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Structure versus Agency: Collapse of the USSR Re-examined

by

Roman Meyerovich, M.A.

A thesis submitted to
the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
in partial fulfilment of
the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Department of Political Science

Carleton University

Ottawa, Ontario

August 20, 1996

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in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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August 1, 1996

Abstract

This thesis is about the collapse of communism in the Soviet Union. The chief proposition is that the changes in the USSR would not have been as dramatic or even possible if it was not for Michael Gorbachev. The purpose is to help redress currently existing imbalance in the explanations of Soviet demise. To do so, human agency is brought back in. However, instead of simply asserting its importance, the method employed is the counterfactual analysis. In Social Sciences, an explicit counterfactual analysis is a controversial method of elucidating a causal factor of an event by hypothesizing a plausible situation whereby the causal factor is absent.

To prove our proposition, the argument is developed in the following manner. First, by arguing against some existing structural explanations of the Soviet collapse, we will show that on the eve of Gorbachev's ascent to power, the Soviet Union was a stable society with its power structure considered legitimate by the population.

Then, we argue in defence of contingency and human agency in historical explanations. A counterfactual strategy in explaining events is discussed and defended. The counterfactual "thought experiments" that follow focus on alternative possible political, social and economic developments within the USSR had Gorbachev's reforms never been undertaken.

Third, it is shown that the CPSU's General Secretary in general, and Gorbachev in particular, possessed tremendous situational ability to unleash major change in the USSR.

That power has fully manifested itself in the role that Gorbachev played in the collapse of the USSR. Utilizing Charles Tilly's model of collective action, it is argued that the decisions of the General Secretary to rearrange economic and political opportunity structures of the elites was primarily responsible for the Soviet demise.

Finally, faithful to the view of contingent as an important cause of historical change, we place Gorbachev's actions within the framework of bounded rationality. To bridge the unintended consequences of the intended actions, it is shown that due to the necessary incongruence between means and ends, what may seem rational to an individual can prove to be systemically irrational and destructive.

Acknowledgments

Writing a Ph.D. thesis is a long and difficult process during which one accumulates debts to many people. First of all I would like to thank my thesis supervisor, Professor Jeremy Paltiel, for his unwavering intellectual and personal support through all the ups and downs of research and writing. In our lengthy discussions, Professor Paltiel helped me to remain focused on the thesis, by showing how my various areas of interest could be harnessed to the same end. This was indispensable in saving me from the twin dangers of the Ph.D. thesis writing process: burnout and boredom. I would also like to thank Professor Genady Ozornoy, who as a member of my dissertation committee thoughtfully commented on various drafts of my chapters and encouraged me to go on. A special thanks is to Professor Piotr Dutkiewicz, who graciously agreed to join the committee at a somewhat later stage. Professor Dutkiewicz's great personal and professional knowledge of Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union and his highly detailed critique of my writings was absolutely crucial to the successful completion of this thesis.

Thank you all.

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Introduction

The most perfect philosophy of the natural kind only staves off our ignorance a little longer, as perhaps the most perfect philosophy of the moral or metaphysical kind serves only to discover larger portions of it.

David Hume, An Inquiry Concerning Human Understanding

Some four and a half years have elapsed since the dissolution of the USSR. To most specialists and lay people, the unravelling of the Soviet system was swift and largely unexpected. Both then and today, one basic question confronting everyone was and still is: was sudden transformation a necessary and inevitable outcome of some deep underlying trends, or was it contingent and unique?

The answer to this question cannot possibly be arrived at easily. As Mark Twain has quipped: "Every complex problem has a simple solution, and it is always wrong." Not surprisingly then, social sciences have had difficulties in explaining abrupt changes in the social and political fabrics of societies. Such complex changes are often described, but theorizing is fraught with conceptual difficulties.

Strangely enough, however, the dramatic changes in the

Soviet Union have resulted in the great deal of soul-searching by the specialists, but intellectually produced far less controversy than one would have expected. Although, the engine of change usually differs from one scholar to the next, practically all explanations of the Soviet collapse are structural in nature and aim at elucidating the systemic failure of the communist regime. As T. H. Rigby said in 1990, among scholars, "there is now fairly general agreement on what went wrong."¹ And as John Keep, echoed in 1995, the agreement is that in "the mid-1990s the defects of the Stalinist and post-Stalinist regimes loom larger than their successes."²

The ultimate purpose of this thesis, however, is to show that without the agency of Michael Gorbachev and some very specific actions taken by him, the Soviet Union might still be with us today. At first glance, this hypothesis seems very unoriginal. There is hardly any Western scholar who does not assign at least some credit (or blame) to Gorbachev for what has happened.

The originality of this thesis is in three areas. First aspect of thesis' originality is its almost Humean critique of the methodologies (and sometimes epistemologies) of prevailing understanding of what went wrong in the USSR. It argues,

¹T. H. Rigby, The Changing Soviet System (Aldershot: Edward Elgar Publishing Limited, 1990), 207.

²John L. H. Keep, Last of the Empires: A History of the Soviet Union, 1945-1991 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 1-2.

theoretically and empirically, against the triumphalism of the Liberal ideas, political developmentalism, and economic and technological determinisms of modernization theory. The attempt is not to show that these explanations are necessarily wrong, but rather that they are not necessarily right. This is not merely an intellectual exercise, but an indispensable part of an attempt to make sense of what happened and to be able to concentrate on the role of Gorbachev.

In fact, only when doubt in determinisms is introduced, can the focus then shift to the role and scope of historical contingency in social change in general and the human agency in particular. Logically, without an objective necessity what must enter our analysis is what Weber called "objective possibility": The question of what if?

The question of "what if" is notorious in history and social science. Scholars traditionally shy away from analysing what did not happen. Some deny the legitimacy of the counterfactual analysis altogether. The danger of the "Cleopatra nose's" explanation of history is always there. No less an authority on the philosophy of history than E. H. Carr, has written that "one can always play a parlour game with the might-have-beens of history." It "is purely emotional and unhistorical reaction."¹

Professor Carr might well have been right about

¹E. H. Carr, What is History?, 2d ed. (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1987), 97-98.

unhistorical nature of question "what if." Regardless, this thesis is not a history thesis. When necessary, it addresses itself to the philosophy of history. Fundamentally, however, this is a thesis in Political Science. And as will be argued, in social science in general and comparative politics in particular, a counterfactual analysis is not only a valid approach, but paradoxically is the safest method of elucidating the cause in small-N samples.

Only when determinisms of Soviet demise are dealt with and the counterfactual arguments are presented, one can legitimately turn to an account of Gorbachev's role in the dramatic events. To the best of my knowledge, both the proposition itself and the counterfactual method used to arrive at it are original.

As we are finally ready to deal with the role of Gorbachev in the collapse of communist regime in the USSR, the thesis presents a new model of Gorbachev's actions and their consequences for the Soviet system. Specifically, it combines Gorbachev's political and economic decision-making, within Charles Tilly's framework of collective action, to account for the unravelling of the communist regime. Contrary to the dominant view, it is proposed that the Soviet Union did not collapse from delegitimation of the prevailing social order. Moreover, after defining the concept of legitimacy and examining it in Soviet context, it will shown that even Gorbachev's glasnost did not lead to delegitimation and

collapse.

A Bibliographical Note

In support of its arguments, this thesis draws on a very wide-ranging scope of literature, from social and political theories to philosophy and psychology. Parts dealing specifically with the former Soviet Union utilize both a literature written by Western scholars as well as original Soviet/Russian sources, in Russian and English.

With respect to Western literature, not to use it (critically of course) would have been foolhardy, given the vast amount of information on the Soviet Union amassed by "Sovietology." To ignore it, would run us a serious risk of rediscovering the wheel.

As far as the utilization of primary sources is concerned, relatively greater weight is given to the memoirs and recollections of the former top Soviet officials, their aides, advisors and other participants in the decision-making process. This is largely due to the fact that despite the volumes of new information about the former Soviet Union coming out from the Commonwealth of Independent States, very little independent documentary evidence has come out on the process of decision-making at the highest reaches of Soviet power structure. There are two possible reasons for this. One, more optimistic explanation is that finding proper documents

takes time and an insufficient amount of time has passed since various Soviet archives have been open. In this case, sooner or later the full documentary evidence will surface.

The second possible explanation for the lack of documentary evidence is a much more pessimistic one. This is due to several factors. First, there is evidence that documents were being systematically destroyed in the last days of the Soviet Union. Second, according to Russian officials and scholars, on many occasions records of decisions and their implementations were simply not held, or even if held, they were falsified.⁴

Ultimately, whatever is the reason, we have little choice but to rely on the testimony and recollections of the former participants in the decision-making.

⁴This is maintained by Vadim Pechenev, a former employee of the General (informational) department. See Vadim Pechenev, "Do pravdy dovrat'sia: raskroiut li arkhivy KGB tainy KPSS?" [To Lie Oneself to Truth: Will the Archives of the KGB shed light on the Secrets of the CPSU?], *Ogonek* 51 (December 1991): 10-11. According to a Russian scholar on archival science, Tat'iana Khorkhordina, an ideological state is simply not interested in the collection of unbiased documentary material. Like everything else in such a state, archives are a tool in an ideological struggle. See T. I. Khorkhordina, "Arkhivy i totalitarizm" [Archives and Totalitarianism], *Otechestvennaia istoriia* 6 (November-December 1994): 145-159.

1. Against Systemic Explanations of the Soviet Collapse:

Stability of the USSR Revisited

Facts, as simple presences, can stand on their own, but make no human sense until woven into fictions or stories that relate facts to each other and too what is absent... by disposing us to construct a culture.... As the culture sets, it hardens the arteries by insulating us from any vivid perception of mortality.

Dudley Young, Origins of the Sacred

1.a) Introduction

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, various theoretical explanations of its systemic disintegration have been offered. In general, most models present one of two broad visions of the world: a) the idea-driven view of historical change, and b) the view of historical change as being a function of the needs of industrial society. The second vision itself can be further subdivided into two other groups of models: (1) "the liberal-democratic models [that] tend to stress the degree to which industrialization is incompatible with totalitarianism...", making the collapse of communism inevitable, and (2) the theories that

"leave the possibility of noncollapse open, but declare that the only alternative to liberalization [was] stagnation and decay."¹

The view advanced in this chapter, in contrast, is that most explanations for the collapse are very broad and systemic in nature. The purpose of this chapter, however, is to demonstrate that despite the sophistication of most attempts to explain the Soviet demise in systemic terms, none of them provides an adequate explanation for the failure of communism in the USSR.

Through the rigorous theoretical analysis of the concepts and the study of available empirical evidence, it will be shown that the Soviet Union, on the eve of perestroika, was a stable, if stagnant society. It will be argued that in the eyes of the population the regime was still seen as basically legitimate. In addition, it will be shown that there were other significant factors contributing to the overall stability of the USSR. Pulling all of the threads together, the conclusion will argue against any over-arching systemic explanation of the Soviet Union sudden collapse.

¹T. Anthony Jones, "Modernization Theory and Socialist Development," in Social Consequences of Modernization in Communist Societies, ed. Mark G. Field (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), 21.

1.b) Non-Western Systems and Western Social Science

Before proceeding, a more precise statement of the methodology employed must be given. One of the long-standing arguments in the field of Soviet studies has been the extent to which, if any, theories derived from studying Western societies can be used in understanding the Soviet Union/Russia. It is doubtful that this argument, like many others in academic disputes, can be conclusively resolved to the complete satisfaction of every scholar. Divergent views on methodology are driven, explicitly or implicitly, by divergent views on epistemology -- the nature of knowledge and the ways to accumulate it.

On the most fundamental level, however, all human actions can arise from a variety of motivations. They can be "substantive and formal, conscious and unconscious, self-regarding and non-self-regarding, forward looking and backward-looking."²

According to Jon Elster, there is enough continuity and stability in human behaviour in various contexts to propose a set of mechanisms, somewhere between the two extremes of "nomological thinking and a "narrative ideographic method."³ In this view, to go from theory to

²Jon Elster, Political Psychology (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 9.

³Ibid., 2-3.

mechanism "is to go from 'If A, then always B' to 'If A, then sometimes B.'" In other words,

[t]he distinctive feature of a mechanism is not that it can be universally applied to predict and control social events, but that it embodies a causal chain that is sufficiently general and precise to enable us to locate it in widely different settings.⁴

The implication for the study of the former Soviet Union is that although the concepts of Western social science can still be useful they should not be applied indiscriminately. At a minimum an analyst must be aware of the historic-cultural context of ideas' origin. Furthermore, if we reject the extreme of nomological theorizing and restrict ourselves to the construction of more limiting mechanisms, then even the same original concept, when applied under a different set of historical, social and cultural conditions, will often lead to an activation of a different causal chain of events.

1.c) Communism, Historical Change and Industrial Society

1.c)(1) (Democratic) Ideas as the Engine of History

To begin, the most fully articulated image of the world as a "war of ideas" can be found in the recent controversial work of Francis Fukuyama. In his account, historical change is premised on the idea that the "desire for freedom and a

⁴Ibid., 8 (footnote), 5.

corresponding desire to organize politics democratically is constitutive of rational human beings, and so the desire for democracy is universal."⁵ Moreover, history is described "as a dialogue between societies, in which those with grave internal contradictions fail and are succeeded by others that manage to overcome those contradictions."⁶ Following Hegel, Fukuyama maintains that the engine of History is the human "struggle for recognition," or spiritedness.⁷ There are several stages to this process.

First, the struggle commences as soon as humans appear as humans. Since what distinguishes man from animal is man's awareness of his mortality, man's willingness to risk his life (other than in self-defence) is the highest prove of his humanity. If it assumed that humans strive for recognition as humans, then for a man in nature, the violent struggle with the fellow man is the path to ultimate recognition. In fact, according to Hegel, violence is the first social contact. This primordial battle acts as the first cause of History through the establishment of "the relationship of lordship and bondage."⁸ By risking his life

⁵Daniel Deudney and G. John Ikenberry, "Soviet Reform and the End of the Cold War: Explaining Large-Scale Historical Change," in Post-Communist Studies & Political Science, ed. Frederic J. Fleron, Jr., and Erik P. Hoffmann (Boulder: Westview Press, 1993), 215.

⁶Francis Fukuyama, The End of history and the Last Man (New York: Avon Books, 1992), 61.

⁷Ibid., 162.

⁸Ibid., 147.

and winning the individual "earned" his status as lord. The individual who decided to submit -- the slave -- was "less" human than the master -- the individual willing to risk it all. The story, however, does not end here.

The relationship between master and slave is not stable. There is pressure to redefine it from both ends. From the master's perspective, the perception of freedom and recognition is fleeting. As soon as recognition is gained, dissatisfaction sets in. Since the individual submitting becomes sub-human at the moment of submission, the recognition gained by the victor is worthless. In other words, one can only be worth something when recognized by an equal. The struggle thus must start anew.⁹

From the point of view of the slave, there is little satisfaction either. In an attempt to recover his humanity, the slave, in the process of working for the master "realizes that as a human being he is capable of free and creative labour," thus conquering nature through work. He "conceives of the idea of freedom." In the course of history, number of slave ideologies appear to reconcile the idea of freedom with the reality of bondage. Finally, Christianity, as "the most important slave ideology" (according to Hegel and Fukuyama), established the "principle of the universal equality in the sight of God."¹⁰

⁹Ibid., 193.

¹⁰Ibid., 195-196.

The complete recovery of slave's freedom, however, occurs only with a "secularization of Christianity" (and rationalization of history) -- the transition from the idea of freedom and equality in Heaven to the real world. Beginning with the French Revolution, a "new synthesis [is achieved] -- the satisfaction of recognition on the part of the master, and the work of the slave."¹¹ Thus, "[t]he problem of human history can be seen, in a certain sense, as the search for a way to satisfy the desire of both masters and slaves for recognition on a mutual and equal basis; history ends with the victory of a social order that accomplishes this goal."¹² That end is reached with the victory of the liberal democratic state, which solves the "internal 'contradiction' of the master-slave relationship" in the most rational way through a reciprocal and equal agreement among citizens to mutually recognize each other.¹³

From Fukuyama's account then, Communism in general and the Soviet Union in particular collapsed because of their inability to satisfy the desire for recognition by their citizens. Fukuyama claims that "reform and revolution were undertaken for the sake of a political system that would institutionalize universal recognition", and that "people did not go into the streets... demanding that the government

¹¹Ibid., 198-199, 201.

¹²Ibid., 152.

¹³Ibid., 200.

give them a 'post-industrial economy,' or that the supermarkets be full of food."¹⁴ How does Fukuyama prove his thesis? The answer: He does not. More precisely, he cannot.

As Fukuyama himself states, his "book consists of two distinct arguments: the first an empirical evaluation of various events, both contemporary and historical, and the second a 'normative' or theoretical one that seeks to evaluate contemporary liberal democracy."¹⁵ Herein lies the problem: An uneasy co-existence of the empirical and the normative in the Fukuyama's presentation. As we have seen above, the normative argument is highly abstract and is based on certain (arguably questionable) assumptions of human nature. As a set of ontological propositions, it can be critiqued but not proved or disproved -- certainly not through appeal to empirical evidence.¹⁶ Fukuyama is aware of this. He admits that all that "empirical fact can do... is to give us greater or lesser degree of hope that the normative statement is true."¹⁷ Thus, Fukuyama can only hope

¹⁴Ibid., 179-180.

¹⁵Francis Fukuyama, "Reflections on the *End of History*, Five Years Later," in After History? Francis Fukuyama and His Critics, ed. Timothy Burns (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1994), 239.

¹⁶For an excellent critique of Fukuyama's normative argument, see the collection of essays in the above mentioned Timothy Burns, ed., After History? Francis Fukuyama and His Critics (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1994).

¹⁷Ibid., 242.

that people went to the streets to demand recognition rather than bread.¹⁸

Nonetheless, still desirous to explain the collapse of the USSR without the "crutch" of the long-term attractiveness of the liberal democracy to the human soul, Fukuyama's account of the origins of change in the Soviet Union then becomes much more conventional and less metaphysical. Thus, the most obvious internal contradiction in the Soviet society was between its command economy and the social and political requirements of industrial development. In Fukuyama's opinion, "it was in the highly complex and dynamic "post-industrial" economic world that Marxism-Leninism as an economic system met its Waterloo."¹⁹ Thus, driven by the immediate need to locate the engine of change in the USSR, Fukuyama's narrative boils down, partially, to an argument about the functional necessity of industrialization. More precisely, according to Fukuyama, in order for a society to become fully industrialized, industrialization must take place within the larger context of social and political pluralism.

It is at this point that Fukuyama's argument merges with the only other remaining theoretical explanation of the

¹⁸An indirect evaluation of Fukuyama's argument will be provided later on through the investigation of the Soviet regime's legitimacy.

¹⁹Fukuyama, The End of History, 93, 177.

Soviet collapse -- the economically-driven, the liberal-democratic framework of developmentalism.

1.c)(2) Liberal Developmentalism

Essentially, Fukuyama reasserts the theory put forward by Talcott Parsons some twenty-five years before him. The latter, though admitting the possibility of persistence of totalitarian systems, quite explicitly based his conceptual framework on the functional needs of industrial societies. By focusing our attention on the "idea of the evolutionary universal and its grounding in the conception of generalized adaptive capacity," Parsons maintained that "communist totalitarian organization will probably not fully match 'democracy' in political and integrative capacity in the long run." More importantly, "it will prove to be unstable and will either make adjustments in the general direction of electoral democracy ... or 'regress' into generally less advanced and politically less effective forms of organization."²⁰ For Parsons, "democratic government... [was] an evolutionary universal," and [was] fundamental to the structures of modern societies.²¹

Central to the liberal developmentalists today is the view that there is an ongoing functional differentiation and

²⁰Talcott Parsons, "Evolutionary Universals in Society," American Sociological Review 29 (June 1964): 356-357.

²¹*Ibid.*, 353.

rationalization of society, driven by the universal and universalizing logic of technological development and innovation. This in turn, leads to the evolution of social and political forms in societies. In the Soviet context, this implies that the increasing complexity of the social and economic aspects of modernization was becoming progressively incongruent with the Stalinist command structures. Increasingly, the "old command order [came to impede] industrial modernization while, at the same time, industrial modernization [was] undercutting the old command order."²² In other words, the functional requirements of modern economy (the increasing division of labour) necessitated the progressive de-ideologization of the Soviet society and the eventual movement towards a more efficient economic and political organization of the society based on a market economy. Increased differentiation in the economic sphere could only be sustained by greater differentiation in the political realm.

From this perspective, communism must be seen as nothing more than a stage in the economic and social development of Russia from a traditional society to a modern one. It is a "disease of the transition."²³

²²Deudney and Ikenberry, "Soviet Reform and the End of the Cold War", 221-22.

²³W. W. Rostow, The Stages of Economic Growth: A Non-communist Manifesto, 2d ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), 162.

1.d) Industrialization, Modernization and the USSR

On the plane of mega-historical trends, the unidirectional evolution of society from traditionally authoritarian to modern and democratic is intuitively appealing. It appeals to the belief in the notion of progress and development, deeply embedded in the social and natural sciences. In fact, the very idea of modernity is inconceivable without the concept of progress.²⁴

However, when used to analyze a concrete case such as the collapse of the USSR, the conceptual framework of transition from tradition to modernity is less than adequate. And the reason is not only because models inevitably simplify reality by including some variables and excluding others. All theoretical frameworks do this. The main difficulty with different developmental models is in the confusion surrounding the definitions of and the relationships between the key variables. This confusion raises many important questions. How much modernization has to take place before a nation is declared modern? Is an industrial society necessarily modern? To be modern, does it have to be a democracy based on a free-market economy? If the answer is yes, how do we know whether this is an

²⁴For the origin of the notion of progress and its place in modern thinking, see J. B. Bury The Idea of Progress: An Inquiry into its Origin and Growth (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1932).

assumption or prediction? Are we merely re-stating Hegel's dictum: what is must be?

Answers to the above questions are far from clear. According to Jones,

the concepts with which theories of cumulative social changes are most directly concerned are those of development, modernization, industrialization, and industrialism. Unfortunately, the precise meaning of these terms is far from self-evident, and the loose manner in which they have been used has provided the basis for a fierce academic debate during the last two decades. Apart from producing an extensive literature on the subject, though, the results have been at best inconclusive and at worst confusing. (Emphasis added)²⁵

The confusion is the most obvious in the Soviet case. Was the Soviet state developed, modern, industrialized? Was it all of the above, some of the above or a combination of the above? If it was developed and/or modern, then no model of evolutionary progressive social change can possibly explain its sudden collapse. If it was modern it certainly did not need to "transit" anywhere. If it had to transit to democracy or the free market, however, it could not have been fully developed. To accept the notion of transition, the Soviet Union could not have been developed and modern.

One of the major aspects of modernization of any society is what Karl Deutsch called "social mobilization". It is defined as the "process in which major clusters of old social, economic and psychological commitments are eroded or broken and people become available for new patterns of

²⁵T. Anthony Jones, "Modernization Theory," 22.

socialization and behaviour."²⁶ The indicators of social mobilization include the levels of literacy, urbanization, exposure to mass media, non-agricultural employment, exposure to new machinery, medical or military practices, geographical mobility, and per capita income.²⁷ Logically, high levels of these indicators would point to the existence of an industrial society. A high level of social mobilization then would indicate high levels of both industrialization and modernization.

1.d)(1) Indicators of Modernity in the Soviet Union

In fact, every indicator of social mobilization in the USSR points to a high level of industrial development in that country. For instance, in 1984, on the eve of Gorbachev's reforms, "there was one radio and one TV for every Soviet family, two sewing machines for every three, and one refrigerator for every family."²⁸ The nation was also highly urbanized with a well educated population.

Organizationally, the Soviet society, as every other modern society, exhibited a highly developed functional specialization in its division of labour. According to Emile

²⁶Karl W. Deutsch, "Social Mobilization and Political Development," The American Political Science Review 45, no.3 (September 1961): 495.

²⁷Ibid., 494-95.

²⁸Ed A. Hewett, Reforming the Soviet Economy: Equality versus Efficiency (Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 1988), 85.

Durkheim, a significantly developed division of labour is a clear indication of a high overall level of socio-economic development. His general description of a society formed on the basis of organic solidarity fits very well the description of the Soviet society and sets it clearly apart from the traditional mode of social organization:

[differentiated parts] are not juxtaposed linearly as the rings of an earthworm, nor entwined one with another, but co-ordinated and subordinated one to another around the same central organ which exercises a moderating action over the rest of the organism.²⁹

Leaving aside for a moment the issue of efficiency, Ed Hewett spoke for most scholars when he observed that "all of the major components of the system fit together rather well, and have for years."³⁰

The ideology of industrialism and scientific progress also permeated the entire society. In fact, the scientific management of every aspect of social life was quite explicitly the ideology of the communist party. However utopian Marxism-Leninism might have been in its goals,³¹ David Beetham was undoubtedly correct in his view that

²⁹Emile Durkheim, The Division of Labour In Society, trans. George Simpson (New York: The Free Press, 1964), 181.

³⁰Hewett, Reforming the Soviet Economy, 97.

³¹The word "utopian" is often used to convey the notion of irrationality. Inasmuch as we are concerned with the origins of socialism, utopian or otherwise, the ideas and the methods to fulfil them are profoundly modern. The utopians' goal was to carry out social experiments to allow man to exercise fully his rational faculties. See Leonardo Benevolo, The Origins of Modern Town Planning, trans. J. Landry (London: Routledge, 1967).

science was a legitimating basis of Marxism-Leninism, with "its claim to be able to guide society according to a scientific understanding of the historical process, knowledge of which [was] vested in the party as the representative of the most historically advanced class."³² Moreover, as Anthony Giddens points out, Marx's historical materialism in its primary orientation toward the future and the "use of knowledge about the past as a means of breaking with it," is fundamentally a "phenomenon of modernity."³³

Finally, in their psychological orientation, Soviet people individually appeared to exhibit an entirely modern outlook on life. After evaluating them on the basis of their conformity to some seven elements of individual modernity, Alex Inkeles concluded that "the Soviet Union is no longer a less developed nation."³⁴

Thus, well before Gorbachev's assumption of power in 1985, the USSR, practically in every respect, seemed to be a fully developed industrial and modern nation.³⁵

³²David Beetham, The Legitimation of Power (Atlantic Highlands, NJ.: Humanities Press International, Inc., 1991), 73.

³³Anthony Giddens, The Consequences of Modernity (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), 50-51.

³⁴Alex Inkeles, "The Modernization of Man in Socialist and Nonsocialist Countries," in Social Consequences of Modernization in Communist Societies, ed. Mark G. Field (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), 57, 53-55.

³⁵This does not mean, of course, that there were no remnants of traditionalism left in the Soviet society. However, as Giddens observed, "even in the most modernised

One caveat, however. It is quite rightly pointed out that in technological sophistication a great deal of the Soviet economy's output was a generation or so behind that found in the developed West.³⁶ Moreover, by the early 1980s the pace of economic growth had declined rather dramatically. Clearly, the Soviet economy was inefficient in its allocation of resources. Would not this information by itself be enough to support the argument that the Soviet Union was not quite modern? In brief: No.

True, the USSR was relatively less technologically developed than the West, but in absolute terms this development was still significant and, as we shall see in the next section, the economic performance was quite good. To focus exclusively on the relative civilian technological backwardness³⁷ of the Soviet Union would force one to accept an extremely narrow technological determinism in explaining social change. This is hardly satisfactory since the conceptual difficulties associated with defining

of modern societies, tradition continues to play a role." Certainly, the Soviet Union was no exception. See Giddens, The Consequences of Modernity, 38.

³⁶W. W. Rostow, "Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union: A Technological Time Warp," in The Crisis of Leninism and the Decline of the Left: The Revolutions of 1989, ed. Daniel Chirot (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1991), 61.

³⁷With greater openness in the Russian military, it is becoming obvious that as far as the military technology (broadly defined) was concerned, the Soviet Union not only was not behind, but in a number of areas was, in fact, ahead of the West. See Carl G. Jacobsen, "Russia's Revolutionary Arbiter? Arms and Society, 1988-1994," War and Society, 13, no. 1 (May 1995): 116, 118-119.

industrialism and modernity, and the relationship between the two remain unresolved. Or more precisely, by reducing modernity to industrialism, we resolve the problem by eliminating the question.

The technological reductionism, often implicit in the literature on the collapse of communism, clearly underscores the conceptual ambiguities in the modernization theory and its inadequacies in explaining sudden change. More specifically, if we cannot unambiguously resolve the issue of whether the Soviet Union was fully developed and/or modernized, then how can we use these categories to explain the sudden and massive change that led to its disintegration? It is simply not enough to point to a general trend in the development from tradition to modernity -- there must be a clear indication of where on that continuum we actually stand. Metaphorically speaking, if we do not know the precise location of where we are, the sense of direction is pointless.

1.e) Economics and Political Collapse

If, however, we put aside the attempts to write Universal Histories of change, it may still be pointed out that despite our theoretical inability to fully resolve the status of the former Soviet Union vis-a-vis the process of modernization and the condition of modernity, there was one identifiable trend deserving attention: the performance of

the Soviet economy. It is an accepted fact that by the mid 1980s the Soviet economy was in serious difficulties. The growth of GNP, industrial production and labour productivity had been all in secular decline for some ten years.³⁸ To all observers the system was clearly inefficient.

This conclusion, however, was not a novelty. In the early years of the Soviet regime, long before the opportunity to evaluate the real performance of the Soviet economy, Max Weber argued that a centrally planned economy is inefficient and "is a type of economy which inherently tends toward bankruptcy."³⁹

1.e)(1) The Political Economy of the Soviet Economic Performance

Be that as it may, nevertheless, by the mid-1980s the Soviet economy was far from bankrupt. In spite of the decline in growth, it was still the world's second largest economy after the United States. More importantly, many

³⁸Although the downward trend was unmistakable, the real numbers may never be known. The problem was not so much the all-pervasive secrecy, but that in many areas of the economy the method of accounting was of dubious nature. For some sectors, the numbers are simply unavailable. For different estimates of the Soviet economy's performance, see Hewett, Reforming the Soviet Economy, 52; Philip Hanson, From Stagnation to Catastroika: Commentaries on the Soviet Economy, 1983-1991 (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1992), 102-103, 107.

³⁹Max Weber, The Theory of Social and Economic Organization, trans. A. M. Henderson and Talcott Parsons (New York: The Free Press of Glencoe, 1947), 209.

Soviet citizens were effectively insulated from the economic difficulties. The "redistributive state"⁴⁰ functioned reasonably well. It goes without saying that members of nomenklatura at all levels were well taken care of by the system. According to calculations of Aleksei Kochetov, members of nomenklatura, administrators and managers comprised about 4.2% of the total workforce (nearly six million people).⁴¹ Further 1.8% and 18.8% (creative intelligentsia and top technical specialists, respectively) -- some twenty eight million people -- had privileged access to economic resources. About 13% of the population -- an additional eighteen million -- were employed in trade and services,⁴² "united by their common responsibility for the smooth functioning of the redistributive machinery of state, in return for which they extracted substantial economic advantages."⁴³ Thus, about 38% of the workforce derived a

⁴⁰This is the concept used by Viktor Zaslavsky to describe the mechanism whereby the state apparatus, "rather than market exchange, determined the ranking of the various social groups," and their access to economic benefits. See Victor Zaslavsky, "From Redistribution to Marketization: Social and attitudinal Change in Post-Soviet Russia," in The New Russia: Troubled Transformation, ed. Gail W. Lapidus (Boulder: Westview Press, 1995), 117.

⁴¹Aleksei Kochetov, "Istoki 'novoï' sotsial'noi struktury," Svobodnaia mysl', 9 (1993): 68. The actual numbers of people, representing the percentages given, are derived from the overall Soviet work force of 138.2 million. See Ibid., 71.

⁴²Ibid., 68.

⁴³Zaslavsky, "From Redistribution," 119.

substantial economic benefit from the system and had every interest in preserving it.

The condition of the industrial workers, the backbone of the Soviet workforce was more ambiguous. Here, there were winners and losers. Among the winners were workers of the defence and heavy industries. Those employed by the military-industrial complex had the highest wages, better-quality housing, privileged supply of consumer goods, etc.⁴⁴ There is a great deal of disagreement about the precise share of the military-industrial complex in the Soviet economy. The estimates range from about twenty-five percent to as high as seventy.⁴⁵ The exact numbers will probably never be known, but even if we take the lower number, we still find about a quarter of the industrial, "blue-collar" labour force -- over fourteen million people⁴⁶ -- having a relatively privileged access to the economic resources.

Among the industrial workers, an interesting category was represented by the "guest-workers", so-called limitchiki.⁴⁷ Limitchiki, comprising "15% of the total

⁴⁴Ibid., 120.

⁴⁵The lower number of 25 percent seems more acceptable to scholars. See David Holloway and Michael McFaul, "Demilitarization and Defence Conversion," in The New Russia: Troubled Transformation, ed. Gail W. Lapidus (Boulder, Co.: Westview, 1995), 204. For a significantly higher estimate, see Igor' Birman, "Sovetskie voennye raskhody" [Soviet Military Expenditures], Oktiabr' 9 (September 1991): 132-153.

⁴⁶Kochetov, "Istoki", 68.

⁴⁷Zaslavsky, "From Redistribution", 121.

labour force in Moscow, Leningrad, and other closed cities," were migrant workers, "hired by the closed city enterprises and given a temporary residence permit."⁴⁸ Although objectively these workers were close to the bottom of the Soviet redistributive system, paradoxically, many of them considered themselves relatively privileged. The guest-workers usually came from the rural areas of the country. As a rule, these areas had the worst supply system and the poorest infrastructure. With all their problems, cities still allowed for a higher standard of living than the rural area. Better hospitals, more consumer goods and improved housing (however sub-standard) tended to offset the drawbacks of being outside of the enterprises closed social distribution network.

Thus, it is the remaining 60% of the blue-collar workers (about 25% of the workforce) -- some thirty four and a half million people -- that bore the brunt of the shortage economy. Yet, even these people can only be considered as relative losers in the economy, relative with respect to the more privileged groups in society. One must not project the reality of empty shelves during the years of perestroika onto the situation prior to 1985. Even though there were considerable shortages and the situation was slowly deteriorating, the life was not a daily struggle for survival as it has been sometimes portrayed in the West.

⁴⁸Ibid.

Although there was little variety, the basic staple foods were cheap and generally available. As for the non-food consumer items, the situation was far from simple. A great number of consumer items were available most of the time. True, the quality of many Soviet-made products was suspect and there was no possibility of selection between the brands of the same product, thus limiting consumer's choice. Still, in the early 1980s, the USSR fully qualified as a consumer society. The shortages that persisted mostly concerned what was perceived as luxury items -- cars, Persian rugs and an, kind of imported items. This can hardly be described as the life of unrelenting hardship.

At the same time, an average Soviet citizen, regardless of his or her economic status, could rely on number of social benefits. Free daycare, schooling, university education, health care (however sub-standard), employment security were valued by the population and still in place when Gorbachev came to power. In an extensive study of the Soviet welfare policies, Linda Cook concluded that

although the rate of growth of per capita spending on social services declined in the 1970s, absolute levels of per capita spending for overall consumption, health, and education increased through 1980, and growth continued in both nominal and real terms.⁴⁹

By early 1980s, although increasingly strained, the multifaceted cradle-to-grave security was not in jeopardy. The

⁴⁹Linda J. Cook, The Soviet Social Contract and Why It Failed: Welfare Policy and Workers' Politics from Brezhnev to Yeltsin (Cambridge, Ma.: Harvard University Press, 1993), 52.

economy, after grinding to a halt began growing again and between 1983 and 1988 posted 11 percent increase in its national income.⁵⁰

Even if we allow for the increasing strains in its economy, the Soviet Union was not the only one experiencing difficulties. In much of the Western world, the beginning of the 1980s' was marked by post-WWII records of high inflation, interest rates and unemployment.

It is often pointed out that Marxism-Leninism's claim to legitimacy as an ideology was bound to the ability of the Soviet society to perform economically and that the increasing guif between the promises and reality was undermining its appeal. Although this may be true to a significant degree, it must be noted that the Soviet-type societies are not unique in this respect. As Brian Barry pointed out, the "liberal societies all attach a good deal of importance to the generation of wealth..."⁵¹ Indeed, it is often overlooked that a singularly most important ethical justification (and a legitimating factor) of the distributive inequities of the market mechanism in the Liberal theory is the idea of increase. In other words, sustained, long-term economic growth was seen as the only

⁵⁰Grigorii Khanin, "Economic Growth in the 1980s," in Disintegration of the Soviet Economic System, eds. Michael Ellman and Vladimir Kontorovich (London: Routledge, 1992), 73.

⁵¹Brian Barry, Political Argument: A Reissue with a New Introduction (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), lxiv.

justification of the highly inequitable results of the free market distribution. For instance, the strongest justification of inequality of possessions that can be found in Locke is that since the invention of agriculture and money, "a king of a large and fruitful territory there feeds, lodges, and is clad worse [in the equal state of nature] than a day-labourer in England [in the unequal state of the present]."² In other words, from the point of view of economics, the liberal (not the liberal-democratic), as well as Marxism-Leninist society's entire credo lies in one premise: the absolute increase in common pleasure, defined in terms of material possessions. The temporary relative regressions are normally overlooked as long as it can be pointed out that the long-term trend is up. In this sense, the significance of the promise of the better economic future is as valid in the West as it was in the East. The question is then, why was the Soviet society affected by worsening relative, short-term performance of its economy, while the West, despite record unemployment, inflation, interest rates and the ongoing squeeze on the middle class remained relatively stable? In 1993, in reference to the German state of affairs, the German president, Richard von Weizsacker, said: "Industry and the economy are stuck in a cost and innovation crisis, labour in an employment crisis, the political class in a credibility crisis and society in

an orientation crisis."⁵² Still, no observer of the German social reality came out to suggest that a legitimation crisis was imminent and the socio-economic system was in danger of collapsing. Yet, if we accept the importance of economic growth as the sole legitimizing factor in the East and the West, then to follow strictly an economic line of argument does not help us explain the sudden collapse of the Soviet system any better than it explains the survival of the Western one.

1.e)(2) Politics of Economics

When used alone, the economic argumentation obscures a very important fact about the logic of the Soviet system. To apply the standard of efficiency as the indication of the overall system's well-being is misguided. As Weber pointed out, in the modern economy, there is a fundamental tension between what he called the "'formal' and 'substantive' rationality o. the economy."⁵⁴ By formal rationality, Weber meant "the extent to which it is possible to carry through accurate rational calculation of the quantities involved in

⁵²Leo Strauss and Joseph Cropsey, eds., History of Political Philosophy, 3d ed., (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 493.

⁵³The quote is from Hans-Georg Betz, Radical Right-Wing Populism in Western Europe (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994), 59.

⁵⁴Talcott Parsons, introduction to The Theory of Social and Economic Organization, by Max Weber (New York: The Free Press of Glencoe, 1947), 35.

economic" operations. In contrast, substantive rationality is the "extent to which it is possible to secure what, according to a given system of values, is an adequate provision of a population with goods and services, and in the process remain in accord with the ethical requirements of the system of norms."⁵⁵ Under complete market freedom, "the highest degree of formal rationality in capital accounting is absolutely indifferent to all the substantive considerations involved." The substantive rationality is the highest under non-market conditions.⁵⁶

Thus, undue emphasis on economic efficiency would miss the fact that in the Soviet Union industrialization was carried out not according to consumers' preferences in production, but by administratively redefining the very criteria of a consumer. Hence, as Antoni Kaminski observed, "[c]onsumers eventually appear as a political category and not as an economic one."⁵⁷ In other words, in the USSR, beginning with the deliberate, rational reorganization of Soviet economic life in substantive terms in 1917 and then throughout its existence, "political will was ultimately the primary determinant of economic action, and this will was based on a very coherent world view developed by Lenin,

⁵⁵Ibid.

⁵⁶Max Weber, The Theory of Social and Economic Organization, 212.

⁵⁷Antoni Z. Kaminski, An Institutional Theory of Communist Regimes: Design, Function, and Breakdown (San Francisco, Ca.: ICS Press, 1992), 88-89.

Stalin, and the other Bolshevik leaders."⁵⁸ It was explicitly reaffirmed as late as 1983, by Vadim Medvedev, the future ideology chief of the CPSU.⁵⁹

In sum, the very logic of political rationality -- the maintenance of control, required, according to Kristian Gerner and Stefan Hedlund, that the "system effectively suppressed economic rationality."⁶⁰ Consequently, it hardly makes sense to use the criteria of formal economic rationality to analyze the decision-making rooted in a non-economic logic. Yet, according to Johann Arnason, many "retrospective explanations" of the Soviet collapse offered today, "often amount to little more than the claim that really existing socialism failed because it did not measure up to an ideal image of capitalism."⁶¹ To quote Weber once again, the programmes of movements for complete socialization do "not rest on technical considerations, but like most such movements, on ethical postulates or other forms of absolute value." As a result, "a 'refutation' of

⁵⁸Daniel Chirot, "What Happened in Eastern Europe in 1989?" in The Crisis of Leninism and the Decline of the Left: The Revolutions of 1989, ed. Daniel Chirot (Seattle, Wa.: University of Washington Press, 1991), 5.

⁵⁹L. K. Naumenko, and others, Nauchnoe upravlenie obshchestvom [Scientific Management of Society], vol. 16 (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo "Mysl'", 1983), 16.

⁶⁰Kristian Gerner and Stefan Hedlund, Ideology and Rationality in the Soviet Model: A Legacy for Gorbachev (London: Routledge, 1989), 45, 32.

⁶¹Johann P. Arnason, The Future That Failed: Origins & Destinies of the Soviet Model (London: Routledge, 1993), 184.

these is beyond the scope of any science."⁶² The system might tend toward bankruptcy in the long run, but this does not explain why the collapse occurred when it did and as quickly as it did. Long-term economic decline was certainly a necessary condition, but it was far from a sufficient one. In the world of economic theory and practice, "some built-in dysfunctionalities of the model are now well-known, but they explain bad performance, rather than declining performance."⁶³ Instructively, professor Radoslav Selucky, a former economic advisor to the Czechoslovak General Secretary Alexander Dubcek noted that they were convinced in 1968 that their economic system would not survive another day.⁶⁴ However, the system lived another twenty years and it took political will to bury it.

1.f) Political Will: The Origin?

The will to act could have come either as a result of pressure from below or as an initiative from above. In order to assess the extent of pressure from below on the eve of Gorbachev's reforms, it is necessary to inquire into the

⁶²Weber, The Theory of Social and Economic Organization, 207.

⁶³Ibid., 197.

⁶⁴The comment was made in 1990 at Carleton University during the graduate seminar in Political Economy of Eastern Europe.

nature of power relationships in the USSR and the extent to which they were legitimate.

1.f)(1) Legitimacy: Toward a Definition

Following Weber, a power relation is considered legitimate if those who issue commands and those who obey believe that their relationship is legitimate. From the perspective of the subordinate, for truly legitimate relation to exist there must be "a certain minimum of voluntary submission; thus an interest (based on ulterior motives or genuine acceptance) in obedience."⁶⁵ To guarantee its continual existence, every system tries to broaden and deepen an interest in obedience, thereby cementing the belief in its legitimacy.⁶⁶ The reasoning behind the need for legitimation was succinctly expressed by Jean Jacques Rousseau, "the strongest is never strong enough to be always the master, unless he transforms strength into right, and obedience into duty."⁶⁷

Over the years there has been a great deal of controversy surrounding the sources of legitimacy of the Soviet regime. First, there is a debate about whether the

⁶⁵Weber, The Theory of Social and Economic Organization, 324-325.

⁶⁶Ibid., 325.

⁶⁷Jean Jacques Rousseau, The Social Contract and Discourses, trans. G. D. H. Cole (New York: Everyman's Library, 1913; reprinted 1968), 6.

communist power had any legitimate claim to power. Then, among those conceding the fact that the Soviet regime was legitimate, there is a serious question as to how to classify the forms of legitimacy found in the former USSR.

Difficulties stem from the fact that "the concept of 'legitimacy' is simple in principle but notoriously slippery in application."⁶⁸ At least part of its notoriety is due to Weber's own definition of legitimacy. Although almost universally accepted in social sciences, at various points the Weberian definition has come under attack. Because of its empiricist epistemology, the most consistent criticism of the definition has come from political philosophers.⁶⁹ From the perspective of a social scientist, the most comprehensive critique of Weber's notion of legitimacy was recently delivered by the British scholar, David Beetham. According to Beetham, the problem with Weber's definition is, "first, that it misrepresents the relationship between beliefs and legitimacy; and, secondly, that it takes no account of those aspects of legitimacy that have little to do with beliefs at all."⁷⁰ Certainly, if legitimacy was

⁶⁸T. H. Rigby, "A Conceptual Approach to Authority, Power and Policy in the Soviet Union," in Authority, Power and Policy in the USSR, ed. T. H. Rigby (London: The MacMillan Press Ltd, 1980), 9.

⁶⁹See Hannah F. Pitkin, Wittgenstein and Justice (Los Angeles, Ca.: University of California Press, 1972).

⁷⁰David Beetham, The Legitimation of Power (Atlantic Highlands, NJ.: Humanities Press International, Inc., 1991), 11.

simply a matter of beliefs, it would be impossible to explain why some systems continue to survive when, reportedly, there are very few believers left.

With its circular logic,⁷¹ the proposition that a regime is legitimate because people believe in its legitimacy is rather uninformative and has no predictive value. Beetham is correct in pointing out that to follow Weber's definition is to be continuously surprised when people appear to change their beliefs and take to the streets.

1.f)(2) Three Levels of Legitimacy

According to David Beetham, there are three levels of legitimacy. First, to be observed, any rules on allocation of resources in a society (i.e. a system of power), must be seen as justifiable in the eyes of the rulers and the ruled. In other words, to judge whether the system is legitimate or not, we must assess the degree of congruence "between a given system of power and the beliefs, values and expectations that provide its justification."⁷² Both the rules and the belief system may remain stable, yet the legitimacy may still be eroded if the rules, for whatever

⁷¹Robert Grafstein, "The Failure of Weber's Conception of Legitimacy: Its Causes and Implications," The Journal of Politics 43 (1981): 456.

⁷²Ibid., 10-11.

reason, increasingly yield results that are not justifiable in terms of the original belief system. Thus, again, it is not the beliefs per se, but the moral justifiability in their terms that can make or break a regime's legitimacy.

Aside from the issue of beliefs, there are two other factors of legitimacy. One was already alluded to above. Every political system incorporates certain rules of organization of power, whether it is for the selection of the chief in a tribe or the election of the prime minister in a modern state. The rules do not have to be written to be followed. Often, it is the refusal to follow the established rules of office selection that tears a given system of power apart. Every regime, then, can be evaluated on the basis of its own adherence to the established rules, or on the extent of what Beetham calls the "legal validity" of a power system.⁷³

The other element of legitimacy is the notion of consent. Every legitimate power must be consensual power. Whatever is its motivational basis, consent "declares" an interest in obedience. According to Carl Friedrich, "consensual power originates in the consent of [subjects] A, B, C...to cooperate with [leader] L in securing a good which they all desire."⁷⁴ It is possible to speak of the presence of consent only when it is "expressed through actions which

⁷³Ibid., 4.

⁷⁴Carl J. Friedrich, "Political Leadership and the Problem of the Charismatic Power," The Journal of Politics 23 (1961): 7.

are understood as demonstrating consent within the conventions of the particular society."⁷⁵

Consequently,

[f]or power to be fully legitimate, then, three conditions are required: its conformity to established rules; the justifiability of the rules by reference to shared beliefs; the express consent of the subordinate, or of the most significant among them, to the particular relations of power.⁷⁶

With time, the rules may change, new beliefs arise, and novel forms of consent appear, but the basic structure of legitimacy remains the same. In other words, legality of the rules of power, their normative justification, and the peoples' demonstrative consent are all essential levels of legitimacy in every regime, in every age. They are not, as Weber claimed, the different types of legitimate authority,⁷⁷ dominant in different types of regimes: legal-rational in modern societies, normatively prescriptive in traditional societies and consensual in special cases when obedience is sought by charismatic individuals.⁷⁸

⁷⁵Beetham, The Legitimation of Power, 12.

⁷⁶Ibid., 19.

⁷⁷Weber, The Theory of Social and Economic Organization, 328.

⁷⁸For a succinct critique of Weber's traditional and rational-legal types of authority, see Carl Friedrich, Tradition and Authority (London: The Pall Mall Press, 1972), 89-91. Friedrich, however, appeared to accept Weber's definition of legitimacy as the belief that a ruler is legitimate.

1.f)(3) Defining Legitimacy and Sovietology

Understanding the source of Weber's confusion helps explain the prevailing disorientation among the Sovietologists. Despite the scholars' unease, Weber's popularity among social scientists led to continuous attempts to fit the Soviet system into the "procrustean bed" of Weberian analytical categories. Thus, replicating Weber's mistakes, some students of Soviet politics stress traditional elements of legitimation in the Soviet system. Others, note the importance of charismatic forms of legitimate authority. Still others, develop variations on rational-legal legitimation.⁷⁹ Even those who reject altogether the applicability of the concept of legitimacy in the Soviet setting do so because they accept Weber's definition of it and its applicability elsewhere.⁸⁰ In other words, since all discussions on legitimacy in the former Soviet Union are informed by Weber's conceptual framework, everyone is handicapped by the methodology they are forced to employ. The result should not come as a surprise. The danger of a potential conceptual crowding-out effect is always present in a universal acceptance of a specific

⁷⁹Various points of views on the nature of legitimacy of the Soviet Regime are presented in T. H. Rigby and Ference Feher, ed., Political Legitimation in the Communist States (London: MacMillan, 1983).

⁸⁰For instance, see Jan Pakulski, "Legitimacy and Mass Compliance: Reflections on Max Weber and Soviet-Type Societies," British Journal of Political Science 16 (1986): 35-56.

paradigm. As Alexander Motyl warned Sovietologists, "we need not accept Antonio Gramsci's notion of cultural hegemony to understand that scholarly consensus can often be a deadly thing."⁸¹

1.g) Legitimacy and the Soviet Union

However, having sorted out some conceptual difficulties surrounding the notion of legitimacy, the essential question remains: the extent of legitimacy of the Soviet regime. To answer it, we must: 1) inquire whether the communist regime sought to legitimize its rule, and 2) using Beetham's tripartite framework of legitimacy, we must assess evidence, if any, of population acceptance of the regime pretensions.

Any attempt to legitimize power, would invariably involve a claim by the powerful that their rule serves the interests of rulers and the ruled. As Aristotle pointed out long ago, all regimes to maintain stability in the long term must claim that their rulership is in the interests of the whole state.⁸² The dictum is as valid today as it was in

⁸¹Alexander J. Motyl, "The Dilemmas of Sovietology and the Labyrinth of Theory," in Post-Communist Studies & Political Science, ed. Frederic J. Floron, Jr., and Erik P. Hoffmann (Boulder Co.: Westview Press, 1993), 94-95.

⁸²According to Aristotle, the regimes, founded on the idea of common good, are more stable because they are natural and subsequently good, as "judged by the standard of absolute justice." These views are anchored in Aristotle's concern with the good, and reflect his belief that some form of a social organization is natural to man. See, Aristotle,

Aristotle's times. Since then, only the criteria of citizenship has changed.

Today, the political reality must, in some form, reflect two fundamental characteristics of the modern age. First, citizenship has been extended to include every person within the borders of the state. Secondly, in the modern state power is invariably claimed in the name of the people.⁸³

In the Soviet case, the system's claims were no different from any other modern regimes. The Marxist component of the communist party ideology appealed to people in the name of both the "true" common interest and of popular sovereignty.

1.g)(1) Legitimacy and Paternalism

There was, however, an important qualification of the principle of popular sovereignty. It was explicit in the Leninist component of the Marxist-Leninist ideology. Leninism, with its essential notion of "consciousness from without", tempered the idea of popular sovereignty with paternalism, by arguing that the masses were not yet ready to rule themselves. The communist party, as a faithful representative of the working class, was to be the guide of,

Politics, trans. and ed. Ernest Barker (New York: Oxford University Press, 1958), 118.

⁸³E. H. Carr, Nationalism and After (London: MacMillan & Co. Ltd, 1945), 18.

and the training ground for, the people on the road to their eventual self-emancipation.

It is tempting to view the Leninist qualification of popular sovereignty as the original sin of the Soviet regime, contravening one of the most important legitimating ideas of the modern age. However, the Soviet "taming" of the popular sovereignty was not unique in the modern world. To the contrary, today limitation on the government by the people is more of a rule than an exception. Only in a simple direct democracy on the style of the ancient Greek city-states can the claim be made that "people" in practice ruled themselves. Any form of government other than the simple direct democracy progressively removes more and more people from the process of direct rule. Even in Western liberal democracies, the majority of people are very distant from the direct governing process. They are linked to this process through the mechanism of political representation.

Political representation, as Hannah Pitkin observed, "taken generally, means the making present in some sense of something that is nevertheless not present literally or in fact."⁸⁴ In other words, representation involves claims to government "in place of the people", and on behalf of the people." As T. C. Pocklington and Paul Johnston pointed out, however, such claims can be uttered with various degrees of

⁸⁴Hannah F. Pitkin, The Concept of Representation (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972), 8-9; quoted in T. C. Pocklington, ed., Representative Democracy (Toronto: Harcourt Brace & Company, Canada, 1994), 16.

cynicism but with similar effect by the "[liberal democrats], princes, the absolute monarchs..., and modern dictators" alike.⁸⁵ Bluntly put, "political representation need not be democratic in character [to be legitimate]."⁸⁶

And in the Soviet case it certainly was not democratic. In fact, as was pointed out above, specifically Leninist claims to representation are explicitly paternalistic in tone. Paternalism, however, need not contravene the idea of political representation. By definition, "X acts paternalistically in regard to Y to the extent that X, in order to secure Y's good, as an end, imposes upon Y."⁸⁷ Inasmuch as the dominant party claims to have the best interests of the subordinate at heart, paternalism clearly fulfils the minimum requirements of representation.

Thus, although the relationship between paternalism and legitimacy is very complex, it is not necessarily one of mutual negation. Since in any society there are always many various sources of authority, paternalist form of rule can be quite legitimate,⁸⁸ as long as there is a profession of

⁸⁵Paul Johnson and T. C. Pocklington, "Democracy and Representative Government," in Representative Democracy, ed. T. C. Pocklington (Toronto: Harcourt Brace & Company, Canada, 1994), 17.

⁸⁶Ibid., 16.

⁸⁷John Kleinig, Paternalism (Totowa, N.J.: Rowman & Allanheld, Publishers, 1983), 13.

⁸⁸Inasmuch as paternalistic relationship is always said to exist whenever the prerogative of the decision-making is claimed on the basis of special knowledge or expertise, it is at least as much a part of modernity as it was the

common interests on the part of the rulers and there is continued acceptance "on the part of the subordinate [of] the principle of differentiation, or the source of authority."⁸⁹

1.h) Regime's Legitimacy and the Russian Political Tradition⁹⁰

Given the presence of paternalism in Leninist doctrine, it is not surprising that a paternalist power relationship between the communist party and the population has been identified as one of the characteristic of the Soviet

characteristic of traditional societies. In fact, increasing professionalization of every-day life and an almost religious deference to experts' advice is perhaps the wholemark of modernity. Today, we transfer rather automatically small and large decision-making to expert authority, who on the basis of possessing special knowledge acquire the right to decide on behalf of those who do not have this knowledge. It matters little whether the claim to expertise is based on a special relationship with a deity or a superior education. See Beetham, The Legitimation of Power, 73. For a darker view of normative implications of professionalism in modern societies, see Jose Ortega y Gasset, The Revolt of the Masses (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1932), 110-112. Leninism had merely extended the trend into the sphere of political relations, thus fulfilling Condorcet's dream of extending the method of science into every aspect of social life.

⁸⁹Beetham, The Legitimation of Power, 90.

⁹⁰The intent here is not to belittle cultural differences among various ethnic groups in the former Soviet Union. However, there is no evidence that the political traditions of these groups differ to any significant extent. Thus, since this is not a study of Soviet nationalities, references to Russian political culture only are fully justified. Throughout, Russian political culture generically stands for all nationalities of the former Soviet Union.

system.⁹¹ Pointing to the continuity of Russian traditions, the students of the Soviet political culture have observed that the paternalism of the communist party conformed to the historical Russian authoritarian norms of behaviour.⁹²

The thesis of continuity in Russian-Soviet political behaviour has not been uncontroversial among the scholars.⁹³ For our purposes, the crucial questions are: What are identifiable traditional Russian political attitudes? Which ones have survived the Bolshevik take-over and why? In what ways did they contribute to the legitimacy of the Soviet power?

The existence of cultural continuity is not, of course, something peculiar to the Russians. As Alexis de Tocqueville noted: "[Nations] always bear some marks of their origin, [and the] [c]ircumstances of birth and growth affect all the rest of their careers."⁹⁴ This is clear enough. The dilemma,

⁹¹Ferenc Feher, "Paternalism as a Mode of Legitimation in Soviet-type Societies," in Political Legitimation in Communist States, ed. T. H. Rigby and Ferenc Feher (London: MacMillan, 1982), 64-81.

⁹²Stephen White, Political Culture and Soviet Politics (London: The MacMillan Press Ltd, 1979), 38, 104; Roy A. Medvedev, On Stalin and Stalinism (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), 184-85.

⁹³Among the most vocal critics of Russian-Soviet continuity thesis and even the "Intra-Soviet" continuity has been Stephen Cohen. See Stephen F. Cohen, Rethinking the Soviet Experience: Politics and History Since 1917 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984). The most ardent proponent of the continuity argument has been Richard Pipes; see Richard Pipes, Russia Under the Old Regime (New York: Scribner's, 1974).

however, is in deciding what period or event to consider as the origin of a nation. In the Soviet case, the controversy is all the more dramatic since the Bolshevik take-over of power has been represented by the official Soviet ideology as the fundamental breaking point in Russian history. Given the number and duration of cataclysmic events such as the civil war, collectivization-industrialization, and the Purges that tore at the fabric of the Russian society since 1917, the Soviet claim cannot be easily dismissed. On the contrary, if there can ever be a discernible origin of something new in the nation's historical experience, certainly 1917 and the beginning of the widespread and sustained violence against the Russian society qualifies as one. Hannah Arendt insightfully observed

[t]hat... [any true] beginning must be intimately connected with violence seems to be vouched for by the legendary beginnings of our history as both biblical and classical antiquity report it: Cain slew Abel, and Romulus slew Remus; violence was the beginning and, by the same token no beginning could be made without using violence, without violating. (Emphasis added).⁹⁵

A protracted fratricidal violence dissolves the pre-existing community by destroying the "sine qua non of a society" -- the mutual expectations of each other's behaviour that

⁹⁴Alexis de Tocqueville, Democracy in America, ed. J. P. Mayer, trans. by George Lawrence (New York: Anchor Books, Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1969), 1:31.

⁹⁵Hannah Arendt, On Revolution (New York: The Viking Press, 1963), 10.

members of a given society may have.⁹⁶ The Russian society was no exception.

Still, the eventual re-integration of the society does not take place in a vacuum. The number of possible combinations is limited by the nation's historical experience, its past patterns of coping with the environment and the immediate demands of the current situation. Also, the individual's attitude to authority is formed early in one's life and remains fairly stable later on. Hence, the earlier observed continuity between the patriarchialism of the pre-revolutionary Russia and patriarchialism-paternalism of the communist one.

To say that, however, does not imply that causality between attitudes to authority and the system of power is necessarily unidirectional or unidimensional. Since an individual simultaneously acts and is being acted upon, the causality in the perceptions-power system relationship can just as easily run the other way. In other words, relevant attitudes may survive or resurface as a functional and rational response to government's actions.⁹⁷

This seems to have been the pattern in the Soviet case. Despite an open and honest hostility of the Bolshevik's

⁹⁶Chalmers Johnson, Revolutionary Change (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1982), 8.

⁹⁷Mary McAuley, "Political Culture and Communist Politics: One Step Forward, Two Steps Back," in Political Culture and Communist Studies, ed. Archie Brown (London: The MacMillan Press Ltd, 1984), 19.

ideology to the traditional Russian values, the government's actions were often just as open in fostering those values. For instance, Nina Tumarkin has convincingly shown how from the very beginning, during Lenin's life, the Bolsheviks had tried, quite deliberately, to adapt some basic tenets of their ideology, their manichaeian world-view and the principle of the vanguard's superior knowledge to the Russian Orthodox beliefs and popular traditions.⁹⁸ And, of course, every student of Soviet politics is familiar with Stalin's evocation of Russian nationalism during the latter part of his rule.

The reason behind such behaviour is obvious. From the start, Lenin's primary and overriding concern was the preservation of the communist party's monopoly of power. Mindful of Rousseau's dictum on the need to legitimize power in order to preserve it, the Soviet regime sought it in the re-animation of the skeleton of Russian political traditions under the lively new garb of the communist ideology. The regime understood that "[i]n order to legitimate the system, a clearly perceivable but at the same time carefully screened link with the past will need to be maintained, in terms of doctrine as well as national values and rituals."⁹⁹ And in the end, it was this desire for legitimation that

⁹⁸Nina Tumarkin, Lenin Lives! The Lenin Cult in Soviet Russia (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1983), 69-70.

⁹⁹Gerner and Hedlund, Ideology and Rationality, 21.

helps explain Gabriel Almond's observation that a "sophisticated political movement ready to manipulate, penetrate, organize, indoctrinate, and coerce and given an opportunity to do so for a generation or longer ends up as much or more transformed than transforming."¹⁰⁰

Whatever was the process by which the traditional Russian norms found their way into the Soviet society,¹⁰¹ every observer of the Soviet Union is struck by the similarities in the state-society relations in the USSR and Tsarist Russia. Particularly important to us is the pattern of submission to political authority among the Soviet people. At least in part, the inclination to accept the will of the powerful is common to all individuals in all types of societies. It comes from the human need to justify one's condition, in order to reduce the dissonance between reality and one's perception of it. In the colourful phrase of Alexis de Tocqueville: "[N]othing comes more natural to man than to recognize the superior wisdom of his oppressor."¹⁰²

¹⁰⁰Gabriel A. Almond, "Communism and Political Culture Theory," Comparative Politics, 15, no. 2 (1983), 137.

¹⁰¹For a very incisive study of "heredity mechanisms" that "account for this continuity", see Victor Sergeev and Nikolai Biryukov, Russia's Road to Democracy: Parliament, Communism and Traditional Culture (Aldershot: Edward Elgar, 1993), chs. 2 & 3.

¹⁰²de Tocqueville, Democracy in America, 436.

1.h)(1) The Pattern of Submission: The Conquered People

The specifically Russian attitudes to authority were conditioned by many centuries of uninterrupted autocratic rule. In the opinion of many students of Russia and the USSR, the effect of autocratic rule on the Russian and Soviet political cultures has been most profound. The imagery of the Russian people, provided by Russian and western writers, new and old, is full of references to conquerors and prisoners. Alain Besancon claimed that "the Russian people is a conquered people." In the view of Robert Tucker: "The relation between the state and the society is seen as one between conqueror and conquered." In reference to the efforts of the narodniki in the nineteenth century and as an unintended prophecy for the subsequent attempts of the Bolsheviks in the twentieth to alter the political behaviour patterns of the Russian population, the Russian writer, Alexander Herzen noted that "to dismantle the Bastille stone by stone will not of itself make free men out of the prisoners."¹⁰³

What needs to be added is that in the long-term neither the subjects of the conquest nor the prisoners necessarily

¹⁰³Alain Besancon, Russkoe proshloe i sovetskoe nastoiashchee [Soviet Present and Russian Past] (London: Overseas Publications Interchange, 1984), 85; Robert C. Tucker, The Soviet Political Mind: Stalinism and Post-Stalin Change, rev. ed., (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1971), 122; Alexander Herzen, From the other Shore, 29; quoted in Isaiah Berlin, The Russian Thinkers (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd, 1979), 95.

have to remain the unwilling victims. As de Tocqueville's quote above indicates, some justification of a power relationship will develop, from below, in due course. The legitimation process is completed when, from above, a profession of the rule in the common interest is met from below with a certain degree of acceptance of that claim.¹⁰⁴

1.h)(2) The Tradition of Paternalism

In the Soviet case, the traditional popular expectations of state's behaviour fitted rather well with the actions of the Bolsheviks, whose primary concern was to cement their rule. The effect was the persistence of the traditional paternalistic relationship between the holders of power and the population into the Soviet period and its subsequent manipulation by the communist party to enhance its control over society. To the very end of the USSR, paternalism remained one of the most important organizing principles of the Soviet power system.

Reflecting on the post-WWII large study of Soviet political beliefs and values¹⁰⁵ and more contemporary evidence Stephen White concurred with the Harvard Project finding that

The Soviet citizen's ideal... was a "paternalistic

¹⁰⁴Beetham, The Legitimation of Power, 59.

¹⁰⁵For the details of the study, see Alex Inkeles and R. Bauer, The Soviet Citizen (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1959).

state, with extremely wide powers which it would vigorously exercise to control the nation's destiny, but which yet served the interests of the citizen benignly... ." [It] should "have the same relation to its citizens as a parent to its child -- it should support, aid and nurture its people."¹⁰⁶

A more recent survey of former Soviet citizens designed to gauge the extent of popular support for regime norms generated results very similar to the ones reported in the Harvard study. Known as the Soviet Interview Project, the survey was carried out in 1983, and included some 2,793 former Soviet citizens, over 90% of which left the USSR between 1978 and 1981.¹⁰⁷

Brian Silver examined the patterns of the regime's popular support along "several key organizing principles of the Soviet political order...." He found that the vast majority of the respondents, having left the USSR voluntarily, still supported the state control of heavy industry, medical care, and education. Fifty six percent of those surveyed were either neutral or in favour of the state-collective versus private-individual interpretation of the rights of the accused. Even on such a fundamental issue for the regime as the right to strike, just fifty four

¹⁰⁶Stephen White, "The USSR: Patterns of Autocracy and Industrialism," in Political Culture and Political Change in Communist States, 2d ed., ed. Archie Brown and Jack Gray (London: The MacMillan Press Ltd, 1979), 41.

¹⁰⁷James R. Millar, "History, Method, and the Problem of Bias," in Politics, Work, and Daily Life in the USSR: A Survey of Former Soviet Citizens, ed. James R. Millar (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 13.

percent of the respondents, all of whom chose the extreme form of rebellion against the system -- emigration, strongly supported the private-individual interests as opposed to the state-collective ones. Only when it came to the agriculture and residence permits, did the overwhelming majority strongly reject the state control.¹⁰⁸ The preference for state-collective as opposed to private-individual view of rights points to another aspect of continuity between behaviour norms in the old Russia and the Soviet Union.

1.h)(3) Communalism vs. Individualism in Russian Tradition

The Russian society before the revolution was a highly patriarchal society. Although more modern doctrine of paternalism has evolved from patriarchalism, it is important to distinguish between the two. According to John Kleinig, to distinguish between patriarchalism and paternalism is to move from "a social order and world-view in which communal and relational categories predominate to one in which 'the discrete individual' holds centre stage." In other words, under the patriarchal social order man is seen as a "relational" rather than "rational being."¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁸Brian D. Silver, "Political Beliefs of the Soviet Citizen: Sources of Support for Regime Norms," in Politics, Work, and Daily Life in the USSR: A Survey of Former Soviet Citizens, ed. James R. Millar (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 109-110.

¹⁰⁹Kleinig, Paternalism, 3.

In the traditional peasant environment of the Russian mir, the life of an individual had meaning only in so far as it was related to the larger whole -- the communal existence of the village life. The village commune as a whole, not an individual peasant, was responsible for the payment of taxes, providing recruits for the Tsarist army, periodically redistributing the strips of land among peasants based on their long-term needs, and even deciding on the time and manner of conducting agricultural operations.¹¹⁰

Far from being an idyllic place as perceived by slavophiles, the mir was nonetheless a manifestation of the Russian attitude towards individualism and private property in general and the ownership of land in particular. According to Nikolai Berdiaev, however much peasants might have coveted better strips of land, the notion of it being privately owned was unacceptable to them. The very idea of the absolute character of private property seemed to be alien to Russian people. The land belonged to God and everyone else was merely a tenant on it.¹¹¹ Even at times of rebellions, peasants continued to express their preference for the communal life and communal property. For instance,

¹¹⁰Robert V. Daniels, Russia : The Roots of Confrontation (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985), 46; Donald, W. Treadgold, Twentieth Century Russia, 3rd. edition (Chicago: Rand McNally & Company, 1972), 106.

¹¹¹Nikolai Berdiaev, Istoki i smysl russkogo kommunizma [The Origins and the Meaning of Russian Communism] (Paris: YMCA-Press, 1955), 14, 49-50.

during the 1905 revolution peasants demanded the "abolition of private property in land."¹¹²

In the Soviet period, as a result of the Marxist-Leninist doctrinaire rejection of liberal individualism, the life of the population continued to exhibit a distinctly patriarchal character. Every effort was made to subsume the individual good under and define it in terms of a social good. More precisely,

the individual whose good [was] being secured ha[d] his identity only in terms of his location within the social whole. It [was] that whole that ha[d] primacy, and although individuals [were] formed and secured in their persons through it, their good [was] structured, not so much by their individual (yet diverse) natures and independently determined interests, as by requirements of the larger body.¹¹³

In a descending chain of importance, an individual was defined first by his or her membership in a class, then a nation-state, followed by a work-place (or a study-place) collective, with the immediate family being a distant last.

1.h)(4) The Russian Religious Mind

In the West, it was the twin process of Renaissance and Reformation that produced what Fichte identified as the revolutionary idea of his age -- "the conception of the

¹¹²Walter Laqueur, The Dream that Failed: Reflections on the Soviet Union (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 32.

¹¹³Kleinig, Paternalism, 174.

individual as possessing within himself an authority over himself."¹¹⁴ Russia, however, did not experience Renaissance or Reformation, and the liberal ideas of individualism, scepticism and secularization as propounded by Hobbes, Locke, Hume and many others, did not find resonance in Russian thought. In Russia, there were simply no counterparts to Western liberal thinkers, certainly not of equal stature, influence or following. On the contrary, as Nikolai Berdiaev observed, the thought of Dostoevskii, Tolstoy, Belinskii, Pisarev, however diverse in its content, was largely religious, messianic and totalistic in its character.¹¹⁵

With the advent of Communism, the Russian thought remained religious in nature if not in content. Walter Laqueur does not overstate the case by pointing out that "[c]ommunism was a secular religion with its pope, ritual prayers, saints, confessions, promises of reward and punishment. It satisfied spiritual needs -- it was a myth, one of the most powerful of all time."¹¹⁶ Laqueur view has

¹¹⁴R. G. Collingwood, The Idea of History (London: Oxford University Press, 1956), 107.

¹¹⁵Berdiaev, Istoki i smysl, 16, 24, 30, 37.

¹¹⁶Laqueur, The Dream, 11. Sergeyev and Biryukov argue that the connecting point between the "old" Orthodox religion and the new "religion" of Russian Marxism was the result of the "paradoxical syncretism created by superimposing" Marx's believe in the "objective course of history" (i.e. the existence of a singularly correct path to human fulfilment) "upon the religious culture of traditional Russia." See Sergeyev, Russia's Road, 42-44.

been supported by Soviet/Russian scholars and politicians alike. According to A. V. Anikin, the similarity between the old religion and the new one is quite remarkable. Describing the latter in terms of the former, he observed that

[i]ndeed, the entire semantic structure is there, from eschatological premonitions of "God's City" in the guise of "bright future" of communism to the ritual oath of the pioneers, the popular worship of the sacred undecayed relics and of the Interpretation of the Holly Writ, [from] catechism-like nature of the party textbooks and acathistuses of the party congresses, [to] the assemblies of proletarian prophets and devotees, fervent sufferers and martyrs.¹¹⁷

Alexander Yakovlev, a member of Gorbachev's politburo, and someone who had spend a great part of his career in the propaganda and ideology section of the CPSU is even more emphatic in his assessment of Marxism-Leninism. Refusing to downplay its religious elements, he provided the following analysis:

The Garden of Eden, just like Purgatory, has no coordinates in time and space. The ideal of a communist society has likewise never had any definite temporal or qualitative parameters, such as could make possible any prediction concerning when and under what particular conditions that society might emerge. It is this remoteness in time, this projection into a super guaranteed future, that makes a noble goal not merely attractive to human consciousness, but actually great, so great that it is worth even giving one's life for.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁷ A. V. Anikin, "Elementy sakral'nogo v russkikh revoliutsionnykh teoriakh" [Elements of the Sacred in Russian Revolutionary Theories], Otechestvennaya istoriya 1 (January-February 1995): 79.

¹¹⁸ Alexander Yakovlev, The Fate of Marxism in Russia, translated by Catherine A. Fitzpatrick (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 191-192.

By itself, the chasm between real and ideal, has never threatened an all-encompassing belief system. On the contrary, the drudgery, stupidity and corruption of the real world can easily be explained away as just another set of obstacles to be overcome.

1.h)(5) Destruction Through Replacement

Being realists and recognizing, as Richard Pipes put it that "yearning for spirituality ... had to be satisfied in one way or another," the Bolsheviks' first priority was to substitute the saints and rituals of Communism for those of Orthodox Christianity.¹¹⁹ The Bolsheviks' first Commissar of Enlightenment, Anatoly Lunacharskii, appeared to hold the same negative view of the masses as did Dostoevskii's "Grand Inquisitor."¹²⁰ According to the Inquisitor, man searches for miracles rather than God. If forced or manipulated, he would accept any system of belief as long as it is based on the "miracle, mystery and authority."¹²¹ Similarly, Lunacharskii held that religious feeling represented "man's need for mystery and ardor," advocating the replacement of

¹¹⁹Richard Pipes, Russia Under the Bolshevik Regime (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993), 338.

¹²⁰ The "Grand Inquisitor's" monologue is in The Collected Works of Feodor M. Dostoevskii, vol. 9, Brat'ia Karamazovy [Brothers Karamazov] (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo khudozhestvennoi literatury, 1958), 309-327.

¹²¹Ibid., 321, 323.

faith in God with faith in science and the machine."¹²² Nina Tumarkin has extensively documented how the new regime attempted to ground the new reality in traditional Russian belief. To the extent that "[t]he human mind is conservative and historical, comprehending the new in familiar terms and images," the lines separating the past and the present were often blurred and sometimes crossed in the minds of the peasants.¹²³ From posters imitating the form of the old Russian icons to the canonization of Bolshevik figures as martyrs and the eventual embalment of Lenin's body, the parallels between the emerging Bolshevik cult and the old Christian (as well as Russian folkloric) one was more than incidental.¹²⁴ As Tumarkin observed,

For the narod political and religious or supernatural power were closely linked and always personified in identifiable male and female saints or rulers. Naive monarchism had focused upon the little father as a positive figure who personally cared about his people.... [T]he Russian people, many of whom were now active politically for the first time in their lives, inevitably transferred to the new regime some of their old forms of allegiance.¹²⁵

According to Pipes, only in viewing the Bolshevik takeover as the destruction of the old by replacement with the new, can one accept the seemingly contradictory facts of the

¹²²Quoted in Pipes, Russia Under Bolshevik Regime, 338-339.

¹²³Tumarkin, Lenin Lives, 108.

¹²⁴Ibid., 69, 180.

¹²⁵Ibid., 108.

Bolshevik ferocious attack on the organized Church and the participation of the Christian soldiers in desecration of the religious objects co-existing with the apparent rise in the religious fervour of the Russian population in the twenties.¹²⁶

The projection of the old fervour onto the new object was even more profound in the case of Stalin's cult. Any attempt to downgrade the cult or even call it quasi-religious would seriously distort the feeling of an average Soviet citizen toward the ultimate authority in the land. For narod, Stalin in the 1930s, 1940s, and the 1950s was everything that Tsar'-Batiushka ever was for the Russian peasants before the Bolshevik takeover. The popular response to the crimes of the Stalin's regime was virtually identical with the peasants' perceptions of the injustices committed by the Tsar's administration. In neither case had the supreme leader ever been blamed. If something was wrong it was thought to be the work of the local officials, mestnyi peregrib (the local twist [abuse]). If only the Tsar'-Batiushka knew, things would be better.

During the darkest times of the purges, countless prisoners appealed to Stalin for help, believing he will right the wrong as soon as he finds out. During the war, the patriotic feelings and faith in Stalin virtually merged into one. Soldiers going into battle yelling, "For Motherland,

¹²⁶Pipes, Russia Under the Bolshevik Regime, 338, 356, 368.

for Stalin", equally and fervently believed in both. When Stalin died, the population perceived his death eschatologically, in apocalyptic terms. Hearing of Stalin's death, a well-educated widow of a man, wrongfully accused and sent to the Gulag thirteen years before, cried in despair: "What is going to happen? How will we live without Stalin?"¹²⁷

Nonetheless, just as in the 1930s Stalin's cult eclipsed the cult of Lenin, after the XXth party congress, the reverse process had taken place. The tone of the cult was unmistakably religious in tone. Once again,

[i]ts forms repeated earlier ones: the ubiquitous iconographic representations of his entire life; the idealized biographies resembling the gospels; the reverence toward Leninism as to sacred writings; the Lenin Corners as local shrines evident in every public institution; and the Lenin Mausoleum, which continued to draw crowds into its inner sanctum.¹²⁸

It is tempting to draw on the frequently-used distinction of the "dual Russia", and dismiss all the official propaganda as irrelevant to an average citizen. Nina Tumarkin, for instance, notes that when in the early 1970s, Lenin's cult reached unheard-of proportions even by the Soviet standards, many people started making fun of the official efforts.¹²⁹ Although this fact is incontrovertible, the popular reaction

¹²⁷The woman and the man in question are the author's grandparents. Born and raised outside of the USSR, and coming under the Soviet orbit only in 1940, neither one of them was ever a member of the Communist party.

¹²⁸Tumarkin, Lenin Lives, 259.

¹²⁹Ibid., 263.

was the result of too much veneration of Lenin, not too little. The name of the Soviet Union's founder was considered sacred and when his portraits began to adore the bottles of vodka, people in the Soviet Union reacted very much the same way Canadians and Americans do during the materialistic excesses of the Christmas season -- they engage in it but consider it to be an act of sacrilege.

Dostoevskii wrote that there is an age old yearning of mankind to find something or someone to worship and that the object of worship must be such that

all [people] come to believe in it and kneel before it, and necessarily all together. This very need for commonality in submission is the greatest suffering of every person individually and the mankind as a whole from the dawn of time. (emphasis in the original)¹³⁰

In the eyes of the Soviet people, Lenin as a person and Leninism as a doctrine, were worthy objects of submission.

If Soviet reality did not correspond to the promises of the communist party leaders, then the population blamed individual leaders, not the overall system. When in the republic of Moldavia the store shelves turned empty in the mid-1970s, popular opinion attributed this to the cavalier boasting of Republic's party leader, Bodiul, to the General Secretary Brezhnev that Moldavia could single-handedly feed the entire Soviet Union. The result, it was held, was that the Republic was moved to a more exacting level in the Union's supply system. It never occurred to anyone to blame

¹³⁰Dostoevskii, Brat'ia Karamazovy, 319.

the system of central planing for the shortages. On the whole, many people knew that the official figures were false, saw the shortages and inadequacies but still did not doubt the system. It is a very common phenomenon for people anywhere to compartmentalize their beliefs and quite frequently hold beliefs inimical to each other without experiencing cognitive dissonance. In the Soviet Union, the indoctrination was intense and as Laqueur suggested, something had always stuck.

1.h)(6) Summary

This tendency goes a long way in explaining Stephen White's observation that "[m]ost people had... some kind of interest in the preservation of the existing system, much though they might object to... its individual features."¹³¹ In other words, the majority of people accepted the fundamental rules of the system's organization of power. Their belief system, anchored in the traditional Russian preference for paternalistic exercise of state authority, eschatological mode of thinking, reinforced through the claims of Marxist-Leninist ideology and manipulated by the practices of the communist party during its seven decades of rule, continued to justify the organization of power in the society. As White pointed out, the central concern of the Soviet citizens did not go beyond "who [was] in control."

¹³¹White, Political Culture and Soviet Politics, 105.

Whatever popular hostility there was, it "was directed primarily against the top political leaders", and not against the system as a whole.¹³²

Indeed, notwithstanding some attempts to prove otherwise,¹³³ prior to Gorbachev's assumption of power, there was no evidence of widespread active withdrawal of consent to the regime's norms. Highly publicised acts of individual dissidence are not necessarily tell-tail signs of popular dissent. The former dissidents themselves have warned us against such an assumption.¹³⁴ To extrapolate directly from one to another would be to commit the so-called "fallacy of composition" -- the extrapolation that what is true for the individual is also true for the community.¹³⁵ From the point of view of any society, the

¹³²Ibid., 104.

¹³³These attempts, can, in part, be explained by the deep soul-searching of post-Sovietology, caused by its widely perceived failure to predict the turn of events. Many of the attempts, however, to magnify every act of discontent into the supposedly missed omen of the coming catastrophe are little more than post factum rationalizations of the perceived failure to live up to the claim of scientificity. One is reminded of Leon Trotsky's words: "It is inappropriate to judge the living body by the germs found in it after a post-mortem."

¹³⁴White provides a number of examples of conversations with former Soviet dissidents in which all of them, without exception note that a Soviet citizen did not relate to their struggle. See White, Political Culture and Soviet Politics, 100.

¹³⁵Jon Elster, Logic and Society: Contradictions and Possible Worlds (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Ltd, 1978), 97.

marginal is a deviation¹³⁶ from the norm of that society. By definition, people involved in marginal activities do not reflect the prevalent ideas of the society as a whole. According to de Tocqueville, "to enable [a man] to dare to declare war, even legitimately, on the ideas of his country and age means that he must have something of violence and adventure in his character...."¹³⁷ Confirming de Tocqueville's observation, Joshua Rubenstein, in a sympathetic study of Soviet dissidents, admitted that the dissident movement "in general does not attract ordinary, cautious citizens." Instead, "it includes people with eccentric qualities."¹³⁸ In other words, just because there were some people ready to reject the norms underpinning the regime's legitimacy, is not enough to assume that their views were shared by the population as a whole.¹³⁹

1.1) The Lack of Alternatives and Regime's Stability

Aside from legitimacy, however, for those who still doubted, there were other factors contributing to the

¹³⁶Thus, the notion of deviance is used as a statistical construct, not as a normative one.

¹³⁷de Tocqueville, Democracy in America, 597.

¹³⁸Joshua Rubenstein, Soviet Dissidents: Their Struggle for Human Rights (Boston, Beacon Press, 1980), xii.

¹³⁹As Beetham pointed out, in all societies there are people who challenge the existing order. In itself, their presence does not tell us much about regime's legitimacy. Beetham, The Legitimation of Power, 19-20.

regime's stability. First among them was the near total ignorance of an alternative mode of living. There is no evidence, for instance, that in the Soviet case, the so-called International Demonstration Effect, the IDE,¹⁴⁰ played any role in undercutting the regime's stability from below by providing an external reference point to one's internal condition. The reason -- there was no IDE. As Bialer convincingly showed, for the Soviet citizen, prior to perestroika, the concept of the life in the West lacked any reality.¹⁴¹ Travel to the West was forbidden. The unofficial contact with the Foreigners was minimal at best, particularly outside of Moscow. For the vast majority of the people there was no escaping the official version of the capitalist world as the place of vicious daily struggle for survival. Under the circumstances, no meaningful comparison was possible. At best, if the West did provide an external reference point, it was a negative one. Without the proper external reference point, the endemic malfunctions "may not be as easily perceived as if they were localized."¹⁴²

¹⁴⁰Andrew Janos draws our attention to the potentially destabilizing role of the IDE in communist countries. His analysis, however, while conceptually correct, is not applicable to the pre-perestroika USSR. See Andrew C. Janos, Politics and Paradigms: Changing Theories of Change in Social Science (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1986), 121-123.

¹⁴¹Seweryn Bialer, Stalin's Successors: Leadership, Stability, and Change in the Soviet Union (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 163.

¹⁴²Gerner and Hedlund, Ideology and Rationality, 8.

In a penetrating account of de Tocqueville's analysis of the causes of the French revolution, Jon Elster brought out de Tocqueville's crucial insight that the social stability is in danger only when there is "a gap between aspirations and the opportunity to satisfy them, not by limited opportunities in themselves."¹⁴³ However, the absence of an external reference point leads to the situation where

[T]he inability to conceive of anything beyond local alternatives reduces the range of what is perceived as possible, while at the same time the pursuit of [cognitive] consonance reduces the range of what is desirable.¹⁴⁴

In other words, without the existence of the meaningful comparison, even the condition of absolute deprivation will not lead to the more socially explosive condition of relative deprivation.¹⁴⁵ Quite the opposite is true. According to Walter Runciman, "If people have no reason to expect or hope for more than they can achieve, they will be less discontented with what they have, or even grateful

¹⁴³Jon Elster, Political Psychology, 171.

¹⁴⁴Ibid., 66.

¹⁴⁵As used here, the concepts of absolute and relative deprivation are among the key variables used to analyze the propensity for disorder in a particular society. Absolute deprivation is the observable objective condition of an individual. Relative deprivation, on the other hand, is a subjective evaluation of one's condition, involving the evaluation of the absolute deprivation against the individual's desires. See Ted Robert Gurr, Why Men Rebel (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970), 24-25.

simply to be able to hold on to it."¹⁴⁶ Moreover, it has been observed that absolute deprivation is likely to produce apathy and resignation rather than rebellion. In general, "downwardly mobile individuals are typically more conservative than other [more successful] members of the [society]."¹⁴⁷ The implications for the communist world are unambiguous. There, the satisfaction of the basic needs, together with the inability to conceive of realistic alternatives, wedded people to the existing regime.¹⁴⁸

1.j) Conclusion

In conclusion, however compelling might have been the sight of the disintegration of the Eastern bloc and the breaching of the Berlin Wall, the collapse of the Soviet Union, as a system, was certainly neither historically inevitable (whether idealistically or materialistically driven) nor the result of pressures from below. On the contrary, on the eve of Gorbachev's rise to power, the

¹⁴⁶Walter G. Runciman, Relative Deprivation and Social Justice (Berkeley, CA.: University of California Press, 1966), 9; quoted in Gurr, Why Men Rebel, 24.

¹⁴⁷Elster, Logic and Society, 142.

¹⁴⁸Bartlomiej Kaminski and Jeffrey Goldfarb, respectively, identified this form of control in the communist world as "negative legitimation" and as "legitimation through disbelief." See Bartlomiej Kaminski, The Collapse of State Socialism: The Case of Poland (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 118; Jeffrey Goldfarb, Beyond Glasnost: The Post-Totalitarian Mind (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1989), 110, 170.

Soviet society was stable and the communist regime seen as legitimate. To appreciate the reasons for the USSR's swift collapse, the focus must shift from the analysis of the "Grand-theoretical" and society-wide factors to the analysis of the so-called "high" politics and more immediate causes of the Soviet demise. The stress must be on the elites and their leadership.

In other words, the organization of power at the top of the Soviet society is crucial to our understanding of both the communist system survival of so many crises in its history and its unexpected collapse in just six years of Gorbachev's rule. Given the overcentralized nature of the USSR's system of power, the analysis must include the evaluation of the Soviet leadership goals, choices it had to pursue stated goals, political resources available to pursue those choices, the decisions it finally made and did not make, and last but not least, the intended as well as the unintended consequences of these decisions.

2. "What If"? Alternative Past without Gorbachev

The notion of individual freedom is a delusion. The further we are from omniscience, the wider our notion of our freedom and responsibility and guilt, products of ignorance and fear. And so individual responsibility and the perception of the difference between right and wrong choices... are mere symptoms, evidences of vanity, of our imperfect adjustment, of human inability to face the truth. The more we know, the greater the relief from the burden of choice....

Isaiah Berlin, Four Essays on Liberty

In chapter 1 it was argued that prevailing systemic explanations cannot account for a swift demise of the Soviet Union. In the conclusion, it was offered that the leadership's decisions and their consequences, intended and unintended, were instrumental in bringing the system down. Introduction of an agent, though, leads to the issue of contingency, the individual and the unique in history. How much freedom of action does an individual enjoy? Are there genuine alternatives in history? What is the scope for contingency?

The goal of this chapter is to examine whether there was a plausible objective alternative to the type of the reform that resulted in the collapse of communism in the Soviet Union. To achieve this objective, the chapter is divided into

two parts. Through the discussion of the nature of explanation in history, the first part seeks to provide theoretical justification for a counterfactual explanation of a particular historical event.

The second part is the practical implementation of a counterfactual thought experiment. Its purpose is to show that in the mid-1980s, the USSR had a range of possible futures in front of her. More specifically, the path pursued by Gorbachev was not forced on him by the ineluctable march of history. It is far more likely that the leader other than Gorbachev would have chosen different solutions to the country's problems -- solutions that would have led to very different outcomes.

Part I

2.a) Contingency and Its Limits

The concept of contingency or chance is one of the central problems in epistemology of science. To what extent is the universe of knowledge (actual and potential) subject to highly predictable regularities of laws? For a long time after Isaac Newton, the view prevailed that all of the world's phenomena, natural and social, was subject to discoverable laws. To use the "clouds and clocks" metaphor introduced by Karl Popper, physical phenomena are akin to clocks, systems whose arrangement is "regular, orderly, and highly predictable

in their behaviour."

2.a)(1) Clouds or Clocks: Back and Forth

In the history of intellectual endeavours outside of hard sciences, Newtonian ideas of order in the universe had an advantage of supplying a kind of theological "foster home" to philosophers and historians mourning the "death of God." As Isaiah Berlin observed,

Race, colour, church, nation, class; climate, irrigation, technology, geo-political situation; civilization, social structure, the Human Spirit, the Collective Unconscious, to take some of these concepts at random, have all played their parts in theologico-historical systems as the protagonists upon the stage of history (emphasis added).²

He further notes that "[d]ifferent though the tone of these forms of determinism may be -- whether scientific, humanitarian, and optimistic, or furious, apocalyptic, and exultant -- they agree in this: that the world has a direction and is governed by laws...."³ In the opinion of another scholar, "[t]he conception of law in history" leads us to conclude that "[h]istory, the great course of human affairs, has not been the result of voluntary efforts on the part of

²Karl Popper, "Indeterminism and Human Freedom," in Popper Selections, ed. David Miller (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), 247.

³Sir Isaiah Berlin, "Historical Inevitability," in The Philosophy of History, ed. Patrick Gardner (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974), 171.

⁴Ibid., 170.

individuals or groups of individuals, much less chance; but has been subject to law."⁴

With advancement in quantum mechanics and the promulgation of the Heizenberg's "uncertainty principle", the clocklike model of nature was challenged. Instead, it was proposed that some degree of "cloudiness" was a better description of nature, social and physical. The metaphor of clouds stood for systems that are "highly irregular, disorderly, and more or less unpredictable."⁵ The progenitor of this view was the American philosopher, Charles Sanders Peirce. Approvingly, Karl Popper summarized Peirce's ideas as follows:

Peirce concluded that we were free to conjecture that there was a certain looseness or imperfection in all clocks, and that this allowed an element of chance to enter. Thus Peirce conjectured that the world was not only ruled by the strict Newtonian laws, but that it was also at the same time ruled by laws of chance, or of randomness, or of disorder: by laws of statistical probability...(emphasis in the original).⁶

It was only a matter of time before, building on Peirce's ideas, some extreme views on indeterminism were advanced by some scholars. Echoing the influential view of David Hume,

⁴Edward P. Cheney, Law in History and Other Essays (New York, 1927), 7; quoted in Ernest Nagel, "Determinism in History," in The Philosophy of History, ed. Patrick Gardner (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974), 187. (Emphasis in the original.) We will come back to the issue of the possibility of laws in history later on.

⁵Ibid.

⁶Ibid., 252.

they declared: "[a]s objects must either be conjoin'd or not,... 'tis impossible to admit of any medium betwixt chance and an absolute necessity." So, they have embraced chance. Almost invariably, an opinion of H. A. L. Fisher is quoted in this regard:

Men wiser and more learned than I have discerned in history a plot, a rhythm, a predetermined pattern. These harmonies are concealed from me. I can see only one emergency following another as wave follows upon wave, only one great fact with respect to which, since it is unique, there can be no generalizations, only one safe rule for the historian: that he should recognize in the development of human destinies the play of the contingent and the unforeseen."

However, does the rejection of rigid determinism force us to embrace the extreme indeterminism? Is there a half-house between these two extremes? To many, this an uncomfortable position. Popper attempts to argue against Hume, but the success of his counter-argument is highly questionable. Disagreeing with the proposition that "chance has no status except as a symptom of our ignorance," Popper tells us: "For we know that even highly reliable clocks are not really perfect,...[a]nd we also know that our clouds are not perfectly chancelike...." Quantum theory seems to buttress

⁷David Hume, A Treatise of Human Nature (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1946; reprinted from the original edition in three volumes), 171; page reference is to the reprinted edition.

⁸H.A.L. Fisher, A History of Europe, complete edition in one volume (London: Edward Arnold & CO., 1936), v.

⁹Popper, Selections, 263.

Popper's objection. His proof, though, is an illusion. However much one tries, the question of determinacy is impossible to answer empirically, one way or the other. Ernest Nagel's view is instructive in this regard.¹⁰ One of his goals is similar to that of Popper -- to find the middle ground between the two extremes of determinism debate. But in pursuing his other goal, the defence of "softer" version of determinism, he shows us the unprovability of Popper's argument -- and, ultimately, his own. Nagel reminds us that, in order to provide a causal explanation, we need to construct a deductive argument. A formally valid deductive argument is an argument,

whose conclusion is a statement formulating the event to be explained, and whose premises contain one or more statements of universal laws (expressing some assumed invariable connections of attributes or relations), as well as relevant singular statements that specify the initial and boundary conditions for applying those laws to the case in hand.¹¹

To establish an universal law, we need to establish the boundaries of a system. However, Nagel's essential point is that we do not really know the true boundaries of our systems. The greater is the complexity of the system, the less certainty there is "that all necessary and sufficient conditions for the occurrence of events have been enumerated."¹² Not being able to show that "determinism has...

¹⁰Ernest Nagel, "Determinism in History," in Philosophy of History, ed. Patrick Gardner (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974), 192.

¹¹Ibid., 198.

¹²Ibid., 191.

been conclusively established," Nagel finds consolation in that "determinism cannot be disproved [either]...." In other words, contrary to Popper, "our failure to discover the determining conditions for some event (or type of event) does not prove that there are in fact no such conditions."¹³ And what about quantum mechanics? Quite legitimately, Nagel states that

even though quantum theory places an upper bound on the precision with which subatomic processes are predictable, it surely is not nonsense to hold, [without an a priori assumption,] as Planck, Einstein, and De Broglie have in fact held whether correctly or mistakenly, that an alternative theory may eventually be constructed which will not impose such theoretical limits on precise predictions in that domain.¹⁴

To put it simply, our ignorance is an ever present possibility, in systems large and small.

At this point, we have reached the limit of positivist epistemology. The questions on whether events are determined or not, and whether there is a middle ground remains unanswered. The answer to this question belongs to the realm of ontology, the primary element in metaphysics.

Since the resolution of an ontological debate (if it is at all possible) belongs to this "higher" realm of metaphysics, some scholars have attempted to deflect the debate to a "lower" world of individual psychology. Thus, they treat Karl Popper's question: "But is [pure] chance really

¹³Ibid., 192.

¹⁴Ibid., 197.

more satisfactory than determinism?", psychologically rather than philosophically.¹⁵ If looked at it that way, the answer, to this question, then, begs another: "Satisfactory for whom? According to William James, the sides of any "barricade", including an epistemological one (and may be even ontological), are chosen entirely according to an individual's temperament. James writes:

The history of philosophy is to a great extent that of a certain clash of human temperaments. Undignified as such a treatment may seem to some..., I shall have to take account of this clash and explain a good many of the divergencies of philosophers by it.... [Their] temperament really gives [them] a stronger bias than any of [their] more objective premises. It loads the evidence for [them] one way or the other, making for a more sentimental or a more hard-hearted view of the universe, just as this fact or that principle would.¹⁶

Even more vivid account about how and why we choose one set of theories as opposed to another, is provided by Isaiah Berlin. He declares that "taken figuratively", the metaphor of "the

¹⁵Popper, Selections, 261 (emphasis in the original). There is little doubt that Popper intends this question to be a philosophical one.

¹⁶William James, Pragmatism (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1995; republication, New York: Longmans, Green and Company, 1907), 2-3 (page references are to republished edition). Friedrich Nietzsche also posited an intimate connection between philosopher's ideas and his personality. To be fair, not all arguments postulating the influence of personality on philosophical ideas come from psychology. Following Edmund Husserl, the phenomenological school of philosophy, instead of Kant's move "down" from nomena to phenomena, raises phenomena to the status of the nomena. See Richard Velkley, "Edmund Husserl," in History of Political Philosophy, 3d. ed., ed. Leo Strauss and Joseph Cropsey (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1987): 870-887.

hedgehog and the fox"

mark[s] one of the deepest differences which divide writers and thinkers.... For there exists a great chasm between those... who relate everything to a central vision,... in terms of which they understand, think and feel -- a single, universal, organizing principle in terms of which alone all... has significance... and,... those who pursue many ends,... related by no moral or aesthetic principle; these last... entertain ideas that are centrifugal rather than centripetal, their thought is scattered or diffused, moving on many levels,... without, consciously or unconsciously, seeking to fit them into,... any one unchanging, all-embracing,... unitary inner vision. The first kind of intellectual and artistic personality belongs to the hedgehogs, the second to the foxes....¹⁷

As insightful as these observations are, the picture they create is also unsatisfactory, or at least, unsettling. Surely, we are influenced by our psychological make-up in adopting a particular perspective. But is this it? Do we have nothing else, other than a subjective feeling, to guide us between the alternatives in thinking? Do we simply adjust facts to fit our whims, while hiding behind "higher" ontological debates? Is "reality" a mere choice of words, as the more extremist followers of Ludwig Wittgenstein suggest? Is there no limits on choices?

2.b) The limits of Contingent

A radically humanistic view is untenable because

¹⁷Isaiah Berlin, The Hedgehog and The Fox: An essay on Tolstoy's view of history (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson Ltd, 1953), 1-2.

obviously in any situation not everything is even theoretically possible. Moreover, not everything logically possible is historically possible. At a minimum, a free-willing (and wheeling) human construction of meaning sooner or later collides with quite real physical limitations -- physical barriers of all sorts facing social groups and the physical death facing an individual. Reflecting on possibilities of German development on the eve of Hitler's ascension to power, Sidney Hook tersely observed:

The abstract theoretical possibility of a return to the free market of early capitalism in Germany was historically impossible. The German masses would have starved to death before the free market could have been established (emphasis in the original).¹⁸

In addition to physical limitations on construction of meaning, there are serious social ones as well. Social limitations come from the duological nature of human mind. The formation of individual identity involves the establishment of identity's "boundaries". The "self" is defined in the opposition to non-self. Paraphrasing Hegel, "I can only become aware of myself if I am also aware of something that is not myself. Self-consciousness is not simply a consciousness contemplating its own navel."¹⁹ Moreover, individual construction of meaning can occur only within the social

¹⁸Sidney Hook, The Hero in History: A Study in Limitation and Possibility (Boston: Beacon Press, 1955), 115.

¹⁹Peter Singer, Hegel (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), 57.

context. "To be aware of oneself as a self-conscious being, one needs to be able to observe another self-conscious being, to see what self-consciousness is like." In other words, "self-consciousness grows out of a social life" through an on-going "dialogue" between an individual and society.²⁰

In as much as society acts as a storage of civilization's ideas, it introduces the past into the present and connects the present to the past. Hence, Marx's remark that individuals make history but not exactly as they please. The past conditions the present. In the colourful phrase of E. H. Carr: "[T]he brain of the brain-washer has itself been washed."²¹ Thus, through the process of socialization (i.e. "brain-washing") the human contingency is circumscribed. By narrowing the horizon of what is theoretically conceivable, language, myths and other cultural symbols exercise powerful constraint on what is practically achievable.

By implication, although we may never be able to establish a historical covering law from which every other "sub"-law may be deductively arrived at, physical and social constraints on contingency still ensure a fairly high level of retroactively explicable behaviour in the form of social trends and mechanisms.²² Thus, "contingent events in history

²⁰Ibid., 58-59.

²¹E. H. Carr, What is History, 2d. ed, ed. R. W. Davies (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1987), 40.

²²Popper is emphatic in his insistence that "laws and trends are radically different things...." A statement

are of tremendous importance, but the evidence of their importance is possible only because not all events are contingent."²²

2.c) (An Occasional) Breakthrough of Contingency

Yet, occasioned by regularity of birth and death, the radical physical and phenomenological discontinuity occurring at an individual level creates at least a possibility of a discontinuity at a social level. As St. Augustine have observed: "That there be a beginning, man was created."²³ The process of socialization, though always extensive is never perfect. Reconciliation between the needs of an individual and the needs of the group in the society is often more tenuous than is usually recognized. Whether Freud's theory of individual needs is accepted or explicitly rejected²⁴, everyone

asserting the existence of a trend at a certain time and place would be a singular historical statement, not a universal law.... A trend... which has persisted for hundreds or even thousands of years may change within a decade, or even more rapidly than that." See Popper, Selections, 301 (emphasis in the original). In this distinction, trends would only allow for a retroactive elucidation of some causal chains of events. To predict and control, however, we need laws.

²³Hook, The Hero in History, 117 (emphasis in the original).

²⁴Quoted in Hannah Arendt, On Revolution (New York: The Viking Press; Viking Compass Edition, 1965), 212.

²⁵A very eloquent argument against Freud's anti-social instincts of Eros and Sanatos is found in Terrence Des Pres, The Survivor: An Anatomy of Life in the Death Camps (New

agrees with Freud's conclusion that "[a] good part of struggles of mankind centre around the single task of finding an expedient accommodation... between th[e] claim of the individual and the cultural claims of the group...."²⁶ In other words, whichever philosophical tradition one is coming from -- whether society corrupts an individual or civilizes him -- there is a universal recognition of the uneasy truce between the needs of one and the needs of many.

Nonetheless, the recognition that every society consists of many maladjusted individuals, is not very helpful in establishing when and why an individual manages to exercise his or her power in a historically consequential manner. A link between individual actions and social phenomena makes many scholars uneasy. As Fred Greenstein notes, on the epistemological level, "debates about the connection between micro- and macro-phenomena are... endemic in the natural sciences as well as the social sciences."²⁷ As with the more general contingency-determinism debate, the question of free

York: Oxford University Press, 1976). The theories of both authors are rooted in socio-biology, but whereas Freud's individual is evolving towards the "civilization", Des Pres dissolves the "civilization" to arrive at an individual.

²⁶Sigmund Freud, Civilization and its Discontents, translated and edited by James Strachey (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1961), 43; similarly, Des Pres writes: "Western civilization is the negation of biological reality...." See Des Pres, The Survivor, 206.

²⁷Fred I. Greenstein, Personality and Politics: Problems of Evidence, Inference, and Conceptualization, with a new preface (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 24.

will also appears to be epistemically insoluble.

However, even though it is insoluble, the ZeitGeist of today's positivist social science tends to emphasise structure at the expense of human agency. Still substantially influenced by Hegel and Spencer, many mainstream social scientists

may note in passing that the individual was the proximate or immediate cause of a decisive happening, but... must go on to an investigation of what produced the individual in question and determined him to act as he did."

Marxism, on the other hand, "does not offer a simple and entirely one-sided answer to this question: man makes history and history makes man...."

It is therefore possible, depending on personal preferences, political requirements, and the changing intellectual fashions of succeeding generations, for Marxists to find in [Marx] whichever emphasis they wish to make, and they have done so."

Generally, there is almost a geographical split among Marxists. In the West, Marxist scholars tend to adhere more closely to economic determinism: "while the Russian Marxists (Mensheviks notwithstanding) often stressed determinism but practiced voluntarism.

"Sidney Hook, The Hero in History, 67.

"Robert V. Daniels, "Fate and Will in the Marxist Philosophy of History," in European Intellectual History Since Darwin and Marx, ed W. Warren Wagar (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1967), 47.

"See, for example, Louis Althusser and Etienne Balibar, Reading "Capital" (London: New Left Books, 1970); Nicos Poulantzas, Political Power and Social Classes (London: New Left Books, 1973); Ralph Miliband, The State in Capitalist Society (London: Wiedenfeld & Nicolson, 1970).

2

PM-1 3½"x4" PHOTOGRAPHIC MICROCOPY TARGET
NBS 1010a ANSI/ISO #2 EQUIVALENT

PRECISIONSM RESOLUTION TARGETS

Leon Trotsky is an interesting case in point. On the one hand, he declared that leaders are no more than "midwives" helping women in labor:" they can be of use, but merely as facilitators of the naturally unfolding process of events. On the other, he grudgingly admits that "[i]t is by no means excluded that, without [Lenin] presence, a disoriented and split [Bolshevik] party might have let slip the revolutionary opportunity for many years."¹²

Like Trotsky, many Marxist scholars before and after him, have tried with various degrees of sophistication to square the circle. Still, to many, great individuals do not make history; at best, they are evoked by great times. Engels, for instance, did not deny that there were historically great leaders. However, he qualified this recognition by declaring that a "great man is a necessary response to a social need for him."

Sidney Hook has systematically demolished such logical flip-flops. First, Hook asks: if the great leader cannot be found, "[w]hat happens to the urgent social need or historical crisis in the meantime? Does it obligingly wait until he turns up?"¹³ Had Lenin drowned in the Gulf of Finland in the Spring of 1917, for example, who would have taken his place? And if

¹²Leon Trotsky, The Russian Revolution, trans. Max Eastman (New York: A Doubleday Anchor Book, 1959), 309.

¹³Ibid., 240.

¹⁴Hook, The Hero in History, 80.

the Bolshevik revolution never happened, how would we have known whether there was a social need for Lenin in Russia? "Surely," exclaims Hook, "not after the event! That would be viciously circular."⁴

Even more damning critique of the social need approach for great leaders is the case of Hitler. Was he inevitable? Or what kind of social need was he fulfilling? So far, people like Caesar, Cromwell, Napoleon have found their places in various philosophical systems. However, in the face of the unspeakable evil of Nazism, what does history or philosophy do with him? As Hook pointed out even before the full horrors of Nazism became known,

it requires only a slight twist to picture Hitler, on Engels' theory, as the "great man" produced by dialectical necessity to fill the necessary needs of the hour. Engels might shudder at such a conclusion but he could hardly disown the method by which it was reached without abandoning his own position.⁵

But if we reject the Cunning of Reason or Historical Materialism having necessitated the appearance of Hitler, we are still left with the question: would Hitler have been able to achieve his destructive potential in any place and at any time? Without the security of Covering Laws in History, we can only hope that the answer is no!

⁴Ibid., 79.

⁵Ibid., 81.

2.d) When Does an Individual Matter?

Without the Covering Laws, according to Fred Greenstein, the chances for an individual to have any influence on historical events depend on "(1) the degree to which the actions take place in an environment which admits of restructuring, (2) the location of the actor in the environment, and (3) the actor's peculiar strengths or weaknesses."³⁶

2.d)(1) The Ease of Environmental Restructuring

Greenstein points out that the role of an individual is greater in a more unstable environment. Unstable environment, however does not necessarily coincide with political instability. The latter, exemplified by the instability of Latin American politics, inexorably produces similar results regardless of individual efforts. Like "an avalanche in motion down a mountainside [it] is for the moment in stable equilibrium... [that] do[es] not at all admit of restructuring."³⁷ Ironically then, politically stable environments can be structurally unstable, "in which modest

³⁶Fred I. Greenstein, Personality and Politics: Problems of Evidence, Inference and Conceptualization, with a new preface (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 42.

³⁷Ibid., 43.

interventions can produce disproportionately large results...."³⁹

The Soviet political environment was, in fact, such an environment. It was an environment of "inverted" modernity. It combined the driving engine of modernity -- the religious belief in scientific solutions, and a very modern struggle with modernity -- the politics of anti-modernity." As Geoffrey Goldfarb pointed out, "a fundamental characteristic of modernity is the differentiation of institutional spheres -- politics, economics, the arts and sciences from religion, economics from politics, the arts and sciences from politics, and so forth." The politics of totalitarianism was an all-out attempt to "reverse differentiation" of modernity.⁴⁰

³⁹Ibid., 42.

⁴⁰At first, it may appear contradictory to call anti-modernity modern. If however, we distinguish between internal and external negations, there is no contradiction. If we take "Np" to stand for necessity "N" of proposition "p", then the external negation of "Np" is "Not(Np)," whereas the internal negation is "N(not-p)." "The external negation of movement is rest, its internal negation movement in the opposite direction.... The external negation of desire is indifference; its internal negation is repugnance." The internal negation of an element is an inverse of that element, while the external negation is a neutral element. In that, anti-modernity is an inverse of modernity (internal negation), not the absence of modernity (external negation). For a very clear exposition of the difference between internal and external negations from which the above examples have been taken, see Jon Elster, Political Psychology (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), ch.2, particularly pp. 72-82.

⁴⁰Jeffrey C. Goldfarb, Beyond Glasnost: The Post-Totalitarian Mind, with a new preface (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press; paperback edition, 1991), 66-67.

The use of the concept of totalitarianism should not suggest a static interpretation of the entire history of the Soviet system. The Soviet Union of the early 1980s was different from the USSR of 1950s, which in turn was different from that of the 1930s. As A. A. Korchak pointed out, the crucial difference was that by the time of Gorbachev, Communist ideology was less important (although far from unimportant) than bureaucratic organization and was used primarily as a conserving and stabilizing force, rather than a dynamic and mobilizing one.⁴¹

Furthermore, throughout Soviet history the social reality was different from the official depiction of social life, particularly as far as the shadow economy and the commodification of everyday life were concerned. Nonetheless, as Goldfarb pointed out:

Officialdom may tolerate a great deal of unorthodox activity, but the unorthodox know the nature of official prerogative. At any moment their activity could be terminated. In this way the juncture persists between the official ideology of social life and social life itself. Functional pluralism of the economy, culture, political bodies, and other social institutions leads a precarious existence alongside totalitarian control. Totalitarian control and functional pluralism are not opposites, but component parts of a single social order.⁴² (Emphasis added.)

The instrument of such totalitarian control and attempted dedifferentiation was the Communist party. The party was the

⁴¹A. A. Korchak, "Contemporary Totalitarianism: A Systems Approach," East European Quarterly, (March 1993): 1-46.

⁴²Goldfarb, Beyond Glasnost, 20-21.

"pivot" within the social "machine," the "thread" holding the pattern together. Its very position within the society made social environment structurally unstable. The party was akin to a keystone, the motion of which could dislodge "massive rock formations at the side of a mountain."¹

2.d)(2) Actor's Location Within the Environment

In the Soviet Union the structural centrality of the communist party was absolute. Its leader, empowered by modern technology and modern ideology, followed in the age-old Russian political tradition. As Nikolai Turgenev observed in the last century,

in all countries ruled by an unlimited power there has always been and is some class, estate, some traditional institutions which in certain instances compel the sovereign to act in a certain way and set limits to his caprice; nothing of the sort exists in Russia (emphasis added).²

What Turgenev said about the position of the sovereign in the Czarist Russia applies as much to the leaders of the CPSU. In any system, the higher is the person in the hierarchy of power, the more consequential are his or her actions.³ In the

¹Greenstein, Personality and Politics, 42-43.

²Nikolai Turgenev, Rossia i russkie (Moscow, 1907-8), 155; quoted in Robert C. Tucker, The Soviet Political Mind: Stalinism and Post-Stalin Change, revised ed. (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1971), 207.

³Even in the highly decentralized politics of the United States, Presidents can and often do matter. For a study on the conditions under which the presidents are most

totalitarian system, because of the potentially unlimited power of the General Secretary", there was a clear tendency of the party-state bureaucratic apparatus to become "a mere "conduit of the dictatorial psychology."

2.d)(3) Personal Qualities of the Actor

Regardless of the system though, actor's psychology as well as his or her political skills influences the extent to which "he himself will contribute to making his subsequent position favourable and his environment manipulable." Great political skills may lead to success in a relatively unfriendly environment, whereas political ineptness may waste whatever opportunity a highly malleable environment can provide. Whether a Great Success or a Grand Failure, "[i]n each case, what... concerns us is a personal input... that diverts the course of events from what would have been expected if the actor's personal capacities had been more

influential see Valerie Bunce, Do New Leaders Make a Difference? Executive Succession and Public Policy under Capitalism and Socialism (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981).

"We will inquire into the sources of the General Secretary's power in Chapter 3.

"Robert C. Tucker, "The Dictator and Totalitarianism," World Politics, 17 (1965): 583.

"Greenstein, Personality and Politics, 45 (emphasis in the original).

typical."" (The personal input of Mikhail Gorbachev will be analyzed in chapters 4 & 5.)

2.e) The Question of "if": Methodological Considerations

Clearly, the introduction of human contingency, however circumscribed, leads us directly to the issue of an objective possibility in history. The question of "if" thus becomes crucial to us. For instance, would history have been fundamentally different had there been a leader other than Gorbachev at the helm of the CPSU?

In part, we have already addressed this question above by discarding the notion of historical inevitability. We have also analyzed the scope of the contingent. Many of us, without hesitation, would accept that statement that history has plurality of endings. Yet, while admitting the plurality of futures, we tend to accept (most often without reflection) the singularity of the past. Theoretically, this cannot be justified; whatever is true of the future must be true of the past.

Our resistance then is not logical but psychological. The past has a definite finality about it. The further away we are from a particular outcome the easier it fits into a grand narrative and the harder it is to accept or even to imagine that there were other possibilities. Thus, the further away we

"Ibid., 46.

are in time, the more pre-determined events seem to be. As Sydney Hook observed,

when we survey the fortunes of a people from a great distance, important facts of variety are overlooked.... For purposes of comparative analysis, an intelligible account of an entire culture can be written in brief compass....⁵⁰

Moreover, since the ethos of science is the ability to predict, speculation about the future is legitimate, even desirable. Questioning the past, on the other hand, is at best futile and at worst belongs not to science but to science fiction.

According to Max Weber, however, an inquiry into historical possibilities (or counterfactuals) is not only permissible, but in some cases is necessary. One way to assess "the causal significance of an historical fact" is to pose a question:

in the event of the exclusion of that fact from the complex of the factors which are taken into account as co-determinants, or in the event of its modification in a certain direction, could the course of events, in accordance with general empirical rules, have taken a direction in any way different in any features which would be decisive for our interest? (emphasis in the original).⁵¹

Similarly, James Fearon argues that "in small-N settings... when degrees of freedom in the actual world are negative, a causal claim requires argument about counterfactual cases for

⁵⁰Sidney Hook, The Hero In History, 137-138.

⁵¹Max Weber, The Methodology of the Social Sciences, translated and edited by Edward A. Shils and Henry A. Finch (New York: The Free Press of Glencoe, 1949), 180.

its justification....⁵²

Methodologically, the only other alternative for a social scientist is to "search for other actual cases that resemble the case in question in significant respects, except that in some of these cases C [the presumed cause] is absent...."⁵³ Although as a method it is preferred in comparative politics, an example that follows will show that adding actual cases involves great risks. In "increasing the degrees of freedom... the analyst adding actual cases may not know if the additional cases are appropriately identical."⁵⁴

2.e)(1) The Perils of Comparison: An Example

The study of the communist world has faced the dilemma of comparability during the entire period of the existence of that world. Many scholars had insisted on the uniqueness of the Soviet world, rejecting the applicability of actual cases from the outside the field.

The debate continues to haunt (Post-)Sovietology even after the demise of communism. Thus, for instance, various strands of "transition theory" with its assumptions deeply embedded in the theories of modernization and political

⁵²James D. Fearon, "Counterfactuals and Hypothesis Testing in Political Science", World Politics, 43 (January 1991): 180 (emphasis in the original).

⁵³Ibid., 171 (emphasis in the original).

⁵⁴Ibid., 173.

development" are the latest attempts to expand the number of the actual cases, i.e. to increase the size of the sample. The inclusion of such disparate countries as the former USSR, Greece, Portugal, Brazil, South Korea increases the degree of freedom to such extent that many scholars question whether the conceptual stretching has not surpassed the breaking point."

However, even if we accept the basic similarity of authoritarian and totalitarian regimes, as many "transitologists" do, we still run into a methodological problem. As Fearon observes:

[t]here is a substantial amount of work in political science where the analyst declares an interest in explaining phenomenon X (for example, war, revolution, democracy), chooses a set of cases where X actually occurred, and ends up drawing conclusions about the causes of phenomenon X.... [However,] if they fail to include cases where X does not occur, how can they find causes that differentiate between outcomes?"

In other words, if we try to explain transition then we have to include in our sample the countries where transition did not occur. Which countries do we include? If authoritarianism, totalitarianism, and dictatorship are all synonyms, there can only be two possible roads of development: (1) transition to

"Recall that in Chapter 1, we have analyzed the theories of modernization and liberal political development and found them lacking.

"Valerie Bunce argues that it is one thing to compare apples to oranges -- both are fruits, and it is quite another to compare apples to kangaroos. See Valerie Bunce, "Should Transitologists Be Grounded?" Slavic Review 54, no. 1 (Spring 1995): 113.

"Fearon, "Counterfactuals", 179-80.

democracy, and (2) "transition" (if it may be so called) into chaos.

The choice of the first road requires us to enlarge our sample to at least include countries such as Singapore, China and Cuba (or for that matter any dictatorship that is still holding out). To follow the second path necessitates the inclusion of countries such as Somalia and Yugoslavia.

One caveat, however. With the transition theories, the appearance of choice is an illusion. Since the theory implicitly assumes that even chaos is a stepping stone to democracy,¹⁰ then to come up with any valid theoretical framework we must include Somalia and Yugoslavia, Singapore and China to our sample of USSR, Brazil, Greece, Poland, etc. Are all of these countries comparable? May be they are; may be they are not! One thing is clear, though. The risk of comparing apples to kangaroos rises exponentially.

2.f) Counterfactual and the Collapse of the USSR

Because the risk of the incomparability is so high, methodologically, the most appropriate course of action is to

¹⁰Thus, Russell Bova approvingly cites Dankwart Rustow's statement that "[w]hat infant democracy requires is not a lukewarm struggle but a hot family feud." See Russell Bova, "Political Dynamics of the Post-Communist Transition: A Comparative Perspective," in Post-Communist Studies & Political Science: Methodology and Empirical Theory in Sovietology, eds. Frederic J. Fleron, Jr., and Erik P. Hoffmann (Boulder: Westview Press, Inc., 1993), 250.

limit oneself to case studies. And as we have seen above, in a single case study a counterfactual argument is "the necessity... for justifying causal claims...."³⁹

In chapter 1, we have shown that the operation of social, economic, and ideological "macropolitical" factors did not make the collapse of the Soviet system inevitable. If the macropolitical factors were not sufficient to cause the collapse of the system, then the micropolitical factors such as political leadership must be assigned a causal status. Since, according to Weber, the only possibility to test the causal significance of a historical factor is to inquire into what would have happened had the causal agent been absent⁴⁰, we must ask whether the course of events in the Soviet Union would have taken a different turn had there been another General Secretary? In other words, what was the objective possibility had there been someone other than Mikhail Gorbachev at the party's helm? Was another outcome possible, given different human choices?

Part II

2.g) The World Through the Soviet Eyes: 1985

In March 1985, Michael Gorbachev became a new General

³⁹ Fearon, "Counterfactuals", 180 (emphasis in the original).

⁴⁰ Weber, The Methodology, 180-181.

Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. Militarily, the Soviet Union was one of the world two superpowers, at the height of its power. Politically, there was no internal opposition to the power of the communist party. There were no centres of power outside of the Party, such as Solidarity Trade Union or the Catholic Church in Poland. Even the dissident movement, a serious embarrassment, though never an actual threat to the regime, was virtually crushed by the early 1980s. Socially, the system continued to deliver its part of the social contract bargain. Unemployment was non-existent, the basic staples were heavily subsidized by the state, with the prices for everything else fairly stable. As far as the Soviet population was concerned, its future might not have been communist and bright, but it certainly was communist and secure.

If there were dark clouds on the horizon, they were in the area of economic indicators. Agriculture, after decades of massive investments continued to be inefficient and incapable of supplying the needs of the state. The growth of industrial production virtually stopped by the early 1980s, although it began to increase again by the time Gorbachev had become the General Secretary. Most worrisome to the leadership, however, was the seeming inability of the Soviet economy to join the new technological revolution sweeping the West. From the leadership's point of view, though, the threat was more in the realm of the long run. It was not an immediate categorical

imperative. There were several reasons for this.

First, from the comparative perspective, the contours of the revolution were only beginning to emerge. Even for the most forward looking scientists, East or West, the mid-1990s computerization of society in breadth and depth was more in the realm of science fiction. Furthermore, at the very moment the scientific revolution began to gather momentum, the West was suffering from the record high inflation and unemployment, followed by the record high interest rates and unemployment.⁶¹ The Third World debt crisis, combined with low and falling prices on primary products threatened to bring down the entire financial edifice of the free world and plunge the West into another Great Depression. At least in the United States, the new technological age looked more like a process of de-industrialization and economic decline than a shift to a more sophisticated post-industrial economy. This perception played a major part in the ensuing debate on the state of American economic, military and political hegemony. From the late 1970s to the late 1980s, a torrent of articles and books was published on the decline of the United States.⁶²

⁶¹For instance, in 1982, industrial production fell over 7% in the U.S., 5% in West Germany and 12% in Canada. At the end of 1982, unemployment rate has reached near or surpassed 10% mark in the U.S., U.K., France, Canada, Holland and Italy. It stood at near 9% in West Germany. See The Economist, 25 December 1982, 68.

⁶²The most prominent works were by Lester Thurow, The Zero Sum Solution (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1985), and Paul Kennedy, The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers: Economic Change and Military Conflict from 1500 to 2000 (New

In addition to the serious economic and social difficulties confronting the West, the Soviet leadership must have been comforted by the Western forecasts of the Soviet future. Practically without exception, the analysts were fairly bullish on the Soviet future. At issue here is not whether or not the analysts were correct, but rather the impact that their views had on the self-perception of the Soviet leaders. Since the Soviet leadership has always assumed that the West was hostile to the USSR, it was conditioned to anticipate only negative comments about life in the Soviet Union. The positive estimates emanating from abroad must have been seen as grudging admissions of Soviet accomplishments. Thus, ironically, instead of providing a reality check, the optimistic Western analyses of the future of the Soviet Union only served to increase the sea of misinformation surrounding the Kremlin. As Walter Laqueur observed,

[W]estern comments on Soviet economic performance ... were circulated in Moscow, not only among professional collectors of intelligence, but also their consumers. Some Western studies... were translated and made accessible to leading Soviet officials, such as members of the Politburo and the Central Committee. Thus the Soviet leadership could base its assessment on relatively optimistic estimates that came not only from their own, but also from foreign experts.⁶³

York: Random House, 1987).

⁶³Walter Laqueur, The Dream that Failed: Reflections on the Soviet Union (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 57.

It is clear today that the Soviet leadership did not know the true state of the Soviet society as a whole or the condition of its economy, in particular. Soviet officials have openly admitted as much. Thus, retrospectively assessing the state of affairs at the beginning of his tenure, Gorbachev declared that "we simply did not know a great deal about our society. We were not receiving necessary information neither about ourselves, nor about the world."⁶⁴ Even if the leaders mistrusted the truthfulness of the locally generated information, there was nowhere to turn to. Everywhere one turned, the information was either not available or falsified. Even the KGB did not always have the right information. No less than the head of the KGB for fifteen years, Yuri Andropov, complained in the early 1980s that "we know poorly the society in which we live."⁶⁵ The usual stages in the process of "doctoring" numbers are described in a joke popular among the Soviets at the time.

The story concerns the announcement at the party Congress that one Soviet cow managed to produce 20 litres of milk in one day. To be sure, the cow only produced 10 litres of milk. The director of the farm, however, felt it was too little and in his report to the district party committee (raikom) added another 2 litres, for the total of 12. When the report arrived

⁶⁴Mikhail Gorbachev, Dekabr' - 91 [December - 91] (Moscow: Novosti, 1992), 141.

⁶⁵A. A. Protashchik, ed., Cherez ternii [Through the Thorny Paths] (Moscow: Progress, 1990), 725.

to the raikom, it was decided that 12 litres was not enough. In their report to obkom, they added 3 more litres. In the obkom, the officials looked at 15 litres and found them unsatisfactory. In its official report to the central committee they added 5 litres more, for the grand total of 20 litres. The central committee, finally, found the numbers to be acceptable and approved them.⁶⁶

As a result, there was no reason for the top Soviet leadership to view the difficulties USSR was facing as a symptom of a global, acute crisis of its political and social systems. To the contrary, the evidence available after the collapse of the Soviet Union, confirms what Timothy Colton noted in 1986: "[M]ass and elite discontent is still directed in the main at the performance of the Soviet system and not at its existence."⁶⁷ This is obvious in the case of conservative Soviet leaders such as Yegor Ligachev, so it is not necessary to quote him. But in the beginning, his views were shared by more reform-minded leaders. Alexander Yakovlev, perhaps the most liberal member of the top Party echelon, spoke for the most of them when he declared that

In this atmosphere in the top Party leadership,

⁶⁶The actual process of falsification is described by the former member of the Czechoslovak Central Committee, Karel Kaplan. See Karel Kaplan, The Communist Party in Power: A Profile of Party Politics in Czechoslovakia (Boulder: Westview Press, 1987).

⁶⁷Timothy J. Colton, The Dilemma of Reform in the Soviet Union, revised and expanded ed. (New York: The Council on Foreign Relations, Inc., 1986), 118.

where the stability of the socialist order was not questioned, the conception of perestroika was born as a type of a socioeconomic "acceleration"... [T]he belief in the possibility of "perfecting socialism" prevailed among the ruling elite of the Party and the leadership of the country."

Yakovlev certainly spoke on behalf of Gorbachev who admitted that "[i]n [Nineteen] Eighty Five I still had the conviction that the system could be perfected."

2.h) Four Possible Soviet Futures

According to Colton, as seen in 1985, in analytical terms, the Soviet Union could face four possible futures.⁷⁰ The first was revolution. The revolution would have entailed a quick and violent upheaval, sweeping away the Soviet order in one blow. It did not happen. As we have seen in the previous chapters and as Colton showed in 1986, there were simply no prerequisites for a revolution. The condition was stable if stagnant, and the regime was seen as legitimate by the ruled and the rulers alike.

The second possibility was a "[r]adical reform: [t]ransformation from within." In this scenario,

Reshaping the system in its totality, radical

⁶⁹Alexander Yakovlev, The Fate of Marxism in Russia, translated by Catherine A. Fitzpatrick (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 103.

⁷⁰Gorbachev, Dekabr' - 91, 140-141.

⁷¹Colton, The Dilemma of Reform, 117.

reform would be distinguished from the less sweeping varieties of reform by its concentration on the fundamentals of institutions and ideology. In politics, it could be expected to bring liberalization and a quotient of democratization. Without necessarily replicating a Western constitutional democracy, it would extent citizens' liberties, multiply their opportunities for political participation, and make the state more directly responsible to them through electoral and other mechanisms. Radical reform would also have important economic consequences, probably involving some considerable displacement of state planning by the market.⁷¹

Again, Colton did not think that this possibility was very likely. We have seen above that as of 1985-1986, the Soviet leadership was convinced that the system needed to be perfected, not dismantled. In the end, of course, the system was dismantled. We will return to this later, but for now we are concerned with the paths that were not taken, or taken and abandoned. As far as the leadership was concerned, in 1985 this possibility even if conceived of, could have not been seriously considered.

Another venue for change was a full blown re-stalinization. Initially, some moves, in fact, were made in that direction. Beginning with Andropov, and continued at first under Gorbachev, the Soviet leadership vigorously pursued the campaign of law and order -- "Soviet style."

Police began raiding stores, movie theatres, public baths houses to look for workers absent from their workplace. To fight corruption, many officials were

⁷¹Ibid., 119-120.

dismissed from their jobs, some were tried and sentenced to prison terms, and in "at least three of the most egregious cases", prominent officials were given death sentences."⁷²

Politically too, there was some retrenchment. The "war" on dissidents was intensified. Number of prominent dissidents were imprisoned, exiled or forced to emigrate. Even the "official" party dissident historian, Roy Medvedev, tolerated under Brezhnev, was warned to stop "anti-Soviet activities" or face prosecution.⁷³ The very boundaries of what constituted dissent were substantially broadened. The arts were openly attacked for straining too far from "socialist realism." The movie industry and the publications considered too liberal by the authorities came under sustained criticism from the Central Committee. At the same time, steps were taken to increase the isolation of the Soviet population from the rest of the world. Direct telephone dialling between the USSR and the outside world was ended to and the few western radio stations that were not jammed before, such as the Voice of America, lost this privilege.⁷⁴

⁷²Ibid., 135, 137.

⁷³This must have been a bitter irony for Medvedev, since during perestroika he revealed that "in 1965 Yuri Andropov...not only did not condemn his [i.e. Medvedev's] work, but advised to continue it...." See G. A. Voskresenskii, ed., 500 imen perestroiki (1985-1991) [500 Names of Perestroika(1985-1991)] (Moscow: Vneshtorgizdat -- Deita-Press, 1992), 216.

⁷⁴Stephen White, Gorbachev in Power (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 11-12.

Still, the leadership stopped short of employing the ultimate means of political control, the mass terror, and with the advent of Gorbachev there was no indication that this would change. To many scholars, mass terror was seen as unlikely because the social conditions in the 1980s were different from those in the 1930s. Certainly, the Soviet Union of the 1980s was more industrialized and its population more urbanized and literate. It is not clear, however, how these factors could have worked to prevent the dissent into new purges. If anything, industrialization and bureaucratization of society can facilitate repression and help to totalize it. The same is true of the urbanization, as it concentrates the population for an effective police action. As for greater literacy, it is often pointed out that one of the main reason behind the success of the Stalinist purges was the illiterate and gullible nature of the nation's peasants. There seems to be an assumption here that education somehow makes life more valuable in the hands of its owner.⁷⁵ Historically, better education did nothing to prevent people from suffering harm, or, for that matter, inflicting it on others. As for the gullibility, there is some argument that education makes one more susceptible to propaganda, not less.⁷⁶ In any case, it is

⁷⁵Wolf H. Halsti, "Finlandization," in Detente, ed. G. R. Urban (New York: Universe Books, 1976), 171.

⁷⁶See Jacques Ellul, Propaganda: The Formation of Men's Attitudes, translated by Konrad Kellen and Jean Lerner (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1965).

not clear, why an illiterate peasant would accept his or her demise any easier than an educated bureaucrat. There is even less ground to conclude that an educated bureaucrat would be less likely to inflict harm than an uncultured peasant. In the wake of the Holocaust, such a proposition is simply unsustainable.

Moreover, after the death of Stalin, the system did not develop any institutional mechanisms to check the will of a potential tyrant. The party discipline was as strong as ever and as ever prone to abuse by the General Secretary. As late as 1989 and four years into perestroika, during the XIXth party conference, the majority of the Central Committee voted itself out of the Central Committee on the insistence of the party leader. This example clearly showed, that no party official would dare to stand up to the leader when he focuses his attention on a specific area.

Instead, it is much more plausible that the reason for not going ahead with a full-scale political re-stalinization was the leadership's unwillingness rather than the inability. As Colton pointed out,

[t]hanks to Stalin, Soviet politicians now comprehend what full-blown Stalinism is like.... [C]ollectively they have no interest in restoring the Kafkaesque atmosphere, groveling before the tyrant, and dread of extinction so much their lot in the high Stalin era."

Even then, according to Joseph Berliner, the Stalinist

"Colton, The Dilemma of Reform, 127.

option contained a less extreme sub-option. Berliner argued that the re-stalinization in the 1980s need not have included the return to the wholesale police terror of the 1930s. Rather, in political terms the policy would have included the tightening of the "ideological, political, and social discipline", together with the greater isolation from the capitalist world.⁷⁹ As we have seen above, with the advent of Andropov all of these measures were undertaken.

As far as the economy was concerned, Berliner argued that, "since Stalin, the essentials of the economic system have not... greatly changed."⁸⁰ Among the possible measures, Berliner saw the tightening up of labour discipline, the creation of the production associations, purge of the managerial elite and some measure of re-centralization.⁸⁰ Again, we have observed above that one of the first steps of Andropov's leadership was to increase labour discipline.

2.1) History That Could Have Been: A Moderate Reform

Thus, for the leadership in 1985 revolution was out of the question, radical peaceful transformation was unnecessary, and the return to Stalinism was simply undesirable. Yet, the

⁷⁹Joseph S. Berliner, "Managing the USSR Economy: Alternative Models," Problems of Communism, 32 (January-February 1983): 44.

⁸⁰Ibid.

⁸⁰Ibid., 44-45.

status quo was unacceptable. Given the degree of impatience on the part of the younger members of the elite to tackle the country's problems, one of the more likely developments was some sort of a moderate reform. Since "[a]ll well-anchored political systems, East and West, rely on leaders and elites who remain committed to certain of the system's central and irreducible features," according to Colton, this should have been a "reform within the Soviet system but not a fundamental reform of it."¹

The main elements of the moderate reform, the beginnings of which were observable as early as 1982, were the law and order campaign (Berliner's Stalinist sub-option), re-allocation of resources to alleviate consumer shortages and improve social services, possible liberalization of small private economic initiatives, particularly in agriculture and services, increased use of material incentives to activate the "human factor", and may be, a very cautious, Hungarian-style "overhaul of the whole system of planning and management."²

2.j) Law and Order

In fact, the first steps in all of the above-mentioned areas of reform were taken under the brief tenure of Yuri Andropov on the post of the General Secretary. Speaking at the

¹Colton, The Dilemma of Reform, 129, 131.

²Ibid., 135.

November 1982 plenum of the Central Committee, Andropov declared that there is an intolerable lack of "initiative, decisive struggle with mismanagement (bezkhosiazstvennost'), [and] wastefulness (rastochitel'stvom)."²² In addition to the measures mentioned on page 105, other measures designed to tighten labour discipline included amendments to the labour code, authorizing management to combat drunkenness, absenteeism and poor performance by reducing workers vacations, wages, and in the extreme cases even laying them off."

The law and order campaign was not restricted to the lower levels of society. From the beginning, Andropov made it clear "that the question about strengthening of discipline concerns not only workers, [or] engineer-technical employees. It concerns everyone, beginning with ministers."²³ Andropov's goal was a clear attempt at recentralization of power.

2.j)(1) The Politics and Economics of Corruption

The concern here was first and foremost with corruption. Although it has been greatly emphasized at home and abroad, corruption and the struggle against it in the Soviet Union was

²²Yu. V. Andropov, Izbrannye rechi i statii [Selected Speeches and Writings] 2d ed., (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo politicheskoi literatury, 1983), 212.

²³Colton, The Dilemma of Reform, 136.

²⁴Andropov, Izbrannye rechi, 230.

not a new phenomenon. It has existed in one form or another since the 1920s. And from the earliest times, the battle with corruption was designed to serve the political functions of the regime as much as economic ones. At the elite level, in the political realm, the periodic campaigns against corruption served largely the purpose of reasserting the central control. As Victor Sergeev and Nikolai Biryukov pointed out, the periodic crusades against corruption was the result of the, so-called, "partocrats-technocrats conflict." Thus, in the eyes of the political leaders, "[i]n their everyday activities the [economic] departments tended to 'disengage' themselves from the 'national' interests, that is the interests of the top party leadership.""" According to Alexander Yakovlev,

Ever since the 1920s, in order to survive, the economic managers were compelled to connive and lie in order to extricate themselves from various difficult situations.... The managers' violations were on an all-Union scale and pervaded everything. The violations were absolutely necessary and inevitable, given the system, and their practice was routine."

Under Brezhnev, nonetheless, corruption and nepotism had reached new heights. One reason was the policy of "stability of cadres." Unwillingness to dismiss public officials in the system based on patron-client relations allowed for the

"Victor Sergeev and Nikolai Biryukov, Russia's Road to Democracy: Parliament, Communism and Traditional Culture (London: Edward Elgar, 1993), 79-80.

"Alexander Yakovlev, The Fate of Marxism in Russia, 110-111.

creation of very extensive regional and sectoral networks where acceptable patronage practically merged with an outright abuse of one's position.

More controversially, however, it appears that certain types of corruption were informally encouraged by the Soviet authorities. Following Samuel Huntington's logic, William Clark argues that corruption was tolerated under Brezhnev because it was seen "as a partial substitute for serious reform of formal institutions."⁸⁸ In the comparative analysis of clientelistic politics, Huntington saw official corruption as a necessary "lubricant" in economic expansion. Thus, "in terms of economic growth, the only thing worse than a society with a rigid, overcentralized dishonest bureaucracy is one with a rigid, overcentralized honest bureaucracy."⁸⁹ Of even greater relevance though, is Huntington's statement that "[c]orruption may thus be functional to the maintenance of a political system in the same way that reform is. Corruption itself may be a substitute for reform and both corruption and reform may be substitutes for revolution."⁹⁰

In terms of corruption, Brezhnev's period can be viewed as the kind of unofficial NEP, where a growing numbers of

⁸⁸William A. Clark, Crime and Punishment in Soviet Officialdom: Combating Corruption in the Political Elite 1965-1990 (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 1993), 92-93.

⁸⁹Samuel P. Huntington, Political Order in Changing Societies (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968), 68.

⁹⁰Ibid.

officials took upon themselves to smooth the rigidities of planning, while the leadership occupied the "commanding heights" in deciding whether in any particular case the benefits of the "shadow economy" tilted too much in favour of an individual rather than society. In terms of policing of corruption then, it would be incorrect to view Brezhnev's team as being "asleep at the switch." The authorities were prepared to look the other way as long as the mis-deeds were viewed as functional for the system. If it was determined that the line was overstepped, then the full brunt of the Soviet punitive machinery would be brought to bear. As the numbers provided by Clark indicate, under Brezhnev the numbers of criminal convictions of Soviet officials, although fluctuating considerably from year to year, were quite high."

2.j)(2) Anti-Corruption Campaigns and Political Succession

There is another important aspect of the corruption battles. In the patron-client system where the rules of political succession do not exist, sometimes the only way to get to the patron is by "criminalizing" the clients. Among the political benefits are:

[S]olving short-term and small-scale political problems in the locales (e.g., getting rid of

"The rate of convictions peaked under Andropov in 1983, declined as much as 30% in 1984 under Chernenko, and, counterintuitively, continued to decline under Gorbachev. See Clark, Crime and Punishment, 87.

local enemies or challengers for power); building personal patronage networks at the local levels... by freeing up important posts to be filled by one's supporters;... weakening the perceived power of one's chief rivals at the top of the political pyramid by successfully destroying any number of the "chains" in the rival seilachaften."

The last Soviet Premier, Valentin Pavlov, characterized personnel changes during the perestroika as a purge, pure and simple. He claims that the slogan of perestroika was used to justify the "fabrication of [criminal] exposures and the 'cooking up' and whipping up of the criminal cases." The main goal was to change the personnel."

Pavlov's claim that the anti-corruption campaign of perestroika had a political rather than a serious economic message is corroborated by the fact that from the economic point of view, in particular the loss of tax revenues to the state, the "shadow economy" did not appear to have reached unsustainable levels. In 1986, the income of black market operators was estimated to have been 5.1 billion rubles -- 2.1

"Ibid., 160.

"Valentin Pavlov, Gorbachev-Putsch: August iznutri [Gorbachev-Coup: August from Within] (Moscow: Delovoi Mir, 1993), 18. As one of the chief organizers of the August 1991 Coup, Pavlov is far from an unbiased commentator of perestroika. For instance, he chooses to ignore the fact that the greatest number of criminal indictments of officials in the post-Stalin era had occurred under late Brezhnev period and then under Andropov. Still, Pavlov's identification of anti-corruption campaigns as serving mainly political goals is an important indication of how the leadership initiating such campaigns actually viewed them. However much Pavlov has an axe to grind against Gorbachev, he cannot help but express the attitudes of the elite.

billion rubles greater than in 1975, but 0.6 billion rubles smaller than in 1985." According to Leonid Abalkin, in 1989 the entire shadow economy amounted to 68.6 billion rubles. As large as it was, this number was still only slightly more than 10% of the GNP of 650 billion rubles." Even if one doubles or triples these numbers, neither in their magnitude nor in the extent of official involvement, the corruption in the Soviet Union was not unheard of in today's world in general or in an industrialized country in particular. For instance, in the functioning and relatively prosperous state of Italy, at least until recently, from the lowest to the highest levels of government, the Mafia and the state appeared to be one and the same."

To return, however, to Andropov's law and order campaign, it had achieved some of its goals. For the purposes of control, at the elite level, it has quickly awakened the sense of dependence and fear. The rush of suicides in the early to mid-1980s showed clearly both the continuing high stakes of Soviet politics and the ease with which one could manipulate

"Agitator 1 (January 1989): 32.

"Leonid Abalkin, Ne ispol'zovannyi shans: Poltora goda v pravitel'stve [A Lost Opportunity: One and a Half Years in the Government] (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo politicheskoi literatury, 1991), 189.

"The latest former Italian official to have an arrest warrant issued against him, is the former Socialist Prime Minister, Bettino Craxi. The longest serving Prime Minister, Giulio Andreotti is already in prison. The current corruption investigation has implicated a former Italian President and numerous other lesser officials.

them to increase the anxiety levels of the officialdom. After the execution of Vahab Usmanov, the minister of cotton production in Uzbekistan," the psychological pressure proved too much for the USSR minister of Internal Affairs, Nikolai Shchelokov and his wife, the first deputy USSR minister of Internal Affairs, Victor Paputin, the first deputy chairman of the USSR KGB, Semen Tsvigun, and the head of the Academy of the USSR Ministry of Internal Affairs, General Sergei Krylov."

The anti-corruption campaign also served admirably the goal of, at first, disrupting, and then, destroying Brezhnev's client network. It began with the mini-purge in the Krasnodar krai in 1982 and by the summer of 1984, under the supervision of Gorbachev and Ligachev, it spread to a number of other regions in the south of the Soviet Union." The long-term significance of these purges was the elevation to some key positions of people with very strong anti-corruption views. Besides already mentioned Gorbachev and Ligachev, the list included future Politburo members, Vitalii Vorotnikov and Georgii Razumovskii from Krasnodar krai, Geidar Aliev from Azerbaidzhan (nicknamed "Hammer of the Mafia"), Eduard Shevarnadze from Georgia and Nikolai Ryzhkov from Sverdlovsk. The execution of Yuri Sokolov, the director of a special store

"Lev Timofeev, Chernyi rynok kak politicheskaya sistema [The Black Market as a Political System] (Vil'nus-Moskva: VIMO, 1993), 190.

"Clark, Crime and Punishment, 196-197.

"Ibid., 167-170; Colton, The Dilemma of Reform, 137.

and a close friend of the Politburo member and Moscow's party chief, Viktor Grishin, weakened Grishin's political position and facilitated his eventual removal.¹⁰⁰

2.k) Regime Legitimation and the Anti-Corruption Campaign

In addition to the shake-up within the elite, the sustained anti-corruption campaign was very popular with the masses. In the first instance, the campaign had the effect of psychological relief of individual frustrations. It satisfied the desire for vengeance against the powerful. It is a cliché that miseries in life are always easier to handle if everyone around is equally miserable. It seems, however, that at a deeper level, even more satisfying than just the sight of another sufferer, is to witness the "fall" from grace of a more fortunate one.¹⁰¹ In a somewhat perverse and contradictory ways, it raises self-esteem and encourages hope.

Even more significant, the campaign served to re-enforce one of the cultural planks of regime's legitimacy -- popular

¹⁰⁰Clark, Crime and Punishment, 155, 158, 171, 184-185; Colton, The Dilemma of Reform, 138.

¹⁰¹This seems to be the case of both the "wicked" and the "noble". While the simple envy explains the feelings of the former, the desire for "justice" brings joy to the latter. From the story of undeserved suffering of Job to the trial of O. J. Simpson, the disgrace of the more fortunate has always promised the mankind a combination of salvation and titillation.

egalitarianism.¹⁰² Nothing threatened to undermine the legitimacy of the regime more than a highly visible extravagant life-styles of the privileged. Deep popular egalitarianism (and a good measure of less noble, simple envy) explains both the popularity of Yel'tsyn's attack on official privileges and Ligachev's fear of the destabilizing consequences these exposures could bring. According to the public opinion poll conducted in 1989, full 86 per cent of those polled were in one way or another against the existence of millionaires in Russia.¹⁰³

The law and order campaign, initiated by Andropov and continued under Chernenko and Gorbachev had moderately re-invigorated the regime. Andropov was not very far from the mark when he declared that "[p]utting things in order does not require any capital investments, but it produces huge effect."¹⁰⁴ According to Colton, at the lowest chain of production, the law and order campaign was "stated to have cut working time lost to absenteeism and tardiness by 15 to 25 percent in various parts of the country."¹⁰⁵ According to the

¹⁰²In 1980, I have witnessed a very instructive episode. During the math class, the teacher suddenly mused about how difficult it must be to live in the West, given a very conspicuous display of disparities in individual wealth. She could not see herself living in a society driven by desire to catch-up with the neighbours.

¹⁰³Yurii Levada, "Homo Sovieticus: A Rough Sketch," Moscow News, 18 March 1990, 11.

¹⁰⁴Andropov, Izbrannye rechi, 225.

¹⁰⁵Colton, The Dilemma of Reform, 136.

Soviet sources, the numbers are even higher.¹⁰⁶

There is no doubt that law and order campaign had a very broad base of social support behind it. Although the numbers for 1983 are not available, those for 1989 clearly indicate that Andropov's campaign had to strike a cord with an average Soviet citizen, not very known for his liberal tendencies to begin with. The numbers showed that, although not very keen on working harder to earn more money,

... 64 per cent [of those polled] wanted [the] retention of [the death penalty] and [its] use on a broader scale. Speaking about assassins, 70 per cent chose the variant "liquidate"; from 27 to 33 per cent suggested applying the same measure to prostitutes, drug addicts and homosexuals. From 16 to 22 per cent demand "liquidating" rockers, AIDS cases and those born defective, and from 3 to 9 per cent want to wipe out beggars and alcoholics.¹⁰⁷

2.k)(1) Recharging Ideological Batteries

As have already been mentioned, at the official level, Andropov's law and order campaign produced an original breakthrough of younger generation into the positions of power. Even more significant, was the demonstration that, contrary to the claims of Western scholars, the system has not

¹⁰⁶Thus, the Soviet press reported that between 1980 and 1987, the annual work-hours loss was cut in half. It attributed the reduction entirely to a decrease in general absenteeism and the anti-alcoholism campaign. See Agitator 1 (January 1989): 33.

¹⁰⁷Yurii Levada, "Homo Sovieticus," 11.

exhausted its ideological potential. Martin Malia, for instance, argues that the moral collapse was the main reason behind the regime's disintegration. More specifically, it was "the gap between reality" of "the Soviet Lie" and "the ideal" of "the socialist Myth", that undermined the "idiotic legitimacy of the Party" and led to the "system's ultimate undoing."¹⁰⁸

Malia, seems to, rather naively, take very seriously Vaclav Havel's claim that people became tired of living in lies. To philosophize a little, Havel was a poet. It is quite possible that poets are much more sensitive to falsehoods. One can speculate that their egos never develop the proper defence mechanisms that would normally allow a person to bridge the mythology of youth with reality (and falsehoods) of adulthood. In that sense, one could argue that poets are psychologically like children, hypersensitive to disparities between theory and practice. This may help explain the tragic fate of so many of them, particularly in Russia and the Soviet Union -- Pushkin, Lermontov, Esenin, Block, Mayakovsky.¹⁰⁹ Perhaps, they

¹⁰⁸Martin Malia, The Soviet Tragedy: A History of Socialism in Russia, 1917-1991 (New York: The Free Press, 1994), 269-270.

¹⁰⁹It is instructive here to compare the reaction of such distant, in time, poets as Lermontov and Mayakovsky. Lermontov, mourning the early death of another Russian poet, Alexander Pushkin, wrote: "Ne vynesla dusha poeta. pozora malochnykh obid. vosstal on protiv mnenii sveta. odin. kak prezhde -- i ubit...." Almost one hundred years later, Mayakovsky, in his suicide note lamented: "The love boat has crashed against byt."

really could not live in lies.

However, a very small percentage of the population are poets and therefore as sensitive as they are. (Writers seem to be able to survive duplicity much better; they even thrive on it.) Smaller still is the number of poets who make it in the political or economic elites, East or West.

2.k)(2) Deception and the Masses

As far as the population is concerned, the best is to combine Alexander Yakovlev's humanistic pity for the common man with Dostoevsky's Grand Inquisitor naked disdain for the masses¹¹⁰ in order to describe its existential plight under the Bolshevik regime. All one has to do is just add the Grand Inquisitor's observation that people will voluntarily surrender truth (i.e. accept lies) in exchange for bread to Yakovlev's lamentation that "given the slightest opportunity, millions of people will still prefer a meagre [guaranteed] existence..., to the opportunity of building their life for themselves...."¹¹¹ Under the Soviets, they certainly did.

Aside from the existential choice, however, there is an important cultural factor that helped the Soviets to adapt to lies. Svetlana Boym documented foreigners' accounts of the

¹¹⁰It also shows how easy one can turn into another.

¹¹¹Yakovlev, The Fate of Marxism, 198-199.

"Russian obsession with keeping appearances...."¹¹² Marquis de Custine, among others, was particularly shocked by the Russians' propensity to build Potemkin villages. To Russians, first and foremost, the foreigners must never see the real state of affairs.

The deception, however, could not and did not affect only foreigners. Building Potemkin villages,¹¹³ like wearing Jungian persona -- "a protective facade designed to meet the demands of society while concealing one's true inner nature",¹¹⁴ can lead to a very unhappy result. If it is indulged in long enough, the facade becomes an integral part of the personality and reality. Thus, Potemkin villages "ran" (and arguably still run) through every Russian soul. Self-deception became indistinguishable from the deception of others.¹¹⁵

¹¹²Svetlana Boym, Common Places: Mythologies of Everyday Life in Russia (Cambridge, Ma.: Harvard University Press, 1994), 75-76.

¹¹³The "Potemkin village" is the most pervasive myth in Russia and about Russia. Myths, however, lay at the foundation of all reality, personal and national. "Reality" dissolves as soon as it is demythologized. Only then, myth becomes a lie.

¹¹⁴For an easy introduction to Jungian notion of persona, see Robert B. Even, An Introduction to Theories of Personality, 3rd ed., (Hillsdale, NJ.: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc., Publishers, 1988), 91, 97, 120.

¹¹⁵Arguably, the Soviet-era self-censorship can also be traced to cultural propensity to build "Potemkin Villages."

2.k)(3) Deception and Elites

With respect to elites, Malia's error is even more serious. Although correctly identifying the Soviet regime as an "idiotic partocracy",¹¹⁶ Malia misses the full implication of his own discovery. Malia's term is very similar to Alexander Yakovlev's description of the Soviet regime as a Church. But as Yakovlev pointed out, if we are dealing with a faith,

faith implies that the goal is postponed indefinitely. The Garden of Eden, just like Purgatory, has no coordinates in time and space. The ideal of a communist society has likewise never had any definite temporal or qualitative parameters, such as could make possible any prediction concerning when and under what particular conditions that society might emerge. It is this remoteness in time, this projection into a superguaranteed future, that makes a noble goal not merely attractive to human consciousness, but actually great, so great that it is worth even giving one's life for.¹¹⁷

Somewhat more cynically, similar idea was expressed by Milan Kundera. According to Kundera, "[t]he Grand March is the splendid march on the road to brotherhood, equality, justice, happiness; it goes on and on, obstacles notwithstanding, for obstacles there must be if the march is to be the Grand March" (emphasis added).¹¹⁸

¹¹⁶Malia, The Soviet Tragedy, 269.

¹¹⁷Yakovlev, The Fate of Marxism, 191-192.

¹¹⁸Milan Kundera, The Unbearable Lightness of Being, translated by Michael Henry Heim (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers; Perennial Library Edition, 1987), 257.

The ability of the faithful to dismiss contradictions between faith and reality and even increase their fervour because of them is well known. Historically, even the unpalatable practices by a religion's high priests are often tolerated and explained away for very long periods of time. If and when the rebellion finally occurs, more often than not, it is in direction of greater fundamentalism.¹¹⁹

At the risk of pushing historical analogy too far, the Bolshevik Party can be described as a twentieth-century secular equivalent of the Jesuit Order. Both were very similar in their organization, devotion to a chosen goal, voluntarism within the rigid boundaries of the pre-determined universe, and, most importantly for our purposes, in their outlook on the world. The most striking was their commitment to praxis. So well described by G. R. Elton, "[t]he trained Jesuit thus combines assurance of righteousness, knowledge of God, controlled mystic experience, and practical resolve to a unique degree."¹²⁰ Trained to "total obedience to superiors,"

¹¹⁹Ironically, the fundamentalist reaction can in the long term lead to the consequences not anticipated by anyone and quite different from the original intentions. Thus, the fundamentalist secession of Protestantism from the medieval church, in opinion of many scholars had led, over the course of several centuries to the present condition of individualism, secularism and the plurality of norms. See Max Weber, Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958); G.R. Elton, Reformation Europe: 1517-1559 (London: Fontana Paperbacks, 1963).

¹²⁰G. R. Elton, Reformation Europe: 1517-1559 (London: Fontana Paperbacks, 1963), 200 (emphasis added).

the Jesuits were "encouraged to think of things in a practical way -- to consider how their ends might be achieved as the world wagged, never to turn their backs on the world."¹²¹ Forever practical, yet rigidly doctrinaire, the Jesuits were not easily swayed by the flawed reality around them or unduly disconcerted by its incongruity with the ideal. They knew the Truth, they were in the right and thus assured that the means used would be absolved by the marvellous end achieved. What unites a Bolshevik and a Jesuit is the readiness of both to utilize any means to achieve the supreme goal. Anything short of a strategic grand end is automatically reduced to the level of tactics.

To illustrate the moral trap, Arthur Koestler, by far, the best psychologist of Marxism-Leninism, did not hesitate to introduce one of his chapters in Darkness at Noon, with the quote from the 15th century Bishop of Verden, Dietrich von Nieheim:

When the existence of the Church is threatened, she is released from the commandments of morality. With unity as the end, the use of every means is sanctified, even cunning, treachery, violence, simony, prison, death. For all order is for the sake of the community, and the individual must be sacrificed to the common good. (emphasis added)¹²²

And to stress the affinity between the "church of Lenin" and the Jesuits still further, Koestler draws a following picture

¹²¹Ibid., 203-204.

¹²²Arthur Koestler, Darkness at Noon (London: Penguin Modern Classics, 1964), 81.

of the ideal Bolshevik/Jesuit:

[he], on the contrary, is thin, ascetic, and a fanatical devotee of logic. He reads Machiavelli, Ignatius of Loyola, Marx, and Hegel; he is cold and unmerciful to mankind, out of a kind of mathematical mercifulness¹²³ (emphasis added).

Martin Malia, however, misses this crucial point. He claims that the Soviet experiment was "intrinsically impossible, for the primitive military means of the partocracy by their very nature cannot realize the complex ideological ends of an efficient economy and a just, egalitarian society."¹²⁴ Unfortunately, Malia grossly underestimates the capacity of a person, trained in dialectical logic, to accept contradictions, apparent or real. To quote Koestler once more, it is a fully acceptable and resolvable contradiction that one may have

to become a slaughterer, in order to abolish slaughtering, to sacrifice lambs so that no more lambs may be slaughtered, to whip people with knouts so that they may learn not to let themselves be whipped, to strip himself of every scruple in the name of a higher scrupulousness, and to challenge the hatred of mankind because of his love for it....¹²⁵

From sublime to banal, Malia ignores one other essential feature of Marxism-Leninism -- its vanguardism. The masses must first be educated, and only then set free. How long can this

¹²³Ibid., 122; Ignatius of Loyola was the founder of the Jesuit Order.

¹²⁴Malia, The Soviet Tragedy, 494.

¹²⁵Koestler, Darkness at Noon, 122.

education last? What happens during the apprenticeship? Given the depth of masses false consciousness, there has never been (nor can there be) a set of precise answers. Surveying today's world, Ronald Aronson, a modern-day Marxist, writes:

I have remarked...how optimistic Marx was, when he told the workers, after 1848: "You have 15, 20, 50 years of civil war to go through in order to alter the situation and to train yourself for the exercise of power." Understanding the real extent of training for the exercise of power would lead us to insist on a more realistic timetable....: maybe 150, maybe 200, maybe even 500 years. (emphasis added)¹²⁶

It was thus hardly surprising that Andropov's call to order was answered honestly and even eagerly by many members of the political and economic elite. Even after allowing for some exaggeration, clearly born of nostalgia, Ryzhkov, must still be speaking for many when he declares that "people got so much tired from an all-encompassing restiveness [razvinchennosti], that [they] accepted this 'tightening' [of screws] not without relief."¹²⁷ As Stephen Hanson observed,

¹²⁶Ronald Aronson, After Marxism (New York: The Guilford Press, 1995), 273.

¹²⁷Nikolai Ryzhkov, Perestroika: istoriia predatel'stv [Perestroika: The Story of Betrayals] (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo "Novosti", 1992), 43. This is also true of the country's intellectuals. A great deal has been written about the intellectual roots of perestroika, implying a rebellious intelligentsia waiting in the wings for an opportunity to attack and destroy the regime's foundations. Although attractive, the view is simplistic. It taps into often unarticulated desire of intellectuals everywhere to see themselves as the force of progress. The fact is that many of the Soviet intelligentsia enthusiastically embraced the "tightening of screws" by Andropov as an end in itself. From the spiritual point of view, the campaign for law and order appealed to the Russians' internal and eternal struggle

"[t]he Gorbachev cohort was thus, by the 1980s, the last substantial group in Soviet society both to believe in the original ideals of Marxism and Leninism and to remain substantially uncorrupted."¹²⁸

2.1) Reallocation of Resources

However, to move from the abstract to the specific, although the Soviet society was remarkably politically stable and its socio-economic system generally acceptable, there was one issue continuously irritating the population -- unsatisfied consumer demand due to either insufficient quantity or the poor quality of consumer goods and services.

against meshchanstvo -- the derogatory (and the only Russian) term for the middle class. As Svetlana Boym observed, "[t]he opposition between byt, everyday existence (everyday routine and stagnation), and byt'ie (spiritual being) is one of the central common places of the Russian intellectual tradition." See Svetlana Boym, Common Places, 29. Even more extreme views on Russian intelligentsia have been recently expressed by other scholars and members of this exclusive social group. V. N. Shevchenko argues that "Russian intelligent [as opposed to an intellectual] is not a profession, [but] a particular ideological position, which he [or she] occupies in a society." See V. N. Shevchenko, "Krizis soznaniia intelligentsii: chto zhe dal'she?" [The Crisis of Intelligentsia's Consciousness: Now What?], Kontavr (November-December 1992): 12.

¹²⁸Stephen E. Hanson, "Gorbachev: The Last True Leninist Believer? in The Crisis of Leninism and the Decline of the Left: The Revolutions of 1989, ed. Daniel Chirot (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1991), 43. Though idealistic, this cohort was by no means revolutionary, bent on destruction of the Soviet regime. Almost all coup participants and sympathizers in 1991 were from Gorbachev cohort.

What were "within-the-system" possibilities of solving the irritants?

The problem of shortages has often been exaggerated, but it also should not be minimized. First, there were no shortages of all goods, all the time. Staples were always available. There was no rationing until well into perestroika. The choice usually was not between a bed or no bed, shoes or no shoes, but between the lower quality Russian-made items and the more desirable Finnish furniture and the Czech-made footwear, respectively. Besides, store outlets were not the only end points of distribution. The other major distribution network of goods and services was the workplace. As Jussi Simpura noted,

[i]n Russia, the workplace has been... more than merely a unit of production or a place for earning wages. The workplace has provided many of the commodities and services, including health care and social security. The workplace was also an important channel for acquiring goods otherwise inaccessible.¹²⁹

In other words, the picture of consumer goods availability in the Soviet Union was complex. On the one hand, although far from desperate, the food situation was more

¹²⁹Jussi Simpura, "Social Problems and Social Policy in Russia and the Baltic Countries," in Change and Continuity in Eastern Europe, ed. Timo Piirainen (Aldershot: Dartmouth Publishing Company Limited, 1994), 157. For instance, meat supply in stores was sporadic. Yet, my father, a school teacher, would often come home from school bearing a chicken. According to the Soviet statistics, 63.8% of the population rely on medical services offered through the workplace, 30.6% rely on similar provision of goods, and 100% depend on their workplace for tourism, sport, culture. See Agitator 1 (January 1989): 31.

serious, particularly in the area of meat supply. On the other hand, as George Breslauer pointed out, in the provision of appliances, apartments, clothing, and even automobiles, the regime's record was quite good.¹³⁰ Breslauer's conclusion is supported by a major longitudinal study on changes in living conditions from the city of Taganrog. Spanning some 20 years (between 1968 and 1989), the study reports "a general improvement of living conditions untill the early 1980's."¹³¹ Even in the area of food supply, available data shows a slow but steady improvement in the situation between 1971 and 1988.¹³² More importantly, perhaps, the population did not

¹³⁰George W. Breslauer, Five Images of the Soviet Future: A Critical Review & Synthesis (Berkeley: Institute of International Studies; University of California, 1978), 31.

¹³¹Simpura, "Social Problems and Social Policy," 155. As was pointed out in the first chapter, already by the late 1970s, the Soviet Union fully qualified as a consumer society. In the summer of 1980 -- at the end of which I left the USSR -- stores were full of bicycles (and their spare parts), motorcycles, television sets, cameras, furniture, watches, clothes, children's games. These were in addition to the items available on the black market. By the Summer of 1980, one shortage consistently overshadowed all the others -- the shortage of money. At the same time, the perception was that just in terms of the new apartment buildings, the city of Kishinev doubled in physical size in just seven years. Indeed, hard numbers support such an impressionistic perception. Although still not satisfying demand, from the early 1960s to mid-1980s, "more than 65 million flats were built..., and 236 million people acquired new homes." See Tatyana Zaslavskaya, The Second Socialist Revolution: An Alternative Soviet Strategy, trans., Susan M. Davies and Jenny Warren (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 102, 32.

¹³²Across the USSR, the annual consumption of meat per person has been increasing on average of 1kg between 1971 and 1985, rising to 2kg in 1987 and 1988. The numbers for

lose its hope in future improvements. At the end of 1990, only a year before the USSR's formal demise, with its economy caught in accelerating downward spiral, full 63 percent of those polled still believed that conditions would improve within their life-time.¹³³

2.m) Consumer Grievances and their Possible Solutions

2.m)(1) Production of Consumer Goods

Of course, there was more than enough room for improvement, both in the realm of quality and quantity.¹³⁴ Since Stalin, all Soviet governments have tried their hand at it. The fact of their relative failures does not mean that, within the system, an acceptable solution of the problem was impossible. It only seemed impossible to many Western scholars, who, according to Breslauer, "by underestimating the scope for political choice," tended "to minimize the regime's capacity to define innovation and to exaggerate the system's

milk and milk products were 0.7kg increase per year between 1971 and 1980, 2.2kg between 1981 and 1985, 8kg in 1986 and 1987, respectively, and 15kg in 1988. See L. I. Tumurova, Uroven' zhizni naseleniia regiona [The Standard of Living of the Region's Population] (Novosibirsk: vo "nauka", 1993), 52, 55.

¹³³Moscow News, 16-23 December 1990.

¹³⁴For instance, in 1988, in the area of food supply, the aggregate consumer demand exceeded supply by 13%. See Agitator 19 (October 1989): 31.

need for innovation."¹³⁵

As Breslauer pointed out, major reforms, such as the overhaul of the planning system and the decentralization of the economic decision-making, were not necessary to solve the worst of consumer grievances. Given the political will to do so, the easiest route was to shift the resources from the type A industries (the military-heavy industries) to the type B (consumer industries).¹³⁶

In the Soviet Union, from 1950 to 1987, the share of type B industries against the overall industrial production in the economy was steadily declining. In 1987 it has reached an all-time low: 24.9 percent. This figure was even lower than it was in 1945, at the start of the post-war industrial reconstruction. In 1986, in its share of type B industries as a percentage of the overall industrial output, the USSR occupied the last place even among the socialist countries. For instance, in Bulgaria, the share was 37 percent; it was 37.7 percent in Hungary; 33.4 percent in GDR; 41 percent in Poland, and 29.6 percent in Czechoslovakia.¹³⁷ Even though, beginning with 1970, the official plans have invariably included the priority in growth of type B industries over type A, in reality very little has changed. The main reason was

¹³⁵Breslauer, Five Images of the Soviet Future, 37 (emphasis in the original).

¹³⁶Ibid., 37.

¹³⁷Agitator 15 (August 1989): 12.

the lack of political will on the part of the leadership.

Given the political will, substantial results could have been achieved. It could have been done gradually, without the disrupting effects of sudden massive cuts in defence expenditures and the concurrent devolution of the central planning. The foundation for such a shift was already in place before perestroika. As Carl Jacobsen pointed out, long before the defence conversion was officially proclaimed during the perestroika, a conversion of sorts has already taken place:

About 40 per cent of military industrial output had gone to the civilian sector, at least since the 1960s; its more advanced production facilities had always been relied on for a wide range of civilian products, from refrigerators and TVs to photographic equipment, computers and video systems (however primitive by the standards of some).¹³⁸

In fact, between 1980 and 1986 the share of heavy industry in the total production of type B items has increased from 28.6 per cent to 32.6 per cent.¹³⁹ Furthermore, by 1988, before the subsequent disruption of vertical ties and disorganization of the economy, first substantial changes in industrial allocations have begun to take place. Finally, in that year, the production of type B industries has exceeded the production of type A industries by 1.4 times.¹⁴⁰ There is no

¹³⁸Carl G. Jacobsen, "Russia's Revolutionary Arbiter? Arms and Society, 1988-1994," War and Society, 13, no.2 (May 1995): 114.

¹³⁹Agitator 3 (February 1988): 30.

¹⁴⁰Ibid., 13.

reason to believe that such improvements in the future were unsustainable. In 1988 the heavy and military industries have only begun perestroika-period process of retooling for the production of consumer goods.

In addition to the direct government action, the encouragement of a greater private initiative, particularly in services and agriculture could have been a very important contributing factor in the solution of consumer dissatisfaction.¹⁴¹ Thus, in the early 1980s, according to the Soviet government own figures, between 17 and 20 million people were involved in individual labour activities illegally.¹⁴² Legalizing a great deal of this activity would have been a major step forward in addressing some of the consumers' grievances. To Gorbachev's credit, he had realized this. However, the required measures could have been taken before Gorbachev and without him. Again, the foundation for change was laid long before Gorbachev. With irony, Olimpiad Ioffe pointed out that Gorbachev achieved "effective regulation of individual labour...not because Gorbachev rejected Stalin's approach but because he developed an approach initiated by a Stalinist Brezhnev."¹⁴³ The measure

¹⁴¹Colton, The Dilemma of Reform, 135.

¹⁴²Olimpiad Ioffe, Gorbachev's Economic Dilemma: An Insider's View (Boulder: Westview Press, 1989), 181.

¹⁴³Private individual labour in "handicrafts, agriculture, domestic services of the populace" had been encouraged in Article 17 of 1977 Constitution. Olimpiad Ioffe, Gorbachev's Economic Dilemma, 184.

could have been a success only if it had been undertaken as a supplement to the government efforts to shift the production towards more consumer-oriented sectors. As it turned out, any positive effect of liberalization was smothered by the simultaneous attempt to restructure the entire planning mechanism -- restructuring that threw the entire economy into chaos.

2.m)(2) Improving the Food Supply

Of all the consumer grievances, shortages of food, particularly meat products, were especially aggravating. For years agriculture was the Achilles heel of the Soviet system. Countless billions of rubles were poured into the sector without any apparent success. There was only one bright spot.

It was widely known that small private plots of land, constituting merely five per cent of the total cultivated land, provided nearly thirty percent of the nation's food supply. Any serious attempt at improving the agriculture had to address the issue of land. At the minimum, it would have been logical to allow the enlargement of private lots. At a maximum, a wholesale privatization of land must have been considered.

With respect to the latter, the success of practically total de-collectivization in China has often been pointed

to.¹⁴⁴ However, to a moderate Soviet reformer, the applicability of the Chinese case to the Soviet Union would or should have been at least questionable.

2.m)(3) Is (Was) China Different?

One difficulty in applying the Chinese case to the Soviet reality was in the realm of ideology. Although in their public pronouncements, both communist regimes insisted on the necessity of collective ownership of the means of production (including land), the ideological significance accorded to the Soviet and the Chinese peasant in their respective societies was fundamentally different.

That difference stemmed from a significant doctrinal difference between Marxism-Leninism and Marxism-Leninism-Maoism. Marx's attitude toward peasants was decidedly hostile. He considered them to be potentially a counter-revolutionary class. Lenin slightly modified Marx's rigid stance. Peasants could play a positive role if properly led by the proletariat. Mao, on the other hand, declared peasants to be the revolutionary class.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴⁴Nicholas R. Lardy, "Is China Different? The Fate of Its Economic Reform," in The Crisis of Leninism and the Decline of the Left: The Revolutions of 1989, ed. Daniel Chirot (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1991), 147-162.

¹⁴⁵David E. Ingersoll and Richard K. Matthews, The Philosophic Roots of Modern Ideology: Liberalism, Communism, Fascism, 2d. ed., (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall,

Formal ideological differences led to fundamentally different programs of economic development. In as much as historical parallels are possible, developmentally, China in the late 1970s resembled the USSR in the late 1920s. And just as the Soviet Union did in the 1920s, China still had a choice between Bukharin's road to industrialization through the capital accumulation in the countryside and Stalin's radical and necessary brutal redefinition of the consumer away from the countryside. In the end, the Chinese did not follow Stalin's path. For all the horrors of the Chinese Cultural revolution, comparatively, Chinese collectivization and attempted industrialization were less brutal.

As a result of a much slower capital accumulation, by the late 1970s full 75 per cent of the Chinese population were still employed in agriculture. Like a tightly compressed spring coil, such an enormous number of people and its almost total exclusion from the "socialist welfare state", combined with the low Communist Party penetration in the countryside and relatively short historical period of collectivization provided for a very potent potential economic force.¹⁴ Thus, when the Chinese leaders decided to conduct a limited experiment of "group responsibility system" in few selected areas, the peasants responded with the nation-wide,

1991), 198.

¹⁴Minxin Pei, From Reform to Revolution: The Demise of Communism in China and the Soviet Union (Cambridge, Ma: Harvard University Press, 1994), 100-101.

spontaneous and initially unauthorized wholesale dismantling of the communes. "[B]y the end of 1983, 97.1 percent of the people's communes were dismantled...."¹⁴⁷

2.m)(4) Back in the USSR

In the Soviet Union, on the other hand, the Bolsheviks followed a different path -- peasantry was crashed. Millions were starved to death, millions sent to the camps, and the rest forced into the serf-like position on the collective farms. Finally, "[i]n the decades that followed population concentration shifted out of rural areas and into cities at a rate perhaps unparalleled anywhere else in the world."¹⁴⁸ The proportion of city dwellers grew from 32 percent in 1939 to 66 percent in 1989.¹⁴⁹ Often, conditions on the collective farms were so poor that even a very restrictive passport regime in the cities could not stem the mass exodus of peasants. In one

¹⁴⁷Ibid., 95-96.

¹⁴⁸Caroline Humphrey, "Rural Society in the Soviet Union," in Understanding Soviet Society, eds. Michael Paul Sacks and Jerry G. Pankhurst (London: Allen & Unwin, Inc., 1988), 53.

¹⁴⁹Throughout the USSR, the growth was uneven. For instance, in Russian republic, the urban population grew from 33% in 1939 to 74% in 1989, while in Tadzhikistan it grew from 17% in 1939 to 37% in 1970, then fell to 33% in 1989. The recent decline in urban dwellers in Tadzhikistan is due entirely to a much higher birth rate in the rural areas of the republic. See V. I. Kozlov, "Dinamika naseleniia SSSR" [Dynamics of the Population of the USSR], Istoriia SSSR 5 (September-October 1991): 6.

instance, in just four years, from 1949 to 1953, the number of farmers on collective farms fell by 3.3 million people.¹⁵⁰ As a result, in the USSR, by the late 1970s and early 1980s, at best a third of the population had any connection with the farm sector of the economy.¹⁵¹ The actual proportion of the peasants was even less than that.

Aside from an obvious political risk in admitting the regime's error and guilt, from the psychological point view, the physical elimination of the most entrepreneurial segment of peasantry -- kulaki and sered'niaki, "proletarization"-through-forced-industrialization of another large segment, the enserfment of the remaining peasants with the concomitant extension of the welfare state benefits to them, ensured a totally state-dependent countryside.

The unwillingness of the peasants to take greater risks and push for more extensive reforms became obvious during the debate on property ownership in the late 1980s. Superficially, it might have appeared that the uncertainty over the legislation stifled the initiative in the countryside. For instance, William Butler, in his commentary on the law of land ownership in the USSR, implicitly blames the slow progress of peasant entrepreneurship on the legal uncertainty. Thus, the

¹⁵⁰E. Iu. Zubkova, "Malenkov i Khrushchev: lich'nyi faktor v politike poslestalinskogo rukovodstva" [Malenkov and Khrushchev: The Personal Factor in the Politics of Post-Stalin Leadership], Otechestvennaia istoriia 4 (July-August 1995): 104.

¹⁵¹Humphrey, "Rural Society", 53.

"rebirth of peasant economies proceeds with great difficulties and very slowly. In spring 1990 only 20,000 such economies were registered in the entire Soviet Union, and of those less than 250 were in the RSFSR."¹⁵² There is no question that the legal uncertainty did have some effect. But it is unlikely to have been a decisive influence. As the Chinese case illustrates, the legal uncertainty, by itself is insufficient to prevent those willing to take the initiative. By the time the Chinese government authorized the change in January 1982, "peasants had already disbanded nearly half the communes in the country and converted them to the new system."¹⁵³

Thus, in the Soviet Union decollectivization from above would have had little economic impact. It is simply insufficient to decree greater responsibility over the decision-making; at the other end, there must be someone willing to accept such responsibility. Unfortunately, the decades of raskrestianivanie did not just lead to the reduction in numbers of peasants. More dramatically, psychologically, the process destroyed the "peasant within" in the remaining agricultural workers. As Gorbachev himself declared:

It so happened that on the collective and state farms an individual has been alienated

¹⁵²M. I. Braginskii, W. E. Butler, A. A. Rubanov, eds., The Law on Ownership in the USSR, trans. W. E. Butler, The Butler Commentaries on Soviet Law (London & Moscow: Interlist, 1991), 114.

¹⁵³Pei, From Reform to Revolution, 96.

from the land, from the means of production.... [Such] an individual acts as a hired laborer, doing something at such and such hours, just in order to earn a living.... [H]owever, this laborer does not have the qualities that a farmer must bring to the land [and] to the farm. It is a living world -- the land, nature, the processes occurring there. One has to know ... the land, to feel it.... By alienating an individual from the land, from the means of production, we have turned the master of his land into a day-laborer.¹⁵⁴

2.n) Within the System Agricultural Reform

Nonetheless, the above analysis should not imply that an improvement in food supply was impossible. One advantage of the Soviet-type economic system was its ability to concentrate resources in the area that needed them most. Agriculture, or more precisely, food supply, was for some time identified as a priority area. Beginning with the late 1970s, extensive resources were poured into the agricultural sector. In fact, it appears that by the mid 1980s, the sector could not absorb any more investments.¹⁵⁵ To solve the manpower problem, millions of school and university students, office workers and even the army were sent each year during the harvest time. Obviously, "the main problem appear[ed] to be administrative

¹⁵⁴Izvestia, 14 October, 1988, p.1

¹⁵⁵Philip Hanson, From Stagnation to Catastroika: Commentaries on the Soviet Economy, 1983-1991 (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1992), 113.

-- not financial."¹⁵⁶

A four-prong strategy could have led to a greater availability of agricultural products, without dismantling collective farms. First, a "wider introduction of the 'link' (zyeno) system in Soviet agriculture....," by increasing autonomy for on-farm teams, would have resulted in greater productivity.¹⁵⁷ Alternatively, as Tatyana Zaslavskaya pointed out, in the past "family contract teams in agriculture have achieved a sharp rise in labour productivity and an increase in food production."¹⁵⁸ Simple logic suggests that an increase in numbers of contract teams would have had to lead to greater food production.

Second, there had to be an increase in government procurement prices. When this was done in 1953, in "the years 1953-8 agricultural output rose more quickly than in all the years the collective farms had been in existence -- by 8-9 per cent a year."¹⁵⁹ Further substantial increases in food production were obtained after similar measures were passed at the March 1965 Central Committee Plenum. In fact, increases in state procurement prices appeared to be a standard Government

¹⁵⁶Breslauer, Five Images of the Soviet Future, 37.

¹⁵⁷Ibid.

¹⁵⁸Tatyana Zaslavskaya, The Second Socialist Revolution, 56.

¹⁵⁹Ibid., 30.

policy well into the 1980s.¹⁶⁰

There are two caveats in the above scenario, however. It is still unclear, the extent to, and the speed with which the food production would have been increased. Many Soviet workers would have shunned any kind of initiative that would have required them to work harder, even if that gave them a higher income. Furthermore, "many Soviet people quite simply regard[ed] a high income as a negative phenomenon irrespective of whether serious and creative work was done to obtain it and whether it brought great benefit to society."¹⁶¹ Thus, surveys showed that only 42 per cent of the rural population supported a wider use of family contract teams. Further 30 per cent were sitting on the fence. Arguably though, even these numbers point to a substantial unused potential of the Soviet agriculture.

Just as important an obstacle to the introduction of the new administrative methods was the resistance of the rural district Party apparatus. Here, the combination of the purges of the rural Party committees and re-introduction of strict accountability of the lower levels for the results achieved, might have done the trick. As Zaslavskaya pointed out, "strict accountability by lower levels for the non-fulfilment of

¹⁶⁰Linda J. Cook, The Soviet Social Contract and Why It Failed: Welfare Policy and Workers' Politics from Brezhnev to Yeltsin (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), 60-65.

¹⁶¹Zaslavskaya, The Second Socialist Revolution, 56.

instructions and orders from above," was one of the central features of Stalinist economic system.¹⁶² Indeed, Stalin's "secret" was his unwavering paranoia regarding the fulfilment of the leadership decisions. In a letter to Molotov, worth quoting at length, Stalin declared:

The Politburo has adopted my proposals concerning grain procurement. This is good, but in my opinion, it is inadequate. Now the problem is fulfilling the Politburo's decision.... Furthermore, I'm afraid that [even] the local GPU will not learn about the Politburo's decision, and it (the decision) will get bogged down in the "bowels" of the OGPU. Therefore, it is necessary to demand ... from procurement organizations...a) copies of their instructions to subordinate organs concerning the fulfilment of the Politburo's decision; b) regular reports every two weeks (even better, once a week) about the results of fulfilment of the decisions.... And the danger of a foul-up will grow if we don't insist that the Central Committee's decision be fulfilled with unrelenting firmness and ruthlessness. (emphasis in the original)¹⁶³

It is plausible to argue that after eighteen years of Brezhnev's "trust in cadres", a period of relentless distrust in cadres with concomitant increase in penalties for the non-fulfilment of the leadership directives might have produced a required change in attitudes.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶²Ibid., 64.

¹⁶³Lars T. Lih, Oleg V. Naumov, and Oleg V. Khlevniuk, eds., Stalin's Letters to Molotov, 1925-1936, trans. Catherine A. Fitzpatrick (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 168-169.

¹⁶⁴To the extent that language reflects acceptable reality, there are two widely used Russian sayings that make the application (and acceptance) of force quite a "common place." The first saying plays on the Marx's postulate: "Bytie opredeliaet soznanie", roughly translating as: The material existence determines consciousness. The Russian

To be effective, however, measures to increase supply had to be matched by the policies designed to lower the demand. Throughout the 1950s, 1960s and the 1970s, an increase in supply was followed by an even larger increase in demand. One of the main reasons for such continuously growing disparity between supply and demand was the policy of keeping retail food prices stable by absorbing increases in procurement costs into the state budget. At the same time, while the food prices remained virtually frozen since 1962, the average money incomes of the population had increased by 70 percent. By 1990 "the production costs of meat, butter and some other products [were still] more than double the state retail prices."¹⁵⁵ "As a result of the excess demand, shortages, queues, and hoarding of food became common, and collective farm market prices rose substantially."¹⁵⁶ Since the shortages were of relative rather than absolute nature,¹⁵⁷ an obvious way to reduce the excess

twist is: "Bitiie opredeliaet soznanie", translating as: Beating determines consciousness. The second saying is only superficially milder: "Ne umeesh -- nauchim, ne khochesh -- zastavim." The English translation is: If you don't know how -- we'll teach you; if you don't want to -- we'll force you.

¹⁵⁵Zaslavskaya, The Second Socialist Revolution, 137.

¹⁵⁶Cook, The Soviet Social Contract, 65.

¹⁵⁷Zaslavskaya differentiates between the two in the following manner. "Relative shortage...means that the supply of goods is insufficient to satisfy demand based on purchasing power.... Under conditions of absolute shortage, [however], it is impossible to satisfy people's minimal requirements...."(emphasis added). See Zaslavskaya, The Second Socialist Revolution, 136.

demand was to pass the rising procurement costs on to the consumer.

Nonetheless, by themselves these methods probably would have not been sufficient to satisfy consumer demand in the short run. But the combination of better administrative techniques, increased producer and consumer prices, continued purchases of grain and meat abroad, and even marginally better average weather led at least one scholar to conclude that a substantial improvement in food supplies to the population was a clear possibility.¹⁶⁸

2.n)(1) Political Risks of More Expensive Food

Undoubtably, a deliberate policy of raising food prices would have entailed a certain degree of political risk. In Poland at least, increases in food prices have led to major political crises, with the last one culminating in the creation of Solidarity trade union. In the USSR itself, there were strikes following "Khrushchev's decision to raise meat prices."¹⁶⁹

Still, in the Soviet Union, the risk of a society-wide upheaval was much lower than in Poland. First, the population

¹⁶⁸Barbara Severin, "Solving the Livestock Feed Dilemma: Key to Meeting Food Program Targets," in the U.S. Congress, Joint Economic Committee, Gorbachev's Economic Plans, vol. 2 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1987), 45, 59-60.

¹⁶⁹Cook, The Soviet Social Contract, 61.

could have absorbed significant price increases without major distress. As Zaslavskaya observed, "[f]rom 1960 to 1986 the number of deposits increased 3.5 times, the average sum deposited nearly seven times, and the total value of savings 25 times."¹⁷⁰ Concluding her analysis Zaslavskaya declared that "[a]t the present time [i.e. late 1980s] Soviet living standards, although not satisfying the needs of most social groups, significantly exceed both the psychological and socially conditioned subsistence level."¹⁷¹

Second, centralization and the political nature of all economic decision-making, together with the absence of the market mechanism and its various transmission belts were very helpful in isolating outcomes in one area from affecting those in another. Thus, increasing food prices would have had no necessary effect on the other elements of the social welfare state. Full employment, free health care, housing rents frozen since 1928, extremely low public transportation prices were still in place and would have mitigated against mass public unrest.

¹⁷⁰Zaslavskaya, The Second Socialist Revolution, 52. In 1987, some 266.9 billion rubles were in people's savings accounts. See Agitator 1 (January 1989): 32.

¹⁷¹Zaslavskaya The Second Socialist Revolution, 51.

2.n)(2) The Politics of Fear¹⁷²

Of course, had the economic rationale for social stability failed to persuade the population, the regime could have always used force.¹⁷³ Historically, the extent of political violence directed at the Soviet population was without parallel anywhere else in the communist world. Long after Stalin's death, the paralysing roots of fear continued to run deep in the Soviet society.

There is evidence that the regime was concerned about potential social instability resulting from dramatically higher food prices. Still, to say this is not to say much. At least from the time of its takeover of power, the Bolshevik Party mistrusted and feared the spontaneity of the masses. Aside from an obvious ideological disdain for the masses' "false consciousness", the concept of vanguardism inevitably begets fear. In the rigidly Manichean Weltanschauung of leaders and followers, if one does not lead, one must follow. And if one does lead, one must fear the followers.

Thus, although speaking in the name of the masses, the Communist Party had always feared them. Well before the

¹⁷²As far as elites are concerned, the history of the politics of fear in the USSR will be more fully addressed in the next chapter.

¹⁷³In fact, the regime had always used force against any manifestation of dissent, individual or popular. Six years after denouncing Stalin's crimes, Khrushchev ordered troops to fire on the workers in the city Novochoerkask. They were protesting against higher meat prices.

beginning of the Civil War, one of the first acts of the Soviet government was the creation of the political police. And even at the height of his totalitarian power, Stalin's letters to Molotov show his obsession with the country's social stability. This did not prevent Stalin from doing the most unpopular things and inflicting unprecedented violence on the society. In other words, the fear of popular unrest does not have to, and in the Soviet context never did translate, into the elite's paralysis.

In any system, no successful displacement from power is possible as long as there is a coercive apparatus that can be relied on by the rulers. The Soviet system had an able and willing security apparatus to deal with any instability, provided there was a political will. It is true that under Brezhnev, the steel fist of coercive machine was covered with velvet glove. But this tells us more about Brezhnev's leadership style than the system over which he presided. The relative timidity of his leadership does not in any way prove that there was any sort of quid-pro-quo between the regime and the population as far as political stability was concerned. Notwithstanding the popular acceptance of the system's basic contours, in the final analysis, that system "was not a contract but a dictat."¹⁷⁴

¹⁷⁴Walter Laqueur, The Dream That Failed: Reflections on the Soviet Union (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 55. Laqueur is reacting against attempts to apply Western "Social Contract Theory" to the Soviet Union. For such latest attempt, see Cook, The Soviet Social Contract.

In other words, however much the Soviet leaders might have been concerned about Polish events in the early 1980s, the fact was that since 1921 Kronshtadt revolt, the leadership in the Kremlin never had to deal with an internal threat to its power. In the early 1980s as in any other Soviet period, there was little likelihood for the Polish-type scenario in the USSR. Indeed, the actions of the Soviet leaders after Brezhnev's death show quite clearly that whatever fears the leadership might have had, it still had more than enough room to manoeuvre. From Andropov's actions against recalcitrant workers to Gorbachev's brutal anti-alcohol campaign, the leadership proved its ability and willingness to ignore popular interests. As late as the fall of 1990, after five stirring years of perestroika and glasnost, Gorbachev still had enough confidence in the system to confiscate 50- and 100-ruble bills and dramatically raise prices on many consumer goods.¹⁷⁵ If such dramatic actions were conceivable in 1990, there can hardly be any reason to doubt government's ability to introduce harsh, unpopular measures in 1985 -- particularly since the leader was the same throughout the period.

2.0) Conclusion

There is no question that in the mid-1980, the Soviet

¹⁷⁵Dmitry Mikheyev, The Rise and Fall of Gorbachev (Indianapolis, Hudson Institute, 1992), 113.

Union was due for some changes. However, there was nothing inevitable about the course that the change should have taken. With all the accumulated problems, there were different objective possibilities to tackle these problems. Using the counterfactual "thought experiment", we have analyzed some of the alternatives to the radical reform and eventual systemic collapse. For our purposes, it was sufficient to establish that an alternative was possible. Undoubtedly, however, still other possibilities must have existed. Although it is questionable whether different courses of actions than those pursued by Gorbachev would have managed to resolve the difficulties once and for all, it is likely that a different path would have at least allowed the Soviet system to muddle through for some time to come. In the end, in the simple provision of more time, the demise postponed might have turned out to be the demise prevented.

3. The Power of the CPSU General Secretary

...An old sickness, [is] inherent... in our entire system: the absolutization of the role of the first [leading] person. Political structures after Stalin still did not have an immunity against Caesarism, exaltation of the leading personality, did not have a guarantee against an appearance of a new form of a cult.

Dmitrii Volkogonov, Stalin: Triumph & Tragedy

In the previous chapter, we have argued that under certain circumstances, an individual can be a powerful force in making history. Among other things, in any political system, that individual's place in the overall structure of power acts as an important determinant of opportunities to act independently. It was further offered that in the Soviet-type regimes, a person in the highest position of power can be the decisive force in initiating and directing the events of the most monumental significance for a nation and the world.

In this chapter, we need to show why the above is true, when applied to the case of the USSR. This is in order for us to appreciate fully the role that one individual, Michael Gorbachev, could and did play in the unraveling of the Soviet system, after becoming the General Secretary of the CPSU in 1985. To achieve our goal, it is imperative for our analysis to take a closer look at the system of power that he

inherited. Since Gorbachev undertook the most fundamental restructuring of the Soviet system since Stalin, our focus is then to elucidate the position he started from. Specifically, we are interested in the power that inheres in the post of the General Secretary of the Communist Party. Hence, formally, the emphasis here is neither on the period of Gorbachev's restructuring, nor on any specific individual per se, but rather on the resources thought to be at the disposal of a General Secretary in the post-Stalin period.

It will be shown that the power of the General Secretary to impose his (and it has always been a man) will on the Soviet elite has been generally underestimated in the West. Specifically, the study will be presented in two parts. The first part will deal with the so-called structural foundations of the leader's power. As such, it will concentrate on the formal aspects of the organization of power. The second one will marshal evidence for the existence of other less tangible, less formalized sources of power which nevertheless play an integral part in cementing the key position of the General Secretary.

3.a) The Place of the CPSU in the Soviet System

To begin, in the former Soviet Union, Marxism-Leninism was supposed to represent the scientific truths about human society. And in the name of Marxism-Leninism "the CPSU

claime[d] that it, and it alone, clearly and correctly [understood] those truths."¹ Not only did the party understand those truths, it was an embodiment of consciousness and will of the only progressive force in history, the working class. As one Soviet ideologist declared, "[t]he policies of the CPSU correspond[ed] to the objective needs of social development, vital interests of classes and social stratas, nations and nationalities, [and] all generations of Soviet People."²

According to Article 6 of the last Soviet Constitution, the Communist Party was the hub of the political system.³ Apart from the issue of ideology, the party, by virtue of its organization, controlled every aspect of life in the USSR. The CPSU, as a highly "centralized hierarchy of control and authority, supported by branches situated at the very point where policy [was] applied," left absolutely no centres of institutional autonomy in the society.⁴ As early as the end of the Civil War, Lenin insisted that "[n]ot a single important political or organizational question... in our republic... is decided... without the guiding instructions... from the

¹Ronald J. Hill and Peter Frank, The Soviet Communist Party, 2d ed. (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1983), 5.

²A. V. Naumenko and others, Nauchnoe upravlenie obshchestvom [Scientific Management of a Society] (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo "Mysl'", 1983), 23. Emphasis added.

³Hill and Frank, The Soviet Communist Party, 2.

⁴Ibid., 48.

party.³ And as late as 1989, merely two years before the party and the Soviet Union ceased to exist, Anatolyi Sobchak, the professor of law and the future mayor of Leningrad used this reality of Soviet life to justify his decision to become a member of the communist party. He declared that "first of all, the CPSU for me [was] not a political party but the state structure, [which] had penetrated all cells of the nation's social organism."⁴

3.a)(1) The Party and the State

In other words, despite the formal recognition of the separate state and party structures, the practical significance of such recognition for policy-making was nil. In practice, from 1917 to 1957, the "successive chairmen of the Council of People's Commissars (Council of Ministers)" invariably chaired the meeting of the Politburo. Moreover, between 1958 and 1964, the positions of the General Secretary of the CPSU and the Chairman of the Council of Ministers, formally with two different job descriptions, were held by the same person.⁵ After 1964, even though the two positions were

³V. I. Lenin, Polnoe sobranie sochinenii, 5th ed. [The Complete Works], vol. 41 (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo politicheskoi literatury, 1955): 30-31.

⁴Anatolyi Sobchak, Khozhdenie vo vlast' [Passage Into Power] (Moscow: Novosti, 1991), 9,26.

⁵John Lowenhardt, James R. Ozinga, and Erik van Ree, The Rise and Fall of the Soviet Politburo (New York: St.

kept separate, the fusion of the party and the state was no less complete than before. Organizationally, the fusion was achieved through the interlocking directorships between the party and the state organizations. Simply put, the same limited number of individuals served as leading members of various committees and councils. Figure 3.1 illustrates the interlocking membership among party and state institutions.

The reality and the consequences of the interlocking directorship of various party and state institutions were such that one could only meaningfully speak of the party as owning a state rather than controlling it. The difference is a crucial one. In most cases, the political movements take over an already established machinery of the state. Then, they try to penetrate the state structures to control them. However, given the institutional inertia and the long established political culture of the state, the penetration and control are never complete and thus, inevitably, are a matter of degree. Schematically, the concept of control still suggests some independence on the part of the controlled at the time (t) of the control. It also suggests an earlier or at least a simultaneous independent existence of the agencies before the control, in the time period, (t-1). In the Soviet case, however, the Communist party did not take over the existing old state institutions; it destroyed them. In the aftermath, the party created new state structures to serve its purposes.

Fig. 3.1. Interlocking membership between the party and the state (November 1980)

Sources: Ronald J. Hill and Peter Frank, The Soviet Communist Party, 116; John Lowenhardt, James R. Ozinga and Erik Van Ree, The Rise and Fall of Politburo (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992), 95.

In such a system, the question of rivalry was excluded a priori. To quote the Soviet source,

[t]he leading status of the CPSU in the political system of the Soviet society has arisen in a historical condition, in which the party, having been created earlier than the Soviets, trade union and the youth organizations, took active role in their formation or was the initiator of their creation. (emphasis added).⁹

According to the same source, this arrangement is referred to as "the party leadership (rukovodstvo) of the state administration (upravleniem)."

Though formally empowered to initiate and implement policies regarding most aspects of life in the Soviet society, the USSR Council of Ministers was often nothing more than the executor of the policies developed within the party apparat. The former chairman of the Council of Ministers, Nikolai Ryzhkov, claims that quite often the Council would receive its own "decisions" for signing from the Central Committee of the CPSU.¹⁰ Moreover, it appears that a number of ministries, though again being formally a part of the Council of Ministers, did not even bother to report to its Chairman. According to Ryzhkov, the crucial power ministries such as

⁹See for instance, Atamanchuk, G.V., ed., KPSS i razvitie sovetskoi politicheskoi systemy [CPSU and the development of the Soviet Political System] (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo "Mysl'", 1987), 148-149.

¹⁰Ibid., 79.

¹⁰Nikolai Ryzhkov, Perestroika: istoriia predatel'stv [Perestroika: The History of Betrayals] (Moscow: Novosti, 1992), 104.

Defence, Interior, KGB, and Foreign Affairs reported directly to the Politburo, by-passing the Council of Ministers.¹¹ It is instructive that the decision to use the military force in Tbilisi was made without informing Ryzhkov, the head of government. When questioned, Anatoli Sobchak, the chair of the committee investigating the events was explained that the situation in Tbilisi was a political issue, whereas the head of government is only responsible for the economy of the country.¹²

However, even some economic ministries were, in practice, outside of the council's sphere of control. The ministries, members of the Military-Industrial Commission (VPK) of the Council, were directed exclusively from the Central Committee. Figure 3.2 shows the formal lines of authority with the key ministries. Informal lines of authority, however, all led to the Secretariat and the Politburo itself.

Outside of the sensitive ministries, the Chairman's authority in the Council was limited too. He lacked the power to exercise the ultimate penalty for inadequate performance -- the ability to fire his own deputies or any other minister. Even criminal misdeeds could not be easily punished. First, in every sense of the word, the communist party was above the

¹¹Ibid., 113. Ryzhkov admits that he did not even try to reign in the ministries of defence, foreign affairs and the KGB.

¹²Anatoli Sobchak, Khozhdenie vo vlast' [Passage into Power] (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo "Novosti", 1991), 97.

Fig. 3.2. Formal Authority Over the Key Ministries 161

Sources: Ryzhkov, Istoriia predatel'stv, 104-105; Ulrich-Joachim Schultz-Torge, ed., Who Was Who in the Soviet Union (Munich: K.G. Saur, 1992), 268-69

law. According to Konstantin Maidaniuk, former senior Soviet prosecutor for especially important cases, "in order to arrest even a deputy minister,... [everything] has to be decided at the level of the CC of the CPSU and the Party Control Commission."¹³

Furthermore, ministers of defence, foreign affairs and state security were co-equals of the Chairman of the Council of Ministers in party ranks. Normally, all of them were members of the Politburo.

Lastly, the Chairman, Chairman's deputies and all of the All-Union ministers, belong to the nomenklatura of the Politburo.¹⁴ In other words, only the Politburo could hire or fire a minister. Within the Politburo, the administration of appointments was the prerogative of the head of the Organization and Party Work Department of the Central Committee. He, in turn, always reported to the General secretary.¹⁵

¹³Lev Timofeev, Chernyi rynok kak politicheskaya sistema [Black Market as a Political System] (Vil'nus-Moscow: VIMO, 1993), 208.

¹⁴Ryzhkov, Perestroika, 104-05. For Western studies of the nomenklatura principle, see Bohdan Harasymiw, Political Elite Recruitment in the Soviet Union (London: MacMillan Press, 1984), chs. 2 and 7; T. H. Rigby, Political Elites in the USSR (Aldershot: Edward Elgar, 1990), chs. 4 & 11. For the insider's appraisal of the nomenklatura, see Michael Voslensky, Nomenklatura, 1984.

¹⁵Yegor Ligachev, Inside Gorbachev's Kremlin: The Memoirs of Yegor Ligachev, trans., Catherine A. Fitzpatrick, Michele A. Berdy, and Dobrochna Dyrzcz-Freeman (New York: Pantheon Books, 1993), 9-10, 81.

Given the supremacy of the Communist party within the Soviet system of power, it is imperative for us to take a closer look at the way the power was organized within the party itself.

3.b) The General Secretary and the Party

By definition, in an overly centralised system, practically all political power is concentrated at the apex of the ruling organization. Thus, at the summit of the Soviet power structure, it is the Politburo that exercises final authority on all matters. Within the Politburo, the decision-making is centred around the office of the General Secretary of the Communist Party.

Formally, the Politburo and the General Secretary are elected by the Central Committee to lead the work of the party between the semi-annual meetings of the Central Committee.¹⁶ In practice, however, the Central Committee merely confirms the decisions submitted to it by the Politburo. Since the Politburo, through the Secretaries of the Central Committee, exercises its prerogative of nomenklatura -- the formal authority to make appointments throughout the Soviet system -- it, in effect, selects its own members.¹⁷ The Central Committee

¹⁶Graeme Gill, The Rules of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, Inc., 1988), 240.

¹⁷Hill and Frank, The Soviet Communist Party, 71.

of the CPSU has never been the party's legislature.

In fact, one of the characteristic features of the Soviet system of power was an incomplete formal institutionalization of the pattern of authority, and a subsequent "substantial discrepancy between the formal procedures and rules of political life and the informal norms which govern[ed] access to power."¹⁸ Nowhere it was as obvious as in the case of the position of the General Secretary.

Formally, there was absolutely no description in the party statutes of duties and responsibilities of the General Secretary. The position, although in existence since 1922, was not even given a legal basis until the XXIII Congress of the Party in 1966. Even then, it was only mentioned once, in one line, in the context of its electibility by the Central Committee.¹⁹

Throughout the Soviet history, however, it was the General Secretary who attended the meetings of the heads of states, opened and closed the party Congresses, chaired the plena of the Central Committee, the Secretariat, and the meetings of the Politburo. In general, his every move was followed and his every word was given the widest possible

¹⁸Graeme Gill, "The Soviet Leader Cult: Reflections on the Structure of Leadership in the Soviet Union," British Journal of Political Science 10 (1980): 175; T.H. Rigby, "The Soviet Political Executive, 1917-1986," in Political Leadership in the Soviet Union, ed. Archie Brown (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), 6.

¹⁹Gill, "The Soviet Leader Cult", 177; idem, The Rules of the Communist Party, 240.

publicity inside the USSR.

In the West, such prominence of the General Secretary was attributed to his control of appointments to the lower rungs of the party hierarchy. With time, these appointments allowed the General Secretary to build the body of support in the Central Committee that he later relied on to get his way within the ruling oligarchy. Such a system of building one's power base in Communist regimes has become known as "the circular flow of power."²⁰

With the death of Stalin, however, and the subsequent intellectual eclipse of the Totalitarian model, postulating the existence of "a dictator who possesses 'absolute power'",²¹ there has been a tendency among the observers of the Soviet political scene to downplay the power of the General Secretary within the ruling oligarchy. Scholars such as Carl Linden, Michel Tatu, Jerry Hough, Darrel Hammer and Seweryn Bialer started to emphasize the notion of collective leadership, within which the General Secretary was "merely" a primus inter pares.²² Along the same lines, Thane Gustafson and Dawn Mann

²⁰Robert V. Daniels, "Soviet Politics since Khrushchev", in The Soviet Union under Brezhnev and Kosygin, ed. John W. Strong (New York: Van Nostrand, 1971), 20-21.

²¹Carl J. Friedrich and Zbigniew K. Brzezinski, Totalitarian Dictatorship and Autocracy, 2d ed. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1965), 31.

²²Seweryn Bialer, Stalin's Successors: Leadership, Stability and Change in the Soviet Union (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 50-51; Darrel P. Hammer, The USSR: The Politics of Oligarchy, 2d ed., rev. and upd. (Boulder: Westview Press, Inc., 1986), 146; Jerry F. Hough

proposed the "law of the diminishing General Secretaries". According to this "law", although the authority of a General Secretary vis-a-vis other members of the oligarchy grew with time, the power of each successive General Secretary was less than that of each of his predecessors." And even though Archie Brown notes that with time, the General Secretary became "more than a first among equals", he goes on to say that "the essentials of collective leadership" were, nevertheless, retained. After recognizing the fact that there is "scarcely an area of policy in which [the General Secretary] did not have an impact", Brown concludes that "even then policies he was able to force through were not always fully implemented."

Such an underestimation of the potential power inherent in the position of the General Secretary naturally caught everyone by surprise when Gorbachev undertook the most ambitious and far reaching shake up of the Soviet system since Stalin. According to the "circular flow of power" model,

and Merle Fainsod, How the Soviet Union is Governed (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979), 476; Carl A. Linden, Khrushchev and the Soviet Leadership 1957-1964, rev. ed. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), 37; Michel Tatu, Power in the Kremlin. From Khrushchev's Decline to Collective Leadership (New York: Viking Press, 1969), 428.

²³Thane Gustafson and Dawn Mann, "Gorbachev's Next Gamble", Problems of Communism XXXVI, no. 4 (July-August 1987): 6.

²⁴Archie Brown, "The Power of the General Secretary of the CPSU", in Authority, Power and Policy in the USSR, ed. T.H. Rigby, Archie Brown and Peter Reddaway (London: The MacMillan Press Ltd, 1980), 100, 145.

appointing one's own supporters takes time. Therefore, it would be imprudent for the General Secretary to show a great deal of activism at the beginning of his tenure in office. Building up the needed support and consensus may take a number of years. The pace and the magnitude of change, however, was such that scholars had to take another look at the extent of the General Secretary's power.

Thus, Archie Brown, writing in 1989, abandons the "law of diminishing General Secretaries". Citing evidence from the 1982-88 period, Brown notes that "Andropov exercised more personal power in his fifteen months than Brezhnev did during his first six years."²⁵ Furthermore, in the case of Gorbachev, the last General Secretary "had the ability to accomplish more [in three and a half years] than any General Secretary in Soviet history [including Stalin] at such an early stage of his incumbency."²⁶ T.H. Rigby is even more emphatic in his claim that Gorbachev had "achieved a position within his first year" similar to the one reached by "Stalin six years after the death of Lenin..., Khrushchev four years after the death of Stalin, and Brezhnev ten or twelve years after the replacement of Khrushchev."²⁷ Gustafson and Mann also

²⁵Idem, "Power and Policy in a Time of Leadership Transition, 1982-1988," in Political Leadership in the Soviet Union, ed. Archie Brown (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), 223-24.

²⁶Ibid.

²⁷T.H. Rigby, "The Soviet Political Executive", 48.

indicated, albeit cautiously, the need "to take a new look at what we mean by 'the circular flow of power', not to mention the 'law of diminishing general secretaries'."²⁸

Recent revisions, among Sovietologists, of the general Secretary's role in the Soviet power structure notwithstanding, there remains the need for a systematic analysis of the sources of power of the top slot in the Communist hierarchy. Otherwise, changes observed cannot be explained.

To focus, however, on this issue, we must first define what is meant by the organization of power. For the purposes of this study, David Beetham's definition is very appropriate. He argues that

central to the social organization of power... are processes of exclusion, typically embodied in rules, which prohibit general access to key resources, and which deter those who may acquire the use or possession of them, and by what means.²⁹

Crucially, as suggested by Eric Nordlinger, to have the power over someone consists not only in one's ability to carry out the proposals put forth in the agenda, but also the ability to control the agenda itself.³⁰ In other words, in the politics

²⁸Thane Gustafson and Dawn Mann, "Gorbachev and the 'Circular Flow of Power'," in Elites and Political Power in the USSR, ed. David Lane (Aldershot: Edward Elgar Publishing Limited, 1988), 25.

²⁹David Beetham, The Legitimation of Power (Atlantic Highlands, NJ.: Humanities Press International, Inc., 1991), 48.

³⁰Eric Nordlinger, On the Autonomy of the Democratic State (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981), 89.

of "nondecision", an opponent is prevented from even considering the issues relevant to him, let alone resolving them in his favour."

Returning to the main issue of the General Secretary's range of power in the Soviet system, it is proposed that the party chief's dominant position is based on two elements: a structural one and a cultural. The structural component is organised around the General Secretary's control of appointments and the flow of information in the Secretariat of the Central Committee.

3.c) The General Secretary and the Structure of Power

As John Armstrong pointed out, the control of the Secretariat was the key to the acquisition of "commanding positions in the Soviet political system."³² Party rules (rule 38) stipulated that the Secretariat was to be elected by the

³¹The concept of power, like many other concepts in political science, is an essentially-contested concept. For a cogent exposition of the main definitions of power, see Steven Lukes, Power: A Radical View (London: MacMillan, 1974). For a more, in depth philosophical study of the origin of the current debate on power, see Thomas E. Wartenberg, The Forms of Power: From Domination to Transformation (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990).

³²John A. Armstrong, Ideology, Politics, and Government in the Soviet Union, 3d ed. (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1974), 91. Also, see Alexander Rahr, "The CPSU in the 1980s: Changes in the Party Apparatus," The Journal of Communist Studies 7, no. 2 (June 1991): 161-69.

Central Committee to oversee the work of the party apparat." In practice, however, Secretaries' slate was always automatically approved by the Central Committee. Once appointed, each of the secretaries was responsible for one or more departments in some specific areas of Central Committee operations."

3.c)(1) The Control of Appointments

In the Secretariat, the formal responsibility for appointments was vested in the Department for Party Work and Cadres Policy. Although the head of this department formally made the appointments, every General Secretary from Stalin to Gorbachev brought their own trusted men to control the department. Existence of this informal or unpublicised (or both) rule³⁵ was confirmed by the former politburo heavyweight, Yegor Ligachev. In his memoirs, he declared that it was taken for granted that irrespective of personal and professional characteristics of the incumbent head of the cadres department, the new General Secretary would invariably dismiss

³³Gill, The Rules, 240.

³⁴Merle Fainsod, How Russia is Ruled, revised ed. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1963), 220-21; Hough and Fainsod, How The Soviet Union is Governed, 410-418.

³⁵The distinction between and the importance of the formal and informal rules and procedures in the operations of the CPSU is analyzed in Graeme Gill, "Institutionalization and Revolution: Rules and the Soviet Political System," Soviet Studies, XXXVII, no. 2 (April 1985): 212-226.

him and appoint another person."¹⁶

Moreover, the General Secretary retained his prerogative for overall control over cadres selection. This stemmed from the application of the principle of democratic centralism in party affairs. According to this principle, all the candidates for "elections" or appointments at the lower levels were made on the "recommendation" of the next higher level party official.¹⁷ Since the General Secretary was the head of the Secretariat, he must, by definition, have had the final say in all spheres of party matters, including that of appointments. In the political setup where upward mobility was impossible outside the rigidly controlled system of appointments, whoever controlled this mechanism wielded an enormous power.

3.c)(2) The Control of Information

The same can be said about the control of information. As a resource, political information is essential to the very existence of all political systems.¹⁸ And since knowledge is power, the control of access to information is a powerful weapon in one's quest for dominance.

¹⁶Yegor Ligachev, "Iz vospominanii," [From the Memoirs] Argumenty i fakty, 4 (1991): 5.

¹⁷Hill and Frank, The Soviet Communist Party, 73.

¹⁸Karl Deutsch, The Nerves of Government: Models of Political Communication and Control (New York: The Free Press, 1963), 77.

In the CPSU it was again the Secretariat that acted as a gate keeper in the flow of information within the Communist top brass. The Secretariat set the agenda for the Politburo meetings and embodied "their decisions in the form of Party resolutions and decrees."³⁹ The former official of the Czechoslovak Central Committee apparat, Karel Kaplan, claims that the Secretariat "discusse[d] many reports before they g[o]t to the [Politburo], and, since several CC secretaries [we]re members of the [Politburo], it thus predetermine[d] the decisions the [Politburo] [would] make on them."⁴⁰ Thus, a skillful manipulation and control of the Secretariat practically guaranteed the General Secretary's control of the Politburo,⁴¹ since the General Secretary was the person who coordinated the work of the Secretariat. During the October 1987 plenum of the Central Committee, Gorbachev openly admitted that "[a]ll of the agenda of a Secretariat meeting [was] scrutinised by the General Secretary. Not one decision c[ame] out without [the approval] of the General Secretary, with the exception of some routine issues."⁴² Organizationally, this scrutiny was performed through the mechanism created by

³⁹Fainsod, How Russia is Ruled, 204.

⁴⁰Karel Kaplan, The Communist Party in Power, ed. and trans. Fred Eidlin (Boulder: Westview Press, 1987), 87.

⁴¹V. V. Zhuravlev, ed., Na poroge krizisa [On the Verge of a Crisis] (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo politicheskoi literatury, 1990), 70.

⁴²Izvestiia TsK KPSS, no.2, February 1989, 284-85.

Stalin from the 1920s onwards.

Under Stalin, the "coordinating" and controlling function was at first performed by the Central Committee's secret department (Sekretnyi otdel TsK). After 1930's reorganization the work was taken over by the special sector of the Central Committee Secretariat (Osobyi sektor Sekretariata TsK).⁴³ The special sector, controlled directly by the General Secretary, handled classified communication between higher and lower party units. It supervised the network of special departments throughout the Soviet Union. In addition, the special sector administered the cipher office and secret archives.⁴⁴ Since the overwhelming amount of intra-Party and Party-state communication, both at the local and the central levels, was classified, the special sector was the nerve centre of the Soviet system.

It has been argued that after Stalin's death, his successors, recognizing the crucial role played by the special sector in securing Stalin's dominance, removed it from the General Secretary's direct control and subordinated the newly re-named General Department (Obshchii Otdel) to the Politburo as a whole.⁴⁵

⁴³Niels Erik Rosenfeldt, Knowledge and Power: The Role of Stalin's Secret Chancellery in the Soviet System of Government (Copenhagen: Rosenkilde and Bagger, 1978), 29, 62.

⁴⁴Ibid, 86.

⁴⁵Leonard Schapiro, "The General Department of the CC of the CPSU," Survey, 21, no.3 (Summer 1975): 58;

In other words, the crucial structural difference between Stalin's years and subsequent periods lay in the separation of the General Department from the personal supervision of the General Secretary, preventing the immense concentration of power in his hands. In effect, this change was to be the essence of structural transformation from personal dictatorship to collective leadership."

However, in an extremely rare discussion of the General Department in Soviet sources, the head of the department under the General Secretary Chernenko, K. M. Bogoliubov -- Chernenko's deputy in the same department for thirteen years" --maintained that at all levels of the Party's organization, "General Departments are operating under the personal leadership of first secretaries of the party committees."" Clearly, this information directly contradicts the assertions made by western scholars.

It could still be argued that although the General Secretary directs the General Department, the relationship between him and the personnel of the department was not as close as it used to be under Stalin. The manifest sign supposedly indicating change was the fact that under Stalin

Rosenfeldt, Knowledge and Power, 199-201.

"Brown, "The Power of the General Secretary," 139.

"Rosenfeldt, Knowledge and Power, 199.

"K. Bogoliubov, "Rabotu s dokumentami partii -- na uroven' sovremennykh trebovaniy," Partiinaya zhizn', 21 (November 1984): 26.

people working in the special sector also served as personal assistants to the General Secretary.⁴⁹ With Stalin's death, this practice was apparently discontinued. It has been pointed out, for instance, that Chernenko, the head of the General Department under Brezhnev, had never formally served as a personal assistant to Brezhnev.⁵⁰

Though it is formally correct, it is also known that Chernenko's association with Brezhnev went back at least fifteen years before Brezhnev's ascendance to the General Secretaryship in 1964.⁵¹ Again then, formally, Chernenko was not Brezhnev's personal assistant. But informally, like much else in the USSR, the reality was quite different. Informally, Chernenko's career path went step-in-step with that of Brezhnev.

Whatever was the formal nature of the relationship between Chernenko and Brezhnev before the former became the Head of the General Department, the duties of Chernenko and his successors while at this post closely resembled those of Poskrebyshev, the head of the special sector and Stalin's personal assistant. In fact, the activities of this department parallel those performed by its predecessor, the special sector. That is, the General Department's functions continued to include: handling of the classified information within the

⁴⁹Ibid., 56-57.

⁵⁰Ibid., 60; Rosenfeldt, Knowledge and Power, 199.

⁵¹Schapiro, "General Department," 60.

Party, responsibility for internal security, maintenance of Party archives, and issuing and safekeeping of Party cards."⁵² Until the end, the General Department handled all the appeals and inquiries addressed to the Central Committee by the general public. The information contained in public letters was analyzed and the reports were sent to the relevant departments throughout the secretariat on the need-to-know basis.⁵³

Altogether, there is little evidence of structural change after the death of Stalin to indicate anything beyond the mere appearance of change in the internal mechanism of control within the CPSU. And whatever facade was maintained under Brezhnev, it was completely thrown away under Gorbachev. In 1987, Valerii Boldin, a long-time personal assistant to Gorbachev, became the head of the General Department.⁵⁴ Boldin continued his close association with Gorbachev after the latter combined the posts of the General Secretary of the CPSU with that of the President of the USSR. In February 1988,

⁵²Ibid., 61-2, 64-65.

⁵³For instance, in its report to the 28th Congress of the CPSU, the General Department reported that in the period between 27th and 28th party Congresses, it has received thousands written and oral complaints from the Soviet citizens. On the basis of these complaints, it prepared over 100 analytical circulars and discussion papers for the top leadership. See Izvestiia TsK KPSS, no.9, September 1990, 33.

⁵⁴Ronald J. Hill and Alexander Rahr, "The General Secretary, the Central Party Secretariat and the Apparatus," in Elites and Political Power in the USSR, ed. David Lane (Aldershot: Edward Elgar, 1988), 65-66.

Boldin became the Administrator of Affairs for the USSR President. Finally, after the re-organization of President's apparat in May 1991, Boldin became the director of the president's apparat without relinquishing the post of the General Department's head.⁵⁵

The unique position of the General Department to keep the General Secretary informed on the most secret matters of the party and the state became obvious immediately after the failure of the coup attempt in August 1991. At the time, a more sinister role of the General Department was revealed. In searching Boldin's office during the investigation into the circumstances surrounding the attempted coup, the investigators stumbled on top-secret correspondence between the head of the KGB at the time, Kryuchkov, and the General Secretary-President, Gorbachev. Among others, the documents included the so-called "the materials of the technical control." In a layman's language, these were the transcripts of the KGB's bugged telephone conversations of the highest party and state officials. Among those subject to "technical control" were Boris Yel'tsyn, Eduard Shevardnadze, Alexander Yakovlev, Vadim Bakatin and Evgenii Primakov.⁵⁶ It is clear

⁵⁵Schulz-Torge, ed., Who Was Who in the Soviet Union, 62.

⁵⁶Valentin Stepankov and Evgenii Lisov, Kremleovskii zagovor: versia sledstviia [Kremlin's Conspiracy: the Version of the Investigation] (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Ogonek, 1992), 195-202. Stepankov and Lisov were, respectively, the Chief Prosecutor and the Deputy Chief Prosecutor of Russia in the period immediately following the attempted coup.

that just as the special sector has done under Stalin, the General Department appears to have served as a relay station between the security service and the General Secretary.

3.c)(3) Summary

So far, the discussion clearly shows that the mechanism of control and coordination of the Secretariat changed very little between Stalin's time and that of Gorbachev. In controlling the General Department, the General Secretary formally "direct[ed] lower-level party units and thus party life."⁵⁷ Also, by strategically manipulating access to information, he normally set the priorities in the Secretariat and, subsequently, decided which issues were put on the agenda of the Politburo meetings. The other CC secretaries-members of the Politburo, though powerful in their own right, could not compete with the General Secretary because of their much more limited range of responsibilities. Each secretary was responsible for a specific sector and according to Nikolai Ryzhkov, the last Chairman of the USSR's Council of Ministers and the member of Gorbachev's Politburo, "[it was] not liked when somebody showed extra initiative, stepped outside the boundaries of his competence, delimited by his position."⁵⁸ According to the Russian historian Elena Zubkova, the fairly

⁵⁷Kaplan, The Communist Party, 96.

⁵⁸Nikolai Ryzhkov, Perestroika: istoria, 41.

rigid division of labour within the Secretariat and the Politburo, "directly... determined the extent of one's knowledge of what was happening in the country as a whole, or in a [more] specific area."⁵⁹ Only the General Secretary did not have institutionally pre-set boundaries of competence. If required, he could bypass even an individual responsible for an area, effectively keeping the latter in the dark. For instance, Valentin Falin claims that this is exactly what Brezhnev had done with Andrei Gromyko in the early 1970s, when the former authorized Falin, the Soviet ambassador to West Germany, to pass the information about West German internal political developments directly to the General Secretary.⁶⁰ In sum, without necessarily turning him into a superhuman, the General Secretary was the only party official situationally in the position to have the broadest possible view of the apparat's operations.

3.d) The General Secretary and the Culture of Power I: Tradition

In addition to the tangible sources of the leader's

⁵⁹E. Yu. Zubkova, "Malenkov i Khrushchev: lichnyi faktor v politike poslestalinskogo rukovodstva," [Malenkov and Khrushchev: The Role of an individual in the politics of Post-Stalin Leadership] Otechestvennaia istoriia 4 (July-August): 106.

⁶⁰V. M. Falin, Novaia i noveishiaia istoriia 5 (September-October 1995): 96.

power, there were also just as important intangible ones. The first among the latter can be described as an organizational ethos, or what Jeremy Paltiel has called "party culture." The party culture is that "preferred mode of behaviour, formed in the course of, and reinforced by the regular practice of organizational action."⁶¹

Before actually discussing the party members preferred mode of behaviour, it must be stressed that the institutional ethos could not possibly survive for as long as it did without a great deal of enthusiasm felt by the party membership towards the CPSU, its history and its promises. Today, this fact is obscured through the overemphasis that is placed on the prevalence of cynicism and disbelief within the Soviet society and the Communist party. The fogginess of view is further reinforced by what might be called the "Nuremberg syndrome" -- the need and desire to distance oneself from the discredited world-view. However, as Yakovlev pointed out, "it would be incorrect to explain everything only by the fact of violence against society. They forced us to believe, and we believed."⁶² Similarly, Georgi Arbatov admits that "I was not a secret 'progressive' and 'reformer,' hiding my views in a closet and masquerading as a loyal Communist in front of

⁶¹Jeremy T. Paltiel, "The Cult of Personality: Some Comparative Reflections on Political Culture in Leninist Regimes," Studies in Comparative Communism, 16, nos. 1&2 (1983): 54.

⁶²Yakovlev, The Fate of Marxism, 95.

others. I was, like the majority, a 'rational believer'.¹⁰⁰ Similar confessions were made by such diverse former Soviet politicians as Ligachev, Ryzhkov and Yel'tsyn.¹⁰¹ There is little doubt that Andropov believed, too. Finally, whoever reads Khrushchev's memoirs invariably concludes that he also was a genuine "true believer." Former Czech dissident writer, Milan Kundera, perhaps summarized it best:

Anyone who thinks that the Communist regimes... were exclusively the work of criminals is overlooking a basic truth: the criminal regimes were made not by criminals but by enthusiasts convinced that they had discovered the only road to paradise. They defended that road so valiantly that they were forced to execute many people. [Only much] [later it became clear that there was no paradise, that the enthusiasts were therefore murderers.]¹⁰²

3.d)(1) The Mentality of the Barricades and "Yedinovlastie"

To return to the organizational ethos itself, the preferred mode of behaviour in Communist-type regimes has been the rule of an individual. Although individual rule is formally alien to Marxism-Leninism, for the most of the CPSU's life, the collective leadership principle "has in practice

¹⁰⁰Arbatov, The System, 37.

¹⁰¹Ligachev, Inside Gorbachev's Kremlin, 109, 286; Ryzhkov, Perestroika: istoriia predatel'stv, 129; Yel'tsyn, Isповed' na zadannuiu temu [A Confession on a Given Theme] (Riga: izdatel'stvo "Rukitis", 1990), 29.

¹⁰²Milan Kundera, The Unbearable Lightness of Being, trans. Michael Henry Heim (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, Inc., 1984), 176.

been undermined by the dominance which one individual has been able to achieve within leadership circles."⁶⁶

Writing about the Bolshevik culture,⁶⁷ Philip Selznick observed that the Leninist party was a hierarchy of leaders built and trained for political combat.⁶⁸ The Bolshevik's barricade mentality did not arise by accident. To use the nature-nurture metaphor in relation to the origin and development of the political movement, the explanation of the Bolshevik movement's militarization, at least partially, lies in its nature. To use a related metaphor, militarization was an integral part of its original sin. According to William Odom, "Marxism-Leninism, based on class struggle, revolution, and war as the motors of history, is a militarized ideology."⁶⁹ It is not mere pedantry to note that when Lenin elaborated the principles of the party organization, he declared that the

⁶⁶Graeme Gill, "The Soviet Leader Cult: Reflections on the Structure of Leadership in the Soviet Union," British Journal of Political Science, 10 (1980): 176.

⁶⁷The study of the Bolshevik organizational culture inevitably brings us to the issue of continuities and discontinuities between the Soviet and the tsarist elites. For the discussion of some important continuities, see Edward L. Keenan, "Muscovite Political Folkways", The Russian Review 45 (1986): 115-181. Keenan, however, emphasises collegiality (p.170) as the dominant principle of elites' behaviour. For an alternative view, more in line with the argument pursued in our study, see Richard Pipes, Russia Under the Old Regime (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1974), 22-24.

⁶⁸Philip Selznick, The Organizational Weapon (Glencoe: Free Press, 1960), 11.

⁶⁹William Odom, "The Pluralist Mirage," National Interest, (Spring 1993): 106

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party must be no less than "a military organization of agents... imbued with the common cause to which all the agents bend their thoughts and actions...."⁷⁰ Following the revolution and the civil war, during the Ninth Party Congress, Nikolai Bukharin noticed with pride that Lenin's wish became reality. Bukharin reminded the Congress' delegates that

[w]e built our own party in such a way that we are the most militarized organization that has ever existed; our party is the most military organization in the most literal sense of the word."⁷¹

In general, the words "military organization" invoke in us the following images. First, every military organization, by definition, implies strict hierarchical subordination to the will of the Supreme Commander.

Secondly, military combat implies a life and death struggle. The law of survival dictated that the organization whose raison d'être was class warfare, could not tolerate dissent within its ranks. As long as the Communist party perceived itself to be surrounded by enemies, and when losing power was seen as tantamount to political, and possibly physical, extinction, any dissension within the party ranks was bound to be considered extremely dangerous and thereby inevitably viewed as treasonous.

⁷⁰V.I. Lenin, What is to be Done? Burning Questions of Our Movement (New York: International Publishers Co. Inc., 1969), 173.

⁷¹Deviatyi S'ezd RKP(b): Protokoly [The Nineth Congress of the RKP(b)] (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo politicheskoi literatury, 1960), 225.

In other words, the military-style organization with the Supreme Commander in a combat environment would more or less inevitably lead to the development of the predilection to individual leadership. Such a result was clearly foreseen by Leon Trotsky as early as 1905. Commenting on the organizational principles of Lenin's party, Trotsky wrote:

The organization of the party will take the place of the party itself; the central committee will take the place of the organization and finally the dictator will take the place of the central committee.⁷²

Trotsky's fears proved correct. In 1921, during the Kronstadt Revolt, the logic of the siege mentality led the Bolsheviks to ban all factional activity within the party.⁷³ The ruling left everyone below the position of the General Secretary, regardless of one's rank, exposed to the potential charge of factionalism and all attended to the military-style organization consequences. This further centralized the decision-making process and proved convenient in concentrating power in the hands of the party leader. The situation remained unchanged throughout the history of the CPSU. Genady Voronov, a Politburo member under Khrushchev and Brezhnev, commenting on the removal of Khrushchev, observed that conspiracies such as the one that removed Khrushchev are inevitable when there

⁷²Bertram D. Wolfe, An Ideology in Power: Reflections on the Russian Revolution (New York: Stein and Day Publishers, 1969), 20.

⁷³Leonard Schapiro, The Communist Party of the Soviet Union, 2d ed., revised and enlarged (New York: Vintage Books, 1971), 214-15.

is "no mechanism of criticising the leadership, [and] correction of [its] mistakes...."" Referring already to the Gorbachev period, Boris Yel'tsin echoes the sentiment: "The word 'opposition' in the party's lexicon [was] altogether forbidden."" Ryzhkov argues that despite the declarations of the collective decision-making by Gorbachev, "the collegiality -- particularly in the first years of perestroika -- would arise easily since the tradition did not allow the coterie to object [to] the leader's [views] too vigorously.""

3.d)(2) Democratic Centralism and "Yedinovlastie"

At the foundation of the tradition Ryzhkov is referring to is the idea of democratic centralism. The enormous power of this doctrine to elicit compliance by the party members with the decisions directed against their interests and ultimately the system itself became evident with the advent of Gorbachev to the post of General Secretary. As Charles Fairbanks pointed out, "[t]he ruling elite of the Soviet Union -- widely thought before the event to be single-mindedly and ruthlessly power

⁷⁴Yu. V. Aksutin, ed., Nikita Sergeevich Khrushchev: Materialy k biografii [Nikita Sergeevich Khrushchev: Materials for a Biography] (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo politicheskoi literatury), 219.

⁷⁵Andrei Karaulov, Vokrug Kremliia: Kniga politicheskikh dialogov [All Around the Kremlin: The Book of political Dialogues] (Moscow: Novosti, 1990), 115.

⁷⁶Ryzhkov, Perestroika: istoriia predatel'stv, 364-65.

oriented -- [simply] voted to give up its power"(emphasis added).⁷⁷ As we will see in the next chapter, beginning with the selection of Gorbachev as Leader in March 1985 through the decision during the Twenty-Eighth Congress of the CPSU in July 1990 to give up the party's supervision of the government, the party's leadership has always got what it wanted.⁷⁸ This could have hardly been accomplished without using the principle of democratic centralism. According to Fairbanks,

[t]he Communist Party of the Soviet Union was an organization that attained and maintained its power through the doctrine of democratic centralism, that is, by lower organizations' disciplined execution of decisions from real decision-making bodies at the top.... As well as insisting on unquestioning obedience from below, the doctrine of democratic centralism also required unanimity at the top.⁷⁹

Unanimity, however, need not imply collegiality. Despite the constant insistence on the principle of collective leadership in the CPSU rules,⁸⁰ the mechanism to ensure such collective decision-making has never been established. It has never even been defined by the Soviets.⁸¹ Even assuming an occasional Soviet sincerity, there were always powerful forces mitigating against the application of the collegiality

⁷⁷Charles H. Fairbanks, Jr., "The Nature of the Beast," National Interest, (Spring 1993): 54.

⁷⁸Ibid.

⁷⁹Ibid.

⁸⁰Gill, "Institutionalization and Revolution," 216.

⁸¹Idem, "The Soviet Leader Cult," 177-78.

principle in the Soviet leadership.

Historically, collective leadership does not fit every situation. Often, it is unstable and transitory. As Max Weber pointed out, collective leadership is particularly not suitable for major rapid changes in the society. "Large-scale tasks which require quick and consistent solutions tend in general, for good technical reasons, to fall into the hands of monocratic 'dictators,' in whom all responsibility is concentrated."" Since the entire Soviet history is a sequence of one monumental project after another, there should be little surprise in the development of the organizational culture within the CPSU favouring the dominance of one individual over the rest. That this dominance, in fact, was necessary was fully realized by Lenin. Writing soon after the Bolsheviks seized power, he declared that

Soviet socialist democracy is not in the least incompatible with individual rule and dictatorship. The will of a class may sometimes be carried out by a dictator who can sometimes do more all by himself and who is frequently more essential. (Emphasis added)."

3.d)(3) Russian Political Culture and "Yedinovlastie"

Lenin's Marxist phraseology, however, concealed his basic

²Max Weber, The Theory of Social and Economic, 399.

³V.I. Lenin, Polnoe sobranie sochinenii, 5th ed., [Collected Works] (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo literatury, 1955), 40: 272.

opportunism. To embark on yet another monumental social project, the Bolsheviks had to use resources available to them within Russian society." Metaphorically speaking, this would be a nurture component of the nature/nurture fulcrum of the origins of the Bolshevik militarized ideology. At least in part, the Bolsheviks were socialized to prevailing attitudes of the Russian political culture. As we have already discussed at length in Chapter 1, one of the Russia's chief resources at the time was the prevalence of religious, manichaen world-view within that society, the view, a priori opposed to dissenting ideas. While warning us not to push the analogies between the Communist party ideology and the teachings of Russian Orthodox Church too far, Dmitri Obolensky still observed that "[b]oth [were] strongly intolerant of rivals and opponents." Specifically,

"[i]t would be difficult to resist the impression that there is at least something in common between the religious messianism of the Second and Third Rome and the fanatical belief of the Russian Communist in the exclusive truth of the Marx, Engels, Lenin, and Stalin."⁵

Instrumentally, the similarity observed, points to the fact that Bolsheviks were equally as good students of Machiavelli

"On the deliberate use of the Orthodox-related symbols by the Bolsheviks see Nina Tumarkin, Lenin Lives! The Lenin Cult in Soviet Russia (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1983).

"Dmitri Obolensky, "Russia's Byzantine Heritage," in The Structure of Russian History: Interpretive Essays, ed. Michael Cherniavsky (New York: Random House, Inc., 1970), 23.

as they were of Marx. Machiavelli taught that "so long as their old ways of life are undisturbed and there is no divergence in customs, men live quietly...."" To succeed, the Bolshevik culture had to reflect the autocratic culture of the society within which it was born. Thus, Lenin's positive appraisal of the potential role a dictator might play in history was well within the parameters of Russian historical experience. As T.H. Rigby pointed out,

[it] can be traced back to Muscovite times. Its very existence threatened by a combination of external enemies, internal disorder, and economic and technological backwardness, Russia throws up a new absolute ruler who carries out a political, social, economic and cultural revolution from above."⁷

Aside, however, from the purely functional and deliberate use of Russian traditional culture to capture and maintain power, discussed in Chapter 1, and in a broader historical sense, the Bolsheviks could not succeed in creating a new tradition without unwittingly preserving the old one. This is known as "the paradox of internal negation."" Militant antagonism to something, normally ends in preservation of the object of opposition. The necessary relationship between the

⁶Niccolo Machiavelli, The Prince (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1961), 36.

⁷T. H. Rigby, The Changing Soviet System: Mono-organizational Socialism from its Origins to Gorbachev's Restructuring (Aldershot: Edward Elgar, 1990), 210.

⁸An excellent exposition on the distinction between an internal and external negations can be found in Jon Elster, Political Psychology (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), ch. 2.

desire to overcome the obstacle and the existence of the obstacle has been explained by Hegel:

Desire and the self-certainty obtained in its gratification, are conditioned by the object, for self-certainty comes from superseding this other: in order that this supersession can take place, there must be this other. Thus self-consciousness, by its negative relation to the object, is unable to supersede it; it is really because of that relation that it produces the object again, and the desire as well."⁹

It is this relationship that inextricably links the goals to the means used to achieve them. And it is all this relationship that ensured that as a means towards a better Soviet goal, the ideology of the Bolshevik party preserved and reinforced precisely those elements of Russian cultural heritage that it fought hardest to overcome. The most important element for our purposes, the traditional Russian deference to authority was one of them.

3.d)(4) The Cult of Collegiality and "Yedinonachalie"

In general, however, the official cult of collective decision-making even if genuinely believed to be an anti-dote to a individual dictatorship, often results in its opposite. The hope is usually to restrict the scope of the leader's power. But the outcome is often conformity and deferment of

⁹G. W. F. Hegel, The Phenomenology of Spirit (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 109, quoted in Jon Elster, Political Psychology, 79-80.

the decisions to the leader. The culprits are political and psychological forces operating with greater or lesser success inside any group.

To begin with, the political consequences of collegiality are often contradictory. Max Weber noted that the introduction of collegial bodies leads to the division of personal responsibility, with the resultant "mutual power of veto." The intent of such a set up is "to prevent the rise of monocratic power."¹⁰ Normally, the device would work in a group where there is no undisputed leader. However, in a group where a leader already exists, collegiality operates only to prevent the rise of a challenger and thereby cement the position of the leader. This effect is exacerbated in the Soviet-type regimes, where there is no mechanism of removing a leader or even criticising him.

Aside from purely political considerations, it is widely recognized that the psychological effect of accentuation of team work in all groups is just as paradoxical. Collegiality can act as a "coercive force that deprives the individual of strength and integrity -- either by threat, or by the individual's fear of isolation and rejection." In extreme cases, it, in effect, can leave hopeful prospects "neither for the diversity of opinions nor the very possibility of

¹⁰Weber, The Theory of Social, 398-99.

diverging views."¹ Moreover, and by itself, constant, however cynical, participation in rituals, such as, for instance, declarations of allegiance to collegial decision-making contributes to conformity through the psychological process of habituation."

3.e) The General Secretary and the Culture of Power II: Fear

Another potent psychological factor in stifling opposition to a leader is fear. Any study of the Soviet leadership mechanism would be incomplete without considering the impact of fear and the role that Stalin's thirty years rule played in fostering it. Stalin's bloody purges led to the physical demise of countless members of the communist party. The terror was all-pervasive, and absolutely no one was safe from the onslaught."

¹Jeffrey Klugman, The New Soviet Elite: How They Think & What They Want (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1989), 111; Zhuravlev, Na poroge krizisa, 27.

²For conflicting perspectives on the meaning, impact and the extent of rituals in Soviet society, see Thomas O. Cushman, "Ritual and Conformity in Soviet Society," The Journal of Communist Studies 4, no. 2 (June 1988): 162-180; Christopher A.P. Binns, "Ritual and Conformity in Soviet Society: A Comment," The Journal of Communist Studies 5, no.2 (June 1989): 211-219; Thomas O. Cushman, "Empiricism versus Rationalism in Soviet Studies: A Rejoinder," The Journal of Communist Studies 6, no.1 (March 1990): 86-98.

³The literature on Stalin and Stalinism is vast and growing. For the latest and the most comprehensive study of Stalin's rule, utilizing until then secret and unknown sources, see Dmitri Volkogonov, Triumf i tragediia: Politicheskii portret I.V. Stalina [Triumph and Tragedy: A

In the West, the total nature of the terror of Stalinist rule and the widespread manipulation of fear for one's life as its controlling element, was seen as the essence of the dictatorship in a totalitarian regime."

With Stalin's death, however, the level of political violence in the Soviet society has subsided. And the intellectual ferment among western Sovietologists mirrored the latest development in the USSR. According to T.H. Rigby, "[s]ubsequently 'totalitarianism' was discarded by perhaps the majority of professional students of Soviet history and politics...."

But even though the arbitrary use of force in the Soviet Union has declined, can a similar statement be made about the extent of fear among the people? More precisely, could the manipulation of fear be maintained without the widespread use of force?

3.e)(1) Psychology of Fear and the Death of Stalin

In this respect, studies in psychology are quite

Political Portrait of I.V. Stalin] (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Agenstva pechati Novosti, 1989), 2 vols.

"Friedrich and Brzezinski, Totalitarian Dictatorship, 179.

"T.H. Rigby, "Reconceptualising the Soviet System," in Developments in Soviet and Post-Soviet Politics, ed. Stephen White, Alex Pravda and Zvi Gitelman (Durham: Duke University Press, 1992), 302.

informative. Often, a single pairing of a neutral stimulus (the presence of an authority figure) and response (submission) at the time of high emotional arousal (fear) due to the presence of unconditioned stimuli (physical or emotional pain) can result in the future elicitation of response without the presence of an unconditioned stimulus. Originally a neutral stimuli (the presence of an authority figure, becomes a conditioned reinforcer of a behaviour as a result of its association with the primary reinforcer (fear of death, pain, etc.). Subsequently, submission is achieved through the fear of authority figure. No actual use of force is necessary." And, of course, the greater the number of trials, the greater is the possibility that this operant conditioning will take hold.

In the Soviet case, we are dealing with innumerable pairings over the period of decades. And the long-term political consequences of the psychological processes are quite significant. In political terms,

one reason why sanctions are much more effective than inducements as the basis for a continuous power relationship is that they do not have to be continually used, or even explicitly threatened, to be effective in modifying behaviour. It is sufficient that people 'know their place'."

Therefore, the fear inspired by Stalin's purges could not disappear quickly even under the best of circumstances. Under

"Philip G. Zimbardo, Psychology and Life, 11th ed. (Glenview, Ill.: Scott, Foresman and Company, 1985), 242.

"Beetham, The Legitimation of Power, 45.

ideal conditions, the process of unlearning a behaviour, particularly one associated with self-preservation, is slow and uneven.

3.e)(2) Fear and Politics After Stalin

As it turned out, however, after Stalin the circumstances were far from ideal. As we have seen above, even under Gorbachev, the highest leaders of the party and state were subject to the surveillance by the security service. In his memoirs, Yegor Ligachev recounts how in 1984 he and then Second Secretary of the CPSU, Gorbachev, could not be certain that Gorbachev's office was not bugged. According to Ligachev, "confidential conversations in [Gorbachev's] office... were made very difficult.... There were times when we could not say some things aloud, but wrote to each other on scraps of paper."¹⁰ The editor of Ogonek, Vitali Korotich, was also convinced that Gorbachev's office was bugged and that the General Secretary knew it. Korotich is certain that Gorbachev was play acting in his own office, feigning his displeasure with the liberal editor.¹¹ It was much less important whether everybody was actually spied upon. Much more significant for the perpetuation of fear was the belief in the widespread surveillance.

¹⁰Ligachev, Inside Gorbachev's Kremlin, 56.

¹¹Moskovskii komsomolets, 21 September 1991.

In the realm of fear, it is often argued that a major change to have affected the Soviet system was the re-subordination of the political police under the party control. The decision was supposed to have had a far-reaching effect on leadership politics in the USSR.¹⁰⁰ However, there is no solid evidence that any structural change has in fact taken place. Amy Knight, one of the most respected scholars on the KGB, admits that "[t]he precise nature of the measures to strengthen party control over the security police have never been made clear."¹⁰¹ Perhaps, they have never been made!¹⁰²

Still, whatever the case might be, the argument over which body controls the secret police entirely misses the point. Regardless of what the party-police relationship was during Stalin's rule, it cannot be denied that the security police was completely subordinate to the will of an individual, the Leader. In other words, what is crucial is not the precise nature of the relationship between the police and the party, but the fact that the collective leadership has never been more than a passing phenomenon in Soviet history,

¹⁰⁰Amy W. Knight, The KGB: Police and Politics in the Soviet Union (Boston: Unwin Hyman, Inc., 1988), 48-9.

¹⁰¹Ibid., 48.

¹⁰²Presumably, the most important change in the party-KGB relationship after Stalin was to be the prohibition on the KGB's involvement into the intra-party affairs. Yet, in an earlier article Amy Knight herself pointed out that there are indications that the KGB might have been involved in the sudden death of the Politburo members, F. Kulakov and P. Masherov. See Amy Knight, "The Powers of the Soviet KGB," Survey 25, no. 3 (Summer 1980): 155.

and that the entire dynamic of the Soviet system of power tends to one-man rule.¹⁰³ And under a single undisputed leader, the formal relationship between the police as an organization and the party as an organization becomes simply irrelevant. In this regard, Leonard Schapiro observed, that, for instance, "[n]o party official could have been in any doubt under Khrushchev of the extent to which his career depended on the First Secretary."¹⁰⁴

Nevertheless, the fear over one's career is not the same as the fear over one's life. The abandonment of the use of terror among the leadership after the death of Stalin is considered then as part of the major change in the Soviet system. Seweryn Bialer pointed out that "[t]he leadership as a whole and the elites as a whole wanted a new deal."¹⁰⁵ There is no dispute with Bialer here; the fact that the desire was there is undeniable.

However, the inconsistency in the leaders' actions in this regard was another matter. The leadership was not sure whether it could trust itself not to use terror to solve its own disputes. In fact, the uncertainty over the death penalty in case of political defeat proved serious enough in 1957 to

¹⁰³See pp. 181-87 above.

¹⁰⁴Schapiro, The Communist Party of the Soviet Union, 624.

¹⁰⁵Seweryn Bialer, Stalin's Successors: Leadership, Stability and Change in the Soviet Union (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 46. *Emphasis added.*

prompt Lazar Kaganovich to beg Khrushchev not to execute him as a member of the defeated so-called "anti-Party" group.¹⁰⁶ Kaganovich had a good reason to fear physical extermination. His experience under Stalin¹⁰⁷ was reinforced by the blood purge of Beria and his supporters. However odious a person Beria was, the fact remained that Beria had been among the leaders who agreed not to use Stalin's methods against each other. Moreover, one of Beria supporters, a candidate member of Politburo, M.D. Bagirov, was executed as late as 1956. He was shot after the Twentieth Party Congress officially condemned Stalin's methods, and after the Stalinist procedural laws for cases of terrorism, wrecking, and sabotage were repealed.¹⁰⁸ This was not all.

3.e)(3) Socialist Legality After Stalin: A Case Study

The worst of the Stalinist methods were openly used between 1961 and 1963. During that period there were nine

¹⁰⁶Alexei Adzhubei, Te desiat' let [Those Ten Years] (Moscow: Sovetskaia Rossiia, 1989), 12; Pravda, October 27, 1961.

¹⁰⁷Kaganovich had seen Khrushchev carrying out Stalin's purges in the Ukraine. For an account of Khrushchev's involvement in liquidating Red Army's military command in the Ukraine, see V.G. Afanas'ev and G.L. Smirnov eds., Urok dact istoriia [The Lesson is Taught by History] (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo politicheskoi literatury, 1989), 301-02.

¹⁰⁸Politburo, Orgburo, Sekretariat TsK RKP(b) -- VKP(b) -- KPSS [Politburo, Orgburo, Secretariat of the CC of the RKP(b) -- VKP(b) -- CPSU] (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo politicheskoi literatury, 1990), 70; Knight, The KGB, 71.

public show trials, resulting in more than a hundred executions of people supposedly guilty of economic crimes.¹⁰⁹

The process had two direct analogues in Stalinist purges. First, the idea of the "economic" crimes was not new. There was a major economic crimes show trial as early as 1928-29. At the time, confronted with the worsening economic situation in the country, a large number of engineers and other technical specialists were arrested and accused of deliberately sabotaging the economy.¹¹⁰ The methods of 1928-29 were then used throughout the Stalin's era.

Second, just as it was with the Doctor's Plot in 1952,¹¹¹ in 1961 the target of the persecution was a specific group -- the Jews. Of course, when the Decree of the Presidium of the USSR on "Intensifying the Struggle Against Especially Dangerous Crimes" was published on May 07, 1961,¹¹² Jews were not mentioned. As targets, however, they were not explicitly mentioned in the Doctor's Plot either. Just as before, the cue came from the media. The convicts' names appeared with their initials when the convicted was a gentile and with full name and surname when he was a Jew. As the trick was used before,

¹⁰⁹Paul Johnson, History of the Jews (London: Paperback Edition, Orion Books Ltd, 1993), 570.

¹¹⁰This is known as the "Shakhty Affair."

¹¹¹For the discussion of the Doctors' Plot see Schapiro, The Communist Party of the Soviet Union, 548-551.

¹¹²The Current Digest of the Soviet Press, vol., XIII, no. 17 (May 24, 1961): 8-9.

every reader knew who was who.

The obvious anti-semitic thrust of this policy notwithstanding, from the legal point of view, the implications were society-wide and the proper lessons were learned (or rather the old ones reinforced) by the leaders and the followers alike, Jews and non-Jews.¹¹³ As in Stalin's period, there was absolutely no question that the victims were completely innocent of the charges.

As an illustration, in September 1961, this writer's grandfather and two uncles were arrested on the basis of an anonymous letter (as it became known later). Their arrest was sanctioned by the Deputy Chief Procurator of the Moldavian republic.

The author's father, Ayzik Meyerovich, went to the police chief of the local area. He was told that the order had come from Kishinev, the capital of the republic. He was also told that the sooner his relatives confess, the better it would be for everybody. In the chief's words, there were no people that were not guilty of some wrong-doing¹¹⁴ and if somebody was

¹¹³Hannah Arendt, in her classic study on the origins of totalitarianism, observed that the state's violation of the law against one particular group in society cannot be quarantined; it ultimately affects the whole society. The introduction of the notion of "objective enemy" is destructive to the concept of justice, and with it to "juridical person in man." See Hannah Arendt, The Origins of the Totalitarianism, rev. ed. (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd, 1967), 424, 447.

¹¹⁴The significance of words such as these is profound. Their implications for every Soviet citizen, including leadership hopefuls, will be addressed below.

arrested, it was better to confess at once lest the ensuing investigation should reveal more details of the crime.

Mr. Meyerovich then visited the Deputy Chief Prosecutor of the republic, the person who sanctioned the arrest, and was told by him that the cause of the arrest could not be revealed until the investigation was completed. Mr Meyerovich's written complaint to the Chief Prosecutor of the Moldavian republic brought the response that the latter had personally reviewed the case and that everything was done legally. This response prompted Mr. Meyerovich to write to the General Prosecutor of the USSR accusing the Moldavian Chief Prosecutor of covering up the illegal actions of his subordinates.

Still, even the attempts to see his relatives failed. According to the Soviet law, no defence attorney was allowed to contact the arrested person until the indictment process was completed, often many months after the arrest had been carried out.¹¹⁵

In the meantime, Mr. Meyerovich's complaints to the highest legal authorities of the USSR so soon after the arrest had one specific effect: his relatives' case, originally part of a much larger case involving people from many regions of the republic, was separated from that case. As Mr. Meyerovich found out later, the fabrication of their case stopped right

¹¹⁵Access to a defence attorney was regulated through the Article 22 of the Soviet Criminal-Procedural code. See G. A. Ginzburg, Sovetskii advokat [The Soviet Defence Attorney] (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo "Yuridicheskaya literatura, 1968), 38.

there. No new evidence was added in the next six months of investigation. Instead, the prosecution focused on making sure that the "witnesses" were well rehearsed for the upcoming trial and would not change there their forced depositions. They were threatened with perjury if they changed the depositions that led to the arrest of Mr. Meyerovich's relatives. After eight months of investigation, Mr. Meyerovich's brothers and father were charged with misappropriation and speculation and sentenced to seven and two years in jail, respectively. All the appeals to the Supreme Court of the republic and the Procurator General of the USSR were unsuccessful. The office of the Procurator General in Moscow merely sent the appeal back to the Moldavian Procurator General. Given the views on the "socialist legality" prevalent in the Moscow's office, the outcome was to be expected. The fabrication of evidence to serve the political needs of the regime was an established part of its modus operandi. Only a few years earlier, the Deputy Procurator General of the USSR told visiting American Professor of Law that "[i]f it becomes necessary we will restore the old [i.e. Stalinist] methods."¹¹⁶ Perhaps, he should have added that they were never completely abandoned.

Realizing where the real power lay, Mr. Meyerovich then

¹¹⁶Harold J. Berman, "Soviet Law Reform -- Dateline Moscow 1957," Yale Law Journal, vol. 66, no.8 (July 1957): 1215; quoted in Leonard Schapiro, The Communist Party of the Soviet Union, 611.

appealed to the Central Committee of the CPSU. After being refused an interview three times, he was finally allowed to speak with an officer of the Department of Administrative Organs of the Central Committee.¹¹⁷ On the officer's initiative, the General Procurator's office itself was ordered to review the case urgently. The review, however, was still negative. On Mr. Meyerovich's subsequent attempt to see again the same officer of the Central Committee, he was told that the man did not work in the Central Committee anymore. With that answer Mr. Meyerovich has exhausted all venues of appeal. Shortly afterwards, however, his relatives were released from prison ahead of time without re-trial or any explanation and sent into internal exile for two years.

Thousands of incidents such as the one described were powerful reinforcers of fear in the Soviet society. How else can one explain the behaviour of Mr. Meyerovich's colleagues who were absolutely mortified even when they were approached about the case in private. The year was 1961, a quarter of a century since the great purges of 1937.

Fear for one's life, not just livelihood, did not disappear with Stalin's death. In 1964, on the eve of the Central Committee Plenum that removed Khrushchev from power, Brezhnev, "...his hands shaking," came to Nikolai Yegorychev, Moscow's First Party Secretary: "Everything is lost."

¹¹⁷This department oversaw the operation of the law-enforcement agencies.

"Khrushchev is informed of the details about the preparation of the Plenum [to remove Khrushchev].... You do not know him well enough... he will shoot us all."¹¹⁶

3.e)(4) The Tyranny of Law

Paradoxically, the state of lawlessness in the USSR was not the result of the insufficient number of legal statutes. Quite the opposite, it resulted from the attempt to legally envelop most of the human actions. In the Soviet Union such enveloping occurred quite naturally. In any society that denies any private space to its citizens, it is only logical that every facet of individual and communal life would be targeted by the state law. However, given the relative unpredictability of human actions, any attempt to over-regularize behaviour leads to tyranny, the tyranny of law. It is a legal truism that the rigid law is the denial of justice. By extension, under the conditions of legal authoritarianism,¹¹⁹ the law ceases to protect and begins to terrorize. Instead of decreasing the uncertainty of the decision-making, it increases it.

The former member of Gorbachev's politburo, Alexander

¹¹⁸"Posle XX s'ezda (interv'yu s N. G. Yegorychevym)", [After the XXth Congress (Interview with N. G. Yegorychev)] Voprosy istorii KPSS 5 (May 1991): 99.

¹¹⁹The term was suggested to me by Piotr Dutkiewicz of Carleton University.

Yakovlev, pointed out that anxiety caused by the "mutual contradictions of hundreds of thousands of petty bureaucratic instructions and regulations" was a very potent method of control. According to Yakovlev,

Ever since the 1920s, in order to survive, the [officials] were compelled to connive and lie in order to extricate themselves from various difficult situations.... [Their] violations were on an all-Union scale and pervaded everything. The violations were absolutely necessary and inevitable, given the system, and their practice was routine. All of this meant that on tip from the Party committee at any level, the law-enforcement agencies could at any time put a case together against [any] official without even falsifying the charges.¹²⁰

Yakovlev's view confirms that the local police official who told Mr. Meyerovich that everyone is guilty of some wrongdoing¹²¹, was not speaking in jest, but was merely stating the fact of Soviet life.

According to Ryzhkov, "in [19]87 and [19]88 for the political and even economic dissidence, people were still being imprisoned and sent to psychiatric hospitals."¹²² Both the category of an economic crime and a potential capital punishment for it continued to exist and to be practiced as late as in the spring of 1990.¹²³ As we have seen in the last

¹²⁰Alexander Yakovlev, The Fate of Marxism in Russia, translated by Catherine A. Fitzpatrick (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 110-111.

¹²¹See p.42.

¹²²Ryzhkov, Perestroika: istoria predatel'stv, 272.

¹²³Olimpiad S. Ioffe, "Update to the Second Printing: From Dilemma to Crisis," in Gorbachev's Economic Dilemma: An

chapter, actual executions of some corrupt officials and the rush of suicides by scores of others in 1986 did not serve to reassure either the Soviet people or the officials.

3.e)(5) Summary

Clearly then, with the death of Stalin, terror, though diminished in magnitude, did not cease. In turn, a small difference in degree did not produce a difference in kind. The fear was still there and it was regularly reinforced. As the last Soviet Chairman of the Council of Ministers points out, in the system created by Stalin and still existing after his death,

[the party's] penetration -- specifically as a weapon of fear! -- into all corners of the country's life in general and separate individuals [in particular] was truly total, all encompassing -- from the government corridors to the [individuals'] beds.¹²⁴

To a leadership contender it hardly mattered whether in case of defeat he would be liquidated alone or together with his friends and family. The psychological and subsequently political results were the same. They were very succinctly explained by the First Secretary of Komsomol between the years 1959-1968, Sergei Pavlov. According to Pavlov, "the most fearful consequences of the [Stalin's] cult... are in that

Insider's View, ed., David A. Rome (Boulder, Co.: westview Press, 1990), 323.

¹²⁴Ryzhkov, Perestroika: istoriia predatel'stv, 356-357.

[Stalin] killed courage inside us. We are afraid to say 'white', when [we] see white, and 'black' --when [we] see black."¹²⁵ The enduring and debilitating hold of fear even on individuals too young to remember Stalin's purges was amply displayed by Yel'tsin's behaviour in 1987, at the time of his expulsion from Gorbachev's politburo. Just as the accused had done during Stalin's show trials, Yel'tsin confessed everything he was charged with and accepted full responsibility for his behaviour.¹²⁶ Afterwards, Yel'tsin confided to his aide, Poltoranin: "They can get rid of me and just leave a damp spot."¹²⁷ It is instructive to remember that the year was 1987, a full fifty years after the Great Purge Trials and almost thirty five years since Stalin's death.

Behaviour of Soviet officials after Stalin runs contrary to John Armstrong's assertion that "the mere fact that... Khrushchev did not execute his defeated rivals went a long way toward establishing a new perception of the stakes of the game of Soviet politics."¹²⁸ It is questionable that with Khrushchev pensioned off in 1964, the stakes of the game became only one's career rather than life. There were no guarantees that the worst Stalinist methods would not be used. In fact, as we

¹²⁵Aksutin, Nikita Sergeevich, 207.

¹²⁶John Morrison, Boris Yel'tsin: From Bolshevik to Democrat (New York: A Dutton Book, 1991), 67-68, 71.

¹²⁷Ibid., 74.

¹²⁸Armstrong, Ideology, Politics, 83.

have seen in chapter 2, beginning with Andropov, some of these methods were brought back. However, let us assume for a moment that some perceptual change did take place. Was this change sufficient to alter fundamentally the behaviour of aspiring party's apparatchicks?

First, freedom from the fear of physical extinction is still a long way from the feeling and reality of political empowerment. This was sufficiently well illustrated above by Yel'tsin's behaviour. But even in less dramatic situations, when the power relationship already exists, the mere "awareness of... impotence outside the relationship can itself be sufficient to keep the dependent party submissive to the wishes of the superior, without any threats needing to be made." In other words, "the basis of a continuous power relationship" is maintained "through the vulnerability of the dependent party to the withdrawal of the essential resource on which [it] relie[s]."

In the USSR, the ability to earn one's livelihood outside the system was very limited, with practically no "alternatives outside the system,... no outside [private realm] to escape to or relax in."¹³⁰ The total absence of private property makes the autonomous (from government) existence virtually impossible. Everyone was aware of the fact that their "power to survive in a life of privilege and comfort...depended in

¹²⁹Beetham, The Legitimation of Power, 45.

¹³⁰Klugman, The New Soviet Elite, 121.

the end, at the end of a long chain of superiors and subordinates, perhaps, on the will of the Leader."¹¹ Indeed, the higher the person's position within the system was, the greater would then be the sacrifice, once the rules of the system were disobeyed.¹²

Secondly, institutionally, well into Gorbachev's reforms, the Communist party remained a highly centralized combat-style organization, where all criticism from below was strongly discouraged. The organizational ethos of the party has not begun to change until the limited elections of 1989. The principle of the democratic centralism remained in force throughout the party's existence. As a result, within the party, the character of the General Secretary's position remained the same until, virtually, the very end. As a one-time personal advisor to Brezhnev, Georgii Arbatov, noted, long after Stalin, "[n]o one could question the decision of the leader." Arbatov is not alone in his assessment. Yel'tsin, a one-time member of Gorbachev's Politburo, fully supports the view that the "post of the General Secretary [is] such that if he wants to follow some line, he would always get [it]

¹¹Schapiro, The Communist Party of the Soviet Union, 624.

¹²With the collapse of the Soviet system, former officials are very candid about the fear they had had of losing their privileges. For instance, see Georgii Arbatov, The System: An Insider's Life in Soviet Politics (New York: Times Books, 1992), 86; Oleg T. Bogomolov, "I Can't Absolve Myself of Guilt," in The Soviet System in Crisis, ed. Alexander Dallin and Gail W. Lapidus (Boulder: Westview Press, 1991), 353.

through.¹³¹ Gorbachev himself admitted that "[t]here was not, nor will there be, more power, or more dictatorship, or bigger resources than the general secretary of the CPSU's Central Committee had at his disposal in any single state."¹³⁴

Indeed, much earlier, in 1965, Myron Rush observed: "The office of Senior [General] Secretary is far less valuable for the authority it confers than for the opportunity it affords the incumbent to aggrandize power."¹³⁵ Brezhnev's personality cult has since proven Rush's argument correct.

3.f) Conclusion

In conclusion, looking back at the entire Soviet experience, it is clear that whether ideological, organizational, or psychological, the resources available to the General Secretary simply dwarfed everything else that might have been available to others. Until its very end, the Soviet system has not managed to develop reliable constraints on the aggrandizement of power by the leader of the communist party.

Nonetheless, the extent of the General Secretary's power should not be taken to imply omnipotence. Not everything can

¹³¹Arbatov, The System, 70. Karaulov, Vokrug kremlia, 432.

¹³⁴Fairbanks, "The Nature of the Beast," 55.

¹³⁵Myron Rush, Political Succession in the USSR (New York: Columbia University Press, 1965), 75.

be changed and not everything that can should be changed. But inasmuch as history zigzags by chance juxtaposition of social forces and the will of an individual, the General Secretaries of the Soviet communist party were always uniquely positioned to make the choices of monumental significance to their contemporaries. And as we shall see in the next two chapters, the actions of the last General Secretary of the CPSU, Michail Gorbachev, proved to be of crucial importance to the very existence of the Soviet regime and the structure of the world order.

4. Dismantling the Soviet Regime: Who Did It and How?

Lenin called himself an opportunist and said up-front that [he] will act [as one], in order to preserve the revolution. [So], appeared NEP. And the knights of the revolution are fighting duels, because [they] cannot go against Lenin and at the same time cannot reconcile [themselves] with his betrayal of the cause of the revolution.... I want to appear in the role of an opportunist.... For me the left, and the right [are] the gravediggers of perestroika.

M. S. Gorbachev¹ (1987)

Throughout the history of the Soviet Union, the Communist Party of the Soviet Union was the "glue" that held the USSR together. Then, in just six years, the glue stopped binding. Political and economic reforms unleashed by Gorbachev wrecked the party's mechanisms of control and coordination of society. Changes in ideology, namely the "new thinking" and the policy of glasnost, destroyed the party's will to power, while structural changes in the economy and the political system disrupted its very capacity

¹ From A. S. Cherniaev, Shest' let s Gorbachevym: po dnevnikovym zapisiam [Six Years with Gorbachev: From the Notes of Diaries] (Moscow: Izdatel'skaya gruppа "Progress" "Kultura", 1993), 187.

to exercise power. Reinforcing each other, and occurring simultaneously, changes in all of these realms, occurring more or less simultaneously, led to the dismantling of Communist Party and subsequently, the Soviet Union.

The purpose of this chapter is to identify specific decisions that led to the collapse of the Soviet Union. More specifically, the goal is to show that Gorbachev was both the initiator of the dramatic changes as well as the only person preventing the Communist Party from reversing the changes that his leadership brought about.

To accomplish our goal, we will first look at the changes in ideology and the role they played in undermining the Soviet system. Second, we will trace the consequences of the introduction of "free" economic and political space. Third, we will look at the cumulative effect of all the innovations and their role in the dissolution of the system. And finally, we will analyze the role of Gorbachev as a breaking mechanism on the party apparat's attempts to regain its control over the society. We will not, however, be dealing with any external factors that might have helped the demise of the USSR not because there were not any, but because of our firm belief that the engine of change, and both its speed and direction were endogenous to the system.²

²Metaphorically, when the train begins to move, there is often an impression that the platform is moving instead. Although, in itself the mere perception of movement is not unimportant, in the end what matters much more to those on the train and the platform is the direction of movement and its ultimate destination.

To begin, chronologically, during perestroika there were at least four "Gorbachevs." The first period, between April 1985 and January 1987, saw the continuation of anti-corruption, law and order policies initiated by Yurii Andropov. From January 1987 until the XIXth Party Conference in June of 1988, a number of new initiatives were undertaken: qualitatively new stage in glasnost, the new political thinking, and the introduction of republican khozraschet. In the period from the XIX Party Conference in the summer of 1988 through the spring of 1989, we see the radical restructuring of the Soviet political system. It starts with the fundamental reorganization of the party apparat, the diminution of its role in economic management, and ends with the creation of the parallel power structure of the elected Supreme Soviet. Finally, after the dramatic changes in the spring of 1989, we begin to see an accelerating de facto devolution of power from the center to the periphery, with Gorbachev increasingly losing the initiative to the centrifugal forces that he set in motion in the first place.

4.a) Changes in Ideology: The Policy of Glasnost'

The era of Gorbachev started with relatively standard policy initiatives. Struggle with corruption, changes in cadres, law and order -- all of these were continuation of the measures initiated by Yurii Andropov.

One of the most remarkable early features of Gorbachev's rule was the introduction of glasnost. In retrospect, the policy of glasnost, as it evolved, led to the ideological disarmament of the Communist Party, the relativization of its position within the Soviet society and, ultimately, the Party's loss of will to power.

4.a)(1) Phase I: Information as Control

At the beginning, however, glasnost was not a revolutionary policy. It was a tool of attempted re-subordination of party elites to the center, the process initiated by Andropov in 1983. Within this process, early glasnost served to provide the appearance of democracy in what was a simple party purge. In many respects, it was an extension of a standard Soviet method of policy correction (often symptomatic of power struggles at the top) and cadre's control. In fact, as a mechanism of policy correction, glasnost was practiced at least since the time of Stalin. On directives from above, the media would selectively criticize the short-comings in a particular area, usually followed by a swift dismissal of the identified "responsible" official(s). Since historically "the exposure" was followed by dismissal or even worse, in "shining" the light into the dark bailiwick of a particular party boss, the center would thus remind the remaining officials of the price they might have to pay for the non-

fulfillment of its directives. As it was felt that Moscow's control over the state bureaucracy had eroded during the latter part of Brezhnev's rule, the relentless and widespread exposure of the shortcomings was seen as necessary to re-assert Party's control.

Thus, at first, "glasnost" and anti-corruption campaign were virtually synonymous. Above all, in the words of Gorbachev, the purpose of the measures was "to restore the image of the pure and honest Communist leader, the image partly blackened by the crimes of a number of renegades."³ Glasnost was exposing official corruption at all levels of nomenklatura. In 1986 alone, 200,000 officials were prosecuted. There were a number of high profile suicides and executions. As Francoise Thom noted, "[t]he central Party [was] dispatching to the republics minor Robespierres charged with restoring order to local affairs, and above all with re-imposing central authority."⁴

Simply put, with Gorbachev's assension to power, there was a change in quantity of glasnost, but not its quality. To uncork the generational change in the system lacking the mechanism of succession, there did not seem to have been a venue other than the exposure of various abuses of power

³TsK KPSS, Maretialy plenuma Tsentral'nogo Komiteta KPSS, 27-28 ianvaria, 1987 [Documents of the Plenum of the Central Committee of the CPSU, 27-28 January, 1987] (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo politicheskoi literatury, 1987), 50.

⁴Francoise Thom and David Regan, Glasnost, Gorbachev & Lenin: Behind the New Thinking (London: Policy Research Publications Ltd, 1988), 17.

(which were always plentiful in the Soviet system) by some officials. This was glasnost in breadth, but not in depth.

4.a)(2) Phase II: Information as Commodity

However, to regain control over the local officials, the Center needed more truthful information. It was not a secret that the information received by the leadership about the state of the nation was enhanced or even outright false. Even the KGB could not be relied on to provide the necessary information. We have seen Andropov, the head of the KGB for fifteen years, complain about the paucity of useful data on the Soviet society.⁵ More damning still is the observation of the last chief of the KGB, Vadim Bakatin. Bakatin writes:

[b]efore I came to the KGB, I was confident of huge intellectual-analytical possibilities of this organization.... [I] was disappointed.... [Neither] the work of informational-analytical units, existing practically in every directorate, [nor the work] of the [whole] line of scientific institutes was properly coordinated. Almost raw torrents of information landed on the desk of the Chairman of the KGB. ... The raw information was unsuitable for the political decision making at the highest level [of] government].⁶

It was finally realized at the Center that "information is a vital commodity" for the decision-making process.'

⁵A. A. Protashchik, ed., Cherez ternii [Through the Thorny Paths] (Moscow: Progress, 1990), 725.

⁶Vadim Bakatin, Izbavlenie ot KGB [Deliverance from the KGB] (Moscow: Novosti, 1992), 44-45.

⁷V. Rubanov, "Ot Kul'ta sekretnosti k informatsionnoi kulture," [From a "Cult of Secrecy" to an Information

Thus, in the leadership's view a more frank discussion of the current problems, via diverse channels, would serve a dual function: concentrating the local officials' minds on the fulfillment of the directives from the center as well as provide the truthful and timely information needed to issue such directives. Kremlin was hoping to reap the benefits identified by Prince Petr Dolgorukov:

[Glasnost] is the best physician for the ulcers of the state.... A wise use of glasnost' is the best weapon for destroying false rumors, secret schemes, absurd and evil hearsay.... A reasonable and proper discussion of various questions will supply the government with information about the needs and requirements of Russia."

To provide for the diversity of channels, during 1986 major changes occurred in the leadership of arts and media. Less orthodox individuals replaced the more conservative ones in the State Committee of Publishing, Printing and Book Sales, the Union of Film Workers and a number of leading Soviet newspapers and journals. With the removal of CC Secretary Mikhail Zimianin in January 1987 and his replacement by the reformist Alexander Yakovlev, the door was open to glasnost' in the social sciences."

With all the changes, however, the breakthrough of glasnost', would have been inconceivable without the changes

Culture] Kommunist 13 (September 1988): 24. Rubanov held the rank of a colonel in the KGB.

"Bruce W. Lincoln, In the Vanguard of Reform: Russia's Enlightened Bureaucrats, 1825-1861 (De Kalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1982), 185.

"Ben Eklof, Soviet Briefing: Gorbachev and the Reform Period (Boulder: Westview Press, Inc., 1989), 17-18.

in Soviet ideology in the international arena. Any system closed onto itself requires an Archimedean point to shift it to a new orbit. For the Soviet Union, the Archimedean point was its foreign policy.

4.b) "New Thinking" and "Better" Glasnost'

In other words, in the first instance, ideological change of the greatest consequence occurred in the realm of the foreign policy. This involved the introduction in 1987 of the so-called "new thinking" in world affairs. The cornerstone of the "New Thinking" was the elevation of the common humanitarian values over international class struggle. The reversal of the traditional Marxist-Leninist position was fatal to the communist ideology not only internationally, but domestically as well. As Edward Shevardnadze observed,

...attempts to curtail the policy of new thinking are explained by the [fact] that both its theory and practice were destroying that [Soviet] monolith from inside. The rejection of global confrontation and the primacy of class struggle [and the acceptance] of priority of pan-human values, pluralism of opinions and political freedoms appropriately considered by the system as explosive devices.¹⁰ (emphasis added).

The new thinking introduced a virus into Marxist-Leninist ideology. The communist party's claim to power was

¹⁰ Edward Shevardnadze, Moi vybor: v zashchitu demokratii i svobody [My Choice: In Defense of Democracy and Freedom] (Moscow: Novosti, 1991), 315.

always based on the supremacy of class interests, specifically that of the working class. Moreover, not only were class interests hierarchically superior, they were the only "true" existing interests. Even the technological revolution was commonly viewed through the lenses of class approach. Any attempts to "represent the socio-political problems of the scientific-technical revolution as 'globally panhuman'", was condemned as the "bourgeois ideology... trying to deprive [the problems] of their class character...."¹¹

Thus, as self-proclaimed embodiment of the working class consciousness, the communist party historically rejected the notion of ideological pluralism, claiming the right to exclusivity. The mere recognition of another set of values, let alone admission of its superiority, served to undermine the doctrinal basis of the Party's claim to power. According to Nikolai Popov,

Gorbachev would have already earned his place in history if he had done nothing else within his six years in power except to give his address to the members of the Issyk-Kul writers' meeting in 1987, where he declared the primacy of humanitarian values over class values. This event was similar to Khrushchev's denunciation of the Stalin cult at the Twentieth Party Congress.... [A]s "the [Western] evil empire" disappeared, Gorbachev's team had removed from the foundation of the Soviet political edifice one

¹¹V. V. Kosolapov and others, eds., Sotsial'no-politicheskie problemy NTR i ideologicheskaya bor'ba [Socio-Political Problems of the Scientific Technological Revolution and Ideological Struggle] (Kiev: Izdatel'stvo politicheskoi literatury ukrainy, 1978), 8.

very important piece....¹²

The "monism" of the common human values was simply inimical to the Manichean world-view of the mentality of the barricades. As Paul Marantz noted, "Gorbachev's new thinking... undermined Soviet messianism, or Soviet leaders' view of their country as the principal source of inspiration for worldwide revolutionary and progressive forces."¹¹ Since no political system or a system of values was superior, the door to a greater pluralism and democratization of the Soviet society was left ajar.

It might have taken time for some members of the Soviet elite to realize the corrosive influence of the ideology of the pan-human values, but beginning with the publication of Nina Andreyeva's letter in March 1988, the opposition to the new ideology struck at the crucial element of the "new thinking". By 1990, the opposition to the new thinking and the loss of CPSU ideological fervor has greatly contributed to the establishment of conservative-dominated Russian Communist Party as a counter-weight to the moribund All-Union Party. Many of the delegates to the founding

¹²Nikolai Popov, The Russian People Speak: Democracy at the Crossroads (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1995), 16; the revolutionary nature of the emphasis on all-human values forms the thesis of Steven Kull, Burying Lenin: The Revolution in Soviet Ideology & Foreign Policy (Boulder: Westview Press, Inc., 1992).

¹³Quoted in Alfred B. Evans, Jr., Soviet Marxism-Leninism: The Decline of an Ideology (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 1993), 203.

conference decried the loss of CPSU class orientation as destructive for both the international communist movement and the existing order at home.¹⁴ As its leader, the new party chose the conservative first secretary of the Krasnodar party kraikom, Ivan Polozkov. In January 1991, during Gorbachev's turn to the right, Polozkov openly attacked what he perceived as unorthodoxy of the CPSU's line: "By counterposing panhuman interests to class interests [and] by giving priority to planetwide values, we did a disservice to the socialist idea...."¹⁵ He complained that the "talk... about panhuman values is being increasingly carried in a sermon-like manner towards socialism."¹⁶ According to the First Secretary of Dagestan obkom, M. G. Aliev, in accepting the idea of panhuman values, the Central Committee of the CPSU accepted the thesis of de-ideologization of the communist party.¹⁷

In calling for the return to the class approach, Polozkov and others, were in effect calling for the reversal of many (if not all) major initiatives of perestroika. The class approach demanded the abandonment of political pluralism, the purge of those guilty of unorthodoxy, return

¹⁴See Izvestiia Ts.K. KPSS 7 (1990): 36-38.

¹⁵Pravda, 4 February, 1991, p. 3.

¹⁶Ivan Polozkov, "Za sotsialisticheskii kharakter perestroiki", [For the Socialist Character of Perestroika] Kommunist 2 (January 1991): 29.

¹⁷Pravda, 4 February, 1991, p. 3.

to central planning, and resumption of a more uncompromizing stance in international affairs.

Nonetheless, the return to class politics did not occur, and the reduction of communist ideology "to the level of other doctrines"¹⁸ has increasingly led to what Ralf Dahrendorf called the return of normal language to the communist world.¹⁹ It removed in some and reduced in others the ideological fog through which they saw the reality around them. Before the "new thinking", As Georgii Arbatov observed, the old thinking of the leaders as well as the masses "was thoroughly littered with ideology and the myths that ideology created."²⁰ Even more dramatically, if before there was only a functional diversification of the elite within the single unifying Marxist paradigm, the introduction of the "new thinking" allowed functional specialization to begin developing into interest group consciousness among the elites, mainly along the lines of their positions within national-economic power structure.

De-ideologizing foreign policy allowed the Soviet elite to obtain more truthful information about the world and the relative position of the USSR in it. The result was the

¹⁸Popov, The Russian People Speak, 17.

¹⁹ See Ralf Dahrendorf, Reflections on the Revolution in Europe: in a Letter Intended to Have Been Sent to a Gentleman in Warsaw (London: Chatto, 1990).

²⁰Georgii Arbatov, The System: An Insider's Life in Soviet Politics (New York: Times Books, 1992), 307.

creeping realization that "the two systems on the economic level -- ... the decisive, the most significant level -- this competition is not on our [Soviet] side."²¹ And it was the increasing perception of failure of the Soviet system to compete that prompted some members of the Soviet elite to ask two questions: 1) what is the true state of affairs in the economy and society at large, and 2) how did we get here?

An attempt to find an answer to the first question led to the official demand for more truthful information. Perestroika was the revolution from above and it goes without saying that "glasnost" would have scarcely been possible," without the "appreciable support in the corridors of power."²² In fact, in the first four years without attention at the highest levels of the CPSU, glasnost would have been smothered in its infancy. As Alexander Yakovlev noted,

...the turn toward glasnost was not inevitable in those years. It was dictated more by the philosophy of perestroika and its initiators than by immediate necessity. At that stage society would have supported even some fairly radical version of an administrative "perfection of socialism," strengthening the technocratic approach, as opposed to the Party-ideological approach for solving vital problems.²³

²¹The quote is that of a "high-level official in the Information Department of the Central Committee...." See Kull, Burying Lenin, 19.

²²Victor Sergeyev and Nikolai Biryukov, Russia's Road to Democracy: Parliament, Communism and Traditional Culture (Aldershot: Edward Elgar Publishing Limited, 1993), 86.

According to Gorbachev's assistant, Alexander Cherniaev, Gorbachev personally had to protect the editor of liberal Moscow News, Yegor Yakovlev, from the wrath of Yegor Ligachev, the Politburo member in charge of ideology. Reputedly, Gorbachev told Ligachev: "If the Propaganda Department of the CC refuses to work with him, it is the problem of the Department -- let them learn."²⁴

Within a short period of time, however, a torrent of data on social conditions became available to the elites and masses alike. From poor infant mortality and life expectancy rates to the dangerously high rates of abortion and alcoholism, the new revelations logically led everyone to ask the question: who is responsible?

Search for the answer to this question proved quite destructive to the communist regime. It was obvious enough that if the situation was as grim as the media portrayed it, then mistakes must have been made. But when were the mistakes made and who made them? Were these mistakes in particular policies or was the entire socialist project one big mistake? In the past, the approach of the new leadership was to vilify the old leadership. Thus, at first with

²³Alexander Yakovlev, The Fate of Marxism in Russia, translated by Catherine A. Fitzpatrick (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 104.

²⁴Alexander S. Cherniaev, Shest' let s Gorbachevym: Po dnevnikovym zapisiam [Six Years with Gorbachev: From Diary's Notes] (Moscow: Izdatel'skaya gruppa "Progress" "Kul'tura", 1993) 201.

Gorbachev, as with those preceding him, Brezhnev's rule was attacked with growing vehemence. In 1985 and 1986 a veritable purge of Brezhnev era officials took place. The system itself, though was pronounced sound; the mistakes were made at the latter stages of Brezhnev's rule. According to Shevardnadze, the fear of the Politburo (fully justified by subsequent events) was that to go further than that might lead to the "domino effect" of reconsideration and undermining of the entire Soviet history.²⁵

A dramatic change occurred in 1987. The formal vehicle of change became the January Plenum of the Central Committee, the main theme of which was "the deepening of socialist democracy." Disappointed with the slow results of perestroika, Gorbachev declared that to improve social conditions, "it is necessary to develop glasnost' still further."²⁶ In his view, "there cannot be in the Soviet society areas [that] are closed to criticism." Supporting his argument by a suitable quote from Lenin, Gorbachev announced: "Like never [before] we now need more light, in order for the party and the people to know everything, in order not to have dark corners."²⁷ Even more remarkable: "Nobody has the right on the truth in the last instance."²⁸

²⁵Shevardnadze, Moi vybor, 290.

²⁶M. S. Gorbachev, Izbrannye rechi i stat'i [Selected Speeches and Writings], vol.4 (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo politicheskoi literatury, 1987), 325.

²⁷Ibid., 326, 358.

In the February 11th speech to the leading members of the Soviet press the General Secretary admitted that there cannot be "forgotten names, white spots neither in history nor literature."²⁹

Gorbachev himself, however, resisted commenting on shortcomings of the system itself. For instance, as far as the evaluation of the past Soviet history was concerned, Gorbachev declared in February 1986 that "Stalinism is a notion invented by opponents of communism and is widely used to smear the Soviet Union and socialism as a whole."³⁰ It took some time for Gorbachev to identify the entire Soviet system with Stalin. This change of view does not appear to have come easy to him. There is no reason to doubt his sincerity, that "[i]n [nineteen] eighty five [he] still had the conviction that the system can be perfected."³¹ Nonetheless, by the summer of 1987, Gorbachev finally confessed to his aids that "Stalin is not just [the purge] of 1937. It is a system, in everything -- from the economy

²⁸ Idem, Perestroika i novoe myshlenie: dlia nashei strany i dlia vsego mira [Perestroika and the New Thinking: For our Country and the World] (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo politicheskoi literatury, 1987), 76.

²⁹ Idem, Izbrannye rechi i stat'i, 4: 373.

³⁰ Otvety M. S. Gorbacheva na voprosy gazety "Humanite", [The Answers of M. S. Gorbachev to the Questions of the Newspaper "Humanite"] Kommunist 3 (February 1986): 19.

³¹ M. S. Gorbachev, Dekabr'-91: moia pozitsia [December -91: My Position] (Moscow: Novosti, 1992), 140-141.

to [social] awareness."³² In public, however, it was not until November 1987 speech at the seventieth anniversary of the October Revolution and the subsequent rehabilitation of Nikolai Bukharin in early 1988 that the General Secretary finally crossed the de-Stalinization Rubicon.

Nonetheless, even though the official wholesale condemnation of Stalinism as a system was still at least a year away, in 1987 glasnost has fought some important preliminary skirmishes. The chief motivating factor was still mainly economic. Democratization sprang out from the attempts to overcome workers' alienation, "resolving the task on how to" to re-awake "the individual's [initiative] in the economy, production, politics,... in the spiritual life of the society."³³

The activation of the "human factor" was to shake the Soviet society out of stagnation. It is in the name of the liberation of the "human factor" that the first attacks on the foundations of the system itself took place. As identified by the Novosibirsk Paper in 1983, among the stifling elements of the system were

the revival of authoritarian management methods in all areas of social life which held back the development of essential human creativity; ... extremely heavy ideological pressure on all forms of spiritual life in society; and... the breakdown of public ethics and a deterioration in

³²Cherniaev, Shest' let, 165.

³³Ibid., 185.

people's social qualities.³⁴

On March 13, 1987, an article in Pravda argued that the "current malfunctioning of the system had roots in the October 1964 Plenum," which ended Khrushchev's de-stalinization.³⁵ Cautiously, others began to test the limits of glasnost' still further. In April of the same year, Stalin's leadership in the war and the interpretation of collectivization became the major issues.³⁶ One by one started appearing articles proclaiming superiority of the market economy, the economic and social necessity of unemployment and espousing other ideas that in the words of Gorbachev, "question our socialist choice."³⁷

Still, despite his obvious dislike for such ideas, he explained his position on glasnost' at the meeting of Politburo on April 30, 1987. He declared that "as long as other mechanisms of perestroika are not yet in operation, only Glasnost' is supporting the process [of perestroika]."³⁸ Glasnost', according to Gorbachev, was the

³⁴Tatyana Zaslavskaya, The Second Socialist Revolution: An Alternative Soviet Strategy, translated by Susan M. Davies and Jenny Warren (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 46.

³⁵Ben Eklof, Soviet Briefing, 54.

³⁶Ibid.

³⁷Cherniaev, Shest' let, 150.

³⁸Ibid., 151.

competition... of people (their talents, intellect, will, character, moral fiber, purposefulness).³⁹

The trickle by the end of 1987 turned into a torrent. Starting with the timid attacks on local officials, by early 1988, Glasnost' progressed from wider coverage of contemporary Soviet problems, to the discussion of yet mostly material aspects of administrative-command system, to the revision of Soviet history, complete condemnation of Stalinism, and finally, to the questioning of whether the entire Soviet experiment was necessary.

4.b)(1) Glasnost': An End to an Isolation of the Soviet People⁴⁰

During 1987, a new striking element of glasnost' appeared -- a more comparative approach to Soviet social and economic problems. The new approach included a more truthful reporting about the world, often making explicit comparisons on the state of selected areas of interest at home and abroad. Soviet TV began broadcasting unedited interviews with Western officials who often challenged the long-standing (and often internalized) Soviet propaganda. The space bridges, linking Soviet and foreign parliament members

³⁹Ibid., 185.

⁴⁰Reading Shevardnadze "between the lines", it appears that the end to the popular isolation was an unintended, though welcomed to reformers, result of new thinking. Shevardnadze, Moi vybor, 136.

as well as lay audiences in Soviet and Western cities, provided the Soviet citizens with uncensored, frequently unflattering "outsiders'" views of themselves.⁴¹

The result was that the International Demonstration Effect (IDE) appeared for the first time in the USSR.⁴² The myth of a more humane society was shattered. As Stephen Kotkin observed, even in the far outlying regions of the Soviet Union, "[p]revious images of the enemy -- unemployment, poverty, homelessness, racism, violent crime, political corruption, foreign interventionism -- were swept aside."⁴³ According to Magnitogorsk sociologist, Vladimir Ishimov,

Many Soviet citizens have long suspected that their living standards were far below those of the West, but it is another thing to have this suspicion confirmed with graphic reporting. Readers share a deep anger at having been deemed unworthy of knowing basic facts about their own lives and country and having been systematically lied to.⁴⁴

⁴¹Ellen Mickiewicz, "Changes in the Media Under Gorbachev: the Case of Television", in Gorbachev and Gorbachevism, ed. Walter Joyce, H. Ticktin, and Stephen White, (London: Cass, 1989), 38-39.

⁴²In an earlier chapter, I argued against Andrew Janos's view that IDE was instrumental in launching dramatic changes in Eastern Europe. Rather, it is clear that IDE was the result of these changes. For Janos's argument, see Andrew C. Janos, Politics and Paradigms: Changing Theories of Change in Social Sciences (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1986), 121-125.

⁴³Stephen Kotkin, Steeltown, USSR: Soviet Society in the Gorbachev Era (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 53.

⁴⁴Quoted in *Ibid.*, 74.

People were shocked to find out "not that their way of life was maybe inferior to the West's but just how inferior it seemed to be, materially and morally, despite all the struggle and sacrifice."⁴⁵

By 1989, hardly any area in the Soviet Union was "off limits" any more.⁴⁶ During 1988 and 1989 so much new historical information on the Communist party and the Soviet regime has been published in the Soviet press that the entire Soviet history seemed to be "full of repression, crime, deception, stagnation, and even treacherous foreign policy."⁴⁷ The effect of all the revelations on the Soviet public was not difficult to predict. Trust in the CPSU as the spokesperson of the people declined from 22 per cent of population in September 1989 to 4 per cent at the end of 1989.⁴⁸

4.c) Glasnost' and Collapse

The demoralizing effect of Glasnost' was indeed great, but what role did it play in the collapse of the USSR? The

⁴⁵Ibid., 75 (emphasis in the original).

⁴⁶See Alec Nove, Glasnost' in Action: Cultural Renaissance in Russia (Boston: Unwin Hyman, Inc., 1989).

⁴⁷Timo Vihavainen, "The Cultural and Moral Upheaval in Russia," in Change and Continuity in Eastern Europe, ed. Timo Piirainen (Aldershot: Dartmouth Publishing Company Limited, 1994), 81.

⁴⁸Yurii Levada, "Homo Sovieticus: A Rough Sketch," Moscow News, 18 March 1990, p. 11.

answer is that by itself, the policy of glasnost⁴⁹ would have not led to the disintegration of the Soviet Union or even the collapse of the discredited communist regime. The reason is that, although discrediting the Communist party elite proved to be relatively easy, at a deeper level the Soviet political culture appeared to be intact. As Sergeyev and Biryukov point out, "the socio-ontological models that constitute the basis of mass political consciousness" still prevailed.⁴⁹ As was demonstrated in chapter 1, the communist ideals were superimposed on the traditions of centuries-old patterns of Russian political behavior.⁵⁰ Thus, "[t]he change in political mentality was not as fundamental as it appeared, and the rupture,... with the communist ideals did not mean rupture with the communist political culture."⁵¹ One can go further and argue that there was not even a rupture with the communist ideals themselves. Such major elements of communist political culture as a paternalistic state/citizen relationship, egalitarianism and the preference of communal over private, resonate deep inside the traditional Russian political culture. The endurance of these ideals was revealed in the poll conducted in Moscow at the same time as the poll showing the dramatic drop in the

⁴⁹Sergeyev and Biryukov, Russia's Road to Democracy, 89.

⁵⁰See chapter 1, pp. 51-64.

⁵¹Sergeyev and Biryukov, Russia's Road to Democracy, 89.

popular trust of the CPSU. According to Moscow poll, 31 per cent of those surveyed were still in favor of "some kind of communist regime in the future", and only "18 per cent believed that it would have been better if Russia had been governed by a liberal, capitalist government for the last 40 years."⁵² In a poll, conducted less than a year earlier, 57 percent of the respondents blamed "past mistakes" for the economic difficulties, while again, only 18 percent thought the difficulties to be an inevitable consequence of the socialist economic system.⁵³

The results of the opinion polls are that much more striking, given the grotesque incongruency between the communist ideals and Soviet reality. By the end of the 1980s already, the widespread corruption of the nomenklatura was taken for granted. Even the communist press joined in the wholesale discreditation of the entire party elite throughout the history of its existence.⁵⁴ However, it was not just the party elite that was corrupt. For years, in their daily lives, many ordinary citizens have either participated in the shadow economy or had to come into contact with it. What was the systemic significance of this?

⁵²Vihavainen, "The Cultural and Moral Upheaval in Russia," 82.

⁵³Agitator 13 (July 1989): 60.

⁵⁴For instance, see Viktor Churilov, "Kogda poveriat partii" [When will the Party be Trusted?], Partiinaia zhizn' 17 (September 1991): 20-22.

Glasnost' dramatically revealed the full extent of the shadow economy. We have seen some official Soviet estimates of the illegal individual labour activities to run as high as 20 million people.⁵⁵ This number corresponds to 7 percent of the entire population. Let us assume that this figure was too low; let us double it. Now we have 14 percent of the population participating in the illegal activities. Let us assume now that all of these people have broken with communist ideals and became supporters of the free market. Let us further assume that the entire remaining 86 percent of the population was forced to deal with the above mentioned 14 percent. This would have made everyone a participant in the shadow economy. Does this mean that the remaining 86 percent were all believers in the free market economy? Certainly not. The opinion polls showed that only 18 percent believed that capitalist, free market social order would have been a better system for the country. The discrepancy in numbers would suggest that the participation in the shadow economy did not necessarily lead one to reject the ideals of the communist order.

The above deduction brings us back to the vital issue of legitimacy and one fundamental question. Did the revelations of glasnost' de-legitimize the Soviet order? The answer is: by itself it did not, at least not as far as the

⁵⁵Izvestiia, May 29, 1986.

general population was concerned. However, it did play an important role in creating a legitimacy deficit.

In chapter 1, it was argued that there are three levels of legitimacy in any political system. The first level concerns the rules according to which power is acquired. The second deals with the justifiability of those rules in terms of shared beliefs. And, finally, the third level of legitimacy "involves the demonstrable expression of consent on the part of the subordinate to the particular power relation in which they are involved, through actions which provide evidence of consent."³⁶ Each level of legitimacy has its own corresponding level of non-legitimacy.

4.c)(1) Three Levels of Non-Legitimacy

When the established rules of power acquisition are violated, it is said that the power relationship is illegitimate. To the extent that there is a discrepancy between the existing rules of power acquisition and the shared beliefs underpinning the rule, the system experiences a degree of legitimacy deficit. Finally, an observable withdrawal of consent by the subordinate allows us to speak of delegitimation of the power system.³⁷ The

³⁶The theoretical framework used in chapter 1 was borrowed from David Beetham. For this note, see David Beetham, The Legitimation of Power (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press International, Inc., 1991), 16-18.

³⁷Ibid., 16-19.

difference is not just in semantics. The concepts allow us to a) recognize the severity of the legitimation crisis, and b) better predict what might happen to the established power relation in a given system. The relationship between a form of a legitimate power, its corresponding non-legitimate power, and the manifestation of such non-legitimacy is summarized in Table 4.1.

If we look at table 4.1, it becomes clear that in the Soviet Union, glasnost by itself did not affect all levels of legitimacy of the communist regime. At the most, it operated at the second level of legitimacy. As we have seen above, many of the communist ideals (e.g. egalitarianism, communalism, etc.) have survived to the end of the Soviet

Table 4.1 The levels of legitimacy and non-legitimacy

Criteria of Legitimacy	Form of Non-legitimate Power	Manifestation of non-legitimacy
conformity to rules (legal validity)	illegitimacy (breach of rules)	Political and economic corruption, coup d'etat
justifiability of rules in terms of shared beliefs	legitimacy deficit (discrepancy between rules and supporting beliefs)	isolated issue-specific protests
legitimation through expressed consent	delegitimation (withdrawal of consent)	social instability

Source: David Beetham, The Legitimation of Power (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press International, Inc., 1991), 16-20.

Union and beyond. However, glasnost', by exposing the extent of official corruption, lies and elite/subject inequality exacerbated a legitimacy deficit. In other words, the belief in communist ideals did not change. Instead, everyone realized that the rules of the system, (particularly a sizable shadow economy and the official corruption) were very different from the beliefs, the discovery that put the justifiability of the newly discovered rules (and not the beliefs) into question.

David Beetham' analysis of legitimation problems in Great Britain is helpful in identifying the typical mistake of scholars studying the extent of legitimacy in a particular system. Beetham writes:

It is argued that the British electoral system... is losing its legitimacy, and to an extent therefore also weakening that of the governments elected under it. This is not because of any shift in people's beliefs, but because the rules have increasingly delivered results that diverge, both regionally and nationally,... from accepted notions about the representative purpose of elections in democracy. It is the increasingly unrepresentative character of the electoral system, and its consequent vulnerability to attack in a society that believes in representation, that is the basis for the weakening legitimacy of governments appointed under it⁵⁰ (emphasis added).

Similarly, in the Soviet Union glasnost' exposed the discrepancy between the beliefs and the rules by exposing the real rules of the game. Hence, the popularity of the campaign against the nomenklatura's privileges. People, however, still believed that everyone should be entitled to

⁵⁰Beetham, The Legitimation of Power, 11.

the same privileges; what glasnost' did was to drive home the extent of inequalities.

Although commentators such as Martin Malia have correctly identified that the growing discrepancy between the ideals and reality contributed to the Soviet demise, they often simply assert their conclusion rather than demonstrate it. By implicitly using Max Weber's definition of legitimacy as the belief in legitimacy, they reverse the arrow of causality. A hidden assumption is employed: if reality is too different from the ideals, then the ideals must change to fit the new reality. The possibility that people, in the face of a discrepancy between the ideal and the real, might choose to change reality or withdraw from it, is disregarded. The result in the end might be the same -- the demise of a political order. But even if the result is the same, the chain of events leading to it will likely be different. A wholesale change in a belief system will most likely bring a fundamental change in the rules of power.

On the other hand, if the belief system is largely intact, then the future of a system depends on the willful actions to bring rules in line with expectations. There is nothing inevitable though in the latter scenario. Inaction is just as possible. In fact, apathy and withdrawal is a frequent response to the worsening "real world". In other words, if the beliefs system is intact, specific actions

might either lead to or forestall the movement from the legitimacy deficit to the delegitimation.

For a system to suffer comprehensive unraveling, there must be delegitimation of its power relationships, involving public withdrawal of consent by "at least the most significant members among the subordinate...."⁵⁹ This takes the form of "[a]ctions ranging from non-cooperation and passive resistance to open disobedience and militant opposition on the part of those qualified to give consent."⁶⁰ Ultimately, of course, it is the general population that is qualified to give consent or withdraw it.

Despite highly publicized miners' strike and demonstrations in some central cities, the vast majority of the Soviet population remained passive. What is more damaging to the thesis of popular delegitimation of the existing regime was the fact that many strikes appeared to have occurred in defense of the old order, and the "proreform constituencies were too concentrated geographically...in large western Soviet cities."⁶¹

Short of a popular uprising, however, it is the people within the governing stratum itself that must have both an interest/desire and an opportunity to withdraw its consent

⁵⁹Ibid., 19.

⁶⁰Ibid.

⁶¹See Linda J. Cook, The Soviet Social Contract and Why It Failed: Welfare Policy and Workers' Politics from Brezhnev to Yel'tsin (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), 206.

to existing power relationship. Withdrawal of consent is a very serious matter, often eliciting a highly coercive reaction from the polity, whatever is the position of an "offender". Only when the cost of disobedience is perceived to be minimal, will the majority of stake-holders openly act on their interests. For the elites, however, the issue of consent is more complex than for the general population. Since they are the ones who create and enforce the rules, the lowering of the cost of disobedience can legitimately be interpreted as the creation of new rules rather than non-compliance with the old.

4.d) Elites and the Re-making of the Opportunity Structure

The truly destructive element of perestroika was not glasnost but the creation of economic and political free spaces for nomenklatura that made what looked like non-compliance with the old rules at first possible and then imperative for survival. As was just mentioned above, probably, more appropriately, this was not a non-compliance with the old rules, but compliance to the new ones, with the Soviet bureaucracy displaying an almost unnatural collective wisdom in the struggle to preserve its power. Uniquely, Gorbachev's reforms altered elites' economic and political opportunity structures. Devastatingly for the system, the leadership's actions that led to the creation of "free action spaces" were undertaken more or less simultaneously

in the economic and the political realm. The actions reinforced each other and led to the cascading unraveling of the Soviet state. Although, for analytical purposes, we will treat economic and political decision-making as separate realms, in most cases we will encounter political effects of economic decisions and vice versa.

4.e) Creation of Economic Space for Non-compliance

The first major step in that direction occurred at the end of 1987 during the preparation of the economic plans for 1988. From 1985 to 1987, there was a replay of Kosygin reforms. To loosen up the rigidity of central planning, a system of goszakazy was re-introduced. Goszakazy (or state orders) were supposed to cover only basic production. However, without radical price reform the shortages continued to be pervasive. Goszakazy then were stretched to include most of the industrial production. Goszakaz ceased to be identified with the reforms and instead indicated the continuation of rigid central planning. The system is best described by Alec Nove:

goszakaz came to cover the bulk of output, and management actively sought after goszakazy because they would then be more likely to receive allocated inputs. So both production planning and administered allocation continued to dominate.⁶² (emphasis in the original).

⁶²Alec Nove, An Economic History of the USSR: 1917-1991, new and final edition (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1992), 394-95.

It appears that originally the plan for 1988 was to lower the levels of goszakazy very slowly. The former politburo member, Yegor Ligachev, claims that the shift to contractual relations was to take slowly, given the fact that the system of resource allocation "was geared almost exclusively to centralized deliveries." Thus, for 1988 goszakazy were to be "lowered to 90 to 95 percent of the general volume of production...."⁶³ Only after the results of the experiment were studied, would the ratio of goszakazy to contractual relations have been lowered still further, with contractual relations allowed to extend to the wider range of industrial production. Ligachev calls this approach the "tactic of great trials and small errors."⁶⁴ The plan for a gradual shift from the rigid planning to some sort of the market mechanism was put forward by the Chairman of the Council of Ministers, Nikolai Ryzhkov.⁶⁵ Throughout 1987, Gorbachev himself appeared to have supported the idea of gradual transformation. He thought that, "it will take two-three years to prepare the price reform, [and the reform of] financial-credit mechanism, [and that it would take] five-six years to shift to a wholesale [free] trade in the means

⁶³Yegor Ligachev, Inside Gorbachev's Kremlin, translated by Catherine A. Fitzpatrick, Michele A. Berdy, and Dobrochna Dyrz-Freeman (New York: Pantheon Books, 1993), 340.

⁶⁴Ibid.

⁶⁵Nikolai Ryzhkov, Perestroika: Istoria predatel'stv [Perestroika: A History of Betrayals] (Moscow: Novosti, 1992), 165-167.

of production."⁶⁶ Schematically, the transformation was to take place from pattern 1 to pattern 2, as shown in Figure 4.1.

Fig. 4.1. From Vertical to Horizontal Ties

Unexpectedly though, at the end of 1987, the plan was rejected in its entirety at a stormy meeting of the Politburo. Dramatically, Gorbachev changed his mind.⁶⁷ The goszakazy for many sectors were slashed by one-third, with some industries losing as much as fifty percent of the state orders.⁶⁸

⁶⁶Gorbachev, Perestroika i novoe myshlenie, 86.

⁶⁷There is a real possibility that Gorbachev changed his mind much earlier and that the late 1987 announcement was chosen for tactical reasons. Cherniaev, for instance describes a meeting on June 20th of that year during which Gorbachev supported the views of Vadim Medvedev (with Yakovlev's approval) against a more cautious approach advanced by Ryzhkov. See Cherniaev, Shest' let, 163-164. If true, Ligachev's account of his own surprise at Gorbachev's (together with Medvedev and Yakovlev) position at the fateful politburo meeting cannot be taken at face value. See Ligachev, Inside Gorbachev's Kremlin, 341-343. It is possible, however, that Ligachev read Gorbachev's Perestroika in early October and concluded from it that Gorbachev will prefer to err on the side of caution.

⁶⁸Ligachev, Inside Gorbachev's Kremlin, 345.

The economic effect was felt immediately. In a highly monopolistic environment, without price reform, market infrastructure or any direct horizontal ties between the enterprises, the result was skyrocketing prices for the products in high demand, shortages of spare parts and other raw materials, removal of unprofitable goods from production, tremendous rise in wages and savings, and the worst consumer shortages in the post-WWII Soviet history.⁶⁹

Corporate elites -- captains of industry and directors of collective and state farms -- gave up whatever concern they might have had for increasing industrial and agricultural output and set to expanding their own privileges and engaging in "wild privatization". This prikhvatization, as it has been popularly styled..., was accompanied by the deterioration of established ties and by a resulting decrease in output.⁷⁰

The situation was exacerbated by the introduction of republican khozraschyot which linked republican "finances more closely with the functioning of 'their' enterprises."⁷¹

⁶⁹Most likely, the "go slow" approach in market introduction, advocated by the more conservative members of the leadership would have failed too, since the conservatives were the most ardent opponents of unpopular price increases. Without the meaningful price reform, the creation of the market mechanism, slowly or otherwise, was impossible. See Nove, An Economic History, 406-407.

⁷⁰Sergeyev and Biryukov, Russia's Road to Democracy, 203.

⁷¹Nove, An Economic History of the USSR, 401.

4.e)(1) Political "Side-Effects"

The most important effect of partial economic changes was political. This was the first major step in the process of balkanization of the Soviet Union. The Center was weakened. No longer being guaranteed the necessary resources by the Plan's allocation, all along the economic hierarchy of the USSR, the monopolistic republics, regions and the enterprises scrambled to find suppliers. In the system of widespread shortages and meaningless prices, financial resources did not mean much. Gorbachev's intent was to promote contractual relations, not barter deals. Instead, the only way to secure the necessary goods was to enter into barter arrangements with suppliers. Proliferating barter arrangements can only be described as fragmentation and feudalization of the economic space. Feudalization of economic arrangements, however, served to strengthen the power bases of local bosses. Without the rigid Central Plan, the party lost an extremely important control tool over the local officials. In the past, the non-fulfillment of plan directives, or even attempts to negotiate plan "downwards", could result in the criminal prosecution. Now, there was less and less plan to be fulfilled.

Secondly, what used to be one of the cardinal sins that one could be accused of, mestnichestvo (localism), now became a defense in the name of achieving local

khozraschyot. Furthermore, in that same name of financial self-sufficiency, one could now legitimately demand even greater economic autonomy for the local decision-making.

Nonetheless, these processes were still reversible (and the ones like republican separatism, preventable). All the levers of administrative control were intact and could have been set in motion again had the leadership, and most of all Gorbachev, so desired. First and foremost, the machinery of the central party apparat was still there, immobilized by the orders from above, but growing more impatient as the situation in the country was getting worse. It was impossible to ignore the colossal potential power of the apparat, and few did. Even one of the future leaders of the democrats, Anatoly Sobchak, who was not until then a member of the CPSU, decided in the summer of 1988 to apply for membership. Whatever one thinks of morality of such a move, one has to agree with Sobchak's assessment of the power game. He saw "that CPSU... [was] not [simply] a political party, but a state structure, penetrating all cells of the country's social organism."⁷² There was also no separate economic realm. Instead, there continued to be the politics of economics, or more precisely, the party politics of economics.

⁷²Anatoly Sobchak, Khozhdenie vo vlast': Rasskaz o rozhdenii parlamenta [Entrance into the Power Game: A Story on the Birth of Parliament] (Moscow: Novosti, 1991), 9.

Gorbachev saw this clearly. His predecessors saw it too. In fact, the party's interference in the economic management was condemned as a negative phenomenon under virtually every Soviet leader. The economic and administrative literature of the Brezhnev period is full of references to podmena, "a tendency on the part of the CPSU organs and officials to usurp the functions and authority of the state,... [and] deal with matters that are properly the province of the state or economic management."⁷³ Gorbachev returned to this topic in his book, Perestroika. In it he declared the necessity to cut and simplify the functions of the central apparat. The "center was overburdened with minutia." It had to be freed "from the operational work" to concentrate on "strategic issues."⁷⁴

4.e)(2) De-coupling the Party-State

It was not until the XIX Party Conference, however, that Gorbachev disclosed what was it that he had in mind. He pronounced that the functions of the party and the state must be very clearly delineated, with Communist party restricted to the role of the political vanguard⁷⁵. Almost

⁷³Ronald J. Hill and Peter Frank, 2d ed., The Soviet Communist Party (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1983), 118-119.

⁷⁴Gorbachev, Perestroika i novoe myshlenie, 87.

⁷⁵Materialy XIX Vsesoyuznoi konferentsii Kommunisticheskoi partii Sovetskogo Soyuza [Documents of the

immediately after the conference, the party apparat was drastically reduced in size and totally re-organized. Instead of twenty six departments, the Central Committee was re-organized into six broad Commissions.⁷⁶ For our purposes, the most dramatic change was the abolition of all specifically economic departments of the Central Committee, with the exception of the Agrarian Policy Department.⁷⁷ In effect, the re-organization meant a de-facto abolition of the Secretariat. According to Yegor Ligachev, who as a Second Secretary usually chaired Secretariat's meetings, the "commissions were established, and the Secretariat's meetings simply ended of their own accord."⁷⁸

The consequences of the re-organization and the de facto abolition of the Secretariat proved disastrous for the structure and authority of power relations everywhere. As was shown in Chapter 3, throughout the existence of the Soviet Union, the party-state was a single organic whole. At least since 1930, the party committees at all levels of the

XIX all-Union Conference of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union] (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo politicheskoi literatury, 1988), 38, 80, 118.

⁷⁶Tsentral'nyi Komitet KPSS, "Ob obrazovanii Komissii TsK KPSS i reorganizatsii apparata TsK KPSS v svete Reshenii XIX Vsesoiuznoi Partiinoi Konferentsii," [On Creation of the Commissions of the CC of the CPSU and the Reorganization of the Apparatus of the CC of the CPSU in Light of the Decision Made at the XIX All-Union Party Conference] Kommunist 15 (October 1988): 3-4.

⁷⁷Graeme Gill, The Collapse of a Single Party System: The Disintegration of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 72-73.

⁷⁸Ligachev, Inside Gorbachev's Kremlin, 109-10.

Union contained economic departments for supervision of practically all aspects of economic life.⁷⁹ To attempt to separate the two was metaphorically equivalent to separating Siamese twins sharing a single nervous system. As Cherniaev pointed out, "[b]efore (and for a long time!) without a decision by the Central Committee (in fact, Politburo) no major action was initiated or continued." For decades, the state structures "were conditioned to be either a decoration [for the party decisions] or faithful executors [of the party policies]."⁸⁰ As a result of attempted separation, "[o]bcoms, raikoms, [local] party organizations in confusion did not know what they should do: 'all [their] life' they... they managed the economy and commanded the [state] administration...."⁸¹

Although, for a while longer, things continued along the old way out of inertia, for all practical purposes, the central authority was crippled. Given the regional monopolistic nature of economic development and the absence of well established horizontal ties between the enterprises as well as the regions, cutting the vertical ties first balkanized republics vis-à-vis the center. The same centrifugal force then continued to work itself down, in

⁷⁹Leonard Schapiro, The Communist Party of the Soviet Union, 2d. ed., revised and enlarged (Fakenham: University Paperbacks, Methuen & Co Ltd., 1970), 652.

⁸⁰Cherniaev, Shest' let, 240.

⁸¹Ibid.; also, Ligachev, Inside Gorbachev's Kremlin, 110.

some cases to the level of the municipalities. Many republics and regions outlawed the delivery of any locally produced goods to other areas."² For instance, in Moscow, at one point the city officials tried to prevent the "transients" from buying consumer goods in Moscow's stores."³

Since the economic decision-making on many issues was transferred to the republics, the focus of political action also shifted to the republican level. As the locus of resource control shifted away from the center, it simply made more sense for the local officials to participate in local politics with greater vigor. Establishing horizontal networks and alliances began to take precedence over the maintenance of periphery-center patron-client relationships. The initial process of establishing the basis for local separatism has begun.

4.f) Creation of Political Space for non-compliance

Nonetheless, the party officials still had some recourse. Since they were still responsible for cadres, they could appoint and fire whoever they wished to. As long as there was no alternative to the party controlled

²Oleg Shenin, "Trevogi nashi i nadezhdy" [Our Anxieties and Hopes], Partiinaja zhizn' 13 (June 1991): 6.

³On the controversy surrounding Moscow's decision, see Moscow News, 24 June-1 July, 1990, p. 10.

appointments system, individual economic prosperity still depended on deference to the Party. With the elimination of both the goszakazy and the micro-economic oversight, the range of non-punishable behavior has greatly increased for the economic elites. However, even though the scope of control has shrunked, the principle of control remained unchanged. The very ability to earn a livelihood still depended on belonging to the party controlled nomenklatura.

4.f)(1) The "New" Politics

It is in that area where the next blow to the system came. It involved another decision made at the XIX Party Conference, namely, to empower the Supreme Soviets at all levels of the Union and allow contested elections for those bodies to take place. The campaign and then the election of people not sanctioned by the party struck at the core of the patron-client relationship.⁸⁴ As John Willerton observed, "[t]he decentralization of decision making and the democratization of the political process [were] fundamentally altering the traditional Soviet opportunity structure and the behavior of Soviet politicians."⁸⁵ It became possible to be expelled from the party or leave it

⁸⁴For the classic study of the Soviet system of patron-client relationships, see Jerry F. Hough, The Soviet Prefects (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1969).

⁸⁵John P. Willerton, Patronage and Politics in the USSR (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 229.

and still survive economically and politically. "Newly independent party, government, and parliamentary institutions [became] alternative career channels through which politicians [could] rise."⁶⁶ This was quickly understood by the more astute politicians. Shortly after his election to the Supreme Soviet, Boris Yel'tsin declared that whether "[t]he decision of the October [1987] Plenum is repealed or not, [simply] does not matter any longer."⁶⁷ In 1987, Gorbachev drove Yel'tsin out of politics. Without Gorbachev's political reforms introduced a little later, Yel'tsin would have found it virtually impossible to come back.

4.g) Elite Opportunity Structure and Republican Secession

However, the most damaging effect of the creation of alternative political career channels was on the territorial integrity of the USSR. The "new" politics came on top of the earlier introduced republican khozraschet, and the result was cumulative and destructive.

Republican khozraschet was introduced in 1987. The original intention was to transfer "more powers to the republics, linking their own finances more closely with the

⁶⁶Ibid.

⁶⁷Boris Yel'tsin, Ispoved' na zadannuiu temu [Confession on a Given Subject] (Riga: Izdatel'stvo "Rukitis, 1990), 161. The October 1987 Central Committee Plenum removed Yel'tsin from political leadership.

functioning of 'their' enterprises."⁸⁸ As the economic dislocation gathered momentum and the shortages became more acute, the newly elected leadership of many republics saw an opportunity to further solidify their power bases. In every republic, there were national grievances. With the exception of the Baltics, however, they were not originally geared towards the separation from the Union. For instance, according to an opinion poll conducted in late 1989, more Ukrainians were concerned about the unity of the USSR than political independence for Ukraine. Political independence was the main preoccupation of only 20.6 percent of Ukrainians.⁸⁹

However, as the economic situation worsened and the public discontent increased, to retain their power the former elites responded in the manner the politicians everywhere are prone to do. All the blame for the local misfortune was shifted to an outside agent, in this case the Union. It was argued that to reach their full economic potential, the republics had to have their "fair" share of the Union resources. The strategy is an old one: unite the opposition under one's leadership against an external foe. With the deteriorating economy, it was relatively easy to effect the merger of the ethnic grievances with economic anxieties. To summarize:

The republican elites, which had formed as

⁸⁸Nove, An Economic History of the USSR, 401.

⁸⁹Ogonek, no. 43 (October 1989): 4-5.

far back as the times of "stagnation", found themselves under growing pressure from democratic and nationalist movements and felt that their only chance of survival lay in "hi-jacking" the nationalist slogans and promoting "sovereignization": in independent states they might still hope to retain their power by endeavoring to draw on the conservative political culture of the bulk of the population.⁹⁰

Schematically, the process of coalition building between members of the polity with the challengers such as nationalists, is best described using Charles Tilly's "Polity Model"⁹¹ (Fig. 4.2). According to Tilly, the "normal" politics is conducted when nearly all of the collective action within the polity is limited to the government and members of that polity. The members may or may not be tightly controlled by the government, but even where they are not (as is the case with the non-governing opposition parties in the West), they all have a relatively easy access to resources such as regular consultation with the government, advantageous tax status and media coverage. Whether or not challengers are officially persecuted, they have none of the benefits that accrue to the government or the members of the polity and are thus relegated to the margins of the political process. As long as such pattern

⁹⁰Sergeyev and Biryukov, Russia's Road to Democracy, 180.

⁹¹The italicised terms are Tilly's. "A member is any contender which has routine, low-cost access to resources controlled by the government; a challenger is any other contender." See Tilly, From Mobilization to Revolution (Reading, Ma: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, Inc., 1978), 52.

remains, the political system is unlikely to undergo a major restructuring. However, if for whatever reason, the government or member of a polity begin to form coalitions with the challengers, then a fundamental change becomes a real possibility.⁹²

Fig. 4.2. The Pattern of Coalition Making (Tilly's Model)

Source: Charles Tilly, From Mobilization to Revolution (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1978), 52-53.

⁹² Ibid., 52-54.

In the USSR, reforms first have legitimized local challengers, then allowed them to enter institutions (such as local Soviets), formally restricted to the members. As the struggle for power intensified while the economic situation deteriorated, practically in all republics, the economic interests of the former communist elites were restated as national interests of the local people. Overnight, political opportunism catapulted the former Party apparatchiks such as Kravchuk, Shushkevich, Nazarbayev and Yel'tsin into the national leaders of their respective republics. Thus, whatever was the original intention of granting the republican khozraschet in 1987, "in and after 1990", this measure "gave an [important] impetus to republican separatism...."⁹³

4.g)(1) Secession of Russia and the Break-up of the USSR

It is common to speak of the collapse of the Soviet multinational empire. This clearly implies the rebellion against the dominant Soviet nationality, the Russians. Yet, with the exception of the Baltic republics, the reverse seems to be true. By 1990, many members of Russian cultural and political elites began to complain openly of Russia's second-class status within the old Soviet Union. Even the

⁹³Nove, An Economic History of the USSR, 401.

official Soviet internationalism was explicitly identified as anti-Russian.⁹⁴

Ultimately, it was Russia that in the words of Andranik Migranian, planted the bomb "under the USSR by the declaration of Russian sovereignty...." Yel'tsin consolidated his position in Russia by counterpoising the economic interests of Russia against the Center, by presenting Russia as an economic loser of the Soviet Union. In the speech announcing the sovereignty of Russia, Yel'tsin declared that "[t]here can be no reconciling with a situation where in labor productivity the republic finds itself in the third place in the country, and in ratio in of expenditure for social needs is 15th and last." The only way out was to ensure "the real sovereignty of Russia on equal terms with the Union republics."⁹⁵ Even more revealing of Yel'tsin's intentions was his speech before the Supreme Soviet of Latvia, on August 3 1990.

We think that we must move towards the development of the horizontal ties. [We] must destroy this vertical rigid pivot. [We must] destroy [the rod]... and move on to direct ties of free, sovereign, [and] independent states.⁹⁶

⁹⁴Oktiabr', no.3 (1990): 144.

⁹⁵Boris Yel'tsin, "Speech to the Russian Federation Congress of People's Deputies, Moscow, May 22, 1990," in The Soviet System: From Crisis to Collapse, revised edition, ed. Alexander Dallin and Gail W. Lapidus (Boulder: Westview Press, Inc., 1995), 410.

⁹⁶M. K. Gorshkov, ed., Gorbachev-El'tsin: 1500 dnei politicheskogo protivostoianiia [Gorbachev-Yel'tsin: 1500 Days of Political Struggle] (Moscow: Izdatel'skii tsentr "TERRA", 1992), 223.

Secession of Russia made the secession of other republics possible.⁹⁷ The Union without Russia was a meaningless concept.

4.g)(2) A (Working) Summary

The collapse of the Soviet regime did not happen because of the popular deligitimation of the existing order. Rather, throughout most of the above changes, the Soviet population remained on the sidelines, while razmezhivanie⁹⁸ of the elites was taking place. There is every reason to agree with Anatoly Dobrynin's statement that

[t]he roots of the demise of the Soviet union must be found mainly at home,... in our incompetent but highly ambitious leaders, and in unbelievably quick chain of domestic events in which the great majority did not participate and still does not really understand.⁹⁹ (emphasis added).

⁹⁷For an English translation of Republics' declarations of sovereignty and other documents pertaining to the national question, see Charles F. Furtado, jr., and Andrea Chandler, eds., Perestroika in the Soviet Republics: Documents on the National Question (Boulder: Westview Press, Inc., 1992).

⁹⁸Although in recent literature on Russia written in Russian, this word often specifically refers to the demarcation of boundaries between ethnic groups, in general, razmezhevanie means only "to establish a boundary." It can be and is widely employed in contexts unconnected to the issue of ethnic relations. In the context of this chapter, it denotes the establishment of various barriers between the elites in place of prior relative permeability of the elites' milieu.

⁹⁹Anatoly Dobrynin, In Confidence: Moscow's Ambassador to America's Six Cold War Presidents (1962-1986) (New York: Times Books, 1995), 615.

To repeat what was said earlier about legitimacy of the old order (see Table 4.1), the bulk of the population never moved beyond the issue-specific protests, corresponding to Beetham's second level of non-legitimacy.¹⁰⁰

Simply put, the collapse of the USSR occurred because the central leadership rewrote the rules of the power game for the elites. In a sense, the center affected the coup d'état against itself. The main reason why the coup was relatively peaceful was due to the fact that a great proportion of the nomenklatura had enough time to adjust to the new rules and to retain their power. The process is best summarized by Nikolai Popov:

[t]he younger nomenklatura, backbone of the system, ... started to move first to make the necessary arrangements to retain their real power within the new conditions of an inevitable market economy instead of engaging in a senseless struggle with liberal democrats. While the democrats were struggling at street rallies and congresses with the rearguard of fanatical communists, the nomenklatura was exchanging its party chairs for seats in the Soviets, in the parliaments, and better still in the new business structures. They were creating foundations, commodity exchanges, joint stock companies, while they were privatizing state and party property and securing a grip on the real economic power.¹⁰¹

¹⁰⁰Beetham, The Legitimation of Power, 11-12.

¹⁰¹Popov, The Russian People Speak, 23-24.

4.h) Gorbachev's Successful Inactions

This brings us to a point often overlooked by the analysts trying to elucidate the reasons for Soviet collapse. The focus is frequently either on the steps taken by the Gorbachev to facilitate the collapse, or on the opportunities he missed to make perestroika successful.¹⁰²

At the same time, we are all impressed by the fact that the Soviet Union imploded rather than exploded. It is proposed that to a great extent this is the result of what was not done by Gorbachev.

Paradoxically as it may sound, Gorbachev secured enough time for the centrifugal processes to reach the point of irreversibility. The fact that there was enough time for the process of relatively peaceful re-arrangement of the opportunity structure for the elites to occur is probably the biggest accomplishment of Gorbachev. What is it that Gorbachev did not do? First, when the changes brought about by perestroika began to go out of control, he did not re-assert the party control. Secondly, he did not use force on a massive scale.

¹⁰²This is particularly true in the case of many Russian writers. For instance, see Abalkin, Ne ispol'zovannyi shans; Arbatov, The System; Sobchak, Khozhdenie vo vlast'.

4.h)(1) Keeping the Party at Bay

It appears that by 1989, Gorbachev no longer had a vision for the future. The Economic situation was getting worse, glasnost' began to move from de-stalinization to de-Leninization, and tensions between the Center and the Republics began to mount. As difficulties increased, the pressure from the Party apparat to revert to old structures of control as well as to use force grew ever so stronger.

At a meeting of first secretaries of republican Central Committees, kraikoms and obkoms held in July 1989, many of Gorbachev's policies were subjected to a withering criticism.¹⁰³ However, in the long-standing Bolshevik tradition no one dared to criticize or challenge the General Secretary directly. The old party discipline and fear of raskol was very difficult to shake. Gorbachev's assistant, Cherniaev, describes an incident which occurred at one of the Politburo meetings, soon after the XIXth Party Conference. Reputedly, during yet another round of complaints from his colleagues, Gorbachev exploded:

Why do you always [try] to scare me, Yegor [Ligachev]? Why do you always stick under my nose: there, [do you] see what your Perestroika has led to?.... But I was and will be for Perestroika.... [However,] [i]f you think that I am doing something wrong, please let us go into the next room,... and I will resign. Immediately!¹⁰⁴

¹⁰³Gill, The Collapse of a Single-Party System, 87-88.

¹⁰⁴Cherniaev, Shest' let, 250.

Despite the fact that the majority of Politburo members at the time were more conservative than Gorbachev, and would have had no difficulty in outvoting Gorbachev and his supporters in a straight vote, they did not dare to take advantage of this momentary opportunity.

In addition, there simply was no guarantee that the General Secretary would submit to the Politburo decision. In the final analysis, until the very end of the USSR there was no foolproof mechanism for removing the General Secretary, save brute force. Although, some often point out the precedent of Nikita Khrushchev's removal as a result of the Politburo vote in 1964, it is worth remembering that when a similar attempt was made in 1957, Khrushchev refused to resign. Shortly afterwards, all of the conspirators were removed from their posts.¹⁰⁵

Ironically, under Gorbachev the more conservative members of the leadership, while potentially constituting the biggest threat to the reformers, found it more difficult to shake off the old Party tradition of submission to the will of the General Secretary. As long as he was there, very little could have been done without his consent.

As we have seen, Gorbachev's actions have paralyzed the apparat. He emasculated the Secretariat to the point that it ceased to exist in all but a name.¹⁰⁶ As long as he

¹⁰⁵ John Owenhardt, James R. Ozinga and Erik van Ree, The Rise and Fall of the Soviet Politburo (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992), 51-52.

remained a General Secretary and continued to be opposed to even partial return to the old methods of control, he acted as a "dam" in the way of apparat's initiative.

It appears that Gorbachev realized this himself. After his resignation as the President of the Soviet Union in December 1991, he stated that

...knowing the might of the party, I understood: if I leave the post of the Gensek, then the reactionaries will prevail.... By the way, here is an explanation why I did not bid farewell to the post of the Gensek....¹⁰⁷

There is no doubt, that there was more to Gorbachev's decision to stay on until the bitter end, than the simple intention to mark time, or to act as a dam blocking the actions of the party. Otherwise, the above quote can be interpreted as an indication of his conspiracy against the party.¹⁰⁸ He clearly had no intention to play the role of a martyr. To the contrary, Gorbachev was clearly hoping that he would be able to reconstruct the party in a more democratic fashion. He did not want to abandon the party, "because this process [of reforms] was born inside the party, and in the party there were many people, who accepted

¹⁰⁶The Secretariat resumed its regular meetings after the 28th Party Congress in the Summer of 1990. By that time the Balkanization of the country has reached a new stage with some republican parties declaring their independence from the CPSU.

¹⁰⁷Gorbachev, Dekabr'-91, 142-43.

¹⁰⁸Ligachev goes as far as to suggest that "getting rid of the Secretariat's meeting was a premeditated ploy [against the party]." See Ligachev, Inside Gorbachev's Kremlin, 111.

the reforms."¹⁰⁹ Also, time and again Gorbachev stressed his dedication to the "socialist choice." And even after the obvious culpability of the apparat in the abortive coup attempt, the General Secretary was still hoping to salvage the party and his leadership of it. Only under an intense pressure did Gorbachev, through the Supreme Soviet "suspend the activity of the CPSU all over the territory of the Soviet Union."¹¹⁰

However irreconcilable might have been Gorbachev's motives¹¹¹, he was nonetheless fully aware that "[p]olitical struggle has become particularly tough, when perestroika approached the decisive stage -- redistribution of power and property on a democratic basis."¹¹² Even if we allow that perestroika by that time has become a destroika of the Soviet system, the political struggle was intense. Gorbachev

¹⁰⁹Ibid., 142.

¹¹⁰Gill, The Collapse of a Single-Party System, 175.

¹¹¹Janice Gross Stein has argued persuasively that Gorbachev's ability to come up with "new thinking" was due to his "higher level of cognitive complexity", which allows the decision-maker to make "new or subtle distinctions when confronted with new information." See Janice Gross Stein, "Political Learning by Doing: Gorbachev as Uncommitted Thinker and Motivated Learner," in Richard Ned Lebow and Thomas Risse-Kappen, eds., International Relations Theory and the End of the Cold War (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 235, 232. However, there is an obvious downside to such high level of cognitive complexity. The more complex is the decision-making, the greater is the risk of attempting to reconcile irreconcilable information, and indulge in a wishful thinking. Sometimes, things are much simpler than they appear.

¹¹²Gorbachev-Yel'tsin: 1500 dnei politicheskogo, 316.

is certainly correct in stating at the end of 1991 that "only one and a half to two years ago, the party could take everything back in its hands without any discussions. On her side was the army, the military-industrial complex, the cadres, everything."¹¹³ This is the key. Had Gorbachev succumbed to the pressure of the "democrats" and relinquished the post of the General Secretary in 1989, perestroika would have been curtailed by the new party leadership, using at least some repression. Had he done so in 1990, the most likely result would have been a civil war.

4.h)(2) Gorbachev and the Use of Force

Equally as important was that Gorbachev, while standing by the party until the end, steadfastly refused to use the full might of Soviet coercive apparatus against his political opponents, even under the pretext of restoring law and order in a state rapidly disintegrating into chaos. It is more than probable, that under similar circumstances, another leader would have had much less hesitation in using force. As far back as February 1988, Ligachev, supported by the majority of the politburo members, argued that "it is time to use force"¹¹⁴, to restore order...."¹¹⁵ Gorbachev,

¹¹³Gorbachev, Dekabr'-91, 147.

¹¹⁴The Russian expression used by Ligachev was upotrebit' vlast'. Although it sounds more delicate in Russian than the more direct upotrebit' silu, the meaning is the same.

however, refused. On paper, by the Spring 1991, he amassed almost dictatorial powers. But again, he did not use them. He frequently criticized the "excesses" of the liberal press, but none of the "offending" publications were ever closed down.

Similarly, Gorbachev threatened to use force; there were widely publicized troop movements. In the end, however, he inevitably backed down. Even if he was involved in the crackdown in Tbilisi, and in Lithuania,¹¹⁶ this was only a tiny fraction of power that was at his disposal. As the events in August 1991 showed, by that time the unity of the coercive apparatus was gone. However, in 1988, 1989, and even 1990, repression could have been used and would have been used, had Gorbachev so wished. Instead, he never went beyond verbal threats and a short-lived economic blockade of Lithuania.

Why did Gorbachev refuse to use force? Some have suggested that he was simply indecisive.¹¹⁷ Others,

¹¹⁵Cherniaev, Shest' let, 250. Yel'tsin, of course, did not hesitate to use massive force neither in Moscow in 1993, nor in Chechnia in 1995.

¹¹⁶Gorbachev denies his involvement, whereas Ryzhkov argues that Gorbachev must have known. On the other hand, Sobchak, the Chairman of the Supreme Soviet Commission that investigated the Tbilissi Affair, implicates Ligachev. See Ryzhkov, Istoriia predatel'stv, 217; Sobchak, Khozhdenie vo vlast', 101. All the evidence, however, is circumstantial. Until the relevant Party documents, if they exist, become public, the true picture will remain the matter of conjecture.

¹¹⁷For instance, Soviet historian Michail Gefter considers indecisiveness to be Gorbachev's fatal flaw. See

including even those who would have preferred him to use force, claim that he was anything but indecisive. Thus, Ligachev recalls that "[o]ne rarely heard Gorbachev called a weak-willed man, nor is he...."¹¹⁸ Ryzhkov echoes: "People [who] do not know Gorbachev well might... consider him indecisive."¹¹⁹

May be the answer to Gorbachev's enigma lies in the General Secretary's own statement:

My firm opinion is that problems can be resolved only by constitutional means. This is a source of weakness.... The weakness lies in the fact that, when people abuse [democratic] rights, it is very difficult to resort to the use of force, even if it were legitimate and justified. This is the specific nature of the process of perestroika as a whole. ...After all, in our country everything was always decided ultimately by force.¹²⁰ (emphasis added).

It is possible that Gorbachev was suffering from what might be called a "post-totalitarian syndrome". Those who initiate

Andrei Karaulov, Vokrug Kremliia: Kniga politicheskikh dialogov [Around Kremlin: A Book of Political Dialogues] (Moscow: Novosti, 1990), 456. Similarly, Gorbachev's assistant, Vladimir Yegorov, stated: "However much a supporter of democracy a man may be it has to be admitted that to carry out profound reforms you need a strong will and a steadfast character.... In practice Michail Gorbachev either did not possess these qualities or deliberately suppressed them in himself...." See Vladimir K. Yegorov, Out of a Dead End Into the Unknown: Notes on Gorbachev's Perestroika, translated by David Floyd (Carol Stream, Ill.: Edition q, inc., 1993), 141-42.

¹¹⁸Ligachev, Inside Gorbachev's Kremlin, 342.

¹¹⁹Ryzhkov, Perestroika: istoriia predatel'stv, 365.

¹²⁰M. S. Gorbachev, The August Coup: The Truth and the Lessons (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, Inc., 1991), 99-100.

reforms after long years of oppression, often find it very difficult to justify to themselves the need for renewed repression. There is a Talmudic saying: "If you are merciful when you have to be cruel, you will be cruel when you have to be merciful." If one can apply this saying to the Soviet political system as a whole and then reverse it, one arrives at Gorbachev's dilemma and his tragedy. The Soviet system was cruel for a long time; this was one of its principle features. To stay as a reformer, whether out of conviction or vanity, Gorbachev had to overcompensate in the other direction.

4.i) Conclusion

In the end, whatever were the factors that motivated Gorbachev, the combination of his actions and strategic inactions destabilized the Soviet system and eventually led to its collapse. First, glasnost and the new thinking helped lift the ideological fog, making subsequent official deviations from Marxism-Leninism possible.

Then, substantial weakening of vertical economic ties, re-organization of the Communist Party apparatus and the subsequent weakening of vertical political ties amongst the elites, and the introduction of "new politics" through the re-invigorated state bodies, fundamentally changed the elite economic and political opportunity structures. When the resultant centrifugal forces threatened to move out of

control, Gorbachev refused to go back to the old structures or to use massive force. Ultimately, the regime, undermined at its foundations and blocked from defending itself, collapsed.

5. Gorbachev, USSR Collapse and a (Tentative) Why?

Soviet socialist democracy is not in the least incompatible with individual rule and dictatorship. The will of a class may sometimes be carried out by a dictator who can sometimes do more all by himself and who is frequently more essential.

V. I. Lenin, Polnoe sobranie sochinenii

In the previous chapter we have analyzed some of Gorbachev's major decisions that led to the unraveling of the Soviet Union. We have also briefly touched upon the issue of Gorbachev's intentions in pursuing those policies, noting some unintended consequences of the leader's actions. With all the possible explanations about the collapse of the Soviet regime, one conclusion is certain: Gorbachev never intended the Soviet system to unravel. Yet unravel it did, with Gorbachev's deliberate actions and inactions playing crucial role in the demise.

The purpose of this chapter is to examine the connection between willful political actions and the unintended consequences they lead to. Using the insights from theories of bounded rationality, it will be argued that

Gorbachev was confronted with an insoluble dilemma in the process of the decision-making. Although every decision-maker is ultimately judged by the magnitude of his or her goal and his eventual proximity to it, the probability of reaching it declines as the magnitude of the goal increases. The greater the goal, the more serious unintended consequences are likely to be, no matter what the effort. Furthermore, the effort itself is unlikely to be exhaustive. In the end, the unbridgible gulf between means and ends is rooted in the imperfection of human rationality, confronting complex and uncertain environment.

5.a) Bounded Rationality

For the past fifty years, in the fields of Political Science, Economics and Psychology, there has been an ongoing debate on the nature of human decision-making. On one side of the debate are those who postulate that humans are perfectly rational, self-interested, utility-maximizers who, given various choices, will always choose the best alternative.¹

On the opposite side are those that insist that the above picture of individual-decision making is simply

¹For a comprehensive overview of the history and development of the Rational Choice Theory, see Gabriel A. Almond, "Rational Choice Theory and the Social Sciences", chap. in A Discipline Divided: Schools and Sects in Political Science (Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, Inc., 1990), 117-137.

unrealistic. They point to the findings from cognitive psychology that individuals do not have a single utility function, that their values can vary from situation to situation, and that sometimes these values can even be in conflict. They further challenge the assumption of utility maximization by arguing that individuals are inherently incapable of optimizing and instead settle for a "satisficing" solution. The earliest² and the most consistent critic of Rational Choice theories, Herbert Simon, summarizes his argument by stating that "human beings have neither the facts nor the consistent structure of values nor the reasoning power at their disposal that would be required, even in... relatively simple situations", to satisfy any of the assumptions underpinning the theory of perfect rationality of the maximizing decision-makers.³

To be fair to the adherents of the rational choice theory in economics and their imitators in political science (known as public choice theorists), they often admit the unrealistic nature of their assumptions. Still, they defend their use. Milton Friedman stated that

[t]he relevant question to ask about the "assumptions" of a theory is not whether they are descriptively "realistic," for they never are, but whether they are sufficiently good approximations for the purpose in hand. And this question can be

²See Herbert Simon, Administrative Behaviour: A Study of Decision-Making Processes in Administrative Organization, 3d ed. (New York: Free Press, 1976).

³Idem, Reason in Human Affairs (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1983), 17.

answered only by seeing whether the theory works, which means whether it yields sufficiently accurate predictions.⁴

Fortunately, the flaws in Friedman's argument are not hard to see. First, on the surface of it, he is certainly justified in using Kantian distinction between nomena and phenomena. No theoretical representation of reality can ever hope to match the complexity of reality itself. There is, however, a tremendous difference between sufficiently realistic assumptions and completely unrealistic ones. All the evidence to date points to the latter when it comes to the rational choice theory. As Simon points out,

there is a great mountain of evidence that actual behavior is quite unlike the neoclassical rational model. The very foundation stone - the assumption of consistency of the utility function - has been subjected to extremely careful study... and has been found to be almost always wrong.... [Furthermore, in] constructing likely alternatives [n]o computation appears to be made to decide exactly when the search for alternatives should stop and a choice be made. Moreover, even in the case where it is reasonable to characterize the goal as maximizing profit, the evidence usually reveals that the decision-makers are trying to achieve a satisfactory profit, satisfaction being measured by past experiences and aspirations.⁵

Under such conditions, Friedman's use of Kantian distinction can be hardly justified.

Second, if the assumptions are sufficiently unrealistic, it is difficult to see how one can continue to argue that the theory based on them is still valid if "it

⁴Milton Friedman, Essays in Positive Economics (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953), 40.

⁵Herbert Simon, "Rationality in Human Behaviour," Political Psychology 16, no. 1 (1995): 49-50.

yields sufficiently accurate predictions." This seems to be the fundamental violation of deductive logic, on which rational choice theories are based. How can a true conclusion be derived from demonstratively false premises? It cannot! If the conclusion still appears to be true, then it is a clear proof that it is unconnected to the premises. In that case, as the structure of the theory disappears so does the theory itself. All we have left is a one dangling proposition, which by itself, even if true, is logically insufficient to be used as a predictor of any kind, leave alone the best one. If it is still used for prediction purposes, then we are dealing with an inductive argument of the crudest variety and very limited utility.

To support his position, Friedman appeals to the parsimony of hard sciences.⁶ However, the parsimony of assumptions does not obviate the need for the truthfulness of those assumptions. Otherwise, the resultant scientific prediction is indistinguishable from simple guessing. For instance, the prediction that the sun will travel the sky from East to West is true regardless of whether earth orbits the sun or vice versa. This is hardly science though, since it has been a very long time that physicists and astronomers found the above prediction even remotely interesting.

⁶Friedman, Essays in Positive Economics, 42.

Herbert Simon shows the gross inadequacy of rational choice theory in Friedman's own profession, economics. According to Simon,

At the macroscopic level, certain kinds of predictions can often be made. If there is a freeze in the Florida citrus groves, the price of oranges will rise. These kinds of relations between supply and demand can be used successfully, and often are, in prediction. But it has been shown... that such predictions can be made without using the stifling assumptions of neoclassical theory. For example, if prices rise, consumers will buy less by reason of limits on their total budgets, quite apart from any utility calculations. There is little or no evidence that accepting the apparatus of neoclassical rationality, instead of simply assuming that people have reasons for what they do, provides additional predictive power.⁷

5.b) Rationality of Political Choices

There is an enormous volume of literature that takes the assumptions of the classical economics and applies them to the study of political behavior.⁸ However, the above criticisms of the assumptions of the classical economics are just as valid in the study of the political decision-making. There are the same cognitive and environmental limitations that impinge on a political decision-maker as the ones that affect the businessmen or consumers.

⁷Simon, "Rationality in Political Behaviour," 50.

⁸Again, for a historical overview of public choice theory, see Gabriel Almond, A Discipline Divided, 117-137. Almond (p.128) approvingly quotes Douglas North in that "[p]ublic choice theory -- economics applied to politics -- has at best had only a modest success in explaining political decision making."

5.b)(1) Cognitive limitations

The most important cognitive limitations of any decision maker are the limited human computational powers and their attention span. First, since attention is "a terribly scarce resource," even in the world of perfect information, "people must attend to... problems in a serial, one-at-a-time (or at best a-few-at-a-time) fashion."⁹ This is because before the information is considered, "it must pass through the bottleneck of attention -- a serial, not parallel, process whose information capacity is exceedingly small... [--] about six chunks... of information."¹⁰

Second, due to our limited computational capacity, information overload is easily reached. The result is that not all the available information is processed by an individual. Research shows that a person "searches very selectively through large realms of possibilities.... The search is incomplete..., and usually terminated with the discovery of satisfactory, not optimal course of action."¹¹

Third, even the information that is eventually processed is subject to various individual biases. A person's "beliefs, values, and stereotypes... serve as

⁹ Simon, Reason in Human Affairs, 79, 94.

¹⁰ Idem, "Human Nature in Politics: The Dialogue of Psychology with Political Science," The American Political Science Review 79, no. 2 (June 1985): 302. Emphasis added.

¹¹ Ibid., 295. Emphasis added.

guides to information processing and become a baseline for interpretations, expectations, and predictions of others' behavior."¹²

In particular, the individual's belief system is at the center of information processing.

[His] belief-set represents all the hypotheses and theories that he is convinced are valid at a given moment in time. Parallel to the belief-set is the disbelief-set, which includes all the hypotheses and theories that he believes to be invalid at a given point in time.... A person locates available information on a spectrum between belief and disbelief....¹³

In the end, the information that does "get in" may be either rejected as incongruent with the existing beliefs or significantly distorted to reduce the cognitive dissonance.

Finally, human emotions influence the way information is processed. Whatever is the origin of human emotions, they often set the "agenda for human problem solving." In fact,

most human beings are able to attend to issues longer, to think harder about them, to receive deeper impressions that last longer, if information is presented in a context of emotion -- a sort of hot dressing -- than if it is presented wholly without affect.¹⁴

5.b)(2) Environmental Limitations

¹²Yaacov Y. I. Vertzberger, The World in Their Minds: Information Processing, Cognition, and Perception in Foreign Policy Decisionmaking (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), 113.

¹³Ibid., 114.

¹⁴Simon, Reason in Human Affairs, 30, 32.

Human cognitive limitations are usually exacerbated by the environment in which decisions have to be made. For a decision-maker, the environment is usually complex and dynamic. A number of different problems compete for person's attention at the same time. Given the fact that attention is a limited resource, the larger is the number of issues to be considered, the greater is the level of stress experienced by the individual. As Janice Gross Stein points out, however, "stress decreases cognitive complexity", adds to cognitive rigidity and reduces the ability to process a discrepant information.¹⁵

Because of the multitude of conflicting interests, values and potentially irreconcilable goals, political environment is a particularly complex and uncertain setting for making decisions. The ill defined nature of the problem

makes highly uncertain and vague exactly which information is relevant and leads to the ignoring of information that could prove relevant and important or to hyperattention and the indiscriminate collecting of quantities of information that will only overburden the information processing system and negatively affect its problem-solving capacity.

Worse still, "decisionmakers are not always aware of the differences between well-defined and ill-structured

¹⁵Janice Gross Stein, "Political Learning by Doing: Gorbachev as Uncommitted Thinker and Motivated Learner," in International Relations Theory and the End of the Cold War, ed. Richard Ned Lebow and Thomas Risse-Kappen (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 232.

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PRECISIONSM RESOLUTION TARGETS

problems... [and] they unconsciously transform [latter into the former] by ignoring their indistinct attributes."¹⁶

There is a further difficulty confronting policy makers.

[E]ven when problems are well defined, the problem-solving system's having been given clear systematic criteria by which to decide when a proposed solution is acceptable and the goal is attained, what constitutes relevant information is not necessarily well defined, because the high level of uncertainty about the nature and scope of future outcomes and needs can persist.¹⁷

Unfortunately, the uncertainty of future outcomes appears to be irremediable. The condition is not only due to the limited computational capacities of people. The world "populated" by fastest computers would not alter this condition. Herbert Simon neatly explains this paradox through the use of Darwin's theory of evolution. He calls it "niche elaboration." Although Darwinian theory is normally associated with the "brute-force struggle for occupancy", there is another often overlooked important element in it.

Instead of battling the competitor in a life and death battle for exclusive survival, "[t]he other way [to survive] is to find a wholly unoccupied niche, or to alter and specialize itself in order to be able to occupy efficiently... a niche that is not occupied effectively by anyone else."¹⁸ For reasons not very well understood, the

¹⁶Vertzberger, The World in Their Minds, 54.

¹⁷Ibid.

¹⁸Simon, Reason in Human Affairs, 44.

"very creation of niches, and the eventual development of new creatures to fill them, alters the system in such a way as to allow the development of still more niches."¹⁹ In the process of open-ended teleology, complexity begets still more complexity, requiring further specialization. Evolution in a complex world, "specifies means (the process of variation and selection) that do not lead to any predictable end."²⁰

The idea elaborated above has direct relevance to the paradox of means and ends mentioned in the introduction. It was stated that the more grandiose the goals are, the less likely they are to be achieved. Although intuitively obvious, the logic of the argument is more involved.

To start with, the greater is the goal, that is the further it is away in time and space, the closer is the system to the ideal state of open-endedness. And the more open-ended the system becomes, the more specified the means must be to "achieve" the (open) end. Finally, in the open-ended universe, all we have left is an open-ended process of the specification of means. Ends become means as every new set of local means serve as the system interim goal. As every means changes so must a goal. In perpetuity, to solve one set of problems only leads to further uncertainty as the new set of problems appears on the horizon.

¹⁹Ibid., 45.

²⁰Ibid., 70.

5.b)(3) Institutions and Bounded Rationality

Although it is not the intent of this chapter to analyze the institutional decision-making process, a few words have to be said about the role institutions play in the world of bounded human rationality.

To provide a more stable environment "that makes at least a modicum of rationality possible", we surround ourselves with institutions. Institutionally enhanced "stabilities and predictabilities of our environment,... allow us to cope with it within the limits set by our knowledge and our computational capacities."²¹

Unfortunately, institutions are only capable of improving our coping skills in the uncertain environment; they cannot make the environment certain. One reason is that institutions are composed of people and the "limits on [their] ability to calculate and to behave in a reasonable fashion impose similar limits on the capabilities of [their] institutions."²²

In addition to the distortions in its decision-making process stemming from limitations of individual players, institutions create powerful distorting forces of their own. They range from compartmentalization of information,

²¹Ibid., 78-79.

²²Ibid., 79.

secrecy, various forms of information gate-keeping, "group think" and major values' tradeoffs to total institutional paralysis of bureaucratic "wars."²³

5.b)(4) Summary

It is quite clear from the above discussion, that human decision making invariably takes place under conditions that favor distortion or a selective use of information. Various cognitive and environmental restraints on the efficient processing of information have direct effect on how and what kind of decisions are reached. Information biasing individual beliefs, norms and stereotypes, combined with the limited attention span and calculating capacity, ensure that in an uncertain environment the solutions arrived at are normally far from the optimal ones.

5.c) Bounded Rationality, Gorbachev and the Collapse of the USSR

The conceptual tools provided by the theory of bounded rationality help shed new light on Gorbachev's actions that led to the unraveling of the Soviet system. The theory points to the fact that Gorbachev a priori could not have

²³Vertzberger, The World in Their Minds, 252-256. The classic in the field of bureaucratic politics is Graham T. Allison's, Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1971), particularly ch. 5; see also Harold L. Wilensky, Organizational Intelligence (New York: Basic Books, Inc., Publishers, 1967).

achieved his ultimate goal(s), except by sheer accident. Even if we accept the conspiracy theory that the General Secretary from the start harbored the desire to destroy the Soviet regime, this goal would not have been any easier to achieve than any other. However, since there is no evidence that Gorbachev wanted the destruction of the USSR as his ultimate goal, then we must conclude that the collapse was the unintended consequence as far as Gorbachev was concerned.

Unintended consequences, of course, do not in any way imply inevitability. In the previous chapters we have argued against various deterministic theories of the Soviet Union's demise. Different choices were available to the Soviet leaders. Some of them, however, were pursued and others were not. Importantly though, whichever the alternatives might have been pursued, systemically, the results at best would have been "satisfactory, not optimal...."²⁴

Gorbachev's uniqueness, of course, lay in the fact that as an individual he found himself at the summit of the power structure that, to borrow the expression from Chaos theory, proved to be highly sensitive to the initial divergent condition, time and time again. Throughout the Soviet history, that initial divergent condition was in form of the choices of the General Secretary of the CPSU.

Gorbachev's choices proved crucial to the destruction of the Soviet system. The debate on why he chose certain

²⁴Simon, "Human Nature in Politics", 295.

alternatives as opposed to others was very heated when he was still in power, but cooled down since he left the political scene. Today, scholars who do not subscribe to history with capital (h), may be tempted to ask: how could Gorbachev have been so blind? How could he have not realized where his reforms were leading to? The answer is that like any other decision maker, Gorbachev had limitations on how he searched for and processed new information on the possible courses of action.

As was stated above, at the center of any information processing stands the person's belief system. Beliefs "usually include principles and general ideas on the nature of the social and physical environment that constitutes the policymaker's field of action."²⁵ Within the belief system, there is the subset of beliefs that is very important for the processing of political information. That subset is called the operational code of a decision maker. According to Vertzberger, "[t]he attributes and role of beliefs as a whole, and especially the interdependence of those core that form the operational code, make them a possible source of biased information processing."²⁶

²⁵Vertzberger, The World in Their Minds, 114.

²⁶Ibid., 117.

5.d) Operational Code

The operational code, an approach developed by Nathan Leites²⁷ and later systematized by Alexander George,²⁸ attempts to establish a connection between the behavior and the belief system of a particular leader. George has suggested that two sets of analytical categories -- the answers to five philosophical and five instrumental questions -- connect a political actor's personality with his judgment and decision-making. Philosophical questions deal with issues such as whether in the view of a leader the nature of political universe is peaceful or not, the extent to which he or she is an optimist and considers the political future predictable, historical development controllable, and contingency manageable. The corresponding instrumental issues deal with the selection of the approach, calculation of risks, timing and utility of different means to achieve the desired ends.²⁹

The operational code approach has been criticized for assuming "that the official and operative ideologies are

²⁷Nathan Leites, The Operational Code of the Politburo (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1951). This work, although published first, summarizes the conclusions reached in the author's other study, published two years later. See Idem, A Study of Bolshevism (New York: Free Press, 1953).

²⁸Alexander L. George, "The 'Operational Code': A Neglected Approach to the Study of Political Leaders and Decision-Making," International Studies Quarterly, XIII (1969): 190-222.

²⁹Ibid., 201-216.

identical...."³⁰ In other words, we must take into account the likelihood that a leader's public oral and written communications are at variance with his or her true beliefs. This has always been a sore problem in Sovietology. In the past, the Soviet leaders always had to anchor their speeches and writings in the "holy scriptures" of Marxism-Leninism. Nevertheless, unless one assumes a total cynicism (which is unwarranted) on the part of a Soviet leader, and consequently a complete incongruency between his declarative and operative belief systems, the operational code approach can be used "to assess whether (or to what extent) behavior is consonant with expressed beliefs, rather than assuming a one-to-one relationship."³¹ In the words of Alexander George, the operational code is "a set of premises and beliefs about politics and not... a set of rules and recipes to be applied mechanically to the choice of action...."³² The operational code has "diagnostic propensities, which extend or restrict the scope of search and evaluation and influence [the leader's] diagnosis of the situation in certain directions."³³

³⁰J. David Singer, "Man and World Politics: The Psycho-Cultural Interface," Journal of Social Issues, XXIV (July 1968): 145.

³¹Ole Holsti, "The 'Operational Code' Approach to the Study of Political Leaders: John Foster Dulles' Philosophical and Instrumental Beliefs," Canadian Journal of Political Science 3 (1970): 123.

³²George, "The 'Operational Code': A Neglected Approach," 196-197.

5.e) Operational Code of Gorbachev

Constructing the operational code of Soviet officials has always been difficult. All-pervasive secrecy, inaccessibility and reticence of the leaders and those close to them and the ritualistic nature of most speeches and writings, made any study of Soviet leaders' cognitive and motivational constructs fraught with almost insurmountable methodological difficulties. As a result, very few scholars ever ventured into a psychological domain of Soviet leadership studies. Aside from the already mentioned path-breaking work of Nathan Leites, only Robert Tucker has consistently tried to adapt the insights of psychology to the study of the Soviet leaders.³⁴

An interesting example of potential futility of studying Soviet leaders before glasnost is the fairly recent attempt by Philip Tetlock and Richard Boettger to analyze cognitive and rhetorical styles of different Soviet leaders using the method of content analysis. They found

³³Idem, "The Causal Nexus Between Cognitive Beliefs and Decision Making Behaviour: The 'Operational Code' Belief System," in Psychological Models in International Politics, ed. L. S. Falkowski (Boulder: Westview Press, 1979), 103.

³⁴For instance, see Robert C. Tucker, Stalin As Revolutionary: A Study in History and Personality (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1973.). Also, Idem, "The Georges' Wilson Reexamined: An Essay on Psychobiography," The American Political Science Review 71, no. 2 (June 1977): 606-618.

that "the discriminant analyses classified Gorbachev as a traditionalist prior to March 1985 and as an ardent reformer after that date." The study also found that after becoming General Secretary, Gorbachev's integrative complexity, "normally associated with increased cognitive flexibility and tolerance of ambiguity", had increased dramatically.³⁵ Before March 1985, Gorbachev was indistinguishable from his older conservative colleagues, save in physical appearance and attention to etiquette.

However, since the start of Gorbachev's reforms, it became possible to study Soviet leaders. Naturally, the most attention was paid to Gorbachev himself. Biographies of the last Soviet leader have been written by Russians and Westerners alike.³⁶

5.e)(1) Some Elements of Gorbachev's Psychological Profile

There have also been several explicit attempts by social scientists to study Gorbachev's personality and cognitive constructs. Above, we have already pointed to Gorbachev's apparent high cognitive complexity. A study by

³⁵Philip E. Tetlock and Richard Boettger, "Cognitive and Rhetorical Styles of Traditionalism and Reformist Soviet Politicians: A Content Analysis Study," Political Psychology 10, no. 2 (1989): 228, 225.

³⁶Among the more notable ones are: Zhores Medvedev, Gorbachev (London: W. W. Norton & Co., 1986); Christian Schmidt-Hauer, Gorbachev: The Path to Power (London: I. B. Tauris & Co. Ltd., 1986); Dusko Doder and Louise Branson, Gorbachev: Heretic in the Kremlin (New York: Viking, 1990).

David Winter and his colleagues found that the former General Secretary had high self-confidence, optimism, saw events as controllable and the world as friendly. They also found that he was prone to set comprehensive goals and likely to pursue compromise as well as conflict. Emotionally, Gorbachev was expressive, somewhat impulsive and sensitive to criticism.³⁷

In retrospect, we can see how some of the above personality traits affected Gorbachev's information processing. The combination of his high energy, self-confidence and optimism often bordered on zealotry,³⁸ with all the negative connotations that the word implies.

Gorbachev's optimism and self-confidence appear to have consistently biased the negative information that he received about his actions and the consequences of those actions. Being convinced that he could control events, he tended to downplay the validity of the discrepant information. According to Anatoly Dobrynin, as early as the spring of 1987, Margaret Thatcher "remarked casually to Gorbachev that some high officials she had recently visited in Washington considered perestroika a misstep that could

³⁷David G. Winter, Margaret G. Hermann, Walter Weintraub, and Stephen G. Walker, "The Personalities of Bush and Gorbachev Measured at a Distance: Procedures, Portraits, and Policy," Political Psychology 12, no. 2 (1991): 237.

³⁸This characterization of Gorbachev is used by Dmitry Mikheyev, The Rise and Fall of Gorbachev (Indianapolis: Hudson Institute, 1992), 120.

disrupt the entire economic structure of such a big country."³⁹ Gorbachev laughed it off. After 1989 elections to the Supreme Soviet, Gorbachev was alone in the leadership in his claim that the party achieved tremendous success during the elections.⁴⁰ Unable to develop a clear and consistent strategy, Gorbachev tended to overlook strategic errors by pointing to tactical successes.

Somewhat counterintuitively, it can be argued that extreme high energy, self-confidence and optimism would serve to lower the cognitive complexity and increase the rigidity of the information processing. The three qualities under discussion are not conducive to listening and learning. The person would have a great tendency to march to his own "drum" and "use others but... not become symbiotic with these others."⁴¹ Such person would be a supreme tactician.

If we look at Gorbachev's behavior, we find a great deal of evidence of such use of others. He displayed an interest in and warmth toward others as long as they were useful. In the end, his close friend, Shevardnadze resigned, allies and opponents alike such as Yakovlev, Ryzhkov, Dobrynin, Ligachev and others were pushed out, some more

³⁹Anatoly Dobrynin, In Confidence: Moscow's Ambassador to America's Six Cold War Presidents (New York: Times Books, 1995), 632-633.

⁴⁰Nikolai Ryzhkov, Istoriia predatel'stv [A History of Betrayals] (Moscow: Novosti, 1992), 284.

⁴¹Winter, "Personalities of Bush and Gorbachev", 222, 232.

gently than the others. According to one of Gorbachev's aides, Vladimir Yegorov, "Mikhail Sergeyevich [Gorbachev] could act decisively, even unceremoniously, towards individual politicians."⁴²

Gorbachev's two "mental habits" were quite revealing about his attitude to others. He would quite literally ignore people who were no longer useful or could not be seen as potentially useful. One of his other aides, Cherniaev, noted that Gorbachev "had a good nose for" useless to him officials. "He even had an expression: Why do we need him?"⁴³ An incident in Washington confirms Cherniaev's observation. During a meeting with an outgoing president Reagan and the president-elect George Bush, "Reagan's spokesman Marlin Fitzwater was shocked to notice that Gorbachev treated Reagan almost like a piece of furniture. The only American that Gorbachev seemed to be interested in was Bush...."⁴⁴

In his interpersonal interactions Gorbachev's mode of addressing someone also displayed his general contempt for those around him. Regardless of the individual's age,

⁴²Vladimir K. Yegorov, Out of a Dead End Into the Unknown: Notes on Gorbachev's Perestroika, trans. David Floyd (Chicago: edition q, Inc., 1993), 140. Emphasis added.

⁴³A. C. Cherniaev, Shest' let s Gorbachevym [Six Years With Gorbachev] (Moscow: Izdatel'skaia gruppa "Progress" "Kultura", 1993), 195. Emphasis added.

⁴⁴Michael R. Beschloss and Strobe Talbott, At the Highest Levels: The Inside Story of the End of the Cold War (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1993), 10.

position or education, Gorbachev used the Russian familiar pronoun "ty" towards others while others addressed him as "vy."⁴⁵ Mikheyev points out that "[e]ven Stalin addressed only one person with the familiar pronoun 'ty': his close associate Viacheslav Molotov."⁴⁶ It is difficult to explain this manner of speech other than being intentionally disrespectful. There is no doubt that the last Soviet leader understood the difference between "ty" and "vy" when it suited him; he accorded Andrei Sakharov a respectful "vy", the only such person in the Union.⁴⁷

Others have also commented on Gorbachev's self-confidence, bordering on imperiousness. Beschloss and Talbott, analyzing the special relationship between Margaret Thatcher and Gorbachev, observed that "[b]oth leaders were self-confident and forceful to the point of imperiousness."⁴⁸ It is quite possible that in their "debates" neither one of them listened to the other. According to Time's correspondent, Margot Hornblower, Gorbachev and his wife "are talking but rarely listening, each lecturing and posturing, while gushing charm."⁴⁹ Even Gorbachev's putative interest in "human factor" can be

⁴⁵Ryzhkov, Istoriia predatel'stv, 17.

⁴⁶Mikheyev, The Rise and Fall, 60.

⁴⁷Ibid., 60-61.

⁴⁸Beschloss and Talbott, At the Highest Levels, 30.

⁴⁹Time, Dec. 21, 1987; quoted in Mikheyev, Rise and Fall, 61.

interpreted as a narcissistic projection on others his preoccupation with himself. Asking himself "whether a man makes politics [and] whether a man makes history", Gorbachev declared that "[t]here is only one answer: [an unequivocal] yes!"⁵⁰ To Gorbachev, his human factor was decisive and he was the man making history.

Two conclusions can be drawn from Gorbachev's extreme self-confidence (or over-confidence) and his conscious or unconscious contempt for those around him. First, despite the cognitive complexity, he would be a relatively slow learner. Indeed, Gorbachev was very slow to realize the danger of nationalism⁵¹, and the pace of economic reform showed his inability to break away from the deep-seated beliefs in socialist ideas.⁵² Those beliefs played a major role in setting the limits on the search for possible options in economic reform. For instance, early on Gorbachev and his principal economic advisor, Leonid Abalkin, singled out the Japanese model of economic management as an example to follow, mainly for the reason of its high level of state's involvement in the economy.⁵³ This behavior, fully

⁵⁰Svobodnaya mysl' 17 (November 1992): 18.

⁵¹Gorbachev has admitted his time lag. See Gorbachev, Dekabr'-91, 156-157.

⁵²However broadly Gorbachev's socialism might be conceived, he remained its adherent even after Soviet demise. *Ibid.*, 164.

⁵³James Clay Moltz, "Divergent Learning and the Failed Politics of Soviet Economic Reform," World Politics 45 (January 1993): 312.

consistent with theories of bounded rationality, stalled the process of searching for more optimizing solutions.

The radical actions that Gorbachev did initiate do not have to be interpreted as the signs of flexibility. Rather, this was the flexibility of means embedded within a significant rigidity of goals.⁵⁴ Gorbachev was a "driven" man and given his propensity for impulsive actions, he would suddenly veer off in a different direction when he perceived a threat to the achievement of his goal. What has been interpreted as brilliant tactics (implying careful calculation) by (perhaps) unwitting subscribers to perfect rationality hypothesis,⁵⁵ may in fact, have been a desperate improvisation to save the relatively unchanging vision of the leader. Gorbachev himself approvingly cites Eduard Bernstein: "[M]ovement is everything, the final destination is nothing...."⁵⁶ Thus, we have witnessed "his impatient, impetuous style of leadership [causing] chaos in the Party, the administration in general, the economy, society, inter-ethnic relations, and local and national politics."⁵⁷ He

⁵⁴This view is supported by Bialer. See Seweryn Bialer, "The Last Communist," U.S. News and World Report, October 8, 1990, 53.

⁵⁵A prime example would be Jerry Hough, who, contrary to views of others including Gorbachev's, seem to grant the Soviet leader an almost unlimited awareness of everything going on around him. See Jerry F. Hough, "Gorbachev's Endgame," in The Soviet System in Crisis: A Reader of Western and Soviet Views, ed. Alexander Dallin and Gail W. Lapidus (Boulder: Westview Press, Inc., 1991), 224-250.

⁵⁶Gorbachev, Dekabr'-91, 165.

destabilized the Soviet system through the actions that according to Mikheyev, "always partially negated [the] previous decision, then... amended his amendment, and eventually negated it altogether."⁵⁶

Gorbachev's self-confidence and optimism, bordering on zealotry led him to attack the institutions underpinning Soviet order. Anthony Downs observed that

zealots play a... central role in altering existing [institutions]. In order to bring about such innovations, they must launch vociferous attacks on the status quo. Their unpopularity is increased by their willingness to support any organizational changes, however radical, that advance their sacred policies. They are often forced to espouse such changes because the existing organizational structures contain no place where their new ideas can be tried and developed. They attract attention to existing or future deficiencies... and provide huge amounts of information about these problems....⁵⁷

There is a legitimate question, however, as to whether Gorbachev had any vision to be a zealot. The impression that he did not have any vision arise when one studies his actions. However, the impression is false due to the confusion between the means and the ends. It is true that Gorbachev did not know what kind of means would have

⁵⁷Peter Reddaway, "Is the Soviet Union Drifting Towards Anarchy?", RL Report, Aug. 25, 1989, p.2; quoted in Mikheyev, The Rise and Fall, 114.

⁵⁸Mikheyev, The Rise and Fall, 116.

⁵⁹Anthony Downs, Inside Bureaucracy (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1967), 110. Interestingly enough, some have noted a similarity between Gorbachev's new thinking and the ideas of another communist zealot, Leon Trotsky. See Michail Gordeyev, "Idei Trotskogo zhyvut i pobezhdaют" [Trotsky Ideas are Alive and Winning] Nash Sovremennik, no.3 (1992): 11-12.

achieved his goals. If we disregard his goals for a moment, the theory of bounded rationality tells us that he would have unlikely reached the optimum solution in any case. He seemed to have intuitively understood that. Gorbachev himself admitted that he did not have ready-made recipes. He declared that mistakes were possible, but in his view, "the biggest mistake is the fear of making a mistake...."⁶⁰ Clearly, this was a rational understanding of the situation, but the rationality of finding proper means was bounded by Gorbachev's own system of beliefs that was formed "when [he] lived in the conditions, when the old rules were in effect."⁶¹ His belief system severely restricted the choices he would have considered as legitimate. As Vertzberger pointed out,

[e]ven though beliefs are necessary constructs for making sense of the information picked up from the environment, they are also a source of bias and non-adaptation. The belief system sets bounds within which interpretations are accepted or rejected. The more central the beliefs, the less adaptive they are to dissonant information.⁶²

The inability to find proper means, however, does not mean that there is no goal. Even without knowing how to make it, one can still imagine the cake. What was the "cake" that Gorbachev was trying to bake? From his speeches and

⁶⁰M. S. Gorbachev, Perestroika i novoe myshlenie dlia nashei strany i dlia vsego mira [Perestroika and New Thinking for our Country and the Whole World] (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo politicheskoi literatury, 1987), 62-63.

⁶¹Ibid., 62.

⁶²Vertzberger, The World in Their Minds, 123.

writings, it is possible to reconstruct the General Secretary's vision. The vision was true socialism as Gorbachev understood it. Peter Reddaway has summarized the main components of this vision.

It posited the following: (a) a strong central government; (b) limited powers for the republics; (c) an economy based on market socialism, with strong regulation from the center, an enlarged but still small private sector, and harder work from everyone; (d) a polity much more flexible and open than before, based on the rule of law (pravoporyadok), but still controlled by a Communist Party which would remain the only party permitted to function freely in the political arena; (e) greatly expanded freedom of expression and association, but with limits still imposed on the mass media (glasnost'); (f) social justice for all; and (g) a peaceful, conciliatory foreign policy which would permit the defense budget to be steadily reduced.⁶³

Regardless of whether the components are reconcilable in theory, let alone the practice, it is quite obvious that Gorbachev did have a grand vision, even if it was on the scale of a fairy tale.

5.e)(2) Grand Vision and Opportunism

However, according to the dictum that the end justifies the means, the conventional logic would suggest that the greater is the vision the more opportunistic one must become. In that sense, Gorbachev was consistent in having

⁶³Peter Reddaway, "The Quality of Gorbachev's Leadership," in The Soviet System in Crisis: A Reader, 212.

both a grand vision and the declared intention of being opportunistic.⁶⁴

Unfortunately for Gorbachev, in a complex, unstructured environment, the more opportunistic one becomes, the more opportunities one creates.⁶⁵ Each new opportunity requires new actions that alter the subsequent opportunity, and so ad infinitum. Thus, tragically and paradoxically, an obsession with grand goal leads a decision-maker to the one-way preoccupation with the means, moving further and further away from the original goal. The person, however, does not usually perceive the contradiction. Because the goal is so great, each new improvisation is justified as a temporary measure. In the end, the temporary becomes permanent.

Having used so much space delineating Gorbachev's belief system, the impression might have been created that he was boxed in in a fixed, unchangeable paradigm. Such impression, though, would be erroneous. His views were changing, albeit at a much slower pace than the evolving situation in the country required. However influential operational code might be in setting individual's view of reality, it is still does not provide the full picture of the complexity of the individual's personality.

⁶⁴He expressed this desire to his aid, Cherniaev. See Cherniaev, Shest' let, 187.

⁶⁵This is Simon's model of niche elaboration discussed earlier. See Simon, Reason in Human Affairs, 44.

5.f) Gorbachev, Psychological Complexity and its Cost

Many professional observers noted that Gorbachev was a man of tremendous complexity. Lay people would say that he was the man of depth. Ironically, the "lay" description of Gorbachev is more revealing than the professional one. The reason is that the notion of depth, if it is to have any meaning, entails a distance. In fact, it can only be measured by a distance. Even more precise would be to say that the depth defines a special kind of distance; it defines the distance between extremes. Even in a two-dimensional picture, there are two extremes.

Human personality is multi-dimensional, and the more complex it is, the more extremes it potentially presides over. The di-stance (as the dual stance) between the extremes tend to increase the intra-psychic tension. As the space between the "chairs" one is attempting to sit on widens, the tension increases. One of the symptoms of the high level of inter-psychic tension is the increased emotionality (and thus tendency to impulsive action) on the part of the individual. And as we know, human emotions form the integral part of the limitations on human rationality.⁶⁶

⁶⁶Ibid., 30; Idem, "Human Nature in Politics," 302.

5.f)(1) Gorbachev: Emotions and Decisions

One extreme that Gorbachev straddled is an almost incomprehensible mixture of authoritarianism and parliamentarism. One of the operational code constructs, for instance, highlighted his tendency to use both politics "(positive words)" as well as conflict.⁶⁷ His authoritarianism and arbitrariness were notorious. First, as was noted above, he has hardly ever listened to anyone. Second, while advocating the need to establish a pravoyoe gosudarstvo, he could operate in the most capricious manner. Some of his actions came back to haunt him later. For example, offended by hostile perception he received in Armenia, he ordered the arrest of the "Karabakh" committee in December 1988, only to see them two years later forming the government in Armenia. He deprived an outspoken KGB General Kalugin of his rank, medals, and pension, then sometimes later embarrassingly reversed his position.⁶⁸ Leonid Gozman points out to two of Gorbachev's "immortal [revealing] phrases": "There cannot be two opinions on pluralism" and "[a] dialog with the opposition is impossible."⁶⁹

⁶⁷Winter, "The Personalities of Bush and Gorbachev", 236.

⁶⁸500 Imen perestroiki, 140-141;

⁶⁹Ogonek 49, Dec. 1991, 17.

Yet at the same time Gorbachev pursued liberalization with all the attending consequence of authority relativization. In part, being a champion of the liberalization did not contradict his authoritarian impulses. Rather, for an intellectual with such characteristics, it must have been immensely gratifying. Since in the beginning, few people dared to contradict the General Secretary, Gorbachev could enjoy an illusion of control through persuasion rather than fear. For a Soviet leader, widely acclaimed to be the most educated and sophisticated since the time of Lenin, to captivate an audience with what appeared to him the power of his convictions was infinitely more gratifying than to use simple coercion. It is doubtful that in the beginning of Perestroika Gorbachev understood the difference between a captive audience and a captivated one. With very disciplined party officials, it was very easy to confuse the two.

Regardless of this perceptual mistake, however, Gorbachev still had the character of a missionary, which helped him to stay the course on liberalization once authoritarian temptation grew stronger. Harold Lasswell's classic characterization of a political agitator is a very apt description of Gorbachev. Lasswell wrote:

Relying upon the magic of rhetoric, [the agitators] conjure away obstacles with the ritualistic repetition of principles. They become frustrated and confused in the tangled mass of technical detail upon which successful administration depends. Agitators of the "pure" type... long... for the roving freedom of the platform and the press. They glorify men of outspoken zeal, men who harry the dragons

and stir the public conscience by exhortation, reiteration, and vituperation.⁷⁰

As an agitator, Gorbachev placed "high value... on the emotional response of the public."⁷¹ Like an actor, he was addicted to the (public) stage and the adulation of the audience, domestic or international. This helps explain the fact that once the processes started spinning out of his control, to remain the leader, he found himself bound to follow. As Leonid Gozman observed, "[m]ost likely [Gorbachev] wanted to stop [the reforms] earlier. But after the very first step it became [too] late."⁷²

Various people have commented that Gorbachev is highly emotional and sentimental man.⁷³ Gorbachev's actions can be seen as the highly emotional reactions to resolve the high levels of cognitive dissonance. Incisively, Leonid Gozman summed up Gorbachev's predicament:

Having began the greatest changes in the history of the country, Gorbachev found himself under the conditions of deep internal conflict.... He understood the necessity of what he was doing, but did not like the consequences of his actions.⁷⁴

⁷⁰Harold D. Lasswell, Psychopathology and Politics (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1930; Midway Reprint edition, 1986), 79.

⁷¹Ibid., 78.

⁷²Ogonek 49, (1991): 17.

⁷³Cherniaev, for instace, uses the words: do iarosti emotsionalen. See Cherniaev, Shest' let, 174; his other aid, Sergei Grigor'ev, uses the word beshestvo. Ogonek 22-23, May-June 1992, 21; see also Ryzhkov, Perestroika: Istoria predatel'stv, 14; and John Kohan, Time, May 11, 1992: 48.

⁷⁴Ogonek 49: 18.

Given the forces of habit pressing on him, how could he? Confronted with the limited or unexpected results, he would periodically lash out against the personalities and institutions involved with the full fury of a zealot, attacking the institutions of Soviet order with the speed that could only be disruptive.

5.f)(2) Oedipus

Thus, it was not Gorbachev's indecision and vacillation that destroyed the Soviet Union. Instead, the culprits were his (quite decisive) impulsive decision-making and lightning speed directed at the central nervous system of the communist order -- the CPSU.

To use an analogy, the entire "pattern" of the Soviet system was "knitted" with the "thread" of the Communist Party. Perhaps, it was a gray, uninspiring pattern, but it held together. In a misguided, but well-intentioned attempt to add some color and patch some wholes, Gorbachev cut the thread and the whole pattern unraveled.

Gorbachev was uniquely positioned to cut the thread. The statement seems obvious; at the apex of the power structure, leaders do possess a great deal of power. This is a truism. Gorbachev, however, was not only a leader of a party that temporarily captured the machinery of a state. In the Soviet Union, the CPSU was the state.

Moreover, the Bolshevik Party was built around Leninist idea of "consciousness from without." The carrier of this consciousness is the vanguard of the working class, the Party. The higher are the rungs of the Party, the clearer is the consciousness. The highest form of revolutionary consciousness, distilled in its purest form, is found at the level of Party Leader. The Leader, constantly checking himself against the eternal sacred texts of Marxism-Leninism communicates his wisdom downwards. Thus, the leader is an ultimate embodiment of working class consciousness. The leader is the keeper and the interpreter of the sacred texts. It is immaterial whether anyone believes in the "religion." As we have seen in chapter 3, in reinforcing a behaviour, rituals are very important in themselves.

Quite simply, as a result of the deliberate design, the Communist Party was defenseless against its leader. To use an organic analogy, why would the body need defense against the brain? However, since the Party is the brain and the nervous system of the state, and the Party leader is the brain of the Party, the whole socio-political system is then defenseless against the Party leader. Although granted, in the Soviet system of Gorbachev's day, the "wisdom" of the leader has long ceased to be a creative force, it still retained its enormous destructive power.

As Vertzberger observed, "[t]he nature of political power structure and the power-sharing arrangement decide whether the emerging definition of the situation is

dominated mostly by group processes or by individual processing."⁷⁵ Tragically for the Soviet system, the latter was the case.

In the case of Gorbachev, he repeatedly declared that he wanted to reconstruct the communist party, but in the process he destroyed it. He carefully revitalized the Soviets as a way to revitalize the communist party and to increase central control over the party apparat. Unintentionally, however, he created an alternate path for the rise of new, independent political actors.

To break down local politico-economic "mafias" and preserve party's ideological purity, he abolished the party's control over the economy. In doing so, however, he effectively deprived the communist party of power and its control over the periphery. Together with the revitalized Soviets, the local economic autonomy quickly snowballed into de facto almost total independent decision-making of the local officials. Without the vertical economic tentacles, the party apparat was like a "hub" without the "spokes." Figure 5.1 illustrates a set of interactions between several of Gorbachev's major personality traits, his intentions, actions and systemic consequences of those actions.

⁷⁵Vertzberger, The World in Their Minds, 347.

Fig. 5.1. Gorbachev and Systemic Failure: From Personality Traits through Actions to Unintended Consequences.

5.g) Conclusion

Gorbachev's predicament is a powerful example of limits to human rational decision-making and the effects these limits can have on the course of history. It illustrates in a dramatic fashion how cognitive and environmental constraints often lead to the results completely opposite of those intended by the actor. Chained by well-established belief system and frequently in the grip of powerful emotions, the decision-maker, who is further constrained by the complex, ill-defined and uncertain environment, is condemned to produce sub-optimal results. What distinguishes one individual from another is the degree of skill, ability and luck, he or she brings to the task and the resultant degree of sub-optimality. Ultimately, a difference in degree might become a difference in kind.

In Gorbachev, we have the case of a leader who phenomenally miscalculated the effects of his actions. Utterly convinced in the infallibility of his judgement and bent on bringing the Soviet system closer to the socialist ideal, he played with the system as though it was a Rubik cube. With every new move, the system became more and more disequilibrated, moving further and further from original position of stability.

The system, however, imploded rather than exploded because the same rigidity and blindness that drove Gorbachev to precipice kept him at the helm of the Communist Party.

However futile might have been his hopes at restructuring the Party, as long as he remained its leader, the apparat's initiative was paralyzed. The system's sensitivity to the initial divergent condition held as long as the Archimedean point remained to be the post of the General Secretary. Had Gorbachev ceased to be the General Secretary at any time prior to the emasculation of the Communist Party's power, the party-state would have defended itself with the ferocity of the wounded and cornered animal.

Conclusion

This thesis demonstrated that the collapse of communist regime in the Soviet Union was not a preordained event and most likely would have not occurred had it not been for some very specific actions of the General Secretary of the CPSU, Michael Gorbachev. In the actual unraveling of the Soviet system, the most important series of actions included the remaking of the economic and political opportunity structures of the Soviet elite. The main effect was to undermine the central control over the local party-state bosses by granting a very significant autonomy of economic decision-making and resources control to the latter (including what and when was to be produced). The more or less simultaneous introduction of so-called "new politics" in the form of competitive elections dealt a final mortal blow to the backbone of the Soviet regime, the system of nomenklatura. The creation of alternative (from the Party) career channels has helped to free many party-state officials from the fear of reprisals. At all levels of the bureaucracy this led to accelerating fragmentation of power. The important point here is that quick radical economic and political decentralization of power resulted in the fragmentation and the recombination in the new coalitions of the old elites, rather the emergence of the new ones. The majority of former members of nomenklatura have survived the collapse of the old regime and have reentered the new

power structures. Only in ethnic non-Russian republics did groups outside the current power elites have managed to enter the governing coalitions. And only in the Baltic republics did the forces un-affiliated with the communist officials managed to gain access to power.

The empirical research and the judicious use of the counterfactual analysis have shown that there is absolutely no evidence that without Gorbachev any of the above changes would have taken place. First, the Soviet system before Gorbachev was stable, if stagnant. Contrary to the widespread belief, there is no evidence that in the eyes of the Soviet population the communist regime was anything but legitimate. Although creating legitimacy deficits, not even glasnost had managed to delegitimize the fundamentals of the established order. From below, there was no pressure for radical change.

If the pressure for massive change from below was absent, it could have only been an action from above. By itself, the statement does not prove anything. Even if it was elite-driven change, so what? What did Gorbachev have to do with it? It still might have been the case that regardless of who was in position of power, the direction and the speed of change would have been the same. In other words, the Soviet Union, like a huge wound-up toy, would have simply and inevitably wound itself down. For whoever was at the top, there was no choice!

In essence, this is the central assumption, explicit or implicit, of most existing explanation of the Soviet collapse. Whether the explanation of change is based on the superiority of the Liberal Idea, a functional requirement of industrial society, or a technological imperative, whether it is the pressure from below or an action from above, the telos, the inevitability of collapse is invariably assumed.

It is not inconceivable that a history with capital (H) is marching on. However, even if it is conceivable, it is unprovable by the scientific method. As such, it is a matter of one's faith.

On the other hand, it is also not inconceivable that choices were available and historical contingency played a major role in the demise of the USSR. Indeed, having used the counterfactual analysis, we have found that different choices were available to the Soviet officials to get the Soviet Union out of some of its troubles. For instance, reallocation of resources, change in investment priorities and within-the-system agricultural reforms could have solved the most pressing problems. There was no need for a quick radical economic decentralization or political reforms, certainly not for both at the same time.

Furthermore, it does not appear that anyone but Gorbachev was ready to attempt either one of them. In the top leadership nobody could match Gorbachev's levels of self-confidence, energy, or intellect. Moreover, from the testimonies of the former Soviet officials and documentary

evidence, it is obvious that besides Alexander Yakovlev, Gorbachev did not have the full support of the other members of the Politburo or the Central Committee. This fact testifies against "someone-else-pursuing-the-same-reforms-as-Gorbachev" theory of change in the USSR. However, Gorbachev was the General Secretary and given the structure and culture of Soviet power structure, particularly the communist party, no one could openly resist the General Secretary for long.

Nonetheless, there is little doubt that Gorbachev did not desire the end result of his reforms. He wanted to reform the system, not to destroy it. He wanted to revitalize the communist party, not to ban it. In general, because of bounded rationality and other restraints on decision-making, we would expect an incongruence between means and ends. The extremity of the gulf in Gorbachev's case, however, is explained by the immense destructive power concentrated in the post of the General Secretary and the personality of its holder. Gorbachev's extreme self-confidence, rigidity of goals, impulsiveness and impatience led him to launch new initiatives, often radically different from the ones announced only a short time before, in misguided belief that he would always be able to control the outcomes. Until the end, he was convinced that he was indispensable. Instead, every new erratic initiative moved Gorbachev further and further away from his goal, until the

combination of strategic sectoral failures resulted in the systemic collapse and made him irrelevant.

The role of Gorbachev in the demise of the Soviet regime has dramatically illustrated the possibilities and limitations of the role of an agency in historical events. As Dankwart Rustow observed some time ago, "in the growing body of systematic social science, there remain[s] less and less room for explicit attention to leadership."¹ Today, most of political analysis tends to concentrate on structures and processes. However, disintegration of the USSR points to an urgent need to bring the study of leadership and personality "back in". This should not lead to the abandonment of structural analyses, but rather to their enrichment through the acceptance of plurality of endings that human agency invariably brings to social processes.

¹ Dankwart A. Rustow, ed., Philosophers and Kings: Studies in Leadership (New York: George Braziller Inc., 1970), 3.

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