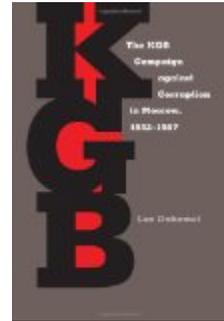


Luc Duhamel. *The KGB Campaign against Corruption in Moscow, 1982-1987*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2010. 312 pp. \$26.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8229-6108-6.

Reviewed by Barbara A. Chotiner (University of Alabama)

Published on H-Russia (August, 2011)

Commissioned by Teddy J. Uldricks



## Corruption and Party Politics in the Late Soviet Period

Luc Duhamel's study of an extensive anticorruption campaign in Moscow in the mid-1980s is riveting. At multiple levels, this work provides new information and perspectives on a period of stalemate, factional competition, and the initiation of fundamental political and economic change. This book chronicles cooperation as well as conflict among institutions and their members, and some resources from which individuals and organizations could draw. Duhamel presents much information about bureaucratic behavior under the apex of the Soviet system. Moreover, his research demonstrates that understanding corruption is not uncomplicated. He additionally indicates some connections from the attack on illegal economic activity and bribery in the capital to post-Soviet politics.

Based on archival materials from the courts, procuracy, and Committee of State Security (KGB), as well as interviews, this account of investigation and prosecution of unsanctioned transactions focused on the "food trade" is highly detailed. The reader learns about techniques and mechanisms for diverting comestibles and distributing them in ways not envisaged by Soviet regulations in force before 1987. Vivid portrayals of a number of those investigated and tried—and their interlocutors—emerge. The author delineates networks of illegal activity, in which bribery seems to have been alleged by the procuracy to have been an important glue. The investigative methods by which these claims were derived receive extensive attention; and Duhamel shows that the initiative to increase the role of the law in Soviet society

under Mikhail Gorbachev gave those accused and judged important weapons.

Duhamel reminds readers that anticorruption probes in which the KGB had a role had taken place before the inquiry that targeted wholesale and retail grocery as well as restaurant staffs was opened in Moscow. Such an investigation in Azerbaijan boosted the career of Geidar (later Heydar) Aliiev. He became first deputy chairman of the Council of Ministers of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). Later, he was president of independent Azerbaijan.

The Moscow operation was launched the year that Yuri Andropov left the chairmanship of the KGB USSR to become, once again, secretary of the Central Committee (CC) of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU). After the inquiry opened, in December 1982, Andropov became general secretary of the CC CPSU; he remained in that position until 1984. This tenure included the period when investigators seemed to have had the greatest latitude and when they were most able to pursue corruption charges against Communist Party officials. As Duhamel shows, an important and unfulfilled goal of the years-long Moscow investigation was the incrimination of Viktor V. Grishin, first secretary of the Moscow City Party Committee, as well as his counterpart, the chairman of the Moscow City Soviet. Politburo member Grishin was not an Andropov supporter. Indeed, the Moscow party leader depended on Konstantin Chernenko and seemed to aspire to his position.[1] Andropov's accession to the

top CPSU post seemed to have allowed the KGB to be used potentially to reduce the influence of a member of the country's top leadership. Yet the corruption inquiry continued while Chernenko headed the party. This fact necessitates further attention by specialists to the distribution of power during the second interregnum and to questions about policy and organizational inertia—along with their mechanisms.

It should be noted that neither First Secretary Grishin nor City Soviet Chairman Promyslov was ever charged with a crime. “Thousands” were investigated; and at least one person who had successfully passed KGB vetting before the anticorruption operation began was convicted (p. 203). In the year that Gorbachev assumed the Party general secretaryship, nonetheless, this probe began to occasion significant public criticism, which continued and which led to the legal reviews of some cases.

Preparation for the inquiry had included the shifting of KGB officials into the regular police under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Internal Affairs USSR (the MVD) and into the procuracy. The KGB determined the composition of the procuracy's special “brigade” charged with rooting out corruption in the agencies that supplied foodstuffs and finding alleged criminals' allies in other agencies. The security police investigated a set of crimes normally outside their legal writ. An important part of the material used against defendants seems—from the account in this volume—to have been confessions and accusations by persons already in custody. As Duhamel states, “While most testimony was obtained through per-

suasion, some of it was acquired through pressure tactics, even physical pressure” (p. 156). Limitations on the rights of the accused became grounds for seeking redress, as did the practices at pretrial interrogations.

To defend themselves, Duhamel argues, members of the “trade network” made common cause with political and economic reformers and thus contributed to liberalization. However, the writer also notes that Boris Yeltsin encouraged the Moscow probe. The chief anticorruption prosecutor, Vladimir Oleinik, later became a judge of the Constitutional Court of the Russian Federation.

*The KGB Campaign against Corruption in Moscow* therefore leads readers to gain a better understanding of the politics and evolution of the Soviet system in its final decade. The work draws attention to resources for change provided by different conceptualizations and usages of the law, and the ways in which it was to be upheld. In addition, Duhamel's analysis highlights the precariousness of efforts to gain organizational autonomy and advantage and even to maintain the “leading role of the Party” in the late Soviet period.

#### Note

[1]. Mikhail Gorbachev, *Memoirs* (New York: Doubleday, 1995), 146; Archie Brown, *The Gorbachev Factor* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 85, 69, 81, 82; and Yegor Ligachev, *Inside Gorbachev's Kremlin*, trans. Catherine A. Fitzpatrick, Michele A. Berdy, Dobryczna Dyrz-Freeman, and Marian Schwartz (1993; aug. ed, Boulder: Westview Press, 1996), 57, 62, 67.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at:

<https://networks.h-net.org/h-russia>

**Citation:** Barbara A. Chotiner. Review of Duhamel, Luc, *The KGB Campaign against Corruption in Moscow, 1982-1987*. H-Russia, H-Net Reviews. August, 2011.

**URL:** <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=31662>



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 United States License.