

tantamount to setting up a new party. And they naturally ought to struggle against this."

With a membership already of about 50,000 the Union is, according to Burchenko, one of the largest unofficial organisations in the country and has a huge potential for expansion. It has, however, decided for the moment not to call itself a party, though, as Buchenko says, "in actual fact we're talking about supporting a multi-party system."

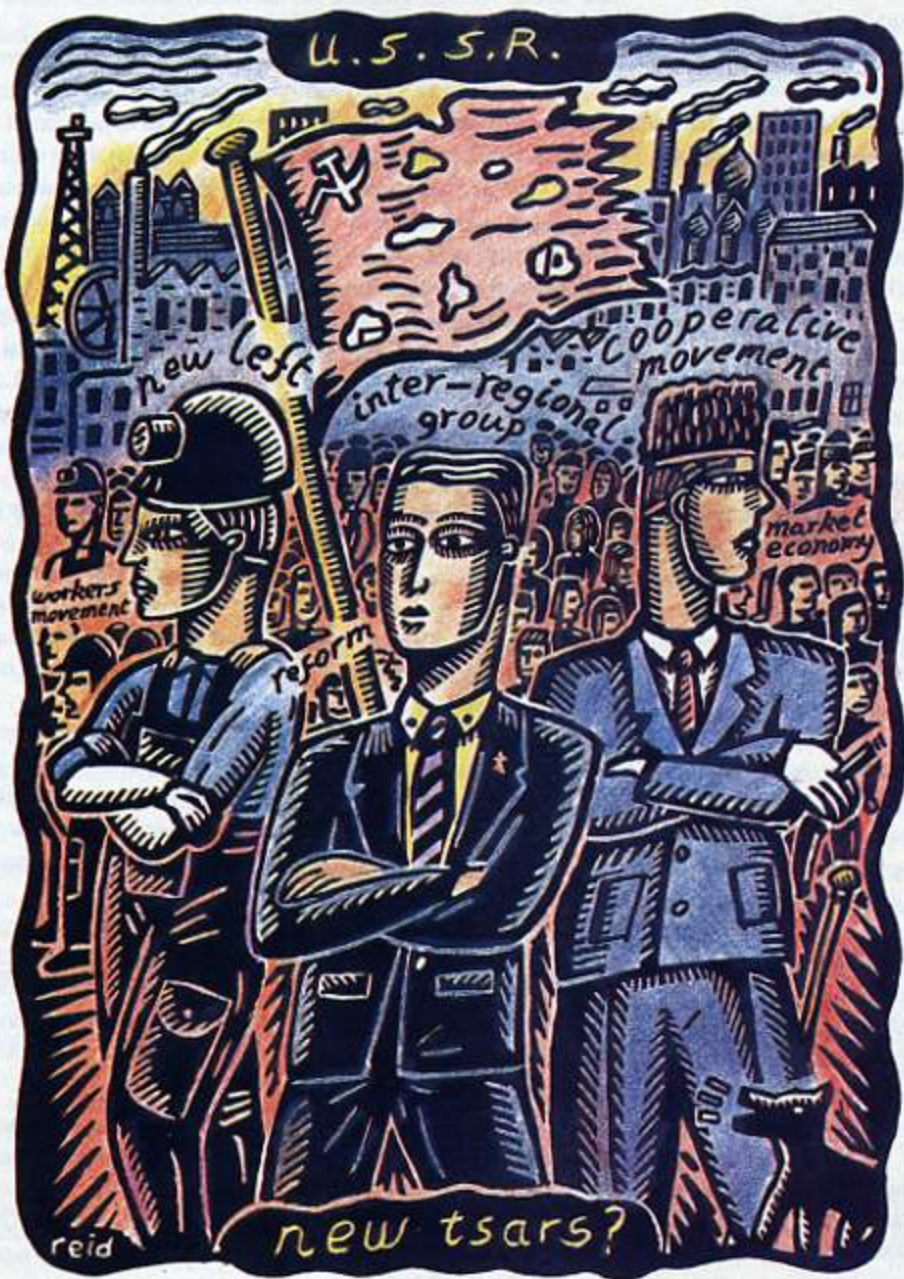
The creation of the Union of Workers has made the authorities unhappy. According to Burchenko: "even though the Union went out of its way not to declare itself a party, the official reaction to the outcome of the conference was very unfavourable. For example, the First Secretary of the Novokuznetsk Party Committee, Albert Lensky, at a closed meeting of the Party Committee, openly declared that a Workers' Party had been formed and all members of the Communist Party should boycott it!" (laughs)

Information Blockade: Glasnost?

The forthcoming March elections to the regional and Republican Soviets are very important for the Union of Workers. They will be fielding candidates in most constituencies in the Kuzbas area but at the moment, according to Burchenko, the authorities have imposed what he calls "an information blockade" on the activities of the Union. Without their own newspaper, Burchenko predicts, the Party will probably triumph at the local elections.

At a deeper level, the information blockade, the control of the local mass media, is one of the last jokers in the hands of a dying apparat. In this sense there is no real glasnost outside the national papers and the press of the more advanced Baltic republics.

In the provinces, the media machine is still largely in the pocket of the local authorities and while you will no longer be imprisoned for publishing unofficial news bulletins, attempting to



print independent newspapers or bulletins you face the almost insurmountable difficulty of trying to obtain paper. Incredible as it may seem, the country with almost the world's largest hectareage of forest is experiencing a grave shortage of paper.

Glasnost for the provincial reader is still official glasnost and largely meaningless. So, for the inhabitant of the provincial city,