

## GORBACHEV AND THE DYNAMICS OF CHANGE\*

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By six in the morning, queues are already beginning to form in front of the news-stands in Moscow and Leningrad. People may be queuing to buy *Ogonek*, a popular illustrated weekly which had no great readership until very recently, or a literary review which is publishing a work that has been held up by the censors for decades, or a long-awaited critical novel. They may even be queuing to make sure of getting hold of their usual daily, or sometimes even *Pravda*, if it contains an article or an interview that is out of the ordinary: they are afraid that it will be sold out within a few hours. Live television programmes are also becoming more common and the public, who are often invited to take part in them, follow them with an attention that was unknown in the past. Although they have a world-wide reputation for being indigestible, the Soviet press and mass media are suddenly enjoying immense public popularity, thanks to the policy of *glasnost* (openness) introduced by Mikhail Gorbachev. Is this phenomenon really only the tip of an iceberg? Are profound changes really at work in Soviet society? How far can the *perestroika* (reconstruction) inspired and led by the new General Secretary actually go?

For the first time since the Revolution of October 1917—and on the eve of its seventieth anniversary—censorship has been virtually abolished in the Soviet Union. Editors of various publications, who are assumed to know just how far they can go, have sole responsibility for what they publish. The bolder the editor, and the better the editorial team around him, the more popular the journal. The startling success of *Ogonek* is convincing proof of that. But, unfortunately for the most successful papers, editors are still not free to increase their print-runs. Paper is still rationed in the USSR, and the quota assigned to every publication is set once a year. No allowance is made for possible changes in demand in the course of the year. Certain issues of literary journals—and of *Ogonek*—are therefore worth their weight in gold on the black market, and sell for fifty or a hundred times more than the cover price. It seems that this anomaly will gradually disappear as new economic mechanisms based upon

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competition are introduced, but not even the most optimistic observers believe that anything will change in the immediate future.

The plethora of new publications that draws the queues at the Moscow news-stands make it particularly difficult to write this analysis. It is based on material published in the Soviet Union during the first two years of the Gorbachev period. This material makes it possible to understand the systematic decline in the quality of Soviet life, in both moral and material terms, and to understand how Russians are becoming aware of it by taking advantage of the space for debate opened up by glasnost. But we are so far removed from the USSR that it is difficult to keep up with the 'new fronts' that are being opened up by debates on, for example, the situation in the peripheral Republics or on the initial results of perestroika.

Perestroika implies reforms which are much more far-reaching than any of those seen in the past. For the first time, the reforms are beginning to effect both the whole political system and the very nature of power in the workplace. Until recently, the Party had a complete monopoly on power in both the State and the economy; it drew up the only list of candidates for election to the Supreme Soviet, and selected all the leading cadres in the productive or cultural apparatus. Allowing more than one candidate to stand for election and introducing secret ballots in both state institutions and the workplace is therefore not a minor reform. And it is not surprising that the new General Secretary should have thrown the whole weight of his authority into the struggle to overcome resistance, or that he should argue the case for his project whenever the Central Committee meets. He is obviously addressing home opinion; he is not, as certain leader-writers claim, addressing the West in an attempt to make it 'drop its guard'. Yet such accusations do not always fall on deaf ears, as the political climate in Europe is still marked by the East-West tension of recent years and by the downturn in contacts between the two blocs.

In France, the USSR is systematically seen in negative terms, even on the left (partly as a result of Brezhnevism). Twenty-five years ago, when I worked with Jean-Jacques Servan-Schreiber and Françoise Giroud on *L'Express*, we welcomed Ilya Ehrenburg and Nicolai Tikhonov with open arms. To great publicity, we published Yevgeny Yevtushenko's autobiography, and interviews with Vozniessenski, Okoudjava, and other poets of the Khrushchev generation. Although they had no sympathy for Bolshevism (or, obviously enough, for *L'Express*) leading figures in the French school of planning such as Claude Gruzon, Simon Nora and Jean Saint-Geours greatly appreciated having contacts amongst Soviet planners, and especially with Niemtchinov, an eminently reformist member of the Academy. At that time, shortly after the Twenty-Second Congress of the CPSU had ordered the removal of Stalin's body from the mausoleum in Red Square, the entire Western left seemed convinced that Soviet society was evolving towards a novel form of democratization, and that demo-

cratization would lead to the take-off of economic production. It was then, and not during the **Stalinist** terror, that **Sartre** and **Simone de Beauvoir** visited the USSR for the first time and established ties of friendship with such irreproachable Soviet democrats as Alexander Tvardovski and Lena Zonina, and with French residents in Moscow like Jean and Lucie **Cathala**, who were both convinced anti-Stalinists.

In the context of the time, our Soviet interlocutors were not suspected of representing an 'immutable totalitarianism'. Even the expression itself was unheard of. These writers, economists and scientists all bore scars from the tragic ordeals their country had lived through before, during and after the Second World War, and they did not feel that they had been entrusted with some 'historic revolutionary mission'. They did not treat us as though they were messengers from another world which was in permanent conflict with our world. Their attitudes differed considerably, and whilst they all gave **Nikita Khrushchev** considerable credit for having liquidated the Gulag and for having put an end to the Terror, some of them were quite prepared to condemn both his erratic relations with intellectuals and the boorish behaviour he displayed on his trips abroad. But, despite all their reservations, they still believed that, as he had denounced Stalin's conduct during the great purges of 1937–38 to the Twentieth Congress of the CPSU in 1956, Khrushchev would finally have to admit that Stalinism began with the forced collectivization of 1929; that he would eventually rehabilitate **Nicolai Bukharin**, who had been the main opponent of that policy; and that he would revise the entire official version of history.

As luck would have it, my friendship with the Labour leader **Aneurin Bevan** meant that I was able to go with him on an official visit to the USSR during this period. **Bevan** met Khrushchev and his entourage in the Kremlin. During our discussions, members of the leading group displayed boundless optimism about the imminent economic boom, but they refused to discuss the 'mistakes' of the past or the lessons that could be learned from them. Khrushchev himself pretended not to know that he had made a 'secret speech' on that very topic to the Twentieth Congress of the CPSU, and gave the impression that all he wanted to do was to forget about Stalin. According to our main guide **Victor Grishin—Mikhail Gorbachev's** main rival in the race for the post of General Secretary in 1985—the road to Communism in the USSR was straightforward, and our questions about possible democratization simply revealed our ignorance of Soviet realities. He told us to come back in 1980, promising that Communism would have **been** achieved by that date, in accordance with the Party programme. The discrepancy between what he told us and what our usual Soviet contacts said to us was both flagrant and vast.

The young **Yevtuschenko** took advantage of the 'thaw' to sum up what the Soviet political elite really thought in the lines: 'Those who extol our

power / with such zeal and lie to meetings / do not love the power of the Soviets / they love power / for its own sake.' But he was wrong to speak of a 'dead hand'. The 'hand' was alive and well, and it was acting in accordance with a logic which, according to the American sociologist and historian Barrington Moore Jr, is common to all ruling elites, in the East and the West alike: when they have the opportunity to acquire a disproportionate share of the things that make civilization bearable, they **never** hesitate to take it.<sup>2</sup> Nikita Khrushchev was not a major obstacle for a generation of the *nomenklatura* who had been hand-picked by Stalin, who had been compromised in the Terror and who claimed to have the right to reap their just rewards for what they had undergone during the difficult years of industrialization and during the war. The new team grouped around Brezhnev knew from experience that in Stalin's time repression struck mainly at the base, but they also knew that it had not spared the hierarchy, and they would not have dreamed of spilling blood or resorting to forced labour. The mesh of the net of repression was not so fine as it had once been, and a discontented Soviet citizen could escape it simply by not venturing into the minefield of politics. With the exception of a certain number of dissidents such as Sakharov, Solzhenitsyn and Siniavsky, most chose not to break the taboo. At the same time they found other ways to resist, and thus allowed society to take its own course in day to day matters, and to drift away from the path the Party-State had traced for it.

Brezhnev's Russia suddenly became, according to a popular anecdote, 'the land of the five paradoxes': 1) everyone has a job, but no one really works; 2) no one works themselves to death, but the plan is always completed and exceeded; 3) production targets are always met, but you never see the results in the shops; 4) there are still shortages, but no one goes hungry or naked; 5) everyone eventually finds a way to go slow at work, but no one is happy as a result.

A sixth, and more surprising, paradox should be added to the list. Having proclaimed *urbi et orbe* that Stalin had committed the unforgivable crime of establishing a 'cult of personality', Brezhnev nonetheless resolved to establish his own cult of personality. He awarded himself the title of Supreme Marshall and boasted about his military prowess—of which no one had ever heard—in his war memoirs, for which he was promptly given the Lenin Prize for Literature. Workers in the big factories dedicated their productive exploits—which existed mainly in their own imaginations—to him, with personalized messages to 'our beloved Leonid Brezhnev' modelled on those the pioneers of Soviet industry used to send to their 'beloved Joseph Vissarionovitch' in the 1930s. Moscow provided perfect confirmation for Marx's old joke about great events occurring twice: the first time as tragedy, the second as farce.

Despite his intellectual limitations, the new 'beloved' was obviously

not foolish enough to believe in his own cult. The truth is more banal: he and those around him had been brought up to respect certain rituals, and they did not know how to govern without invoking those rituals. They may also have taken the view that 'believers' who believed in nothing would do more to ensure institutional stability than true believers who might formulate demands in the name of their faith. Whatever the truth of the matter, Brezhnevism, unlike Stalinism, never became a doctrine; it never acquired a hold over hearts and minds and it did not inspire anyone to act in accordance with its canons. Although Brezhnev's power elite became wealthy and adopted the consumerist values of western elites, it simply hid behind a smokescreen of impoverished socialist rhetoric which no longer had any meaning.

And yet books and magazines still had to be published, films and plays had to be performed, and spiritual nourishment had to be supplied for a country which was no longer made up of ignorant *moujiks* and which was no longer cut off from the outside world as it had been in Stalin's day. As we have seen, there were not many dissidents, but a great number of other creative workers, who were in theory 'loyal', in fact began to join various critical currents. During the dark years of Brezhnevism, a so-called 'village' or peasant literature began to develop. Its great forebears were Ovetchkin, Solzhenitsyn (*Matryona's Home*), Fedor Abramov and Boris Mojaev, and its most noteworthy heir is Valentine Rasputin, whose latest novel *The Fire* caused a sensation when it was published in 1985. Almost all these books centre upon forced collectivization and its effects, and they therefore challenge, either explicitly or implicitly, the official version of history. In the collective Soviet memory, the second revolution unleashed by Stalin in order to industrialize the country therefore once more stands out as a terrible injustice which cost an incredible number of lives and which destroyed a whole peasant culture which had once been the source of the country's wealth. 'Village' literature does not describe what the history books so delicately refer to as 'the transfer of resources from the pre-socialist sector to the socialist sector'; it describes, without any euphemisms, what Marx, referring to the development of capitalism in Britain, spoke of as the brutal spoliation of the countryside. Yet not one of these authors refers either to Marx or to the precedents set by capitalism; they all regard the evils their parents and relatives suffered as being the work of an evil 'socialist utopia', and claim that they are still paying the price for it today. There is therefore a split between those who suggest that the evil began with the Revolution of October 1917, and those who think that it could have been avoided, had Lenin lived to pursue his NEP policy, which was liberal and worked to the advantage of the peasantry.

Still under the rule of Supreme Marshal Brezhnev, a parallel literary current developed, thanks mainly to the success of Yuri Trifonov's series of 'Muscovite' novels. So-called *bytovaia* literature describes day to day

life (*byt*), and contains many bitter truths about the illusions and hesitations of an older generation 'which preferred believing to knowing'—a generation which is treated with respect but without any indulgence—and above all all about careerism, the absence of principles and modern occupation. These novels are not indictments. Trifonov does not howl in protest, and he does not point his accusatory finger at Brezhnev or even at those who, in 1938, shot his father and deported his mother for eight years. He is a moralist who describes the changing motives of people from one era to the next in a place known as the USSR and, more generally, in the world at large. According to one American expert on Russian literature, he is the 'Soviet Chekov'; in his own country, he tends rather to be seen as Dostoevsky's heir. People often find it surprising that Brezhnev's censors should have allowed such corrosive works to be published. The key to the mystery lies in shortsightedness of a power elite which, although it was deeply imbued with consumerist values, claimed to be fighting precisely those same values when other Soviet citizens displayed them, and which persisted in the belief that Trifonov was criticising 'someone else'. Most 'ordinary readers' understood him better than that.

The work of Abkhaze Fazil Iskander stems from a different genre: *satire*.<sup>3</sup> He too pretends simply to be laughing at the prejudices of mere mortals, but he also weaves in the major themes of the construction of socialism, usually by using the proverbial wit of the Caucasus. The mule who is the hero of one of his stories no more appreciated the innovations introduced by Stalin than its masters, who were, in theory, as backward as their mule, but when the story was written in 1978, most Russian readers had the definite feeling that Iskander's characters had a better understanding of the situation and more common sense than the 'great men' who were the only real 'backward elements' in the book. And when one recalls that Brezhnev was imitating the cult of 'the great man with the moustache', one soon realises that by mocking Stalin, Iskander was really mocking the new Supreme Marshal.

Positive heroes are also becoming rare on the screen and the stage. We know that many films and plays were held up by the censors, because they were 'liberated' only last year thanks to *glasnost* and to changes in the leadership of the film makers' union and the union of theatre workers. Certain films did, however, escape the net, and the relaxation that took place at the end of the Brezhnev period had impressive results in that it revealed that, in the crucial cultural sector—and by extension in the ideological sector—the regime had lost the battle completely. What would the effects be? How could such a breakthrough for non-conformist art be reconciled with the image of Soviet totalitarianism that the West had derived from the writings of the dissidents? \*

In 1984, I went to Moscow to look for the answers, travelling as an ordinary tourist. In 1985 I again visited Moscow, as well as Leningrad, Tbilissi and Soukhami. I obviously did not expect to find the Russia I had known during the ordeal of the Second World War. It was after all forty years since the victory of 1945. What I did see differed greatly from what I had seen on a previous visit in 1970, at the beginning of the Brezhnev era. Social differences had taken on a previously unknown dimension, and were conspicuously visible in the broad light of day. For the first time, I heard talk of *bogatye* liudi—rich men—and even of millionaires, as though their presence in the land of the Soviets was natural or even necessary. I was told, as though this was quite natural, that the children of the rich were known as the gilded youth (*zolotyie* dietki), whereas those of the have-nots were grey mice (*sieryie kryssy*), and that the two groups frequented different discotheques. What was more important, their futures were determined for them in advance. The downturn in growth had restricted social mobility, and it had become difficult, if not impossible, for a grey mouse to ascend into the ranks of the gilded youth. This had created resentment and conflicts which were well portrayed in 'Come and See Who's Here This Evening', a play by Vladimir Arro performed at the Leninist *Komsomol* Theatre. I also saw Alexander Guelman's *The Bench*, which deals with the problems, loneliness and dissatisfaction of adults, and which is still surrounded by controversy in Moscow.

The development that surprised me most, however, was the emergence of a parallel market in the crucial sector of labour. I would not have been surprised to find that people did not work themselves to death, or that they took part-time jobs in their spare time to make ends meet or to make up for the inadequacy of official services. But I had never suspected that, in a country where everyone is supposed to have a job or face accusations of parasitism, whole brigades of independent workers were signing private contracts with state factories and were being paid five times as much as ordinary workers. . . for doing the same work. In the interview he granted me when I visited the USSR in 1984, General Vitalli Fedortchouk, the then Minister for the Interior, explained that the legal status of the *chabachniki*—as these private *Stakhanovites* are known—was not very clear, but restricting their activities was out of the question as they alone were responsible for more than half the construction work going on outside the capital. In a recent article in *Kommunist*,<sup>4</sup> Academician Tatania Zaslavskaya also states that the *chabachniki* cost the State nothing (they have no social insurance cover) and that they should therefore be allowed to go on providing socially useful labour, subject to certain restrictions. It is, however, no secret that these independent brigades are surrounded by a host of opportunists who are lining their own pockets by procuring them contracts and essential raw materials.

Even if that extra form of corruption did not exist—or was not as widespread as some people suggest—it is difficult to see how the existence of a second labour market, which is privileged in money terms but which has none of the social protection the Soviet Constitution prescribes for all citizens, can be reconciled with a system which calls itself socialist and which is supposedly based upon the public ownership of the means of production. Official ideology really must be a hollow sham, and officials really must be concerned solely with appearances for matters to have gone that far.

Nothing I discovered in 1984, just before Gorbachw's arrival in the Kremlin, or in 1985, immediately after he became General Secretary, remains hidden from the general public in the USSR. Articles on Soviet millionaires—and other wealthy individuals—have appeared in *Literaturnya Gazeta*, and Academician Zaslavskaya has hinted that their fortunes 'were not made by working', and that they could only be accumulated because of the existence of several different exchange circuits in which the rouble has different values. To put it in plain English, anyone who can divert goods which are heavily subsidised by the State into a semi-subsidised or open—and legal—market can make considerable profits. The profits are proportional to the scale of the deal. And in order to stimulate the production of essential commodities, the Brezhnev regime constantly increased subsidies, whilst pretending not to notice that few of them ever reached their supposed beneficiaries in the less privileged strata.

And yet colossal sums were involved, sums equivalent to several months' wages for the entire active population of the Soviet Union. It is not surprising that the 'wild' redistribution of such sums should have destroyed even the semblance of a vaguely rational relationship between wages and labour. Soviet citizens chose their jobs, not on the basis of the wages offered, but by weighing up the possibility of receiving special rations, or getting involved in some more or less legal racket, as that was always more profitable than a hypothetical official productivity bonus. In her usual slippery language, Tatania Zaslavskaya concludes that 'elements of injustice [have become more marked] in various spheres of social life, and are turning workers away from the goals and values of society.'

In the midst of this multicoloured society, there was also a vast middle class whose members derived most of their income from their official salaries and therefore felt no pangs of conscience. Although they lived much better than the majority of the population, they seemed to me to be politically alienated and very dissatisfied with their lot. The problem is that they evaluate their position by comparing it, not with the past, or with that of the poorer strata, but with that of their counterparts in the West. 'In my day', my Soviet comrades could not have drawn such comparisons because they lived in a closed environment and had never even heard of Greta Garbo or Marlene Dietrich (and I had great

difficulty in describing who they were). Nowadays, the Russians I meet know much more than I do about Jean-Paul Belmondo, Adriano Celentano and a whole host of other Western stars. And they have an almost magical ability for picking up unexpected details in Western films. Russians who had seen *Kramer Versus Kramer*, for instance, could tell me the size of the rooms in the American divorcés' apartments to the nearest metre. They explained to me that in Russia, newly divorced couples were often forced to go on living under the same roof—which really is a form of mental cruelty—because they had nowhere else to go. In their view, it is socialism that is to blame, and they imagine that under a different regime everyone in the USSR would have a big apartment like the Kramers.

Continued socialist shortages also appear to be the main explanation for the wave of divorces which is sweeping across the country—in the European Socialist Republics, one marriage in two breaks up—for the increase in one-parent families, and even for more disturbing phenomena such as a rising crime rate, increased use of drugs, and prostitution. The same phenomena do, however, exist on an even greater scale under 'different regimes', and in terms of drugs and prostitution Moscow is still a long way behind New York and most other major cities in the West. When I pointed this out, people would say, 'Yes, but we have escaped that because Russia has a very special cultural tradition. . . or God knows how.' The negative aspects of the situation have become so obvious that one malcontent ended up distributing leaflets with nothing written on them in Red Square, or so the story goes. When he was arrested and brought before a high official in the Kremlin, he explained without batting an eyelid: 'It's not worth writing anything. . . everyone knows. . . .' Everyone found the story very funny, but if we look at it more closely, it may not be all that amusing. This brave malcontent was distributing blank pieces of paper because he did not know what to write, because he could suggest no way of changing the situation. The Russians I spoke to displayed a distrust of politics that went far beyond a critique of socialism; it was as though all political thought were dangerous in itself, as though it would result in disaster. Under these conditions, all they could hope for was a spiritual revolution inspired by the tradition of the great Russian moralists; the main root of the evil lay in the soul, and no social reform could cure the soul. Interest in religion was on the increase, even though the Orthodox Church, which has seriously compromised itself by collaborating with the State, did not command anything like the same loyalty as the Catholic Church in Poland. But we could not avoid noticing that every film we saw included close-ups of church domes, and that references to religious values appeared in many books, even by authors who were known to belong to the Party and to hold high positions in the cultural apparatus.

Being an incorrigible leftist, and being convinced that Soviet society

is no more than a specific variant on the society we know in the West, I was particularly disappointed by this climate and by the obvious lack of interest those I spoke to took in the fate of workers who were less well-off than they were. But we have to understand what the intelligentsia's new ideology is based upon.

A history which has been ill-digested always produces myths which reflect primarily the subjectivity of those who live in the period that comes after it. Take the case of Stalin. For serious Western historians from Carr and Deutscher, there can be no doubt that he did all he could to eliminate the egalitarian precepts of the original doctrine of the Bolsheviks, and to establish strictly hierarchical relations in the country's emergent industries and in society as a whole. He therefore proclaimed that socialism was incompatible, first with *ouravnilovka* (levelling down), then with *ravnost* (equality), and finally with anything that threatened labour discipline, specialization, or the status and authority of the cadres who, in the words of his slogan, 'decided everything'. He did, however, prefer them to take turns in deciding everything; if they became too accustomed to power, they might be a threat to his own authority. He therefore used terror to ensure some rotation amongst the higher cadres, but he did not prevent the crystalization of a power elite which, after his death, consolidated its privileges for good. Even a cursory study of the biographies of Soviet leaders and of important managers will provide convincing evidence of that. And yet some critics still ignore the incontrovertible facts and insist on trying to prove that, in the name of egalitarianism, Stalin systematically executed the elite, and preached 'levelling down'.

Strangely enough, even Brezhnev is accused of having sinned by egalitarianism because he did restrict the wage range and used productivity bonuses to ensure that workers in major industries could earn more from the official economy than certain categories of technicians, doctors or teachers. But, so far as we know, no worker became a millionaire as a result. In order to do so, one had to derive an income from the secondary economy which was spontaneously developing behind the façade of planning. It was not the workers who benefited from it. But some people had only to take a few special cases out of context to prove that, even under Brezhnev, 'egalitarianism' flourished to the detriment of the more educated and more deserving strata. One of the people I spoke to told me: 'You become a worker if you want to make a lot of money for little effort rather than getting an education, getting qualifications and then earning very little money by working very hard.' To illustrate his remarks he told me that bus-drivers and taxi-drivers in Moscow could earn much more than a fairly well-known writer, and stressed that when they finished work, they would also have twice his pension.

During a short visit to Georgia, finally, I found that the Georgians I met

took a curiously limited view of the history of their country and of its special characteristics. Like the Poles, the Georgians lost their independence without striking a blow at the end of the eighteenth century, and came under the rule of Tsarist Russia, which forced a harsh imperial regime on them. Throughout the last century, they fought that regime and its local pro-consuls in alliance with anti-Tsarist Russians. When the Tsar finally fell, virtually the only forces left in Georgia were the Bolsheviks and the Mensheviks, who eventually become embroiled in a fratricidal war. But although their fellow countryman Eduard Shevardnadze was promoted to the Politburo and became Minister for Foreign Affairs in 1985, 'my' Georgians did not seem to be looking towards Moscow, and refused to make any predictions as the policies General Secretary Gorbachev might introduce. It was as though they lived in their own little world, and as though any reforms he might introduce were no concern of theirs. I wonder what they think of him now.



Not for the first time, our ability—and that of our friends in the East—to predict events has proved lacking. When I briefly visited Warsaw in the summer of 1979, I met a number of friends who, within the year, were to become leaders of, or advisers to, Solidarity. They all spoke to me about the economic crisis in their country, but none of them foresaw, even as an improbable hypothesis, the coming wave of strikes and the birth of an independent trade union under workers' control. The scenario in the USSR is, of course, very different as the initiative is coming from above, but, once again, no one could have predicted how rapid and how far-reaching the reforms would be.

'We are all the children of our time,' the new Secretary General told a recent **Komsomol** conference. In the Soviet context, this truism serves as a terse explanation for many things. It explains, first of all, that Gorbachev and his collaborators are in their fifties, that they were educated during the Khrushchev era in a country which was no longer held together by 'the dogmas of the 1930s and 1940s' (the expression is Gorbachev's), and that they **bear no** responsibility for the Stalinist Terror. It also explains that they are aware of the fact that, far from experiencing a great rise in productivity, their society is so run down that it is on the slippery slope to decline. Finally, it explains that they realize that their country needs new ideas and a healthier politico-intellectual climate if it is to recover. I am not attributing all this to Gorbachev on the basis of a single sentence; I am merely summarizing the 'doctrine' which emerges from his speeches.

A lawyer by training, and a graduate from one of the Soviet Union's best universities, Gorbachev is certainly a Party man first and foremost. But he also has a foot in the intellectual world. His wife Raissa teaches philosophy at Moscow University, and his daughter Irina is a doctor

married to a well-known surgeon. The family is, as they would say in Moscow, typical of the Soviet upper-middle class. Gorbachev is well placed to understand the feelings and grievances of the intelligentsia, but he is also convinced of the need to restore society's spirituality (*oudouchevit*), though he does not divorce that from the need to transform the economy and social relations. It has been easier for him to remove restrictions on literary and artistic creation than to find effective remedies for the country's economic stagnation, and that is why, since the beginning of 1987, he has raised the tone of the debate and has begun to put forward totally unexpected proposals. His speech of 27 January 1987 on the need to hold elections at every level of social life if society is to be democratized in a revolutionary manner—which implies novel forms of workers' control—had a shattering effect in the USSR. What is at stake?

Whereas a car comes to a sudden halt when it breaks down, a social system goes on functioning long after its gears have seized up. But this state of semi-paralysis inevitably divides society from top to bottom. On the one hand, life becomes intolerable for part of the population; on the other, the ruling class senses the threat of bankruptcy, but can no longer analyse the origins of the crisis, find an adequate solution or act in unison. A similar situation existed, for example, in the United States at the end of the great depression of the 1930s. It took the patrician Franklin D. Roosevelt to save the American system from its own internal logic, which was leading to the paralysis of production, decline and, ultimately, to the danger of revolution. Gut in order to arrive at the New Deal which warded off the danger, Roosevelt had to fight the majority of his own class, and even today many in his own class still regard him as a traitor. It will also be recalled that, in order to overcome the resistance of the powerful, the President of the United States, who was subject to considerable pressure from below, became increasingly radical, and that in his famous Philadelphia speech, he even denounced the economic tyranny which, behind the mask of democracy, had introduced slavery into the United States. When he was inaugurated as President in 1933, no one would have believed him capable of talking like that.

The stir Gorbachev has created recently appears to result from a similar development. The situation is obviously not exactly the same, as the Soviet Union does not have millions of unemployed, opposition parties or broad social movements. But many American analysts have spoken of the New Deal in relation to Gorbachev,<sup>6</sup> because he is trying, in conditions specific to the USSR, to restore his country's confidence, just as Roosevelt restored America's confidence, and to 'get the Soviets back to work'. And it is quite obvious that his chosen remedies are in conflict with the consolidated interests of those who were quite happy to live with stagnation—and to profit from it—as well as those of the many other people who are afraid of change, either because of their inertia, or because they fear that

it will not be to their advantage. The history of other Eastern-bloc countries—Czechoslovakia in 1968, Poland in 1980—also shows that when the testing point comes, ruling Communist Parties split along reformist and conservative lines, and that a large proportion of their members tend to leave them completely (during the rise of Solidarity, the Polish CP lost more than one third of its members). Such precedents are enough to show, should further proof be required, that when Gorbachev appealed to cadres to change their working methods, to behave like good democrats and to listen to grievances from the base, there was no hope that everyone would listen. Similarly, it was unrealistic of him to expect that the entire Soviet people would drop the habit of defending their own individual interests by working without enthusiasm and regarding public property as their own private property because of the new perspectives he offered them. Such attitudes developed over a period of decades, in specific conditions, and in the context of shortages which still foster them. The good word—or even good literature—is not enough to change attitudes. During the first twenty months of his New Deal, Gorbachev deplored the sullen resistance his policies had encountered, and transferred cadres from post to post. Then, having realized more quickly than his entourage that the missing 'human factor' could not be dealt with in this way, he called upon Soviet citizens to take part in the life of their factories, local Soviets and—last but not least—the Party itself by participating in elections. He obviously did not call upon them to 'bombard the headquarters', as Mao did at the beginning of the Cultural Revolution. But he did try to give the CPSU a political character, and to make it understand that its role was not merely managerial. And he did want its members to be recruited from the ranks of the politically motivated rather than from amongst specialists who were seeking to make a career, and who never opened their mouths even when they became members of the Central Committee. His attitude was very similar to that taken by Mao in 1958, when he stressed the need to be red and expert. Whether he is talking about a 'spiritual revolution' in culture or a new approach to the economic battle, Gorbachev does therefore give the impression of wanting to rehabilitate politics in the USSR, of wanting to restore its civil rights after a fifty-year exile.

At first sight, it must seem to many Soviet citizens, and to most Westerners, that this project is incompatible with the continued existence of a single Party which has monopolized power to its own advantage. But it may be less illusory than the sceptics might think. In normal times, when the CP apparatus is functioning in accordance with its centralized rules, and when discipline is good, organizing a pseudo-democratic election at any given level is child's play. But when the Party itself is divided, and when there is a conflict of interests between leaders and cadres, the whole nature of the problem changes completely: different individuals come to represent different options. In such a context, the base may find a real

opportunity to express itself, and may become interested in taking part in politics once more. Signs of internal conflict at every level are now becoming more common in the USSR and, even when they are based upon 'incorrect positions', they appear to be significant and in a sense encouraging.

Take the case of K. Boudinski, the Party leader in Rostov on the Don, a town to which I feel emotionally attached because I lived there both immediately before the Second World War and after it. Under Boudnitski's leadership, the Party organization had, according to Gorbachev, become an organized group of *delinquents*.<sup>7</sup> Boudnitski's unworthy conduct was therefore shown for the whole of the USSR to see on a television programme called *byvbyie* ('Yesterday's Men'). A court in Rostov then sentenced him to twenty or thirty years in prison; I forget which. The sentence was in fact irrelevant, as Boudnitski had the good grace—or lack of it—to die a few days after the verdict had been passed. The friends of the depraved leader promptly organized an impressive funeral for him, and a large crowd followed his coffin to Rostov cemetery, where he was buried in the area reserved for the town's distinguished citizens. You do not have to be a great intellectual to realize that when the next CP election is held in the capital of Southern Russia, every vote will count.

The central issue of this phase of democratization is the reform of the economy. Gorbachev and his team are proposing to combine central planning with market forces. Broadly speaking, they want to legalize the clandestine spontaneity which already exists in the economy, and to give factories sufficient autonomy to be able to compete freely, and to adapt their out-put and prices to the law of supply and demand. The least competitive factories will be eliminated, and one in fact filed bankruptcy papers at the beginning of **1987**. A new system of contracts will allow farmers to dispose freely of surplus produce from the *kolkhozes*, and will thus extend the open market. In the service sector, twenty-nine professions were authorized to operate privately, on an individual or family basis, as of **1 May 1987**. Horizontal relations between individual factories will also be encouraged, and some factories will be allowed to have direct links with foreign firms without having to go through the Ministry for Foreign Trade. It is hoped that by **1990** this policy will do away with shortages and the black market, that it will dry up sources of income that are not derived from work, and that it will make it possible to establish a rational relationship between wages and work. Academicians Zaslavskaya and Aganbegian often write in the Soviet press to demonstrate that this programme is inspired by a desire to promote greater social justice in the USSR.

In normal times, a united Party which was confident of its ability to run the economy would argue against these assumptions on the grounds that planning can do more to guarantee social justice than market forces.

The debate has in fact been going on for twenty-five years or more; as early as **1962**, the CPSU told the reformists of the day—Nemtchinov, Trapenikov, Liberman and others—that a woman cannot be half-pregnant, and that an economy cannot be half-planned. The problem is that it subsequently became obvious to everyone that a child conceived by centralized planning alone has no real backbone, and has the same facial scars as his cousin who was born of the free market. The old argument 'Either the plan, or the market: *tertium non datur*' has been countered by the realistic argument that it is precisely that *tertium* that has to be found. The attempts at reform being made by Gorbachev and his supporters may be held up or even sabotaged—either deliberately or simply by a refusal to accept change—but there is no longer any credible alternative. A return to Brezhnevism appears to be simply unthinkable.

This does not mean, because of some purely logical opposition, that the current experiments in the USSR are the only possible experiments that could be carried out, or that the results will live up to expectations. At the theoretical level, the Polish economist Oskar Lange was arguing as early as **1938** that it is a mistake to make a rigid distinction between planning and market forces in every area of production and services, and that socialism did not imply a total rejection of the market. But in practice, the reforms that have been introduced in Yugoslavia, Poland or China do not provide a viable model for the USSR. During the 'lost twenty-five years' divisions deepened in every sector of this vast country. The Republics that make it up are divided amongst themselves, between the big cities and medium-sized towns, and between the towns and the countryside. The results of the development plan adopted in **1927** have been paradoxical in the extreme. It was claimed that it would unite society around the economic pole provided by large-scale industry, and that reliance on the 'material base to socialism' would then facilitate the transition to proletarian democracy. It is not simply that the society which emerged is not homogeneous; it is also singularly opaque to those who live in it, no matter whether they are at the base or the top of the hierarchy, and it is not for nothing that Gorbachev feels the need for *glasnost*—for a little openness. An atmosphere of latent, repressed and unpredictable conflict certainly does not make it easy to introduce reforms in stages, and nor does it make it any easier to predict their effects from one stage to the next. *Glasnost* allows people to criticize officials who make mistakes, and it provides a valuable safety-valve which defuses uncontrollable outbursts. But it will, it would seem, only have lasting results if all social groups are allowed to express and defend their own specific interests in ways that have yet to be defined.

To take only one significant example of the social conflicts which might be exacerbated by the current policy of *perestroika* if it is not accompanied by political mediation. The present reforms are designed

to modernize and restructure industry by introducing computerization and new technologies. One of the first decisions taken by Gorbachev was the decision to provide computer facilities for all schools. Because of the lack of resources, the policy will have to be implemented in stages, but it is a clear indication of how he sees the future. At first sight, the USSR has a long way to go, as Academician Vitali Ginzburg is having to plead the case for photocopiers! The country's backwardness in this domain is seen as one of the causes of all the economic difficulties it has to face. We can be sure that energetic measures will be taken, and that they will obviously not be without their effects, if only because the new technological and scientific revolution will be accompanied by qualitative and numerical changes in the labour force. It will enhance the role of engineers and technicians, and petty restrictions must be removed if their initiative is to be tapped. They will of course be 'supervised' by the computers they work with, but that is very different to the supervision implied by the time and motion studies and the assembly lines of the past. If Western-style unemployment is to be avoided, all this implies a redeployment of the labour force, and there is a lot of talk of early retirement to resolve overmanning problems, and of other measures which have a familiar ring to Western ears.

.We have already noted that in the days of Brezhnev's 'spontaneity', workers chose their jobs on the basis of criteria of their own and ~~that~~, as a result of the widespread labour shortage, they did not necessarily look for work in their own city or region. On the contrary, the last twenty years have seen an enormous and unplanned increase in the population of the big cities, including Moscow and Leningrad (even though the latter are protected by draconian ~~special legislation~~).<sup>8</sup> Workers 'redeployed' themselves, and often took time off between one job and the next. They are unlikely to give up their rights to do so at a time when managers and technicians are being given extra privileges and higher wages. Is productivity—or even socially useful production—the sole criteria of socialist good conduct, and must it be the key to a worker's relations with his fellows or with society as a whole? It seems unlikely that this is in fact the case, especially in the USSR, where workers still make up the majority of the active population, and where their educational standards are much higher than those of their counterparts in the West. Until recently, they have defended their labour power, and they often take time off when they change jobs because carrying out repetitive productive tasks is not satisfying and does not give their lives a meaning. This is a spontaneous way of demanding a shorter working week and a different leisure culture. New technology should, in time, make it possible to reorganize productive life in such a way as to satisfy those needs. In the Western labour movement, similar suggestions are being discussed as a possible way of combating the crisis and the scourge of unemployment. If the USSR really wants to

avoid these disasters, the unions, which have been asked by Gorbachev to play an independent role, must be able to put forward their own proposals for restructuring, and those proposals must include non-productivist demands which the present reformers appear not to be taking into account. Pluralism at this level is not incompatible with the existing political system; on the contrary, it would give more consistency to the democratic debate called for by Gorbachev and his supporters. Such dynamic developments and contradictory debates have nothing in common with workerist utopianism, and would fit in perfectly well with the *perestroika* of society. We will soon see whether the base has the strength to introduce them.



For the moment, the Soviet debate is preoccupied primarily with three main problems: health, law and history. In our modern industrialized society it is not in the interest of any common mortal to fall ill in the two countries which are, thanks to a curious historical irony, the two greatest modern powers: the US and the USSR. Our prosperous **trans-Atlantic** cousins have such respect for the mighty medical profession that they have never succeeded in establishing a real national health service. Their welfare system, which is very fragmentary and which dates only from 1965, works mainly to the benefit of a powerful health care industry which administers the most unequal health system in the world.<sup>9</sup> In the USSR, in contrast, free healthcare is available to all, and the system was for a very long time one of the regime's proudest achievements. But it has not been able to withstand either the 'commodification' of society as a whole or the unthinking egotism of the privileged elite who, because they can obtain good health care in special clinics (or by going abroad), have stopped investing in health care for the have-nots. The writer Boris Mojaev, who is certainly not just anybody, found this out to his own cost when he tried to get treatment for a broken arm. The picaresque account he published in *Literaturnaya Gazeta* paints a damning picture of the horrors of Soviet hospitals: 'What remains engraved on my memory is not so much the consulting rooms, the treatment rooms or even the public wards, as the hospital corridors. Doctors treat patients in the corridors too, provided that the patients can assert their rights by clinging on to their white coats. People eat and drink in the corridors, just as they do in the canteen; they sleep and queue for toilets in the corridors. Sometimes the corridors have their own reception areas, and incredible numbers of beds are packed into them. "Beds" is a curious euphemism for patients.'

The new Health Minister, Academician Eugen Tchazov admitted in *Pravda* (13 April 1987) that the health system has not been spared 'the negative phenomena which have accumulated in our country in the recent past'. For the moment, he is not promising any miracles, and tends to talk about the harmful effects of smoking and training courses for doctors

rather than about measures to bring the USSR rapidly up to acceptable standards in a sector which is so vital to 'the human factor'. He has even spoken of the possibility of establishing 'clinics working on a profit basis'; this would appear to imply the introduction of a two-tier system: one for those who can pay, and one for lesser mortals.

The most interesting account of the debate over the legal system is provided by Olga Tchaikovskaya, who writes an excellent legal column for *Literaturnaya Gazeta*.<sup>10</sup> It should be pointed out that, in this domain, we have a wealth of material to choose from; interest in legal problems is so great in the USSR that *Man and Law* has a print-run of ten million copies, and has broken every world record for sales of a legal journal. Backwardness in this sector is something of a paradox if one recalls that a large middle class has existed for decades in the USSR and that, like any middle class, it needs a well defined legal framework if it is to be able to pursue its activities. A Russian who belongs to this category now owns a flat, a car and often a dacha, and he has the right to leave them to his heirs. That implies legal procedures, and conflicts which can only really be settled by competent and impartial authorities. In short, a developed society in which different forms of property coexist cannot do without an equally complex and developed legal system.

But from a political and moral point of view, the central problem is, of course that of criminal law. And whilst it is true that under Brezhnev, repression became very selective and affected only a few oppositionists, it is also true to say that the workings of justice had little to do with the principles of rule of law, which guarantees the inalienable rights of all individuals and recognizes that the accused is presumed innocent until proven guilty. Current criticisms are concentrated on the role of the prosecution, and on the fact that the defence has no part in preliminary hearings. It has been revealed that, far from being arbitrators in an adversarial debate between the prosecution and the defence, presiding judges openly drank tea with the prosecutor, as though to make it perfectly clear that they were his allies or even that they were there to carry out his wishes. Trials took place in public, but judges often refused to allow even journalists to take notes. No statistics on the workings of the courts have been published since 1937, and even highly-placed lawyers cannot find out how many people have been found guilty, what crimes they were sentenced for, or what sentences they received. All this is now being denounced in *Man and Law*, and often in *Pravda* itself, in order to justify the Central Committee's resolution of December 1986; this dealt with the reform of the entire criminal and civil law. The reforms will be introduced this year and will 'do more to guarantee the legitimate interests of Soviet citizens'.

This new interest in legal matters was stimulated by a series of signals 'from above'. A KGB official who became involved in a case that went

beyond his official remit has been sentenced. Judges who tolerated police brutality during interrogations—one claimed that 'If we did not beat up suspects, none of them would confess to their crimes'—have been relieved of their duties. Academician Andrei Sakharov has finally been released after having been exiled to Gorki without trial and in flagrant breach of the law. The view taken in Moscow is that Gorbachev has taken these decisions in order to overcome the doubts of those who support his policies but are reluctant to say so in public because they do not want to find themselves on the wrong side of the barricades if he fails. When Khrushchev fell, those who had been involved in the thaw were not really purged, but they were subject to enough harassment from the administration to have very bad memories of that period. Gorbachev's aim is to demonstrate that this time the new legal framework will make it impossible for such things to happen.

Whatever the motives or ulterior motives of the new Secretary General, it is the results that count. The new Soviet codes—criminal and civil—will be published in a few months, and we will then be able to see to what extent the USSR has adopted the notion of an *Etat de droit*, and whether it does now assume that justice is independent of the political authorities. For the moment, all we know from the press conference given by Justice Minister Boris Kravtsov in Vienna in December 1986 is that article 70 of the old penal code, which dealt with the repression of 'anti-Soviet propaganda and activity', will not figure in the new code. It was in the name of this catch-all article that most awkward citizens, or 'those who think differently', as they say in Moscow, were sentenced to very long terms of imprisonment. The news that it is to be abolished is good, but we still await the remainder of Gorbachev's legislation.

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To turn to the problem of history. In a recent interview Rector Afanassiev analyses the origins of the new mythology that has come to surround the October Revolution, a mythology which has had its effects in the West too. In Stalin's time, Russians were brought up on the falsified and propagandist version of the past summarized in the *History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Bolsheviks): Short Course*. In the time of Khrushchev and Brezhnev, that version was replaced by something that can only be described as non-history pure and simple. The only thing that stood between Lenin and each new General Secretary was an anonymous Central Committee, which was supposed to have taken all the necessary decisions, and even to have run the country and commanded the army collectively during the great anti-Nazi war. Many books were published on the history of Russia, but not, for understandable reasons, on the history of the Soviet Union. Rector Afanassiev rightly points out that artistic history is no substitute for the work of the historian. Even so,

recent plays on Brest-Litovsk are a major step forward. For the first time, it is possible to talk about Trotsky, Bukharin and Stalin's other Bolshevik victims, and attempts are being made to give them back their dignity and a real historical dimension. On the other hand, we also know—although Afanassiev does not say so—that the official historical void was immediately filled by the dissidents, who suffered discrimination under Brezhnev, and who are filled with a justifiable anger.

I can still remember the press conference Alexander Solzhenitsyn gave in Paris in 1974. A few months after he had been expelled from the Soviet Union. Speaking to an audience of important leader-writers ranging from Raymond Aron to André Fontaine, he crudely expounded the view that the responsibility for the Gulag lay with Marx, or with the very principle of revolution—'Yours or ours'—and, of course, with the ideas of the Enlightenment. Not one of his listeners printed these extremist theses, for fear of being seen as a 'reactionary' by their readers. But nor did they criticize them, presumably because they did not wish to be accused of failing to display solidarity with the author of the Gulag Archipelago, with a man who had been driven away from his native land by the masters of his country.

As the economic crisis began to bite in the West, neo-conservative ideologists needed the negative example of the Soviet Union more than ever before in their struggle to neutralize progressive ideas. They immediately took advantage of the fact that it is very difficult to distinguish between Solzhenitsyn's eye-witness accounts and his political message and his vision of history. Works inspired by the message brought by Solzhenitsyn and his wing of the dissident movement gradually—and with the help of the mass media—drowned out books and essays on Soviet history by even the most resolute anti-Stalinists who had some Marxist sympathies, and who tried to analyze the socio-economic processes at work in the Soviet experiment or to put it in an international context. It was officially proclaimed that all of them, historians and philosophers alike, Deutscher and Marcuse alike, were, if not apologists for Stalinism, at best naive dupes who had been fooled all along the line.

What has been happening in the East over the last two years simply does not square with the theses of Solzhenitsyn's disciples. They console themselves by saying that it cannot last, that totalitarianism cannot change, and by predicting the inevitable fall of Gorbachev. In the meantime, they have no explanations to offer, as none of their versions of the past allows us to understand anything of what is happening in the USSR. But we do find elements of an explanation in books from an earlier period, in the books that they criticize for their Marxist or pro-Marxist sympathies. These authors were obviously not wrong to begin to investigate the real origins of the accelerated industrialization of the USSR, and they were not wrong to argue that, whilst Stalingrad cannot atone for Stalin's crimes,

it is still part of the same history, and that that history is not simply a chain of aberrations. They were also right to take the view that, unlike Nazism, which put its criminally racist and militaristic plans into practice with perfect logic, Stalinism professed humanist ideas which it was unable to put into practice, and that it bore within it contradictions which were eventually to undermine its foundations. In his *The Spectre of Stalin*,<sup>11</sup> Sartre did of course predict that these contradictions would be overcome thanks to economic growth and the maturation of Soviet society—and not, as is now the case, thanks to a moral and economic crisis. But the work of these earlier Marxist historians can still be used as the basis for new analyses of the paralysis of Soviet society,<sup>12</sup> whereas no serious work is possible on the basis of the historical diatribes of the supporters of Solzhenitsyn, whatever their nationality or tendency.

At least some Russians appear to be realizing that they need Marxist analytic tools to understand the extent to which their mode of production resembles capitalism and the extent to which the two differ. For them this is not an academic question, and neither, as Rector Afanassiev pointed out when he called for all the historical archives to be published, is the question of understanding their own history. Only a qualitative leap in *glasnost* will turn back the threatening tide of nationalism, which rose constantly in all the Soviet Republics during the pre-Gorbachev period. I have already said that this phenomenon is understandable, and that a non-conformist Russian faced with a regime which claims to be socialist does find it rather difficult to say that he is a socialist. But understanding does not mean approval, and it does not mean that we should underestimate the dangers of a nationalist culture which can so easily turn to chauvinism—a disease which has already caused more than one historic disaster in this part of Europe. For a multinational state like the USSR, the rise of nationalisms represents a terrible threat, and it is no coincidence that the appointment of a Russian as Party Secretary in Kazakhstan in December 1986 should lead to riots in Alma Ata. Since then, several intellectuals from the Asian Republics have condemned such excesses, but they have also observed with some bitterness that the tendency of certain Muscovite historians to glorify Russia's past encourages Uzbeks and Kazakhs to do the same for their own past. They are demanding a return to Lenin in this domain too, and point out that he defined the old Russia as 'a prison of peoples'. But in the present climate, it will not be easy to meet their demands.

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One evening in 1985 in Peredelkino, Yevgeny Yevtushenko was talking to me with his usual lyricism about a book by one of his neighbours. The book was Anatoly Rybakov's *Children of the Arbat*. Yevtushenko told me that it contained the first authentic portrait of Stalin to be based on first-hand accounts from Russians who had worked with him. and not on

accounts by foreigners like Milovan Djilas, who, naturally enough, did not really know him well. What is more, *Children of the Arbat* describes how a group of idealistic komsomols were killed for no reason. It is set in 1934, before the wave of Stalinist trials and the terror of 1937-38. 'When that book is published,' Yevtushenko assured me, 'we will have woken up in a new country'.

But that day seemed very far off, and although Yevtushenko argued in his articles and in meetings of the Union of Writers for the work of authors who, like Andrei Platanov, had been outcasts in Stalin's day, he never even spoke of his neighbour Anatoly Rybakov's book, assuming, no doubt, that it stood no chance. In April 1987, *Children of the Arbat* appeared in *Druzhbba Narodov* (Friendship of the People), and became an immediate best seller. It is true that it is fascinating reading, but Russians still wake up in the same country every morning. In saying that, I am not trying to play down the importance of literature in Russian life. When he visited Paris recently, Academician Dmitri Likhatchev, a great liberal intellectual and a man of immense authority in the field of classical literary studies, explained that even under the yoke of the Mongols, literature had been an essential element in Russian unity and that literature still played a greater role there than in other countries.<sup>13</sup> But that does not mean that a book, or any other work of art, can have the immediate and almost magical effect of changing life.

Mikhail Gorbachev appears to have understood this, and that is the great difference between him and Stalin and all his heirs. He appears to be the first General Secretary not to suffer from an insecurity complex and to feel himself capable of winning a consensus in favour of his policies by using democratic methods similar to those used by the ruling classes in Western countries. There is no contradiction between that impression and Gorbachev's repeated assertions that he does not intend to establish in the USSR a parliamentary democracy similar to those which developed in Britain, France, the US and other capitalist countries during the bourgeois revolution. The nature of the economic power on which, in the last instance, those regimes are based is different to the economic base of the USSR, where there is no private ownership of the means of production. That difference is not, as some have claimed, enough to guarantee the socialist character of Soviet society, but it does mean that, should democratic institutions develop, they will do so on a different basis. It is too early to tell whether such institutions will develop, but even now we can state that if they do, they will be of direct concern to the left in the West. The Western left may even be able to contribute to their successful development.

It need scarcely be pointed out here that the Western left has not succeeded in overcoming the capitalist system, or that its patrimony therefore does not include a model for a true socialism based upon

freedom and equality (and one cannot exist without the other). But, despite its setbacks and its internal splits, it has a wealth of experience, and a wealth of ideas about the partial transformation of industrial societies. Feelings which were once repressed can now be openly expressed, and new fronts are being opened up in the fight against the social evils of our time. Gabriel Garcia Marquez once said that the little that is known about medicine is still known by doctors. To paraphrase his famous words, the little that is known about how to change our societies, and about how to introduce a greater measure of social justice, is still known by people who were educated in the struggles and culture of a labour movement which developed primarily out of Marxism. For my own part, I am convinced that, after a quarter of a century of depoliticization and resignation, the Russians need that knowledge if they are to combat the irresistible rise of nationalism, if they are to resolve their sectorial problems, and if they are to return to the universal ideas of the left.

At the moment, Gorbachev and his associates are trying to re-establish a dialogue which was broken off when Khrushchev fell. Their partners in that dialogue will be Western intellectuals from a variety of backgrounds. Their backgrounds will be much more varied than they once were because the main partners of the past—the communists—have lost their influence (this is particularly true of the French Communists, who were especially sectarian, and who compromised themselves by supporting Brezhnev even during the invasion of Afghanistan) or have changed their position and entered new alliances (like the Italian Communists, who are now closer to the great social democracies of Northern Europe than to their old comrades in the Third International). Western Communist guests at the international meetings organized by the Soviets in 1986 and 1987 could be counted on the fingers of one hand. What is more, those meetings did not end, as they once would have done, with appeals being addressed to the peoples of the world to go over the heads of their own governments and to support some diplomatic initiative on the part of the Kremlin. At the end of one meeting, Gorbachev said quite simply: 'we are very short of new ideas.' The shortage is particularly obvious when one thinks of some of the problems that have come to the fore for the left in the West. There is, for example, an embryonic ecology movement in the USSR, and it won a major victory when a major project to divert the rivers of Northern Russia and Siberia southwards was dropped, even though it had already been approved by the Central Committee of the CPSU. But, despite the terrifying disaster at Chernobyl, Soviet ecologists—with the exception of the Bielorrussian writer Ales Admvtich and Valentin Rasputin<sup>14</sup>—never raise the issue of the civilian use of nuclear power, whereas it has become a central element in the political culture of the Western left, France being the exception to the rule. By rejecting nuclear power, the left is rejecting a society based on secrecy, on the power of a

tiny elite of specialists who are accountable to no one but themselves. This is not, then, simply a rejection of a particularly dangerous form of energy; it involves a debate as to how to adapt democracy to the innovations created by modern technologies, and as such, it is valid for all countries.

Although the Soviet press often describes the isolation of divorced or single women, and although it argues that it is not right—or good for society—that they should bring up children alone if their fathers are still alive, Western feminism remains unknown. Despite its ups and downs, the feminist movement has developed new forms of solidarity between women; it has created a whole culture which does influence thinking on the left, and it will certainly not disappear from the political horizon. In the USSR, in contrast, discussion still centres on 'Where do bad wives come from?' It is still argued that bad wives who are materially independent have succumbed to the temptation to exercise power in the home. For their part, some women have no qualms about accusing Soviet men of being uncouth and of having lost their past virility. In what is now a chaotic battle between the sexes, women definitely seem to be on the losing side. They are seriously under-represented in State bodies—there are virtually no women in the government!—and they are at a disadvantage in the race for the responsible positions which their level of education should allow them to occupy. More than half of all Soviet graduates are women, but they are not proportionately represented in the hierarchy of the productive apparatus. Far from it. There are many reasons for this, and matters should not be oversimplified, but it does seem obvious that a certain primal male chauvinism has been making rapid advances in the USSR in recent years. Seen from a distance, some of its manifestations seem almost comical, like the lonely hearts advert placed in an Estonian newspaper by a thirty-eight-year old academic. He was looking for 'A young woman of classical beauty, highly educated, disappointed with the fruits of emancipation, but not yet ready to abandon all hopes of domestic bliss'. The works of Pan-Russian writers like Victor Astafiev contain many worse (or less amusing) sentiments, as their pleas for a return to tradition include remarks about the family which are based on a truly outdated morality.

It should also be noted that the revival of interest in legal matters, and the new desire to return to basics have not been enough to produce any great revulsion against the death penalty, even though Lenin abolished it in October 1917.<sup>15</sup> In the West, the left can rightly claim that, wherever it has sufficient influence, it has succeeded in doing away with that barbaric form of punishment. A few months ago, the Czech exile Lubornir Sochor, a man of great culture and a sophisticated analyst of Stalinism, emphatically stated that he did not believe that any far-reaching change would take place in the Soviet Union until the country's criminal code abolished the death penalty.<sup>16</sup> Shortly afterwards, he committed suicide.

Whilst the surprises unveiled during Gorbachev's first two years in power are no guarantee as to what will happen in the future, and whilst we should not be too optimistic, they do seem to prove that what Academician Andrei Sakharov calls 'a dynamics of change' is at work, and that further surprises may yet be in store.

*Translated by David Macey*

NOTES

1. A French translation (*Autobiographie précoce*) was published by Juillard in 1962.
2. Cf. Barrington Moore Jr, *Authority and Inequality Under Capitalism and Socialism*, London, Clarendon Press, 1986.
3. Fazil Iskander's works have long been available in the United States, where critics see him as the Soviet Mark Twain. It was not until 1987 that his *Sandro de Tchegukme* was published in France by Ledrapiet.
4. Cf. *Kommunist* 13, 1986. (A debate followed in *Kommunist* 17, 1986).
5. Cf. *Kommunist* 13, 1986.
6. 'Le New Deal' is the title of the interesting dossier published by *Le Courier des pays de l'est*, La Documentation française, March 1987 (no 316). It should be noted in passing that no leader of this status has been condemned to death. In Uzbekhstan, however, the Party Secretary in Bokhara—Boudnitski's direct counterpart—was indeed shot. In the European areas of the USSR, 75% of the population now live in cities with a population of more than 100,000 inhabitants; one third of the population live in major cities with more than half a million inhabitants. Even though residence permits for Moscow are very difficult to obtain, the city now has a population of over nine million.
9. Cf. Paul Starr, *The Social Transformation of American Medicine*, New York, Basic Books, 1984. Starr won the Pulitzer Prize for 1984.
10. As well as publishing her own accounts of dubious trials, she has interviewed the most prominent jurists in the country, and has forced them to admit that these anomalies cannot go on.
11. Jean-Paul Sartre, *The Spectre of Stalin*, trans. Irene Clephane, London, 1969.
12. These issues were discussed in overall terms in the debate between Paul Sweezy and Charles Bettelheim, which was published by *Monthly Review* in New York, and by Maspero in Paris. For a more general discussion see the works published by Bettelheim's Centre d'Etudes et de Planification socialiste.
13. Cf. the interview with Dmitir Likhatchev in *Le Nouvel Observateur*, 8 May 1987.
14. Both writers spoke out against the building of nuclear power stations at a widely discussed news conference given in Berlin on 6 March 1987.
15. The publication of Yuri Arkatchev's novel *The Pyramid* has recently been announced. It deals with an innocent man who is condemned to death, but is not, fortunately, executed. Other articles have, it appears, been published in less prestigious journals, but neither Tass nor the television network has given them nationwide coverage. Cf. *La Nouvelle Alliance* 4, December, 1986.