

AFTER PERESTROIKA

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I find it difficult to speak calmly of 'real problems and false solutions' in the former USSR. The theme arouses too many passions for it to be reduced to economic and social factors alone. Even at its most critical of the Soviet experiment, the Western Left has always had to define itself in relation to the Revolution of October **1917**, which was the product of a common socialist culture. Despite the polemics, the hope that both branches of the tree would one day unite never disappeared totally. With the coming to power of Mikhail Gorbachev, that hope became much more substantial from **1985** onwards. Resolved to democratize society, the new leader made a brave attack on the dogmas of a Marxism-Leninism that had become anachronistic. If Gorbachev could succeed in his attempt, it did seem that this time the USSR would be able to transform itself, if not into a truly socialist society – the heritage of the past was too burdensome for that – at least into a transitional society which would no longer give socialists and communists of the whole world cause to blush. The scale of the project – and of its likely repercussions – explains the disappointment felt by the left when it failed. Twice betrayed by his supporters in **1991**, Mikhail Gorbachev has been removed from power, and the USSR has ceased to exist. It has splintered into fifteen Republics, two of which are already at war with one another and three of which are being torn apart by civil wars, whilst the other ten are embroiled in chaos. The CPSU, which had as many as **19** million members, has vanished into thin air almost overnight, like a *groupuscule*. How could this happen? Can we speak of a new 'Russian Revolution'?

A Latin proverb states that 'Times change and men change with them'. It is well known that the propensity for change increases in troubled times, but it seems to me that certain Soviet citizens have broken a few records in this domain. I would like to give a few examples.

After the publication of my *La Chine de Mao* in **1967**, I was persona *non grata* in the Soviet Embassy in Paris for twenty years. As the third year of 'perestroika' began to dawn, Ambassador Iakov Riabov, a member of the Central Committee and a former secretary of the CPSU in Sverdlovsk, began to invite me to meals and conferences in order to explain to me that

Gorbachev's aim was to perfect a society which was already in many respects exemplary. Seeing that I was sceptical, he suggested that I should go to Moscow to meet Boris Yeltsin, his old comrade from Sverdlovsk who had recently been promoted to alternative membership of the Politburo. The appointment was set up for the end of September 1987. Unfortunately, the Central Committee torpedoed the project; in the meantime Yeltsin had fallen from grace. It was only a year later, in June 1988, that I met him at the XIXth All-Union Conference of the CPSU, when I personally heard him demand his 'political rehabilitation' on the grounds that he was a good Communist who had been unfairly removed from the Politburo. His appeal was proof that times had changed, for in the past no dismissed leader had a chance to demand his rehabilitation in this way. Who could have predicted that this ultra-loyalist would, only two years later, become one of the most bitter enemies of communism, and that he would ask Russia's Constitutional Court to condemn the CPSU – to which he owed his entire career – as a 'criminal organization'?

I find my second example even more intriguing: it concerns Eduard Shevardnadze who, in October 1988, granted me a long and uninhibited interview in Paris. Whilst he did not try to avoid any of my questions, I had the feeling that he was giving the stock answers expected of a Soviet Minister who was quite sure that he had an answer to every problem. His vision of the conflict-free world that would emerge thanks to improved Soviet-American understanding, seemed unrealistic to me. But he swept aside my objections by stating that he had more faith in humanity than I did. The next year, he received me again, this time in an impressive ministerial office in Moscow which was richly decorated with portraits of Lenin and Gorbachev. As the conversation was off the record, he spoke to me openly of his worries about Georgia where, after a bloody military intervention against a peaceful demonstration in Tbilisi in April 1989, the nationalist tide was rising very fast. Shaking his white head in pain and indignation, he read me a letter from a relative in the Kutaisi region describing how the crowd had torn down Lenin's statue. We met again in Rome and in Paris in 1991, when he was no longer a minister. His comments were, inevitably, those of a disillusioned man, but the refrain was still the same: peace and democracy above all.

In March 1992, Eduard Shevardnadze went back to his native Georgia to attempt to reestablish peace. He had been asked to come to the help of the newly democratic Georgia because the elected President, Zviad Gamsakhurdia, an ultra-nationalist dissident, was terrorizing the country. Gamsakhurdia was driven out at gunpoint, and Shevardnadze was appointed president of a provisional Council of State. Less than six months later, in August 1992, the pacifist Eduard Shevardnadze was sending tanks to take Sukhumi, the capital of Abkhazia, which had remained more loyal to the values of the former USSR and was demanding more independence.

Having removed the bust of Lenin from the Government Palace, the triumphant invaders posed for photographs with their trophy. Not having a crane to remove Lenin's statue from the main square, they shelled it with mortars. I have to admit that, when I saw these photographs in the Moscow press, I was very perplexed. I knew that Georgia had been poisoned by Zviad Kamsakhurdhia's fanatical xenophobia and anti-communism. But who would have believed that Eduard Shevardnadze himself would have been so badly affected by the same poison as to approve the sacking of Sukhumi and to deny Abkhazia the right to a truly autonomous existence?

One could compile a whole anthology about the conversion of less important figures, especially intellectuals. Verba volent, scripta manent, and, thanks to *glasnost*, all these people wrote a great deal. Like the chorus in a Greek tragedy, they initially sang in harmony with Gorbachev, and were grateful for being able to express themselves democratically. But in the second act, they had already begun to distance themselves from their leader and were outdoing him with their denunciations of the entire Soviet past. The leitmotiv had become: 'We want unqualified democracy', which implied that every trace of socialism had to be rejected. Pretending to ignore the chorus at his back and avoiding polemics, Gorbachev stubbornly went on recommending 'a socialist option' within a Communist perspective. Disliked by his party, which had not wanted perestroika, and abandoned by his democratic allies, Gorbachev was losing ground and seemed very vulnerable, despite his undeniable prestige on the international stage.

This shift to the right – curiously enough, in Moscow it was described as a shift to the left – gathered speed when the walls began to come down in Eastern Europe. Gorbachev certainly gained more international prestige by refraining from interfering in the internal affairs of those countries. But if he had taken into account his own country's political calendar, he would surely have slowed down the process of the 'decommunization' of the East to ensure that the reunification of Germany, for example, did not take place a few months before legislative elections were held in Russia and in most of the Republics. Having failed to play his trumps at the right moment – and he had a lot of trumps in his hand – he had to watch powerlessly as electoral gains were made by a loose coalition of anti-communist forces brought together by 'Democratic Russia' and nationalists demanding independence in the Baltic lands. Although isolated and enjoying little support, he did at least cling to certain principles for longer than his comrades. Even after the terrible ordeal of the coup of August 1991, he reasserted when he returned to Moscow that: 'I am not a weather vane. I will not abandon my socialist principles and I will continue to fight for the renewal of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union.' This was too much for even the last handful of loyalists. Stupified by his 'scandalous'

declaration, they used it as an excuse to jump happily on to Boris Yeltsin's victorious bandwagon.

Are we to conclude that Moscow is particularly fond of weather vanes? Thousands of Russian proverbs tend to suggest the opposite. Since time immemorial Russians have warned against those who turn their coats at the first puff of wind. An old peasant saying even advises young girls not to trust divorced men: 'He left his first wife, and he will leave you too'. The high-ranking divorcees of the CPSU are sometimes asked why they suddenly broke up with 'their lifelong Party'. Two answers are worth recalling: those given by Leonid Kravchuk, the president of the Ukraine, and by Gennady Burbulis, Boris Yeltsin's right-hand man and the 'ideologue' who now sits in Mikhail Gorbachev's office in the Kremlin. It should be recalled in passing that both men played a decisive role in organizing the 'summit of Slav Republics' that was held in Bialwierz Forest in Belorussia in December 1991. The summit hastened the break-up of the former USSR.

For Leonid Kravchuk, it is all so simple. As Party Secretary in the Ukraine, he had been responsible for ideological work and energetically fought the nationalists. He did not know that the CP had been destroying his country for a long time.' Once he had seen documentary evidence of its crimes, he dropped the red flag and picked up the beautiful blue and gold flag of the Ukraine. What were these documents that had previously been inaccessible to a leader of Leonid Kravchuk's status, to one of the most important leaders in the former USSR? No one knows. Not that it matters greatly: his answer is at least concise and coherent, and it served as a rallying cry for all the refugees from the CP who, under the leadership of Leonid Kravchuk, are now defending the independent Ukraine. One of my friends in Moscow adds: 'It takes a real statesmen to tell lies as big as the mountains of the Caucasus without batting an eyelid'.

Writing in *Izvestia*, Gennady Burbulis gave a very different answer.' Twelve years younger than Kravchuk, this forty-five-year old philosopher used to teach 'scientific communism' in Sverdlovsk, and slowly, but surely made his way up the Party hierarchy in the wake of Boris Yeltsin. In order to get himself elected to the People's Congress in 1989, he demanded 'All power to the Soviets'. 'It was a mistake', he now admits, but he claims not to have made any other mistakes. A fanatical defender of private property, he claims to have always preferred a market economy to collectivism. Gennady Burbulis did not need to read the mysterious documents that persuaded Leonid Kravchuk to change sides so suddenly; even when he was in Sverdlovsk, he would rather have taught the liberal doctrines of Friedrich von Hayek than the 'disastrous egalitarian utopia' of communism. Forced to conform to the demands of totalitarianism, he practised an Orwellian doublethink until such time as he was able to say out loud what he had always thought in secret. Such statements absolve him from any

need to reply to his many enemies, who cannot forgive him, among other things for his involvement in the 'Bialowierza plot', which sealed the dissolution of the Soviet Union, and who bring out recordings of his old lectures in Sverdlovsk at every possible opportunity.'

Gennady Burbulis's answer suits large number of intellectuals and members of the *nomenklatura*, who would like to have it believed that they too were forced to say the opposite of what they had always thought. Identifying with Kravchuk, who knew nothing, or with Burbulis, who always knew, serves the same purpose: it allows the elite of the CPSU to change sides with a clear conscience. In order to situate this society's 'real problems', we have to look at the real intellectual outlook of the Soviet 'power elite' over the last decades.

I deliberately use C. Wright Mills's definition because it seems to me more pertinent than either that of the Trotskyists (bureaucracy) or that of Milova Djilas (the new class). C. Wright Mills's elite is made up of men and women who are, in material terms, much better off than ordinary people and who also have the ability to take decisions affecting the destiny of all. The USSR's 'super-rich' were of course much less wealthy than their equivalent in the United States, and Moscow's 'celebrities' enjoyed much less celebrity than their trans-Atlantic counterparts. Yet after the Khrushchev period, social stratifications in the land of the Soviets became very pronounced, as society became increasingly hierarchical, even though this blatantly contradicted its official doctrine. Those at the top of the social scale were not only irremovable; they were also able to guarantee their children a place in the sun. Their major concerns were no less egotistical than those of their Western counterparts, but, given that there was no private ownership of the means of production, they were unable to increase their wealth and power beyond a certain point. Greedy and completely unscrupulous, they appropriated a bigger slice of the national cake year by year. They did so at the expense of the national economy. By 1956, credits for education and health had simply stopped rising, and the USSR has therefore been outstripped by most Western countries, even in the essential sectors in which it once showed other countries the way. One could list other areas in which the USSR has fallen behind, but let us simply note that if Burboulis and Co. did not believe in the 'egalitarian utopia' they used to teach, their pupils had even less faith in it, as they could see the gap between the power elite and mere mortals growing bigger day by day. On the one hand, there were the *zolotyie dietki* ('the gilded youth'), and on the other there were the *sieryie kryssy* ('the grey mice'). Each group lived in a world that would not change for generations to come. It comes as no surprise to learn that, for a great number of privileged Soviet citizens, the values of Western capitalism were, when it came down to it, more attractive than the values of their communist grandfathers. The social situation of this power elite quite naturally determined its behaviour, its

appetites and the tastes it borrowed from the capitalist world. The conviction that democracy can exist only when there exists a property-owning bourgeoisie and 'kulaks' was not born overnight. They had been coming to that conclusion throughout the previous period, less clearly than Gennady Burbulis suggests, but quite definitely nonetheless. And they obviously did not imagine that the new bourgeoisie and kulaks required by democracy would be chosen at random from amongst the people. Totalitarianism prevented them from openly demanding that role for themselves, but they knew perfectly well that they would be given it, especially if they could retain power.

In 1990, the journal *Sociolguitcheskie issledovania*, which is not widely distributed and which tends to take a christian-democratic line, published, to my great surprise, an extract from Trotsky's *The Revolution Betrayed.* In that book, Trotsky argued that, if it was not overthrown in time by the people, the soviet bureaucracy would try to transform itself into a property-owning class. It seems to me that, when that book was published, very few readers took that prophecy seriously. It was seen as an expression of bitterness or even sectarianism on the part of the exile in Mexico. Even in 1990, the extract published in Moscow did not stimulate discussion, so improbable was the future envisaged by Trotsky. It was only after the 'democratic' victory of August 1991 and the irresistible rise to power of Boris Yeltsin that things began to change radically. On the first anniversary of the 'three glorious Moscow days', the victors are, like Gavriil Popov, who resigned as Mayor of Moscow, now explaining at great length that 'the *nomenklatura* of the CPSU without the CPSU have taken complete control in order to promote reform, but above all to profit from it'.⁵ A revolution, he says in substance, finds expression in the overthrow of a ruling class – as in France in 1789 and as in Russia in 1917 – but this time the same class has remained in power. To complete that pertinent observation, we might add that the class in question is looking for ways to transform itself so as to base its power on a different system of property ownership.

This is undeniably new, and the process is just beginning: Mass privatization will not begin until Autumn 1992, when there will be a no-holds-barred fight for every factory, large or small, for land, if possible, and for everything else! Sergei Alexiev, the star of the democratic camp and a man above suspicion, writes quite openly in *Moscow News* that government plans for privatization will allow the nomenklaturists to acquire most of the national heritage 'because their old party loyalties have enabled them both to keep the power they had in the previous period and to maintain the many connections they established during the long years in which they worked together.'⁶ Gavriil Popov advises the democrats to be patient and to form an opposition, but he also advises them to grab a share in power wherever they can, and to take their share of the cake without any delay.

Others are talking of the *nomenklatournyi capital* ('nomenklatura capital') which will be the earlier 'quasi-capitalism's' legitimate heir. After a whole year of pro-capitalist 'ideological bombardment' – capitalism is now being referred to by its true name, and not as 'normal society' – public opinion is, they think, ready for this radical reform. The Russian man in the street is traditionally a sceptic, and he is well aware that this has nothing to do with ideas and that it is purely a matter of power and money. If it did not cost him anything, he would no doubt accept the situation ('I wouldn't object if they paid me more now that they are capitalists than they did when they were communists'). But whilst the privatisers make no secret of their ambitions, the task may be beyond them, strong as they are, simply because 'they cannot pay more.' Quite the contrary. Hence the climate of fear in Moscow and throughout the country; people are afraid of popular revolts, coups and other calamities. The transition from 'real socialism' to capitalism will not, in other words, be straightforward and the present power elite is creating more problems than it can resolve in its attempt to change its spots. Hence its great internal divisions, and hence the changes of tack when it applies its policies. In order to understand this curious battle, we must first look at the avatars of the 'shock therapy' introduced by the Yeltsin-Burbulis-Gaidar team at the beginning of 1992.

Nascent capitalism in England, in other European countries and in the United States undoubtedly led to increased wealth. Karl Marx, its most severe critic, paid tribute to its ability, which was unlike anything that had been previously known, to revolutionise the means of production and to create new markets. But the former USSR is not a virgin land where capital can play a similar role. It is already an industrialized country with an enormous productive potential, and it is in crisis because of the corruption of the elite and because the central command structure created in the era of industrialisation is no longer adapted to an economy of that size. That is why Gorbachev wanted to introduce a 'socialist market' – the definition of which left something to be desired – which would, in his view, free producers from the constraints of rigid planning and oil the wheels of the system. Unlike the reformers in other Communist countries, he came to believe, after some initial hesitations, that priority should be given to political reform, arguing that the roots of the problem lay in the Soviet citizen's alienation from politics and work. Having failed to introduce shopfloor democracy in 1987, he resolved to free the state from Party control and to democratize it by calling elections. The Congress of People's Deputies was elected in 1989 and Soviets (parliaments) were elected in every republic, region and municipality in 1990. It is therefore somewhat of a paradox to hear orators in these assemblies – especially in Russia – accusing the former President of having blocked reforms during his six-year rule. If that were true, how could they have become deputies in a country in which there had been no free elections for seventy years?

The truth is that Gorbachev's 'liberal' critics hold it against him that he did not immediately dismantle the two pillars of the centralised economy: Gosplan (the central planning body) and Gossnab (the state distribution body). It should be recalled that 87.7% of the Soviet state's revenue comes from the profits made by state and cooperative enterprises, and that it would have been suicidal to kill the goose that laid the golden eggs in the name of market-economy dogma. Experience proved, moreover, that granting factories total accounting autonomy and encouraging the development of the private sector was enough to provoke the illegal accumulation of wealth at the expense of the profitability of the economy. Even in Gorbachev's day, the first millionaires, who came from the nomenklatura and the mafia of the underground economy, were beginning to demonstrate 'the power of their money.' They were not, however, entirely sure of their future: the President was threatening to fight corruption and had even promulgated a decree (which was never applied) allowing the KGB to undertake investigations without a court warrant. The President had a lot on his plate as a result of the rise of demands for independence and, wishing to put first things first, he turned a blind eye to what seemed to be temporary economic anomalies. In 1991, he organized a great national referendum on a 'New Union of Republics'. The outcome was satisfactory (57% in favour), but it did not put a brake on the centrifugal forces. In the meantime, the managers of the big factories were founding commercial banks – which were in fact financial holding companies – whose parasitic operations astonished even western specialists in speculation. *Pravda*, the central organ of the CPSU, published advertisements for the first 'raw materials and commodity exchanges', using a slogan that was familiar from the past: '*Enrichissez vous*'. Then, during the short-lived coup of August 1991, the 'Moscow rich' financed the defence of Boris Yeltsin's 'White House' and constantly shouted his praises from the rooftops in the hope of reaping political dividends.

In these conditions, the victory of the democrats was almost automatically transformed into a victory for the radical wing of the marketeers, who were anxious to make the transition to capitalism 'with a single leap across the precipice', to use an expression that has been in vogue in Moscow since 1990. How were they to prepare to make that leap? The liquidation of Gosplan and Gossnab had sounded the death knell for the old system, but had not thereby established a western-style economy. The state might well proclaim that it no longer wished to intervene in the economy, and might well take its inspiration from the precepts of Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher, but that did not turn Russia into the United States or Great Britain. It was therefore decided to proceed one stage at a time, and to begin – on the advice of the International Monetary Fund and in the expectation of receiving its help – by balancing the state budget. No sooner had Boris Yeltsin reached the heights of power than he

asked the thirty-five-year old Yegor Gaidar and a few other young economists to apply the 'shock therapy' that had already been tried out in Poland for more than two years, beginning in January **1992**. According to those who dreamed it up, this therapy would work like chemotherapy. In order to block the spread of cancerous cells, chemotherapy also temporarily stops the growth of healthy cells; that is the price the body must pay to rid itself of the illness and to return to normal. When applied to the economy, the therapy consists in ceasing to subsidize non-profitable sectors so that 'healthy cells' of private entrepreneurs can multiply and get the country out of its crisis. In Poland in **1989**, the 'liberal doctors' promised that the worst of the treatment would be over within six months. In Russia in **1992**, it was known that this was far from being the case and that Poland was sinking into a depression. The Yeltsin-Burbulis-Gaidar team nevertheless promised in its turn that the situation would stabilise within six months and would then begin to improve.

The miracle did not take place. For a variety of reasons – the size of the country, the anarchic proliferation of 'commercial banks', the impossibility of ensuring the partial convertibility of the rouble – 'shock therapy' did even more damage in Russia than it had done in Poland. This wild form of capitalist accumulation is purely destructive and does nothing at all to increase 'the wealth of the nation'. I have before me an interview with Russian Vice-President Alexander Rutskoi published in *Moscow News* on **23 August 1992**. He draws up a balance sheet for the 'therapy' with a few figures that do not require comment: 'Since the beginning of the year, industrial output has fallen by **18%**, national revenue by **18%**, agricultural output by **27%**, and foreign trade by **27%**. In order to reach the **1990** level, we have, according to my calculations, at least eight years of very hard work ahead of us.'

How are we to explain such a rapid collapse on such a large scale? Without going into details, we can identify a few decisive factors: a) the removal of subsidies and of almost all price-controls resulted in an increase in the cost of living that is unprecedented in the country's history; prices rose by **30**, **40** or even **60** times the original figure (officially, according to Gaidar, they rose by **18** times); b) very few factories in Russia – even profitable ones – can do without state credit facilities, for the very good reason that, despite the recommendations of the plan, their clients often pay them late. The decision to do away with those facilities at a time when prices were spiralling resulted in widespread non-payment and in a fantastic level of debt on the part of all factories. According to official statistics, the total owed was **39** billion roubles in January **1992**, but it had risen to **3,200** billion in July, and most factories did not even have enough roubles to pay wages; some put their staff on unpaid leave; others invented their own currency or paid wages in kind, resorted to barter and God knows what else. c) Russia imposed reforms on the other republics because

Russia alone controlled their common currency – the rouble. Despite that, the Republics were not slow to establish their own banks and to establish their own economic priorities. In these conditions, the very idea of balancing the budget was ludicrous, particularly as the CIS's economic ministers did not even attempt to coordinate their policies, realizing that it was a case of 'every man for himself'.

Taking their cue from an unfortunate slogan launched by Boris Yeltsin in an attempt to stimulate enterprise ('take all the freedom you can') everyone who was in a position to plunder national assets was, in the meantime, doing so with great imagination and no scruples. In a country where the mere possession of foreign currency had until very recently been an official crime, all restrictions and controls were removed overnight. Russia's central bank estimates the outflow of capital at 15 billion dollars since the beginning of 1992.' The statistics do not, however, tell us what proportion of those dollars belong to legal exporters who have decided not to repatriate them, and what proportion belongs to speculators who are investing their loot in tax havens in the Bahamas. The distinction between the two sectors is, besides, somewhat vague, as the top managers and the new entrepreneurs tend to work in partnership rather than to compete, and often come from the same social background. To the best of my knowledge, only Armenia has banned its ministers and top bureaucrats from becoming involved **with** private businesses. The relevant law will not come into effect until January 1993, but the other republics do not seem to be in any great hurry to follow Armenia's example. In the meantime, the Russian minister for energy states, as though he were talking about someone going off with boxes of matches in his pocket, that, according to his estimates, two million tonnes of oil are being exported without licences every month. One does not have to be a great intellectual to guess that fraud on this scale – and oil is only one example – is only possible because of the connivance of the administration and the private sector, which are getting rich by doing one another favours.

Within the space of a few months, the Russian economy had been 'dollarized' on a scale that has never been seen even in eastern Europe, which has years of experience of these things. In Moscow, the dollar soared from 60 roubles in January to 300 roubles at the end of September 1992. At this absurd rate of exchange, which suits the logic of the speculators, the average Russian wage (5,000 roubles per month) is at the level of the poorest countries in the world – Haiti and Burma. 'Dollarization' is helping some to get rich illegally and is impoverishing the majority. The smart districts of Moscow and St Petersburg are now full of the 'new poor', but the imperturbable **commentaries on** 'The Voice of Russia' explain that similar contrasts can be found everywhere – in New York, London, Rome and Lisbon – and that it is quite natural to find them in the big cities of the former USSR too.'

Not all the power elite would endorse such cynical comments. It is already seen as a miracle that the people did not rise in revolt during the first winter of 'shock therapy', but it would be decidedly dangerous to gamble on its continued passivity. Public opinion polls show that less than 10% of the population is satisfied with the radical reforms, whereas 70% are unhappy with them, and 6% 'already want to take to the barricades.' In the Moscow region by-elections of July 1992, more than 60% of voters abstained, and the democrat candidate received only 5% of the votes cast. Boris Yeltsin saw which way the wind was blowing and summoned the ministers and top bureaucrats to the bedside of Russia's sick economy. Former Prime Minister Valentin Pavlov is still in prison as a result of his involvement in the August 1991 coup, but his closest collaborators – Tchernomyrdin, Bartchuk and Khaya – are now back in the Kremlin. Victor Gerachenko has been made director of the National Bank. He is a 'second-generation Soviet banker', and succeeded his father as director of the former USSR's Gosbank. All this confirms the existence of the CPSU nomenklatura's 'many connections' and of the many shared interests that transcend the noisy public disputes. It should be remembered that during the stormy session of the Supreme Soviet that followed the coup, Boris Yeltsin pointed an accusing finger at Gorbachev, who had tried to protect certain ministers. 'Read this report aloud,' he shouted, handing him the stenographic record of the last meeting of the Council of Ministers. But that was in August 1991, and Gorbachev had to be humiliated. In August 1992, the former president counts for nothing on the political scene, and there is nothing to prevent Yeltsin from rehabilitating 'comrades' or 'gentlemen' who do, after all, know more about the economy than young Yegor Gaidar and the other 'boys in pink shorts', to use Vice-President Rutskoi's early description of Gaidar's team.

Another example, this time relating to the coup, shows how fluid and murky Russian politics can be. The guiding light behind the dangerous adventure of August 1991 seemed to have been the KGB chief Kruitchkov, acting with the help of Defence Minister Yazov, who deployed his tanks in the streets. But on the anniversary of the coup, General Mikhail Moiseev, former head of the General Staff, broke his silence and told the press that he had not been aware of anything and that Marshal Yazov had enlisted the help of only two top-ranking military men: General Pavel Gratchev, who brought his paratroopers from the Far East to Moscow, and Air Marshal Yevgeny Chapochnikov, who supplied the aircraft for the operation.' All in vain, as at the last moment, the paratroopers remained in their barracks. The final outcome is still astounding: Air Marshal Yevgeny Chapochnikov is now Commander in Chief of the CIS's armed forces, and General Pavel Gratchev is Russia's Minister for Defence. The two men who took part in the plot have been promoted, whereas the honest Moiseev has been dismissed. Where is the logic in all that?

A friend in Moscow said that this is a westerner's question. 'According to your logic', he told me, 'Yeltsin should not have become president of the Supreme Soviet in 1990 because he could initially count on only 30% of all deputies. When the time came to elect a president by universal suffrage, it would have been logical for him to choose his running mate from his own camp and not from the CPSU. But our logic, and especially Boris Yeltsin's logic, is based upon the art of behind the scenes negotiations: you have to win over likely "comrades", tame the waverers and buy the hard-liners. General Moiseev's revelations do nothing to embarrass Yeltsin; on the contrary, they show that he did buy some plotters and did keep his word. Doesn't he boast of having outwitted them?'

My friend in Moscow is not pro-Yeltsin – far from it. He does not see him as a charismatic leader ('He's not clever enough') and does not believe that he will emerge victorious from the new battles that are looming on the social front. Caution suggests that we should not make too many predictions about those battles, but it is time to examine the opposing forces.

The almost simultaneous break up of the 'Democratic Russia' electoral pact and the CPSU is not really surprising. Both were conglomerates bringing together men with different opinions, some because they were opposed to the government of the day, others because they were bound together by the rites and customs of a party that lost its ideological soul long ago. Because of its mixed composition, the new government – which was made up of 'radicals' from the *nomenklatura* and some democrats – helped to fragment the political scene still further. On 28 October 1991, Boris Yeltsin announced his intention of founding his own political party, but quickly realised that the project was unrealistic. It would have required the formulation of at least a programme, if not a doctrine, and the President of Russia has a definite aversion to such commitments. It should of course be recalled that the Yeltsin-Gaidar government did not in fact present a programme to the Supreme Soviet, and that its 'shock therapy' proposals were put forward only in a 'letter of intent' sent to the IMF in a bid to obtain credits. Within the former CPSU, now split into six mini-parties, discussion centres mainly on the rules of the game – the perennial problem of 'democratic centralism' – with a view to a possible but unlikely reunification. The Party's old leading lights – Ryjkov, Ligachev and Polozkov – have kept out of the debate and are, it is said, no longer on speaking terms. It is not surprising that only a tiny fraction of the population – estimated at 300,000 people, which is not very much for a huge country with a population of 150 million – should take a more or less active part in political life. There are of course parliamentary groupings in the Supreme Soviet and in the Congress of Deputies, and very bitter debates do take place, but it is hard to say just how representative the deputies are, given that they were elected long before the break up of the USSR. There are more opinion polls than there were, but they cannot

replace the parties which, in democratic countries, allow governments to keep a finger on society's pulse. The Kremlin's strategists still hope, however, that the seething cauldron will eventually produce two 'non-extremist' forces which, like the Republicans and the Democrats in the USA, will be able to form a two-party system. A first small step in that direction was taken when the terms 'left' and 'right' began to be used in their correct senses; Mrs Thatcher's admirers in Moscow no longer say that they are on the 'left' and admit, like their fellows in the rest of the world, to being on the 'right'. The two parties which may, it is thought, form a future government have been established within the last few months; their names were previously unknown, but they are more open about their intentions than the old parties. Let me briefly describe them.

The mathematician Constantin Borovy, who is one of the richest men in Russia, made his fortune (estimated at hundreds of millions of dollars) by founding the first 'raw materials and commodity exchange' in central Moscow in 1990. The name is deceptive, as the exchange is in reality no more than a gigantic auction room where companies and even private individuals can sell or exchange their commodities. I admit that I have never quite understood just how it works, and I am not alone in that. When he was invited to New York by Wall Street's 'big wheels', Borovy disappointed those gentlemen, and either could not or would not reveal the workings of his highly profitable invention. But Constantin Borovy is now too rich and powerful to have to confine his interests to business. The highly ambitious Constantin Natanovitch may well have presidential ambitions, but given the prevailing climate of antisemitism, his Jewish patronymic is a serious handicap. He has therefore contented himself with founding a political party **in partnership** with the famous eye surgeon Sviatoslav Fedorov, who is a 'real Russian'. The last-named also distinguished himself as a reformer within the CPSU – I can recall his speech to the **XIXth** All-Union Conference of the CPSU – without neglecting his own business interests. He has built a major hotel complex in the grounds of his eye clinic. It is intended for foreign patients who will pay in hard currency. He has also opened Moscow's first big casino ('It's a place where you learn to take decisions', he says). His fortune is estimated at 100 million dollars, which certainly qualifies him to be co-President, with Borovy, of the 'Economic Freedom Party'. Both millionaires support Yegor Gaidar, but not in the same way as the other members of his government who, they say, are 'still building communism'. Their party would like to play the role the Republicans play in the United States, and like that party proclaims that every citizen should be able to go into business and get rich. In the Russian-version of the old American myth of the shoeshine boy who became a billionaire, the 'Economic Freedom Party' cites the example of 41-year-old Valery Neverov, the 'honest academic' who was decorated by the Mayor of Moscow for being the best

USSR 'businessman of 1991', and keeps quiet about the sharks and mafiosi who are exploiting the anarchic market. Neverov, a professor of physics at the University of Tioumen in Western Siberia, made fabulous profits in his 'Hermes' oil exchange by buying at Soviet prices and then selling on the world market at forty times that price. This was semi-legal, as the state has accepted the right of oil-producers to sell 20% of their output in order to modernize their wells and to improve the work force's living standards. In practice, these deals have made the middlemen rich, and allow the directors of the oil fields to try out their brand new Mercedes on the dusty roads of the region. Having once spent some time in Western Siberia, I can well imagine the results, and I can quite understand that the people are not exactly enthusiastic about this kind of modernization. The 'Economic Freedom Party' does not agree; in its view, young people and active members of society have been gripped by 'business fever'; and it is flooding the press with adverts, and preparing to launch both a daily newspaper and a television channel.

The opposition to this 'big capital' party is provided by the equivalent to the American Democratic Party (to go on using the initial analogy): the 'Civic Union', which claims to be a centre-left party. It is prepared to cooperate with its 'Economic Freedom' rival over certain points (and in all matters concerning the development of the private sector), but is putting forward a more cautious overall strategy for the transition to a market economy." The Civic Union is led by key figures like Alexander Rutskoi, the Vice-President of Russia, and Arkady Volsky, the chairman of a powerful lobby of state industries. The last-named is not afraid to describe 'shock therapy' as 'pure idiocy', openly admits to having prime ministerial ambitions, and recommends the adoption of the current Chinese model. He points out that, since 1979, China has had an annual growth-rate of 10% and that it attracted 30 billion dollars worth of foreign investment in 1992. The figures dazzle Russians, who are not really concerned about what lies behind the facade of 'China's success'. But are they capable of the same performance, or of imposing hyperexploitation on the workers? What is more, the Chinese regime rejects all forms of democracy, which means that when it cites China as a model, the Civic Union shows, say its critics, its own authoritarian instincts. General Rutskoi, one of the Union's founders and a hero of the war in Afghanistan does in fact have a somewhat 'Bonapartist' profile, and still has strong links with the army. In the present climate, the case being made against him – on the basis of assumptions rather than facts – does not seem to alarm many Russians, and his popularity continues to grow, and to outstrip that of Boris Yeltsin. In fact, the Volsky-Rutskoi duo is simply prioritizing a revival of industrial and agricultural output under the aegis of the state, and wants to delay privatization by introducing it in stages so as to avoid the clearance sales being held by the present government.

Arkady Volsky, who was director of the ZIL car factory before being given responsibility for the industrial sector in the Central Committee of the CPSU, is described by his enemies as 'a managing agent acting for the former USSR's military-industrial complex'. The description is meant to be pejorative, but it is in fact an involuntary tribute to Volsky's power. It is no secret that the USSR concentrated its best technologies, its best research laboratories, and its best engineers and technicians in the defence industries. Those who work in them, at any level, still have the accommodation, holiday homes, creches, hospitals and thousands of other facilities that go with the job. What private industrialist would agree to take on all that? One has only to ask that question to realize that the Civic Union is opposing doctrinaire privatization on pragmatic grounds, and that its hand is not short of trumps. The 'idiotic' policy of the radical reformers would result in the decline of the military-industrial complex's factories (mainly because of the brain drain) and, in the long run, in their paralysis. Even during the great arms race, these factories devoted some of their capacity to civilian needs (Aeroflot's planes have always been manufactured within the military-industrial complex, as have fishing boats, to take only two examples). Arkady Volsky maintains that his policies would allow the conversion and modernization of this vast sector and would make it capable of producing quality goods for both export and the home market. He is obviously counting on assistance from foreign capital for his ambitious project, but intends to carry it out under state leadership. In his view, the other essential precondition for its success is the reestablishment of the value of the rouble and of links between industries, which cannot rely upon the various 'exchanges' of Borovy, Neverov and Co. For his part, Vice-President Ruskoï, who is in charge of the agricultural sector, is arguing the case against those who say that the land should be sold to individual farmers and maintains, with figures to prove his case, that such an operation would cost 4,500 billion roubles, which cannot possibly be found, and that rural productivity would be even lower than it is now." In short the Civic Union is arguing for a mixed economy in which the public and cooperative (*kolkhoze*) sectors would play the dominant role for a long time to come. This is essentially a technocratic programme and, in a sense, a social-democratic programme (it gives an important role to welfare), but its influential authors prefer to describe it as 'civic' or simply 'democratic' so as not to bring down the wrath of those who regard any mention of 'the social' as a reminder of the pernicious 'communist utopia'. Since the fiasco of 'shock therapy', Boris Yeltsin has been ready to listen to the arguments of the Volsky-Ruskoï team, particularly as he is now navigating a storm without a compass, the power elite can hear the mounting rumble of discontent from a base which is poorly organized but which feels that it has no place in this new 'democratic society'.

The images that reached us from Moscow after the aborted coup of August 1991 gave the impression of a generalized anti-communist upris-

ing: the crowd tearing down Dzerzhinsky's statue, and besieging the CPSU Central Committee building and other Party offices. But a year after the event, Gavriil Popov revealed, in the series of articles mentioned earlier, that these 'enraged democrats' had been brought to Moscow from the surrounding area and that, even so, they did not represent an uncontrollable force. All it took to make everyone go home quietly was, he says, a presidential decree banning further manifestations of public disorder. We also know that the monuments spared by the upheavals of August 1991 are still there and that in St Petersburg, even Felix Dzerzhinsky's statue is still in place outside the headquarters of the former KGB. Although their anti-communist diatribes are becoming louder, Yeltsin, Burbulis and the rest of them have no intention of closing Lenin's Mausoleum, because, it is said, to do so would offend popular sensibilities. But how can they revile the Bolsheviks from morning to night without offending those same popular sensibilities?

The answer lies, in my view, in the loss of all historical memory of the October Revolution in the former USSR. Stalin was largely responsible for its destruction because he reduced an entire history to the **personality** of Lenin – and his own personality – and physically liquidated all the other protagonists. It took decades for the victims, starting with Nicolai Bukharin, to be rehabilitated under Mikhail Gorbachev (and Bukharin was rehabilitated for opportunistic reasons, or in other words to allow Gorbachev to claim his heritage). Communists in the USSR were taught a version of history which could be – and was – easily manipulated." I am obviously not concerned here with an historical debate, but with a factor which may help us to understand the behaviour of an ex-communist elite which is trying to turn itself into a property-owning class. General Volkogonov said that: 'The last obstacle standing in **the way** of my departure from the CPSU was Lenin', and he was obviously not the only one who could have said that. Many others had to find at least one good reason to justify their careers within the Party, and Lenin was apparently the best reason of all because he was an intellectual – and intellectuals now enjoy great prestige – and because he founded a great state, which is not bad either. Aside from openly anti-Soviet dissidents – and there were not many of them – almost no one questioned Lenin's role. Generalized attacks on the Bolsheviks, on the other hand, had already begun to be made during *perestroika*, when any street violence or even mere reference to the working class, were denounced as unacceptably Bolshevik. I recall the indignation of a professor and deputy who read in *Pravda* that, after the anti-Armenian pogrom in Baku, a CP leader in Azerbaijan was considering forming workers' militias to **combat** racist disorder. 'This is a return to Bolshevik methods', he exclaimed, even though he was anti-racist and **pro-Armenian**. For the Russian elite, everything that is not strictly parliamentary has gradually become 'classist', 'marxist' and above all 'Bolshevik'.

There must be a logic – and I think that it is indeed a 'classist' logic – to this fearful simplification, which reminds one of the reactions of the Western bourgeoisie when it felt itself threatened by the labour movement. On the other hand, whilst it is in historical terms absurd to make a distinction between Lenin and his Party, the fact is that statues and images of the old leader have always been ubiquitous in the USSR, whereas the Bolsheviks have not been part of the political landscape for fifty years. The good people of Moscow therefore have nothing good to say about the Bolsheviks, so as not to be accused of having violent intentions and, in my view, because the entire history of October seems as remote to them as the history of Herman Cortès's conquest of Mexico. For the last forty-seven years, the event that founded the USSR has not been the October Revolution, but victory over the Nazi invaders in the 'Great Patriotic War of the Russian people'. That became the source of the identity of anyone who claimed to be a Communist, but it was also the source of pride of every Russian. At the victory banquet held in the Kremlin in June 1945, Stalin made a famous toast to 'the great Russian people'. It became engraved on the memory of a whole generation, and seems to have been handed down to their children.

The Soviet people have lost their fatherland overnight. 'We used to be a great country, respected throughout the world, and now we are no more than fifteen wretched states begging for Western aid.' This heartfelt cry from the very 'patriotic' general Alexander Lebed is echoed throughout the country. The other Republics hung out flags when they gained their independence. Not the Russians, who had most to lose from the changes that were occurring. Despite the predictions of certain prophets, they did not become rich when they shrugged off the 'burden of aid' to the other former Soviet Republics. What is more, twenty-five million Russians are living outside their own country in 'fraternal republics' which do not even recognize their national identity. They are simply the 'Russian-speaking population', second-class citizens who, in the Baltic countries for example, do not even have the right to vote. And as if that were not enough, they are suffering because of inter-ethnic conflicts which, in theory, are no concern of theirs, but which are forcing them to flee in haste from first Azerbaijan, and then Chechen-Ingush, Tadjikistan and Abkhazia. All these refugees have relations in Moscow, St Petersburg and even distant Sakhalin. Their families are too poor to help them, but share their indignation at the way they have been treated.

The slogans of October 1917 referred to 'the fraternal union of the proletariat', but it certainly does not apply to this situation. Stalin's 1945 toast seems tailor-made. Hence a phenomenon which is to say the least unexpected: from year to year, the generalissimo's popularity has been rising in the polls. In 1990, only 8% expressed support for Stalin. In 1991, 18% did so, but support for him suddenly rose to 49% in 1992. If we are to

believe the figures, which seem to me to be an exaggeration, one in two Russians mourns 'the great Stalin' and would like to have a new leader of the same mettle." It is not the power elite that is nostalgic about Stalin. nor is it the supporters of the potential two-party system; it is the working people who constitute the natural base for a left opposition. One of the organizers of the first demonstration to be held against Yeltsin's policies in Moscow, told me of his consternation at seeing groups of workers. including young people, marching into Manezh Square carrying portraits of Stalin. Seeing the television cameras homing in on these groups, he begged them to get rid of the portraits, but to no avail. He has now become accustomed to seeing old portraits of Stalin at meetings organized by right-wing 'patriots' whose ranks include monarchists with portraits of the Tsar, as well as at those organized by the Party of Labour, which is on the left and which is fighting for social justice. For the power elite, this is a heaven-sent opportunity; it can describe the opposition as 'red-brown' and imply that the collusion of today is a continuation of the collusion that supposedly always existed between Communists and Nazis. This is enough to give a heart attack to anyone who knows anything about the struggle to the death between the anti-Bolshevik fanatics of the Third Reich and Stalin's Russia, not to mention Red Army veterans, who do not exactly recall playing cricket with their 'ideological allies' during the war. With its overstated denunciations of the 'red-browns', the present government is poisoning the political atmosphere, and destroying the threshold of mutual tolerance that is an essential part of democracy.

Whilst it swears that it has the best of intentions, the West is also constantly stoking the flames. IMF advisers who know nothing about the Soviet economy demand the application of their 'universal' neo-liberal recipes and then say at the end of every quarter that the Russians do not deserve the aid promised because they are still not practising hard line capitalism. In Washington in June 1992, Yeltsin signed a truly unequal agreement on nuclear disarmament which will deprive Russia of the greater part of its strike force, whilst the Americans will not agree to give up the weapons that the Soviet military most fear. What is more, Moscow and the big provincial cities have been invaded not only by American businessmen, many of them shady, but also by a cohort of preachers from various Protestant churches. For many Russians, this is unbearably humiliating, and worse than any past humiliations. It will not take much to make them conclude that the American capitalist 'professors' who are telling Yeltsin and Gaidar what to do, are the root of all evil. The clear social divide that is emerging is not an extension of the old quarrel between slavophiles and westernisers; it is a **dispute** between those who are being forced to live on their devalued roubles – the majority of the population – and those who are prospering thanks to their green banknotes. Some people in the Kremlin – notably Burbulis, Poltoranin and Kozyrev – are

claiming that the wolf is at the door, and denouncing 'the plots of the enemies of the market economy.' The more cautious Boris Yeltsin is attempting to adjust his fire by making direct attacks by decree on the omnipotence of the dollar – which, in the absence of any alternative economic strategy, is no more than wishful thinking – but this does reveal his 'patriotic' sensibilities and his awareness of the danger that threatens. For if certain Cassandras in Moscow are to be believed, Russia has lost its bearings and if it continues to go down the road it is following, the result will be a devastating civil war.

Such fears are not unfounded but, being incapable of thinking in apocalyptic terms, I prefer to believe that the rift in Russian society, which is the result of social conflict, will not lead to a bloody confrontation. The rise of nationalism and nostalgia for Stalin are no more than the froth on a wave of popular discontent (and are holding back a more effective expression of that discontent). But with time, as the various strata of the working class begin to defend their real interests, the present protests, which are both disorganized and contaminated by demagogy, will be drowned out. That is why I attach such great importance to the actions of the independent trade unions, which may appear to be corporatist but which do allow social subjects to organize around specific aims. Experience showed during the miners' strike of 1989 that Russian workers have a great capacity for self-organization and that once they begin to take action, they refuse to listen to patriotic false prophets bearing portraits of Stalin. Of course they are 'groups in fusion', as defined by Sartre, and will not become lasting movements capable of making their presence felt at the national level. But we know that a strike, and especially a victorious strike, marks consciousness and creates the **premisses** for new actions and demands. It is no accident that the miners had only to threaten to cease to work in 1992 to win a 1,000% wage rise. For the moment, however, industrial workers are suffering less than other wage-earners in the public sector such as teachers, health-service workers and lowly bureaucrats. To say nothing of the misery of old age-pensioners, who have been hardest hit of all by the 'shock therapy', who have been reduced to poverty and who are usually a burden on the inadequate budgets of their relatives. For all those who are immune to 'business fever' – and many of them are struggling for reform – the trade unions are the only hope, and the Party of Labour is quite right to try to win their support. The road ahead is of course as long as the road that once lay ahead of the early labour movement in Britain, but I can see no other 'right solution' to the Russian crisis.

It would be wrong for me to forger Gorbachev at the end of a text which began by talking so much about him. In my view, the former president fluffed his exit from the Kremlin because he was either unable or unwilling to denounce aloud the 'Bialowierza plot' which destroyed the USSR; the

stance he took against 'shock therapy' was also too ill-defined, and suggested that he was resigned to it all. And whilst he continues to speak of his 'socialist option' and even to attend the Congress of the Socialist International, the content of that 'option' has become almost impossible to determine. The fact remains, however, that the Russian opposition is wrong to blame *perestroika* for the present crisis, as it is simply not true that the ancien regime could have gone on functioning much longer. What is more, Yeltsin and his supporters are once more afraid of Gorbachev, having sensed that they are unpopular and realized that he is a strong personality who might still have a role to play. But their attempts to discredit him thanks to the absurd tactic of putting the CPSU on trial in the Constitutional Court may rebound against them by arousing sympathy for a victim of the arbitrary exercise of power. The left opposition would be making a serious mistake if it turned away from (or remained indifferent to the fate of) a leader whose thinking may be confused, but who does aspire towards something resembling social democracy at a time when most of the power elite is openly fighting for the worst of all possible capitalisms. Last but not least, not being an advocate of 'all or nothing' I think that the victory of Arkady Volsky's technocrats might be a good thing, and might help to improve Russia's terrifying economic position. Were that to happen, a degree of political sanity might also be restored.

Paris, 15 October 1992.

Postscript: 20 December 1992

Over the last two months, Russia has been through some serious ordeals which could have degenerated into civil war. But having come within an ace of disaster, it has found a compromise solution and has simply changed government. Victor Chernomyrdin, the new prime minister is a technocrat, a top manager who formerly worked in the gas industry, and has links with Arkady Volsky's Civic Union. It seemed to me in October that this would be the inevitable outcome and I therefore do not wish to make any substantial changes to my article. In order to bring it up to date, I would like to imitate the end of certain films and indicate what has become of my 'main characters'.

BORIS YELTSIN. Having lost his majority in the Congress of People's Deputies, the country's highest legislative body, on 10 December he attempted an anti-parliamentary coup but he had the support of neither the army nor a substantial section of the population. His coup was therefore no more than a bluff, and *The Guardian* soberly concluded that he had been 'ham-fisted'. Valery Zorkin, the president of the Constitutional Court, needed all his skills to enable the ebullient Russian leader to save face and to persuade the deputies to accept a compromise that left the President's powers intact. Yeltsin did, however, emerge from the trial of

strength with a tarnished reputation, and that can only be a very good thing for Russia's young democracy.

GENNADY BURBULIS. In order to appease the deputies' anger, Yeltsin sacrificed his eminence grise, the former professor of 'scientific communism' who, according to his critics, had considerable influence over the President. At all events, it was Burbulis who encouraged him to threaten and insult deputies, and it is only natural that he should pay for the fiasco.

EDUARD SHEVARDNADZE. Being the only candidate in the presidential elections held in Georgia on 11 October, he was 'democratically' elected with 95% of the vote. He is also Prime Minister and has been granted special powers for a period of three years. On 23 November, he was baptised Gueorgui, meaning 'protector of Georgia' in an orthodox church in Tsbilitsi, and told the press that he had an icon of the Holy Virgin in his office. Being bogged down in the war in Abkhazia, which has united all the Muslim peoples of the Caucasus against him, he certainly needs divine protection.

LEONID KRAVCHUK is still riding high on a wave of nationalism, but the breakdown of the Ukraine's economy has forced him to sacrifice his faithful prime minister Vitold Fokin. Leonid Kutchma, the new prime minister, is, like his counterpart in Moscow, a top manager who previously worked in heavy industry. Chernomyrdin sums up the situation as follows: 'Once you could go shopping with a pocketful of money and come back with a basketful of groceries; now you go out with a basketful of roubles, and you come back with scarcely enough to fill one pocket.' In the circumstances, Kravchuk will probably have to tone down his demagogic talk of independence and try to work more closely with Russia and the other former Soviet Republics.

ALEXANDER RUTSKOI. During the session of the Congress of Deputies, Russia's Vice-President distinguished himself as one of the opposition's most effective leaders. He even went so far as to demand that Boris Yeltsin's entourage should be brought before the courts because of their political adventurism, which has done the country incalculable harm. His connections in the army no doubt did a lot to ensure its continued loyalty to Parliament. Defence Minister General Gratchev even dragged himself from his hospital bed to swear to the deputies that he was loyal to the constitution. He also made a point of saying that the army 'has not forgotten its comrades from the Afghan campaign'; this was a nod in the direction of General Rutskoi, who was a hero of the said 'campaign'. According to political observers in Moscow, the Rutskoi-Travkin ticket (Travkin is another refugee from the Yeltsin camp) stands a good chance of defeating Yeltsin in the next presidential elections.

RUSLAN KHAZBULATOV. The Speaker of the Supreme Soviet was the great strategist in the trial of strength with the Russian President, who

was once his main protector. Yeltsin appointed him for two reasons. Khazbulatov is a Chechen, and his appointment to a high office of state symbolises the multinational nature of the Russian Federation; what is more, he is an academic and an economist who has never been part of the apparatus of the CPSU. What Yeltsin did not expect was that the Chechen would prove to be a real statesman who could impose his will upon a parliament in which outbursts of Russian xenophobia are not unknown. Curiously enough, he has also become a *bête noire* for the ultra-liberals, who have not forgiven him for telling Congress that there are many models for a market economy and that **Russia** should look for its own model and turn for inspiration to Sweden rather than the United States. Replying to Khazbulatov, Yegor Gaidar argued that, given the state of affairs in Russia, it was too early to be discussing Swedish and American models, as Sweden and America were amongst the richest countries in the world. But Sweden began to introduce its great social reforms in 1936, when the country was not all that rich. And the Labour Party founded the Welfare State in a Great Britain that had been ruined by the war. The grievances expressed to Congress by deputies were ample proof that the Russians were not ready to wait for some hypothetical **general** prosperity before they too had the right to a modicum of social justice. Khazbulatov also has to be given credit for his ability, during the December sessions, to neutralise the highly vociferous group of pseudo-patriots and Stalinist *revanchistes*. Jonathan Steele is perfectly correct to write (*Guardian*, 16 December 1992): 'Mr Khazbulatov has lived up to his reputation as Russia's most powerful politician.'

CONSTANTIN BOROVY. At the beginning of November, the founder of the 'Economic Freedom Party' fought a by-election in the Krasnodar constituency in Southern Russia so as to be able to participate in the session of the Congress of Deputies. The fact that he won less than 5% of the votes cast and came a long way behind a local leader from the former CPSU, may have convinced him that his dream of winning a majority for a party which openly describes itself as 'bourgeois', is unlikely to come true in the near future. Krasnodar's voters in fact failed to turn out in such numbers that the election was inquorate and will have to be rerun with different candidates. The test of elections showed that, like the other 'post-Communist' countries of Eastern Europe, Russia is already suffering from abstentionism, a very painful illness for new regimes, and one which is adequate proof that its citizens are disappointed by the ruling democrats' failure to **keep** their promises. **Borovy** was a victim of a very general phenomenon, but he naturally blames everything on the unfortunate heritage of 'real socialism'. His Party held its first Congress in Moscow at the beginning of December, and promises to fight the Chernomyrdin government.

VICTOR CHERNOMYRDIN. The new Prime Minister supports the theses of the Civic Union of Arkady Volsky, Rutskoi and **Travkin**. His task

seems impossible: how can he reduce inflation and halt the downturn in production in a country which is, to cite Valery Zorkin, President of the Constitutional Court, ruled by 'totalitarian cliques of mafiosi'? For the moment, all we know is that Chernomyrdin will prioritize the protection of national industries rather than the various joint-ventures, many of which are speculative, and that he will reintroduce the planned distribution of raw materials to get factories back to work and to ensure that airports are not paralysed by fuel shortages. He also wants to improve conditions for those social groups which have been worst affected by the crisis so as to 'put an end to the impoverishment of the population.' These measures do not yet represent a programme, much less a new and socialist-oriented economic model. But the fact that power is in the hands of a man who is not a dogmatic 'liberal' and who enjoys the trust of both President and Congress should, logically, mean that Russia will, given time, recover. Most deputies have a great deal of influence in their constituencies and have important positions in their local or regional Soviet. If they collaborate with Chernomyrdin and actively commit themselves to the new reforms, the state will gradually begin to function again, and that is a *sine qua non* if the present chaos is to end. The heritage of 'Gaidarism' is however, so oppressive that it is too early to draw conclusions.

NOTES

1. *CF Argumenty i fakty* (Moscow), December 1991. In another interview in which he keeps it all rather vague, Leonid Kravchuk maintains (*Izvestia* 25 December 1991) that he knew nothing about Stalin's anti-peasant policy in the 1930s or about the repression that took place in Ukraine after the war.
2. *Izvestia*, 20 August 1992.
3. In the course of a quiz show, the film maker Nikita Mikhalkov asked television viewers 'Who said that?' and played them a tape of a delirious panygeric of 'real socialism'. Most said it was Mikhail Suslov; others thought it was Andrei Zhdanov. The speaker was in fact none other than Gennady Burbulis. The programme was immediately banned, and was spared only thanks to the intervention of Vice-President Alexander Rutskoi. It was, however, shown very late at night.
4. Cf *Sociologicheskie issledovaniya*, I, 1990.
5. Cf the series of four articles published by Popov in *Iszvestia*, 21, 24, 25 and 26 August 1992.
6. Cf. Moscow News 16 August 1992 (Russian edition).
7. Cf the interview with the Bank's director Victor Guerachtchenko *Literatournia* Gazeta. 2 September 1992.
8. As far as corruption in the higher spheres is concerned, not only the press but even leaders say things that make one's hair stand on end. On 8 October 1992, Praesidium-member Mikhail Gurtovoi, told *Niezavissimaya* Gazeta that: 'no matter which ministry you go to, the deputy ministers and the main specialists are no more than travelling salesmen for western companies and spend their time placing orders on their behalf.' Ministers themselves have also been accused of taking over official flats and datchas, and of having bought them in great haste with money coming from bribes. Asked about this by *Argumenty i fakty* (October 1992) deputy minister Mikhail Poltoranin was non-committal: 'I own a datcha, which I built together with my sons. As far as other ministers are concerned, I can guarantee the honesty of those I know very well. I cannot say anything about the others.'

9. His comments were broadcast on the 'news hour' programme broadcast in Russian between 10 and 11 am on 18 September.
10. The *Graydenskiosivch* (Civic Union) emerged from a merger between four parliamentary groups: Arkady Volsky's Civic Union, Alexander Rutskoi's Democratic Russia, Nicolai Travkin's Free Russia, and *Smena* Change).
11. Rutskoi estimates the cost of equipping a modern farm to be at least 20 to 30 million roubles. Given that there are 152,000 would-be farmers, this does give a total of 4.5 billions. Even so, this would represent only a very partial privatization of agriculture.
12. I had occasion to deal with this problem in my *Solik*, which is based on my own wartime experience of the USSR. The book was published in France in 1983, long before the beginning of *Perestroika*.
13. The polls published in the Russian press are sometimes based upon readers' letters, and those who write to the press are not a representative cross-section of the population as a whole. It is also possible that the newspapers are deliberately exaggerating Stalin's popularity so as to warn their readers about the danger of neo-Stalinism. But even if we divide 49% by two or three, that still leaves a lot of people.

Translated by David Macey.