Hwa Chong Institution (College Paper 1)
Theme I: Understanding the Cold War, 1945 -1991
The Collapse of the Soviet Union

The State of the Soviet Economy

- In the 1980s, practically every index of economic performance was depressing. The technological gap between the Soviet Union and the industrially-advanced capitalist countries was widening in every sector except military armaments. The Soviet Union had been left behind in both information technology and biotechnology. The state budget in the last years of Brezhnev's rule would have been massively insolvent if not for the revenues from the domestic sales of vodka. The Ministry of Finance depended heavily on the popular consumption of alcohol. It relied even more on the export of petrochemical fuels at high prices. Oil and gas constituted 18 per cent of exports in 1972 and 54 per cent by 1984. Agriculture was so inefficient that two-fifths of hard currency expenditure on imports were for food.

- By the early 1980s, revenues earned by exports to the West could no longer be used mainly to buy advanced industrial technology and equipment: two-fifths of the Soviet Union's hard currency purchases abroad were of animal feed; and the purchase of energy by the Eastern European countries at lower than world market prices deprived the Soviet Union of the full value of its trade. The Soviet Union's very industrial achievements were made at grievous ecological expense. Large areas were unfit for human habitation. The Caspian Sea, Lake Baikal and the river Volga had been poisoned and the air in major cities were dangerous to breathe.[1]

Pursuit of Economic Reform

- Gorbachev's road to his change of mind on economic reform was gradual. He was never a closet free-marketer. But Gorbachev's unique capacity as a Soviet politician has been his willingness to learn and to reject what now are widely viewed as the illusions of his predecessors. Between 1982 and 1985, with Yuri Andropov and Konstantin Chernenko in power, Gorbachev was nominally in charge of the entire Soviet economy. He called on many reform-minded economists to help him think through domestic policy. He asked for reports not only on earlier Soviet reforms, but also on the land reforms of Pyotr Stolypin under Tsarist rule.

- In 1984, Gorbachev ordered a team of reform-minded academics working in Novosibirsk, led by Tatyana Zaslavskaya and Abel Agenbegyan, to write a report on the realities of economic life. The report, a stunning portrait of a collapsing system, was instructive for Gorbachev, but it won Zaslavskaya a reprimand from local Communist officials when it was published abroad. At a Central Committee meeting in December 1984, Gorbachev spoke of the need for "revolutionary decisions" and "perestroika {restructuring} of economic

[1] Robert Service, A History of Twentieth-Century Russia, pp. 467-468.

management." He spoke in favour of competition, democratisation and glasnost, or openness. The speech had the ring of a reformer's campaign manifesto.[2]

- Gorbachev's impressionability showed up in economics. He had been aware from his travels outside the Soviet Union before assuming the leadership that 'people there … were better off than in our country.' It seemed that Kremlin leaders 'were not especially worried about our undeniably lower living standards, our unsatisfactory way of life, and our falling behind in the field of advanced technology.'[3] Gorbachev, however, had no clear sense of what to do about this. Secretary of State Shultz, a former economics professor at Stanford, took it upon himself to educate the new Soviet leader.[4]

- From early 1985, Shultz began to lecture Gorbachev on the impossibility of a closed society being a prosperous country. Gorbachev joked that Shultz should take over the planning office in Moscow because he had more ideas than they have. Over the next several years, Shultz made trips to that city to run tutorials for Gorbachev and his advisors, even bringing pie charts to the Kremlin to illustrate his argument that as long as it retained a command economy, the Soviet Union could fall further behind the rest of the developed world.[5] Gorbachev was surprisingly receptive. He echoed some of Shultz's ideas in his 1987 book Perestroika. He asked how could the economy advance if it creates preferential conditions for backward enterprises and penalises the foremost ones.[6] When Reagan visited the Soviet Union in May 1988, Gorbachev arranged for him to lecture at Moscow State University on the virtues of market capitalism. By the Malta Summit in December 1989, Gorbachev was able to repeat what he had learnt to Reagan's successor, Bush. "Whether we like it or not, we will have to deal with a united, integrated, European economy… whether we want it or not, Japan is one more centre of world politics. China is another huge reality ... all these, I repeat, are huge events typical of a regrouping of forces in the world."[7]

- Most of this however was rhetoric. Gorbachev was never willing to leap directly to a market economy in the way Deng had done. He reminded the Politburo in late 1988 that Roosevelt had saved American capitalism by 'borrowing socialist ideas of state planning, state regulation and the principle of more social fairness.' The implication was that Gorbachev could save socialism by borrowing from capitalism, but just how remained uncertain. Indeed, after the Soviet Union collapsed, Gorbachev admitted his failure: the Achilles heel of socialism was the inability to link the socialist goal with the provision of incentives for efficient labour and the encouragement of initiative on the part of individuals. It became clear in practice that a market provides such incentives best of all.[8]

Reforms in Soviet Agriculture

- In the early attempts at reform, Gorbachev and his colleagues in the Kremlin followed Andropov's general line and focus efforts on the economy. Discipline and order returned to the agenda. The Politburo, persuaded by Ligachev, even took the risk of discouraging alcohol consumption. Threefold increases in the price of vodka were decreed and vineyards hacked down in Georgia, Moldova and the Ukraine. On this occasion, Gorbachev was nicknamed the Mineral Secretary for asserting the superiority of mineral water over booze.[9] While Gorbachev's main economic slogan was 'acceleration', actual measures were slower to emerge. The first move was made in November 1985, when a super-ministry for the cultivation and processing of foodstuffs was formed along the lines unsuccessfully proposed by Gorbachev in Brezhnev's time. Named as the State Committee for the Agro-Industrial Complex (Gosagroprom), it was to be led by

[2] David Remnick, Gorbachev Shifts on Economy, The Washington Post, 13 September 1990, accessed 12 May 2018.

[3] Gorbachev, Memoirs, pp. 102-103.

[4] Gaddis, The Cold War, p. 233.

[5] Ibid.. Shultz, Turmoil and Triumph, p. 591.

[6] Gorbachev, Perestroika, p. 85.

[7] Gaddis, The Cold War, p. 234.

[8] Ibid..

[9] Service, Twentieth-Century Russia, pp. 439-440.

one of Gorbachev's political clients, Vsevolod Murakhovski. In this, Gorbachev was aiming to renovate Soviet agriculture chiefly by reorganising its central governmental institutions.

- Regeneration of the economy however required more than just administrative measures. *Kolkhozniki*[10] and *sovkhozniki*[11]remained subject to a system of peremptory orders and of weak material incentives; and they had no positive influence over the running of the collective farm; they were bossed by farm chairmen and the chairmen themselves were bossed by Moscow. Gosagroprom was not going to dislodge a single brick in this bureaucratic wall. The reality was the opposite: giving additional authority to another central body increased the wall's solidity.[12]

Reforms in Soviet Industry

- In the first months after Gorbachev took power, there was no equivalent reorganisation of the manufacturing sector. Nevertheless, a re-jigging of budgetary aims took place. The Twelfth Five-Year Plan was scheduled to begin in 1986, and the Politburo declared an increase in the quantity and quality of industrial output required the maximising of investment in the machine-building sector. Ryzhkov and Gorbachev were the principal advocates of this strategy. Increasingly, Gorbachev recognised that such calculations were inadequate to the solution of the country's problems.

- By late 1985, there was scarcely an industrial sector not mentioned by the General Secretary as deserving of large, additional investment. Ryzhkov, a former deputy chairman of Gosplan, perceived that such promises were a budgetary impossibility. Yet, Ryzhkov too lacked a workable strategy and continued to advocate an unrealisably rapid expansion in the output of industrial consumer goods. The draft Twelfth Five-Year Plan presented by Ryzhkov to the Twenty-Seventh Party Congress in February in 1986 was based on false economic premises.[13]

- The leadership would be frustrated until the ideas on economic reform underwent more basic revision. Gorbachev sometimes hinted that he was considering this option. In May 1985, he announced to fellow communists: 'Obviously, we all of us must undergo reconstruction, all of us… everyone must adopt new approaches and understand that no other path is available to us. Within a year, the notion of reconstruction (or perestroika) was the condiment in every dish of policy served up by the General Secretary.

- Yet the struggle for reform had only just begun. At the Twenty-Seventh Party Congress in February 1986, Gorbachev had to tread carefully in recommending fresh policy initiatives. Nonetheless, immediately after the Congress, Gorbachev showed that he would not be permanently denied. Local officialdom was to be brought in line with his thinking: by the middle of 1986, two-thirds of province-level party secretaries had not had the same jobs a half-decade earlier. He was convinced that the vigorous support of such appointees would guarantee his success.[14]

- In June 1987, Gorbachev presented the detailed economic measures at the Central Committee plenum, which adopted the draft Law of the State Enterprise. Apart from introducing the elective principle to the choice of managers, the Law gave the right to factories and mines to decide what to produce after satisfying the basis requirements of the state planning authorities. Enterprises were permitted to set their own wholesale prices. Central controls over wage levels were to be relaxed. The reform envisaged the establishment of five state-owned banks, which would operate without day-to-day intervention by the Central State Bank. There was to be an allowance for a private sector in services and small sector industry. Although there would still be a predominance of state ownership and regulation in the economy, this was

[10] A Russian term which means someone who works on a kolkhoz (farming collective).

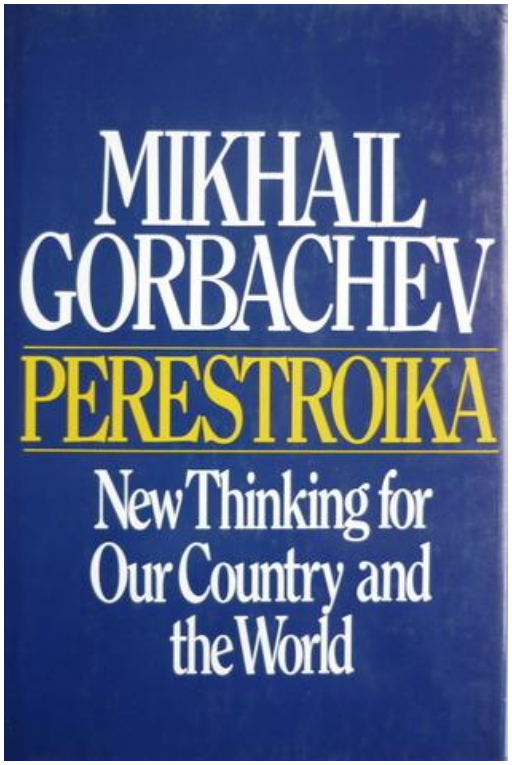
[11] A Russian term which means someone who works on a sovkhoz (state farm).

[12] Service, Twentieth-Century Russia, p. 440.

[13] Ibid., p. 441.

[14] Ibid., pp. 441-442.

the greatest projected reform since 1921. The Central Plenum laid down that it should come into effect in January 1988.[15]



- In November 1987, Gorbachev published his book **Perestroika** and delivered a speech commemorating the seventieth-anniversary of the October Revolution. In both of them, he denounced the regime's 'command-administrative system. He treated not only the October Revolution but also the February Revolution as truly popular political movements.

- He expressed admiration for the mixed economy and cultural effervescence of the New Economic Policy (NEP). He praised Lenin as a humanitarian, representing him as having been much less violent politician than had been true. Despite lauding the NEP, Gorbachev continued to profess the benefits of agricultural collectivisation at the end of the 1920s. He still equivocated about Stalin, in particular, the industrial achievements of the first Five-Year Plan and the military triumph of the Second World War were counted unto him for virtue.[16]

- Although Gorbachev set out a range of general objectives, but there was hardly clarification on policies. He still regarded the objectives themselves as attainable without the disbandment of the one-party, one-ideology state. He refused to consider that the party and the people might not voluntarily rally to the cause of renovating Marxism-Leninism and the entire Soviet order. He also did not take into consideration the role of the Soviet Union as an imperial power both within its own boundaries and across Eastern Europe. He also declined to reject the traditional class-based analysis of international affairs as a whole. These contradictions stemmed from both the pressures of Politburo colleagues and from ambivalence in his own mind. Yet the general direction of his thought was evident. Gorbachev now declared that a new political culture and an insistence on the rule of law were required in the Soviet Union. He called for a fresh agenda for Eastern Europe and asserted that Soviet foreign policy throughout the world should be based on 'common human values.'[17]

- While Gorbachev rethought his policies, he was also a disorganised thinker. His knowledge of his country's history was patchy. His sociological understandings may have more impressive since his wife had written a dissertation on contemporary rural relationships though his public statements continued to treat Soviet society as an inchoate whole and made little allowance for the different interests of the multifarious groups in an increasingly complex society. His understanding of economic principles was rudimentary in the extreme.[18]

- A further advance was made in economic reform with the passage of the Law on the State Enterprise in January 1988. In May, the Law on Co-Operatives was passed whereby co-op members could set their own prices and make their own deals both in the Soviet Union and abroad. Certainly, the fiscal disincentives were strong, the local soviets were entitled to deny official registration to the co-ops. Yet the Law's significance was undeniable. For the first time in 60 years, it was permitted to set up urban manufacturing and service-sector enterprises that were not owned by the state.[19]

[15] Ibid., p. 452.

[16] Ibid., p. 454.

[17] Ibid., p. 455.

[18] Ibid.

[19] Ibid., pp. 460-461.

The Failure of Economic Reforms

- In the course of pursuing economic reform, Gorbachev made many mistakes. The anti-alcohol campaign and the excessive investment in the machine tool industry in 1985-1986 had depleted state revenues without producing long-term gains in output. The openness of the debate conducted by the authorities in 1987-1988 on the need to raise retail prices had the undesired effect of inducing consumers into buying and hoarding all manner of goods. Shortages in the shops were increasing. The Law on the State Enterprise, by empowering workers to elect their own managers, led to a steep rise in wages. Payments to urban labour increased by 9 per cent in 1988 and 13 per cent in 1989. The Soviet budget was now in serious deficit. Foreign indebtedness and domestic inflation increased sharply and industrial output declined.[20]

- His choice of collaborators was far from ideal. Ryzhkov, his Chairman of the Council of Ministers, was a reformer but the pace he sought was slower than what Gorbachev intended. Ligachev on the other hand was opposed to reform. Gorbachev erred when demoting Ligachev in the party leadership by putting him in charge of agriculture. Under his supervision, not even the size of the private plots was increased. The situation was compounded by an earthquake that struck Armenia on 9 December 1988, a day after Gorbachev delivered his speech at the United Nations General Assembly. Radical economic reform was thus being attempted in a very unpropitious situation.[21] The reorientation of the industrial sector to consumer needs was unrealised. Gorbachev had promised much material improvement but delivered deterioration. Soviet queues, already legendary for their lengths, became longer and angrier in the course of 1989.[22]

- A rationing system had existed for food products in certain provincial cities even before 1985. Steadily the system was geographically extended. Already at the end of 1988, meat was rationed in 26 out of 55 regions of the RSFSR. Sugar was even scarcer: only two regions managed to get by without rationing. There was no end in sight to the inadequate provision of housing and everyday services. To the stupefaction of the Politburo and nearly all the commentators in the Soviet Union and the West, a full-scale economic crisis had occurred.[23]

- When the Law on State Enterprise and other measures failed to produce the desired results, Gorbachev spoke of the need to create a 'socialist market economy'. While he refrained from defining the term, Gorbachev appeared more relaxed when speaking about agriculture. In 1986, he had proposed that every sovkhoz and kolkhoz should be run on the basis of 'family contracts'. By this he meant that a family or household would take over a particular function of the farm and be rewarded for any increase in productivity. These changes in ideas did not materialise. On the contrary, officials in every republic, region and province implemented aspects of those policies that did not damage their immediate interests. Initially, their inclination was to show outward enthusiasm for Gorbachev while disobeying his instructions. Some localities displayed sterner attitudes and officials engaged in blatant sabotage. In Leningrad, local officials gave orders to withdraw sausages from warehouses and buried them in a specially-dug trench. Life without beef and chicken was bad enough for ordinary citizens; without sausages, it became intolerable and Gorbachev got the blame.[24]

- The private sector co-operatives were distrusted by the rest of society, especially those with low fixed incomes: the pensioners, the war invalids, the poorly-paid unskilled workers. The co-ops had a reputation as scams for speculation and did little to expand manufacturing output. They usually operated mainly in the service and retail sectors and flourished in the form of private restaurants and clothes-kiosks which brought up goods in supply and put a large mark-up on them. The consequence was that the same goods were not being sold in the state-owned enterprises. The co-ops aggravated the shortages in the shops and raised the cost of living. They added to the problems of law enforcement because their owners had to bribe local

[20] Ibid., p. 468.

[21] Ibid., p. 469.

[22] Ibid., p. 470.

[23] Ibid.

[24] Ibid., p. 471.

officials to be allowed to trade; and often it was impossible for them to obtain raw materials and equipment except by colluding with venal factory directors.[25]

- By the winter of 1989-1990, all this brought notoriety to the reforms. Milk, tea, coffee, soap and meat had vanished from state retail outlets even in Moscow. The dairy product shops were particularly hit. Not all citizens were willing to tolerate their plight. A great strike was organised by coal miners in Kemerovo in the Kuz Basin and this was followed by a similar strike in the Don Basin. A further strike occurred in November in the mines around Norilsk in the Siberian far north. These strikes were settled in favour of the strikers, who demanded higher wages and improved living conditions; and in contrast with Soviet political practice since the Civil War, no repressive sanctions were applied against the strike leaders. Independently-elected strike committees were in operation. The Council of Ministers under Rzyhkov did little else in these months but try to effect a reconciliation with those segments of the working class which threatened to do it damage. The government feared a Soviet equivalent of Poland's Solidarity was in the making.[26]

- When Gorbachev made his political choice to remain with the Communist Party, it had the consequence, among other things, that drastic economic measures would be postponed and that popular living standards would continue falling. The industrial, commercial and financial sectors were on the verge of collapse. Even from official figures, output from manufacturing and mining enterprises in 1990 fell by one per cent over the previous year. Retail trade was reduced to pitiful proportions. Massive state loans were contracted with Western banks. Imports of grain and industrial consumer goods increased. Gorbachev refused to allow any factory or kolkhoz to go to the wall and there were no bankruptcies. However, the general economic condition was dire. Most citizens could not believe that so rapid a deterioration had taken place. Industry was on the verge of collapse. Inflation was rising. Banking and commerce were in disorder. Gorbachev was blamed. By 1990, people were wondering whether they would soon be starving.[27]

- On 24 May 1990, Ryzhkov announced the latest round of economic reforms, on whose successful implementation future US economic aid depended. Announcing a three-fold increase in bread prices, popular distrust of Gorbachev intensified.[28] By June, Ryzhkov yielded somewhat, but still called in opaque terms for a 'regulated market'. This position however combined the worst of both worlds: a half-hearted, drawn out privatisation programme and a further rise in the cost of living. The most radical among Gorbachev's advisors argued that the economy's collapse was imminent. According to them, measures had to be deep, had to be rapid and consistently imposed. On 20 July, a '500 day' economic programme to move the Soviet Union to a market economy was published. It proposed the sale of large numbers of state enterprises, the dissolution of state collective farms, currency reform, and a new banking system. In August, Gorbachev got permission from the USSR Supreme Soviet to create a commission to elaborate a plan for industrial, agricultural and commercial recovery. Yeltsin agreed to cooperate with the commission. The result was the '500 Days Plan' by Stanislav Shatalin. In his economic thinking, Gorbachev has gone from decades of working within the Stalinist system of centralized planning and collective farming to supporting a reform plan that calls for the privatization of nearly two-thirds of Soviet industry by 1992, the rise of commercial banking, a stock market and farms owned by farmers. There is to be a rapid sell-off of state properties, deep cuts in the budgets of the KGB security service, the Defencee Ministry and foreign aid.[29]

- Gorbachev's nerves failed him; the reforms were not introduced. Appealed to for urgent financial and economic aid, the Bush administration steadfastly refused; any aid given would be a reward for implementing reform, not an inducement. In September, he ordered a reworking of the plan by Abel Aganbegyan to effect a compromise between the position of Shatalin and Ryzhkov. While the result was a predictably unworkable mixture of radical language and conservative ideas, it helped Gorbachev out of his political complications, and in October, the Supreme Soviet approved the set of 'Basic Guidelines' he

[25] Ibid., pp. 471-472.

[26] Ibid.

[27] Ibid., p. 491.

[28] Ibid., pp. 459-460.

[29] Remnick, Gorbachev Shifts on Economy.

presented to it.[30] By 1991, the economy was collapsing in every sector. Industrial output fell by 18 per cent, agriculture by 17 per cent. Even energy production, whose exports had supplied the backbone of state revenues in previous years, went down by ten per cent. The USSR budget deficit was between 12 and 14 per cent of gross domestic deficit whereas it had been only 4 per cent in 1990. The result was a decline in the government's ability to sustain the level of imports of consumer goods. The USSR's towns and villages also experienced a shortage of fuel supplies. Consumers were further troubled by Pavlov's decision at last to start raising the prices of food products in state shops. The result was highly unpleasant for a population unaccustomed to overt inflation. Across the year, prices in such shops almost doubled.[31]

Administrative Reform

- As the glasnost brought the existing Soviet politicians into disrepute, with the notable exception of Gorbachev, he hoped to avoid growing popular resentment against Communist rule by pensioning off older politicians under Brezhnev. In his first year in power, Gorbachev had imposed new first secretaries on 24 out of 72 of the RSFSR's provincial party committees. Between April 1986 and March 1988, a further 19 such appointments were made. Gorbachev wanted to break with the Soviet custom whereby a political patron favoured his career-long clients. Most of these appointees had been recently working under his gaze in Moscow and appeared to have the necessary talent. The snag was that once the newcomers went to the localities, they turned native and made little effort to alter local practices and attitudes. In another way, Gorbachev was himself acting traditionally.

- Since January 1987, it was official policy that local party organisations should elect their own secretaries and yet Gorbachev persisted in making his own appointments through the central party apparatus. This contradiction highlights the scale of the obstacles in his path. He knew party committees were blocking the introduction of multi-candidate elections, with merely one per cent of province-level secretaries appointed in this fashion.[32]

Glasnost

- In assuming leadership of the Soviet Union, Gorbachev had proposed '**openness'** (**glasnost**). Bolshevik rule had been based on a closed, often secretive control by an elite; free thought and open access to information for the general population had been dismissed by party leaders as naïve and even dangerous notions, as was "formal" majority rule unguided by Leninist leadership. In practice, even within the higher party ranks, free expression of opinion had long been severely circumscribed. Even after the death of Stalin and Khrushchev's reforms, the party operated bureaucratically, not openly and democratically. Similarly, perestroika, Gorbachev's proposed reorganisation and decentralisation of the economy, while looking attractive in principle, did not work in practice because it challenged entrenched bureaucracies. It also disrupted the routines and work habits that generations of ordinary Soviet citizens had acquired under centralised direction.[33]

- By mid-1986, Gorbachev had concluded that his early economic and disciplinary measures offered no basic solution: he also recognised that it would not be enough merely to replace Brezhnev's personnel with younger, more energetic officials. The attitudes and practices of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) needed changing. The problem was that most party officials refused to recognise the acuteness of the problems faced by the Soviet Union. This was a reflection of their self-interest; but it also derived from their ignorance. Their ignorance was not confined to officialdom. Soviet society for decades had been prevented from acquiring comprehensive knowledge of the country's past and current problems. It was for

[30] Isaacs and Downing, Cold War, p. 463. Service, Twentieth-Century Russia, p. 492.

[31] Service, Twentieth-Century Russia, p. 495.

[32] Ibid., pp. 459-460.

[33] Lindemann, A History of Modern Europe, From 1815 to Present, p. 390.

this reason that Gorbachev initiated a series of public debates. The policy was now encapsulated in the slogan of glasnost.[34]

- Gorbachev's choice of vocabulary was not accidental. Glasnost, for its vagueness, does not mean freedom of information. He had no intention of relinquishing the Politburo's capacity to decide the limits of public discussion. Moreover, he assumed that if Soviet society were to examine its problems within a framework of guidance, a renaissance of Leninist ideals would occur. Gorbachev was no political liberal. Nonetheless, his liberating initiative was impressive in freeing debate in the Soviet Union to an extent that no Soviet leader had attempted.[35]

- Gorbachev was apparently sincere in his belief that glasnost would generate greater popularity for Communist rule and that perestroika would significantly improve its economic performance. On both counts, his beliefs were revealed as ill-founded. There was initially much popular enthusiasm for greater openness, but that enthusiasm detracted from support for Communist rule rather than enhancing it. The initial enthusiasm for reforms quickly got out of control. Moreover, when offered a genuinely free choice, the peoples of most non-Russian Soviet republics favoured independence from the Soviet Union. Even in the Russian-speaking areas, the Communist Party was unable to generate a reliable majority in reasonably open elections and a relatively free press.[36]

- The decision to launch the glasnost campaign was a courageous one, as is shown simply by listing a few of the areas touched upon by it. Glasnost, for example, has brought revelations about the state of women in Soviet society. As one woman author wrote, "Our statistics give one the impression of Soviet women as happy, hard-working, well-educated professionals good at sport, dancing, and singing, active in unions and in public life. This is a highly inaccurate picture. . . ." (In some cities, the divorce rate reaches 80 or 90 per cent.) Glasnost has also shed light on prostitution, alcoholism, the wide use of drugs. It has exposed the appallingly high crime rate, as well as the serious shortcomings in the administration of justice.

- Perhaps most painfully of all, glasnost has brought to the attention of the leadership and the public the condition of the younger Soviet generation. This has had its trivial side, as in the debates over whether rock music should be banned or co-opted, whether it produces in its adepts not only moral but also biochemical changes, whether jeans affect the female body for the worse, whether youth culture is a foreign importation sent by the forces of Western imperialism to weaken the national fibre. But important issues have been raised as well: the *veshism* (materialism) of the younger generation, the importance of money in its scale of values, the attitude of the older generation to youth. In theory, to quote a famous Soviet slogan, children are regarded as "the only privileged class in our society"; in fact, it has turned out, children are widely seen as a nuisance, noisy, ill-behaved, lazy, and in every respect inferior to the generation of their parents.

- Equally depressing have been the revelations concerning the health service, once upon a time the pride and joy of the Soviet leadership. At issue are not just the rise in infant mortality and the decline in life expectancy. A public debate has been launched over the question of continuing free health care altogether. Most patients seem to be in favour, most doctors against. But in many ways the discussion is irrelevant; as one journalist wrote in a leading paper: "No one is ashamed to take money, this is the norm in our medicine. Now we discuss in our press whether or not we should pay for medical care. But this is sheer hypocrisy—medical care has not been free for a long time. In our hospitals, especially those in our capital, there is no room for people with empty pockets." Many other aspects of Soviet social life have come under scrutiny: education, low pensions, creeping inflation, hidden and not so hidden poverty. There have been countless complaints over the decline in manners and morals. One writer noted that the last time he heard the phrase "pardon me" was in Leningrad in 1961. Where, another asked, has all the spite and anger come from? What has made people so hard and unfeeling? Could it be the harsh living conditions, the unending queuing, a political system which breeds dissimulation and suspicion?

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[34] Service, Twentieth-Century Russia, p. 448.

[35] Ibid.

[36] Lindemann, A History of Modern Europe, p. 390.

- The very fact that so many look nostalgically backward rather than casting their eyes to the future is evidence of dissatisfaction and lack of confidence. There is the feeling that somehow, some time, Russian history took a wrong turn, and as a result many of the old virtues disappeared. Of course there is a tendency in all this to glorify a past which was in fact far from idyllic, but what counts is the perception of loss, along with the conviction that even a higher standard of living is no substitute for human kindness. For the Russian people to find its soul again—so it is believed—a moral revolution is needed for which the prevailing doctrine, whatever its other merits, cannot serve as a guide or compass.[37]

- Glavlit, which censored all printed materials prior to publication was instructed from June 1986 to relax its rules. The USSR Union of Writers held a Congress in the same month and welcomed the relaxation of rules on the press. But the new novels took time to be written. Consequently, the leading edge of glasnost was sharpened by weekly newspapers and magazines. Chief among these were Moscow News, Ogonek (Little Spark) and Arguments and Facts. As they acquired new editors – Yegor Yalovlev, Vitali Korotich and Vladislav Starkov – on recommendation from Gorbachev's Party Secretariat, these publications displayed growing radicalism. The problem for Gorbachev was that such figures were rarities in the party apparatus. Many officials only wanted minimal reforms, which meant Gorbachev had to turn to the intelligentsia. His preference was for those, who like him, believed that Marxism-Leninism had been distorted since Lenin's time.[38]

- Moreover, 'openness' meant not only open discussion of current affairs but also filling in the many "blank spaces" of Soviet history, as Gorbachev termed them and that was a large order. Gorbachev indicated that his urgent priority was to subject Soviet history to public reconsideration. It meant going over what Khrushchev in 1956 dubbed 'the crimes of the Stalin era' – the show trials and mass arrests of the late 1930s – but also over still hugely sensitive issues as the murders of Polish officers at Katyn forest during World War II. Permission was given for the release of the film 'Repentance', whose director satirised the Stalin years. Gorbachev felt that until there was comprehension of the past, little could be done by him in the present. He saw a brilliant way to highlight his attitude: on 16 December 1986, he spoke to the dissenting physicist Andrei Sakharov and invited him to return from exile in Gorki. One of the regime's most uncompromising dissidents was to return to liberty.[39]

- In the academic world, an interim balance shows that there has been a great deal of cultural glasnost in some fields and very little in others. Some economists and sociologists have made good use of the new freedom, but official journals like Voprosy Ekonomiki and Planovoe Khosiaistvo show little "new thinking."

- The greatest resistance has come from historians and political philosophers; in political philosophy an interesting dichotomy has developed in which the organs of the Central Committee (such as Kommunist) have taken a more liberal line than many professionals in the field, while in Soviet history the version that has emerged in historical novels and plays differs markedly from that based on the old orthodoxy and still espoused by most academics. Whereas the great damage done by Lysenkoism to Soviet science and agriculture has been thoroughly aired, Soviet historiography, a field in which there has been at least as much lying as in genetics, has yet to undergo a house-cleaning. Although the whole editorial board of Voprosy

[37] Walter Z. Laqueur, Glasnost & Its Limits, Commentary, 1 July 1988, accessed 13 May 2018.

[38] Service, Twentieth-Century Russia, p. 449.

[39] Lindemann, A History of Modern Europe, pp. 390-391. Service, Twentieth-Century Russia, p. 450.

Istorii was fired earlier this year, it would still be unrealistic to expect much change even now; there are simply too few liberals among Soviet historians.

- The crucial test facing writers of Soviet history is of course how they deal with the role of Stalin; the next most critical test is their treatment of Stalin's chief antagonist, Trotsky. According to virtually all contemporaries Trotsky was not a lovable man. While he was probably more intelligent and better educated than most other Bolshevik leaders, his political judgment was frequently suspect and sometimes utterly wrong. He often quarrelled with Lenin, who after 1917 said that Trotsky had been "with us but not of us." Yet the same Lenin also remarked that since 1917 there had been no better Bolshevik than Comrade Trotsky. And in November 1918 Stalin himself wrote in Pravda that "all the work of practical organization of the insurrection was conducted under the immediate leadership of the president of the Petrograd Soviet, Comrade Trotsky."

- The treatment of Trotsky is a litmus test of glasnost precisely because he has for so long been considered an arch-villain—Satan, Judas, Lucifer, the incarnation of all evil. Half a century after his assassination in Mexico, it ought to be possible to publish the truth about him. The issue is after all no longer topical: in what sense can Trotskyism as a political movement be said to constitute a real danger to Soviet power? Yet it has proved to be impossible. No more than the medieval church could detect merits in the Antichrist can Trotsky be conceded his virtues. Some beliefs are so deeply ingrained that any slight revision can cause an irreparable schism. For similar reasons there are inbuilt limitations to telling the truth about Stalin. It can be freely admitted that Stalin committed grave mistakes, even crimes. After all, Lenin is always there to replace him as Father of the Revolution and great and good leader, unsullied by mistake or transgression. But at the same time Stalin (and Stalinism) cannot be entirely discarded without fatally undermining the legitimacy of party and state.[40]

- While glasnost was pursued, economic measures were not forgotten. A Law on the State Enterprise was being drafted to restrict the authority of the central planning authorities. There were simultaneous deliberations on the old proposal to introduce the 'link' system to agriculture. A commission was also set up to draft a Law on Co-operatives. But Gorbachev, while pushing Ryzhkov to hurry forward with proposals, put his greatest efforts into ideological and political measures. He did this with the knowledge that substantial progress on the economic front would be impeded until he had broken the opposition to his policies in the party, including the Politburo. It took months of persuasion before the Politburo agreed to hold a Central Committee plenum in order to strengthen the process of reform.[41]

- The Central Committee plenum which began on 27 January 1987 saw a renewed campaign for *demokratizatsiya* and glasnost, which was resisted by the conservatives. The entire Communist system was riddled with privileges for the *nomenklatura*, the elite, who wanted to maintain the status quo from which they benefited. While Gorbachev made sweeping changes to the party and state bureaucracies, many of his own appointees, embedded in the status quo, began to oppose further reform. His deputy in the party, Yegor Ligachev, led a reactionary clique in criticising glasnost, predicting that weakening party discipline and the ethnic nationalisms unleased in the Baltic states and in the southern Soviet republics would prove destructive. Gorbachev continued to deny that perestroika threatened the 'values of socialism' and pressed for yet vigorous reform.[42] Gorbachev instead called for changes in the party's official ideas. 'Developed socialism' was no longer a topic for boasting; it was not even mentioned. Gorbachev now described the Soviet situation as 'socialism in the process of self-development'. He called for the 'blank spots' in the central party textbooks to be filled. He denounced Stalin and the lasting effects of his policies. Despite not naming Brezhnev, Gorbachev dismissed his rule as a period of stagnation, and declared that the leaving of cadres in post had been taken to the extreme of absurdity.[43]

[40] Laqueur, Glasnost & Its Limits, Commentary, accessed 13 May 2018.

[41] Service, Twentieth-Century Russia, p. 451.

[42] Isaacs and Downing, Cold War, p. 422.

[43] Service, Twentieth-Century Russia, p. 451.

- The implementation of economic and political measures proved more daunting. While communist intellectuals were attracted to Gorbachev, the party functionaries were not. His own second secretary Ligachev was covertly trying to undermine Gorbachev's authority. Yeltsin in the Moscow Party City Committee was urging a faster pace of reform and a broader dimension for glasnost. Ligachev proved more intransigent; he was in charge of ideological matters in the Secretariat and acted as a brake on historical and political debate. The more immediate problem was Yeltsin since his sackings of Moscow personnel left scarcely anyone in a responsible job who had held it for more than a year. Yeltsin proved an implacable challenge given his domineering tendencies. In October 1987, Gorbachev accepted his resignation as a candidate member of the Politburo. A few days later, Yeltsin was also sacked as party secretary of Moscow. Gorbachev then showed mercy to Yeltsin by appointing him as the Deputy Chairman of the State Construction Committee.[44]

- The process of restructuring continued despite hardened opposition to reform at a special conference of the Communist Party in June 1988. Embattled, Gorbachev faced opponents who believed that his concessions to the United States were not based on mutual recognition of shared interests but on capitulation to American demands. Nonetheless, Gorbachev was still able to get agreement that elections would be held to appoint most party chiefs. A Congress of People's Deputies was created above the Supreme Soviet. Later that year, Gorbachev was elected president, succeeding Gromyko.[45]

Rise of Nationalism

- In the 'national question', Gorbachev displayed baleful complacency. Superficially, he seemed to understand the sensitivities of the non-Russians; he excluded favourable mention of the Russians in the 1986 Party Programme and affirmed the 'full unity of nations' in the USSR to be a task of 'the remote historical future'. This gave reassurance to the non-Russian peoples that there would not no Russification campaign under his leadership. However, no practical changes of a positive kind followed. Gorbachev was not a pure Russian, born to a couple consisting of a Russian and Ukrainian. This mixed ancestry, far from keeping him alert to national tensions in the Soviet Union, had dulled his understanding of them. He was comfortable with his dual identity as a Russian and as a Soviet citizen' and that produced casualness that gave much offence. On his first visit to the Ukraine in 1986, he spoke about Russia and the Soviet Union as if they were co-extensive. Ukrainian national sensitivities were outraged.[46]

- The problem was exacerbated by the fact that non-Russians had been prevented from expressing their grievances. Inter-ethnic difficulties were the hatred that dared not to speak its name. Gorbachev and other central party leaders were slow to perceive the inherent risks involved in campaigning against corruption in the republics while granting them freedom of the press and assembly. Much resentment arose over the appointment of Russian functionaries in place of cadres drawn from the local nationalities. In addition, more scandals were exposed in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan than Russia. In December 1986, Dinmukhammed Kunaev, one of Brezhnev's loyalists, was compelled to retire. In October 1987, Geidar Aliev, brought from Azerbaijan to Moscow by Andropov was dropped from the Politburo. Only Shevardnadze was the sole remaining non-Slav in its membership. The Politburo was virtually a Slavic men's club.[47]

- An early sign of future trouble occurred in Kazakhstan where violent protests in Alma-Ata were organised over the appointment of a Russian, Gennadi Kolbin as Kunaev's successor. The Kazakh functionaries in the republican *nomenklatura* connived in the trouble on the streets while Kazakh intellectuals were unrestrained in condemning the horrors perpetrated on the Kazakh people under Communist rule. The nationalist resurgence had been quieter but still more defiant in the Baltic States. The nationalities there had a living memory of independence and their forced incorporation in 1940 had never obtained official recognition in the West. In June 1986, demonstrations first broke out in Latvia. Dissenters in Lithuania and Estonia joined the protest movement. While not all demanded outright independence, the degree of

[44] Ibid., p. 453.

[45] Isaacs and Downing, Cold War, p. 427.

[46] Service, Twentieth-Century Russia, pp. 455-456.

[47] Ibid., p. 456.

autonomy demanded was rising. In August 1987, demonstrations were held to mark the anniversary of the 1939 Nazi-Soviet Pact. The example set by the Baltic States stimulated national movements elsewhere. Discontent in the Ukraine intensified after Chernobyl. Gorbachev was so concerned over instability that he retained Shcherbytskiy, a friend of Brezhnev as the party first secretary in the Ukraine.[48]

- The USSR contained many inter-ethnic rivalries that did not predominantly involve Russians. Over the winter of 1987-1988, disturbances between the Armenians and Azeris in Nagorno-Karabakh occurred. The Armenian populated district of Nagorno-Karabakh in Azerbaijan was brought under direct rule from Moscow. In February 1988, 15 000 demonstrated in the Georgian capital of Tbilisi, marking the anniversary of the Soviet 'annexation' of Georgia.

- In the Baltic States, there were rumblings of protest against Soviet rule, and in June, the Lithuanian nationalists formed a popular front called Sajudis. Other such groups were formed in Estonia and Latvia. The Belorussian Communist Party Central Committee tried to suppress the popular front in Minsk, but its leaders simply moved to neighbouring Lithuania and held their founding congress in Vilnius. But Gorbachev and the Kremlin leadership were determined that the Soviet Union would itself remain intact. They ignored signs of the gathering storm within the fifteen republics that constituted the Soviet Union. Moreover, a considerable number of the population in these restive republics did not belong to the titular nationality of each Soviet republic. Around 25 million Russians lived outside the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic. Groups formed by ethnic Russians fearing local nationalisms also emerged in response to the popular fronts.[49]

- In November 1988, the Estonian Supreme Soviet declared its right to veto laws passed in Moscow; in January, Lithuanian nationalists held a demonstration against the continued location of Soviet troops in Lithuania. The official authorities in these republics decided to drop Russian as the state language. Latvia was not far behind, there was a protest rally in Riga against the Latvian Communist Party Central Committee's repudiation of 'anti-Soviet and separatist' trends of thought in Latvia.[50]

- While there was no popular front in Russia, there was much nationalist talk. An organisation *Pamyat* which had been created with the expressed aim of preserving Russian traditional culture, exhibited anti-Semitic tendencies. Unlike the other popular fronts, it had no commitment to democracy. Gorbachev judged that the situation could be managed. What he underestimated was the possibility of Ligachev and his associates

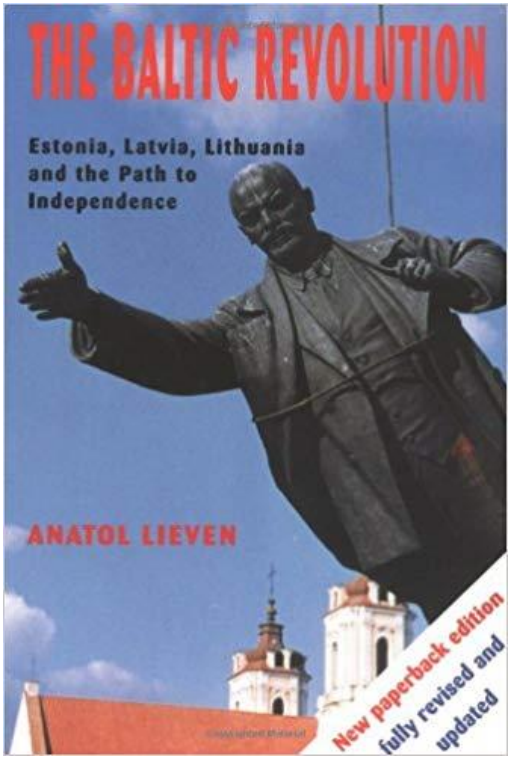
[48] Ibid., pp. 456-457.

[49] Isaacs and Downing, Cold War, p. 430. Service, Twentieth-Century Russia, p. 457.

[50] Service, Twentieth-Century Russia, p. 473.

playing the cards linking Soviet state pride and Russian nationalism. Ligachev had been affronted by the relentless public criticism of Stalin and was looking for an opportunity to reassert official pride in the Russian nation's role during the First Five-Year Plan and the Second World War. He bided his time until March 1988 when Gorbachev was about to leave for Yugoslavia. A letter demanding the rehabilitation of Stalin and accusing the Jews for the country's plight after the October Revolution was circulated through the efforts of Ligachev. Gorbachev returned and conducted an inquiry but Ligachev lied about his actions. Nonetheless, Gorbachev took measures to avoid a repeat. He enhanced the position of Alexander Yakovlev, who had been a Politburo member since mid-1987.[51]

- Reforms in Moscow sent tremors throughout the Soviet Union. The mood of the majority nationalities in the Baltic republics was shared in the Transcaucasus, but with fatal consequences. Disturbances in Tbilisi, Georgia in April were brutally suppressed, shocking Shevardnadze. Over the next few weeks, there were riots in many Central Asian cities. Gorbachev wanted to encourage liberalisation in the countries of Eastern Europe, but he was deaf to nationalist voices within the Soviet Union. Even when in Moscow, Gorbachev's colleague Alexander Yakovlev formally condemned Stalin's annexation of the Baltic republics in 1940, he made it clear that the Kremlin stood firm against calls for independence. In July, however, Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia declared their 'sovereignty.' In the following month, to protest the fiftieth anniversary of the Nazi-Soviet Pact, a million demonstrators formed a vast human chain, stretching from Vilnius for 430 miles through Riga to Tallinn, linking the three Baltic capitals.[52] Gorbachev refused to contemplate the possibility of these republics seceding from the USSR, on the contrary, he assumed that their citizens would perceive their economic interests as being best served by their republics remaining within the Soviet Union.[53]



- The trend had an arithmetical precision. The greater the distance from Moscow, the bolder the nations were in repudiating the Kremlin's overlordship. The Communist regimes of Eastern Europe had been put on notice that they would have to fend politically for themselves without reliance on the Soviet Army. This knowledge had been kept secret from the populations of the same states. If the news had got out, there would have been instantaneous revolts against the existing regimes. It was no wonder that Gorbachev was seen by foreign counterparts as a dangerous subversive. This was also the viewpoint of him taken by fellow central leaders in the USSR. Rebelliousness and inter-ethnic conflict were on the rise in the non-Russian republics. In September 1989, Rukh was formed in the Ukraine. Gorbachev flew to Kiev and replaced Shcherbytskiy with the more flexible Vladimir Ivashko. He recognised that the clampdown on Ukrainian national self-expression had begun to cause more problems than it solved. At this moment, he preferred concession to confrontation, but thereby he also took another step towards the disintegration of the USSR.[54]

[51] Ibid., pp. 458-459.

[52] Isaacs and Downing, Cold War, p. 434.

[53] Service, Twentieth-Century Russia, p. 481.

[54] Ibid., p. 482.

Democratisation

- On 28 June 1988, Gorbachev opened the Nineteenth Party Conference by calling for a strict functional separation between the party and the soviets. He wanted to disband the economic departments in the Central Committee Secretariat and to reduce the size of the party apparatus in Moscow. At the same time, the Supreme Soviet, which had only a honorific role, was to become a kind of parliament with over 400 members who would be in session most of the year and be chosen from a Congress of People's Deputies, consisting 2250 members. He proposed that while two thirds of the deputies should be elected through universal suffrage, one third should be provided by 'public organisations' including the Communist Party. One of the most startling suggestions was that local party first secretaries should automatically submit themselves for election to the parallel soviet chairmanship. While he gave the impression that he expected such secretaries to retain their power, he privately hoped that the electorate would use their votes to get rid of his political opponents.[55]

- The size and functions of the central party apparatus were sharply diminished at a Central Committee plenum held in September 1988. The same plenum left Vadim Medvedev instead of Ligachev in charge of ideology and gave Yakovlev a supervisory role on the party's behalf in international affairs. Gromyko was pushed into retirement in October and replaced as Chairman of the USSR Supreme Soviet by Gorbachev himself. The Soviet Union remained a one-party state; but the party as such had abruptly lost much of its power.[56] At the end of March 1989, the Soviet Union held its first largely free elections in 75 years. For the new Congress of People's Deputies, 170 million electors voted. One-third of all seats were reserved for Communist Party members, and overall 80 per cent of party members won seats. Significantly, 20 per cent did not, and these included some major political figures, even when there was no candidate opposing them. If voters crossed out the name of the only listed candidate, this was counted as a vote against. Leningrad party chief and Politburo member Yury Solovyev failed to be elected when 130 000 crossed out his name and only 110 000 voted for him.

- In Moscow, Boris Yeltsin demonstrated his growing popularity when 5 million voters returned him as mayor. Unlike Lenin, Gorbachev did not overturn the elections. To those of his party comrades who had incurred the people's disapproval, he signalled that they should step down from their posts in the party and other institutions. When the Congress met in late May, its members elected the new Supreme Soviet, and voted Gorbachev president, with 95 per cent of the vote. Debates in the Congress were televised and attracted such interest that workers left their factories to watch daily broadcasts. This led to plummeting productivity.[57] For many days, television viewers throughout the Soviet Union relished the unprecedented sight of a vociferous opposition haranguing the government. Gorbachev recalled that "everyone was so sick of singing the praises of Brezhnev that it now became a must to chide the leader." "Being disciplined people, my Politburo colleagues did not show that they were unhappy. Nevertheless, I sensed their bad mood. How could it be otherwise when it was already clear to everybody that the days of Party dictatorship were over?"[58]

- Yeltsin once again caused trouble. Standing as a candidate in Moscow, he had secured nine-tenths of the city's vote. This victory however did not endear him to the Congress; and when it came to the Congress's internal elections to the 542 seats of the new USSR Supreme Soviet, a majority rejected him. He obtained a seat only because an elected member of the Supreme Soviet voluntarily yielded his seat to him. Gorbachev went along with this improvised compromise; he wanted to show that his own slogan of democratisation was sincere: Yeltsin had to be seen to be treated decently.

[55] Ibid., p. 461.

[56] Ibid., p. 463.

[57] Isaacs and Downing, Cold War, pp. 433-434. Service, Twentieth-Century Russia, p. 473.

[58] Gorbachev, Memoirs, p. 287, 290, 292.

- Yeltsin and the Congress radicals on the contrary showed Gorbachev no gratitude. They were determined to use the Congress as a means of constituting a formal opposition to the Communist regime despite the fact that many of them were still communist party members. Around 300 of them gathered in an Inter-Regional Group led by Yeltsin, Sakharov, Afanasev and the economist Gavril Popov. Its unifying purpose was to push Gorbachev into making further moves against his conservative central and local party comrades. The Group however could not throw off all caution since its members were still outnumbered by the conservative communist rump at the Congress.

- The Group also faced problems outside the Congress. Active popular opposition to communist conservatism was strongest in the non-Russian Soviet republics. It is true that political associations had been formed in Moscow and other Russian cities since 1987. These were known as the 'informals' (neformaly) since the Constitution only gave formal public recognition solely to the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. These groups did not have many branches in other cities and rivalries of ideology, region, class and personality inhibited the birth of a unified Russian radical movement.[59]

- In other crucial matters, the Supreme Soviet had taken giant strides; on 1 October 1990, it passed a law guaranteeing freedom of worship and on 9 October, legislation to bring into being a multiparty system.[60] As 1990 ended, Gorbachev, under persistent conservative criticism, moved to the right. The Supreme Soviet had granted him special powers to rule by decree during the transition to a market economy. Gorbachev increasingly dispensed with prominent reformers in his entourage. By now, Alexander Yakovlev ceased to be one of his regular consultants after the Twenty-Eighth Party Congress. In November, Vadim Bakatin was asked to step down as Minister of Internal Affairs. He was replaced with a former KGB chief, Boris Pugo[61], who was an advocate of repressive measures. Gorbachev also lost his close party colleague Vadim Medvedev. Bakatin and Medvedev had been proponents of the need to take the reforms further and faster.

- On 17 December, Gorbachev said that the country needed 'firm executive rule to overcome the threat posed by the dark forces of nationalism.' On 20 December, Shevardnadze resigned as foreign minister, warning that a hard-line dictatorship was near. He was replaced by Alexander Bessmertnykh. Nikolai Petrakov, Gorbachev's economic advisor also departed. Ryzhkov was also laid low by a heart condition, and his position as the Chairman of the Cabinet of Ministers was taken by Valentin Pavlov, the Minister of Finances. Pavlov was eventually more suspicious of reform than Ryzhkov. On 26 December, the Congress of People's Deputies approved new executive powers for the president of the USSR, Gorbachev. He now chose as his vice president a conservative, Gennady Yanayev.[62]

Implosion of the Soviet Union

- For Gorbachev, there was an essential link between international politics and domestic reform. His international standing, he thought, helped him carry the process of reform at home. Glasnost and perestroika in the Soviet Union helped him argue internationally for his 'new thinking' and for an end to the Cold War. Even more crucial, the economic improvement he needed to achieve at home depended on ending the arms race. That however could only be wound down with international agreement for disarmament. Throughout the summer of 1989, Gorbachev was preoccupied with restructuring the Soviet Union. However, growing unrest threatened his reforms. Thousands of miners went on strike in Siberia; and the Baltic States and Asian republics called for greater freedom from Moscow. The pressure on Gorbachev to relieve the Soviet Union of its international commitments and advance arms-reduction talks with the United States grew intense.[63]

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[59] Service, Twentieth-Century Russia, pp. 475-476.

[60] Isaacs and Downing, Cold War, p. 462.

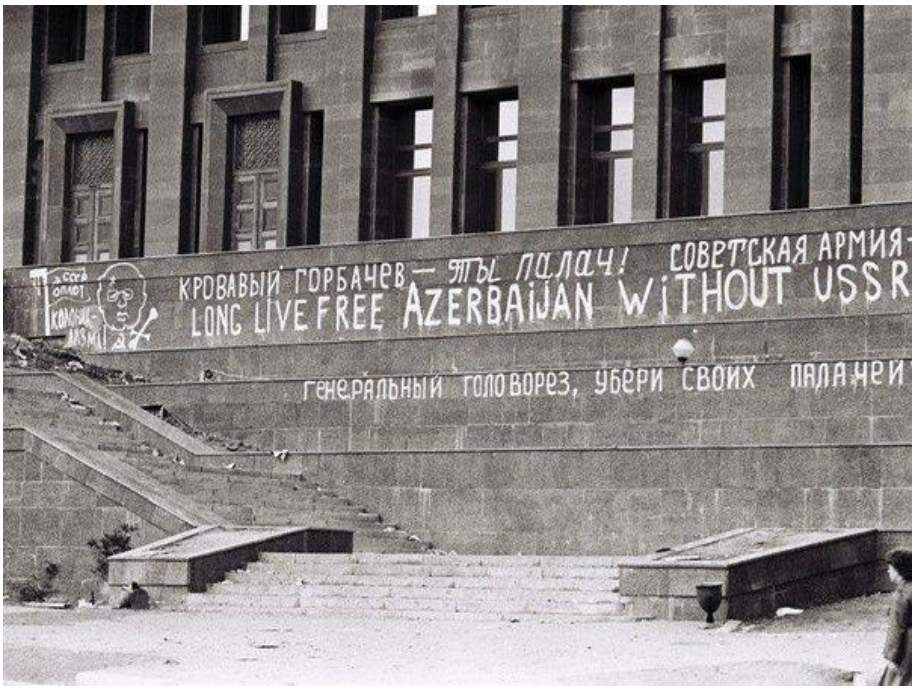
[61] Boris Karlovich Pugo (1937-1991) was a Soviet Communist political figure, and Minister of the Interior from December 1990 to August 1991. He committed suicide in the aftermath of the August coup.

[62] Ibid., p. 464.Gennady Ivanovich Yanayev (1937-2010) was a Soviet politician who served as the first and only Vice President of the Soviet Union from December 1990 to August 1991.

[63] Ibid., pp. 438-439.

- In October 1989, the Latvian Popular Front demanded state independence and in November, the Lithuanian government itself decided to hold a referendum on the question. In December 1989, the Communist Party in Lithuania voted to declare the country's independence from Moscow. Tensions increased between the resident Russians and the majority nationalities in the Baltic States. The Estonian proposals for a linguistic qualification for citizenship of Estonia were especially contentious. In Estonia and Latvia, nationalist groupings won elections by a handsome margin. The Baltic States were comparatively newer additions to the Soviet Union, but their peoples had never willingly accepted this fate. The United States too had never recognised Soviet rule over these states or formally withdrawn recognition of their independence. Now that these republics had claimed their independence again, Gorbachev began to grasp at formulae for compromise, while insisting that the Union must be preserved. Once he returned to Moscow from a visit to Vilnius in January 1990, Gorbachev was confronted with ethnic rioting and civil war in Azerbaijan. The Azerbaijanis were concerned that the largely Armenian Christian population of Nagorno-Karabakh was rebelling against their rule and seeking independence from Moscow. Thousands rioted near the Iranian border. Troops were mobilised to quell the disturbances.[64]

- In February, the East German government proposed a re-united and neutral Germany, a concept accepted by Gorbachev, though this prospect would further test the tolerance of hardliners in the Kremlin.[65] The deployment of troops did not deter trouble elsewhere. Inter-ethnic carnage was already being reported in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan in February. The possibility that the USSR might implode under these pressures began to be discussed in the press. The more rhetorical of politicians warned against any actions that might lead eventually to civil war across the USSR.



- A massive demonstration in Moscow called for an end to the Communist Party's monopoly on power and on 5 February, Gorbachev proposed that the Soviet Union should end one-party rule, accept a multiparty system, and adopt 'humane, democratic socialism.' Specifically, he put forth economic reforms, proposed a reduction in the membership of the Central Committee, and called for a new executive office of the president of the USSR. Gorbachev used his most extraordinary language to date: 'The main objective of the transitional period is the spiritual and political liberation of society.' His implication was that the USSR had

[64] On January 19, 1990, after blowing up the central television station and cutting the phone and radio lines, 26,000 Soviet troops entered the Azerbaijani capital Baku, smashing barricades, attacking protesters, and firing into crowds. On that night and during subsequent confrontations (which lasted until February), more than 130 people died. Most of these were civilians. More than 700 civilians were wounded, hundreds were detained, but only a few were actually tried for alleged criminal offenses.

[65] Ibid., p 456-457.

always been a despotism. His vision of a socialist future, however, barely mentioned Lenin and Marxism-Leninism. He was repudiating most of the Soviet historical experience.

- Communism was no longer the avowed aim. Since Lenin, socialism had been depicted as merely a first post-capitalist stage towards the ultimate objective: Communism. Now, socialism was the ultimate objective. The draft platform was strongly reminiscent of Western social-democracy.[66] At the Central Committee plenum, Gorbachev's critics desisted from attacking the draft platform, they even acquiesced to Gorbachev's demand for the repeal of Article 6 of the 1977 USSR Constitution which guaranteed the political monopoly to the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. Gorbachev was breaking with the dictatorial heritage of his hero Lenin. On 27 February, Gorbachev addressed the USSR Supreme Soviet and obtained its sanction for multi-party politics. This was ratified by the Congress of People's Deputies on 14 April 1990.[67]

- The radicals were disgruntled with Gorbachev. Yeltsin was the most vociferous in demanding faster and deeper reform. He grasped an opportunity to press his case in March 1990 when he stood for election to the RSFSR Supreme Soviet and became its chairman. Politically, he was playing the 'Russian card'. Unable to challenge Gorbachev directly at the level of the Soviet Union, Yeltsin asserted himself in the organs of the RSFSR. The conservatives reacted furiously. Wanting to put pressure on Gorbachev as well as strike down Yeltsin, they adopted the device of setting up a Communist Party of the Russian Federation. Its leader was Ivan Polozkov, Krasnodar Regional Party First Secretary. Its first congress was held in June and Polozkov became its First Secretary. He took up the role of leading the party traditionalists, a role held by Ligachev before his successive demotions in 1989. The dispute between Yeltsin and Polozkov took some of the heat off Gorbachev. One of his devices was to occupy a position above all the country's politicians and exploit their disagreements to his own advantage. He also had an interest in refraining from protecting any rivals from nasty accusations. Newspapers claimed Ligachev had made pecuniary gain from the corruption in Uzbekistan. It was also alleged at the Congress of People's Deputies that Ryzhkov had been involved in shady industrial deals. Gorbachev did nothing to help both of them.[68]

- On 11 March, Lithuania formally declared its independence. Vytautas Landsbergis was elected president. Gorbachev denounced the decision but was reluctant to use force to reverse it. At Malta, he had agreed with Bush not to do so; Bush in return had promised not to make Gorbachev's task more difficult. The United States wanted to see the Baltic States win their freedom, but relied at this point for world stability on a lasting relationship with a strong Soviet Union, it did not welcome chaos. As the crisis deepened in March, Soviet paratroopers occupied party buildings in Vilnius. On 25 March, Estonian Communists voted for independence, and Latvia followed in May. In response, Gorbachev imposed an economic embargo on Lithuania. He cut off oil supplies and 84 per cent of the flow of natural gas by pipeline and prohibited the supplying of other goods. Although US citizens in the Baltic States lobbied, the United States eventually rejected imposing sanctions on Moscow. Instead, it threatened to withhold the signing of a projected trade agreement with the Soviet Union.[69]

- On 29 May, Yeltsin, who had resigned his membership in the Politburo and the Communist Party, was chosen leader of the Russian Republic by its parliament, which declared that its laws took precedence over Soviet laws. This was in effect a declaration of Russian sovereignty, and very nearly, of independence from the Soviet Union.[70] In June, Uzbekistan declared its sovereignty.

- On 16 July, Ukraine declared its sovereignty followed by Armenia, Turkmenistan, and Tajikistan in August, and Kazakhstan and Kirghizia in October. In October, both Russia and the Ukraine declared their state laws sovereign over Union laws. The Supreme Soviet declared this invalid in November. By now, the republican leaderships were calling for democracy and national self-determination. In some cases, there was a genuine commitment to liberal political principles, but in most cases, local communist party elites were struggling

[66] Service, Twentieth-Century Russia, p. 487.

[67] Ibid., p. 488.

[68] Ibid.

[69] Isaacs and Downing, Cold War, pp. 458-459.

[70] Ibid., pp. 459-460.

to avoid the loss of their power. While detesting Gorbachev, they used his democratisation of public affairs as a means of reinforcing their position and increasing their affluence. By announcing their independence, they aimed to seal off each republic from Moscow's interference. Gorbachev proposed to set up a new central government that would have in it representatives from the fifteen Soviet republics.

- Yeltsin now made it clear that he did not want to see power concentrated at the centre, in Gorbachev's hands. By the end of November, Gorbachev had shifted again: this time he proposed a new Union Treaty: a Union of Sovereign Soviet Republics, but with loosened ties between each republic and the central Soviet government.[71]

- In the meantime, the Twenty-Eight Party Congress met on 2 June 1990 to discuss the party platform approved by the Central Committee in February. This time, Gorbachev's critics attacked him and delegates from the Russian Communist Party led a successful campaign to vote Alexander Yakovlev off the Central Committee. Gorbachev retained his post as General Secretary by a huge majority and his platform was ratified by the Congress. Gorbachev's victory did not satisfy Yeltsin and other communist radicals. They were annoyed by Yakovlev's departure and urged Gorbachev to leave the Communist Party. When he refused, they walked out.[72]

- On 2 January 1991, tensions in the Baltics escalated, as Moscow sent riot police to seize the state-owned buildings in Vilnius and Riga. On 7 January, elite paratroopers were ordered to round up draft dodgers and deserters. The United States now cautioned against the use of the force. The Soviet Union, slipping back into Cold War rhetoric, warned the United States not to interfere in its internal affairs. On 13 January, Soviet troops stormed the television tower and other public buildings. 14 Lithuanians were killed. On 20 January in Riga, Soviet troops stormed the Interior Ministry, killing 5. The United States and world opinion were outraged. The orders for the crackdown in Vilnius were said to have come from the very top, but Gorbachev, after the first killings, got cold feet and ordered a stop to the operations. Urged to go to Vilnius, Gorbachev was told his security there could not be guaranteed. He stayed in Moscow. Speaking to the Supreme Soviet, he defended what was done and refused to condemn the use of force. On 21 January, Gorbachev did condemn brutality, and promised to punish those responsible. In the meantime, Yeltsin, as parliamentary leader of Russia, signed a mutual security pact with the Baltic States.[73]

- On 17 March, Gorbachev organised a referendum on the question, "Do you consider necessary the preservation of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics as a renewed federation of equal sovereign republics in which the rights and freedom of the individual of any nationality will be guaranteed?" His phrasing made it difficult for reform-minded citizens to vote against sanctioning the Union.
    - He won approval of the proposed Union Treaty: The Soviet Union was to be preserved as a renewed federation of equal sovereign republics in which human rights and the freedoms of all nationalities would be guaranteed. Several republics boycotted the vote, and Yeltsin made it clear that he sided with the boycotters.
    - In March, mass demonstrations were held in Moscow – for Yeltsin and against Gorbachev. While the marches went off peacefully, the ban and massing of armed forces caused tremendous offence. Gorbachev's new, more hard-line stance was losing him support among reformers. In April, Georgia declared its independence from the USSR.

- The conservative prime minister Valentin Pavlov, presented an 'anti-crisis' programme designed to restore power to the central government. Gorbachev, shifting from hard-line policies, held talks with leaders of nine Soviet republics on 23 April to formulate a political and economic reform package and a modified relationship between Moscow and the republics. The leaders reached a new understanding on a treaty, the Nine-Plus-One agreement. The final version was to be signed on 20 August. This tried the patience of Polozkov and his supporters and they criticised Gorbachev at the Central Committee of the USSR Community Party from 24-25 April.

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[71] Ibid., p. 462.

[72] Service, Twentieth-Century Russia, p. 491.

[73] Isaacs and Downing, Cold War, p. 465.

- At one point, Gorbachev threatened to resign as General Secretary. Only a petition in his favour persuaded him to remain in office. The result was a victory for Gorbachev. The terms of the proposed Union Treaty were approved by the Central Committee. On 12 June, Yeltsin was elected to the newly created post of president of Russia, in a landslide, becoming the first democratically elected leader in Russian history.

- On 20 July, Yeltsin pressed home his advantage by issuing a decree banning communist party organisations from keeping offices in administrative institutions and economic enterprises in Russia. This was not approved by Gorbachev but by now, he was exasperated by the party's resistance to self-reform.[74]

The August 1991 Coup

- By now, many of Gorbachev's leading colleagues had concluded that the domestic chaos and international weaknesses resulted from an excess of reform. Oleg Shenin[75], who had taken over the Central Committee Secretariat in the absence of both Gorbachev and the ailing Ivashko, called in January 1991 for 'an end to the careless, anarchic approach' to party affairs. Vice President Yanayev spoke often about the need for at least 'elementary order' in the country. Oleg Baklanov, Deputy Chairman of the Defence Council, regretted the arms agreement with the United States. Prime Minister Pavlov at the April Central Committee plenum demanded the declaration of a state of emergency on the railways, in the oil and metallurgical industries and in several regions of the USSR. At the Supreme Soviet in June, he stated that the sovereignty demanded by the various Soviet republics could not be unconditional.[76]

- Gorbachev was a tired man, too tired to take full cognisance of the dangers. While he had often heard of warnings of an imminent coup, yet nothing had ever happened. In June, old guard Communists had attempted to unseat Gorbachev by passing resolutions in the Congress of People's Deputies (the so-called constitutional coup); now they moved again to dislodge him from power, this time by force. In June 1991, US Secretary of State James Baker had sent Gorbachev a message naming Pavlov[77], Kryuchkov[78] and Yazov[79] as possible conspirators, Gorbachev refused to be alarmed and set off in early August for an extended vacation in his dacha at the Black Sea village of Foros. Gorbachev had badly underrated the extraordinary political discontent he left behind. On 23 July 1991, a newspaper carried an article 'A Word to the People' signed by 12 public figures. It railed against current conditions in the Soviet Union.[80]

- In Moscow, early in the morning of 19 August, radio and television started broadcasting an announcement by the 'State Committee for the State of Emergency': President Gorbachev was ill and could not perform his duties; Vice President Yanayev had assumed the powers of the presidency; an emergency had been declared. On 18 August, a delegation from Moscow had arrived at the seaside villa to see Gorbachev. They included Shenin, Baklanov, Varennikov and Gorbachev's personal assistant Valeri Boldin. The conspirators told Gorbachev that he should approve declaration of a national state of emergency and sign it, or else resign and hand over his authority to Yanayev. Gorbachev flatly refused; to have agreed would have legitimised the plot. They left, putting Gorbachev under house arrest, cut off from communication with the outside world. In the meantime, KGB Chairman Kryuchkov and Interior Minister Pugo had been busy persuading

[74] Ibid., p. 466. Service, Twentieth-Century Russia, pp.494-495.

[75] Oleg Semyonovich Shenin ((1937-2009) was the leader of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. Shenin was a member of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union; he was also a member of the Politburo and Secretariat from 1990 to 1991. During the Soviet coup attempt of 1991, he was a member of the group of CPSU Central Committee members who tried to regain control of the country in order to re-establish the Soviet Union

[76] Service, Twentieth-Century Russia, p. 496.

[77] Valentin Sergeyevich Pavlov (1937-2003) was a Soviet official who became a Russian banker following the dissolution of the Soviet Union. He served as Prime Minister of the Soviet Union from January to August 1991.

[78] Vladimir Alexandrovich Kryuchkov (1924-2007) was a Soviet lawyer, diplomat and head of the KGB, member of the Politburo of the Central Committee of the CPSU.

[79] Dmitry Timofeyevich Yazov (1924-) was the last Marshal of the Soviet Union to be appointed before the collapse of the Soviet Union. He was Minister of Defence from May 1987 to August 1991.

[80] Service, Twentieth-Century Russia, p. 497.

officials to join them in the State Committee for the Emergency Situation. Vice-President Yanayev, Prime Minister Pavlov and Defence Minister Yazov were courted strongly. All eventually agreed.[81]

- From the night of 18-19 August, nothing went right for the conspiracy. The plan was for the creation of a State Committee for the Emergency Situation to be announced in the morning. Explanations were to be sent out to the army, the KGB and the Soviet Communist Party. Then the State Committee's members were set to appear at a televised press conference. In fact, the press conference was a shambles. Yanayev, while declaring himself Acting President, could not stop his fingers from twitching. Pavlov was too drunk to attend. Outlandish incompetence was shown after the conference. Meetings of public protest were not broken up in the capital. The telephone network was allowed to function. Fax messages could be sent unimpeded. Satellite TV continued to be beamed into the USSR. Foreign television crews moved around the city unhindered. The attempted coup had not been unrealistic. Disillusionment with Gorbachev was pervasive by the summer of 1991. The conspirators also had the cunning to court popularity by releasing basic consumer products to be sold in the shops at rock bottom prices. Moreover, every Soviet citizen knew that traditional institutions of coercion were at the disposal of the State Committee. Resistance to the attempted coup would involve considerable bravery.[82]

- Resistance to the coup came from the White House, the seat of the Russian parliament, by Yeltsin. Usually at odds with Gorbachev, Yeltsin stood firm. The conspirators had blundered in failing to arrest Yeltsin and his colleagues. He denounced the coup and those behind it, rallying support for legitimate government and a liberal future. Calling for a general strike, those who supported Yeltsin went to the White House, ringed by troops and tanks, to declare their support. Shevardnadze was one of the first. Bush received news of the coup but adopted a 'wait and see' response. At the villa, the Gorbachevs learned what was happening in Moscow from a transistor radio no one knew they had. Gorbachev sent a message to Yanayev: Cancel what you've done and convene the Congress of People's Deputies or the USSR Supreme Soviet. On 20 August, three young men were killed by armoured personnel carriers moving towards the White House in support of the coup. Hesitant and unsure of themselves, the coup had failed. On 21 August, it was announced that a delegation would be permitted to leave for the Crimea to see for themselves that Gorbachev was gravely ill. Gorbachev refused to meet them until communications were restored. As telephones came back into use, Gorbachev spoke with Yeltsin. Shortly after, a Russian delegation led by Alexander Rutskoi, Yeltsin's vice president arrived to bring Gorbachev and his family back to Moscow.[83]

[81] Ibid., p. 498.

[82] Ibid. 499-500.

[83] Isaacs and Downing, Cold War, p. 473.

The End

- Gorbachev returned to Moscow, reaffirming his belief in the Communist Party and the need to renew it. This was not what many wanted to hear. He was jeered in the Russian parliament and humiliated by Yeltsin who, without warning, put into his hand a set of minutes he had not seen before and forced him to read the documents out loud on live television. They showed that his communist allies, members of his government, had been behind the coup. US diplomats, as did Russian viewers, knew that Gorbachev was finished, destroyed by a coup that failed and that Yeltsin, who had led the resistance, was now the master. On 23 August, Yeltsin suspended the legal status of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in Russia. On 24 August, Gorbachev dissolved the Central Committee of the CPSU, resigned as the leader of the Communist Party, dissolved all party units in the government and disbanded the Central Committee. It was too late. On 29 August, the Supreme Soviet indefinitely suspended all CPSU activity on Soviet territory, effectively ending Communist rule in the Soviet Union and dissolving the only remaining unifying force in the country. the Soviet Communist Party dissolved itself.[84]

- All that remained was to establish the precise relationship between the Soviet Union and the individual republics. On 20-21 August, Estonia and Latvia declared independence, and Lithuania reaffirmed its declaration of 1990. The republics of Ukraine, Belarus, Moldavia, Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan, Kirghizia, Tajikistan and Armenia followed soon after. On 2 September, the United States recognised the independence of the Baltic States. The Soviet State Council did so on 6 September. On the same day, Georgia broke off all ties with the Soviet Union. While Gorbachev still hoped for a federation like the United States, the others were against it. At most, a loose confederation of independent states now looked likely. The United States could tolerate this, provided they have assurances on security and the control of nuclear weapons. The US Congress meanwhile voted $500 million of the defence budget to help dismantle Soviet nuclear warheads.[85] On 17 September 17, General Assembly resolution numbers 46/4, 46/5, and 46/6 admitted Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania to the United Nations, conforming to Security Council resolution numbers 709, 710, and 711 passed on September 12 without a vote.[86]

- Yeltsin's pressure on Gorbachev was unremitting. On 28 October, he made a lengthy, televised speech to the Russian Congress of People's Deputies about his intention to implement an economic programme based on the principles of the market. On 6 November, he issued a decree banning the Soviet communist party altogether. He stipulated as well that the ministers of RSFSR had precedence over those of the USSR; and he applied a veto on any USSR appointments he disliked. Between 6 and 8 November, he announced the full composition of his full cabinet. He himself would be RSFSR prime minister while Yegor Gaidar[87], a proponent of laissez-faire economics, would be the Finance Minister and a Deputy Prime Minister. It would be a cabinet for drastic economic reform.[88]

- Yeltsin had yet to reveal his purposes about the USSR. Publicly, he denied any wish to break up the Union, and he accepted the invitation to return to the negotiations for a new Union Treaty. Yet his aides had been working on contingency plans for Russia's complete secession even before the August coup and Yeltsin subsequently wasted no chance to weaken the draft powers of the Union he was discussing with Gorbachev. The proposal was for the Soviet Union to give way to a 'Union of Sovereign States'. There would still be a single economic space and a unified military command. There would also be regular consultations among the republican presidents. Gorbachev concurred that the Union President would not be allowed to dominate the others. He even offered to step down in Yeltsin's favour as Union President if only Yeltsin would agree to maintain the Union. Yeltsin however kept his options open. Of special importance was the refusal of Leonid Kravchuk[89], the Ukrainian President, to join the discussions. On 18 October, when a Treaty

[84] Ibid., p. 475.

[85] Ibid., p. 476.

[86] "Resolutions adopted by the United Nations Security Council in 1991". United Nations, accessed 13 May 2018.

[87] Yegor Timurovich (1956-2009) was a Soviet and Russian economist, politician, and author, and was the Acting Prime Minister of Russia from June 1992 to December 1992.

[88] Service, Twentieth-Century Russia, p. 505.

[89] Leonid Makarovych Kravchuk (1934-) is a former Ukrainian politician and the first President of Ukraine from December 1991 to July 1994.

on the Economic Commonwealth had been signed, the Ukraine refused to send a representative. In such a situation, on 24 November, Yeltsin rejected Gorbachev's request to him and other republican leaders to sign the Union Treaty. The Soviet republics voted to reject Gorbachev's Union Treaty: the new state would be a confederation. On 30 November, Yeltsin's Russia, the leading power in the new association, took control of the Soviet Foreign Ministry and of all its embassies abroad.

- On 1 December, the Ukraine voted for independence. This was a disaster for the proposed Union of Sovereign States. Without the Ukraine, such a Union was unrealisable. Yeltsin arranged an emergency meeting with Kravchuk and Shushkevich, Chairman of the Supreme Soviet of Belarus near Minsk. On 8 December, the leaders of Russia, Belarus and the Ukraine, signed a pact ending the USSR and created the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). The Commonwealth would maintain a unified economic area and unified strategic military forces. It would have its central offices not in Moscow but in Minsk, but there would be no president. The declaration of the three Slavic republics presented the rest of the republics with a fait accompli. They informed Bush and then Gorbachev, what they had done. Humiliated, Gorbachev denied their right to do so the next day. The Russian parliament however ratified the agreement and within days, all but one of the republics joined.[90]

- James Baker, in Moscow a week later, met with Gorbachev and Yeltsin and had it brought pointedly to his attention that the Soviet military was now backing Yeltsin and the CIS. Gorbachev, accepting a fait accompli, announced that all Soviet central structures would cease to exist at the end of the year. The four republics that possessed nuclear weapons – Russia, the Ukraine, Belarus and Kazakhstan – announced that they would abide by and implement the cuts in arms and nuclear weapons agreed to by Bush and Gorbachev. On 21 December, eight other republics joined the CIS. The dissenting ones were the three Baltic States and Georgia.[91] On 25 December 1991, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics ceased to exist. The dissolution of the Union was a result of the declaration number 142-H of the Supreme Soviet of the Soviet Union.[92] It acknowledged the independence of the former Soviet republics and created the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). That evening at 7:32 p.m., the Soviet flag was lowered from the Kremlin for the last time and replaced with the pre-revolutionary Russian flag. Gorbachev resigned his now non-existent office. The USSR would be abolished on 31 December 1991.[93]

[90] The leaders of Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus secretly met in Belavezhskaya Pushcha, in western Belarus, and signed the Belavezha Accords, which proclaimed the Soviet Union had ceased to exist and announced formation of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) as a looser association to take its place. They also invited other republics to join the CIS. Gorbachev called it an unconstitutional coup. On December 12, the Supreme Soviet of the Russian SFSR formally ratified the Belavezha Accords and renounced the 1922 Union Treaty. It also recalled the Russian deputies from the Supreme Soviet of the USSR. The legality of this action was questionable, since Soviet law did not allow a republic to unilaterally recall its deputies.

[91] Representatives of 11 of the 12 remaining republics – all except Georgia – signed the Alma-Ata Protocol, which confirmed the dissolution of the Union and formally established the CIS. Francis X. Clines, "11 Soviet States Form Commonwealth Without Clearly Defining Its Powers", The New York Times, 22 December 1991, accessed 13 May 2018.

[92] Declaration No. 142-H of the Soviet of the Republics of the Supreme Soviet of the Soviet Union, formally establishing the dissolution of the Soviet Union as a state and subject of international law.

[93] Isaacs and Downing, Cold War, p. 476. Service, Twentieth-Century Russia, pp. 506-507. Francis X. Clines, "Gorbachev, Last Soviet Leader, Resigns; U.S. Recognizes Republics' Independence". The New York Times, 25 December 1991, accessed 13 May 2018.