



The second revolution

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hen a society is at a turning point in its history, it always happens that the ruling classes divide into two groups. There are those who in different ways realize the need for change, and proceed to carry it out, in order either to prevent it from becoming uncontrollable, or to keep it to minimum cosmetic touches, not hurting the existing power structure. And there are also those who firmly refuse any compromise with the new, defending the status quo, their own power positions, and their privileges.

The painful process which led to the March 1985 election of Mikhail Gorbachev as General Secretary of the CPSU may only be correctly understood in this light. Indeed, the events of the last three years confirm the tough political struggle between these two factions. And also the events immediately preceding the "Gorbachev era" are a long and troublesome incubation, during which the Soviet leadership tried to reach a new internal equilibrium before facing these unavoidable historical problems. But, as it is more easily understood today, the ground lost during the long Brezhnev stagnation could not be recovered with a few corrections, nor could political compromise mediate between views which were becoming radically alternative.

Brezhnev's flawed legacy

This fact was proved by the brief experience of Yuri Andropov, the first to inherit the burdensome Brezhnev past, and to attempt some kind of renovation. In the February 1983 issue of *Kommunist* he wrote that "it is self-evident that we are lagging far behind the needs of the material, technical, social and cultural progress of Soviet society", and that "all temptations to manage the economy with non-economic methods should be resisted", thus expressing his opposition to the penalizing of professional ability in the name of equality, and the conviction — still surviving, and which represents one of

the many obstacles to *perestroika* — that it was possible to create “communist forms of income distribution” independently of individual contributions to social wealth. In other words, Andropov was changing the foundations of the Soviet political economy, and doing away with demagogical salary increases unrelated to productivity. These were supposed to overcome or at least reduce the people’s disinterest in their work, and defuse the risks of social tension; but this — as monetary increases did not correspond to a larger supply of goods — amounted to pure self-deception.

Brezhnev’s dilapidatory policies had left a deep dent in society, unbalancing the entire national economic structure, leaving key industrial sectors without adequate investment, determining the decay of a great part of the productive apparatus. Conscious of not being able to invert the drastic fall in the pace of growth, which had been worsening for three consecutive five-year periods, the Brezhnev leadership had deceived itself into thinking that it could remedy the problem by distributing ever-increasing quantities of cash for consumer use, describing it as fraternal preoccupation with “the welfare of the people”.

This obviously did not, and could not, invert the trend. More money did not mean more purchasing power or the solution of old problems, but inflation and new disequilibria. In banks, family savings grew apace, reaching hundreds of billions of roubles, while the official growth rates of the national income fell towards (and in the 1980s actually reached) absolute minimums in the whole of Soviet history. And agricultural production, which in 1976-1980 had shown an official average annual increase of 1.8% — the lowest ever — actually plummeted to the dramatic negative figure of minus 3% during the last of these years.

Into the “magnetic field”

Moreover, other constraints — as foreseen by both Soviet planners and several Western observers — are beginning simultaneously to exercise their influence. Because of the massive exploitation of natural resources, and of demographic decline in the European USSR, the Soviet Union is increasingly in the “disagreeable” situation of having all the production factors in different areas: its industrial plants in the West, its manpower in the South, and its energy resources in the North and East. Some kind of strategy was thus needed — as the official documents said themselves — to pass over to a “technology-intensive phase”, abandoning older “natural resource-intensive” methods which had become impracticable in this new situation. Yet things continued in the old

direction, as though a powerful “magnetic field”, stronger than planning indications, were dictating its own law. Against it, the repeated political appeals had no, or very minor, effects. To use one of Lenin’s expressions, the vehicle was moving independently of the driver; a paradoxical phenomenon for an economy which was supposed to be based on the principle of total planning.

But perhaps the most striking fact concerned what Gorbachev later — during the January 1987 Plenum — resolutely defined as a “pre-crisis” situation. Brezhnev’s political leadership had not been unaware of the challenge ahead. At the XXVI CPSU Congress, in February 1981, both Brezhnev and the Prime Minister Nikolai Tikhonov described the “passing over to the intensive phase” as a transformation which “on account of its historic dimensions, its importance and its consequences”, could only be compared to the phase of “socialist industrialization, following which the face of our country was radically changed”. This reference alone gave some idea of the dramatic importance of the processes to be set into motion. But it strikingly contrasted with the almost total absence of actual innovations, as well as with the climate of immobility and paralysis which permeated most of the country’s social, economic and cultural life. The Soviet leaders were prisoners of the ideological schemes and “general laws of the development of socialism”, as invented by Stalin.

From a political point of view, the “monolithic compactness” of Soviet society worked well under conditions of “extensive” economic development, but did not work when up against the problems of social articulation, conflict, and contradiction, all constraints which profound economic reform would have produced over the first few years.

As the instrument or motor of change, the Party was not ready for this kind of enterprise; its structure, its habit of giving orders uncontested, its acquired privileges, and its ways of recruiting its leadership, all made it incapable of coping with new social relationships, tolerating diversified social interests, analyzing society as it really was, or following developments without recourse to its own administrative control. “Let’s speak clearly. We have still not analyzed, as we should have, the society in which we are living, and we have still not completely discovered its internal laws, especially its economic ones”. These are Andropov’s words, and are significantly miles apart from those used by Konstantin Chernenko during his speech to the June 1983 Plenum. Chernenko was in charge of ideology, and “second-in-command” after Andropov: a sufficient proof of the political compromise which made Andropov’s election possible.

timing of the fourth Kremlin succession in little more than three years. Yet it was “the year of Chernenko” which definitively shocked both the leadership and the country into action, as the first signs of economic recovery which Andropov had succeeded in determining with his partially innovatory experiments — “mobilization” of available resources, the “moral struggle”, and the hopes aroused by the first feeble hints of a “new course” in politics and administration — had by the end of 1984 completely disappeared.

The alternatives to Gorbachev

The fifty-three year old Mikhail Gorbachev, who had already been a “possible candidate” for the Andropov succession, and often pronounced “dauphin” over the previous two years, was now the strongest candidate. A powerful Politburo member already in October 1980, by the time of Chernenko’s death, he had accumulated the posts normally occupied by four members of the top Party ranks. He was supervisor of the “agro-industrial complex”, he had gradually assumed responsibility for propaganda, science and education, he had succeeded Chernenko in the control of management policy, and finally, he was co-ordinator for the economy, with the exception of heavy industry and building.

Yet in contrast to the conclusions of the hurried Western analysts, Gorbachev still did not represent the “only” possible solution. As was clear during Chernenko’s last few days, the opposing candidate was the first Secretary of the Moscow Party, Viktor Grishin.

At this crucial moment, in fact, a choice had to be made between two “diverse



alternatives". In a speech which was only partially published by the weekly *Moskovskie Novosti*, the writer and dramatist Mikhail Shatrov said: "We cannot forget the serious danger hanging over us in March 1985, which, although not immediately, could have led to a relapse into uncontrolled power. The problems suffocating our country could be solved by democratization, or repressed by an iron hand. Tertium non datur". It is thus clear that the conservative coalition had stayed strong, and it took the personal "guarantee" of Andrey Gromyko, who proposed Gorbachev to the March Plenum in a dramatic investiture speech, to pass a candidate who was not only younger than the others, but also the "youngest" amongst the possible candidates.

It is impossible to "understand" Gorbachev, his strategic plans, his problems and his approach to government, without accounting for both the completely new and specific economic and social constraints he had to face, as well as the political, psychological, cultural and organizational inheritance which acted as a strong "braking mechanism", as he himself defined it during the January 1987 Plenum. And it must be said that one of the reasons behind the "surprise" noted in Western capitals — surprise over the speed of change in the Kremlin's foreign policy, over the "new way of conceiving world relations", and over the courageous frankness in equating problems of internal reform with the opening of a new phase of detente — was probably due to an underestimation of the seriousness of the problems which the USSR had to face.

It was obvious from Gorbachev's very first actions, that he was in a great hurry to recuperate delays which were becoming overwhelming. At the end of February 1986, during the XXVII Congress he spoke of "radical transformation"; and less than a year after, drawing on the first experiences of his struggle, he spoke of a real "revolution". A revolution "from above" is not unusual, of course, in Russian and Soviet history, but this time its author is a refined politician, not a despot enforcing his will through a power structure; although, on a careful analysis, this looks more a necessity than a choice, as the power structure in the USSR seems to be an obstacle — and indeed, the most serious — to any programme for change.

A strategy of alliances

A reform project aimed at reshaping the productive and intellectual backbone of a country requires social and political alliances, and Gorbachev turned to just those who would best know how to reset the economy in motion. Even before holding his first Plenum as Party Leader, on April 8 he organized a

pan-Soviet conference of industrial and agricultural management — factory managers, agricultural *sovkhoz* leaders, and *kolkhoz* presidents. In not inviting ministers or Central Committee departmental heads, a direct dialogue was established between the leader and a heterogeneous social group which could be transformed into a possible instrument of change.

One of the requests was greater organizational autonomy for enterprises and consortia, and a parallel reduction in the role of the central organs traditionally responsible for economic organization, accompanied by very harsh collective criticism of “bad centralization” (even though the concept of “good centralization” was left unclear). A few days later, Gorbachev reported the results of this conference to the April Plenum, and began a series of pitiless analyses of the “existing state of affairs” to which the party was to be subjected in the following months. Gorbachev’s hurry was motivated by precise political reasons. The XXVII Congress was about to open; the new Five-Year Plan would start in 1986; so that it was necessary to formulate a medium and long term strategy based on the new criteria. The Congress — which Chernenko would have liked to have held at the end of 1985 — was then postponed until early 1986, and the Politburo rejected the outlines of the plan as proposed by the Council of Ministers, something which had not happened for decades.

Gorbachev’s first year was occupied with establishing the political and organizational basis for the reform, and — confirming the lack of unanimity in the Politburo — he had to proceed to a harsh selection of its members. Grigory Romanov was the first to go, not due to his age, but to his “style”, and the elderly Prime Minister, Tikhonov, shortly followed. The third was Viktor Grishin, who had appeared more and more on television at Chernenko’s side during the latter’s last days, and who left — not without trying to offer resistance — under the crushing weight of his results as leader of the Moscow party, marked by scandals and widespread corruption.

For the first time after the long, immobile Brezhnev period, then, members left the Politburo for reasons other than death. Yet this change of guard did not only concern the supreme authorities, Gorbachev demanded “psychological re-qualification” of the entire ruling class, in order to meet the new managerial and administrative needs of the economy and of society. Those unable to undertake their own personal revolution were asked to “step aside and not hamper”.

Andropov had operated the first wave of intermediate-level substitutions, and despite the halt provoked by the Chernenko interlude, by the XXVII Party Congress, 143 representatives out of the 319 Central Committee members

elected at the previous Congress no longer held their posts, either because deceased, or because they were pensioned off. Eight Central Committee department heads, (out of 23), were replaced, and the Prime Minister, two vice Prime Ministers, and 22 ministers were changed. In all, 43 regional or republican First Secretaries were removed from their posts, and under these ranks, thousands of other officials. Yet this was only the first wave.

A leap forward

At the XXVII Congress, Gorbachev imposed a sharp spurt of acceleration on the entire political scene. The few months of the first phase were very complex, and the supporters of reform (it must not be forgotten that this term, today generally accepted and even accompanied by the adjective “radical”, had still not entered the vocabulary of the Soviet leadership), were anything but homogeneous. The average Party officials, in fact, saw more danger offered to their status than any hypothetical advantages they could gain from the changes proposed by their leader. As was to be expected, then, the country was prevalently sceptical, when not openly diffident. Gorbachev, however, did not react by playing low-key. He has certainly thoroughly analyzed the reasons behind the failure of Krushchev’s attempted reforms, and fully realized that a faulty step could trigger off rejection. But he also knew, that in contrast to 1956, the USSR no longer has the time, materials or men which were (apparently, at least) available when it hoped to overtake the United States by the early 1980s. Gorbachev, therefore, needed a catapult sufficient to propel him through a five-year period and more: for the crucial years necessary for the pass over into the intensive phase. He stated his analysis before the tribune of the Congress with striking frankness, but even though dramatic, his criticism went no further than the 1970s and 1980s, while many aspects of the economic reform remained unclear, and the question of political reform was only timidly hinted at; and mostly in terms of “perfecting” the electoral system.

A change in gear could be noticed immediately after the Congress in March 1986, with greater autonomy given to agricultural enterprises — starting in January 1987 — that were immediately allowed to commercialize directly, up to 30% of their vegetables and fruit. Regions and republics would receive strict planning instructions for the five-year period, but all the surpluses could be used in loco. Procedures for reorganising bureaucratic reform remained uncertain but aimed at creating “super ministries” in order to avoid fragmentation.

But Gorbachev’s most substantial initiatives were taken in the field of culture,

information and the media. He openly invited the intelligentsia to express its feelings, provoking immediate and strong resistance, against which he had to resort to *glasnost*. In mid-May, the Film-workers Industry Congress, traditionally attended by the entire Politburo, as with all the other "creative unions", ended up with the replacement of the entire leadership of the profession. Similarly on June 24, the writers' congress witnessed an analogous battle though in this case, the surprise factor did not work and the cultural bureaucracy managed to maintain its positions both in the Union and the Party.

By mid-June, Gorbachev called a new Plenum, in which he harshly criticized the situation, saying that "the initiative is meeting a wall of indifference, when not outright resistance". And for the first time, the clear object of criticism was the Party and its laziness and inefficiency in respect to the new tasks. Two days after the Plenum, Gorbachev assembled a group of writers to ask them to "make irreversible" the transformation then underway.

The Chernobyl catastrophe obliged the leadership for some months to face its dramatic internal and international consequences and hampered reform initiatives. Yet even here, Gorbachev showed exceptional ability to transform the initial negative image into a lesson for all to proceed with greater and more forthright openness. Most editors of the daily press and the more important magazines were replaced by new men "with broad mandates to tell the truth". Films and theatrical work banned for decades were shown in Moscow theatres. The hidden culture of the nation, which stagnation had buried under layers of propaganda and rhetoric, re-emerged with the liberalization of the media and the rediscovery of unpublished literary works.

Gathering resistance

In the summer and fall of 1986 it became clear that the preparation of the "radical measures" announced was close to completion. But doubts and worries arose even among the ruling elite where more than just the scope of the changes was discussed. The entire debate revolved around the question of how to control the changes. The risk feared even by some reformers was that moving too fast could trigger strong negative reactions in Soviet society. Clearly, the psychological changes required by *perestroika* worried both the bureaucrats and the people and Khrushchev's failure cautioned a path of prudence and balancing acts.



The analysis of the congress was unequivocal. Not only did time press but — as Gorbachev untiringly repeated — “there is no other way”. Speaking in Krasnodar in late September he moved one more step in publicly admitting opposition and spelled out the “policies” indispensable to the reform, openly speaking of the necessary “democratization of Soviet society”. The new wording had fundamental ideological implications: the issue was no longer “perfecting socialist democracy” but substantially restructuring the country’s institutions.

Less than one year after the Congress, the reformers had to admit that the stagnation could not only be explained by the poor decision-making of the Brezhnev years. Moreover, Gorbachev himself extended the notion of “stagnation”, adding more drastically that the USSR was in a “pre-crisis” situation. The remedy had to be ruthless: “the task has proved more difficult, the backlog more serious than we thought” ... therefore ... “we must go back to the roots, and review the events at the turn of the 1970s and 1980s. The experience of the year just past forces us to turn back to the real historical situation when ... authoritarian ideas became a reality that cannot be denied”.

The reference is unmistakable. What was being discussed here was the onset of Stalinism in the late 20s, that is "the reality of an absolutist society". The reference is to what was then assumed to be an "undeniable truth" and responsible for "blocking social and economic development and all positive transformations".

Gorbachev practically repeated what the economist Nemcinov had written, twenty three years before, when hopes were high for a reform that never became reality: "an economic system so totally crippled inevitably blocks all economic, social and technological improvements, and is doomed to collapse sooner or later under the pressure of real economic processes".

In Krasnodar, after repeated hints in the media, Gorbachev referred for the first time to Lenin's NEP and gave new impetus to the reform in both action (twenty ministers were permitted to deal directly with foreign enterprises) and promises (a wage reform would affect 75 million industrial workers in 1988; factory councils would make decisions over hiring and firing; wage ceilings would be abolished and wages set according to professional capacity). All this added up to stronger wage differentiation, greater labour mobility and increased autonomy for industry, to which would be added the legalization of "individual activity". In December, with resounding international and domestic repercussions, Andrei Sakharov was permitted to return to Moscow from his Gorky exile.

In the same month, though, two episodes revealed a gathering resistance. First, in Alma Ata, the capital of Kazakhstan, "nationalistic" mass demonstrations followed the replacement, as party secretary, of a Kazakh, Dinmukhamed Kunaev, member of the Politburo of the CPSU for seventeen years, with Kolbin, a Russian. This reaction, largely nourished by anti-Russian nationalism, was not without some support by the party organization, namely Kunaev's friends, patrons and protégés. Though one could argue that the Kazakh party apparatus was among the most corrupted; still this was the first reaction of the party bureaucracy to the Andropov and Gorbachev "moralization" drive. Secondly, late in January 1987, we learn from Gorbachev himself, that the Plenum had to be postponed three times; a clear sign of the alarm raised among interest groups endangered by the "radical reform".

Gorbachev, in his concluding speech of the Plenum, posed the direct question of "whether we need *perestroika* or not". As we later learn, there were three main areas of disagreement. First, the reform of the socialist enterprise, which would grant a large degree of self-management to the firms, drastically limiting central planning. Second, the issue of democracy and institutional reform,

raised by Gorbachev in highly emotive words: "We need democracy as we need air. It is the lever with which we can get people involved, to ensure the reform process ... otherwise there will simply be no reform". Third, Gorbachev wanted to hold a Pan-Soviet party conference in 1988, a special mid-term meeting to discuss the situation and to make new crucial appointments at the top party level. But, the procrastination which had already emerged over the first two points became so serious by the last proposal that it disappeared from the final resolution.

Already, in the concluding speech of the Plenum, Gorbachev reasserted his aim to create "new forces in the leadership" replacing those unable to sustain the proposed reforms or those engaged in dishonest behaviour. Indeed, according to unofficial data available at the XXVII Congress, since March 1985, 400,000 members had been eliminated from the Party, with a further 400,000 the following year, creating strong feelings of instability and encroaching danger in the party machinery. In January 1987, all the potential problems mentioned by Gorbachev six months earlier, while speaking to a group of writers, had materialized. That speech, unpublished but leaked by credible sources and available a few months later, stated that "every day brings new information, worse and worse, aptly illustrating the difficulties to be faced by those who work along the lines of the XXVII Congress". Even clearer was the desire of the people for these changes, but between them and the leadership there was the thick stratum of middle management - the party and ministry machinery, which did not want change and refused to give up its rights and privileges.

An ideological smokescreen

After the general Plenum it was reported even in the press that the struggle was been won - albeit not without concessions - by the reformers. It was the ideological journal of the Party, *Kommunist*, which confirmed that open war was being fought against *perestroika*. In late March 1987, with the meaningful title "Climbing a Mountain Along an Untried Path", the popular actor Mikhail Ulinov, newly elected President of the Russian Theatrical Union and member of the Central Revision Committee, did not mince words: "It is already clear that *perestroika* will be opposed in the most extreme manner. Once those vital interests have been placed under discussion no exhortations or appeasement can provide a way out. Nobody will openly declare war, but it is already being fought - using all possible means, including the most treacherous such as sabotage". Between January and June both camps increased their political stances with renewed vigour. If the conservatives believed the moment had



Restes de l'église Sainte-Irène, à Kiev.

arrived to organize their defence, the reformers were ready to respond. Gorbachev's clearest conclusion at the January Plenum explained why the struggle could not be postponed: "A drastic turn is unavoidable precisely because we have no other way out. It is impossible to withdraw since we have no remaining rear ground". By now, in fact, both sides knew they could not back down.

The confrontation, though, was hidden behind an "ideological smokescreen", which put the conservatives in the more comfortable position. From time immemorial, the defence of the status quo had always been conducted in the name of "ideology", in the Marxist sense of "false consciousness". This fact was confirmed when those fearing the loss of privileges decry an "abandoning of socialism" and described *glasnost* and democratization as a threat to the "Party's leading role". The disclosure of economic distortions due to Stalin's

“proper planning laws” was equated to “liquidating” the aims of socialism. But nobody dared challenge Gorbachev’s going behind the smokescreen, when in Public Prosecution style, he stated before the Plenum, that there had been a serious weakening of the control both of “those who manage socialist property and the way in which they manage it”. But all efforts to go deeper, to fill the “black spots” of Soviet History and re-establish the debate forcibly interrupted after the XX and XXII Congress, were blocked with the equivocal argument that discussing the tragedy of rural collectivization and accelerated industrialization would insult people’s feelings, heroic sacrifices and total devotion to socialism.

In reality, in spite of the rhetoric and the bitterness of the fight, the socialist nature of the USSR was not in question. Except for a few marginal extremists, whose opinions were now reported by the press, the debate was entirely inside socialism. As Gorbachev said in January, the discussion was about a “different, qualitatively new, idea of socialism”, where democracy and clarity are “indispensable” elements. “It would be mistaken to believe that we utilize democracy and *glasnost* only to criticize past shortcomings”. This new socialism was conceived as a way to go beyond the “dogmas that prevent an objective scientific analysis”, the same dogmas that created a “petrified idea of socialist production relations” and have described society as “without the contradictions and dynamics of diversified interests”, destroying Lenin’s doctrines on such “crucial issues as social property, class relations and international affairs, measurement of work and consumption, co-operation, methods of economic management, individual power and self-management, the struggle against bureaucratic deformation; the very key to the revolutionary and transforming nature of socialist ideology”.

On the foreign front

In only two years the breach has become one of mind boggling dimensions, but its meaning cannot be understood unless we take into consideration Gorbachev’s volte-face — no less radical — in Soviet foreign policy. This is the field where deep political and conceptual revisions first most clearly appeared. At the XXVII Congress Gorbachev spoke for the first time on the subject of global security in terms of “interdependence” (*vsaimosavisimost*), claiming it is no longer possible to establish one’s own security independently, or at the expense of the others, in an endless arms race. Security goes beyond the problems of peace and war, since our times raise the question of the future survival of the human race, a question which can no longer be answered by

one country or a group of countries; and means taking into consideration the problems of the environment, energy, food supply, common exploitation of outer-space — with all its military implications — the North/South divide with the South indebted and incapable of self-propelled change.

The *novoe myshlenie*, the “new thinking” in foreign affairs presented at the XXVII Congress, went far beyond simply updating the policy of peaceful coexistence. Here, the conceptual and theoretical innovation was substantial: the new world situation does not permit “competition”, even when “peaceful”, among the two systems. What is needed is “active co-operation since it is not only self-evident that all great world issues today are potential sources of conflict, but also that they cannot be solved by one country, however powerful”.

On the other hand Gorbachev did not hesitate to show the link between “new thinking” and international and domestic affairs. The traditional Soviet position holds that the arms race is a pure loss, and Gorbachev did not diverge from his precedents, but introduces the flip side of this question; a side where the difficulties of managing Brezhnev’s inheritance are not hidden. He realized and stated openly that the Soviet economy is not expanding at the same pace as in the fifties, nor does it have unlimited human and natural resources to call on, and in many crucial areas is lagging behind Western technology, his credibility in foreign affairs hinging on the severity of these domestic problems. A country undergoing gigantic and long term changes cannot seek predominance or exercise threats.

Just name it ...

Though not wishing to renounce its strength and world influence, or the military parity that has been reached at the cost of such unspeakable sacrifices, the Soviets believe that this military parity could allow the beginnings of negotiations based on a parallel arms decrease. And reviewing established ideas on “the balance of terror”, it cannot be denied that the new Soviet leadership moved from words to deeds. Kremlin initiatives have gone on at a remarkable pace: from a unilateral moratorium on nuclear tests (August 6, 1985) to opening up diplomatic relations with Europe and China. On January 15, 1986, Moscow proposed a detailed plan to scrap all nuclear arms by the end of the century. A month later, the Warsaw Pact proposed a negotiation on conventional arms in Europe. These initiatives led to the Reykjavik proposals where Moscow fully accepted Reagan’s “Zero Option” and proposed the ban of all strategic nuclear arms by 1996. All this was a substantial concession - the

Soviets giving up their offensive strategic potential, in exchange for the Americans giving up real deployment (laboratory experiments excluded), of the "Strategic Defence Initiative", launched by Reagan in March 1983.

The card Gorbachev played at Reykjavik met with great acclaim. The Summit failure revealed the divergence between the two superpowers but gave Gorbachev a popularity in the West unrivaled by a Soviet leader for many decades. It is conceivable that if it were not for Irangate and the fall of Reagan's popularity, Gorbachev would not have been able, after Reykjavik, to obtain the results he was seeking. What is certain is that the Kremlin initiative has been relentless right up to the announcement of February 28, 1987, when the Soviet leader opened the Reykjavik package to negotiate a separate deal on medium range nuclear missiles.

This was a "moment of truth" where one could see the determination of the Kremlin to reach an agreement, and also the ambiguities and incertitude of the West, in general, and Europe in particular. The first objection came from the US which questioned the need to keep a hundred medium range missiles in Asia. To which Gorbachev replied — "let's get rid of them". The second, rather surprising objection came from NATO. Western reactions were close to ridiculing the USSR when it had deployed short range missiles in Czechoslovakia and the German Democratic Republic in response to the interruptions of the Geneva negotiation on Euro-missiles and the deployment of Pershing 2 and Cruise in Western Europe. The Soviet move was deemed irrelevant and the deployment of so called tactical operational missiles little more than a smokescreen to conceal political defeat. Now, after the last Soviet offer, these short range missiles seemed to have suddenly become of decisive importance for NATO.

But only a few hours later Gorbachev proposed the removal of these missiles on a reciprocal basis: a total double zero option that fully satisfies and actually goes beyond the 1983 American request. This time a new obstacle appeared: the Federal German Republic-owned 72 short range Pershing 1A missiles loaded with German conventional and US-controlled nuclear war heads. This led to another arms wrestle between Washington and Europe which lasted until the meeting between Shultz and Shevardnadze in Washington (September 1987) when Chancellor Kohl folded under Reagan's and Gorbachev's pressure, and accepted that the double zero option included the American war heads, and "his" Pershing 1As.

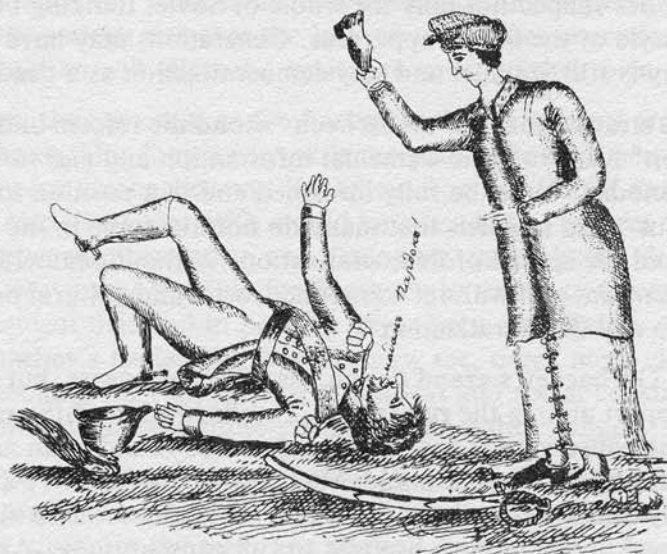
However, the Soviet Foreign Minister arrived in Washington with a larger

mandate than just the discussion of the double zero option. He carried a letter from Gorbachev to Reagan, offering a further compromise on "Star Wars". SDI remains a serious menace for the USSR, but in the face of US intractability and the problem of face saving for Reagan after his four year defence of the project, the Soviet leader offered a way out: the basic idea being that Washington should agree to extend the same ABM treaty for another ten years; with a literal rather than "extensive" interpretation. The Kremlin in return would offer to cut strategic arms by fifty percent in a period to be specified, and Gorbachev declared himself available for a second strategic arms agreement by mid-1988. The two camps converged on the basis of these proposals, though for different reasons, and the Washington Summit really took place, the first real success of *novoe myshlenie*. The logic initiated by the Soviets at the Reykjavik meeting has triumphed after a year of vying detente proposals. And this victory, if it proves to be more than an isolated episode, will be a strong blow to the domestic opposition.

Of course, in Moscow too there are those suspicious of the many concessions granted to the US. Indeed, although on the defensive, Reagan's diplomacy has kept to its basic strategic options, and its philosophy against "the Evil Empire". Soviet reactions are concerned with the domestic implications of *novoe myshlenie*, since radical detente could affect the isolation and impenetrability of the country, exposing it to foreign ideas and changing the nature of the ideological struggle. In harmony with the conservative and dogmatic position, there is already a flowering of pro-Slav Russo-centrism and anti-Western sentiment which in their turn fuel other national feelings in the complex Soviet mosaic.

But Gorbachev has not left his flank unprotected. He does not conceal that *perestroika* is only a great bet on the domestic front and a cultural and technical invitation to the West to become more concerned with Soviet affairs. Nor does he conceal, but actually declares, that *perestroika* will be the only way to keep the USSR as a world power, an approach which persuades many military leaders, who would otherwise be opposed to democratization.

The West has long been puzzled by these unforeseen developments and wondered at Gorbachev's real intentions. Having seen that his proposals were of substance, they were tempted to trip the giant as it embarked on one of its most difficult crossings in history. But Gorbachev has succeeded in warding them off by successfully improving the USSR's image and the creation of a new phase in world diplomacy; signalling solutions for the regional conflicts in Asia and Africa; indicating in the Vladivostok and New Delhi speeches an



Russian woman finishing off a French soldier

intention to substantiate with regional initiatives, his new general security policy; launching a “national reconciliation policy” in Kabul, a drastic change which acknowledges past errors and by implication, puts an end to the “Afghan adventure”.

Looking for a constituency

There is no doubt that this new foreign policy has had a favourable domestic impact, strengthening the new leader’s image in the public opinion, but on the domestic front he has also been put to test by the need for fast and substantial economic and social reforms. Since the first half of 1987, domestic developments have shown increasing tension, due to *glasnost* and the freeing of the press. One must realize that, as we have already said, the rethinking of the past does not mean focusing only on the mid 1970s, but on the Stalinist era in all its political and economic aspects. The struggle to demolish the myth of

Stalin is vigorous, even greater than during Krushchev's dismantling of the "personality cult". The present debate reaches further than the limitations of Krushchevian attempts, despite the strong resistance of the Stalinist heritage, a heritage which has shaped not only the whole of Soviet thinking but also the structure and style of the Soviet apparatus. Generations may have changed but the bureaucracy is still Stalinist and sees democratization as a deadly threat.

Gorbachev has stressed that the tie between "economic reform and democratization" has two basic elements: information and *glasnost*. "Society" he says in Krasnodar, "must be fully informed and in a position to judge everything." But "it so happens that many do not like to be in the open, nor like criticism and the spread of democratization. Without democracy then, there can be no *perestroika* and without economic, social and cultural *perestroika* there will be no real democratization".

In conclusion, Gorbachev's grand design has taken two years, but it has not had unanimous support among the ruling elite. An illustration of the rallying cry under which the conservatives are organizing can be found in an article by Vera Tkacenko published by *Pravda* in mid-August with the title "We are given our Fatherland only once — for all our life". Marx's words come to mind: this is bureaucracy speaking, a Jesuitry brought to full consciousness. Among the ones dragging their feet are those who simply prefer a slower pace, those who sit on the fence waiting for the winner, and those who have carved for themselves a comfortable social niche. There are many, too many. As Gorbachev himself points out at Murmansk, one out of every six or seven Soviet citizens has some leading role or authority; seventeen million people. Not only a large mass but an influential one, and one unwilling to give up its power.

The first real crisis over *perestroika* explodes in the October Plenum bringing about the dramatic expulsion of Boris Yeltsin from the leadership of the Moscow Party, and confirming the existence of several clashing groups. It further proves that any attempt to force the pace is doomed to trigger the vicious and uncontrolled reaction of the political apparatuses. The warning signal is clear. All the more so because economic reform is only just beginning in January 1988, and the results cannot appear for quite some time, pushing the possibility of getting public consensus further into the future, postponing and thus creating the risk of an alliance between the conservative resistance within the party machine and the passivity of the public.

Even when they are far from the centre of power, deep in the stream of history, the populace are hard to shake. All the more so because Gorbachev asks from the Soviets more than he can give in return, at least in the short

term. He is asking for harder, more efficient work with increased participation and responsibility: "Democracy, Comrades, means more discipline ... Democracy presupposes that every body participates through work to achieve the goals of our society". But if the tangible results are not evident to every one, there is the serious risk that the lack of confidence engendered by a long period of stagnation will allow the cynical to use it to their own advantage.

A contradiction thus emerges as Gorbachev looks for support from below rather than above. This looking towards the people through *glasnost* is the real difference between Gorbachev and Kruschev. The intellectual and political beliefs of the leaders of the 1950s would have made this present "necessary" relationship between information and democracy unthinkable. A factor which helps explain why it was possible for Brezhnev to return to the well-worn paths of authoritarianism that had in practice never been abandoned. After three years of Gorbachev's leadership, one can now see, much more clearly, a political line looking for support, for a political and social constituency capable of counterbalancing those pushing against the changes.

But there is one more inner contradiction, the most difficult to resolve: how to use the party machine as the tool which can implement all these changes. This tool is, in fact, unfit for the task, and in itself an obstacle to be overcome. Without reform of the Party there can be no "intellectual or moral reform" of the entire country. Gorbachev's USSR, in looking to the reform of the middle strata of the Party, is heading for a crucial appointment with history — the challenge of restructuring the engine without bringing it to a halt.

