

Gorbachev and the Soviet Future

Edited By

**Lawrence W. Lerner and
Donald W. Treadgold**

INTRODUCTION BY
Herbert J. Ellison



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1

Gorbachev and Reform: An Introduction

Herbert J. Ellison

Back to the Future: Khrushchev and Gorbachev

The assumption of power by Mikhail Gorbachev in March 1985 may well prove to be a major turning point in Soviet history. Even before Gorbachev came to power, his speeches were marked by unusual candor about deficiencies in Soviet life, and his speech to the plenum of the Central Committee in April 1985 described a grave situation: an economy in decline and suffering a dangerous technological lag, a governing party that had become bureaucratized and aloof from society's problems, and a large segment of the population uninvolved either in the economic tasks of the country or in the business of the government. Thereafter, Gorbachev lost no time in demonstrating that he had great energy, imagination, and political skill and that he was determined to apply them to the nation's problems. He also possessed a talent for publicity, capsulizing his program in catchwords—such as *glasnost'* (publicity), *perestroika* (restructuring), and *uskorenie* (acceleration)—some of which have become as familiar in Paris and Peoria as in Moscow.

For the second time in one generation, a Soviet leader has undertaken a major program of reform and renewal affecting every aspect of domestic and foreign policy. This program is not a simple replay of the Khrushchev era; the times and the actors have changed. Yet Gorbachev and many of his key aides are *shestidesiatniki* ("men of the 1960s"), whose views and attitudes were profoundly influenced by the aspirations, achievements, and frustrations of that turbulent era. Their sense of what was attempted and why it failed influences their approach to reform today. Indeed, there is a continuity of problems that gives the outside observer of the process, and perhaps also the internal participant, a sense of *déjà vu*.

It would be misleading to speak of the Khrushchev reforms of the 1950s and 1960s as a "program." The word implies coherence and plan, but the dominant element of Khrushchev's policies was improvisation—

often brilliant improvisation—motivated by an urgent sense of the need for reform, an openness to new approaches, and a willingness to take bold measures. Khrushchev sought to rid his country of both the myth of Stalin's brilliant leadership and the negative legacy of Stalin's rule: the destructive power of the police system together with the arbitrariness of the judicial system and the law; the regimentation of intellectual and cultural life; the pervasive irrationality and inefficiency of an economy that failed to meet the fundamental food, clothing, and housing needs of Soviet citizens; and the tyranny within the Communist movement that had rejected Yugoslavia, created a political powder keg in Eastern Europe, and weakened the influence and initiative of communism globally.

In all of these areas, Khrushchev could claim impressive achievements: the dismantling of Beria's police apparatus and much of the gulag system; the reform of the judicial and legal structures; the "thaw" in literature, the arts, and scholarship; a number of economic reforms that restored economic growth and improved Soviet living standards; an increased independence and variety in the conduct and policies of the Communist parties; and an impressive extension of Soviet influence globally. In the end, however, the reform effort stalled—partly for lack of coherence and systematic reform leadership, but even more specifically because of the instability and resistance that had been engendered by the reforms. Khrushchev's colleagues felt that his impulsive de-Stalinization had fanned the flames of rebellion in Eastern Europe and exacerbated relations with China. They also criticized his often hasty and volatile economic reform schemes, and they greatly feared the broad growth of intellectual dissent that had been encouraged by relaxed ideological controls and by official de-Stalinization.

It was probably the challenge to the entrenched power of the ruling party elite that ultimately proved Khrushchev's undoing. He changed the Party Rules in 1961 because he recognized that the party secretaries—especially the *oblast* secretaries, or "little Stalins," with their enormous power and independence and their virtual lifetime tenure in office—constituted a powerful barrier to reform.

It is no coincidence that the Gorbachev leadership, which is severe in its criticism of the Brezhnev and Stalin years, had either omitted criticism of Khrushchev or explicitly praised his policies. An important example of the latter is the *Pravda* article by Georgii Smirnov, the new head of the Central Committee's Institute of Marxism-Leninism. In particular, Smirnov links the economic failures of the Brezhnev era with the reversal of Khrushchev's party reform efforts.¹ Smirnov further notes that the Central Committee plenum of October 1964 that removed Khrushchev also revised "certain democratic norms that had been introduced into the Party Rules"—a reference to the new Party Rules of the 22nd Party Congress of 1961, which required extensive renewal of membership of key party organizations at every regular election. (That is, one-quarter of the members of the Central Committee and Politburo, one-third of the members of the Union-

republican central committees and of the *krai* and *oblast* party committees, and one-half of the members of the city and *raion* party committees and of the committees of the primary party organizations were affected.) In short, Gorbachev sees a close connection between contemporary economic reform and the task of political reform at which Khrushchev failed.

Political Reform: Gorbachev's Turn

In his efforts at political reform, Gorbachev, like Khrushchev before him, seeks to make the party apparatus a more effective instrument of his power and policy. Khrushchev's reform of the Party Rules, already doomed in 1964, was formally withdrawn by Brezhnev at the 23rd Party Congress in 1966. Moreover, the policy of his years in power was described as "respect for cadres"—that is, a virtual lifetime tenure for party officials, with all the attendant implications of inertia and corruption. In his preparations for the repeatedly postponed Central Committee plenum of January 1987, Gorbachev used other means to attack the same structure of entrenched power. In one speech, for instance, he proposed that party secretaries at all levels from district to territorial be elected by secret ballot and that the members of the party committees be able to enter multiple candidacies.² The Central Committee resolution on the subject avoided his specific recommendation in favor of a recommendation for "improving the mechanism for the formation of elective party organs at all levels with the aim of its further democratization."³

Thus Gorbachev's proposals for multiple candidates and secret elections within the party appear to have failed, although the principle of elections was accepted in economic organizations such as factories and farms. Still, the resolution formula was flexibly vague, and he may choose to press the matter once again in the party conference scheduled for 1988. By all indications, he has sought a change in the Party Rules as a means of transforming the party leadership since before the 27th Party Congress, but he is also proceeding cautiously so as to avoid Khrushchev's fate. In this and many other respects, he shows a political skill that his reform-minded predecessor lacked. But the blocking of his initiatives is also an indication of the strength of the opposition to party reform.

Gorbachev may be blocked, at least for the present, in terms of party reorganization, but he has been impressively successful in his efforts to appoint new party leaders. Between his appointment as general secretary in March 1985 and the Central Committee plenum of June 1987, eight new members were added to the Politburo, whose total membership increased from twelve to fourteen at the June Plenum. Aside from Gorbachev himself, only Andrei Gromyko and Vladimir Shcherbitsky remained from the Brezhnev Politburo.⁴ Extensive changes were made in the membership of the Central Committee (one-third of its members were replaced at the 27th Congress in 1986), and a virtually total transformation occurred in the membership of the Central Committee Secretariat and the headship

of the powerful departments of the Central Committee. In addition, Gorbachev replaced a third of the officials of the primary party organizations during his first two years as general secretary.⁵ Changes in the party leadership were matched by extensive changes in the Council of Ministers. Indeed, no previous Soviet leader has made so many alterations in the leadership of party and government in so short a time.

Gorbachev was fortunate that his accession to power was soon followed by a party congress that gave him the opportunity to make major changes in the membership of the Central Committee and other party organs. The statutory five-year interval between party congresses, however, places a constraint on the pace of change in the membership of the Central Committee, in which Brezhnev-era appointees remain a significant force. It is therefore significant that Gorbachev now proposes to restore the institution of the party conference, which once played a major role in party policy (with seventeen conferences by 1932) but fell into desuetude after the eighteenth conference in 1941 and was described as no longer needed by a resolution of the 18th party congress in 1952.⁶

Gorbachev's first proposal to hold such a conference was made in January 1987, and he returned to the subject at the next Central Committee plenum in June, proposing a date of June 28, 1988. Between the two plenums an article on the institution of the party conference published by Yurii Bondar, chief of the CPSU Central Committee Institute of Marxism-Leninism Party Development Department, claimed that it had the authority to remove up to one-fifth of the members of the Central Committee, replacing them with candidate members and appointing new candidate members to fill the vacancies thus created.⁷ If one recalls the power of the party conference in the 1920s, when Stalin's first five-year plan for the expansion and total socialization of industry as well as the collectivization of agriculture was adopted, Gorbachev's emphasis on the major policy role of the conference assumes added significance; he is determined to use every possible means to eliminate opposition to his policies within the party apparatus.

The Economic Challenge

There is no greater challenge for the Gorbachev leadership than that posed by the economy. Soviet agriculture consistently fails to meet production needs. In spite of a large labor force and enormous investment (five to six times the U.S. proportion of gross new capital investment), it suffers repeated shortfalls of grain production, requiring huge and costly grain imports. Without the large contribution from the peasants' private plots, the Soviet diet would be even further below its current unsatisfactory levels of variety and price. Agricultural production is not only inadequate, however (as it has been for sixty years); its high costs in labor, investment capital, imports, and consumer dissatisfaction have also severely retarded the development of the rest of the economy.

For the urban economy, too, the problems are old and familiar: constant shortages of consumer goods (especially quality goods) and services; a housing shortage (entailing many years of waiting for new apartments); low levels of efficiency in the use of labor, capital, and raw materials; and a slow pace of development, importation, and application of advanced technologies. The high growth rates maintained from the 1930s to the 1960s in spite of such weaknesses have been somewhat misleading. In part, these rates are simply the statistical result of starting with a small base and magnifying the growth increments. More important, they were achieved under a policy devised by Stalin that emphasized growth, channeled resources to producers' goods and to heavy industry, depressed living standards, and disposed of huge reserves of labor and raw materials—all of which constitute policy options that are either less feasible or unavailable to the present leadership.

During the fifteen years or so before Gorbachev came to power, the deficiencies of Stalin's development formula became increasingly apparent. Economic growth rates began a downward trend, approaching zero growth by the beginning of the 1980s. The huge additions to the urban labor force of the 1950s and 1960s gave way to labor shortages in the 1970s and 1980s, reflecting the declining birthrates of the postwar era. And competition for investment capital from neglected sectors of the economy (housing, consumer goods, and agriculture), as well as an immensely ambitious plan for expansion and modernization of military programs, challenged the priority of heavy industrial investment.

Khrushchev had recognized many of these problems and sought to develop a coherent policy response to them. It is greatly to his credit that he spoke candidly of the failures of Soviet agriculture and industry, attempted to meet the material needs of the Soviet citizenry, acknowledged openly the lag in Soviet technology behind that of the West, and tried to reduce military costs. He was weak, however, in his efforts at structural reform of the economy, partly because he remained committed to further socialization in the area of agriculture and was hostile to peasant private production—partly for lack of a coherent scheme for reform of the industrial economy, and partly because he lacked the power within the party to press his programs forward.

There is much justification for Gorbachev's criticism of the policies of the Brezhnev era, including those pertaining to the economy. Experimental reform programs in both industry and agriculture (e.g., Aleksi Kosygin's industrial reforms and Ivan Khudenko's experiment in agricultural reorganization) were largely abandoned by the early 1970s, and the basic system was retained. Important reform initiatives continued, however. Agriculture received a greatly expanded share of new investment, and peasants' incomes climbed steadily and impressively in a process accompanied by important legal improvements in the peasants' position. In industry, vigorous efforts were made to modernize, especially through the importation of new technology. In the main, however, the approach was one of working within

the established system and seeking to make it function more effectively. The leadership ignored indications that the system was faulty. Meanwhile, economic growth rates continued to decline, labor and capital shortages became more pressing, the improvements in living standards of the 1960s and early 1970s gave way to growth stagnation and widespread shortages, and the colossal burden of defense expenditures grew relentlessly.

Such was the formidable legacy of economic problems and policies inherited by Brezhnev's successors. Not until Gorbachev's succession in 1985 could serious reform efforts begin. By then it was apparent that effective reforms would require not only transformation of the sclerotic party organization and its personnel but also a great deal of "new thinking" about economic problems. Hence economic reform was dependent on a relaxation of the controls on intellectual inquiry and debate, covering a far wider range of contemporary and historical issues than that encompassed by an exchange on such problems as pricing or technology. Consistent with a uniquely Russian tradition, the question of economic reform has come (as it must) to involve not only economists and journalists but also sociologists, historians, novelists, and poets.

Gorbachev's experience with economic reform has been difficult. It underlies his recognition, evident in the policy changes that appeared as of early 1987, that political reform could not be postponed while he pursued economic change. His economic reform program began early, with personnel changes and efforts to restore labor discipline. He also proposed to restructure the system of economic management by reducing the size and role of the bureaucracy and giving greater autonomy to enterprises and increased incentives to both management and workers. His early speeches reveal that he had expected resistance to his decentralization policies from midlevel officials but that he also envisaged the need to pressure this group "from below and from above."

The scope and strength of the opposition was much greater than Gorbachev had anticipated. In early 1986 he acknowledged that opposition to reform was coming from virtually every segment of society. His reforms threatened the powers and privileges of all levels of the bureaucracy and placed new responsibilities on industrial managers. Many workers had to relocate and some faced temporary unemployment. Differentiation of incomes and reduction of state subsidies for food, clothing, and housing presented additional problems.

Although Gorbachev's reform proposals aimed to reward productive and efficient factory managers and diligent workers, the resistance within the bureaucracy and the party was accompanied by signs of worker unrest. The evidence of worker dissatisfaction was widespread. Strikers in the Ukraine and Belorussia in the summer of 1986 protested meat price increases, which were then rescinded. And the introduction of strict quality-control measures, especially those involving the severe reduction of wages of workers in factories failing to meet quality standards, brought protests by workers.⁸ Gorbachev's speeches showed increasing frustration with the

evidence of popular resistance to his reforms. He remarked at a meeting in September 1986 on the need to achieve "a restructuring of people's thinking" before reform could succeed.⁹ His proposals and initiatives for political "democratization" and increased "openness" in the treatment of Soviet economic and other deficiencies by the media during the autumn and winter of 1986–1987 were apparently a result of his growing sense of the need to make people aware of the serious problems of the Soviet economy and society.

Meanwhile, the pressure for economic reform continued, reaching an important new stage with the Central Committee plenum on the economy on June 25–26, 1987. Gorbachev's speech at the plenum revealed both ambitious plans for the future and a sense of frustration with the severe limits on reform to date. He proposed the regrouping of the 37,000 industrial enterprises currently directed by Moscow ministries into a structure of vertically organized trusts managing whole areas of industry from development to mass production (an idea borrowed from East Germany). The enterprises subordinate to republic ministries and local authorities, serving mainly consumer needs and the special supply needs of the large state trusts, were to remain numerous and small, adding many new cooperatives to the development of outside state planning.

The plenum endorsed a new draft law on a state enterprise, under discussion for several months, that figured into the cautious approach being taken to a larger role for the market in the Soviet economy. This enterprise fell far short of the marketization of the Hungarian economy but represented, nevertheless, a substantial departure from Soviet practice. In the proposed system, inaugurated in January 1988, the Soviet state enterprise will control its own plan, but state contracts and control figures imposed from above will influence output planning for about 50 to 60 percent of production. The system also provides for establishment of a clearly defined plan involving enterprise payments to the state budget in order to give enterprise managers a predictable context for their own planning decisions. The proportion of production directed from above as well as the fact that the ministries retain both the right and the motivation to "manage" the enterprises under their supervision indicate that the provision of real independence of the enterprise remains a distant goal.¹⁰

Gorbachev's efforts to achieve price reforms look even more problematic than his industrial reforms. In the area of retail prices, he has mainly targeted the commodities that receive massive state subsidies, currently running at about 73 billion rubles a year. He also seeks a reform of the system for establishing prices in buying and selling between enterprises, allowing these prices to be set by the enterprises rather than by central planners. Both ideas continue to meet powerful resistance.

Regarding reform of the agricultural economy, Gorbachev stresses the advantages of small contract teams (often family groups), which work independently within the state and collective farms. This notion closely matches his views about the need for encouraging independent cooperative

and family concerns in other sectors of the economy, especially in services and the production of consumer goods.

In his efforts to reform the economic system, Gorbachev faces not only the resistance of conservative elements of the leadership, and that of much of the general population, but also the impatience and criticism of intellectuals—economists, journalists, historians, and others—who want more rapid and extensive reform than he is prepared to offer. Evidence of precisely these attitudes inspired the remarks he made in his closing speech to the Central Committee on June 9, 1987, with reference to the need to “rebuff anyone who offers us anti-Socialist alternatives.”¹¹ Clearly, his concern was that the public debate on economic reform was developing in ways that were politically sensitive; going beyond discussion of the merits of market versus plan in economic development, the debate evolved into criticism of the existing forms of social ownership, including collectivized agriculture. Moreover, some critics were challenging not only the specific elements of *perestroika* but also the way in which the leadership had conceived and implemented it; some complained that the guiding ideas were often muddled and that serious economic discussion was being curtailed. Their increasingly candid criticisms of past economic policy—particularly that during the Stalin era—raised questions about the soundness of the existing system. Obviously the alliance with the reform-minded intelligentsia would not always be easy.

Cultural Liberalization: Instrument or Policy?

Gorbachev's cultural policies, like those affecting the economy and party and state affairs, recall important themes from the Khrushchev years. As with political reform, Gorbachev rejected the idea of early changes in cultural policy during his first year of power, arguing that economic reform must have priority. By the end of the first year, however, rapid changes in cultural policy had begun, and he acknowledged that economic reform was not possible without changes in political and cultural life as well. Such changes have become apparent in the party leadership, in the new leadership and policies of the major cultural organizations, and in new (or newly released) films, plays, and literature.

As in economic and foreign policy, the Gorbachev regime has been notable for its appointment of an unusually talented leadership for cultural affairs. The most important senior party appointee is Alexander Yakovlev, who in the summer of 1985 became head of the Propaganda Department of the CPSU Central Committee—a position he had lost in 1973 for criticizing nationalist tendencies in Soviet journalism and literary criticism. He swiftly rose within the party apparatus from Central Committee secretary for propaganda and agitation at the 27th Congress (early 1986), to candidate member of the Politburo (January 1987), and then to full member (June 1987). The remarks he made at a Central Committee conference in October 1986 clearly reflect his attitudes.¹² Yakovlev observed that “bans

in art cannot lead to positive results." He had not only supported the revolt against the conservative leadership of the Union of Cinema Workers the previous May but also had brought Tengiz Abuladze's film *Repentance* to Soviet screens and backed publication of Anatolii Rybakov's *Children of the Arbat*. It was also Yakovlev who made possible the formation of the new Union of Theater Workers—against the opposition of Politburo ideologist Egor Ligachev.¹³

Other important and increasingly influential figures in cultural life were to be found in publishing (Mikhail Nenashev), in journalism (Fedor Burlatsky), and in the Ministry of Culture (Vasilii Sakharov). The latter appointment provided leadership in the Ministry of Culture to support the policymaking leadership of Yakovlev in the party. Under Gorbachev, Soviet cultural life has witnessed a dramatic turnaround from the Brezhnev years, marked not only by a new freedom in the cinema and the theater but also by the appearance of hitherto proscribed literary works—the writings of émigré Vladimir Nabokov, the publication of Boris Pasternak's *Doctor Zhivago*, and the publication, or promise of publication, of works by Nikolai Gumilev and Mikhail Bulgakov. Meanwhile, the remarkable Sergei Zalygin was appointed in August 1986 to head the key journal *Novy mir*. This appointment was notable for two reasons: Zalygin, one of the founders of the "village prose" movement, was not a party member; and his most recent work, *After the Storm*, had dealt with the New Economic Policy (NEP), a period he portrayed with much admiration.

The cultural liberalization has been accompanied by a series of innovations in the mass media (newspapers, journals and broadcasting) that have brought about a remarkable change in both content and style. The main feature of the new policy is epitomized by the term *glasnost*—a term often translated as "openness" but perhaps more precisely understood as "publicity." The policy has permitted publication on many hitherto taboo subjects—crime, prostitution, poverty, major accidents and disasters, and much else that is negative in Soviet life.

The new leadership appears to have two major reasons for employing the concept of *glasnost*: to reveal failures in many aspects of government, the economy, and society, thus providing support for reform measures; and to expose officials who are incompetent or who abuse their power and to apply pressure for their removal. Public criticism of both ordinary citizens and high officials is not new. Such criticism has been extensively used—and frequently abused—throughout Soviet history. What distinguishes the current policy is the purposeful way in which the exposures are linked to an explicit set of reform objectives, and the publicity given not only to individual failures and abuses but also to major deficiencies in the performance of the system as a whole. It is a revealing fact that critics of the policy of *glasnost* usually claim that the unaccustomed exposure of negative aspects of Soviet life will lead to a serious decline of confidence in the official order, including the authority of the party. According to supporters of the policy, it is impossible to deal effectively

with shortcomings in Soviet life if they are not brought to public attention; in other words, secrecy only conceals abuses and failures, but the Soviet system is strong enough to survive exposure of its deficiencies.

Beyond the publicity pertaining to shortcomings lies the more complicated task of analyzing their background and causes. In this area, too, the new leadership has allowed greater freedom than that during the Brezhnev era; if anything, its policies recall the Khrushchev years. And today, as in the 1950s and 1960s, many economists, historians, journalists, and others would like to go beyond the officially sanctioned liberalization.

A crucial question regarding Stalin and the Stalin era has been raised and reviewed from various perspectives by writers, film-makers, journalists, historians, and economists. The question encompasses a number of issues: the human costs of Stalin's policies (especially collectivization) and the terror generated by them; Stalin's creation of a system of despotic power that betrayed the legacy, or at least the aims, of Lenin; Stalin's leadership failures in World War II; the failures of Stalin's system of command economy; and the terrible impact of Stalin's policies upon the leaders and achievements of Soviet science and culture. The Brezhnev years brought with them a rapid retreat from any open criticism of Stalin. In its effort to rebuild the support of the intelligentsia, the new leadership undertook what is often called today a "renewal of the initiative of the 20th Party Congress"—a reference to Khrushchev's call in 1956 for dramatic reform of the Stalin system.

The issues posed in film by Abuladze's *Repentance* and in literature by Rybakov's *Children of the Arbat* have been analyzed historically by Yurii Afanasev, who charged that Stalin's interpretive scheme for Soviet history, which is "far from the truth," still dominates Soviet history textbooks.¹⁴ The sharp response by highly placed scholars—Fedor Vaganov (chief of Glavarkhiv) and B. Ponomarev—employ precisely the technique of distortion of Afanasev's views that Soviet journals have lately denounced as an unfortunate legacy of Stalinism.¹⁵ But the sturdy defense of Afanasev by the philosopher Genrikh Volkov offers an even more explicit denunciation of the Stalin legacy; in particular, it recalls the way in which Mark Mitin and Pavel Yudin destroyed the careers of fellow philosophers in the 1930s by means of political denunciation and won membership in the Academy of Sciences for their service to Stalin.¹⁶

Whereas Volkov spoke generally of the persistence of Stalinist practices in Soviet cultural debate, the historian Vasilii Polikarpov provided a specific example from the Brezhnev years—the removal of Pavel Volobuev in 1972 as director of the Moscow Institute of the History of the USSR, following an attack on his scholarship regarding the October Revolution by academician Aleksei Narochnitsky (who subsequently took Volobuev's position), which charged that he had expounded "a hostile system of views."¹⁷ Polikarpov's central point is that the Stalinist practice of using nonscholarly argumentation to curtail or destroy the careers of scholarly colleagues persists today, and that a powerful group of senior administrators remain

whose careers began, and whose attitudes were formed, in the Stalin era. His pessimistic presentation of the current scholarly scene should perhaps be qualified by the fact that the misdeeds of such people can currently be exposed.

The fear that the honest expression of unorthodox views can have very negative consequences for one's career has acted as a powerful defense of both the established order and its leaders. Clearly that fear has subsided under Gorbachev. Yet equally clear are the limits restricting what the new leadership and new political realities will permit. These limits were tested when Nikolay Shmelev, an economist with the Institute for the Study of the USA and Canada, expressed the doubt that "measures conceived within the framework of the existing system" could solve the agricultural problem; indeed, he insisted that there "was no more effective measure of work than profit" and urged greater freedom for employers to release unneeded employees (though with unemployment benefits).¹⁸

In spite of Alexander Yakovlev's prominent role in cultural liberalization and his arrival at full membership in the Politburo, efforts are clearly being made to limit the "thaw" in which the "second secretary," Egor Ligachev, plays the leading role. On July 1 and 3, 1987, Ligachev delivered harsh criticisms of the recent liberalizing trends—which he evidently considers an unacceptable application of *glasnost*—at a session of the editorial board of *Sovetskaya kultura*, a journal that has become the most outspoken of all on issues of cultural reform since Albert Belyaev became chief editor in early 1986. What bothered Ligachev was obvious: the vigorous criticisms of the past (more attention was advised to "the achievements of the Soviet regime") and the excessive attention to historical figures eliminated by Stalinist historiography. He was fearful that the party was losing control of Soviet cultural life and criticized the efforts of many cultural organizations (particularly the new Theater Workers' Union) to achieve independence of party direction.

Ligachev's comments were part of the continuing attack by conservatives against the reformers that opened the meeting of the Secretariat of the Board of the RSFSR Union of Writers and the Board of the USSR Union of Writers in March 1987.¹⁹ Perhaps the most important point to be made about this event is that the conservative critics were themselves attacked in the pages of *Ogonek*.²⁰ Similarly, the publication of the discussion between Ligachev and the editors of *Sovetskaya kultura* elicited an impressive critical response from the critic Oleg Mikhailov in *Literaturnaya gazeta*. Mikhailov rejected the notion that literature served political ends and appealed to the authoritative statements of Alexander Yakovlev on the need to tolerate various views. Such developments indicate both the differences of views within the party leadership and the struggle that continues over the correct policy course. For the time being, probably the most important issue concerns the fact that the Gorbachev appointees have allowed (though with occasional cautions or warnings from the party) much greater freedom of intellectual exchange, and that the conservative critics

of the new cultural policy regularly face vigorous responses from a variety of important cultural journals and organizations that are now controlled by the reformers.

"New Thinking" in Soviet Foreign Policy

No policy has received more attention or imaginative policy innovation under Gorbachev than foreign and security policy. In virtually every major area there has been a fundamental rethinking of the problems of past and current policy, the structures and personnel of the foreign policy apparatus have been greatly remodeled, and a wide range of new policy initiatives has been undertaken. As in other areas, many of the changes being made recall the shift of Soviet policy in the Khrushchev years.

For Gorbachev, foreign policy is an area of great interest, despite his lack of background in the field. The depth of his interest undoubtedly has much to do with his sense of the crucial problems he inherited: the ongoing deployment of the Pershing II and cruise missiles by NATO, following the failure of the Soviet confrontation over the SS-20s; the pressing need for extending the reconciliation with China in the face of growing Chinese economic and security cooperation with the West and the U.S. military and diplomatic buildup in East Asia; the many problems associated with the Third World Communist revolution, including the insurrections against Soviet-supported Communist governments from Cambodia to Afghanistan, Ethiopia, Angola, Mozambique, and Nicaragua; and the immense and growing costs of an enormous defense establishment, costs that threaten to accelerate in the face of Western technological innovation, particularly if the United States accepts the Reagan initiative for development of an antimissile defense system (the so-called Strategic Defense Initiative, or SDI).

New Faces

The seriousness with which Gorbachev is approaching foreign policy problems is evident in his impressive appointments for foreign policy leadership. In foreign policy, as in other policy matters, he has concentrated leadership in the party secretariat. The new foreign minister, Eduard Shevardnadze, had previously made his mark not in foreign affairs but in party administration in Georgia. The key appointment in the new foreign policy apparatus was that of Anatoly Dobrynin, a remarkable foreign policy specialist with nearly thirty years of service in the United States, mostly as Soviet ambassador in Washington. Dobrynin's replacement of Boris Ponomarev in the International Department of the Central Committee represented a dramatic change of leadership experience. Ponomarev had worked chiefly within the party apparatus and on relations with foreign Communist parties since his days in the Comintern, whereas Dobrynin had had his major experience abroad, mostly in the United States.

The reorganization of the International Department and the Foreign Ministry brought into the foreign policy leadership a great deal of new talent, including many individuals with excellent foreign affairs training and long experience abroad. The purpose of the reorganization was to provide improvements both in organization and in personnel for a focus upon U.S.-Soviet relations, armaments policy, and relations with governing and nongoverning Communist parties, with special emphasis on China and Eastern Europe.

Among Gorbachev's main appointees with an influence on foreign policy, in addition to Shevardnadze and Dobrynin, was Alexander Yakovlev, a key Gorbachev foreign policy advisor and now full member of the Politburo, whose role in propaganda included an international aspect. Gorbachev also named a new head for the Central Committee Department for Liaison with Communist and Workers' Parties of Socialist Countries—namely, Vadim Medvedev. A new spirit and a new generation of leaders now dominates Soviet foreign policymaking, bringing with them much increased imagination and vigor. An increased role has also been taken by the research institutes, whose headship includes such influential individuals as Georgii Arbatov of the Institute for the Study of the USA and Canada and Evgenii Primakov of the Institute of World Economy and International Relations.

Arms Control and U.S.-Soviet Relations

At the time of Gorbachev's accession to power, the U.S.-Soviet arms negotiations were stalled on the issue of U.S. commitment to SDI. Only a few days before Chernenko's death on March 10, 1985, a Soviet spokesman had threatened to expand offensive strategic arms programs if the United States went forward with its SDI plans. Nothing more about this threat was heard following Gorbachev's succession, but it was clear from his early foreign policy statements that the effort to halt U.S. progress on the SDI program was his major objective. Moreover, Gorbachev displayed a talent for public relations that contrasted markedly with Gromyko's style of foreign policy. As early as July 1985, Shevardnadze and Shultz were preparing an agenda for a summit meeting; and in the months before the Geneva summit in November, the Soviet side challenged the United States with a series of initiatives and proposals that included a five-month moratorium on nuclear testing in July (urging the United States to follow suit), a proposal in August to form a "star peace" international space agency, a proposal in September to cut nuclear arms by 50 percent in exchange for U.S. curbs on SDI, and a proposal in October for an intermediate-range missile accord independent of an SDI agreement. Gorbachev appeared to have secured a propaganda advantage, but the November summit meeting brought no significant movement on the nuclear arms question.

The Soviets opened 1986 with a dramatic proposal for the phased elimination of all nuclear weapons by the end of the century, starting with

a withdrawal by both sides of medium-range missiles in Europe. The proposal accepted retention of British and French nuclear armaments at current levels through the end of the first phase in exchange for retention of SS-20 missiles in Asia until the final state of disarmament. The sticking point, as before, was insistence upon U.S. abandonment of the SDI program, but the Soviets continued to pressure the United States by offering to accept on-site inspections, pressing for a U.S. response to the Soviet nuclear test moratorium, and insisting that U.S. SDI research violated the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty.

For the next eight months the arms deadlock continued, involving a variety of U.S.-Soviet conflicts over Soviet UN personnel and other issues. It reached a serious confrontation that began with the arrest on August 23 of a Soviet UN representative, Gennadi Zakharov, on charges of espionage, and was followed the next day by the Soviet arrest of Nicholas Daniloff, the Moscow correspondent for *U.S. News and World Report*, on the same charge.

During the negotiations for the release of Daniloff, the granting of departure to Zakharov following a no-contest plea in court, and other concessions by both sides, plans were made for a "presummit" meeting in Reykjavik, Iceland, on October 11. At the Reykjavik meeting, where the Soviets' careful advance preparation contrasted markedly with that of their American counterparts, the participants outlined a broad agreement to reduce long-range missiles and bombers by half in five years and totally by 1996, and to eliminate all but 100 medium-range missiles on each side, including those deployed in Europe, half in the first five-year phase and the balance in 1996. The deal collapsed, amidst mutual recriminations, because of the Soviets' insistence that it be conditional on no testing of SDI weaponry. The months that followed were marked by slow but steady progress in efforts to put the deal back together, minus the SDI conditions. By the summer of 1987 there were many signs that an accord might be achieved, leading to a new summit conference; it appeared at the time, however, that the accord would be confined, at least initially, to intermediate-range nuclear weapons.

Western Europe

In many ways Soviet policy toward Western Europe complemented the strategy in armaments discussions with the United States. The policy aimed at the revival of the peace movement and its utilization both in support of Soviet arms proposals and against cooperation of European governments with the United States in development of the SDI. The means used were carefully orchestrated. They included exchanges of visits by heads of state (in which Gorbachev demonstrated an impressive talent for public relations); utilization of a united front appeal to Socialist parties and their leaders, with a mixture of peace slogans and anti-U.S. propaganda; and a steady appeal to the citizens of various European countries relating to the achievement of peace through massive publicity for Soviet arms-reduction

proposals. There was little success in breaking the solidarity of the NATO powers. But the new Soviet leadership had clearly gained much greater respectability and confidence among the general public, in spite of such setbacks as the nuclear disaster at Chernobyl and the activities of Soviet submarines in the Baltic. But the governing Socialist party leaders were little influenced by Soviet overtures, and the more cooperative opposition figures, such as Neil Kinnock and Willy Brandt, lost more electoral support than they gained with their unilateral disarmament proposals.

Eastern Europe

When Gorbachev came to power in 1985, the Soviet leadership was still struggling with both old and new problems in its difficult relationship with Eastern Europe. During the 1970s, many of the East European states rapidly expanded their contacts with the West and undertook ambitious economic expansion and modernization programs with the support of Western capital and technology. At the same time, a vigorous Eurocommunism combined with détente to encourage increased independence of the Soviet leadership, even though the Helsinki accord of 1975 had provided guarantees that Soviet leaders clearly hoped would strengthen their position in Eastern Europe. Still, the mounting economic problems of most of Eastern Europe, complicated by heavy indebtedness and, in Poland, by severe political instability, caused great concern; hence, in the early 1980s the Soviet leaders were determined to achieve greater integration of Eastern Europe with the Soviet Union, along with reduced cultural and economic links with the West.

Thus, when Gorbachev became general secretary, the Soviet policy was one of fighting "revisionism, national communism, and anti-Sovietism" in Eastern Europe. It also emphasized economic integration of Eastern Europe with the Soviet Union in a context in which the terms of trade had turned sharply against the Eastern Europeans. The Soviets demanded high-quality machinery, advanced technology, consumer goods and food, as well as East European investment in Soviet natural gas and iron ore, in exchange for oil and gas at much increased prices.

Gorbachev has pursued a policy fraught with immense difficulties. In effect, he is urging a group that consists mostly of aging and cautious leaders to pursue a policy of renewal. His star pupil is General Wojciech Jaruzelski, who has been given approval not only for sweeping economic reforms but for far-reaching experiments in new forms of political participation. Clearly the renewal policy aims to achieve a new and lasting political stability as well as friendlier ties with the Soviet Union, both by encouraging reform and by giving it Soviet sponsorship.

The problem that confronts Gorbachev's policy has been cogently defined by Charles Gati:

The new problem Gorbachev is facing has to do with the truly radical next steps Moscow Spring is generating in Eastern Europe. Because some of these

countries have already gone far beyond his *perestroika* or *glasnost* or both, their next steps under their circumstances would have to take them beyond anything Gorbachev has in mind for the Soviet Union.²¹

There is no doubt that Gorbachev supports the most reform-minded leaders of Eastern Europe and that he is applying strong pressure to the many who are conservative, cautious, and possibly wiser than he is about the risks inherent in his policy. As in Khrushchev's time (another era of de-Stalinization in Eastern Europe), one risk is that "Moscow Spring cannot be insulated from the Prague Springs of the future"; another is that Gorbachev could "lose his battle for the restructuring and liberalization of communism not in the Soviet Union but in Eastern Europe."²²

Thus the central question is whether Gorbachev will find, through reform, the political and social stability and progress that he seeks in Eastern Europe while promising broad independence in domestic policy but denying genuine autonomy. In July 1986 he articulated the fundamental reality of the Soviet position in a speech in Poland in which he reaffirmed the Brezhnev Doctrine, announcing that "socialist gains are irreversible" and that it is impossible "to wrench a country away from the socialist community" without a threat to peace.

Asia and Africa

The Brezhnev era bequeathed a legacy of difficult problems in Asia and Africa to which the new leadership has given careful attention. Collectively, these problems led to a worrisome diplomatic isolation over much of the globe and to encirclement by hostile states along much of the Soviet border.

In East Asia special attention has been devoted to improved relations with China, Japan, and India. In the case of China the effort to press forward with a policy of reconciliation and "normalization" has had considerable success—more a slow accumulation of modest improvements than a dramatic breakthrough, but an impressive accumulation nevertheless. The tone of exchanges is now civil, even complimentary, and the pace of visits by all kinds of delegations has increased enormously, as has the scale of trade and the progress of border negotiations. Differences remain regarding Soviet troops in Mongolia and along the Sino-Soviet border, the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan, and Soviet support for Vietnam's actions in Cambodia. But the Soviets have obviously given the Vietnamese notice that improved relations with China are vital, and they have insisted upon increased respect for Chinese interests and concerns. The Soviets have made impressive strides in just over two years. China has taken a somewhat cautious stance in maintaining an equidistant position between the United States and the Soviet Union, but it is also attempting to broaden and improve its relationship with the Soviets. Both sides recognize that they share a common ideological tradition and the common task of combining extensive reform with the legacy of Communist institutions and economy.

In its approach to Japan, the Soviet Union has shown no willingness to make concessions on the issue of the northern islands. But the Soviets

have sought, within such limits, to improve relations by arranging for annual visits of foreign ministers (following the successful first visit by Shevardnadze in January 1986) and encouraging trade discussions. The improvement in relations has been modest. Japan continues to expand its military strength and military cooperation with the United States, and the tone (though not necessarily the substance) of Japanese-Soviet relations has improved considerably. As in Western Europe, the Soviets have given much attention to the political opposition, appealing to the Socialists and other opposition parties receptive to Soviet "peace diplomacy" and opposed to the government's rearmament plans and defense cooperation with the United States. Both the general improvement in state-to-state relations and the expansion of Soviet ties with the Japanese Left attest to the greater flexibility and skill of the new Soviet diplomacy.

The Soviet Union's relationship with India, the pivot of Soviet-Asian diplomacy, has been greatly strengthened. Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi seemed initially less sympathetic to the Soviets than his mother was, and a spy scandal in early 1985 was a setback. But the Soviets contrived an impressive diplomatic reception during Gandhi's visit to Moscow in May 1985, and they made much of the celebration in the following August of the fourteenth anniversary of the friendship treaty with India. By the time of Gorbachev's four-day visit in November 1986, Soviet-Indian relations appeared to have been fully restored, with Gandhi calling Gorbachev a "crusader for peace" and both leaders blaming President Reagan for the failure of the Iceland meeting to reach final agreements on weapons reduction. Perhaps the major negative change in the relationship was that India had outgrown the earlier economic relationship and increasingly needed the trade and technology that were uniquely available from the capitalist economies.

Similar efforts to reduce frictions with states along the Soviet periphery are evident elsewhere: in Egypt, where the Soviets have made much progress in reestablishing relations; in Turkey, Iran, Israel, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates, where the Soviets have made modest gains in opening, or reopening, diplomatic contact and negotiations; and in Southeast Asia, where the Soviets' diplomatic initiatives in relations with the ASEAN states have been very strong and somewhat successful, although Thailand has been strongly opposed to the Soviets' relationship with Vietnam.

Third World Revolution

Although Soviet policy toward Third World revolution has not changed fundamentally, it is expressed in words quite different from before. The specific topic of wars of liberation, and the general subject of communism in the Third World, received scant attention in the reports at the 27th Party Congress—in contrast to the careful regional inventory of progress provided by Brezhnev in the 1981 congress report. On the other hand, efforts have been made to provide strong support for Communist leaders

in the Third World threatened by armed opposition movements—a major feature of Third World Communist revolution. The Soviets' quarrel with Castro has been settled; they undertook huge increases in their aid to Nicaragua during 1986; they increased their aid to Angola and Ethiopia; and they have begun to increase activity in Southern Africa in response to the opportunities created by the turmoil in South Africa.

Above all, Gorbachev's policy has made it clear that the Soviets will provide strong support to protect Third World Communist governments against internal opponents. Moreover, much of the Soviets' propaganda effort in the United States, Western Europe, and elsewhere has been directed toward discouraging or discrediting anti-Communist resistance forces and foreign aid for them.

The vexing problem of Afghanistan was first approached with an aggressive policy of active engagement of guerrilla forces by the Soviet armed forces. Their military actions entailed bombardment of villages, destruction of food supplies, and great loss of life among villagers. The costs of such actions (including negative diplomatic repercussions in the region and around the world), as well as the evidence of their futility, have apparently encouraged a move toward negotiation; but such negotiation will settle for nothing less than acceptance of the dominance of the existing government and retention of Soviet troops in the country until Moscow is convinced of the government's stability. Afghanistan remains, in Gorbachev's words, "a bleeding wound." Whatever else he may wish to change in Soviet diplomacy, he remains committed to the irreversibility of Communist revolution.

Foreign Policy Overview

Gorbachev's foreign policy has acquired a distinctive style—and achieved significant advances—in a remarkably brief period. The changes in personnel and organization under Gorbachev have resulted in a new flexibility, subtlety, and dynamism. Clearly the United States has been hard-pressed to respond to Gorbachev's many initiatives on arms control and reduction; it has also taken a reactive and somewhat defensive posture. But Gorbachev's salesmanship has had a powerful impact in both Western Europe and the United States, and Soviet public diplomacy has found new openings for influencing public opinion in the United States. Moreover, Dobrynin's International Department has had a considerable impact on policy, thereby attesting to its leader's understanding of the U.S. social and political scene.

Obviously one of the objectives of Soviet policy has been to reduce Soviet military costs. In many statements Soviet spokesmen have made it clear that they fault the Brezhnev leadership for its excessive reliance upon military power and the immense costs it entailed. The criticism of that policy points up three important concerns: the simple need to economize, given the heavy demands for funds required for economic modernization; the ineffectiveness of the policy; and the danger and potential

costs of nuclear warfare. Soviet policy discussions have emphasized the need to achieve policy objectives by political means, and recent policy trends show the strong influence of that view—in the effort to establish a new structure of relations with the peripheral states, in the abandonment of explicit identification of revolutionary objectives and achievements, in the emphasis on influencing public opinion in target areas, especially through portrayal of Soviet policy as a policy of peace, and in the elimination, to the maximum degree possible, of the perception of the Soviet system as internally oppressive and internationally aggressive. In the pursuit of such policy objectives, the Gorbachev regime has already proven to be a master.

Gorbachev and the Future of Reform

Pour un mauvais gouvernement le moment le plus dangereux est celui où il commence à se transformer.

—Montesquieu

As the Gorbachev era is very young, judgments about its meaning, or its achievements and failures, are obviously premature. But so dynamic and purposeful a leadership encourages some tentative remarks about the future.

As a leader Gorbachev is a formidable force, worthy of the attention and interest he is receiving. He appears to have built a powerful position in the party apparatus and to have surrounded himself with an impressive group of talented policymakers and administrators—possibly the most promising group that has governed the Soviet Union in the past seventy years. He is busy designing and implementing a policy of reform, four major aspects of which have just been reviewed. In each of the four areas—party organization, economy, culture, and foreign policy—the reforms are intended to refurbish and strengthen the existing system, not to transform it. But there are many signs that a larger intention, and a more daring and flexible program, will be needed. Toward that end, Gorbachev has been wise in building a rapport with the intelligentsia, who alone can provide the ideas he needs. That rapport is a very positive sign. Less positive is the speed with which serious criticism reaches the limits of official toleration; one fears that the familiar cycle of thaw and freeze may repeat itself.

Another important question concerns the instrument of reform. Gorbachev and his collaborators clearly feel that a reformed party is the appropriate context in which to carry out their *perestroika*, and they are undoubtedly correct in that assessment. They have made enormous changes in party personnel, but significant organizational changes have eluded them thus far, and the resistance to their proposed changes continues to be very strong.

These changes, should they succeed, would give much greater power to the new leadership within the party, but they would not really touch on

the more fundamental issue of the role and power of the party in Soviet society—an issue that serious reform cannot ignore. It is to this issue that one must return when exploring the question of reforms in the cultural life, economy, and other facets of Soviet society. In the final analysis, the problem can be seen as much more significant than the attitudes and intentions of the current leadership and the degree of their control of the party apparatus. Still, the process of transformation of the leadership and organization of the party will be an immensely important clue to the prospects for reform in other areas of Soviet life.

A third question concerns Montesquieu's dictum, which opened this section. The period of greatest danger for a government needing, and undertaking, major reform is indeed the beginning—the time when pent-up pressures and conflicts are released, when established power and vested interests are threatened, when expectations are often dangerously inflated, and when the mechanisms of economic, political, and social order are faltering, or even collapsing, before a new system can be built. Navigating through the shoals of this difficult and dangerous period is undoubtedly Gorbachev's greatest challenge.

Notes

1. *Pravda*, March 13, 1987.
2. TASS, January 27, 1987.
3. Ibid.
4. *Radio Liberty Research*, June 26, 1987.
5. *Radio Liberty Research*, March 3, 1987.
6. *Radio Liberty Research*, June 28, 1987.
7. *Sovetskaya Rossiya*, March 27, 1987.
8. *Radio Liberty Research*, March 9, 1987. Indicative of the policy of *glasnost*' was the report at the Kamaz truck plant in *Izvestiya*, December 4, 1986.
9. *Krasnaya zvezda*, September 19, 1986.
10. *Radio Liberty Research*, June 30, 1987.
11. *Izvestiya*, June 13, 1987.
12. *Sovetskaya kultura*, October 23, 1986.
13. *Radio Liberty Research*, December 23, 1986.
14. Speech reported by *Moscow News*, No. 2, January 11, 1987; interview in *Sovetskaya kultura*, March 21, 1987.
15. *Radio Liberty Research*, June 11, 1986.
16. *Sovetskaya kultura*, July 4, 1987.
17. *Sovetskaya kultura*, July 9, 1987.
18. *The Economist*, July 25–31, 1987, p. 37.
19. The speeches at the meeting of the Secretariat are recorded in *Literaturnaya Rossiya*, March 27, 1987.
20. *Ogonek*, No. 14, 1987, p. 28; No. 23, 1987, pp. 10–12.
21. Charles Gati, "Gorbachev and Eastern Europe," *Foreign Affairs*, Summer 1987, p. 970.
22. Ibid., p. 975.

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The Soviet Political Scene: The Era of Gorbachev?

Archie Brown

No Soviet leader in his first year of office ever presided over such sweeping changes in the composition of the highest party and state organs as Mikhail Gorbachev. The scale of the turnover, and especially the change of occupancy of key posts in both the domestic and foreign policymaking structures, has raised the possibility of policy innovation worthy of the name. The failures in the Soviet economy and in international relations during the Brezhnev years left his successors with severe and unresolved problems. Andropov and Chernenko reached the top job too infirm, and with too short a time-span ahead of them, to take the more difficult decisions, although Andropov at least made a significant start by facing up to the seriousness of the failures and encouraging some fresh ideas and new faces.

Before looking at the extent to which new policies are, indeed, being promoted under Gorbachev (as evidenced at the 27th Party Congress and elsewhere) and examining the scope for, and limitations upon, further policy innovation, it is worth underlining the sheer importance of the offices held by new people and the remarkable extent of the personnel changes in the highest echelons of Soviet political life. The most powerful men in the Soviet Union are the party general secretary (who is never less, and in Gorbachev's case significantly more, than *primus inter pares*), the senior secretaries of the Central Committee (by which I mean those who hold a secretaryship in conjunction with full membership of the Politburo),¹ the chairman of the Council of Ministers, and the chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet.

Immediately prior to the death of Konstantin Chernenko on March 10, 1985, only Gorbachev among the present incumbents held any one of these positions—that of a senior secretary. When he succeeded Chernenko as general secretary, changes were soon set in motion. The following month, Egor Ligachev and Nikolay Ryzhkov, who had been brought into the top leadership team² only under Andropov, became senior secretaries, although