

This article was written in response to the idea of developing ethics-based television programming for the emerging Soviet Union. The date indicates that it was written in January 1991, 7 months before the collapse of the USSR. It was not written by myself but was based on the work we were doing with Ethics conferences and some Television in the USSR at the time. The persons who met to develop these ideas are noted in the first paragraphs. It reflects an optimistic view of what could be accomplished at that early stage in a changing Soviet Union. The writer as noted is Paul Marshall.

Economics and Morality: Report of a Working Group

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PART I

A. Introduction

On January 21, 1991 Mr. Art DeFehr, the Chairperson of the Soviet Union Network, called a meeting in Toronto to discuss suggestions for a possible Soviet television series, perhaps by Moscow Evening, on the personal values and attitudes necessary for the development of a free economy. Others at the meeting were Paul Marshall (political theorist), Karen Pascal (independent TV and video producer), Chris Shore (S.U.N.), Ron Sider (social ethicist), Brian Stiller (church leader), and Wilber Sutherland (media consultant).

We were agreed that personal values are essential to a healthy functioning economy. Without wanting to prejudice the Soviet situation we were also agreed that in principle a television series would be a good means of communicating this and could play some part itself in bringing about those changes. We therefore make the following suggestions for such a series. Our remarks are divided into five sections: Background Comments on Economics, Attitudes and Morality, Values for a Free Economy, Institutional Support for values, Suggestions for Implementation, Follow-up.

B. Economics, Attitudes and Morality

Few, if any, would want to assert that economic development is solely a matter of appropriate personal characteristics. At the same time, however, it is becoming clear that any discussion of economic development which does not address personal attitudes and behavior is one-sided if not actually futile. Any change toward decentralized economic decision making and the use of market mechanisms requires people who will actually fill the new economic roles in a fruitful way. Some of this will be almost automatic as some people will take up opportunities that they have long sought but which previously have been restricted. Other changes such as those

involved in entrepreneurship, independent management, and self-disciplined work habits, call for acquired skills and habits and beyond them—morality.

This can be illustrated in the notion of credit, something which is vital to the smooth functioning of markets. It means the practice of extending loans and the amount that can be loaned to any particular person or enterprise. It also means believability or trustworthiness (from the Latin credo). These two senses are intimately related. A person who has proved trustworthy may be given credit. One who has not lacks credibility. This means that trust lies at the heart of extended markets. If people cannot trust others or show they are trustworthy then transactions will be limited to those where cash and goods can be put up front, which invariably limits them to short-term goals.

We offer no independent analysis of problems facing the restructuring of the Soviet economy. But reports from many observers including, most importantly, from Soviet citizens themselves, indicate that personal factors are a major barrier to economic reform. Hence personal changes can in turn be an important factor in such reform. Essentially this aspect of the problem stems from the fact that after decades of a command economy Soviet citizens have had little or no experience with direct responsibility for economic life. The demand was to carry out the orders given by a higher authority. But a market economy takes its “orders” immediately from the actual circumstances—what is in short supply, in surplus, what raw materials are available, what skills and resources are at hand, what the costs would be compared to the costs of other suppliers. We need to know how to read these signals. We must also be able to respond to them—to make calculations and decisions, and then act upon them. Similar constraints apply to new environments for consumption.

These personal factors involve new skills, but also new moral requirements. Decisions based on indicators from the environment rather than from orders also carry the risk that they may be wrong, and the fault cannot be then passed on to someone else. In addition the decision may even be “right”, in the sense that it was the best that could be made in the circumstances, but even so it might lead to bad results. A market might collapse, new discoveries might be made, a competitor might do better. In either case there is a responsibility and a risk. Living in such a setting required not only certain skills but also a particular kind of courage. Without such courage an enterprise cannot prosper. Similar types of virtues affect each level of the economy.

We have mentioned only personal values that are important to a free economy. Different countries have different needs, and changes in different economic systems require very different emphases. We do not pretend that the values we suggest are ones which should be emphasized primarily in countries which have very free, perhaps overly free, economies. Nor do we suggest that they give anything like the full range of attitudes and beliefs than any person should have. We merely suggest that these are some of the values which are vital to the development of a prosperous economy in a country which has had a “command economy” for decades.

C. Values for a Free Economy

The values we suggest can be clustered in four areas:

- 1) Integrity, 2) Liberty, 3) Creativity, 4) Responsibility

1. Integrity

Integrity points to the virtues of solidity and reliability. A person with integrity can be relied on to do what is right even in changing circumstances. Their direction becomes from within rather than from prevailing conditions. It involves truthfulness—that what we say can be trusted and what we commit ourselves to we will do. This allows others to make their own wider economic decisions based not only on what we have done, but on what we say we will do in the future.

Integrity also involves honesty—that we will take only what is ours and that we can be entrusted safely with what belongs to others. This allows us and others to divert energy away from protecting property toward making fruitful use of it. Finally, integrity involves self-discipline. We will work hard even if not watched. This allows us to accept and give responsibility without always being commanded.

D. Institutional Support for Values

The values and attitudes we have described cannot be produced solely by the pressure of external circumstances for there are many instances where short-sighted or rigid attitude could be in some people's self-interest, though it might damage many others. The element of responsibility highlights the fact that there needs to be internal changes in order for economic change to happen.

Nevertheless, it is also true that societal, structural and institutional factors can greatly help or hinder this process. Some of these are:

1) Freedom of Speech and Inquiry

People need information in order to make decisions or they will make faulty ones. If there are problems they need to be investigated or they will be repeated. Lack of freedom of expression warps not only politics but economics in a fog and makes economic action blind. Good economic activity needs openness.

2) Free Intermediary Institutions

Not only individuals but institutions need a measure of freedom to perform their role. This is true of enterprises, churches, families, the media, and scientific and artistic organizations. This allows many more loci of freedom and responsibility and so helps to cultivate, train and provide opportunities for the values and attitudes we have described.

3) Private Ownership

If people cannot control some goods and services then they have nothing with which they can act in an economic fashion; there is no opportunity. If they can receive some benefit from their own work and effort they are more likely to be disciplined in their work, careful with their decisions, and creative in their judgments. Conversely, if misuse or careless use of our own goods has negative consequences then we are more likely to be more responsible in our actions than if the goods and consequences always belong to someone or something else.

4) Limited Government

The first three structural requirements are also ways of pointing out that, while certainly governments have a responsibility for economic developments, many economic features will only work if governments leave people to make up their own minds, devise their own plans, and follow their own decisions. If governments do everything then others can't and won't. Governments must move over and let their "actors" play a part.

5) Competition

If the first four structures allow the possibility of new economic attitudes then competition demands and spurs such changes. It has positive benefits in lowering prices and increasing variety, choice and services. It's benefits are often brought about by the pain and uncertainty that it introduces. If others work harder than us, we will lose out. If others are more creative than us we will lose out. Competition is not always a moral or personal judgment. Some people will lose out simply because of bad luck and unforeseeable circumstances. But, other things being equal, then those people with the appropriate values are likely to do better. Exposure to this fact is likely to encourage such values.

PART II

SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPLEMENTATION

PREAMBLE

It is with some reluctance that we offer these suggestions for implementing the values/perceptions and attitudes outlined in the preceding section. While the technical nature of the television medium presents essentially the same problems and opportunities to Soviets in the USSR as to Canadians in Canada the actual objective of communication is also profoundly a function of the culture and circumstances of the society using the TV. Therefore, only Soviets can really determine how most effectively to communicate the preceding proposal to their people. The following comments are only made, therefore, to stimulate and to suggest possibilities. They are given in three parts.

1. General comments about the use of this medium
2. Suggestions of research into images/associations
3. Specific program ideas.

THE MEDIUM

If Marshall McLuhan's thesis that "the medium is the messenger" is essentially valid then there are certain important observations about communicating through TV which are universally valid and independent of the specific culture involved. These are surely well known to our colleagues in the USSR but knowing our own tendency to forget them in practice we feel it is wise to state them.

Television is essentially a visual medium, words have their impact, particularly if the images support them, but the lasting impressions are usually those made by the visuals.

Words tend to appeal to the rational. Certainly some words have strong emotional connotations but they still tend to steer us towards intellectual considerations. Images touch us by way of memory, association and ultimately, through feeling and emotion.

When viewers see programs based on "real life" stories they tend to believe them as truth even when the episodes have been highly selective.

If these three comments are generally valid then certain implications relate to the communication of the ideas given in the preceding proposal.

In any program if the visuals bear a different message from the words it will be the visuals which will win out. More positively, television will be at its most powerful (for good or evil) when image and word are giving the same message. Therefore, in endeavoring to communicate the values/perceptions and attitudes dealt with in the proposal every consideration needs to be given to insuring that the visual components are not only supportive of the verbal message but also absolutely integral with it. Perhaps it would be helpful to suggest that in many cases the visual element might be developed first and then words found to focus the message rather than the other way around. It certainly could be a creative exercise.

As much as possible real life stories and documentaries covering a range of actual situations should be a central part of each program. Interviews are usually not as compelling except where a strong impression of candour is given. An interactive group situation is often more likely to produce this. In any case the problems and failures need to be frankly acknowledged. In other words the story or series of situations need to be told with "warts" on! The program needs to use its "truth" power to compel attention.

If the values/perception and attitudes in the proposal are to be effectively communicated the production team from producer to janitor need to be working together to try and implement the new values in their situation. Ultimately, you communicate what you are. Also, if the team is struggling to implement these values themselves they will be both more sensitive to the issues and more sympathetic in handling them.

If the general comments given above about the nature and power of television are generally valid then we would urge the following considerations in developing specific programs.

RESEARCH INTO IMAGES/ASSOCIATION

1. What are the images/associations in the history and experience of the Soviet people which would be most likely to trigger emotional engagement with the values/perceptions desired? What paintings, objects, scenes, events would evoke them?
2. What language, even language rhythms, brings to mind images/events/stories congruent with the values/perceptions desired? Poetry, phrases, allusions, aphorisms, songs.....
3. What persons such as poets, writers, singers, national heroes and what childhood myths and ancient tales emotionally complement and support the ideas of the program?

4. What new images/associations from other cultural worlds such as the west arouse dreams, hopes etc. which would be positively affirming?
5. The findings from the above and similar research need to be deliberately used in all aspects of the visual imagery such as sets, locations, clothing, props, symbolic artifacts, and in sound imagery such as songs, music sound effects etc.

The overall suggestion is to find those images/associations which are rooted in the psyche of the Soviet people which will arouse responses to the "new" ideas so that they will seem less threatening or even a fulfillment of old dreams, experiences, victories, hopes.

PROGRAM SUGGESTIONS

A. GENERAL ELEMENTS

1. Start where your viewers are.

Effective communication starts where people are and acknowledges their current mind frame. This may be done by collecting man-on-the -street comments or a brief documentary segment which articulates the prevailing attitudes on an issue. For instance, what attitude towards the state and future security may underlie the two phenomena of line ups and hoarding? Raw honesty, the very ideal you wish to teach must permeate the communication itself if you are to create trust.

2. Model change.

Television is a perfect medium for modeling change. This modeling should be done on several different levels to be most effective. For example, the program might start with a children's game. Watching the games of children usually evokes pleasant memories, relaxing and opening the audience to explore new ideas.

3. Focus the program.

Plan to have each program capture its overall thrust in a simple image/statement which will bring the argument to a focus which all viewers can grasp and also pass on.

- a) The above principle could be affected by a recurring story which embodies the central idea in a different context. For instance, a 30 second spot showing children at play could be carried on intermittently through the program and then end the program. The play might show the children sorting out how to share resources if that were the main point of the program.

- b) The single statement of the idea in story/image form could be a 30 second spot like a commercial and run at the end of the program to encapsulate it. The spot could then be run with other, quite different programs as a reinforcing idea of the main point of this program. An example of the kind of treatment in this spot might be the Bell Canada ad on communication which uses a powerful image of sight/sound rooted in the Canadian psyche, wolves howling in the wilderness.

4. Use humour.

Humour is one of the best ways of lodging an idea in people's heads. Poke fun at the absurdities of the present value system, structures, presuppositions etc. Use some of the current black humour jokes or the "taken for granted" aphorisms of the present society and ways of doing things. These could even become the basis for a full program or simply be used for some kind of walk on personality almost like a clown or the "allowed" fool of Shakespeare.

5. Repeat your main point.

Come back to your main point frequently but in different guises.

6. Suggest beginning action.

Plan that each program will offer by direct suggestion, or story a simple action which could be a point of beginning for viewers, something which will move them to say, "I could do that!"

- a) Develop a three minute documentary showing a real life situation using the principle/value which has been presented but focused on the first action step.
- b) Use a cartoon type animation sequence in which the same character deals with the issue in the context of his (perhaps) zany world. If a series were being done then this character would appear after each program working out that program's issue in his own inimitable style.
- c) Simply use a host or special presenter each time at the end with "this week's suggestion."
- d) Offer a follow up pamphlet with practical "how to" suggestions in dealing with the problems which might arise in trying to implement the proposals of the various programs. Build a mailing list of those who write or phone in and consider them for a program or programs of "follow up" on the ideas presented.

B. SPECIFIC PROGRAM SUGGESTIONS

1. Documentary Series – Some options

- a) Select four different, real life situations each of which highlight one of the four “value clusters” presented in Part C of Part I. (All real life situations will, of course, involve all four of these value groupings but usually one is predominant or proves to be key, not unlike the key log in a log jam which loosened releases the rest. That log image could indeed be used as a short visual sequence to open each unit of the series.)
- b) Do four programs on each of the four “value clusters” in turn but instead of studying just one situation in each program look at three or four which are quite different from each other but all of which illustrate the same central issue. One might be a manufacturing business, another a small family business etc.
- c) Do a series of five programs on the same real life situation but looking at it from each of the four different value areas in turn, then four different ways of looking at the same situation. Then do a fifth program showing how all these different value areas impinge upon, depend upon and affect each other. In other words, in the last program show the necessity of a wholistic viewpoint.

2. Example

For example of the approach to one program we might start with a small farming community where the existing cooperative has broken down. Land is available but few are daring enough to grasp the opportunity available simply because they either lack the skills or, more likely, the confidence to pick up this new, risky challenge. What if they should fail? We hear from a variety of people in the community – those considering taking a risk and those solidly convinced it is not worth the hassles which will naturally ensue. We follow the ones who choose to risk, carefully bringing out the various ethical dilemmas that arise. We are honest to show that it is not simple or easy. We allow our models to exhibit gradually a growth of confidence, ability and self esteem in the process of trying. This same kind of modeling of problem solving may draw from other nationalities and may be especially helpful in drawing useful parallels to the Russian situation. For example, we may explore the important role of competition in a dynamic economy by showing the town in Italy where over three hundred chair manufacturers exist in one community. The competition upgrades the level of performance while keeping prices keenly competitive. It might also be helpful to look at an example of “failure” in a western setting where it became an occasion for a fresh review of life goals and a new creative career. The “failure” became

the beginning of a better life. This would highlight that failure is not to be feared. As Franklin Delano Roosevelt said to the American people at the beginning of his attack on the ravages of the Great Depression, "the only thing we have to fear is fear itself."

Interspersed with this kind of documentary, on-location production, the program will make use of experts to discuss ideas and to underline the concepts being communicated. Key people such as Alexander Kaichenko, an economist and philosopher and Johannes Reimer will be used to comment on stories as they progress. These discussion portions may also use a well known TV personality to act as the catalyst in the discussion. At times key people in the stories may also come to the discussion table to give in depth review of their efforts to integrate new ideas and ethics in their work place.

Animation or graphic depictions that simplify and clarify the principles being taught will recur throughout the progress. These become important building blocks in communicating the ideas and offer an opportunity for repetition and summation. A key graphic could have different elements representing different values added as they become clear in the presentation so that we see the graphic gradually becoming complete.

In a variation one of the "experts" might be willing to become involved directly by serving as a consultant to individuals in the real life situation. In that case he/she should be asked to review his/her role as consultant at the end of the situation. Would he now in hindsight change some of his counsel?

3. A Hypothetical Situation.

- a) Create a hypothetical situation such as a small business which has started and has begun to grow but which has encountered various difficulties at a certain stage of expansion, such as supply, pricing, advertising, regulations etc. Or the situation need not be hypothetical. It could be an actual situation which successfully worked through such problems and is now well established. However, for the sake of this program it should not be identified initially as actual.
- b) Bring together an assembly of various persons from the different action levels which would be involved in the situation described.
e.g. owner/entrepreneur, worker, financier, distributor, advertiser, consumer, government agent. All the key roles involved in decision making or supportive response needs to be represented. These persons would be drawn from quite different localities but all with extensive experience in the role they will be representing. The fact that they have

not had previous dealings with one another should enable them to participate without personal feelings being overly stirred.

- c) A very quick thinking host/provocateur needs to be chosen who can move along the action, present the salient points of the hypothetical situation clearly and quickly, bring out the views of the participants without antagonizing them and, in general, create the learning experience profitable to all. He/she will present the hypothetical situation a chapter at a time. The host would probably first sketch out the context of the situation and name the various issues which prevail at the beginning of the story and the nature of the issue facing the would-be entrepreneur. The host would then challenge the various role players to state their advice, objections etc. as if they were actually involved. The host would call on the key role players in this stage of the situation and get them to debate with each other. The host would try to draw out underlying objections and clarify the values at stake or being used or presupposed.
- d) After an appropriate time spent on "chapter one" the host would spell out the next chapter in the saga. The entrepreneur has made his/her decision and moved on to new problems. The process of debate and advice starts again. There might be about four such "chapters".
- e) If the hypothetical situation was in fact an actual real life story that could be revealed at the end of the role playing sessions by having the real life entrepreneur introduced. He/she could then be asked to comment on the ideas raised in the debates and how they connect with his actual experience.
- f) If the situation outlined in successive chapters was in fact hypothetical an alternative ending could be to have two or three persons introduced whose experiences have been somewhat similar to the story. In fact, different chapters might have been taken from each of their stores. They could then be interviewed briefly and allowed to comment on the dramatic presentation.
- g) In all this the host is obviously the key. Above all he/she must be able to handle sharp disagreements and enable the various speakers to feel free to express their views. He/she also needs to be able to sum up clearly.
- H) This program needs to be brought to a conclusion with a clear articulation of the key value/issues involved. This might best be done by the host but could also be done by an appropriate guest expert who by sitting on the sidelines until the end is able to watch the flow of action and pick out the

salient points. He will be helped by the fact that the various "chapters" have been set up to focus on key values.

4. Children's Series

A program might be developed for school use recognizing that the future lies with a new generation whose minds and spirits have not been made captive to pessimism and fear of risk. It is important that as children they develop the new values/perceptions. These programs could be run as a ten minute series in the early part of the evening program when the older children are still up. They could then be rerun during the daytime hours by other programs for home/school viewing and/or made available to schools for classroom use. In the latter case a simple leaflet of suggestions for stimulating discussion and working at specific problems could be developed to accompany the video. Depending upon the age level of the youth audience aimed at these programs could use a puppet group of characters similarly to Sesame Street but within the Soviet children's culture context or could use a youth soap opera approach, that might show their views on adult problems of parents etc. In either case the cast of characters could also illustrate issues of diversity in the culture and their implications for a clear value undergirding of the society and how such values could bind together the diversity in an effective working community. Such a program could also communicate to the adult audience and supplement an adult presentation.

CONCLUSIONS - PRODUCTION STYLE

It bears repeating that the programs must be seen as honest, and be energetic, hopeful and dynamic. When planting fresh concepts a positive enthusiastic spirit must permeate the production. All elements of the programs should communicate a sense of thoroughness and expertise engaging the mind as well as the spirit. Ultimately, the really critical issue is that the programs be entertaining. You need an audience! It is also as important to show people failing and trying again as it is to show people succeeding.

Documentary programs necessitate investigative reporting. In such television journalism it is essential to distinguish between fact and opinion. It is, therefore, important that the documentary reporters in their eagerness to make a point for the program do not allow themselves to manipulate the evidence or encourage persons being interviewed to say what they think the interviewer wants. Also, there is no room for laziness or facile

acceptance of situations or of discouragement from the first obstacle. Dig, dig, and dig again.

THE ROLE OF FAITH

The programs will be designed to communicate to a broad audience involving different religious backgrounds or none at all. The values being set forth as the basis for an effective and humane market economy can be justified to a large degree pragmatically. Yet a society which does not share some larger sense of meaning and direction is finally unable to maintain and to extend the values necessary for risking and growing together. The role of faith in fostering such a larger sense of meaning and of direction should, therefore, be welcomed. This should be particularly true for Christianity which is part of the warp and woof of Russian heritage. Each program may draw many of its models from this heritage. The problem solving will allow the introduction of the importance of finding and living out ethical principles in an economy. Key authorities and commentators could bring a Christian perspective in their contributions without it being an inappropriate proselytizing activity. The power to take risks and to live in a new ethical fashion will probably ultimately be rooted in a newly dynamic faith in God.

COMMERCIALS

In addition to these program ideas it might well be suggested that foreign businesses now active in the Soviet or wanting to be might be interested in advertising through commercials related to these programs or in sponsoring some of them.