

Soviet bloc gears up nuclear industry

by Clifford Gaddy and Konstantin George

The Soviet Union is launching a program to accelerate the output of high-technology industries, as a vital element of its war economy mobilization. The results are striking in the case of the nuclear power industry, where, just one year ago, plant construction was at a record low. Only three plants had been completed in two-and-a-half years, instead of the planned number of ten.

After an emergency meeting of the Soviet leadership late last summer to discuss the problem, the results have now begun to show. Between July 1, 1984 and June 30, 1985, eight big plants (with a total capacity of 8,000 megawatts) have been commissioned.

Now, under new party boss Mikhail Gorbachov, the drive for a high-technology buildup will intensify, as recent speeches by him and other East bloc leaders testify (see accompanying article).

Soviet commentators—and of course military strategists—are keeping a close eye on the performance of corresponding industries in the United States. And they like what they see: the collapse of American industries. A recent article in the Soviet economics weekly *Ekonomicheskaya Gazeta*, is a case in point.

With barely concealed delight, author V. Sergeev tells his readers, "The U.S. energy industry is among the sectors of the American economy that are experiencing serious financial difficulties. This is reflected, in particular, in the fact that firms in that sector have one of the highest rates of indebtedness in the country."

The Soviet observer continues: "But even among them, there is one category of firm that is in the worst situation of all, and as strange as it may seem, it is the most modern of them all—the nuclear power industry. This is due to the fact that the economic crises of 1974-75 and 1979-82 led to lower electric power consumption and, consequently, to a drop in income for producers, while inflation meanwhile increased the costs of nuclear plant equipment by an incredible amount. In the past 10 years, for instance, the cost of construction rose ten-fold, and construction periods increased from 6-7 years to 10-14."

Sergeev caps it off by gloating, "Since 1978, not one single reactor has been ordered in the United States."

The Soviet economist's real interest is best revealed in a

quote he offers from a speech by U.S. Presidential Science Adviser George Keyworth: Unless the United States solves the financial problems facing the nuclear power industry, said Keyworth, then "the possibilities of industrial development in our country will be drastically restricted."

The same stepped-up pace of nuclear power plant construction that is occurring in the U.S.S.R. is in evidence throughout the Soviet bloc. By 1990-92, countries which till now have no functioning nuclear power plants, like Poland and Romania, will have their first plants in operation. The Polish case is important, although the volume of power produced through nuclear energy is miniscule, because it documents a Soviet policy decision under Yuri Andropov, reflected in the signed U.S.S.R.-Polish agreement of April 1983, to begin nuclear power construction in Poland.

Czechoslovakia will quadruple its nuclear power capacity from a current 1,320 MW on stream, to 5,280 MW by 1990. East Germany will triple its nuclear power capacity, from a current 1,760 MW on stream, to 5,520 MW, also by 1990. Hungary will double its nuclear power capacity from a current 880 MW to 1,760 MW. Bulgaria will add an extra 2,000 MW of nuclear power capacity.

Seen in percentage terms of national power supply, the increases are also significant. Czechoslovakia will jump from a current 10% of its energy capacity from nuclear power, to 34% by 1990. In Hungary, it will double to 25% of national energy capacity, and in Bulgaria, it will jump from a current 26%, to 40% of the nation's energy capacity. In East Germany, it will go up from a current 12% of energy capacity, to over 30% by 1990.

Eastern Europe now has 6,720 MW of nuclear energy capacity. By 1990, if plans are met, it will have 18,320 MW—nearly a threefold increase.

The breakdown is as follows:

Country	1985	1990 Plan
East Germany	1,760 MW	5,520 MW
Czechoslovakia	1,320 MW	5,280 MW
Bulgaria	2,760 MW	4,760 MW
Hungary	880 MW	1,760 MW
Romania	0 MW	1,000 MW
Poland	0 MW	0 MW

The quicker tempo in Eastern Europe, compared to the U.S.S.R., is dictated by Soviet strategic planning, which insists on drastic reductions of Eastern European use of Soviet-supplied fossil fuels (oil and coal). This not only frees Soviet supplies for Western export markets and Soviet internal consumption, but also eases strains on the Soviet transportation system.