Vincent Youmans—whose upper-crust parents often looked askance at their sons' songwriting careers—were far more typical. In fact, notes Pessen, nearly two-thirds of those he deems the "outstanding" composers and lyricists attended college, one-third went on to professional school (usually law), and nearly 90 percent came from what were considered well-to-do families. This at a time when only five to 10 percent of American youths went to college and barely one percent completed professional school.

But popular music was fast becoming big business. Sparked mainly by the expansion of the record and radio broadcasting industries, professional songwriters copyrighted more than 100,000 popular tunes during this 20-year "golden age" of American songwriting. Of course, most of those ditties were flops. (Even the "giants" of the era could only count about five percent of their total output as commercially successful.) Yet the ones that hit, hit big. Royalties from recordings and sheet music of Berlin's "Alexander's Rag Time Band" (1911) pulled in more than $100,000 the first year; "Cheek to Cheek" (1935), about $250,000. Porter, Richard Rodgers, and Lorenz Hart each grossed about half a million dollars a year just from their songs. Outside this elite circle, Pessen finds a handful of unexpected "one-shot" winners. The essayist Dorothy Parker occasionally tried her hand at writing lyrics and made it to the top-playing song charts with "How Am I to Know?" and "I Wished on the Moon." But poet Ogden Nash, a more prolific lyricist, succeeded only with "Speak Low."

While it is true, says Pessen, that "Tin Pan Alley rarely sang a song of social significance," he also believes that historians can glean something useful from the lyrics of that era. "The best of the songs . . . are gems that merit our attention not only for their value as a social barometer but also because they are things of beauty."

OTHER NATIONS

Gorbachev As Reformer?

"Waiting for Gorbachev" by Peter Reddaway, in *The New York Review of Books* (Oct. 10, 1985), 250 West 57th St., New York, N.Y. 10107.

For nearly two decades now, says Reddaway, program secretary at the Kennan Institute for Advanced Russian Studies, the Soviet Union has just been "muddling through."

Rates of crime, alcoholism, and divorce have risen; birth rates and industrial productivity have fallen. Chronic shortages of basic food and medicine persist. And, Reddaway observes, a perceived "lack of order" in everyday life has "demoralized" the Soviet population. Social discontent may provide the catalyst necessary to provoke a "change of course" in the Soviet government. "The entire situation might seem tailor-made for a reforming leader," namely Mikhail Gorbachev.

Since coming to power in March 1985, Gorbachev has replaced at least 18 of the 150 regional Communist Party first secretaries and spoken of "a profound reconstruction of the whole economic mechanism." He favors the decentralized decision-making and limited "capitalism in agriculture" that some dissidents (Andrey Sakharov, Roy Medvedev) have advocated since the 1960s. He has also spoken of dispersing computers among Soviet workplaces, a daring notion in a totalitarian society where, as Reddaway notes, "every photocopying machine is closely guarded."

Unlike his recent predecessors, Gorbachev may pay greater heed to Soviet dissidents, since, in Reddaway's opinion, "the [critiques] of the dissident groups during the last two decades will provide him with a useful guide to the underlying tensions he must try to resolve." Reddaway contends that the Kremlin has little to lose by easing up on several fronts: halting religious persecution (and freeing the 400 or so current "religious prisoners"); opening the doors to emigration; creating less arbitrary legal and penal systems; and appeasing some dissident ethnic groups, particularly the Muslim Tatars and Meskhetians who were ousted from Crimea and Georgia by Stalin in 1944.

Help for the "dissident" group most in need of reform—the proletariat—is not so close at hand, the author maintains. Various workers' attempts to establish free trade unions (such as the Free International Association of Working People) have been crushed. Currently, such agitators have few good prospects, outside of Gorbachev's eagerness to make the work force more productive.

But Gorbachev, as a putative reformer, faces plenty of obstacles, Reddaway observes. The Soviet leader lacks support among key elements of the Communist Party, including the police and military, certain government ministers, and economic planners. Neo-Stalinist sentiments are also sweeping the *nomenklatura* (ruling elite), a product of the revived age-old Russian desire for an "iron hand" to restore "order." But Reddaway remains hopeful. In time, he says, Gorbachev may be able to prevail over his party's own reactionaries.

Lawyers In Bhopal

"Legal Torpor: Why So Little Has Happened in India after the Bhopal Tragedy" by Marc Galanter, in *Texas International Law Journal* (No. 20), Univ. of Tex. at Austin School of Law, 727 East 26th St., Austin, Tex. 78705.

Within days after the December 1984 toxic gas leak at an American-owned Union Carbide chemical processing plant in Bhopal, India (which killed more than 2,000 local residents and injured at least 10,000 more), a host of emergency relief workers had rushed in to aid the victims. Hard on their heels was a contingent of American lawyers.

The American press has condemned those lawyers for responding "inappropriately" to the disaster. But Galanter, who teaches law at the University of Wisconsin, argues that the Americans presented a logical legal alternative to the Bhopal victims since the Indian legal system cannot handle liability suits for an accident of that magnitude.