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The Spoils of Progress: Environmental Pollution in the Soviet Union

Marshall I. Goldman

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(Published in paper under the title *Environmental Pollution in the Soviet Union: The Spoils of Progress*)

Because industrialism had its beginnings in capitalist countries, the existence of environmental disruption in socialist and communist societies has been largely ignored. The truth is that pollution of natural resources plagues the planned economy and free enterprise system alike. Rapid industrial growth rather than form of government is the prime agent causing environmental havoc, and where socialist reality diverges from socialist theory the ecological balance of nature suffers as in any major industrial country.

Marshall I. Goldman, whose articles on the subject have appeared in *Science, The New York Times,* and *The New Yorker*, brings this point home as he describes abuses of water, air, land, and raw materials in Russia, analyzing the forces that have brought about the current situation and describing both the drawbacks and advantages of state control and conservation. He devotes chapters to the pollution of Lake Baikal in Siberia, remarking that "Baikal is a unique lake in the world and all mankind will suffer from its desecration," and to the Aral and Caspian seas, which are literally in danger of drying up as an effect of widespread irrigation and teh construction of hydroelectric stations. Proposals to restore the seas by building dams and reversing the flow of major rivers from north to south ("Reshaping the Earth") may have equally profound and undesirable results.

The book concludes by pointing out that the Soviet state is both manufacturer and polluter and its priorities lie with increased production rather than conservation; with progress rather than restraint. Yet, hopefully, Goldman points to a number of beneficial state controls which if enlarged in the direction of restoring and protecting natural resources could make Russia the most powerful and efficient of conservationists.

Appendixes contain selected laws on the environment, the Conservation Law of the Russian Republic 1960, and the Water Law 1970.

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