

# Communist Party Politics, Rockets and Komsomol Business in Soviet Dnipropetrovsk

Written by Sergei I. Zhuk

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SERGEI I. ZHUK, JAN 21 2022

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The Ukrainian city of Dnipropetrovsk (in 2016 the city was renamed Dnipro) was shown on a movie screen in the Soviet Union for the first time in 1981 as a 'Russian-speaking' city in Nikita Mikhalkov's feature film *Rodnia*. A story of a Russian peasant woman who visited her daughter in the big industrial city was used by Mikhalkov in his movie to emphasise a growing crisis in Soviet family life during the Brezhnev era when former Russian peasants lost their Orthodox Christian identity during the process of socialist industrialisation and modernisation. Paradoxically, Mikhalkov completely ignored the real social and national problems of the city; instead choosing as the setting for his movie Russian peasants' adjustment to Soviet modernisation. Even now many Russians use this film as evidence of the 'Russian character' of Dnipropetrovsk ignoring the real demographic and social history of this Ukrainian region (Elberg-Wilson 2016).[1] Despite Mikhalkov's picture, the city of Dnipro and the Dnipropetrovsk region had a multi-national and multi-cultural character coupled with the strong influence of Ukrainian and Jewish culture.

Using various archival and published documents, this chapter will cover the social, economic and cultural development of the city and the region of Dnipropetrovsk through the period of late socialism after Stalin, showing the ties between the multi-national *Komsomol* members and business ventures during *perestroika* and how this influenced the rise of oligarchic clans in post-Soviet Ukraine.

### Emergence of Soviet Dnipropetrovsk

Paradoxically, from the early beginning, the founding of the 'city of Catherine's glory' (Ekaterinoslav in Russian) and its province in 1776 by the Russian imperial administration of the Catherine the Second involved non-Russian ethnic groups, which shaped a historical demography of this region in Southern Ukraine. These ethnic groups included the local Ukrainian Orthodox Christian peasants and Cossacks, Jewish traders and artisans, Armenian Christians, and Tatar Muslim settlers. By the middle of the nineteenth century, thousands of German Protestant and Mennonite colonists also settled in the province. Moreover, by attracting foreign capital, the Russian imperial administration transformed this multi-ethnic and multi-religious region in the booming industrial centre of the Russian Empire by the beginning of twentieth century (Zhuk 2004, 33-96).

After the Russian Revolution and civil war, the province of Ekaterinoslav continued to play an important role in the industrial development of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic. In 1926 the Soviet administration decided to change the name of Ekaterinoslav which sounded too 'old fashioned' and 'imperial Russian.' The new name was a combination of the name of the Dnipro River with the last name of Grigorii Petrovskii, head of the All-Ukrainian Executive Committee of the Soviets, and well-known organiser of the working-class movement in the region of Ekaterinoslav before the Revolution. 'Dnipro-Petrovske' was later transformed into 'Dnipropetrovsk' (Bolebrukh 2001, 156).

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Both the city and region of Dnipropetrovsk lived through the New Economic Policy (N.E.P.), industrialisation and the Stakhanovite movement. The region lost millions of human lives during collectivisation and the *dekulakisation* campaign, and especially during the Holodomor of 1932–33. During industrialisation, the Soviet government restored the industrial base of the region. Former metallurgical giants such as the *Petrovskii* (formerly *Brianskii*) plant, the *Chodoir* (formerly Vladimir Lenin) plant and others resumed production of pig iron and steel. During the 1930s, Dnipropetrovsk became an important centre for Soviet heavy industry. In 1932, Dnipropetrovsk regional metallurgical plants produced 20 per cent of the entire cast iron and 25 per cent of the steel manufactured in the Soviet Ukrainian Republic.

After the beginning of the campaign of 'Ukrainianisation' in 1923, the number of those who spoke Ukrainian grew, reaching 38.5 per cent in the city by the end of the 1920s. Between 1932 and 1939, the number of city dwellers in Dnipropetrovsk increased to over 500,662. The Dnipropetrovsk region became the most urbanised of Soviet Ukraine with more than 2,273,000 people living in the region (Vasiliev 1977, 55; Bolebrukh 2001, 159–164).

Dnipropetrovsk also became the cultural and educational centre of Soviet Ukraine. There were ten colleges, including the State University, 97 secondary schools and 19 vocational schools. The Soviet administration restored local drama and music theatres. During the 1930s, Dnipropetrovsk had 120 libraries, five museums, six movie-theatres, 30 clubs and palaces of culture (Bolebrukh 2001, 159–164).

## The Leonid Brezhnev Clan

Post-war Soviet modernisation influenced the careers of many young and ambitious *Komsomol* members in the region. One of them, Leonid Brezhnev, was born in 1906 in Kamenskoe, joined the *Kommunistycheskaya Partyya Sovetskoho Soyuz*a (Communist party of the Soviet Union – KPSS) in 1931 and, after graduation from Dniprodzerzhinsk Metallurgical Institute was elected as a council deputy of the city of Dniprodzerzhinsk. The Stalinist purges of the 1930s removed many old Soviet and Communist officials from government positions who perished in prisons and the labour camps of GULAG. Young people such as Brezhnev filled the void created by Stalinist repressions in the region. In 1938, the young Brezhnev was elected as a member of the regional committee of the Soviet Communist party of Ukraine (KPU) and head of the Department of Agitation and Propaganda. By the young age of 32, Brezhnev had become secretary of the KPU committee of the most important industrial region of Soviet Ukraine. His career was interrupted by the Great Patriotic War when Brezhnev joined the army as an ideological officer (see Mlechin 2005).

From August 1941 to October 1943, the Dnipropetrovsk region was occupied by the Nazis, and Soviet troops liberated the entire region by February 1944 (Berkhoff 2004, 11, 36, 49, 149–150, 152–153, 248–249). The Soviet administration restored the industrial base of Dnipropetrovsk, and by 1950 the main metallurgical and machine-building factories had reached their pre-war levels of industrial production and productivity.

During this period, Brezhnev began his political career as a talented and ambitious organizer of the industrial re-birth of Dnipropetrovsk. He was an experienced young army ideologist who had proved his loyalty to the Stalinist leadership during the war and was familiar with Dnipropetrovsk before 1941. The Central Committee of the KPSS sent Brezhnev to Dnipropetrovsk in November 1947 when he was elected first secretary of the Dnipropetrovsk regional committee of the KPU, and he ruled the oblast until June 1950 (*Vosstanovlenie*). His successors were Andrei Kirilenko and Volodymyr Shcherbitsky, both close friends. Two other young comrades of Brezhnev, Oleksiy Vatchenko and Yevhen Kachalovskii led the region respectively in 1965–1976 and 1976–1983 (Vasiliev 1977, 72; Bolebrukh 2001, 233; Mlechin 2005).

Brezhnev promoted the political career of his old friends, many of whom became prominent political figures in Kyiv and Moscow during his leadership of the KPSS. Both contemporaries and scholars who study the 'Brezhnev period' call this phenomenon the 'Dnipropetrovsk mafia' or rule of the 'Dnipropetrovsk Family' (Nahaylo 1999, 36, 69; Wilson 2000, 162). Since the rise of Brezhnev to the pinnacle of Soviet power, the ruling elites of Dnipropetrovsk influenced not only regional, but also republican and All-Union politics.

# Communist Party Politics, Rockets and Komsomol Business in Soviet Dnipropetrovsk

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Dnipropetrovsk's transformation into an important centre of the Soviet military industrial complex was directly related to the sudden rise of Brezhnev to the pinnacle of Soviet power in October of 1964. Brezhnev promoted the political career of his compatriots from the Dnipropetrovsk military industrial complex. Brezhnev's friends and close colleagues from his post-war years in the Dnipropetrovsk region went to Moscow and became prominent political figures in the Soviet *nomenklatura* hierarchy during the 1960s and 1970s. Two main industries of the Soviet military industrial complex – metallurgy and missile-building – had important factories in Dnipropetrovsk and therefore provided the Brezhnev clan with new members from 1964 until 1982. Even after the downfall of the Brezhnev clan in Moscow in 1983, when Yurii Andropov began his struggle 'against corruption and nepotism' in the Soviet *nomenklatura*, members of this clan continued to play a prominent role in the political life of Soviet Ukraine.

Besides the Physical-Technical Department of Dnipropetrovsk State University, the Dnipropetrovsk Metallurgical Institute also assisted the political careers of many of Brezhnev's close friends who in the 1970s and 1980s became important members of the Kremlin *nomenklatura*. Nikolai Tikhonov, former head of Dnipropetrovsk *Sovnarkhoz* during the 1950s, was one of the deputies of the Soviet Prime Minister between 1966 and 1976, First Deputy of the Prime Minister from 1976 to 1980 and head of the USSR Council of Ministers from 1980 to 1985.[2] Nikolai Shchokolov was the Soviet Minister of Public Order in 1966–1968 and from 1968 to 1982 he was Soviet Minister of Interior. Georgii Tsynev was during 1971–1976 a member of the Central Revision Committee of the KPSS and a deputy head of the KGB from 1970 to 1982. In the KGB he was the 1st Deputy Chairman in 1982–1985 as well as he was a Candidate Member of CPSU Central Committee in 1976–1981 and accordingly was a full Member of the said body in 1981–1986. Victor Chebrikov, who graduated from Dnipropetrovsk Metallurgical Institute in 1950, was one of the leaders of the city party organisation in Dnipropetrovsk from 1961 to 1971. In 1971 he became the head of the personnel department of the USSR KGB, First Deputy of the Head of this organization and from 1982 to 1988 a chairman of the KGB (Pikhovshek 1996, 11–12, 272–274).

Another of Brezhnev's close friends, Volodymyr Shcherbytsky, promoted the careers of other people from the region of Dnipropetrovsk. With his support, Oleksii Vatchenko became the head of the Presidium of the Ukrainian Soviet Supreme Soviet from 1976 until 1984 with the assistance of another politician from Dnipropetrovsk, Valentyna Shevchenko. Aleksandr Kapto, who worked as a secretary of both the Dnipropetrovsk *Komsomol* organization and the Soviet Ukrainian *Komsomol* in Kyiv in the 1960s, oversaw the Department of Culture in the Central Committee of the KPU; in 1979–1986 he was a Secretary of the Central Committee and accordingly was the main ideologist of the Soviet Ukraine. Many other members of the 'Kyiv ruling class' under Shcherbytsky were also linked to the Dnipropetrovsk metallurgical and military lobby. Shcherbytsky's assistant from 1972 to 1984 was Konstantin Prodan who began his career in the *Komsomol* organisation of the city of Dnipropetrovsk (Pikhovshek 1996, 48–103). As a contemporary political analyst noted, 'Officially Prodan was put in charge of industrial production, though, according to insiders of the former KPU Central Committee, his principal function was 'maintaining' contact with Brezhnev's assistant Georgii Tsukanov in Moscow' (Pikhovshek 1996, 33–34).

Another important reason for the rise of the 'Brezhnev Clan' was the relative independence of Dnipropetrovsk's local administration from Kyiv. Because of the status of Dnipropetrovsk as a 'strategically important centre for military industry,' different branches of the local administration were under the direct supervision of Moscow, rather than Kyiv (Interviews with Tihpko, Markov and Bocharova).

## The Military Industrial Complex and Ruling Elite of Dnipropetrovsk

The city of Dnipropetrovsk was the location of famous metallurgical and machine-building factories in pre-revolutionary Russia and the Soviet Union. Before 1941, Dnipropetrovsk became the most urbanised region of the Soviet Ukraine. Almost 53 per cent of this region's population lived in 16 cities and towns of the region (Vasiliev 1977, 55; Bolebrukh 2001, 159–164). In 1980, the industrial enterprises of Dnipropetrovsk manufactured a significant part of the industrial products and customer goods for the Soviet Ukrainian Republic. A total of 5.4 per cent of steel, 9 per cent of rolled iron, 28 per cent of pipes, 62 per cent of combine beet-harvesters, 27.9 per cent of television sets, and 8.5 per cent of knitted wear in Ukraine were produced in the city of Dnipropetrovsk (Bolebrukh 2001, 219).

## Communist Party Politics, Rockets and Komsomol Business in Soviet Dnipropetrovsk

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After 1945, the main centre of economic and financial activities of the region and the city of Dnipropetrovsk became neither metallurgy nor mining. The new centre which changed the status of the region and of the city was a secret military factory in Dnipropetrovsk. The entire ideological and cultural situation in the region, and especially the city, depended on this one industrial plant which became the most important part of the Soviet military industrial complex. In July 1944, the State Committee of Defence in Moscow decided to build a large military machine-building factory in Dnipropetrovsk on the location of the pre-war aircraft plant. In December 1945, thousands of German prisoners of war began construction and built the first sections and shops of the new Dnipropetrovsk Automobile Factory (Markov, 1995). In 1947–1948 this factory produced its first cars and special military vehicles. However, on 9 May 1951 the USSR Council of Ministers decided to transform the main shops and sectors of this factory into 'secret production' which included not only special military vehicles, but also powerful rocket engines and different types of modern military aircraft. The former Dnipropetrovsk Automobile Factory was transferred to the Ministry of Armament of the USSR and received a new name – the State Union Plant #586 (Lukanov 1996, 12).

Stalin introduced the organisation of special secret training of highly qualified engineers and scientists who were to become rocket construction specialists. He recommended the introduction of a new college degree at Dnipropetrovsk State University which would be a Master of Sciences in rocket construction. In 1952 the university administration formed a new department with the name 'physical-technical faculty' which was the largest department at the university, admitting on average four hundred students each year. These students received better accommodation and a higher stipend payment than students from other departments and colleges; the lowest stipend for this department was 450 roubles, while the highest stipend at another prestigious school, the Dnipropetrovsk Medical Institute, was only 180 roubles. A special commission from Moscow selected talented undergraduate students studying physics from engineering schools all over the USSR and sent them to the physical-technical department at Dnipropetrovsk State University, where they resumed their studies as rocket engineers. Simultaneously, the university administration announced the admission of new freshmen students in this department. The promise of a good stipend and a 'romantic' career of rocket engineer attracted thousands of talented young people to this 'secret' department, which provided training specialists for only the Dnipropetrovsk Automobile Factory (Horbulin 1998, 9, 62–63).

In accordance with another decision of the Soviet government, in 1954 the administration of this automobile factory opened a secret design office with the name 'Southern Construction Bureau' (*konstruktorskoe biuro Yuzhnoe*). The main assignment of this office was to construct military missiles and rocket engines. Hundreds of talented physicists, engineers and machine designers moved from Moscow and other big cities in the Soviet Union to Dnipropetrovsk where they joined the *konstruktorskoe biuro Yuzhnoe (KBYu)*. In 1965, the secret Plant #586 was transferred to the Ministry of General Machine-Building of the USSR and the next year it changed its name into the 'Southern Machine-building Factory' (*Yuzhnyi mashino-stroitelnyi zavod*) or simply *Yuzhmash* (in Ukrainian *Pivdenmash*). The first 'General Constructor' and head of the 'Southern' design office was Mikhail Yangel, a prominent scientist and outstanding designer of space rockets who led the design office and factory from 1954 to 1971. Yangel designed the first powerful rockets and space military equipment for the Soviet Ministry of Defence. Yangel worked with talented engineers who later became the leaders of military production in Dnipropetrovsk and the official directors of *Pivdenmash*. Two close collaborators of Yangel were the *Pivdenmash* directors Leonid Smirnov (1952–1961) and Aleksandr Makarov (1961–1986). Makarov's successor was Leonid Kuchma, the Director General of the *Pivdenmash* in 1986–1992, who later became one of the most prominent political leaders in independent Ukraine and was and still is the only President of Ukraine (1994–2005) elected twice (Strazheva; Platonov and Horbulin; Romanov and Gubarev; Baikonur; Baikonur, Korolev, Yangel).

In 1951 the Southern Machine-building Factory began manufacturing and testing new military rockets with an initial range of only 270 kilometres. By 1959 Soviet scientists and engineers developed new technologies, and as a result, the *KBYu* launched a new machine-building project producing ballistic missiles. Under Yangel, *KBYu* produced very powerful rocket engines which dramatically increased the range of ballistic missiles and from the 1960s, began to be used as launch vehicles for Soviet spaceships. *Pivdenmash* designed and manufactured four generations of missile complexes which included space launch vehicles *Kosmos*, *Interkosmos*, *Tsyklon-2*, *Tsyklon-3* and *Zenith*. The *KBYu* created a unique space-rocket system called *Energia-Buran* and manufactured 400 technical devices which were launched as artificial satellites (*Sputniks*).

# Communist Party Politics, Rockets and Komsomol Business in Soviet Dnipropetrovsk

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For the first time in the world space industry, the Dnipropetrovsk missile plant produced space Sputniks. By the 1980s, *Pivdenmash* manufactured 67 different types of spaceships, 12 space research complexes and four defence space rocket systems. These systems were used not only for purely military purposes by the Ministry of Defence, but also for astronomical research, for global radio and television and for environmental monitoring. *Pivdenmash* initiated and sponsored the international space programme of Eastern European socialist countries, called *Interkosmos*. Twenty-two of the 25 automatic space *Sputniks* of this programme were designed, manufactured, and launched by engineers and workers from Dnipropetrovsk. *Pivdenmash* and *KBYu* became not only an important centre of the Soviet space industry and Soviet military industrial complex, but also the main rocket producer for the entire Soviet bloc. (Hall and Shayler 2001, 316ff; Siddiqi 2003, 97, 113, 114, 164, 177, 285) The military rocket systems manufactured in Dnipropetrovsk created the base for the Soviet Strategic Missile Forces (Dnepropetrovskii raketno 1994; Bolebrukh 2001, 209–211, 229; Lukanov 1996, 13).

On the eve of the disintegration of the Soviet Union, *KBYu* had nine regular and corresponding members of the Soviet Academy of Sciences, 33 full professors and 290 scientists holding a Ph.D. More than 50,000 people worked at *Pivdenmash*. *Pivdenmash* was 'a state' inside the Soviet state. In 1969, after a long competition with Moscow's V. Chelomei Centre of Rocket Construction, *Pivdenmash* rocket designs won, and from then leaders of the Soviet military industrial complex preferred only *Pivdenmash* models. The Soviet state provided billions of Soviet roubles to finance *Pivdenmash* projects (Horbulin 1998, 6, 24–31).

Officially, *Pivdenmash* also manufactured agricultural tractors and special kitchen equipment for everyday needs, such as mincing machines or juicers for Soviet households. In official reports and public information there were no details given about its production of rockets or spaceships. However, hundreds of thousands of workers and engineers in the city of Dnipropetrovsk were employees of this plant, and members of their families and therefore most local people knew about the 'real production' of *Pivdenmash*.

## Dnipropetrovsk as a KGB "Testing Ground"

The Soviet government approved the KGB's proposal to introduce the highest level of secrecy over *Pivdenmash* and its products. According to the Soviet government's decision, the city of Dnipropetrovsk was officially closed to foreign visitors in 1959. No citizen of a foreign country (even Eastern European socialist) was allowed to visit the city or district of Dnipropetrovsk. From the late 1950s, Soviet people called Dnipropetrovsk 'the rocket city' or 'closed city.' (Bolebrukh 2001, 211).

Members of the Brezhnev clan in the Moscow offices of the KGB and Ministry of Interior also contributed to centralised ideological control in Dnipropetrovsk, which especially influenced the KGB and security operations in the closed city. The local KGB office was always more Moscow-oriented, ignoring the interests of the authorities in Kyiv. At the same time, for Moscow officials who began their careers in Dnipropetrovsk, the city became the testing ground for many All-Union KGB campaigns which they attempted to initiate. Dnipropetrovsk KGB officers were 'pioneers' in the organisation of ideological campaigns which became 'models' for other 'closed' industrial Soviet cities. [This phrase – 'pioneers of ideological campaigns' – belongs to a local retired KGB officer. According to the KGB documents, Moscow's representatives in the Dnipropetrovsk clan always interfered in local KGB business, imposing their own practices on the local officers.] (Igor T.; DADO, f. 19, op. 52, spr. 72, ark. 1–18) As a result, the inhabitants of Dnipropetrovsk experienced more ideological limitations and more brutal anti-Western campaigns than people in many other Soviet cities. Facing direct Kremlin supervision, the local KGB and KPSS ideologists sought to prove their ideological reliability and occasionally exaggerated the 'threat from the capitalist West.'

KGB officers transformed one building in the Dnipropetrovsk Special Psychiatric Hospital (*psikhushka*), located in a town of Ihren (now a suburban district of Dnipro), into a special police facility for 'political dissidents.' All over the Soviet Union, Ihren *psikhushka* (especially its Section 9) became notorious and known as the worst incarceration for political prisoners. The Dnipropetrovsk KGB tested various drugs on prisoners and performed different medical experiments, treating the most 'opinionated' political dissidents as mentally sick patients. Many religious and civil rights activists and 'bourgeois nationalists,' such as national communist dissident Leonid Plyushch, described the Dnipropetrovsk Psychiatric Hospital as 'mental hell' because of its police system of harsh treatment and everyday

## **Communist Party Politics, Rockets and Komsomol Business in Soviet Dnipropetrovsk**

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humiliation (Plyushch 1979, 304–326, 340–349). Meanwhile, local KGB officers explained their harsh treatment of dissidents such as Plyushch as an ideological necessity to protect a strategically important centre of the Soviet military industrial complex (Igor T).

### **Growth of the Population and Standards of Living in the Region**

The new status of the city brought more state investments and contributed to the overall improvement of the standard of living of its inhabitants. During the 1950s, the main sponsor of city improvements and renovations was the metallurgical industry. During the 1960s and 1970s, the space rocket industry and its biggest factory, *Pivdenmash*, sponsored all major city programmes, renovations and new architectural projects which included the sports palace *Meteor* with a large indoor pool, football team *Dnipro*, city airport, city theatre of opera and ballet, historical museum of Yavornitskii, department store 'Children's World,' construction of thousands of modern apartments, libraries and movie-theatres, and celebrations of the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the city of Dnipropetrovsk in 1976. (Bolebrukh 2001, 211–212).

Even the expansion and renovation of the Dnipropetrovsk Central Farmer Market (known as *Oziorka*) was supported by *Pivdenmash* as part of its improvement of the city's life, and a reflection of the growth and strategic importance of the city. From 1958 to 1965 the city administration invested money in building a new covered location for the market and by 1970 they had re-built the entire neighbourhood transforming it into a modern and convenient place for the 'socialist consumption of goods and services.' (Lazebnik 2001, 167–185)

As a result, the missile factory, the centre of the Soviet military industrial complex, contributed to a new level of cultural consumption among not only the city's dwellers, but also among all guests of Dnipropetrovsk. Consequently, the pioneering efforts in the popularisation of new modern forms of Western music such as jazz and rock-n-roll also began among engineers and workers of *Pivdenmash* who contributed to the spread of new cultural forms and activities among those who lived in the city and region of Dnipropetrovsk.

The improving living conditions in Dnipropetrovsk led to an increase of the regional population from 2,339,800 people (with a 56 per cent urban population) in 1951 to 2,850,700 (with a 72 per cent urban population) in 1961. The larger salaries and better distribution of food and industrial goods also attracted young people from other regions of the Soviet Union to Dnipropetrovsk. From the 1950s onward, most of the Dnipropetrovsk population were people younger than 30 years old. In 1970 there were 3,343,000 people in the region (76 per cent of who lived in cities) which by 1984 had increased to 3,771,200 people (with 83 per cent urban population). The population of the city of Dnipropetrovsk grew from 660,800 people in 1959 to 1,066,000 in 1979 and more than 1,153,400 people in 1985 when Gorbachev came to power (Glushkina 1985, 10, 11).

The Dnipropetrovsk region had a young multinational, predominantly Russian speaking population. Three major ethnic groups shaped the cultural development of the region – Ukrainians, Russians, and Jews. During the peak of 'international harmony and prosperity of developed socialism' in 1979, Ukrainians made up the overwhelming majority of the regional (72.8 per cent) and urban (68.5 per cent) population. Due to massive emigration from the Soviet Union, the Jewish population decreased from 2.7 per cent in 1959 to 1.7 per cent in 1979 and 1.3 per cent in 1989. The number of Russians in the region's population grew rapidly from 17.2 per cent in 1959, 20.9 per cent in 1970, 23 per cent in 1979 and 24.2 per cent in 1989 (O vozrastnoi structure 1971; Goskomstat USSR 1991, 100, 102). By 1985, more than a third of the population in the city of Dnipropetrovsk was ethnically Russian. If we add to this number the 3.2 per cent of Russian-speaking Jews and more than 33 per cent of Ukrainians who considered Russian their native language, we will have more than two thirds of the city's population who associated themselves with Russian rather than with Ukrainian culture. According to contemporaries, the high salaries and better conditions of living attracted representatives of various nationalities from different republics who also spoke Russian rather than the Ukrainian language in Dnipropetrovsk (Goskomstat USSR 1991, 106, 108, 119, 122; Prudchenko and Smolenska 2007).

### **Komsomol 'Business' During the Late Soviet Era**

## Communist Party Politics, Rockets and Komsomol Business in Soviet Dnipropetrovsk

Written by Sergei I. Zhuk

The regional economic activities of local 'businessmen and women' from the *Komsomol* during perestroika had their roots in the pre-perestroika era. They also strengthened trends for independence from Moscow which had earlier existed in Dnipropetrovsk. All the elements of their initial business had already been developed during the Brezhnev era when the cultural consumption of late socialism combined the structures of Soviet international tourism with the ideological efforts of *Komsomol* activists into one business network. Mass rock and discotheque music consumption among Soviet youth was delivered by *Komsomol* and trade union *apparatchiks*. International tourism and discotheque enthusiasts provided these *apparatchiks* with music and video material for their entertainment business. Without these relations it would be impossible to imagine the development of post-Soviet capitalism.

The first pioneers of organizing *Komsomol* business in the region were two graduates of Dnipropetrovsk Metallurgical Institute, the Ukrainian-Moldovan Sergiy Tihipko, the First Secretary of the Dnipropetrovsk *Komsomol* regional organization in 1986–91, and the Ukrainian Oleksandr Turchynov, who worked with Tihipko as head of the agitation and propaganda division in the same *Komsomol* regional organisation in 1987–90. Tihipko and Turchynov initiated and 'ideologically justified' the first *Komsomol* businesses in the region. Two other *Komsomol* members, who also graduated from the same institute as Tihipko and Turchynov, Kolomoyskyy and Viktor Pinchuk, both of Jewish origin, started their careers not in the official *Komsomol* business, but on the black market of Dnipropetrovsk, trading various goods, and using their financial and engineering skills for their own survival in the conditions of economic collapse of late socialism. Kolomoyskyy used his financial skills and connections with Tihipko to organize its own financial corporation *Privatbank*, which became the most successful bank in post-Soviet Ukraine. Pinchuk, using his engineering and managerial skills, founded his own metallurgical venture, entitled *Interpipe Company*. It is noteworthy that all four of those *Komsomol* members, two Ukrainian and two Jewish, used their personal connections through their friends and partners from *Pivdenmash*, including through its last director Leonid Kuchma, to start their first businesses in Dnipropetrovsk (see Golovko 2012).

In the mid-1980s, when *perestroika* created favourable conditions for the managerial skills of *Komsomol* activists, this system produced new activities for cultural consumption, such as video salons which brought their organisers more profits than traditional discotheque clubs. The video business used the same infrastructure and network of the discotheque movement; namely international tourism, *Komsomol* activists, trade union leaders and the 'discotheque mafia.'

This network contributed to the business career of two fans of Western popular music, Yulia Tymoshenko and her husband, Oleksandr (Popov, Milshtein, 55; Ponamarchuk). Yulia Grigian (Telegina) was the daughter of Armenian taxi-driver Grigian and Russian technical worker Telegina, a fan of British rock music. Yulia Grigian married Oleksandr Tymoshenko, son of a member of the city KPU committee in the *Pivdenmash* administration. In 1978, Yulia Tymoshenko joined the student *Komsomol* organization in the Department of Economy at Dnipropetrovsk State University. This department was opened on the initiative of the *Pivdenmash* administration in 1977 to provide training for qualified economists in Dnipropetrovsk's growing military industrial complex.

Yulia Tymoshenko graduated with honours from the Department of Economy in 1984 and began her first job as an engineer-economist through the connections of her father-in-law, Hennadii Tymoshenko. For five years, she worked at the Lenin machine building plant, another factory which belonged to the Soviet military industrial complex. In 1979, she gave birth to her daughter Yevhenia, and until 1988 she and her husband enjoyed a typical Soviet upper-middle class life in their one-bedroom cooperative apartment. They continued to watch movies, listen to Western pop music, and occasionally visited and danced in well-known discotheque clubs in downtown Dnipropetrovsk (Popov and Milshtein 2006, 64–67; Suvorov 1991).

*Perestroika* changed the young Tymoshenko family. Hennadii Tymoshenko recommended his son and daughter-in-law to join the co-operative movement and promised his support through the city's KPU and Soviet administration. In 1988, the young Tymoshenkos used their old connections in the *Komsomol* discothèque world to open a public service enterprise, a video-rental shop in Dnipropetrovsk, with 5,000 borrowed Soviet roubles. The profits made from this first venture were used to open a chain of video rental stores. They used the experience of *Komsomol apparatchiks*, who brought their first VCRs in Dnipropetrovsk through *Sputnik*.

## Communist Party Politics, Rockets and Komsomol Business in Soviet Dnipropetrovsk

Written by Sergei I. Zhuk

Contacts in the discotheque movement helped provide these *apparatchiks* with Western video tapes and an audience which was ready to consume new Western cultural products. Former discotheque enthusiasts tested these new business practices and proposed the idea of video salons, which had already become the most popular and fashionable form of entertainment Moscow and the three Baltic republics. As a result, during *perestroika* both the *Komsomol* and 'discotheque mafia' provided infrastructure for these salons in Dnipropetrovsk.

When in 1987 the KGB opened the city of Dnipropetrovsk to foreigners, *Pivdenmash* imported thousands of VCRs using barter agreements with South Korean businessmen. As a regional KPU *apparatchik* who oversaw the distribution of movies throughout the Dnipropetrovsk region (*kinoprokat*), Yulia Tymoshenko's father-in-law had access not only to these Korean VCRs but also to local movie theatres which provided the first mass audience for video films.

The main base of a Tymoshenko's 'video enterprise' was the location of the former central *Komsomol* discotheque club of Dnipropetrovsk oblast– the Student Palace in the Taras Shevchenko Park of Culture and Relaxation in downtown Dnipropetrovsk (Popov and Milshtein 2006, 52–89; Ponamarchuk 2007). In 1989, she quit her old engineer-economist job and became the head of the *Terminal* co-operative. The same year, another participant in the 'discotheque mafia,' Serhiy Tihipko, was elected as the first secretary of the *Komsomol* organization of Dnipropetrovsk oblast. He not only supported Tymoshenko's enterprise, but also brought his additional discotheque and *Sputnik* connections into *Terminal*. In this way, discotheque activists and *Komsomol* apparatchiks contributed to the growth and popularity of Tymoshenko's business (Tihipko).

In 1991 after the disintegration of the Soviet Union and Soviet state tourism, the representatives of the Brezhnev era *Komsomol* elite, such as Tymoshenko demonstrated again that a skilful adjustment of this network to the new economic situation was an important foundation for success in post-Soviet business activities. The initial capital of *Terminal*, the music and video *Komsomol* enterprise which Tymoshenko had launched during 'the discotheque era' of late socialism, became the foundation of her business and political career in post-Soviet Ukraine.

### Epilogue: Dnipropetrovsk Komsomol Entrepreneurs and the Formation of Post-Soviet Oligarchs

Political corruption in the post-Soviet geopolitical space is rooted in cultural consumption during the Brezhnev era, especially in the so-called 'discotheque effect' on society during the era of 'mature socialism.' During this period of late socialism in the USSR, millions of Soviet young people, loyal members of *Komsomol*, fell in love with the catchy sound of 'beat music' by the Beatles and hard rock by Deep Purple. Even ten years after dissolution of the Soviet Union, the post-Soviet space was ruled by former Soviet hard rock fans, representatives of the so-called 'Deep Purple generation,' new post-Soviet politicians, such as Russian Prime-Minister Dmitri Medvedev, twice Ukrainian Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko, President Petro Poroshenko and former Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili.

Paradoxically, *détente* in the 1970s led to the influx of Western cultural products into the USSR, such as popular music and feature films. As a result, Soviet ideologists, including the *Komsomol*, attempted to control Soviet consumption of cultural products from the West using 'Komsomol discothèques' where Soviet young people could dance to 'ideologically permitted' Soviet and Western music. Contemporaries called these organizers 'disco mafia' in the industrial cities of Eastern Ukraine.

By the end of *perestroika* in 1991, more than 100 *Komsomol* businesses had emerged in industrial cities in Eastern Soviet Ukraine, of which more than ninety originated in the city of Dnipropetrovsk (Zhuk 2010, 301). Only a few of the most successful enterprises survived post-Soviet competition during the 1990s and created 'new business corporations' such as Yulia Tymoshenko's 'Gas Empire,' Kolomoyskyy's and Tihipko's *Privatbank*, Aleksandr Balashov's 'Trade Corporation' and Rinat Akhmetov's *Liuks*. The overwhelming majority of these post-Soviet successful businesses were organised by or directly connected to the 'disco mafia.' At the same time, the first Dnipropetrovsk 'capitalists' demonstrated a wide range of ethnic backgrounds, from the Ukrainian Tihipko, Armenian-Russian Tymoshenko, Russian Balashov and Jewish Kolomoyskyy contributing to the multi-national identity of the city of Dnipropetrovsk and Dnipro.



# Communist Party Politics, Rockets and Komsomol Business in Soviet Dnipropetrovsk

Written by Sergei I. Zhuk

Some contemporaries noted how the business activities of *Komsomol* 'entrepreneurs' in the 1980s contributed to regional identity in Eastern Ukraine. Many of these 'entrepreneurs' who were not ethnic Ukrainians became active participants in the Ukrainian independence movement in 1988–1991 to protect their regional business interests rather than defending Ukrainian culture and language. In the 1990s, former members of the Soviet 'discotheque mafia' and their former KPU supervisors became an integral part of the business and political life of independent Ukraine. As leaders of oligarchic clans in Ukraine they have resisted Russian expansion into their 'spheres of influence.'

The case of Volodymyr Zelenskyy, elected in April 2019, whose entire career was generated inside the Soviet-based system of television entertainment, continues to demonstrate the connection between 'post-*Komsomol*' business and political careers. Zelenskyy began his acting career in *95-yi Kvartal*, which was a reference to a neighbourhood in Kryvyy Rih, where he had grown up and was inspired by the 1960s Soviet television show *KVN*. As we see, the Dnipropetrovsk and Dnipro elites, who are still rooted in their Soviet past, play a significant role in the development of independent Ukraine.

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# Communist Party Politics, Rockets and Komsomol Business in Soviet Dnipropetrovsk

Written by Sergei I. Zhuk

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# Communist Party Politics, Rockets and Komsomol Business in Soviet Dnipropetrovsk

Written by Sergei I. Zhuk

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## Notes

[1] I used also numerous interviews conducted with my relatives, who are ethnic Ukrainians, but live in Moscow, Russia, who still support Russian President Vladimir Putin's anti-Ukrainian politics.

[2] *Sovnarkhoz* is abbreviated from Russian *Sovet narodnogo khoziaistva*, an economic department in the Soviet government during the early Stalin era and during Khrushchev's reforms.

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