

## RESEARCH REPORTS

*Reviews of new research at public agencies and private institutions*

### **"Gorbachev's Struggle for Economic Reform."**

Cornell Univ. Press, 124 Roberts Pl., Ithaca, N.Y. 14850. 219 pp. \$12.95.

Author: *Anders Åslund*

Nobody is more skeptical about Mikhail Gorbachev's chances of reforming the Soviet economy than Anders Åslund.

"The Soviet economic system has been counted out many times before," writes the Stockholm School of Economics scholar, "but never has it appeared so devoid of advantages." He believes, along with a few other deeply pessimistic analysts, that Soviet economic growth "appears to have ceased in 1978."

Meanwhile, Soviet military expenditures continued to grow by two percent annually through the early 1980s. The U.S. Central Intelligence Agency estimates that the Soviet military now consumes a staggering 15 to 17 percent of the Soviet gross national product. (U.S. military spending amounts to six percent of

GNP.) Yet, Åslund notes, "it is difficult to find any informed Soviet citizen who believes in earnest that it is less than . . . 22 to 30 percent."

Looking back at the Soviet's last major attempt at economic reform, in 1965, Åslund says that some stumbling blocks have been removed. The 1965 reforms, under Leonid Brezhnev, failed for several reasons: Soviet leaders could still deceive themselves about the state of their economy; the legacy of Stalinist thinking was still overpowering; and communism was on the upsurge around the world.

But the 1965 reforms failed chiefly because there was no consensus among the Soviet leadership. And Gorbachev today faces essentially the same problem.

Although the composition of the 12-man Politburo has

changed somewhat since Åslund completed this study, his essential point holds: The top leadership is badly split over what to do about the Soviet economy.

Gorbachev and several allies favor radical reform predicated on some democratization. But Åslund discerns four other camps: moderate reformers, technocratic "streamliners," neo-Stalinist advocates of increased discipline, and Brezhnevite "stand-patters."

Without unanimity at the top, Åslund predicts, Gorbachev will find it next to impossible to design a coherent reform program or to make the Party bureaucracy do his bidding. In any event, Åslund concludes, it will be another year before whatever reforms Gorbachev does achieve begin to have an impact on the Soviet economy.

### **"Down and Out in America: The Origins of Homelessness."**

Univ. of Chicago Press, 5801 S. Ellis Ave., Chicago, Ill. 60637. 288 pp. \$15.95.

Author: *Peter H. Rossi*

Only a decade after the homeless first began to creep into public awareness, they have already been counted, analyzed, and debated over to the point of diminishing returns. The great saving virtue of this study by Rossi, a sociologist at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, is that it lends historical perspective to today's emotion-charged debates.

Overall, Rossi shows, the number of homeless people has not changed vastly over the years. There were 200,000 or more homeless in the United

States during the Great Depression; in 1950, there were at least 100,000. Today, says Rossi, the homeless population is 250,000 to 350,000. (Some well-publicized and misleading "guesstimates" have gone as high as three million.)

The greatest changes in homelessness, according to Rossi, have been *qualitative*. In the past, for example, few of the homeless actually slept in parks or on the streets. They could find cheap shelter on their own in flophouses and single-room-occupancy hotels.

Today's homeless are in far more dire straits.

To compare the homeless then and now, Rossi contrasts his own study of the Chicago homeless in 1985-86 and sociologist Donald Bogue's 1958 survey in the same city.

In 1958, the homeless of Chicago (and other cities) were largely confined to Skid Row. The vast majority were white males; their median age was 50. Most worked intermittently at low-wage jobs. About a quarter of them were retirees, just barely scraping by on Social

Security. Surprisingly, only a quarter of the Skid Row inhabitants were alcoholics, but they had plenty of other problems: 20 percent suffered a physical disability, 20 percent were mentally ill, and 10 percent suffered what Bogue called "social maladjustment."

Today's Chicago homeless are like yesterday's in several respects. Alcoholism remains common. And while the "deinstitutionalization" of the mentally ill beginning in the 1960s is frequently blamed for today's homeless problem, only 25 percent of Rossi's subjects reported previous episodes as mental health patients (though 33 percent showed signs of mental disorders)—not a much greater proportion than Bogue found in 1958.

What's new about today's homeless?

About 20 percent are drug

users or ex-addicts.

Most are young, in their twenties or thirties. (Thanks to Social Security, the elderly have disappeared from the ranks of the homeless.)

Most are black.

In part because demand for unskilled labor has dried up, they are much less likely than the homeless of 1958 to find even occasional work. And they are much poorer. The Chicago homeless of 1958 had annual incomes of \$1,058; their counterparts today earn only \$383 (in 1958 dollars).

About 25 percent are women. Most have had children, but relatively few have their children with them. As before, homeless families are rare: More than 90 percent of the Chicago homeless are alone.

The homeless are more visible than ever before. In Chi-

cago, as in other cities, Skid Row gave way to downtown redevelopment beginning in the 1960s; the cheap hotels and flophouses were destroyed, their residents dispersed. At the same time, public drunkenness and other minor infractions were decriminalized.

But the homeless, Rossi warns, are simply the most visible members of the "extremely poor": the four to seven million Americans with incomes below \$4,000 annually. Any of these people can tumble into homelessness at any time.

How can the homeless be helped? Few of them now receive welfare benefits they are entitled to, says Rossi; they must be aggressively enlisted. But in the long run, he argues, only generous public employment and housing programs will do the job.

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### "50 Simple Things You Can Do To Save The Earth."

Earthworks Press, Box 25, 1400 Shattuck Ave., Berkeley, Calif. 94709. 96 pp. \$4.95.

Authors: *The Earth Works Group*

World salvation may be a bit much to expect from the 50 modest conservation measures suggested in this slim volume. But it is encouraging to be reminded that some of the world's environmental problems can be addressed without radical legislation and ecological policemen.

The authors note, for example, that adding one passenger to every commuter car in the nation could daily save 600 million gallons of gasoline and reduce by 12 million pounds the carbon dioxide emissions

that are the likely cause of the "greenhouse effect."

Like nagging mothers, they note that you can waste 10 to 15 gallons of water simply by letting the tap run while brushing your teeth: "A household can save up to 20,000 gallons of water each year by getting a grip on its faucets."

Or consider the lowly automobile tire. About 500 million of them are now on the road and 50 to 80 percent of them are underinflated. The cost in fuel economy is close to two billion gallons of gasoline an-

nually.

What about junk mail? Americans receive almost two million tons of it every year—and promptly discard 44 percent of it unread. The junk mail Americans receive every day could produce enough energy to heat 250,000 homes; the paper in the junk mail the average family receives in a year represents one and a half trees. The authors note that one can have one's name removed from mailing lists.

Overall, Ben Franklin would have approved.