, 1990: 2; cited in *The Current Digest of the Soviet Press* 42(42): 29-30.

²³See "Mirror Image: Or What Rights do the Handicapped Have?", *Moscow News*, no. 17 (1990): 15.

the interests and issues of persons with a physical disability were forwarded.

a. Persons with a Physical Disability in the Congress of People's Deputies

The 1989 elections for the Congress of People's Deputies brought several prominent deputies with a physical disability to the highest body of state authority. Nikolai Engver was born in the Potma labour camp southeast of Moscow in the Mordvin ASSR, where his mother was placed because her husband was judged an enemy of the people in 1937. Engver was born with polio, and had to walk with the help of two canes since birth. Engver had been a member of the Communist Party since 1975, but was at one time expelled from the Komsomol for having criticized Khrushchev's 1956 "cult of personality" speech. Upon his election, Engver was appointed Chairman of the Subcommittee for Social and Economic Problems of Youth within the Committee of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR for Youth Affairs.²⁴

Ilya Zaslavsky was nominated as a candidate for deputy of the Supreme Soviet by the Oktyabrsky (October) District Organization of the All-Russia Society of Disabled (Moscow).²⁵ Later in the year, Zaslavsky was elected to the

²⁴Station Relay Vol. 4, nos. 1-5 (September 1988-May 1989): 91. Also see Bill Keller, "Comrade Engver Goes to Moscow, *The New York Times Magazine*, August 27, 1989: 25-27, 56-57, 62, 65.

²⁵For more on the Society. see *The Station Relay*, Vol. 4, nos. 1-5 (September 1988-May 1989): 78-84.

Supreme Soviet and was made Deputy Chairman of the Committee of the Supreme Soviet for the Affairs of Veterans and the Disabled.²⁶ In an interview with *Moscow News* in February 1989,²⁷ Zaslavsky remarked that "I am a fortunate person." Born into a family of white-collar workers, he went straight from school to the institute, where he did his postgraduate work, defended his thesis, and researched with excellent results-- his monograph on the chemical processes in textile dyeing appeared in mid-January 1990.

Zaslavsky pushed hard for better living and working conditions for persons with a physical disability. His election platform had included:

....regular cost of living pension increases,....tax exemptions for enterprises run by the Society of the Disabled....boarding schools for disabled students at higher and technical schools....[and] a network of enterprises and cooperatives under the All-Russia Society of Invalids..."²⁸

In an interview with *Izvestiya* in August 1989,²⁹ the newly elected Zaslavsky remarked that, for many years, the problems of persons with a physical disability did not exist. For example, the president of the German firm Meyer,

²⁶Zaslavsky and his wife were also guests of honour at the World Institute on Disability at Berkeley, California in September, 1989.

²⁷*Moscow News*, no. 5, (1989): 9.

²⁸*Ibid.*

²⁹*Izvestiya*, August 24, 1989: 2; cited in *The Station Relay*, volume 4, nos. 1-5 September 1988-May 1989): 94.

who proposed setting up the production of wheelchairs in the Soviet Union, was told that this was unnecessary because there were no needy persons with a disability in the Soviet Union.³⁰ Zaslavsky also commented on the Committee of the Supreme Soviet for the Affairs of Veterans and Disabled, and its ability to work with the larger community. Complaints to the Committee allowed it to "analyze typical situations and make working contacts with agencies with executive powers."³¹

Zaslavsky recognized the connection between better living conditions for persons with a physical disability and the general economic health of the country:

The disabled live poorly because, for now, many people live poorly because of the low economic level of the country...[O]ur economy needs much more than elsewhere in the world to achieve analogous results...But is it really easier for the rural disabled because the country produces more metal than others if the disabled person himself doesn't have enough iron for his roof?

In order to help the disabled, we must first of all improve the country's economic situation. But new reforms in the economy are impossible without political reforms, without democratic elections on all levels on a competitive basis. Precisely for this reason, I took part in the working out of various proposals directed toward the general improvement of life in the country. In particular, I took part in the work of the Moscow Deputy's Club and of the Inter Regional Deputies Group.³²

³⁰Ibid.

³¹Ibid.

³²Ibid.

Unless the country's overall economic situation is improved, Zaslavsky remarked, nothing will get better for anyone and "all attempts will be like pulling on a ragged blanket which threatens to tear apart."

The Congress also gave the opportunity for many deputies to voice their concerns over inter-related issues on economic and environmental mismanagement and their affects on personal well-being and health. On June 2, the first secretary of the Cherkassy City Komsomol Committee in the Ukraine spoke for persons with a physical disability. An army major crippled in Afghanistan, the deputy spoke about the right to receiving proper prosthesis equipment:

It is an insult [to the state] to have rationing coupons in the 72nd year of Soviet power, an insult in the collapse of the economy, the devastated villages...the fishless rivers and the cities with chemical smog....

It is an insult [to Afghan veterans] to wait in the so-called preferential lines for a baby carriage when the child is already in school, to wait until the year 2000 for an apartment...to have our prosthetics industry...remain at Stone-Age level.

Comrades, I will not beat around the bush. My prostheses were manufactured on equipment at one of the two prostheses plants given to us after the war by Churchill's wife. Yes, respected scientists, it is possible to mow with a 12th century model scythe, and even do a good job with it, but I would not even wish it upon my enemies to have to move around with such deformity at the end of the 20th century.³³

Public involvement at the community level was also

³³*Izvestiya*, June 5, 1989: 1; cited in Feshbach and Friendly Jr., eds., *Ecocide in the USSR*, pp. 234-35.

crucial in the labour and social rehabilitation of persons with a physical disability. At the International Meeting on Human Resources in the Field of Disability, in Tallinn, Estonia from August 14 to 22, 1989 it was pointed out that:

the abilities of disabled persons and their families should be strengthened through community-based supplementary services provided by Governments and non-governmental organizations....These services should promote self-determination and enable disabled persons to participate in the development of society.

Many speakers considered that community-based rehabilitation was best suited to all areas of the country. The involvement of the family and the community was essential to such rehabilitation.³⁴

Integral to community involvement in the rehabilitative process was the role of non-governmental organizations and the active participation of persons with a physical disability in them. Articles #14-16 of the Tallinn meeting dealt with this issue and grass-roots initiative as a whole:

14. Local community initiatives should be especially promoted. Disabled persons and their families should be encouraged to form grass-roots organizations, with governmental recognition of their importance and governmental support in the form of financing and training.

15. Governmental and non-governmental organizations concerned with disability issues should allow disabled persons to participate as equal partners.

16. The efficient functioning of governmental and non-governmental organizations concerned with

³⁴Despouy, *Human Rights and Disabled Persons*, p. 30, paragraph #212.

disability calls for training in organizational and management skills.³⁵

The Tallinn conference also contained guidelines on the promotion of employment:

Disabled persons have the right to be trained for and to work on equal terms in the regular labor force. Community-based rehabilitation programmes should be encouraged to provide better job opportunities....

Employment opportunities can be promoted primarily by measures relating to employment and salary standards that apply to all workers and secondarily by measures offering special support and incentives. In addition to formal employment, opportunities should be broadened to include self-employment, cooperatives and other group income-generating schemes. Where special national employment drives have been launched for youth and unemployed persons, disabled persons should be included. Disabled persons should be actively recruited, and when a disabled candidate and a non-disabled candidate are equally qualified, the disabled candidate should be chosen.

Provision was made for the employment of women with a disability:

Employers' and workers' organizations should adopt, in cooperation with organizations of disabled persons, policies that promote the training and employment of disabled and non-disabled persons on an equal basis, including disabled women.

Policies for affirmative action should be formulated and implemented to increase the employment of disabled women. Governments and non-governmental organizations should support the creation of income-generating projects involving disabled women.³⁶

³⁵Ibid., p. 32, paragraph #223.

³⁶Despouy, *Human Rights and Disabled Persons*, p. 35, paragraph #242.

It remained to be seen whether women with a physical disability could make significant advances in employment when previous studies on women with a physical disability and employment in the United States illustrated that much was still needed.³⁷ Nevertheless, the extent to which the Tallinn guidelines reflected general Soviet perestroika policy can be illustrated in the establishment and administration of charitable organizations and the All-Russia Society of Disabled Persons.

b. Charitable Funds

All-Union charitable funds like the V.I. Lenin Children's Fund³⁸ and the Soviet Health and Charity Fund enjoyed both public support and government cooperation.³⁹ Because both Funds were considered public organizations, they were guaranteed representation in the Congress of People's Deputies. In the 1988 elections of People's Deputies, the Children's Fund and the Health and Charity Fund held five spots each.⁴⁰ Altogether, thirty prominent members of the Children's Fund were elected to, or selected

³⁷See Dunn and Dunn, p. 22.

³⁸See chapter three.

³⁹For more on state response to the rapid growth of social groups during perestroika, see Jim Butterfield and Marcia Weigle, "Unofficial Social Groups and Regime Response in the Soviet Union", in Sedaitis and Butterfield, eds., *Perestroika From Below*, pp. 175-195.

⁴⁰*Izvestiya*, December 28, 1988: 1; cited in *The Current Digest of the Soviet Press* 40(52): 28.

for, the Congress.⁴¹

The All-Union Constituent Conference of the Soviet Health and Charity Fund took place in Moscow on September 16, 1988. In addition to organizations for persons with a disability, members of the USSR Union of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, the All-Union Central Council of Trade Unions, the Young Communist Central League Central Committee, the Soviet War and Labour Veterans Committee, the USSR Ministry of Public Health, the USSR State Committee on Labour and Social Questions, the Soviet Women's Committee, the creative unions, and other state and public organizations constituted the Fund.

S.N. Fyodorov, chairman of the Fund's organizing committee, outlined the scope of activity and general tasks of the Fund.⁴² Fyodorov recognized the ever-growing number of local groups of volunteers and associations in Moscow, Leningrad, Gorky and Tbilisi, among other cities. Fyodorov also commented on the narrowing ratio of persons over 60 years of age in comparison to the general population (1 in 6 in 1988 compared to 1 in 15 before World War II) and the inability of the rest homes to meet the increasing demands for the elderly and persons with a disability. Food and medical supplies were critically low for some rest homes and

⁴¹Pearson, "The V.I. Lenin Soviet Children's Fund", pp. 121-122.

⁴²*Izvestiya*, September 17, 1988: 2; cited in *The Current Digest of the Soviet Press* 40(37): 19.

space was a problem. In addition, persons with a physical disability did not have enough wheelchairs, while the ones available were cumbersome, heavy and hard to steer. Meanwhile, the production of prostheses were in even worse shape.⁴³

Fyodorov pledged monies from the Fund for equipping and furnishing rest homes, manufacturing the needed quantity of prostheses and improving their quality, and producing "special equipment" to make life easier for persons with a physical disability. Fyodorov also stated that the Fund was considering rendering medical, social and consumer assistance to a home for the elderly and persons with a physical disability and to war and labour veterans with a physical disability who live alone. The Fund also pledged to promote public health, social security, physical education and sport.⁴⁴ Finally, Fyodorov explained that all financing would come from state, public and cooperative organizations, proceeds from events organized by the Fund

⁴³It should be noted that at this time the increasing presence of Afghan war veterans in the media had illustrated the inefficiencies of the Soviet prosthetics industry. Bureaucratization, lack of parts, shoddy productivity, cost-efficiency and ineffective physician training, among others, had brought to light a need for a complete overhaul of the Soviet prosthetics industry. For more see *The Station Relay*, volume 4, nos. 1-5 (September 1988-May 1989): 93; *Ogonek*, no. 21: 22-24; and Drew Hittenberger, "Soviet Prosthetics Workshop", *Almanac* (December 1989): 22-30.

⁴⁴This will be discussed further in chapter four.

(various lotteries, auctions, concerts, book sales, film rentals), contributions from individual citizens, and foreign currencies.

The V.I. Lenin Soviet Children's Fund expanded quickly after its inaugural conference in October 1987. By December 1988, local bodies had been set up in nearly all oblasts, krajs, and republics. Apart from a full-time apparatus of 500-600 persons, nearly 10,000 persons were volunteers. The full-time staff did not receive their earnings from public contributions, but from other sources like returns from the Fund's journal *Semia*, and several commercial cooperatives; including a clinic, a family-services unit and a milk-processing center.⁴⁵ All told, in 1988, its first full year of operation, the Children's Fund received 43 million rubles in donations.⁴⁶

The Children's Fund was instrumental in providing services to children with a physical disability, but the task was formidable. One of the Fund's first projects occurred in 1987 with the mobilization of emergency medical teams from around the Soviet Union to reduce infant mortality- set at 33 per thousand and possibly higher in the

⁴⁵Matthews, "Perestroika", p. 161.

⁴⁶*Pravda*, October 14, 1988: 5; cited in *The Current Digest of the Soviet Press* 40(41): 13. A 24-hour TV fund raiser-the first of its kind- raised 61 million rubles in January 1990. See *Pravda*, January 9, 1990.

late 1980's- in various cities of Central Asia.⁴⁷ Even still, although the Fund did save lives, their impact was localized and transitory, owing to terrible conditions and outdated equipment.⁴⁸ In many areas, residents had no knowledge about different programs that were open to them. In Irkutsk, for example, the Children's Fund determined that there were 3,158 children with a severe disability, many of whom whose parents were unaware of the availability of allowances and other forms of state assistance.⁴⁹

The Children's Fund was also interested in the conditions in which children with a physical disability lived⁵⁰ and the educational options open to them. Although the Fund had no intention of intervening directly in the school curriculum,⁵¹ such issues as the incorporation of

⁴⁷Feshbach and Friendly Jr., eds., *Ecocide in the USSR*, p. 82

⁴⁸Ibid., pp. 84-86.

⁴⁹Pearson, "The V.I. Lenin Soviet Children's Fund", p. 124.

⁵⁰In Nizhny Tagil in the northern Urals, a reporter writing on industrial pollution visited a school for persons with intellectual disabilities. Across the street and around the corner a metallurgical complex and a cement factory spewed harmful pollutants into the air. "You go to school sometimes in a thick haze of smoke with your teeth gritting from the cement dust," a teacher remarked. "And you must never open the classroom windows. The sills turn gray in an instant." L. Yermakova, "V ognyonnom ozherelye," *Semya* 22(1990); cited in Feshbach and Friendly, Jr., eds., *Ecocide in the USSR*, p. 103.

⁵¹It should be noted that some Western researchers believed that the Fund was biased towards the integration of children with a disability into the regular school system.

facilities for children with a physical disability in new schools and the placement of ramps in old schools had been raised by the Fund. In addition, the Fund was involved in the building of a center for the creative rehabilitation of children with a physical disability in Moscow to identify the gifted among them, to develop their creative powers, and to ease their integration into society. The Fund proposed to grant a certain number of scholarships to these children, to supplement those that it had already granted to gifted children in the general population (14 in 1989 and 145 in 1990), in order for them to study at premier institutions such as the Moscow Conservatory of Music.⁵²

The Fund also pushed for changes in the care and institutionalization of children with a physical disability. In an interview in *Pravda* in October 1988,⁵³ the chairman of the Fund, Albert Likhanov suggested that keeping a child with a physical disability in a state institution would cost the public treasury several times more than a significant increase in disability pensions would. Likhanov brought

This was not the position of the Institute of Defectology. This has proven to be a controversial issue. See Fearson, pp. 124-127; V. Lubovskii, "Some Urgent Problems of Soviet Work with Handicapped Children", in *Soviet Education* vol. 31, no.5 (May 1989): 50-67; Andrew Sutton, "Special Education for Handicapped Pupils", in James Riordan, ed., *Soviet Education*, pp. 70-93.

⁵²Ibid.

⁵³*Pravda*, October 14, 1988: 5; cited in *The Current Digest of the Soviet Press* 40(41): 11-13.

forward three proposals for nationwide discussion. First, he suggested that all people and enterprises, collective farms and institutions, on every Children's Day (June 1), conduct another all-Union volunteer workday or set aside some other day of unpaid work, transferring all the money earned to the Children's Fund, first of all to assist families who are rearing children with a physical disability. He also suggested that all enterprises should be required to give 3 percent of their workplaces to persons with a disability, after organizing special classes for their vocational training. If the 3 percent were not filled, these enterprises should allocate to social security or the Children's Fund sums equalling the average wages of the employees occupying these jobs. Finally, Likhanov suggested that the Supreme Soviet, the Party Central Committee and the Council of Ministers direct part of the money from the reduction of military programs, putting special emphasis on the fact that they are doing so, to children with a disability and those receiving their disability in childhood.

c. The All-Russian Society of the Disabled (VOI)

The single-most important demand by the *Initiative Group to Defend the Rights of the Disabled* during the late 1970's - an independent society for persons with a physical

disability -⁵⁴ came into fruition during perestroika with the establishment of the All-Russian Society for the Disabled in 1988. The government's position on the right to organize had changed considerably since the late 1970's. In an article in *Izvestiya* in February 1988, N.T. Trubilin, vice-chairman of the Russian Republic's Council of Ministers remarked that the decision to establish a society for persons with a physical disability was:

Primarily because of disabled people's desire to play a more active role in public life, to have broader opportunities for socializing, and to hold the kind of jobs they are capable of handling and at which they can be most productive. The latter is especially important, as it gives them a sense of independence and the knowledge that they are being useful to society.⁵⁵

Trubilin also remarked that although there were over four million persons with a physical disability in the Russian Republic, and nearly 350 000 people were declared disabled each year, just over one million were placed in jobs at the time. Further, more than half of all persons with a physical disability were healthy enough to work. Trubilin also referred to the societies of the blind and deaf which had been operating for several decades, successfully overseeing the social and labour rehabilitation of those with hearing and visual disabilities. These

⁵⁴The *Initiative Group* is discussed in the second chapter.

⁵⁵*Izvestiya*, February 14, 1988: 18; cited in *The Current Digest of the Soviet Press* 40(7): 24.

societies had 20 production associations and 139 production-training enterprises, and operated clubs, sanatoris, vacation homes, hotels, a mime-studio theatre and other facilities.⁵⁶

A constituent conference held on August 16-17, 1988 created the Russian Republic Society for the Disabled. At this conference a Charter was confirmed and a Central Board elected. Such issues as job placement, occupational training, medical and social rehabilitation, consumer service and everyday assistance, medical supplies, high-quality prostheses, carts, wheelchairs, and better specialized motor transport were all raised. Perhaps the most important issue, however, was the question of the social and occupational rehabilitation of persons with a physical disability. The key to this issue was job creation and special producer cooperatives, something that had been eliminated in 1956.⁵⁷

The founding conference was emotional, and certainly not without controversy. An article in the popular magazine *Ogonek*⁵⁸ revealed just how explosive the conference was. In the voting for the Charter of the Society, only one of the

⁵⁶Ibid.

⁵⁷For a general overview of the conference, see *Izvestiya*, August 19, 1988: 2. For more on occupational rehabilitation, see *Izvestiya*, January 9, 1990: 32.

⁵⁸"Oni' i 'my" [We and They], *Ogonek*, no. 42(1988): 14-16; cited in *The Station Relay* vol. 4, nos. 1-5 (September 1988-May 1989): 85-86, 88.

166 delegates voted against. Nevertheless, this individual proved to be influential in the affairs of the Society and persons with a physical disability in general. The dissenting voice came from Sergei Germanovich D'iachkov, a sociologist at the Volga Automobile Plant and chairman of VOI from Autoplant Raion in Tol'iatti, Volga region.

D'iachkov criticized the ambiguities of the Charter with respect to financing, asking why primary organizations were not yet incorporated.⁵⁹ He also questioned why it was not possible to add a sentence about budgeting for these primary organizations, so that voluntary dues and the funds from paid services and from cooperative activity could be better spent.

D'iachkov denounced the Society for not discussing the problem of children with a physical disability and called the existing division of people into three groups of disability the legalization of "enormous social disproportions." D'iachkov also condemned the existing social-security administration:

And who has calculated how much disabled people cost the government? Not only their pensions, but those able-bodied people who serve them, the type of social and consumer conveniences which disabled people need, their alienation from public life, from social institutions, and from the possibility of working...To this day, neither agencies nor

⁵⁹Incorporations meant that primary organizations would have the right to open bank-accounts, receive contributions from the public, own property, make contracts, lease premises, equipment and facilities, etc. *The Station Relay*, volume 4, nos. 1-5 (September 1988-May 1989): 85.

the entire surrounding infrastructure have been oriented toward the disabled.⁶⁰

D'iachkov suggested that it would be simpler just to give the funds saved to VOI and let them distribute them:

It would be easier for the government, and social justice would triumph, and VOI would receive a real opportunity to influence the process of the social security for the disabled in all categories.⁶¹

D'iachkov also criticized the Charter for not specifying how the interests and tasks of Miloserdie (Charity) Fund,⁶² or the Red Cross, were related to those of VOI.

D'iachkov's criticisms revealed just how deeply-rooted the legacy of taut planning was. Clearly the central government was reluctant to turn financial issues over to regional and local governments, for obvious bureaucratic and political reasons. The absence of guidelines for the financing of primary organizations was tantamount to the prevalence of the state over the community. Consequently, the decisions to be made over fiscal matters at all levels was still in the hands of the few. D'iachkov was also correct in demonstrating how a centralized social-security administration could not work in a country which could simply *not afford* to take care of those who needed support.

⁶⁰Ibid.

⁶¹Ibid.

⁶²For more on this Fund, see Matthews, "Perestroika", pp. 163-165.

Transferring more fiscal and administrative power over to those requiring support would make the lines of cooperation more direct and help to perpetuate even greater initiative.

D'iachkov also criticized the administration of the organization. In an article published in *Sotsial'noe obespechenie* [Social Security] in 1989,⁶³ D'iachkov reported that in a survey taken of the 5,000 persons with a physical disability in Autoplant Raion in Tol'iatti, only 11 percent had joined VOI. Forty percent did not join because they did not know what the organization was about; 22 percent because they did not want to cooperate, and 27 percent because VOI had done nothing for them. D'iachkov was also receiving harassment from local authorities over funds contributed to VOI.⁶⁴ In Perm oblast, the local security directors, chiefs of shops, deputies, and the Sports and Engineering Commission were giving VOI a hard time. At that time, in Perm oblast, VOI had neither a building, nor a base for production, nor transport.

D'iachkov was also highly critical of the government as it related to policy and practice. At the founding conference the minister of social security of the RSFSR, V. Kaznacheev had promised that "a truly humanistic approach to the disabled is not a slogan, and not a campaign, but one of

⁶³*Sotsial'noe obespechenie* [Social Security], no. 1 (1989): 39-40; cited in *The Station Relay*, vol. 4, nos. 1-5 (September 1988-May 1989): 85-90.

⁶⁴*Ibid.*, 88.

the links of state policy in the social sphere." Kaznacheev also admitted that the situation was worsening. He pointed out that in 1987 more than 45 000 persons with restricted work abilities were employed, which was almost 100 000 more than before April 1985. However, in 1987, only 30 percent of the total number of persons with a disability were employed, which was actually 4 percent less than in 1985. Among those employed, Group III persons with were doing the best (79 percent); only 10 percent of Group II persons with and 9 percent of Group I were employed. A study revealed that about 40 percent of persons with a disability were unhappy with the character and content of the work, and 39 percent were not satisfied with their working conditions.⁶⁵ Clearly the issue of employment and occupation was only getting worse as the Soviet Union moved away from a centrally planned system. The government recognized it but could offer very little.

In December 1989, D'iachkov published an open letter to Kaznacheev in which he wrote that more than 300 000 acquired a disability yearly in the RFSFR, a third of them younger than forty years of age. D'iachkov remarked that although there was now no persecution of persons like Gennady Gus'kov,⁶⁶ who set up the first cooperative shop for persons

⁶⁵*Sotsial'noe obespechenie* [Social Security] 11(1988); cited in Dunn and Dunn, p. 228.

⁶⁶see chapter two.

with a physical disability, not much had changed in this respect. Although the UN had issued a Declaration of the Rights of the Disabled and published materials on achieving equality for persons with a physical disability, no one was taking responsibility for actions of this sort in the Soviet Union.

D'iachkov also criticized the Minister of Social Security, remarking that statements like "we are posing the question of the creation of complexes in which people live and work" were not being followed up in practice. D'iachkov was adversarial of the administration of VOI, remarking that although the Society had been established, no organization defended persons with a physical disability. For example, no more than 8 to 9 percent of the 100 000 persons with a disability in Kuibyshev Oblast in the Urals had joined the organization. VOI was created from above, D'iachkov remarked, and remained there, closely bound up with the structure of the Ministry of Social Security. Administrators were "fatally incompetent", but nonetheless had the right to distribute funds, use privileges and take advantage of possibilities. Those specialists among persons with a physical disability were in fact kept from the management of affairs.

D'iachkov's criticisms seemed to follow the initial day-to-day experiences of the Society, which proved to be daunting. For example, those members of the Society in the

Kuibyshev raion (district)⁶⁷ of Moscow found it difficult to determine how many persons with a physical disability lived in their area. Although the Communist Party was quick to give the Society facilities to work in and its own telephone line, information on addresses given to members at the raion social security department and at several adult and children's polyclinics proved to have limited usefulness. In addition, the information number of Moscow telephone was of marginal help: two requests for telephone numbers were free; each additional number cost fifteen kopeks.⁶⁸ Despite controversies within the community, however, the Society succeeded in establishing relations with interest groups abroad. For example, in September and October 1988, the Moscow Society of Disabled hosted a delegation which included American Vietnam veterans, "prosthetists, an orthopaedic surgeon, readjustment psychologists, computer designers and transportation (wheelchair) specialists." The trip was organized by Earthstewards Network (Washington State) and the Soviet Foundation for Social Inventions.⁶⁹

3. Persons with a Physical Disability and the Media

⁶⁷A raion is comparable to a rural county or an urban ward.

⁶⁸E. Potapova, "Kogda est'opora" [When Support is Wearing Away], *Sotsial'noe obespechenie* [Social Security] 12 (1988): 40-42; cited in Dunn and Dunn, p. 228.

⁶⁹Marilyn Golden, "Mission: Moscow", *Challenge* (January-February, 1989): 18-25. Also see *Moscow News* no.41 (1988): 4.

As mentioned above, government legislation created the conditions for a revitalization of public initiative in Soviet society during perestroika. Persons with a physical disability were directly affected by these changes. At first, the popular and public media were instrumental in publicizing the work of local charitable organizations.⁷⁰ Questionnaires and essays on charity and other forms of material support revealed widespread public concern.⁷¹

The public media was also instrumental in illustrating the daily living and working conditions of persons with a physical disability. In January 1988 the Soviet television show First Program broadcast a segment called "Nashi Dolgi" (Our Debts) - one of the rare instances in which persons on crutches or in wheelchairs were shown on Soviet television.⁷²

Moscow News reported on several aspects of life for

⁷⁰For a general analysis, see *The Station Relay*, volume 4, nos. 1-5 (September 1988-May 1989): 78-81; and Matthews, "Perestroika", pp. 163-165. Matthews remarks that in publicizing the concerns of local support groups and promoting appropriate reaction to it, "it is possible to perceive, in this respect, a distinct change of editorial policy in a number of leading newspapers." See p. 163.

⁷¹For example, in a *Moscow News* no. 8 (1989) survey, 72 per cent of 800 people surveyed believed pensioners - especially those living alone, and peasants - were the least provided for and most needed the state's support. Thirty percent believed persons with a disability were the least provided for. Also see *Moscow News*, no. 32 (1988): 16; *Moscow News*, no. 10 (1990): 7; and *Moscow News*, no. 30 (1991): 9.

⁷²Dunn and Dunn, "Everyday Lives", p. 228.

persons with a physical disability, including unsatisfactory living conditions in special clinics,⁷³ rent-free and private ownership housing for persons receiving a disability in World War II⁷⁴ and the transformation of reception houses, government dachas, and cottages in Armenia into holiday homes for orphaned children and war and labour veterans.⁷⁵ Human interest stories and vignettes of persons with a physical disability were also featured.⁷⁶ *Moscow News* reported on instances of public protest by persons with a physical disability. For example, a hunger strike by Soviet Afghanistan veterans demanding the opening of a much promised training and rehabilitation center for them was reported.⁷⁷ A demonstration by persons with a physical disability in Red Square, before the opening of the USSR Supreme Soviet in September 1989, over working conditions in a local factory was covered by *Moscow News*.⁷⁸ Letters from persons with a physical disability explaining how perestroika and the reintroduction of worker cooperatives

⁷³See *Moscow News*, no. 17(1990): 15

⁷⁴See *Moscow News*, no. 18(1990): 2; and no. 11(1991): 2.

⁷⁵*Moscow News*, no. 37(1988). Also see *Moscow News Supplement*, no. 3(1988):5

⁷⁶See *Moscow News*, no. 2(1989): 2; no. 10(1991): 14; no. 41(1988): 4; and no. 31(1989): 2.

⁷⁷*Moscow News*, no. 4(1990): 2.

⁷⁸*Moscow News*, no. 41(1989): 14.

brought higher earnings, better medical assistance, and social benefits were also published.⁷⁹

Lack of accessibility to buildings and public transportation for persons with a physical disability were illustrated by the popular media for the first time during perestroika. In February 1989, *Ogonek* reported on the lack of wheelchair accessibility in Moscow and the City Soviet's Executive Committee's refusal to move on the issue.⁸⁰ *Moscow News* called on its readers to help persons with a physical disability after receiving a letter asking all the charitable Christian and human rights institutions to help persons with a physical disability living in homes to purchase buses for increased mobilization. One boarding school in Leningrad was using a hearse to transport persons with a physical disability to different cultural events and exhibits.⁸¹

4. Conclusion

Perestroika ushered in a new era in the relationship between state and society in the Soviet Union. It was a policy of social and economic restructuring engineered from above, but fully expecting support and initiative from below. By the end of 1991, the ramifications of perestroika had been largely responsible for bringing down the political

⁷⁹See *Moscow News*, no. 6 (1990): 2.

⁸⁰*Ogonek*, no. 9 (February, 1988): 12-15.

⁸¹*Moscow News*, no. 38 (1990): 7.

establishment and marking the end of 70-plus years of Communist rule. Nevertheless, economic and social restructuring affected the daily lives of almost everyone, especially those individuals long denied the basic rights and freedoms others enjoyed. Persons with a physical disability were a large and important example of this transformation.

Government initiated reforms like increased pensions and benefits, in addition to social-security administration, were meant as immediate responses to a change in state orientation. These changes were no doubt significant, but when one considers how restricted these benefits were, and the increased costs of living, direct 'top-down' reforms proved to be limited. Government reforms were significant, no doubt, but political in their agenda and unilateral to a degree. In addition, the social-security administrative system, including pensions was virtually bankrupt, but not free of the tangled web of bureaucracy and centralized planning. While people like Sergei D'iachkov called for greater local control, the central government stumbled along the worn road to extinction.

It is at the community and nongovernmental level where one truly recognizes significant and worthwhile change. Public involvement in the affairs of the state - something completely unheard of for persons with a physical disability until 1988 - became a reality when persons with a physical

disability were elected to the Congress of People's Deputies. In addition, the interests of persons with a physical disability benefitted from local and state wide charitable funds, another product of perestroika. It is also significant to note that foreign and international charitable organizations like the Salvation Army - re-established in 1991 after 68 years - also appeared at this time.⁸² Persons with a physical disability were also represented in the administration of the Funds, putting them in a more directly responsible position.

The establishment of an All-Russia Society for the Disabled proved to be the culmination of ten years of frustration and repression. The establishment of a society for persons with a physical disability had long been denied while persons with visual and hearing impairments had their own societies. The Society understood its role in the labour and social rehabilitation of persons with a physical disability to be of great importance. For example, the need to re-introduce worker cooperatives was strongly supported by the Society. Some in the Society called for increased worker cooperatives for persons with a physical disability and less material aid from the government. The Society also enabled persons with a physical disability living in the Russian Republic to present their views in an

⁸²For more on the Salvation Army in Russia see *Moscow News* no. 4(1992): 6

organization which they could call their own. The early organizational and financial difficulties of the Society should not be overlooked, but above all the All-Russia Society of the Disabled allowed persons with a physical disability to take an active part in the public life of a radically transforming state and society. D'iachkov's criticisms over fiscal and administrative issues were well-founded, but one must not overlook the fact that his ability to speak freely without fear of reprisals represented a major step in the road towards a civil society.

Finally, the public media provided a vital link between the able-bodied and non able-bodied in the Soviet Union. Public attitude towards persons with a physical disability had long been one of ambivalence. A combination of rigid ideology and unwavering silence in the press coaxed the public into believing that persons with a physical disability were taken care of. Perestroika opened up several avenues hitherto closed to public awareness, and in the process informed citizens on the daily lives of persons with a physical disability.

**Chapter IV- Perestroika and Sport for Persons with a
Physical Disability**

The previous chapter illustrated how issues like employment, political participation, community involvement and the right to organize were dramatically affected by social and economic restructuring. The effects of perestroika on persons with a physical disability in sport is the focus of this chapter.¹ The first section will focus on the inability of pre-perestroika measures to eradicate the gulf between mass and elite sport. The second section will cover those measures during perestroika that facilitated increased participation among previously disadvantaged groups. The final section will focus on the significant advances made by persons with a physical disability in the realm of sport during perestroika, in particular the establishment of sporting societies for persons with a physical disability and increased participation at international events.

1. Government Policy and the Realities of *Nassovost*'

It is important to stress from the outset that the

¹For a general analysis of perestroika and sport, see Kenneth M. Cox, "The Impact of Perestroika on Physical Education and Sport Science in the USSR: Phase I, 1987-88", *Journal of Abstracts in International Education*, 16(Spring/Summer, 1988): 25-52; Jim Riordan, "Playing to New Rules: Soviet Sport and Perestroika", *Soviet Studies* 42(January 1990): 133-145; and Jim Riordan, "The Rise, Fall and Rebirth of Sporting Women in Russia in the USSR", *Journal of Sport History*, vol. 18, no. 1(Spring, 1991): 183-199.

duplicity behind government pontifications on the precedence of *massovost'* over *masterstvo* affected all Soviet persons. Nevertheless, the government slowly expressed concern about the factors impeding the mass physical culture movement as early as 1979 when an article in *Komsomolskaya pravda*² revealed the inadequacies of the system. The lack of athletic complexes for mass-participation physical culture and sport activities was cited as well as the increasing gap between the development of mass-participation physical culture and superior athletic skills. In September 1981 the government resolution "On the Further Development of Mass-Participation Physical Culture and Sports" addressed the shortcomings in mass-participation sport in the Soviet Union.³ Nevertheless, four years later it was admitted that only eight percent of men and two percent of women engaged in sport regularly.⁴ Two-thirds of workers did not belong to sports organizations and their physical fitness evidently "makes only a tiny contribution to higher productivity, a lower sickness rate and resolution of social and economic

²*Komsomolskaya pravda*, January 28, 1979: 2-3; cited in *The Current Digest of the Soviet Press* 31(4): 8-9.

³See *Pravda*, September 24, 1981: 1-2; and *The Current Digest of the Soviet Press* 33(38): 13-14.

⁴O. Dmitrieva, "Bokal protiv detstvu" [Stop Creating Idols], *Komsomolskaya pravda*, 8 (June 1985): 2; cited in Riordan, "Playing to New Rules": 134.

problems".⁵ In June 1985, a resolution "On Measures to Improve the Use of Clubs and Athletic Facilities" once again criticized the existing cultural and sports organizations, but offered no specific measures to rectify the issues.

2. Perestroika and the Drive Towards Mass Sport'

The ramifications of perestroika on sport in general were significant. As government control over sport became decentralized and the mass media was encouraged to respond, previously disadvantaged groups benefitted. More people openly criticized the state's sport policy. For example, one writer in Moscow News remarked that:

Not too long ago statistics were so 'cleverly' prepared in this country that on paper you got the idea that the entire population goes in for physical cultureCan't we see for ourselves in our everyday life that much more stress is on professional sport, on training record breakers, champions, medal winners than on mass-scale sport?....What about the eternal shortage of sports gear? Its that same old selection - if you're accepted for training in some sport, you get sports gear, if not - you won't be able to buy one for love or money....Medals are precious things, but the health of the nation is much more precious.⁶

Criticisms against the increasing gulf in privileges between the elite and the masses, in addition to early intensive training of children, were also voiced. Former

⁵Sport v SSSR, no. 7(1988): 15; cited in Riordan, "Playing to New Rules": 134.

⁶A. Druzenko, "Sport: Festivals and Humdrum Thoughts", *Moscow News* 42(1988): 3. Also see O. Polonskaya, "To Your Health", *Moscow News* 30(1988): 15.

athletes with a physical disability were asked to comment on their own personal feelings about the old Soviet sport system. Some expressed openly their criticisms. In one instance, *Moscow News* featured an interview with gymnast Yelena Mukhina, the 1978 over-all world champion, confined to a special medical chair after rupturing her spine during training on July 3, 1980.⁷ Asked for her opinion on the detrimental effects of complex gymnastics on childrens' and women's organs, Mukhina stressed the importance for flexibility and subtlety in the "human interrelations" factor:

The coaches today should realize that they are, after all, working with children who sometimes have to stand up to more physical and moral stresses which not even all grown-ups could bear.⁸

Perestroika also had immediate effects on sport at the international level. The USSR and USA engaged in the first-ever cultural physical education exchange in 1987 under the theme "Better Understanding Through Youth Fitness." About 300 able-bodied students from California and Washington D.C. took the Soviet Youth Performance Test, to see how their fitness levels compared to Soviet youth. The purpose of the testing was to encourage *glasnost* (openness) and comparison, not competition. As part of the USA/USSR Youth Fitness

⁷ *Moscow News* 10(1987): 15. Also see O. Petrichenko, "Ne sotvori sebe kumira", *Ogonek* no. 12(March 1987): 14-15; and *Sport v SSSR* no. 6(1987): 26-28.

⁸Ibid.

Exchange Program, Valentina Yuritcheva, Chief of the School of Physical Education, State Sports Committee (SSC) of the USSR, visited the USA and attended the annual convention of the American Alliance of Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance (AAHPERD) in April, 1988.⁹

Direct government control over sport policy loosened gradually, and the ideal of sport for all became more possible. A number of cooperative health, fitness and sport clubs began to function after enterprises were legalized in 1987. In the middle of the year, the major trade union sport societies combined to form a single sports organization in order to improve facilities and to 'democratize the work of sports clubs'. They also declared their intention of reducing elite leagues and competitions so they could divert more funds to sport for all and to serve a greater diversity of interest groups and health clubs.¹⁰

State-guided philanthropic organizations were also involved in the 'sport for all' drive. A charitable association of sportspersons attached to the All-Union V.I. Lenin Children's Fund was set up in 1989. At the press conference to mark the event, the founders of the association noted that it was a charity commercial organization which would help sportspersons who wished to

⁹Kenneth M. Cox, "The Impact of *Perestroika*": 34-35.

¹⁰Jim Riordan, "Playing to New Rules": 135.

sign contracts with foreign clubs, or participate in international competitions. In return, the foreign currency it received would be transferred to the Children's Fund. One of the founders, the chess grandmaster Garri Kasparov explained the reason for breaking off from the State Committee of the USSR for Physical Culture and Sport and its foreign economic department, Sovintersport: "The State Committee wants to receive all the money, but we want to receive this money ourselves, pay state taxes, and spend the rest on children."¹¹ The Soviet Health and Charity Fund also expressed an interest in "creating appropriate conditions for the elderly, sick and persons with to engage in physical culture and sports that they can manage."¹²

3. Sport for Persons with a Physical Disability During Perestroika

The recognition of the importance of sport for persons with a physical disability coincided with the early changes underway in other aspects of daily life during perestroika.¹³ In an article in *Sobesednik* [Childhood] in 1987, it was admitted that "for a long time we pretended the problem [of state neglect for persons with physical disabilities] did not exist. We thought: the state looks

¹¹*Moscow News*, 26 (1989): 2.

¹²*Izvestiya*, September 17, 1988: 2; cited in *The Current Digest of the Soviet Press* 40(37): 19.

¹³See chapter three.

after the handicapped, social security provides living and working conditions for them. What else do they want?"¹⁴ The author also commented on conditions in Moscow where there was "no equipment, coach, doctor or sports facilities for the disabled."¹⁵

This article revealed the intricate relationship between general attitudes towards persons with a physical disability and social interaction. Perestroika illustrated the need for civic involvement in the face of crumbling state hegemony. The issue of the rights and needs of persons with a disability in general and access to physical culture in particular were intertwined as social initiative increased.

a. The USSR Federation of Physical Culture for the Disabled

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the founding of the Russian Society for the Disabled in 1988 was a significant step in creating greater involvement and

¹⁴V. Ponomareva, "Eshche odna pobeda" [One More Victory], *Sobesednik* [Childhood], no. 37 (September, 1987): 12; cited in Riordan, "Playing to New Rules": 136.

¹⁵Ibid. This comment seems to reinforce the results of a study on leisure and persons with a disability carried out by the Institute for Sociological Research at the USSR Academy of Sciences in Moscow. The study revealed that pensioners and persons with a disability spent on the average about one hour per week engaged in physical culture and sport. The study concluded that "in general the pattern of use of free time by disabled persons and pensioners is not diverse, active, without physical tension. It is, for the most part passive." *Journal of Leisurability*, vol. 15, no. 2 (Spring 1988): 30-31.

responsibility in Soviet society for persons with a physical disability.¹⁶ It is interesting to note, however, that the All-Russian Society was not the first organization created by and for persons with a physical disability during perestroika. The establishment of the USSR Federation of Physical Culture for the Disabled in 1987 pre-dated the All-Russian Society and illustrated the importance given to physical culture and sport in the daily lives of persons with a physical disability, something completely neglected before perestroika.

The chairman of the Federation, Valentin Dikul, was a high-profile power juggler at the Moscow Circus. While performing as an aerial acrobat in 1960, Dikul fell from a height of thirteen meters. After five years of intense exercise on a program he established, Dikul was able to walk again. From 1965 on, Dikul offered his services for persons with a physical disability at the circus (a comment on the availability of locations). Dikul still performed at the circus, balancing his performances and consultations at the circus with appointments at the Burdenko All-Union Centre of Cerebrospinal Injuries. Up to 1987, over 18,000 people had taken up Dikul's system, which included 600 exercises, under the supervision of physicians. Six hundred had been healed

¹⁶For a discussion on the Russian Society for the Disabled, see chapter three.

completely.¹⁷ The popularity of Dikul went beyond his rehabilitation programs, however. Dikul was also seen as a popular figure for children with a physical disability. A Canadian official writing in 1986 on Soviet childhood experience noted that at a school for children with a physical disability in Moscow, a photograph of a visit by Dikul adorned the school's museum where children were encouraged to identify with a person with a disability who has had a successful life. Children were inspired to collect material about Dikul and others.¹⁸

In an interview with *Moscow News* in 1987¹⁹, Dikul explained the conditions persons with a physical disability faced and the tasks that lay ahead:

On June 4, I went to an invalids car rally in Tallinn. As distinct from the athletes, who belong to the Voluntary Society for Assisting Army, Air Force and Navy, the invalids competed in their own cars, repaired the machines and bought gasoline themselves; organized the competitions and paid for the hotel with their own money without any help.

The Federation has its work cut out on organizing physical culture and sport for invalids and pensioners. I do hope we'll meet with a response, understanding and assistance on the part of various organizations.

Dikul also outlined the initial plans of the Federation:

We'll start by creating the necessary conditions

¹⁷*Moscow News* 25(1987): 15

¹⁸Landon Pearson, *Children of Glasnost: Growing Up Soviet* (Toronto: Lester & Orpen Dennys, 1990), pp. 180-1.

¹⁹*Moscow News* 25(1987): 15

for the setting up of similar federations in Republics, regions, cities and districts. We've already elaborated the schedule for sports competitions for 1988, which envisages the participation by our invalids in the Winter Olympics for the handicapped. We intend to study foreign know-how in organizing competitions and using gym equipment for invalids. We also have to deal with the questions of teaching coaches with specialized know-how.

We are pinning great hopes on the TV, which has a lot of experience of broadcasting programmes for people going in for sport. A TV programme on sports for the handicapped is necessary as are columns in sports periodicals. Our Federation expects to go in literally for all sports at its clubs.²⁰

Dikul's hopes for greater media attention were soon realized. An article in 1988 by Stiv Shenkman in the popular periodical *Sport in the USSR*²¹ illustrated the importance of sport for persons with a physical disability. Shenkman's interview with Mihkel Aitsam, chairman of Tallinn's Invasport Club, put the experiences and challenges of persons with a physical disability in Soviet society into perspective:

The problem is that there is a shortage of good wheel-chairs here. We cannot ride them into a lift, mount stairs, ride into a shop or public building. It is not just a matter of wheel chairs. We see the problem as much more serious. Society is not yet prepared to include invalids in the ranks of its full-fledged members.²²

A sense of personal fulfillment and an equal and active role

²⁰Ibid.

²¹Stiv Shenkman, "We are Sports-Minded Too", *Sport in the USSR* 5(1988): 48-52.

²²Ibid., 50.

in society are not mutually exclusive.

Sport and especially sports organizations are fundamental in the integration of persons with a physical disability into everyday social life. Aitsam comments that, "The Invasport Club was founded seven years ago". At first there were just a few people. Now there are several hundred members. We take part in wheelchair races, motor sport, swimming, volleyball." Aitsam also remarked on the increased opportunity for diversification during perestroika, especially after the Soviet Sports Committee gave its support to sports clubs for persons with a physical disability in Tallinn, Leningrad, Riga, Vilnius and Omsk:

Our club now has an opportunity to diversify its activity. It is of particular significance that the Kalev trade union sports society took upon itself to help the club financially. This enabled us to open an account in the bank, to invite experienced instructors, to travel to competitions in other towns and to host members of other clubs.²³

The Tallinn Invasport Society was maintained by the republic's trade unions, keeping membership dues to a minimum. Adults paid three rubles a year; children and teenagers one. The Society received about 15 000 rubles from trade union funds every year to pay the coaches, rent gyms and pools, and cover travel expenses when the Invasport

²³Ibid., 52.

team visits another town.²⁴ These funds enabled select persons with a physical disability to participate in a wide variety of sporting events at advanced levels. A thirty-six year old Estonian man used a specially equipped car to enter racing events, compete in javelin-throwing, and take part regularly in contests and exhibition performances. Coaches also met with athletes with a physical disability twice a week at the Olympic Sailing Center in Tallinn.²⁵ It was unclear, however, whether these examples of diversification among elite athletes represented the experiences of casual participants.

Nevertheless, sport societies like Invasport went beyond the provision of sport and physical culture for persons with a physical disability. They have also served as centers for social events, leading Aitsam to remark that, "We had four weddings in Invasport in the past five years. We're not a matrimonial bureau, but I'm glad, nevertheless. The more happy people there are in a community, the healthier it is."²⁶

Shankman commented on the universal appeal that sport has for all, irrespective of level and ability. After watching a hard-fought and exciting volleyball match, he

²⁴G. Rozov, "A Car for a Happy Man", *Soviet Life* (June 1987): 12-14; cited in *The Station Relay* vol. 2, no. 4 (March 1987): 17.

²⁵Ibid.

²⁶Ibid.

remarked:

Thrills, emotions, the joy of victory, the dismay of defeat. Sedentary volleyball enables [persons with physical disabilities] to experience everything that ordinary athletes do. When I first watched such volleyball, I admit, my heart gave a twinge. But within just half an hour, compassion aside, I was engrossed in following the play of a sixsome that had caught my fancy, cheering over good smashes and frowning at poor services. In other words, my sentiments were no different from those that I experience watching ordinary volleyball at a sports hall or on the beach. It was my conclusion that during the game I had managed to overcome a needless sense of compassion in me and, with it, a certain distance from invalids.²⁷

b. Competition and Cooperation at the International Level

One of the most significant changes in state sport policy during perestroika was the transformation of international competition from a battle of ideology to the spirit of understanding and cooperation through competition and participation.²⁸ While persons with hearing and visual had performed at the international level for some years - and had been quite successful - it was not until perestroika that persons with a physical disability were given the same opportunities. Now persons with a physical disability were

²⁷Ibid., 52.

²⁸The Sixth Session of the Intergovernmental Committee for Physical Education and Sport, held in Moscow from November 15-18, 1988 illustrated the new approach to sport during perestroika. See especially the opening address by Nikolai Roussak, Vice-Chairman of the Committee in United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), *Final Report of the Intergovernmental Committee for Physical Education and Sport, Sixth Session, Moscow, 15-18 November 1988* (Paris: UNESCO, June 1988), Annex 2.

able to compete under the flag of their country with other athletes from around the world.²⁹

Before 1988 the USSR had never held domestic championships at any level for any category of persons with a disability. Two years after China had staged its first nationwide games for persons with a physical disability and in the year of the Seoul Paralympics, the All-Union Disabled Sports Federation held its inaugural championship in Estonia.³⁰ The Tallinn Invasport Federation was one of the first groups to take part in international competition at Brno, Czechoslovakia in 1988. Members from the Federation won the five kilometer race for women and the ten kilometer race for men.³¹

Athletes with a physical disability also made their debut at the Paralympic Games during perestroika. After a number of well publicised complaints that "sport for the disabled has been developing around the world with virtually

²⁹Intellectually-challenged athletes also made their debut in the Special Olympics at this time. More than twenty children took part in the summer European Special Olympics in Scotland in August 1990 (All hard currency expenditures connected with the trip were covered by the Soviet Charity and Health Fund and the State Committee for Physical Culture and Sports). In the spring of 1993, mentally challenged athletes from Russia made their debut at the fifth Special Olympics in Salzburg and Schladming, Austria. They took first place, winning 49 medals. See *Moscow News* (1993): 15.

³⁰Riordan, "Playing to New Rules": 136.

³¹"We are Sports Minded Too", *Sport in the USSR* 5(1988): 52

no participation from the Soviet Union"³², Soviet athletes with a visual disability participated in the 1988 Seoul Paralympics. The government also appeared committed to supporting elite events for athletes with a physical disability, even after the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991. At the 1992 Paralympic Games in Barcelona, Spain from September 3 to 14, Russian President Boris Yeltsin sent a letter to the members of the Unified Team, commending the athletes from the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and calling for greater integration:

You are an example of dignity, optimism, faith in one's strength and the firm belief in human possibilities. Your sporting achievements are a brilliant testimony to the capabilities of disabled people and that disabled people are the equal of any other citizens of their country.

....May the competition be honest, beautiful and intense. Your rewards will not only be medals and titles, but also the victory of the human spirit....³³

Competitors from Estonia and Latvia also competed for their respective countries.³⁴

Soviet and Russian successes at international events were no doubt impressive, however persons with a physical disability also benefitted from increased cooperation between western and Russian sport organizations in other

³²Riordan, "Playing to New Rules": 136-137.

³³Translated in *Disability Today*, vol. 2, no. 1 (Fall 1992): 49. Athletes from the Unified Team won 46 medals in total.

³⁴Estonia won three medals, Latvia none.

ways. To begin, international competitors experienced first-hand the superior conditions athletes from western countries enjoyed. International competitions gave Russian athletes a chance to compare experiences in public through the media. At the Ski Spectacular Challenge for Disabled Skiers in Breckenridge, Colorado, Soviet athletes marvelled at the ease with which persons with a physical disability travelled in airports compared to their own experiences upon return at Sheremetyevo-2 Airport in Moscow.³⁵

Increased international contacts also brought significant (although limited) opportunities for non-elite participants with a physical disability at home. While visiting Moscow in 1990, Dr. Robert Steadward, President of the International Paralympic Committee, discussed the integration of sport for persons with a physical disability into the "Sport for All" program. It was suggested by Natalia Sladkova, Secretary General of the USSR Federation of Physical Culture for the Disabled that a friendly "Sport for All" competition should be held between Odessa and Vancouver, Canada in 1990, incorporating the participation of persons with a physical disability.³⁶

³⁵*Moscow News* 2(1990): 10.

³⁶Letter, dated April 26, 1990 from Natalia Sladkova, Secretary General of the USSR Federation of Physical Culture for the Disabled to Dr. Robert Steadward, President of the International Paralympic Committee. Also see the feature interview with Dr. Steadward in *Soviet Sport* 88(April 17, 1990).

Finally, sports organizations in the west have been crucial in providing financial assistance for analogous projects in Russia. Former President Mikhail Gorbachev's visit to Canada in the spring of 1993 included a stop at the Variety Village, a six-acre sports complex designed specifically for persons with physical and developmental disabilities. The complex was serving as a model for a similar center being built in Moscow with money raised in Canada through the McDonald's 'McHappy' program. George Cohon, McDonald's Restaurants' head, reported that two million dollars had been raised towards a complex in Moscow.³⁷ Although Gorbachev carried no official Russian government portfolio since his resignation two years earlier, it was clear that such programs as the 'McHappy' program signified the commitment towards an integrated Russian society through international cooperation.

4. Conclusion

The effects of perestroika on sport for persons with a physical disability were significant but unbalanced. Persons with a physical disability made significant strides at the international and Olympic levels. Persons with a physical disability also found it easier to participate in a diversity of activities with the establishment of sport societies representing their interests.

Ironically, however, fundamental issues common before

³⁷*Disability Today* vol. 2, no. 3 (Spring 1993): 5.

perestroika emerged which actually shifted the *massovost'* and *masterstvo* conflict front and center to persons with a physical disability. Were the opportunities for mass participation amongst persons with a physical disability being sacrificed for high-prestige events like the Paralympic Games? Were sport societies like Invasport geared mainly towards the elite performers despite low entrance costs? Clearly, the majority of persons with a physical disability could not participate in sailing. In addition, Invasport was well-administered and funded generously, but what about the experiences of sport societies outside Russia and especially the Baltics? On the other hand, international 'friendly' competitions between Canadian and Russian cities seemed to signify the recognition of the importance of participation for all persons with a physical disability.

Perestroika brought increased opportunities for persons with a physical disability in sport and forged an atmosphere of optimism and a sense of challenge. It helped to break down the 'we know what's good for you' syndrome,³⁸ long the norm in Soviet sport policy. Indeed, the re-orientation of sport during perestroika mirrored the transformation of other aspects of daily life experiences for persons with a physical disability.

³⁸Jim Riordan, "Playing to New Rules": 133.

Whither the "New Soviet Man": A Conclusion

I remember my childhood. An invalid
 attracted us like a magnet.
 He would gather us kids, and
 Would commence his story slowly.
 He told us about snipers, foxholes,
 Tank attacks. He wore a medal.
 Suddenly he would stare at me
 Like through a haze. He sank
 Into himself for quite a while.
 Then, embarrassed, he would move.
 His old crutch creaked.
 The doleful sound refracted
 Inside me with tremor. It scorched.
 The heart would overflow with pity
 We understood each other without words.¹

This poem reveals some interesting aspects of popular attitudes towards persons with a physical disability in contemporary Russia. Metaphors like *"he sank into himself"*, *"his old crutch creaked"* and *"the heart would overflow with pity"* are used in this poem to induce compassion and responsibility for suffering on the part of the able-bodied. What does this poem say about popular attitudes towards persons with a physical disability? It has been noted by a literary critic that in Russia there is no such thing as the image of persons with a disability in state publishing house fiction, popular or otherwise, let alone a pattern, an image

¹Viacheslav Sablukov, "Recollection", in *Almanak 'Isotki'* (Moscow, 1986): 346; cited in Vera S. Dunham, "Images of the Disabled, Especially the War Wounded, in Soviet Literature", in *The Disabled in the Soviet Union*, p. 151.

or a reflection of reality.² Surely there is no standardized image of persons with a disability, however the above poem raises an altogether different social issue which is confronted by all persons with a disability today. How are expressions of pity and/or commiseration detrimental to the daily lives of persons with a disability today?

Persons with a disability - physical and intellectual - have had a place in the popular literature of Russia, from Nikolai Gogol and Fyodor Dostoyevsky in the nineteenth century to Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn in the twentieth. Nevertheless, the place of persons with a disability in popular culture must be qualified by certain considerations. The question to be asked is: Have popular attitudes of persons with a disability been marked by empathy - feeling the spirit of others - or merely sympathy, a sharing in the emotions of others, no doubt, but mainly the sharing of one's ills, pains and difficulties? The former is positive and predicated on equality. The latter is negative and, to a degree, condescending. Some would maintain that empathy implies arrogance through the assumption that one understands and comprehends fully someone else. On the other hand, empathy is not presumptive; stereotypes are excluded.

There is no hard and fast reason why much of Russian literature is sympathetic towards persons with a disability.

²Ibid., p. 153.

It has been argued that at the very least, literature "provides a permanent place in the history and literature of the European East, a place from which [persons with a disability] can enter the minds of all future generations of the population, and from which, short of the most obscurantist and long-standing censorship, they cannot be deposed."³ There is, however, an implied relationship between political and popular culture which is undergoing a mammoth transformation in the last years of the twentieth century. In a centralized and top-heavy administered command system where the interests of state presided over the rights - and, by extension needs - of society, questions of sympathy versus empathy were blurred. The state cared little for issues of morality, let alone terminological differences. Yet, human rights is very much a question of morality in addition to legality. Taken one step further, the treatment of persons with a disability reveals the cultural values of a society. The permanent place of persons with a disability in Russian literature on its own does not suggest attitudes of egalitarianism. Indeed, sympathetic images of persons with a disability in literature could be used to reinforce social stratification.

Russia is perpetually at a cross-roads. Consequently, the issues at stake are not wholly dissimilar from previous times. Since the mid-1980's, ideology, nationality, human

³*The Disabled in the Soviet Union*, p. 301.

rights and the environment, to name just a few, have all been affected by the new relationship between state and society. Even today, the fundamental and never-ending conflict continues to be played out: the place of individuality in the struggle between society and state. Since the mid-1980's, social initiative and grass-roots organization have emerged, but it does not take much to see which aspects of Russian political culture have predominated in the past. Certain daily experiences for persons with a physical disability in the future will be no different than the experiences of others, but the will to break through the inertia is strong and expectation is high. As Ilya Zaslavsky commented in the summer of 1990, "It's a terrible thing to have a democracy that talks but doesn't work. After so many years of silence, people expect great change."⁴

Yet, even the experiences of persons with a physical disability has been varied in different regions of the former Soviet Union. The Baltic republics - and especially Estonia - proved to be at the forefront in the daily living and working conditions of persons with a physical disability. Indeed, the programs of the Baltics served as models for other regions, especially the Russian Republic. Societies for persons with a physical disability - in

⁴Feshabach and Friendly Jr., eds., *Ecocide in the USSR*, p. 230.

politics and sport, among others - were established first in the Baltics. Re-vamped and reformed social assistance programs were first introduced in the Baltics. Without stepping too far forward, one could possibly argue that the experiences of persons with a physical disability in the Baltics differed from those of persons in other regions due to the fundamental dissimilarities in the relationship between state and society.

The disparity in the daily living and working conditions of persons with a physical disability between the Baltics and Russia is similar in other areas of civic involvement, most notably the environment. The roots of dissimilarity lie in the centuries old tradition of East-West comparison and contrast where the ideology of statism and restricted civic involvement identified with the former clashes with the ideology of individuality and responsible representation associated with the latter. Surely these time-worn methods of understanding are simplistic, but they serve as a springboard in offering one the opportunity to identify the differences in the values, attitudes and ways of life of a multitude of communities and societies around the world.

The passivity associated with the statism of Soviet hierarchy must be transformed into active communication and cooperation between individuals and communities in a civil society. Persons with a physical disability are individual

human beings, as are all persons, regardless of physical, mental, religious, or material make-up. All individuals enjoy legal rights because they are human beings. With rights comes responsibility, however. It is the understanding or ambivalence towards universality of responsibility to oneself and to others that will shape the daily living and working experiences for all.

Glossary

1. Terminology and Definitions: World Health Organization Classifications

The interdisciplinary approach to a historical study requires clear and precise definitions of all terms and concepts which one encounters in the context of the work. As mentioned in the outset, 'integration', 'accessibility' and 'equal-opportunity' can only be understood in a historical context if one understands the universal premises behind them.

To integrate means "to absorb into an existing whole". Integration is the "coordination of personality and environment."¹ 'Accessibility' is defined as "the state or quality of being accessible; this includes "the right of approach [and] the right to consult."² 'Equal opportunity' refers to "employment that does not discriminate between men and women. Certain universal criteria can be measured through these definitions as it relates to this study: (1) To what extent can persons with a disability make independent decisions on their lives and the society in which they live and (2) What are the political, economic and cultural conditions which affect them?

There are several complexities in the terminology and

¹*The New Lexicon Webster's Dictionary of the English Language* (New York: Lexicon Publications Inc., 1987), p. 502.

²*Ibid.*, p. 5.

definition of *disability*. To begin, there is the serious question of connotation. The official Soviet term for the academic discipline for those who teach children with a disability is *defektologija*; this clearly incorporates negative attitudes through its reference to physical limitations.³ The present trend in the international community is to discourage any reference that describes a person in terms of his or her limitations.⁴

Second, there are certain fundamental differences in the definition of key words that are currently under revision.⁵ There has been an effort to revise the definition of *disability* for the world community that can be used as a universal reference and will guarantee protection to those who are so defined. Presently, the World Health Organization (WHO) provides the following distinctions between *impairment*, *disability* and *handicap* in the World Programme of Action:

Impairment: Any loss or abnormality of psychological, physiological, or anatomical structure or function.

Disability: Any restriction or lack (resulting from an impairment) of ability to perform an activity in the manner or within the range considered normal for a human being.

³See William O. McCagg, "The Origins of Defectology", in *The Disabled in the Soviet Union*, pp. 39-61. McCagg offers several reasons why the terminology has lasted. See *Ibid.*, pp. 42-48.

⁴Despouy, *Human Rights*, p. 10, paragraph #86.

⁵*Ibid.*, pp. 11-12, paragraph #95.

Handicap: A disadvantage for a given individual, resulting from an impairment or disability, that limits or prevents the fulfillment of a role that is normal, depending on age, sex, social and cultural factors, for that individual.⁶

According to the definition contained in the Declaration on the Rights of Disabled Persons, the term "disabled person" means "any person unable to ensure by himself or herself, wholly or partly, the necessities of a normal individual and/or social life, as a result of a deficiency, either congenital or not, in his her physical or mental capabilities."⁷ Clearly, this definition of disability is restricted to the bodily functions of the individual. There is little regard for socio-cultural factors. Furthermore, even the definition is unclear; interpretations of "disabled persons" vary from country to country.

Definitional ambiguities have also led to stereotyping in many areas of social activity, including sport. One study discusses how the public and some professionals still often perceive all athletes with a disability as the same.⁸ In addition, there are several degrees of severity of

⁶Ibid., p. 11, paragraph #89. Compare these definitions to those of the Ministry of Fitness and Amateur Sport of the Canadian Government as outlined in "The Active Living Alliance-Words with Dignity". For more see page 1, footnote #1.

⁷Ibid., paragraph #90.

⁸See Claudine Sherrill, "Social and Psychological Dimensions of Sports for Disabled Athletes", in *Sport and Disabled Athletes*, pp. 21-24.

disability that are factors in detecting the extent of *handicap*.

There are also several complexities in defining *handicap*. While the term does consider disadvantages and restrictions at the social and economic level, disagreements arise when linking this (and the other) ideas to operational definitions.⁹ Indeed, *handicap* is for many purposes a relative, not an absolute condition. It is often as much a legal category defining eligibility for services as it is a description of a person's physical or mental state.¹⁰ One essay suggests that (in the Soviet case, at least), knowing how one applies the formal definitions *in practice* in every region is more important than the definitions themselves.¹¹

Finally, the above WHO Classifications were established in the context of health experience and are therefore basically clinical and do not incorporate the social and cultural aspects that are necessarily present in *disability* and *impairment*. Persons may be treated as if they have a disability and subjected to many kinds of restrictions (occupational, social, educational, etc.) although from a clinical point of view they are not actually disabled.¹²

Is it possible to formulate a definition that allows

⁹Despouy, p. 11, paragraph #94.

¹⁰"Education of the Handicapped in the USSR": 469.

¹¹Ibid., p. 470.

¹²Despouy, p. 12, paragraph #96.

for the complexities of terminology? Are certain elements in *impairment, disability and handicapped* similar? Since there has not yet been a revision of WHO International Classifications, we can use the United Nations' recently suggested amendment to the WHO Classification:

Any person suffering from a permanent or prolonged functional disorder, whether physical or mental, which having regard to his age and social environment entails considerable disadvantages for the purpose of his family, social, educational or occupational integration, and for the effective enjoyment of his human rights, shall be considered disabled.¹³

This definition succeeds where previously others did not. It recognizes differences among persons with a disability but makes no distinction when it comes to the enjoyment of universal human rights for everyone in all spheres of social life. In this respect, *disability* is no longer an administrative and bureaucratic term used by the state to categorize and 'package' parts of society, irrespective of the complexities and sensitivities involved. *Disability* - whether it is functional, physical or mental - and the guarantees that make up human rights are not mutually exclusive. It remains to be seen whether this transformation of attitudes and values will be realized in the new relationship between state and society in Russia and her new independent neighbours.

2. Occupation and the Three-Tiered Classification of

¹³Ibid., p. 13, paragraph #104.

Disability

The idea of total or partial incapacity for work due to illness or accident seems to form the basis of all legislation on persons with a disability in many countries.¹⁴ This was certainly the case in the Soviet Union. In fact, all persons with a disability were classified on their ability to work: Group I included those who had lost all capacity for work and required constant care; Group II lost the capacity to work efficiently in their former or any other occupation but could possibly work under special conditions, but did not need constant nursing care; Group III included those who had partial and whose loss-of-work ability may be as high as two-thirds and were unable to work in their former occupations under pre-injury conditions. Nevertheless, they could engage in casual, part time or less skilled works in another occupation. Group III persons represented 70-80 percent of all persons with a disability.¹⁵

¹⁴Ibid., p. 12, paragraph #99.

¹⁵Bernice Madison, "Programs for the Disabled", in *The Disabled in the Soviet Union*, pp. 171-172.

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