

Americans examine Kyrgyzstan

Lack of technology, wealth show Communist mindset stays, they say

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"They haven't gone very far toward capitalism," Avery said. "There is just an enormous amount of work to be done, but they have aspirations."

Breaking out of the habits of a centrally planned economy has proven hardest for the society, he said.

In Kyrgyzstan, a country of about 4.5 million, the effects of communism linger over every aspect of life, Avery said. The agricultural-based economy is poor and has sparse manufacturing plants, private industry, or foreign exchange, he said.

The country has no banking system, legal system or well-developed idea of credit and finance to support a free market, Avery said.

The government—the people's only hope—is infiltrated with former party leaders and elites who now rule under the nationalist label, he said.

"The communist party may not exist," Avery said, "but essentially, the same people are in power. They just aren't ruling in the name of the communist party anymore."

So the people are left in the same place as before the 1989 fall of the USSR, he said. Many are communal farmers, and others work for the state. They have no private enterprise and little-to-no accumulated wealth.

Kyrgyzstan farmers are typically seen driving horse-drawn carts. Only a handful own rundown tractors and old, Russian-made cars, Avery said.

The most visible and lasting effects of communist rule are in the old Stalinist architecture with its drab, gray structures towering and crumbling over the city, Avery said.

"All the buildings look the same," he said. "They have the look of a country that doesn't have enough money to maintain what they have built."

Though Kyrgyzstan, like the other former Soviet republics, is rich in history and culture, Avery said, that too is crumbling.

"It was interesting to be on the Silk Road, a major trade route used by Marco Polo, and to see how little progress had been made," Avery said. "It was depressing."

Not everything about the professors' trip was depressing, he said. In fact, he said, most of it was enjoyable.

Visitors were treated to a stay at a mountain resort formerly used by party elites, Avery said. They also enjoyed numerous banquets and vodka toasts at all hours of the day—including breakfast.

"(The vodka toast) was very, very Russian," Avery said, "but for breakfast, it's not my favorite way to start the day."

The group got another taste of Russian culture at a five-finger feast—so-called because a fatted calf is eaten by tearing the meat off the bones without using utensils, he said.

At the end of the meal, a local dignitary was presented with a boiled sheep head, and proceeded to pluck the eyeballs from the sockets. He sliced the eyeballs in portions to allow everyone at the table a taste.

"I ate it," Avery said. "My wife asked me what it tasted like, and I said it tasted like vodka, because I chased it with a shot of vodka."

Accommodations in the former communist country were not so enjoyable, Avery said. Lack of hot water, broken toilet seats, burned-out light bulbs and uneven floors

created an uncomfortable experience, he said.

Avery said even the best hotel in Bishkek "was not up to the standards of a rundown Holiday Inn."

Raising those standards is the goal of the Regional Organization of Central Asian Republics, Avery said. The countries that are members want to develop trade and private industry, he said.

"They want to develop capitalism, but they don't have the slightest idea of how to go about it," he said.

At the conference, Avery, Fritz and Sozouz taught the organization about time and quality management and international trade and development.

Avery told the 180 ROCAR representatives they needed to create manufacturing capabilities to support trade and private industry.

Fritz said that the country's situation extended into the roots of its economy.

Formerly, Russian manufacturing was done in almost all parts of the country, Fritz said. But all manufactured goods were made part by part in different regions of the country.

No good was manufactured from start to finish in a single region, she said.

Kyrgyzstan was a part of this manufacturing network, that dissolved with the Soviet Union, she said, and now Kyrgyzstan could rely only on itself to create a manufacturing base of its own.

Avery said foreign investors have expressed interest in developing manufacturing plants in Kyrgyzstan, but there have been no final announcements.

"It's going to take Kyrgyzstan many decades to rebuild."

Work of Mad Dads tough, rewarded with better city

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C.F. Simmons, a sophomore general studies major at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, said the inconvenience was a small price to pay.

"It's all about sacrifice really," Simmons said, "whether it be your time or your body."

Simmons said that someone could turn around tomorrow and deface the concrete he was painting, but for now, the work of Mad Dads would serve as a deterrent and a beautification project.

Don Coleman, president of Lincoln's Mad Dads chapter, said the group paints twice a year, usually once before Easter and once before football season.

"We were going to do it before this football season, but there was no graffiti to clean up at the time," Coleman

said. Coleman said painting over graffiti now would make the city look good for the Star City Holiday Parade and the Christmas season.

The belated event also ensured that six special guests from the Mad Dads chapter in Buffalo, N.Y., could participate.

The guests came to Lincoln after visiting the Omaha chapter of Mad Dads. They were accompanied by Eddie Staton, the organization's co-founder.

Before the painting began, Staton praised the Lincoln Mad Dads chapter and the message it carried.

"It doesn't matter what color your skin is or how much money you make," Staton said. "The one thing we all have in common is that we care about our children."

Hagel plans for Senate committees

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he said. "I don't want judges that legislate from the bench."

"I don't want case workers or social workers. I want real judges."

Hagel is to be sworn in Jan. 7. He

says Sen. Hagel won't be different from candidate Hagel.

"The Chuck Hagel you've known all along, no matter how long you have known me, is the Chuck Hagel that you are going to be dealing with for the next six years."

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