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“How can environmental groups work to influence decisions that are made in Moscow?

or

Do public interest organisations really have any influence on the policy-makers and oligarchs in Russia?”

- I. Introduction: Siberia may become one of the “victims” as well as one of the principal “playing grounds” for global warming.
 - A. Recent data show that global warming is most pronounced in Siberian Russia.
 1. The temperature around Lake Baikal has increased about 2 degrees F in the last 100 years, twice the global average.
 2. The temperature of the lake itself has increased 2 degrees F in the last 60 years, and is already altering the overall Baikal ecosystem.
 - a. This has led to sixteen more ice-free days at Baikal each year, affecting the nesting and other live-cycle patterns of the Baikal seal (*nerpa*) amongst other animals.
 - b. Warmer water has also led to marked increases in zooplankton in the lake.
 - B. Siberia not only has the largest lake in the world. It is also loaded with other natural resources which, when removed and then consumed, will likely generate even higher global temperatures.
 1. Forests in Siberia are extensive, and absorb large amounts of carbon from the atmosphere (but how much carbon is yet unknown).
 2. Large deposits of oil are being developed in western Siberia, and may well be pumped south to China through new pipeline systems.
 3. Let's not forget Siberian coal and uranium deposits, which are both relatively abundant.
 - C. Siberia can be seen as a resource colony for other parts of the world, esp. for China.
 1. Life along the Chinese/Russian border is one of great contrast, one where large resource supplies to the north might feed growing demand from burgeoning markets in the south.
 2. Other contrasts: Economic boom in China over the last few decades vs. economic doldrums in Russia (particularly after the complete overhaul of Soviet society in the 1990s).
 - a. Economic inefficiencies and misallocations under Soviet planning system have proven very difficult to overcome.
 - b. As a result, most value-adding industries have collapsed in Russia, leaving it as a resource-driven economy.
 3. Population contrast: Siberia with its @30 million people vs. China with its 1.35 billion (population density: Siberia's 3 per km² vs China's 138 people per km²)
 - a. Much of the settlement of Siberia (by Russians) has been artificial, either due to exile or removal out to the Gulag system, or due to earlier forced removal of industrial complexes to Siberia during Stalinist times.

- b. Nevertheless, Russian (that is, non-native) Siberians are fiercely proud of their region, and live in relative harmony with their native Siberian neighbours.

II. Various social movements, especially the environmental movement, have been growing by leaps and bounds in Siberia over the last 20 years.

- A. There are now three large environmental NGOs that are active around Lake Baikal, and numerous smaller groups as well. In addition, virtually every region of Siberia (from the Altai to Yakutia, from the Urals to the Kuzbas region) has at least one environmental group that is locally founded and based.
 - 1. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the government agencies purportedly charged with protecting the environment were severely downsized, and have yet to gain any real effectiveness to this day.
 - 2. Environmental NGOs, especially around Lake Baikal, have tried to fill this vacuum, and have stepped in to do much of (what should have been) the government's work.
 - a. In their efforts to protect the environment, as well as protect local citizens' rights in general, these public-interest NGOs have done everything from performing environmental impact assessments (on oil-pipelines, uranium mines, etc.) to researching into the true environmental and other social costs from rampant resource extraction in Siberia. They have also been educating the public as to the results of their research, and have helped the local populace understand their own role in the larger global warming picture.
 - b. Local NGOs at Baikal have shied away from raising too many alarms or otherwise practicing the art of "nay-saying" to all economic development. As an example of this, they have been working closely with the parks and nature reserves at Baikal to develop low-impact, but highly profitable ecotourism around the lake.
 - 3. In essence, then, these NGOs are trying to respond to the needs of local people, empowering them to a degree, and perhaps giving them hope for a prosperous future (hopefully at a minimal cost to the environment).
- B. The issues which dominate these NGO's agendas are both local and global in nature:
 - 1. Local issues include the imminent closure of a pulp and paper plant along Baikal's shores (one of the chief polluters of the lake over the last 45 years), as well the development of other, more sustainable enterprises, ones that would help in protecting wildlife habitat, etc. Recent efforts by NGOs therefore have focused on such things as building the first national system of trails at Baikal, as part of a bigger program to promote ecotourism as a true economic alternative.
 - 2. Issues that are more global in scope all have some relation to climate change in one way or another. These include the development of oil and gas deposits, and concomitant construction of pipelines to supply these energy resources to China and the rest of Asia. In addition, there are campaigns against the deforestation of Siberia, as well as other (politically-charged) programs towards limiting the mining of uranium around Baikal, and

opposing the expansion of an uranium enrichment plant immediately to the west of the lake.

- a. These issues are admittedly all very complicated, and must be treated individually as well as part of an overall whole. For instance, there is the question of whether natural gas developments should be supported, or at least not opposed in the same way that oil developments are. There is also the question as to whether nuclear energy should be promoted as a possible solution to global warming, and at what cost (in this case, the question is: will Siberia end up as a dumping ground for Russia's nuclear waste, and perhaps the nuclear waste of other countries as well?)
- b. There are other socio-economic dilemmas, such as the fact that Russia often can't even afford to purchase its own resources, whereas richer countries (such as China) can pay hard currency and import these precious stores of oil, gas, coal, wood, etc at higher prices for their own use.
- c. Finally, there are issue of native Siberians and their own rights, which local NGOs are quick to emphasize in their work.

C. In each campaign, therefore, these Siberian NGOs are trying to ensure that all true environmental "costs" are accounted for during the exploitation of these resources —costs which may be localized (such as the environmental cost of building an oil-pipeline right along the shores of Lake Baikal), as well as ones that are more global, especially as they might relate, or contribute, to global warming.

III. How can NGOs influence policy-decisions in Russia?

- A. NGOs based at Baikal realize that they must target policy-makers in Moscow, along with the operators of all the enterprises that are extracting and exporting all the Siberian oil, coal, wood, etc.
 1. Some of these enterprises are quasi-governmental, while few are privately held outright. There are others that are seeking (or have already secured) the investments or partnership of foreign governments or other multi-lateral agencies. This all adds an extra layer of stakeholders, whom the NGOs might want to influence.
- B. Let's cite one example of an attempt to influence regional policy: There are oil pipelines planned from eastern Siberia to China and/or other Asian ports. (PLEASE SEE POWER-POINT PRESENTATION for the story behind this pipeline—a story, by the way, that is sometimes circular, and certainly characterized by a web of causes and effects. In this case, the global warming that will naturally follow from Siberian oil development will undoubtedly result in a further meltdown of the permafrost soils in Siberia, which will, in turn, pose an even greater threat to the viability of the pipelines that are built in the permafrost in the first place!)

IV. What's next? What steps might be taken to combat climate change in Siberia?

- A. We would argue that a good starting point might be to support the work of the best NGOs in the region. They are the ones who are able to take global science, and information on climate change, best technologies, etc., and inform local people as to the options lying before them. These NGOs are also the ones who are hiring the local scientists and building bridges between science,

government and the public. With these connections there are able to feed us the data that we all will need to make optimal policy decisions.

- B. We would also argue that we must support an expanded role for government in Russia. After all, the local NGOs are mostly just filling in for government agencies, until that time when these agencies can do their own work, and can effectively, and without prejudice, protect the rights of local people in Siberia. (Note: there is a certain irony in all this, given the overarching powers of the erstwhile Soviet government. Many locals were happy to see the demise of “big brother” when the USSR crumbled. Now they are beginning to reassess matters, and perhaps are looking for a better balance between public and private interests?)