The International Foundation
for Socio-Economic and Political Studies
(The Gorbachev Foundation)

BREAKTHROUGH TO FREEDOM

PERESTROIKA: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS

R.VALENT PUBLISHERS
2009

Compiled by Viktor Kuvaldin,
Professor, Doctor of History

Executive Editor: Aleksandr Veber,
Doctor of History
Translation: Tatiana Belyak,
Konstantin Petrenko
Page make-up: Viktoriya Kolesnichenko
Art design: R.Valent Publishers

Publisher's Acknowledgement: Special thanks
to *Mr. Mikhail Selivanov,*
who helped make this book possible.

ISBN 978-5-93439-262-9

Breakthrough to Freedom. Perestroika: A Critical Analysis.
M., R.Valent Publishers, 2009, — 304 pages.

Printed in the Russian Federation
2009

CONTENTS

TO THE READER

It has been twenty years since the beginning of the dramatic stage in the history of our country, which got the name of "Perestroika".

Two decades on, people still keep asking themselves questions like, "Was Perestroika really needed?", "Was it conditioned by the objective demands of social development?", "Were the fatal events that resulted in its abrupt termination and the disintegration of the Soviet Union really inevitable?", and "What did it give to society and the world and what is its legacy?"

All these questions are taking on a new urgency in the light of the specific nature of the social and political situation existing in Russia today. They arise in the minds of generations of young people who started out in life in the post-Perestroika period. And once again these questions make one try to understand and assess the events of 1985–1991, when the foundations of democratization of our society and transition to market economy were laid down in the atmosphere of a breakthrough to freedom that swept through the country.

The research foundation, of which I am head, invited a number of Russian and foreign scientists and public figures who were active participants or witnesses to the events of those times to analyze or comment on them from today's perspective. Many of them responded favorably to our invitation, which made this book possible. It contains articles by more than twenty authors, who are economists, political scientists, social scientists, historians with the Russian Academy of Sciences, diplomats who held important positions in the years of

Perestroika, former senior officials with the CPSU Central Committee, and associates with the Gorbachev Foundation.

The authors include, among others, Aleksandr Nekipelov, Academician and Vice-President of the Russian Academy of Sciences (RAN); Oleg Bogomolov, Academician; Nikolay Shmelev, Academician and Director of the Institute of Europe of the RAN; Vadim Medvedev, Corresponding Member of the RAN; prominent foreign Slavic studies scholars Stephen F. Cohen (USA) and Archie Brown (Great Britain); Anatoly Adamishin, former Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of the USSR; Jack F. Matlock, Jr., former Ambassador of the United States to Moscow; Roderick Braithwaite, former Ambassador of Great Britain to Moscow; Anatoly Chernyayev, Aide to General Secretary of the CSPU Central Committee and later to the President of the USSR; prominent Russian scientists and political writers Vadim Mezhuyev, Liliya Shevtsova, Dmitry Furman, and others.

The readers will, certainly, notice not only the variety of genres of the essays included in this book, but also the wide range of opinions and assessments presented here. I see it as the book's great virtue, since it does not impose on readers a pre-set viewpoint, but provokes thought, reflection and comparison of assessments and facts.

I hope this book will contribute to better understanding of the ideas and actions of the initiators of Perestroika and to further studies of this most major event in Russia's and world history of the 20th Century.

Mikhail Gorbachev

PART I.

Seven Years that Changed the Country and the World

PERESTROIKA'S CHANCE OF SUCCESS

by Vadim Medvedev

Vadim Medvedev is Corresponding Member of the Russian Academy of Sciences (RAN), Doctor of Science (Economics), Professor, Adviser with the Gorbachev Foundation, Project Leader; in 1985, Head of the CPSU Central Committee's Department for Science and Educational Institutions; in 1986-1990, Secretary of the CPSU Central Committee; and in 1988, Member of the Presidential Council and Senior Adviser to the President of the USSR.

Today hardly anyone disagrees that Perestroika was one of the most important events in contemporary history of this country and the whole world. However, divergence of opinion on this phenomenon is great, ranging from positive, even enthusiastic, views to critical and extremely negative. The former prevail in the world public opinion. The latter are characteristic mostly of the Russian writers and the Russian mass consciousness.

This paradox is easy to explain. The world is right to associate Perestroika with new political thinking, the end of the Cold War, real reduction of armaments and freeing of humanity from the threat of a global thermonuclear disaster. It is also associated with the unification of Germany, termination of the reckless war in Afghanistan, and a number of other local conflicts, and, of course, shifting of the country's development onto the path of modern democratic processes. Naturally, the world community did and does welcome all these changes.

However, inside Russia itself, opinions of Perestroika were shaped under the determining influence of the profound economic and political crisis which followed Perestroika in the 1990s. A big part of society, or, possibly, its bigger part, perceive the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the decline in the country's standing in the international arena; political shocks in Russia; the two Chechen wars; the catastrophic decline in the living standards of the people; the sharp property differentiation among the Russian public; and the rampant crime and corruption as direct results of Perestroika. Already the ancient Romans believed that "after" does not equal to "because of"; however, the twists and turns of public opinion are governed by their own laws. Sometimes, it takes a lot of time to have the actual link between the events reflected in it.

The sharp divergence of opinion on Perestroika was also reflected in the vast flow of literature published in the past decade. My views and judgments on all these complex issues were given in four of my books,[1] in a great number of brochures, articles, and reports published in those years. In this article I would not want to repeat what I have already said; however, I think it is important to give my judgments on some of the stereotypes that formed in the interpretation of a number of important problems of Perestroika, without claiming them complete or indisputable.

On the causes of the defeat of Perestroika

Perestroika started in spring of 1985 and had several stages. The first stage (or, rather, preparation for Perestroika) covered the period from spring 1985 through the end of 1986. The second stage (the actual start of Perestroika processes) covered the period from the early 1987 to the middle of 1988. The third one, the culminating stage, lasted from mid-1988 (the time of the 19th Party Conference) until the middle of 1990 (the time of the 28th Congress of the CPSU). Finally, the fourth period, the crisis and defeat of Perestroika, continued from mid-1990 until the end of 1991. The end of Perestroika was marked by the disintegration of the Soviet Union, Gorbachev's resignation and the shift to catastrophic economic reforms.

There exist different opinions of the reasons for the defeat of Perestroika.

According to one of them, that is rather exotic in nature, Perestroika as a process of democratic reformation was doomed to failure, because Soviet society was essentially unreformable and the old system was ossified and had to be simply scrapped. Allegedly, Russia passed its point of historical apogee, the highest point of its development, and was doomed to slide down. The nation was too crippled and beaten both physically and spiritually by the shocks that fell to its lot in the 20th Century. That is why they regarded Perestroika as a greatest historical tragedy. It was a desperate, although hopeless, attempt to get the country out of the historical dead-end. And Gorbachev shared the dramatic fate of all great reformers and revolutionaries.

One can understand the feelings of those who share this opinion and sympathize with Gorbachev; however, one cannot agree with this point of view. It smacks of fatalism and portrays Gorbachev as a man who dragged his country into a hopeless and essentially reckless venture, which stood no chance of success.

Most researchers and simply reasonable people caring for their country believe that Perestroika proved to be necessary to do away with the totalitarian legacy of the past and open up the way to the future for

the country. However, it came too late, thus condemning itself to great difficulties, while Perestroika leaders failed to size up and overcome them. Some think that Gorbachev was acting too boldly, that he was launching and implementing his reforms too zealously, disregarding the legacy of the Soviet past, and swung off the socialist path. Others, on the contrary, think that he acted too cautiously and did not show due determination in breaking away from the past, that he destroyed the socialist institutions and brought the country back into the fold of capitalism and the liberal system of values.

Of course, in the course of Perestroika the country's political leadership made many mistakes and miscalculations. We shall discuss them later. However, there were quite serious objective reasons for them. I would like to point out just one of them and this one, in my opinion, has not yet got proper assessment. I refer to the dependency on the world economic situation and, in particular, on the world oil prices, the country fell into in the 1970s. Because of the rapid growth of oil production in Western Siberia and a multiple increase in the world oil prices, the annual revenues from sales of oil and oil products (except for gas and other natural resources and their pre-processed products) in foreign markets reached 20 billion US Dollars. It is also quite useful to remember this fact to understand the present situation in Russia, which is in some ways similar to that of the 70s of the last century.

However, in the beginning of the 1980s, the world oil prices experienced a "revolution in reverse": they dropped three to three-and-a-half times. It radically changed the situation with currency earnings from foreign trade. The fact that 5-year-averaged prices were used in the trade with socialist countries eased the situation to a certain extent. Nevertheless, in the second half of the 1980s this factor also went away and we started to get into debt with these countries in terms of trade turnover. In 1989, the country for the first time ever had an imbalance in trade. Great difficulties with importation of products emerged, including grain and other commodities, which had a most negative impact on the domestic market.

It cannot be denied that the radical shift in the financial situation of the country, which was oil-addicted for 15 years, was not seen immediately. The hardships were regarded as something temporary and transient. Official statistics, while using the enormously lowered US Dollar rate of exchange, gave no real idea of the significance of this factor for the country's economy. In fact, in the early 1980s, sales of oil, gas, and other natural resources in the world market represented at least 10% to 15% of the national income and a quarter of budget receipts.[2] Any attempts to

make up for the price cuts by increasing oil exports failed. Moreover, it was exactly during those years that oil production started to decrease.

All this, together with the unwarranted growth in money incomes of the population and the amount of money in circulation, shaped a most adverse background for implementing economic and political reforms. Production growth continued in the country into 1989, too; however, the situation in the consumer market started to deteriorate quickly.

Of course, in that situation it was necessary to look for a way out. It was already impossible to stop the political reforms or even to slow them down. As regards the economic reforms, it was necessary above all to single out those of them which were capable of giving immediate economic benefits, like development of small and medium-sized business in the sphere of services, trade, construction, and agriculture. Postponed should have also been the measures in the social sphere which required huge investment, for instance, the pension reform, which required additional allocations of 40 billion rubles a year. What was also needed was maintenance and tightening of control over the increasing money incomes of the population and the cash turnover.

The leaders of the state responsible for economy should have adopted a more clear-cut stand on these matters. Leaders of the Government reacted defensively to all attempts on the part of some members of the Politburo to put these problems bluntly and dismissed them.

In this regard I cannot fail to share an observation of mine: despite all the democratic, confidential, and friendly atmosphere in the Politburo, with freedom of expression and discussions; its members still lacked responsibility for their respective areas of work and strict insistence on high standards of performance. It must be remembered that throughout all those years until the coup, no member of the top political leadership was held accountable in any way or released from his duties because of his political or, in fact, anti-Perestroika activity. Ligachev deserved it for the episode with the well-known letter by Nina Andreyeva; Yazov — for the use of troops in Tbilisi; Kryuchkov — for the storming of the television center in Vilnius; Pavlov — for claiming extraordinary powers for the Government in the Supreme Soviet in the absence of approval by the President; and, of course, Yeltsin, the last but not the least. Everybody expected that after his attack on the Politburo in October 1987, he would be removed from politics and sent to work as an ambassador in some African country; however, he got a ministerial position and remained a member of the Central Committee until he demonstratively left the Party at his own will.[3] I personally explain this fact not by the weakness or indecisiveness on the part of Gorbachev (these accusations against him are disproved most notably by his courageous decision to opt for radical

reforms in the country and his enormous vigor in implementing them), but rather by his idealism; the genetic commitment of the General Secretary to democratic methods; and his faith that differences of opinion among the new leadership team stayed within the boundaries of its fundamental unity and could be overcome in the course of a friendly debate.

Why not the Chinese model?

Often asked during the discussions on Perestroika is the question, "Why did the Soviet leadership disregard the Chinese path when starting to reform society and refrain from application of the Chinese model of reforms: shifting of the economy to market basis, while keeping the political system and even the ideology?" This question was formulated after we saw a peculiar Chinese economic miracle. Apparently, another reason for a question like that was also the belief in preponderance of the economic basis over the superstructure, which was deeply rooted in the minds of the Russian public.

What can be said in this regard? First of all, the approach of the Soviet leadership towards reforming society should not be contrasted with the Chinese model. It was not a dogmatic understanding of the role of economy, but the analysis of the actual pre-crisis situation in the country that brought us to conclude that it was the economy that had to be reformed first. Together with my fellow economists who had collaborated with Gorbachev long before he came to power, I believed that the country would not be able to embark on the path of modern social and economic development, if saddled with the old mechanisms and methods of managing the economy. Gorbachev, too, stated it quite clearly when delivering a report at the scientific practical conference in December 1984, even before Perestroika was started.

And after he became General Secretary, he consistently implemented this policy in practice. Suffice it to recall the All-Union Meeting on acceleration of the scientific and technical progress held in summer 1985; the development of radical measures to modernize the national engineering industry and redistribute financial resources to that end; and carrying out of a large-scale economic experiment in three targeted industries. One should also recall the development of self-employed sector and cooperatives; the real steps that were taken towards attaining full cost-accounting, self-financing, and self-sufficiency of industrial enterprises and associations; and, finally, there was development and adoption in the summer of 1987 of the decision to radically reform the economy, in fact, providing for commercialization of the economy based on full-fledged self-financing, lease, and cooperative system. We assumed

that all those measures could give real effects two or three years later, and in the meantime, however, it would be unwise to neglect the traditional administrative levers; strengthening of the planning and financial and labor discipline; introduction of two- and three-shift patterns of operation of enterprises; and strict control over production quality. It was in the same context that intensification of the campaign against heavy drinking and alcoholism was viewed.

Unfortunately, the initial idea was not realized. What was the reason for that?

The main reason has to do with the attitudes of the Party and economic apparatus, its growing resistance to progressive changes in the methods of running and managing the economy and introduction of new ways of managing it, as envisaged by the reform of 1987. Naturally, directors of enterprises welcomed the expansion of their prerogatives, the more so that the system of their election was introduced. Nevertheless, many of them were not ready to independently run their businesses and strongly objected to reduction of state financing and planned material and technical supply. Top officials in the ministries, the State Planning Committee, or Gosplan, and the Government, while fighting to keep their rights and powers, showed silent, but stubborn, resistance to the departure from strict directive planning, to pricing reform and the introduction of wholesale trade in means of production to replace their centralized distribution. The Party apparatus at all levels, staffed mostly with members of the economic and managerial elite, also opposed the radical economic reform, which meant denationalization and hence, also departization of the economy.

As a result, the economic reform found itself in need of restructuring of the political system, primarily, the Party itself, of deep democratization of society, glasnost, and freedom of speech. This is where the fundamental difference between our experience of reforms and the Chinese one lies. In China, it proved possible to carry out economic reforms, while keeping the political system and even ideology, at least in words. Apparently, the traditional features of Chinese society had their effect, namely, the reverential attitude towards government, self-restriction, obedience, and industriousness. Also, one cannot fail to take into account the fact that shortly before that the country itself had recovered from the shocks of the cultural revolution.

In the case of the Soviet Union, the economic reform could only succeed as a constituent element of a wider overall process of reforming society. It is a different matter that starting from 1988, the country's leadership, having deeply engaged into reforming the political system, found itself unable to focus on economic reforms as specifically as it

concentrated on the political ones. They were essentially allocated to the Government, where conservative attitudes were strong. Of course, those attitudes were gradually defeated; but still the resistance remained very strong. A new attempt at economic reforms taken by the Ryzhkov-Abalkin Cabinet in 1989-1990 envisaged moving forward towards a market economy; however, in certain aspects it represented even a retreat from the stand taken in 1987. Stubborn resistance at various levels of the economic management system was shown to proposals on introduction of self-financing for the Soviet republics, price and pricing reform, wholesale trade in means of production, etc. The economy was increasingly becoming a hostage to politics, and progress along the way of economic reforms was continuously blocked by political battles and attacks on Perestroika by both the conservative and the radical and liberal opposition.

On the Party's role in Perestroika

This fundamental issue contains many paradoxes. Perestroika started when Gorbachev was elected General Secretary of the Party Central Committee. It ended with the first demands for Gorbachev's resignation among its leaders and their actual support of the anti-Gorbachev putsch.

As to the first aspect, the things could not be different. Soviet society was organized in such a way that only the Party could initiate radical reforms. Any possible spontaneous processes could have developed into mass conflicts with unpredictable consequences. However, having started Perestroika, the Party itself could not remain the same as before, but had to become not only the source, but also the role-model of reforms. The initiators of Perestroika realized it perfectly well. Democratization of the Party was the main topic of the January Plenum of the Party Central Committee held in 1987, which, in fact, started the real Perestroika processes in the political system of the country, paved the way for the 19th Party Conference, and later for the 28th Congress of the CPSU. It was the beginning of the process of de-etatization of the Party, its liberation from the role of the core of the state and the functions of direct public management of all affairs in the country, and its transformation into a truly political party, the process of embracing new contents and new methods of political activity. There is no need to remind how complicated and painful this process was and what conflicts and outbursts of discontent it caused within the Party apparatus. It was most clearly visible both at the Central Committee Plenums of 1989 and 1990 and at the 28th Party Congress, and, particularly, after it.

In view of Gorbachev's election as President of the USSR, the question of him leaving the Party leadership was raised. The Party conservatives

wanted to get rid of Gorbachev and his supporters, turn the Party into a stronghold of anti-Perestroika forces, and launch a campaign against Perestroika under the pretence of protecting socialism. Radical democrats also spoke in favor of the President leaving the post of the Party leader; they were eager to have Gorbachev join their camp, separate him from the Party under the pretext of deepening Perestroika, arguing that the Party had turned into an anti-Perestroika force.

Was Gorbachev right to stay in the Party and continue playing the leading role in the Party as President of the state? Should we agree that the Party was an essentially unreformable organization, capable only of being a stronghold of the conservative forces present in society?

I believed it then and continue to believe it now that the President did not have to give up leadership of the Party and break off with it. If that had happened the Party would have fallen into the hands of anti-Perestroika forces. The "democrats" could not have rendered more or less reliable support to the presidential power at the time. They did not have any clear political reference points, or public organizations, and their camp was in chaos and disarray. The tone was set by ambitious attitudes and demagogy of the politicians whose careers failed in the past, perhaps, with the exception of Andrey Sakharov.

As far as the CPSU was concerned, it continued to keep the important levers of influence on the development of the country, particularly locally. True, it was living through a hard period of a struggle between the conservative and reformatory attitudes. However, the seeds of renovation were already sown and they gave robust sprouts in the sentiments of the Party masses and many of its activists. To illustrate this fact, one can cite the almost unanimous adoption at the 28th Party Congress of the Program Statement titled *Towards the Humane and Democratic Socialism*, a document which in its spirit and letter greatly differed from everything that was passed before and, in fact, was generally of a social democratic nature. Indicative of the attitudes within the Party may also be the election of Gorbachev as General Secretary of the CPSU Central Committee by the absolute majority of delegates to the Party Congress, as contrasted to a complete failure of Ligachev, who was an embodiment of the conservative forces in the CPSU and its leadership, in the election for Deputy General Secretary.

Why did the Party fail to take the right stand, that is, thwart the coup and oppose it, just one year after the 28th Congress, when most of its members supported the reforms?

It seems to me that the point is that the Party failed to find its niche in the new social system after the state functions were transferred into the hands of those entitled to possess them, namely, the representative and

executive bodies of state power. The Party bodies continued by inertia to hold on to the old functions. However, the center of gravity was shifting from the Party to the Presidential Council, the Presidential Administration, and the Supreme Soviet and its bodies. The powerful Party apparatus in the center and in the provinces could not find its own niche in the social and political activities and could not give up its command methods practiced in relation to the state bodies, public organizations, and the mass media.

In retrospect, I must say that the actual suspension in autumn 1988 of activities of the Central Committee Secretariat, which could have played its positive role in pursuing the Perestroika policies and Party personnel activities, was a major mistake. Contacts with the local Party bodies fell into the hands of the Department for Organizational and Party Work, known for its adherence to conservative views.

In the aftermath of the 28th Party Congress the role of the Party Central Committee, its Politburo, and the local Party bodies experienced a particular decline. In conformity with the new role and functions of the Party, no state leader, except for the President, was able to join the Politburo. The only thing left of the traditional Politburo was in effect just the name of it. However, the ambitions of its members remained unchanged. Gorbachev by no means presided over all meetings of the Politburo. Often charged with this responsibility was the Deputy General Secretary, who had no serious authority with the Party and the country. This was sure to cause jealousy and oppositional feelings towards the Presidential team among the Politburo members.

One must also admit that before the 28th Congress and especially after it, the efforts at consolidating the forces of reform in the Party around its new objectives were not active enough. The General Secretary, after he became President, was also unable to pay the Party as much attention as before and the help we gave him was not adequate enough. There were no aggressive and purposeful efforts as far as the ideology and organization of activities were concerned. The 28th Congress brought forth to leadership positions in the Party some reasonable and democratically-minded people (including Yegor Stroyev, Aleksandr Dzasokhov, Valentin Kuptsov, and Andrey Girenko). Nevertheless, there were also some serious mistakes in personnel selection (like Gennady Yanayev, Oleg Shenin, Vladimir Ivashko, and Valentin Falin). Personnel activities in the provinces also lacked a democratic focus. Because of all this, the support for reforms in the Party was been weakened, rather than consolidated.

In spring 1991, the work started on a new Party program and on preparation of a new congress of the CPSU, where its division into the party of reforms and the party of tradition was supposed to take place.

However, it did not happen because of the putsch, which was virtually supported by the Party leaders, the failure of the coup-plotters, and the dissolution of the CPSU.

As a result, Russia became the only one among the post-socialist European countries with no mass party of social-democratic type grown on the basis of the former ruling communist parties. In a number of countries, such parties either stayed in power or came to power in subsequent years.

On the fate of the Union

In the minds of the people from quite large sections of the population, in op-ed articles, and often in scientific papers the opinion has taken root that the dissolution of the Soviet Union was a direct result of Perestroika, with Gorbachev being almost the main culprit.

In fact, the disintegration of the Union resulted not from Perestroika, but from its defeat. Perestroika itself had the preservation of the Union by way of reforming it as its goal. With time, it becomes more and more obvious that preservation of the Union in its old form was impossible in the context of democratization and reforms of the country.

It is true that the Union of Soviet Republics was resting upon the historically established ties between the peoples of the former Russian empire. It was based on economic factors, a single national economy complex that was taking shape. The core of the Union was Russia, which was a center of gravity not only for the Slavic republics, but also for Kazakhstan, the Caucasian republics, the Central Asian republics, and, to a certain extent, the Baltic republics. The Union's constituent republics, some of them for the first time in history, got their territorial administrative boundaries and many attributes of statehood. At the same time the federal foundations of the Union were only proclaimed, but actually, it was a strictly centralized, in fact, a unitary state. Its unity rested on rigid structures of the political system, primarily, the Party, as well as on security agencies. The sovereignty of the Union republics proclaimed in the Constitution had no real substance in spite of all of its external attributes.

One must also admit that understanding of the necessity of Perestroika in inter-ethnic relations did not come easily. In the Soviet Union, the "nationalities question" was supposed to be essentially solved and the ties of friendship between its peoples indestructible. However, in fact, many problems were hushed up and pushed into the background. As democratization and the expansion of glasnost progressed, they started to surface here and there (for example, the events involving Crimean Tatars

and in Alma-Ata). Later, the mass actions gained momentum to produce the events in Karabakh, in Abkhazia with the related events in Tbilisi, in the Baltic republics, Central Asian republics, Moldavia, and, finally and most unexpectedly, Russia.

The Central Committee Plenum devoted to inter-ethnic relations was definitely belated and could not materially affect the way the situation developed. We underestimated the ability of the conservative and radical forces to speculate on the problem of Russia. As a result, the problems of Russia were hijacked by the conservative forces within the Party, which formed an opposition center of resistance to Perestroika, represented by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Russia. At the state level in Russia, Yeltsin and his supporters took the upper hand. National movements in the Baltic region and other republics were rapidly becoming more radicalized. From a modest slogan of self-financing for republics they moved on to demands for revision of the Union Treaty, which was still a rather constructive idea. Later, campaigns were launched for full national and state sovereignty and secession from the USSR. Quite telling is the fact that separatists in national republics vehemently spoke in favor of sovereignty for Russia, while supporters of sovereignization of Russia from Yeltsin's team rendered them every assistance. Together they formed a kind of a united front.

The work on a new Union Treaty seemed to be channeling the complex and painful processes in the inter-ethnic relations along constitutional lines. However, the further it went, the more complicated it became, and then it was sabotaged by the Russian leadership led by Yeltsin, which initiated a "parade of sovereignties" to oppose the Union center and destroy the Union. The August coup was also aimed against the reform of the Union, with its failure used by Yeltsin to undermine the Center and deprive it of its real powers. At the last moment, the Ukrainian referendum on independence for the republic dealt a most severe blow to the efforts to keep the reformed Union together.

Thus, all the anti-Perestroika forces united against the Union, and they achieved what they wanted, in spite of Gorbachev and his supporters fighting to the end for it to be reformed and preserved.

The question is, "Was there any chance to preserve the Union?" The point is that in the 20th Century virtually all multinational empires and states dissolved and ceased to exist. I think we did have such a chance, even if one out of ten. The fact is that peoples of the Soviet Union, unlike other empires that left the arena of history, and first of all, its Slavic backbone, had lived together for many centuries and decades in a single geopolitical (Euro-Asian) economic and social and cultural space. This chance lay in democratic national and state restructuring of the Union, based on the

principles of true equality of nations and their self-determination within the framework of a real federation. The defeat of Perestroika threw this chance away.

There can be no return to the old Union, even with reduced membership in the near future or in a distant perspective. The goal should be the development of multifaceted cooperation between the post-Soviet states, based on the positive ties, traditions, and common interests inherited from the past.

On the legacy of Perestroika and Yeltsinism

Widely spread is the opinion that after the dissolution of the Union, the reforms started at the time of Gorbachev's Perestroika were, in fact, continued in Russia, and were just made more radical in nature. Moreover, some of the overzealous supporters of Yeltsin, started to describe the situation as if the democratic reforms started only after the disintegration of the Union and the removal of Gorbachev. For instance, glasnost and freedom of speech are linked to the Law on Press passed in the time of Yeltsin. In fact, well-known is the fact that the first democratic law on the mass media was adopted in 1990, and censorship was practically abolished two years before that. The first free elections of People's Deputies were held in 1989. The road to a multi-party system was opened up when Article 6 of the Constitution was amended in 1990, and so on.

Of course, after coming to power in Russia, Yeltsin could not ignore the democratic gains of Perestroika. However, his administration introduced nothing materially new to the democratic processes. Moreover, there is every reason to assert that an authoritarian backsliding on the democratic principles took place when the new Constitution of the country was adopted, which gave the President almost dictatorship powers. Imagine all this taking place after the disbandment of the Supreme Soviet and shelling of the Russian parliament!

There is no connection between the never disproved well-known facts of the close ties maintained by Yeltsin and his team with the big oligarchs and the statements about development of democracy. (The well-known evidence of close links Yeltsin and his team had with major oligarchs, which was never refuted, is in stark contradiction with talk about deepening of democracy.)

The most "convincing" argument to prove the deepening of democracy in Yeltsin's Russia is the simultaneous introduction of free pricing and mass privatization of state property. However, there is no ground for even calling this shock therapy the reforms. It was, in effect, destruction of the existing economy and opening up the way for economic chaos in the hope

for the "invisible hand of the market". This process was sure to acquire an anti-democratic and anti-social nature and benefit profiteers, shadow dealers, and corrupt officials of all levels. It also caused huge losses to the population, namely, halving of real wages, devaluation of savings, unemployment growth, etc. And most importantly, it not only failed to revive the economy, but on the contrary, plunged it into an unprecedented deep and protracted crisis, which ended in the August 1998 default.

The policies of the Yeltsin administration suffered complete bankruptcy, but not because they followed the path of Perestroika, but rather because they had nothing in common with it, either in its goals, or in the methods to achieve them.

Its main purport was the soonest destruction of socialism, which was associated with the Soviet past, and return to capitalism, where everything is managed by the "invisible hand of the market". And all that was done in a revolutionary way, through a total privatization of property, complete withdrawal of the state from the economy, and minimization of its social functions.

So, what was the result of it? We actually left behind the Soviet system; however, together with its vices and weaknesses characteristic of the state authoritarian socialism we have lost its social, scientific and technical, and cultural achievements. But what we have is a system of obsolete, wild capitalism with its rampant greed, corruption, crime, and unheard of property gaps and social differences, which is a far cry from a modern society with a socially oriented and regulated market economy.

Perestroika, in contrast, envisaged gradual transformation of Soviet society, its emancipation from the totalitarian past and bringing it onto the path of modern development, based on own achievements and traditions and using the experience accumulated by the developed countries in ensuring decent living standards and working conditions for the population. For some time in the past, the case for reforming society and its restructuring, was presented, according to the established tradition, in the form of contrasting socialism and capitalism.

Society and even the political leaders continued to believe in the principles of social justice.[4] However, I can say with full responsibility that this belief was based not on some abstract dogmas, but on the understanding of real issues which our society had to tackle: democratization and glasnost in all spheres of social life, ensuring the rights and freedoms of people, creation of incentives for labor and business activities of the population, and the international security.

The current Russian administration has markedly adjusted the policies of its predecessors. It started to meet the interests of the country to a greater extent, consider the lessons of the past, including those of

Perestroika and the post-Perestroika period, and won support of the public. Still, even today, many questions arise relating to the social and economic policies pursued and the development of democratic processes; however, this has to be discussed elsewhere.

---

[1] Medvedev V.A. *V komande Gorbacheva: vzglyad iznutri (In the Team of Gorbachev. An Insider's Perspective).* M., Bylina Publishing House, 1994; Medvedev V.A. *Raspad, kak on nazreval v mirovoi sisteme socializma (Collapse: How It Was Brewing within the World Socialist System),* M., International Relations Publishing House, 1994; Medvedev V.A. *Prozreniye, mif ili predatelstvo? K voprosu ob ideologii perestroiki (Enlightenment, Myth or Betrayal? On the Question of Ideology of Perestroika,* M., Voskresenie Publishing House, 1998; Medvedev V.A. *Postperestroyechnaya Rossiya. Problemy i perspektivy (The Post-Perestroika Russia. Problems and Prospects)*, Parts I and II, M., Institute of Economics of the Russian Academy of Sciences (RAN), 1999; Medvedev V.A. *Pered vyzovami postindustrializma: vzglyad na proshloye, nastoyashcheye i budushcheye ekonomiki Rossiyi (Facing the Challenges of Post-Industrialism: A View of the Past, Present and Future of the Russian Economy)*, M., Alpina Publishers Publishing House, 2003.

[2] In today's Russia, according to various estimates, they account for half to three fourths of budget revenues.

[3] Perhaps, the only example of someone been held strictly accountable was the dismissal of Marshal Sokolov from the post of Minister of Defense because of Rust's landing on the Red Square.

[4] It would not be out of place to recall in this regard that the key message of the authors of the sensational book titled *Inogo ne dano. Perestroika: glasnost, demokratizatsiya, sotsializm (There is no Other Way. Perestroika: Glasnost, Democratization, and Socialism)*, Progress Publishing House, 1988, including the leading figures of the democratic opposition, was promotion of socialism and its renovation.

[It is] the question of all questions.

Leon Onikov

WAS THE SOVIET SYSTEM REFORMABLE?*

by Stephen F. Cohen

Stephen F. Cohen is Professor of Russian Studies at New York University and Professor Emeritus of Politics at Princeton University.

Of all Russia's "accursed" twentieth-century questions, one will continue to torment the nation more than any other in the twenty-first century: Why did the Soviet Union, or "Great Russia," as nationalists sometimes call it, perish? Russian scholars, politicians, and public opinion have been bitterly divided over the question ever since that state disappeared in December 1991, but most Western commentators think they already know the answer: The Soviet system was not reformable and thus was doomed by its inherent, irremediable defects.

Considering the historic pro-democratic and pro-market changes that occurred under Mikhail Gorbachev during the six years from 1985 to 1991, all of them far exceeding the mere liberalization thought possible by even the most "optimistic" Sovietologists, was the system really unreformable? Certainly there was no such consensus at the time. Virtually to the end, Western governments, including the United States, thought and indeed hoped that a reformed Soviet Union might result from Gorbachev's leadership. (The issue here, I should emphasize, is not, however, his role as a reform leader but the system's capacity for fundamental change.) And while scholarly "pessimists" maintained, as most Sovietologists always had, that the system could not be reformed and Gorbachev would therefore fail, many studies conducted during the perestroika years now took it for granted that "systematic change was possible in the Soviet context." An American economist soon to be the top Soviet expert at the White House was even more emphatic: "Is Soviet socialism reformable? Yes, it is reformable, and it is already being reformed."

* This is an abridged version of an article that originally appeared in Slavic Review, vol. 63, No 3 (fall 2004), pp. 459-488.

* * *

Why, then, have so many specialists of different generations and scholarly persuasions, with very few exceptions, maintained since 1991 that the "USSR could not be reformed," that it was "fundamentally, structurally unreformable," indeed that Soviet reform was a "contradiction in terms, like fried snowballs," and therefore that Gorbachev merely "failed to reform the unreformable?" Still more, why do they insist, as though to preclude any reconsideration, that this towering historical question "has been answered?" Understanding their reasoning is not always easy because the "intrinsic irreformability of Soviet Communism" is one of the worst formulated axioms in the literature. In some cases, it is mere tautology, as with the French Sovietologist who could "not see the Soviet system reforming itself into something really different without ceasing to be the Soviet system."

In fact, there is not any theoretical or conceptual reason to think that the Soviet system was unreformable and thus, as is so often said, "doomed" from the onset of Gorbachev's reforms. Indeed, if the question is formulated properly, without the customary ideological slant, and examined empirically in light of the changes actually introduced, particularly in the years 1985-90 before crises de-stabilized the country, we might reasonably conclude that it turned out to be remarkably reformable. But in order to ask the question correctly, we need exact rather than cavalier understandings both of reform and of the Soviet system.

The universal meaning of reform is not merely change but change that betters people's lives, usually by expanding their political or economic freedom, or both. Nor is it revolution or total transformation of an existing order but normally piecemeal, gradualist improvements within a system's broad historical, institutional, cultural dimensions. Insisting that "real reform" must be rapid and complete, as does so much Sovietological writing, would disqualify, for example, historic but incremental expansions of voting, civil, and welfare rights over decades in Great Britain and the United States, as well as the New Deal of the American 1930s. It should also be remembered that reform has not always or necessarily meant democratization and marketization, though it has increasingly been the case in modern times.

In those plain terms, it is not true historically that the Soviet system was unreformable — that it had experienced only "failed attempts at reform." NEP greatly expanded the economic and, to a lesser degree, political freedom of most citizens in the 1920s, and Khrushchev's policies benefited them in several important and lasting ways in the 1950s and

1960s. Most Western specialists evidently believe those were the limits of possible Soviet reform, arguing that even Gorbachev's professed democratic socialism was incompatible with the system's more legitimizing, anti-democratic historical icons — the October revolution and Lenin.

But this assumption too lacks comparative perspective. French and American generations later re-imagined their national revolutions to accommodate latter-day values. Why could not Lenin and other Soviet founders, who had professed democracy while suppressing it, eventually be viewed and forgiven by a democratic nation as products of their times, which were shaped by the then unprecedented violence of World War I, much as American founding fathers were forgiven their slaves? (The United States had slave-owning presidents for nearly 50 years and pro-slavery ones for even longer, and slave labor was used even to build the nation's Capitol and White House.) In fact, such reconsiderations of October and Lenin were already well under way by the late 1980s as part of the larger process of "repentance."

Arbitrary definitions of "the Soviet system" must also be set aside. Equating it with "Communism" is the most widespread, as in the ubiquitous axiom "Communism was unreformable." In this usage, Communism is a non-observable and meaningless analytical notion. No Soviet leaders ever said it existed in their country or anywhere else, only socialism, and the last Soviet leader doubted even that. Communist was merely the name given to the official ideology, ruling party, and professed goal; and its meaning depended on the current leadership and varied so greatly over the years that it could mean almost anything. Thus, by 1990, Gorbachev decided it meant "to be consistently democratic and put universal values above everything else." Western observers may not understand the difference between the abstraction "Communism" and the fullness of the actual Soviet system, or Sovietism, but the Soviet (and later Russian) people made it clear that about this they agreed with Gorbachev: "Communism is not the Soviet Union."

Instead, the Soviet system, like any other, has to be defined and evaluated not as an abstraction or ideological artifact but in terms of its functioning components, particularly its basic institutions and practices. Six have always been emphasized in Western Sovietological literature: the official and obligatory ideology; the especially authoritarian nature of the ruling Communist Party; the party's dictatorship over everything related to politics, buttressed by the political police; the nation-wide pyramid of pseudo-democratic soviets; the state's monopolistic control of the economy and all substantive property; and the multinational federation, or Union, of republics that was really a unitary state dominated by Moscow.

To ask if the Soviet system was reformable means asking if any or all of those basic components could be reformed. Contrary to the view that the system was an indivisible "monolith," or that the Communist Party was its only essential element, it makes no sense to assume that if any components were transformed, supplemented by new ones, or eliminated, the result would no longer be the Soviet system. Such reasoning is not applied to reform in other systems, and there are no grounds for it in Soviet history. The system's original foundations, the soviets of 1917, were popularly elected, multiparty institutions, only later becoming something else. There was no monopolistic control of the economy or absence of a market until the 1930s. And when the Stalinist mass terror, which had been a fundamental feature for 25 years, ended in the 1950s, no one doubted that the system was still Soviet.

By 1990, Soviet conceptions of legitimate reforms within the system varied considerably, but many Gorbachev and Yeltsin supporters had come to believe they should and could include multiparty democracy, a marketized economy with both state and private property, and an authentic federation of republics. Those contemporary beliefs and the country's political history suggest that for a reformed system still to be Soviet, or to be regarded as such, four general elements had to be preserved in some form: a national (though not necessarily well-defined or unanimous) socialist idea that continued to memorialize antecedents in 1917 and the original Leninist movement, which had called itself social democratic until 1918; the network of soviets as the institutional continuity with 1917 and constitutional source of political sovereignty; a state and private "mixed" market economy with enough social entitlements to be called socialist, however much it might resemble a Western-style welfare state; and a union of Russia with at least several of the Soviet republics, whose number had grown over the years from four to fifteen.

* * *

We can now ask which, if any, basic components of the old Soviet system were actually reformed under Gorbachev. There can hardly be any doubt about the official ideology. By 1990, decades of Stalinist and then Leninist punitive dogmas had been largely replaced by Western-style social democratic and other "universal" tenets that differed little from liberal-democratic ones. What had been heresy for generations now became official Soviet ideology, ratified by the newly elected Congress of People's Deputies and even by an at least semi-converted Communist Party congress. Still more, the government's ideology was no longer

obligatory, even in once thoroughly proscribed realms such as education and official Communist publications. "Pluralism" of thought, including religious belief, was the new official watchword and growing reality.

The next and larger reform was dismantling the Communist Party monopoly on politics, particularly on public discourse, the selection of office-holders, and policy-making. The magnitude of these democratizing changes was already so great by 1990, as a result of Gorbachev's policies virtually ending censorship, permitting freedom of political organization, promoting increasingly free elections, and creating an authentic parliament, that some Western scholars called it a "revolution" within the system. Party dictatorship and the primacy of Communist officials at every level, established during the Leninist era 70 years before, had always been (with the arguable exception of the Stalin terror years) the bedrock of Soviet politics. In the "command-administrative system" inherited by Gorbachev, the nation-wide party apparatus was commander-in-chief and overriding administrator. In only five years, a fundamental change had therefore taken place: The Soviet political system had ceased to be Leninist or, as some writers would say, Communist.

That generalization requires qualification. In a country so vast and culturally diverse, political reforms legislated in Moscow were bound to have disparate results, from fast-paced democratization in Russia's capital cities and the Western Baltic republics to less substantial changes in the Central Asian party dictatorships. In addition, the Communist Party's exit from power, even where democratization had progressed, was still far from complete. With millions of members, units in almost every institution and workplace, long-standing controls over military and other security forces, large financial resources, and the deference exacted from citizens for decades — the party remained the most formidable political organization in the country. And though political prisoners had been released, human rights were rapidly being established, and security forces were exposed to growing public scrutiny, the KGB remained intact and under uncertain control.

Nonetheless, the redistribution of the Communist Party's long-held powers — to the parliament, to the new presidency created in early 1990, and to the now popularly elected soviets in the regions and republics — was already very far along. Gorbachev did not exaggerate when he told a national party congress in 1990, "The Communist Party's monopoly on power and government has come to an end." The de-monopolization process abruptly terminated another longtime feature of the Soviet system — pseudo-democratic politics. A broad and clamorous political spectrum, exercising almost complete freedom of speech, emerged from subterranean banishment. Organized opposition, scores of would-be

parties, mass demonstrations, strikes, and uncensored publications, repressed for nearly 70 years, were rapidly developing across the country and being legalized by the reformist legislature. Gorbachev was also close to the truth when he remarked with pride that the Soviet Union had suddenly become the "most politicized society in the world."

Russia had been intensely politicized before, fatefully so in 1917, but never under the auspices of an established regime or in the cause of constitutional government. Indeed, constitutionalism and legal procedures were the most characteristic features of Gorbachev's political reformation. The country had a long history of laws and even constitutions, before and after 1917, but almost never any real constitutional order or lawful constraints on power, which had traditionally been concentrated in a supreme leadership and exercised through bureaucratic edicts. (An estimated one million ministerial decrees were still in force in 1988.)

Therein lay the unprecedented nature of Gorbachev's political reforms. The entire Soviet transition from a dictatorship to a fledgling republic based on a separation of the Communist Party's former powers and a "socialist system of checks and balances" was carried out through existing and amended constitutional procedures. The legal culture and political habits necessary for rule-of-law government could not be engendered so quickly, but it was a remarkable beginning. By September 1990, for example, the nascent constitutional court had struck down one of Gorbachev's first presidential decrees, and he complied with the ruling.

Considering those achievements, why is it so often said that Gorbachev's political reforms failed? The answer usually given is that the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, or CPSU as the pivot of the old system was called, turned out to be unreformable. The inadequacy of this generalization is twofold. It equates the entire Soviet system with the CPSU in ways that assume the former could not exist without the latter. And it treats the party as a single, undifferentiated organization.

As a result of its long and complex history, the CPSU had grown by the 1980s into a vast realm inhabited by four related but significantly different entities: the notorious but relatively small *apparat* that dictatorially controlled the rest of the party and, though to a decreasing extent, the bureaucratic state itself; the *apparat*-appointed but much larger and more diverse nomenklatura class that held all important positions in the Soviet system; about 19 million rank-and-file members, many of whom had joined for reasons of conformity and career; and, lurking in the shadows, at least two crypto-political parties — reformist and conservative — that had been developing in the "monolithic" one-

party system since the 1950s. Not surprisingly, these components of the CPSU reacted to Gorbachev's reforms in different ways.

Whether or not the party apparatus — traditionally some 1800 functionaries at its Moscow headquarters and several hundred thousand at other echelons of the system — was reformable hardly mattered because by 1990 it had been largely disfranchised by Gorbachev's policies. (In this connection, the growing opposition of Yegor Ligachev, the party *apparat*'s chief representative and Gorbachev's onetime ally, was particularly indicative.) The Moscow nerve center of *apparat* operations, the Secretariat, had been all but dismantled, its party committees in state economic ministries withdrawn or marginalized, and the authority of their counterparts at lower government levels assumed by elected soviets. The process lagged in the provinces, but the dethronement of the CPSU apparatus was formalized when powers exercised for decades by its Central Committee and Politburo were ceremoniously transferred to the new Soviet parliament and presidency. The *apparat*'s control even over its own party had been substantially diminished, and in 1990 its head, the General Secretary, previously selected in secret by the Communist oligarchy, was elected for the first time by a national party congress.

Gorbachev may have continued to fear "this mangy, rabid dog," but the CPSU apparatus turned out to be something of a bureaucratic paper tiger. Confronted by his electoral reforms, it fell into a "state of psychological shock" and "complete confusion." As its role in the system shrank and its organizations disintegrated, *apparat* representatives stepped up their anti-Gorbachev activities, but to little effect. Muscular anti-reform forces were now effectively based elsewhere — in the state economic ministries, military, KGB, and even the parliament. How little the Communist Party apparatus any longer mattered was dramatized in August 1991. A majority of its central and regional officials evidently supported the coup against Gorbachev, but, contrary to many Western accounts, the party apparatus did not organize or probably even know about it beforehand.

Unlike the Communist *apparat* that created it, large segments of the nomenklatura class survived the Soviet Union. That alone invalidates any simple generalization about its adaptability. Broadly understood, the millions of nomenklatura appointees throughout the system included many of the nation's administrative, economic, cultural, and other professional elites, and thus significant parts of its middle class. As is the case elsewhere, this large stratum of Soviet society, though nominally composed solely of Communist Party members and indiscriminately vilified, was divided internally by privilege, occupation, education, generation, geographic location, and political attitudes.

It therefore makes no sense to characterize the party-state nomenklatura as unreformable. Even its high-level officials reacted to Gorbachev's reforms in conflicting ways and went in different directions. By 1990, they could be found almost everywhere along the emerging political spectrum, from left to right. Many were in the forefront of opposition to perestroika. But virtually all the leading Soviet and post-Soviet reformers of the 1980s and 1990s also came from the nomenklatura class, foremost among them Mikhail Gorbachev, Boris Yeltsin, and their ranking supporters. And after 1991, large segments of the old Soviet nomenklatura reemerged as mainstays of post-Communist Russia's political, administrative, and property-owning elites, some of them in the ranks of what would now be called "radical reformers." Indeed, one of its younger members, Vladimir Putin, would become Russia's first president in the twenty-first century.

Still less is it correct to characterize the Communist Party's 19 million rank-and-file members as unreformable. Most of them differed little in actual power, privilege, or political attitudes from other ordinary Soviet citizens, and they behaved in similarly diverse ways during the Gorbachev years. By mid-1991, approximately 4 million had left the party, mostly because membership was no longer worth the time or dues required. Among those who stayed, there was a "silent majority," but many supported Gorbachev's policies, as they had done from the beginning, and waged a grassroots struggle against the *apparat*. Many others became a social base for anti-perestroika movements forming inside and outside the party.

The real question about the Communist Party's reformability, given Gorbachev's democratization policies, was whether or not a competitive electoral parliamentary party could emerge from it as part of a reformed Soviet system. What we loosely call "the party" had actually been different things during its 80-year history — an underground movement in Tsarist Russia, a successful vote-getting organization in revolutionary 1917, a dictatorship but with factions openly struggling over policy and power in the NEP 1920s, a decimated and terrorized officialdom in the Stalinist 1930s, a militarized instrument of war against the German invader in the 1940s, a resurgent institution of oligarchical rule in the post-Stalin 1950s and 1960s, and by the 1980s an integral part of the bureaucratic statist system.

After all of those transformations, Gorbachev now wanted the party, or a significant segment of it, to undergo yet another metamorphosis by becoming a "normal political organization" capable of winning elections "strictly within the framework of a democratic process." Pursuing that goal involved ramifications he may not have fully foreseen but eventually came to accept. It meant politicizing, or re-politicizing, the Soviet Communist

Party, as Gorbachev began to do when he called for its own democratization in 1987, which meant permitting its embryonic parties to emerge, develop, and possibly go their separate ways. It meant ending the fiction of "monolithic unity" and risking an "era of schism." Though cut short by the events of late 1991, the process unfolded inexorably and quickly.

By early 1988, the schism in the party was already so far along that it erupted in unprecedented polemics between the Central Committee's two most authoritative newspapers. Defending fundamentalist, including neo-Stalinist, "principles," *Sovetskaya Rossiya* published a long, defiant protest against Gorbachev's perestroika; *Pravda* replied with an equally adamant defense of anti-Stalinist and democratic reform. At the national party conference two months later, delegates spoke publicly in strongly opposing voices for the first time since the 1920s. Central Committee meetings were now a "battlefield between reformers and conservatives." In March 1989, Communists ran against Communists across the country for seats in the Congress of People's Deputies. Though 87 percent of the winners were members of the same party, their political views were so unlike that Gorbachev announced they were no longer bound by a party line.

By 1990, the growing schism had taken territorial and organizational forms, as parties began tumbling out of the CPSU like Russian nestling dolls. The three Baltic Communist parties left the Union party to try to compete in their native and increasingly nationalistic republics. At the center, *apparat* and other nomenklatura conservatives compelled Gorbachev to allow the formation of a Communist Party of the Russian Republic nominally within the CPSU but under their control. Formally embracing more than 60 percent of all Soviet Communists, it too almost immediately split when reformers formed a rival organization, the Democratic Party of Communists of Russia.

All sides now understood that the "CPSU is 'pregnant' with multiparty-ness" and that its political spectrum ranged "from anarchists to monarchists." No one knew how many parties might spring from its womb — Gorbachev thought in 1991 there were "two, three, or four" just among the 412 Central Committee members — but only the two largest mattered: the pro-reform or radical perestroika wing of the CPSU led by Gorbachev and now all but social democratic; and the amalgam of conservative and neo-Stalinist forces that opposed fundamental changes in the name of traditional Communist beliefs and practices.

A formal "dividing up" and "parting of the ways" was already being widely discussed in 1990, but neither side was ready. Conservatives still lacked a compelling national leader and feared the ascending Yeltsin, who quit the CPSU in mid-1990, almost (though not quite) as much as they

hated Gorbachev. Several Gorbachev advisers urged him to lead his followers out of the CPSU or drive out his opponents and thereby create an avowedly social democratic movement, but he still feared losing the national apparatus, with its ties to the security forces, to his enemies and, like any politician, was reluctant to split his own party. Only in the summer of 1991 were both sides ready for a formal "divorce." It was to take place at a special national congress in November or December but became another casualty of the attempted coup in August.

Splitting the enormous Communist Party into its polarized wings, as Gorbachev's close associate Aleksandr Yakovlev had proposed privately in 1985 and still believed, would have been the surest and quickest way to create a real multiparty system in the Soviet Union, and indeed one more substantial than existed in post-Soviet Russia in the early twenty-first century. In a "civilized divorce" that involved voting on opposing principles, framed by Gorbachev's social-democratic program, both sides would have walked away with a substantial proportion of the CPSU's membership, local organizations, printing presses, and other assets. Both would have immediately been the largest and only nation-wide Soviet parties, far overshadowing the dozen of "pygmy parties," as they were called, that were to dot the political landscape for years to come, some of them barely larger than the Moscow apartments in which they were conceived. (Based on a secret survey, Gorbachev believed that at least 5 to 7 million party members would remain with him in a new or recast party.)

Nor is there any reason to doubt that both wings of the CPSU would have been formidable vote-getting parties in ongoing local, regional, and eventually national elections. Although a majority of Soviet citizens now held the existing Communist Party responsible for past and present ills, both divorcees could have escaped some of the onus by blaming the other, as they were already doing. Both would have had considerable electoral advantages of organization, experienced activists, media, campaign funds, and even voter deference. In surveys done in 1990, 56 percent of Soviet citizens distrusted the CPSU but 81 percent distrusted all the other parties on the scene, and 34 percent still preferred the Communist Party over any other. Given the growing polarization in the country, both offshoots of the old Communist Party would have been in a position to expand their electorate.

Constituencies for a social democratic party led by Gorbachev included those millions of Soviet citizens who now wanted political liberties but also a mixed or regulated market economy that preserved welfare and other elements of the old state system. In all likelihood, it would have been strongest among professional and other middle classes, skilled workers, pro-Western intellectuals, and generally people who

remained socialists but not Communists. As Soviet and Russian electoral results showed in the late 1980s and 1990s, as well as those in Eastern Europe, the kind of democratic Communists and ex-Communists who would have been the core of a social democratic party were fully capable of organizing campaigns and winning elections.

In this case, analytical hindsight can tell us something important about real possibilities. Gorbachev's failure to carve out of the CPSU what in effect would have been a presidential party may have been his biggest political mistake. If he had done so at the already deeply polarized (and essentially multiparty) Twenty Eighth Communist Party Congress in July 1990, to take a beckoning moment, he would not have been isolated politically when crises swept the country later in 1990 and 1991 and his personal popularity fell precipitously.

Gorbachev's orthodox Communist opponents, contrary to most Western accounts, also had plenty of potential as a Soviet electoral party. As proponents of "healthy conservatism," they had an expanding base of support in the millions of officials, factory workers, collective farmers, anti-Western intellectuals, and other traditionalists aggrieved by Gorbachev's political and economic reforms. As change eroded the social guarantees and other certainties of the old order, the number of "newly discontented," which had been growing since 1985, was bound to increase. Conservative Communists had another growing appeal. The militant statist, or "patriotic," nationalism that had characterized their "communism" since the Stalin era was becoming a powerful ideological force in the country, especially in Russia.

Nor should it be thought that the anti-reform wing of the Soviet Communist Party was incapable of adapting to democratic politics. After their shocked petulance over the defeat of a few dozen *apparat* candidates in the March 1989 elections to the Congress of People's Deputies, conservative Communists began to identify and organize their own constituents. By 1990, they were a large electoral and parliamentary party in the Soviet Russian Republic. Whatever their private ambitions, they behaved in a generally constitutional manner, even after Yeltsin won executive power in the republic and Communists suddenly became an opposition party for the first time in Soviet history.

The electoral potential of the Gorbachev wing of the CPSU, which dispersed after the end of the Soviet Union, can only be surmised, but his conservative enemies soon demonstrated their own capabilities. In opposition, as a Russian observer remarked several years later, they "got a second wind." In 1993, they reemerged as the Communist Party of the Russian Federation and quickly became the largest and most successful electoral party in post-Soviet Russia. By 1996, it governed many regions

and cities, had more deputies by far than any other party in the national parliament, and officially won 40 percent of the vote (some analysts thought even more) in a losing presidential campaign against Yeltsin, who still had not been able to form a mass party. Indeed, until 2003, it won more votes in each parliamentary election than it had in the preceding one. In short, if the reformability of the old Soviet Communist Party is to be judged by its electoral capacities, both of its wings were reformable.

Two major components of the Soviet system still need to be reconsidered — the statist economy and the Union. On close examination, no real case can be found in the specialized literature that the Soviet economy was unreformable. There is a near consensus that Gorbachev's economic reforms "failed miserably," but even if true, it speaks to his leadership and policies, not the economic system itself. Many Western specialists not only assumed that the economy could be reformed but proffered their own prescriptions for reforming it. Assertions that the Soviet economy had been unreformable were yet another afterthought inspired by Russian politicians (and their Western patrons) who later decided to launch an all-out, "shock-therapy" assault on the old system.

Once again we must ask what is meant by reform. In the Soviet case, if it meant the advent of a fully privatized, entirely free-market capitalism, the economy was, of course, not reformable; it could only have been replaced in its entirety. By 1991, some self-appointed Western advisers were already urging that outcome and never forgave Gorbachev for disregarding them. But very few Soviet politicians or policy intellectuals, including radical reformers at that time, advocated such an economic system. Overwhelmingly, they shared Gorbachev's often and by 1990 emphatically stated goal of a "mixed economy" with a "regulated" but "modern full-blooded market" that would give "economic freedom" to people and "equal rights" to all forms of property ownership and still be called socialist.

Gorbachev's proposed mixed economy has been the subject of much Western derision, and Yeltsin's retort that the Soviet leader "wanted to combine things that cannot be combined" — or as a Western historian put it, "like mating a rabbit with a donkey" — much applause. But this too is unjustified. All modern capitalist economies have been mixed and regulated to various degrees, the combination of private and state ownership, market and non-market regulation, changing repeatedly over time. None of them have chosen actually to practice the fully "free market" their ideologues often preach. Moreover, economies with large state and private sectors had been the Tsarist and Soviet Russian tradition, except during the years since the end of NEP in 1929.

Introducing "capitalist" elements into a reformed Soviet system was more difficult politically and economically than had been adding "socialist" ones to, for instance, American capitalism in the 1930s. But there was no inherent reason why non-state, market elements could not have been added to the Soviet economy — private manufacturing firms, banks, service industries, shops, and farms alongside state and collective ones — and encouraged to compete and grow. Something similar had been done under far greater political constraints in Communist Eastern Europe and China. It would have required adhering to Gorbachev's principle of gradualism and emphatic refusal to impose a way of life on people, even a reformed life. The reasons it did not happen in Soviet or post-Soviet Russia were primarily political, not economic, as were the causes of the country's growing economic crisis in 1990-91.

We must also ask if Gorbachev's economic policies really "failed miserably" because it suggests that the Soviet economy did not respond to his reform initiatives. As often as not, this too is an afterthought in the literature. Even as late as 1990, when Gorbachev's policies were already generating an ominous combination of growing budget deficits, inflation, consumer shortages, and falling production, a number of Western economists nonetheless thought he was moving in the right direction.

If economic reform is a "transition" composed of necessary stages, Gorbachev had launched the entire process by 1990 in four essential respects. He had pushed through almost all the legislation needed for a comprehensive economic reformation. He had converted large segments of the Soviet elite to market thinking to the extent that even the most neo-Stalinist candidate in the 1991 Russian presidential election conceded, "Today, only a crazy person can deny the need for market relations." Indeed, by discrediting long-standing ideological dogmas, legalizing private enterprises and property, and thus market relations, and personally lauding "lively and fair competition" for "each form of property," Gorbachev had largely freed the economy from the clutches of the proscriptive Communist Party apparatus. And as a direct result of these changes, the actual marketization, privatization, and commercialization of the Soviet economy were under way.

The latter developments require special attention because they are now almost always attributed to Yeltsin and post-Soviet Russia. By 1990, the private businesses called cooperatives already numbered about 200,000, employed almost 5 million people, and accounted for 5 to 6 percent of GNP. For better or worse, state property was already in effect being privatized by nomenklatura officials and others. Commercial banks were springing up in many cities, and the first stock exchanges had appeared. New entrepreneurial and financial elites, including a soon-to-be

formed "Young Millionaires Club," were rapidly developing along with these market institutions. By mid-1991, an American correspondent was filing a series of reports on "Soviet capitalism." Western experts may dismiss Gorbachev's policies as failed half-measures, but later some Russian economists knew better: "It was during his years in power that all the basic forms of economic activity in modern Russia were born." The larger point is that they were born within the Soviet economy and thus were evidence of its reformability.

Finally, there is the question of the largest and most essential component of the old Soviet system — the Union or multinational state itself. Gorbachev was slow to recognize that Moscow's hold on the fifteen republics was vulnerable to his political and economic policies, but by 1990 he knew that the fate of the Union would decide the outcome of all his reforms and "my own fate." During his final two years in office, he became a Lincolnesque figure determined to "preserve the Union" — in his case, however, not by force but by negotiating a transformation of the discredited "super-centralized unitary state" into an authentic, voluntary federation. When the Soviet Union ended in December 1991, all of the republics becoming separate and independent states, so did the evolutionary reformation Gorbachev called perestroika.

Was the Union reformable, as Gorbachev and many Russian politicians and intellectuals insisted before and after 1991? Two biases afflict Western writing on this enormous "question of all questions." The anti-Sovietism of most Western accounts, particularly American ones, inclines them to believe, with however much "hindsight bias," that the Soviet Union was a doomed state. The other bias, probably unwitting, is again the language or formulation of the question. It is almost always said, perhaps in a tacit analogy with the end of the Tsarist state in 1917, that the Union "collapsed" or "disintegrated," words that imply inherently terminal causes and thus seem to rule out the possibility of a reformed Soviet state. But if we ask instead how and why the Union was abolished, dissolved, disbanded, or simply ended, the formulation leaves open the possibility that contingencies or subjective factors may have been the primary cause and therefore that a different outcome was possible.

The standard Western thesis that the Union was unreformable is based largely on a ramifying misconception. It assumes that the nationwide Communist Party apparatus, with its vertical organizational discipline imposing authority from above and compliance below, "alone held the federal union together." Therefore, once the dictatorial party was disfranchised by Gorbachev's reforms, there were no other integrative factors to offset centrifugal forces and the "disintegration of the Soviet Union was a foregone conclusion." In short, "No party, no Union."

The role of the party should not be minimized, but other factors also bound the Union together, including other Soviet institutions. In significant respects, the Moscow state economic ministries, with their branches throughout the country, had become as important as party organizations. And the integrative role of the all-Union military, with its own kind of discipline and assimilation, should not be under-estimated. The state economy itself was even more important. Over many decades, the economies of the fifteen republics had become virtually one, sharing and depending upon the same natural resources, energy grids and pipelines, transportation, suppliers, producers, consumers, and subsidies. The result, as was commonly acknowledged, was a "single Soviet economic space."

Nor should compelling human elements of integration be discounted. Official formulas boasting of a "Soviet people" and "Soviet nation" were overstated, but they were not, reliable sources assure us, merely an "ideological artifact." Though the Soviet Union was composed of scores of different ethnic groups, there were many millions of mixed families and some 75 million citizens, nearly a third of the population, lived outside their ethnic territories, including 25 million Russians. Shared historical experiences were also a unifying factor, such as the terrible losses and ultimate victory in World War II, or "Great Patriotic War," as was the language of the Moscow center. More than 60 percent of non-Russians spoke Russian fluently and most of the others had assimilated some of Russia's language and culture though the all-Union educational system and media.

Given the right reform policies and other circumstances, these multiple integrative elements, along with habits of living with Russia formed before and since 1917, were enough to hold most of the Soviet Union together without the Communist Party dictatorship. If nothing else, tens of millions of Soviet citizens had much to lose in the event of a breakup of the Union. That understanding no doubt helps explain the result of the March 1991 referendum, which was, an American specialist confirms, an "overwhelming vote for the Union."

It is also true that the voluntary Soviet federation proposed by Gorbachev would have meant fewer than the fourteen non-Russian republics. He hoped otherwise but acknowledged the prospect by enacting a new Law on Secession in April 1990. The tiny Baltic republics of Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia, annexed by Stalin's Red Army in 1940, were almost certain to choose renewed independence, and Western Moldova reunion with Romania (though it changed its mind after 1991). One or two of the three small Transcaucasian republics also might have seceded depending on whether bitter enemies Armenia and Azerbaijan sought Russia's protection against the other and whether Georgia decided it needed Moscow's help in preserving its own multiethnic state.

Even so, all of these small nationalities were on the Soviet periphery and the remaining eight to ten republics constituted more than 90 percent of the old Union's territory, population, and resources. They were more than enough to form and sustain a new Soviet Union. Even fewer grouped around Russia would have been adequate. Indeed, according to a non-Russian leader who participated in the abolition of the Soviet state a few months later, a new Union could "consist of four republics."

Popular opinion may have been overwhelmingly pro-Union, but after early 1990, when regional parliamentary elections devolved considerable power from the Moscow center, it was the leaders and elites of the republics who would decide their future. There is strong evidence that a majority of them also wanted to preserve the Union. This preference was clearly expressed in negotiations for a new Union Treaty that Gorbachev began directly with the willing leaders of nine Soviet republics — Russia, Ukraine, Byelorussia, the five Central Asian republics, and Azerbaijan — in April 1991.

The negotiations, known as the Novo-Ogarevo process, resulted in an agreement to form a new "Union of Soviet Sovereign Republics." Scheduled to be signed formally on August 20, 1991, the Treaty was initialed by all nine republic leaders, including the three who would abolish the Soviet Union only a few months later — Yeltsin of Russia, Leonid Kravchuk of Ukraine, and Stanislav Shushkevich of Byelorussia. Gorbachev had to cede more power than he wanted to the republics, but the Treaty preserved an all-Union state, elected presidency and parliament, military, and economy. It was so finalized that even disputes over seating at the signing ceremony, which was to be followed by a new constitution and elections, had been resolved and special paper for the text and souvenir stamps agreed upon.

The familiar argument that Novo-Ogarevo's failure to save the Soviet Union proved its unreformability therefore makes no sense. Those negotiations were successful; and, like Gorbachev's other reforms, they developed within the Soviet system, legitimized by the popular mandate of the March referendum and conducted by the established multinational leaderships of most of the country. Instead, the Novo-Ogarevo process should be seen as the kind of elite consensus, or "pact-making," that many political scientists say is necessary for the successful democratic reformation of a political system. That is how even a leading pro-Yeltsin democrat anticipated the signing of the new Treaty — as a "historic event" that could be "as long-lived as the American Declaration of Independence, and serve as the same reliable political and legal basis of the renovated Union."

In other words, the Treaty did not fail because the Union was unreformable but because a small group of high-level Moscow officials staged an armed coup on August 19 to stop its successful reform. (Nor was the coup inevitable, but that is another story.) Though the putsch quickly collapsed, primarily because its leaders lacked the resolve to use the military force they had amassed in Moscow, its fallout dealt a heavy blow to the Novo-Ogarevo process. It profoundly weakened Gorbachev and his central government, emboldened the political ambitions of Yeltsin and Kravchuk, and made other republic leaders wary of Moscow's unpredictable behavior.

In fact, not even the failed but calamitous August coup extinguished the political impulse to preserve the Union or expectations by leading Soviet reformers that it would still be saved. In September, some 1900 deputies from 12 Soviet republics resumed their participation in sessions of the Union Congress. In October, an agreement on a new economic union was signed. And as late as November 1991, Yeltsin assured the public, "The Union will live!" Seven republics, including Russia, continued to negotiate with Soviet President Gorbachev — a majority, not counting the now independent Balts — and, on November 25, they seemed to agree on yet another Treaty. It was more confederal than federative but still provided for a Union state, presidency, parliament, economy, and military. Two weeks later, it too was aborted by a coup, this one carried out by even fewer conspirators, but ones with greater resolve, and successfully.

* * *

We must conclude, then, that just as we found no conceptual reasons for believing the Soviet system was unreformable, there are no empirical ones either. As the historical developments reconsidered here show, by 1991 most of the system was in a process of far-reaching democratic and market reformation. The Soviet Union under Gorbachev was, of course, not yet fully reformed, but it was in full "transition," a term usually reserved for the post-Soviet period. All that remains of the unreformability axiom is the insistence that because Gorbachev's reforms were avowedly pro-Soviet and pro-socialist, they were merely a "fantasy" or "chimera." It is, of course, ideological bias, not historical analysis.

Why, contrary to the assertions of so many specialists for so many years, did the system turn out to be remarkably reformable? Was it really some kind of "political miracle," as an American historian later wrote? Important elements of a full explanation include the enduring power of anti-Stalinist ideas dating back to the 1920s and even to 1917; the legacies

of Nikita Khrushchev's policies, among them the birth of a proto-reform party inside the Communist Party; the Soviet elite's increasing exposure to the West and thus awareness of alternative ways of life (both socialist and capitalist); profound changes in society that were de-Stalinizing the system from below; growing social and economic problems that further promoted pro-reform sentiments in the high nomenklatura; and, not to be minimized, of course, Gorbachev's exceptional leadership. But there was an equally crucial factor.

Most Western specialists had long believed that the Soviet system's basic institutions were too "totalitarian" or otherwise rigged to be fundamentally reformed. In fact, the system had been constructed all along in a dualistic way that made it potentially reformable, even, so to speak, reform-ready. Formally, it had most of the institutions of a representative democracy — a constitution that included provisions for civil liberties, a legislature, elections, a judiciary, a federation. But inside or alongside each of those components were "counterweights" that nullified their democratic content, most importantly the Communist Party's political monopoly, single-candidate ballots, censorship, and police repression. To begin a process of democratic reform, all that was needed was a will and a way to remove the counterweights.

Gorbachev and his closest aides understood the duality, which he characterized as "democratic principles in words and authoritarianism in reality." To democratize the system, he later observed, "it wasn't necessary to invent anything new," only, as an adviser remarked, to transform the democratic components of the Soviet Union "from decoration into reality." This was true of almost all of Gorbachev's reforms, though the most ramifying example was, as he emphasized, the "transfer of power from the hands of the Communist Party, which had monopolized it, into the hands of those to whom it should have belonged according to the Constitution — to the soviets through free elections." Not only did its dualistic institutions make the Soviet system highly reformable, without them the peaceful democratization and other transformations of the Gorbachev years probably would not have been possible, and certainly not as rapid or historic.

A final issue should be emphasized, though it cannot be explored here. If the argument presented in this article is substantially valid, it also casts doubt on most of the prevailing explanations of the end of the Soviet Union, which assume in one way or another that it was unreformable. But that is an even larger and more controversial question awaiting our reconsideration.

PERESTROIKA AND THE FIVE TRANSFORMATIONS[1]

by Archie Brown

Archie Brown is Professor of Politics at Oxford University (Great Britain).

Perestroika is likely to be debated by historians for centuries to come. For the time being, discussion of these seven years that changed the world is surrounded by misunderstandings and confusions. In the minds of many Russians it is linked to their disappointment with the poor quality of what has been called "democracy" in post-Soviet Russia and with the extremes of wealth and poverty which have emerged since the early 1990s. Yet those who launched perestroika were not in positions of institutional power in post-Soviet Russia. They should, therefore, be judged on the basis of their own record, not that of their successors.

We need to understand both how perestroika began and what it became. Beginning as an attempt to make the Soviet system work better, its initiators (above all, the new General Secretary, Mikhail Sergeyevich Gorbachev) wished to *improve* the existing Soviet economic and political system. The term, *perestroika*, was useful because the idea that the Soviet Union needed "reform" had been taboo ever since Czech Communist reformers embraced both political and economic reform and also the idea of pluralism in 1968. The theory and practice of political pluralism in Czechoslovakia so alarmed the Soviet leadership that they put an end to the "Prague Spring" with tanks. Subsequently, those who wished to introduce even modest change within the Soviet system had, in Brezhnev's time, to resort to such euphemisms as the "further perfecting" of the Soviet political system or of the system of economic management.

"Perestroika" carried less ideological baggage than reform — with its connotation for Soviet conservatives of reform*ism* or revisionism — and so became a cloak under which increasingly radical reform could be carried out. Initially, the very ambiguity of the concept was a political advantage for those, led by the new General Secretary, who did, indeed, wish to introduce serious reform. Everyone — or almost everyone — could in the earliest period support perestroika because it meant different things to each of them.

As the content of perestroika became more radical — and especially when Gorbachev and his allies moved in the summer of 1988 from reform of the system to systemic transformation — the ambiguity of the term perhaps ceased to be an advantage. More substantive discussion of institutional change was required. To some extent this happened, as *glasnost'* evolved into genuine freedom of speech and, increasingly, into freedom of publication, although the political argument in the awakened society was stronger on generalization than on the concrete institutional changes that should be undertaken.

Communist systems

Before discussing the five transformations that occurred in the perestroika years, I should begin by distinguishing socialism and Communism — not in a Marxist-Leninist sense but in terms of comparative political analysis. The five defining characteristics of Communist systems may be summarised as (1) the monopoly of power of the Communist Party; (2) democratic centralism; (3) state ownership of the means of production; (4) the declared aim of building communism — a society in which the state would have withered away — as the ultimate, legitimizing goal; and (5) the existence of, and sense of belonging to, an international Communist movement.[2] The fact that Communist leaders and ideologists in the unreformed Soviet Union, and in other Communist states, described their systems as "socialist" is hardly a good reason for following their example. The same Communist leaders and guardians of ideology described their systems as "democratic". "Soviet democracy" and "Socialist democracy" were used almost interchangeably in the pre-*perestroika* USSR. While to call the system "socialist" was less evidently absurd than to call it "democratic", the fact that the system was described as "socialist" by Soviet leaders from Lenin to Chernenko[3] is not a sufficient ground for adopting it as an analytically useful term.[4]

The adjective "socialist" is applicable to a far wider range of social movements, political parties and governments than those which have professed allegiance to Marxism-Leninism.[5] It is a less discriminating term than "Communist" to apply to the Soviet Union and those countries that were recognized by it as forming part of the international Communist movement. It is not difficult to distinguish between a Communist (with a capital "C") system and (lower-case) "communism", the stateless utopia that provided the ultimate justification for the "leading role" of Communist Parties, since it was the Party, as Lenin had argued, that provided the theoretical insight and organizational basis to guide less advanced citizens to this harmonious, classless society. (It is doubtful whether there was a single true believer in this mythical future society in

Brezhnev's Politburo in the 1970s, but that is not to deny its remaining ideological significance — until it was abandoned even as a theoretical construct in the late 1980s, as part of a wider rejection of Marxism-Leninism.)[6] There should be little danger of confusing the Communism of *realnyi sotsializm* (in the terminology of Brezhnev's Soviet Union) with the utopia of "full communism". There is more conceptual stretching, and blurring of crucial distinctions, involved in applying the same term, "socialist", to, for example, socialist governments in Fifth Republic France and to the unreformed Soviet Union than in using the term "Communist" for the latter.

During the perestroika years the Soviet Union ceased to have a Communist system. It is a myth that Communism in Russia ended only with the establishment of Boris Yeltsin's post-Soviet regime. The Soviet Union came to an end in December 1991, but Communism in the Soviet Union ended in 1989. Consider the five defining characteristics of a Communist system already enumerated. The Communist Party's monopoly on power was abandoned *de jure* when the Constitution was changed in March 1990 to remove the guaranteed "leading and guiding role" of the KPSS, but independent political organizations and embryonic political parties already existed *de facto* in 1989. Second, democratic centralism had been disappearing fast from 1986 onwards and by 1989 it was totally abandoned when Communists, with radically different policies and values, opposed one another in contested elections. Third, state ownership of the means of production survived during perestroika to a greater extent than any of the other main features of Communism, but in 1988 the Law on Co-operatives made serious inroads into it, going much further than the Law on Individual Labour Activity of 1986. Co-operatives quickly developed into thinly-disguised private enterprise. Fourth, the ideological commitment to "communism" disappeared even as a distant aspiration for Gorbachev and his allies and from the programmatic documents of the KPSS. And, fifth, after 1989 there was no international Communist movement for the Soviet Union to lead or to belong to.

* * *

The five transformations to be discussed in the remaining sections of this chapter involve the dismantling of Communism in the Soviet Union but have even broader significance. Although they were strongly interconnected in political practice, they need to be kept analytically distinct. These are: (1) the dismantling of the command economy; (2) the transition from an extremely authoritarian political system to political pluralism; (3) the ending of the Cold War; (4) the abandonment of Soviet hegemony over Eastern Europe; and (5) the breakup of the Soviet Union. I shall discuss each of these political phenomena in turn.

From command economy to economic limbo

It is abundantly clear that those who held that the Soviet Union could not be changed from within — and changed radically — were wrong. While, however, some reform of the economy took place in the USSR and other Communist states at different times, radical reform posed fundamental problems connected with the operational principles of the systems and exacerbated, in the Soviet case, by some special circumstances peculiar to Russia. The eminent American political scientist and democratic theorist, Robert A. Dahl, has persuasively argued not only that a command economy is incompatible with democracy but that this applies also to a pure market economy.[7] He observes: "Historically, all democratic countries have developed mixed economies in which markets, though highly important, are significantly modified by government intervention."[8] This is partly in response to the activities of groups defending interests that would be too severely damaged if the market were the *only* criterion for authoritative economic decision-making.

However, although pure models exist only in textbooks, an economic system must be *primarily* one thing or another. While an economy may be essentially a command economy, operating on the basis of administrative allocation of resources, some concessions will be made to the law of supply and demand (for example, the existence of private tuition even in the unreformed Soviet Union), and while a market economy is always subject to a degree of state regulation, it has a different logic from a command economy. A mixed economy exists, to a greater or lesser degree, in all essentially market economies. It may well involve elements of public ownership, such as nationalized railways or municipally-owned airports, and will generally include extensive state intervention to modify the workings of the market, such as high taxes on tobacco to discourage use of substances damaging to health.

Yet to move from a command economy to a market economy is a fundamental shift, fully deserving use of the term *perekhod*. In the Soviet Union there was a basic tension between trying to *make the existing economic system work better* and *replacing that system by an essentially market economy* which would operate on *different principles*. As a result, much of the well-intentioned economic legislation of the Gorbachev era — for example, the Law on the State Enterprise of 1987 and the Law on Cooperatives of 1988 — had unintended consequences. In a command economy as long-established as the Soviet one there was no easy way of making the transition from one system to another, as the experience of post-Soviet Russia has only served to underline. At some point most prices had to become essentially market prices, and the attempt to improve the

pre-existing "administrative-command system" had to give way to its replacement by a regulated market economy (although Gorbachev was subjected to much ignorant criticism for employing the adjective "regulated" in front of "market economy").

Notwithstanding the fact, however, that the goal of an essentially market economy had been embraced by Gorbachev by 1989, the economic system between then and the end of the Soviet Union was neither one thing nor another. The country's economy was in limbo — no longer a functioning command economy but not yet a market economy. The reforms had introduced what were, from the standpoint of central planners, perverse incentives, while market institutions remained weak and the crucial marketizing measure of freeing the majority of prices was postponed. In *this* sense there is some truth in the arguments of those who say that the Soviet economic system was unreformable. Partial reforms could and did take place, but the operating principles of an economic system have to be, *in the main*, one thing or another. To point to the dilemma is not to suggest that there was an easy solution. To add to the systemic problem, there were Russian specifics which made economic transition far more difficult in the Soviet Union than in the countries of East-Central Europe. Not only had the administrative-command system been operating for far longer, but the size and climatic conditions of Russia, coupled with the inheritance left by Soviet planning, imposed (and still impose) far greater difficulties even for politicians eager to embrace the market than is the case, for instance, in Hungary or the Czech Republic. The recent work of Fiona Hill and Clifford Gaddy, analyzing the heavy economic burden of extensive urban development in Siberia, eloquently illustrates the point.[9] Dahl's observations about the prohibitive social and political costs of observing *only* market economic criteria are fully applicable to this case.[10] Entire cities, even if they have no prospect of becoming economically viable, cannot simply be closed down.

From authoritarian political system to political pluralism

Although some Western political commentators began to echo Russian radicals — very often Soviet citizens who had been perfectly conformist before Gorbachev made the Soviet Union safe for dissent — and thus condemn the slowness of political reform in the USSR under Gorbachev, the speed of change was dramatic, especially between 1987 and 1990. East European regimes, needless to say, changed even more quickly — in 1989 — but that is hardly surprising. The Communist institutions that were there so quickly cast aside were seen by a majority of people in East-

Central Europe as an alien imposition. They were sustainable only so long as the Soviet leadership was prepared, in the last resort, to use armed force to defend unpopular systems and leaders. For Russia — with its autocratic pre-revolutionary tradition and seven decades of oppressive Communist rule, whether autocratic or oligarchical — to move within three years from a highly authoritarian political system to political pluralism and contested elections was a breakthrough of breathtaking speed.

In spite of the many good reasons why radical change was necessary by the mid-1980s, there was a huge element of contingency in the transformation of the Soviet system coming when it did. The views of the other members of the Politburo at the time when Gorbachev became General Secretary of the Central Committee in March 1985 are by now well known, both from contemporary documents and the rich memoir literature. None of them would have pursued a policy remotely similar to that of Gorbachev. His own views also underwent rapid evolution which reflected both a reformist disposition and an openness to new ideas unusual (to put it mildly) at the level of the Politburo. That open-mindedness was crucially important. The only realistic alternative leaders of the Soviet Union, far from breaking the taboo on speaking positively about "pluralism", as Gorbachev did,[11] would have used all the numerous levers at their command — from censorship and party discipline to the *siloviki* — to make sure that change did not get out of hand.[12]

Some of the important decisions Gorbachev pushed through the Nineteenth Party Conference in the summer of 1988 became political reality only in 1989. The most fundamental of such changes were the contested elections for a legislature with real power (power enough to reject 13 percent of Nikolay Ryzhkov's nominations of ministers in 1989).[13] "Reform" is an inadequate word to describe the transformation that occurred within the Soviet system. Gorbachev, with justification, sees the Nineteenth Conference as a turning point. His major speech to the conference, he has said, concerned nothing less than an attempt to make a "peaceful, smooth *transition from one political system to another*" [my italics, AB].[14] Change moved beyond liberalization to democratization, but democratization is a process and not the same as an established democracy. If the system did not become a fully-fledged democracy either under Gorbachev or under his successors in post-Soviet Russia, it did become politically pluralistic and different in kind from the Communist system.

It is worth noting that the fundamental decisions in favour of the pluralization of the political system occurred at a time when Boris Yeltsin was playing no part in the political process. When the decisive pluralizing measures were endorsed by the Nineteenth Party Conference in the summer of 1988 — however reluctantly on the part of a significant

proportion of delegates — Yeltsin was still nominally a member of the Central Committee of the KPSS, but completely marginalized within the party. He played no part in the discussions that led to the adoption of the remarkably radical documents presented to the conference. He was, however, to become a prime beneficiary of the new pluralism and also someone who, for a time, helped to give it greater substance. Yeltsin's overwhelming victory in the 1989 elections for a seat in the new legislature — representing a constituency whose electorate embraced the whole of Moscow — was a landmark achievement. Yet, as the American Ambassador to the Soviet Union at that time, Jack Matlock, appositely remarked: "I found Yeltsin's victory less astonishing than the fact that *the votes had been honestly counted*" (italics Matlock's).[15]

While the pluralization of the Soviet system was a breakthrough of historic proportions, the fact remains that neither the Soviet Union nor post-Soviet Russia was ever fully democratized. If we turn from interpretations of the facts to "counterfactuals", it is arguable — although in the nature of things far from certain — that had Gorbachev come down on the opposite side of the argument in two particular instances, a more vibrant and more effectively institutionalized democracy might have emerged. The first such fateful decision was to have the President of the USSR elected indirectly by the legislature in March 1990 rather than directly by the whole people. If the decision had gone in favour of direct election in the spring of 1990 (and not just for *future* presidential elections, as was intended), that would have been even more important in relation to the attempt to keep most of the republics within a new and voluntary Union (of which more below).

The second decision — which would have been important in establishing legitimate political institutions that cut across republican boundaries, thus bolstering a Union, and still more important from the point of view of the future consolidation of democracy — was Gorbachev's postponement of an overt split in the Communist Party. That in private he was ready to contemplate party competition is well-known. When as early as 1985 Aleksandr Yakovlev wrote a private memorandum to Gorbachev suggesting that the Communist Party be divided into two in order to introduce contestation into the political system, Gorbachev did not react as if this were a sin against the holy ghost of party unity. Instead, he said that the idea was "premature (prezhdevrennoi)".[16] Clearly, in practical political terms it *was* premature; it would have been impossible for a recently selected General Secretary, surrounded in the Politburo by Communists of orthodox views, to split the Party, especially given the animus reserved in Leninist parties for splitters.

The best time for Gorbachev to have taken the risk of splitting the CPSU would have been either in 1989 or at the Twenty-Eighth Party Congress in June 1990, with the Congress possibly representing the optimal moment. At that point several million members would probably have followed Gorbachev into a Social Democratic Party and those who remained "true Communists" would also have been able to form a large party. A liberal party could, moreover, have emerged from the KPSS, for the membership of that ideologically variegated organization included Yegor Gaidar and most of those who were to come to prominence as proselytizing marketeers. This would have been an optimal way of giving birth to a competitive party system with mass membership and mass support and, if the Party's property had been divided among the successor parties, they would have had strong financial bases. To make the last point is, however, to raise doubts as to whether such an open embrace of Western-style party competition to the detriment of the KPSS could have been agreed in a kind of pact-making process.

It is likely that the Party *apparatchiki*, a majority of whom were already highly suspicious of Gorbachev's social democratic leanings, would have been the backbone of the Communist rump party. But might they not have made common cause with the military and the KGB to put a stop to the split? That cannot be ruled out, and a coup over a year earlier than the August 1991 putsch would have had a greater chance of success. In 1990 the same people who led the actual coup attempt would not have been faced with their August 1991 problem of claiming to speak for the people as a whole when the Russian people, at least, had just elected a person of quite different views, Boris Yeltsin, as President two months earlier. Yeltsin would have had no such formidable democratic legitimacy in the summer of 1990 — unless he had been the victor in an election by universal suffrage for a *Soviet* presidency in the spring of that year. That is where the counterfactual of direct election of the President of the USSR assumes great significance (and is discussed in the section of this chapter on the fifth transformation — the breakup of the Soviet Union). While it has to be acknowledged that it would have been a real risk for Gorbachev to take the initiative in splitting the Communist Party, the risks of keeping the Party superficially united were, on balance, even greater.

The ending of the Cold War

Argument still continues over the role of the West — and, in particular, that of the Reagan administration — in bringing about the end of the Cold War.[17] Two things, however, are clear. The first is that the Cold War showed no signs of ending — on the contrary, it was getting

colder — during the years in which Ronald Reagan overlapped with three other Soviet general secretaries, and dramatic change in East-West relations occurred only after Gorbachev entered the Kremlin in March 1985. The last two years of Leonid Brezhnev's life and the brief periods at the top of the political hierarchy of Yury Andropov and Konstantin Chernenko saw the veteran Foreign and Defence Ministers Andrey Gromyko and Dmitry Ustinov conducting Soviet foreign and security policy inflexibly and responding to increased military expenditure in the United States in traditional ways. It was Gorbachev who sanctioned, promoted, and established new thinking, new behaviour, and a new foreign policy team in Moscow.

The second indisputable fact is that the Cold War ended while Gorbachev was at the helm. His successor, Boris Yeltsin, played no part in that particular transformation. Yeltsin, even in the last years of the Soviet Union, did not have a foreign policy distinctive from that of Gorbachev and, moreover, made few pronouncements on the subject. His input into the foreign policy-making process was zero during the years in which East-West relations were transformed. American Secretary of State George Shultz took the view that the Cold War was already over by the time he left office at the end of 1988.[18] By then Reagan and Gorbachev had signed important arms control treaties and Reagan had made his amicable visit to Moscow in the course of which he said that the Soviet Union was no longer an "evil empire".

Gorbachev, in contrast with Yeltsin, was genuinely interested in ideas. These included ideas on international relations whose conduct, so far as he was concerned, was no longer to be determined either by hidebound ideological preconceptions or by pure power politics. His reading, while still a *kraikom* secretary in Stavropol, had ranged far beyond what was typical for a party official. Both then and subsequently his intellectual curiosity took him into areas that ranged well beyond Soviet orthodoxy. He made himself still better informed also by appointing such enlightened and knowledgeable *pomoshchniki* as Anatoly Chernyayev and Georgy Shakhnazarov, by changing the leadership of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, by giving accelerated promotion in the party hierarchy to Aleksandr Yakovlev, and by encouraging Soviet scholars in the research institutes to think the unthinkable and to come up with fresh ideas.

What was crucially important was that Gorbachev's practice followed his precept. Much of the rhetoric of traditional Soviet Marxism-Leninism concerning class struggle and proletarian internationalism had served as a rationalization of Soviet hegemony within the international Communist movement and in the struggle between two systems into which they saw the world as divided. In contrast, Gorbachev's belief — influenced by his

reading and by the best of his advisers, but based also on his personal interaction with foreign leaders and his direct observation of other cultures and systems — was that there were universal values and interests that transcended both sectional interests and the differences among states. This belief became for him a guide to action — or, in the case of Eastern Europe, discussed in the next section, benign inaction.

The abandonment of Soviet hegemony over Eastern Europe

Against George Shultz's view that the Cold War was over by the end of 1988, a case can be made for saying that it was not truly over until the peoples in the countries of Eastern Europe were allowed to choose their own political and economic systems. In the course of 1988, Gorbachev had declared their "freedom to choose," first of all at the Nineteenth Party Conference in the summer of that year and again at the United Nations in December. It was Soviet non-intervention as one Central and East European country after another tested his sincerity during 1989 which demonstrated beyond doubt that the Cold War was over. It ended when the Soviet leadership — influenced both by new ideas of global interdependence and universal human interests and values and by a new calculus of the costs and benefits of maintaining Soviet hegemony over reluctant East European peoples — consciously decided no longer to sustain regimes that could not command the confidence of their own citizens.

Gorbachev has been much criticized in Russia for ending the Cold War on terms supposedly disadvantageous for his own country. For many of his critics, that includes the abandonment of Communist clients and pro-Soviet regimes in Eastern Europe. Yet, as Gorbachev himself has written:

> Critics at home have also charged that we lost our allies in Eastern Europe, that we surrendered these countries without compensation. But to whom did we surrender them? To their own people. The nations of Eastern Europe, in the course of a free expression of the will of the people, chose their own path of development based on their national needs. The system that existed in Eastern and Central Europe was condemned by history, as was the system in our own country. Any effort to preserve this system would have further weakened our country's positions, discrediting the Soviet Union in the eyes of our own people and the whole world.[19]

In Western capitals it was still taken as axiomatic in the mid-1980s that Soviet hegemony over Eastern Europe was for Moscow non-negotiable. The most that could be hoped for, and it was also the most that

the East-Central Europeans themselves deemed to be feasible, was some relaxation and liberalization (of the kind that occurred gradually in Hungary under Kádár) rather than full independence and the end of the Warsaw Pact, Comecon, and Soviet control.

The abandonment of the attempt to maintain Soviet hegemony over Eastern Europe was very much the policy of Gorbachev and his immediate circle rather than a policy which emanated primarily from either the Ministry of Foreign Affairs or the International Department of the Central Committee (into which the Socialist Countries Department of the TsK was amalgamated in 1988). It is true that change in Eastern Europe in 1989 came quicker (and with more immediate dire consequences for even reformist Communists, although some of them were later able to make a political comeback once their parties had embraced socialism of a social democratic type) than Gorbachev — or his principal adviser on Eastern Europe, Shakhnazarov — expected. However, in a complete break with the past, the question of using armed force to slow down or prevent the removal of Communist regimes in Eastern Europe was not even considered.

The breakup of the Soviet Union

There are those who argue that a "democratized Soviet Union" was a "contradiction in terms". That statement needs substantial qualification. It is surely true if it relates to all fifteen republics. The Baltic states were a special case and, difficult though it was for the central leadership in Moscow to recognize this, it would have been better if they had been treated as such. Forcibly incorporated in the Soviet Union against their will as relatively recently as 1940, Estonians, Lithuanians and Latvians predictably opted for independent statehood when the risks of making such demands were sufficiently reduced. Given that their reference group of countries was their Scandinavian neighbours, who had enjoyed far greater prosperity as well as flourishing democracy, it is not surprising that the Balts' political aspirations should have been very different from those of the peoples of Soviet Central Asia.

There are, however, ways in which a smaller, voluntary Union could have survived. There is, furthermore, no reason to suppose that the breakup of the Soviet Union whereby fifteen independent states stand on the territory that had been occupied by just one state was necessarily a more democratic outcome than a Union containing nine or even twelve republics. (Some of those states are, indeed, more authoritarian today than they were in the last years of the Soviet Union.) If a larger political entity, embracing different nationalities, can be held together by consent,

that need not be inferior as a democratic polity to a state based on a particular nation's claim to statehood. Indeed, the belief that every nation has an absolute right to its own state raises as many problems as it resolves. Within virtually every projected "nation-state" there are smaller national groups, sometimes occupying territorial enclaves which, following the breakup of the larger political entity (as we have seen both in the former Soviet Union and former Yugoslavia), may form the basis of *their* claim to "nation-statehood". This raises the possibility of an almost infinite regress to ever smaller states, civil war, or the spectre of ethnic cleansing.

How significant might election of a Soviet president by universal suffrage have been? Most members of the Central Committee of the KPSS would have been extremely unhappy had Gorbachev endorsed the idea of direct election of a Soviet president in early 1990, for anti-Communist sentiment had grown within the Soviet Union, stimulated by economic problems, the sharpening of the "nationalities question", and, not least, the demonstration effect of events in Eastern Europe when in the course of the previous year — as a result of the new freedoms — Soviet citizens were able to watch on their own television screens Communist rulers being held responsible for the peoples' manifold discontents and summarily dispatched from office.[20] Moreover, the two most popular politicians in the country at the time, according to the best survey research then, that of VTsIOM, were Gorbachev and Yeltsin. In March 1990 Gorbachev was still ahead of Yeltsin; in May-June of that year, with Gorbachev on a downward trajectory and Yeltsin's popularity increasing, the positions were reversed.[21]

If Gorbachev had won a direct, Union-wide election in March or April 1990, that would have been bad news for the Party traditionalists. Having a mandate from the whole people, he would have been even freer from pressures by the Politburo and Central Committee than he was as an indirectly elected President. If Yeltsin had won the election — and he would surely have contested it, given his growing popularity — that would have doubtless have struck the *apparat* as a still worse outcome. Yet, if Gorbachev had sprung a decision for election of a President by universal suffrage on a surprised Party, just as he sprung the move to contested elections for a new and serious legislature on them at the Nineteenth Party Conference, he would probably have got away with it.

Juan Linz and Alfred Stepan have argued that the chances of holding the Soviet Union (or, at least, the greater part of it) together as a new, voluntary federation were weakened because competitive elections in the republics preceded elections at all-Union level.[22] Their general point about sequencing is a substantial one, but it could have been more

powerfully applied to the presidential elections than to the parliamentary elections which are the focus of their argument. There was not such a qualitative difference between the elections for the Congress of People's Deputies of the USSR in 1989 and for the Congress of People's Deputies of the RSFSR in 1990 as Linz and Stepan suggest. Moreover, the first *multi-party* elections in Russia did not occur until 1993 and make a poor candidate for a "founding election", since they attracted the lowest turnout of all national elections between 1989 and 2004. The level of violence to which Yeltsin resorted in disbanding the previous legislature had left a bad taste in the mouths of many Russian citizens. The contrast between 1993 and 1989 could not have been greater. There was genuine excitement surrounding these first contested elections, notwithstanding their compromise character (with a third of the places reserved for candidates from public organizations). If, however, a free election had taken place for the executive presidency of the USSR in 1990 — i.e. a full year before the actual elections for presidents of the republics — this would have been an event of extraordinary political significance. It would have given not only the winner but also a renewed Union greater legitimacy.

From the point of view of preservation of a Union of nine or more republics, it is arguable that a victory by Yeltsin would have made an especially great difference.[23] Although a number of scholars have rightly pointed to the importance of the institutional resources that could be mobilized in each of the Union republics once local elites, in a reformed and more tolerant Soviet Union, had decided to seek sovereignty,[24] Yeltsin personally played a major, and probably decisive, role in the breakup of the Soviet Union. There was something paradoxical about Yeltsin's assertion of Russian "independence" from the Union. Since the Union had been, in a sense, a greater Russia, and since, apart from a very brief period in late 1991, a majority of Russians favoured preservation of the Soviet Union (both before and after its break-up),[25] it was hardly in Russia's long-term interest for Yeltsin to argue that Russian law had supremacy over Union law and that Russia should seek its "independence".[26] In terms of his ambition to replace Gorbachev in the Kremlin, this made sense, but that was evidently higher on his scale of priorities than preservation of a larger Union. Clearly, if Yeltsin had been elected *Soviet* president in 1990, he would have had no incentive whatsoever to assert *Russian* independence — quite the reverse.

The breakup of the Soviet Union was facilitated by the new freedom and political pluralism that Gorbachev played the major role in introducing in the second half of the 1980s. In that sense, Gorbachev created preconditions for such an outcome. Nevertheless, this

disintegration of the state was the ultimate unintended consequence of his actions. Furthermore, only those who believe that it would have been better to have preserved the unreformed Soviet political system — with all its arbitrariness and lack of political, intellectual, and religious freedom, together with its economic inefficiency — can logically blame Gorbachev for opening up possibilities unthinkable in the past (given the severity of the sanctions applied against any hint of separatist sentiments). Apart from the role of the Baltic states, the most immediate causes of the breakup were Yeltsin's playing of the Russian card against the Union and the intervention of the putschists who took their action in August 1991 to prevent the signing of the agreed Union Treaty (which devolved extensive powers to the republics) and, in their folly, hastened what they had sought to prevent.

Conclusion

Liberalization, and the substantial measure of democratization represented by competitive elections, was bound to put great strain on the Union, but it did not rule out the possibility of movement from pseudo-federalism to a genuine (albeit loose) federation embracing a majority of Soviet republics on the basis of a new and voluntary Union Treaty. A smaller *union* could have survived, but it is unlikely that the Soviet *system* could have survived by being reformed. Reform showed up the contradictions, inefficiencies and injustices of the system and quite quickly led to the point where the leader of the reform process had to decide whether to reassert the familiar norms of the old system or to follow the logic of the pluralization of the system that had occurred under perestroika. It is to Gorbachev's credit that he followed the latter course. It is almost certain that the only way a peaceful transition to a pluralistic political system could take place in as firmly established a Communist system as that of the Soviet Union was by reform from above or, as many have termed it, "revolution from above". At some stage, however, this was bound to move out of the control of the top leadership if the reforms were radical enough to allow open discussion of all possible options by an awakened society. That made Gorbachev's declared aim of "revolutionary change by evolutionary means" (a laudable goal) increasingly difficult to sustain. Moreover, reform of the Soviet command economy could not but bring out the limitations of reform of such a system, thus pointing to the need to move to an economic system operating on different principles, even though transition from one system to the other was liable to make things worse before they got better. Reform of the command polity could proceed more smoothly to systemic transformation. Yet, that required a high degree of political skill and dexterity on the part of Gorbachev, not

least in "tranquillizing the hardliners", and thus avoiding a reversal of the changes at a time when their opponents could have brought this about by as simple a device as votes in the Politburo and Central Committee to replace him as General Secretary.[27]

Gorbachev was faced by intense pressures coming from different directions — from conservative Communists occupying strong positions in the party apparatus, the security forces, and the military-industrial complex; from national elites demanding, in some cases, separate statehood, for which, in the Baltic states in particular they enjoyed mass support; and from a highly politicized Russian society now able to voice its discontent at the persistence of economic shortages and social problems. Nevertheless, by the end of the 1980s Russia and the Soviet Union as a whole had moved beyond reform of the system to systemic transformation. That this is not merely playing with words is suggested by Gorbachev's recognition already by 1988 of the need for "a *perekhod* from one political system to another".[28] Tactical retreats and hesitations (some of which were counter-productive) notwithstanding, Gorbachev and his closest supporters pursued the strategic goals of dismantling the system they inherited. With success that was much greater in the former than the latter case, they sought to construct a political system and an economic system qualitatively better than their Soviet inheritance.

---

[1] Although specially written for this volume, the chapter draws upon some passages in my contributions to Archie Brown and Lilia Shevtsova (eds), *Gorbachev, Yeltsin, and Putin: Political Leadership in Russia's Transition* (Washington, DC, 2001) and from my article, 'The Soviet Union: Reform of the System or Systemic Transformation?', *Slavic Review*, Vol. 63, No. 3, 2004.

[2] The points are elaborated in Archie Brown, "Communism", in N.J. Smelser and Paul B. Baltes (eds), *International Encyclopedia of the Social and Behavioral Sciences* (Oxford, 2001), pp. 2323-2325; and also *Brown, The Gorbachev Factor* (Oxford, 1996), pp. 309-315.

[3] Gorbachev, at the beginning of his General Secretaryship, regarded the system as "socialist", albeit a flawed socialism in need of reform. He subsequently came to embrace a social democratic conception of socialism and, as a corollary, held that the Soviet Union had never been socialist. The change in Gorbachev's position was a gradual one. As he put it in conversation with one of his oldest friends: "But to deny the idea that the Soviet system was identical with socialism, to deny that it embodied the advantages of socialism, I reached that point only after 1983, and not all at once even then": Mikhail Gorbachev and Zden□k Mlyn□ř, *Conversations with Gorbachev: On Perestroika, the Prague Spring, and the Crossroads of Socialism* (New York, 2002), p. 65. Gorbachev also observed: "...in 1985, and for some time after that, our desire was to improve, to make more socialist a system that was not truly socialist. ... it is a big step forward that we are no longer trying to create ideal models and force the life of

our society to fit into a preconceived mold. We have eliminated totalitarian governmental power, provided freedom of choice and democratic pluralism, and that is the main thing for the cause of socialism, which is inseparable from democracy" (ibid., p. 200).

[4] I have, therefore, respectfully to disagree with the late Georgy Shakhnazarov who – in a posthumously published book in which he comments generously on my own analyses of Soviet and Russian politics – takes me to task for not using "socialism" and "communism" in what was the traditional Soviet way. See G. Kh. Shakhnazarov, *Sovremennaya tsivilizatsiya i Rossiya* (Moscow, 2003), esp. 'Faktor lichnosti i alternativy demokratii', pp. 176-191, at 179-180.

[5] It is worth noting that the meaning of "socialism" for the socialist parties of Western Europe has also changed. Few in the leadership of any of the mainstream parties that belong to the Socialist International believe any more in the possibility of building a distinctive socio-economic system that would bear the name of socialism. "Socialism", in so far as they continue to use the term (and it is used less today by the leadership of the British Labour Party than by their Socialist International counterparts in continental Europe) has come to mean different values and priorities rather than an entirely distinctive system.

[6] See Archie Brown (ed.), *The Demise of Marxism-Leninism in Russia* (London, 2004); and Robert D. English, *Russia and the Idea of the West: Gorbachev, Intellectuals, and the End of the Cold War* (New York, 2000).

[7] Robert A. Dahl, "Why All Democratic Countries Have Mixed Economies", in John W. Chapman and Ian Shapiro (eds), *Democratic Community* (New York, 1993), pp. 259-282.

[8] Ibid., p. 259.

[9] Fiona Hill and Clifford Gaddy, *The Siberian Curse: How Communist Planners Left Russia Out in the Cold* (Washington, DC, 2003).

[10] Dahl, "Why All Democratic Countries Have Mixed Economies", op.cit.

[11] See *Pravda*, 15 July 1987, pp. 1-2, at p. 2; and *Pravda*, 30 September 1987, p. 1.

[12] On the attempts to put a stop to the rise of Gorbachev in the course of 1984, and the maneuverings of, among others, Nikolay Tikhonov and Viktor Grishin, see Mikhail Gorbachev, *Zhizn' i reformy* (Moscow, 1995), Vol. 1, pp. 248-262. The conservative Communist views of Viktor Grishin emerge clearly enough from his book, *Ot Khrushcheva do Gorbacheva: politicheskie portrety piati gensekov i A.N. Kosygina: memuary* (Moscow, 1996). According to Aleksandr Yakovlev, Grishin not only aspired to the post of General Secretary but Konstantin Chernenko's closest circle had "already prepared the speeches and political programme" for a Grishin general secretaryship. See Yakovlev, *Sumerki* (Moscow, 2003), p. 459. Grishin knew the game was up when Chernenko died at 7.20 p.m. on 10 March 1985 and a first meeting of the Politburo was convened by Gorbachev for that very evening. Gorbachev's allies had also been preparing the ground for a smooth succession. This included coming to an understanding with Andrey Gromyko. See Yakovlev, *Sumerki*, pp. 459-463, and Anatoly Gromyko, Andrey Gromyko. *V labirintakh kremlya: vospominaniya i razmyshleniya syna* (Moscow, 1997), pp. 94-95. Anatoly Gromyko suggests that Grigoriy Romanov, even more strongly than Grishin, aspired to be General Secretary (Gromyko, pp. 96-98). One possible scenario would have been a short period of

leadership by the elderly Grishin, followed as General Secretary by the younger but no less unreconstructed Romanov.

[13] Nikolay Ryzhkov, *Perestroika: istoriya predatel'stv* (Moscow, 1992), p. 291.

[14] Gorbachev, *Zhizn' i reformy*, Vol. 1, p. 395.

[15] Jack F. Matlock, Jr, *Autopsy on an Empire: The American Ambassador's Account of the Collapse of the Soviet Union* (New York: Random House, 1995), p. 210.

[16] Yakovlev, *Sumerki*, p. 383.

[17] The best case for Reagan in this context is made by former Ambassador Matlock, although he fully recognizes the crucial role played by Gorbachev. See Jack F. Matlock, Jr, *Reagan and Gorbachev: How the Cold War Ended* (New York: Random House, 2004).

[18] George Shultz, *Turmoil and Triumph: My Years as Secretary of State* (New York: Macmillan, 1993), p. 1138.

[19] Mikhail Gorbachev, *Gorbachev on My Country and the World* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), p. 206. See also Vadim Medvedev, *Raspad* (Moscow: Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniya, 1994); Vadim Medvedev, *Prozrenie, mif ili predatel'stvo? K voprosu ob ideologii perestroyki* (Moscow: Evraziya, 1998); A.S. Chernyayev, *Shest' let s Gorbachevym: Po dnevnikovym zapisyam pomoshchnika* (Moscow: Kultura, 1993); Georgy Shakhnazarov, *Tsena svobody: Reformatsiya Gorbacheva glazami ego pomoshchnika* (Moscow: Rossika Zevs. 1993); and for a more hostile account of Gorbachev's conduct of foreign policy, V.M. Falin, *Bez skidok na obstoyatel'stva: politicheskie vospominaniya* (Moscow: Respublika, 1999).

[20] For the Baltic nations, the sight of East-Central European countries becoming fully independent and non-Communist was particularly important and emboldened them to move from demands for greater autonomy within the Soviet Union to outright independence. Cf. Archie Brown, "Transnational Influences in the Transition from Communism", *Post-Soviet Affairs*, Vol. 16, No. 2, April-June 2000, pp. 177-200.

[21] The reliable VTsIOM survey data show clearly that Gorbachev's popularity was, indeed, in steep decline during his last eighteen months in office, but the contemporary hard evidence, as distinct from retrospective and selective memory, also shows that he was the most popular politician in Russia and the Soviet Union as a whole for the greater part of his time as Soviet leader. Or, as the leading VTsIOM researcher, Boris Dubin, noted, between 1988 and the early 1990s the two people who emerged from survey research as "heroes of the year" were the "vozhdi-reformatory" – at first M. Gorbachev, later B. Yeltsin". See Dubin, "Stalin i drugie. Figury vysshey vlasti v obshchestvennom mnenii sovremennoy Rossii", *Monitoring obshchestvennogo mneniya*, No. 1, January-February 2003, pp.13-15, at p. 6. In addition to the VTsIOM surveys, serious sociological research commissioned by the Academy of Social Sciences showed that Gorbachev's standing was still high in 1989, although less spectacularly so than earlier. See Vadim Medvedev, *Prozrenie, mif ili predatel'vstvo?*, p. 213.

[22] Juan Linz and Alfred Stepan, *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation* (Baltimore, 1996), esp. pp. 381-385.

[23] Yeltsin's victory would have been far from guaranteed. To institute a popular election for the presidency would have given a new boost to Gorbachev's flagging popularity and he would surely have gained from being the first supreme leader in

Russian history who, having inherited vast power, voluntarily chose to put his power at the disposal of the people. Cumulatively, Gorbachev's reforms did precisely that, but the point would have emerged much more clearly if direct elections for a Soviet presidency had occurred when Gorbachev still had a lot to lose.

[24] See, for example, Rogers Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed: Nationhood and Nationalism in the New Europe* (Cambridge, Eng., 1966); and Valerie Bunce, *Subversive Institutions: The Design and Destruction of Socialism and the State* (Cambridge, Eng., 1999). See also Linz and Stepan, *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation*, especially chapter 19.

[25] See Matthew Wyman, "Russians and Non-Russians on the Collapse of the USSR" in his book (which, title notwithstanding, deals with the late Soviet as well as post-Soviet period), *Public Opinion in Postcommunist Russia* (London, 1997), pp. 149-173.

[26] In May 1990 Yeltsin insisted that Union laws must not contravene those of Russia, rather than the other way round. See Leon Aron, *Boris Yeltsin: A Revolutionary Life* (London, 2000), p. 377. The fate of the Union not only for Yeltsin but also for his ambitious entourage was secondary to the struggle for power.

[27] On the need to "tranquillize the hardliners", as a general problem of political transition, see Guillermo O'Donnell and Philippe C. Schmitter, *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule: Tentative Conclusions about Uncertain Democracies* (Baltimore, 1986), p. 44. Or, as Andrey Grachev (Gorbachev's last presidential press spokesman) has put it: "People seldom ask how many coups d'etats Gorbachev managed to avoid in six and a half years of reform. Any of these potential coups could have occurred under much less favorable circumstances, when Gorbachev's position in the Politburo and Central Committee was such that he was virtually isolated from the Party of which he was the leader". See Andrey S. Grachev, *Final Days: The Inside Story of the Collapse of the Soviet Union* (Boulder, 1995), p. 101.

[28] See note 14.

THE PLACE OF PERESTROIKA IN THE HISTORY OF RUSSIA

by Aleksandr Galkin

Aleksandr Galkin is Chief Research Officer at the Institute of Social Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences (RAN), Doctor of History, Project Head at the Center for Research Projects of the Gorbachev Foundation; in 1985, Head of the Social and Political Development Department, Institute for International Workers' Movement of the USSR Academy of Sciences; in 1987, Pro-rector of the Institute of Social Sciences at the CPSU Central Committee.

Twenty years is a considerable length of time. Over this period, thousands of books and articles on various aspects of Perestroika were published. And still, we by no means have a clear picture of it. There are still heated, and at times fierce, public debates going on over the causes of Perestroika, its goals and patterns of implementation, its outcomes, and place in the history of Russia.

Meanwhile, much depends on the nature of answers to the above questions, and above all, on the understanding of the situation Russia found itself in 20 years later.

The causes

The political, social and economic system established in the country after the October Revolution, having lost many of the values it proclaimed, with time, started to transform itself into a purely mobilization system. In the context of crisis development and in emergency situations this system showed its efficiency. However, soon after the end of the Great Patriotic War, this efficiency started to decline sharply in the course of further peaceful development. Political organizations of the mobilization system came into conflict with the needs of a new, better educated, and mainly urban public, while the economy proved unable to adjust to the demands of the next stage of the scientific and technical revolution.

As early as in the 1950s, right after the death of Joseph Stalin, understanding started to take shape among the ruling circles of the country of the necessity of changes. This explains the repeated attempts to reform the system, the most large-scale of them associated with the names

of Nikita Khrushchev and Aleksey Kosygin. The feeling that society needed some serious changes was also growing at the grassroots level, among various groups of the population.

Up until now, the special literature and op-eds by political journalists have been presenting the opinion, according to which the decisive factor that prompted the country's leadership to launch Perestroika was economic difficulties. The burden of the arms race caused by the competition for superiority against another superpower, the United States, is often cited as their root. This assertion is still been used even today to make the view of Perestroika as a consequence of the defeat suffered by the Soviet Union in the Cold War against the "Western World" look more convincing.

Indeed, by the beginning of the 1980s, the economic situation of the Soviet Union was rather complicated, to put it mildly. The industrial growth had slowed down. Production capacities were used inefficiently. Energy consumption and resource intensity of products remained abnormally high. The range and quality of manufactured goods did not meet the growing demands of the public. Enterprises continued to persistently reject innovations dictated by the scientific and technical revolution.

Meanwhile, however, the key production mechanisms continued to operate more or less successfully. The per capita GDP was approximately twice as high as in the beginning of the 21st Century, 20 years later. The volume of industrial production was two times higher. The country had accumulated a huge scientific expertise, thus, creating prerequisites for its economic development according to modern standards. With all the irritating shortages of many goods, the pattern and the volume of consumption of many durable goods and, particularly, foodstuffs were better than today. Despite their obvious weak spots, the education, public health, and social security systems, in general, coped with their tasks rather successfully.

The burden put on society by the excessively grown military structures, as well as the expenditures to maintain military parity with the United States, were indeed heavy. Nevertheless, the main reason for the difficulties experienced by the economy was different. The most important factor was the internal flaws of the system. Its resources were running out. The foundations it rested upon did not correspond to the objective needs and had to be replaced.

At the same time, the resources available at the time to the Soviet economy, although overstrained, still allowed to stand the increased loads, maybe, for decades to go, had it not been for other circumstances...

The most important among them was the social and psychological situation determining the political climate. During the post-war years, a gap emerged and started to constantly grow between the actual state of

affairs in the country and the expectations of the population at large. The political credit the government had for decades was based on the ideologically consolidated belief of the public that the serious hardships that accompanied their daily lives were transient and that better times were to come soon. This faith was based not only on the promises and proclaimed policy documents, but also on some real acts of social policy perceived as an evidence of movement in the promised direction.

However, with time, it was becoming increasingly clear that the future, with which the coming improvements were associated, was being put off farther and farther. This caused frustrations, which grew into estrangement from the government, gradually developing into hostility towards it.

Many of the developments that happened between the 1950s and the 1980s contributed, each in its own way, to the dilution of the ideological and psychological aims and, hence, of the political credit the government had:

- facts of the Great Terror initiated by Joseph Stalin, made known after the 20th Congress of the CPSU and cloaked in that period under the euphemism of "Stalin's cult of personality," and later, an attempt to revive that "cult" undertaken in the years of Leonid Brezhnev's rule;
- The use of Soviet troops to suppress the uprising in Hungary in 1956 and the Prague Spring in 1969;
- Interference of the Soviet Union into the internal affairs of Afghanistan, ending with a lengthy involvement of the Soviet troops in military operations on the territory of this country;
- A wave of persecutions and suppression of dissent, which peaked in the 1970-80s;
- Emergence, in view of the growth of tourism, of an opportunity for large section of the population to compare the living conditions in the Soviet Union and abroad;
- Growing inequality in the living conditions between the administrative (*nomenklatura*) stratum of society, on the one hand, and the bulk of the population, on the other hand;
- Interruptions of supplies of meat and milk products to the population in a number of regions due to the excess of money supply over the supply of goods.

The slowed-down rotation of managerial personnel, which turned the top bodies of power into a senate of gerontocrats with a distorted perception of the real processes in the country and the world greatly irritated the public consciousness.

As a result, a great part of the population developed serious doubts about the correctness of the chosen path of social, economic and political

development and the correspondence of the domestic and foreign policies pursued to the proclaimed principles, and the ability of the ruling circle to successfully address the challenges encountered by the country in the new situation.

Such attitudes had different manifestations, depending on the social status, occupation, educational level, and the living standards of the citizens in question. Intelligentsia showed a particularly bitter reaction to the developments.

In the 1950s-80s, the share of the intelligentsia in the Soviet Union not only reached the relevant share enjoyed by intellectuals in the most developed industrial Western countries, but in some aspects exceeded it. Therefore, the relationship between the intelligentsia and the government, which was rather complicated even before, got a new powerful impetus. On the one hand, the intelligentsia had a positive opinion of the opportunities of social mobility and professional fulfillment that appeared in the course of modernization of Soviet society. On the other hand, its self-assertion and creative activity started to increasingly come into conflict with the growing inefficiency of administrative institutions, their low competence, and red-tape.

The intelligentsia, or, at least the overwhelming majority of it, badly reacted to its artificially lowered social status and derogatory views of intellectual labor as an unproductive one.

The government tamed some groups of the intelligentsia, whose cooperation it was particularly interested in. At the same time, a certain anti-intelligentsia thrust of its general course, not so evident at the first stages of formation of the system, but still quite definite, remained unchanged. The intelligentsia, perceived as a source of potential instability, was kept under vigilant surveillance.

All this predetermined progressing estrangement of mass sections of the intelligentsia from the governmental institutions and, eventually, from the political system in general. It became especially obvious when the main ties that had ensured operation of the system till a certain moment loosened.

First to express such attitudes was an extremely amorphous movement, called later the "men and women of the sixties", as well as marginal groups of "dissidents." At the initial stage, it was they who happened to be the active bearers of the idea of restructuring.

Complicated processes were going on in those years amidst the ranks of the influential category of administrative, management, and party workers. In the situation of a comprehensive state control over all spheres of life, this category was not just numerous, but constantly showing a growth trend. Its structure was significantly changing.

Growing was the share of its part called the Party and management activists. It was increasingly pushing political "talkers" into the background.

Personal characteristics of members of this group were also changing.

Half-educated functionaries who were experts in managing any activity were starting to be increasingly replaced by "experienced professional technicians" who had higher education diplomas and little interest in ideology, however, were experts in their respective fields. They valued the government, which aided their vertical mobility, but at the same time they were oppressed by petty surveillance of Party bodies and expressed frustration with a senseless centralization and bureaucratization of managerial decision-making. At the same time, this group was increasingly seeking to lock in the managing functions delegated to them by the government and turn them into ownership rights. That is why they interpreted urgent changes mainly as a series of measures which could improve and lock in the social status obtained by them, without destruction of the foundations of established power relations.

At the same time, in an increasingly noticeable trend, members of the humanitarian intelligentsia, whom the government needed to give it some outward gloss, were joining the ranks of managers of all kinds. While serving the government, they were at same time introducing into the government agencies the values, aims and preferences established among the intelligentsia.

Also growing were conflicts in the sphere of ethnic relations. Formally, at the Soviet time, the "nationalities questions" were supposed to be essentially solved. In reality, they, like all the other problems, were pushed into the background, which made them more, rather than less, explosive.

Frustration experienced by the bulk of the population was still amorphous at that time.

Its most illustrative manifestation was accented distancing from the government. The majority of people were not ready for active actions of protest; however, they were also not showing desire to defend their "bosses" from those who attacked them. Its most active part in no way had any clearly-defined objectives, either. There was an idea of what had to be fought against. Much more difficult was finding an answer to the question of what should be sought. Nevertheless, already then first signs started to emerge of the division of the movement for change into ideological trends with their own peculiar systems of values, namely, the renewal and socialist, traditionalist and nationalistic, and neo-liberal and Western-oriented trends.

Such was the situation in the country, when the bright extraordinary figure of the new leader, Mikhail Gorbachev, appeared on the horizon of big politics.

The goals

History shows that when the majority of people want changes, moving to the forefront of the public life are the leaders who feel and express their hopes. This was exactly the case with Gorbachev.

Joining of the top body of state power in the country by the First Secretary of the Stavropol Krai Party Committee, little known to the general public, immediately attracted the attention of the Moscow public, which looked to changes. Many things about him made people like him. It was both his youth, particularly accented against the background of the "Kremlin elders"; and his obvious refinement, so rarely observed at the top level he had reached; and his friendliness towards the people around him; and his openness to new information, which he readily took in and thought over.

Also speaking well for Mikhail Gorbachev was his track record. He was born in the back country to an ordinary working family and possessed good knowledge of what the real life was beyond the Moscow Ring Road. He was a graduate of the Moscow State University and was schooled during the tumultuous years after the 20th Party Congress and the "thaw" of Khrushchev's time. He was a man who was familiar with all the tiers of the Party and managerial structure and had first-hand knowledge of its mechanisms and problems.

Soon the intelligentsia, including outside of Moscow, as well as part of workers of the Party and state apparatus who were thinking of themselves as progressive, started to view Mikhail Gorbachev as the preferred candidate for the post of head of the Party and the state, should this seat become vacant. This opinion became popular among the wider public, too. The years that followed helped strengthen this view. That is why the transfer of the decisive levers of power into the hands of Mikhail Gorbachev in March 1985 was welcomed not just with approval, but with cheers. The course chosen by him and later, when developed still further, called "Perestroika", was met favorably, too.

Of course, various sections and groups of the Soviet population associated this course with their special interests, which were coinciding or, more often than not, far from being identical. However, it became known later.

Until this day, critics of Perestroika blame its initiator for his failure to prepare an elaborate plan of action, detailing the reform stages and taking into account the whole range of their consequences, when he started the reforms affecting the fate of millions of people. Our response to this criticism, if we are to regard this view as a sincere opinion and not as a deliberate propaganda ("PR") message intended for ignorant people, would be as follows:

Any social shock, which large-scale reforms of economic system, political government, and administrative institutions really are, is, as a rule, based on a general system of values, which is modified, supplemented, or transformed in the course of spontaneous creative activity of the masses of people set in motion. The substance of such creative efforts cannot be predicted in detail.

Did the initiator of Perestroika and his associates have their own system of values? Of course, they did. Reflecting the sentiments prevalent in society, it envisaged the introduction of changes into the economic, social and political systems, which would free the country and its population from the above ills, while keeping all the positive achievements of the previous years.

Specifically, the goal was to transform Soviet society into a society of free people, built on the principles of humanism, people's power, and social justice. It had to be based on various forms of property, guaranteeing ownership rights to the people and unlimited opportunities for displaying initiatives and was to ensure true equality of all nations and nationalities, full human rights, and embrace the best democratic achievements of the humankind.

The action program for the foreign policy sphere was obvious, too. It was urgently necessary to put an immediate end to the growth of international tensions and the arms race, especially, as regards weapons of mass destruction. It was necessary to repair the relations with many leading countries of the world, damaged in the course of the Cold War. There was an urgent need to overhaul relations with allies in the Warsaw Treaty Organization. Relations with many countries of the so-called "Third World" also needed to be adjusted. In this regard, first of all, it was necessary to put an end to involvement of the Soviet troops in the military operations in Afghanistan.

Accomplishment of the above tasks required a fresh outlook on the international situation, launching new unorthodox proposals, flexibility, and readiness for compromises. All these were available and present in the "new political thinking" concept.

Things were more complicated as regards changes in the economy and internal policies. The complexity of the problems accumulated in this field was showing itself gradually, following every action that was taken to address them.

Initially, the plan was to achieve positive shifts in the economy by increasing investment in the industrial production to meet the demands of the scientific and technical revolution (the "acceleration policy"). However, the existing mechanisms did not work. The inertia of the extremely centralized planned economy dampened all the attempts to

modernize it. The attempts to reform the economic mechanism yielded no results, either.

In this regard, the need to use the market mechanisms as a means to stimulate economic development became particularly obvious.

Correspondingly, it also became necessary to reinvent the strategy of economic development, providing, in particular, for support to cooperative and private business activities.

Gradual emancipation of the mass media from the strict control over their activities (the "policy of glasnost") became the threshold of the urgent political reform. Its goal was to bolster the feed-back system and strengthen the population's support for economic and political reforms. Later, control over the institutions of state power exercised by the Party bodies was loosened.

The following stage was characterized by alternative elections, first to the Supreme Soviet of the USSR and later to the Supreme Soviets of the RSFSR and other Union republics.

Thanks to the reforms, relations between the representative bodies and the administrative institutions were fully revised. The latter became accountable to the Soviets, which, in their turn, were transformed into organizations of parliamentary type. Deleted from the Constitution of the USSR was Article 6 that provided for the leadership role of the CPSU, the only party existing in the country.

Efforts were taken to radically improve relations between the Union republics and the state center by updating the substance and the structures of the common Union. Lengthy and difficult discussions resulted in elaboration of the draft of a new Union Treaty, acceptable for the majority of the republics.

The achievements and problems

A detailed description of all the reforms implemented in the years of Perestroika is beyond the scope of this article. Suffice it to point out in this regard that, in spite of the fact that the renovation of the country undertaken in the course of Perestroika turned out to be a more complicated process than was initially anticipated, positive changes took place in the country within this very short period.

- The Cold War, which lasted many decades, was brought to an end; some important treaties providing for reduction of the most dangerous types of armaments were concluded; and relations with most of the major economically developed countries were normalized. The Soviet Union opened up to the

world and renounced interference in affairs of other countries. The peoples of the countries which were allies of the Union and where difficult crisis processes were emerging obtained a real freedom of choice. Within the framework of the pursued policy, a relatively painless solution was found to the old problem of reunification of Germany, fraught with explosive consequences, and Soviet troops were withdrawn from Afghanistan.

- Society was no longer muzzled. It became free both spiritually and politically. A breakthrough was made on the path of democratic reforms and the foundations were laid down of a normal political system providing for separation of the representative, executive and judicial powers, a multiparty system and free multi-candidate elections. Freedom of the press and conscience was formalized in legislation; restrictions on trips abroad were lifted; and human rights were proclaimed the highest principle of all.

- The progress towards a mixed economy began. Preconditions for development of economic activity were established: freedom of economic activity for manufacturers was legalized; barriers in the foreign trade monopoly were loosened; establishment of joint ventures with participation of foreign capital was permitted; introduction of the market principles at the major state-owned plants was started; and measures were taken to stimulate cooperatives and small and medium-sized businesses.

Of course, by no means everything that had to be done in that situation was accomplished. However, the process of democratization and modernization of society was successfully started and the course of its further development was charted.

Naturally, such a complicated process of reforms like Perestroika was not without mistakes and miscalculations. Some of them were corrected in the process. Others, more significant ones, had a negative impact on the fate of Perestroika.

- No effective civil public organizations were created, capable of upholding and defending the reforms. At the same time, renewal of personnel was not completed. As a result, in many cases the fates of Perestroika fell into the hands of people who were internally hostile towards it, while efforts to discourage them were sporadic and, as a rule, yielded no results.

- The fact was not duly taken into account that profound reforms could be expected to win mass support only if popular slogans,

even the most vital and noble ones, are accompanied by a noticeable, if even minimal, improvement in the material conditions of life for the majority of the population. Otherwise, the course based on them is sure to be perceived by the people as an idle talk or a deliberate deception.

The severity of conflicts existing in society, above all, between the nations, was not assessed in due time, whereas their impact on the course of developments was becoming increasingly manifest.

The above is a result of miscalculations made by the leadership. However, there were other equally grave mistakes, responsibility for which lies with the social group that initially was and for some time remained the main bearer of the ideas of Perestroika, namely, the intelligentsia, and, above all, its leading lights.

Today, many members of this group have forgotten (or pretend to have forgotten) how high their enthusiasm and hopes were when they welcomed Perestroika and how active their support for it was. And there were good reasons for that. Having supported Perestroika, the intelligentsia practically got everything it sought in looking forward to it, like going away of derogatory views of intellectual labor, formation of democratic institutions and procedures, an opportunity of active participation in the political life of society, freedom of creativity, an opportunity of free travel abroad and maintenance of business and personal contacts with foreign partners.

The most ambitious and politically active intellectuals got unprecedented opportunities to rise in their careers. Mediocre lawyers, using their professional skill to speak eloquently, became public political figures of the top echelon. Journalists just starting their careers and ordinary TV reporters were perceived by the public as torches of truth, a kind of ideological "gurus." Staff of scientific and research institutes with little knowledge of the real problems faced by society and no experience of human resources management were becoming deputy ministers, ministers, and, sometimes, vice prime ministers. They all readily called themselves the "foremen of Perestroika," competing for the right to directly participate in preparing popular decisions.

However, as time passed, the situation changed. As Perestroika went deeper and the conflicts related to it grew, influential groups of intellectuals started to show more reserved, and later hostile, attitudes towards it. Actions taken by the country's leadership came under fire and the team implementing Perestroika was increasingly reviled. To discredit the policy of Perestroika in the eyes of the general public the freedom of speech and the press, newly obtained thanks to this very Perestroika, were used.

It would be wrong to deny that there was also some core of sense in the critical demands presented by the top sections of the intelligentsia. In some ways they were even useful, since they helped the leaders of Perestroika to overcome the resistance of the conservative part of the managerial apparatus.

However, on the whole, the stand from which attacks on Perestroika were made, was a destructive one. It was not only that the organizers of those attacks ignored the real situation and the objective limitations which had to be taken into account. As shown by the course of subsequent events, their stance was not at all based on the desire to accelerate the started process of reforms, make it more efficient and save from making mistakes and distortions. The matter was quite different. It was the intention to set the policy of Perestroika against a fundamentally different pattern of values, which was a copy-cat of social relations of early capitalism, long renounced and left behind in the economically developed countries.

At that time and a little later, another critical message emerged, at loggerheads with the call for a more speedy, energetic, and radical implementation of Perestroika policy. It reflected a growing concern that the dismantling of old managerial structures would bring destruction and chaos to the country. It also reflected a negative attitude towards what was described as an unwarranted haste with implementation of political reforms before some real positive results were brought by economic reforms. It was pointed out that such haste was opening up a broad way for political speculators.

One could agree with the considerations to this effect from the purely theoretical point of view. However, one could not fail to take into account the fact that there were some circumstances, dictated by the situation, working against them.

First, the practical experience of the first years of Perestroika convincingly showed that the existing administrative and bureaucratic machine was consistently rejecting any attempts to modernize the economic system. Replacement of this machine was only possible by way of overhauling the political institutions.

Secondly, preservation of the old administrative and bureaucratic machine in the context of growing resistance to changes increased the threat of a political coup that could throw the country back and once again deprive it of freedom.

Thirdly, the masses set in motion were calling above all for political reforms, which would liberate the country from the "muzzle" referred to above. Any delay with effecting these changes meant going into conflict with sentiments that took hold of the society, the more so that the activist intellectuals did everything to stoke those sentiments.

The deep causes of this evolution of the intellectuals who were initially supporters of Perestroika into its radical critics has not yet been fully established. However, some of them are obvious enough.

These are intolerance and radicality, engendered by the negative experience of the previous decades, and the range of personal grievances feeding their desire to "smash into pieces" everything connected with the past, no matter what the consequences of such actions may be.

This is the influence of corporatist sentiments centered solely around the interests of own group, rather than the common good, like it used to be the case with the intelligentsia in the past. These sentiments widely spread in the process of transformation of the intelligentsia into a mass social group.

This is a poor, mostly bookish, knowledge of the realities of the Western way of life, the peculiar features of its social system and the conflicts specific to it, conditioned by long isolation of Soviet society. As is known, a few years later the stand on Perestroika adopted by many members of the intelligentsia proved to be a catastrophe for its greater part, with its consequences experienced even these days.

Peculiar changes in the attitudes towards Perestroika were taking place in the administrative and party-economic structures, too. Three antagonistic groups took shape as a result of stratification of their staff. The first group (the smallest in number) brought together people who stayed loyal to the original values of Perestroika and were ready to consistently support it. The second group (a more numerous one) continued to uphold fundamentalist positions, rejecting Perestroika in principle and seeking to restore the previous system they were accustomed to. The third group (also a numerous one) saw the developments as a situation that opened up additional opportunities for rapid career growth, consolidation of the status positions they gained, and sublimation of administrative powers delegated to them into ownership rights and, hence, their perpetuation, rather than movement towards revitalization and democratization of society. Therefore, it was interested in Perestroika, but not the one that was actually been carried out. They wanted a different Perestroika, the one placed onto the rails of capitalism.

With time, this group entered into partnership relations with a part of the intelligentsia to launch a joint crusade against that Perestroika which was inseparably associated with the name of Mikhail Gorbachev. Election of such incomparable and conflicting figures as Academician Andrey Sakharov, an outstanding scientist, a democrat, and a high-grade intellectual, and Boris Yeltsin, a coarse and despotic Party apparatchik of the worst provincial type, as co-chairmen of the Interregional Group of Deputies of the USSR Supreme Soviet, which became the core of the

forces opposing the leaders of Perestroika, became a kind of symbol of these relations.

The subsequent course of events is well known. There was an increasingly harder resistance of the fundamentalist wing of the Party and administrative bureaucracy to the policy of Perestroika. There were attacks on it launched from formally democratic positions by a part of intelligentsia secretly supported by the Party and management activists of the second tier. There was a coup attempt, undertaken by a group of fundamentalists from the higher echelons of power (the GKChP, or the State Committee for the State of Emergency, plot). There were mass rallies against the coup-plotters held all over the country. There was the coming to power on this wave of Boris Yeltsin and his team, where champions of primitive early capitalism ruled the roost. There was the taking of power positions by the Party and economic *nomenklatura* of the second tier. There was "disbandment" of the Soviet Union and destruction of the political and administrative institutions in the Russian Federation and the entire system of management of society.

The majority of citizens perceived the initial changes as a more determined course towards continuation of Perestroika. At first, this impression was also sustained by the new authorities who used the widely spread sentiments to their advantage. In fact, what was happening was not a continuation, but a "perestroika of Perestroika".

The value reference points lying in the basis of the course proposed to the country by the new team after the tragic events of 1991 were fundamentally different from the main values of Perestroika.

Perestroika envisaged reforms of the existing social system. The post-Perestroika aimed at its complete destruction.

Perestroika was oriented towards an evolutionary path of the country's development. The post-Perestroika employed extremist ways of reforms.

The driving force behind Perestroika was the desire to achieve the common good, based on social justice. The post-Perestroika was meant to benefit few people, the ones not burdened with "strict morals," but rapacious, business-minded and cheeky.

The economic program of Perestroika provided for development of the national economy based on multiple forms of ownership, including cooperative, private, municipal, and state property. Competition between them was to become the stimulus for intensification of production, wide use of achievements of the scientific and technical revolution and improvement of labor productivity. Within the framework of post-Perestroika, a course was adopted of establishing a private monopoly on natural resources and means of production. This was, in particular, the

essence of privatization, during which the public property accumulated over many decades was given away and plundered. As a result, the deformed current economic system was shaped, in which the main wealth of the country is concentrated in the hands of its top bureaucracy, on the one hand, and the biggest financial and industrial oligarchs, on the other hand.

Perestroika was aimed at democratic reforms, that is, at real democratization of all social relations, including the political system. For the post-Perestroika, democracy remained only a cover, used to mask contempt for the common people and needed only to the extent necessary to keep power and maintain that kind of image of the regime which was acceptable for its Western partners, so much valued by it.

Perestroika envisaged preservation of the Soviet Union as a revitalized community of free Union republics. Post-Perestroika was characterized by its open hostility towards the USSR, which was viewed as an obsolete empire, with its destruction regarded as a good for its constituent nations. Hence, deliberate actions were taken to that end.

The aim of Perestroika was creation of conditions to ensure termination of the tough stand-off between the country and other developed countries and its entry into the world community as an influential and equal partner. Post-Perestroika assigned to the country the role of a satellite of the "Western World," content with just picking crumbs off the table of the masters.

In other words, that what is still called the democratic revolution of August 1991, in fact, marked the massacring of Perestroika.

A final line under this period in the life of the country was drawn in autumn 1993, when the building of the Supreme Soviet of the Russian Federation, one of the last living creations of Perestroika, was shelled by tanks. This fact confirmed the fact that the regime established in the country and democracy were not compatible.

* * *

Today, almost everybody admits that the 1990s were the time of ruin and destruction. Damage was done to all spheres of public life: economy, social sphere, culture, and security.

This leads to a conclusion that could only be unambiguous. The forced termination of Perestroika was a tragic mistake. In the 1980s, Russian society got a unique chance to embark on the way of comprehensive renewal in the interests of all of its members, with no senseless losses and shocks. The necessary preconditions to implement it were in place: the material base, the social atmosphere, and the possibility to rely on the

institutions of state power. However, this chance was never used. And the blame for it, certainly, lies with everyone: those participating in Perestroika, those staying away from it, and those who deliberately put obstacles in its way.

However, the years of Perestroika were not wasted. They left a deep imprint on the public consciousness. Its experience became an integral part of this consciousness as an idea of a real alternative to the barrack and administrative caricature of socialism and the bureaucratic and oligarchic capitalism that established itself as a result of post-Perestroika.

Perestroika was in effect the first major attempt at implementing in practice the idea of democratic socialism, implying formation of a social system based on solidarity and social justice, on the one hand, and stable freedoms guaranteed by its democratic institutions and procedures, on the other hand.

The significance of this attempt is incomparably greater than that of the famous Prague Spring, which was suppressed even before it made some first real steps.

It is obvious that Perestroika as a range of practical measures was defeated. At the same time, it opened for the humankind new opportunities for development, thus becoming an integral part of its history.

THREE FORKS IN THE ROAD OF GORBACHEV'S PERESTROIKA

by Viktor Kuvaldin

Viktor Kuvaldin is Executive Director of the "Expertise" Round Table (the Gorbachev Foundation), Doctor of History, Professor at MGIMO University (the Moscow State Institute of International Relations) and the Lomonosov Moscow State University. In the beginning of Perestroika, he was Adviser with the International Department of the CPSU Central Committee, and in 1991, Adviser to the Aide to the President of the USSR.

For a human being, 20 years is an entire life-span. This is a period separating one generation from another. For history, 20 years is just a moment. To make a comprehensive analysis of such a major phenomenon like Gorbachev's Perestroika a distance of 20 years is not big at all. Many participants in the events are still alive; political and human passions have not yet died down; and by no means all secret things have been made manifest.

I would like to start with a seemingly formal question as to the time given by history to carry out Perestroika. The answer seams obvious: a little over seven years. But was it really so? There are many reasons to believe that the process called "Perestroika" was in fact much shorter than the time of Mikhail Gorbachev's stay in power.

According to authoritative estimates, the beginning of Perestroika proper may be associated with the preparation and holding of the January (1987) Plenum of the CPSU Central Committee. The preceding year and a half should be seen as an entry into Perestroika, a "pre-Perestroika" period, described below.

Likewise, the dramatic finale of Perestroika came not in December and not even in August 1991. The borderline beyond which it would difficult to state that Perestroika processes were been continued, was essentially the election of Boris Yeltsin as Chairman of the Supreme Soviet of the RSFSR and adoption of the Declaration on Sovereignty (in the first half of June 1990) by the Russian Parliament, which matured only too quickly. After that, the situation of a "dual center" emerges in the USSR, soon transforming into a "dual power" situation. In Russia, like anywhere else, dual power means a fierce struggle for power until one of the parties gets full victory. In this situation, it is meaningless to refer to more or less normal continuation of Perestroika.

It turns out that Perestroika, in the precise meaning of the word, lasted about three and a half years.[1] This time would not be enough to make a radical turn in the life of any country. Three and a half years is an extremely short period to carry out a profound transformation of such a complicated and fragile organism as the Soviet Union was. Such a short period increases the risk of mistakes and miscalculations many times.

* * *

Many things in the assessment of Perestroika depend on what precisely is meant by this notion. Its initiators conceived Perestroika as a renewal of socialism to render it a more democratic and humane nature. We understand it as a Soviet (Russian) search for ways out of the totalitarian system that called itself "real socialism." This movement out of the labyrinths and dead-ends of "state socialism" meant a lot of things: from restoration of market economy to establishment of pluralism of ideas; however, the essence of its meaning was transition from party and police dictatorship to modern representative institutions based on the rule of law.

The entire frame of reference of the public life was changed in just a few years. From the point of view of mass psychology, consciousness and behavior, Perestroika meant three grandiose transitions, namely 1) transition from strict state regulation of distribution of goods and services, guaranteeing everyone a certain subsistence minimum, to commodity-money relations, accompanied by a rapid social stratification of rather a homogeneous Soviet society; 2) transition from formal, purely superficial participation in the political life to a conscious choice and real opportunity to influence the government; and 3) transition from conformism of ideas, imposed from the top, to true axiological and ideological self-determination of individuals. Perestroika resulted in the abrupt relocation of the "Soviet man" from one social world into a different one, previously known to him solely from magazines and movies, often in a distorted way, at that.

Looking back, one might say that the key to understanding the fate of Perestroika is the correlation between economic, political, and ideological reforms and their interdependence and reciprocal influence. A simplified and distorted formulation of this "question of questions" is often seen in arguments regarding the extent to which Perestroika could and should have followed the path of Chinese reforms.

It is obvious that such an approach is open to criticism, since the realities inherited by reformers of the two socialist giants were too different. However, it still reflects the essence of the matter: the tragic finale of Perestroika was in many ways predetermined by the impossibility,

inability or reluctance to break down in whatever way the overwhelming "super-task" into separate program blocks, try to prioritize them, avoid "getting ahead of developments," and refrain from trying to resolve all problems at once.

Retrospectively, the actual succession of actions taken by Gorbachev's leadership team looks as follows: revolution in consciousness – political reform – economic reforms. There was a certain logic to it, because the established etatist administrative and command system looked like an integral rigid body, which rejected any attempts at partial reforms. However, the overloads created by the simultaneous launch of offensives on all fronts were giving rise to the risk, the degree of which went beyond acceptable limits. Add here the outburst of national conflicts in the polyethnic, polyconfessional, and polycivilizational environment; the rapidly emerging conservative and radical opposition ready to go any length to seize power; the lightning collapse of the protective cover of the "European socialist system;" and formidable external forces striving to "do away with the Soviet empire" – and it looks like Gorbachev's leadership team had few chances to survive and carry through the great cause it undertook.

* * *

Moving out of the etatist system, even in the relatively homogeneous Soviet society, could only be made through a fierce struggle between various ideological and political projects. All kinds of forces, including the external ones, actively participated in this struggle. It goes without saying that their chances of success were determined by the availability of appropriate resources and capabilities. Here the various components of the elite of the later Soviet period played first fiddle: the party and state *nomenklatura*, economic leaders, prominent members of the intelligentsia, public and political figures of the "new wave," shadow dealers, and even top leaders of the criminal world. Each of the segments of the Soviet "top leadership" sought to direct the rapidly developing transformations of the stagnated society into a channel benefiting them; everybody hurried to stake positions for the future, and many were busy pushing forward their own public projects. They also had a minimal common denominator: conversion of the Soviet-time status into power and property in the post-socialist social medium.

Assuming that Perestroika, as a more or less meaningful movement towards a new system, began much later than March-April 1985, we may ask ourselves the question, "What was done during the first eighteen months of Gorbachev's stay in power?" This "pre-Perestroika" period

(spring 1985 – autumn 1986) was a desperate attempt to breathe new life into the decrepit Soviet system.

Strictly speaking, "pre-Perestroika" began not with Mikhail Gorbachev, but Yuri Andropov, his predecessor and patron, who regarded Mikhail Gorbachev as his successor and continuer of his work, becoming General Secretary of the CPSU Central Committee (in November 1982). It was exactly at that time that "... the ruling elite started to show desire to significantly upgrade the existing social and economic system. However, the balance of forces "at the top" and their ideological attachment to a certain system of values imposed rather rigid limits on possible changes".[2]

In the first eighteen months, Gorbachev's leadership team was only approaching the fork in the road, busy mostly with implementation of the program of their predecessor.

Setting the logic of actions in 1985-1986 were largely Andropov's guidelines and his ideological and political legacy. The key reference points were the system's stability and "realization of the creative potential of socialism," which eventually found its expression in the slogan of "acceleration of social and economic development." Thus, what was done was the technocratic adjustment of the existing mechanism that had come loose in the situation of "stagnating and progressing" paralysis of power,[3] rather than an economic reform. To tell the truth, there was not much to it; however, as they say, you are welcome to all we have.

Undoubtedly, it would have been much better if Yuri Andropov himself implemented his own program, inherited by Gorbachev. In this case, he could have demythologized the "untapped reserves of socialism" and, perhaps, passed on to his successor more practical experience of reforming and less illusions. However, he was not destined to fully launch his plans, and the task of resuscitating the "state socialism," as well as its dismantling, fell to the lot of Gorbachev's team. An obviously conflicting mixture of historical tasks was sure to make the path of Perestroika take the form of a zigzag.

At the start of Gorbachev's reforms, the most significant in its scale and importance was the so-called "*anti-drinking*" *campaign* (May 1985). Much has been said about it and these are mostly unflattering remarks. Such an opinion seems not quite fair; however, the scope of this article does not allow us to debate this subject. For us, in this particular context, the anti-drinking campaign is important as a harbinger of hardships to fall to the lot of Gorbachev's plan.

The interpretation of this story offered by Mikhail Gorbachev himself has an obvious "gap" between the depth and the scale of the problem and the approaches to its resolution.[4] Launched was a storming attempt with

doubtful chances of success, where long-term consistent efforts were needed. In trying to somehow explain and justify the stepped-up pace of campaign against the demon drink, he writes, "It was because our desire to solve this big trouble was so great".[5]

The same style is characteristic of another failed experiment in the field of economy, the so-called "gospriyomka," or state commissioning system, where a system to control production quality existing at military plants was spread to civil enterprises. He offers a similar explanation of the insufficiently thought-out measures: "We wanted to upgrade production quality as soon as possible and using every means ... since time urged us on ..."[6]

The anti-drinking campaign was the baptism of fire for the reformers, testifying to their acute, even hypertrophied, *sense of time in history*. And it is not at all surprising, since after the stagnation of Brezhnev's time, they were making desperate efforts to make up for lost time (the policy of "acceleration"). They constantly felt the pressure of time constraints (a little overplayed one, though, as seen from the subsequent events) and that the time for accomplishing everything that was planned had already run out. They were spurred by the desire to make the process of reforms irreversible and not let the conservatives undo what had been achieved. What made them speed-up things was the strict logic of the bipolar confrontation with the United States and the capitalist world. And, finally, there was that eternal sin of the Russian intelligentsia: *impatience*, which often makes one race against time.

In retrospect, the failure of the anti-drinking campaign sounded a strong warning to alert the reformers that the explainable and understandable desire to move mountains in the shortest time possible was counterproductive. However, to heed it and draw the right conclusions in the fever of Perestroika routine was not at all that easy.

* * *

Having swiftly passed the "Andropov stage," in the middle of 1986, the reformers reached a fork in the road to the increasingly hazy future. As testified by a Russian researcher of that period, by the middle or the second half of 1986, two approaches took shape at the "top" towards further reforms of Soviet society, namely, the "economic and technological" approach and the "political" one. The former envisaged implementation of economic reforms, while keeping the political system intact, whereas the latter approach provided for rapid and determined democratization of society. Aiming at a political reform, the democratically-minded Party leaders had a quite clear idea of the scope of

conceived changes and things they sought to accomplish.[7] Despite the obvious risks of speeding-up the reform of the political system, particularly in the context of growing economic problems and difficulties, they opted for the latter approach.[8]

Simultaneously, intensive reinvention of such key notions of Gorbachev's reforms as "Perestroika" and "glasnost" is taking place. Sensing the growing opposition to his course, the General Secretary is increasingly emphasizing the revolutionary nature of the developments taking place. Once started as a simple change in the style of work, "Perestroika" now is a symbol of breaking away from the totalitarian past and of profound democratization of society. Likewise, "glasnost," conceived as a feedback channel between the "top" and "the grass roots" is becoming an important lever of democratization and a unique means of making the masses more socially and politically active.

Having mentally crossed the borderline of 1986 and 1987 separating Andropov's "pre-Perestroika" and Gorbachev's "Perestroika",[9] let us look back and once again ask ourselves the "accursed question," "How justified was this spurt forward on all fronts in the context of the deteriorating social and economic situation?" Did a more down-to-earth strategy of consistent economic reforms in the spirit of "market socialism," which yielded good fruits in the former European countries of "people's democracy," in China and in Vietnam, promise more chances of success?

There are many serious arguments in favor of the choice made by Gorbachev's team on the threshold of the year 1987. The system of "state socialism," which took shape over seven decades (spanning three generations!) and consolidated itself, rejected economic innovations; everybody remembered the examples of unsuccessful undertakings in this field, in particular, Kosygin's reform. Not only the economic reforms, but also the reformers themselves, could be buried by the "back wave." Everybody remembered the story of Khrushchev all too well.[10]

The "economic bias" of Perestroika could seem too insipid and dull to its mass support base that was taking shape: renewal-minded part of the Party-state elite, the intelligentsia, and the youth.

Still another thing can be added to these weighty considerations, the one that played a very important role, although was hidden from view: the "world outlook" that existed in the minds of the people who were ideologically preparing and inspiring Perestroika. The West and, above all, the United States was dominating it as a reference point and a role-model. The Western experience of social development, centered on a free individual, pushed everything else into the background and obscured from view. I am referring specifically to the phenomenon of rather successful

efforts at authoritarian modernization taken in the East, in countries like South Korea, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Taiwan, etc., which proved to be absent from the radar of the then figures of dominant influence. However, typologically this phenomenon was as significant for Soviet society as the tempting Western models.

There is still another thing. The authoritarian modernization, the rails of which Gorbachev's Perestroika resolutely left in the end of 1986, needed its own political agent. It could be the state apparatus, the armed forces, or the Party. In any event, what was needed was a significant part of the national elite willing to take the risk of profound social and economic reforms. Did the elite of the later Soviet period contain such a segment?

Stubborn battles over the first attempts at economic reform, which took place in 1987, can be viewed as a kind of real-life test of the reform potential of the *nomenklatura* of the later Soviet period.

Looking back, Gorbachev himself calls the transformation of planned economy into a market economy "... an immensely challenging task."[11] Of course, the first steps on that path were the most difficult ones. Stereotypes of "socialist mentality," combined with the huge interests that were affected by the fundamental changes of power relationships in the state-run economy, were capable of nipping any reform in the bud.

Particularly fierce was the resistance of the "general staffs" of the economic bureaucracy, like the Gosplan (State Planning Committee), the Gossnab (State Procurement Committee), the Finance Ministry, the Government Office, and the ministries, relying on the corps of directors, or executives of enterprises. Premier Nikolay Ryzhkov, whose relations with Gorbachev began to show the first signs of a rift, often played the role of their mouthpiece.

The stubborn tug-of-war between the camps of reformers and conservatives resulted in a reasonable compromise. If measured by the standards of that time, the decisions that were been taken were radical, even revolutionary, and, a true break-through. They were paving the way for shifting the economy onto the market rails. However, this was just paving the way, no more than that.

As is known, the economic reform of 1987 yielded limited and controversial results. There were many reasons for that, like the loss of entrepreneurial zest by Soviet society, persistent sabotage by the powerful economic bureaucracy of decisions that were taken, inconsistency of reformers, in particular, in the pricing policy, and the inevitable mistakes and miscalculations made in the new and complex activity. As a result, the valuable time was lost and the most propitious moment to start a painful adaptation of the population to new conditions

of economic life was missed; the uncontrolled increase in money supply and the growing shortages of goods were destroying the consumer market. Subsequently, this "miscalculation of a strategic nature"[12] would have a most adverse impact on the fate of Perestroika.

What conclusions can be drawn from this sad story? The first and the most important one is that the objective correlation of forces in society at the start of the "Gorbachev stage" of Perestroika allowed the implementation of profound economic reforms without affecting the political sphere.

The second conclusion is that the concentration of forces on the economic front was not only possible, but necessary. Looking back now, Vadim Medvedev, one of Gorbachev' closest associates and architects of the reforms, writes, "... the time allotted us to carry out a radical economic reform was much less than the cited three to four years. We had to take extraordinary measures and resolutely shift to market relations."[13]

The third conclusion is as follows: The profound economic reforms could have been used as a test of efficiency of the political system of Soviet society and helped chart promising courses of its transformation.

The fourth one reads: they had to be started, *as far as possible*, before the political reform so as not to create an explosive mixture of mass discontent and organized protest that could be easily used by the anti-Gorbachev opposition both from the left and from the right.

And, finally, the fifth conclusion is that the new economic agents engendered by the reform sooner or later start to demand political representation of their interests; from that time on, they were factors of not only the economic process, but of the political one as well. And, of course, they would not be adherents of the "socialist choice."

It looked like Gorbachev himself was not sure whether the route chosen by him was right. Later he stated, "The economic reforms have fallen behind the political ones."[14]

What tipped the scales back then in choosing the path to take? Andrey Grachev offered a very interesting explanation in this regard: "Obviously, one should view the fact that economic aspects of the reform always proved to be subordinate to the political ones and meant to serve them as the main reason for that choice."[15]

In the seemingly immortal but vulnerable Soviet system, economy was tightly wrapped into politics and everything was covered with a thick ideological fog. In protecting itself, the System imposed a certain logic of actions on the reformers attempting on its foundations. Nevertheless, the question still stands, "To what extent was Gorbachev's leadership team forced to accept the pattern of behavior imposed on it by the 'given circumstances'"?

* * *

Timewise, the second fork in the road of Gorbachev's Perestroika is located somewhere close to the first one. And it is not accidental. Having exhausted the potential of "Perestroika Andropov-style," Gorbachev is groping for a way to the future. He becomes increasingly convinced that the point is replacement of the System, rather than its overhaul, even if a major one. Plans of profound reforms in various spheres are been conceived almost simultaneously – clashing and competing with each other – since everything has to be changed – from the roof to the foundation.

The political reform that was, as we saw it, given priority over economic changes could be interpreted and implemented in different ways. The January 1987 Plenum opted for a radical version, aimed at speeded-up democratization of society. Remaining in the shadow were other transformation models of the later Soviet polity, rejected without any serious discussion.

The political reform was the core of Gorbachev's reforms, since the party state was the essence of the Soviet system. To be more exact, it was even the party-state, the Siamese twins, permanently conjoined with one another over the seventy years since the October Revolution. The operation conceived by the General Secretary to separate them and turn into a normal modern party (or parties) and a state required an accurate calculation and extremely high precision to perform it. Otherwise, both of them could prove to be feeble and anemic creations unable to stand the overloads of Perestroika. This ultimately proved to be the case.

However, could it be that this entire plan was doomed to failure from the very start, with absolutely no chances for this peculiar product of the Stalin era to survive? In the light of the events that actually happened, temptation is strong to give an affirmative answer;[16] however, let us not jump to a final verdict.

In the party-state link, the CPSU was, indeed, its "leading and guiding" element. Its ability to self-reform and find its place in post-Soviet society remains the subject of heated discussions even these days.

Roughly speaking, in the Communist Party of the mid-1980s, comprising almost 20 million members, it is possible to distinguish three main components, namely, 1) the party apparatus; 2) the notorious *nomenklatura*; and 3) the mass of its members. Each of them deserves a special discussion in the context of Perestroika.

To estimate the reform potential of the party masses would be the easiest thing. Of course, the CPSU had much dead wood, granted

membership to fill quotas on the instructions from the top to ensure the right social composition of the "party of workers and peasants."

At the same time, all socially active elements of Soviet society sought to join the party and wormed their way into it by fair means or foul. In this sense, it was indeed a "vanguard," which left the forces opposing the system in the desolate wilderness, with no human resources at all. Although it is true that ordinary members of the party, its modest toilers entitled to no benefits, were not very much attached to the old order of things.

Many Communists welcomed Perestroika as a long-awaited renewal. Dominating among its "foremen" and rank-and-file were the people with party membership cards. The party mass of many millions pushed Perestroika forward and not backward.

It is much more difficult to figure out what the *nomenklatura* felt about the revolutionary reforms started by Gorbachev. With its privileged positions in Soviet society, it instinctively feared any changes. Its life, judging by the short allowance of the "socialist camp," was not bad at all and it did have something to lose. It was aware that the Soviet system had started to decay; however, it hoped that things would settle somehow or, if the worst came to the worst, the system would last their life-times.

What was of decisive importance for the fate of Perestroika, was the stand of the top leadership, the "bosses," rather than of the whole *nomenklatura* layer, numbering a few million people. It grew more and more negative as the changes became more profound. Nevertheless, it is still unclear how predetermined its evolution was in this aspect.

Probably, it would be more correct to formulate this problem in a different way: Was Gorbachev able to win over to his side the decisive groups of the Soviet elite, without making excessive concessions and departures from the set goal? Were they ready to proceed still further on the Perestroika path after having passed the "Andropov stage"? Today hardly anyone can answer this question with certainty. However, it is possible to offer some reflections.

While maintaining continuity, Gorbachev's generation of the country's leaders greatly differs from its predecessors of Brezhnev's and Andropov's times. It is better educated, less narrow-minded and has a more adequate perception of the outside world. It is *the second post-Stalin generation* at the helm of the huge superpower, which leaves a deep imprint on their inner world and social and political views.

Their predecessors represented by the Khrushchev and Brezhnev cohort shaped by the October era are, at heart, *the last soldiers of the world revolution*.

Unlike the "children of October", Gorbachev and his supporters, as a product of de-Stalinization, are more independently-minded. Their feeling of the fundamental ambiguity of their personal and group status is rather acute. On the one hand, they are people vested with great powers and wielding enormous resources; on the other hand, they are just public officials of high ranks, whose status in society is fully determined by their post and place in the hierarchy. Without their offices, they are nobody and have nothing to leave their children. Carefully looking at the world around them, they see that beyond the boundaries of the "socialist camp" people of their caliber are always valued, irrespective of their official status.

Getting ahead of myself, I can say that the overwhelming ambiguity about the status of members of the Soviet elite predetermined its rather cynical and indifferent parting with the System. It goes without saying that to feel sympathetic towards Perestroika it had to see a proper place for itself in the new order of things. It was feasible, since it absorbed almost all dynamic elements of Soviet society, which had no counter-elite.

Indeed, even in the years of Perestroika, many members of the Soviet elite managed to quiet successfully convert their positions in the power system into property rights. With their new status in hand, they quickly overtake Perestroika on the left flank and push it far beyond the boundaries of the "socialist choice path." According to a Russian researcher of that period, "...amidst the Party, Soviet and economic *nomenklatura* a movement was taking shape as well which was interested in having their new status legitimized and, consequently, in radicalization of the reforms."[17] It was not by chance that in the post-Soviet Russia, many former members of the "old *nomenklatura*" managed to maintain and consolidate their social status.

Gorbachev knew this kind of people, with their flexibility and timeserving spirit, well enough. He had no illusions about it; however, he never attached great importance to it either. Possibly, that is why he only brushed aside persistent advice that he "sort them out." However, it went against his grain; besides, he did not see any urgent necessity to do it. Apparently, his intuition told him that it would not fight for the "bright ideals of communism" and would get on well with anybody.

Finally, there was the *Party apparatus*. It was huge and rather influential, the core of the System in the party state and the living embodiment of its spirit.[18] It was the Party apparatus which considered itself the Party, and it had every reason to think so.

Gorbachev also professed the principle of "cadres decide everything" and paid unflagging attention to the Party apparatus. He quickly came to the conclusion that the root of evil lied there and tried to restrict

the absolute rule of the Party bosses. The General Secretary tried to keep them on a short leash to avoid repeating the sad fate of Khrushchev.

Ignoring the persistent advice given by his closest associates, Gorbachev would not right to the end let go of the reins of the "vanguard of the Soviet people." Despite all the costs of such a close association and involuntary identification with his "sworn friends," he was explaining to the small group of his confidants that he saw no other option in the situation. He said that the hardened apparatchiks were capable of making a fine mess of things, if left to their own devices.[19] Later, another important consideration appeared, namely, the fear that "federalization of the party" would become a prelude to destruction of the union state.[20]

As shown by the subsequent course of developments, such fears were more than justified. A biographer of Gorbachev states that "... as long as the party clamp existed it prevented the state from disintegration."[21]

There was still another one and, possibly, the most decisive motive. In Gorbachev's memoirs a constant hope is discernible that never left the General Secretary, that reforming the CPSU and turning it into a modern political force and a powerful instrument of democratic renewal of Soviet society was possible.[22] At the same time, according to some opinions, he did not pay enough attention to reforming the party and renewing its leadership, particularly, in its higher echelon.[23]

As Perestroika processes grew deeper and more radical, the ways of Gorbachev and the most influential layer of the Party bosses parted more and more. One of the most important motives of the political reform conceived by Gorbachev was getting free from the suffocating embrace of his "party fellows." To a significant extent he succeeded in doing it; however, he paid a high price for that. Well known is the fact that the Party apparatus became the center of resistance to the reform-minded leadership of the country, with Yegor Ligachev, its unofficial leader, acting as a symbol of conservatism. In fact, Gorbachev's opponents in the Politburo and the Secretariat, the Party Areopagus, outnumbered the architects of Perestroika. On the eve of the historical 19th Party Conference held in summer 1988, a well-informed aide to the General Secretary offering a sober assessment of the actual level of support showed to his boss by his closest associates described the "mighty handful" of Gorbachev's supporters as "... two or three members of the Politburo and two or three Secretaries of the Central Committee."[24] Later, the party leader increasingly became an "alien among his own people," with their relationships strained to the utmost.

It is hard to dispute the fact. However, to what extent the destructive conflict between the mighty apparatus and the no less mighty General Secretary was preprogrammed? Did Mikhail Gorbachev have any chance

to tame this bearer of Soviet traditions? Of course, there are no Ifs and Buts in history; however, it is always useful to reflect on its alternative scenarios.

We can start with the question of the *real extent of resistance* by the party apparatus to Gorbachev's reforms. Nailed to the pillory by the Perestroika-period cliche of "braking mechanism," it never dared to openly break off with its nominal leader. Both the difficult 19th Party Conference (of June 1988) and even the much more difficult 28th Congress of the CPSU (of July 1990), the last one, ended up with an undisputable victory of Gorbachev over the party conservatives, who were forced to grin and bear his leadership. The August coup (of 1991) was plotted by the top bosses of the state apparatus and not by the party leaders, who actually took a wait-and-see approach.

It turns out that the threat from the right-wing, the orthodox communists, was not as great as it seemed in the years of Perestroika (eventually, the fatal blow was dealt by the coalition of anti-communist-minded radicals and nationalists). We can find an important proof of that in Gorbachev's works.

Speaking about the stubborn resistance continuously shown to his reform efforts, he wrote, "Standing in opposition were only *the most hard-core members of the apparatus*." (emphasis added — *V.K.*)[25]

The internal Party opposition that gradually took shape had its own inherent flaws which prevented it from recapturing the initiative. First, it was not strong enough. Even at the 28th Party Congress, where the opposition of conservatives reached its apogee, they could expect, with more or less certainty, to get only a third of the vote.[26]

Secondly, there was a lack of fresh ideas. The Soviet people were fed up with the "real socialism." "Socialism with a human face" was a prerogative of Gorbachev's reformers. Nobody wanted a return to Stalinism, least of all the reformers themselves. Vacuum emerged, revealing an insatiable thirst for power.

Thirdly, generally speaking, there was no leader either. Of course, Ligachev was a professional in apparatus games and intrigues; however, in the new era of public politics he was no match for either Gorbachev or Yeltsin.

If one adds to the above the sacral character of the General Secretary's figure and the sizeable support showed by the awakened society to the reformers, one is certain to come to the conclusion that the conservatives' chances of success were less than they seemed at the time. Probably, the "danger from the right-wing" was somewhat overplayed (and the danger from the left-wing, namely, from the radical "democrats," was underestimated).

In terms of survival of the leaders of the reforms – and in the fifth year of Perestroika the issue starts to be formulated in exactly this way – the political reform gave results as controversial as the results yielded by the reforms of economy. The state power was taken by the Soviets, at least nominally. According to Georgy Shakhnazarov, a "super-democratic monster," a two-tier parliament unknown to the world, started to reign at the top of the new power pyramid. Expelled from Olympus, the CPSU was offered a status of a "normal parliamentary party."

Undoubtedly, at first, the political reform strengthened the positions of Perestroika leadership. Gorbachev, as Chairman of the Presidium of the USSR Supreme Soviet (since 1 October 1988), got a new foothold that widened his room for maneuver. Sessions of the Congress of People's Deputies, which immediately became the most popular TV series, immensely speeded up the process of political enlightenment and education of the masses. At the end of the communist regime, some semblance of modern representative institutions appeared, and the revival of the Russian parliamentary system was started. A deadly blow was delivered to the command and administrative system, from which it never was to recover.

However, the proposed structure showed serious flaws shortly after that. The party was debarred from the control levers; bodies of power, with their pivot taken away, were losing their efficiency; and the vessel of the state lost stability. Soon the processes triggered by the political reform went out of control of the Perestroika leader. The process got under way; however, its direction was often different from the one intended. As it turned out, in a revolutionary situation the masses stirred to activity are a double-edged weapon, which can be turned either way.

Deterioration of the social and economic situation in the country diluted the mass support base for the course of Perestroika and played into the hands of nationalists and both left-wing and right-wing radicals.

Today, having learned the bitter experience of those events, we can mentally try to figure out other scenarios of implementation of a political reform. Say, the scenario, under which we could have directly headed for a presidential republic straight away, instead of making inefficient attempts to revive the "power of the Soviets" serving just as a screen for the absolute power of the Party apparatus. We could have nominated the General Secretary as a CPSU candidate to run for President of the country in the free democratic election of autumn 1988. A sure victory for Gorbachev in the fair competitive election could have given him the necessary legitimacy and a margin of safety, the lack of which made him vulnerable in dealing with his opponents at crucial moments. A new vertical of executive power could have been created, including governors to be elected or appointed.

The "CPSU problem" demanded as much attention. Turning the ruler of the world's second superpower into an instrument of parliamentary battles was too much even for the party that had been through a lot of things. Something more inspiring could have been looked for. For instance, convening of an extraordinary Congress of the CPSU, "the President's party," in spring 1989, may have been considered. The "leading and guiding" force may have been oriented towards its transformation into a modern dominant party, keeping the levers to control the state within the framework of democratic institutions (like the Liberal Democratic Party in Japan, the Christian Democratic Party in Italy, the Institutional Revolutionary Party in Mexico, the Indian National Congress in India, etc.).

In order to succeed in the situation of tough competitive struggle against other forces, the Party had to keep pace with society in its political development. Development of inner-party democracy could have been encouraged, based on the platforms, currents, and factions. There was also no need to dramatize a possible "civilized divorce" resulting in formation of a social democratic party and a much more traditionalist (Communist) party. It could have laid down a basis for a two-party system, optimal for a presidential republic.

Using the Presidency and the dominant party as its base of support, the reformers could have easily taken part in elections to the Supreme Soviets and other representative bodies, without fearing deadly breakthroughs of the anti-system forces.

In addition to the vitally important consolidation of the state institutions in the transitional period, the above schematically presented plan of actions could have had other positive impacts as well. Specifically, it could have prompted the conservative-minded part of the *nomenklatura* and the party apparatus to keep pace with the reform-minded country's leadership. There could have been two steady anchors to hold them back from going in selfish opposition and engaging in sabotage. The first such anchor could have been their participation in power that would have outweighed any other ideological considerations. The second anchor would be wide-ranging opportunities to privatize state property, in the course of which the ruling elite could have offered its loyal supporters most favored treatment.

There are no guarantees as to effectiveness of such a strategy. It is, however, also true that the political reform, the decisive battle of Perestroika, was in need of a thorough working through of possible scenarios.

Judging by the recollections of participants in Gorbachev-led brainstorming sessions, many of the issues raised were actually discussed

at the time, however, not thoroughly enough. Besides, unbiased assessment of the pluses and minuses of various plans of actions was also lacking.[27]

* * *

Unlike in the case of the first two forks in the road, it was the rapidly and highly rising wave of Perestroika that quickly brought Gorbachev to the third, and the last, fork in the road, rather than he himself came to it. He felt the first symptoms of an imminent crisis of the national-state structure of the USSR as early as in the mid-1987, when in the atmosphere of glasnost and democracy the movement of the Crimean Tatars suddenly grew more active and ferment started in the Baltic republics, the weakest link of the union state. Half a year later, the situation in Karabakh exploded.

Behind the Karabakh crisis that immediately went to the forefront of the country's social and political life was an extremely complex tangle of problems of the multinational, multi-confessional and multi-civilizational Soviet Union.

Quickly releasing their enormous destructive potentials, national conflicts, starting from 1989, were putting into question the very existence of the Soviet state, federal by its form and unitary in its essence.

Unlike the situation with the economic and political reforms, in this sphere Gorbachev had less time for reflections and taking decisions. The room for maneuver was narrower. At the beginning, when there was still no direct threat to the Union's integrity, he "...sought to develop a uniform democratic approach towards inter-ethnic disputes."[28]

In fulfilling this puzzling task, the ruling CPSU was of no help to its General Secretary.[29] The leadership showed strong attitudes favoring "putting things in order." The party bodies were wary and suspicious of the mushrooming national movements. Used to applying administrative methods of control, the apparatchiks were inferior to the leaders of "people's fronts" in their ability to work with the masses.[30]

In the boiling cauldron of Perestroika, Gorbachev found himself standing alone to face the nationalist element awakened by him. He felt he was losing the race against time. Themes of underestimated militant nationalism, chronic lagging behind, and forced responses to the situations[31] run like a scarlet thread through his books of memoirs. Essentially, the choice available to him boiled down to the dilemma of the use of force and search for consensus and entering into cooperation with the national elites that took shape in the federative republics, or proto-states. In Perestroika's practice both approaches were tested. The result is

well-known: the centrifugal forces tore the multinational Union to pieces and buried it. To what extent was this outcome preprogrammed?

The use of force version of the solution to the "nationalities question," implying in effect preservation of the union state, was rejected soon enough. The events in Alma-Ata in December 1986 became a typical Soviet-style example of the use of force in the Perestroika period. In their aftermath, on instructions from the Union leadership, force was used very seldom (the developments in Baku in January 1990 being the most illustrative example).

Going through the crucible of inter-ethnic conflicts, Gorbachev finally progressed from "October" to "February," from Bolshevism to the democratic political culture. The more heated the atmosphere in the country was, the more filled with the philosophy of non-violence the last Soviet leader became. Both his own experience and the world experience were convincing him to embrace it. He rejects the Russian history, full of bloodshed, and professes primacy of law, democratic principles, humanistic values, and "new thinking."

Coming close in his beliefs to Leo Tolstoi and Mahatma Ghandi, Mikhail Gorbachev tightens the reins on members of the top brass. Sharing the lessons learnt from the Baku tragedy, he wrote, "the government cannot do without the use of force in extreme circumstances. However, such an action needs to be justified by absolute necessity and conducted with utmost restraint, while the real solution to the problem is only possible through political means (emphasis added — *V.K.*).[32]

It is hard not to appreciate the moral message of this stand taken by the omnipotent ruler of the "Evil Empire." However, as is know, the devil is in the detail. Should the term "extreme circumstances" be interpreted as covering only pogroms and mass bloodshed? Did there exist at a certain moment an "absolute necessity" to stop the destructive activities of the united separatists and ultra-radicals, who with outright cynicism defied the Constitution and the laws of the country? What had to be done with those deaf to any reason and ready to go any length to seize power? What could the future hold in store for a state that was voluntarily waiving its constitutional right to legitimate violence?

The legitimacy of these questions does not at all undo Gorbachev's truth.

His rejection of violence was dictated not only by moral imperatives, but by political considerations as well. Russia's harsh experience suggests that any use of force could quickly bury the democratic ideals of Perestroika and hopes and dreams of freedom associated with it.

Gorbachev flatly refused to herd the people into the Perestroika kingdom of freedom. However, it was impossible to get there without

using the force component. As Perestroika gathered momentum, spontaneous forces threatened to smash to pieces the state that had lost the ability to defend itself. Looking back, Gorbachev himself describes the trap prepared for him by the Russian history as follows: "The only thing Gorbachev did was to repudiate violence as the main means to implement state policy. It proved enough to make the state fall to pieces."[33]

It would seem that the legitimate use of force fit into the Perestroika strategy. In theory, it really did. As seen from the above citation from the post-Baku reflections, Mikhail Gorbachev admitted such a possibility, too. One of my friends from the university period, a convinced liberal since his young days and a staunch supporter of Gorbachev, gave a brief, military-style, formula of the "optimum kind of Perestroika": "lock'em up and develop democracy; lock'em up and develop democracy."

With all its humor, this lapidary formula has a deep meaning to it. In Russia, effective and steady democracy can only take shape, when based on – and at the same time as a negation of (!) – its traditional culture, strongly intertwined with violence. Oriented towards extremely high standards of democratic principles, Gorbachev very much lost touch with the native soil. As a result, he found himself to be very vulnerable in the context of the permanent political crisis of 1990-1991.

However, this is only half the truth. The other half of it speaks fully in favor of Gorbachev. The problem — and the trouble — of the Father of Perestroika lies in the fact that in Russia the legitimate use of force soon gradually degenerates into lawlessness and violence. Here, any breakthrough to freedom claims its huge toll of blood and human lives, and if the Liberator is not ready to pay it voluntarily, history will collect it anyway.

Paying such a terrible ransom – be it even for his darling creation – went against the grain for both the initiator of Perestroika and many of his associates and supporters. Ironically, this very stand has made Mikhail Gorbachev a true historical figure. And it was this stand that has undone a priori his heroic efforts to carry the great cause of Perestroika through to a victorious end. One cannot hope even for miracles when getting into the boxing ring with his hands tied behind his back.

Having sheathed his sword, Gorbachev could only rely on his skills as a politician. He hoped that the "nationalities question" would gradually lose its urgency under the healthy influence of the economic and political reforms. However, the partially successful reforms only added fuel to the flame: the economic reform pushed the national elites towards the so-called "republican self-financing pattern" (in fact, the dismemberment of a single economic mechanism), while the political reform aroused appetites of cheeky "national fronts," which thought it no longer

necessary to make a secret of their separatist intentions. At the critical phase of Perestroika, nationalists managed to break through to power in many regions, while in some other regions they were hot on the heels of Party leaders, forcing them to pickup their own slogans and demands.

Under such circumstances, it was impossible to keep the Union in its original form and composition. The Baltic Republics would have broken away, whatever the situation. Georgia, Moldova, Azerbaijan, and some Central Asian Republics could have followed suit.

However, Russia, Ukraine, Byelorussia, and Kazakhstan, the core of the Union, may have stayed. A few more republics may have possibly joined them. In aggregate, they had the lion's share of the territory, population, resources and potential of the USSR. Under this scenario, the post-Soviet space could have experienced much less shocks.

Since he believed it was impossible to keep the state together without the use of force, Gorbachev opted for the latter path. In the context of progressive weakening of the Center and the emergence of the dual power situation,[34] the Federal President and the leaders of the republics started a negotiating marathon, which got the name of the *Novo-Ogaryovo Process*. For the sake of preserving the union state, the USSR President agreed to share power and the federal property with the leaders of the republics representing the interests of the national elites. The Novo-Ogaryovo Process, a "venture of mind wrecking complexity,"[35] resulted in a new Union Treaty, in which the vitally important interests of many parties thereto, in effect, of potential states, were agreed. The open clash between the conservatives and radicals in Moscow in August 1991, which opened the door wide for the action of centrifugal forces, disrupted its signature.

Opinions of the Union Treaty that was drafted were widely different. Gorbachev spoke of the "... vital importance of the principles laid down at that stage into the foundation of the renewed federative state system."[36] Georgy Shakhnazarov, Gorbachev's closest assistant in the "treaty matters," agreed with this assessment.[37]

However, by no means all people agreed with it then (and agree now). To all appearances, the August coup-plotters disagreed, just like some other influential political figures as well. One of the leading contemporary researchers of Perestroika believes that the treaty in effect "...meant termination of the existence of the USSR as a single state."[38]

Despite the virtual nature of this debate by correspondence, I am inclined to think that the assessments given by Gorbachev and Shakhnazarov are more correct. The fact is that they spoke about a *trend* without making predictions as to its possible outcome; while their

opponents talk of a real possibility of the union state's disintegration after signature of the Treaty as of *an accomplished fact*. In reality, the fact is different: in its *intended form* the renewed Union could have been a more robust structure than the European Union of today.

In fact, the Union Treaty formalized a certain correlation of forces between the Center and the independence-minded republican elites at a critical and extremely unstable moment of the country's political history. The Treaty presented an opportunity to move either way: towards consolidation or the final ruin of the union state. What happened cannot be undone, and it casts an uncertain light onto the most complicated and little-researched history of Perestroika.

* * *

We have touched upon just a thin layer of the range of Perestroika problems. Many of its most important aspects and features have not even been outlined. The fact is that simultaneously raised and resolved were the issues of foreign policy that were truly crucial both for the country and the world. Preparation and carrying out of diplomatic breakthroughs required much time and great effort; however, their reward was the end of the Cold War on terms acceptable to the USSR.

Still another such problem is the role of ideology in the policies pursued by Perestroika leaders. Well known is the fact that democratic humane socialism was and remains Gorbachev's guiding star. Let us assume that Fortune has smiled on him and he has won most fierce battles that fell to his lot. Where could it have brought us? To the "socialism with a human face" much spoken about, but never seen by anybody? Or could it have been a certain version of "social democratic capitalism," keeping the most important social achievements of the previous period? Questions, questions, questions... Perestroika has left much more of them than answers.

---

[1] See, for example, Barsenkov A.S. *Vvedeniye v sovremennuyu rossiiskuyu istoriyu* (*Introduction into Modern Russian History*). M., 2002, pp. 43, 81, and 172.

[2] Ibid, p. 49.

[3] See more in Barsenkov A.S., Op. cit., pp. 58-63.

[4] Gorbachev M.S. *Zhizn i reformy* (*Life and Reforms*), Book One. Moscow, 1995, pp. 338-342.

[5] Ibid., p. 342.

[6] Gorbachev M.S. *Life and Reforms*, Book One. Moscow, 1995, p. 343.

[7] Medvedev V. *V komande Gorbacheva (In the Team of Gorbachev)*. Moscow, 1994, pp. 44-45; Shakhnazarov G. *S vozhdyami i bez (With and Without Leaders)*. Moscow, 2001, p. 325.

[8] Barsenkov A.S. Op. cit., pp. 74-78.

[9] Gorbachev himself sees the borderline of 1986-1987 as "the first serious crisis of Perestroika" (Gorbachev M.S. *Life and Reforms*, Book One, p. 311).

[10] Andrey Grachev directly points out to running away from "... the ever-present haunting ghost of Khrushchev-style 'dismissal' that could take place at every next Plenum of the Central Committee." Grachev A. *Gorbachev*, Moscow, 2001, p. 236.

[11] Gorbachev M.S. *Razmyshleniya o proshlom i budushchem (Reflections on the Past and the Future)*, Moscow, 1998, p. 69.

[12] Gorbachev M.S. *Life and Reforms*, Book One, p. 363.

[13] Medvedev V., Op. cit., p. 54.

[14] Citation from Grachev A., Op. cit., p.247.

[15] Ibid. Also see p. 218.

[16] Such is the viewpoint shared by Anatoly Chernyayev and Georgy Shakhnazarov, two "political" aides to the last General Secretary. See: Chernyayev A.S. *Shest let s Gorbachevym (My Six Years with Gorbachev)*. Moscow, 1993, pp. 241-242; Shakhnazarov G.S. *With and Without Leaders*, pp. 421, 430, 431.

[17] Barsenkov A.S., Op. cit., p. 121. Also see p. 122.

[18] The staff of the CPSU Central Committee alone amounted to approximately 3,000 people, while the army of Party apparatchiks totaled hundreds of times this figure. In the first major staff reduction in the party apparatus in autumn 1988, dismissal of 800 to 900 thousand people was considered.

[19] See Chernyayev A.S. Op. cit., pp. 242, 356; Shakhnazarov G. *With and Without Leaders*, pp. 425, 428. Also see: Gorbachev M.S. *Life and Reforms*, Book Two, p. 540.

[20] Gorbachev M. S. *Life and Reforms*, Book Two, p. 538.

[21] Grachev A., Op. cit., p. 254.

[22] Gorbachev M.S. *Life and Reforms*. Book Two, pp. 524, 542, and 548.

[23] See: Shakhnazarov G. *With and Without Leaders*, p. 410. A different viewpoint also exists, according to which the reason was "not the people, but the functions they perform." However, Andrey Grachev, who offered it, also stated "...Gorbachev has not in effect done anything to help the "second party," the party of Perestroika (i.e. ordinary Communists supporting Perestroika — *V.K.*) to organize into a formal entity." Grachev A., Op. cit., pp. 228, 229.

[24] See: Chernyayev A.S., Op. cit., p. 217. Also, see: Gorbachev M.S. *Life and Reforms*, Book One, p. 387.

[25] Gorbachev M.S. *Life and Reforms,* Book One, p. 347.

[26] Shakhnazarov G. *With and Without Leaders*, p. 429.

[27] See: Medvedev V., Op. cit., pp. 74-75; Shakhnazarov G. *With and Without Leaders*, p. 326-330; Chernyayev A.S., Op. cit., p. 238.

[28] Gorbachev M.S. *Life and Reforms*, Book One, p.509.

[29] Looking back, Anatoly Chernyayev states sadly, "It was not only Ligachev who was unable to act as an 'aide' in solving the 'nationalities question,' but the whole of the then administrative staff. That's where the tragedy lay." Chernyayev A.S., Op. cit., p. 250.

[30] Recalling the reactions of the Party leaders to the bloody events in Tbilisi in spring 1989, Gorbachev writes in his memoirs "...our staff regards the use of political methods as a sign of weakness. The most important of their arguments is force." Gorbachev M.S. *Life and Reforms*, Book One, p. 515.

[31] See Gorbachev M.S. *Life and Reforms*, Book One, pp. 496, 501, 514, 517, 518; Book Two, p. 499.

[32] Gorbachev M.S. *Life and Reforms*, Book One, p. 520.

[33] Citation from Grachev A., Op. cit., p. 301.

[34] Both Vadim Medvedev and Georgy Shakhnazarov cite the date of the emergence of the dual power situation in the country as March-April 1991, in the aftermath of a most severe political crisis that occurred in the beginning of that year.

[35] Shakhnazarov G. *With and Without Leaders*, p. 411. Georgy Shakhnazarov, one of the "fathers" of the future treaty, recalled later, "This document aroused so much passion and fighting." – Ibid, p. 401.

[36] Gorbachev M.S. *Life and Reforms*, Book Two, p. 550.

[37] Shakhnazarov G. *With and Without Leaders*, p. 417.

[38] Barsenkov A.S., Op. cit., p. 207.

PERESTROIKA AND INTERNATIONAL SOCIAL DEMOCRACY

by Aleksandr Veber

Aleksandr Veber is an associate with the Gorbachev Foundation, Chief Research Officer at the Institute of Social Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences (RAN), Doctor of History; in the 1980s, Adviser with the International Department of the CPSU Central Committee; in 1990-1991, Adviser to the Aide to the President of the USSR.

The circles of social democracy met the coming of Mikhail Gorbachev to power in the Soviet Union and the turn he initiated in the Soviet internal and foreign policies with a particular interest. The leaders of social democracy were better positioned to see the true value of this shift than their opponents from the right-wing conservative camp. Social democracy leaders started to show their interest in direct contacts with the Soviet leadership as early as during the period of detente in the 1970s. By the spring of 1985, about 20 socialist and social-democratic parties had established contacts with the CPSU; those ties were maintained in the form of exchange of delegations, correspondence, and information. With the start of Gorbachev's Perestroika, the mutual interest in developing relations got new impetuses.

Social democrats demonstrated it in the very first months: the delegations which came to Moscow in May 1985 to celebrate the 40th Anniversary of the Victory Day included, among many others, the delegations of Belgian, Italian, French, and Greek socialists, the British Labour Party, and social democratic parties of Finland and Sweden. It seemed to be dictated not only by their wish to do credit to the contribution the peoples of the Soviet Union made to the common victory over fascism, but also by their desire to probe the situation in the country after the change in its leadership.

At the end of May, Willy Brandt came to Moscow at the invitation of Gorbachev for their first face-to-face meeting (by the way, shortly before that Reagan refused to receive Brandt who came on a visit to the United States). The strongest impression Brandt gained from that meeting was the sincerely with which Gorbachev answered to the so-called "humanitarian" questions. Later, when recalling that meeting, Brandt wrote, "Already at

our first meeting, I found in Gorbachev an extraordinarily competent person, who had knowledge of issues and was a purposeful and, at the same time, flexible interlocutor. The eternal argument about the role of personality in history got a new and particularly bright coloring, at that. Insiders never doubted the fact that his manner of reasoning reflected many of the things he and his wife had repeatedly played over in their minds for many years.

However, even experts in the Soviet reality did not suspect how profound the changes in internal and foreign policies would be."[1]

Gorbachev, on his part, gained from that meeting the conviction that there was a real opportunity for political interaction with international social democracy.[2] The two agreed to maintain regular contacts through their authorized staff and, subsequently, this communication channel worked efficiently, which brought its results.

Mikhail Gorbachev paid his first visit in the capacity of General Secretary to a socialist, the President of France Mitterrand. The Western public noted this fact, although it was a state visit. Journalists interviewing Gorbachev for the French television on the eve of the visit, asked him, "It looks like you maintain excellent relations with all of social democratic governments in Europe, don't you?"

Gorbachev's answer was: "In recent years, we have been actively cooperating with social democratic parties. [...]. We don't think our ideological differences are a hindrance to our cooperation in resolving such vital problems as the matters of war and peace."[3]

In mid-October 1985, the Socialist International's Second Conference on Disarmament was held in Vienna (the first one took place in Helsinki in 1978).

There were just five weeks to go until the Soviet-American summit in Geneva; therefore, it was a good occasion to show to the world public how concerned the leaders of the two superpowers were to reach positive agreements. Official representatives of the United States, the Soviet Union, the UN, as well as China, India, and some other countries were invited to attend the conference. Many speakers spoke about peace proposals of the new Soviet leadership, stressing that they deserved serious attention and consideration.

That is why the speech of the official representative of the United States Government Kenneth Adelman, Director of the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, caused a great deal of disappointment. He arrived only on the second day of the Conference; and on the morning of day two, he was absent from the conference hall when the floor was to be given to him. Most likely, it was a trick intended to let the Soviet representative (Boris Ponomarev) take the floor before him so that later he could slam

the entire former Soviet policy and, by doing so, try to justify the SDI program as being of a "defensive" nature.

Generally, it was negatively received by the Conference; Adelman was bombarded with questions; however, his answers failed to dispel doubts or allay concerns sounded in the questions. The proposals contained in the "Vienna Appeal" to Reagan and Gorbachev were generally in harmony with the new Soviet foreign policy that later was more specifically outlined in Gorbachev's report to the 27th Party Congress, in the decisions taken by the Congress, and prior to that — in the program on the elimination of nuclear weapons, presented in the January 15, 1986 Statement.

In the days of the Congress, news came of the death of Olof Palme, who had fallen victim to a killer. The Congress stood for a minute's silence in remembrance of the leader of Swedish social democrats. Later, when delivering a lecture in memory of Palme in Stockholm in June 1993, Gorbachev would recall, "It is easy to imagine the delicacy of the situation: 5,000 delegates gathered for a congress of the Communist party, which still was back then an ideological opponent of social democracy, and Perestroika had not yet progressed so far as to rid people's minds of prejudices and hardened dogmas imposed on them over many decades. However, we, the CPSU leaders, never doubted that the Congress should pay respect to the memory of this outstanding person. Opening the session, the Chairman made a proposal to do that. All delegates rose from their seats." According to Gorbachev, during this minute's silence, something important for our future spiritual liberation flowed into the hearts of many people, bringing them closer to understanding of the significance of common human values.

As noted by Pentti Vaananen, many provisions of Gorbachev's report at the Congress, relating to international relations, were close to the fundamental aims of the Socialist International. The Congress gave food for thought and the "new vision" of Gorbachev was worthy of the most careful attention of social democrats.

A group of deputies representing the Social Democratic Party of Germany in the Bundestag prepared a review of the proceedings of the 27th Congress of the CPSU and arrived at the conclusion that changes in the Soviet Union would have great importance for the development of a concept of the second phase of the Eastern policy by the social democrats. They saw their goal as facilitating creation of a "network of balanced political and economic dependency between the two political systems in Europe." They also hoped to use the new phase of the Eastern policy to encourage reform currents in the communist parties and show solidarity with the "democratic opposition."

By that time, development of contacts between social democrats and the ruling parties of the Eastern European countries had become a routine practice. In the community of socialist countries, coordination of "work with social democracy", as they called it in the Party jargon, was carried out by the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party (HSWP), which was probably the first one to start opening up to the social democratic ideas and collaborate with social democracy. As a coordinator, the HSWP acted in a positive way to facilitate development of common conceptual approaches in relations with social democracy in the spirit of mutual understanding, trust, and repudiation of dogmatic prejudice.

Showing the greatest activity on the part of social democracy was the SDP, in possession of the appropriate material and organizational resources for that purpose. Gaining popularity was a practice, whereby joint working groups were established to discuss specific problems and try to work out common grounds. For instance, representatives of the SDP discussed with the CPSU the possibility of reduction of military expenditures and use of part of the funds freed in this way to render assistance to the developing countries; the policy of security and confidence-building measures in Europe with the Polish United Workers' Party (PUWP); the issues of environmental protection with the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (KPC); the problems of cooperation in the field of economy with the HSWP; and the problems of establishing zones free of chemical weapons and battlefield nuclear weapons and a nuclear-weapon-free corridor in the Central Europe with the Socialist Unity Party of Germany (SED). The SDP Commission on Basic Values (Grundwertekommission) and the Academy of Social Sciences at the SED Central Committee jointly drafted a document titled "Argument of Ideologies and Common Security," which was presented to the public in Bonn and East Berlin in August 1982.

According to Erhard Eppler, the then Chairman of the SDP Commission on Basic Values, the authors of this document took in and extended the signals sent by Gorbachev, his report to the 27th Congress of the CPSU, and his positive attitude toward the report of the Palme Commission.[4] The document attempted to determine what had to be changed in relations between the two social systems and ideologies to make common security possible. The finding was as follows: both sides had to recognize one another's ability to live in peace (that is, not to consider one another aggressive by nature), the right to exist, and ability to evolve and reform. The document's authors proceeded from the presumption of "insurmountable differences" between the ideologies of the two systems; however, they insisted that it was possible and necessary to wage ideological struggle in the forms which would not undermine or poison the

international relations, i.e., by sticking to certain cultural principles of an ideological argument.

In the 1980s, trying to find ways out of the difficulties, social democracy was increasingly looking into the new problems and challenges engendered by the technogenic civilization and the processes of globalization. Gorbachev's "new thinking" was evolving in the same direction. No wonder, it acquired a certain Social Democratic coloring. Gorbachev's book *Perestroika: New Thinking for Our Country and the World* had a tremendous international response. The report delivered by Gorbachev to mark the 70th Anniversary of the October Revolution also confirmed the willingness of the reform-minded leadership of the CPSU to review many of the judgments held before and based on ideological dogmas and draw relevant conclusions for political action. This situation made possible such an extraordinary event as participation of a large group of representatives of the parties of Social-Democratic orientation in the events held in Moscow to celebrate the occasion.

Speaking on behalf of the Socialist International at the grand meeting in the Kremlin was Kalevi Sorsa. This international meeting of representatives of the parties and movements who came to celebrate the October Revolution anniversary was timed to mark the occasion. In addition to the leaders of Communist parties (and not only of the ruling ones at that), its participants included many figures of social democracy. After the failure of the Conference of the Three Internationals in 1922, it was for the first time they sat together at one table. It was a great event in itself. In many aspects, the contents and style of speeches made by representatives of the Socialist International parties were determined by the considerations of political correctness; however, their enthusiasm towards Perestroika was sincere, the more so that it was perceived as a confirmation of the correctness of the social-democratic choice. Social democrats hardly had any illusions as regards the prospects for the international Communist movement, which was increasingly showing signs of decline. It is characteristic that representatives of some Communist parties were more reserved in their assessments.

When Brandt met Gorbachev again in Moscow, on 5 April 1988, he had more weighty grounds than before to believe that, unlike the right-wing dictatorships, the social system in the Soviet Union was not unchangeable.

By that time, the processes of democratization had gathered their own momentum and there could be no doubts about qualitative changes taking place in Soviet policies, both foreign and domestic.

Naturally, Brandt was interested in Perestroika's prospects as seen by the Soviet leadership. He was deeply impressed with the frank assessment his interlocutor gave of the difficulties that were growing in the context of

deepening of Perestroika, when the command and administrative system stopped functioning and new economic and political mechanisms did not yet take shape. According to Brandt, Gorbachev did not conceal the fact that rising in the bureaucratic circles were discontent and dissent. Brandt recalled, "It was not clear to me whether this resistance could be overcome, and if so, then in what way. However, I did not have a moment's doubt that we should wish every success to the reforms and the reformer."[5]

What attracted Brandt's attention the most was the interest shown by Gorbachev and his staff towards global objectives standing above the usual ideological arguments, such as lowering the level of confrontation, reasonable reduction of military expenditures, provision of resources for the development of the Third World countries and for environmental protection. In his speeches and publications, as noted by Brandt, "the new Soviet leader was clearly using the ideas developed by Palme and me together with our respective Commissions, or even earlier with our friends from all countries of the world."[6] In confirmation of this fact, he cited Gorbachev's words said at that meeting, "We have adopted many of the things developed by social democrats and the Socialist International, including some of the things that were developed by the commissions led by Brandt and Palme."[7] The remarkable thing about this meeting was that the conversation of the two leaders turned to discussion of ideological problems, namely, the discussion of a new vision of the socialist idea and new opportunities for development of relations between the CPSU and the SDP, communists and social democrats.[8]

The next step in this direction was made soon after that: for the first time the CPSU was invited to send its representatives to a regular meeting of the Council of the Socialist International in Madrid (scheduled for May 11-12, 1988). The Central Committee of the CPSU sent there Aleksandr Zotov and the author of this article, who were staff of the International Department (holding positions of Advisers at the time). Pentti Vaananen told us that it was not an "easy thing" for the Socialist International to take such a decision, given the conflicts of opinion among various parties on the advisability of contacts with communists; nevertheless, "no protests were filed." "European response" to the changing West-East relations, particularly, in view of the changes taking place in the Soviet Union, shifts in the Soviet-American relations, and the difficulties in the negotiation process because of the presidential election campaign started in the United States, was the central theme of the meeting.

Participants in the discussion (representing 70 parties and organizations, including guests and observers) focused their attention on the processes going on in the Soviet Union, on which they — as we could see — pinned hopes for a new role of Europe and European social

democracy in the international affairs. Some of them, including Willy Brandt, Felipe Gonzalez, Oskar Lafontaine, and Neil Kinnock, devoted a significant part of their speeches to analysis of the "Gorbachev phenomenon," the processes of Perestroika in the Soviet Union, and its prospects and influence on world and European politics. One of the participants said to us, "So, you see, your Gorbachev has proved to be the main figure in the discussion."

In his opening speech, Gonzalez colorfully said that Gorbachev "turned off the autopilot" which had controlled the Soviet Union for decades and gave a new direction to the Soviet policy. Gonzalez called for a sober and objective assessment of Perestroika, to the assessment of facts, rather than intentions. He said it was necessary to consider with understanding the difficulties encountered by Perestroika domestically. However, despite all its restrictions and contradictions, social democrats were interested in its further progress, since they were not to lose anything, but could gain a lot.

Brandt shared with the participants of the meeting his impressions of meeting Gorbachev. Their conversation made him more firmly convinced that a historical chance emerged to pursue disarmament. As for Perestroika's prospects, he said that in the situation of changes of a "revolutionary caliber" going on, nobody could tell if they would be crowned with success. However, the social democrats wished them success. Brandt added that the West (he meant the conservative circles) should not give an impression that it was uncertain or hesitant about its assessment of Soviet Perestroika, or, even worse, wanted to stop this process. (These words were met with applause.) Brandt made another separate report on his meeting with Gorbachev at the closed meeting of the Presidium of the Socialist International.

On the day Brandt opened the meeting of the Council of the Socialist International in Madrid, in Moscow Gorbachev was meeting Hans-Jochen Vogel, Chairman of the SDP (who replaced Brandt on this post in 1987). Vogel said that they took the success of Perestroika close to heart "as Party comrades would do" and that this policy accorded with the interests of the SDP and, so, there was certain "egoism" to SDP wishing it success. He asked if there was anything, they could help it with. He praised the Argument of Ideologies and Common Security document, with which, as it turned out, Gorbachev had familiarized himself even before it was signed.

In the end of June 1988, the 19th Party Conference of the CPSU was opened. During the days of the Conference, Lindenberg, an Aide to Brandt and a representative of the SDP, was visiting Moscow. I had an opportunity to ask him about his impressions. Speaking about Perestroika, he did not hide his worry about the fact that all the problems were being tackled

simultaneously. He felt that economic decisions were not specific enough, particularly, in what concerned the price reform. He was also worried about the fact that the question of introducing a multi-party system was moving to the forefront of debates over the political reform. He wondered if this was overloading the agenda. Lindenberg's personal opinion was that whether it was a one-party or multi-party system was of no fundamental importance; the main thing was to have an independent system of public control over the government, while its forms may be different.

In the Soviet Union, transition to a more active phase of economic and political reforms stimulated the interest toward the managerial experience of social democracy. In June 1988, a group of Soviet specialists (Abalkin, Aganbegyan, and others) visited Sweden to study the experience of governmental activities of the Swedish social democrats. The group submitted a detailed report and recommendations, which were discussed at the meeting of the Commission for Improving the Management and Planning Systems and the Economic Mechanism.

The Commission approved a program for organization of work regarding possible use of Swedish experience of economic and social development in the national situation. Another meeting with the Swedes dedicated to the same subject took place in Moscow in September 1989. A decision was taken then to set up several joint working groups to examine certain problems, like reorganization of the tax system, development of cooperatives, forms of ownership and pricing policy. In December of the same year, the Central Committee Secretariat passed a resolution titled "On the Study of Practical Experience of Social Democracy" and approved a plan of activities for the next two years. (This plan, for obvious reasons, was never implemented.)

In parallel to the development of inter-party contacts, the Soviet social science increasingly sought to study Western social democracy as a political movement, since new opportunities and new stimuli emerged for that.[9] As early as in the late 1970s, the Interdepartmental Council for Studies of Social Democracy was established with Professor Aleksandr Galkin as its Head. The Council sought to promote research into social democracy, facilitate overcoming of obsolete and distorted views of it, and develop cooperation with academic research centers close to social democracy. The Council comprised representatives of several academic institutions, including the Institute for Scientific Information on Social Sciences, which under the guidance of Boris Orlov for many years explored the themes of social democracy and published collections of research and information materials.

A discussion arranged in December 1988 in Freudenburg, West Germany, by the Gustav Heinemann Academy of the Friedrich Ebert

Foundation became an indication of the starting transition to a qualitatively new level of relations. It was attended by politicians and researchers representing ten Western Social Democratic and Socialist parties and the ruling parties of Bulgaria, Hungary, the GDR, the Soviet Union, and Czechoslovakia. The discussions focused on the problems outlined in the joint document of the SED and the SDP "Argument of Ideologies and Common Security," referred to above. The speakers agreed that this document should be viewed not as a German-German one, but as that of international importance.

The Social Democratic part of the audience was inspired by the speech made by Gorbachev at the UN one week before the meeting. They cited his words, "Life makes us throw away the old stereotypes, obsolete views, and free ourselves from illusions."[10] The ideas contained in the SED-SDP document were assessed from this angle. "This is a document of the Gorbachev era," said Jan Veersma (of the Labor Party of the Netherlands). He was supported by Eppler (member of the SDP Board), who said that "but for Gorbachev, this document could never have appeared at all."

A new stage emerged in inter-party discussions: at first, ideological issues were excluded from discussion; then they started to be included into the agenda, stating above all the existing differences; now, identification of the sphere of agreement was moved to the forefront, and it started to expand. Some participants in the meeting noted that, from this point of view, the joint document of the SED-SDP was already lagging behind the course of events, that there was a need to move further ahead, towards overcoming of the "enemy image" in mutual perceptions. I recall my conversation with Thomas Meyer (Director of the Academy and a participant in the discussion). He said that a certain contradiction was contained in Marxism: the conflict between the desire to rationally organize society in its relationship with Nature and the principle of free development of the man. Any attempts at resolving this conflict result in distortion of the socialist ideal, leading to a state authoritarian system in some cases or to anarchism in other cases. The way out was to recognize this contradiction as unremovable.

It was necessary to try to alleviate this contradiction, rather than strive for some final state of harmony, which was an unfeasible objective. Specifically, it could be done by combining the market and "framework planning." If this was accepted, said Myer, "we will have the common field for discussion."

The proposal on joint celebration in 1989 of the 100th Anniversary of the Second International as a "joint legacy," moved by Yury Krasin (the then Rector of the Institute of Social Sciences) made a great impression on the participants. (The humiliating assessments of the Second International

in the Soviet Party propaganda were still fresh in the memory of many of them.) Otto Rheingold, Rector of the Academy of Social Sciences at the SED Central Committee, supported Krasin's proposal. Eppler was also quick to back up the idea and expressed his confidence in its approval by the Board of the SED.

At the same time, in December 1988, an agreement on opening of the Moscow representative office of the Friedrich Ebert Foundation was signed in Bonn. The opening of the Moscow representative office of the Foundation took place in April next year with participation of Vogel, Chairman of the SED. In May 1989, an international seminar themed "The World of Labor and Fates of the Humankind," timed to coincide with the 100th Anniversary of the Second International, was held in Moscow. Gathered at the round table at the Oktyabrskaya Hotel, where Party leaders coming to Moscow usually stayed (presently, the Arbat Hotel), were representatives of the Soviet Union, the countries of Western Europe and Western social democracy (Belgium, Great Britain, Italy, the FRG, Switzerland, and Sweden). The discussion was rather heated, but quite friendly. Everybody called each other "comrade" and spoke their minds straightforwardly.

The editorial office of the journal *Problems of Peace and Socialism* (based in Prague) suggested that Swiss socialist Jean Ziegler and the author of this article continue their dialogue on the pages of this publication.[11] The dialogue proved to be rather heated, since Ziegler, as a left socialist, was not inclined to act diplomatically and offered the most difficult questions for discussion. In justice to Perestroika, which he called "a fascinating process, similar to eruption of a volcano on a still silent glacier," he did not conceal his worries about it running out of steam when encountering serious obstacles, which, according to my interlocutor, were impossible to overcome with the one-party system still in existence. However, it was he who said, "As a Social Democrat, I dream of the time, when the CPSU is represented in the bodies of the Socialist International."

Of course, this assumption was too bold and unrealistic. However, for the first time the representatives of the CPSU, as well as the Polish United Workers' Party (PUWP), the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party (HSWP), and the Italian Communist Party (ICP) were invited to attend the 8th Congress of the Socialist International (held in Stockholm in June 1989) as observers. Representing the CPSU was Karen Brutents (Deputy Head of the International Department of the CPSU Central Committee), Victor Rykin (Head of Sector), and the author of this article. On the eve of the opening of the Congress, we were received by Brandt, to whom we handed over an address to the Congress made by the CPSU Central Committee.[12] Practically all those we spoke to, welcomed our

participation in the event, regarding it as a logical consequence of the development of relations between the Socialist International and the CPSU. Speaking from the rostrum, Pena Gomez, the leader of the Dominican Revolutionary Party, could not but use a hyperbole, saying that the presence of Soviet representatives "reflects the process of reunification of the Socialist family."

The theme of Perestroika in the Soviet Union and support for it was present in the reports of almost all of the speakers. Clearly stated was the idea that social democracy could not remain a passive observer (unlike some of the conservative circles); that social democracy has also a responsibility, specifically, for keeping the reforms away from the path of capitalism (Neil Kinnock and Michel Rocard). Noted was something new: realization of the fact that such a turn could be against the interests of social democrats.

The discussion confirmed the fact that social democracy pinned its hopes for the expansion of its sphere of influence and reforms in the Eastern Europe on Perestroika. However, also observed was the difference of opinion, reflecting the divergence in assessments of Perestroika processes by the parties and certain political figures. Some, while doing justice to "Gorbachev's bold reforms," spoke in a triumphalist manner, emphasizing the "collapse of communism" and the triumph of the ideas of democratic socialism. Others sounded worries about the fate of Perestroika processes, spoke of the dangers lying in wait for them, of the need to facilitate keeping of these processes in the socialist channel (Bahr, Kinnock, Sorsa). The dual attitude of social democracy to the changes in the Soviet Union and the countries of Eastern Europe showed itself in something else. On the one hand, it was the desire to support social democratic groups and currents taking shape in those countries, and on the other hand, there was the eagerness to avoid playing into the hands of the extremist forces and undermining the existing cooperation with the ruling parties. Speaking at the closing press conference, Brandt stressed the fact that "social democracy was not meant for export."

The Stockholm Congress adopted a new program of the Socialist International — the Declaration of Principles, which replaced the Frankfurt Declaration of 1951.

The new Declaration started with the words, "The idea of Socialism has caught the imagination of people across the world, promoted successful political movements, decisively improved the lives of working men and women, and contributed to shaping the 20th century."[13] The beginning of the preliminary draft that Thomas Meyer, one of the leading authors of the program, showed to me in Freudenburg was different. Developments in Eastern Europe, in Latin America and other regions of the Third World

made the leaders of the Socialist International feel optimistic about the prospects opening up for social democracy. "It was a congress optimistic in nature," said Brandt in his parting conversation with us.

This optimistic mood was characteristic of the meeting between Gorbachev and Brandt, too. The latter came to Moscow to "deliver lectures" in mid-October 1989, that is, a few weeks before the collapse of the Berlin Wall. Gorbachev disputed the opinion that the events happening in the countries of Eastern Europe meant the failure of the socialist idea; he spoke of a possible development of socialism in the context of general development of civilization and stated "our rapprochement with social democracy." Responding to this statement, Brandt expressed his confidence that socialism was "getting a fresh lease of life," despite all the announcements of its demise. Naturally, he meant what social democrats called democratic socialism, as opposed to the so-called "real socialism." (Worth mentioning is the fact that the German social democrats did not recognize the Soviet state system as socialist, but regarded it as a form of state capitalism and saw the communist ideology as a distorted socialism.)

Brandt proposed sending a delegation of the Socialist International to Moscow to discuss the forms and themes of regular exchange of opinions on such matters as the world economy, environment, scientific and technical revolution, North-South relations, etc., in addition to the problems of peace and disarmament. (The delegation came to the Soviet Union in the end of February 1990 and visited, in particular, the Baltic region.) Brandt also suggested that Gorbachev and he become authors of articles opening the first issue of Socialism of the Future ("El Socialismo del Futuro"), a new international journal being launched in several European languages at the initiative of the Spanish socialists.[14]

However, in addition to the future of socialism, Brandt was interested in other things, too. He was concerned about its immediate prospects. He was aware of the colossal difficulties faced by Gorbachev and his supporters within the country. The seriousness of intentions demonstrated by the "top person in the Kremlin" raised with him "less doubt than before"; however, he was no longer sure if the peaceful renewal had any chances of success left.[15]

The rapid development of events in Eastern Europe in autumn 1989 came as a surprise to many people, including the German social democrats.

No doubt, the SDP expected the changes in the GDR, other Eastern European countries and the Soviet Union to develop in accordance with the social democratic scenario. However, they hoped for a gradual evolutionary process, and not an abrupt revolutionary destruction. This variant was not excluded, though.

Concluding the manuscript of his Recollections in summer 1989, Brandt guessed that "not hundreds, but hundreds of thousands of people will come to the streets" one day in Leipzig, Dresden and other cities and towns of the GDR to fight for their rights.[16] In fact, it all happened much sooner than it could have been expected. The process of reunification of Germany weakened the position held by the SDP. It expected the process to take some time and admitted the possibility of a German confederation taking shape somewhere towards the end of the 1990s. It made the CDU/CSU more popular with the people of both parts of Germany, while the results of the all-German elections to the Bundestag held on December 2, 1990 proved disappointing to the SDP.

The events in Eastern Europe could not but affect the situation in the CPSU by speeding up the process of its internal division. The draft of a political platform titled "Toward Humane Democratic Socialism" prepared to be presented at the 28th Party Congress, scheduled for July 1990, had a noticeable imprint of social democratic ideas. In the course of discussions of the draft at the February Plenum of the Central Committee, raised was an issue of the need to more clearly formulate the Party's attitude towards social democracy. The draft text published on February 13 to be discussed by the public, had it as follows: "The CPSU repudiates any negative dogmatic stereotypes with regard to other parties of the working people, including social democratic parties contributing to the progressive development of countries and peoples."

The draft platform confirmed the course towards further development of ties with social democracy; however, the situation was becoming increasingly complicated for that. This subject was discussed at the meeting of the Commission for Foreign Policy Matters of the CPSU Central Committee held on June 15, that is, shortly before the Congress.[17] Many right, although already belated, words were said there about the place and role of social democracy in the world. The political landscape in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, including the Soviet Union, was changing too rapidly. The ruling communist parties were losing their influence and power. The Western social democrats got new partners: social democratic parties and groups. Of course, the Socialist International sympathized with the revival of social democracy in that region. At the same time, it was with interest mixed with some skepticism that its leaders watched the transformation of communist parties into those of social democratic orientation. It implied a promise of an imminent meeting with the "old and new friends," who, as Brandt assured, could rely on "our sympathy and support."[18]

The 28th Congress of the CPSU was held in the atmosphere of a sharp confrontation between the reform-minded and orthodox and conservative

currents, however, the party discipline was still in force, and the new political platform, reform-oriented in its nature, was approved. There were no guests from abroad invited to participate in the Congress; however, the leaders of international social democracy watched its work with great attention. It was the subject of Brandt's message to Gorbachev on the occasion of the Congress, "You should know how attentively the parties united by the Socialist International, and, for sure, not only them, are watching the work of the 28th Congress of the CPSU. We are not going to interfere with your discussions, but, of course, we note rather seriously the new diversified interest in the positions of social democratic parties and the Socialist International expressed by you."[19]

Vogel also sent his letter to the delegates to the Congress. It read, "The SDP is watching closely and with sympathy the efforts taken in the USSR to radically transform the life of its society, restore the humanistic traditions and true democratic values. We hope this Congress will take the decisions, the implementation of which will benefit the peoples of the Soviet Union and facilitate overcoming the division of Europe and assertion of the ideals of freedom, progress, and justice."

The next Congress of the CPSU, the extraordinary one, scheduled for autumn 1991, was to discuss the draft of a new Party program.

It was the program of already a new, different party, the program more social democratic by its content.[20] Everything indicated to an organizational division that could result in the transformation of the reform-oriented wing in the CPSU into a mass party based on the platform of democratic socialism. Then its joining the Socialist International could become possible. Maybe, it was exactly what Gorbachev had in mind as a prospect, sending to Brandt his letter on the occasion of the 40th Anniversary of the reestablishment of the Socialist International in the end of June 1991. The message read, "Cooperation of the CPSU with the parties of the Socialist International is becoming more regular and useful. I am looking forward to its fruitful continuation along the general lines of activities carried out by the democratic forces for the sake of peace and social progress."[21]

In the days of the August coup in Moscow, the Socialist International, unlike many foreign communist parties, openly or indirectly approving the measures taken by the GKChP (State Committee for the State of Emergency), expressed its solidarity with Gorbachev. On August 20, the Socialist International Council released a very strongly-worded statement condemning the coup-plotters. The parties of the Socialist International showed their unconditional support for Perestroika and the democratic reorganization of Soviet society. On September 17, a delegation of the Socialist International, led by Pierre Mauroy, came to Moscow. Meeting

Gorbachev, Mauroy expressed his hope for continuation of the democratic reforms and the process of renewal of Soviet society "fitting into the framework of the socialist movement well under way in Europe and the world."[22]

The course of developments in the aftermath of the coup, resulting in a soon disintegration of the USSR, shattered those hopes and illusions shared by both sides.

The consequences of the disintegration of the Soviet Union proved heavy for international social democracy, too. Discrediting of the so-called "real socialism" was spread to the notion of "socialism" in general. In the mass consciousness, socialism was associated with ineffective state economy, centralized planning, one-party domination, and a police state. "With such associations in the air, liberalism was seen as the only economic, political, and social alternative to communism. Social democracy was perceived considerably in Eastern Europe and quite appreciably in the countries of the Western Europe, in association with the collapsing communism, since the seeming similarity of the principal ideas and the political language of communism and social democracy was presented as an absolute truth. [...] The pendulum has suddenly swung in the opposite direction."[23]

In general, it is also true in the case of Russia, too. In hindsight, looking back at Perestroika, we may say that it was a Social Democratic Project, with its implementation disrupted because of unfavorable concurrence of circumstances. Development of ties between the CPSU and social democracy, efforts to "rehabilitate" social democratic movements, despite of their publicity and wide coverage in the party press, still were the superficial processes involving only a narrow layer of the Party intelligentsia and members of the intelligentsia close to the Party.

Later on, towards the end of the 1990s, the pendulum swung in the direction of a "liberal" project.

Subsequently, by the end of the 1990s, social democracy generally managed to restore its positions in the world. The Socialist International, with its already more than 170 constituent parties and organizations, now includes 27 parties from 19 post-socialist countries, as well. In particular, the last Congress (held in Sao Paulo in October 2003) admitted the Social Democratic Party of Russia, founded with the personal participation of Gorbachev, to the Socialist International as its advisory member. However, this is a different story.

---

[1] Brandt W. *Recollections*. Translation from German. M.: Novosti, 1991, p. 409, Op. cit., p. 409.

[2] Gorbachev M.S. *Zhizn i reformy* (*Life and Reforms*), Book Two, M., Novosti, 1995, p. 484.

[3] *Pravda*, 2 October 1985.

[4] Report of the "Palme Commission" (the Independent Commission on Disarmament and Security Issues), titled *Common Security*, was published in 1982. See *Bezopasnost dlya vsekh (Security for All)*, M., Progress Publishers, 1982.

[5] Brandt W., Op. cit., p. 414.

[6] Ibid. p. 410. The Independent Commission on International Development Issues, chaired by Brandt (the "Brandt Commission") published two reports on North-South relations in 1980 and 1983.

[7] Ibid. p. 408.

[8] Incidentally, in those days the newspaper of Italian communists *Avanti!* published my article on the same subject under the catchy title of "Take the hand, Comrades from the Socialist International" (Qua la mano, compagni dell'Internazionale Socialista"). However, a meaningful photograph showing Brandt posing against the Berlin Wall accompanied the article. // *Avanti*!, 10 aprile 1988.

[9] For more details, see: Orlov B.S. *Sotsial-demokratiya kak ob'ekt nauchnykh issledovaniy v Rossii* (*Social Democracy as an Object of Scientific Studies in Russia*). M., RAN INION, 2000.

[10] Gorbachev M.S. Speech at the United Nations Organization, 7 December 1988 // M.: Politizdat Publishing House, 1988, p.6.

[11] See: *Communists and Social Democrats: Time to Gather Stones Together // Problems of Peace and Socialism*, 1989, Issue No.8.

[12] Such addresses were sent in the past to the 14th (Albufeira, 1983) and the 17th (Lima, 1986) Congresses.

[13] Socialist International. The 18th Congress. Stockholm, June 1989. London, 1989, p. 23. At the same time, with regard to communism it read, "Communism has lost the appeal that it once had to parts of the labour movement or to some intellectuals after the October Revolution or during the struggle against fascism. The crimes of stalinism, mass persecution and the violation of human rights, as well as unsolved economic problems, have undermined the idea of communism as an alternative to democratic socialism or as a model for the future.". Ibid., p. 38. In this country, the Declaration (its Russian translation, slightly abridged) was published in the journal *Communist*, 1989, Issue No.16.

[14] The first issue of the Spanish version of the journal was published in Madrid in spring 1990. It opened with articles by Mikhail Gorbachev (*The Future World and Socialism)* and Willy Brandt *(The Future of Democratic Socialism*). See the Russian version of the journal, titled *Socialism of the Future. A Journal of Political Debates*. Volume One, No.1, 1990. Published in Russian were only three issues of this journal.

[15] Brandt W., Op. cit., p. 509.

[16] Ibid., pp. 489, and 505.

[17] *On Cooperation between the CPSU and Social Democracy at the Present Stage// Izvestiya of the Central Committee of the CPSU, 1990*, Issue No.11.

[18] *Socialist Affairs,* Issue 1/1990, pp. 4-5.

[19] *Pravda,* July 13, 1990.

[20] See Gorbachev M.S. *Life and Reforms*, Book Two, p. 486.

[21] *Pravda*, June 25, 1991.

[22] Citation from Gorbachev M.S. *Life and Reforms,* Book Two, p. 488.

[23] Meyer T. *Transformation of Social Democracy. The Party Heading for the 21st Century. Translation from German*. M.: Memorials of Historical Ideas series, 2000, p. 147.

"Our choice was to humanize and rebuild the country through democratization and in an evolutionary way, keeping within the socialist path."

(Mikhail Gorbachev.
Extract from conversations with Zden□k Mlyn□ř)

PERESTROIKA IN THE MIRROR OF MODERN INTERPRETATIONS

by Boris Slavin

Boris Slavin is an Aide to the President of the Gorbachev Foundation. In 1985, he was Head of the Social Sciences Department at the Central Institute for Advanced Training of Teachers. Doctor of Philosophy, Professor. From 1987 to 1991, he was a researcher and, later, Deputy Head of the Institute for the Theory and History of Socialism at the CPSU Central Committee, a political observer, and member of the editorial board of the newspaper Pravda.

The past has always been the basis for understanding the present and the future. It also directly refers to Perestroika, which many politicians, historians, and ideologists see today, with all its contradictions, as a starting point of modern times.

Twenty years have passed since the start of Perestroika; however, as seen from the modern mass media, the ideological struggle over it is not only not subsiding, but intensifies with every new turn in the history and politics of Russia.

Revolution or counter-revolution?

Telling is the fact that today representatives of almost all currents of modern ideological and political life are trying to comprehend the nature and the experience of Perestroika. For instance, ideologists and politicians of the conservative trend, including the outspoken nationalists and neo-Stalinists, regard Perestroika as a symbol of all the troubles of today's Russia, starting with the dismantling of the Soviet Union and the implementation of the "shock therapy" policy and ending with the destructive acts of international terrorism. "The terrorist acts and hostage

takings we see today," wrote Igor Rodionov, the Russian ex-Minister of Defense, "are the consequences of Perestroika and of the disintegration of the Soviet Union, of the war for 'independence' started by the national separatists and abetted by Yeltsin and Gorbachev."[1]

Ironically enough, speaking about the purely destructive nature of Perestroika are also modern neo-liberals in the West, who think that Gorbachev "has dug a grave for communism and paved the way for the disintegration of the Soviet Union."[2] Liliya Shevtsova, a well-known Russian political scientist, espouses a similar idea in Russia. She believes that Gorbachev "has virtually eliminated any possibility for the existence of a Russian national civilization model as an alternative to liberal democracy. He brought that what Francis Fukuyama, a U.S. philosopher, called "the end of history," meaning the crash of all other civilization scenarios and the victory of only one of them, namely, liberalism."[3]

While agreeing that Perestroika in general was of a destructive nature, the right and the left radicals differ in that the former call it a revolution while the latter call it a counter-revolution, the former regard it as a progressive phenomenon while the latter consider it a total setback for Russia. For instance, Georgy Satarov, a former Aide to Yeltsin and currently head of Indem research center, speaking at the Gorbachev Foundation, said frankly, "We have gone through and, maybe, are still in the process of going through, a revolution that was started by you, Mikhail Sergeyevich."[4] Aleksandr Zinoviev, a well-known Soviet dissident who then became a theorist and an advocate of the "Russian Communism," held an opposite view of Perestroika, calling it a "catastroika" and a "Soviet counter-revolution."[5] Many members of the modern communist movement in Russia share this view, regarding Perestroika as a natural result of the "counter-revolution that took place under the slogan of renewal of Soviet society and improvement of socialism."[6]

In this way, for the left and the right radicals, for the nationalist communists, and for the neo-liberals, Perestroika, in its essence, means one and the same thing, namely, the collapse of the Soviet model of socialism (communism) and transition to a modern model of liberal capitalism. As we see, the terms "revolution" and "counter-revolution" are used here as a kind of evaluation — either a positive or a negative one.

What is in fact the essence of Perestroika and its role in the history of the country?

The answer to this question would be impossible without an overall understanding of the history of Soviet society.

In our view, the history of Soviet society is characterized by the struggle between two basic trends, the democratic trend and the antidemocratic one. The former trend expressed interests of the majority

of the people, primarily, the working people. The latter trend reflected, as a rule, interests of the national bureaucracy, which took advantage of the immaturity of Soviet society.

The democratic trend was linked to the transition of the country from the politics of "military communism" to the new economic policy (NEP), to Lenin's ideas contained in his Political Testament, which outlined some real ways to democratically reshape the Soviet state, developed a new vision for socialism, different from classical Marxism, and espoused creative ideas of cooperative economy and intensive cultural development of the country. It was this trend that gave birth in the second half of the 20th Century, to Khrushchev's "thaw" and Gorbachev's Perestroika.

The antidemocratic ("authoritarian" or "totalitarian" — you may name it as you like) trend, while expressing primarily interests of the Soviet bureaucracy and of some marginal groups of petty bourgeoisie, workers and intelligentsia, immediately started to prevail after the death of Lenin. As a result, Joseph Stalin became the most characteristic bearer of this trend and a mouthpiece of these groups of society. It was this trend that ultimately resulted in a totalitarian regime been established in the USSR. The tragic consequences of forced industrialization and of premature collectivization of agriculture, unlawful mass reprisals of the 1930s, neo-Stalinism of the Brezhnev era and its recurrences in the Perestroika and post-Perestroika periods are linked to that trend.

Perestroika and the processes of renewal during the second half of the 1980s were in their essence a negation and overcoming of the antidemocratic trend that was most fully embodied in the Stalin model of totalitarianism in our country. In this respect, Perestroika may rightfully be called a peaceful anti-totalitarian revolution carried out for the sake of democratic and socialist ideals.

It should be emphasized that socialism in its nature tends towards democracy, rather than totalitarianism. Totalitarianism is a distortion of socialism and its antipode. Its social support base — and we repeat it again — is the bureaucratic caste. However, since the bureaucracy is not an independent class of society, it is compelled to serve interests of either labor or capital. A totalitarian regime cannot live long in the context of socialist construction: it is bound to degenerate sooner or later. This degeneration will either trigger a political revolution and the establishment of true socialist democracy, or culminate in a counter-revolution resulting in the establishment of "barbarian capitalism" with its dramatic impoverishment of the working people and social polarization. The history of Perestroika and of the post-Perestroika Russia is an illustration of how it happens in practice.

In our opinion, the most objective and historically correct view of Perestroika is the one that sees it as the process of final emancipation of Soviet society from every manifestation of the Stalinist totalitarian system and a decisive shift to the model of humane democratic socialism. It is not fortuitous that these features of socialism were the ones to form the basis of the CPSU Central Committee's Platform for the 28th Party Congress. This view of Perestroika is fundamentally different from its interpretations by modern neo-liberals and nationalist communists. We believe that Perestroika was neither a bourgeois-liberal revolution, nor a counter-revolution of antisocialist kind. In its essence, it was a revolutionary renewal of Soviet society, implementing the democratic and socialist ideals of freedom, justice, solidarity, and humanism. In short, Perestroika was the world's first anti-totalitarian political revolution in a society that was building socialism.

No dogmas, please

Strange things often happen in our country: hardly have the old dogmas and myths become obsolete as new ones are erected in their place. Such modern dogmas and myths include equating the totalitarian system with the entire history of Soviet society, including Perestroika, lumping together of Gorbachev and Yeltsin, and of the Perestroika period with the post-Perestroika time, etc. However, nothing is farther from the truth. We shall try to prove it.

At some point, certain Russian historians, to demonstrate their "innovative approach" and without giving it any critical thought, borrowed the notion of "totalitarianism" from Western conservative-minded researchers, such as Adam Ulam, Richard Pipes, Zbigniew Brzezinski, and others, to describe the system and the history of Soviet society. In our view, it was a mistake, since the notion of "totalitarianism" refers, above all, to a characteristic of a regime of political power, rather than to a socio-economic system of society or to its history. In case of the USSR, the notion of "totalitarianism" refers, above all, to the domination of Stalin's political regime, rather than to the entire history of Soviet society. The truth is concrete. Beyond the time boundaries of Stalin's totalitarianism, there were other political regimes: the authoritarian and democratic rule of Khrushchev, the authoritarianism of Brezhnev, and the transition from authoritarianism to democracy at the time of Gorbachev's Perestroika. However, those who like Valeriya Novodvorskaya equate Perestroika and the dominance of Stalin's totalitarianism, ignore the obvious fact that Perestroika represented its direct historical negation and overcoming.

Of course, Stalin's totalitarianism for many years was characteristic of Soviet society. Nevertheless, methodologically it would be wrong to view Soviet history as a continuous line towards the establishment and strengthening of totalitarianism. That disregards the conflicts and severe political struggles between various social forces, parties, and factions, which represent a significant element of the Soviet history. Such an approach is particularly unproductive in the study of history, since instead of examining real facts of society's life, it twists them to fit a pre-determined concept.

We repeat it again: Perestroika is not a continuation but a direct negation and overcoming of Stalin's totalitarianism. Historically, it was preceded by a most severe struggle between the two above trends. And we know its results: Stalin's regime of absolute rule gave way to Khrushchev's "thaw," which undermined totalitarianism, and later it was replaced by the "frosts" of Brezhnev's authoritarian regime, with its attempt at reviving Stalin's system. However, he was already unable to accomplish it in full, since Stalinism as a phenomenon was in conflict with the challenges of modern time and with the advancing new post-industrial era. That is why in due course Brezhnev's authoritarianism made way to the democratic Perestroika, implemented by Mikhail Gorbachev and his team.

When analyzing the history of Perestroika, we proceed from a conceptual possibility of reforming the society and the system that had taken shape by the mid-1980s. Here we absolutely agree with the view and the arguments of Professor Stephen Cohen, whose answer to the question as to whether it was possible to reform the Soviet system was in the affirmative.[7] Of course, the supporters of Perestroika themselves, who from the very beginning started to decisively scrap the remnants of Stalinism still existing at the time, proceeded from a similar political and methodological position. However, following the interruption of Perestroika, even some of its former supporters came to the view, formerly held only by the opponents of Perestroika, that the system inherited by Gorbachev from pre-Perestroika times was unreformable in principle.

Today, the idea that Soviet society was fundamentally unreformable is commonplace, used by some political scientists and historians as a basis for trying to explain both the disintegration of the Union and the defeat of Perestroika. I think at one time Mikhail Gorbachev himself was close to adopting that point of view, too, when he argued in the mid-1990s, that the issue of whether Soviet society was reformable or not "still remained open."[8] Only later, thorough reflections led him to the conclusion that "there are no unreformable systems; otherwise, there would be no progress in history." In our opinion, in relying on the dogma that "Soviet society was unreformable," its adherents miss the fact that they come into

conflict with reality and with themselves. By doing so they make Perestroika look like a fruitless historical miscarriage. If Soviet society was unreformable, then was there any need even to start Perestroika?

In our opinion, one should not forget that Perestroika was born out of historical necessity. This necessity made itself felt long before Perestroika officially started in 1985. According to Gorbachev's vivid expression, Soviet society "was literally pregnant with Perestroika." There were objective reasons for that: the intelligentsia, which demanded freedom of speech and political and ideological pluralism, was pressing for it; workers, who saw the undeserved privileges of the party and state *nomenklatura*, called for it; the absolute majority of the Soviet people, who shared the ideals of social justice and socialism, longed for it.

Was there any theory of Perestroika?

The initial concept of Perestroika was to return, in a certain way, to Lenin's ideas and norms of state life and to eliminate the deformities of Soviet society caused by Stalin.

This is borne out by the specific steps of Perestroika made under the slogan of reviving the October ideals and Lenin's view of socialism during the NEP period. Among the numerous examples of this are the facts relating to the continuation of the political course of the 20th Congress of the CPSU, with its condemnation of Stalin "personality cult" and rehabilitation of many historical figures who were Lenin's associates (Zinoviev, Kamenev, Bukharin, Rykov, Pyatakov, and others), as well as all other citizens who were victims of unlawful reprisals. This is also seen from the fact that forbidden films that had been previously "shelved" returned to the screens; sharply critical books by Rybakov, Shatrov, Dudintsev, and Bek were published; and "dissident," that is, emigrant, literature and works by pre-revolutionary Russian historians, political writers and thinkers who had been ostracized at one time were republished.

The merit of Gorbachev and his team was that they realized earlier than others that it was necessary to fully emancipate Soviet society from the remnants of the totalitarian regime embodied by the bureaucratic and command system of administration. They made possible significant progress of society, by starting its profound renewal based on the principles of freedom, democracy, and humanism and transforming the authoritarian model of "developed socialism" of the Brezhnev era into "democratic socialism" of the Gorbachev era. It explains the famous motto of that time: "More democracy and more socialism!"

It was not just a motto. In this regard, in order to feel and understand the purely revolutionary nature of Perestroika, one may recall the

atmosphere of the first Congress of People's Deputies, the endless discussions among politicians, the rallies that drew thousands of people, the demonstrations of citizens, and the increasingly vigorous debate in the mass media. Indeed, in many aspects the atmosphere created by Perestroika reminded one of the revolutionary events of 1917. It was not by chance that parallels between Perestroika and the October Revolution were drawn at that time. The two were alike not only in form, but also in substance: millions of people became active participants in the social transformations. Thanks to these people, Perestroika turned into a kind of political spring in the history of Soviet society. This gave reasons to the poet Yevgeny Yevtushenko to say "We all are members of the Perestroika Party."

Until this date, there exists a widespread opinion that the men and women of Perestroika had no ideology and no strategy of renewing Soviet society. At one time, the Russian writer Yury Bondarev, most vividly expressed this point of view, when he compared Perestroika to a plane with no course and no idea where to land. Today, many critics of Perestroika from both the right and the left express similar views, considering it "a flight into the unknown." According to M.Korobkova, "the General Secretary was doomed to failure with his Perestroika, because he did not have a scientifically based long-term vision of it and did not know the answers to the essential questions."

What was in need of reforms? Who has ever explained the substance of "new thinking?"[9] Nevertheless, these views are far from being objective. They are right only in one part: the theory of Perestroika in its ready-to-use form could not immediately take shape in the mind of its architect, but developed gradually based on practical activity. However, by the end of 1988, a general concept of Perestroika had taken shape, allowing its initiators and supporters to start reforming society fully conscious of what they were doing.

Many official and non-official materials and documents of Perestroika confirm this fact. In this regard, I would like to cite a little known fact related to writing and preparation for publication of the brochure *On Socialism* by Mikhail Gorbachev. Speaking with his assistant in August 1988, Mikhail Gorbachev expressed his flat disagreement with those who argued that Perestroika had no theory or policy. He also stressed: "We do have them. Their main point is to put to full use the potential of the socialist system and eliminate the deformities and the consequences of the personality cult and the stagnation period, and everything that hampered and impeded the development of socialism that brought society to a difficult pre-crisis situation.

The core of our current concept is to make man again the main actor in the political process, economy and the spiritual sphere, to complete the work started by the October Revolution in 1917. We need to do away with alienation of man from production, government, and culture."

All this pointed to the need for Perestroika, democratization and glasnost, and, later, for political reform, in other words, the need for profound rethinking of the political system and dramatic changes in industry, transportation, trade and public amenities. It is interesting that in this conversation Mikhail Gorbachev called Perestroika "our new revolution," which made a breakthrough not only in practice, but also "in theory, in the field of public thought."[10] Later, when discussing the essence of Perestroika's concept in his conversation during the post-Perestroika period with Zdeněk Mlynář, a participant in the Prague Spring, Mikhail Gorbachev would say that the "concept of Perestroika was aimed at profound qualitative transformation of society through combining socialism and democracy. This was its principal and humane goal."[11] Later, the policy of Perestroika was adjusted, "however, the idea and the focus of our concept remained unchanged."[12]

When analyzing the evolution and the political thrust of the processes of Perestroika, we arrive at the conclusion that by the end of the 1980s, the processes of renewing Soviet society had in many aspects developed a social democratic character. This is seen not only from Gorbachev's numerous contacts with leaders of the European social democracy (like his meetings with Brandt, Lafontaine, Gonzalez, and others) or only from cooperation of the CPSU with the social democratic parties on the issues of war and peace, of the strategy and tactics of the international working class, but also from the numerous results of Perestroika itself, relating to the acceptance of private property in the economy, on the one hand, and to the development of effective social policy of the state, on the other.

The social democratic nature of the renewal processes was also seen from the new draft program of the CPSU, prepared for the coming 29th Congress of the CPSU.

Mikhail Gorbachev viewed the proposals of some communists to rename the CPSU into a socialist or a social democratic party from the same perspective. However, in the opinion of Mikhail Gorbachev, only a congress or a general Party referendum could decide on this matter.

At the same time, the documents of Perestroika also testify to the fact that the social democratic vision of Perestroika should not be interpreted in a purely liberal way, as done today by some liberal ideologues and neo-Stalinists who align with them in arguing that the ultimate goal of Perestroika was transition to capitalism.

The historical truth does not need to be improved or worsened. In our opinion, the theory of Perestroika developed within the framework of the concept of putting to full use the "potential of the socialist system," of the "socialist perspective" or the "socialist choice." In one of his draft articles, when describing the ideological quests of the final years of Perestroika, Mikhail Gorbachev said, "In looking for a way out, some are ready to try just about anything. Some favor reestablishment of the old system that existed under the tsar, including the monarchy. Others favor spiritual revival — only by giving the church and religion a monopoly on spirituality. Still others argue for implantation of the capitalist system, so to say, in its "pure form," with the mentality of "every man for himself": glory to those who succeed and may the others survive as best they can.

Some mock the socialist choice, overlooking the fact that the rejection of socialism in the mass consciousness happened only because it was presented in the form of Stalinism. However, this is temporary. The next generation will definitely return to this great idea and hope. The fact that this idea has a basis and is deeply rooted in the objective logic of human history is recognized even by prominent anticommunist scholars and philosophers."[13]

We would like to stress again that, in our opinion, the concept and theory of Perestroika did not and could not go beyond the boundaries of the concept of "socialist choice." This is seen from, among other things, the political views held by Mikhail Gorbachev himself, who still remains a supporter of the socialist idea. To my mind, it is wrong to see Mikhail Gorbachev as a radical liberal, who has flatly repudiated the socialist ideals, or as an orthodox communist, who has failed to learn any lessons during the years of Perestroika.

Being the leader of the world's leading communist party and a person who felt the challenges and the needs of his time, Gorbachev's ideology was bound to change as Perestroika progressed. According to his own words, in those years he lived "several human lives, not just seven years."[14] At the same time, his biography shows that until today he in many aspects remains a man of the left, who sees the socialist idea as a most important value in modern world. Even the dramatic events of his captivity at Foros did not change his views. Let me cite the words he said at a press conference shortly after his return from Foros, "I belong to that group of people who never conceal their views. I am a staunch supporter of the socialist idea..."[15] Ten years later, when addressing members of a new social democratic party founded by him, he would repeat the words of his late friend Brandt: "A person pronouncing the word 'socialism' with difficulty cannot be called a social democrat."

Achievements, mistakes, and causes of the disruption of Perestroika

There is a persistent myth that Perestroika was the "time of missed opportunities." This myth was invented to discredit the real achievements of Perestroika, which constitute its unique substance.

Of course, there were lapses and even mistakes during the years of Perestroika; nevertheless, they do not define the substance of all the renewal processes implemented by Mikhail Gorbachev's team during the second half of the 1980s. Despite the fact that in historical terms it had little time to effect changes, this team succeeded in accomplishing a great deal. The men and women of Perestroika not only implemented the ideas outlined by Lenin in his last works, but went even further and started reforming all spheres of Soviet society. Eventually, they succeeded in a qualitative transformation of both the domestic and foreign policies of the country.

In particular, they came very close to establishing a socially-oriented market economy, proving that socialism was not in conflict with the market, while being more than just market economics. The market is a sphere of the economy; it cannot and should not determine development of the social sphere, politics and ideology of society.

The men and women of Perestroika succeeded not only in proclaiming glasnost and freedom of speech, but also in making them a reality. They abolished censorship, introduced pluralism to the political life and the spiritual sphere of society, and began democratization of the Soviets and renewal of the ruling party. In doing that they faced desperate resistance to reforms on the part of conservative forces in the party and the government. In this respect, the reformers, like their historical predecessors, the Paris Communards, literally "stormed the skies." They succeeded in holding the first contested elections in the country and in establishing a parliamentary system with active opposition and independent mass media. On nation-wide television alone, several independent and opposition-leaning programs, like the Fifth Wheel, the Outlook, the 600 Seconds, and others, were launched.

Perestroika made a start in implementing the fundamental rights and freedoms of the individual. In addition to the rights to work, rest, education, etc., political rights and freedoms, not traditional to the Soviet Union, such as freedom of assembly, rallies, and demonstrations; freedom to launch political organizations and parties; freedom to hold demonstrations and marches; freedom to travel abroad; freedom of conscience; and others were also implemented. Much was done in the sphere of developing economic democracy: employee councils were launched; elections of heads of enterprises were introduced; and self-management of production started to develop.

Following the general referendum on preservation of the Union, a new Union Treaty was put on the agenda that would really provide greater independence and the rights of the Union Republics.

Particularly beneficial were the efforts taken by the reformers in the area of the Soviet Union's foreign policy. Using "new thinking" as a basis, they really staved off the threat of a global nuclear missile war, scaled down nuclear weapons tests, started the disarmament process, etc. Many countries and peoples breathed with relief. All these facts refute not only the "theory of missed opportunities" but also the dogma that the Soviet state system was unreformable in principle.

In spite of the resistance shown to it by various political forces, ultimately Perestroika succeeded in accomplishing the main thing, namely, in creating real prerequisites for a functioning democratic socialism in the Soviet country. In our opinion, this is what represents the historical meaning of Perestroika.

What then caused the disruption of Perestroika and its end?

In our view, the disruption and the end of Perestroika happened because the CPSU in general, being the ruling political party by the start of the reforms, failed to rise up to the historical tasks that had to be addressed in response to the challenges of the time. Using Lenin's words, in many respects it found itself in the position of a "party that thought too much of itself" but was unable to lead the great masses of the population. That is why after Yeltsin virtually banned it, not only ordinary citizens but also members of the Party themselves staged no significant protests.

Life proved that political reforms in the country, where the Communist party was the political, organizational, and ideological core of society, had to be started with Perestroika of the ruling party itself, and above all of its bureaucratic *apparat*, which showed considerable resistance to the renewal processes in the country. Historical facts show that it was this *apparat* that during the August coup rendered significant support to the GKChP (State Committee for the State of Emergency). Here are the roots of a most serious mistake made by the initiators of Perestroika, who were clearly late with starting the renewal and democratization of the ruling party, in particular, its division into a social democratic wing and a conservative communist wing, which was distinctly visible within the CPSU during the last years of Perestroika, particularly when the Russian Communist Party was launched.

During the implementation of Perestroika, there were some other mistakes that were no less serious and were related to the technological and economic spheres.

Having correctly identified the goal of transition to post-industrial society, the reformers have nevertheless failed to achieve higher

productivity of labor based on the technological progress and the renewal of the country's production potential. By that time, the USSR largely remained a purely industrialized country with an extensive economy and the military and industrial complex that had grown out of proportion.

The resistance shown by top military officials and a part of the conservative Party *nomenklatura* prevented the men and women of Perestroika from properly implementing the intended conversion of the military industry, which worsened the difficult economic situation the country had found itself in by the end of the 1980s.

Having focused mostly on the political reforms, the men and women of Perestroika failed to fully resolve the economic problems inherited from the past. During the short time allotted to them by history, they failed in reviving the slumping economy and in raising the living standards of the population.

The resistance shown by anti-Perestroika forces and the lapses in the reform policy resulted in the country finding itself confronted with economic and financial difficulties.

The aid promised by the West was delayed and interruptions in supplies of basic goods to the population started to happen, which alienated great masses of the people from Perestroika. As a result, the reformers lost their social support base. Many people, including the intelligentsia, unhappy with the material gains of Perestroika, started to come over to its opponents, replenishing radical movements on both the right and the left. In short, the evolution of Perestroika confirmed the old truth: political freedoms in a society need to be accompanied by improvements in the material situation of the people. Otherwise, the reforms are not sustainable.

However, the above mistakes and lapses of the national reformers could have been corrected, had there been no interruption of Perestroika by the August 1991 coup, staged by the conservative and bureaucratic forces, which saw the continuation of Perestroika as a direct threat to their own existence.

As is known, by the beginning of the 1990s, three major social and political forces took shape in the country, namely, the supporters of Perestroika, conservatives and neo-liberals, who called themselves "radical democrats."

The supporters of Perestroika spoke for full implementation in the country of their strategy of establishing a model of renewed, or democratic, socialism. The conservatives called for getting back to the pre-Perestroika times, seeing Perestroika as the "destruction" of the existing social system. The neo-liberals, on the contrary, demanded the "socialist experiment" to be done away with as soon as possible and urged for a decisive march towards capitalism. In his thorough reflections on

this strategy, Ye. Gaidar would say later, "The big question is what kind of capitalism are we going to get: a bureaucratic, corrupted... or a civilized one." Eventually, by giving contrary goals to Soviet society the conservatives and neo-liberals did everything to tear it apart, thus disrupting Perestroika.

The last phase of Perestroika ended with the dissolution of the Union, which was mutually conspired at the Belovezhskaya Pushcha by the three republican presidents: Yeltsin, acting on behalf of Russia, Kravchuk on behalf of Ukraine, and Shushkevich on behalf of Byelorussia. These names have become a symbol of the breakup and tragedy of many peoples of the once great country that determined the progress of world history in the 20th Century.

So, Perestroika ended with the dissolution of the Union, that is, with the disappearance of the entity that had to be reformed. Mikhail Gorbachev's famous televised appearance on December 25, 1991, in which he announced his resignation from the post of President of the USSR, marks this boundary to the exact minute. I would like to stress that in this case we are speaking about the purely formal boundary that marked the end of Perestroika. Beyond this boundary there are ideological and political impacts of Perestroika, which, in my opinion, will continue to remain relevant until its strategy of establishing democratic and humane socialism in Russia is implemented.

Perestroika and post-Perestroika Gorbachev and Yeltsin

Perhaps, the most unfair view of Perestroika is its full equating with the post-Perestroika time. Proponents of this view argue that Boris Yeltsin continued and developed the processes started by Mikhail Gorbachev. Igor Froyanov, Doctor of History who advocates a conspiracy theory blaming the men and women of Perestroika and believes that "Yeltsin followed the way shown by Gorbachev," is the most aggressive supporter of this point of view.[16]

With this lumping together of Gorbachev and Yeltsin, Perestroika starts to be seen as a purely negative process, which does not end with Gorbachev's stepping down as President, but goes on, inevitably transforming itself into the policy of neo-liberal fundamentalism, with all its harmful social and economic impacts: the unprecedented decline in the living standards of the population, social division of society into a small group of the super-rich and a mass of the poor and extremely poor people, growth in crime and child homelessness, etc.

However, it should be clear to any reasonable person that in fact there are considerable qualitative differences between the Perestroika of

Mikhail Gorbachev and the post-Perestroika of Boris Yeltsin. Likewise, the two political figures are also quite different.

For instance, the men and women of Perestroika have never had building of capitalism in the country or copying of the American model of society as their ultimate goal. As noted above, they tried, particularly in the first years of Perestroika, to tap the democratic "potential of the socialist system" in the USSR, supplementing it with the achievements of socially oriented market economy, characteristic of the Western European countries led by social democrats.

Unlike them, long before the coup, the followers of Boris Yeltsin used his words to state that, "Russia has made its final choice. It will take neither the socialist path, nor the path of capitalism; it will stick to the civilized path traveled by the United States of America."[17]

It has been proved many times that "after that" does not mean "because of that." The period of radical reforms of Yeltsin and Gaidar is not a continuation of Perestroika, but its negation, both as regards its social and political substance and the way of transforming society. Guided by the results of the all-Union referendum of 1991, the men and women of Perestroika tried to avoid extreme, and above all forceful, methods of solving the problems that had accumulated, particularly in the sphere of social and ethnic relations. On the contrary, the supporters of neo-liberal fundamentalism in the circle of Boris Yeltsin, while ignoring the results of the all-Union referendum made use of many radical measures, including force, in their activity. Hence, such reckless actions as the disintegration of the Union, the initiation and implementation of "shock therapy" and "voucher privatization," the shelling of Russian parliament, the unleashing of the war in Chechnya, etc.

The distinction between the historical periods of Perestroika and post-Perestroika is also seen from the difference in the characters of political figures of Mikhail Gorbachev and Boris Yeltsin. It is not by chance that they differed in both the understanding of the essence of reforms of Russian society and the ways to reform it. Of course, the main difference between them has to do with the understanding of the goal of reforms and the interests they must serve. As noted above, in reforming Soviet society Gorbachev, unlike Yeltsin, always tried to proceed from public interests, rather than personal ones. As to the policy of Boris Yeltsin, it was always dominated by interests of certain oligarchic clans or by those of the "family."

Yeltsin and Gorbachev, so different from each other in their understanding of the substance and the ways of reforming society, are also very different as far as their personal qualities are concerned. The former is an authoritarian person, while the latter is democratic by nature. The

former listens only to himself, while the latter listens to other peoples' opinions. The former is pettily vindictive and never forgives mistakes even to his former associates, while the latter is ready to forgive mistakes not only to his friends, but also to his former opponents.

I think the Russian political elite should learn many things from the history of the 20th Century. For instance, it had tried to build socialism with a clearly "inhuman face" and it was rejected by the masses in the years of the "thaw" and Perestroika. Under Yeltsin, it built wild, or criminal, "capitalism" and it was not accepted by the people, either. Consequently, there is only one path left, a "third one," to be chosen by President Vladimir Putin and his circle.

---

[1] Citation from the newspaper *Zavtra*, Issue No.38, 2004, p. 5.

[2] *The New York Times*, October 10, 2004.

[3] See: Proceedings of the conferences held by the Gorbachev Foundation. Conference "Perestroika: Is It Our Past or Our Future?"; March 1, 2001; at the Gorbachev Foundation's Web-site: http://www.gorby.ru/rubrs.asp?rubr_id=332).

[4] See: The Gorbachev Foundation. Seminar "Ideological Preferences of the Population of Russia: New Trends"; November 16, 2000; at the Gorbachev Foundation's Web-site: http://www.gorby.ru/rubrs.asp?rubr_id=331.

[5] Zinoviev A.A. *Russkaya tragediya. Gibel utopiyi* (*The Russian Tragedy. The Death of Utopia*), M., Algorithm Publishing House, 2002, pp. 244-246.

[6] VKPB Program. Collection of "Proceedings of the First (Founding) Congress of the All-Russian Communist Party of the Future", M., 2004, pp. 28-29.

[7] Cohen S. Was it possible to reform the Soviet system?, *The Political Journal*, Issue of January 17, 2005.

[8] *Neokonchennaya istoriya. Besedy Mikhaila Gorbacheva s politologom Borisom Slavinym* (*The Unfinished Story. Conversations of Mikhail Gorbachev and Boris Slavin, a Political Scientist*), M., Olma-Press Publishing House, 2001, p. 37.

[9] Korobkova M. *Tak chto zhe sotsializm?* (*What Is Socialism, After All?*), *The Literary Gazette*, Issue No.5, 2002, p.11.

[10] See: The Archives of the Gorbachev Foundation, Holding No.2. Materials of Chernyayev A.S., List No.2. The conversation of Gorbachev and Chernyayev about the brochure *On Socialism*, August 7, 1988, the Crimea, Foros, Dacha "Zarya".

[11] See: Mikhail Gorbachev, Zdeněk Mlynář. *Dialogue on Perestroika, the Prague Spring, and Socialism*. Manuscript of the book. The Archives of the Gorbachev Foundation. Holding No.1, List No.3.

[12] Ibid.

[13] See: The Archives of the Gorbachev Foundation. Notes taken by Anatoly Chernyayev during the dictation of an article by Mikhail Gorbachev, August 2, 1991.

[14] See: His speech of March 8, 1992 at the Munich Kammerspiele (Munich Chamber Theater), the Archives of the Gorbachev Foundation, Holding No.1, List No.4 of March 8, 1992.

[15] *Pravda*, August 22, 1991.

[16] Froyanov I. *Arkhitektura razrusheniya* (*The Architecture of Destruction*), *The Literary Gazette*, Issue No.5, 2002, p.11.

[17] See: His speech at the New York University. Citation from *Pravda*, July 9, 1991.

PERESTROIKA AS VIEWED FROM WASHINGTON, 1985–1991

by Jack F. Matlock, Jr.

Jack F. Matlock, Jr. is a prominent U.S. diplomat; in 1983-1987, President Reagan's principal adviser on Soviet affairs; in 1987-1991, Ambassador of the United States to the Soviet Union.

Although some intelligence analysts predicted that Viktor Grishin would succeed Konstantin Chernenko as General Secretary of the CPSU Central Committee, most American officials were not surprised that the Central Committee chose Mikhail Gorbachev when Chernenko died in March 1985. It was clear that the Brezhnev generation of leaders was no longer capable of dealing with the country's mounting problems. The election of a leader from the younger generation seemed obviously in the country's interest if the USSR was to recover any of the dynamism it had showed at earlier periods of its history. Mikhail Gorbachev seemed poised for the top position: a generation younger than the majority of his Politburo colleagues, he possessed what was assumed to be the minimum prerequisites for a CPSU General Secretary: membership in both the Politburo and the CC Secretariat. Furthermore, he seemed to be acting informally as "second secretary" since he was reported to chair Politburo sessions in Chernenko's absence.

Not all analysts were convinced that Gorbachev would be Chernenko's successor. After all, the selection of Chernenko when Yury Andropov died seemed to indicate that members of the Brezhnev generation would cling to power so long as they lived, oblivious to the country's real interests. Nevertheless, Gorbachev's visit to London in December 1984 suggested that the Soviet leadership might be grooming Gorbachev as the next general secretary.

President Ronald Reagan was pleased when Gorbachev became the Soviet leader. He had hoped, at least from 1983, to meet the Soviet leader and begin a process of resolving differences and ending the arms race. Nevertheless, the infirmity of Gorbachev's predecessors, as well as the rigidity of their foreign policy, made a meeting impossible. Since Gorbachev was known to be younger, healthier, and more vigorous than his predecessors, Reagan had hopes that they could meet soon. He sent Vice President George Bush and Secretary of State George Shultz to

Moscow for Chernenko's funeral. When they met with Gorbachev they delivered an invitation from Reagan for Gorbachev to visit Washington.

Vice President Bush and Secretary Shultz reported upon their return to Washington that they had found Gorbachev articulate and well briefed on issues. Not surprisingly, Gorbachev gave no indication that he was prepared to change Soviet foreign policy in any way, but he seemed capable of thinking for himself, rather than simply reading statements prepared by others, as his immediate predecessors had done. Bush and Shultz agreed with the judgment British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher had expressed following Gorbachev's visit to London: he was a man the West could do business with.

There was no illusion that Gorbachev would be easy to deal with. On the contrary, some thought he would be tougher than his predecessors. When U.S. Ambassador Arthur Hartman briefed President Reagan in April 1985, he reported that Gorbachev was "a narrow fellow, of set views," who, in any case, would be preoccupied for a time with consolidating his power. Shultz commented that Gorbachev might be more "dangerous" than his predecessors since he lacked some of their faults. Following that meeting, Reagan noted in his diary the conclusion that "Gorbachev will be as tough as any of their leaders."

Nevertheless, Reagan was eager to meet and to initiate a dialogue, convinced that it would be in the Soviet interest to end the arms race, open the country to outside influences, and to begin reforms to make it more democratic and less threatening to its neighbors. He had hoped that he could meet Gorbachev in Washington and show him something of the United States, but when Gorbachev demurred and proposed a meeting elsewhere, Reagan agreed that they would meet in Geneva in November.

Although the summit meeting in Geneva did not solve any of the "big" issues between the United States and the Soviet Union, Reagan felt the meeting was a success. Reagan liked Gorbachev, despite their differences, and was encouraged that they could eventually find common language. He also considered it significant that Gorbachev was willing to approve much broader and more intensive contacts between American and Soviet citizens than his predecessors had allowed. The agreement to expand exchanges, signed at Geneva, in time did much to reduce misunderstanding and distrust between ordinary Americans and Soviet citizens.

In 1985, there was no direct mention of perestroika. Instead, Americans observed policies such as the anti-alcohol campaign and *uskorenie*. Although the goal of the first was laudable — public health in the USSR would benefit from less alcohol consumption — the campaign was carried out in ways that were not effective. It seemed that Soviet officials had learned nothing from the failure of prohibition in the United States in the 1920s. As for *uskorenie*, Soviet citizens resisted attempts to

force them to work harder with no increase in benefits. American analysts noted that these policies were not bringing the intended results, but that Gorbachev, during 1985, had consolidated his power to the degree that he could subsequently initiate more meaningful reforms if he chose.

When it analyzed the new CPSU Program, adopted by the 27th Party Congress in March 1986, the CIA pointed out that the program "opens up new options for Gorbachev" and "makes clear that new policies are needed to get the country moving again but it does not provide a specific plan of action." The report also noted that "The program presents an image of a party leadership that sees strengthening the country's economic base as an important factor in improving foreign policy prospects." One feature that suggested the primacy of economics was the fact that the 1986 Party program discussed domestic policy before foreign policy, in contrast to the 1961 program, which gave foreign policy precedence.[1]

During 1986 the policy of *glasnost* attracted more attention than perestroika, a term that was still used only sparingly. In August the CIA issued a report that concluded:

> Gorbachev evidently believes that more media candor in discussing domestic problems will help marshal public support for his policy initiatives — such as the campaign against alcohol, corruption, and crime — and legitimize the discussion of economic reform.
>
> Gorbachev is also using publicity of shortcomings within the elite to pressure officials to behave in accordance with new standards he is setting.[2]

The report noted, however, that "there are clear limits to Gorbachev's desire for openness; not surprisingly, no criticism of his leadership has appeared in Soviet media." It also pointed out that *glasnost* "harbors major risks for the regime and for Gorbachev personally. Public airing of social problems could stimulate a process of social ferment within the intelligentsia and criticism from below that could get out of hand."

In September 1986, the American intelligence community issued a "national intelligence estimate" predicting Gorbachev's policies toward the United States over the following two years (1986-88). It concluded that "The Gorbachev regime aims to re-create some sort of detente relationship with the United States to ease the burden of arms competition and, accordingly, the task of domestic economic revival." It recognized that this would not be easy to achieve and would be controversial in Moscow, but predicted that "Gorbachev has the political strength to forge Politburo consensus behind the initiatives and decisions he favors in dealing with the United States."[3]

A month later, Reagan and Gorbachev met for two days in Reykjavik, Iceland. Their negotiations dealt largely with nuclear weapons and missile defense, and they came close to an agreement to eliminate nuclear weapons in ten years. Nevertheless, each refused to accept a key element in the other's position, and the meeting ended in apparent failure. In retrospect, however, this meeting can be seen as a turning point in the personal relationship between Reagan and Gorbachev, since each came to understand that the other was genuinely interested in ending the arms race, particularly in nuclear weapons.[4]

The Central Committee plenary session that convened after repeated delays in January 1987 convinced American intelligence analysts that Gorbachev was serious about "systemic change" in the USSR. (Previously, analysts had assumed that his intent was limited to changes that did not affect the Soviet system of rule.) In a report issued March 11, 1987, nearly six weeks after the CC plenum (suggesting that the conclusions had been debated intensely), the CIA reached the following judgments:

> Gorbachev is attempting to revitalize the country's institutional structure to smooth the way for the successful implementation of his economic reforms. He made clear that he has no intention of limiting the party's monopoly of political power or the top leadership's authority within the party. Rather, his proposals are intended to energize the system by mobilizing grassroots pressure against recalcitrant lower level officials and by giving the population a sense of participation in the political process. ...
>
> The plenum clearly demonstrated that Gorbachev now has the initiative and is strong enough politically to push openly for broad policy and systemic changes. By taking the offensive, however, he is heightening the risk of a direct clash with more conservative elements. ... His program and his own political future are more closely tied together than ever.[5]

The Central Committee plenum that followed in June 1987 marked a further step forward in adopting Gorbachev's program. The CIA reported that "General Secretary Gorbachev scored a major political victory at the Central Committee plenum and Supreme Soviet session in June, winning approval of a landmark program for comprehensive economic reform and securing leadership changes that will enhance his ability to control the policy agenda." It noted that the decision to hold a party conference in 1988 "could allow him to further strengthen his position in the Central Committee, where his supporters are locked in battle with conservative Brezhnev-era holdovers who want to limit the scope and slow the pace of reform." The CIA report then added:

> The plenum's approval of guidelines for a comprehensive economic reform package, along with the Supreme Soviet's ratification of a new Law on State Enterprises, marks a watershed in Gorbachev's quest for a "new economic mechanism." Previously, he had introduced limited economic reforms in a piecemeal fashion, and critics inside and outside the USSR had insisted that a comprehensive approach was necessary. The new program ... is designed to sharply reduce rigid central control over economic activity. ..."

While greeting the resolutions in June 1987 as "watershed decisions," the CIA cautioned that "while impressive, they [Gorbachev's achievements] do not guarantee either his longevity in office or the success of economic reform. ... Conservative forces are still represented in the Politburo and Central Committee and some leaders previously allied with Gorbachev think he is pushing too far too fast. Above all, the vast governmental bureaucracy is notoriously reluctant to change."[6]

A few weeks before Gorbachev arrived in Washington in December 1987, the American intelligence community issued a "National Intelligence Estimate," a comprehensive assessment of Soviet policy and politics in the years ahead. It began with the attention-getting statement that "Mikhail Gorbachev has staked his future on a bold effort to revitalize Soviet society, improve Moscow's abilities to compete with the West, and more effectively advance Soviet influence in the global power arena. The reforms he is pressing ... have the *potential* to produce the most significant changes in Soviet policies and institutions since Stalin's forced regimentation of the country in the late 1920s." The report then went on to describe "Gorbachev's Vision" as follows:

> We believe Gorbachev is now convinced that he can make significant changes in the system, not just tinker at the margins, if he is to achieve his ambitious domestic and foreign objectives. *To revitalize the society and the economy he:*
>
> — Has launched a thorough-going turnover of party and government officials designed to consolidate his political power and prepare the ground for his ambitions policy agenda.
>
> — Intends to revamp the main institutions of the Stalinist system. He wants to create a 'halfway house' that preserves the essential features of the Leninist system (the primacy of the Communist Party and strategic control of the main directions of the economy), while grafting onto it approaches not seen in the USSR since the 1920s — a political atmosphere more tolerant of diversity and debate, a less repressive environment for Soviet citizens, an expanded role for market forces in the economy, and a dose of economic competition.

While the report judged that Gorbachev aimed at radical change in Soviet society, it expressed the view that Gorbachev's foreign policy objectives remained the traditional Soviet ones: "first and foremost enhancing the security of the Soviet homeland; expanding Soviet influence worldwide; and advancing Communism at the expense of capitalism around the globe." Nevertheless, the report expressed the belief that Gorbachev wished to change Soviet strategy and tactics in order to achieve these goals: "He believes that a more pragmatic approach to ideology, a more flexible and accommodating diplomacy toward the West, the Communist Bloc, China, and the Third World, and a corresponding de-emphasis on military intimidation as an instrument of foreign policy will help achieve his objectives."[7]

Having thus defined Gorbachev's goals, the report assessed the likelihood that Gorbachev would achieve them. The most likely outcome, it opined, would be a *rejuvenation of the existing system*. It added that, given the obstacles to change, "the chances that Gorbachev will succeed in going beyond *rejuvenation* to implement what we call *systemic reform* are small." Significantly, however, the possibility of systemic reform was not totally dismissed: the odds that Gorbachev could achieve it were judged to be one in three. As for other possibilities, the report concluded that a return to a more authoritarian neo-Stalinist regime was less likely than systemic reform, and stated: "At the other end of the spectrum, we believe the odds of a turn toward *democratic socialism*, featuring a more radical push for a market economy and a pluralistic society than systemic reform, will remain virtually nil under any circumstances."

Reports by the intelligence community contributed, of course, to the judgments formed by policy-making officials, but they were not taken as definitive or conclusive. Both President Reagan and Secretary of State Shultz based their judgments increasingly on their personal contacts with Soviet leaders, particularly — of course — General Secretary Gorbachev and Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze. As these contacts became more frequent and intense, confidence began to grow that Mikhail Gorbachev was indeed a different sort of Soviet leader, who was dedicated to fundamental reform — perhaps even movement toward the "democratic socialism" that the U.S. intelligence community considered a virtual impossibility.

Reagan was impressed by Gorbachev's willingness to agree to eliminate intermediate-range nuclear missiles, and by the steps taken to open Soviet information media to informed debate and to foster more personal contact between Soviet citizens and persons in the West. While some of Reagan's advisors warned that Gorbachev wished to reform the Soviet Union only to make it stronger and better able to conduct its traditional foreign policy, Reagan understood that a democratic Soviet

Union, even if stronger, would not be a threat to the United States or its neighbors, but would more likely be a partner for economic development and the preservation of peace. He, therefore, looked for signs that Gorbachev intended to use perestroika to make the Soviet Union more democratic.

The most convincing of these signs came in May 1988 when the CPSU Central Committee issued its "Theses" for the Nineteenth CPSU Conference. At that time I had been U.S. ambassador in Moscow for a year. I was in Helsinki, Finland, when the Theses were issued, in order to brief President Reagan before his visit to Moscow. When I read the Theses, I understood that one could no longer question Gorbachev's determination to press for fundamental reform of the Soviet system. I described the Theses to President Reagan and remarked that if Gorbachev could implement the ideas in them, "the Soviet Union will never be the same." Reagan agreed, and when, a few days later, he was asked in Moscow if he still considered the Soviet Union an "Evil Empire," he replied, "No. That was another time, another era." And when he was asked who was responsible for the change, he said without hesitation that the credit went to Gorbachev, as the leader of the country.

American intelligence analysts concentrated their attention on political struggles, economic performance, and military doctrine and deployments and gave scant attention to ideology. President Reagan, however, had a keen interest in ideology since he was convinced that ideology lay behind the tensions of the Cold War. The arms race and geopolitical competitions were, of course, serious, and had to be dealt with, but unless there was a change in ideology, it would be difficult to bring the Cold War to a definitive close. Reagan often said, "Nations don't fear each other because they are armed; they arm because they fear each other." He wanted, first of all, to attenuate the fundamental distrust the Cold War had engendered.

As ambassador to the Soviet Union, I also understood that ideology was important, even if it was no longer the strong motivating force it had been during the Bolshevik Revolution and Stalin's collectivization drives. After all, the Brezhnev government had declared in the 1970s, during the detente period, that relaxation (*razryadka*) applied to relations between states of different social systems, but not to ideology. Specifically, the foreign policy of the Soviet Union continued to be based on "the international class struggle," which implied that there could be no compromise with "bourgeois" or "imperialist" states, but only a temporary truce until the Soviet Union was strong enough to fulfill its international duty to support the expansion of "socialism" as it defined the term.

For this reason, the debate that occurred in the Soviet leadership in 1988 over "the common interests of mankind" attracted the American embassy's attention. Most of it occurred behind closed doors, but

occasionally it became public, as when the newspaper *Sovetskaya Rossia* published an article by Nina Andreyeva defending Stalinism, and Aleksandr Yakovlev and Yegor Ligachev gave conflicting speeches on the subject. During a call on Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze on other subjects I mentioned the debate and he assured me that the Soviet Union no longer considered the international class struggle the basis of its foreign policy. On December 7, 1988, Gorbachev in effect gave the same assurances in his speech to the United Nations when he declared that there could be no limits on a nation's freedom of choice.

Following his speech at the United Nations, Gorbachev met with Reagan and with President-elect George H.W. Bush on Governors Island in New York harbor. Ideologically, the Cold War seemed over at that meeting. Reagan told Gorbachev that he prayed to God that his successor would continue his policies of accommodation with the Soviet Union and he noted in his diary, "The meeting was a tremendous success... Gorbachev sounded as if he saw us as partners in making a better world."

Although the spirit of the U.S.-Soviet relationship had changed, many issues still separated the superpowers. Europe was still divided in opposing military blocs; Germany itself was divided with American troops, as part of NATO, stationed in the west and Soviet troops, under the Warsaw Pact, in the east. Agreements to reduce strategic nuclear weapons and conventional forces in Europe were still under negotiation with no clear end in sight. While Soviet troops were withdrawing from Afghanistan, "proxy wars" continued in Africa and Central America. Nevertheless, Gorbachev's announcement in his United Nations speech that the USSR would reduce its armed forces by half a million made a strong impression on Western governments and on public opinion in Europe and the United States.

When President Bush took office in January 1989 he announced that he would undertake a policy review before formulating his own policy toward the Soviet Union. His intent was to continue Reagan's policies (which, as Vice President, he had supported) for the most part, but to convince those on the right wing of the Republican Party that he was not "soft," and to formulate policies that he could call his own rather than seeming merely to implement policies designed by his predecessor. His principal advisers were less impressed by Gorbachev's reforms than President Reagan and Secretary of State Shultz had been. They were "realists" who paid more attention to the Cold War issues that had not been resolved than to the shift in underlying attitudes that took place in 1987 and 1988.

Shortly before George H.W. Bush took office as President, the U.S. intelligence community produced an assessment of the prospects for economic reform in the Soviet Union. Entitled "Gorbachev's Economic Programs: the Challenges Ahead," the report found that the economic results of perestroika were meager at best, and predicted a difficult road

ahead. While the policies themselves might hold promise, "a resentful public and skeptical bureaucracy" would make it most difficult to "increase the production of goods and services for consumers." Despite this pessimistic outlook, the report conceded that "Gorbachev has often dealt with setbacks by adopting radical measures, and we cannot rule out an effort to move rapidly toward a market economy in the state sector."[8]

When President Bush announced his review of U.S. policy toward the Soviet Union, I sent three lengthy telegrams from the American Embassy in Moscow, which dealt, successively, with internal developments in the Soviet Union, Soviet foreign policy, and proposals for U.S. policy.[9] Some officials of the new American administration were advising President Bush that Gorbachev hoped to improve the Soviet economy only to oppose the United States more effectively, and that Gorbachev himself might be removed soon if he did not change course, just as Nikita Khrushchev had been swept aside in 1964. I drafted the telegrams in order to refute both these propositions. I predicted that Gorbachev was likely to remain in office throughout the Bush administration and longer, and that the reforms he was undertaking would bring profound changes to the Soviet Union. However, I was not optimistic that the reforms would greatly improve the Soviet economy, and I foresaw problems ahead in dealing with the growing signs of ethnic conflict within the Soviet Union. As for U.S. policy, I advised that "We have an historic opportunity to test the degree the Soviet Union is willing to move into a new relationship with the rest of the world, and to strengthen those tendencies in the Soviet Union to 'civilianize' the economy and 'pluralize' the society." U.S. policy, I argued, should be supportive of perestroika because it was in the U.S. interest for the Soviet Union to democratize its political system and its society.

Not all American officials shared Embassy Moscow's position. A National Intelligence Estimate issued in April 1989 described disagreements among analysts in Washington as follows:

> — Some analysts see current [Soviet] policy changes as largely tactical, driven by the need for breathing space from the competition. They believe the ideological imperatives of Marxism-Leninism and its hostility toward capitalist countries are enduring. They point to previous failures of reform and the transient nature of past "detentes." They judge that there is a serious risk of Moscow returning to traditionally combative behavior when the hopes for gains in economic performance are achieved.
>
> — Other analysts believe Gorbachev's policies reflect a fundamental rethinking of national interests and ideology as well as more tactical considerations. They argue that ideological tenets of Marxism-Leninism such as class conflict and capitalist-socialist enmity are being revised. They consider the withdrawal from Afghanistan and the shift toward tolerance of power sharing in Eastern Europe to be historic shifts in the Soviet definition of national interest. They judge that Gorbachev's changes are likely to have sufficient momentum to produce lasting shifts in Soviet behavior.[10]

President Bush's policy review lasted several months, but his meeting with Gorbachev on Malta in December 1989 gave new impetus to the relationship. Both leaders agreed that their countries were no longer enemies, and Gorbachev assured Bush that he would not intervene in Eastern Europe to preserve unpopular regimes there. Meanwhile, political reform in the Soviet Union had continued apace, with contested elections, the formation of a legislature with real power (the Congress of Peoples Deputies and its Supreme Soviet), and growing restrictions on the authority of local Communist Party officials to interfere in management of the economy. Forces in several republics, particularly the three Baltic republics, demanded economic autonomy, and — when this was denied — sentiment grew to insist on full independence.

The United States, like most Western countries, had never recognized the legality of the incorporation of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania into the Soviet Union. Therefore, U.S. leaders tried to convince Gorbachev that he should find a way to restore independence to the Baltic countries. The United States government, however, did not wish to see the other twelve union republics leave the Soviet Union. It supported Gorbachev's efforts to negotiate a Union Treaty that would provide a democratic basis for a federated state.

Toward the end of November 1989 the American intelligence community issued a National Intelligence Estimate entitled "The Soviet System in Crisis: Prospects for the Next Two Years."[11] The report summarized its predictions as follows:

> — The Soviet domestic crisis will continue beyond the two years of this Estimate regardless of the policies the regime pursues. The regime will be preoccupied with domestic problems for years to come, will want to keep tensions with the United States low, and will probably still pursue agreements that reduce military competition and make resource trade-offs easier.
>
> — Despite the enormous problems he faces, Gorbachev's position in the leadership appears relatively secure, and he has increased power and political room to cope with the crisis.
>
> — There will be greater efforts to define the limits of political change, a tougher approach to ethnic issues, and some retrenchment in media policy, but the process of political liberalization will expand with the legislature and independent political groups increasing in power at party expense.

— The regime will concentrate on stabilizing the economy and, while pulling back on some reforms, will push for others designed to enlarge the role of the market and private enterprise.

— Despite these efforts, we expect little improvement — and possibly a decline — in economic performance as well as further increase in domestic turmoil.

• Community analysts consider it most likely that the regime will maintain the present course, intensifying reform while making some retreats.

• In a less likely scenario that all analysts believe is a possibility, the political turmoil and economic decline will become unmanageable and lead to a repressive crackdown, effectively ending any serious reform effort.

In a most unusual dissent, the CIA's Deputy Director for Intelligence disagreed with both the scenarios listed above. He expressed the following alternative view:

> Assuming Gorbachev holds on to power and refrains from repression, the next two years are likely to bring a significant progression toward a pluralist-albeit chaotic-democratic system, accompanied by a higher degree of political instability, social upheaval and interethnic conflict than this Estimate judges probable. In these circumstances, we believe there is a significant chance that Gorbachev, during the period of this Estimate, will progressively lose control of events. The personal political strength he has accumulated is likely to erode, and his political position will be severely tested.
>
> The essence of the Soviet crisis is that neither the political system that Gorbachev is attempting to change nor the emergent system he is fostering is likely to cope effectively with newly mobilized popular demands and the deepening economic crisis.

This report was issued almost exactly two years before Boris Yeltsin, Leonid Kravchuk and Stanislav Shushkevich met at Belovezhskaya Pushcha and decided to dissolve the USSR and replace it with a Commonwealth of Independent States. This, however, was not a result that the United States sought. Indeed, from December 1989 it was American policy to give the fullest possible support to Gorbachev's reform efforts.

The problem for American policy makers was that events seemed to be spiraling out of Gorbachev's control, in ways that no foreign power could hope to restrain, or even to influence in any significant way. In May

1990, I sent an analysis of the situation to prepare Secretary of State James Baker III for his upcoming meeting with Shevardnadze. It was entitled, "Gorbachev Confronts a Crisis of Power."[12] In a formal sense, Gorbachev seemed to be at the acme of his power, having created the office of president and a Presidential Council of his choice, freeing him from much of the constraints that the CPSU Politburo might impose. Nevertheless, these new institutions were not yet up the formidable tasks they faced. I described the situation as follows:

> — Gorbachev has yet to fashion a coherent system of legitimate power around new state institutions to replace the old Party-dominated, Stalinist one he has extensively dismantled. In the absence of a strong center of power, Soviet society has fragmented along ethnic lines and polarized on the political spectrum. The Party itself, as yet still the dominant political institution, is beset by factional struggle and probably doomed to split at the 28th Party Congress this July or shortly thereafter.
>
> — The success of Gorbachev's efforts to modernize Soviet society and at the same time to keep the federation together appears increasingly problematical. Democratization and market reforms are exacerbating regional, ethnic and class tensions, and thus complicating the forging of the national consensus needed for further reform. True to his past, Gorbachev is probably resolved to move boldly to resolve the current crisis. He has said that the next year or year and a half will make or break the reform process. Nevertheless, he may find that there is no bold departure that will allow him to keep both reform on track and the federation together. ...
>
> — Despite the problems, Gorbachev has a reasonable chance of remaining at the helm for some time to come. His position is under pressure, not lost. Bold, effective use of his powers as president could reverse the current decline in his popularity and authority. ...

This message was sent following the Lithuanian declaration of independence, which Gorbachev refused to honor but did not attempt to remove the Lithuanian leadership by military force. As the year progressed, the last important remnants of the Cold War were eliminated: Germany was allowed to unite, the Soviet Union accepted non-communist governments in the Warsaw Pact countries of Eastern Europe, a treaty to limit conventional weapons in Europe was signed, and the Soviet Union voted with other members of the United Nations Security Council to condemn Iraq's invasion of Kuwait. President Bush was eager to support the reforms of perestroika

and, at Gorbachev's request, sent a delegation of prominent American businessmen to discuss economic cooperation. All were interested in finding areas of potential investment and represented companies capable of investing billions of dollars in promising foreign ventures.

Gorbachev received the American delegation graciously, but following an encouraging meeting turned them over to the Chairman of Gosplan, Yury Maslyukov, who promised to convey a list of investment opportunities within days. The American Embassy repeatedly requested the list, to inform the American investors, but it was never supplied. This, and many other experiences convinced the embassy that the Soviet bureaucracy was simply refusing to implement policies Gorbachev had announced. Gorbachev also started changing his mind under pressure: he and Boris Yeltsin had indicated support for the "500-Day Plan," but then when the bureaucracy opposed it, Gorbachev withdrew his support and ordered that it be combined with contradictory elements of a government stabilization plan. Meanwhile, the economy was in a tailspin.

By November 1990, the predictions in the annual National Intelligence Estimate became more alarming:

> The USSR is in the midst of a historic transformation that threatens to tear the country apart. The old Communist order is in its death throes. But its diehards remain an obstructive force, and new political parties and institutions have yet to prove their effectiveness. The erosion of the center's influence, coupled with the republics' assertion of sovereignty, is creating a power vacuum. Gorbachev has amassed impressive power on paper, but his ability to use it effectively is increasingly in doubt. Meanwhile, economic conditions are steadily deteriorating.

The American intelligence community concluded that the slim chances of surmounting this crisis would depend on improving economic performance and on cooperation between Gorbachev and Yeltsin, neither of which seemed likely.[13]

President Bush and Secretary of State Baker were more hopeful than their intelligence agencies that Gorbachev could master the situation. The American Embassy in Moscow, while recognizing the great problems Gorbachev faced, also hoped that Gorbachev would find ways to put perestroika on track. In the winter of 1990 and 1991 there were recurrent rumors that Gorbachev might be removed from power. My opinion, which I expressed in several messages to Washington, was that Gorbachev could not be removed unconstitutionally so long as he had the full support of the KGB Chairman, the commander of the Kremlin guard, and the Minister of Defense. Nevertheless, problems were mounting, and Gorbachev's apparent "turn to the right" in November 1990, when he

replaced several key officials, Eduard Shevardnadze's dramatic resignation in December, and the subsequent appointment of unreliable individuals to the posts of vice president and prime minister raised questions in many minds about Gorbachev's judgment of people.

Crisis seemed to follow crisis. For Washington, the most important was the attack on the television tower in Vilnius in January 1991. Gorbachev denied that he had ordered it (and I believed his denial), but if he had not ordered it, why did he not act promptly to bring to justice those who had perpetrated the outrage? His failure to clarify the situation promptly led many observers in Moscow to believe either that he was dissembling or if not that he had lost control over the security organs. In a speech in Minsk in February, Gorbachev attacked the "democratic" forces as if they were his enemies, capable of an illegal seizure of power. He then put great political energy in conducting a non-binding referendum on the union, which in the end did more harm than good to his cause since it was worded differently in different republics, not conducted at all in several, and in the RSFSR was coupled with a vote to create a Russian presidency-giving Yeltsin a stronger platform to challenge Gorbachev's authority. Then, in late March, Gorbachev authorized bringing troops to Moscow to prevent a mass demonstration, which took place anyway without significant violence.

It seemed to our embassy, and to most intelligence analysts in Washington, that Gorbachev needed the "democrats" to make perestroika work; they might be difficult to deal with and more radical in their proposals than was prudent, yet if Gorbachev lost their support by pandering to the "power ministries," how could he succeed in implementing the reforms he had proposed? The idea, expressed in Gorbachev's Minsk speech, that the "democrats" were planning an illegal seizure of power seemed ludicrous to us. It was well known that the security organs, most military officers, and the bulk of the Communist Party apparatchiks were opposed to the democrats. There was no realistic possibility that the democrats could seize power by force — even it that had been their aim, which, so far as the embassy could determine, was definitely not the case. The embassy could only speculate that Gorbachev must have been misled by his own intelligence organization, which seemed to have an agenda of its own. Bringing troops to Moscow in March to control a demonstration seemed an ominous rehearsal for an attempt by the security forces to seize power.

It was in the wake of these events that the CIA's Office of Soviet Analysis issued a report on April 25, 1991, entitled "The Soviet Cauldron," which, in summary, came to the following conclusions:[14]

1. Economic crisis, independence aspirations, and anti-communist forces are breaking down the Soviet empire and system of governance; ...

2. In the midst of this chaos, Gorbachev has gone from ardent reformer to consolidator. ... Gorbachev has chosen this course both because of his own political credo and by pressures on him by other traditionalists, who would like him to use much tougher repressive measures. ...

3. Gorbachev has truly been faced with terrible choices in his effort to move the USSR away from the failed, rigid old system. His expedients have so far kept him in office and changed that system irretrievably, but have also prolonged and complicated the agony of transition to a new system and meant a political stalemate in the overall power equation. ...

4. In this situation of growing chaos, explosive events have become increasingly possible. ...

5. ... A premeditated, organized attempt to restore a full-fledged dictatorship would be the most fateful in that it would try to roll back newly acquired freedoms and be inherently destabilizing in the long term. Unfortunately preparations for dictatorial rule have begun in two ways:

a. Gorbachev may not want this turn of events but is increasing the chances of it through his personnel appointments; through his estrangement from the reformers and consequent reliance on the traditionalists whom he thereby strengthens; and through his attempted rule by decree, which does not work but invites dictatorship to make it work.

b. More ominously, military, MVD, and KGB leaders are making preparations for a broad use of force in the political process; ...

c. A campaign to retire democratically inclined officers or at least move them out of key positions has been going on for some time. ...

6. Should the reactionaries make their move, with or without Gorbachev, their first target this time would be Boris Yeltsin and the Russian democrats. ...

7. Any attempt to restore full-fledged dictatorship would start in Moscow with the arrest or assassination of Yeltsin and other democratic leaders. ... A committee of national salvation-probably under a less sullied name — would be set up and proclaim its intent to save the fatherland through tough but temporary measures...

• The long-term prospects of such an enterprise are poor, and even short-term success is far from assured.

• The number of troops that can be counted on to enforce repression is limited.

The report continued with further speculation about the effects of an attempted putsch on the non-Russian republics (it would increase the demand for independence), and concluded with the judgment that "with or without Gorbachev, with or without a putsch, the most likely prospect for the end of this decade, if not earlier, is a Soviet Union transformed into some independent states and a confederation of the remaining republics, including Russia."

In Washington, at the political level, there was still hope that Gorbachev could avoid a breakup of the union. His renewal of the "Novo-Ogarevo process" of negotiation with union republic leaders in April was an encouraging step, but a workable economic reform plan seemed to elude him. He failed to obtain significant Western economic support at the Group of Seven meeting in London in June, but not because the Western leaders were indifferent or hostile. All were willing to help if that had been feasible. But without a credible plan to turn the economy around, foreign leaders felt that financial assistance would be tantamount to pouring water into the sand. They might have been willing to prime a pump, but without a pump there was nothing to prime.

In June, when we received a report that senior officials including KGB Chairman Kryuchkov, Prime Minister Pavlov, and Defense Minister Yazov were planning to seize power, we tried to warn Gorbachev. He, however, failed to take the warning seriously, perhaps because we did not name the individuals but gave only a general warning. Nevertheless, the attempt to warn him made it clear that the U.S. government did not wish to see a change of leadership in Moscow. Furthermore, when President Bush made his state visit at the end of July, he attempted to persuade the non-Russian union republics to sign the union treaty that Gorbachev had negotiated. He traveled to Kiev on August 1 and delivered a speech to the Ukrainian parliament that was intended for all the non-Russian union republics aside from the Baltic states. Pointing out that freedom and independence were not synonyms, he advised the republics to choose freedom by signing Gorbachev's union treaty and thus creating a federation.

At that time it appeared that several, though not all, union republics were prepared to sign the treaty. Plans to do so, however, were put aside during the attempted putsch organized the night of August 18-19. Though the putsch failed, it so undermined Gorbachev's authority that he was unable to preserve even a voluntary federation. The American government was not happy with this turn of events, but could do nothing to stop the disintegration of the USSR once the process started.

In my view it would be wrong to consider the breakup of the Soviet Union as a failure of perestroika. When he was CPSU General Secretary and President, Gorbachev often stated that perestroika was an objective process, not dependent on one individual. That process continued in many of the Soviet republics after they became independent, and continues to this day, with setbacks at times and progress at others. Perestroika has turned out to be a longer and more complicated process than its initiators hoped, but its core ideas are still valid, not only in Russia and other successor states of the Soviet Union, but more generally. Those political leaders who are able to implement these ideas will lead more successful societies than will those leaders who reject or ignore them.

---

[1] "The New CPSU Program: Charting the Soviet Future," [SOV-86-10022], issued by the CIA on April 1, 1986.

[2] "The Debate over 'Openness' in Soviet Propaganda and Culture," issued by the CIA on August 1, 1986.

[3] "Gorbachev's Policy Toward the United States, 1986-88," issued September 1, 1986.

[4] I have described the meeting in Reykjavik and its aftermath in Matlock, *Reagan and Gorbachev: How the Cold War Ended*. New York: Random House, 2004, pp. 215-250.

[5] "The January Plenum: Gorbachev Draws the Battlelines," issued March 11, 1987.

[6] "The June Plenum and Supreme Soviet Session: Building Support for Economic Change," issued in September 1987.

[7] "Whither Gorbachev: Soviet Policy and Politics in the 1990s," [NIE 11-18-87], issued in November 1987.

[8] NIE 11-23-88 of December 1988, published in Benjamin B. Fischer, editor. *At Cold War's End: U.S. Intelligence on the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, 1989-1991*. Washington: Government Reprints Press, 2001, pp. 1-26.

[9] Moscow 02962; 89 Moscow 03850; 89 Moscow 04648. All have been declassified from the original Secret classification and are available from the Historical Division, Department of State.

[10] NIE 11-4-89, "Soviet Policy Toward the West: The Gorbachev Challenge," published in Benjamin B. Fischer, editor. *At Cold War's End*, pp. 227-254.

[11] NIE ll-18-89, published in Benjamin B. Fischer, editor. *At Cold War's End*, pp. 49-81.

[12] 90 Moscow 15714, declassified and available online at the Department of State FOIA Electronic Reading Room.

[13] NIE 11-18-90, "The Deepening Crisis in the USSR: Prospects for the Next Year," published in Benjamin B. Fischer, editor. *At Cold War's End*, pp. 83-110.

[14] Published in Benjamin B. Fischer, editor. *At Cold War's End*, pp. 111-119.

PART II.
Our Times and Ourselves

IS IT EASY TO CATCH A BLACK CAT IN A DARK ROOM, EVEN IF IT IS THERE?

by Aleksandr Nekipelov

Aleksandr Nekipelov is Vice-President of the Russian Academy of Sciences; at the beginning of Perestroika, he was Head of Sector, Deputy Director and Director of the Institute of International Economic and Political Studies (IMEPI) of the USSR Academy of Sciences.

Numerous polls show that an overwhelming majority of our citizens, including those whose material wealth was adversely affected in the course of the reforms of the past two decades, do not want a return to the past. One might think it is a proof of success of Perestroika.

However, this argument is not widely supported. A large part of society and its elite continue to see Perestroika as one of the major failures ("catastroika") in the history of the country. And, in a paradoxical way, it fits into today's belief of most intellectuals and politicians, well, of the population, in general, that the country had no other meaningful alternative to starting transition to democratic society and capitalist market economy.

I am not a psychoanalyst, but I believe that the reason for such unusual — in terms of formal logic — attitudes lies in the lack of correspondence between present-day reality and the hopes stirred by Perestroika. We prefer our present-day society to that "really socialist" one (freedom is a great thing after all!) and at the same time think that it is not a patch on the vague dream of a "renewed society" that captivated the country in the early second half of the 1980s.

During the past two decades, some radical changes took place in our life. Important steps were taken to move away from a totalitarian political system to the democratic one. Mechanisms of command management of the economy were dismantled and significant liberalization of economic activity was carried out; basic institutions of a market economy (private property, basic infrastructure of commodity and factor markets) took shape. The end of the Cold War eliminated the threat of the country been plunged into a global conflict and a real opportunity emerged to concentrate its resources on the vital needs of internal development.

At the same time, this period became a source of dramatic challenges for our state. The process of social, economic, and political

transformation was accompanied by the collapse of the Soviet Union and the emergence of disintegration trends in Russia, a dramatic drop in and regression of production, and accumulation of serious social problems. A considerable part of the Russian population found themselves falling below the poverty line. Undermined were guarantees of the rights to have work and housing, free education and medical services. Crime and homelessness among children rose to unprecedented levels and life expectancy fell sharply. Deep stratification of Russian society according to income took place, in parallel with the general drop in living standards.

No wonder, many of his fellow countrymen still perceive Mikhail Gorbachev, the initiator of the changes, who both intellectually and morally was head and shoulders above Boris Yeltsin, as the "main villain" of the entire period of the transformation of our society. He is blamed for everything, including his failure to decisively take Boris Yeltsin's side and failure to remove him from politics; for having been too soft and democratic and for his refusal to be led by the interregional group of deputies; for his heeding no advice and his surrounding himself with "wrong" advisers. He is at fault even for "setting us free" without having a clear idea of how we would use this freedom. In fact, he became the main scapegoat for our disappointment with ourselves for having wasted the chance history gave us.

Of course, no one can free a political leader from responsibility for the consequences of reforms he initiated. However, ideally, this responsibility itself should be carefully measured against the objective conditions that existed in the particular historic period in which the respective reforms were undertaken. Besides, and I would like to specifically stress it, the amount of knowledge available to society at that moment should also be counted as objective conditions. It is easy to be wise after the event; however, one should keep in mind that decision-makers have to act in real time mode. It should also be remembered that present-day views of most of us differ very significantly from the ones we had at that time. It is not to say, of course, that these ideals were betrayed: it's just that history has considerably broadened our mental outlooks and, possibly, replaced the old prejudices with new ones.

Apparently, the human being is so constituted that the most difficult thing for him to admit is significant evolution of his own views. Every one of us thinks that he for his part has always had the one and the same stand that was, of course, right and it was the "totally unexplainable" unwillingness of his fellow countrymen to heed his advice that led the country to a disaster. However, no matter how difficult it could be, we should learn to subject our own views and deeds to an honest, I would even say, uncompromising analysis. Only in this case will we be able to really understand something about the events of the past and the present.

Let's start, for instance, with something that is considered to be an indisputable fact: by the mid-1980s, very many people in our country had realized to one extent or another that "going on living like that" was no longer possible. It was clear that society was confronted with serious challenges in very different spheres. We were worried not only with the stagnating economy, but also with the gap between words and deeds and between the level of society's education and the archaic rituals filling a significant part of its life that reached a critical level. Besides, discussions of these problems started to take place beyond the "kitchen walls" even before Perestroika was started. I would like to cite one isolated episode, which is, however, very illustrative, in my opinion. It took place in autumn of 1984 or the very beginning of 1985 during a meeting of party members from among the diplomatic staff of the Soviet Embassy in Rumania, where I worked as a representative of the Institute for the Economics of the World Socialist System of the USSR Academy of Sciences. It was supposedly initiated by "grass-roots members" and discussed with great concern the problem of "double thinking" that had spread to dangerous proportions in the Soviet Union. It should be noted that the Embassy had been already been sending to the center many "double purpose" documents, which ridiculed the hypocritical nature of pseudo-democratic institutions in the Rumania of Nicolae Ceauşescu's times. However, allusions based on the experience of a "brotherly state" and open discussions of the same issues as applied to one's own country are two different things.

However, the distance between a statement of a health problem and a correct diagnosis is enormous. I am positive that at the very beginning of Perestroika the overwhelming majority of the Soviet academic and political elite sincerely believed that since we ultimately found strength to look at the world with open eyes, it was then just a "technical matter" to reform it in a rational way. The more so that at the time we linked the "hitches" in the country's social development to deformities in a generally robust social system and thought they were due to subjective reasons, rather than to the flaws of the overall structure.

It explains the special attention that was paid at the initial stage of Perestroika to the differences between the existing version of the Soviet social system and the ideal model described in the most general terms in the works of the classical authors of Marxism. The aim of overcoming the "deformities" came to the foreground, with a call for "More Socialism!" becoming a slogan of an entire stage of Perestroika. Glasnost was seen as a powerful weapon in the struggle for "return to the basics." In the economic sphere "acceleration", which involved a large-scale structural

maneuver with the purpose of modernizing the national economy, was regarded as the main task.

It is important to stress that these attitudes were practically universal. I would like to cite an episode from my own experience. In May 1985, Professor M.A. Muntyan, a researcher from our Institute, came to Bucharest on a business trip. I remember very well how in his account of the events taking place in our country he generously used most colorful epithets to describe them. I remember particularly well him saying, "Gorbachev is Lenin of our time."

Little by little, the inadequacy of efforts to "purify socialism" was becoming more and more evident. A new direction of reform was emerging: in the sphere of economy it was movement towards the market. However, a clear "vision" was still missing, at least from the point of view of our today's perceptions. That is why practical steps were sporadic and lacked consistency. They included both measures to change price ratios and experimental search for some miraculous economic indicators, steps to free state-owned socialist enterprises and reliance on rent system and cooperatives.

At this stage, the ideological struggle over the choice of a path of social development, in general, and economic development, in particular, dramatically escalated. In economics, it was waged between adherents of modernization of the system of centrally managed socialist economy and supporters of transition to this or another variety of "market socialism." The latter were gradually taking the upper hand; however, success did not come easy to them. Suffice it to say that the very notion of "market" got recognition for the first time in 1986, with respect to the area of mutual relations between the Comecon countries, when the aim of forming a "united socialist market" was officially formulated.

The way the question was presented in 1986 differed fundamentally from the old sterile discussions of the world socialist market, since it dealt with a large-scale development of relations at a micro-level ("direct links"). Even at that time it was clear that there could be no real hope for an integrating market to take shape before formation of fully-fledged domestic markets was completed in the socialist countries. However, it was precisely what constituted the positive charge of this idea: it prompted recognition of the necessity of genuine market reforms.

However, it cannot be denied that the victory of market ideology was accompanied by accumulation of economic problems and the general loss of balance in the national economy. And the problem was not that putting emphasis on the market was wrong or, moreover, that the government was indecisive. The problem was that we, having recognized the need of the market, still had a very superficial idea of its substance and so our

actions were isolated and lacked coordination, and more often than not were carried out in the wrong order. All this resulted in the country finding itself in a kind of "in-between-the-systems" situation: it was no longer a planned socialist economy and not a market one yet.

Gradually we started to realize the importance of properly motivating economic entities for normal operation of market mechanisms. It was also clear from the negative practice that became evident of actual pilfering by heads of the "freed" enterprises of income from property that formally remained in public ownership. As a result, just before the curtain fell on Perestroika, a law on privatization was developed, aimed at corporatization of the bulk of the state sector of economy. The prospect emerged that an organic market environment would take shape in the context of true diversity of forms of ownership. In fact, it was then that the country already started abandoning its hope for implementation of a model of pure market socialism.

Of course, the ideological struggle was not over, including in the camp of "market champions." I was an adherent of the approach underlying the Ryzhkov-Abalkin program back then and still remain one now. I am convinced that the implementation of the "500 Days" program aimed at the immediate lifting of all restrictions on the impact of market forces entailed a colossal structural shock and a train of severe social problems. Actually, all this got a confirmation when Gaidar's reforms were launched. That is why I see the "indecisive" stand taken by Mikhail Gorbachev in this dispute, when he was under unprecedented pressure from the "democratic opposition," as a proof of his good economic intuition and well-developed political wisdom.

Anyway, a political crisis broke out before it became possible to ensure stabilization of economic development based on a new economic system that was taking shape. The coup buried the hope for a harmonic renewal of the Soviet Union, including in the economic sphere.

I would like to offer now some reminiscences of my own ideological evolution, since, as I feel it, it gives an idea of the path traveled by many Russian economists during that period.

Being a student of the "Tsagolov School," I fully embraced the theoretical notion of property being a decisive factor of any economic system. Perestroika provided a powerful spur to rethinking of theoretical views. "All of a sudden," I paid attention to the difference between the version of "real socialism" built in the country and the one envisaged by the classical authors of Marxism. Hierarchical arrangement of the economic system that earlier seemed to be an insignificant, in terms of political economy, feature of planned management, turned out to be a fundamental and meaningful feature of the system. This very feature

determined its real economic entities and the true nature of production relations, at the core of which was the struggle for maximization of resources obtained from the center and minimization of planned tasks given by it. I read the formula backward: it is not the form of ownership that determines the totality of production relations, but it is the latter that reveals the essence of ownership. I realized that simple quantitative redistribution of the rights between hierarchical levels could not change the system, which ineffectiveness was already obvious to all of us. I finally realized that a comprehensive market-oriented transformation of the national economy was needed.

After becoming a supporter of the approach that put emphasis on goods, I did not abandon my skeptical attitudes towards attempts at reforming the system piecemeal, with parts to reform chosen at random at that. It is not to say that I was against cooperatives, but I believed it to be a mere stopgap and, moreover, thought it could become dangerous if this new economic organism was not prevented from piggybacking on the state sector. I do not quite share the opinion of those colleagues of mine who see as a great mistake the underestimation in Perestroika period of "small" steps aimed to encourage the Soviet people to develop the instincts of private business, suppressed by the previous system. I am sure that creation of conditions for the development of small business should have been organically tied in with the process of reforming the economy in general. Likewise, the Chinese way, if defined as the start of a reform process with an isolated reform of agriculture, could hardly be applied in our country. Such a sequence of actions doomed the economy of a country with prevalence of heavy industry to serious deformities.

It did not take me long to figure out that the key to success in reform was creation of truly market incentives for enterprises of the state sector, as well as institutions that properly matched the new economic conditions and ensured the necessary flow of labor and capital between various types of production. I did not believe that privatization of absolutely everything could be carried out quickly and in compliance with the principles of social justice (to be exact, I knew it was impossible); therefore, I kept looking for the ways to switch the state sector to a market mode of operation. Little by little, the vision of a state capitalist version based on corporatization of state enterprises and transfer of shares for management to special state holding companies (or even one such company) was taking shape.

And, finally, with time I got more and more concerned about the ways to soften the structural shock in the course of transition to market economy. It was clear that the production structure developed in the context of planned economy would bulge at the seams as soon as the market started to work properly. And eventually I realized that

institutional reforms related to the creation of incentives for producers that would match the new conditions, as well as of labor and capital markets were to be carried out as soon as practically possible, while the liberalization of many spheres of economic activity had to be done gradually, as if meting out exposure to market forces.

The evolution of my understanding of the optimal ways to reform the Soviet economy, like, apparently, the evolution of the views shared by other scientists, took place not in isolation from the actual course of developments, but under its direct influence. One must admit that although we were very quick to learn new things in the course of Perestroika, regretfully, we still failed to keep abreast of events, which were taking place at a dizzying pace.

In the new political context that emerged after the coup and the disintegration of the Soviet Union, and, later, after Yegor Gaidar's "shock therapy," the dashing reformers really did achieve their aim: we live in a different country now. It is Russia, not the USSR. It is not a superpower, but a state trying desperately not to decline ultimately into the Third World. It is not a scientific and technology power, but almost a province of the world economy supplying it with fuel and raw materials. Its economy is no more of a command and control type, but a truly capitalist market one, fully corresponding to the models seen in the end of the 19th Century.

We will long be haunted by the question of "Could things have been different? Was there really a black cat in a dark room we were after and could we have found it?" It is not easy to answer this question, particularly if we fail to figure out what cat we were looking for.

At one time, supporters of Perestroika were angered at its comparison by the Russian author Yury Bondarev to a plane that took off with no landing area determined. Today it is clear that the author was right about it: at the start of Perestroika, only most general outlines of the desired future were clear. This vision was continuously clarified; however, eventually, the "landing" took place clearly not in the right area. The costs of transition to democracy and the market proved to be enormous. They included the disintegration of the state; the fact that very many fellow citizens passed away prematurely or were never born; the impoverishment of a great part of the population; the loss of a significant portion of its scientific and technology potential; and so on and so forth.

However, does it mean there should have been no "take off" altogether, as the author implied? Even today, knowing of the miseries that befell the country over the past years, I simply cannot agree with the question been put like that.

Firstly, Perestroika did have its chances of success, if by success we mean establishment of a civilized socially oriented society based on

democracy and market economy. There are no Ifs and Buts in history; however, it is clear that there were many bifurcation points for it to take different paths. Just think of what could have happened had the Russian leadership acted as an ally of the Union center and not as its opponent.

Alas, we failed to use those chances. Of course, the matter was not the supposed indecisiveness of its initiator. It seems to me that the clearer it became that Perestroika could not be confined to mellow superficial initiatives and that the general (or almost general) consent to "change something to make life better" was based on different ideas of the essence and ways to implement these changes, the stronger grew Mikhail Gorbachev's belief that success depended on whether it would be possible to melt everyone's truth, *one might say the truth of a "die-hard tsagolovets" and the truth of a non-compromising market champion,* into a new integral vision of a desired social structure. However, we already got a taste for it and did not care about a meticulous search of truth and consensus. The plane of Perestroika got into a storm because its crew and passengers simply started a fight instead of trying to jointly determine its course, rather than because it took off with no destination determined.

Secondly, would it have been better had Perestroika been delayed until the moment a detailed plan of its implementation was drafted? How would it have begun, if at all?

While pondering over this question, I remembered an episode that took place in late autumn of 1992. Back then, I happened to take part in a major conference held in the town of Svetlogorsk, Kaliningrad Oblast (Region). I have memories of the banquet rather than of the conference itself. Shortly after it began, I learned that my neighbors at the table were not only the town's key businesspersons, but also former leaders of its Party and Soviet bodies. After a few drinks, they started to criticize Mikhail Gorbachev for nothing. "What wrong has Mikhail Sergeyevich done to you?" was my naive question. "Well," their indignant answer came, "he should have said straight that we had to build capitalism, and then we would have all set to work together and would have had the work done long ago. But he kept feeding us endless fairy-tales and we almost lost power in the town!"

What I am thinking now is that hadn't Perestroika started in spring 1985, we, together with our fellow economists, led by the "guys" like these, could have continued disputes until this date over what words should be emphasized in the phrase "socialist commodity-money relations arranged in a planned way." This country could have continued hopelessly lagging behind the developed states. In addition, the risks connected with a possible Perestroika could have kept growing and growing...

A TURNING POINT IN HISTORY: REFLECTIONS OF AN EYE-WITNESS

by Oleg Bogomolov

Oleg Bogomolov is Member of the Russian Academy of Sciences (RAS), Honorary Director of the Institute of International Economic and Political Studies (IMEPI) of the RAS, RAS Counselor; in the years of Perestroika, he was Director of the Institute for the Economics of the World Socialist System of the USSR Academy of Sciences; in 1989-1991, he was People's Deputy of the USSR.

Over a period of two decades, dramatic transformations have been taking place in our country, with their outcome still remaining the subject of discussions and optimistic or pessimistic prognoses. Scholars, politicians and political writers are trying to understand what has happened in the world with the start of Perestroika in the Soviet Union and what impact it has made on the fates of people and nations affected by these changes.

The more time passes since the period of Perestroika, the more distinct is the historical scale of the changes of those years, initiated by Mikhail Gorbachev. However, there is still no clear answer as to why the Russian path of social restructuring proved to be so painful. The Central and Eastern Europe have traveled this road much faster and with greater success. Economic achievements of China present an even more striking contrast.

Perestroika in the Soviet Union, having begun gradually, just a tiny step at a time, triggered a tectonic shift in the development of the modern world. The year of 1985, when Mikhail Gorbachev was elected General Secretary of the CPSU, is generally recognized as the beginning of the transitional period in the history of our country. However, it was only starting from 1987 that the advent of serious reforms became obvious and the notion of "Perestroika" became widely used. Until that time only preconditions for changes in mentality and politics had been accumulating. To move a bulky block of the Soviet system and, moreover, change its direction of movement was almost an impossible mission, requiring skills and political courage. The renovation process was slow to get underway, like taking fresh air gulp after gulp, with "thaws" full of hopes intermitted with "frosts."

Having come to power, Mikhail Gorbachev made an attempt to use administrative methods to modernize the economy and speed up its growth; however, soon he realized that different decisions were needed. In his view, it was necessary to unleash the energy of the masses and turn them into active participants in the process of reforms. That is why he went as far as to expand glasnost and political freedoms, allow pluralism of opinions and start speaking in support of democratically choosing the path of development and social system.

Looking back at Perestroika now, one can see it differently from what many thought it to be at that time. In one of his interviews given abroad in December 1997, Mikhail Gorbachev stated its essence as follows:

- Giving up the monopoly of the Communist Party and its undivided power over public and spiritual life;
- Elimination of the monopoly of state ownership and redirection of the economy towards the people;
- Liberation of initiative in economy and recognition of private property;
- Real political liberties;
- Laying of the foundations of parliamentarism, pluralism of opinions and parties, freedom of speech and religion and the right to go abroad;
- Public discussions and democratic choice of a path of development and social system;
- Foreign policy based on common sense instead of ideological competition.

In addition, at the final stage of Perestroika, still another essential aspect was added to it in the course of the painful "Novo-Ogaryovo Process," namely, the democratic reform of the country's federal system.

At first, Mikhail Gorbachev did not attach great importance to this problem and began to vigorously address it only after the state started to slowly fall apart and efforts did not work to maintain its integrity through the use of force.

Perestroika meant a revolutionary shift in both public thought and practical activity, a shift accompanied by a most fierce ideological and political struggle. Division was taking place between conservatives with views of various degrees of backwardness and readiness to changes and reformers of many hues — ranging from extreme radicals to moderate democrats. Resistance was rather strong from the party and state *apparat* and the inertia of the administrative system was felt very strongly. A euphemism was used to describe the forces opposing Perestroika: the "braking mechanism." And that mechanism kept working in desperate fits.

Nevertheless, for some time Mikhail Gorbachev succeeded in winning one position after another from the conservatives and making his way forward.

We and the whole world in general, as well, owe a lot to Gorbachev's Perestroika. Its achievements and consequences include among others the end of the Cold War and the emergence of conditions for democratic "velvet revolutions" in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe and reunification of Germany. Emancipation of people's consciousness and establishment, to a varying extent, of democratic institutions in Russia and other post-Soviet countries, glasnost, freedom of speech, elements of civil society, a rule-of-law state and socially-oriented market were no less important. We cannot also fail to mention the restoration of historical truth and the involvement of great masses of the population in active political life. These achievements are still with us, although attempts are made to roll back democracy and emasculate it, restrict the freedom of speech, return to lies in politics, and subordinate market reforms and legal practice to the interests of bureaucracy, a new class of bourgeoisie and criminal elements seeking enrichment.

Attacked from the right by die-hard communists and Stalinists and from the left by impatient democrats who were often prone to extremism, Mikhail Gorbachev was compelled to maneuver to avoid dramatic aggravation of the situation. However, events gathered their own momentum and became less and less controllable.

Perhaps, the turning point was the election to the Congress of People's Deputies, in which lots of Party bosses nominated with approval of the CPSU Central Committee were "blackballed." I had to go through a difficult election campaign in the Sevastopolsky District of Moscow, running against the First Secretary of the CPSU District Committee. At the numerous rallies and meetings I could easily feel the attitudes that prevailed among the voters. They pinned their hopes on democratic renewal and fresh forces coming into power and demonstrated their distrust of the old Party *nomenklatura*.

The opening session of the Congress of People's Deputies took place in late May 1989, gathering together in the Kremlin more than two thousand deputies. The agenda of the Congress included, in addition to time-consuming organizational and procedural issues, a discussion of urgent problems of internal and external policies, based on the report made by Mikhail Gorbachev. As a matter of fact, this very discussion became the central event in the activities of the Congress.

Divides became evident both among the Congress deputies and among the public. Some sincerely believed it was necessary to know full truth about the past and the present and demanded a final break with Stalinism in all of its manifestations. They considered it necessary to reform

property relations and introduce genuine power of the people, and sought the triumph of social justice and ethnic rights. Others were of the opinion that half-measures, partial liberalization and glasnost were acceptable and even preferable. They felt it was better not to rake up the past and not raise the problem of responsibility for the protracted stagnation, suppression of fresh ideas for decades and the crimes of the past. Then, there were also some who were ready to justify the use of brutal military force against those promoting different political slogans and taking part in meetings and demonstrations. Later, this polarization of society grew even sharper under the impact of disastrous stratification of the population according to property. That is why calls for consolidation are still on politicians' lips. The big question is how to achieve it.

In modern society, there is no way to convert dissenters to one's faith by using force, not to say of military force. To my mind, a way to consolidation runs through resolution of deep conflicts in social life that are perceived so differently in the mass consciousness. The monolith that Soviet society had always been considered developed a crack, or rather several cracks. At the threshold of the 1980s and 1990s, the divide and the bitterness of society were becoming more and more evident and this hindered the reforms that were long overdue. There could be two ways out of this imminent deadlock: one of the conflicting sides could take the upper hand and impose its will on the other, or acceptable compromises could be reached, along with the required degree of consensus as to what should be done and how.

It was with poorly concealed irritation that the Party leaders tolerated the appearance at the Congress of the opposition represented by a small and amorphous group of deputies. In their eyes, those were some trouble-makers, disturbing and stirring the public opinion and provoking extremism. They thought it unnecessary to listen to their arguments. It must be admitted in all fairness that certain members of the above-mentioned group, and it became quite obvious later, were guided above all by an ambitious desire to get to power, riding on the wave of democratic feelings of the masses. Populism for them was the main means to achieve their aims. Instead of eliminating the reasons for the stratification of society and looking for ways to reach agreement, the ruling leaders tried to repulse their critics, to move them aside, and debar them from participating in the process of decision-making. The mass media were blamed, too, for inflaming the passions.

To this day the notions persist about the dialectics of social development being unity and struggle of opposites that ends with negation of the negation. Apparently, the idea of uncompromising struggle had deeply rooted itself in the minds of former Party functionaries. Should

there appear any forces opposing the policies of authorities, the aim of the latter would be to crash such forces as soon as possible. Convenient Stalinist dialectics, isn't it? However, in the present-day world there are enough examples when synthesis and mutual impregnation of different causes are reached through compromises or, as they often say today, convergence, rather than negation of one another. It might be called resolution of conflicts through political means, or conscious voluntary agreement, or call it whatever you like — what really matters is that today progress is becoming possible precisely on such basis.

I believe that the emergence of opposition at the Congress facilitated the process of democratization of society, establishment of parliamentarism and promoting economic reform. It was with its participation that the notorious Article 6 of the Constitution establishing the dominating role of the Communist Party was abrogated. However, even if the Interregional Group of Deputies did present an opposition in the Soviet parliamentary system that was only taking shape, it was still very immature and not responsible enough. Sometimes its proposals smacked of radicalism that matched the sentiments of a part of society but failed to take into account the complexity and the enormous risks of changes.

In the context of the increasing tensions in the economy and society a well-known comparison offered itself — the one with the Polish events of August 1980, when there were mass strikes that plunged the country into a social and economic crisis that lasted for an entire decade with no end in sight at that time. The communist government was too late to agree to sit down with its opponents at the round table which, eventually, opened up prospects for revival.

The Polish experience should have been a warning, making one ponder over the necessity of reaching a national consensus and taking into account the opinions of the people. It showed the importance of free discussion of urgent problems and free expression of people's will and brought one closer to understanding the obvious fact that suppression of differing views and attempts to make people happy by measures implemented from the "top" on the basis of decrepit ideological doctrines and in defiance of common sense and people's own wishes were dangerous and hopeless. Suppression by force is possible, but it won't work when encouraging an upsurge of creative effort and enthusiasm of the people was needed. It seemed to me that this truth needed no other arguments in its support.

After the first Congress of People's Deputies, the Government got to work on a program of economic reform and simultaneously on a plan for 1990. This work consumed a lot of efforts by the Government and the

relevant central agencies. But it was improvement and reform of the economy that the main hopes for society overcoming the crisis were linked to. Three possible approaches to reform were considered: an evolutionary approach that continued the unhurried pace of reform, slowly and tentatively, without any serious changes in the habitual forms of management. Secondly, a moderate radical approach, which implied speeding up of transition to market relations, with keeping state control of prices, income and some other aspects of economic life. And, finally, there was a radical approach, along the lines of a "shock therapy" now known to everyone, with simultaneous liberalization of prices and trade and withdrawal of the state from the economy. Testing of the last version using economic and mathematical models showed that it was ruinous (which was proved by Gaidar in a most brilliant way in practice two years later); therefore, it was rejected, just like the first one, though. The Government opted for a moderate radical approach. However, the implementation of practical steps was delayed.

It was clear that having a thought-out program of transition to the market was a good and necessary thing, which made the almost two-years' delay (since the July 1987 Central Committee Plenum) with its final formulation all the more inexcusable. However, in the face of the imminent collapse it was necessary to act in a decisive and pragmatic way and be guided by common sense, without waiting for last-minute clarifications. It was important to achieve improvements in at least one sphere, the one that caused the biggest concerns, namely, in money circulation and consumer markets, before proceeding further in accordance with the overall strategy.

Measures to curb inflation which were discussed at the time included, among others, not only increase in prices and taxes, but also loans against guarantees of repayment in the form of durable goods in short supply, importation of considerable amounts of food and other consumer products, and raising interest rates on saving accounts. Many of the above things were quite reasonable. But the emphasis should have been made on expanding the range of goods on offer, tapping the internal production reserves. Of course, a vicious circle would have emerged, because effective incentives were needed to increase production and the range of goods offered in the market; however it was impossible to provide them without additional supplies of goods to the market. A way out was seen, first of all, in widening goods supply by involving state assets into the market activity and introducing a full-fledged currency like the *chervonets* of the 1920s. Then it could become possible to gradually shift agriculture and light and food industry onto the market track and encourage creation and development of small construction, processing and other industries in the

rural areas and handicraft and cooperative production in towns and settlements. However, this way of transition to the market did not find support from the Government.

Meanwhile, China successfully introduced market freedoms first only in those individual spheres of economy which could provide the quickest return, without trying to change everything else at once. First, farmers were emancipated from semi-serfdom; relations between producers of agricultural products and the rest of the economy, that is, the state, were shifted onto the market basis. Only after that, having ascertained the success, they started to widen the market sector by engaging industrial production. In our case the state was clearly reluctant to employ the same approach and so, a most tough administrative control in the agrarian sphere was maintained. Farming businesses that just started to emerge found themselves withering in its grip. The state remained a monopolistic buyer of harvested crops at fixed prices that were way below market prices and, in addition, stifled the rural areas with taxes and exactions and refused any loan support.

Nikolay Ryzhkov presented a program of economic reform at the Second Congress of People's Deputies, held in late December 1989. It was subjected to severe criticisms by many deputies. Nevertheless, it was adopted. However, soon it emerged that the steps approved by the Congress were absolutely inadequate. As Mikhail Gorbachev wrote in his memoirs, he interpreted Ryzhkov's program as a departure from the decisions of the Central Committee's Plenum of June 1987 and backtracking to the command and administrative system. Within the upper echelons of Party and state power a desperate tug of war was started between moderate technocratic reformers and reformers of a more radical market orientation. Meanwhile, an imminent economic collapse was threatening Perestroika with fatal political consequences.

Separatist feelings were growing in the republics and the consumer market was falling apart. August 1991 became a turning point: the failed coup by a part of the Party and state leaders speeded up the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the resignation of Mikhail Gorbachev, its first President.

Today there is still no definite answer to the question as to why Perestroika died out and was forcefully interrupted. History will certainly pass its own judgment and we should not pressure it for conclusions. In my opinion, several political miscalculations have made their fatal contribution.

Firstly, there was the underestimation of the importance of a democratic reform of the federative system of the Soviet Union; its development was started too late.

Secondly, efforts failed to ensure controllability of the process of transformations, i.e. to reform in a timely manner the Communist Party and consolidate its reform-minded part.

Thirdly, the inertia of public consciousness and the Bolshevik mentality of a great part of society with its disposition to radical and revolutionary changes were never properly taken into account, while there was a need to act gradually and with caution.

Fourthly, own historical experience of reforms was disregarded, in particular, the NEP (New Economic Policy) reform and the monetary reform of the 1920s and the possibility was ignored of long co-existence of market and non-market (controlled by planning and administrative methods) sectors of the economy.

The failures should not be explained by the severe problems in the economy inherited from the past or by the lack of mental preparedness of the great part of the population for dramatic changes. They both did exist, but I see the root causes of our troubles, first of all, in the worthlessness of the political elite. I refer both to the old dogmatic and conformist elite, the dominating one, and the new democratic and reform-minded elite, since both developed in the context of the administrative and command system. The political elite was in no way capable of rising up to the challenges of history, neither from the point of view of its ethical standards, nor in terms of the criteria of political maturity, common honesty and conscience, nor as far as understanding of responsibility to the country and its people was concerned. It proved to be incapable of placing itself at the head of the renewal process to lead the majority of the masses and direct the public energy into the right channel.

It goes without saying that it is impossible to avoid mistakes and miscalculations in performing a novel challenging task of implementing fundamental social reforms. Mikhail Gorbachev and those who attacked him both from the right and from the left in the years of Perestroika did make them, too.

Slow and excessively cautious economic reforms gave rise to discontent among the masses, since their economic situation was deteriorating before their eyes and something had to be done about it. The public opinion expected immediate and decisive steps to be taken to reform the economy. If a victorious euphoria reigning among the democratic forces after the defeat of the coup and the illusions as to a quick success of radical market reforms are factored in, it becomes clear why the choice was made in favor of a "shock therapy." Drastic forcible measures also excellently matched to the Bolshevik background of Yeltsin and his circle. In addition, his choice was also influenced by recommendations of the West, where liberalism was established as

a dominating ideology, and Russian radical democrats easily came to believe in its remedial properties.

Quick disappointment of a part of the political elite and the population with the course of economic policy that was adopted in a hurry and caused galloping inflation, drastic impoverishment of the majority of the people, a slump in production and unprecedented social differentiation led to the deepening of the split in society and to confrontation between the parliament and the President. It culminated in autumn of 1993 in tank shelling of the parliament and its dissolution, adoption in a referendum of a constitution tailored towards the needs of the authoritarian ruler and changes in the nature of power. The course was charted towards complete repudiation of the Soviet heritage and restoration of capitalism in its primitive forms, rather than modernizing the existing society and correcting its flaws.

Implementation of policies using force and radical methods, sacrificing the interests of common people, ignoring common ethical standards, constant lies and erasing the traces of improper deeds and even crimes committed by the powers that be — all this was in stark contrast to the notions of mature democracy and socially oriented market economy. It was a final departure from the concept of Gorbachev's Perestroika.

Regretfully, even after the end of Yeltsin's era, Russia is still standing at the crossroads pondering over which path to take. Prospects for democracy are still uncertain and the causes for the failure of the economic reforms have not been fully understood yet.

BLOODSHED IS NOT INEVITABLE

by Nikolay Shmelev

Nikolay Shmelev is Member of the Russian Academy of Sciences (RAN); Director of the Institute of Europe of the Russian Academy of Sciences; Professor, Doctor of Science (Economics); in 1985-1991, Department Head at the Institute for the USA and Canada Studies of the USSR Academy of Sciences; in 1989, People's Deputy of the USSR; in 1991, Member of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR.

Twenty years ago, when Mikhail Gorbachev became the leader of the country in March 1985, yet another Russian revolution began, which continues up to this day. The main thing that makes it different from all the previous revolutions is the fact that it was bloodless, or, rather, almost bloodless, if certainly we are to compare it with those torrents of blood that used to run across Russia at the sharp turns of its history. Personally, I have only one explanation for this fact: the vast majority of the Russian people, no matter whether at the top or at the bottom, have swallowed so much blood, particularly during the lifetime of the previous three or four generations, that there is no way for anyone, for any force, to provoke them to commit large-scale murder, whatever the ideas, goals or motives of those forces might be. In Russia, the historical quota for bloodshed seems to have been used up for the foreseeable future (unless, of course, some new deadly threat emerges from the outside). The immortal service Mikhail Gorbachev has done to this country and to the entire world is not only that he set rolling downhill a giant mossy stone that ought to have been moved decades before, but also that he directed it onto a bloodless course and so it rolled, burying many things that were dead or alive, but not human lives.

During the years that have passed since the start of Perestroika, a totally new generation has grown and is just about to enter active life; a generation for which the pains, the hopes and the frustrations of the 20th century are in effect as distant as all the things that filled the lives of our ancestors centuries ago. The Tartar Yoke, the Time of Troubles, serfdom, revolutions, World War I and World War II, the Bolshevik terror, the Cold War — do they really matter? For them, the current generation, "All over and pure nothing — just the same," as Goethe said. They know nothing of the shortages that drove one to despair, or humiliating lines, or total

control over everyone's private life by visible and invisible repressive agencies, or the deafening rattle of lying propaganda coming from everywhere, or the feeling of being locked away in a "besieged fortress" with the right to leave it granted only occasionally and only to the select few, and they do not want to know anything about it. And they are lucky to live like this, to take for granted the new conditions of life in the country, see them as a given, natural, as we don't notice the air we breathe.

Even the very first, "Gorbachev's" stage of our current revolution has drawn a distinct line under the centuries-old messianic Russian fantasies, under the almost national idea of saving humankind by way of forceful imposition on any and all of some totally speculative concept developed in a monastic cell or an office of some way too smart theorist. We shall never salvage anybody, God help us to stay afloat ourselves. I think it has already become an obvious truth both for those who make up the so-called "elite" of Russian society and for a "man in the street," whom there are millions.

We must finally stop being guided by chimeras; let us get down to earth and set goals that everyone understands, like building a home and setting up a garden, paving a road, building a hospital, a charity home for the disabled and aged people, bringing up and educating children, supporting science, culture and church, strengthening defense, making their cities better, reviving the Russian countryside, which is almost on its last legs, developing the areas that still have not been properly developed and given to us by God as a gift — Siberia and the Far East, etc., in short, let us rebuild our vast country. These are our present tasks and it will take generations and centuries to accomplish them. Of course, I am not sure that even now everybody will share my views about all this, but I think everyone will agree with me on one thing, that is that construction, the creation and preservation of the population of this country and its wellbeing is today our main national idea.

This very shift in the national psychology, namely, the national repudiation of violence, blood spilling and all kinds of totalitarian chimeras, has become the most important thing in the life of modern Russia and this phenomenon should be the main measure of the historical effect of "Gorbachev's Perestroika."

Together with me, there are many people who even today do not believe that socialism is unviable. But I mean not the "Soviet" version of socialism, but a democratic and market based one, that is, a socialism "with a human face" based on natural aspirations of man and the laws of economics tested by all the experience gained by humankind over the centuries. For many decades not only a great number of Western

European countries have been building a quite viable and economically effective socialism based on the principles of social solidarity of the public and the leading role of private initiative and private property in the economy. Even the socialism of Janos Kadar in Hungary, bound hand and foot by the ties of "bloc discipline," convincingly proved its viability and did so at a most difficult time. The "self-governing" socialism of Josip Broz Tito in Yugoslavia, which collapsed later only because of irrational ethnic conflicts that tore the country apart, with obvious provocative instigation from abroad, rather than for reasons of social and economic nature, also showed itself to be unquestionably viable.

Now, tell me, what system with a claim to long-term viability could stand all the humiliation, there is no other word to call it, to which the Bolsheviks subjected it with such self-destructive persistence? Thus, our present ultra-leftists have only themselves to blame for what happened. This structure could not fail to collapse under the burden of such thoughtless decisions and absolutely senseless expenditures that were unbearable for the country with its dysfunctional government. I am positive that if it were not in March 1985, then within the nearest years Mikhail Gorbachev (or someone called on to play this role) just could not have failed to appear on the scene. The Soviet system degraded to the very limit and at stake was salvation of the nation. There is absolutely no reason to believe that by this time the instincts of self-preservation among the people, in the society and a great part of the Soviet "elite" as well (unlike at the top tiers of power) had totally atrophied. The figure like Mikhail Gorbachev was expected to emerge and he did appear, as they say, in the right place at the right time.

However, in reality, even after he became the leader, things proved to be far from easy. Of course, any serious shift in policies, especially a dramatic one like "Perestroika," required time to grow ripe in the heads of both its initiators and those around them. It must be admitted that this shift started most dreadfully, in full compliance with the same old pattern that was deeply rooted in the flesh and blood of our leaders in general, including the best and most capable of them. It started with a gross mistake that immediately alerted the thinking people of this country, namely, with the notorious anti-drinking campaign. It was outright ignorance that underlay this campaign (which was implemented, of course, with the best of intentions). In the 1920s, the United States, having introduced the "dry law," already carried out this experiment for us in full, with a result that was unambiguously negative: over the 12 years that the law was in effect, consumption of alcohol in the country increased because of black market production and smuggling of all kinds, rather than decreased, and America, which never before knew any serious

organized crime, got it in full measure for decades to follow. In our case, these same consequences were aggravated by still another one, which was rather specific in nature, namely, a total undermining of the state budget. One just should have looked back to avoid this disastrous mistake!

At the initial stage of Perestroika, many things pointed to the fact that its initiators only wanted to change something dramatically and take the country out of the historic dead-end; however, there was no plan as to how to achieve it. Convulsive movements (although, perhaps, understandable in our specific circumstances) from one extreme to another started. Remember how Yegor Ligachev launched his crazy campaign against the so-called "unearned" (that is any privately earned) income — and on the orders of the authorities helicopters, each equipped with a cast-iron weight on a chain, would hover over the countryside of southern Russia to crush glass hothouses in kitchen gardens of its residents. Or how a slogan was launched, reminding one of a whip used to drive on a stumbling horse — the slogan of "acceleration." But what needed to be accelerated, and how, was known only to Almighty God. Or how they found the magic key to the problem of technological progress — "state acceptance [certification] of products" manufactured at enterprises, totally ignoring the fact that any forms of control in the world account for at the most 1% of the product quality.

Nevertheless, by the early — mid-1987, contours of some new society we are moving towards now had started to take shape, making their way through the debris and ruins of the past and through the traditional mentality that had prevailed in the country for such a long time. Democracy, law, truly elected bodies of state power, human rights, freedom of speech ("glasnost"), assembly and rallies, freedom of worship, a market economy with a regulating role of the state, the end to international isolation and to the Cold War — all this meant that the Soviet Union, Russia, while remaining a great power, was making a new sharp turn in its history and embarking on a normal human, "European" path of development. At first, with caution, with distrust, just little by little, but the country came to believe in the genuineness of the new course and very soon after that it started to prod Mikhail Gorbachev to proceed faster on this path, complaining of the slow progress and the persistent inability to implement Perestroika "by next Monday." Likewise, not too soon, slowly and with distrust, the hostile West also came to believe the new Soviet leader and, I must say, since that time it has always had this belief right up to this day.

It is natural for man, when looking back, to not only understand how it all was at that time, but also to think with regret how much better it could have been, if things have been done differently. Of course, today one

can speculate that the efforts of Mikhail Gorbachev would have been much more successful had he decided to openly break with the ultra-conservative wing of the Communist Party, had he openly declared himself a supporter of social democracy and placed himself already then at the head of the social democratic movement, had he stopped staying away from the so-called "true democrats," but, instead relied on them and the people in the streets who supported them, etc.

However, I think that the maneuvering of all sorts and the refusal to prematurely break with the Communist Party and its ramified *apparat*, which controlled all the government agencies in the country, including the army and enforcement bodies, was at that time of troubles a manifestation of wisdom, rather than weakness. This is what saved us from massive bloodshed and reduced the entire violent potential of "Gorbachev's revolution" to an operetta-like coup of August 1991. In a country where three successive generations were taught, and thought, that the Bolshevik was a good man, a man of stone, while the Social Democrat was a bespectacled sissy, a traitor, a crook, as well as of suspicious ethnic origin, was it really possible to launch, virtually from the beginning and within the shortest time, a powerful social-democratic movement aiming to play a leading role in public affairs? How was it possible to pin all hopes on the democrats and the crowd that they regularly took to the streets, in that specific situation, when any thinking man saw the things that had been seen by all the previous revolutions in this country and abroad, namely, the all too familiar picture of "Jesus Christ wearing a wreath of white roses leading the way," followed by a greedy gang of unscrupulous politicos dreaming only of pushing through their way to power and property as soon as possible? Which is what they demonstrated in a most illustrious manner later, when the Soviet Union collapsed and the ultraliberal reforms were launched.

However, being an economist, I am inclined to think that the main blunders of Perestroika were made in the social and economic sphere, rather than in the political one. And, being an observer and a rather active participant in those events, I hold that these mistakes were mainly the consequences of the absence of a well thought-out strategic plan of reforms. I do not refer to their goals, since the goal itself was more or less clear, although vague (a kind of Russian version of "social market economy"). However, I am convinced that nobody had a clear vision of the ways and phases in achieving this goal and of their order of priority and sequence.

In my opinion, the biggest mistake made by the leaders of Perestroika was their intuitive, rather than conscious, disdain for one vital task, which is hard to articulate and even harder to measure, that is to revive in the

country the enterprising spirit of the people, their business instincts and potential, in other words, that spontaneous "grass-roots energy" that breaks through any road pavement. Over the previous seventy years, this energy was suppressed in every possible way, and the state regarded any independent businessman as its enemy, be it a peasant, or an artisan, or a dealer, or a doctor. The only thing the country was preoccupied with during all those decades of the Soviet power was construction of yet another industrial giant, never considering the fact that all over the world small and medium-size business had long ago become the principal engine of the economy and of technological progress, the main market agent and employer.

It is not fortuitous that the wise Chinese started their reforms after 1978 precisely with small and medium-size sector, quickly reviving their half dead economy back and creating a full-fledged market. It took them 20 years to accomplish it and now for another 15-20 years, they will be reforming large-scale industries by way of incorporating and modernizing them, getting rid of hopelessly loss-making enterprises, etc. However, our own attempts to unleash the people's energy in the late 1980s were limited only to a weak revival of the cooperative sector. Even then, fearing its rapid growth, the authorities quickly backtracked, again strangulating the cooperative entrepreneurs with prohibitive taxes and artificially inflated prices for all the supplies they needed. Unfortunately, such self-destructive treatment of the small and medium-size sector remains characteristic of us right up to this date, indeed. Moreover, it has become even worse, since, for instance, in the end of the 1980s, it took three months on average to start one's own business in Russia, while now it takes a year.

Another serious miscalculation was underestimating the danger posed by unbalanced domestic market, by the widening gap between money demand and commodity supply, and by the artificial aggravation of shortages in the economy where the supply was already extremely low. In professional slang it is called "money overhang," meaning the growing excess of money supply in the country over its commodity cover. There were only two ways out of that situation at the time: either seizure of excess money from the population and enterprises or money "buy-back" at a price acceptable to the state, while simultaneously turning off the money printing press.

Some economists here (me included) suggested that the government should not take risks, should not irritate the population without need, since it was already bristling at all kinds of shortages, and not generate in increasingly greater numbers new underground millionaires who kept their goods under the counter and on warehouse shelves across the

country in anticipation of another price hike; instead, "buy back" the excess money using, first, massive sales of unmarketable assets and other unsold goods, as well as cars, other equipment, housing, buildings, land plots, etc., and, secondly, by massive importation of high value added consumer goods (bearing in mind that at the time one ruble invested into the importation of consumer goods brought nine to ten rubles of profit for the state). Of course, it immediately invited the question of where the money for it was to be taken from. At the time, there was only one answer to this question: borrow the money abroad as part of government program. However, this simple idea would not be supported by our leaders, although at that time our country still enjoyed a reputation of a sufficiently good payer.

Eventually, the country leaders seemed to agree to this plan. However, it was already too late. In spring 1991, Grigory Yavlinsky was dispatched to America to discuss a project that was similar in its essence to the above plan; however, it did not work. In London in July that year, the G-7 leaders directly refused real financial support to Mikhail Gorbachev and by doing so, I am convinced, voluntarily or not, among other things, triggered the August coup. Of course later, during the "Yeltsin — Gaidar" phase, only one method was employed, namely, no "buy-back" whatsoever, no indexation of savings, but sheer robbery of everyone without exception, both of the people and of businesses. The country has never forgiven and, probably, will never forgive the liberal democrats for that.

Finally, at that time it was already becoming clear that to overcome the growing crisis would be impossible without dramatic changes in the monetary and financial sphere, as well as in pricing. It was necessary to restore the budget and reestablish, in particular, a real state monopoly on alcohol and other excisable goods. It was necessary to start gradual liberalization of prices for the main commodities circulating in the market, while keeping down, through government regulation, the prices for the most basic consumer goods. Corporatization should have been started and preparations for privatization of state assets should have been carried out, however, against payments in real money, rather than "for free," as was actually the case in the first half of the 1990s. There should have been no hurry in dealing with this matter, bearing in mind that, for instance, it took Margaret Thatcher at least ten years to carry out successful privatization of just a dozen of British leading state companies in the 1980s.

I am convinced that at the time there still was the very last chance to implement the country's transition to a market economy in a more or less painless way. In particular, the sensational plan proposed at the time by

Grigory Yavlinsky and Stanislav Shatalin, known as the "500 Days Plan," was exactly of that kind. The name, of course, was not serious and smacked of PR and everyone realized that it would take at best 500 weeks, or even months, never mind 500 days, to implement it. However, I am convinced that in terms of its philosophy and underlying ideas the plan was quite realistic. However, as usual, politics and people's passions and ambitions, "entrenched interests," as the British say, interfered with the plan, and it was eventually shelved.

Looking back, I recall being appointed a kind of moderator between the authors of the plan and the team of its opponents (mostly in the government) in the hope to work out something acceptable to everybody. I recall a night meeting in Arkhangelskoye outside Moscow, in August 1990, with the "500 Days Plan" team on my left and the government team on my right and me seated at the head of the table. I remember that oppressive feeling that nearly crushed me when I thought: "My God, what are they arguing about? What does the economy have to do with it, after all?! One side keeps pressing for power; the other keeps resisting equally fiercely, not giving an inch."

Quite often, especially these days, when many things that happened at that time seem a lot less relevant, my memory brings back to me an ancient maxim: "Our shortcomings are the extension of our merits." Perhaps, even today, our society does not have an unambiguous answer to the question of "How could it have happened that the Soviet Union collapsed? How could the Kremlin let it happen?" I personally have two explanations, the first one being of political and economic nature, so to say, and the other one of purely psychological nature and linked mostly to Mikhail Gorbachev or, rather, to my own perception of this truly outstanding figure. I am sure that the political and economic explanation is indisputable and clear to everybody: the big country could no longer normally function, not to say develop, when Moscow accumulated up to 95% of the state budget revenues, while the republics, territories, regions, districts and other administrative units had a mere 5% to be used at their own discretion, that is, without the Kremlin's approval. Eventually, the leaders of Perestroika realized it; however, it happened too late, as usual.

Another explanation, a purely psychological one, is in Gorbachev's sincere and deep aversion for blood. If only a dozen or two of the instigators of massacre had been hanged on lamp-posts in a traditional Russian manner in Sumgait, Azerbaijan, in 1988 (and I am convinced that it was the first serious test of strength for Gorbachev's regime by destructive forces), if only they had isolated the utterly crazy Zviad Gamsakhurdia and his associates, if only a single division (or even a regiment) of paratroopers landed in December 1991 in the Belovezhskaya

Pushcha to arrest those three provincial men of great ambition who lost any sense of responsibility to the country — . However, Mikhail Gorbachev could not bring himself to do anything like that, the reason, in my opinion, being not only his fear of leaving a blood-stained memory of himself in history, but, above all, because of his understanding of this very history, our Russian history: no matter how poorly, long, groggily, with curses and frustrations the process unfolds, this time let there be no bloodletting. Perhaps then Russia might get a chance to break away from this centuries-old vicious circle, in which blood and violence cause only more blood and violence, and so ad infinitum.

Today, the dramatic shift in the foreign policy of the Soviet Union initiated by Mikhail Gorbachev is also perceived by many as something equally complex and by no means unambiguous. On the one hand, one cannot but admire the determination with which he scrapped the decades-old doctrines and stereotypes, the division of the world into two opposing camps armed beyond sanity, the deeply-rooted mentality of the Cold War, characteristic of both us and Western countries, which never escalated into a "hot war" only because both sides developed a "mutual assured destruction" capability, speaking plainly, a capability to annihilate all forms of life on planet Earth. The "new thinking" was indeed absolutely new: a shift from confrontation to partnership with our former adversaries; prospects for real mutually verified disarmament; repudiation of any imperial ambitions, including the so-called "world socialist system"; the revision of the results of World War II, including consent to reunification of Germany; gradual end to the years-long international isolation of the Soviet Union and its opening up to the world; and, finally, phased withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan. Could anyone think of something like that even in the early 1980s, not to mention more distant times?

However, critics of "Gorbachev's shift" also have their arguments. Why, they ask, did the Soviet Union withdraw from Europe and agree to reunification of Germany free of charge, just "for nothing," as a kind of a generous gesture? What about a pragmatic national interest? Even the multi-billion Soviet property in those countries was left behind virtually without any compensation, never mention the fact that any such political decision should have its own price. What about any compensation for the forty-year-long supplies to Comecon countries of vital energy resources and raw materials for only 30% of their world prices and the purchases of their products of doubtful quality for 200% of their price? Nothing of the kind, no compensation at all; on the contrary, Europe's former Comecon countries have claims against us to the tune of some ten billion dollars, and Germany is currently, perhaps, the toughest of our lenders as far as the

Soviet debts are concerned. And the idea of a second "Marshall Plan," that is a mass-scale foreign assistance to the new Russian revolution, this time of a democratic and market nature, never materialized, since generosity in the new international situation also proved to be clearly unilateral. And they also cheated us, speaking plainly, with promises not to expand NATO to the East; they took advantage of our naivety; it is hard to understand why this agreement could not have been put on paper from the very beginning. Well, and so on and so forth.

Still, it seems to me that these criticisms may be recognized as fair only if we were to take a bean-counting approach to evaluating policy, and foreign policy in particular. Firstly, as they say, it's no use crying over the spilt milk. Without those concessions (or was it a retreat — call it as you like) we would not have been able to persuade our main partners in the West and, more importantly, perhaps, even ourselves that our country was really breaking with the past. It was precisely the foreign policy of expansionism that had turned Russia into a bugaboo in the eyes of the whole world from the very first days of the Soviet power. And it was precisely the full and unreserved repudiation of this entire unbearable imperial burden, which brought us nothing but strain and ruin, that showed that the country was really entering a new era and developing a new image.

I think there was another very important result of Perestroika. Once again, after many decades of unrestrained arbitrary rule and absolute immorality ("the end justifies the means"), moral and ethical criteria and respect for the individual and his rights, which had seemed to have been completely forgotten, started to gradually, little by little, return to the political life of our country. Of course, one should not overestimate the effects of those first manifestations of legal conscience and humaneness, nor should one forget that occasional local outbursts of violence, like those that occurred in Tbilisi or Vilnius, did occur even at that time. Miracles never happen: three generations of Soviet people were trained in every possible way to forget and delete from their daily lives such fundamental notions of modern civilization as conscience, honesty, generosity, charity, human rights, personal safety, respect for property, unquestioned rule of law and many other things.

Unfortunately, after the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the start of ultra-liberal reforms, the fragile environment of certain moral stability that had just started to take shape in the country was shaken again. The brazen seizure of people's savings in 1992 and 1998; the "take it for free" privatization; mass-scale nonpayment of wages; impoverishment of a huge part of population; the gap between the wealth that was accumulated or, rather, "seized" overnight and mass poverty,

unprecedented in the civilized world; and rampant crime and corruption — all this together with many other things sharply worsened again the situation in the country. I happened to write about this several times before and want to insist again on one simple idea, which to me seems entirely correct: "poor morals breed a poor economy." Rather than resulting from objective factors, such as obsolescence and rigidity of the country's industrial base, the failures and set-backs of ultra-liberal reforms and the incredible pain they caused to the people were brought about mostly by purely moral, human factors, namely, the "neo-Bolshevik" contempt for the people, those teeming masses of towns and villages who must accept every hardship deemed necessary by the state power, no matter how cruel it could be.

Such a policy is dangerous, particularly in Russia. It seems to me that our top leaders are starting to realize this, although so far by no means to the full extent. Attempts — however clumsy — taken recently by the state to revise the uniquely Russian formula for the division of profits and super-profits between Russian oil and other resource tycoons, on the one hand, and society, on the other, allow us to hope that the more than a decade-long era when the country was ruled by absolutely immoral and socially irresponsible business is possibly coming to an end. However, there are still many reasons to doubt that this is the case. Contempt for the "man in the street" shown by the Russian authorities still makes itself felt at every corner.

And yet, the revolution started by Mikhail Gorbachev still continues today, delving ever deeper into the depths of Russian life and offering new opportunities to more and more people. Today, there is probably even chance that this revolution could meet either with inglorious end or that it will play a beneficial role in the imminent revival and thriving of Russia, a Russia that would be young, vigorous, and confident, that would preserve what is most valuable in its unique centuries-old tradition, while at the same time adopting the best of what modern world has to offer. For people of my generation, who saw the contradictory past of their country and see its equally contradictory present, Russia's future is less a question of logical analysis than that of faith. I would hate to see our faith weaken with time. And I hope, and my hope is really strong, that the generations to come will also keep that faith.

... THOSE BEST THREE YEARS

by Anatoly Adamishin

Anatoly Adamishin is Ambassador (retired since 1998); President of the Euro-Atlantic Association; Professor at the Institute of Europe of the Russian Academy of Sciences (RAN); in 1985 – Head of the First European Department of the USSR Ministry of Foreign Affairs; in 1986-1990 – Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of the USSR; from May 1990 to January 1993 – Ambassador of the USSR/Russia to Italy.

What kind of state did we live in before the start of Perestroika? This is easily forgotten; however, at least some of it is worth recalling, if one is to assess the scope of changes that occurred within rather a short period of time. Some of them proved to be irreversible, others, alas, are fading away from our life, which is returning to what it was before.

To begin with, we did not know our own country well enough. Even Andropov, the man who climbed all the steps of the Party and state career ladders, including the position of Chairman of the KGB, once exclaimed in a fit of temper — and he was already General Secretary of the CPSU Central Committee, — "We still need to gain an understanding of what kind of society we have built!" However, how was it possible? Curiosity was directly counter-indicated for ordinary citizens — and for not so ordinary ones as well. Just imagine how many taboos and restrictions there existed and for how many people the only job was keeping sealed everything that was defined — again by secret instructions — as state, official or other kind of secret! More often than not, we, as diplomats, were "not supposed" to know the information that was already released to our American partners, of course, according to the instructions from Moscow, by our military colleagues in the negotiating team.

What we had to know firmly was that this country was surrounded by enemies. Like Dadon, a tsar from Pushkin's fairy tale, we had to "keep a numerous army," almost the biggest one in the world. Despite declarations at the highest levels that we spent on defense no more than absolutely necessary, nobody, including those who said that, possessed accurate data on the actual cost of the arms race to the country. Military expenses, direct and indirect, carefully hidden into various items of the budget which looked sometimes completely innocent, were constantly growing. You bet they were; we had to parry threats from the West as well as from the East

and the South, since we were waging a war in Afghanistan. The North with its standoff between the submarine fleets was no exception either.

Many mistakes, miscalculations, wasteful expenditures, and even loss of life were being justified with a trite excuse that we would sacrifice anything to prevent war. Cited were various figures showing the share of the military-industrial complex in the country's national product. I think that nobody has succeeded in establishing its real volume. Is it the reason why during their first years in power the leaders of Perestroika could not bring themselves to revise it either? It took them long time to come to a bitter conclusion that our military expenditures per capita were the highest in the world.

The spirit of militarization permeated the entire social fabric. We never had any idea as to the extent of the enormous, at times even catastrophic, losses caused by thoughtless management of our economy. Preference was given to the defense industry to the detriment of the environment and the health of the country's population. Was the public at large informed well enough about the growing demographic crisis or about mortality exceeding birth rate, starting since 1982? Were the people informed of the extent of hard drinking, if the 1984 data on the consumption of pure alcohol in the amount of 8.3 liters per capita, that is, twice as much as in the pre-revolutionary Russia, and four times as much as in 1950, were placed into the "top secret" category. The pre-Perestroika leaders were aware of these figures; however, they hid striking reports of worried scientists deep in their safes.[1] It all affected Gorbachev in a most unfair way when he lifted the veil over numerous secrets, including demographic statistics. Sore spots that had been hidden from view for decades burst like blisters after those to blame for them had left this world. In their good old days, big troubles did happen, too. However, who learned about them? After us, the deluge...

And were there many people who knew — not guessed, but had a more or less clear idea of — how rotten the foundation of the Soviet state was? Or what was the state of its agriculture, despite awful lots of money poured into it? Or how obsolete was the industrial equipment? Or how overstretched were its infrastructures? Or how far behind we lagged in the scientific and technological revolution (with the military-industrial complex being in rather a good shape, though)? Or how low was people's motivation to work and, hence, their labor efficiency? Also added to that must be the enormous amount of money in circulation, oversupply of goods that were not in demand, while basic necessities were in short supply, for instance, billions of dollars worth of cereals were purchased abroad. Also added should be a bloated bureaucratic *apparat*; the administrative system that was unmanageable and, therefore, unable to manage; and apathy and satisfaction with what little was available.

Were anyone to dare at the time to express their concerns about inter-ethnic relations he would not have gotten very far or, rather, he would have been sent very far. The nationalities question was supposed to have been settled once and for all in the "unbreakable union of free republics" [The first line of the Soviet national anthem — *Ed.*]. Just try to grasp the meaning of the phrase: every word is not quite accurate. In fact, the Union and its constituent national republics lived according to their own laws, which they demonstrated shortly after.

And what about the Party that was nineteen million strong and was supposed to be "the intellect, the honor and the conscience of our era" [an oft-quoted phrase by Lenin — *Ed.*]? We were reminded of this role at every corner, perhaps, to prevent any doubts in people's minds. Where was that Party when the Union was falling apart? However, there was logic to it all: when someone joins a political organization to pursue a career, to get to a feeding trough or because a mandatory quota has to be filled, the end result is easy to predict.

Of course, we were aware of many things even before Perestroika, but somehow managed to get used to them, so to say. Besides, maybe today, after all the shocks we have suffered, the time of stagnation is getting a shadow of nostalgia.

But let us recall how the right to express our own opinion was flatly denied to us, not to mention the opportunities to influence the developments. This is why the famous kitchens came into existence as the only forum available for free discussion. I remember discussing some minor issue with my chief boss, who quite seriously said to me, — and I was then member of the Foreign Ministry Collegium, that is to say "authorized personnel", — "What right do you have to judge it?"

By the way, there is something to say about the MFA Board. As far as I remember, there had been neither serious discussions held at its meetings, nor real decisions taken before Ministry leaders were replaced in 1985. Sometimes it happened that an overzealous ambassador would be called to Moscow to make a special report and warned to refrain from bringing severe problems to the Board's attention. Of course, we did get some pep talk and some information from our superiors, but that was the most we could expect.

Worth recalling are Party meetings, where everybody seemed not to be amazed at the striking gap between words and deeds and sat giving no ear to statements by the Party's chief ideologist Mikhail Suslov along the lines of "attacks on Marxism only proving its superiority" and the CPSU having a "unique ability to scientifically predict the future," which would mean full victory for us in the nearest future, and even statements about the Party's General Secretary Leonid Brezhnev "making a great personal contribution to the cause of scientific investigation of problems." And

those words referred to the person who was already sick and ailing at the time and was rumored to have been asking to let him go in peace. Discord between our everyday life and the way it was supposed to be perceived gave birth to incredible lies. People were brought up hearing lies, to stay politically undereducated as a result.

Let us also recall how our bureaucratic *apparat* stifled talents, encouraging mediocrity, and how many people had to leave the country amidst yells of "Good Riddance!" In fact, it was mostly the talented rather than the dissidents who were targeted. Great, indeed, were our intellectual giveaways to the West.

Another thing to recall is how the country was ruled by old men who ultimately were starting to see very many things in a distorted mirror, if not becoming senile. According to Karl Marx, power tends to infinity, if it is not restrained. And the only limits that were placed on it were the differences of opinion among the top leaders. Many Kremlinologists managed to make a fortune on interpretation of those differences. A waterproof layer of old men with their blood contaminated with power as if with syphilis blocked the way to the top for many a generation. At the bottom, however, decay was in progress; the swamp was rotting. Later, Gorbachev would say tactfully that there had been some problems with rotation of leaders. Some problems, indeed! He himself, too, was allowed to power only when even humble ordinary Party members started writing letters to the Central Committee complaining that they were fed up with burying General Secretaries. Indeed, how great their self-importance had to be and how far they had gone in considering themselves the ultimate guardians of the Marxist-Leninist truth to create a situation where two or three of them could rule an enormous country, with others been more often than not satisfied with the role of extras. The rules of the game, Party dogmas intricately mixed with customs reminding those of mafia, were unwritten, but strictly observed within this small group. I think if and when minutes of meetings of the Politburo are published, even this country, which is used to just about everything, will gasp with surprise. However, one already starts feeling uneasy reading even what has been published, since in the first years of Yeltsin's rule a few thousand archive pages were sold abroad to become available to virtually all those willing. How petty were some of the matters the Politburo dealt with at its meetings for the sake of ideological purity! Issues considered to be of higher importance were decided by a small group in advance of the meetings or shelved.

The ABC of political science states that mistakes are inevitable if decisions are taken privately, if leaders work in a protected environment, with no glasnost or political competition, and if the public is just notified

of the decisions taken and implements them in a lukewarm manner. To correct such mistakes is extremely difficult.

Now, how fatuously they spent the seemingly inexhaustible flow of petrodollars! Although, was it really fatuous? It extended the life and time of staying in power for our top old-timers by a certain number of years. It was demonstrated for the first time ever that oil meant not only wealth, but also an extremely dangerous thing, because it contributes to physical and intellectual stagnation. Why rack one's brains over ways to modernize national economy? The timid attempts to reform the industry and agriculture, associated with the names of Kosygin and Kulakov, respectively, were completely dropped as early as in the beginning of the 1970s. In this process the ideology that was worshipped beyond any reason played a most negative role. We failed to find our own Deng Xiaoping who valued a cat for its ability to catch mice, rather than for its color. That was exactly the time to follow the example of China. The USSR was kept afloat almost solely by exports of its energy resources, successfully eating away the wealth belonging to future generations. Technological response of the West, the famous energy saving strategies, was overlooked. Eventually, the oil prices, on which so many things depended, fell. However, it happened after the old-timers had already left. Again, it was Gorbachev who had to sort out that mess and deal with the economic and financial crisis.

Obviously, the greater part of that wad of petrodollars was thrown into the furnace of the arms race. Today we can only wonder how blind people could be not to see where the implementation of more and more new military programs was taking them. The leaders of the United States and the USSR kept meeting and assuring each other that stockpiling of increasingly deadly weapons was senseless and extremely dangerous. So what? Every time they came back home, they would approve another round of nuclear weapons growth. By 1982, our two countries had accumulated nuclear explosives, the amount of which translated into four tons of TNT per Earthling.

The U.S. intelligence agencies and politicians were very inventive in picturing the Soviet military machine in soul-chilling colors. Every time talks picked up, classified reports appeared about the guile and the might of Russians, who easily cheat the gullible Westerners. Today, some say with hindsight that already then the policy-makers were aware of the real situation; however, they kept their mouths shut. Let the Soviets, they said, get deeper and deeper into this process of wasting away intellectual and material resources.

How many times did we get into this trap? Suffice it to recall Reagan's Star Wars, a classical example of misinformation.

Now, take the famous Shuttle technology. Did we really believe that unless we develop a similar spacecraft we would not have protection from this spaceborne killer? Visiting the Baikonur Cosmodrome, I saw an almost completely decayed gigantic truss to launch a super-powerful space rocket. Actually, it was used just few times. As well-informed people told me there, the last phase of the "Buran" project required about one million specialists to work on it. In everybody's opinion, the spacecraft was a success; however, it was more expensive than we could afford.

It must be said that invented was a tricky thing like a theory of parity. Allegedly, only equality in the quantities of weapons held could guarantee the country's safety. Failure of the reckless venture in Cuba in 1962, which was initiated by us, at that, was explained by the fact that the United States had twenty-fold superiority in armaments. We rushed to catch up. On May 6, 1985, twenty-three years later, Sergei Sokolov, the USSR Minister of Defense, stated in his interview to TASS news agency that the parity between the USSR and the United States, the Warsaw Treaty and NATO was an "objective" one. He offered no definition of this word.

In fact, there was no parity, neither in quantity nor, particularly, in quality, and this fact was mentioned — furtively at the time and openly now. The Americans were always ahead of us, at least half a step, if not one full step ahead. David C. Jones, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, coined in 1980 the famous phrase that he would not want to swap military potentials with the Russians. However, was it possible, purely physically, to achieve parity in the context of continuous improvement of military equipment, asymmetrical, at that?

Once aware of our weak points, the Americans held us tight in the grip of the arms race, while offering a nice set of reasons for the case of our military-industrial complex. Their cynicism was easy to explain, since the U.S. technical progress depended heavily on the unrestrained growth of American military and industrial complex. The Federal Government granted half of the money needed for research and development, with 2/3 of the amount directed to military needs. However, the Americans learned to quickly introduce novelties into the civil industries and, after testing them there, return them to the military-industrial complex already with value added, so to say. As for us, with that secrecy mania of ours, we lacked such an advantage almost completely. We "made up for it" by making the emphasis on numbers and churning out tanks and nuclear weapons in incredible quantities.[2]

The military are responsible for the country's security. This idea was not challenged even during the initial stage of Perestroika, but it automatically implied making more and more weapons. At the same time, political methods to achieve the aim, like talk about "reasonable sufficiency" and arguments that it was "either mutual security or mutual

unreliability," were beyond the sphere of direct responsibilities of the Ministry of Defense and the respective Departments of the Central Committee.

I would like to dwell more on the episode with Pioneer medium-range missiles as a classical example from this field. These weapons are more widely known by their Western classification, where they are code-named as SS-20 missiles, since in our country their name itself remained secret for a long time.

Since the end of 1950s, we had had R-12 and R-14 medium-ranged missiles pointed at the Western Europe. They were powered by liquid propellants and deployed in silos. Twenty years later the time came to replace them. Deployment of mobile "Pioneer" missiles with three nuclear warheads was carried out at great pace. However, there was no hurry in removing the old missiles. The new weapons were introduced on the sly, because the very idea of discussing such matters with the West seemed ridiculous at that time. Naturally, nobody informed the Soviet people of the above either. This was a great opportunity for the Americans. They got a good excuse to deploy their own Pershing-2 missiles, the first smart nuclear missiles with penetrating warheads. In other words, they were missiles capable of hitting a bunker prepared in advance to accommodate very important persons, as well. It was time to start thinking about one's personal vulnerability. The Americans could fire at us from their bases in the Western Europe, i.e. practically point-blank, with the impact time reduced to the minimum.

There was another reason for the Americans to secretly rub their hands with glee, since no new threats appeared for the United States, as a parent state, but it was the Western Europeans, its "hostages," who suffered from it. However, our careless actions presented the best possible case for the need to get new allocations.

Strictly proceeding from the principle of equality, the Americans were wrong. If everything that NATO had was to be taken aggregately, including nuclear weapons of not only the United States, but also those of France and Great Britain, the advantage had always been with the West. In particular, the American carrier-based air power was many times greater than ours. In addition, there were military bases surrounding the USSR from all sides and submarines that were also outnumbering the Soviet submarine fleet, and so on and so forth. However, the Yankees did not care about our reasoning. As Andrey Gromyko used to say, "Right is not the one who is right, but the one with more rights." In pressuring us from a position of strength, Americans were also demanding full equality in specific types of weapons, interpreting this concept in a rather fraudulent way. In addition, they knew that the French would never agree to have their nuclear potential regarded as part of NATO's one. "What if

the USSR agrees with the United States to completely eliminate their nuclear capabilities?" was President Fran□ois Mitterrand's reasoning. "Will France be compelled to abandon its deterrent forces then? Never!" The British, however, made excuses referring to a purely bilateral nature of this Soviet-American matter.

Using modern technical language, a smart PR move was invented: NATO decision of December 12, 1979 was presented as "dual-track," that is, unless there was an amicable agreement by 1983, the Americans would deploy their medium-range missiles in Europe within the next two years. Their number was announced in advance, to include 108 Pershing-2 and 464 winged missiles of Tomahawk type. The latter ones were no better either. We entered the proposed talks after spending one year thinking everything over; however, we were just going through the motions. "What is there to be discussed?" reasoned the then Minister of Foreign Affairs, with his argument, as far as I know, looking compelling to other members of the Politburo, "We have missiles and they don't." However, what if they get them? They will not, he argued, since the Western Europeans would not like to get themselves a magnet to attract Soviet nuclear weapons. Just look at how wide the anti-war movement is and how strong peace supporters are! Of course, it was just another case of miscalculation.

The time flew quickly; in October 1983, deployment of American medium-range missiles began as promised. We slammed the door (demonstrating our tiredness of fruitless negotiations); however, it did not win us any laurels. A year later, we were back. To tell the truth, this time, to save our face, we packaged medium-range weapons together with two more components, namely, strategic and space armaments. Another year later, we revised the package again to make medium-range missiles a separate item. Eventually, the USSR and the United States signed the treaty in Washington on 8 December 1987. It provided for elimination of both the Soviet (1,752 missiles of five types in total) and the American (859 missiles of three types) missiles of medium- and small-range. The "zeros" hidden therein were close to what Americans had proposed as long ago as in 1981.

The leaders of Perestroika have been criticized many a time for concluding such kind of a treaty, envisaging unfair twofold reduction of weapons on our part. Only few people did recall the words we had uttered earlier, "What is there to discuss? We have missiles and they don't." Only few people recalled how much time had been missed and how many efforts and resources had been wasted away. Of course, we could have continued playing these games, aggravating both the direct threat of deadly and accurate weapons and the burden of the exhausting arms race. At one moment, one had to find courage to stop it all.

Thus, Mikhail Gorbachev had to correct the mistakes made by the previous leadership in this area as well. And even if there was a downside

to that, it would be fairer to place more of the blame on those who had plunged the country into dire straits.

I will allow myself to make a personal digression. All of a sudden, the Dutch showed their character. Their share in almost half a thousand winged missiles was just 48 pieces. However, Holland did not want even this small amount to be deployed in their country. Their neighbors had not only given their consent already but installed missiles in their territory, while the Dutch delayed their answer. At a certain moment, they approached us with a confidential proposal to remove 48 missiles from our many-hundred formation for them to refuse to have Tomahawks in return. Naturally, this proposal was of little military significance. However, its political pluses looked self-evident. Why not try to stop the chain reaction of actions and counteractions and bring this avalanche to a halt? Holland was a country dealt with by the First European Department of the MFI under my direction at that time. I started to knock on all doors (thank goodness, there were only a few of them), urging everybody to cling to the Dutch idea. Alas! The Dutch, however, would not take "no" for an answer saying that we could continue keeping the 48 missiles there but remove them from combat duty, so that they could have a good reason to refuse placement of the missiles. Deep in my heart, I leapt with joy. The advantages looked too obvious. We ran no risk. Say, should the Dutch have failed to refuse the missiles, we could have put them on duty again, as simple as that. By the way, it could have been hard enough to check if the missiles were removed from duty at all.

I had painful conversations with Georgy Markovich Korniyenko, the then First Deputy Minister and, in fact, the MFA boss as far as politics was concerned, many times. Gromyko trusted him absolutely while he himself already paid not too much attention to this aspect at that time. GM, as we called him, was God Almighty for us. He was a highly professional diplomat with profound and detailed knowledge of practically every issue and surprisingly hardworking. He was especially enthusiastic about defending the right of the USSR to parity with the U.S. as far as arms were concerned. "Parity is our stable granite-firm basis, scientifically and mathematically calculated," said he. We debated this matter with him many times. Unlike the Minister, it was easy to dispute with him. I used to say that our boat was already overloaded with arms, and that the Americans would not agree to a true parity, no matter what it cost them, and that, regretfully, their material and other capabilities were far greater than ours, and still I could not convince him. The issues relating to medium-range missiles were under his special control. In the MFA of that time, the number of specialists involved in some way in these and other issues relating to arms control was strictly limited. Most probably, he tolerated my tricks because of my professional involvement in this

country. Well, one day, when he seemed tired of my "Dutch" obsession, he said to me, "Anatoly, just drop this subject, you cannot even imagine what interests of economic, military or political nature are involved here. Nobody would ever allow you to do anything." There were but only a few instances when true motives of our policies were frankly presented. My slowness on the uptake even led to the possibility of disciplinary measures.

However, by that time, different winds were blowing, and Mikhail Gorbachev, the new General Secretary of the CPSU Central Committee, was quick to put a new Foreign Minister into the office at the Smolenskaya Square. Instead of 48 missiles, hundreds were put on the bargaining table — with no tragic consequences. As we see today, the factors that have been determining the country's security are quite different. There is no need in piling up mountains of weapons; what is needed is reasonable sufficiency of the arsenals. The greatest service done by Perestroika is that our country withdrew from the Cold War in all aspects, even though there was a cost to it. Thanks to that first, Gorbachev's, breakthrough today's Russia is not engaged in any global confrontation. Moreover, it has normal relations with its former adversaries and stands with them on the same side of a new frontline — the fight against international terrorism. The country can now significantly save on defense expenditures, conditional, of course, on its ability to learn the bitter lessons of the past.

Confrontation meant not only the arms race. In addition to the war in Afghanistan, military contingents numbering hundreds of thousands of troops were deployed beyond the boundaries of the Soviet Union. It is well known that the biggest burden was placed in this regard on the German Democratic Republic (East Germany). Built there were more than 750 cantonments, over 5,000 military camps and 47 airfields (I would have been surely put behind bars if not shot for releasing these figures during the years preceding Perestroika). We settled there to stay for long, if not forever. And we did the same in other places, too. Did anybody make a calculation of how much this aspect of military preparations cost us? This time, too, we started trying to work things out when it became a matter of utmost urgency, with all member-states of the Warsaw Treaty rushing to get rid of us. Still, people somehow tend to forget about the great service done by Mikhail Gorbachev, namely, a bloodless resolution of such a dramatic situation. "Instead," the blame for the blunders made by his predecessors as well as by his successors was shifted on him. One of the most often cited arguments is that the troops were pulled out into the open country. Well, where had they been before, and why the money had been spent abroad, and not at home? The funds allocated by the Germans for the resettlement of troops were embezzled; however, as of December 1991, there was neither Gorbachev nor the Soviet Union on the scene, while the withdrawal continued until August 1994. Could we have got

more money in return for our withdrawal? Perhaps we could and the then leaders of the country could have done better in this regard. But now tell me, was it easy for him to act with Yeltsin hot on his heels to seize power and the tragedy of the collapse of the USSR increasingly looming?

The unrestrained desire to bring to our side one or another country from the "other camp" was another reason that was long undermining our country. However, was there any other way to win the battle of two social systems? Our dogmatists had not completely abandoned the idea of exporting revolution. Any movement proclaiming itself socialist could expect our support (and the situations when we burnt our fingers with such schemers are plenty!).

I will permit myself another personal vignette. Somewhere in the early 1980s, I came back home from a two-week holiday spent in Cuba. In addition to the Varadero beaches and cocktails served in the taverns of Havana once frequented by Hemingway, I was interested to understand the extent of our involvement there. I asked plenty of questions of local people, both Russians and Cubans, read some materials, and tried to assess the scope of our assistance to this country. The result showed that this "Freedom" Island could every year live two months doing nothing, with us paying the expenses. When in Moscow, I shared my observations with Stepan Chervonenko. He was at the time in charge of a Central Committee Department and one of the people truly anxious about interests of our country. He listened to me attentively, making some notes, then he sighed and said, "There is little to be done about it, but don't tell Andrey Gromyko about it, otherwise you will get into trouble."

Cuba was in a special category; however, there were also Angola, from where we managed to withdraw in the years of Perestroika, and Ethiopia, where we didn't have time to resolve the situation, so it all ended with Mengistu's shameful flight and our billions going to waste. There were monetary injections to the African National Congress, and a great many other things. Now, take the "brotherly cooperation" with the socialist countries that somehow resulted in our debts to each one of them. Or take the "establishment of order" in Hungary and Czechoslovakia. Thank God, we were wise enough not to get involved into the events in Poland, since the picture of Afghanistan was still too vivid to us. However, we were in earnest arguing that losing Poland would amount to acknowledging the failure of the historical experiment.

Well, now let me make some sort of conclusions.

1. Little by little, the unpleasant aspects of our life before Perestroika are fading away from our memory. Many of its achievements are perceived as something taken for granted.

2. The problems that had accumulated over decades became apparent not at once; therefore, it is not always possible to establish their cause and effect relations.
   My conclusion is as follows: By 1985, "thanks" to the efforts of its previous leaders, starting with Stalin and ending with Chernenko, the Soviet Union had found itself in such a bad state that it was doomed 80%. Anatoly Chernyayev wrote: "When the boss (Mikhail Gorbachev) faced the truth, the country was already standing on the edge."
3. Was it possible to save the USSR? Who can answer this question now? In any way, it would have required enormous efforts of a whole cohort of selfless and educated people with truly new thinking. The CPSU together with its staff selection system could not find such people.
4. All honor to Mikhail Gorbachev for his attempts to get the country out of the quagmire, because he could have easily chosen a quieter and more comfortable life for himself. Ultimately, you have to choose what is dearer to you — your country or yourself. There are few political leaders choosing the former.
5. Russia, regardless of the circumstances, or delays or rollbacks, will never forget the wind of glasnost and freedom that started to blow in the years of Perestroika.
6. The achievements on the international stage, including putting an end to confrontation, scaling down of the arms race, reconciliation with the outside world, and repudiation of ideological dogmas, are, perhaps, its main strategic attainment.

It is no secret the attitudes in Russia towards Gorbachev and Perestroika in general are less favorable than in the rest of the world. There are very few people who have been targeted with so much criticism, some of it, perhaps, justified. As for me, I cannot bring myself to throw a stone at those who tried to storm the skies.

---

[1] I know for sure that a report with these findings was for several months pigeonholed at Politburo Member Andrey Gromyko's office and was filed away later, with no action taken.

[2] One of our best military experts V. Dvorkin once explained to me that, among other reasons to that, there was a severe psychological trauma of 1941, when the country lost overnight almost all of its weapons; therefore they tried to accumulate as much weapons as possible.

GORBACHEV AND PERESTROIKA: FORESIGHT AND HINDSIGHT

by Rodric Braithwaite

Sir Rodric Braithwaite is former Ambassador of the United Kingdom to the Soviet Union and Russia (in 1988-1999). Subsequently, he served as an adviser to UK Prime Minister John Major. He is the author of the book Across the River, in which he describes his life as Ambassador in Moscow.

There is a crucial difference between writing history and making it. When you write history you have the inestimable advantage of hindsight. You can see how and why the statesmen made their mistakes. From there it is very easy to slip into the belief that the statesmen were blind, stupid or villainous when they embarked on a course of action that ended in disaster.

That is a failure of imagination on the part of the historians. Even the best statesmen, even those with the most well-developed political instincts, have to operate in the dark. They may judge, but they cannot know, what will happen tomorrow, let alone in a year or a decade. They have to stumble forward as best they can.

What is true of politicians and generals is true of all of us in our everyday lives. The biggest decision most of us ever take is to get married. That too is a leap into the dark, and that too does not always turn out well.

That is why we should be modest and cautious when we judge those who take part in great events. It is easy to say that Gorbachev, or Reagan, or Mrs Thatcher, should have done this rather than that. Surely Gorbachev could see that he was initiating a process which would bring the Soviet Union to an end? Surely he knew that the Soviet Union was bound to fly apart under nationalist pressure from the Union Republics?

Well, the first thing to remember is that Gorbachev was not the only one who failed to foresee that. So until the last minute, did many of the best analysts in the CIA, the JIC, the KGB, and academia. And even among those who had long believed that the Soviet Union could not survive indefinitely, there was almost no one who foresaw the timing.

There is a view that the Soviet collapse was a consequence of American victory in the Cold War. That is a gross oversimplification. The Soviet Union collapsed of its own weight, I believe, because it was an

unviable system. Competition with America was important because it added a significant external pressure to the strains which the system was already generating within itself. But it was not the root cause.

After the massive devastation of the Second World War the Soviets rebuilt their country after a fashion, but with amazing speed. Soviet military science and industry forged ahead. Soviet scientists and engineers mastered thermonuclear fusion, built formidable bombs and rockets and catapulted a dog, and then a man, into space. The Soviet leaders and the Soviet people felt — for the first time in their history — that they were beating the West at its own game of technical excellence. The Party Programme of 1961 predicted that within twenty years the Soviet consumer would be provided with an abundance of material and cultural goods.

But by then observers inside and outside the country were already beginning to see the skull beneath the skin. One of the earliest people to predict the demise of the Soviet Union was George Kennan. In an article which appeared in *Foreign Affairs* in April 1951 he said confidently that Soviet power would eventually run its course, or would fundamentally change its spirit and the nature of its leadership. Being a wise man, he did not attempt to put a term to this prediction.

By the late 1950s the Soviet Union was already in deep domestic crisis. Its political and economic system had been crude, brutal, but successful in meeting the demands of forced industrialisation, war, and post-war reconstruction. But thereafter it became too muscle-bound and sclerotic to meet the demands of peace. Ambitious and hugely expensive investment projects lay unfinished for years, sometimes for decades. Shoddy goods, which even the long-suffering Soviet consumer refused to buy, piled up in the warehouses. Social services were underfunded. Agriculture lurched from one crisis to another. Concealed unemployment was on the increase. Advanced technology produced by the Soviet Union's brilliant scientists and technicians languished on the drawing boards because there was no effective mechanism to bring it into production. Above all, despite its successes in space and defence, Soviet technology was lagging increasingly behind the West. These things were evident to those who, like myself, were living in Moscow in the 1960s. You only had to travel a few kilometres outside the capital to see how poor the Soviet Union really was. The British businessmen with whom I dealt at the time were continually amazed by the gap they perceived between Soviet achievements in space and the gross waste and incompetence in the Soviet factories which they visited. For some reason these facts were less self-evident to Sovietologists in the West, many of whom knew little Russian

history, had only a rough grasp of the language, and had never been to the place.

These weaknesses were of course also evident to the Soviet leadership. By the early 1960s they knew that the economy was stagnant. The economy worked as well as it did only because of the lubrication provided by the all-embracing system of *blat*; because of the emergence of an underclass of *tolkachi*, fixers and middlemen who could provide the connection between supply and demand that the central planners were unable to encompass; and above all because of the heroic efforts of managers in the factories and the farms, driven as they were by a mixture of dedication, ambition, ruthlessness, and a well-grounded fear of the consequences of failure which in Stalin's day could be literally fatal. Official statistics claimed that growth continued, even if the tempos were reduced. But in 1964 a young economist from Novosibirsk, Abel Aganbegyan, told his professional colleagues that the official figures were false, and advised his listeners to use the figures put out by the CIA instead.

Khrushchev, who was First Secretary of the Soviet Communist Party from 1953 to 1964, was not a fool. He knew he had a serious problem on his hands. At first he tried the traditional solutions — mounting political campaigns, punishing scapegoats, and fiddling with the administrative system. He imported Western technology and Western grain. He grumbled about *izhdivenchestvo* — the dependency culture which encouraged people to do nothing until they had received orders and funds from above.

But each new "reform" simply produced new problems. In the early 1960s Khrushchev permitted a more fundamental debate. It was my job to follow it, and a fascinating business it was. Soviet economists were divided. Some thought that a version of the old central planning machinery could be made to work if it were computerised. Others believed that this was impossible in principle: even the most powerful computer could never capture and process the volume of information needed to replicate the complexity of a living economy. Instead they timidly began to advocate solutions which bordered on the heretical. Professor Liberman, and a number of young economists, who later became prominent under Gorbachev, worked out ways of replicating market forces by simulating more realistic interest rates, and by introducing a carefully controlled notion of "profit". The debate was serious, well-informed, and intellectually challenging. But no one dared to argue that the reintroduction of private property would be by far the best means of encouraging economic actors to behave rationally.

At the height of the debate in late 1964, the British ambassador in Moscow told the Foreign Office that "for all the talk of profit, [it is not] in the least likely that the Soviet Government will ever allow individual citizens to amass private wealth and put it to work: they shoot the few who try." Years later I met an entrepreneur in Rostov-on-Don who had himself been part of the underground economy at this time. For him the men who were shot — Roifman, Shakerman, and others (some of whose "crimes" were committed even before Khrushchev passed the relevant law) — were genuine martyrs in the sacred cause of free enterprise.

Nevertheless in 1965 Prime Minister Kosygin did make a systematic though unambitious attempt at economic reform. The attempt was stifled by bureaucratic resistance and Brezhnev's desire for an easy life. The intellectual ferment of the Khrushchev years was brought to an end, though echoes of it continued into the 1980s. Public discourse was again dominated by tired slogans from the old ideology. High oil prices enabled Brezhnev to continue the arms race with America, to engage in the Soviet Union's pointless and provocative lurches into Africa and Latin America, and to provide a modest but comforting increase in the standards of living of ordinary people. The regime bought itself time.

But the warnings continued. In 1970 Andrey Sakharov warned Brezhnev that "dislocation and stagnation" in the economy would continue to grow unless something was done about the "anti-democratic norms of public life" set up by Stalin and never wholly abandoned.[1] "The more novel and revolutionary the aspect of the economy," he said, "the wider becomes the rift between the USA and ourselves." The Soviet Union "could gradually revert to the status of a second-rate provincial power." In the same year the dissident Andrey Amalrik wrote a pamphlet entitled *Can the Soviet Union survive until 1984?* In 1974, Baibakov, the Chairman of the State Planning Committee, Gosplan, warned that the economy was in serious trouble.

Morale declined among the Party's own officials as they realised the extent and nature of the crisis. Mikhail Gorbachev saw discontent grow among ordinary people as the volume and variety of goods in the shops declined. Yeltsin, then First Party Secretary of the Sverdlovsk Region, told the people of Sverdlovsk in 1981 that food rationing would continue: families could expect no more than one kilo of meat products per person on holiday occasions — May Day and Revolution Day.

In per capita consumption the Soviet Union was, by the late 1980s, in seventy-seventh place in the world. Forty four per cent of Soviet pensioners received less than the official subsistence minimum. In 1989 Gorbachev's Health Minister Chazov revealed publicly that one in four Soviet hospitals had no drains and one in six no running water; that tens of

thousands of medical workers received wages below the poverty level; and that the USSR spent less on health care than any other developed country. These are official Soviet figures. Whatever Gorbachev's domestic critics may now say, the Soviet economic and social system had failed long before Gorbachev started to tinker with it.

One of the great achievements of Soviet policy — perceived as early as 1958 by the policy planners in the British Foreign Office — was the achievement of nuclear parity with the United States. By the early 1980s, this achievement was under serious threat as Reagan's newly confident America began to rearm. Even the most conservative among the members of the PolitBuro and the General Staff realised that some changes were necessary if the Soviet Union was not to lose its position as an effective military rival to the United States. After the stagnation of the Brezhnev years they needed to find a new leader, younger, more energetic, more imaginative than his predecessors, someone who could repair what was broken in the Soviet system. They found Gorbachev.

Someone else who found Gorbachev was Mrs Thatcher. And that, she claims in her memoirs, was because she was looking for him. Under the tutelage of some right-wing conservative academics, she had spent a good deal of time reading and thinking about the nature of the Soviet Union even before she came to office. In spring of 1980 she organised a meeting with me and Christopher Mallaby, who had just returned from Moscow where he had been head of the political section. After we finally persuaded her to stop ranting and start listening, Christopher proceeded to give her a brilliant and detailed analysis of just what was going wrong with the Soviet Union. She said: "If that's what it's like, the system is going to fly apart." We hastened to assure her that the Party, the KGB, and the army still had a strong grip, and that the collapse was not imminent. But I was struck that her mind was a whole lot more open than I had expected.

It was easy enough, when one met him, to see why Mrs Thatcher thought that Gorbachev was a man with whom she could do business. His first discussions with Mrs Thatcher and Geoffrey Howe in December 1984 demonstrated the breathtaking difference between him and his predecessors. Here was a man who — unlike Brezhnev — had mastered his briefs and could speak without advisers, confident, lively, and intelligent, who obviously enjoyed giving Mrs Thatcher as good as he got in argument. Even those of us who saw only the dry official records could sense the excitement.

Gorbachev was elected General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union three months later, in March 1985. He was the last person ever to hold that post.

In the five years that followed the settled view of the political, military and intelligence establishments in London and Washington was that *perestroika*, *demokratisatsia* and *glasnost* were a cunning Communist trap, designed to gain time to repair the Soviet economy and prepare for another leap forward. Those who thought Gorbachev might mean what he said with his talk of reform believed that his ideas would be successfully opposed by the barons of the Party, the KGB, and the military. Everyone deplored the Gorbymania sweeping the West, because they believed it would undermine the popular will to resist Communism. At the end of 1988 CIA analysts predicted that the main threat to American security over the next two decades would be the Soviet Union.

The moment of Gorbachev's greatest triumph at home and abroad was in the first half of 1989. That winter he announced at the United Nations a programme of unilateral arms reductions which met almost all the demands the West had been making of the Soviet Union for a decade. The West regarded it as yet another trap, and the new administration in Washington — Bush the Father — took several months before they decided it was genuine after all. It was the first move in a process which led to the withdrawal of Soviet troops in Europe, the reunification of Germany, and the break up of the Soviet Union which was almost exactly co-terminous with the old Tsarist Empire. No doubt these momentous changes would eventually have happened sooner or later. Thanks to Gorbachev, they happened with an absence of bloodshed unprecedented in the history of other declining empires, including the British empire.

At home Gorbachev organised the first genuine elections to take place in Russia since the election of the ill-fated Constituent Assembly seventy-two years earlier. By Western standards the electoral system was less than ideal, and had a built-in bias in favour of the Communist party. But it gave the elector real choice, and in Moscow, Leningrad, Kiev and elsewhere the electors used their votes with great sophistication to throw out the old Communist administration and elect new figures associated with reform.

These elections preceded the first free elections in Poland by three months. Polish friends told us when we lived there in the late 1950s that reform in Poland could never be secure until there was fundamental change in the Soviet Union. Now the Poles and the other members of the Warsaw Pact were free to pursue their own destinies.

Ironically it was at this moment of his greatest triumph that Gorbachev's popularity at home began to wane. There were three main reasons for this.

The first was his failure to take a grip on the economy, which was going into free fall. The liberal economists of the 1960s now resurfaced. They gave Gorbachev good advice, some of it quite far-reaching. But it

was never sufficiently radical to replace the failed system of central planning with something that might eventually work. By the autumn of 1990 the standard of living had fallen, unemployment had greatly increased, and the shops had emptied. The man in the Russian street was at first equally delighted with Gorbachev's direct manner. His walkabouts in Moscow and Leningrad in the early years of *Perestroika* were triumphant occasions. Now the people turned against him.

Second, the unrest in the Union republics, combined with the humiliation of the withdrawal from Germany and the concessions Gorbachev made over arms control, began increasingly to upset even those military and Party conservatives who had originally supported him. In the smoke-filled rooms some of them were already calling him a traitor.

Third, the liberal intelligentsia of Moscow and Leningrad now began to desert him as well. They were suspicious of the way he continued to operate through the Communist Party, which was reforming more slowly than he hoped. They were critical of his failure to grasp the economic nettle. They deserted him for Yeltsin, whom they believed to be a truer "democrat."

The result was that by the end of 1990 Gorbachev's policies were in ruins, and the way was open for the right wing attempt at a coup in August 1991. People in the West had been aware of the risk of a coup against Gorbachev from the beginning of 1989 if not earlier. The Foreign Office and I used to correspond about it. Our Russian friends used to warn us about it. So in one sense none of us were surprised when it happened. But none of us — including Gorbachev himself, of course — predicted the date, except the CIA. They told Bush a few days in advance that the coup might happen in the week beginning 19 August, and they were right. As far as I know they had no secret information to back their judgement. They just analysed the information generally available — to the press as well — rather better than we did.

But even the CIA did not predict that the coup would fail. On the contrary, they assumed, like we all assumed, that any coup backed by the Party, the army and the KGB would be bound to succeed for a time — perhaps for a long time, even if the Soviet system would eventually be forced back to the path of reform. But the tide of political change that Gorbachev introduced had undermined all the old certainties in the minds of many ordinary people, and even in the minds of those who led the coup. It was after all the Minister of Defence, Marshal Yazov, who decided to withdraw the tanks from Moscow rather than risk the shedding of blood.

Gorbachev had all the ambition, all the energy, all the cunning, all the vanity, and all the ruthlessness that a politician needs to rise to the top of the greasy pole. He also had the courage to think unorthodox thoughts,

to push them through against determined opposition from the old guard, and to change his mind if the circumstances demanded. Of course he made many mistakes. Unlike many politicians, he is now prepared to admit a number of them.

Gorbachev is now widely accused among his own people and elsewhere of having had no strategy for reform, of failing to tackle the problems of the economy, of being too weak to contain the forces of reaction, of not responding effectively to the movements for independence in the Union republics, of not foreseeing that his policies would lead to the collapse of the Soviet Union and his own loss of office, of not abandoning his belief in Communism in time or perhaps at all.

Many of these criticisms benefit heavily from hindsight. They fail to take account of the intrinsic difficulty, which all politicians face, of acting without a clear knowledge of how your actions will pan out. They also fail to take account of the fact that the Soviet Union was intrinsically resistant to reform, and that the apparatus of the state was still well able to put an incautious reformer in his place. Gorbachev always feared that he would wake up one day to discover that he had suffered the fate of Khrushchev, that he had unexpectedly fallen ill, and that he had been removed from office by his sympathetic friends. He was accused of being too timid. But his fear was not an idle one. On 19 July 1991 he was taken into custody by the hard men and the world was told that ill-health prevented him from exercising his responsibilities. It was almost exactly an action replay of what happened to Khrushchev in October 1961. Only this time the outcome was different.

Gorbachev himself believed that he did have a strategy for reform. He believed that the Soviet Union could only recover from its profound crisis if it withdrew from its empire abroad, cut back on its military expenditure, tapped into the talents of ordinary people by opening up society through some process of democracy, and introduced some kind of economic reform.

What Gorbachev did not have was a detailed blueprint for the measures needed to push through this strategy. He believed that no such blueprint was possible, that he had to make process piecemeal, wherever he could, in the light of the domestic and international situation as it developed. That was a reasonable belief. It is in practice how most great reformers have operated.

His inability to grapple with the economy was his greatest failure. This was where his political instincts, which served him well in dealing with international affairs and domestic politics, failed him. He understood little of how a modern economy worked. He feared that major reform would lead to popular unrest. He vacillated between the proposals put to him. In

the end he backed none of them. His successor Yeltsin, who understood less about economics than he did, simply took the bull by the horns and bashed ahead. The Yeltsin reforms were incoherent. They caused much hardship among ordinary people. They made a minority disgracefully rich. They encouraged corruption. But they set in train a process which was essential if Russia was eventually to become a modern state.

The withdrawal of support by the liberals and democrats who ran after Yeltsin instead made it much harder for Gorbachev to confront the forces of reaction. By the end of 1990 it seemed as if there was no one to whom he could look. The Party, military and the KGB were beginning to plot against him. So he ducked and weaved and economised with the truth and cajoled and bullied and harangued. He compromised right up to the limit with the men who had the guns and tapped the telephones. It was only at the last minute that he managed to avoid being co-opted into their camp. Had he not done so, his place in history would now look very different. I believe that the incoherence and political blindness of the liberals and the intelligentsia was as much to blame for what went wrong in 1990 and 1991 as any of Gorbachev's own vacillations and miscalculations.

Gorbachev's failure to foresee and act on the rise of sentiment in the Union republics is one of the main counts against him in the eyes of those who regret the collapse of the Soviet Union and hold him responsible. These people would have stuck at nothing, including bloodshed, to hold the Union together. They were behind the shootings in Vilnius and elsewhere at the beginning of 1991. For most of the rest of us, the independence of the Balts, the Ukrainians and others is a good thing. When we criticise Gorbachev's nationalities policy, are we regretting that his attempts to keep them in the Union through peaceful negotiation were a failure? Are we saying that he should have encouraged them to leave the Union right from the beginning, despite the strong risk of provoking a right wing backlash? Or are we simply indulging in a particularly egregious piece of hindsight?

It seems unreasonable to pick on Gorbachev for failing to see that his policies would lead to the collapse of the Soviet Union. The failure was shared until the last minute by almost everyone else both in the East and in the West.

Gorbachev has continued to maintain faith with what he believes are the basic principles of "Socialism". Long before his fall these had already evolved in his mind to something much closer to the Social Democracy of the West than to the brutal and incompetent rigours of Soviet Communism. In this he differed from those members of the Party who spent their lives mouthing its sacred platitudes, and then abandoned it

without a qualm. I think that Gorbachev's struggle to be true to his past and to maintain some degree of intellectual consistency is not at all to his discredit. But then I believe, unlike Mrs Thatcher, that Social Democracy is a perfectly respectable part of the European political tradition.

Gorbachev's great achievement was to ease Russia into a profound historical transition. He broke with the discredited Soviet system and took the first steps towards transforming it into something more democratic and more efficient. He took the crucial initiatives which brought about the end of the Cold War. A different Soviet leadership might have tried to resist the pressure of history, and that would have made the task much harder, much bloodier, and much more dangerous for all of us.

Thereafter Gorbachev's historical task was done, and it was left to his successors to carry Russia on to the next stage. It is not clear that they have managed better than he did. Russia's path to genuine political and economic stability, to a system which for the first time in its history is designed to benefit ordinary people rather than the rich and the powerful, is bound to be a long one, a matter of generations not decades. There will inevitably be setbacks as well as progress. Those who believe that the future is inherently unpredictable will not want to forecast more confidently than that.

None of that detracts from the fact that Gorbachev's own people owe him a debt. It is not entirely surprising that they are reluctant to recognise it. Losing an empire was painful; but not as painful as fighting a nuclear war. The future may be uncertain, but Gorbachev provided the Russians with an opportunity that in the end only they can secure. His place in history is safe. Even his countrymen, even those in the West who benefit from 20/20 hindsight, will in the end come to appreciate it.

---

[1] Sakharov's warning to Brezhnev is taken from *The Awakening of the Soviet Union*, Geoffrey Hosking's 1988 Reith Lectures.

TO BE CONTINUED

by Vadim Zagladin

Vadim Zagladin was Adviser to the President of the Gorbachev Foundation, Doctor of Philosophy, Professor; in the years of Perestroika, Member of the Central Committee of the CPSU, First Deputy Head of the International Department of the CPSU Central Committee, Secretary of the Commission on Foreign Affairs of the Soviet of the Union of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, Adviser to the President of the USSR.

After the Central Committee's Plenum at which Mikhail Gorbachev was unanimously elected General Secretary of the Party Central Committee, the speech he delivered at the meeting became the subject of thorough research and abundant commentary. Responses to the speech were mostly positive, however, with a hint of wait-and-see attitude: What would it all mean?

I personally asked myself similar questions. Did I expect any serious and dramatic turns in the policies of the country?

By the beginning of 1985, I had already formed my impression of the new General Secretary, his ideas, and his aspirations. Nevertheless, I cannot say that at that time, in the early 1985, I cherished any particular hopes or was full of rosy expectations. I realized that Gorbachev's intentions were laudable and deserved the deepest respect. However, would he be successful in realizing them? Here I was not that sure. That was because, in the first place, I was not sure whether other members of the party leadership would support those intentions. Knowing them personally and meeting them at sessions of the Politburo and the Secretariat and from my own personal working contacts with them, I was rather convinced of the opposite.

The ideas of Gorbachev seemed to me to be very distant from the sentiments and plans of the majority of the Party leaders. They were used to all things present. For many of them the main thing was to make sure that nothing changes so they could live the rest of their lives sitting comfortably in their leadership chairs. The theory of "personnel stability" that took root in the 1970s clearly reflected those sentiments and, on the other hand, was a good cover for opponents of any serious change.

Of course, Gorbachev realized all this much better and deeper than my colleagues at the Department and me. The majority of my work fellows showed their understanding and support for the changes that were made

later in the Party and state leadership. Some of them only regretted that those changes did not reach their logical conclusion. Another cause of regret was the fact that new personnel were taken from the pool of *nomenklatura*, which supplied only such "new" staff as would fully possess the qualities of the "old guard." The effects of this were seen in a most explosive manner in the days of the August coup of 1991.

Therefore, I had no great expectations at the time when Perestroika started. I was somewhat skeptical even later, too, though, of course, my expectations were changing. Gorbachev's vigorous steps and manifestations of his determination would give rise to growing expectations. Certain difficulties that emerged would dampen them. However, what always remained unchanged was my faith in the sincerity of intentions and goals of the first and the last President of the Union.

The issue of Perestroika's prospects and of our future immediately became an on-going subject of discussions at meetings that I had as part of my official duties with representatives of foreign political parties and states. Of course, Gorbachev was informed about those meetings. He insisted that they be used to explain our positions. He himself took a most active part in this activity and always did well in those meetings.

Moreover, during his conversations with foreign guests, Gorbachev often was more eloquent and convincing than in his public speeches at home, especially in the initial period after his election. Here at home, he felt the burden of the past and the inherited stereotypes of making "policy guidance" speeches, which generally were lackluster and contained few novel ideas. It is true, though, that very soon Mikhail Gorbachev understood that this style did not at all correspond to the spirit of Perestroika and its dynamics. So, he started changing it. However, in his conversations with foreign public figures Gorbachev was more relaxed and tried to put across the meaning of his ideas to his interlocutors. He was quite convincing, which did not go unnoticed.

It so happened that literally on the next day after the funeral of Konstantin Chernenko, I had to go to Germany and then to France. Prior to my departure, Gorbachev told me to try my best to bring home to my interlocutors the meaning of what was said at the Central Committee Plenum and the thrust of our intentions.

As early as on March 15, upon my arrival to Bonn, Germany, I met Egon Bahr, an extraordinary figure who was close to Willy Brandt. In the cozy atmosphere of Bahr's apartment we spent time discussing in detail the developments in Moscow, our plans and hopes for the future. My interlocutor listened to me with delight and amazement. Obviously, he wanted to hope for positive changes and, at the same time, he could not believe they were possible. Even among those who felt friendly towards our country, the years of stagnation cultivated a feeling of extreme

caution and strong doubts as to the possibility of serious reform — and Bahr, who frequently visited Moscow, keenly felt the atmosphere and it filled him with no illusions.

Soon after that, an interview by Gorbachev appeared in Moscow, in which he announced termination of the process of deployment of intermediate-range missiles. Bahr called me at home and literally shouted out into the phone, "Now I'm starting to believe!"

On Monday, March 18, I paid a visit to Willy Brandt, whom I personally had known since the early 1970s. Bahr had already told him about our conversation. Brandt showered me with questions about the possible scenarios. Naturally, I could not tell him anything definite, because the new positions were still "in the pipeline." However, even the general information I could share was like a breath of fresh air for him. Of course, Brandt was keen to know about Gorbachev — as a political leader and a human being. He was trying to understand with whom he was going to do business. Here I was able to give more definite answers, based on my own opinions of him, described above.

The first face-to-face meeting between Brandt and Gorbachev took place later. However, they managed to find common ground very soon, first on international problems and somewhat later on the concept of socialism — in its axiological, rather than doctrinaire and formal interpretation. Until his last day, Brandt treated Gorbachev with genuine respect and saw him as a valuable partner and a friend. Gorbachev, too, highly valued his relationship with the patriarch of the German social democracy.

Such a relationship emerged as a result of long reflections, even doubts — probably, on both sides; for both parties could inherit from the past only mutual resentment. In our country, social democracy for decades had been presented as an enemy and at times (under Stalin) even as enemy number one. Echoes of that were still felt in the first years of Perestroika. In his conversations with representatives of Western communist parties in 1985-86, Gorbachev on a couple of occasions suggested that there was nothing to be learned from the social democrats and that it was very important for the communists not to slip into the path of social democracy. However, later, as they were getting to know each other better and with exposure to the real policies of the Socialist International, Gorbachev's views started to change. In real life, Gorbachev and Brandt, political leaders who were close in spirit but at the same time very different, proved to be not only compatible, but also in some ways complementary. The death of Brandt was a heavy personal loss for Gorbachev.

From Bonn, I flew to Paris. There I had a conversation with Georges Marchais, General Secretary of the Central Committee of the French Communist Party, then a breakfast with Pierre Mauroy, leader of the

Socialist Party, and a meeting with President Fran□ois Mitterand, an old acquaintance of mine. I had other meetings, as well, since the number of those interested in "what was happening there in Moscow" was clearly greater than I could handle during my stay in Paris. However, the interest was always absolutely sincere, although not uniform — in terms of nuance and substance.

Mitterrand, who after his election as President had seemed to consciously distance himself somewhat from contacts with Moscow, started reinvigorating relations in 1984. He paid a visit to the Soviet Union and "defrosted" some of the old ideas. He was also very interested in the promise the changes in the Soviet leadership held for him. He "took notice" of Gorbachev already during that trip, because of his rather uninhibited remarks made at the lunch given by the Soviet leadership in honor of their French guest. When in Moscow, he questioned me about Gorbachev. Of course, I spoke with required caution, but I did try to strengthen Mitterand's interest in the new young Member of the Politburo. Mitterrand asked if Gorbachev could take the post of the country's leader. My answer was evasive, although I did not exclude such a possibility. Years later, when Gorbachev came to Paris on a visit, already in the capacity of head of his foundation, Mitterrand reminded him of that trip to Moscow. "Already then, Zagladin pointed to you as a man of the future," he said. I was pleased that the President remembered it, although at the same time I was embarrassed by his remark, since Mitterrand "disclosed" the contents of a purely private conversation...

Upon my return to Moscow, I conveyed my impressions of the trip to Gorbachev — naturally, via his assistant. However, this was not the end of the discussion with our foreign partners of the changes that took place. Every day one of them would come to Moscow. Visits were paid in those days, among others, by Lothar Spath, one of the leaders of the Christian Democratic Union of the FRG, and Guy Spitaels, President of the Belgian Socialist Party. Precisely in that period, a delegation from the U.S. House of Representatives came and had talks in the Supreme Soviet, which lasted for two days. In each case, they would again and again ask, "What are we to expect?" Perhaps, the Europeans showed more visible interest in the changes in Moscow, than the Americans. The Germans and the Belgians asked in the first place about the prospects for disarmament talks, while the Americans were above all interested in the human rights.

Anyway, judging by my own impressions, I could conclude that the world was full of expectations, expectations of something about to happen. However, what was this something? Everybody saw it differently. Still, I don't think anybody expected — at least in the first months after the election of the new General Secretary — the kind of changes that

became the hallmark of the years that followed. There were people who hoped for them, but they did not believe themselves. The great majority of people still had doubts...

The number of real signs of change grew with time. However, the signals that were sent to public opinion and to the outside world were rather conflicting, particularly, in the first couple of years of Perestroika (though, it happened later as well). Responses towards them kept changing, too.

In 1985, much talk in the country and abroad was caused by the meeting on economic problems, to be exact, the problems of scientific and technological progress, held in the Party Central Committee in early June. Speaking at the meeting, Gorbachev for the first time gave a compelling critical analysis of the situation in the areas that were clearly defined and vitally important for the country. The fact that the Soviet Union was increasingly lagging behind Western countries in science and technology was publicly acknowledged at the highest level. This gap was widely discussed in the foreign printed media before Perestroika. Many of those who specialized in criticizing socialism were inspired by the meeting: now the top man in Moscow admitted they had been right all the way!

I got extremely interested in a peculiar reaction shown by the left circles of the Western public who were divided into two groups at the time. The first group, which used to hold retrograde, conservative positions, was indignant: what was the need for Gorbachev to mention it all? All right, it was true, but this truth — well, it was harmful to the interests of socialism. Some of our experts expressed similar opinions; however, there were only a few of them. Of course, a nice lie is less irritating than a hard-hitting truth. However, such a lie is a huge impediment to development. The other group, on the contrary, welcomed the truth, seeing the very fact of its disclosure as a sign of recovery and a catalyst of progress.

Our comrades from the Italian Communist Party belonged to the second group. Their long standing position was to critically treat everything that in their view was in conflict with the ideals of socialism and created obstacles for its development, while welcoming all the achievements of the Soviet Union and all its steps that actually served the cause of peace and disarmament. The Italian comrades expressed their opinions openly, without diplomatic niceties. Such behavior found no understanding with the Soviet leadership, which often regarded any criticism as a hostile act against our country. All this resulted in numerous cases of misunderstanding perceived rather dramatically by both sides.

Shortly before Perestroika, there even was talk about a possible split between the CPSU and the Italian Communist Party. To a certain extent, it was due to a public statement made by Enrico Berlinguer, Secretary of

the Italian Communist Party. He said that in the light of the recent events (invasion of Afghanistan by the Soviet troops, the political crisis in Poland, etc.) the "appeal of the October Revolution was at a point of been exhausted." The said events and the stagnation itself that was in progress in our country made an extremely unfavorable impression on the foreign public, including, and, maybe especially so, its left segment, which included the communists. The image of the Soviet Union suffered a great damage at that time.

Gorbachev realized it very well. Overall, he did not see anything bad in the critical attitude of our Italian friends to the Soviet reality. In fact, deep in his heart he regarded such an approach as the right one, that would facilitate the overcoming of difficulties in our development. He clearly did not see the complications that occurred as a tragedy. He was also convinced that the past had to be left to the past, and that it was necessary to continue moving along the path of real cooperation. He certainly was aware of the fact that not all leaders of the CPSU could agree with such an approach. That is why he was very cautious.

During his trip to the funeral of Enrico Berlinguer in summer 1984, Gorbachev tried to make a first breach in the growing wall that could separate the CPSU and the biggest Communist Party in the Western world. He said to his friends several times, "You said it a hundred times that the ICP was autonomous and independent. The CPSU has recognized your independence a thousand times. What next? Shall we continue repeating these truths all over again? No, this page has to be turned." During the visit by a delegation of the ICP to the funeral of Konstantin Chernenko, Gorbachev agreed with Alessandro Natta, new Secretary of the Italian Communist Party, to have a meeting and discuss in detail everything that was of interest to both sides. This meeting took place in the beginning of 1986, on the eve of the 27th Congress of the CPSU.

There is a detailed record of this conversation. I believe it is still of interest not only as a document of international diplomacy, because, in fact, there was little diplomacy to it, if any. What makes it interesting is, on the one hand, an illustration of evolution of Gorbachev's views in the process of developing the concept of Perestroika and, on the other hand, an example of a practical approach towards overcoming mutual misunderstanding and establishing truly friendly relations.

In the course of the said talks, which lasted two days, it became absolutely clear that the only thing separating us was exactly our mutual misunderstanding, which in many ways had to do with the attachment of the Soviet side to the stereotypes and myths of the Communist International past. In reality, those were real comrades and like-minded associates. Recalling those meetings later, Gorbachev would say that, in fact, the Italian comrades were right in focusing attention on the

nationalities question, while we, seemingly understanding the situation, acted too late to address it... Ultimately, the nationalities question proved to be one of those dangerous rocks on which the boat of the Soviet Union crashed in the end.

Matters of economy were also touched upon during those conversations. Our comrades spoke very highly of Gorbachev's report at the meeting on the scientific and technological progress. They enquired what reforms had to be implemented to overcome the difficulties that had emerged. Later, during an impromptu lunch held in an informal atmosphere they said that, in their view, it was very important to be consistent in those matters and to avoid deviations from the chartered course. They said such deviations were possible, because some of the fundamental issues still lacked clarity as to the direction of reform. In particular, they asked whether economic creativity of the masses would really be given a chance. All those questions had not a hint of hostility. In fact, they showed a genuine interest in the developments and the desire to have everything go smoothly. After our meetings in January 1986, the way to further development of our relations with the Italian friends was cleared.

The theme "What is Gorbachev and what could (or could not) be expected of him" continues to be controversial even today. Both the attitudes towards Mikhail Gorbachev and the answers to this question kept changing like waves of a tide. There have been a great many legends about him, told and written. They tried to blame him for all the deadly sins, great and small, even for minor ones and they were not successful. Of course, he could be mistaken and he made mistakes. When he could do it and had enough time and strength he corrected them himself. However, more importantly, he wanted and always tried to follow without reservation the moral principles. Gorbachev attempted to bring together morality and politics. Moreover, in general, he succeeded in doing it, although it was (and had to be) extremely difficult.

Gorbachev has always been interested in this problem of balance between morality and politics. On numerous occasions I heard him asking the question of whether the two things were at all compatible. The first time I heard it was back in 1985, when during the preparations for a visit to France, his first trip abroad, we discussed in a close circle the problem of nuclear arms reduction — specifically, the things that could be mentioned during his future conversation with President Mitterrand. Mikhail Gorbachev was wondering whether it was moral to endlessly drag out discussions on disarmament, while letting the nuclear arms race continue unchecked. Later, he would ask this question at virtually every turn of Perestroika process. Every time he tried to seek solutions that would be justified from the moral standpoint.

The last time I heard this question about the compatibility of morality and politics from Gorbachev in the years of Perestroika was when he came back from his captivity at Foros and was preparing to meet a delegation from the Socialist International. However, this time his tone seemed rather sarcastic. "Well, what do you say now: Is politics compatible with morality?" He answered the question himself, "Now I am more than ever convinced that politics must be moral. Otherwise, it would be not politics, but — ."

Some time passed; and the bitter final days of 1991, Gorbachev's courageous decision to step down as President of the USSR, and the dignified statement made by him in this connection confirmed once again that Gorbachev remained true to his life's principle. This may be the single most important feature of his image and the corner stone of what he accomplished as one of the greatest political leaders of our complicated, dramatic, and unique era.

In the opening lines of these notes, I mentioned the fact that in the first years of Perestroika I cherished no particular hopes for the future. As far as I remember it today, most likely I personally got those hopes after the January Plenum of the CPSU Central Committee held in 1987. It was there that Gorbachev delivered a speech that described his intentions in even more detail than his famous report at the 27th Party Congress. The report made at the Congress was drawn up (as far as its phrases and expressions are concerned) to a considerable extent in the spirit of the "old times." Besides, the documents adopted by the Congress, namely, the new version of the Party Program and the resolution on the political report of the Central Committee, differed from each other too much. They seemed to have been adopted by different people. The Program was too literal in repeating the old formulas, while the Resolution was characterized by noticeable novelty of ideas and even words. However, the spirit of the January Plenum of the Central Committee held in 1987 was quite different, and so were its participants. The 27th Congress introduced significant changes into the composition of the Central Committee (as it proved rather soon, they were by no means sufficient). After the Congress, the composition of the Party Politburo and Secretariat was renewed (still, not sufficiently enough, as I thought even than). In short, Perestroika started to make itself felt as something real.

It was all this that gave rise to hopes. In spite of all the difficulties of Perestroika, despite its failure to achieve its goals, these hopes are still with me today. It is true that the decade following Perestroika was to a considerable extent wasted. It is true that even today we have an uphill road to travel. However, it seems to me that everything we have had to go through during the past years confirms the correctness of our choice of the course made twenty years ago. I believe that solutions to many problems of today can be found if we proceed along this course (continuity and renovation!).

Much has been said about why the reforms of the 1980s did not bring the expected result. Analyzed were both the objective difficulties, and the subjective aspects, the achievements, and the mistakes. However, in my opinion, the main reason was that society as a whole and even the majority of those who called themselves its vanguard were totally unprepared for serious changes necessitated by the new state of the world and the country. This thought first came to me and quickly consolidated under the impression from the 19th Party Conference and, later, from the Congress of People's Deputies in 1989. The division of society and the feeling of confusion experienced by the country were evident. The division was not too severe and disastrous, which was good. However, on the other hand, it was a sign that realization of the depth and seriousness of the changes had not yet reached the deeper layers of society. Speakers were using words and terms often without understanding their meaning and even without trying to comprehend the meaning of what they were saying...

In the beginning of 1991, to be exact, on January 21, while in Paris, I had to make a speech on the situation in the USSR at the French Senate. Those were difficult days — the events in Vilnius were giving rise to hysterical comments in the local press and to accusations fired at Gorbachev from all sides... I expected the President to make a statement to clarify the situation. However, he had not yet commented on the situation. What was I supposed to say? On my own responsibility, I made a statement saying that these developments were not the result of the will of or instructions by the President, but the consequence of manipulations by those who were against him. With this statement in hand, I went straight to the Senate.

The spirits there were very low. I met people's gloomy glances. I stated my viewpoint again. Somebody (do not remember who exactly) asked me, "Do you yourself believe in what you are saying?" I resented the question; nevertheless, my answer was restrained. Another question was asked, "So, how long is this all going to last?" Maybe, this time I should have also given a very general answer. But I said something that was really on my mind: "These changes will take a long time. We are not quite ready for them ourselves. This process is going to continue for at least as long as the life span of two or three generations." The audience was disappointed. I continued, "Now tell me, how many generations had changed in France after the Great Revolution before its ideals triumphed?" There was silence in the audience...

I still continue to believe today that the ideals of Perestroika will ultimately triumph. Its goals are in sync with the challenges of history. However, even today we are not quite "mature" for them. The process of this maturing will take another couple of generations. Epoch-making turns require patience...

Whatever they say, new thinking
has done a lot of work in the world arena.

NEW THINKING: YESTERDAY AND FOR THE FUTURE

by Anatoly Chernyayev

Anatoly Chernyayev is an associate with the Gorbachev Foundation, Project Leader; during the years of Perestroika, Aide to the General Secretary of the CPSU Central Committee in charge of international matters; subsequently, Aide to the President of the USSR, Member of the CPSU Central Committee.

I would like to give an outline of my perception of Perestroika as a phenomenon that "shaped an era" without going too deep into the historical record or indulging in polemics. I will omit both the opportunistic twists and turns and the purely personal factors. Likewise, I will not touch on the eternal but in fact trivial problem of the gap between the original plan and the outcome.

Twenty years... Were they the youth years of a new era or the period of a painful demise of the old one? If one tries to rate it using the criteria of a great culture as a source of improving the man and society, then it looks more like a demise. And if we look at world politics as a space and an engine for international activities, then it is the "youth," with all its extravagances, follies, claims and arrogant treatment of the past... Naturally, it is also characterized by the introduction of new rules, interdependencies and so on.

Perestroika deprived world politics of the 20th Century of its meaning. It made meaningless the participation of great many states on both sides of the confrontation. Whatever meaning there was turned out to be nonsense, a dangerous and anti-humane one... It happened immediately after one of the main players announced that he was not willing to participate in this deadly roulette game any longer.

This is a metaphor for what Gorbachev has performed. One may not recognize it, brand it, incriminate it or pin labels on it. However it is a bedrock accomplished historical fact, and no one can undo it. The international Cold War system collapsed. And that which was maturing under its cover, called later "globalization," broke its way through the debris of the Berlin Wall and into a new vast space, getting a new speed and scale. A new international system is rapidly taking shape to replace — and

I emphasize it specifically — the Cold War system. The whole world is compelled to adjust itself to the new situation... in the context of an unheard of freedom of choice, at that.

The main "feature" of the old system was the threat of a nuclear war. And the phenomenon which, alas, was by no means its centerpiece at the time, quickly, in a "Brownian movement" of the transitional period, turned into the foundation of a new system. That which used to be termed "North-West" is now called "international terrorism and campaign against it." The question is: Which of the two things is better — the Cold War with its inter-state terrorist order or globalization with the current terrorism (which also means fear and terror)? This question is not a rhetorical one, but something like: "What would have happened had there been something that, in fact, never occurred?"

Actually, what really has a true **historical significance for the 21st century** is the fact that the only superpower determining global politics, when the whole world makes a turn to a certain new order, placed **precisely waging war** against the really global terrorist danger into the foundation of its foreign strategy.

Within the framework of civilized search for a way out, it became possible to prevent a catastrophic outcome of the Cold War logic. The solution was found because the level of maturity (and experience of the international community) achieved toward the end of the 20th Century after the millennia of evolution allowed us to understand that in the future civilized transformation may proceed in a different way — along the lines of normal human common sense. This understanding penetrated even the utterly ideologized minds — and, fortunately, the mind of a person who could realize his intention with the tools of a powerful state.

I am not going to dwell upon the foreign policy of Perestroika.

I will confine myself to a few problems which, proceeding primarily from **national interests** to avoid a nuclear catastrophe, **had to be handled in a single possible way**, of course, if one acted responsibly.

So, was it necessary to stop the arms race? Yes, it was. It was necessary to eliminate the threat of a world war, to lessen the burden of the military-industrial complex that lay heavy upon all branches of the economy, mutilating it and bringing the living standards, disgracefully low as they were, even lower. The ossified patterns of functioning of the economy and the levers to control it had proved to be ineffective already 30 to 40 years earlier. The country was heading for a blind alley.

Moreover, we started to fall behind in the arms race because of our general lagging behind. Thus, the arms race was losing its political value as a deterrent.

Now, let's take nuclear weapons. Gorbachev moved a proposal to eliminate them by the year 2000. It did not work. The reason might well be the fact that the Soviet Union ceased to exist ten years before that date. Nevertheless, Gorbachev's idea proved to be fruitful, relevant and it is indeed working.

The above-mentioned objectives could not be achieved without moving towards a new type of relations with America, since international politics was determined by relations between the two superpowers, with its core and impetus represented by the arms race.

At the same time it implied revision of relations with the West in general, and our emergence from self-isolation from the most developed part of the international community. Hence, the policy of opening up to the world. The aim was to have the country join not just the world economy, but also the world civilization process in general, and do it as its integral part rather than as an antagonist. Hence, the policy of integration into Europe. Gorbachev revived the European process on a new foundation. His idea of a "common European home," once the subject of never-ending mockery, has taken root, after all. Slowly, haltingly, and with difficulty, but "the process got underway."

Such was the response of Perestroika to the rapidly growing interconnectedness and interdependency among all parts of the international community.

Otherwise, we would have been condemned to degradation in every sense of that word (it did happen anyway, though in its "delayed" version, since it was inherently present in the foundations of the Soviet system, for which history allotted a certain life time, but this time had expired long ago).

Next, the problem of having normal and, as much as possible, friendly relations with the entire outside world. Here Gorbachev's services are unquestionable, be it novelty of his ideas or specific steps. He was the first in the country to appreciate the significance of the Asia-Pacific Region and outline the ways to bring his country and this great and promising part of the world closer together. He made a good start in building new relations not only with practically all West-European countries, but also with India, China, Japan, Indonesia and some other Asian countries, as well as Latin American countries. It was a forward-looking policy. And that what he has started is relevant and continues working.

Was the withdrawal from Afghanistan necessary? Yes, it was necessary because the previous six years had revealed a totally criminal and ridiculous nature of the idea behind this intervention. There were financial considerations: 6 billion rubles of war expenditures annually. And, most importantly, there were moral reasons: nothing in the world can justify

suffering and loss of human lives. Withdrawal was also necessary because otherwise nobody would have believed us in earnest nor accepted our change of course. Likewise, a most important incentive to meet us half-way would not be in place.

Take reunification of Germany. What other stand could have been taken, when the German people (and above all our allies, citizens of the GDR) declared that they would no longer tolerate the existence of the Berlin Wall, which cut through the living fabric of the nation? Sending in tanks and "replicating 1968"? It would have meant a war in Europe and ruining all hopes for bringing our own country onto the path of modern progress.

Alternatively, were we supposed to slow down this process that was becoming an avalanche, engage in blackmail, or "skin the Germans alive"? Many proposed just that and are still of the same opinion. However, in this case (unless, of course, one accepts an armed conflict) unification would have taken place anyway, **without our involvement and against us**. And the united Germany would have been hostile toward us and an even more powerful instrument of the Cold War, rather than a friendly nation.

The unification of Germany (with the USSR playing the decisive role) did away with the Iron Curtain. **The Cold War was ended**, and it was the greatest event of the 20th century, comparable with the victory in World War II. Gorbachev was the person who made the main contribution to this.

Let's now take Eastern Europe. Here the situation is essentially the same as in case of the GDR, but with great differences in specific details. Suffice it to put a question: Did we really need any obedient and forcefully-kept allies, in effect, satellites in the context of ending the Cold War and confrontation? Probably, Gorbachev's reasoning was correct when he said once, "They got tired of us, and we got tired of them. Let's not be afraid to start living in a new way."

It was implied, though, that the "friends" would turn their new, social democratic face towards us in gratitude for their liberation. However, that proved to be wishful thinking, rooted, of course, in the self-important mentality of the great power and in the ideological narrow-mindedness, which, by the way, for many years had prevented us from correctly assessing the processes that were taking place in the neighboring countries and their outcome.

Let's take the response to Iraq's invasion of Kuwait and the war in the Persian Gulf. The joint action taken by the international community led by the United States and the USSR together with the UN to curb Saddam Hussein's aggression constituted an important **precedent for world politics of the new era**, which was essentially a new epoch of policies of cooperation, interaction, and solidarity for the sake of common values of

human civilization. Gorbachev took the only appropriate stand. His efforts to put an end to the aggression in a peaceful manner were not successful; nevertheless, it does not undo the fundamental correctness of his conduct.

The imperial policies in the zone of the so-called "national liberation movement" also lost its sense in the context of ending of the Cold War and given the enormous difficulties on the path of reforming one's own country. The ideological component of these policies had faded away long before Gorbachev's time. And it was also long ago that the Central Committee and the Government came to realize that they were making fools of us when posing as staunch Marxists and Leninists building socialism. Our involvement there was of solely strategic nature and in the context of the Cold War.

It was Gorbachev (and not Yeltsin, as is generally asserted in our propaganda) who established links with the G-7 and participated in its London meeting in summer 1991.

Gorbachev was the first to establish formal relationship with the International Monetary Fund and sign the document to this effect with Michel Camdessus in 1991.

It was Gorbachev who started to erode our fear of NATO, which as we had long been told was about to stage "another 1941" or "another Hiroshima." It was in Gorbachev's time that Manfred Werner, NATO Secretary General, visited Moscow in July 1990, for the first time ever, and the USSR Minister of Foreign Affairs made a speech at the NATO Council meeting in Brussels.

Later, however, there were lots of foolish polemics and hopeless ultimatums, and simply comic blackmail as regards expansion of NATO. Although nobody, including politicians, professional servicemen and journalists, has ever explained why moving of NATO 100 km closer to our borders would create a deadly threat to our country, when both sides are armed with missiles able to hit targets located at distances of thousands of kilometers away with similar accuracy.

Now, with Putin in power, we have come to the realization of what was clear right after the end of the Cold War, namely, that the Alliance presents no threat to us, that it is not a bearer of pro-active aggression and that cooperation with it is not only possible but desirable.

The above aspects of Gorbachev's foreign policy are the most significant ones to have initiated radical changes of the whole situation in the world arena.

It is impossible to prove, from a position of genuine national interests and in the context of the 21st Century, that this was damaging to our country and its people (some even call it a "crime"). Although, this was,

indeed, in conflict with the imperial "interests" (or, rather, imperial ideology). However, the era of empires is over.

Gorbachev's "new thinking" appeared in world history at the right time and gave a powerful impetus to crossing the line beyond which an opportunity arose (objectively, for the first time ever) to shape progress in a more humane way, to give it a "more humane" face. The policy of "new thinking" was necessary and justified, despite everything that happened later and that could not be prevented by even the greatest leaders or the most powerful and perfect state.

The principles and criteria of "new thinking" I am going to name may sound trite. Still, as a rule, turns in history happen when commonplace things, that is, common sense, become too obvious. So, what are the principles and criteria constituting the **concept of new thinking**? One has to admit, though, that this concept did not immediately take shape in the course of Perestroika. These principles and criteria are as follows:

- repudiation of confrontation based on ideological motives, since any differences can be overcome when the existence of values now common to the international community is recognized;
- de-ideologization of international politics;
- dialogue and talks, and personal contacts at high levels as a preferred method for maintaining inter-state communications and international links;
- repudiation of the use of armed force as the main means in upholding national interests (inevitably egoistic in their substance);
- inadmissibility of interference in affairs of other states, except when approved by the international community;
- sovereign contacts and interaction of every state with any other state, based on the principle of mutual benefit, unless it jeopardizes security of third countries (according to generally accepted security norms);
- respect for independence and uniqueness of any state recognized as independent under the norms of international law effective at any given time;
- multilateral, regional and other kinds of cooperation in addressing the problems engendered by globalization and common challenges of natural and human origin, whether of environmental, demographic, energy, nuclear, outer space, food, health or any other nature;

- optimal combination of foreign policy and morality, i.e. humanistic norms reflected in some way or other in all world religions.

There may be something else to add, though…

It is clear that nothing of the above has been "invented" by Gorbachev. The novelty of it all is that, once employed by the leaders of a superpower, some of the above principles and methods became habitual in practical politics and diplomacy, and proved to be valuable in interstate relations. It is also obvious that they have never been used anywhere in their entirety. However, repudiation of confrontation and its replacement with dialogue has created a certain "matrix." It started to be employed by the public and journalists, and, to some extent, by political circles to evaluate the merits and efficiency of this or that policy, or performance of this or that political figure. Owing to this, by the way, the atmosphere of political relations between most of the countries in the modern world today is strikingly different from what it was, say, 20 years ago.

For all the sarcastic comments about it, the "new thinking" born by Perestroika has done a lot of work in the world arena. And even with its role often reduced to "political correctness," it still means a lot in the present time, facilitating the search for mutual understanding and acceptable solutions.

So, what do we have now and what should be done? Is "new thinking" applicable in the present situation, when the above-mentioned main "aspect" of the new world system is actually evolving into World War III (many believe that it is already underway). Despite the seemingly obvious answer, I think the answer is "yes." The sources of this war, which is virtual so far, are not to be found in the Third World. This world itself took shape through the fault of the "First World" and the "Second World," which ceased to be. The underlying preconditions for modern terrorism outside Europe are in the distant European past, the centuries-old colonialism and cynical and egoistic methods used later to dismantle it.

What is needed is not repentance but practical and responsible actions in world politics and economy. The civilized world will sustain the defense it is mounting now against international terrorism. However, an offensive must be prepared with the same degree of efficiency and concern and in good time. On a historic scale it ultimately can succeed only if we are guided by the "new thinking." Otherwise, in my opinion, there is no future for humankind.

ENDING THE COLD WAR

by Pavel Palazhchenko

Pavel Palazhchenko is Head of International and Media Relations of the Gorbachev Foundation; when Perestroika started, he worked at the Translation Department of the USSR Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

There is little doubt that the period we call the Cold War, including the way it was waged and the manner in which it ended, will attract the keen interest of historians for many decades to come. It was a unique and unprecedented era in that the threat of a major conflict, very likely involving the use of nuclear weapons, was real, or was at least clear and present in the minds of those who ducked under tables during civil defense alerts and lived through the terror of the Cuban missile crisis. There is much that needs to be clarified and understood about the Cold War's origins and causes. For example, a question that deserves serious consideration is whether the Cold War was inevitable because of the nature of the Soviet regime or whether it could have been avoided with a different interpretation of the doctrine of containment. Perhaps of even greater interest is the question of why the Cold War ended and whether other scenarios of its end were possible. Though the unique circumstances that brought about the Cold War are unlikely to be repeated, it would be hard to deny the importance of considering such questions and thereby learning lessons for the future.

Debates about the Cold War and the way it ended are inevitably clouded by the politics of the day. In Russia, the collapse of the hopes of the intelligentsia, who had expected radical changes following the breakup of the Soviet Union to result in almost overnight prosperity and a major role for Russia in a new world order, has led many to question the disengagement from the Cold War. The Russian press is rife with writings accusing Mikhail Gorbachev and his foreign minister, Eduard Shevardnadze, of having betrayed Russia's national interests, even though Russia as a separate entity under international law did not exist on their watch. In the United States during the administration of the first President Bush, the general consensus of welcoming the peaceful end of the Cold War was soon replaced by the celebration of the West's — and most particularly America's — victory in the Cold War. This, in turn, reinforced the feelings of inferiority and injury felt by many members of

the Russian establishment, feelings that are not conducive to a sensible debate either about the past or about Russia's present foreign policy.

Depoliticizing the study of the Cold War would only benefit the discussion, and although it may not be possible in current media debates, one would hope that historians would at least strive for this goal. Something else would also help: we should bear in mind that the notion of the Cold War is, after all, a metaphor that captures the confrontational aspect of that period but is not, and cannot be, its full and accurate description. Much of the inaccurate and unhelpful loose talk about the Cold War and its end is, in fact, the result of either unfamiliarity with the facts and the documentary record or taking the metaphor too literally. It was not, after all, a war. In fact, preventing war was perhaps the essence of that period and was of greater importance and concern to its protagonists than preparing for war or winning the various battles or skirmishes, whether in propaganda or geopolitics, that occupied so much space in the press of that time. War prevention as a substantive aspect of the Cold War has only recently begun to receive sufficient attention from historians.

Contributions to the Cold War's historical record by former Soviet and U.S. officials who were active during the various phases of that era are invaluable. Much credit is due to the conferences, books, and oral history interviews that aim to develop the factual basis for further study and debate. An example is the recent Cuban missile crisis conference held in Havana and attended by former U.S., Soviet, and Cuban political and military officials. We can be grateful for the efforts to make available documents from the Cold War years from both the U.S. and the Russian sides, yet it is unlikely that a large body of such material will soon become accessible to historians. A more realistic possibility is that participants in the making and implementation of policies on both sides will speak and write about their recollections. As a Russian, I only regret that such literature is being published more in the United States than in my own country, but in any case, the fact that a significant body of evidence is gradually emerging is positive and welcome. Much of what follows in this essay is based on my recollections of the events that I witnessed and participated in from 1985 to 1991 and then recorded in *My Years with Gorbachev and Shevardnadze*, published in the United States in 1997.

A book recently published in the United States, with contributions from US and Soviet former officials, analysts and historians, is called *Turning Points in Ending the Cold War*. As one of the contributors to the book, I must note that the phrase "turning points" is another metaphor. Though it has often served to describe the events surrounding the end of the Cold War, perhaps an even better metaphor would be "going

forward," for it is this relentless movement away from the past that stands out as we recall that era. There was not so much a turn in a particular direction, for the direction stayed basically the same, as a refusal to go back despite frequent temptations to do so.

Since it is often asserted, particularly in Russia, that the West alone benefited from the end of the Cold War, it would be useful to consider the benefits that accrued to the Soviet Union and its successor states by first taking a look at the international position that Gorbachev inherited from his predecessors. In the early 1980s, the Soviet Union was saddled with an astounding range of foreign policy problems. It found itself in a situation that could almost be described as "us against the world." Its relations were confrontational with the United States; tense, at best, with Europe; and downright hostile with China. The unsuccessful war in Afghanistan was having a destructive effect on both the domestic situation and relations with the West and much of the rest of the world. The country was bogged down in several regional conflicts in third-world nations with little hope of extricating itself from them. The USSR had no real friends, and the Soviet elite knew only too well that the Warsaw Pact countries could not be regarded as reliable allies. The Soviet Union's negotiating position in arms control negotiations reflected a sense of isolation, insecurity, and pervasive hostility. In the INF talks, for example, the Soviet delegation initially asked to be allowed the same number of weapons as all its potential adversaries put together.

By mid-1991, the Soviet Union had worked out its relations with both the West and China. The arms buildup had been stopped, and two treaties, INF and START, calling for real and deep cuts in nuclear weapons had been signed. Steps had been taken toward the Soviet Union's acceptance by and eventual admission to the Group of Seven industrialized nations. The Charter of Paris proclaimed a Europe without dividing lines. Gorbachev's visit to China, in the words of Deng Xiaoping, closed the book on the past and opened the future. Soviet troops had left Afghanistan and conflicts in Cambodia, Central America, and Angola were being defused. Iraq's invasion of Kuwait had been rejected and reversed, with the United States and the Soviet Union taking a stand against the aggression and working through the United Nations to put an end to it. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the changes in Central and Eastern Europe benefited the Soviet Union by ending an unsustainable relationship in a peaceful manner without the burden of long-term bad blood.

As Henry Kissinger said to Gorbachev in Moscow in February 1992, "As a result of your policies, Russia is more secure than ever before." This

is important to bear in mind since Gorbachev's critics assumed that his policies had the opposite effect.

The years from 1985 to 1991 can be divided into two distinct periods in international politics. Each period saw changes in the direction of ending the ideological, political, and military confrontations between East and West and the Soviet Union's reintegration into the world community, but the pace of this process was relatively slow during the first period and extremely fast during the second, which began in early 1989. The quickening of the pace was the result of internal developments in the Soviet Union and Central Europe that could be controlled, in my view, only by sacrificing the process of change itself and turning back. Gorbachev bore the brunt of decision making at that time; had he yielded to the temptation to reverse course, history would have taken a different and, most likely, a much more dangerous path.

Working with Gorbachev and Shevardnadze during those years, I recall the difference in the psychological makeup and the political agendas of the two periods. During the first three years (1985-1988), there was a feeling that history had given us sufficient time to disengage from confrontation and build a sound basis for new international relations. This was a time when Gorbachev engaged the West on arms reduction and proposed the adoption of "new thinking," a set of non-ideological, common-sense, international law-based principles in which he profoundly believed. During the second period, there was a feeling that events were running ahead of the Soviet Union and, increasingly, that the best thing to do was manage change and assure its peaceful character without prejudging the outcome. It was a humbling experience, but I believe that the new thinking greatly facilitated the Soviet Union's adaptation to and acceptance of both the pace of change and its eventual outcome.

This new thinking was based, above all, on the understanding that much of the old, ideology-driven agenda of international relations had become obsolete. The words "new thinking" had been used before, of course, and the substance of the concept was not totally new. Indeed, in the early 1980s, the Palme Commission had presaged many tenets of new thinking such as, for example, the concept of common security as opposed to security at the expense of others. Nevertheless, the Soviet Union under Gorbachev was the first state to declare and elaborate these principles, setting in motion a major revision of, and shift in, the international agenda. As David Holloway points out in his perceptive essay in *Turning Points*, new thinking "provided a vision of the Soviet Union's place in the world that reassured the Soviet public as well as foreign leaders and publics. It therefore exercised a calming influence on the process of change."

In addition to the influence of the new thinking in facilitating change in the nature of international relations, another important factor was the conscious application of the human factor by the leading protagonists of the end of the Cold War. While recognizing the role of Margaret Thatcher, François Mitterrand, and Helmut Kohl, I believe most of the credit should go to Mikhail Gorbachev and Ronald Reagan. During their interaction from 1985 to 1989, I could see them persevere to build a personal rapport. They regarded this rapport as an important political goal despite Gorbachev's "dogmatic Communist heritage," as noted in Anatoly Chernyayev's essay in *Turning Points,* and Reagan's strong ideological views about the Soviet Union as an evil empire.

Unlike their predecessors, Reagan and Gorbachev did not allow inevitable setbacks, such as the death of U.S. Army Major Arthur Nicholson, killed by a sentry at a Soviet military base in the GDR, or the arrest of U.S. reporter Nicholas Daniloff in response to the arrest of Soviet UN official Gennadi Zakharov in New York on spying charges, to distract them from the pursuit of their goal. Many fascinating details of the relationship between the two leaders, and much of what was happening behind the scenes, are described by Ambassador Jack Matlock in his book *Reagan and Gorbachev* and his contributions to this book and to *Turning Points*.

I first saw Ronald Reagan in person in September 1985 when I was interpreting at his White House meeting with Eduard Shevardnadze. From that first encounter, he struck me as a warm and forthcoming person anxious to engage and even please his guest. The reason, in retrospect, seems to be that Reagan, though deeply conservative, was not dogmatic or aggressive. This is what Gorbachev has often emphasized in his recollections of Reagan, including his interesting letter on the occasion of the ceremony at which Ronald Reagan was awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor. He wrote, "While adhering to his convictions, with which one might agree or disagree, Ronald Reagan was not dogmatic. He was ready to negotiate and cooperate. That is what enabled us together to take the first steps toward ending the Cold War."

For both Reagan and Gorbachev, intuition played an important role in shaping their attitudes and actions. Of particular interest in this regard is the remark François Mitterrand made to Gorbachev in the summer of 1986, quoted by Chernyayev: "Reagan is among those leaders who intuitively want to put an end to the existing status quo." I think intuition made Reagan support the inclusion, in the final communiqué of the Geneva summit in 1985, of the phrase, "Nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought," although at least the first part of it contradicted the views of some of his advisers. Gorbachev is usually regarded as a

politician for whom instincts were less important, but I believe that without trusting his instincts he would not have been able to accomplish as much as he did.

Another important factor in building his rapport with Reagan and other Western leaders was Gorbachev's healthy respect for people elected through a democratic process. I remember how, in Geneva, when one of his advisers began to over-eagerly criticize Reagan, Gorbachev said rather curtly that Reagan was the elected president of the United States and we had to deal with him.

The relationship between the two men was, of course, often bumpy, but it was always respectful and equal. I must disagree with the assertion by some Russian scholars, such as Dr. Anatoly Utkin of the Institute of U.S. and Canada Studies, that Soviet leaders developed some kind of psychological dependence on their U.S. counterparts and therefore became almost subservient to them. I know that this view is also held by my U.S. Department of State colleagues with whom I shared interpretation duties.

Trust was the product of both human rapport and the new political direction, and it gradually became a significant factor in U.S.-Soviet relations. Surprisingly to some observers, the idea of trust was later revived in the relationship between George W. Bush and Vladimir Putin, and both presidents have encountered some criticism for being naive in this regard. But trust is not the same as blind faith. While the latter is something no statesman can afford, the former is indispensable to relations between civilized nations.

The new thinking in the Soviet Union, reciprocated by the West's willingness to engage and negotiate, and the gradually emerging trust in relations between the leaders of the great powers, set the stage for a new relationship between the world's major power centers. In this new context, many of the things that seemed all-important at the height of the Cold War gradually lost their value. This devaluation was related to the importance of ideology in international relations, third-world alliances, and the value of the nuclear arsenals conceived and built in a confrontational environment.

In his essay in *Turning Points,* Professor Georgy Mirsky recalls a conference at the Soviet Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1987, convened at Shevardnadze's initiative in order to hear from non-MFA thinkers on foreign policy issues. It was an eye-opener for many in the ministry and was one of the first times that the concept of de-ideologizing international relations was discussed openly and favorably. In such a context, the struggle for influence in the third world no longer appeared to many in the Soviet foreign policy establishment as the "moral as well as strategic

opportunity" that it was for much of the Cold War, as Peter Rodman writes in his essay. Working in the Soviet foreign ministry, I witnessed this "third world fatigue" and the declining interest in third world influence among officials at all levels in the second half of the 1980s. The Soviet Union made a serious effort to resolve or disengage from the conflicts in the third world, and, as Rodman points out, the Reagan and Bush administrations accepted Gorbachev's good faith and sought negotiated outcomes to the conflicts then raging in various parts of the world.

It is clear that no country, and certainly not the Soviet Union, could bear indefinitely the burden of the geopolitical obligations assumed under Stalin, Khrushchev, and Brezhnev. The Soviet Union's withdrawal from Afghanistan may be seen as a good, though by no means perfect, example of the art of letting go with dignity. In hindsight, a more cooperative attitude on the part of the United States both in the negotiating process and in the post-withdrawal period would have served the best interests of everyone. When the United States showed little interest in such cooperation, Gorbachev suggested to Secretary of State James Baker in May 1989, "Perhaps we should let the Afghans stew in their own juices for some time." Later, however, Afghanistan's fate was left largely in the hands of Pakistan's military intelligence service, a course chosen by two U.S. administrations with well-known consequences, including the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001. The lesson to be learned from this is that neglecting the third world agenda may be dangerous.

Of even greater importance than the disengagement from regional conflicts was the decline in the importance of the superpowers' nuclear arsenals. Indeed, as Robert Hutchings observes in his essay in *Turning Points*, "The vast American and Soviet nuclear arsenals were becoming increasingly irrelevant" even to the realities of the late Cold War and certainly, one might add, to the post-Cold War environment that both sides were looking forward to at that time. The negotiations on arms control produced two seminal agreements that are still in effect: the INF and START treaties. Even this achievement, however, is often disputed today in Russia, for reasons that are described cogently by Alexei Arbatov in his commentary to Jack Matlock's essay. In fact, however, the two treaties constitute a legacy that Russia has found to be fully consistent with its best interests; it therefore insisted on the reaffirmation of the START-I treaty in the nuclear disarmament agreements concluded by Presidents George W. Bush and Vladimir Putin in May 2002.

The story of the arms control negotiations has been told many times, with little disagreement among serious scholars as to its main turning points and achievements. I would note in this regard a statement by George Shultz that has received far less attention than it deserves. At a

conference at Princeton University in 1993, Shultz expressed regret that, mostly because of the resistance of hard-liners within the U.S. administration, it had proved impossible to sign the START treaty in 1988. The fact remains that the agreements achieved by Gorbachev, Reagan, and Bush, including the unprecedented exchange of letters between Presidents Bush and Gorbachev on the elimination of many of the two countries' shorter-range nuclear weapons, were equitable and beneficial.

It may be argued that Europe was the centerpiece and the focus of the process that led to the end of the Cold War. The most dramatic and potentially the most explosive developments in Europe at the time were taking place in Germany. The leaders who had to manage that process are often accused of lacking foresight and failing to anticipate events. It is questionable whether the kind of prescience that the critics seem to call for was possible. The essay by Philip Zelikow and Condoleezza Rice in *Turning Points* contains numerous excerpts from statements by Soviet, U.S., and European leaders that make it clear that no one expected German unification to happen as fast as it did. This includes the amazing comment made in December 1989 by Helmut Kohl on Henry Kissinger's supposition that East and West Germany might unite within two years: "This [is] obviously impossible." In any case, it is doubtful that a better forecast would have done much good. What mattered more was the attitude of the main players toward the prospect of German unification. The material provided by Zelikow and Rice is consistent with my own impressions at the time based on what I heard during talks on the issue and discussions among Soviet leaders.

Margaret Thatcher manifested herself as most suspicious of a unified Germany and she was viscerally antagonistic to the prospect of unification. During a meeting with Shevardnadze in London in November 1989, she did not bother to disguise that antagonism. I recall her expression of barely suppressed fury combined with resignation. Certainly neither during that meeting nor, to my knowledge, in subsequent discussions and communications with Soviet leaders did she propose any measures capable of slowing down the process. Rather, she seemed to be trying to probe the depth of the Soviet leaders' apprehensions about German unity and their willingness and ability to act against it. It appears from what we know now that Mitterrand's attitude was similar to Thatcher's, though perhaps less furious. Yet my conversations with French diplomats in Moscow and my familiarity with diplomatic cables from Paris suggest that, having no plan to counteract the process, Mitterrand rather quickly resigned himself to the outcome.

The pivotal factor in speeding up German unification was the explosive expression of the Germans' desire for it. Zelikow and Rice

emphasize the "judicious splashes of gasoline" applied by Kohl and Bush "instead of a fire extinguisher." Yet the breakdown of public order in the GDR began in December 1989 when Bush's position, as expressed at a NATO meeting, still left open the possibility of a slow process with an uncertain outcome: "We should not at this time endorse nor exclude any particular vision of unity." My impression, from some of Bush's remarks made at Malta and even later, was that he might have preferred a slower process. Yet, once the people of East Germany began to show their ability to impose their will, all leaders had to adjust, and a more welcoming attitude was only natural for Kohl and for Bush, as the Western world's leader.

As for the attitude of the Soviet leaders, I recall no expressions of panic, either about the prospect of German unification itself or about the domestic consequences of it in the Soviet Union. It is notable that although experts on German affairs in the foreign ministry and the Communist Party Central Committee called for maximum possible resistance to unification, a poll commissioned by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1990 indicated a generally positive attitude toward a united Germany among all strata of the population including, surprisingly, the military. Credit for the general acceptance of unification should be given to the Russian people, who both then and later showed themselves to be much more level-headed and realistic than many members of the Russian elite; and to Gorbachev, whose calming influence played an important role. In subsequent conversations, Gorbachev confirmed to me that at no point in the process was the use of force to prevent unification proposed as a possible course of action either by himself, by other members of the Soviet leadership, or by the military.

The study of the history of the Cold War and the events that brought it to a peaceful end will continue, producing new factual material and new interpretations of the actions and motives of the main players. In order to better understand what happened and why, historians may both question the wisdom of the decisions taken by the leaders and speculate on various "what if" and "what might have been" scenarios. In fairness, however, they should try to put themselves in the shoes of the decision makers who had to contend with forces often beyond their control in an environment changing at a breathtaking pace. The counterfactuals proposed for consideration mean little if they reflect policy options not even contemplated at the time. The "deep mining" of facts provides ample evidence that the Cold War ended peacefully because leaders, under great pressure and in often unpredictable circumstances, acted honorably.

TO END THE ARGUMENT WITH HISTORY

by Andrey Grachev

Andrey Grachev is Chairman of the Scientific Committee of the World Political Forum (Turin, Italy), a journalist and political scientist; a former Aide and Press Secretary to the President of the USSR.

The events connected with Perestroika, led by Mikhail Gorbachev, have irreversibly transformed the former Soviet society and had a most important influence upon the development of the situation in the entire world at the end of the 20th Century. This unique experience includes the historical achievements facilitated largely by the energy, political courage, and commitment of Mikhail Gorbachev, its initiator, to the goals he set for himself: democracy, the rule of law and renunciation of violence in international relations. However, the things we all came through also contained much disappointment, as well as political and psychological shocks that had a dramatic impact on the fates of millions of people in the former Soviet Union and many countries of the world.

Almost all ex-colleagues of Gorbachev have retired after they wrote their memoirs and their names left newspaper pages for historical reference books; he is the only one reluctant to leave active politics. It gives one the impression that Gorbachev, true to the motto he inscribed on his shield and made the title of his book written as early as 1987, namely, *Perestroika: New Thinking for Our Country and the World*, is trying to use whatever strength and time are left him to do his utmost to accomplish the most important work of his life started twenty years ago, no matter what it cost him.

Gorbachev's staunch adherence to the idea of Perestroika is not possession, not just a natural desire to protect his own creation and prove, even if in hindsight, that he was right, but the desire to end the argument with history. And he tries to do it in the circumstances when the current situation in the post-Soviet Russia and the world does not, alas, seem to give any grounds for complacence or optimism.

Today many of those who followed Gorbachev blame him for his failure to warn them not to expect getting into the Promised Land upon

crossing the threshold, but anticipate the same cruel world of human passions, self-interest, intolerance, national narrow-mindedness, and conflicts of power interests. Of course, Gorbachev may say with a clear conscience that he hoped for the best. Besides, having come to power in the Kremlin, he did his utmost and emancipated the country from unfreedom and freed the world from the real threat of a nuclear war. Probably, he could not do more than that and anybody else in his place would have hardly achieved similar results and, in fact, most likely would not have even sought to achieve them. However, he does not seem to be content with it. He never asks himself the question as to whether the things he started back in 1985 were really worth doing — the question he is regularly asked by journalists. He is convinced that his decision was right to continue the thing once started.

It would seem on the face of it that for Mikhail Gorbachev, a Nobel Peace Laureate, it would be easier to defend his contribution to strengthening international security from among the results of his activities in the capacity of the Party General Secretary and the country's President. It is clear that the world owes him many things: the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan and the Eastern Europe; the destruction of the Berlin Wall; and the reunification of Germany and, later, of the greater part of Europe. Most importantly, he achieved a shift, unprecedented in history, from the logic of competition in the arms race, including nuclear arms, the most dangerous of all, to real disarmament with destruction of hundreds of Soviet and American missiles and thousands of nuclear warheads.

And, finally, in a broader sense, the world owes him not only the destruction of the Iron Curtain, but also the elimination of its political division and reunification of the world history that was split into two flows at the beginning of the 20th Century following the Russian revolution.

Today hardly anyone can imagine that the Brandenburg Gate in Berlin was once a "no man's land," which was surrounded by barbed wire and could be raked with fire from automatic weapons, and schoolchildren in the United States were instructed to duck under tables in the event of a Soviet nuclear attack on America. However, the global Cold War has been replaced with the reality of local "hot wars" and acts of terror and genocide to which millions of people fell victims. One would think that Gorbachev has nothing to do with it, since he is not responsible for the situation in the new world any more.

Alas, everything in this world, including good deeds, not to mention good intentions, comes at a price. The price paid by Gorbachev, against his own will, to change world politics was the demise of the Soviet Union. Even abroad, assessments differ of the consequences of this event. Some

praise the former President, seeing him as a person deserving credit for the fact that the disintegration of the last world empire took place in a surprisingly peaceful way, saving its population and the surrounding world from the nightmare of becoming a vast "Yugoslavia" with nuclear weapons. Others blame Gorbachev for depriving the world — by letting the USSR disintegrate — of one of its most important pillars, which undermined stability of international relations. Supporting their view is the behavior in the world arena of the only super power, which has been left without any counterbalance.

Ignoring the praise of some people and fending off attacks from others, today Gorbachev continues to insist that the disintegration of the Soviet Union was a historical mistake and the united state could have been preserved had there been no two coups, namely, the coup organized by KGB and the revanchist Party *nomenklatura* in August 1991 and the coup staged by conspirators in the Belovezhskaya Pushcha.

However, while justly denouncing the August and December coup-plotters and reminding of their responsibility, Gorbachev has no right to forget his own one. Perhaps, after almost seventeen years have passed since those events it might be necessary to admit the obvious: the attempt at reforming Soviet society helped destroy the former "unbreakable Union." Although it is hard to be proud of it from a psychological point of view, at least there is no reason to be ashamed of it, since every time Gorbachev had to choose between saving the bureaucratic state and the process of democratization, he chose — although not without hesitations — democracy, and preferred freedom to coercion.

This Party-State was resting on its three whales: the Messianic nature of the communist project, its merciless repressive regime and the atmosphere of a "besieged fortress" created in the country by the Party propaganda. Having started internal restructuring of this fine-tuned fighting machine, Gorbachev set to dismantling its load-bearing elements one by one.

He was not afraid of questioning the "divine", or "scientific" using agitprop language, justification of the communist doctrine. He was decisive in his breaking away from Stalinism, thus depriving the *nomenklatura*, including himself, of the instrument of state violence used for many centuries by Russia's rulers as a bridle to govern the country. And, finally, his policy of easing military tensions with the West and beginning of the process of disarmament cut the main supporting ground from under the feet of the world's second super power, namely, the fear it induced in the world.

Was Gorbachev so naive that he failed to realize what he was putting at stake? Of course, he was not. He simply saw that the failure to timely

change the course might lead to a disaster for both the Soviet Union and the world: a blood-spilling collapse of the USSR and a possible nuclear conflict. Even if any blame is to be attached to him, it should be his excessive optimism.

Today, when looking back, we may say that Gorbachev has definitely overestimated a number of important factors characteristic of the internal situation in the Soviet Union and affecting the situation in the world. Above all, it was the degree of democratic maturity of Soviet society and particularly the readiness of the Party *nomenklatura* to follow him obediently to the scaffold of true democratic reform.

Unlike the romantic-minded General Secretary and a few of his associates, the rest of the sullen people from his circle had no desire whatsoever to make the face of "real socialism" human, that is, to repeat the fate of the Prague Spring, poor in their view, twenty years later.

The second illusion was Gorbachev's conviction that the majority of Soviet (Russian) society, if not the Party *apparat*, had already matured for democratic changes and a radical moving away from the decades (or centuries, to be more precise) of existence under the conditions of actually feudal subordination to the authoritarian bureaucratic state and that the USSR possessed a truly developed and modern economic potential. He believed that that potential was capable of self-regulation and could survive after the system of administrative and command management was abandoned, the system of the state military orders eliminated, and the country entered the world market, where its economy would be exposed to the fierce pressure of relentless competition.

For Gorbachev and his team this delusion, with its dramatic impact on the political fate of Perestroika, resulted in the loss of their main resource: the mass support of the population, which, having tired from waiting for the promised fruits of changes, started to turn away from the vague democratic project long before tanks suppressed it in August 1991.

In fact, Gorbachev proved to be a maverick among the Russian reformers: a person convinced that implementation of truly profound changes needed freeing up of inner forces of society itself, rather than an "iron hand" and coercion. Svetlana Alexiyevich, a Byelorussian author, said once, "A typical Soviet man, Homo Sovieticus, was a product of two incarnations of the Soviet state, namely, a prison and a kindergarten." Gorbachev as a reformer had a most difficult task of emancipating his compatriots from the legacy of both and opening the prison gate proved to be an easier challenge than the task of closing the doors of the kindergarten.

However, one should not forget that he himself had to travel the long path of inner liberation. The fact that he himself was exposed to still new

layers of problems as the implementation of his project progressed, largely facilitated this evolution. Fran□ois Mitterrand, who watched spellbound the "high-wire act" performed by the General Secretary of the CPSU Central Committee under the roof of the Soviet circus tent without any safety ropes, once said to his close friend Roland Dumas, "Gorbachev reminds me of a person who decided to paint over a dirty spot on a wall of his house. However, after starting to clean the wall he noticed that one of the bricks was loose. His tried to replace it and ruined the entire wall, after which he started to rebuild it and found out that the entire foundation of the house was rotten."

The main builder himself was undergoing major inner transformation, changing together with his project. A party secretary of the Stavropol region at the beginning of Perestroika, for whom both the former members of Brezhnev's Politburo and the future coup-plotters had every reason to vote unanimously, he emerged from it being in fact a different person, unlike them all. It might be that Gorbachev (together with us) paid too high a price to see for himself after he had covered a long path in the search of "humane socialism" that this path ended with a fatal dilemma: either GULAG or a coup.

As a result, he had to give up the goal he had originally declared. No more did the ambition of Perestroika consist in "making Bolshevism humane," not even in breaking down the old system. The goal was to eliminate and overcome, "squeeze out" communism of the old Homo Sovieticus. The task was already more of psychological and existential nature, rather than political one. In this way for Gorbachev Perestroika started to transform itself from the project of an overdue political reform into the concept of a real cultural revolution. When describing this concept today, he says what he could not say in the capacity of the Party General Secretary and the country's President: "Perestroika must take one or two generations to achieve the results that were planned." It is clear that this timeframe could not satisfy society that waited impatiently for changes for the better to take place.

Finally, there is another example of Gorbachev's optimism that proved vain. It has to do with the behavior of his Western partners, rather than with the realities of his own country. They turned out to be as unreliable allies as his former Party associates were. Looking behind Gorbachev's back and seeing there the silhouette of Yeltsin, the G-7 leaders did not regard political and financial investments in Perestroika and its leader, weakened by inner crises, as worthwhile. However, later, after having spent immeasurably greater funds on Yeltsin's Russia, some of them regretted it.

Today, already after his resignation, Gorbachev reproaches the West for its failure to have prudently used the unique chance his new policy offered to the world, rather than for the failure of its leaders to have rendered him adequate assistance (for he knows that the fate of Perestroika depended on something else). He reproaches them for their having taken the drive towards democracy shown by Soviet society for just a manifestation of inner weakness and the readiness to throw itself on the mercy of the winner.

Having hardly finished clearing the debris of the Berlin Wall, the Western politicians, according to Gorbachev, started to erect new walls and barriers. Instead of directing the funds freed up by the end of the arms race to fighting poverty, assisting the Third World and addressing the environmental problems, the Western world, above all the America led by George W. Bush, reverted to the "old egoisms" and the times when politics were determined by the military and industrial complex. As a result, instead of a united world of harmony dreamt about by Gorbachev and his associates, what we actually got after the long-awaited end of the Cold War was the chaos of a new world disorder, ruled by the principle of "might makes right" and full of extremist violence, rather than by the principle of "right makes might" and new political thinking.

Having arrived at the conclusion that world politics was "wandering in the darkness" and the existing international instruments and organizations lagged behind the pace of developments in the world, in May 2003, Gorbachev came forward with the initiative of establishing the World Political Forum. He defined its goal as "countering the spontaneity of global processes and adaptation of politics and its institutions to new realities and challenges of the modern world." Gorbachev remains of the opinion that a little bit of Perestroika would only benefit world politics that "has lost its way".

"At one time," said Gorbachev in his opening address to the Forum, "I explained to my Western counterparts that they would have to change themselves, too. Having drawn no right conclusions from the end of the Cold War, they made a great mistake by resuming their usual geo-strategic maneuvering immediately after the disappearance of the Soviet Union. Many decided that the collapse of the old Soviet system meant cheers for unbridled liberalism. However, we see that the ten years of liberal globalization have not resolved the problems of poverty and backwardness, but only made them worse. The West has demonstrated the lack of readiness for a global peace."

Gorbachev is of the opinion that today it is necessary to search for solutions to new problems beyond the boundaries of the traditional dichotomy between socialism and capitalism.

At the same time, he is reluctant to give up the convictions and hopes of his youth, even if he admits that it was rather Jesus than Karl Marx who helped him shape his present vision of socialist idea. Disappointed with the simplistic ideological approach that dominated the past century, he is not ready to place himself just in the category of pragmatic politicians, because he is not willing to sacrifice either his ideas or ideals. What is to be done to prevent the ideals from getting ossified in ideological formulas that become the foundations of totalitarianism? Gorbachev has his own answer to this question: the humankind needs a different strategy, the one that would open up the way to a truly integrated society and true globalization. Maybe the outside world, which he has managed to reform more radically and successfully than his own state, would be able to offer him bigger audiences and more people sharing his views, than his own home country.

As noted long ago, there would always be people ready to disprove even the multiplication table, should they decide that it affects their interests...

NEW BEGINNING OF A SEEMINGLY IMPOSSIBLE VENTURE
(Subjective Notes on Perestroika in Russia)

by Georgy Ostroumov

Georgy Ostroumov is an Associate with the Gorbachev Foundation and Head of the Gorbachev After the Kremlin project; in 1989-1990, he was Reviewer to the General Secretary of the CPSU Central Committee; in 1991, Aide to the General Secretary of the CPSU Central Committee, Head of the Secretariat of the USSR President.

It has been twenty years that the country and the world have been waging endless fierce debates on the substance and the meaning of Perestroika, the unprecedented social and political changes initiated by Mikhail Gorbachev in the second half of the 1980s.

At times, they try to hush up Gorbachev's Perestroika, saying, "What's the use of speaking about Perestroika again? Thank God, it's over and we all have got rid of Gorbachev." However, new generations of young people start to ask themselves again and again the same accursed questions: "Why and for what purpose was Perestroika started, after all?", and "What is its place in the history of the Russian state and society?" The most substantive answers, given, so to say, straight from the horse's mouth, may be found in the works of Gorbachev himself and in the books by his associates and aides, like Vadim Medvedev, Anatoly Chernyayev, and Georgy Shakhnazarov. Nevertheless, I believe that the notes taken by one of the less eminent members of his team, who joined it guided by own convictions that formed at the time of Nikita Khrushchev, could also be of certain interest.

Generation of the 20th Party Congress

In the life of the people of my generation, whose childhood and youth fell on the war and the first post-war years, the death of Stalin was an overwhelming event, apart, of course, from the beginning of the war and the Victory. The first question that all of my friends and acquaintances

asked upon hearing the news was, "How shall we live without him?" Starting from the mid-1950s, the "rehabilitated people," a new term full of meaning, started to be used more and more often. These people were chary of words when describing the life and death of thousands and thousands of "political" prisoners in camps and prisons. Their accounts shed new light on the events and the facts about which people of older generations knew much from their own experience but kept us, the young people, from publicly discussing where the "rootless cosmopolitans" had come from and what was so dangerous about them; how could the "killer doctors" had got right to the "top"; and why our people with all their decisive contribution to the liberation of the world from fascism still had so many ill-wishers and enemies.

We got the first answers to these and other hard questions that were competent and strikingly frank first from expositions and later from the official accounts of Khrushchev's report to the 20th Party Congress titled "On the Personality Cult and Its Consequences." Later, when pondering over the circumstances of Stalin's death, over how the almighty leader who had become seriously ill found himself all alone at his "near" super-protected dacha with no medical assistance at all and how even his own daughter could not get to him for so long, I got astonished by my own thought about how cruel and inhumane the system "up there at the very top" really was.

In the second half of the 1950s, at the time of the so-called "Khrushchev Draft," I joined the Party with recommendations of my comrades and fellow-workers at the Academic Institute of Sinology, including Yury Levada. Khrushchev wanted to bring new young members to the Party to strengthen his positions in the fight against that group of top Party hierarchs which opposed the process of overcoming the legacy of Stalin's arbitrary rule.

I am convinced that despite all the really big mistakes and tactical lapses that were actually made by the First Secretary of the CPSU Central Committee, the most important thing the conservative majority of the Party and state *nomenklatura* could not forgive him was his sharp and open criticism of Stalin's crimes and, in effect, of Stalin's system of rule. Over a number of years, Khrushchev's political opponents in the Party *apparat*, the army and the state security agencies displeased with many of his initiatives and personnel decisions were deliberately trying to covertly "set him up" and even, sometimes, openly discredit him. I saw it myself on many occasions when I met different people, ranging from Party and Soviet officials to teachers, university students and miners during my public lecture tours through towns and villages that covered areas from

Byelorussia and Ukraine in the West of the country to the Krasnoyarsk and Altai Territories in the East.

Despite some of his controversial statements, sometimes of a purely opportunistic nature, Nikita Khrushchev remained a staunch opponent of the Stalin cult and of the attempts to whitewash his crimes. At a rally welcoming the Hungarian Party and Government delegation led by Janos Kadar that was held in Moscow in July 1964, he made a public statement for the whole world to hear: "*Stalin shot at his own people, at veterans of the revolution. It is this arbitrary rule of his that we denounce. Vain are the attempts of those who want to change the leadership of our country while defending all the abuses committed by Stalin...*" This phrase alone reflects the essence of the struggle for power that continued "up there at the very top." "A leopard cannot change its spots," Nikita Khrushchev summed it all up to make his idea even clearer. Still, just three months (!) later, he himself fell victim to a conspiracy plotted by members of his own political entourage, with active participation of Vladimir Semichastny, Chairman of the KGB at the Council of Ministers of the USSR.

After his resignation, the processes of democratization in the Party and the state started in Khrushchev's time were halted and the process of rehabilitating the victims of Stalin's reprisals was practically interrupted. The mass media launched a campaign to discredit Khrushchev's statements against the Stalin cult, reducing its main thrust to purely personal motives related to his own grievances and revenge. Played on the political scene was a kind of a remake of the personality cult, perceived by the general public in the last years of Leonid Brezhnev's life as a tragic farce.

In Andropov's office at the Lubyanka

I realized the entire depth of the crisis in the country's leadership in April 1982, when Yury Andropov, Member of the Politburo of the CPSU Central Committee and Chairman of the Committee for State Security of the USSR (or KGB), invited a small group of advisers from the party's Central Committee *apparat*, including me, to his office at Lubyanka Square. We were preparing materials for a report devoted to the forthcoming anniversary of Lenin's birthday, which Andropov was entrusted to make. In our view, it was a sign of a special favor to him on the part of Leonid Brezhnev.[1]

Viktor Sharapov, Aide to the Chairman of the KGB, frequented the dacha where we worked. Our conversations with him helped us better understand the message and the style of our principal. Comrades from the Propaganda Department gave spin to the concluding part of the report without consulting Sharapov, though.

Yury Andropov's face looked haggard; apparently, he did not feel well; however, he greeted us in a friendly manner and immediately won our favor by asking playfully, "Well, what do you yourself think of your own creation?" Then, all of a sudden, he made rather sharp critical remarks about the concluding part of the report that contained, for the most part, some ritual praises to Leonid Brezhnev and the "Leninist Central Committee," and did it in a most serious manner. In the end, Andropov stated quite clearly that neither Leonid Ilyich, nor the Central Committee of the CPSU could be called a "model of creative work for all," since the real state of affairs and the situation in general gave absolutely no ground for that. Therefore, it was necessary to decisively abandon all laudatory assessments. He said that weighing and choosing his words, and we felt that he had said only a fraction of what he could have actually said on the matter. Speaking with us was the most informed and, by virtue of his profession, the most reserved person in the country, and, in effect, he spoke openly and confidentially with us about the abnormality and unacceptability of what was taking place "up there at the very top."

Seven months later, after he became General Secretary of the CPSU Central Committee, Andropov launched far-reaching efforts aimed at normalizing the situation in the top echelons of the Party and the state. However, he did not have time to give them full thrust. At the time, many people expected Gorbachev, whom, as we were aware, Andropov had highly valued and promoted, to continue the cause started by him. Contrary to the expectations, Gorbachev was "sandbagged" by Brezhnev's old guard, some of which had been affected and frightened by Andropov's initiatives. That campaign was led by Konstantin Chernenko, a seriously ill man, known for his perfectly correct calls "to pay careful attention to citizens' letters and complaints," which in itself, however, changed absolutely nothing and boiled down to pure red tape. Precious time was being wasted.

Gorbachev came in spring, like Khrushchev

Today we still recall the spring of 1985, with the changes in the top leadership it brought along, as a bright period of fresh hopes for renewal of life in the country. Indeed, I thought then and I still think so today that of all times in the history of Russia — and the Soviet Union was in fact the Greater Russia — at last, a normal person, who was well-educated and full of energy and came from a hard-working peasant family, ascended to the pinnacle of power in a way that was clear and transparent to the people, and not because of some bloody coups or palace conspiracies.

It had taken decades for the rigid monopolistic party and state system to shape Gorbachev's personality and bring him to the top, just like in the case of Khrushchev. They both served it faithfully, of course, as seen fit given the challenges of their times. However, after getting to the top of the system, — which was not by chance — they both were able to realize the need to radically overhaul it. What was the reason for that seemingly surprising metamorphosis? Only dull-witted and strongly messed-up minds of political opponents, who are ready to go any length, might come up with a simple answer to this question, claiming that they were "traitors," "apostates," "betrayers," "foreign agents," etc. Now tell me, what was the reason for a person to become a traitor after he got to the very top of power? Another question, "How at all could people with such qualities get 'up there to the very top' bypassing the multi-channel system of screening and selection of cadres set up as long ago as in Stalin's time?"

In my opinion, the answer is absolutely different. Both Khrushchev and Gorbachev, no matter how pretentious it may sound, were, in fact, flesh of the flesh of the people, with all its virtues and weaknesses. Each of them in his own unique way fully and vividly embodied the powerful character of his people and its eternal pursuit of justice, which is an integral part of it. I believe that neither the *nomenklatura* corridors and walls, nor the reinforced-concrete dogmas of ideology, nor the praises of sycophants could mar their innate common sense and eliminate the natural closeness of Khrushchev and Gorbachev to the real life of "ordinary people." This is what helped the former develop the liberating ideas of the 20th Party Congress and the latter, who had no burden of involvement in the reprisals of Stalin's time, to revive those ideas and, while espousing them, to start democratic renewal of the state and society, a venture seemingly impossible to accomplish in Russia.

Of course, Gorbachev was well aware of what the First Secretary of the Central Committee of the CPSU had infringed upon at the 20th Party Congress and of how, eventually, he was done away with. However, the new General Secretary keenly felt that the country and the world needed change and renewal. He knew well what the social and political stagnation was and how harmful it was for the development of the country. And so, he made up his mind.

Many people were surprised to see that the calls for studies in democracy, which initially had been perceived as habitual and purely ritual statements, were followed by real changes, never seen before, like glasnost, easing, and later, abolition of censorship, and press coverage of the themes that had been forbidden earlier and the situation in the "closed zones." Publication of fiction, history and philosophy books by Russian and foreign authors, inaccessible before to the Soviet reader, started on a

mass scale. Rehabilitation of the victims of Stalin's political reprisals, halted in Brezhnev's time, was restarted. The process of releasing political prisoners of the post-Stalin years began. Rights of enterprises and labor collectives were significantly broadened; contracting and leasing were introduced; and the existing and newly launched cooperatives became more active. The Party and the state introduced contested elections.

By frequently speaking to all kinds of audiences and freely communicating with the people, Gorbachev really got the nation to "speak up." Debates that were unheard-of before on the past and the present of the country, on its red and white leaders were shifted from the kitchens, famous as the place to hold them in the past, to the pages of newspapers and magazines and to public audiences. Dissent was no longer suppressed. Forcing its way forward was ideological and political pluralism. However, there were many people who did not like those developments.

In spring 1988, after the publication in the magazine *Soviet Russia* of the article by Nina Andreyeva titled "I Cannot Waive My Principles", it became obvious that the conservative part of *nomenklatura* was rising for an open fight against Gorbachev's Perestroika.

I remember how this article was praised at the Soviet Embassy in Czechoslovakia and later, naturally, among the staff of Vasil Bilak, one of the leaders of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia. On the instructions from Erich Honecker, the *Neues Deutschland* reprinted the article, which became a manifesto of the anti-Perestroika forces. It was clear that "up there at the very top" there were quite influential people who were behind Nina Andreyeva. Even the supporters of Gorbachev among the staff of the CPSU Central Committee started saying that "He will suffer the same fate as Khrushchev." I did not rule out such an end; however, I believed that Gorbachev would manage to escape it, since comparisons with Khrushchev's fate were mentioned more and more often and he could not fail to see and understand it.

Times getting ever busier. The Central Committee Secretaries in the office of the General Secretary's reviewer

The times were getting ever busier. Gorbachev was increasingly faced with the severe pressure put by the left and the right on the reform-minded part of the Party and the country leadership; besides, the leadership itself was being divided. Both the conservative wing of the CPSU and the radical democrats started to act along the lines of "the worse is the better." Both were using in their own political interests the

objective difficulties in the economic situation of the country that had got worse. Both were hijacking the nationalities question and above all the Russian one, complicated as it already was.

Meanwhile, Gorbachev was waging an offensive rather than was on the defense. To replace Stalin's model of socialism, he was building a democratic political system with free contested elections, separation of powers, real parliamentarism, ideological and political pluralism, recognition of the priority of human rights, and competition between various forms of ownership. Power, on which the CPSU had held a monopoly, was being transferred to the Soviets of People's Deputies. Little by little, the country was opening up to the world; freedom of citizens to leave and to return to their fatherland, unheard of since the pre-revolution times, was being introduced.

At the conference of the Russian Communists held in June 1990, the General Secretary openly and firmly rejected the calls for the Party to repent and said that the CPSU unconditionally, without reservations or compromises, repudiated Stalin's ideology and practice, which had trampled down the spiritual and moral ideals of socialism. The Party intended to gain support of society in the implementation of socialist values by persuasion, political work with the masses, participation in the parliamentary discussions, and keeping strictly to the Constitution and the law. These fundamental conclusions made by Gorbachev, just like the decisions of the 28th Party Congress, were the result of many years of search for solutions to urgent social and political problems of the new era that started after the 20th Party's Congress.

The greater part of Party functionaries, particularly at the top and medium level, regional and municipal officials, while formally agreeing with the Congress decisions that confirmed giving up of the Party's monopoly on power, was not ready to embrace them. Suffice it to say that, according to the opinion poll conducted among the participants of the 28th Congress, 85% of them believed that the private sector in the economy was acceptable only to a small extent, or even that there should be no private sector at all. A third of those polled spoke against the development of cooperatives in the country.

One day a whole delegation of Secretaries of the CPSU Central Committee (three or four of them), led by Oleg Baklanov, paid a surprise visit to my modest office. I had a hard time trying to find seats for all of them. The conversation initiated by Baklanov boiled down to just one idea: it was necessary to exert influence on Mikhail Gorbachev to persuade him not to shy away from most resolute and extraordinary measures to impose order and rein in the so-called "democrats," because they were not going to stop at anything to seize power and, when in

power, they would not spare anybody, starting above all with Mikhail Gorbachev himself.

I said I found it impossible to "exert influence" on Gorbachev. In fact, it was him who could influence me. And so, that was it. After that, my relations with those people became rather cool. I guess they paid visits to other people, too.

"The Smolensk plot"

In April 1991, I got a letter marked "Urgent" with a note "To be conveyed personally to Gorbachev or his aide" delivered to me from the *Pravda* editorial office. A freelance correspondent with the newspaper reported that the Smolensk meeting of the Secretaries of City Committees of a number of big cities of Russia, Ukraine and Byelorussia, which was formally dedicated to sharing experience of preparations for the 50th anniversary since the beginning of the Great Patriotic War, in reality discussed a totally different issue. First and Second Secretaries of the City Committees of Moscow, Leningrad, Kiev, Minsk, Brest, Kerch, Murmansk, Novorossiysk, Odessa, Sevastopol, and Tula were trying to reach a secret agreement on removing Gorbachev from his office. The most active of all was Yury Prokofiev, First Secretary of the Moscow City Committee.

For this purpose, arrangements were made to push through at the next Central Committee Plenum, to be held in April, a decision to convene an extraordinary Party Congress. Generally, there was nothing extraordinary about Secretaries of the City Committees getting together to discuss issues that were of concern to them; however, holding a meeting that was, in effect, secret and behind the back of the General Secretary and the Politburo could not fail to raise worrying questions.

At that time, Gorbachev was on a visit to Japan, where he had difficult talks with Prime Minister Toshiki Kaifu on the possibility of attracting substantial Japanese investments to Siberia and the Far East. In charge of the Party there remained Oleg Shenin. I shared with him the information that I received and asked him to report it to the General Secretary at the earliest opportunity. Shenin, as if trying to reassure me, mumbled something vague like, "it was all tricks played by Yury Prokofiev" and there was nothing extraordinary to that.

Upon Gorbachev's return, I immediately informed him about the "Smolensk plot," particularly since there were just a few days left before the opening of the April Plenum of the Central Committee, where a major battle could take place. However, Gorbachev's mind was already preoccupied with the coming meeting with the leaders of nine Union Republics, where important compromise solutions were expected to be reached.

However, the Plenum became an arena of a serious drama. Melnikov, Gurenko, Malofeyev, and others made fierce statements that boiled down to a single idea, the need to take extraordinary measures, and they got so deep under Gorbachev's "skin" that he immediately announced his resignation from the post of General Secretary. Nobody expected such a turn of events. During a recess, the hastily convened Politburo meeting barely managed to convince him not to oppose the proposal to remove the question of his resignation from the agenda. Supporters of Gorbachev, including Nursultan Nazarbayev, vigorously repulsed the absolutely destructive attacks on the Party General Secretary. It became possible to disrupt the conspirators' plans and save the situation largely thanks to the important agreements on overcoming the political and economic crisis and moving towards a new Union Treaty that had been reached by the President of the USSR and the leaders of the Union Republics on the eve of the Plenum.

The main conspirators did not show their real worth at the April Plenum. They kept their heads down for a time being, apparently having decided to act using quite different methods.[2]

Communists lose Russia to Yeltsin

In May-June 1991, acting on the instructions from the General Secretary, I regularly got in touch with heads of the Regional Committees of the Russian Communist Party to ask their opinions about the progress of the election campaign and possible outcome of the presidential election in the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic. In most cases, the answers contained one common conclusion: Yeltsin was leading the race, with all the communist candidates (with Nikolay Ryzhkov and Vadim Bakatin among them) trailing behind. According to my interlocutors, Anatoly Lukianov could have been a real competition to him; however, he was not running.

Meanwhile, during his meetings with the voters, Yeltsin promised to give every region as much sovereignty as they could "digest" and a marked increase in the living standards in just two years by freeing Russia from the dependents that sponged on it... As a result, they believed him; he won the majority of votes and became President of the RSFSR. No matter how hard many of them pretended to have had nothing to do with the outcome of this election later, it became a true mirror of the attitudes of the Russian voters. Candidates for Russian presidency supported by the CPSU lost in all major cities, that is, in the cities with the biggest concentration of the working class and intelligentsia. It was a failure of the Polozkov-led RCP and of those Politburo members who directed and supported it. The

only right conclusion Gorbachev could make based on the results of the election was that with Yeltsin elected President of the RSFSR he, as President of the USSR, had to cooperate with him.

Tanks as an argument of the politically weak

Unlike the April Plenum, the Plenum of the Central Committee held in July was rather quiet, although a new draft program of the Party, which it discussed, in fact, was turning it into a different party, a social democratic one.

Passions that had run high at the very top seemed to have subsided and it looked like the time of compromise came. On August 4, Gorbachev went on a vacation to get prepared for the signing of a new Union Treaty, scheduled for August 20. He tried to cheer up those who saw him off at the airport and himself, saying that now, with an anti-crisis program, the text of the Union Treaty and the draft of the new Party program finally agreed upon, they all could start working in those basic areas with confidence and at full thrust.

Having seen off the boss, the top party and state officials who were left in charge chose a totally different direction and started hands-on preparations for practical introduction of the state of emergency. Gorbachev was convinced that introduction of the state of emergency in the country would actually mean a retreat to the pre-Perestroika order, to the administrative and command system and the undoing of all the beginnings started by Perestroika. That is why he dismissed the persistent recommendations and demands to introduce the state of emergency, with which many people, including Prime Minister Pavlov with his proposal to provide the Head of Government with emergency powers, had repeatedly approached him.

The ultimatum with which the State Committee for the State of Emergency (SCSE, or GKChP) aced Gorbachev in Foros on August 18 was an attempt to get him to introduce the state of emergency, this time using force and blackmail, — an attempt that was crude and, in my opinion, doomed to failure from the very beginning. Gorbachev did not yield to blackmail and refused to render any assistance to the conspirators. The arguments of coercion did not work on the President of the USSR. I believe this was the first — and in many ways decisive — blow to the plot.

The SCSE decided to show its power and determination by bringing on the early morning of August 19, hundreds of tanks, armored vehicles, and regiments of paratroopers to the streets and squares of Moscow. Obviously, they chose to rely on the authority of this military might

primarily because they were not sure of their own political weight. The SCSE in effect resorted to the method that was known since the time of the Prague Spring, according to which tanks in the streets were the most compelling political argument.

In Prague of August 1968, it worked for some time and, luckily, there was no significant bloodshed; although I know from my own personal experience of contacts with residents of Prague and our tank crews that things could have gone very differently. A semblance of success in Czechoslovakia allowed Brezhnev and some military leaders to think that this method was politically effective. As the Soviet Ambassador to Romania told me, Grechko, the then Minister of Defense, regretted the fact that Moscow had not dared to "normalize" the situation in Romania simultaneously with Czechoslovakia. "We could have normalized it in no time at all and do it white-gloved before anybody could say a word," allegedly was what the Marshal said.

The temptation to use armored forces for political purposes in Afghanistan led to the results that are very well-known. The actions taken by military units equipped with armored vehicles in Vilnius in January 1991, contrary to the guidance and instructions of the President of the USSR, led to loss of life and shattering of the prospects for finding a political solution to the crisis situation in the Baltic Republics. And now, as if in denial of common sense, the SCSE decided to bring hundreds of tanks to Moscow. There were few people who believed the statements made by the SCSE members; at least the SCSE did not get any meaningful mass support either in Moscow or Petersburg, or other cities. They could not ensure even a semblance of support on the part of the "broad masses." And this happened despite the fact that, as it turned out later, the Party Regional Committees received secret instructions from the Center to support the SCSE.

The coup shattered the agreed prospects for the renewal of the Union and evolutionary reforms and dealt a most heavy blow to Perestroika. At the same time, it became clear that Perestroika had triggered irreversible and profound changes in the public and political consciousness. Masses of people started to feel themselves and behave like citizens. Despite all the hardships of the Perestroika years, the majority of the citizens of Russia did not accept the opportunity to return to the pre-Perestroika past that was offered by the coup plotters.

Was it the August Revolution or a counter-revolution?

On August 22, Gorbachev, who came back from Foros in the early morning, had a meeting in the Kremlin with members of the Security

Council and advisers to the President. As they met, a crowd of people gathered outside the Central Committee building at the Old Square, with many people clearly intoxicated with alcohol. Threatening shouts were heard, like, "Down with you!", "Come out here!", "Get lost!", etc. Some tried to knock down the big raised letters of the "CPSU CC" abbreviation installed over the main entrance. Particularly furious was the crowd at the entrance of the Moscow City Committee of the CPSU. Protesters tried to get inside and it looked like they were going to storm the building and stage a pogrom. I could see everything from my office window well enough. The buzz in the crowd, coming in waves, was heard through the window glass. The crowd grew bigger and reached a critical mass. All my attempts to get in touch with Gorbachev were unsuccessful and I succeeded only in getting through to Georgy Shakhnazarov, and then I called Rutskoy. He was absent and so I asked his assistant to inform him immediately that in case they start storming the building I would come out to the pogromists, furious as they already were, and if they trample me down, it would spoil the grand celebration of democracy, much spoken about on the radio. I am not at all sure that these calls of mine really impressed anyone; however, soon one of the leaders of the democrats appeared near the Central Committee building and in response to his call the crowd started to move in the direction of the Dzerzhinsky Square. I dropped into the office of Aleksandr Dzasokhov to see Pyotr Luchinsky and other Politburo and Central Committee members, who, as far as I knew, were not involved with the SCSE. Everybody looked depressed. Time and again they tried to call different places, like the Kremlin, the Moscow City Soviet, the prosecutor's office, and their homes. It never occurred to them that the political headquarters of the powerful party that for 75 years had controlled a vast country could rely on the support and protection from thousands of party organizations and hundreds of thousands of communists in Moscow alone. However, there was no political headquarters of a powerful party. The Central Committee and its staff had long ago — since Stalin's time — become a professionally adjusted and highly qualified but bureaucratic party and state management structure. Even Gorbachev with his radical democratic initiatives had no time to reform it significantly. This structure inevitably reflected the deep contradictions that had accumulated over many years in the whole of the Soviet state and public organism and made it weaker.

Meanwhile, despite the fact that the USSR President had come back to the Kremlin, still acting at the Union Ministries and Departments, and at the financial and banking institutions were authorized representatives of the RSFSR President, who had been sent there in the days of the coup with powers to control the situation and dismiss those involved in the

conspiracy from their duties. Weakened by the coup and decapitated as a result of its failure, the Union state *apparat* was in effect kept away from the activities carried out by the bureaucratic *apparat* of the RSFSR, controlled by the President of Russia.

Without Yeltsin's approval Gorbachev could no longer take decisions on the personnel issues that were crucial for the country. In the very first days, he had to revise and cancel his initial decisions regarding appointments of Acting Prime Minister, Acting Minister of Defense, Acting Chairman of the Committee for State Security (KGB), etc. This dual power situation was in effect the beginning of a counter-revolution. However, even in those circumstances, Gorbachev tried his best to save the Union — already as a confederation — and, despite everything, was close to achieving his goal. This time his efforts were thwarted by a secret conspiracy by Yeltsin, Kravchuk and Shushkevich in the Belovezhskaya Pushcha.

Yeltsin's regime as a negation of Perestroika

I often hear both from the communists and the democrats that Yeltsin continued the cause started by Gorbachev. By saying that they all mean the destruction of the socialist principles and the disintegration of the Soviet Union. What is different about them is that the former disparage Gorbachev and Yeltsin in equal measure and the latter, while considering Gorbachev's policy indecisive and inconsistent, still praise him sometimes in a condescending manner for having started Perestroika.

Such an interpretation of the events is advantageous for Gorbachev's opponents; however, it is in sharp conflict with the Russian reality. The initial social and philosophical idea and the practice of Perestroika was humanization of the state and society, transition from the system under which the people were treated like a herd steered by a shepherd to civil self-determination, to real participation in making decisions that affect their personal fates and fates of their own state. Perestroika was above all a democratic project aimed at preservation of the existing and accumulation of new achievements in the social sphere. Hence, its goal of developing the principles of justice and solidarity, characteristic of the Russian national consciousness, of achieving human democratic socialism, turning the CPSU into a social democratic party, of establishing socialism with a "human face," that is, the goals that are generally in harmony with the European social democracy.

The coup plotters, who belonged to the highest *nomenklatura* of the CPSU, shattered this prospect. Radical anti-communists from Yeltsin's circle took advantage of this and embarked on the path of total anti-

socialism in the hope for successful application of the right liberal social and economic models of the American champions of "free play of market forces."

Yeltsin's rule resulted in the majority of the population finding themselves on the brink of poverty, with no wages and salaries paid for months and years and beggarly pensions and allowances instead of the promised growth in prosperity in just two years. Meanwhile, a small group at the top was channeling millions of dollars out of the country. Russian society found itself torn apart and polarized as never before.

Using the Yeltsin bureaucracy as a cover and with its participation, mostly shadow dealers managed to get to the very top and, becoming more and more impudent, fabulously enriched themselves, acting hand in hand with the criminals. The so-called "oligarchs" became the actual owners of the national wealth, exerted decisive influence on the President of Russia through his family, and turned the bureaucratic state machine into a tool that served their own interests, which were quite remote from the interests of the absolute majority of the population and the country in general. All this did not and does not have anything in common with Gorbachev's Perestroika, but was a cynical negation of it.

Following suit of the coup plotters, the Russian President broke off with Perestroika and, in the first place, with its social and democratic goals. Its main achievements, including the development of public and civil consciousness, glasnost, and freedom of speech, were put to new tests — this time by a new absolute power, a power of money and big oligarch and shadow capital, practically unrestricted by anything or anybody. However, it proved impossible to do away with the lasting values of Gorbachev's Perestroika and it seems that no one will ever succeed in doing it.

The experience of Perestroika and the modern state

In my opinion, twenty years on after the start of Perestroika, a thorough assessment of its experience gains a critical importance in comprehending further ways to develop Russia. A view of Perestroika that was widely communicated over a number of years suggests that it was precisely the original cause of the chaos and lawlessness inherited by Putin from Yeltsin. And if this is the case, there was no need from the outset and will be no need in future in any democracy; what is needed is the policy of a "firm hand." The most outspoken hardliners were openly suggesting that we needed a Russian Pinochet and went as far as proposing to arrange for the Chilean dictator's visit to Russia. There are other supporters of the policy of a "firm hand." They argue for the need for our country to have a less odious model of personal rule, for some other forms of it — something

like authoritarian liberalism or liberal authoritarianism. Some often recommend borrowing the Chinese model, as if forgetting the fact that it is in many ways determined by the unique features of this great and very ancient nation. Still, all such recommendations generally suggest that Russian society is not ready for independent democratic development or is alien to it by its nature.

It is quite clear that consolidation of the state became the main and primary issue that had to be addressed by Vladimir Putin as the new leader of the Russian state, because right before his eyes it was turning into an unmanageable conglomerate of feudal principalities, with almost half of their laws directly in conflict with the federal legislation, which was not strictly observed at that. Hence, naturally, the need to strengthen the "vertical power" — one of the Russian President's biggest concerns.

Gorbachev sees the fact that the office of the President in the Soviet Union has not become a proper branch of power as one of the main reasons for the failures of Perestroika. He was the first to introduce the presidential office in our country to ensure a peaceful transition from the monopolistic command and administrative system to the democratic system of Soviets from top to bottom. Strong presidential power was seen as an essential institution to democratize the state and society. Using it as a support, the President of the USSR hoped to stabilize the situation in the country and proceed with its democratic renewal without the use of emergency measures. These prospects, as well as Gorbachev's presidential power, were shattered in a most dramatic way by the coup plotters from the President's close circle and by the separatist-minded republican leaders. Of course, Putin knows these lessons from modern history of the Russian state and, probably, takes them into account in his own way, including when making personnel decisions.

The years of the rule of "Tsar Boris" and the radical liberals resulted in profound discrediting and rejection in the mass consciousness of the very notions of "democracy" and "democrat." Unfortunately, they often became equated with the notions of "deception" and "crook." Instead of forming the middle class of owners, the Yeltsin and Chubais privatization resulted in formation of a few groups and clans of the super-rich, while humiliating the absolute majority of the population and making them equal in their poverty and misery. The only people who have found courage to repent it were Irina Khakamada and Mikhail Khodorkovsky, with the latter doing it when already behind bars. As far as leaders of the radical liberals of Yeltsin's time are concerned, they are not going to repent anything and continue their cause together with their new associates, acting, in a slightly different fashion, though.

In the present circumstances, the government agencies are tempted to confine themselves to building the so-called "managed democracy," which, according to them, has always and everywhere been just like that. Indeed, in our century of information and technology democracy is manageable, too. The question is how is it really arranged and how and in whose interests it works. Of course, one may try to build purely superficial structures of democratic institutions and with their help make the directives issued by one or another variety of administrative and command system look like decisions made in a democratic way. However, in addition to serious mistakes and abuses that are unavoidable in such a system, democracy would be increasingly discredited and, eventually, people would be increasingly distrustful of the government.

Still, this is not the main trouble. Imitative and "decorative" democracy may serve the clans and bureaucratic groups that manage it for quite a long time. However, it is not capable of addressing urgent and long-term problems related to the development of Russia. Over the past 15 years, the gap between Russia and many countries has significantly increased in what concerns critical indicators of not only economic and technological progress, but also the country's social, socio-political, and state development.

When in the second half of the 1980s Gorbachev started democratic modernization in the USSR, many countries in Europe and in the East had already entered or were in the process of entering a fundamentally new, post-industrial, stage of their development. A prerequisite and a pre-condition for such development is a modern state with its truly operational democratic institutions.

Russia still has a long road to travel to reach a post-industrial stage. However, does it mean we should ignore it at all? Such a view, which is generally obscurant, is rather wide-spread: they say we are original, self-sufficient and so on and so forth. However, the modern global world does not at all preclude originality. France, Germany, the United States, and Japan, being modern, have not at all lost their originality. By the way, the Constitution of Russia provides for democracy, human rights, and a social and law-based state. This is in fact the right direction for us to go once we really start moving along it.

To do so we need to continue the truly democratic renewal of the Russian state and society, thoroughly taking into account the experience of Perestroika and the years that followed it. This experience strongly reminds us of the uncompromising nature of the truths that are generally known and the underestimation of which inevitably punishes not only political figures and political parties, but the whole states and nations, too. Development of democracy should not result in the undermining of

statehood; otherwise, it may cause the death of both democracy and statehood. Statehood without development of democracy is doomed to stagnation and decay. It truly hits the nail on the head in describing the uncompromising fundamentalist communists, the foremen of Perestroika and the radical democrats — all those who put spokes in Perestroika's wheels or hurried up Gorbachev to move faster.

The time that has passed since the start of Perestroika makes many things clearer. The public consciousness is somewhat recovering from its heavy intoxication with civil apathy, frustration and despair that were so widely spread during the years of Yeltsin's rule. However, the revival of democratic institutions that would preclude or minimize possibilities for the old and newly formed bureaucratic clans and fat cats to manipulate interests of the citizens is not observed yet. It looks like these quarters are very much interested in maintaining the status quo that existed under Yeltsin. Hence, the noticeable resentment shown by the radical liberals towards the policies pursued by Vladimir Putin. Hence, also the attempt to raise a new wave of attacks on Perestroika and Gorbachev in the mass media.

The two decades of disputes about Perestroika show that the solutions offered by it and the problems it raised are still relevant. One way or another, the seemingly impossible venture of renewing Russia must be continued. The generation of the 20th Party Congress was followed by the generation of Perestroika. Those who were born in its years are now under 20. These young citizens of Russia cannot fail to become interested in the era during which they came to this world. I hope, they will not let themselves be fooled and, despite all the slanders and lies, they will understand and appreciate the ideas of Perestroika and will continue the democratic modernization of the Russian state and society started by Gorbachev.

---

[1] Icidentally, Andropov was the one to suggest that Gorbachev make a report on the next anniversary of Lenin's birthday in 1983.

[2] As it was found out during the investigation into the SCSE (State Committee for the State of Emergency) case, before the opening of the April Plenum of the CPSU Central Committee, A.Tizyakov had the list of future members of the SCES, which contained the names of O.Shenin, O.Baklanov, V.Boldin, D.Yazov, V.Kryuchkov, and others. Also, see V.Stepankov and Ye.Lisov. *Kremlevsky zagovor. Versiya sledstviya* (*The Kremlin Conspiracy. Investigation Story*), *Ogonyok Publishing House*., M. 1992, p. 46.

PERESTROIKA AS SEEN TODAY

by Vadim Mezhuev

Vadim Mezhuev is Chief Research Officer at the Institute of Philosophy of the Russian Academy of Sciences (RAN), Doctor of Philosophy, Professor.

For me, Perestroika is not just the time when Mikhail Gorbachev was in power (at first, in the capacity of General Secretary of the CPSU, and then as President of the USSR), but the process of democratization of the country initiated by him. As I see it, for Gorbachev Perestroika was not an instantaneous idea; it evolved gradually. However, once he came to it he developed it into an extremely vast program of democratic reforms aimed to change the foreign and domestic policies of the state and the whole existing political and social system. Today, we may debate the degree to which he realized the complexity and the scale of the task he set, nevertheless, the first step in that direction was undoubtedly taken exactly at that period.

From this point of view, there is only one event in the Russian history of the 20th century which could be comparable to Perestroika as far as its meaning and importance are concerned. I am referring to the Great Russian Revolution of 1917, which is known to have started not in October but in February, which fact is often overlooked for some reason. The October, which brought one party-dictatorship and terror, was just the concluding episode of the revolution, a response to the February events, which is in fact characteristic of all revolutions. The common thing about the February events and Perestroika, in spite of all the differences between them, is an attempt — unprecedented in Russian history — to establish democracy in Russia and arrange it after the model of Western democracies. I do not know of any other similar attempts in our history. Russia's movement toward democracy that had been started by the February Revolution and later halted by the October Revolution was kind of restarted when Perestroika began. Although Perestroika was originally conceived not as a negation of the October Revolution, but as elimination of the negative consequences of Stalinism, called collectively "totalitarianism," it proved to be no less grandiose exercise in democratic transformation of Russia than the February Revolution.

Today, twenty years after the beginning of Perestroika, we may also see what made those two events different. As far as I understand it, those who conceived Perestroika, including, in the first place, Gorbachev himself, tried to implement it without a revolution — without violence and destruction, without sweeping away everything in its way, without ignoring the unique national character of the country and its past, or the readiness of the majority of its population for radical changes. I see the intention of the authors of Perestroika as transition to democracy by means of reform, rather than a revolution, which, in my opinion, was right. Democracy is seldom a direct consequence of a violent political coup or a result of just the desire of the political elite that came to power. In all circumstances it needs the consent of the people, mass support, and a broad-based civil initiative. Today, one would say that establishment of democracy requires not only the strong will of the leadership of the state, but also the existence of civil society uniting people as free citizens conscious of their rights, law-abiding, capable of self-organization, and politically active. Despite of civil society becoming the subject of discussions a little later, it was transition to such society that was the goal of Perestroika, although it was not always clearly articulated. It implied elimination of all restrictions that fettered political initiative of the people, and prevented them from freely expressing their thoughts, sentiments and feelings. During that period, political freedom (and, therefore, activity) of citizens reached its all-time high, never seen before or after in Russian history.

My personal perception of Perestroika is directly linked to a new feeling of public freedom that emerged during that period and was never known before, that is, the right to think the way you want, to speak about, to write, to read and to listen to everything you deem necessary. This feeling only grew stronger with the first free elections to representative bodies of state power and their transformation into a political forum where deputies truly elected by the people could openly speak their minds and express their opinions. Politics became exciting and interesting, and the print media, radio, and television covering politics absorbed attention of the entire country. All those living at that time remember it well. However, those who forgot or do not want to remember it, perhaps, never wanted any freedom and experienced no need in it.

Of course, freedom that came with Perestroika did not represent the whole of democracy, but was only its prelude. The people understood it even in those days. The political, and moreover, economic system of the country remained the same in many aspects. The essence of this system was the merging of a single party with the state, and of the state with the national economy. And since the party was called the Communist Party of

the Soviet Union, and the state called the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, this system was perceived in the country and in the world as an adequate incarnation of socialism or communism (and in terms of ideology, of Marxism-Leninism). This fact invited a seemingly logical conclusion that democracy would never win unless socialism is done away with once and for all — and not only in practice, but also in theory.

This conclusion quickly gained hold on the minds of those members of the intelligentsia who while having enthusiastically welcomed the beginning of Perestroika, regarded themselves to be more consistent democrats than the very initiators of Perestroika process. My deepest conviction is that it was they who buried the idea of Perestroika by making Yeltsin the mouthpiece of their sentiments and views, by transforming the nature of the process of change into a real revolution, rather than reform. The disintegration of the USSR as it was and the removal of Gorbachev from power that followed it, although triggered by the August coup, were not an example of a lawful and, accordingly, a democratic settlement of the issue; they rather looked like a political coup made from the top. Perhaps, there were some who believed that democracy would finally triumph with the disappearance of the CPSU and the USSR; however, those able to look a little further ahead, were fully aware of the fact that the people who came to power after Gorbachev were not at all guided by the interests of democracy. The subsequent events in Russia, as well as in many republics of the former USSR, confirmed the correctness of this view; although, in the early 1990s, it was scorned as a sign of persistent Soviet-style and reactionary attitudes.

To correctly evaluate the essence and the meaning of Perestroika it is necessary in the first place to do away with the myth that since 1991, we have been living in a democratic country. Can Russia still be seen as a democratic country today? The answer is in the affirmative if democracy is to mean destruction of everything that constituted our life and our hopes under the so-called socialism. However, if democracy is to mean a civil society, a law-based state, separation of powers, independent mass media, openly pursued policies, the executive power accountable to society and its representative bodies, etc., then even today democracy is still a dream that is far away from reality. So, what do we call the reality which, having ceased to be socialist, never became democratic? If we ignore the democratic rhetoric used by the government in the Yeltsin times and nowadays, the meaning of the policy pursued by it is very simple: it replaced transition to a civil society by transition to a market economy and called it democracy. In the absence of real democracy, such transition could in fact mean only one thing — redistribution of public property in favor of the few individuals chosen by the government, that is,

in its essence, plundering of the state. The privatization carried out in this country was similar to expropriation; however, this time targeting not private owners, but the entire people. That is why the time of Perestroika and the time after Perestroika are as different as the democratic goals and ideals are different from the practices of economic robbery, corruption, and permissiveness that is not bound by any law.

What is it, in my view, that was never understood by the people who while considering themselves true advocates of the democratic path of development, rejected Gorbachev's Perestroika for the sake of Yeltsin's purported radicalism and antisocialism? I am interested only in them, since those who in that period were openly hankering after the old times and hating Gorbachev for his very attempt to carry out a democratic reform did not represent a formidable adversary and did not cause his removal from power. Even the coup that was inspired by such sentiments would not have caused his dismissal, had it not been used by those who counted on Yeltsin in their hope for the victory of democracy. It was they who actually lost in the end. Today, many people seem to understand this. However, there are also many people who persist in their delusion and put all the blame on Putin, thinking that backsliding on democracy started with him coming to power. The political miscalculation made by our radical democrats seems to be the main lesson to be learned from everything that happened after the end of Perestroika. What was their mistake? Why was Yeltsin's way of building democracy wrong, and why must it never be tried again?

The matter is not Yeltsin, of course, but those who started to believe in him. Their reasoning was primitively simple: Yeltsin would destroy the old system and we would build democracy on its ruins, and this democracy would not be inferior to the one already existing in the United States and Europe. Their way of thinking was clearly different from that of the author of Perestroika: he wanted to reform the old system, while they aimed at its complete destruction under the pretext that it was unreformable. In other words, they deliberately rejected the very possibility that democracy could be married with socialism, and not only in its Soviet version, but also in its European, that is, social democratic variant. Instead, they proposed the most radical versions of liberal and neo-liberal concepts of development, which even in the democratic West are no longer prevalent. As for Russia, what support base, experience, or tradition could they rely on here? What period of its history could they use as a reference point? Any attempt of immediate transition from socialism that repudiated democracy to liberalism, without passing all the intermediate stages characterized by a certain combination of socialism (represented, for instance, by that same social democracy) and democracy

amounted to the mistake of the February Revolution, which overnight turned the monarchy into a republic. Nobody in Europe has ever succeeded in doing it, as they say, at one sitting — just recall the history of Great Britain, France, or Germany. And we all know how such attempts end: rootless, foreign-born liberalism, by giving rise to chaos and anarchy in the country, leads to the restoration of vertical power in a form that is even more authoritarian than before.

Having started as an attempt at a democratic reform of the existing system, at some moment under the pressure from the intelligentsia that was inexperienced in politics, but obsessed with the liberal idea, Perestroika, unfortunately, lost the balance of socialist and democratic elements possible at that time. This resulted not only in the collapse of socialism, but also, eventually, in the undoing of the first beginnings of democracy. And like the February events ended with the October Revolution, Perestroika ended with the Yeltsin Russia, which, I repeat it again, I do not see as a democracy. It is not that Yeltsin was an enemy of democracy. He just recognized it as long as it did not jeopardize his power and allowed him to be an unchecked ruler of Russia. If you don't encroach upon my power, if you don't contradict me, you may do whatever you please: this is a democracy fit for a tsar. And it went nicely with those who used to serve the government, not the public, and were guided by its orders and whims, getting in return the right to really do whatever they pleased — and more importantly — do that to their benefit. This typically Russian rein of chaos and confusion was mistakenly called freedom and democracy. It ends quickly, since it threatens to plunge the country into total anarchy and ungovernability, and is replaced by what people now call "unpopular" measures that actually eliminate the last remnants of freedom.

In saying that the social democratic model of development (which is what the entire strategy of Perestroika, proposed by Gorbachev and rejected by Yeltsin, gravitated towards) held more promise for Russia, I am far from believing that it would have precluded the country's transition to parliamentarism, a multi-party system, free elections, and a free market. There is no doubt that Perestroika would have eventually gone that way, possibly at a slower pace, but with fewer losses — without disintegration of the state, the predatory privatization, impoverishment of the population, the shelling of Parliament, the August 1998 crash, the war in Chechnya, etc. And more importantly, without transformation of democracy into a purely formal exercise.

Democracy in the West, irrespective of who is in power at a given moment of time, has long ago developed the features of not only liberal democracy, but also of social one as well (true, there it is called not

socialism, but a welfare society). With us, even that set of social benefits that existed in the Soviet Union (like the absence of unemployment, free education and healthcare, children's allowances and pensions, etc.) was sacrificed to the misunderstood notions of liberalism and market economy.

I think that when we lived under "developed socialism," no one of us had any great sympathy for the system. However, even after socialism was done away with both in theory and in practice, our public life did not become more interesting or more attractive. Today, everybody is preoccupied with one's own private life, thinks only of oneself, tries to survive by whatever means, and cares nothing about other people. The government — as before — is far removed from society, while society, which awoke from hibernation in the period Perestroika, has again sunk into political amnesia. Public life has been deprived of something that in the past used to make people think about something more than just their daily bread, that brought them together to respond to all that was happening around them. Today, nobody is interested in anybody; everybody is minding one's own business. Is this civil society? It certainly started to take shape during Perestroika; however, later it vanished into thin air.

The thing that was obvious to me then and is obvious now is that democracy in Russia is doomed to failure, unless the right and the left forces, the supporters of liberal and socialist ideas find common ground and reach a certain compromise and agreement. Their unwillingness to understand each other ruined Perestroika and is now ruining whatever is still left of democracy. The blame for all this rests both with our liberals and our Communists. Their mutual hatred turns them either into pseudo-democrats or simply antidemocrats. Their hatred may result in something that would even be worse than that (again remember the experience of Germany in the 1930s), namely, in coming to power of the forces professing the ideology of extreme nationalism, chauvinism, xenophobia, or religious fundamentalism. Certainly, there are some people who want it to happen; there are some who see it as the only way to save Russia. It is almost impossible to persuade them that in the modern world this is the surest way to destruction. However, those who see the salvation of Russia in democracy will definitely return to the experience of Perestroika — of course not to repeat it (which is impossible anyway), but to try to avoid the mistakes and miscalculations made by the democrats at that time.

PERESTROIKA AS SEEN BY A MOSCOW HUMANITARIAN

by Dmitry Furman

Dmitry Furman is a Chief Research Officer at the Institute of Europe of the Russian Academy of Sciences, Doctor of Sciences (History); during the period of Perestroika, he was a Lead Research Officer at the Institute of US and Canada Studies of the USSR Academy of Sciences.

My participation in the political life of the era of Perestroika was minimal. Moreover, I did not know personally at the time any of the more prominent political figures of that period. I met many of them, including Gorbachev, later. That is why my memories of Perestroika are the recollections of an ordinary and not very active participant in the events, a member of the Moscow humanitarian intelligentsia.

1. Pre-Perestroika Era

Marxism-Leninism died a quiet death that went unnoticed at some moment in Brezhnev's times. During Khrushchev's era and at the beginning of Brezhnev's era, I met very many Marxists who were bright and really committed. They all, naturally, were opposition-minded.

That was the time when showing interest in Marxism and being in opposition were practically one and the same thing. One and the same process repeated itself time and again, when someone from the great mass of people with formulas of official ideology drummed into their heads would go back to its "original sources" to get astonished at the discrepancies between what had been written by the "classics of Marxism" and the official orthodoxy and "real Socialism." If a person becomes convinced that he or she understands the truth contained in the sacral sources of ideology abandoned by the government and not understood by society, they would have a natural desire to open people's eyes to it. The official Marxism logically gave birth to its own "Protestantism." However, Marxism is also an ideology of historical optimism and action aimed at changing the world. That is why the realization of the existence of a conflict between the official doctrine and the contents of Marxist texts

inevitably resulted not just in the desire to "open people's eyes", but also in the drive to change society, the drive towards "Perestroika."

I would like to recount two episodes from that remote time which are etched in my memory.

The first episode dates back to 1963 or 1964. There was a student at our history department at MGU (the Moscow State University), older than me and reputed to be a great expert in Marxism. The university authorities were afraid of him, since he was suspected of some underground activities. He suffered from some eye disease and was losing sight. He had a girlfriend, a nice girl who was an art critic and saw him as a romantic hero. Sometimes they would skip lectures together and hide in some corner and she would read aloud to him. Once I came up to them and heard her reading to him *The State and Revolution* by Lenin. Suddenly he interrupted her: "This place is very important; let's read it again." I can clearly see this picture before me even today.

The other episode dates back to 1969 or 1970. I was acquainted with a philosopher, who was a passionate Marxist and managed for some time to make a career (he became a teacher with the Academy of Social Sciences at the CPSU Central Committee) being at the same time secretly involved with a dissident movement (of course, he left it later). He gave samizdat (underground literature) books to me and to other people to read and disseminate them and we had to pay him for that with any money we could spare and take money from the readers and give it to him. These funds were subsequently used to help political prisoners. I remember him giving me a book by Solzhenitsyn, which I did not read (I was not much interested in it), still I paid the money. He did not really like me, for I was not a Marxist. I never argued with him, which, apparently, irritated him even more. Once we met each other by chance and his feelings burst out. All of a sudden, he started telling me with some anger that people like me were not capable of doing anything, since the 20th Century was the century of Marxism and all the great things in it were accomplished by Marxists only. I remember countering to him then, "Hitler, for instance."

Of course, the peak of these "Perestroika" activist attitudes and the democratic ideological search within the Marxist and the Russian revolutionary tradition (represented by Nikolay Chernyshevsky and narodniks (Russian populists)) falls on 1968, and after the Prague Spring they started to subside. By the mid-1980s, there were practically no more people like I mentioned above. Some left for the West or Israel; some

became ordinary Soviet scientific workers. I do not know what happened to the first of the two characters I told you about. As to the other, I met him in the post-Perestroika era; he was a moderately successful editor of a liberal journal and it seemed to me that he was mostly afraid of my asking him questions about his Marxism.

* * *

Since the early 1970s, when I worked at academic institutes and had a lot of acquaintances among the humanitarian intelligentsia, I have not practically met sincere and smart Marxists any more (at first, I wrote "have not met," then remembered a few "doubtful" cases and added the word "practically"). Among my acquaintances there were many dedicated Westernizers; there were also Zen Buddhists and Orthodox Christians, Russian nationalists of fascist trend, Zionists, and so on and so forth. (Of course, it would be impossible to describe convictions of most of them — they were just people living without any convictions.) However, there were no or almost no Marxists among them. I am aware of the fact that my circle of acquaintances was limited and, of course, there were Marxists around. However, the fact that I can hardly recall just a few doubtful examples from among some hundred and fifty of my acquaintances belonging to the humanitarian intelligentsia shows that by that time they had become very rare.

With virtual disappearance of unofficial reformative Marxism, the government got rid of the only ideology capable of inducing people to commit a purposeful "revolutionary" act. The ideological trends filling in the vacuum were incomparably farther from the official ideology that nobody believed any more; however, they were pregnant with smaller direct threat. A person having read too much of the *State and Revolution*, like the University friend of mine, was supposed to call for some rebuilding and make some plans to change the system. A person having read too much of Buddhist Sutras or Orthodox Christian philosophers was not capable of committing anything "socially dangerous". It was even easier for him to be a conformist repeating formulas that meant nothing to him. The situation was similar to that of the Renaissance and Reformation era when true Christian Protestants were violent enemies of the papacy and at same time there were many people at the Pope's court who did not believe in Christian God at all, but were quite loyal.

In the 1970s, there existed two main social world-views, both far from being of Marxist nature and not too dangerous for the government.

Firstly, it was Westernism. Unlike Marxism, with its ideology of action, and "Perestroika," this Westernism was just a belief that

"everything with us was bad," while "with them everything was all right". Of course, westernizers in high positions in some way facilitated the process of liberalization; however, this world-view did in no way engender any projects of changing the reality. More often than not its adherents believed that everything with us was so bad that there was absolutely nothing we could do about it. The only radical step resulting from this belief was to leave the country for good. Many of my acquaintances moved to the West or Israel in the 1970s and 1980s. Many Russians pretended to be Jews or married Jewish girls (both fictitiously and not) just to leave this hopeless country.

Of course, the dissident movement was also active. However, it was active only through the efforts of isolated individuals unable to stand the atmosphere of dying totalitarianism any more, but still having no plans as to reforming society. In my opinion, what dissidents said and wrote was not very interesting. Samizdat, which actively spread at the turn of the 1960s and 1970s, had "withered" by the 1980s, partially because of the fact that the dissidents started moving to the West one by one and partially due to the loss of interest in this phenomenon.

Secondly, there was Slavophilism. In the 1960s and even in the beginning of the 1970s, moving "back to the roots" of the official orthodoxy meant getting to Lenin's and then to Marx's works (early Marx was very popular), then to Hegel and Chernyshevsky and Russian populists (as another branch). In the 1970s — early 1980s, Lenin and Chernyshevsky were not read any more; however, everybody started reading Russian religious philosophers. Passion for these authors could sometimes be combined with Westernism; however, more often it would lead to "patriotism" of a fascist trend, portraying the Great October Socialist Revolution as a result of a conspiracy by Jews and masons. This ideology represented a negation of official dogmas, which was even more radical than Westernism; however, it was not dangerous for the government, either. The fact was that the "patriots" perceived the USSR as a new Russian empire, restored to life after the Jewish dominance of the 1920s, and saw liberal and dissident attempts to weaken the government as a continuation of Jewish intrigues. Among the people around me there were only few adherents of this trend.

Thus, dominating among the intelligentsia were the trends negating dogmas of official ideology but carrying no message of taking efforts towards a revolution or reform. I do not remember a single conversation from the entire era starting from the beginning of the 1970s until the moment Perestroika began, which would discuss plans to reform society, although many conversations were extremely frank and there were dissidents among my acquaintances, who later moved to the West and

were rather active there. However, once resettled there, they would reveal no plans secretly nurtured while in this country, either, since they had none.

I am writing this to make clear the idea that Gorbachev's advent was untimely. Had the cards of history shown something different and had Perestroika with its initial ideology of Marxist and Leninist reform (a belated Soviet version of the Prague Spring) happened earlier, then Gorbachev with his "more socialism" concept would not have found himself in a vacuum. Evolutionary democratization could take place in the USSR only through a Marxist reform, through "getting back to Lenin," "back to Marx." However, such kind of reform required some minimum amount of people capable of embracing these ideas literally, rather than as a cover or an outward form. There were plenty of such in people in the 1960s; in the 1980s there were none.

* * *

I must also say a few words about my own ideas of that time.

It is hard to give a frank recollection of the thoughts one had 20 years ago. Human memory works in such a way as to forget things that do not fit into the person's current perception of the past events and oneself and replace these forgotten things with things that fit in. Just like peoples create flattering versions of their own history, individuals create flattering versions of their own recollections and believe them. Today it is hard to find a person who would remember their admiration for Yeltsin; likewise, some time later it would be difficult to find a person remembering their admiration for Putin. However, I will try my best to be accurate in my recollections.

My views were a version of passive Westernism, which I mentioned above, with a few nuances explained by my profession (history of religion) and personal features. When a student, I was astonished by the similarity between the struggle waged by dogmatic parties at ecumenical councils of the church, that I studied just for myself, and the struggle seen at the Party congresses in Lenin's era that was the subject of our course in the history of the CPSU. I realized that Marxism-Leninist was a kind of religion. I thought that there had been many religions that flourished and then died. The dominating religion in the USSR of my time was Marxism-Leninism that was dying. Of course, it was not the "true faith." But there can be no true faith at all. I did not hate the Soviet government and Marxism, although I believed that my professional duty was to search for some real mechanisms of development of society and, hence, get into conflict with official dogmas, which was not too dangerous in itself, since I dealt with things that were rather "esoteric" in nature.

In the 1970s and the early 1980s, I was convinced that the Soviet power was doomed, for dying was the ideology that constituted its "soul." I saw it as a weak and senile old man and the evolution of the regime as "corruption developing into liberalism." I was sure that ultimately a system shaped after a Western model was to establish itself and I saw it not as an ideal but just as another stage of human development. However, these prospects looked very remote to me. I was of the opinion that between the Soviet government and democracy there should be a period of radical change of ideological symbols with preservation of the basic contours of the Soviet system. I defined it as a relatively short period of "sluggish fascism." I used the word "sluggish" because the era of powerful ideologies was over and a kind of fascism in the future could only be "sluggish" and non-serious. At one time, it seemed to me that Solzhenitsyn could become its ideologist. I amused myself with inventing funny, in my opinion, formulas to be found in newspapers of the post-Soviet future, which would be a blend of new symbols and old substance, like "the village elder of the Sergius of Radonezh agricultural community reported at a meeting a new corn variety lovingly called 'The White Guard' by farmers." Of course, the collapse of the Soviet power and the advent of "fascism" were to be accompanied by some social cataclysm which I feared but hoped I would not live that long to see it happen. I could not understand which form it might take. At one time, I thought there might even be a military coup. In general, this scenario proved to be rather close to reality. However, it lacked Gorbachev.

I was convinced that the mechanism of social mobility, particularly in the sphere of politics, in a state based on an ideology that was already dead, operated in such a way that getting to its "top" was possible only to fools or scoundrels, with the latter eventually turning into fools themselves as a result of endless talking nonsense. My view seemed to me to be confirmed by photos of members of the Politburo.

Today I realize that my conviction of those days, which is in conflict with the advent of Gorbachev, was wrong. However, even now, Gorbachev's successful career in the Party is a puzzle to me. I think that his coming to power was the realization of the least possible scenario in history, a kind of winning a lottery — such things do happen sometimes; however, chances are very low for that and it is silly to hope for them to happen.

2. Perestroika

My amazement was enormous when it became clear after Gorbachev came to power that he was a man consciously leading the country to freedom. Gorbachev did not at all fit into my scenario and I perceived him

as a God given opportunity to escape its realization and start orderly, rather then disastrous — through a coup and a victory of "sluggish fascism," — movement towards democracy.

Of course, I was far from thinking that Gorbachev was capable of bringing us to "bourgeois democracy," which seemed to me a prospect for the 21st Century, the times that were not that close in those days. What seemed to me as a real prospect was precisely "Perestroika," "Socialism with a human face" and "Marxist and Leninist reform." I believed in the possible transformation of the CPSU into a party that would be socialist, of course, but of parliamentary type and retaining its role for a long time, like the Indian National Congress. It had to be a party regularly winning elections and incapable of uniting the radical opposition presented by orthodox communists, radical champions of capitalism and various nationalists and separatists. The dominance of such a party for some 25 to 30 years could pave the road for future advancement. It was only in Gorbachev's time that I started traveling abroad. I was sent to Chicago to attend some American gathering discussing Perestroika (I don't think I understood what kind of gathering it was back then and I absolutely do not remember it now). As I was making my speech, an American from the audience asked me if I believed in democratization with the CPSU in power. I replied saying that Great Britain was a country as free as the United States, but a monarchy that even had a House of Lords and a state church. If putting of new substance into a medieval form is possible, then why not do the same thing with the form of the Soviet government and the CPSU?

I was delighted with "new thinking." It seemed to me I was a witness of a great process, when another great ideology and tradition, a communist one, was being added to various spiritual traditions embracing liberal values. It seemed to me that Gorbachev's role was similar to that of Pope John XXIII or Pope John Paul II. Catholicism succeeded in rethinking its past, with its inquisitions and crusades, without denouncing it and adding its own "touch" to the modern democratic world. My thoughts were about us doing the same thing: rethinking our own past — precisely rethinking and not just denouncing it — and adding to the "chorus" of modern democracy the striving for a "bright future" characteristic of the communist ideology and the creative impulse of some common efforts towards the development of humanity. I thought it was exactly what the "free world" lacked.

I have never been a "patriot." I was of the opinion that one does not choose his country and if born in this country, one must try to make it better. Leaving for the West never was my aspiration. But I was never proud of my country, although, unlike many of my acquaintances, I did

not consider it to be an extremely dreadful place. It was only in Gorbachev's time that I started to experience a feeling earlier unknown to me: pride in my country and its leader. This feeling so pleasant and unknown to me before disappeared again after 1991, but I am grateful to my fate and to Gorbachev for letting me experience this feeling during my life-time.

There were two problems that worried me. Firstly, I wanted to take part in the process and help Gorbachev. However, my plans did not at all include taking up modern Soviet problems, particularly, political activity. I had a certain life experience and a research plan I did not want to ruin. Little by little, I got involved (and found myself involved by others) into the "Perestroika" range of problems, although I resisted it and finally broke with the past and abandoned my previous plans only when Perestroika was over. The second problem was much more complicated. I was always of the opinion that for a person earnestly dealing with the humanities in a country with a dominating dogmatic ideology this ideology becomes their natural enemy number one. I even held that any work I published had to be in contradiction with at least one Marxist dogma. Sometimes I made references to Marx and Engels, just consulted the index and checked what they had written on the given theme and I was always lucky to find something that was to the point and "anti-Marxist." However, as for references to Lenin, it was beyond the compromise I could make. I just could not write something like "Lenin was a great man and the ideals of the October Revolution were great," because I saw it as simply shameful. However, the situation became different. The only ideology that could serve as the ideology of Perestroika was the ideology of "non-dogmatic" Marxism, of the "socialist ideals," the ideals of the Great October Socialist Revolution (with its goals "distorted" later), and of the priority of "values common to all humankind." If I wanted to help Perestroika, I had to start speaking and writing in a way that was different from what it had been before. For me it was a very difficult thing to do. Nevertheless, I published several articles in some popular collections of essays by the Progress Publishing House (titled "There Is No Other Way," "Understanding the Cult of Stalin," and "On the Way to Freedom of Conscience"), in which my emphasis was totally different — I did not state that the teaching of Marx and Lenin was true, but wrote that Marxism was a great tradition in the Russian and world cultures and that it had to be treated seriously, etc.

I began giving some credit to Marxism when everybody had already stopped doing it. Perestroika was quickly developing into a revolution.

* * *

Even today when recalling that time I experience the feeling of horror and, frankly speaking, disgust. An acquaintance of mine told me then, "At last the time is right for our generation." In fact, it was true. I do not know why it was in Russia that the youth took no active part in the developments of that time (the role played by the youth in other countries was much more significant). Our revolution was the one made by people aged between 40 and 50, that is, by the people who before that had whiled away the time sitting quietly in their research institutes and kitchens. The great majority of them were members of the Party. Now, with their fear gone, they started to hastily make up for their idleness, lies and time-serving, spilling out everything that had been accumulated over the years of stagnation. And those things that had accumulated were mostly that same passive Westernism, which all of a sudden became active and turned into an ardent anti-communism and that what was dubbed as "Russophobia" by our "patriots."

I hold that "Russophobia," like "Russophilia" ("Slavophilism") are absolutely normal phenomena. Self-consciousness of a people, just like self-consciousness of an individual, should have both love and dislike for oneself. A person who is at all times delighted with his own self is as abnormal as the one always feeling disgust for oneself. However, in the years of stagnation, it was "Russophobia" that had been accumulated and it had accumulated in such quantities as to develop destructive forms. Radicalism and irresponsibility of many pro-active democrats were directly linked to the fact that they never worried too much about the future of this country. It was in that period, with prospects opening up for democratic changes, that many people, including some of my acquaintances, after making some democratic noises, rushed to the West and settled there. It was clear that their plans to settle in the West and their democratic radicalism were interlinked, since they expected to avoid the consequences of these radical attitudes.

The thing started next I called an "orgy." Quiet "scientific workers" or people making careers in the Party were turning into ardent radicals right before my eyes. People were becoming engrossed in reading articles that tried to prove that Marxism was the source of all troubles for Russia (written by staff of the CPSU Central Committee), that social democracy was the main danger and that it ruined the Scandinavian countries (such articles were written by researchers from the Institute of International Working-Class Movement), and so on. In 1989, a person could write about the ideals of Socialism, but already in the year 1990, once they became sure that it would not spell trouble for them, they would write that Socialism and the Soviet government were unreformable.

Everything that could shatter the government was welcome, and people never worried about their demands being in conflict with one another. For instance, everybody supported the Armenians, who sought to take Karabakh from Azerbaijan. I remember how at a gathering at the Moscow Tribune, a club popular at that time, an Azerbaijanian was shushed when the poor fellow tried to explain that he personally strongly condemned the Sumgait pogrom [Translator's Note: An Azeri-led pogrom that targeted the Armenian population of the seaside town of Sumgait in Azerbaijan in February 1988] and that democrats existed in Azerbaijan, too. They started to demand from him that he immediately admit that Karabakh had to belong to Armenia. However, transfer of a territory from one union republic to another required a very powerful center. Meanwhile, at the same time, everybody demanded broader rights for Republics, weaker Union center, and, later, dissolution of the USSR altogether.

Even today, I cannot fully understand why the people who were not at all brave were fearless when the country's fate was at stake. For instance, they were not afraid that after the dissolution of the USSR our country would turn into a territory where all people would fight against one another, like the former Yugoslavia, but armed with nuclear weapons. The Americans, but not our people, were afraid of that. I personally was terribly afraid of the prospect of dissolution of the USSR; I even wrote an article for *The 20th Century and the World* journal, a popular publication of that time, titled "Be Careful with Empires," where I said that dissolution of empires was a natural process, albeit a risky one, and gave an example of the British presence in Africa: there were no cannibal presidents under the British; however, they appeared after the British left.

I did not know what was happening at the "top," but sometimes I learned things that perturbed me. As an example I will give two episodes that discouraged me greatly, without mentioning any names. I attended a discussion of a new set of plans to reform the USSR held at the Institute of Asian Studies. Presented was a plan drawn by two young scientists. Even a tenth grade school pupil could prepare a plan like that: to hold a referendum on self-determination in all of the Republics and, in case of a part of some Republic opposing it, hold another referendum in that area allowing it to secede from that Republic. I may not remember it full well, but my recollection is more or less accurate. Had this plan been, by any chance, implemented, the whole of the USSR territory would have been flooded with blood. This plan was supposed to be submitted to the Politburo. I said that the plan was childish and should not be sent anywhere, not to feel ashamed of it. However, it was, of course, submitted there. Soon afterwards, I was shocked to learn that its authors met one of the closest associates of Gorbachev, they discussed it in earnest and he

gave them much consideration. I realized that the minds of statesmen personifying Perestroika may not differ from those of junior researchers drunk with freedom.

Another example: I spoke with a person, who was important at the time, being a people's deputy and member of the Party Central Committee. I told him that nobody was aware of what was going on in the USSR Republics and that there was an urgent need to establish some research center to study the republics. Naturally, that man interpreted my opinion as a desire to place myself at the head of such a center. He was very well disposed towards me and so he said that if I wanted to deal with autonomies in Russia, then they would set up a relevant organization and provide it with people and money, but the Republics were something different, since (and I quote word for word) "the process of democratization will take place in individual Republics." This phrase, which on the face of it looked totally meaningless, meant that my interlocutor already treated the USSR as no longer existent (and this conversation took place some time in December 1990).

Gorbachev quickly lost his popularity and became a target for attacks and ridicule. I saw them as a manifestation of a slave's mindset. Everybody kept silent when such attitudes were dangerous. Gorbachev made it possible to attack the government and it became clear that he presented no threat to those attacking. Then everybody started attacking the man who gave them freedom. Their behavior reminded that of dogs sitting in a cage and whining until they were let out of the cage by somebody they immediately attacked. I held that behind the democratic radicalism demonstrated in this situation was a hidden desire to move away from freedom, a subconscious willingness to get back to authoritarianism.

People were irritated by Gorbachev's willingness to try to persuade and seek "consensus." They were irritated by the fact that he was a politician of a democratic trend, unlike Yeltsin who filled me with disgust and horror by his being a "Teflon president." In my view, he was talking utter nonsense. He changed his views at a dizzying speed and one felt that he was ready to become even a Muslim for the sake of power. I perceived him as a morally and intellectually sick figure. Still, his attitudes were radical and he spoke like a determined person who was not into "any sorts of consensus."

To me, it seemed a shame that the democratic intelligentsia could find an idol in a person like that. Yeltsin became the leader of a revolution and the founder of a new Russian state, a kind of our own George Washington. I used to say, like nation, like its George Washington.

* * *

I was aware that Gorbachev was losing control of the situation but hoped things would settle one way and another. I started to believe more and more that it was time for us to stop at a certain level of freedom and adapt ourselves to it, "digest" it, rather than proceed further.

Today I still remain of the opinion that it was possible to change everything while preserving the CPSU (under a new name) and the USSR (not forever, of course, but for a sufficiently long period of time). The only thing that had to be done was to snap at people in a timely manner. I was waiting for it to happen, but Gorbachev was reluctant to do it and he did not do it.

When GKChP, or SCSE (State Committee for the State of Emergency), emerged, I felt completely at a loss. Had it been Gorbachev's creation, I would have welcomed it. However, the people who placed themselves at its head were unattractive and "inarticulate." It was not clear what they wanted. The only thing clear enough was that they did not want any bloodshed (unlike Yeltsin, who did it later without a moment's hesitation). The notorious press conference given by the SCSE showed clearly that it was good for nothing. I even got the impression that the coup-plotters staged it just to "keep their conscience clear," to say later, "We have offered resistance."

After the August coup, there was an agony. Gorbachev was openly ridiculed at the Congress of People's Deputies of the RSFSR (for which God punished them later). Yeltsin, who previously used to say to the Republics, "Take as much sovereignty as you can swallow," started threatening them with a war should they secede from the USSR, thinking that now he could take Gorbachev's place. However, later he changed his mind and in December the USSR was done away with. The courage shown by Gorbachev in the course of all these events impressed me greatly; however, no sympathy was shown towards him by the people.

3. Post-Perestroika

After those August events, my life became different. I felt horror at the victory of "democrats" and at the spur of the moment decided to put everything aside and start writing to newspapers and you name it where, explaining that we were heading for a disaster and that the victory of democrats meant the end of democracy and the collapse of the empire meant wars.

However, everything turned out to be better than I had expected. There was no war of all against all. And we managed to prevent a conflict

between Russia and Kazakhstan and Ukraine, the most terrible thing that could happen. I was positive that after 1991 it would not take long for an authoritarian regime with a "faschizoid" ideology to emerge. Of course, our system can hardly be called democratic, but at the time I did not believe that freedom of speech would last (even if restrained) until the year 2007 and even 17 years later some democratic institutions would still exist in the country.

Later, I got acquainted with Gorbachev and even worked at his Foundation for one year. I like Gorbachev seeing him close up, too. I like his persistent, although hopeless and naive in my opinion, attempts to create social democracy.

I cannot fail to mention an episode which revealed for me an unexpected side of him. It was in 1996, when he decided to run for President. Of course, I thought that this idea was doomed to complete failure, but being loyal to this man I accepted an invitation to deliver a speech during his visit to the Moscow Tribune, a club that guarded dissident and "near-dissident" traditions. I said then that we should be grateful to him for all the elements of democracy we had at the time. I said that everyone in the audience respected the late Sakharov, including me, of course. But imagine such a person did never exist. What difference could it make? To me, nothing would change. Now imagine there was no Gorbachev — everything would be different — and things would change for the worse. I did not want to tell lies, so I said that I did not know how many votes he would get, but it would be indicative of the degree of readiness for democracy on the part of our nation. My speech was a success, although there was nothing special about it. Still, Gorbachev was deeply impressed by it. Later, he repeated many times both in his speeches and interviews to newspapers that Furman rated his role higher than that of Sakharov, but he absolutely disagreed with the statement that our people were not ready for democracy. He said these words in my presence on two occasions. Until this day, I don't really understand why my assessment of his role in history as being more significant than that of Sakharov was perceived by him as a great compliment.

An opinion that "history will eventually sort things out" is definitely not true. We are unable to fully understand the importance of an event in principle and all the disputes about the significance of Perestroika and Gorbachev will continue for as long as historical science exists. However, I am writing about my own perceptions of his role and the role of Perestroika.

I believe that Gorbachev's role in our history is immense, notwithstanding the failure of his plan and his own defeat. I am convinced that the advent of Gorbachev and his Perestroika was not at all the most

realistic and probably among the least possible scenarios of future in the USSR of the 1980s.

The victory of Perestroika, the realization of Gorbachev's project of a gradual movement towards democracy and market with preservation of the state and symbolic spiritual continuity was also, in my opinion, hardly probable, but still possible. Moving along this path involved certain problems and difficulties. However, many hardships could have been avoided. There would have been no war in Chechnya. There would have been no monstrous regimes of Turkmenbashi or Lukashenko. Social stratification would not have taken such enormous proportions. I don't think that this path could have brought us by the year of 2008 to real democracy, with a possible rotation in power of different political forces. However, there is a huge difference between slow movement forward and a failure and going back. Failure always means demoralization of society, followed by frustration.

Of course, Gorbachev is also to blame for his defeat, because he was in a hurry, giving in to the pressure from the radical intelligentsia, whom he gave more consideration than necessary, and was a democratic political leader in a country that was not at all ready for democracy. He wanted a "consensus" on the issues where it could not be reached and tried to use persuasion in the situations where he needed to give frights. To my mind, strange as it may seem for a person who had climbed all the steps of the huge pyramid of hierarchical power, he had a poor knowledge of people. But all of the above "weak points" and "mistakes" of his, as well as many others, were infinitely small when compared with the immensely difficult task he voluntarily took upon himself.

Realization of his project would have been a better scenario than the one that actually took place. However, had there been no such attempt at all, for instance, had the Soviet power collapsed (which was inevitable anyway) as a result of an overthrow of another Chernenko by a group of drunken "patriotic-minded" military, the outcome would have been much much worse.

Still, I think that the importance of Perestroika and Gorbachev is greater than their role in the development of our country in the end of the 20th Century.

It is not clear what makes a great political leader. Our mind is so built that for a great politician we necessarily take a villain who stops at nothing to get power and strengthen and expand it — like Ivan the Terrible, Peter the Great, and Stalin. Of course, there were political leaders in our history who sought to work for the benefit of their country and its people. But I don't know of a historical leader with whom this striving did not imply striving for power and its expansion. Gorbachev was

the only political leader in the Russian history who had full power in his hands and still was consciously ready to restrict it or run the risk of losing it for the sake of ideological and moral values. His criteria of success were different; he played by different rules; he played in politics based on the principles of human ethics. His success should therefore be assessed against these principles.

The rules of politics required him to get things under control before it was too late and launch a kind of SCSE himself, and do it even earlier than in August 1991. Then he would not have suffered a defeat. However, according to his principles, this very thing would have constituted a defeat. According to his principles, his defeat meant his victory.

That is why I consider Gorbachev to be a great political leader, perhaps, the greatest political leader in Russian history. To a certain extent he rehabilitates our history. His success in getting to the very top of the Party hierarchy showed that things were not that hopeless in the Soviet system. His emergence in the Russian political culture showed that things were not that bad in that culture. And finally, since such a statesman was once at the head of our country, then the emergence of a state leader like him is possible in the future, too.

STOP REVILING PERESTROIKA!

by Aleksandr Tsipko

Aleksandr Tsipko is a columnist with the Literaturnaya Gazeta; at the beginning of Perestroika he was a researcher at the Institute for the Economics of the World Socialist System of the USSR Academy of Sciences and in 1986-1990, was an adviser with the Socialist Countries Department of the CPSU Central Committee.

The reviling of Gorbachev and Perestroika makes me protest. It is an internal instinctive protest, like self-defense of my soul, a protest against glaring injustice. Gorbachev plays the role of a lightning rod in our country. He is a scapegoat for all our mistakes, all our Russian weaknesses, and our unreasonableness. Only the nation that ultimately failed to become the maker of its own history and its future could surrender Perestroika as easily and carelessly as we did. However, what we surrender is not Perestroika and its creator, but ourselves. We keep saying on every corner that there can be no "black holes" in the Russian history; we have mastered calm and philosophical treatment of both Lenin's and Stalin's terror; but, at the same time, we dump one of the brightest and most festive periods in the Russian history of the 20th Century, even the first years of Perestroika. According to the main "popular" version still around today, "it was the CIA that was behind Perestroika" and "Gorbachev sold out the USSR for money." This opinion is engendered by little intelligence and a sick soul.

In my opinion, most often the openly malicious words, filled with hatred and dirt, about Gorbachev and about the changes linked to his name are signs of a serious sickness of our society. It is not only a sickness of its soul, feelings and reason. This is the case of some evil curse no gypsy could lift. This curse might most probably get us into another, this time the last one, anti-Russian revolution.

And the most terrible thing is that our youth shares these superficial judgments about Perestroika that are not so much malicious as ironical and slighting. This youth, brought up in the era of all-pervasive irony, is incapable of serious treatment of serious things. Political freedoms and a host of rights we never dreamed of in the days of our youth and at a mature age fell down upon them like manna from heaven. They are simply unable to appreciate what they have been given. They are unable to

understand how difficult it was for a person endowed by nature with conscience and a sound mind to live in Soviet society, moreover, in Stalin's time. Or how difficult it was for them to walk across the thin ice of the Marxist-Leninist ideology without stumbling, or (God forbid!) saying aloud everything they really thought of the great "leader of the peoples," his collectivization or the advantages of the collective-farm system.

Unfortunately, with us freedom is of a value only to those who did not have it or those who know what an abnormal society is, where everything natural is prohibited. However, people brought up in a normal society find it difficult to imagine that such things may not exist at all and that there may be no right to openly judge everything they want. Getting used to the norm ruined the Russian intelligentsia, who realized only after the Bolsheviks came to power that tsarism was after all a normal system, at least, if compared with the Soviets.

There is a risk that the youth also project their ironical, condescending at best, attitudes towards Gorbachev and his Perestroika, implanted in their consciousness, onto the political freedoms granted to them: to freedom of conscience and freedom of press, the right to historical memory granted to them as a gift and the right to know the truth about Russian and Soviet history, and the right to see the world with their own eyes, granted to the people of my generation only in their late forties. This is twice as dangerous in the context of our corrupted post-modernism, where conscience and ethics are out of fashion and the most awful truth about the crimes perpetrated by Lenin and Stalin no longer stirs any emotions or feelings in people.

To understand the dramatic changes that took place in the spiritual and political life of Russia thanks to Gorbachev's Perestroika I recommend that all his critics, all those reviling him, read Gorbachev's report delivered at the April Plenum of the CPSU Central Committee, held in 1985. At that time, we just started shifting away from the so-called "language of the Marxist-Leninist ideology," awful and stilted, and Gorbachev gingerly acted as a messenger of good news, the news of change. His words about the "language of truth," the harmfulness of empty rhetoric and about "the man hearing one thing and seeing something different in reality" were something not expected of the Party General Secretary.

Do not forget that the very need for a refined person to make a fool of himself and keep repeating the mantras of the inevitability of victory of communism, the advantages of the socialist economy over the capitalist one, and the "decay of the capitalist West" were a torture for millions of people.

Nobody calls for making Gorbachev a national hero. Unfortunately, his fate as a politician and a human being is full of drama. His humaneness and openness to all human joys and weaknesses that prompted Gorbachev the General Secretary to launch Perestroika and free people from hypocrisy in ideology caused his ill fate after his stepping down as President.

Gorbachev wanted precisely to transform socialism into a normal society, where nothing human is alien to people, including making money and living in comfort, if one can do it. Gorbachev wanted to rehabilitate commonness. Had he been different, we would have still been idolizing Marx and Lenin, like savages. Had there been someone else in Gorbachev's place, he would have held tight the reins and never shared his power with anybody.

In the first days after his resignation, Gorbachev was very emotional — and without a reason — over what he called the "betrayal by the intelligentsia, to whom I gave everything." However, those close to him in the first days of January 1992 suggested that he should become more reserved and transcendental and become, at least for a short period of time, a man not of this world and out of politics. Not knowing Gorbachev well enough, I, for instance, in my innocence recommended that he should give up everything immediately after his resignation, go to his mother's village near Stavropol, live in seclusion in his mother's house, among the farmers, and publish his books to become a person people listen to.

Gorbachev as a politician lost a lot after his resignation. Nevertheless, he made several great things, which, by the way, caused another wave of anger from our "grateful" democratic public.

Gorbachev strongly protested against the so-called "trial of the CPSU" staged by Yeltsin in 1992 and he did not attend the "trial" demonstratively. By the way, it shows that his conscience was clear and Yeltsin had no dirt on him. It was with dignity that Gorbachev went through all the harassment orchestrated by Andrey Kozyrev, a "democrat," in revenge and, of course, at Yeltsin's instructions.

Gorbachev personally took the shelling of the Russian White House in October 1993 very close to heart. Speaking to cameras of the world's leading TV companies he condemned this barbaric act and the death of innocent people. I had been sitting together with Georgy Shakhnazarov and him in his office at the Gorbachev Foundation since eight in the morning and saw his human emotions and sympathy with those staying at the White House at that time.

In my opinion, had we been a healthy nation, serious and wise in its treatment of own historical heritage, we should have changed before it was too late our opinion of Perestroika and considered it at least in the

context of the general chain of tragic events of the Russian history of the 20th Century. We should have regarded Gorbachev as a response to the people's demand for truth, for rehabilitation of ethics and consciousness, for common sense, after all.

The fact is that it was not fortuitous that everybody, including those reviling him today, admired the Party General Secretary at first, at least, in the first two years, admired his youth, freshness, and his desire to be closer to the people and to the truth of life. They were delighted with his plans to see through to the end the process started by Khrushchev, to rehabilitate Bukharin and all other victims of Stalin's reprisals, and to remove fear from both our political and everyday life.

You will agree that Gorbachev was the first Party General Secretary who did not fill us with fear or worries over a possible another tightening the screws.

Everything Gorbachev did was something expected from him by the people and required by the very logic of development of Soviet society. The fact is that it was not only Gorbachev, but also the overwhelming majority of the intelligentsia and all the "men and women of the sixties," who believed that it was possible to combine socialism with democracy. Of course, Gorbachev in launching his Perestroika modeled himself, consciously or unconsciously, on the leaders of the Prague Spring and on Jaruzelski with his reforms and his dialogue with the so-called "constructive opposition."

Jaruzelski, with whom I stayed for a few sleepless nights translating his speech from Polish into Russian for the official meeting in the Kremlin dedicated to the 70th Anniversary of the October Revolution, said that he was surprised at Gorbachev's openness and his ability to put himself in place of his interlocutor.

However, everybody, except for die-hard Stalinists, wanted the same thing, namely, to make the USSR look like the socialist countries of the Eastern Europe, where people traveled to the West more freely and had less tough ideological censorship and more tolerance of the private property market. The fact is that all those who, like Leonid Batalin, Viktor Shabad, Galina Starovoitova, and others, launched an attack on Gorbachev in 1989 for his "Perestroika of the *apparat*" did not even dream in 1986 or even 1988 of something more than Gorbachev shifting to the course of socialism with a human face. I will never forget how Leonid Batkin, the ideologist of the Democratic Russia coalition, criticized my anticommunist underestimation of the heuristic and humanistic value of the Marx theory of communism in November 1989 at an international conference in Bergamo, Italy. In the first years of Perestroika, Gorbachev, together with all the "men and women of the sixties," sought

to get back to the later period Lenin and Bukharin of the "get rich" era and start everything from the beginning. Gorbachev shared the illusions of the overwhelming majority of the intelligentsia that but for Stalin everything could have gone differently and in a more decent way. By the way, shifting from what they called "true Marxism" to anticommunism was a very painful experience for the overwhelming majority of the current Russian liberals.

Today, it strikes me when Sergey Karaganov, a colleague from my days at the USSR Academy of Sciences, publicly accuses Gorbachev and his team on the radio of failing to realize what they were doing. Well, did any of today's critics of Gorbachev from the liberal camp know or propose anything apart from Dubcek's project, of course, which turned out to be a Utopian project of combining socialism and democracy, and the project of reviving the common human ethics and the Christian "Thou Shalt not Kill" commandment? No, they did not.

Until the moment when the first transformation in the history of humankind of the first socialist state started, nobody in the world knew that reverse transformation of state property into private one entails great moral costs and enormous corruption. Nobody thought that privatization would lead to the results that were just the opposite, to appalling corruption and marginalization of a significant part of the population. Nobody had ever thought that the newly emerged owners, instead of seeking to modernize the enterprises previously run by the state and make them more efficient, would simply plunder and sell them piecemeal to lead an extravagant life at the Cote d' Azur in France with the money they gained. Nobody had ever expected the new democratic elite to start building villas and houses as far from Russia as possible, instead of building a new Russia.

In general, a true member of the Soviet intelligentsia, passionate about destroying KGB and the hateful state, had no knowledge whatsoever of the pillars of society and social life. He was not aware that apart from the problem of freedom there also existed the problem of security and the problem of introducing "checks and balances" not only into the political system, but also into the family, into the human mind and into the desires of every individual. In the matters of building a new life the Soviet intelligentsia and our brilliant "men and women of the sixties" proved to be even more ignorant and arrogant than their predecessors, the Russian liberals who overthrew the Tsarist autocracy in February 1917.

Gorbachev with his Perestroika and democratization emerged as a negation of the Kosolapov-Chernenko project and of the program for

advanced building of communism, total socialization of means of production, and return to the class-based, Lenin's ethics.

However, the most amazing thing is criticism of Gorbachev for his rehabilitation of the so-called "common human ethics."

Unfortunately, here we simply see a manifestation of philosophical ignorance and lack of humanitarian knowledge. Rehabilitation of common human ethics, "common human conscience" as opposed to the class ethics of Marx and Lenin, was started in the USSR long before Gorbachev's Perestroika. In his later period, Lenin, all of a sudden, suggested that civil war should be judged against the principle of human life being "the highest value." This is a clear shift to the guidelines of the Christian "Thou Shalt not Kill" commandment.

Khrushchev, of course, was not aware of the fact that by making his report at the 20th CPSU Congress he put an end to Marxism-Leninism and started charging Stalin with departure from common human ethics and killings of innocent people.

Even more ridiculous are attacks on Gorbachev for his "common human ethics" by our patriotic authors of nationalist trend. Long before Perestroika, it was not Solzhenitsyn, but Valentin Rasputin with his Dariya, female character in his novel *Farewell to Matyora*, who criticized Communism and Marxism for their departure from simple common human ethics. Communism, said this character, measures a man against such a long yardstick that it is impossible to understand whether he is good or bad.

When Gorbachev spoke of common human ethics, he meant rehabilitation of the ethical and moral feeling that was called "common human conscience" by the Soviet ethicians as early as in the second half of the 1960s. Already in the late 1960s, the Science Department of the CPSU Central Committee did not know what to do about Oleg Drobnitsky, who tried to prove that the "sense of conscience" was devoid of any class features.

Perestroika was an imperative of the era and a demand of the overwhelming part of the Soviet intelligentsia, the most active part of the population. It's another matter that had there been no Gorbachev, it would have taken place much later. Critics of Gorbachev, both the patriots and the liberals, fail to see the most important thing: no fears, no KGB, or the CPSU Central Committee's Science Department could halt the natural process of Soviet society moving away from the unnatural and anti-human ethics of the civil war, in which ethics and conscience were placed outside the boundaries of social life, when, as Lenin wrote, everything serving the cause of communism was ethical. The higher was

the educational level of society, the more insistent was its demand for "living a life not governed by lies," as Solzhenitsyn put it.

In fact, political rehabilitation of common human ethics and conscience was inevitable, because since Stalin's time education in this country had been based on the Russian classical literature, which was Orthodox Christian by its nature.

Therefore, I say that the irresponsible reviling of Gorbachev perpetuates our deeply-rooted laziness of mind, our reluctance to think, to understand the nature of Soviet society, in which we lived, to understand its unnatural character and the fact that it was doomed from the very beginning as a Utopia in power.

And, definitely, those people who call themselves patriots and Russia not "this" but "their" country, should not treat Gorbachev and his Perestroika so carelessly and with deliberate simplification. The fact is that the biased and nihilistic attitudes of the patriots towards Perestroika play into the hands of their enemies and those believing that the Russians even when accomplishing some really remarkable things do it without wanting it, as if by chance, and that behind Perestroika there was the so-called "defeat of the USSR in the Cold War," rather than the people's drive towards truth and conscience and Dariya's desire to live a life governed by the truth and be able to distinguish between an evil man and a good one.

The patriots renouncing Perestroika and the democratic reforms of the late 1980s because of their irritation with Gorbachev actually renounce one of the greatest heroic deeds of the peoples of Russia, primarily the Russian people, namely, their getting rid of the Communist totalitarian system. Both Khrushchev and Gorbachev reflected the demands deeply felt by the Russian soul. I remember it well that with all the fears linked to the death of Stalin in spring 1953, there were no people, either old or young, who wanted a new Stalin. Everybody was waiting and longing for changes; everybody wanted at least some loosening up.

Nobody freed us from the dictatorship of the theory of Marx and Lenin. We did it ourselves. We need to realize and appreciate this fact, after all!

In fact, this reviling of Perestroika on the part of the patriots is simply unfair in many aspects. It is true that the Russian people have lost a lot because of the processes triggered by Perestroika. Most of the Russians found themselves unprepared for the market. However, the fact is that thanks to Perestroika the Russian man got back all the things taken away from him by the Bolsheviks. The revival of the Russian Orthodox Church, the keeper of Russian spirit, started during Perestroika on Gorbachev's initiative. It was in the years of Perestroika that the Russian people were brought back the whole truth about its history, the civil war of 1917-1920,

the acts of moral courage by heroes of the White Movement, the heroic deeds of Denikin and Wrangel. The Russian people got back the wealth of Russian religious philosophy and all the wealth of Russian public thought at the time of Gorbachev and on the initiative of Aleksandr Yakovlev at that. Finally, rehabilitation of Solzhenitsyn's anti-communism also took place in Gorbachev's time.

Perestroika created all the necessary political conditions for full humanitarian and spiritual education and for bringing the Russian man back into the context of his national history, into the context of Russian public thought. I understand it when a dogmatist Marxist-Leninist with an injured backward brain and living a life of class hatred towards everything perfect does not see all these things. However, what really puzzles me is why these obvious achievements of Perestroika, that is, the revival of Russian culture and thought that took place during those years, are ignored by the people regarding themselves as patriots celebrating Russia. It is not Gorbachev who is to be blamed for the fact that the spiritual wealth returned to the people turned out to be useless to anybody.

It is indecorous, particularly for the red patriots, to revile Gorbachev for his failure to rise up in many respects to the imaginary role of the leader of the Soviet Russia. My dear fellows, in the state of workers and peasants, so much praised by you but with its national elite and the families bringing up worthy educated patriots willing to serve Russia totally eradicated, it could not have been different. Even the patriotism and internal loyalty to the Russian state heritage characteristic of Stalin were implanted in him not by Marxism-Leninism, but contrary to it, by his education at a tsarist theological seminary, by Russian imperial civilization. That is why Stalin was a "defensist."

In my opinion, to give a fair and objective assessment of Gorbachev's Perestroika, it is after all necessary to distinguish its moral motives from its negative results. Perestroika was not launched to convert power into property, as claimed by Yegor Gaidar and Gavriil Popov. At least, Mikhail Gorbachev and Vadim Medvedev and Aleksandr Yakovlev, being typical representatives of the Soviet Party intelligentsia, put its ideological and moral motives before all else.

Of course, had there been no democratic changes caused by Perestroika, there would have been no dissolution of the USSR, at least in the year 1991. However, had there been any of the dinosaurs of Konstantin Chernenko's type in Gorbachev's place, we could have got involved in another Afghanistan, sustaining losses in a different way. One should not forget that thanks to Gorbachev the main threat, the threat of a thermonuclear war, has been removed.

We tend to forget that the beginning of Perestroika, the April 1985 Plenum of the CPSU Central Committee, where Gorbachev for the first time tentatively aired the ideas of glasnost, the language of truth and the inadmissibility of a gap between words and deeds, and the Belovezhskaya Pushcha agreements are six years apart. This huge period of time was filled with many events that depended not on Gorbachev, but on the masses that curse him today.

The fault of Gorbachev consists in his failure to consider all the consequences of the liberation of the Soviet intelligentsia and anticipate that they would immediately start using the benefits of democracy against him, against Perestroika, against the state. He failed to consider that the people he was saving from state oppression might have no sense of gratefulness, that they would demand all freedoms right away, like Andrey Sakharov did, that the Russian and moreover the Soviet intelligentsia had no sense of moderation, or conscience, or responsibility. Of course, only a mad man knowing nothing about the Soviet economy, could promise implementing reforms within just 500 days.

However, the fault of our brilliant Russian people, the great fault, lies in the fact that it always puts trust in those adventurers who tell it fairy-tales and promise heaven on earth here and right away. The fact is that what happened in the late 1980s — early 1990s was a repetition of the events of 1917. Back then, our brilliant people believed the Bolsheviks' promises of immediate peace and land, and plants given to workers. This time it believed Yeltsin with his assurances that, unlike the "indecisive and slow" Gorbachev, he would give it wealth and prosperity in just two years. They trusted Yeltsin when he said that his course towards sovereignty of the RSFSR would make them rich and that all the mineral resources would belong only to the population of the RSFSR.

The people have forgotten or want to forget that Gorbachev, unlike Yeltsin, wanted neither the dissolution of the USSR, nor an avalanche, all-out privatization. In fact, both the dissolution of the USSR and the avalanche privatization that took place later happened because our people turned away from Gorbachev and made Yeltsin, with all his promises to make everybody rich within a few years, its idol. There was something sick and reckless about all this worshiping of Yeltsin by the Russian people. People have forgotten that they finally deserted Gorbachev after he, in spite of everything, said the word "socialism." Now, all of those who hate Gorbachev remember socialism with warmth.

Many ordinary people blame everything on Gorbachev precisely because they feel ashamed of their enthusiasm about Yeltsin and their foolish belief in exhortations and promises of the democrats. As a matter of fact, the dissolution of the USSR took place through no fault of

Gorbachev, but above all through the fault of the people of the RSFSR and Russians, in the first place, who actively supported the idea of a sovereign RSFSR and the idea of the RSFSR seceding from the Soviet Union. The fact is that in June 1991, Yeltsin ran for President on the slogan of an independent and sovereign RSFSR.

The Soviet top brass and the entire officer corps did absolutely nothing to save the country back then, in the tragic months of autumn and early winter of 1991. Our generals and colonels did not stir a finger to stop the outrage when the country and the army were being destroyed at Yeltsin's behest right before their eyes. As it turned out later, they dreamed of something different, like a "brilliant" career made by Kobets who in just one day got several new stars added to his shoulder straps.

Today, many former admirers of Yeltsin's political talents say they did not realize back then what was at stake and that it was difficult for them at the time to "understand what was going on." But, wait, dear comrades, if the reason is your inability to sort things out, then you should not put the blame on the wrong person, and at least try to separate in your mind the "sins" and obvious mistakes of Gorbachev from the fault and responsibility of Yeltsin. This is not about the restoration of the historical justice; this is about our people starting to develop the ability to think about its national history, the ability to distinguish between the things that are possible and the things that are wishful thinking.

I would like to conclude this article on Gorbachev's Perestroika with what I said in the beginning. The reviling of the democratic reforms of the second half of the 1980s shows our lack of readiness or inability to earnestly start trying to understand the history that we, the Russian people living today, were making ourselves and start trying to analyze the weaknesses and vices of that thing we call the "Russian soul." How many times do we need to repeat the same mistake? Maybe it is time for us to learn to take responsibility for our political choice, to do away with our hopes for a miracle to happen, and to learn thinking. The drama of Perestroika is not only the drama of Gorbachev, but also the drama of our history. A really sad story — and I wanted optimism so much.

TWENTY YEARS LATER...

by Liliya Shevtsova

Liliya Shevtsova is Senior Associate and Co-Chair of the Russian Domestic Politics and Political Institutions Project at Carnegie Endowment for International Peace (Moscow Office), Professor of the Moscow State Institute of International Relations of the Foreign Ministry of the Russian Federation (MGIMO); when Perestroika started, she was Senior Research Officer at the Institute for Economics of the World Socialist System of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR.

It is hard to believe that twenty years have passed since the beginning of the Gorbachev thaw, an entire human life span! And those years contained very many events, like the breakup of the nuclear superpower that used to keep the entire world under strain; the change of three political regimes; two civil wars; several economic crises (big crises, at that!); a kaleidoscope of governments, and, finally, the change of the historical cycle from revolution to restoration. The structural shifts affected human fates, destroying many of them, and shaped new generations that no longer know what "Communism" and the USSR mean.

The anniversary of Perestroika may become an occasion for us to look back and reflect on that time and on what it meant to us, as individuals and the society of which we are part.

The law of unintended consequences

Arguments about what Mikhail Gorbachev and his team had in mind when they started making one of the greatest historical turns and, possibly, the most significant turn in the 20th Century, will last forever, if only because there can be no single interpretation of history, particularly, of such a dramatic event as the fall of the USSR. However, there are certain issues about which there is agreement both among the Gorbachev supporters and the numerous researchers of that era alike. For example, they have agreed that Gorbachev was a classical reformer, judging by his aims. That means that for a long time, possibly, until the end of his term in power, he sought to improve socialism, trying to avoid complete destruction of the state and the system.

Yet, I do not rule out that at some point during the final stage of his stay in power, Gorbachev, possibly, realized that renovation of socialism

was impossible. However, it was already impossible for him to negate his original mission and to turn from a reformer into a gravedigger of socialism. No political figure would stand such a dramatic transformation; otherwise, it would lose its integrity and destroy itself. The public, too, would have hardly accepted such a transformation of Gorbachev and legitimized it. The political history has not yet seen any examples of leaders changing their roles so radically and continuing to stay at the top. According to the compelling law of transformation, each of its stages gives rise to the need for a new leader, a new grounding for policy and a new team. In short, the irony of it was that the logic of the process required Gorbachev to leave after the mission he had tried to accomplish, exhausted itself.

Mikhail Gorbachev turned out to be a social democrat, who came at the time when the conditions were not yet in place in Russia for social democracy. Besides, as the experience of all former communist states shows, it is impossible to abandon communism via the stage of social democracy. In this case, development will proceed in the opposite direction, towards negation of social justice and, more generally, the social vector of development, discredited by communism. All the post-communist societies, even those where transformation has developed a relatively soft nature, failed to successfully combine its depressurization, on the one hand, and the principle of justice, on the other hand.

In short, obviously, Gorbachev started the process of renovation of the communist regime not at all aiming at destruction of the Soviet state. However, in practice, by abolishing oppression and separating the Communist party from the state, he dealt a crushing blow to the two constituent parts of the traditional Russian system — undivided power and its legitimization and maintenance through force. It was Gorbachev who introduced elections as a new method of making the Russian power legitimate, and it were exactly elections that became a delayed-action bomb for the Soviet system, causing its collapse and the downfall of President himself. This is an example of how the *law of unintended circumstances* works.

However, all social transformations started exactly this way. It is quite possible that the leaders putting themselves at the head of a process with unforeseen consequences, upon thorough consideration, would have refused to proceed on that path, had they known the outcomes of their actions. A question arises in this regard as to the possibility to include Gorbachev into the category of leaders of transformation processes, if the process of transformation he led resulted in outcomes that were unintended and undesirable both for the leadership and part of society. I think that we may answer this question affirmatively, if only because the

majority of transformation leaders in history acted intuitively and could not always foresee the consequences of their actions. However, it is very difficult, and sometimes impossible, to determine the correlation of the things intended and unintended at the time of reforms, especially, in the case of an anti-system transformation.

That is why we have to make a conclusion based on the results of such leadership. The activities of Mikhail Gorbachev resulted in destruction of the party state and the superpower. Nevertheless, as the subsequent events showed, Gorbachev's team of Perestroika men and women eventually failed to create safeguards against irreversibility of all post-communist processes. The reason for this failure was an objective one, since it governed society only at the stage of destruction of the old system. However, in the course of Perestroika, Gorbachev managed to give a number of inoculations to Soviet society and the Soviet elite to create the basis for at least a partial irreversibility of the processes started in the 1980s.

What am I referring to? In the first place, I mean the end of the Cold War. Whatever further developments at the international arena may be, it is hard to imagine that Russia and the West would return to this paradigm of relations. Gorbachev managed to train society and the elites to a certain level of pluralism and freedoms. Whatever direction Russia takes now, it is impossible to completely do away with these political habits. All this indicates that the process of transformational changes undermining the old system started as early as at the Perestroika stage.

What did Perestroika achieve?

Gorbachev's Perestroika was a process which destroyed the traditional mechanism of social order in Russia and, at the same time, the mechanism of ordering the geopolitical space that emerged in the aftermath of World War II. Until today, no new forms and mechanisms of such ordering have taken shape either in Russia or in the world political space; therefore, today we still live in the post-Perestroika world.

When speaking about the consequences of Perestroika specifically for Russia, one could say that it resulted not only in the disintegration of the old pattern of existence of Russia and the USSR, but also in the undermining of the pattern of managing society, habitual for Russia. Later, true, it turned out that Russia and its political class proved not ready to create a system of independent institutions and under Yeltsin Russia returned to the system of personified power, however, it was the power legitimized through elections. I believe that despite the strengthening of centralization and authoritarianism, this breakout

beyond the boundaries of the old tradition has consolidated in recent years, and that at least the highest power in Russia will be legitimized by way of elections. We owe this breakthrough to Perestroika.

True, Russia, after leaving behind one system, hasn't moved on to a different one and found itself in a grey area, becoming a kind of unique hybrid. The logic of existence of such a hybrid is apparent. With society failing to move towards clearer democratic rules, the democratic institutions that emerged in the years of Perestroika degenerate and the country is thrown back. Consequently, some time later another Perestroika is needed. The question facing the Russian political class and society is to what extent they are ready to return to the past, and if so, what time will it take them to realize that this past would not bring them anything, but stagnation and decay…

Now I would like to say a few words about the international consequences of Perestroika. It destroyed the bipolar system of the world and cleared the field for America, the only superpower. Meanwhile, as seen from the events of the past two years, particularly, in Iraq, the hegemonism of America, despite a number of positive aspects to it, is unable to find, at least for the time being, rational solutions to international problems. This hegemonism must be backed up by a more effective system of international institutions. However, the existing international institutions, including the UN and the Security Council, are apparently unable in their present form to become such a system.

We can see tensions within the Western community. They are also consequences of Perestroika, i.e., of the elimination of the USSR as a factor consolidating the Western community. Pluralism emerges within the Western world in the understanding of the key goals and objectives within the framework of the international relations and the understanding of liberal and democratic values. The "Old Europe" and America demonstrate different visions of the world order.

In brief, we continue to live in a world that still tries to manage the consequences of Perestroika and meet the challenges triggered by Gorbachev. It is quite possible that the next generation, not burdened by the inertia of notions of the pre-Perestroika world, which, in fact, has already ceased to exist, will give a more appropriate response to these challenges.

What proved unsuccessful and why?

In his memoirs, Gorbachev gave an assessment of his own performance and mentioned what he had failed to realize, at least, at the initial stage of Perestroika. In his own opinion, Gorbachev failed to divide

the ruling Communist party and establish a new social democratic party based on the reform-oriented wing of the CPSU. He failed to reform the economy and release economic initiative of society. In short, he deprived himself of a new political and economic support; that is why he had to rely on the *apparat* and the old state.

Moreover, at the final stage of Perestroika, Gorbachev found himself under the pressure of accelerating events, when one thing triggered another, giving him no time to think through the consequences of a particular course of action. It was that phase of transformation when most leaders lose control over the processes and are forced to act reactively. Nevertheless, I think that even at that stage, Gorbachev still had a chance to make a breakthrough by sharply distancing himself from the conservative part of the *apparat* and forming a close-knit team of reformers. I think that for a certain time, at least before the beginning of 1991, he also had a room for maneuver in his relations with Boris Yeltsin and the team of Russian political leadership and could use these relations to ensure a less harsh process of reforming the USSR. However, I again come to this conclusion based on my personal subjective assessment of facts. I do not exclude the possibility that during 1990 — early 1991, Gorbachev already found himself caught in a trap of accelerating time, the influence of the conservative part of the Soviet bureaucracy and his own lack of preparedness for breakthroughs, or, possibly, his desire to balance extreme trends, which made it impossible for him to take radical steps. Therefore, my conclusion about him having a room for maneuver at that time may be erroneous.

However, there were still other factors of influence and, above all, the sentiments and opportunities of the elite groups and society itself, which started to play a more active role in Russia with the beginning of Perestroika. The successes and failures of the years of Perestroika is our responsibility as well, i.e. the responsibility of people who were active in the political or intellectual spheres. Were the elites and society ready for Perestroika and more serious reforms? As far as emotions and expectations are concerned, they were, and there is not doubt about that. The very process of Perestroika swiftly radicalized society and soon it outgrew the boundaries of the paradigm of renewing socialism. I remember my own impatience of those years. It seemed to me that everything that Gorbachev was doing at that time was done too slowly. It seemed that it was possible to move forward in a more decisive manner, to replace the people and structures more rapidly, and get rid of the dead-wood. At some moment, Gorbachev stopped hurrying and even started to slow down the developments. He started to assign key roles to weird characters and moved away from democratically-minded intellectuals. He

was clearly starting to lag behind. And it was not only my impression. Many of my colleagues and friends thought this way, too.

Meanwhile, when one starts reflecting on the past events after so many years, one arrives at the conclusion that we, burning with impatience and attacking Gorbachev in those years, could offer very little to him. The democratically-minded elite did not ultimately succeed in creating a concept for development of the market and forming new political institutions. Indeed, there were many vague generalities; however, they were never brought up to the level of a concrete national agenda. Indeed, there were some sensible proposals; however, their initiators ultimately failed to persuade Gorbachev of their efficiency and necessity. And at that time, persuading was still possible and the government still heeded the society.

In short, we all rushed into the door opened by Perestroika. However, in the process, we did not give much thought to any details, institutions, mechanisms, and the rough routine work of effecting reforms. Gorbachev had a democratic intellectual support base in society, but expertise was a problem. It is not even that he did not bring in experts or did not understand what they said. The problem was that in Russia at the time there was nobody able to design new structures.

Other countries, like Poland, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia had better luck. By the end of the 1980s, there were already several generations of reformers there and they were giving thought to systemic transformations at the level of expert analysis. Therefore, when the moment came to "reformat" Communism and its economic and political structures, their societies could provide not just individual experts, but entire teams of specialists able to shoulder responsibility for a systemic breakthrough. Several generations of reformers, who tried to improve socialism, have accumulated experience of defeats and understanding of the fact that reforms should be followed by transformation of the system. Russia did not have such an experience of defeated reforms and understanding of the limits of the old state. There were no experts ready for working through the problem of building new institutions, either. This also contributed to the fact that the events left Perestroika and Perestroika men and women behind.

On the past and the present

Evolution of Russian politics in Putin's time, intensification of unitary trends, and narrowing of political freedoms and of political pluralism — all testify to the development of restoration impulses. Notwithstanding the rapid processes of the opening up of Russian society in the late 1980s-

1990s, the backbone of the traditional system is still in place in Russia; what is more, it is consolidating.

Monopolist and corporatist attitudes once again prevail in the country's politics, giving rise to a corresponding trend in its economic development. Naturally, the return to centralism and subordination revives many Soviet stereotypes, which were inherent in the authoritarian model of government. What Gorbachev tried to fight and wanted to eliminate in the 1980s is reemerging.

The current vector of the development of Russia makes one again consider the question of the extent of reversibility of the processes of democratization and liberalization and of permanency of Russia's rapprochement with the Western community. Reflections on Perestroika, its roots, driving forces and consequences for Russia and the outside world may well give rise to constructive discussions of Russia's current problems. It is also possible that Russia has to once again go through a period of authoritarianism, this time in a more technocratic guise, in order to see that authoritarian modernization is a myth unable to meet the post-industrial challenges facing Russia. If this will be the case, the anatomy of Perestroika may help a new generation of Russian reformers to escape the illusions of the 1980s and shorten the way to a final transformation of the Russian System with its self-reproducing government independent of society.

PERESTROIKA: FROM OPINIONS TO UNDERSTANDING

by Olga Zdravomyslova

Olga Zdravomyslova is Executive Director of the Gorbachev Foundation; Head of its Public Affairs Center; Vice-President of the Raisa Maximovna Club; Candidate of Sciences (Philosophy); social scientist; and writer; at the beginning of Perestroika, she was a Research Officer at the Institute for Social Studies of the USSR Academy of Sciences.

Anniversary of Perestroika has not become a public holiday in Russia. Russian authorities passed over in silence the historical date of its beginning (the 11th of March 1985, the date when Mikhail Gorbachev became General Secretary of the CPSU Central Committee). Failure to express any attitudes towards a key event in the modern history of Russia invites interpretation in itself. Against this background even more contrasting is the stream of articles on Perestroika and Gorbachev in the central mass media, the heatedness and seriousness of newly launched debates on the essence and significance of the events of those years and the discussions of sometimes controversial findings of public opinion polls.

Over the past fifteen years, the contents and the tone of discussions on Perestroika, just like the attitudes towards its leader, have been determined by two main circumstances. The first one is the dissatisfaction of the overwhelming majority of Russian people with the direction of events in the country and with their own life becoming too difficult, unstable and difficult to project under the impact of these events. The second circumstance is a deep trauma from the disintegration of the Soviet Union, breaking of the "link of times" and failure to understand the place and role of Russia in the territory of the former USSR and in the modern world, resulting in the feelings of loss, grievance and anxiety. The emergence of instability and the start of dramatic changes are associated by people with the mid-1980s and Perestroika. However, the impact of these circumstances on the public opinion of Perestroika and Gorbachev keeps changing. The way the attitudes change towards it and its leader in the minds of Russian people remains one of the most important indicators of a "destination" present-day Russia is moving to.

A social cataclysm and/or a social revolution: The public opinion of the events of the late 1980s in the USSR

The habit of seeing public opinion polls and reactions of the mass media as a barometer that shows social changes and closely watching its readings is deeply rooted in the political culture of Europeans and Americans. That is why immediately after a course towards Perestroika was declared in the USSR in the spring of 1985, perceptions of events in our country became a subject of regular public opinion polls and a hot subject for journalists in Western Europe and the United States. The situation was totally different in the Soviet Union, where the launching of VTsIOM (the All-Russia Public Opinion Research Center) in the late 1980s and starting of regular representative polls, publication of their results and discussions of their findings in the mass media were a necessary element of the policy of glasnost and the beginning of Perestroika in the minds of Soviet people.

In the years of Perestroika, for the first time since the late 1950s, a tendency of the Western European public opinion to show stable positive perception of the Soviet Union started to emerge. It was the tendency destroying the stereotypes of the Cold War. Research showed that Gorbachev's contribution to this process was a decisive factor. At the same time, in the European public opinion the personal standing of the Soviet leader proved to be much better than the image of the Soviet policies of that time in general. The European public opinion of Perestroika and Gorbachev varied from country to country. It had its own peculiar features in certain countries and was controversially linked to the stereotyped perceptions of the USSR and its leaders and of the Soviet man as shaped by the "system." Perceptions of Gorbachev by Europeans is a multifaceted phenomenon that goes far beyond what the journalists described as "Gorbymania."[1]

Changes in the public opinion in the United States also show that Gorbachev managed to quickly dispel the traditional distrust of the Soviet ("Russian") leaders and improve the image of his country in the eyes of Americans. Favorable attitudes towards the USSR in the United States increased from 25% to 62% between 1987 and 1989.[2] Over the two years, the rates of warming up towards the USSR in the United States were approximately the same as in the FRG and higher than those seen in France, Italy and Great Britain. At the same time, Americans were significantly much more likely to perceive the Soviet Union's policies and the personality of Gorbachev as a single whole than people in Western Europe did (as seen from the closeness of the figures for attitudes about

Gorbachev and about the "policy of Gorbachev," which shows strong ideological motivation behind the ratings of Americans). Differences in the evaluations of the personality of the CPSU General Secretary and, later, President of the USSR, on the one hand, and of the USSR policies during Perestroika, on the other hand, were more of a "European", rather than an "American" feature of the public opinion. For instance, there is multiple evidence that Mikhail Gorbachev as a person was perceived by the public opinion in the Western Europe as the main driving force behind the changes taking place within the Soviet Union and in the international policy pursued by the USSR. From the very beginning, he was seen as a representative of a new generation that was fundamentally different from the old Soviet *nomenklatura* elite. It was not by chance that the mass media of Western Europe immediately identified the intelligentsia as the "supporting structure" of Perestroika. In effect, it was probably the coming to power of the "children of the 20th Party Congress," the generation of the "men and women of the sixties," — the coming that was somewhat delayed but finally took place.

In contrast to the European and American public opinion, where a stable image of the "Gorbachev era" and Gorbachev's personality was formed in the years of Perestroika, in Russia perceptions of them keep changing depending on the twists and turns of post-Soviet history, one day touching on the "ground of facts" and losing it the next day. It is clear that the type of a political reformer embodied by Mikhail Gorbachev turned out to be as much a "surprise" for the population of the USSR and post-Soviet Russia as for Europeans and Americans. The lack of confidence in the stability of the political course of Perestroika undoubtedly had an influence on the public opinion of Europeans and Americans, but Gorbachev's personality as a reformer became a separate value with them.

Immediately after they were introduced in the Soviet Union, polls showed that "at the end of the 1980s, the public opinion was mostly a factor of mass support for Perestroika" (Yury Levada).[3] Tatiana Zaslavskaya holds the same opinion, saying that at the first stage of Perestroika (in 1985-88), the public opinion supported Mikhail Gorbachev and the reforms initiated by him, since "the evolving glasnost awakened people's interest in politics, made them socially active, and gave them a hope for democratization of society."[4]

The polls of public opinion showed that society was ready for changes; however, the people who enthusiastically gave their support to the course of Perestroika felt there was strong resistance to changes in the country. The nature of such resistance was not quite clear to them, but its power suppressed people, lowered their confidence in the success of Perestroika and led to pessimism.[5] When asked about the causes of difficulties, people

openly stated that the source of resistance to the democratization process was to be found within the country's system of government and that the hidden but stubborn resistance to the course of Perestroika permeated all levels of this system.[6] Nevertheless, as late as December 1989, the overwhelming majority of those polled (77%) spoke for continuation of the democratic reforms and supported Gorbachev. At the same time, a high level of trust in him (87%) presented a sharp contrast with the growing distrust of the CPSU (in December 1989, 27% of those interviewed said they had absolute trust in the CPSU, 25% — had partial trust, and 24% did not trust it at all).[7]

The attitudes society had about Perestroika and Gorbachev were changing as Perestroika was evolving into a social revolution that affected vital interests of various groups of the Soviet people. With the beginning of a real struggle over redistribution of power and assets in 1989-90, society found itself confronted with the problems of escalating social tensions and growing economic difficulties. But it was only when the resistance to the course of Perestroika became open and of a mass nature ("the bloodshed in Baku in the beginning of 1990, Boris Yeltsin becoming head of the Supreme Soviet of Russia in June, and the growing threat of a military coup emerging at the year end...'[8]) that a profound change in the public opinion took place. It started doubting the correctness of the chosen course and turning away from Gorbachev. In 1990, 53% of those polled noted the "weakening of real government in the country with every passing month." The proportion of those in favor of a coup capable to put an end to Perestroika as well as to the disorder in the country grew 1.7-fold from September to December 1990, reaching one third of those polled.[9]

The results of the polls showed disappointment with the outcomes of Perestroika: 43% spoke of "loss of confidence in the future"; 37% referred to a "crisis in inter-ethnic relations"; 29% pointed to the "chaos and confusion in governing the country"; and 28% noted "deepening of the economic crisis". Only 19% remembered "normalization of international relations and peaceful foreign policy." When asked whether "their life has become better, worse or has not changed after Mikhail Gorbachev came to power," 7% gave a positive answer, 22% said it had not changed, 57% complained it had worsened, and 14% found that difficult to answer.[10] The number of those distrusting the leaders of the CPSU increased from 53% to 62% within the period from January to May 1991. In May 1991, the number of respondents who had an absolute trust in the leaders of the CPSU was 5%, while in January it was 3%.

These changes are quite easily explained in the context of the sharply deteriorating situation in the country, which in the last year of

Perestroika was felt by the entire population. Nevertheless, the polls carried out in the late 1980s convincingly disprove the allegation that was widely spread in the 1990s that "the people did not support Perestroika." In fact, their findings suggested that the people felt the enormous complexity of the task and had a realistic assessment of the degree of resistance shown to Gorbachev's course of reforms.

Today many tend to consider the data describing the attitudes shown in the last year of Perestroika as a final assessment by Russian society of the entire period of Perestroika. Of course, this is a superficial view. Based on a detailed analysis of the Soviet polls from the Perestroika period, Archie Brown argues that "contrary to what has been suggested by many Western commentators and by Gorbachev's political enemies in Russia, Gorbachev was still the most popular and respected person in the Soviet Union five years after he had become General Secretary."[12]

Public opinion and discussions on Perestroika in present-day Russia

Judging by the results of the polls conducted by the Public Opinion Foundation (FOM) with a time interval of several years, the highest levels of negative attitudes towards Perestroika and Gorbachev were in the mid-1990s. The polls of 2001 and 2004 showed a slow growth in positive assessments.[13] Researchers come to a conclusion that the significance and scale of the changes linked to the name of the first President of the USSR are not questioned by the Russians; however, one third of those polled lays the blame for the current hardships at the feet of Mikhail Gorbachev. In the year of 2004, the same one third of those interviewed spoke about their antipathy to Gorbachev; however, a greater number of his country-fellows (38%) were sympathetic with Mikhail Gorbachev as a person (27% found it difficult to answer).[14]

Characteristic of the statements given by participants in the polls conducted a decade and a half after 1990 (in 2004) are deeply conflicting attitudes towards the recent past of Russia. People are worried about it; they describe their perceptions of Perestroika as "very complex," because "*on the one hand, as a result of it we got freedom, including freedom of speech, which is one of our biggest achievements, but, on the other hand, we got differentiation of society into a handful of the rich and a great mass of the poor.*"[15]

In March 2005, on the eve of Perestroika's anniversary, results of the polls conducted by the Levada Center and a detailed research by the Institute for Integrated Social Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences (IKSI RAN) were released. They suggested the emergence of a trend

towards "warming" of the public attitudes to Perestroika. According to the findings of IKSI RAN, 46% of the respondents answered "yes" to the question "*Was there a need to start Perestroika*?" (according to the findings of a FOM poll conducted in 1995, such answer was given by 40% of the respondents, while the figure obtained by a VTsIOM poll in 1995 was 37%). At the same time, according to the poll of IKSI RAN, the number of those who thought there was no need to start Perestroika and everything should have been left as it had been before the beginning of 1985 amounted to 35% (the FOM figure obtained in 1995 was 45% and that of VTsIOM was 54%).

One might agree with the researchers that the tendency of people showing more favorable attitudes to Perestroika is linked to the arrival of a new generation, the generation of the "post-Gorbachev era." Indeed, the answers given to the question from a Levada Center poll conducted in 2005 "*What role did the reforms started by Mikhail Gorbachev in 1985 under the slogan of Perestroika play in the life of our country*?" are clearly grouped according to generation. Positive assessments of the reforms were given by 32% of the respondents aged 18-24; 28% of the respondents aged between 25 and 39 years; 20% of the respondents aged 40-54 years; and just 12% of the respondents aged 55-plus. Accordingly, the proportion of those who believe that the reforms of Gorbachev's time played a negative role in the country's life sharply grows with the age of the respondents: this answer was given by 63% to 70% of the respondents aged 40-plus.

Researchers from IKSI RAN make a clear conclusion: "The generation of Russians brought up to become members of society already in the post-Gorbachev era give much more favorable assessments of Perestroika as compared with the generation of their fathers and grandfathers."[16] The majority of those supporting the idea of Perestroika today are the "most educated and active groups of the population, above all, the humanitarian intelligentsia and the business class, university students and civil servants, and the engineering and technology intelligentsia."[17]

At the same time, it is clear that in the present-day Russia perceptions of Perestroika remain to be deeply conflicting. Listed below are just a few of these contradictions:

- positive assessments of the majority of main events and changes associated with Gorbachev's era and at the same time negative attitudes to Perestroika in general (according to IKSI RAN, 53% to 91% of Russians give a positive rating to certain processes associated with Perestroika, but only 28% approve of it in general and 63% rate it negatively);

- nostalgia for the USSR and a strong and tough government, combined with a sharply negative attitudes to the use of force to preserve the state (according to the results of a Levada Center poll, 35% of the respondents believe that but for Perestroika life in the country would have become better with time and 36% are convinced that the great country would not have been ruined; IKSI RAN polls show that 41% of those interviewed believe that Russia needs a strong, tough and stable government, while 63% think negatively about the use of the armed forces in fighting the supporters of independent statehood in former Soviet Republics);
- recognition of democratic rights and freedoms as the main achievements of Perestroika and at the same time uncertainty about the fact that the need of Perestroika itself was determined by the task of democratizing Soviet society (according to IKSI RAN, 52% of the respondents see the low living standards and the shortage of goods and services as the main reason for the need to reform Soviet society; 28% refer to the monopoly of one party and the crisis of the political system; and only 18% believe it was necessary to develop political rights and freedoms).

In the past, the following questions proved to be of fundamental importance to the implementation of Perestroika: What was, in fact, Soviet society? What groups of interests existed in it? What groups would win and what groups would lose from democratization? What place would be taken by the "winners" and the "losers" in the structure of society and would it be possible to overcome an inevitable conflict between them?

At the end of the 1980s, the shrewdest analysts immediately pointed out the last issue. "I cannot agree with the opinion offered by some writers," wrote Tatiana Zaslavskaya in 1998, "that Perestroika equally matches the interests of all social groups... Meanwhile, the barricade (to be exact, a host of invisible but clearly felt barricades) is sure to split society into groups of initiators, supporters and allies of Perestroika, on the one hand, and groups of its opponents, on the other hand, with all of them gradually consolidating and realizing that their interests are in conflict..."[18] In 1988, Academician Nikita Moiseyev warned that "Our country will have to undergo a fundamental transformation, enter a new era, if you will; therefore, it is for this long period requiring enormous effort that our society has to be prepared... Everything considered at the moment and already proposed must be done! There is no doubt about that. However, there should be no expectation that the effect of 'emancipation' is seen soon."[19] Ten years later, in 1998, the same idea was repeated by Giulietto Chiesa, who said that "many have realized the

totality of the burden of the sixteen generations that lived through the serfdom, autocracy and empire."[20] The need to take responsibility for the past and the lack of preparedness for a painful "job of mourning"[21] is one of the deeper causes of the public opinion accepting in 1990-1991 the "discrediting and fall of Gorbachev, the events that seemed incredible by the standards of the Soviet political life."[22]

Public opinion polls carried out today, discussions and the open struggle over Perestroika and Gorbachev also show that present-day Russian society is still arguing over the choice of a path of development. The Russians see the essence of Perestroika, first of all, as being a phenomenon of national history, with one third of respondents describing it as a "crucial" event, 17% thinking it to be "of importance," and 16% regarding it as "insignificant." Only 14% of the respondents believe Perestroika to be a "world history event."[23] However, this image, a rather vague one, is starting to take shape as soon as respondents are requested to choose from among the following three statements allowing them to take a certain stand:[24]

1) In Russian history Perestroika is an experiment doomed to failure (52% of the respondents agreed with this statement); in the history of Russia Perestroika is an uncompleted breakthrough into the country's future (47% of the answers);

2) Perestroika is the time of spiritual degradation of society and pessimistic sentiments (48% of the answers); Perestroika is the time of spiritual growth of society, intensive activity of people and bright hopes (47%);

3) Perestroika has achieved its main objective, namely, democratization of the USSR and, thanks to that alone, left a positive mark on the history of the country (37% agreed with this statement and 44% disagreed).

The attitudes to Perestroika are still "splitting" society and, to all appearances, today's supporters of Perestroika are those who, being committed to the idea of its democratization, see in the era of Gorbachev the largest attempt to date to accomplish it. It is also enhanced by the fact that the public, having got an opportunity to compare the three eras that passed within the last twenty years, namely, those of Gorbachev, Yeltsin and Putin, is starting to notice significant differences between them.

While in the 1990s the era of Yeltsin was perceived by the overwhelming majority of Russians, despite historical facts, as a continuation of Perestroika, in 2005, 51% of the respondents agreed with the statement that "Boris Yeltsin departed from the course of reforms taken by Mikhail Gorbachev and set out on the path of radical destruction of society's structure."[25] At the same time, people almost do not see any

continuity between Perestroika and the times of Vladimir Putin. Moreover, researchers point out that many Russians believe it's impossible to use the ideological wealth of Perestroika in present times.

After Perestroika was interrupted, society saw the ruining of its naive ideas of "natural" transformation of Russia, emancipated overnight from the communist dictatorship, into a "normal country", a version of Western democracy. It was plunged into the chaos of lawlessness, went through social disasters and felt the threat of social disintegration. In the so-called "period of stabilization" that started after the resignation of Boris Yeltsin and the election of Vladimir Putin as President of Russia, the main social problems, like, first of all, poverty, social vulnerability, the war in Chechnya, and tensions in inter-ethnic relations, were not resolved. Dissatisfaction with the present situation and the lack of certainty about the future took the form of nostalgia for the Soviet, pre-Perestroika past and growth in positive attitudes to Stalin as its extreme manifestation. VTsIOM polls show that during Perestroika (in 1989) 12% of the respondents regarded Stalin as a prominent historical figure; in 1994 — 20% of the respondents held that opinion; in 1999 there were 35% of them; and in 2003-2005 — already 50%. In March 2005, 42% of those polled (with 31% of young people among them) were willing to see a "new Stalin" in power, while 52% of the respondents were against it. A February poll (2005) conducted by Romir, a Moscow-based independent research company, to ascertain the main challenges of the country showed that only 3% of the respondents mentioned development of democracy as one of them.[26]

In such situation positive perceptions of Perestroika and favorable assessments of Gorbachev's activity are a natural counterbalance to the tendency of curtailing and emasculating democratic processes, while the discussion on "the ambitious plan attempted by Gorbachev to direct the course of Russian history towards cooperation with Europe and the whole world" (this phrase belongs to Andrey Grachev) becomes a necessary and significant element of public life in today's Russia. Recent publications and statements are quite frank about it: "a discussion on Perestroika should be continuously widened in our intellectual community rather than curtailed out of political expediency" or because of our inability to find answers to the questions raised by Gorbachev's era.[27]

Russian society begins to better understand the meaning of Perestroika and Gorbachev's message; however, we should not fail to understand that today's discussions on Perestroika and the enlightenment of the public opinion are taking place in the extremely complicated and conflicting context. There are several viewpoints sometimes complimenting or excluding each other. On the one hand, it is a stand

demonstrated by Gorbachev in his statements — and he frequently talks to the mass media and to Russian and foreign audiences. It is developed by Gorbachev's associates and supporters of Perestroika in Russian society. The essence of this stand lies in the understanding of Perestroika as a strategy of democratic reforms and a belief that an emphasis on authoritarianism in reforming Russian society would mean a failure with disastrous consequences from the historical point of view.

On the other hand, actively promoted in society are neo-liberal and neo-conservative ideas, seemingly antagonistic at first sight, but, as a matter of fact, similar in their negation of the very possibility of development in Russia of democratization experience, in which the period of Perestroika plays a key role.

And finally, young people of the post-Perestroika generation, perceiving Perestroika as the beginning of a new period in the history of Russia and active in shaping their own role in the modern global world, are developing their own understanding of Perestroika.

Only one thing is certain: over the time that passed since 1985, the attitudes to Perestroika and its leader demonstrated by Russian society remain the issue that is closely linked to the establishment of democracy in today's Russia.

---

[1] Results of public opinion polls in Western Europe were given in the presentation by Eymert den Oudsten "The Perception of the Soviet Union and President Gorbachev in Western Europe: 1985-1990", delivered at the conference themed "The Future of Security in Europe: A Comparative Analysis of European Public Opinion", Brussels, December 16-17, 1991, organized by Philippe Monigart, to whom the author of this article expresses her thanks for the information made available to her.

[2] Saad L. *Russia Faces Image Problem in U.S. as Yeltsin Resigns*, http:/www.gallup.com/poll/releases/pr000106.asp

[3] Levada Yu. *Oglyadyvayas' na proidennoye i neprodumannoye: 1987-2002 (Looking Back at the Path We Have Traveled and the Things We Have not Considered: 1987-2002)*, http://www.polit.ru/country/2002/12/30/479430.html

[4] Zaslavskaya T.I. *Sotsial'naya transformatsiya rossiyskogo obshchestva (Social Transformation of Russian Society)*, M., Delo Publishing House, 2002, p. 106.

[5] According to the Institute for Social Studies of the USSR Academy of Sciences, in 1987, 16% of respondents were of the opinion that Perestroika was progressing quite successfully; 31% pointed out its slow progress, accompanied by great difficulties; 32% said they didn't feel it at all; and the rest gave no answer or found if difficult to answer. Citation from Tatiana Zaslavskaya. *O strategii sotsial'nogo upravleniya perestroikoy // Inogo ne dano (On the Strategy of Social Management of Perestroika // There is No Other Way)*, edited by Afanasiev Y.M., M., Progress Publishing House, 1988, p. 10.

[6] Eighty percent of those polled said they personally encountered problems related to excessive formalities; 57% pointed out the reluctance by state officials to take responsibility for addressing important problems; 47% noted indifference and passive attitudes shown by officials; 34% noted their incompetence; 42% stressed the impunity of officials responsible for excessive formalities, ibid.

[7] VTsIOM polls, http://www.levada.ru/press/2000101100.html

[8] Levada Yu. Ibid.

[9] Zaslavskaya T.I. *Sotsial'naya transformatsiya rossiyskogo obshchestva (Social Transformation of Russian Society)*, M., Delo Publishing House, 2002, pp. 110-111.

[10] Zaslavskaya T.I. Ibid., p. 113.

[11] VTsIOM polls, http://www.levada.ru/press/2000101100.html

[12] Brown A. *The Gorbachev Factor*, Oxford University Press, 1996, p. 5.

[13] Public poll of February 26, 2004. FOM, http://bd.fom.ru/report/map/special/ 90_13412/978_13557/d040815

[14] Public poll of February 26, 2004. FOM, http://bd.fom.ru/report/map/special/ 90_13412/978_13557/d040815

[15] Ibid.

[16] *Perestroika glazami rossiyan: dvadzat' let spustya. Analiticheskiy doklad (Perestroika as Seen by Russians: Twenty years After. Analytical report)*. IKSI RAN with support from the National Investment Council and the Representative Office of the Friedrich Ebert Foundation in the Russian Federation, M., 2005, p. 7.

[17] Ibid., p. 41.

[18] Zaslavskaya T.I. *O strategii sotsial'nogo upravleniya perestroikoy // Inogo ne dano (On the Strategy of Social Management of Perestroika // There is No Other Way)*, edited by Afanasiev Y.M., M., Progress Publishing House, 1988, pp. 41-42.

[19] Moiseyev N.N. *Zachem doroga, esli ona ne vedyot k khramu // Inogo ne dano (What is the Use of the Road, if it Does not Lead to a Church? // There is No Other Way)*, edited by Afanasiev Y.M., M., Progress Publishing House, 1988, pp. 52 and 61.

[20] Chiesa G. *Proshchay Rossiya (A Farewell to Russia)*, M., Geya Publishing House, 1998, pp. 66-67.

[21] Ferretti M. *Dialog s proshlym: ot perestroiki do nashikh dnei // Gorbachevskiye chteniya (Dialogue with the Past: From Perestroika to These Days // The Gorbachev Readings)*, Issue III, M., The Gorbachev Foundation, 2005.

[22] Levada Yu. Op. cit.

[23] *Perestroika glazami rossiyan (Perestroika as Seen by Russians)*, p. 33.

[24] Ibid., pp. 34 and 35.

[25] Ibid., p. 30.

[26] hptt://www.romir.ru/socpolit/socio/2005/02/trouble.htm

[27] Tretiakov V. *Tezisy o perestroike ili voprosy na kotorye my tak i ne otvetili (Theses on Perestroika or the Questions Still Unanswered by Us) // Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, March 11, 2005.

HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF PERESTROIKA*

by Mikhail Gorbachev

The revolution of 1917 determined many things in the 20th Century. Perestroika in many ways determined the turn which is now taking place in our country and the world. In 1917, the Bolsheviks made an emphasis on a dictatorship as a means to solve their own problems and the problems of the world. Perestroika men and women sought to achieve it by peaceful and democratic means.

As to the choice made by the people, it was inevitable and right both back in October 1917 and in April 1985. Of course, we made certain miscalculations, failed to accomplish many things and were prevented from accomplishing many things. However, from the point of view of historical choice, it certainly expressed the interests of the great nation.

The system created by the Bolsheviks ceased to exist. Nevertheless, it would be a grave mistake to consider the "Russian experiment" as useless and causing harm only.

Soviet society, from the historical point of view, came to a dead end; however, during that period many new things appeared that were already then necessary and useful for millions of people. They are valuable for the future, too. So, our grandfathers and fathers lived their life with purpose. Even at the lowest steps of the social ladder in the USSR, people never felt they lived in the situation of social despair their children would never be able to leave behind. This is not to mention building of a powerful industry — which was at the time and remained for some period an advanced one.

Also of importance is something else: the Bolsheviks through a cultural revolution and development of science created an educated society, which, ironically and contrary to their intentions, eventually overthrew the regime. The regime was rejected **at the cultural level**. And it is very significant.

If one is to learn lessons from mistakes, one can take valuable things from any era. **The difference between eras also lies in the price people pay for achievements**. We know the price paid in the years of Stalinism. Perestroika had its losses, too. The direction the developments took did not allow us to keep them within the course we had charted. Nevertheless, we did not resort to Stalin's methods of shooting, coercion, and reprisals.

History has not confirmed the inevitability of the collapse of capitalism... at least, has not confirmed it **till the present day** and, in my opinion, will never confirm it **in future**. However, the inevitability of collapse of the "social totalitarian system" was announced as far back as at the time of the Prague Spring. Its very failure under the Soviet tanks meant not only another wave of suppression of all attempts at democracy under the conditions of "real socialism," but meant, in terms of dialectics, the beginning of the end of the totalitarian system.

No matter what opponents of Perestroika and its critics may say about it, it was a wonderful time that stirred up the whole society. Only the generations of our grandchildren and great grandchildren would be able to really appreciate what Perestroika has given them. We went through so many wars, civil conflicts, divisions, industrialization, collectivization, the GULAG, and the shameful campaign against cosmopolitanism and dissidence that it's time we stopped it. At the same time, it should always be remembered that there are limits to people's patience and they may revolt if driven to the extremes.

Perestroika was meant to resolve the problem of taking the country out of totalitarianism. We wanted a society of common human values. It implied justice and solidarity, and Christian and democratic ideas and notions.

We opened up the way to further progress. We did what had to be done: granted freedom, glasnost, political pluralism, and democracy. We gave people freedom. We gave an opportunity of choice in the context of civil freedom and freedom of conscience, thought, and speech. I believe that the democratic understanding of socialism fits into this framework, too.

I believe that the world will never return to the barbarian forms of governance. They have become outdated, although authoritarian regimes may still emerge. The future of society should be decided not based on the dichotomy of capitalism and socialism. This matter is not about structures. What really matters is moving towards a society that would incorporate the best features from liberalism, socialism and other versions of progress. I do not know what to call this future society, but I think it will take in all the cultural, spiritual, and material wealth developed by the humankind over thousands of years.

There has been no funeral of the socialist idea. However, it itself should abandon its claim for monopoly and provide a platform for dialogue with other ideas and philosophies and mutual spiritual enrichment in the search for a society of the future.

---

* The text is taken from the book *Ponyat' Perestroiku (To Understand Perestroika)* by Mikhail Gorbachev, M., 2006.

The most important lesson of Perestroika and our times is that no emphasis should be made on leaps and overthrows. Of course, this approach has been deeply ingrained in our minds. We have always had to make breakthroughs or defend and mobilize ourselves. For the sake of a grand idea or goal we stinted and restricted ourselves in everything. It is time for us to scrap hopes of resolving everything at one stroke. We need **to stop swinging** from one extreme to another.

Was Perestroika a kind of a historical miscarriage? When reflecting on this today, I arrive at the conclusion that there are no unreformable social systems; otherwise, there would be no progress in history at all.

Perestroika should be evaluated not by what it failed or did not have time to accomplish, but based on the **magnitude of the turn** that it represented in the centuries-old history of Russia and by its positive consequences for the whole world.

Perestroika was above all a response to the urgent needs of Soviet society, with all its problems and conflicts. At the same time, it also reflected some wider processes that were characteristic of the global development in the last quarter of the past century. Perestroika brought the country back into the stream of world processes. It set off a ripple effect, encouraging the emergence of promising trends in the outside world.

In this sense, Perestroika fits into the "third wave of democratic revolutions" that swept across Europe (Greece, Spain, and Portugal) in the mid 1970s and spread over to the Western hemisphere during the next decade. Perestroika picked up this baton and returned it to Europe, to the Eastern part of the continent that was tightly sealed off at the time by the Iron Curtain.

Developing in parallel with it was a universal process known today as "globalization." During the 1980s and 1990s, practically all countries found themselves confronted with the need to adapt themselves to its challenges.

The **external dimension** of Perestroika could become a project that would be an alternative to the dominating neo-liberal version of globalization. Social concerns are expressed much stronger in the Perestroika concept. Its "picture of the world" is based on the balance of interests, rather than on power potentials. As long as the Soviet Union was still around such scenario of international development after the end of the Cold War had good prospects.

With consideration of its history, culture, mentality, and abilities, every nation has the right to freedom of choice. This means there are many scenarios of development. Freedom of choice should not be restricted for anybody. My "revisionism," if you will, started exactly with it: I proceed from the assumption that the fates of democracy cannot be

determined without application of the principle of freedom of choice, pluralism and democracy.

Over a period of almost seven years, the attitudes towards Perestroika dramatically changed as it progressed and went deeper. At first, it was not taken seriously and regarded as just another propaganda ploy by the Kremlin. Then, with difficulties and doubts, they started to believe that the new course of the Soviet leadership was for real. Later, it gained enthusiastic support and was even defended against hostile attacks. A great part of the world public sincerely regretted the tragic end of Perestroika. This is understandable, since with the interruption of Perestroika many people lost their hopes for a dramatic renewal of the world and a democratic breakthrough to the future.

What has Perestroika given the country and the world? I will mention just a few of its achievements.

Perestroika abolished the monopoly of one party and ideology. Stalinism, with its political and ideological reprisals, was completely done away with. Hundreds of thousands of people convicted without any grounds were fully rehabilitated.

We prohibited censorship, gave freedom of speech and press, freedom of assembly and association, the right to launch political organizations and parties, the opportunity to elect government in contested elections. Formed were truly representative bodies of power and the first steps were made towards separation of powers. In fact, a political system receptive to parliamentarianism was established in the country.

The human rights (called in the past "the so-called" with a mandatory use of diminishing inverted commas) became a mandatory principle. For the first time ever the opportunity was granted to freely travel abroad and publicly criticize any bosses and the government itself. Even though it proved impossible to fully implement all the rights and freedoms, the progress in this direction, started by Perestroika, is irreversible.

Transition to a new state of society was accomplished without any bloodshed. We managed to avoid a civil war. **We took the reforms so far** that this trend could not be stopped. Until this date, many people keep wondering how we managed to accomplish it in a country that vast and complex.

The economic logic of Perestroika developed along the lines of gradual dismantling of the command and administrative system of managing the economy and introduction of elements of market economy. Movement was started towards a mixed economy and equality of all forms of ownership; entrepreneurial activity and leasing were getting widespread; the processes of corporatization and privatization were launched. Within the framework of the Law on Land, rural communities

were getting a new lease of life and farming businesses emerged. Millions of hectares of land were granted to villagers and townspeople.

The pursuit of a democratic reform of the multinational state and its transformation from an over-centralized unitary state into a real federation brought the country to the threshold of conclusion of a new Union Treaty, which was based on the recognition of sovereignty of every republic, while maintaining common economic, social and legal space, common defense, and principles of foreign policy needed for all constituent entities.

Some critics of Perestroika, those who supposedly knew for sure already then how to act best, say today that everything had to be started with the Party. However, it was exactly what we started to do in the first place. But it was precisely in this area that we were confronted with the greatest difficulties: a hidden, and later increasingly obvious, resistance of the *nomenklatura* and, at the same time, a growing crisis of the authority and legitimacy of the CPSU because of the uncovering of Stalin's crimes. Renewal of the party had to be completed at the 29th Congress with the adoption of a new program, which was in effect a social democratic program, the draft of which had been published. By the time of the calling of an extraordinary Party Congress, scheduled for autumn 1991, at least three political parties were expected to emerge, championing social democratic, communist, or liberal ideas. Transformations within the country inevitably resulted in a turn in its foreign policies. A new, Perestroika course led to abandoning the stereotypes and techniques used in the past, full of confrontation, division of the world into "friends" and "foes," and the maniacal urge to impose one's way of life on the outside world. It allowed rethinking of the key parameters of the state's security and ways to ensure it, and stimulated a wide dialogue on new principles of world order.

Despite all the difficulties experienced both domestically and internationally, the foreign policy of Perestroika, inspired by the ideas of new thinking, brought indisputably positive results. Its main outcome was the **end of Cold War. A long and potentially deadly period in world history, when the whole humankind lived under the constant threat of a nuclear disaster, came to an end**. For many years, an argument has been going on as to who are the winners and the losers in the Cold War. The very way this question is formulated is, in fact, nothing else but a tribute to the Stalinist dogmatics. In common sense terms, the winners were all of us. Consolidation of the foundations of peace on the planet took place. A new foreign policy contributed to strengthening of the USSR security (unless, of course, we interpret security in terms of the Stalinist ideology). Our relations with other states, both in the East and in the West, were

normalized and directed into a **non-confrontational channel**. We paved the way for an equal partnership serving the interests of all, and primarily, our national and state interests. The opportunity appeared to significantly reduce the burden of military spending and weapons and direct some of the resources that would be freed in this way to civil production. The ardent desire of our people, who lived through the year of 1941, to never allow anything close to the last war to happen again was finally realized.

Like in many other fields, in the sphere of foreign policy of the Perestroika period not all things were ideal (and it could not have been otherwise!). Some things could have been done more effectively and in a more delicate way. Were there any opportunities for that? Probably, there were. However, anyway, the things that were conceived and accomplished in the main decisive areas served the interests and the needs of the country, strengthened its security, and improved its standing and international influence.

These are the decisive results of Perestroika. Even the shortest list of its achievements disproves a wide-spread opinion that Perestroika was a failure. In the course of Perestroika many of its goals were achieved. The dissolution of the Soviet Union eliminated the factor that hampered the country's powerful and forward-looking development and removed from the international arena **an enormous factor** of regulation and pacification of global processes.

Perestroika stimulated the **growth of national consciousness** in the Republics. In principle, it was a positive phenomenon. However, riding the wave of national sentiments, the republican elites rushed to seize the economic resources and put the assets that were owned by the entire Union under their control. Of course, it was necessary to put new material foundations under the statehood of the Union. The country's leadership realized and admitted it. However, we seemed to have overestimated the "strength margin" of the Soviet system and, most importantly, we underestimated the degree of self-interest and ambitions of the national elites. Their goal was to use the wave of national sentiments to get political power. To achieve this goal they did not stop short of destroying the union state. As the saying goes, they were ready to set the house on fire to warm their hands. This is exactly what they did: they aimed at Gorbachev and hit the Union.

The destructive policies of the leadership of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (RSFSR), headed by Boris Yeltsin, played a most negative role in the fate of the USSR. Using as a cover the quite natural demand of meeting more fully the needs of the Russian people, it virtually **torpedoed all drafts of the Union Treaty** and deliberately and self-interestedly sought destruction of the single state.

Looking back today, I become more and more convinced that **the unity of the country** or, at least, its main part could have been preserved — based on a profound renewal of the federation. Some argue that it was impossible to preserve the Soviet Union, that its dissolution was predetermined by objective reasons that lead to the disappearance of empires in the 20th Century. This opinion is a result of a purely mechanical approach to history, with its supposedly "iron" laws and unambiguous rules. Most often than not it is underpinned by the desire **to whitewash those guilty of the dissolution** of the Union.

Two decades after, it is easy to reason about what was done wrong in the course of Perestroika, about the mistakes that were made and about what was due to a fatal concurrence of circumstances. The dramatic paradox of Perestroika is closely linked to the heritage left to us: to dare to start changes meant running high risks; however, not starting them was even more dangerous for the country in the situation it was in when I became its leader.

Looking back one can see more clearly the fundamental factors that hindered reforms of Soviet society. In the process of democratization various claims and contradictions accumulated over the 70 years of the Soviet era rapidly came back to life and became stronger. Unscrupulous ideologists and irresponsible politicos rushing to the front of the political scene skillfully took advantage of them.

A contributing factor was a protracted reorganization of state institutions — the result of the growing confrontation between the reform-minded leadership of the country and its adversaries and opponents. The weakening of controls and of law and order intensified the desire of a part of the *nomenklatura* to actually seize state assets. Lifting of total control over society was now perceived not as an invitation by the government to a dialogue and cooperation, but as its weakness, provoking behavior along the lines that "everything is allowed." Violation of laws became a norm; real influence upon the economy was now exerted by mafia groups interested in criminal division of state assets rather than in shaping a normal market system.

The fatal concurrence of circumstances played its role, too. The Chernobyl disaster, the terrible earthquake in Armenia, and the dramatic fall of the world prices for energy resources — all this significantly narrowed the opportunities for reforms and dampened the reviving social optimism of the population.

However, it would be wrong and unfair to explain the dramatic finale of Perestroika solely by objective reasons, tragic occurrences, and the specific features of Russia and the Soviet past. The leadership had its share of mistakes and miscalculations, as it acted in the context of severe

shortage of time and found itself under the crossfire from the conservatives, radicals, and nationalists, who eventually formed a united front in their drive to overthrow the central government.

There are still arguments as to whether the reform-minded leadership of the Soviet Union made in the course of Perestroika some **fatal** miscalculations that could have been avoided or Gorbachev and his associates in the extremely difficult situation of the 1980s and the early 1990s had disastrously less room for choice, which left practically no alternatives and room for maneuver. I must admit that it was not always that we succeeded in finding the optimal versions of solutions.

The missed opportunities and mistakes may be divided for the sake of convenience into institutional and administrative ones.

The failure to set up a new structure of government should be included in the first group. The mass base of support for Perestroika was not sustained, either. We failed to fully use the unconditional support of the people shown us at the initial stage. I do not know whether the government has ever enjoyed such sincere mass support. However, we started to gradually lose it. We did not use the time allotted to us to resolve the problems of pricing and market. People were waiting and we could not make ourselves sacrifice the old methods and continued investing money, billions of dollars, in obsolete costly facilities. We needed to make the consumer market balanced and act more decisively and aggressively to redirect the defense industry towards production of quality goods for the people. Had we done so, nobody would have been able to confuse the people.

We were late with reforming the Union. What we needed was decentralization of the USSR, rather than its disintegration. We were late with reforming the Party. **These are the two biggest mistakes**.

Well known is the fact that the USSR was a "party state," where the political and ideological authority represented by the CPSU and the state institutions were inseparably entwined. Therefore, the weakening of the Party automatically led to the weakening of the state. The embodiment of the Party was the *nomenklatura*. However, as history shows, it is the *nomenklatura* that devours reformers. It removes them from power and suppresses the trends that show a change potential. The tragic conflict lay in the fact that with the "CPSU state," which was the heritage of the obsolete historical era that was coming to its end, we could not go any further and develop; however, we could not repudiate it overnight, either, because it would mean exposing the country to risks, since the *nomenklatura* was present at all managerial levels. However, the CPSU represented by its *nomenklatura* turned from the engine of Perestroika (no, the engine is too strong a word to use in this case, although, of course,

it was the initiator of Perestroika) into a real reactionary force. A possible way to resolve this essential conflict could be division of the CPSU, at the initiative of the Party leadership, and using one of its parts to form a party of reforms. I believe that in case of such division the majority of members of the CPSU (irrespective of their views), as well as the key resources of this powerful organization would have been left with the reform-minded leadership. In such a situation, the old tradition and our habitual discipline could prove helpful to us. However, the August coup buried this plan, along with the new Union Treaty.

The presence of a strong conservative current in the Politburo and in the top echelons of government in general, resulted in the fact that we often were late with taking urgent decisions. The election of the President of the USSR by the Congress of People's Deputies of the Soviet Union was an important event. According to a widespread opinion, had Gorbachev been elected in a general popular vote election (there were few people doubting my victory at the time), in the crucial moments of 1991 the more convincing legitimacy of the President's authority could have allowed us to take more determined action against the destroyers of the USSR.

Included in the group of unrealized opportunities of administrative nature should be flaws in control over the compliance with law, necessary to ensure stability in the context of a dramatic and rapid political process. The consequences of this failure became apparent in the course of numerous ethnic conflicts, starting with the 1988 bloodshed in Sumgait. No harsh measures were taken to prosecute and punish the pogrom-makers and break up the illegal paramilitary groups.

We showed certain arrogance in the matters of inter-ethnic relations. Of course, our achievements in the area of nationalities policy in the decades following the October Revolution were great. At the same time, there were many problems inherited from the distant past and those that emerged in the Soviet time, in the course of the implementation of the post-October nationalities policy, particularly during Stalin's time.

We had to anticipate that since we charted a course towards democratization, many old problems would resurface and new problems would emerge. And it did really happen. I refer above all to the problem of illegal deportation of the peoples: the Ingushes, the Chechens, the Karachays, the Balkars, the Kalmyks, the Crimean Tatars, the Germans, and others. We could have solved all these problems, but we were late doing it. We persuaded them that a new Treaty was needed; however, we had little time and the boat was rocked so much that a coup was enough to trigger centrifugal passions. We lost on this one. But it could have been avoided had we, I repeat it again, launched reforms of the Party and the Union earlier.

The Soviet political system had its own advantages. Today, after the bitter experience of the 1990s, many people in Russia feel nostalgic about the Soviet government, thinking of it better than it was perceived in the pre-Perestroika period, when the Soviets kept only their outward appearance that masked the absolute power of the Party *nomenklatura*. Making the past look better is also people's response to the cynicism of the current government. This dangerous disease has swept through our politics and the mass media.

The historical merit of the reformers of the Perestroika years consists in that they launched fundamental and urgent reforms and tried to implement them in a democratic way, advancing forward step by step along the only possible path they could choose at the time, extending the boundaries of freedom and the scale and depth of the reforms. In the course of Perestroika, we succeeded in fundamentally changing society and adding a democratic dimension to it. That is why the presence of these or those mistakes in the history of Perestroika can not undo its main achievements.

Perestroika took place as an alternative to two historical extremes: egoistic capitalism of private ownership, on the one hand, and the Stalinist totalitarianism, on the other hand. It happened as a spontaneous and at the same time purposeful movement towards synthesis of positive features of socialism and capitalism.

The name of this synthesis did not matter. The most important thing was that this attempt of massive social creative work was aimed at **overcoming the "accursed" conflict between efficiency and justice.** It was meant to show that history is inexhaustible and bring the humanity to a new level of fulfilling its potential.

Perestroika inscribed on its banner the famous words: "justice", "democracy", and "glasnost" and in many ways put them into practice. The outcome of the "shock reforms" was different. They brought rampant lawlessness and violations of human rights in the context of **the gap that emerged between the living standards of the majority of the people and a narrow circle of the privileged**, an unprecedented growth of crime and "systemic corruption," and the war in Chechnya. This time is associated with the dependency of the mass media on the oligarchs and the executive power. "Radical reforms" were carried out using the Bolshevik methods and it was not without reason that this process was accompanied by building up of security and law-enforcement agencies unheard of since the times of Stalin. This was done to suppress the people's protest and ensure obedience from the representative and elected institutions.

In its own way Perestroika was a historical heroic deed, since Soviet society freed itself from totalitarianism through its own effort and opened

up the way to freedom and democracy for other countries and peoples. With all the wide variety of opinions on Perestroika itself, even today our fellow-countrymen continue to benefit from its achievements, even without realizing it, primarily in the area of civil and political rights and freedoms. Up to 70-80 percent of the Russians share or support, to this or that extent, the basic democratic values introduced to our life by Perestroika. The approval ratings for the main outcomes of the foreign policies of that period also remain high. The difference between the Perestroika and the post-Perestroika periods is clearly seen in the international affairs.

The humanity entered the 21st Century with a burden of unsolved problems from the past and was faced with new, global challenges. To meet and cope with them we need a truly democratic world order. The preconditions created by Perestroika and the prospects opened up by it are not simply a "bid for the future," but a factor that still plays a role, preventing the world from sliding into a new confrontation and serving as a reminder of the experience of real cooperation in tackling the most difficult problems of the world.

The International Foundation for Socio-Economic and Political Studies (The Gorbachev Foundation)

BREAKTHROUGH TO FREEDOM

PERESTROIKA: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS

R.VALENT PUBLISHERS
2009