

Gorbachev cursed in Soviet Georgia



TBILISI, U.S.S.R.

-- To much of the world, Soviet President Mikhail Sergeyevich Gorbachev is a leader, a man respected for his strides in foreign policy. He is seen as a man trying, against many odds, to save his country from political and economic disaster.

In Soviet Georgia, Gorbachev is cursed.

Shaeva Chkhaidze, 24, a student at the Politechnical Institute in Tbilisi, takes a radical view, even for Georgians, of Gorbachev and his policies.

"There is written in the Bible that there will be a second coming of Jesus Christ," Chkhaidze said, "and before Jesus Christ's second coming there will be a kind of Satan with good eyes, who is for good things and comes as if he were Jesus Christ. He attracts all the people toward him and he will have the special spot on his head."

"I think that man is Gorbachev," Chkhaidze, secretary for the National Democratic Party, pauses, his intense brown eyes unwavering, as he explains his ideals and fears.

The main purpose of the Democratic Party, Chkhaidze said, is to unite the people and their religion to fight this devil.

"Those people who believe in Gorbachev will have nothing," he said. "Those who follow this Satan will die without water and without bread."

Georgians have always been religious people. Even during

times when formal religion was outlawed in Soviet republics, the Georgians kept their faith. After the tragedy April 9, Chkhaidze said, Georgians began relying on their religion to help them in their struggle for autonomy. They believe that God is on their side and will help them reach secession from the Soviet Union.

"The ideology of our party is deo-democracy -- to fight with God," he said.

Chkhaidze said Gorbachev understands that communism will no longer work, but still holds to the idea of a Russian empire.

Soviet officials thought the April 9 killings would divide the Georgians, forcing them to give up their fight for independence, he said.

Instead, the tragedy united them.

"Now all of Georgia is gathered," he said. "After the tragedy all Georgians understand that the Kremlin is to blame for it."

The main goal of the hunger strike on April 9 was to wake up the nation, Chkhaidze said, to make people aware of the movement.

"That's why the government is against the meetings, because they don't want the people to unite," he said.

Gorbachev's reforms have included public elections, but Chkhaidze said Georgians refuse to participate in Soviet elections because they will accomplish nothing. Even if his party supports a candidate, Chkhaidze said, the people's candidate will not get elected; their voice still will be the minority.

"We don't want to cooperate with Congress (the Soviet Congress of People's Deputies) because we think it's a collaboration of occupying the territories," he said.

Chkhaidze said only careerists in the Communist Party have stayed out of the Georgian's fight. But, he said, the Georgians are not fighting the Communist Party or the Russians, but their system of occupying Georgia.

"(The people) are fighting," he said, "but they are not fighting with guns. The movement is peaceful."

Chkhaidze said the Georgians do not use violence because they don't know what Gorbachev will do.

"This Communist Party can do anything with (Gorbachev as leader). They can drop even the atomic bomb on Georgians."

Not all Georgians adhere to Chkhaidze's opinion of Gor-



David Turashvili, second from left, the most popular student leader in Tbilisi's nationalist movement, speaks to other students following a June meeting at the university.

bachev.

But Ekaterina Arakhamia, 21, a student in Tbilisi's Institute of Foreign Languages, said all Georgians believe in some form of independence.

Arakhamia said that ideally, Georgians want both political and economic independence. But she thinks economic independence will be the first step. Now, she said, Georgia could survive on its own economically. The resources in Georgia are rich, she said, and could maintain the country. But it would be difficult to operate a government separate from Moscow, she said.

"The tragedy on the 9th of April showed that. But someday, I have this hope. For now, I wish for economic freedom, so we are not required to give half of everything to the Soviet government."

Arakhamia said the Soviet Union needs Georgia for its agriculture and will not allow the country to secede.

Giorgio Giashevia, an engineer and Communist Party member, said he is disappointed in the party and now thinks differently than when he joined several years ago.

Giashevia, 24, hopes he can use his experience as a party member to help the secession movement. When he goes to party meetings, Giashevia said, he listens to what

leaders have to say about Georgia, and uses this information to help people in unofficial underground parties.

Most leaders in the Communist Party in Georgia share his ideas, Giashevia said.

Everyone, he said, wants independence.

Giashevia said Communist Party members in Georgia hold cards proclaiming membership to the party, but the cards do not symbolize their feelings.

Only Communist Party careerists, such as the secret police, consider their party membership a way of life, he said. The rest continue to go to meetings only to get information on government proceedings.

On the day that Georgia gains its independence, he said, party members in Georgia will burn their cards.

Gorbachev may be popular in the rest of the world, Giashevia said, but he is not popular in Georgia.

Irena Sarishvili, the National Democratic Party leader who spent 15 days in jail, said the Soviet government -- regardless of Gorbachev's move to power -- is the same enemy to the Soviet people that it was during Josef Stalin's regime.

"Perestroika is done only for the West and the non-political popula-

tion," she said.

Gorbachev's reforms cannot compensate for the deaths of 21 people. Their families and the Georgians who watched them die will not forget.

All over Tbilisi, the red, black and white Georgian flag -- outlawed until May -- waves from apartments, car windows and businesses.

Ekaterine Adeishvili, 21, a student at Tbilisi's Institute of Foreign Languages, said the flag's colors have a special meaning.

"The red means the people's blood who have died fighting for the independence. The black is the period of Georgia under the aggression of Russia, and the white means the future," she said.

David Turashvili, 22, a leader in Tbilisi's large student movement, said that this fall Georgians will ask that the flag, now only a symbol of freedom, wave once again as the official flag of an independent Georgia.

He said Georgian politicians will demand that the Kremlin accept Georgia's withdrawal sometime in October or November.

If their demand fails, which experts say is almost certain, "the nation will fight forever for its independence," Turashvili said.

-- Amy Edwards



Shaeva Chkhaidze

"Before Jesus Christ's second coming there will be a kind of Satan with good eyes...I think that man is Gorbachev."

--Shaeva Chkhaidze