

Supreme Soviet approves law allowing private, small factories

MOSCOW - Beset by a sinking economy and rising discontent, Soviet lawmakers made a drastic break with Communist orthodoxy Tuesday by voting to allow private citizens to own small factories and hire their own workers.

Applause swept through the Kremlin chamber as the Supreme Soviet, by a 350-3 vote with 11 abstentions, passed the Property Law, which the official Tass news agency described as "the main plank" of President Mikhail Gorbachev's campaign for economic reform.

The law permits Soviets for the first time in nearly seven decades to privately possess "means of production," an approach at odds with classic Marxist thinking, which sees in private ownership the roots of the capitalist exploitation wiped out by the Russian Revolution 72 years ago.

Deputy Premier Leonid Abalkin said the law, to go into effect July 1, will enable private citizens to own workshops, garages for automotive repairs, farm enterprises and other small-scale ventures to supplement the notoriously ineffective state-run economy.

Also, subject to restrictions from legislatures in the 15 Soviet republics, the law permits one citizen to hire another for pay, a practice that currently is illegal and was a key target of the Russian revolutionaries.

In the early 1920s, Vladimir Lenin and his Bolsheviks temporarily retreated from their drive to implement communism and allowed private ownership of the means of production

under the New Economic Policy, or NEP. The policy was ended under Lenin's successor, Josef Stalin.

Tuesday's vote was hailed by supporters not as a tactical move backward but as a great advance toward a more just and prosperous society. It again showed Gorbachev's bent for pragmatism, even when it runs counter to policies pursued by his predecessors for decades.

Abalkin stressed to reporters that new approaches were needed to wrench the country from its economic quagmire, which he said was deepening. "Either we speed up the reforms, or we ship things using military transport," he said.

He revealed that Soviet economic performance had worsened in the past two months, with industrial production slipping 1 percent. "There is a crisis of confidence, of confidence in the government," he added.

Although the Property Law conserves large economic monopolies for the state-run sector, it declares all forms of ownership juridically equal, including property owned by individuals, the government and collectives, and says society gains by competition among them.

"This is an enormous step forward because it lays down the principle of pluralism in the forms of ownership and the basis of their equality and their protection from the government," said progressive lawmaker Alexei Yablokov.

In another sign of the new economic thinking, a government-sponsored preamble offered by Abalkin proclaiming "socialist property" to

be the foundation of the country officially named the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics failed to pass the 542-seat legislature.

"The preamble would turn the law into a propaganda slogan," objected deputy Konstantin Lubchenko, a senior lecturer in Moscow State University's law faculty.

Despite its new stance on property rights, the law continues to skirt the socialist aversion to private property by referring instead to "the property of citizens."

"It's unfortunate that there is no mention of private property, but the principle is there," Yablokov said. Soviets long have been permitted to own cars, summer homes and other personal property, and the new law won't change that.

Abalkin said a key provision of the 23-page document orders state-owned factories and other businesses to allocate a share of after-tax profits to workers.

By providing them with a material stake in their enterprise's profitability, the law will presumably encourage Soviets to work harder, a problem Gorbachev's leadership has said is crucial to raising the often abysmal rate of productivity.

Abalkin cautioned that the law was "just a piece of paper" and by itself won't bring about an economic miracle.

"We need to change the stereotypes of behavior, and peoples' psychology," he said, apparently referring to the widespread Soviet hostility toward any form of private enterprise.

Afghan troops and rebels attempt coup

ISLAMABAD, Pakistan - Soldiers led by the defense minister joined with Moslem guerrillas Tuesday to try to overthrow Afghanistan's government, but were defeated by troops loyal to President Najib, Kabul radio reported.

The official radio said the loyalists controlled Kabul, the capital, and an indefinite curfew was imposed at 7 p.m.

In the Soviet Union, which sponsors the Najib government, the official news agency Tass said: "The loyal troops have now mopped up the main pockets of resistance, leaving the situation in Kabul firmly controlled by the government."

Western diplomats, guerrilla leaders in Pakistan and the Soviet media reported heavy fighting and said Afghan air force planes had bombed Arg Palace, Najib's headquarters in the heart of Kabul.

Heavy artillery and tanks fired for several hours on the buildings of the Defense Ministry and the army's main political directorate, Tass said. It also reported shelling of residential dis-

tricts, but said it abated after dusk.

Kabul radio said the coup leader was Maj. Gen. Shah Nawaz Tanai, the defense minister, a hard-line Marxist linked to at least two of the five previous coup attempts reported against Najib, who took office in 1986.

He was joined by followers of the fundamentalist guerrilla leader Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, the radio said.

Najib said on state television Tuesday night: "Some soiled elements today tried to carry out a conspiracy and provoke bloodshed, but the government forces have neutralized them. They have been suppressed."

Repeating a message broadcast earlier in the day by Interior Minister Aslam Watanjar, who was named to replace Tanai, Najib urged Afghans to help capture the general "dead or alive." He said mutinous soldiers who surrendered by 4 a.m. today would be given amnesty.

Ahmad Sarwar, Afghan ambassador in New Delhi, said he spoke with Najib by telephone Tuesday night and the president sounded "very strong

and very confident."

"He said everything is under control," said Sarwar, whose wife is a sister to Najib's wife. He said Najib told him one group of Tanai's followers had been killed and another captured.

Najib did not say when the fighting started or mention where he was when the telephone contact was made, Sarwar said. The ambassador said another source in Kabul, whom he would not identify, told him the defense minister was in hiding.

According to his source, Sarwar said, some of Tanai's supporters bombed Kabul from the air, but no bombs fell within half a mile of Najib or Arg Palace.

Tuesday's attempted coup was the third said to involve Tanai and Hekmatyar, leader of the fundamentalist Hezb-i-Islami, or Party of Islam.

On Monday, 124 of those arrested went on trial in Kabul, including senior army officers. The other three were released.

Gephardt says Soviets should have U.S. aid for successful reforms

WASHINGTON - House Democratic Leader Richard Gephardt said Tuesday the United States should offer direct aid to the Soviet Union to ensure that its reforms succeed.

"We should be investing in our own self-interest," Gephardt said. "And stability, democracy and a market economy in the Soviet Union are in America's strong self-interest."

The proposal brought immediate criticism from some quarters, with a presidential spokesman saying the Soviets don't want direct aid.

Sen. Bill Bradley, D-N.J., also said that the Soviets haven't requested U.S. help and that, if they did, it would be wasted without economic reform. "Unless they reform the economy, it's going down a rathole," Bradley said.

Others on Capitol Hill said that while they thought Gephardt's proposal would spark a useful debate, the idea would fall on disapproving public ears.

"If you're going to start giving foreign aid to the hated commies of 70 years' worth, you've got a real sales job to do in the United States," said Sen. Alan Simpson, R-Wyo.

Gephardt noted an appeal by Czechoslovak President Vaclav Havel, in a Feb. 21 speech to Congress, to help his country by helping the Soviet Union continue on its reformist road.

If Havel, who was imprisoned by the communists, can call for aid to the Soviets, "the least we can do is listen," Gephardt said in a speech that also contained his harshest criticism to date of Bush's policy toward Eastern Europe.

He accused Bush of "a lack of leadership in this most crucial moment," throwing billions of dollars into the military budget to defend against "communists who don't want to be communists anymore," while ignoring their economic needs.

"It's as though George Bush's Pentagon budget were written by someone who hadn't read a newspaper in a year," Gephardt said, drawing applause. Indeed, most of the administration's budget was drafted last year, after the opening of the Berlin Wall but before many other dramatic developments in Eastern Europe.

At the White House, spokesman Marlin Fitzwater called the charges "general old political stuff," and added, "The Soviet Union doesn't want direct aid."

But others, while saying the Soviet Union should have to meet certain conditions before receiving U.S. help, acknowledged that events have moved so rapidly that aid is no longer out of the question.

House Speaker Thomas Foley said he agreed with Gephardt. "It's a dramatically different circumstance from a few months ago," Foley said, noting local elections that have taken place in the Soviet Union and the existence of competing political parties.

"Those changes are coming on very fast, and we have a stake in this country in supporting those changes," Foley said.

Gephardt, a 1988 candidate for the Democratic presidential nomination, proposed the idea of direct aid in a speech to the liberal Center for National Policy and acknowledged that it would be difficult politically.

"There are votes to be lost in taking a risk for peace, in appearing insufficiently tough on the Soviets. And there are votes to be lost in calling on the American people to make some changes to adapt to the changing world," the Missouri congressman said.

Speaking to reporters later, Gephardt added:

"We live in a paradox. We now face the prospect of giving assistance and support to people who've oppressed people for 45 years."

But he said that during a trip to Eastern Europe two months ago "I was embarrassed that we are not being as strong and as courageous as they are. Can't we do something to help?"

Specifically, Gephardt called for a "Food for Freedom" program to send U.S. food aid to the Soviets; the lifting of trade restrictions, including those on high-technology exports, and guarantees for businesses that want to invest in the Soviet Union.

"A stronger Soviet economy will facilitate the process of peace," said Gephardt. "How can the Soviets pull Red Army troops out of Eastern Europe if they have no jobs and no homes for them to return to in Russia?"

Direct U.S. aid is possible now because "the Cold War as we have known it for four decades is over," Gephardt said. While the possibility remains that Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev could be ousted or his reforms could fail, superpower competition in arms and influence has changed in fundamental ways, he said.

Kohl drops demands for Polish concessions

BONN, West Germany - Chancellor Helmut Kohl dropped his demand for Polish concessions on a border treaty and moved closer Tuesday to guaranteeing a united Germany would not claim land ceded to Poland after World War II.

His government proposed a parliamentary resolution, to be introduced Thursday, saying a united Germany should sign a treaty with Poland declaring that the right of Poles "to live in secure borders will not now or in the future be questioned by us Germans."

After a Cabinet meeting, at which ministers discussed disagreements over the chancellor's handling of the border issue, Kohl said: "The things that burdened us are cleared away."

Kohl had been criticized for his reluctance to state clearly, presumably in an effort to preserve the conser-

vative vote in December elections, that a reunified Germany would not question Poland's western border.

Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher and his Free Democrats agreed with Poland that Kohl must clarify his position on the sensitive border issue.

After a meeting Tuesday between Kohl and Genscher, their second in two days, Free Democrat official Torsten Wolfgramm said the chancellor had abandoned his demand that Polish assurances accompany a border treaty.

"It is completely clear," he said. "A treaty would contain only the border question."

Rudolf Seiters, Kohl's chief of staff, also indicated a treaty would concern only the border.

Silesia and East Prussia were awarded to Poland and the Soviet

Union, respectively, at the Potsdam conference of 1945. That led to the expulsion of 12 million Germans, and at least 2 million died in the process.

Genscher was born in what now is East Germany. The foreign minister has made it clear he and his party are willing, in return for reunification, to give up all claims to the territory lost to Poland.

Seiters said the parliamentary resolution would recommend declarations of respect for Poland's western border by the parliaments of both Germanys, to be made after the East German elections March 18.

President Mikhail Gorbachev of the Soviet Union warned against any attempt by a reunited Germany to change the borders drawn at the end of World War II.

"Naturally, the inviolability of postwar borders is the main issue in

this respect," he said in Moscow. "To use German reunification to reanimate revanchist plans would be to pursue an irresponsible policy fraught with very serious consequences."

The Bonn newspaper Die Welt quoted Jaruzelski as saying, when asked whether he feared German reunification: "Yes and no. I worry as a Pole and European because of historical experiences. The position of a mighty power, a dominance, could lead to this position being somehow used at the cost of others."

On the other hand, Jaruzelski said, he believes "the Germans themselves, the big powers and all European peoples, especially the Poles, will do everything so that a united Germany will be a constructive element in Europe."

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