TITLE: Survival Strategies: The Miners of Donetsk in the Post-Soviet Era

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THE NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR SOVIET AND EAST EUROPEAN RESEARCH

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Washington, D.C. 20036
PROJECT INFORMATION:

CONTRACTOR: Media Network

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COUNCIL CONTRACT NUMBER: 807-10

DATE: April 16, 1993

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* The work leading to this report was supported by contract funds provided by the National Council for Soviet and East European Research. The analysis and interpretations contained in the report are those of the author.
Contents

Summary ....................................................... v

Introduction ................................................... 1

The Donbass Miners' Movement: 1989-92 ....................... 3

Orientation and Agenda ....................................... 4
The Politics of Representation ............................... 9

A Tale of Two Mines .......................................... 13

Kuibyshev: The Restoration of Enterprise Paternalism ........ 15
The October Mine: NPG Insurgency .......................... 21

Facing the Future ............................................. 24
Survival Strategies:
The Miners of Donetsk in the Post-Soviet Era

Summary

This essay is based on fieldwork undertaken in Donetsk over a span of some three years and most recently in the summer of 1992. It consists of two parts: an overview of the miners' movement in the Donbass, and an analysis of strategies pursued by labor and management at two mines in the Kuibyshev district of Donetsk. The first part examines the interaction of "politics" and "economics" within the movement and the ways it has institutionally represented itself. The second part attempts to explain why two mines, so close in their geographical proximity and geological conditions, display radically different trajectories in terms of labor-management relations.

Resolutions passed at miners' congresses, demands issued during strikes, newspapers and information bulletins of the strike committees and the Independent Miners' Union (NPG), and questionnaire data are used to reconstruct the evolution of the miners' movement in the Donbass. This partial record suggests a three-phase process: an initial "economic" phase in which miner-activists evoked mass enthusiasm and participation in their struggle to extract concessions from the Soviet bureaucracy; a second "political" phase in which they reached out to workers in other industries and the "democratic" intelligentsia to bring down the central government; and a third phase, beginning in August 1991, when they sought to adjust to the new political configuration and economic uncertainties in Ukraine.

It is argued that even in its first phase, the movement at least implicitly challenged the legitimacy of the system of centralized administrative appropriation and went beyond the boundaries of trade union demands. Reluctance to articulate political demands was not so much a function of lack of consciousness as of a political calculus according to which perestroika might be redefined to incorporate input from "below." The abandonment of such a calculus did not reflect impatience or immaturity but rather the perception that the central state had become fatally incapacitated and could be challenged directly. In this sense, Eltsin's elevation to the chairmanship of the Russian Federation's Supreme Soviet provided
the stimulus for direct confrontation. Yet, the fulfillment of the miners' political demands fortuitously brought about by the failure of the August 1991 putsch attempt and the subsequent dissolution of the Soviet Union—had several ironic consequences. While the command system has been dismantled, the development of new property relations and the marketing of coal remain problematic. And in Ukraine, where coal is more expensive to produce, the miners' movement finds itself in the contradictory position of struggling for the maintenance (or restitution) of state subsidies on the one hand and the establishment of greater financial autonomy for enterprises on the other.

In terms of institutional representation, the miners' movement has exhibited both the strengths and weaknesses of flexibility and overlapping authority. Formed initially to prosecute the strike and enter into negotiations with the government, the strike committees assumed the function of ensuring the fulfillment of the government's promises. In the meantime, the leaders of the committees sought to change the orientation of the official Union of Mine workers and to capture the enterprise-based Councils of Labor Collectives (STKs). Particularly in the Donbass, these efforts led to a diversion of energy away from the institutionalization of the strike committees with the result that at most mines, they were liquidated. The formation of a new Independent Miners' Union (NPG) established a framework for national and regional coordination but at least in the Donbass this was at the expense of regional and city-wide strike committees.

However, to describe events thusly is to remain at the macro-level, at the level of large social movements and state politics. Why some miners are active and others are not, why some mines have strong NPG representation while others have retained the old trade union, and why at a time of great social and economic transformation, most other workers have not joined the miners as part of a "workers' movement" requires a different level of analysis. In the second part of our essay, we descend to the micro-level to examine the trajectories of two mines, Kuibyshev and October.

At Kuibyshev, as at many mines throughout the Donbass, the strike committee oversaw elections to the trade union committee and the STK. The latter institution thereafter took over from the strike committee as an organ of workers' control with the same chair and vice-chair reversing the positions they had occupied on the strike committee. In June 1990,
the chief engineer, G. T. Alizaev, was elected as director of the mine and proceeded to negotiate a new contract with the union committee and the STK. By 1991, matters were looking up for the mine. Having managed to reduce the state plan and scale down output norms, it was able to turn a profit from which it purchased new computers and made other investments. At the moment when other mines, including October, were heeding the call of the NPG and the Donetsk city strike committee to strike, Kuibyshev’s workers received a nearly 100 percent increase in their wages and refrained from striking. The STK leaders defended this position on the grounds that the mine had too much to lose. Since then, the STK has all but ceased to function and relations between the director and the collective, mediated by the trade union committee, have resumed their pre-1989 character which we describe as "enterprise paternalism." Indeed, with the breakdown of the old centralized system of distribution, the enterprise--rather than the market--has assumed even greater importance as a source of goods and services.

The situation at October, located only several kilometers away, could not be more different. Here, an active branch of the NPG with some 500 members, agitates for a fundamental revision in the system of wage determination, lays claim to the mine’s social security fund, and in other ways challenges managerial authority. In seeking to account for these different outcomes, we concluded that October’s experience of an authoritarian director prior to July 1989 was the critical factor. It was this experience that solidified the miners as they went from a "hard" boss to a "soft" one and finally to one who, though still regarded as an antagonist, remains accountable to the collective.

In more general terms, these two mines represent different survival strategies in the context of a catastrophic decline in working and living conditions for miners, their families and other residents of Donetsk. Each would appear to be doomed. But if both enterprise paternalism and workers’ control offer only short-term solutions, it is by no means clear what will replace them. The "Thatcherite" solution of destroying the British coal miners’ movement and gutting much of their industry was child’s play compared to what it will take to exit from a system that simultaneously protected and enraged Soviet miners.
Survival Strategies:
The Miners of Donetsk in the Post-Soviet Era

Introduction

One of the more significant consequences of the collapse of Communist party rule and the disintegration of the Soviet Union has been the retreat of the state from its historic role as central appropriator and redistributor of surplus. This "withering away of the party state" has had profound implications for both managers and workers within the tens of thousands of industrial enterprises scattered throughout the successor states. Depending on the location of raw materials and parts, opportunities for bartering the product, the connections and infrastructure built up by management, and the nature of the labor process, both managers and workers have had to devise new strategies for dealing with the vagaries of supplies, inflation, and each other. In such circumstances, the need for micro-level studies becomes manifest, a need that fortunately has coincided with new opportunities for engaging in the requisite fieldwork. Our own fieldwork was undertaken in Donetsk, a city of 1.2 million people and the capital of the Donbass coal-mining region in eastern Ukraine. We focused on two mining enterprises located in the same raion of the city.

*Research for this paper has been carried out as part of a larger project on "Working Through Perestroika: The Kuibyshev Miners of Donetsk." The authors would like to thank the National Council for Soviet and East European Research for its financial support and the co-director of the project, Professor Daniel J. Walkowitz, with whom we discussed many of the ideas contained herein. We also gratefully acknowledge the assistance of Leonid A. Gordon, Evgenii I. Romanovskii, and our numerous friends in Donetsk, especially Larissa Sartania whose tragic death we mourn.

Our choice of subjects was based on several considerations.\textsuperscript{2} Coal mining everywhere has been one of the first sectors to suffer from de-industrialization, and not surprisingly, the mining industry was the site of the most intense labor struggles during the last years of the Soviet Union. Thus, while miners are in many respects atypical, the mining industry seems a logical place to begin to map industrial workers' strategies for surviving the economic shocks of the post-Soviet period. Moreover, for complex reasons that have to do as much with Soviet political culture as with the economics of mining coal in an area whose first deep shafts were sunk over a century ago, the Donbass miners have assumed a political importance out of all proportion to their numbers and, precisely (though paradoxically) because prospects for their industry are so grim, are likely to remain so for some time to come. Historically, miners have been axiomatic to Soviet definitions of the proletariat, and, as a social movement, the alliances and resentments they have created suggest both the possibilities and limitations for broad-based workers' movements and cross-class coalitions in the post-Soviet era. Finally, the radically different trajectories of these two mining enterprises over the last three years underscore the importance and advantages of comparative analysis.

Our analysis proceeds on two levels: that of the Donbass miners' movement, which was the product of the July 1989 strike and from which it has involved activists, and that of the individual mining enterprise where the chief actors have been managers, trade union committees and rank-and-file miner activists. Although analytically distinct and presented here sequentially, the two levels have been intricately related to each other as well as to national politics and macro-economic forces. But they have not necessarily evolved at the same pace or in tandem. Rather, the expansion and contraction of opportunities at the national and local or enterprise levels have structurally delimited the nature, degree and foci of miners' activism. Having initially demanded changes in enterprise administration and concessions from the state, the miners' movement eventually sought the radical transforma-

\textsuperscript{2}To be sure, the exact location of our study was facilitated by extensive contacts with the miners and managers of one of the two enterprises. The initial contacts were made in connection with an oral history video project, organized by Larry Evans and directed by Daniel J. Walkowicz. They were renewed in the spring of 1991 and again in the summer of 1992.
tion of the state itself. The fulfillment of that objective, represented by the collapse of the Soviet Union and the achievement of Ukrainian independence in late 1991, once again transferred the center of gravity to the workplace and the individual enterprise. At this point, as mining directors scrambled to secure increasingly scarce resources and reestablish amicable relations with their workers, great strains were placed on the miners' one strength— their solidarity.

The Donbass Miners’ Movement: 1989-92

Clearly the most striking feature of the former Soviet mining industry since 1989 has been the militancy and self-organization of its workforce. One need only recall here the massive strike of July 1989, the strike committees that grew out of that upheaval, their subsequent evolution into regional councils and the core of the Independent Miners’ Union (NPG), and the prosecution of another all-Union strike in March-April 1991. Such prolonged combativeness and organizational creativity are relatively rare in the annals of labor history and remain exceptional in post-Soviet circumstances. Even while workers in other industries and institutions have endeavored to catch up to the miners by forming their own independent trade unions and pressing demands, miners have remained in the forefront of labor organization and militancy in the former Soviet Union.

Many factors, both structural and conjunctural, can be cited to account for the miners’ “achievements” in these respects. Among those that have occurred to us are the association of face work with heroism, particularly in tightly knit mining communities themselves, and the psychic tensions between such a self-image and the necessity of demeaning oneself before party, trade union and managerial bosses; deteriorating working conditions that greatly exacerbated the dangers endemic to the occupation and living conditions that in no way compensated; the strategic importance of the industry as an energy source (heightened by the Chernobyl disaster) and the leverage it gave to miners; the opportunities for protest presented by glasnost, and the rapid capitulation of Soviet authorities to miners’ demands but their inability/unwillingness to substantively fulfill them; and the moral capital generated by the 1989 strike on which the strike committees and the Independent Miners’ Union have been
able to draw in their dealings with local economic and political authorities, the media, and the general public.

**Orientation and Agenda**

Resolutions passed at miners' congresses, demands issued during strikes, newspapers and information bulletins of the strike committees and the NPG, and questionnaire data can all be used to reconstruct the evolution of the miners' movement in the Donbass. This partial record suggests a three-phase process: an initial "economic" phase in which miner-activists evoked mass enthusiasm and participation in their struggle to extract concessions from the Soviet bureaucracy; a second "political" phase in which they reached out to workers in other industries and the "democratic" intelligentsia to bring down the central government; and a third phase, beginning in August 1991, when they sought to adjust to the new political configuration and economic uncertainties in Ukraine.

However, these neat divisions need to be modified. Although overwhelmingly socio-economic, the demands associated with the July 1989 strike and the actions taken in connection with its settlement had profoundly political implications. The demands were of two kinds. One was for more from higher authorities--more goods, more money for pensions, and more accountability from their immediate bosses especially as it pertained to the distribution of goods and services. The other, stressed more in the Kuzbass than in the Donbass, was for the restructuring of the industry along the lines of greater enterprise autonomy in terms of contractual obligations with the state and the disposition of profits. But given the highly integrated nature of political and economic power in the Soviet Union and the fact that the trade union hierarchy, by virtue of its incorporation into the nomenklatura,

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3We are grateful to the staff of the Donetsk Regional Museum for allowing us to consult this material.

4Reference here is to the demands incorporated into Protocol No. 608 issued by the USSR Ministry of Coal on 3 August 1989. Analyzing 1760 demands advanced in all of 1989, I. P. Kiseleva categorized 88.7 percent as either "economic" or "social" (the distinction between the two not being made explicit). See "Chego zhe vse-taki khotiat shaktery?" Sotsiologicheskie issledovaniia, 3, 1992, p. 90.
tura system, was itself part of the ruling apparatus, any unauthorized collective action to revise economic priorities and policies was inherently political as well.\(^5\) To be sure, much had changed in the Soviet polity by 1989. But the mere act of striking on such a massive scale, and then proceeding to oust offensive directors and trade union leaders and set up alternative structures of workers' control in the form of the strike committees was to violate numerous political taboos which had remained unchallenged at least since the 1920s.\(^6\)

That Gorbachev was also violating taboos or at least breaking with long-standing Communist Party practices created the impression among many miners that they were supporting perestroika by giving it a boost "from below."\(^7\) In this sense, the miners' movement was analogous to the ecology clubs and other informal ("neformal'nye") organizations that sprouted among the intelligentsia in the hothouse atmosphere of glasnost. But as central authorities continued to drag their feet about fulfilling the August agreement and as Gorbachev's economic reforms sputtered in the face of bureaucratic resistance, miners' attitudes towards the Communist Party and its monopolization of political power hardened.\(^8\)


\(^7\)Illustrative of this impression was the statement by a member of the Makeevka strike committee in February 1990 that "...our perestroika has to proceed not only from the top, but from the bottom. We are beginning to smash our system of administration by command from below." "Soviet People Speak: Interviews By and Letters to William Mandel. 1989-1992," The Station Relay, 5, 1-5, 1989-92, p. 3. See also "Oni khotiit reform," Argumenty i fakty, no. 30, 1989, p. 7. Of course, it is possible that even at this stage some miner-activists had little faith in Gorbachev or perestroika but merely wanted to create the impression that they were on the side of "revolutionary reform."

\(^8\)It should be recalled that the Supreme Soviet's "Law on Strikes" of October 1989, considered only economic strikes to be illegal. A week after the law was passed Vorkuta began
There was something else as well. Prior to July 1989 the boundaries of legitimate protest were largely untested and the miners were reluctant to give the regime any pretext for repressing their strike. In the months that followed, however, a growing sense of their own collective power combined with an appreciation of the regime's "weakness" (i.e., its unwillingness to use force or take punitive action against strikers) altered their calculations. Many who had been party members turned in their party cards at this time. Explicitly political declarations and objectives—for the removal of Article 6 of the Soviet Constitution, for the ouster of certain regional party secretaries, for the elimination of party committees within the mines—began to appear in their rhetoric and strike demands, culminating in the second all-Union strike of March-April 1991 with its demand for the removal of Gorbachev.

To be sure, the connection between the "political" and the "economic" was articulated sooner in Vorkuta and the Kuzbass than in the Donbass. The reasons for this require further investigation but probably have to do with the fact that being older and more expensive to operate, the Donbass mines were more obviously dependent on state subsidies. For the Vorkuta and Kuzbass miners, the reversion of profits to the center seemed that much more arbitrary and exploitative. Then again, it would be a mistake to conflate the "economic" with purely trade unionist concerns. Only half of all miners' demands in 1989, according to one tabulation, related specifically to occupational concerns. The remainder

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9Writing in the latter half of 1990, Andrei Vasil'ev and Maksim Krans noted that "in general, despite the clear politicization of the movement, a considerable segment of the Donbass miners are still—perhaps in contrast to their colleagues in the Kuzbass and Vorkuta—more concerned with concrete economic problems." See their "Shakhterskaia al'ternativa: neskol'ko voprosov dla razmyshlenii," Kommunist, 13, 1990, p. 61.

10Both the Kuzbass and Vorkuta were also dependent on subsidies but these were hidden in the cost of transporting coal from and raw materials to these remote regions. One might also cite here the relative lack of amenities in the case of the Russian coal mining regions compared to the Donbass.
involved society as a whole, mining regions, contracting partners of the mining industry and "weakly defended socio-demographic groups."\textsuperscript{11}

Frequency of demands is not the only available index of the movement's orientation. Partly under the influence of public discussion in the media about alternative forms of property and the advantages of a market economy and partly through the miners' own largely frustrating experience of participating in managerial decision-making, the economic thinking of the movement quickly transcended the initial strike demands. One measure of this evolution was the declaration of the first All-Union Miners' Congress (June 1990) in support of a multiplicity of property forms, with a marked preference among the delegates who were polled for non-state enterprises (either joint-stock, private, or leasehold). If only 21 percent of delegates at this congress indicated that they would like to work in a state enterprise, then at the first post-Soviet congress of the NPG in December 1991, the corresponding figure was a mere one percent.\textsuperscript{12} As for the economic organization of society, three percent of delegates responding to a questionnaire distributed at the first miners' congresses stated a preference for either a "centralized planned economy" or a "basically centralized planned economy but with elements of market relations," while 34 percent chose a "free market" and 55 percent selected a "regulated market economy with strong social protection of workers." At the second miners' congress in October 1990, the responses were similar: six percent

\textsuperscript{11}Kiseleva, "Chego zhe vse-taki khotiat shakhtery?" p. 87.

\textsuperscript{12}In the latter case 59 percent chose "it depends on wages," an option that was unavailable in the earlier survey. When asked what form of property they preferred with respect to their own enterprise, 42 percent of delegates at the second miners' congress (October 1990) indicated "state but with more autonomy," 18 percent preferred that the enterprise become the property of the labor collective, 14 percent wanted their enterprise to become a joint-stock company, and 11 percent favored attracting foreign capital. In the case of the December 1991 congress, the corresponding percentages were 19, 34, 25 and 8. Institut problem zaniatnosti RAN i Ministerstva truda RF, Shakterskoe dvizhenie: dokumental'nye i analiticske materialy (Moscow, 1992), pp. 238-9. The role of sociological data collection (and the publicity given to results) in shaping miners' thinking is an interesting phenomenon worthy of further investigation.
chose the first two options, 26 percent opted for a market economy and 60 percent preferred a regulated market.\footnote{The remainder found it "difficult to say." \textit{Ibid.}, p. 234.}

Such preferences were clearly out of step with the pace of economic reform. How then was the gap to be closed? As one commentator remarked in 1991, "[h]aving gone through the mass enthusiasm of 1989 the labour movement failed to become an organised political force capable of bringing about permanent social changes."\footnote{Anna Temkina, "The Labour Movement of the Perestroika Period," \textit{Russia and the World} (UK), 20, 1991, p. 17.} Determined to bring the regime down or at least to its knees, the miners' leaders nonetheless were compelled to negotiate with its representatives over such relatively mundane matters as the level of wages and other typically trade union concerns.\footnote{The situation was somewhat analogous to that of Solidarnost' in Poland during 1979-80. The differences, though, are at least as great and point to the extent to which by 1990-91 the nomenklatura had become fragmented and disoriented. On the one hand, Solidarnost' represented a much broader cross-section of the population; on the other, nobody within the ruling circles of the Soviet government (leastwise Gorbachev) was willing to play the role of Jaruzelski.}

With morale sinking among the rank-and-file, the leadership gambled on another all-Union strike, this time explicitly appealing to other workers and broader sections of society for support. The strike, which began on 4 March 1991, centered on four major demands: the resignation of Gorbachev; the transfer of power in Russia to its federative Soviet; the removal of Communist Party control of the police, the KGB, the army and educational institutions; and the transfer of mines to the RSFSR government with which a new wage agreement, indexed to prices, was to be concluded.\footnote{Nasha Gazeta (Kemerovo), 1 March 1991, p. 1.} But in the absence of any but the most tenuous institutional links, mass support outside the coal industry amounted to little more than monetary donations on street corners and at places of work. True, before the termination or "suspension" of the strike in early May, tens of thousands of workers in Minsk had taken to the streets in a general strike and there were brief walkouts of transporta-
tion and construction workers in Kiev and other major cities. However, these stoppages merely happened to coincide with the miners' strike. Within the mining industry, some 120 enterprises participated, but that figure included only about half of the mines in the Donbass.

What encouraged the miner-activists to call a strike in the first place and what enabled them to claim at least a partial victory was the existence of an alternative base of political power. That base was represented by Boris Eltsin, who having become chairman of the Russian Federation's Supreme Soviet, added his voice to those supporting the miners' political demands. The subsequent agreement between Gorbachev and nine republic leaders (including Eltsin), although regarded by some miner-activists as a betrayal, actually provided them with the opportunity to extricate themselves from a difficult situation. In return for seeking an end to the strike, Eltsin achieved the transference of 101 mines in the Kuzbass and 13 in Vorkuta to the jurisdiction of the Russian republic. A similar arrangement was reached in Ukraine where the Supreme Soviet had declared the mines and all other industrial property to belong to the republic as part of its declaration of "sovereignty."

The Politics of Representation

The evolution of the miners' movement also can be charted in terms of its institutional development, or what might be called the politics of representation. Initially, the movement was represented by strike committees that sprang up at individual mines throughout the USSR's coal fields and continued to exist after the end of the strike to monitor the fulfillment of the agreement of 5 August 1989. City-wide and regional strike committees, consisting of

17In Leningrad where according to one mass survey 60 percent approved of the miners' actions, only one enterprise struck in sympathy with the miners. Temkina, "The Labour Movement of the Perestroika Period," p. 19.

18These politics should be understood within a broader context which has been outlined by a Russian sociologist as follows: "[t]he politization of the labour movement and industrial relations in post-socialist countries is manifested not so much by the appearance of workers' parties, in the pure sense of the word, as much as by the formation of broad multi-functional movements [which] combine defence of workers' current interests (trade union functions) with the campaign for this or the other path of development for society as a whole...." Leonid A. Gordon, "Russia on the Road to New Industrial Relations" (draft manuscript), p. 5.
delegates from individual mines, emerged soon after. While most individual mines’ strike committees voted to disband within a few months, those at the city and regional levels perpetuated themselves, in the process adopting the new sobriquet of workers’ committees.

One of the reasons for the disbanding of the strike committees at the mines was the election of many of their members to councils of labor collectives (STKs). These bodies, which originated in the Brezhnev era and had their functions expanded in Gorbachev’s Law on State Enterprises, were designed to involve representatives from the rank-and-file in enterprise administrative affairs. Infused with new blood, the STKs inserted themselves between management proper and the insurgent miners’ movement. But the continuing deterioration of the economy and of the mines themselves robbed them of the legitimacy they might otherwise have acquired. Where they endorsed managerial decisions and attempted to mobilize support for them among the miners, they tended to smack of the old party committees; to the extent that they questioned managerial authority without replacing it, they retarded the decision-making process, adding a new layer to the bureaucratic structure.  

In the meantime, the strike/workers’ committees were laying the groundwork for a larger-scale organization and ironically, for their own supersession. In June and again in October 1990, several hundred delegates from the committees met in Donetsk to constitute the first and second congresses of miners of the USSR. From these gatherings emerged the framework for the Independent Miners’ Union (NPG), a wholly new organization staffed for the most part by veterans of the strike committees. Although formally enrolling no more than five to ten percent of miners, the NPG showed its ability during the Spring 1991 strike—which was opposed by the old "official" miners’ union—to mobilize the support of many times that proportion. Indeed, the NPG has served as a model for workers in other industries.  

19Parallel developments were occurring in other industries, most notably, the automobile and military-industrial sectors. In the autumn of 1990, the STKs amalgamated into a Union.

20The creation of new "free" and "independent" unions has proceeded at a dizzying pace. Most, however, appear to be enterprise-based strike committees by another name or constitute regionally-based amalgamations of workers from different industries. To date, the only equivalent to the NPG has been within the field of civil aviation where there exist an
The organization that claims to speak for all Donbass workers is the Union of Independent Associations of Trade Unions (known by its Russian acronym as SNOP). With its brightly colored logo advertised on local buses and its sponsorship of rallies for economic reform, SNOP has made a concerted effort to distance itself from its Communist-dominated predecessor, the oblast' executive council of trade unions. To be sure, the association is broadly based, with representatives from the steelworkers and miners unions ranged around an enormous table alongside their counterparts from the textile workers union (the sole woman), the union of jurists which includes the police, and something called "Solidarnost" which turns out to be an association of small businessmen. But in private, several of these people ridiculed the organization's pretensions to "independence," and other than a rather vague feeling of not getting a fair deal from Kiev, it is hard to see what unites them or how SNOP can serve as an effective agent for mass mobilization.

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21 Aside from being the acronym of the union, "snop" is the Russian word for "sheaf." The organization's logo is a yellow sheaf, said by its chair to represent the combination of unions, each of which comprises a stalk. It is some indication of how muddled the organization is that SNOP's newspaper is called "The Position," though from its pages it is impossible to determine what that position might be. In place of the masthead slogan "Workers of the world, unite!," now appears the more innocuous "Trade unions defend the rights of workers." At its rally on 12 June 1992, SNOP passed resolutions calling on the oblast' council of people's deputies and the president's representative to reorient the regional economy along the lines of producing consumer goods, halt the "artificial bankrupting of state enterprises," maintain social services, and curb crime and violence in the area. In a throwback to the Communist Saturdays, the meeting ended with an appeal to all workers to devote 2-3 days' labor to assist with bringing in the harvest. Pozitsiia, 17-23 June 1992, p. 2.

Finally, mention should be made of the formally constituted political parties and organizations in which miner-activists have participated or with which they have had dealings. The close, mutually-supportive relationship between Democratic Russia on the one hand and the Kuzbass-based Confederation of Labor and its constituent workers’ committees on the other, has had no parallel in Ukraine mainly because there exists no Ukrainian equivalent to Democratic Russia. Rukh, though vastly popular in western Ukraine, has little following in the Donbass. The nationalist-oriented All-Ukrainian Association of Free Workers (VOST), has attracted some miner support, but mostly from the Pavlohrad and L’viv regions. In the presidential campaign of late November 1991, the Donetsk strike committee supported neither Kravchuk nor Rukh’s candidate, Viacheslav Chornovyl, but rather Vladimir Grinyov, a Russian-speaking mathematician from Kharkiv, who served as deputy chair of the Supreme Soviet.

Since the referendum of December 1991 in which close to 90 percent voted in favor of independence, the economic situation in the Donbass has become increasingly desperate and the political situation more heated. While the Kravchuk government has moved to ease price restrictions on coal and other commodities, it has cut back severely on subsidies to the mines. At the same time, the mines have been cut off from their traditional supplies of Russian timber. The result has been an intensification of the hoarding practices characteristic of the state socialist economy, sharp declines in production (estimated at 20 percent in 1992) and investment and a heightened sense of regionalism. In June 1992, several hundred people from the Donbass—miners, transport workers, doctors, teachers, and officials from the old, but now "reformed," trade unions—travelled to Kiev to picket the Supreme Soviet. After presenting a list of nine demands which included the establishment of a "free economic zone" for the Donbass and a revision of budgetary allocations more in line with the region’s contributions, they departed with some vaguely worded promises.23 Even earlier, new

23 The demands with commentary by M. Krylov and Iu. Boldyrev were published in Novosti i sobytia (organ of the Donetsk city strike committee and the Donetsk NPG), 9, June 1992, p. 3. A free economic zone to attract foreign capital investment has also been proposed by the Kuzbass workers’ committees. See interview with Viacheslav Golikov, chair of the council of workers’ committees of the Kuzbass in Moskovskie novosti, 21 June 1992, p. 11.
regionally-based political organizations (Interfront of the Donbass; Movement for the Rebirth of the Donbass) were formed among the local intelligentsia and have established contacts with the miners’ movement. Their inspiration is at least as much cultural as economic: condemning Kiev’s fiscal policies, they also have expressed apprehensiveness about compulsory Ukrainianization.  

It would thus appear that the miners’ movement in the Donbass has become increasingly detached from its analogues in other parts of the former Soviet Union at the same time as it has been overtaken within Ukraine by nationalist currents and those ranged against such currents. But to describe events thusly is to remain at the macro-level, at the level of large social movements and state politics. Why some miners are active and others are not, why some mines have strong NPG representation while others have retained the old trade union, and why at a time of great social and economic transformation, most other workers have not joined the miners as part of a "workers’ movement" requires a different level of analysis.

A Tale of Two Mines

The range of possible responses among miners to their problems is exemplified by the differences between two mines, both located in Donetsk’s Kuibyshev raion. At one extreme is the Kuibyshev mine where miners remain thoroughly dependent on their enterprise and its management; at the other is the October mine where activists have pursued an approach to

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24"Zaiavlenie Interdvizheniia Donbassa: Ob obshchestvenno-politicheskoi situatsii," press release, 20 January 1992; "Spasti ekonomiku ot krakha," Vechernyi Donetsk, 2 February 1992. Interfront has been compromised from the outset by its opposition to Ukrainian independence and the notorious actions of its namesakes in the Baltic republics; the Movement for the Rebirth of the Donbass, formed in February 1992, implicitly accepts independence but claims that "the inhabitants of the Donbass, as before, are not masters in their own house… As before, we are commanded from the center, only now the center is not Moscow but Kiev." Dvizhenie za vozrozhdenie Donbassa, "Rezoliutsiia grazhdanskogo s’ezda," 8 February 1992. More recently still, a Labour Party has been formed in Donetsk headed by the director of a refrigerator manufacturing company. Among the 321 delegates at its founding congress, 54 were characterized as workers, 142 as engineering-technical personnel and 63 as directors of enterprises or entrepreneurs. The party’s program calls for a federal system with Ukrainian and Russian as official languages. Vechernyi Donetsk, 23, 30 December 1992.
labor relations that is at least partly syndicalist. In some sense, these two mines reflect the divergent tendencies in the miners' movement as a whole.

The system of enterprise dependence developed as part and parcel of the command economy. In addition to relying on the workplace for pay, benefits and pension, workers--particularly in the more prestigious and better endowed "heavy" industrial sector--came to depend on their enterprises for virtually all their basic needs. This situation was brought about by what Kornai has called "the economics of shortage" in which the alternatives to workplace distribution were few, and the shortage of labor compelled managers to bribe workers to keep them from seeking jobs and associated goods and services elsewhere. Yet such goods and services were endemically scarce inside enterprises as well, which meant that the question of their distribution--who would be rewarded and by what principle--would be a major source of tension and division among workers as well as between them and management. As a steelworker at Magnitogorsk told Stephen Kotkin a few years ago, "We're completely dependent on them. Food, clothes, apartments, furniture, day care, summer camp, vacations--everything is allocated by them according to their lists, with which they rule over our lives. Everyone has something to lose." Without independent organizations of their own, workers could not collectively challenge the system of distribution within enterprises. They also had no institutionalized means for influencing the destination of what they produced. The one kind of control they did exercise, as Burawoy and Krotov have emphasized, was over production. In the "plan-

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25The Kuibyshev mine administration is responsible for both the Kuibyshev and Panfilov mines which together employ 5,508 workers; the October mine employs 4,919. Data obtained from the Office of Employment, Kuibyshev raiisovet.


fulfillment pact," "managers required minimal cooperation from workers to ensure that plan targets were met, while in turn workers expected managers to deliver adequate supplies and protect a minimum standard of living."\textsuperscript{29}

\textit{Kuibyshev: The Restoration of Enterprise Paternalism}

This, then, was roughly the situation of the miners before the strike of July 1989. At Kuibyshev, as at many other mines, the strike temporarily exploded the boundaries between management and workers. Valery Samofalov and Gennady Kushch, both veteran face workers in their late thirties, were chosen by the collective as chair and vice-chair of the strike committee, and for several weeks during and immediately after the strike, they worked with the technical and managerial staff to run the mine.\textsuperscript{30} Having supervised elections to the trade union committee and the STK, the strike committee ceased to meet on a regular basis and eventually disbanded. Kushch and Samofalov now served as chair and vice-chair of the STK, with Samofalov also representing the mine on the Donetsk city strike committee.

Unlike the October mine which expelled its director during the strike, Kuibyshev carried on with the old director, Lopatukhin, for almost another year. In June 1990, G. T. Alizaev, previously chief engineer and before that head of the department of mine preparation, was elected as the new director. Energetic and at 34 years of age, the youngest director among the 28 mines that comprise the Donetskugol' association. Alizaev promised to work "for the good of the collective." Not long after assuming his new responsibilities, Alizaev negotiated a new collective agreement with the trade union and the STK which


placed the mine on a contract-based system whereby individual miners signed contracts with section heads who in turn contracted with higher management. What this meant in effect was that wages would be paid out of current accounts, or as Alizaev explained, "there will be no debts and no loans and we will have to count on our own resources." Meanwhile, Kushch and Samofalov, like the outstanding workers of an earlier era, assumed the role of the mine's representatives before higher authorities. Meeting with the Minister of Coal, Shchadov, they appealed for a reduction in the state plan--"because it was not feasible"--and were successful in having norms scaled down.

However, the acid test of this new arrangement came in March of the following year when the NPG and the Donetsk city strike committee called on miners to strike, initially over a series of economic demands but after the strike spread to the Kuzbass, for broader "political" demands as well. At first, the miners at Kuibyshev and Panfilov heeded the strike call despite the fact that the STK voted "nearly unanimously" against striking. Only after Alizaev had agreed to raise wages across the board did they return to work.

A month after the strike had been terminated, Kushch characterized his own position and that of the STK in the following terms:

I'm a little uncomfortable with the explanation that the STK leaders persuaded people. Nobody persuaded anybody else. When the strike began ... we came out armed with facts and figures and said: 'This is our collective, this is our mine, these are our geological conditions. This is what we can lose or gain. We can lose everything, including the mine itself, since it can't stand idle even for a day. And this is what we can gain. We have a right, a legally confirmed right, and if we work well we can turn this right into extra wages.'

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33 Throughout the two-month strike, participation was spotty, with some mines joining and others leaving, and still others working with the blessing of the city strike committee to supply certain local enterprises with coal.
The fact that the mine worked well during this period made Kushch feel vindicated. "People saw that we were not just spouting empty phrases.... Those 860,000 rubles of extra profits that we earned since the beginning of the year were used for the collective."34 Since then, the administration has gone from strength to strength. By June 1992, the director could report that despite the prevailing economic chaos, the general decline in production and the growing threat of unemployment, "the past twelve months have been successful in the life of our collective. We work without stoppages. In fact, people from other enterprises try to get work here because of the high pay. We've stopped taking people on, but we can guarantee work to all who are presently working here." The STK, meanwhile, had not met since August 1991. According to Kushch, "The STK elected the director, who now does more than at the time of the [1989] strike. We trust him, since we elected him." When asked how the mine was resolving labor conflicts, Alizaev replied, "As a rule people come to me, though we have a commission to handle this." When pressed on what sort of conflicts arose, he claimed that there were "no conflicts, only problems," such as lines for the distribution of housing and cars.35

The mine's ability to distribute such goods and to provide for the work force generally was a source of pride for Alizaev and his assistants. In addition to claiming to be able to guarantee work for all presently employed, the director stated that "we've calculated a minimum amount of coal that has to be extracted each month in order to feed everybody." Like many other mines in the area, Kuibyshev provided housing, day care, vacations on the Black Sea, pioneer camps for children, cultural and sports centers and more.

It might be expected that with greater independence for enterprises and the putative growth of the "free market," these functions would atrophy. But in fact just the opposite has occurred. With the breakdown of the former Union's system of distribution, it is the

34Interview with Kushch. Samofalov's opposition to the strike led to his resignation from the city strike committee. For their part, the (remaining) members of the strike committee referred to the Kuibyshev miners as strike breakers and "kolbasniki" (sausage lovers).

enterprise, rather than the market, that has stepped in to fill the gap. Thus, in the case of housing, Kuibyshev formed its own construction group in lieu of the city soviet’s failure to build "one square meter of housing in the raion." The mine also has organized its own "commercial service" consisting of two departments, one for the provision of foodstuffs and the other for consumer goods, all of which were sold at subsidized prices to employees. Most of these items were received through assorted barter deals for coal. Although both miners and management cited the need to replace the mine’s antiquated equipment--both to compete with cheaper Kuzbass coal and to lower the atrocious accident rate--capital renewal did not figure in these deals.

With the strike committee disbanded and the STK practically defunct, the mine’s trade union committee once more has become the sole representative of the work force. The chair of the committee is Evgenii Grigorevich Belous, a former electrician, who was elected to that post in August 1989 for a five-year term. Seated behind his desk in a large air-conditioned office, Belous ticks off the changes that have occurred in the trade union’s operations in recent years. "Under Brezhnev, the party ran the trade union," adding quickly that he was never a party member. Now, "we’re all workers here." While previously 65 percent of union dues--one percent of wages--went above to the trade union’s territorial committee, now, only twelve percent is siphoned upwards. Belous also claimed that the collective contract was a fundamentally different document than before in that "it provides more for the workers’ social good," and that each article was voted on at the semi-annual labor collective conference. And while in the past the going rate for a pass to the mine’s vacation center was a couple of bottles of vodka placed on the desk of the old trade union chair, that sort of thing doesn’t happen anymore.

But if corruption has been removed, the trade union committee still spends most of its time and energy on the distribution of goods and services. The six million rubles at the committee’s disposal is used to staff five full-time employees and two accountants plus five

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36 At the nearby Chemical Reactive Factory, the administration leased out land to an enterprising farmer who appeared every day at the factory gates to sell tomatoes and cucumbers to workers.
sports trainers. One sixth of annual dues goes towards maintaining the mine’s two Houses of Culture. The union also helps run the mines’ seven day care centers, pioneer camps and vacation centers and renders material assistance to pensioners, veterans of the Chernobyl disaster (there were 76 from the mine who had helped with the cleanup), and others who had been injured in mining accidents. Belous was particularly proud of having been able to buy equipment in Minsk for the mine’s soccer team. "We bought real uniforms; they did really well last year."37

Most goods and services, however, continue to be supplied by the enterprise through its barter of coal. The union thus remains a point of distribution, with such items as shoes, skirts, jackets, cigarettes, fur hats and chandeliers piled up in its outer offices. "We’re getting no social defense from the government," complains Belous. "It’s approaching the stage where we have to pay for everything ourselves. It’s our poverty that makes us distribute hats, refrigerators, TVs and so on."

The most important item distributed through the mine, and also the one that has caused the most conflict, is housing. At Kuibyshev, as at many other such enterprises, the waiting line for an apartment stretches to ten years and more, with young workers living in dormitories or crammed into the apartments of their parents.38 Whereas at some enterprises workers have fought for and won the right to a single uniform housing list, at Kuibyshev only sixty percent of the housing built by the mine was thus distributed. Ten percent was allocated to young specialists, another ten percent was reserved for the mine’s construction workers (i.e., those who actually built the apartments) and the remaining twenty percent went

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38 Or not so young, as illustrated by the Mezhinskii family. Vera, a packer at the Chemical Reactive Factory, and her husband, Aleksandr, formerly employed at the same factory and now a miner at the October mine, lived in a dormitory for thirteen years before being allocated a "temporary apartment" lacking indoor plumbing. The heart condition of their four-year old daughter allowed them to jump the queue (!). Interview with Vera Aleksandrovna Mezhinskaia, 26 June 1992. The sad state of the goods and services distributed by the chemical factory, a predominantly women’s collective, illustrates the gendered hierarchy of enterprise distribution.
to the "director's fund" for distribution to peredoviki proizvodstva, exemplary workers as defined by management.

Although the trade union is not directly responsible for the distribution of housing, its approval of the collective contract which contains such provisions implicates it in the system. Also included in the contract were sections on worker discipline and responsibilities with provision for the trade union committee to vote on the punishments up to and including dismissal from the mine. While the union's participation ostensibly serves as a check on management capriciousness, Belous' contention that "the trade union works closely with the administration to improve workers' social welfare" makes one wonder how independent the union can be in defending workers' rights.

Indeed, not everyone at Kuibyshev was happy with the trade union's work. Valery Samofalov, who had broken with the city strike committee over the 1991 strike, commented that "[t]he ideology of the trade union remains the same as before, and the miners need more information to make decisions." Evidently, Samofalov had in mind the union's failure to publicize the picketing of the Ukrainian Supreme Soviet in which he participated on his own initiative. After returning from Kiev, he gave a report--again on his own initiative--to the miners as they came off each shift. "Our STK fell apart," he told a group of eighty or so in the mine's meeting hall.

Maybe we didn't need one with those people on it, but we need one now. For two weeks I called our trade union about sending representatives to the picket in Kiev, but they wouldn't inform anyone. This is a long and constant process; if we sit and be quiet, nothing will be done. . . . The workers' movement is doing good things, but our mine doesn't belong to it.

After his invitation for questions was met with silence, the miners rose and shuffled out. Asked about the apparent lack of initiative among rank-and-file miners, Samofalov replied:

It's not simple. Our trade union, our STK, hasn't explained to people what we have to do. A lot of people don't give a damn. Our stupidity is that our STK fell apart, and our trade union committee doesn't know how to change.
Most people are getting relatively good pay, are getting supplied with goods, and don't care beyond that. That is our misfortune.\textsuperscript{39}

\textit{The October Mine: NPG Insurgency}

The atmosphere at the October mine, only several kilometers away, could not have been more different. If Samofalov was the sole Kuibyshev miner to have left the official trade union, at October 500 miners had joined the NPG in the past six months. While Kuibyshev's trade union chair entertained questions in his spacious office, the independent union's committee at October was quartered in a crowded, dimly lit room, the only piece of equipment being a telephone that looked like a relic from a Second World War bunker. And whereas Belous had spoken at length without interruption, his secretary guarding the door, at October the door to the NPG's office was constantly opening and closing, as miners came in between shifts to ask questions, scrawl out requests on pieces of scrap paper, and discuss the same political issues that Samofalov had raised to no avail at Kuibyshev.

As already indicated, the October miners' collective replaced their director in the wake of the 1989 strike. According to the former Komsomol organizer, "He ran the mine with military discipline, but that's what is needed in a mine."\textsuperscript{40} "He ran things with terror," was the way one of the members of the independent union's committee remembered him.\textsuperscript{41} "The director was like a tsar," recalled Mikhail Krylov, the mine's delegate to the Donetsk city strike committee who now serves as its co-chair. "When my mother died, he wouldn't give me paid leave to bury her. With the strike there was an explosion in the collective.

\textsuperscript{39}Interviews with Valery V. Samofalov, 24-25 June 1992. Gennady Kushch, the other strike leader from 1989 and thereafter chair of the STK, seems to have withdrawn into his personal life. Recently divorced and remarried (to the union's housing inspector), he has moved to a cleaner, less industrial part of the city. After injuring his leg, he ceased working below the surface and now drives the mine's van.

\textsuperscript{40}Interview with Viktor Adreevich Zadorozhnyi, 28 June 1992.

\textsuperscript{41}Interview with October NPG members, 25 June 1992.
We wanted democracy in the mine. When people saw it was possible to get rid of our despot, there was greater solidarity" than at other mines.42

After the tsar, Kerenskii. The new director elected by the October miners, though well-liked, evidently lacked authoritativeness. "When we established democracy," a member of the independent union recalled, "people felt they could do whatever they liked." But according to another member, the problem was not so much democracy as a lack of clear incentives. Although Krylov claims otherwise, several NPG members admitted that "labor discipline," a term that encompasses everything from punctuality to respectful behavior towards supervisors, suffered.43

A visit to the mine in April 1991, during the second major strike, provided a strong sense that it was indeed under a form of workers' control. The mine's offices were occupied by strike leaders. While the deputy strike committee chair and the chair of the trade union were answering visitors' questions, the director entered the room, circled around the worker-activists and, smiling weakly, remarked "OK, fellas, we think we're real important giving interviews to foreigners, but isn't it time to get back to work?" His presence was barely acknowledged. At the end of this second strike, the October miners voted to remove their second director and elect a third whose "election campaign" included a plan for the mine's reconstruction. A year later, this plan was being carried out with the help of the city strike committee.

Unlike the official union which is open to everyone employed in the industry--including clerical and managerial personnel--the NPG restricts membership to those in the "basic professions." At October, they number approximately 2,000. Thus, as of July 1992, the committee had enrolled about a quarter of its potential constituency. But what it lacks in terms of numbers is compensated by a combativeness and sense of mission absent from the old trade union. A return visit to the committee's office found members preparing a formal document alleging that the head of the accounting department had violated the collective

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42 Interview with Mikhail Krylov, 1 July 1992.

43 Interview with October NPG members.
contract by withholding vacation pay from one worker. "If he repeats it," one of the members remarked, "we will demand that he be fired."44

A more serious conflict concerned the control of social security funds. Under the old system, the state withheld a certain percentage of each worker's pay and placed it in the general fund for such expenditures as health care and pensions. With the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the Ukrainian government has granted enterprises the right to administer employees' social security benefits. Although the October mine's collective agreement with the NPG provided for a portion of members' contributions to be administered by the union, the mine's administration failed to turn over two-months' worth of payments, at which point the union took the mine to arbitration court.45 The court decided in favor of the NPG, but the conflict was prolonged by the intervention of the old trade union. After meeting with officials from the rival union, one of the NPG's members reported indignantly that they had tried to capitalize on the NPG's legal victory by seeking control of social security at the mine.

The issue seems to have pivoted on the miner-activists' deep-seated distrust of the old union bureaucracy in particular and, in a larger sense, all centralized authority. In the words of Bobunov, the chair of October's independent union, "We propose to accumulate the money ourselves so that we can determine where it should go."46 Or, as Krylov put it, "We should control the distribution of the money we earn. The money we earn has been disappearing."47 The same suspicion of having been cheated cropped up in a discussion about the wage system. Here, their objection was to the "coefficient of labor participation" in which members of a work brigade are paid differentially according to their labor input, usually as determined by the foreman.

44 Ibid.

45 Novosti i sobytia, 8, June 1992, p. 3.

46 Interview with October NPG members.

47 Interview with Krylov.
Couched in terms of accountability and "democracy," the rhetoric of these activists also revealed a strong materialist strain. To them, it was unfair that the director should receive as much as 50,000 rubles a month while miners are paid 15-20,000. Faced with the prospect of unemployment, they argued that it was the mine's management and support staff that should combine jobs and undergo layoffs. The accounting department, for instance, recently had received computers, so that the number of people working there could be reduced, they argued. "Look at how many mouths we are feeding," one committee member remarked. "This system must be smashed."48 The NPG's policy of refusing to admit non-miners suggests a similar orientation at higher levels.

Not surprisingly, the October miners' militancy came in for criticism elsewhere in Donetsk. In the view of the chairman of the Kuibyshev raionsoviet, the miner-leaders at the Kuibyshev and Panfilov mines were "more mature and thoughtful" and "not populists," while "the October miners chose irresponsible leaders."49 The contrast between the two mines was put somewhat differently by Krylov: "At October, the climate is better for the workers' collective. But if you want 'gifts,' well, go to work at Kuibyshev."

Facing the Future

How is one to account for the different trajectories of these two mines and what prospects does each hold for the future? To provide a broader context for addressing these questions, it might be useful to refer to another mine, Zasiad'ko, located in the northern part of the Donetsk city limits. Like October, which opened in 1967, Zasiad'ko is a relatively new mine. Its long-standing director, E. L. Zviagil'skii, is something of a local legend

48Interview with October NPG members. Some mines are in fact reducing administrative costs thanks to privatization initiatives of their staff. At the Zasiad'ko mine, for example, engineers have set up their own "small enterprise" which contracts with the mine to provide their services. Small enterprises may be a way to increase compensation to highly skilled personnel without incurring the wrath of other workers. Interview with Iurii Varevoda, 24 June 1992.

whose entrepreneurial skills and philanthropic largesse have reached near mythic proportions. In July 1989, while other mine directors made themselves scarce, Zviagil’skii retained the loyalty of his miners by expressing his support for their demands and their decision to strike. When in the spring of 1991 Donetsk was again engulfed by a strike, Zasiad’ko’s workers, like those at Kuibyshev, remained on the job. "The director works, above all, for people," explained a face worker in an article entitled "Why the Zasiad’ko Mine Is Not Striking." The article went on to describe how the mine had developed "an entire trade and industrial complex" which included a department for housing construction, two vacation centers, greenhouses, a livestock station replete with slaughterhouse and smokehouse and its own farm whose produce was exchanged for consumer goods. Contracts with trade organizations brought in clothes, shoes, furniture and automobiles, while barter deals provided the miners with cassette players, VCRs and televisions at subsidized prices. The mine was purchasing an Italian bakery which would use the farm’s wheat, had built a new cafeteria "with a vitamin bar," and had acquired several stores for the "Miner" trading complex. To transport all these goods, the mine obtained its own truck depot, and to improve export prospects, it had purchased jointly with other enterprises a freight ship.

All these emoluments succeeded in keeping the miners at Zasiad’ko quiescent. But more recently, with the freeing of coal prices in Ukraine, the relative position of Zasiad’ko’s miners has slipped. Other mines have raised their wages more sharply and, as exemplified

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50 One can hardly visit Donetsk without hearing about the Zasiad’ko mine and its director. Occasionally, the comments about Zviagil’skii are tinged with anti-Semitism. "Well, the director is a Jew," one miner explained. "I’m not a nationalist, you understand, but the Jews have many friends; they stick together." Interview with N. S., 21 April 1991. Since 1991, Zviagil’skii has embarked on a political career. Elected as a deputy to the Ukrainian Supreme Soviet, he returned to Donetsk in late 1992 to be chosen by the city soviet as mayor. Since 1992, he has served as president of the Donetsk branch of the Ukraine-Israel Society. Vechernyi Donetsk, 23 June 1992; Vechernyi Donetsk, 19 December 1992.


52 Vechernyi Donetsk, 17 April 1991. At a recent exhibition of mining technology, the Zasiad’ko display contained a table filled with various foodstuffs which the miners were said to enjoy thanks to the mine’s extensive operations. Donetsk Television, 28 June 1992.
by Kuibyshev, are able to look after their workers in other ways. According to Iurii Makarov, co-chair of the city strike committee, two brigades from Zasiad’ko had approached the NPG for assistance in setting up a branch at the mine, suggesting that the distribution of "gifts" and the enterprise dependency thereby established may have its limits after all.53

At least to some degree, then, the alternative strategies pursued by Donetsk miners have been shaped by their material circumstances which have varied from one mine to another. But material circumstances do not exhaust the reasons for the divergent strategies. In Donetsk it was often remarked that Zasiad’ko’s relative prosperity had attracted an educated (and therefore supposedly less volatile) work force, but this argument seems less than compelling in light of the presence of highly educated miners among the leadership of the strike committees at other mines.54 The fact that Zasiad’ko is a relatively new mine would appear to explain its prosperity, but then so is October, while Kuibyshev--an older enterprise with access to only average quality coal--has succeeded in renewing miners’ dependence much like Zasiad’ko.

If structural explanations fail here, what about those that rely on human agency? One factor in the continued dependence of miners at Zasiad’ko and the revival of such a relationship at Kuibyshev certainly has been the entrepreneurial skills of Zviagil’skii and Alizaev. These individuals have succeeded in making the transition from bargaining with the state for more resources to seeking customers, above all through barter deals, for their enterprises’ product. Yet, October’s radicalism has not simply been due to entrepreneurial failures. Indeed, the October miners’ experience with their first director--the tsar--would almost certainly lead them to reject any manager who tried to reimpose the old paternalism, no matter how prosperous the mine became. It was this experience that appears to have


54Indeed, the presence of educated workers, drawn to mining by the relatively high wages, often has been cited as an explanation for why miners and not other workers struck so widely and formed an organized movement. See Peter Rutland, "Labor Unrest and Movements in 1989 and 1990," Soviet Economy, 6, 1990, p. 350.
solidified these miners as they have gone first from a "hard" boss to a "soft" one, and finally to one who, though still seen as an antagonist, is accountable to his constituents.

The outcome of the October miners' insurgency—if indeed one can speak of outcomes as opposed to a longer-term Gramscian war of position—remains murky. At a higher level, the NPG has been grappling with the implications of its own insurgency. In Donetsk, representatives from the city's mines meet periodically in the new union's headquarters, which is located in Donetskugol's office building just down the corridor from the city strike committee's offices. Among the issues discussed at the meeting we attended were those that any fledgling union might confront: the right to bring the administration to court for wrongful dismissal; whether union members are obliged to participate in a strike called by the union; control over social security funds. The substance of these issues and the heat generated by their discussion illustrated the combativeness of the NPG and its commitment to break with the servile tradition of Soviet trade unions. Nevertheless, the absence of alternative mechanisms for the distribution of scarce goods and social services makes it is difficult to see how the NPG can avoid becoming involved in the same relationship of dependency that, in its view, discredited its rival. Indeed, at some mines, the NPG, if only to compete for members, already has found itself involved in distribution and the resolution of cultural and consumer problems (raspredelenie i sotskul'tbyt).55

It might be assumed that the introduction of a "free market" economy could provide a way out of these dilemmas. First, by allowing prices to reach their "natural" levels, the market would stimulate the production of those goods now in short supply, giving consumers an alternative to wasting time in lines or relying on their enterprises. Second, the elimina-

55According to one mine's official trade union chair, "At first the NPG ... pushed aside health issues, daily life concerns, and all the rest. But now the NPG takes care of everything up to trade and the distribution of foodstuffs, that is, those things for which the NPG leaders always cursed us." Pozitsiia, 6-12 May 1992, p. 1. In Vorkuta the NPG, which claims half of the miners as members, runs its own small enterprises and cooperatives. In June it "flooded the city with red caviar from Sakhalin, distributing it first to its own membership at cut prices of 100 rubles a tin, about half the normal price in the shops...." Michael Burawoy and Pavel Krotov, "The Uneven Development of Merchant Capitalism in Russia: Economic Reforms in the Wood and Coal Industries," unpublished draft, pp. 25-6.
tion of credits that are currently propping up state enterprises throughout the former Soviet Union would compel those that are strong enough to survive to become more efficient and get out of the business of supplying such services as housing construction, day care, etc. Finally, a reduction in the number of mines and their work force would remove the main reason why enterprises supplied workers with goods and services in the first place--to attract and retain skilled workers in a taut labor market.

Aside from the considerable weight exercised by the industrialist lobby and the vague if real fear of a "social explosion," the major obstacle to the realization of this scenario remains the absence of visible substitutes for the enterprises now supplying vital services to a large part, perhaps a majority, of the population. Small entrepreneurs, even if they existed in larger numbers than at present, would not be able to do the job since they would have to charge prices out of the reach of their potential customers. Local governments, which have long battled industrial enterprises and state ministries for control of such communal services without much success, simply do not have the resources to run them: the meager resources they do have come primarily from the very enterprises that would be threatened with bankruptcy. Thus, to cut credits to these enterprises, forcing many to close, would not simply deprive their workers of wages and benefits (which could be replaced temporarily at least by unemployment payments), but of access to housing, health care, child care and important sources of food and consumer goods as well. Consequently, both the Russian and Ukrainian governments have found it preferable to continue to extend unrecoverable "loans" to enterprises. While these industrial "dinosaurs" produce less and

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56 In the Kuibyshev raion of Donetsk, for instance, only ten of 57 day care centers are run by the city Soviet which is facing a severe budget crunch. Data supplied by Kuibyshev raionvot.

57 In a chapter entitled "New Cities: The Politics of Company Towns," William Taubman refers to the more than one thousand cities built in the Soviet Union since the 1917 Revolution most of which "have been born and raised as Soviet-style company towns, in the shadow of one industrial establishment or with several establishments dividing responsibility or competing for control." These enterprises provide "housing and whatever meager services" there are. See Governing Soviet Cities: Bureaucratic Politics and Urban Development in the USSR (New York, Praeger, 1973), p. 54.
less, they continue to be the main provider of social services, becoming, as it were, social
welfare or employment agencies.58

There is nonetheless much talk of unemployment in the Donbass. Unlike the Siberian
Kuzbass or Vorkuta where mines are relatively new and the coal is nearer the surface, many
of the mines in the Donbass are all but worked out, so much so that one source has claimed
that "most of the Donetsk mines would no longer be considered proven reserves by Western
standards."59 "In a normal country our mine would have been closed long ago," said
Belous in a typical comment. "But you can’t do that; there are 8,000 (sic) people working
here," he said, adding that one-half of Donetsk’s population was tied directly or indirectly to
the coal industry.60 "Other cities have only the coal industry—how will they survive?," asked
the deputy chair of Donetsk’s city soviet when discussing the Donbass’s future.61

More ominously and with characteristic forthrightness, Yuri Boldyrev of the city strike
committee stated, "The Donbass is today’s Ruhr. Dying or soon to die."62

Could privatizing the mines rescue them and their work force? When asked about
privatization, Krylov, the city strike committee co-chair, replied that he was for it, especially
in trade and services. "But not in the coal industry. Where would the miners get the money
to buy their mines?"63 Boldyrev argued that the future of the Donbass is "not only a
question of economics, but even more of politics," since closing the mines would lead to

58See "The Clock is Ticking," The Politics of Soviet Economic Reform, The Newsletter of
the Center on East-West Trade, Investment and Communications, Duke University, 2, 5, 15

59David Warner and Louis Kaiser, "Developments of the USSR’s Eastern Coal Basins," in

60Interview with Belous.


62Interview with Yuri Boldyrev, 1 July 1992.

63Interview with Krylov. His answer reflects the different meanings that a basic economic
term such as "privatization" can have in the former Soviet Union as opposed to the western
world.
social upheaval. Yet, with mining fatalities running at the rate of 350 per annum, "many mines must be closed down, but in a humanitarian way."  

Others let it be known that they would not be left jobless without a struggle. Bobunov, head of October’s NPG, said, "If even a few mines close, thousands will be thrown out in the streets. In other countries, miners have been retrained." When asked what they should be retrained for, another October miner replied, "Each of us has a specialty here. We don’t have enough roads or houses--we’ll do construction, whatever is needed." "They can’t simply close the mines and throw us out of work," remarked Yuri Makarov. "Retrain us, let us build cars, whatever." His colleague Krylov put it this way: "There are 120,000 underground miners in the Donbass. If they close the mines, there will be a social explosion--a war." Nevertheless, a visit to the Kuibyshev raionsov’s office of (un)employment, established in the spring of 1991, found the director preparing for the future. "We now have 47 unemployed. But these are only the first swallows."  

The uncertainty of the future thus casts a deep shadow over the present. But the problems of the present are generating anxiety in themselves. Although shortages and inflation are by no means restricted to the Donbass or Ukraine, many people in Donetsk assert that the Donbass has the worst of both. Whether the relatively high wages of miners has contributed to this parlous situation, as alleged by some local residents, is a sore point with miner-activists. Attributing both shortages and inflation to the nefarious operations of the "Mafia," they justify earning twice or three times what most intellectual workers receive.

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65 Interview with October NPG members.

66 Interview with Makarov.

67 Interview with Krylov.

68 Interview with Viktor Ivanovich Belozorov. 3 July 1992.
by claiming that steelworkers' wages are still higher and by pointing out that miners pay for their wages in blood.

Be that as it may, the miners' very success in obtaining wage increases has ironically, if predictably, created serious problems for the miners' movement. By letting the price of coal go free (while simultaneously raising prices on important consumer goods), the Ukrainian government quite clearly intended to placate the most militant segment of the workforce. Miners' wages soared and as service workers in the coal industry saw their pay rise as well, workers performing the same services in other industries or the municipal government at much lower rates reacted strongly. At the same time, differential rates of wage increases among miners—a function of the different physical endowments of mines and management's success in finding customers and suppliers for essential inputs—threaten to undermine the solidarity of the movement.

But even if the mining industry in the Donbass seems doomed, the miners' movement has not yet played itself out. Having contributed to the dismantling of the administrative-command system (and indeed of the Soviet Union), the miners find themselves confronting the bitter fruits of their victory: either an intensified version of enterprise paternalism or the prospect of further deterioration in working and living conditions if not the dismantling of the coal mining industry itself. To the extent that the first alternative is contingent on the continuation of state subsidies, recent efforts by the Yeltsin and Kravchuk governments to cut enterprises adrift do not bode well. But if the era of enterprise paternalism is drawing to an end, it is by no means clear what is to replace it. The Thatcherite "solution," which entailed the destruction of the British coal miners' movement and the gutting of much of their industry, was child's play compared to what it will take to exit from a system that simultaneously protected and enraged the miners of Donetsk.

In the Donbass, there remain two city strike committees, those of Donetsk and Krasnoarmeisk, and a regional council based in Gorlovka.69 During the strike of 1991, an

69Illustrative of the regional differences among miners is the fact that leaders of the Donbass strike committees did not enter into the Confederation of Labor, an organization formed in the spring of 1990 with a membership consisting primarily of representatives from the Kuzbass and secondarily from Vorkuta and Karaganda coalfields. See Gordon, "Russia on the Road to New
inter-regional coordinating council of workers' and strike committees was formed but effectively ceased to exist after the termination or "suspension" of the strike.

Since December 1991, political authority in the Donbass has rested with a plenipotentiary of President Kravchuk whose headquarters are in the former Communist Party obkom building.