NATIONAL AFFAIRS

An opinion: "I believe the opinion is general and held that there is a need for a Soviet rouble to be viable. The only difference is in the professional views of how to make the transition. The difference is in the fact that the professional views are held by the Soviet Union but the idea, too—that convertibility cannot be introduced by decree. We cannot just have a session of the Supreme Soviet and declare rouble convertibility as of January 1. In order for this to come about, we must have the flexible and developed market economy, a price structure on the world market. We must have a developed infrastructure with the circulation of domestic securities and at least what we call internal convertibility. We will have-well-trained professionals. We must have a whole host of other conditions and cannot be created just by decree or administrative decision made purely at will. This is the road we must go down. But we must come down. The system of rationing is, in my opinion, an unacceptable path. We asked the country's leading academics and politicians for an analysis of this problem and of the possible economic and social consequences. We had virtually total unanimity from them in their assessment of the inexpediency and of the socioeconomic unjustifiability of such a move. It does not feature in the program of our actions. If we succeed in implementing the steps that have been mapped out in the course of this year and next year, then the issue will have been removed from discussions by the start of 1990. If this program is not implemented—if something prevents it from being carried through—and if by the end of 1990...by the start of the 1990s we are unable to stabilize the situation in the country, then a system of rationing will be inevitable, but that will be the end of the reform. If the question of a parallel currency is a question that is open to discussion. It is open to discussion. There are many plans and proposals on this score, but there has been no decision on this matter. There are pros and cons. It is a matter which outweigh which, or by how much. We need some more time to form a definite opinion, but there is less than a month for this."

An APN correspondent asks about the difficulty of the present state of affairs and whether the population expected to wait.

Rakhal says everyone is waiting for an instant miracle. In the past, he says, it is at times like this that reports of UPU's start circulating. We must convince public opinion, he means of the truth and nothing but the truth. Huge disappointments are inevitable after huge illusions. The unfortunate must be made aware of the state's stance for their well-being. We must not give way to emotions. The individual must be made to feel his own responsibility and the importance of this work. The republics must be given their chance. In 1990 they must be free of change; they must show that things are changing for the better.

An ABC correspondent, speaking in English with superimposed Russian translation, asks: "President Bush has said that he wants perestroika to succeed. What steps would you like the United States to take in the economic sphere to help perestroika succeed?"

Abalkin responds: "We must do most of the work ourselves. I remember what Bush said about Poland and Hungary. He was quite right, I think, when he said, as a wise and realistic politician, that the Poles and Hungarians themselves must bring their country out of economic crisis, just like the Soviet people must do. We must do this ourselves. I am concerned most by what must be done in our country in these matters. As for what can be expected of the United States of America, which might be of assistance, I do not wish to develop this topic, because apart from the most general concepts with which you have all long been familiar—decide the issue of the most-favoured nation system, remove some other restrictions—I shall not be enriching our knowledge with anything."

A (CHARLES DLAGDA) correspondent, speaking in Russian, asks: "We did not manage to follow the debates conducted at the conference. Could you perhaps tell us more specifically which points gave rise to the most negative reaction from the conservatives, and how do you reckon to break this opposition?"

Abalkin answers: "We have a great deal of historical experience on how to break the opposition. [laughter in hall] Therefore, the main task is to learn to hold a dialogue with the opposition. The best way is to compel the conservatives to do battle with the radicals, while we get on calmly with the job at hand. [laughter] That would be the best solution, we have both radicals and conservatives. At the same time, we must take all the valuable and useful radical ideas, the things offered by both of these, and include these in our programme and get on along our own way. As for the aspects which came in for criticism, I would limit myself to just two approaches. Emotions carried over from meetings were present at the conference; and there were also scientific discussions.

"Everything starts at the very beginning: Should state property be left unaltered, or should we start to modernize and renew, make it more flexible and start the process of de-statization, given labor collectives on this basis the freedom to decide matters independently and to elect their manager. Or should we maintain the system of administration by injunction. Should we move to a market with new laws of regulating it, with flexible and mobile prices. Or should we as before keep prices unambiguously under harsh state control. A quite normal process is under way, not a very pleasant one, but a normal process of counterposing and weighing up and so forth. At the same time—and this is also a very well known thing—the existence of any opposition..."
At 1607 GMT, the session is scheduled to continue with a debate on the autonomy of the Baltic republics. At 1611 GMT, Deputy Valfsoled discusses the situation in the Baltic region. At 1635 GMT, Abalkin mentions the importance of the draft law on economic autonomy. At 1635 GMT, Deputy Abalkin states that the financial basis of autonomous economic management has not been included in the agenda. At 1604 GMT, Deputy Abalkin requests that a debate on the autonomy of the Baltic republics be included on the agenda. At 1606 GMT, Deputy Abalkin emphasizes the need for a draft law on economic autonomy. At 1535 GMT, Deputy Abalkin requests that the draft law on economic autonomy be included on the agenda.