

USSR Trip Report #10

Art DeFehr
August 9 – 23, 1991

If drama is the criteria, this trip rated a straight 10 out of 10! Leona accompanied me to the USSR for the third time. Our itinerary included one day in Latvia, four days in Lithuania timed to participate in the closing of the summer English Institute, two days in Kazakhstan regarding various business opportunities and five days in Moscow conveniently timed to observe the revolution and participate a little. The main purpose of the Moscow and Kazakhstan portion was to advance my personal business interests which have been evolving during the last four visits. If the story of the revolution is of special interest, go directly to Section IV.

I. Riga

Leona and I were accompanied on the Riga and Lithuania portion of our trip by Professor Lawrence Burkholder of Goshen College, James Pankratz, President of Mennonite Brethren Bible College of Winnipeg, and Jake Thielmann, the USSR Secretary of the Mennonite Brethren Mission/Services. In addition, John Esau joined us from Moscow. Our routing was Winnipeg, Toronto, Frankfurt, Helsinki, Riga. All flights were precisely on time and the last leg on Aeroflot assisted with the transition to a society where lower expectations were appropriate. We arrived at 6:00 p.m. Sunday with an elapsed travel time of 22 hours and were taken on a short tour of the City and then a dinner in one of the new private restaurants. The ambience approached Western standards, the service and quality of food was still in the transition zone. We were hosted for a night in a four-room apartment vacated by a Christian family who were at their dacha for the summer. The comfort level was adequate but it gave everyone a quick introduction to the realities of the glorious Soviet revolution.

Our host was Jhodor Yagodkin who is an executive with Xoetika SP., a Riga-based Soviet holding company. His role is to open a new commodity exchange in Riga to deal with raw materials. Given the breakdown in central planning, these exchanges seem to be taking on a transitional role in facilitating the movement of industrial supplies between companies in an under-developed market. They take a fee of 0.2% of the transaction and presumably many brokers will trade on their own account. The exchange will have an initial capitalization of 8,000,000 rubles, mainly for computers and facilities and will be operated by owner/investors (maximum of 10). They invited me to participate in this venture.

Yagodkin is also pursuing several other business ventures for which he is seeking foreign partners. One of his ongoing activities has been a series of management training seminars of approximately 10-days duration. His training is as an electrical technician/engineer plus training in financial management. He represents a new breed of sophisticated Soviet Christians we have met in the USSR. Yagodkin only became a Christian in May, 1990 and as a result has not been taken too seriously by other ACB members – he is not yet known well enough.

The relations with ACB are also not positive on his side since as a Baltic resident he does not appreciate anything coming from Moscow and also points to the total absence of communication from ACB in Moscow. Yagodkin has apparently written personally to six persons associated with SUN in the West (he says in English) with proposals on investments but was disappointed that only one person has replied (from Holland). He was quite discouraged about his contacts with the West at this point.

We visited several other facilities which represented existing or potential investments:

1. Vafelite

Director Rachel Michailovna Ratkevitch
 Tel. 620268 (off.); 411354 (res.)
 226069 Rige
 ul. C-Ljulina 34-74

This is a small limited company with nine shareholders which has emerged out of an earlier cooperative. They rent equipment and space inside a huge dairy-processing complex and produce ice cream cones for the Latvian market. Their revenue was 800,000 rubles last year with profit of 400,000 rubles. They would like new equipment to produce a differentiated product (full cone shape with air pockets in the dough) in order to get a better free-market price. Jim Penner of Canada had visited them in 1990 and this looks like a mature firm with genuine investment possibilities.

2. Breakfast Cereal

The Director of a large grain terminal in Riga wants to start a small private company in a neighboring warehouse to produce dry breakfast cereal along Western lines. Demand is apparently strong but supply is virtually non-existent. Could start with used equipment.

3. Saw Mill

Yagodkin is considering a personal investment together with his brother in a saw mill near the Finnish border.

Yagodkin is also associated with the Latvian Christian Mission, where he assists them in their financial management. The Latvian Christian Mission has two aspects – a construction company to finance the mission and an evangelism department headed by the evangelist Andrej Bendarenko, nephew of Joseph Bendarenko. It seems Andrej is also trying to break away and start his own organization. The Latvian Christian Mission is supported by five different Protestant denominations and is very inter-denominational by USSR standards. It exists under the cooperative law since no other legal jurisdiction was available at that time. They are also involved with prison ministry, distribution of clothing and ministry of children of Chernobyl. Most of their evangelism seems focused on the most Eastern reaches of Siberia.

It was a short but excellent visit. As we passed the Lenin monument described in my last trip report, we speculated how long it would stand – we all saw it come down on August 25th! The relationship of the Baltics to each other and to the USSR will create some major uncertainties for investment in the Baltics. At least, the future political structure is now clear! We wish the Latvians all the best as they dismantle the barricades.

II. Lithuania Christian College

This has been an eventful year for the people of Lithuania and we rejoice with them in their apparent achievement of full independence. Given the realities of economic/industrial integration with the old Soviet Union, very limited industrial diversity, and a Catholic Church struggling to find its role in a modern society, the Lithuanians still have a few hurdles to cross. Our time was very focused on the issues surrounding the English Institute in Panevezys and most observations will be limited to that subject.

In addition to the Institute, a number of other Christian groups have visited Lithuania this summer, including a visit by the Continentals (singing group) in July and a youth ministry by Johannes Reimer in August. A number of other more charismatic groups also floated about the country with a great variety of approaches to evangelism and religious unity.

The English Institute ended on August 16th with a very moving “graduation” ceremony in the nearby drama theater that can only be judged as an unqualified success. The Western staff exhibited a very positive attitude and Christian unity in their work and lifestyles and competence in their level of instruction. The 102 students represented a majority of English teachers or other adults plus a group of 20 high school graduates who hope to study in the new Lithuania Christian College. This level of maturity among the students contributed greatly to the very positive relationships between the Western and Lithuanian groups. There were many visits to homes, in depth discussions and the development of long-term friendships. The summer English Institute obviously meant a great deal to those students who are attempting to enrich their lives and relationships.

From a Christian perspective, the summer appears to have been very positive, although judgment may require more time. The Western groups held regular weekly “church” services to which the Lithuanians were invited and 15 – 25 attended each time. In addition, the Western group held their own evening discussion and devotional meetings. The Lithuanian students were completely aware of the Christian nature of the group, in part due to the publicity given the matter by the Catholic authorities. There was a great deal of openness by the students towards an environment which presumed an explicit Christian purpose and atmosphere.

The challenge from the Catholic authorities had remained intact during the six weeks of the Institute and it was clear that the proposed “Protestant” College in Panevezys had become the focal point for the debate on the nature and degree of religious freedom in Lithuania. For example, the Lithuanian Christian Charity Fund had successfully negotiated 30 minutes of free T.V. time each week but could not get the final signatures. It has become clear the T.V. authorities want a signal from the government as to how much diversity they will tolerate and view the decision on the College as the most important signal.

The Ministry of Culture and Education is somewhat divided but remains strongly committed to the idea of a “Western College”. The Minister pleaded with us not to abandon the project, pointing out that his ministry was not strong enough to tackle the Catholic Church on its own. Discussions with the Archbishop had suggested a compromise of locating the College in Klaipeda (port city) or a smaller town in the Southwest of the country. Both have a German/Lithuanian heritage. Although these cities may be adequate for the purposes of the College, it is not certain if the venture is strong enough to survive such a shift.

After some deliberation, the Western delegation suggested an alternative. We would operate the existing English program as a series of language Institutes for the next twelve months under the existing protocol. There would also be one or more specialized Institutes or symposiums during this period. Subjects could include a Management Training Institute on “The Christian Family” or training in Protestant Theology. The Minister felt this was a good alternative and both city and Republic level officials have given their blessing.

The City has signed a one-year lease for 50,000 rubles for the building being used as the Institute. One other concern was that the younger students who will participate this winter will be at risk in terms of further education if the College idea does not proceed. The Ministry has promised to provide a letter of assurance that students will be permitted some kind of transfer opportunities if the College does not proceed.

The summer Institute does not prove everything, but certain issues were well-tested. Panevezys is an appropriate and delightful venue for both Western instructors and Lithuanian students. The natural setting and the human scale of the square and the town contributed to a very positive experience. Civic officials and citizens alike were very pleased with the Institute and are hoping it can evolve into a permanent educational institution. The high degree of support and integrity by all groups created a great deal of confidence. From the Lithuanian side, the major issue is the development of Government-church relations which will permit the College to develop productively. From the Western perspective, we must also assess the experience of the summer and test the nature of support among colleges and other Christians and educational groups to determine if a long-term institute is feasible.

The most dramatic event on the religious freedom front was a meeting in the chambers of the town council organized by Sialus Varnas, the Vice-Major of Panevezys. Participants included two senior Catholic officials, chairman of the Reformed Church in Lithuania, a Priest of the “Evangelical” Church in Panevezys, the Bishop of the Lutheran Church in Lithuania, a representative of the Christian Democratic Union (political party), Victoras Pectus, Editor of a newspaper, one of the original signatories of the Helsinki group and a veteran of 25-years in the Gulag, representative of all the educational institutions in the area, a student of the Institute plus all civic officials. Our delegation included Otonas Baltchiunas of the Lithuania Christian Charity Fund, Johannes Reimer of Logos, Henry Dueck of the Institute, visitors Burkholder, Pankratz, Thielmann and myself. It gave all of us a first-hand understanding of the debates which took place in the town council of Zurich, Geneva and other centers of the Reformation.

The City made an opening statement and then asked for our group to speak. I made a short statement and requested that if the different religious confessions were really interested in working together with us on the College, they should be explicit in their intentions. Furthermore, I stated that we could not hide our motives or competences in six weeks and they should judge us according to the realities and not perceptions. Participation should be understood as being an active involvement in terms of supplying faculty and funding.

The Protestant representative spoke first and by the time the Catholic representative could respond it became very clear that everyone had waited a long time to get something off of their chest. The Catholic Dean of the Cathedral asserted that they had good relations with all other groups and also defined democracy as “the minority must succumb to the majority – and in Lithuania Catholics are the majority”. The reformed Church representative responded rather icily that they were indeed the minority now – but by virtue of a long history of intolerance and oppression by the Catholic Church!

Pectus, the human rights campaigner, gave a long speech about democracy, human rights, the rights of minorities and religious freedom. He is very much in favour of an open society and feels that the College represents an important test for the new democratic movement in Lithuania. The most dramatic statement was from a very articulate and well-educated “student” of the Language Institute. She made a very personal statement of her faith and criticized authorities who did not treat the opinions of people with respect. The Catholic priest then criticized her publicly which resulted in tears. The young representative of the Christian Democratic Union gave a very well-aimed riposte to the priest by starting his speech with the comment that, “I am too young to lecture others on what is appropriate etiquette”, suggesting that the gray-haired priest should not try to humiliate a young woman in public.

With the exception of the two Catholic representatives, everyone was very supportive of the idea of a College. It turned out to be more a trial of the Catholic Church rather than a discussion of the College. We learned later that this was probably the first full face-to-face discussion between different religious confessions since 1940! We are confronted with a rather important question – if we back down on the College – will this create the impression that the Catholic Church does in fact have the authority to make such decisions? If so, will this make it more difficult for other groups and projects to proceed?

The Lithuania Christian Charity Fund suggests that they would consider mobilizing the young Christians of the country to collect signatures on a petition in favor of the College. (One of the more remarkable aspects of the final days of the Institute was a petition – directed at the Pope, drafted and signed by the class of 20-year-olds). It would be relatively easy to get more than the 9,000 signatures that the Catholics have collected. Another idea is to host a symposium on “Religion and Democracy” in Panevezys – an event which President Landsbergis would be obligated to attend and in which he could hardly come out against freedom. These are important questions and we will need seasoned advice from many different people.

From the Western perspective, all instructors and visitors are very positive on the City, the people and the setting of the College. The degree of long-term support for a College needs to be tested during this winter. One of the important questions is the relationship with the other Baltic Republics as well as the potential East-West character of the institution. The existing facility is adequate for 200 – 250 students and there are good prospects for using a neighboring building plus a modest addition to create a compact teaching facility for up to 500 students. The empty land directly across the small river could support dormitories and staff housing for such an institution.

The winter program will proceed as an English Institute commencing October 21, 1991 and operating until mid-June, 1992. There will be a five-week Summer Institute (July 7 – August 7) in 1992 with a potential expansion to 200 students. Staff has been confirmed for this winter but it would be wise to add one or two English instructors to enrich the program. Johannes Reimer of Logos is planning to send an administrator to Panevezys who could operate the facility including the local side of specialized Institutes.

A few quotes from the Western staff will give some flavor of the experience:

- “Why do they treat us so well?”
- “Everything better than expected”
- “No hardships – great friends”
- “Students are more fluent than expected”
- “Exciting to discover faith in student body”
- “Students changed from serious to laughter”
- “(They) would give you the moon if they could give you the moon”
- “Best experience (international teaching) so far”
- “I’d do it again”

The response from one of the senior Lithuanian staff sums up their response: “Greatest summer of my life”.

III. Kazakhstan

The distance between Lithuania and Kazakhstan is much greater than the two Aeroflot flights required to get there. The daily flight from Moscow arrives in Kokchetov at 4:00 a.m. speaking volumes about the importance of the area from the Moscow perspective. We were met by Hans Warkentin from Shuchinsk as well as a representative of Mr. Vartofsky, the regional head of Agriprom. Vartofsky is co-organizer of the group of eight Sovkhozes and Kolkhozes who have created the company “Spectrum” to initiate new technologies and agricultural contacts outside of the various ministries. Dr. Heidebrecht was planning to meet me in Kokchetov but was ill with kidney stones in Alma-Ata. His son came instead and had collected another dozen heads of Kolkhozes from Stavropol, North Kazakhstan and several areas of Siberia. This unexpected event required an adjustment of our planned “quiet” Sunday schedule and Warkentin and I returned after a little sleep to meet the group at the Octoberskaj Sovkhoz West of Kokchetov.

The Group of twelve met around a table full of borscht and good home-cooked food. They felt it essential to toast everything with cognac and vodka and a minimum of four bottles were dispatched over Sunday lunch. Since Warkentin and I declined, that's a pretty solid intake for lunch! The group of twelve were approximately 50% of Mennonite heritage and more than 50% had some command of German.

Apparently the German community plays a disproportionate role in the agricultural leadership in these Northern areas. The Party Boss of the local Sovkhoz had been invited but was pointedly seated at the far end of my side of the table – presumably the least prestigious position. He apologized for being there and said he would not have anything to say. I asked him what the role of a Party Boss was – he responded that, "I work with people – in the same way as the Baptists do". That provided a good laugh all around. The meal finished with dessert – a large pot of liquid honey and spoons all around.

After listening to their individual stories – most very moving and like the Jewish memory of the captivity always begun with their forced relocation from somewhere further West – I asked them to outline their priorities for cooperation with the West. Among the ideas mentioned were:

1. Technology to improve corn seed quality through germination testing equipment;
2. Assistance to develop Natural Medicinal Industry;
3. Small computers for each Sovkhoz/Kolkhoz to take advantage of new methods;
4. Combining/harvesting technology;
5. An experimental project in South-North custom combining (they do this with small grain-hauling trucks but not combines);
6. Air seeder production – possibly with a larger equipment plant in Tselinograd, Kazakhstan;
7. Development of rape seed planting – apparently they had the use of an "Amazonia" seeder from Hoechst (a no-till seeder) which together with Hoechst chemicals produced excellent results. They want to expand rape seed from 30,000 ha. to 100,000 ha. in local regions next year;
8. Rape seed oil pressing plant;
9. Processing and marketing of ginseng;
10. Want to sell seed for "Steinklei" which I believe is alfalfa;

We also met a Victor Heinrich Luft in Shuchinsk. He has held senior positions in the region and on state farms but now has gone independent as a consultant – apparently receiving a percentage of the crop above a minimum level. In 1992 he has contracted 5,000 ha. which he wants to farm on a "private" basis and is looking for a Western partner. Apparently it is quite possible to sell part of the crop for hard currency making it possible to consider the import of equipment and selected imports. Luft has been involved in an experiment comparing various combines at the Tselinograd test station and said a "red Canadian combine" had performed best but could not identify the brand.

I have invited Vartofsky and Heidebrecht to visit Canada in October, 1991 to establish contacts with Government, Universities and the agricultural industries. The plan would be to highlight Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta in a two-week period, then have Heidebrecht follow up with visits to specific locations to establish more detailed projects. The report of poor crop conditions in Kazakhstan and Siberia can certainly be confirmed by my observations. They said the rainfall in the April – mid-July period had been the "lowest in 100 years". Corn stands were erratic, grain fields were thin to the point of being transparent. The areas I saw will do well to yield 25% of a decent crop.

What impressed me most about the people in agriculture was the intensity of their interest in making contact and breaking free from the system. They are also not asking for handouts – they want contacts, knowledge, partnerships and are more than willing to pull their part of the load. Any Canadian groups or industries who would want to work with these people should have a rewarding experience.

The main purpose of my Kazakhstan trip was to finalize the registration of my company in Kazakhstan and to advance the discussions on the privatization of the Shuchinsk furniture factory. The local

“President” had worked hard to achieve my registration in Kazakhstan but it is not the 100% foreign-owned company I had hoped for. Instead, they have devised a form of “accreditation” which gives me legal status, allows me to own and operate businesses in Kazakhstan. The presentation of a carefully bound red-covered certificate in both the Russian and Kazakl languages was made at a formal meeting in the President’s office with local media included. Apparently I am the first foreign investor in the region. The authorities are most anxious that we take full control of the factory since they are very “down” on state industry. Warkentin continues to expand his business rapidly and is something of a local business hero. Following the presentation, the President requested if we could go to the building next door to meet the regional communist Party Boss just as a matter of courtesy. He said “It doesn’t mean anything, he makes no decisions, but just give him the courtesy of a greeting”. He seemed relieved that the Party Boss was away for lunch – the offices were well-appointed but there was no sign of any activity in the building – so that was our little bow to the party. The treatment of the party officials at the Sovkhoz on Sunday and in Shuchinsk Monday – one hour before the fall of Gorbachev was announced – may well have been a more genuine sign of the state of communism than the ceremony and tanks in Moscow. Communism was for all intent and purposes an empty shell in the countryside – someone in Moscow had to give the house of cards one final push and it all collapsed.

The furniture factory also reflected the reality of the bald statistics we read daily. The GNP decline for 1991 was initially estimated at 10%, then 15 – 20%, and in today’s Financial Times of London they suggest 30%. Whatever the drop, it is precipitous and genuine – for example – a story in today’s Financial Times speaks of a complete halt to bauxite imports. The aluminum factories are eating into their strategic 3-5 year reserve because there is no hard currency. They are exporting greatly increased quantities of aluminum to the West because the drop in GNP also means less internal demand for aluminum. This has resulted in a significant decline in the world price of aluminum. The furniture plant was using 50% of its facilities during my May visit, but had shut for summer holidays four weeks ago and had failed to re-open. The general consensus was that they did not have enough raw materials and had not yet figured out how to survive in a situation which was daily becoming more market-driven. A more detailed survey of the plant, on the other hand, revealed a much better stock of buildings and equipment than on my earlier visit.

This project will now depend on a firm proposal by the Government on the sale of facilities and by acceptance on our side. The other project in the area involves a potential completion of an unfinished 250-room resort hotel on a nearby lake. The Government may propose a joint project but the economics of such a venture are very difficult in the prevailing circumstances.

A visit to Kazakhstan always produces some bizarre experiences. The first evening we were invited to my second “Bishparmakh”, or “five fingers”, the name for the hands-only feast of a sheep and pasta. The local chief believed that just by repeating “tradition” often enough Leona would eventually “bottoms-up” on a large glass of cognac and then down a huge spoonful of different parts of a sheep’s head. Well, it is enough to say that a great deal of cross-cultural learning took place!

The negotiations about the furniture plant were equally interesting. We went to Kokchetov for dinner and an evening in the well-appointed sauna complex of a larger building materials factory. Since the coup in Moscow had just hit the news, the whole evening became somewhat surreal as everyone speculated about their own future. I ventured a few Russian jokes near the end of the evening and this finally got some of the old Bolsheviks to tell some of theirs – regrettably they are not printable!

Kazakhstan is and will remain very different than Moscow. Relationships are more direct and access to officials is much simpler. The nature of the new economic relationships between republics will be very important since population centers and supply sources are usually scattered among several republics. Since Communism was always more of a veneer in these areas, it should also disappear more quickly.

IV. Revolution

Where were you when Communism fell? Everyone will remember this historic event and every (former) Soviet citizen will attempt to reconstruct events to place himself or herself on the right side of history and in the fore front.

We heard the news of Gorbachev's fall while touring a furniture factory in Kazakhstan and since the media more or less went off the air, we continued with our program including under the circumstances some strange discussions in the sauna. Despite the very limited information, the consensus of the group in Kokchetov was that the critical mass of the army would not support a coup. If the coup succeeded, there would be some degree of civil war; if it failed, as was the most likely scenario, Communism would collapse. We returned to Shuchinsk after midnight just in time to catch the famous news conference of five of the putsch leaders.

The comments of my host, Hans Warkentin, were not only negative but derisive! The combination of planted questions and clever probing by journalists all simultaneously interpreted (politically) by locals was one of my most dramatic experiences ever. Genayeev's shaking hands, the bold lies by the chiefs of the military and KGB were surrealistic in the extreme. The sad but fortunate part of the whole circus was that these people were so out of touch with reality that they actually believed their own statements and assumed that the military and citizens would go quietly to their places like they always have. One of the most clever questions which was immediately understood by the locals was "How do you respond to Yeltsin's request for a national strike?" Just after the group had told the country that Yeltsin agreed with the coup.

We decided to stick with our schedule and return to Moscow Tuesday morning. The airport was normal, the Mafia still in control of the taxis, and we returned to a tense downtown. The English Institute teachers also arrived in Moscow that morning as part of their post-Institute tour. One of their only inconveniences was that they were met by a tour guide who spoke very poor English. Later we learned that the originally scheduled guide had decided the price of the tour did not include valor and did not show up. A new guide was located by lunchtime. The group was located in the suburbs for safety, while Leona, John Esau and myself remained in the very central Peking Hotel. Located at the corner of Gorky Street and the Garden Ring, it was a great location for watching demos and tanks. We remained in the room during the afternoon, located our group and other friends, made our plans and various back-up plans and then continued with our work.

Alexander Semchenko was to meet us at 4:00 p.m. Tuesday to show us a project a "stone's throw" from the Russian Parliament. Alex arrived about 6:00 p.m., very tired (heart condition) and told us about the first 24 hours of the revolution. His main press was out of commission but some smaller equipment was churning out leaflets for Yeltsin. Some of his donated food had also been "donated" during the night to the folks behind the barricades. He told us about the barricades at the "White House", the fear of an attack that evening and of his own vulnerability if the coup should succeed.

We took his car to an area close to the Russian Parliament and joined the growing crowd. Everyone was pulling steel pipes and every other piece of loose material toward the ever-growing barricades (four barricades deep). Women in high-heeled shoes, men in suits, groups of toughs, old military men in full uniform and regalia holding up their hands, biting their lips and holding back tears. It was a crowd that was not in a mood to compromise and, probably more than anything else, this sudden resolve of the people contributed to the demise of communism. We spent two hours in, around and behind the barricades and left around 9:00 p.m. when Semchenko's heart became so weak we thought he was having an attack. As we left busses were still being driven into position, crowds were positioning huge pieces of steel and concrete at various angles – but nobody had a weapon. One of the more bizarre scenes was a group of Hare Krishnas chanting among the clanking steel.

We learned next morning that the strategy worked out by the leaders behind the barricades was to allow the first group of tanks to pass, then to form a human barricade and stop the infantry which would undoubtedly be following. There were rumors of attack by helicopter and other scenarios. We went back to our hotel to pray – this was not our revolution.

The following morning we continued with our appointments – it was apparent that no major attack had occurred although we were up half the night watching groups of tanks race up and down the Garden Ring. Our colleagues that morning represented opposite sides of the spectrum – one an older apparatchik who will undoubtedly have something to lose under the new rule – the other a Communist Party member who has been essentially “private” for the past 18 months and was behind the barricades for much of the night. We heard about the events of the night, of the “resignation” of the Defense Minister, of Pavlov’s illness, about the regional commanders who had come out for Yeltsin, etc. What I find so amazing with hindsight is that despite a complete blackout of the local media, the information we heard throughout was very timely and accurate. It is obvious that the informal lines of communication in the USSR, honed by 74 years of practice are very effective.

Our host had a Masters Degree in Political History with an emphasis on coups d’etats. This may have contributed to his very accurate and insightful analysis of the coup while it was taking place. On Wednesday morning he felt that the critical moment for the success or failure of the coup had passed on Tuesday night. “Every hour that passes the group will weaken unless they take decisive action”. He did not consider the failure of the coup as automatic, however, and on Monday had shredded all documents relating to our previous discussion plus other potentially dangerous material.

On Wednesday we needed to make a number of transfers by car and found the combination of barricades, military blockages and demonstrations too difficult to penetrate. We hit the subway system and emerged at our meetings – then back down to the subway. Mid-afternoon we were in a law office where they were tuned to one of the Western short-wave stations and learned that the leaders had departed for Vnukovo Airport (for directions South). This was taken to mean some kind of end to the coup. What is interesting is that I had been told at 8:00 a.m. that morning by another friend, a Soviet T.V. correspondent, that during the night there had been unusual tank movements to and around Vnukovo – by tanks supporting both sides – but the meaning of the movement was unclear! By 4:00 p.m. it was obvious that the coup was over and huge crowds descended on central Moscow. The language Institute group had visited Zagorsk (50 km. North of Moscow) that day and were scheduled to join us for dinner at the Peking Hotel. In view of the occasion, several Soviet friends joined us to help interpret the situation and it turned into a great celebration! The group was divided whether to walk the streets after dinner or return to their hotel (the younger ones wanted to join the excitement) so the group returned to the hotel. Leona and I walked the Arbat and Kalininsky Prospect then took the subway home. What we noted and had been evident earlier in the day was that the people were not celebrating. They marched in a determined manner but there were no shouts or cheers – just columns of thousands marching in silence. Presumably they fear the future almost as much as the past.

Thursday was a very busy day with seven different appointments – an accomplishment anywhere – but especially in Moscow. We had arranged to meet our T.V. contacts at 6:00 p.m. to discuss our proposed business venture. They advised that three of them would come, including one of the T.V. anchor personalities, a producer and a correspondent. We invited them to join us for dinner, they accepted and we managed a private room at the very exclusive “Prague” restaurant at one end of the Arbat. As we sat down to dinner there were tremendous explosions outside. We rushed to the third floor balcony outside of our room and enjoyed the spectacle of an unannounced fireworks display over the Kremlin with huge crowds merging past our building on the way to the Red Square. It was a magnificent finale to a great week.

Our guests had all been intimately and actively involved in the events of the week in spite of the fact that their channel had been off the air and the studio surrounded by tanks. The correspondent (we used German as a common language) had spent much of the time in the “White House” and would brief me by phone each morning and evening. The producer had covered the events at Vnukovo and the T.V. personality had been secretly taping the events of the coup while they occurred – hoping to broadcast them later or destroy them. As a result, they had been able to put a coherent three-hour chronicle on the air on Wednesday night within hours of the end of the coup. We were able to hear some remarkable first-hand reports about the events and personalities with much speculation about the future.

Friday we drove past the place where the tanks had crushed several people – young revolutionaries were breaking up doors to keep a memorial fire going. There will obviously be a permanent monument in the middle of this grimy eight-lane underpass! If I had to be anywhere that week, I couldn’t think of a place I would rather have been!

V. Business in Moscow

The ACB is showing signs of life but between the coup and Zaichenko being on holidays, we never had any meetings on that subject. Apparently Zaichenko has been promised an office inside the embassy-style building of the Ministry of Religious Affairs. The building and location are excellent and if they can be retained will be a great place for ACB and hopefully SUN. The shape of the new program is not yet clear, although Zaichenko is reported to have made the moves on both the consulting organization as well as the Bank.

A major goal was to register a 100% foreign-controlled company in Moscow. Final approval was received in early September. If other SUN members wish to achieve legal status in the USSR, my recent experience should be helpful.

Our own activities in Moscow area focus on Bible publishing and the establishment of a company to do direct-marketing on television. Plans for such a venture are now well advanced and we hope to begin some test programs late this year.

The meeting with Evgeny Filev of Maikop, the former ACB President, was most interesting. I have invested some money in a new bank of which he is Chairman. He shared the six-month results with me (very profitable) and we hope to register my ownership formally with my new company. He also speaks very positively about the experience of Christian camping with Dave and Elfrieda Loewen. There had been some problems of cultural adjustment, but the overall impact on the community and the children was very positive. With three Logos/Loewen associated camps operating this summer, there should be a base of training and experience to build a larger program in 1992. It was personally rewarding that some of the programs which had been given significant effort such as the Belorechensk Bible School, the Panevezys English Institute and Christian Camping had all made very position advances. In spite of the great difficulties, it is possible to accomplish something in the USSR!

What are the prospects for the future? More informed writers are creating a deluge of post-mortems and predictions. What is surprising is that the analysts were no more prepared for the sudden implosion of Communism in August, 1991 than they were for the events of 1989. This tells me that the analysis about the future may be equally askew.

The nationalities issues is certainly the #1 concern but not the only one. My own prediction is that in the economic sphere there will be an initial collapse of the centrally controlled industrial system but a very rapid development of local economics based largely around food production and services. The greatest concern should be the severe social disruption which will be caused by large numbers of people becoming economically marginalized through plant closures or the inability to adjust to an environment which

requires and rewards individual effort and initiation. In the words of Hans Warkentin... “there will be millions of very poor and very hungry people in this country within one or two years”.

This prospect can produce political and social instability as well as very genuine individual suffering. There will soon be a major challenge for humanitarian groups and governments in the West. My concern is that they will wait too long and then be ineffective as they attempt to gear up in what is and will remain a very complex and confusing environment. Democracy is not the product of a proclamation but a state of tolerance and decency which is earned and learned over many years. May God grant our Soviet friends the time, wisdom and good fortune to make it through the no-man land ahead.

Art DeFehr