

Glasnost, Perestroika, and the Soviet Social System

PATRICIO N. ABINALES: *It is wrong and even harmful to see socialist society as something rigid and unchangeable, to perceive its improvements as an effort to adapt complicated reality to concepts and formulas that have been established once and for all.* [Mikhail Gorbachev]

Seventy-two years after Lenin and the Bolsheviks seized power and established the first socialist regime, 59 years after the Stalinist Thermidor, and 33 years since Khrushchev's secret speech, the Soviet Union has once again caught the world's attention. This time, global focus is on Mikhail Sergeyevich Gorbachev and his extraordinary attempt to alter the status of men and things in a society believed to be conservative and fast decomposing. Both bourgeois and radical critics of Gorbachev and the USSR have grudgingly conceded this new turn in Soviet history, although both are quick to predict that the so-called "Gorbachev phenomenon" will fail. Conservatives like Zbigniew Brzezinski regard Gorbachevism as the ultimate proof of the failure of socialism while radicals like the ever militant but constantly splitting Fourth International predict the decline of Soviet bureaucratism and the re-articulation of real socialism. [Zbigniew Brzezinski, *The Grand Failure* (New York, 1989)]



In the Philippines, Gorbachevism has not made a strong impact, and explanations of this phenomenon have largely been made by such simpletons as Cardinal Sin and the AFP. In academe, Soviet studies is insignificant, having been ignored by an intelligentsia whose mental construct and scholarly concerns are mainly Western. Neither has the Philippine Left done much to correct this as it seems to demonstrate a relative unfamiliarity with the socialist world. [Institute for Popular Democracy, *Political Brief*, No. 8, April-May 1989, p. 3] The Communist Party of the Philippines has revised, without providing any theoretical grounds, its policy towards the Soviet Union and its previous classification of similar states as "revisionists" and "capitalist roaders". This turn-around appears to be prompted more by the revolutionary demands of expansion rather than by an ideological re-appraisal of Maoism and the events in the socialist world. [Marites Danguilan-Vitug, "On the Socialist Bloc and the CPP: Interview with Reputed CPP Secretary-General Rafael Baylosis", *Katipunan*, July 1989, pp. 5-6, 14]. With some exceptions, the Left's internationalism has mainly been proforma and its unfamiliarity with the socialist world evident. [Ang Bayan Editorial Staff, *The Filipino People will Triumph! Conversations with Filipino Revolutionary Leaders* (Central Publishing House, 1988) and, as an exception, A. M. Mendoza, "Democracy, Socialism, and Post-Revolutionary States: Problems in Theory and Reality", *Kasarinlan*, Vol. 4 No. 2.]

We in academe, however, must account for the changes in the largest socialist state. Students of the Soviet Union have increasingly found such concepts as "totalitarianism" (or even "Stalinism") lacking in analytical and explanatory value. To decode the Soviet Union along these terms does not, in the words of scholar Moshe Lewin, say much "about where the system came from, where it is heading, what kind of changes it was undergoing, if any, and how to study it critically and seriously". Furthermore, such terms do not "recognize the mechanism of change... and [have] no use for even a shadow of some historical process". What these concepts miss is the fact that we are dealing here with entire social systems whose "rich and complex social fabric" remains largely unstudied. [Moshe Lewin, *The Gorbachev Phenomenon: A Historical Interpretation*, (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1988), p. 3]

With this view, issues like the overpowering control of the state over Soviet society assumes a different meaning. Society has its way of counter-acting, undermining, if not lording over State attempts at regulating and controlling its development. [Joel Migdal, *Strong Societies and Weak States: State-Society Relations and State Capabilities in the Third World* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1988)] Lewin further says:

We may sum up many of these phenomena as manifestations of an emerging civil society in the bosom of a system that is statist par excellence. By civil society, we refer to the aggregate of networks and institutions that either exist and act independently of the state or are official organizations capable of developing their own spontaneous views on national or local issues and then impressing these views on their members, on small groups and, finally, on the authorities. These social complexes do not necessarily oppose the state, but exist in contrast to outright state organisms and enjoy a certain degree of autonomy. The possibility of serious dissidence from various levels of society cannot be excluded. [Lewin, 1988, p. 80]

This social deterrence to statism has hitherto been seen to belong to the field of overt political actions (strikes, protests, etc.). Unfortunately, this is a very limited view. Observes Lewin, in an earlier work on the Soviet Union:

The Russian historical milieu, even if strongly and traditionally authoritarian, often exhibited powerful rifts between the political and social spheres... But we do not need spectacular events to illustrate our thesis. Simpler processes of everyday life from the Soviet period - 'simpler' in the sense of not concerning any open turbulence or even open political criticism - can be shown to create at times insuperable obstacles to state action. We observe it when workers engage in massive turnover in search of better employment conditions, when officials are sluggish in supplying data to their superiors or are impolite and inefficient in dealing with the public, when peasants employ their zeal in their private plots and do not overexert themselves on the fields of the *kolhoz*, when intellectuals develop trends, moods and ideologies, and when youths allow fads and fashions, from life projects to career preferences, that are a far cry from what the official world would like to see... The party and the ruling strata are not immune to the corrosion by influences and cultures that the country, a huge historical laboratory, keeps creating in conjunction with its old statist tradition, or, on the contrary, in tune with the numerous other traditions which shaped the minds of people and sprang out of them, high up or low down, in a constant irrepressible interplay. [Lewin, *The Making of the Soviet System: Essays in the Social History of Interwar Russia* (New York: Pantheon, 1985), pp. 7-8. See also James Scott, "Protest and Profanation: Agrarian Revolt and the Little Tradition, Part I and II", *Theory and Society*, Vol. 4 Nos. 1-2, 1977, and *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985).]

Social history combined with more political sensitivity to non-State actors and the subaltern classes, therefore, provide a more meaningful approach to understanding contemporary Soviet society and the spectacular changes it is now undergoing. While Gorbachev remains a central figure in current Soviet politics, it is equally important to recognize that he, as with earlier Soviet leaders, "acted inside a social and cultural milieu, undergoing violent jolts within the framework of disintegrating or reemerging (or now-emergent, we would add) structures". [Lewin, 1985, p. 7] The appeal of Sovietologists like Lewin is that they treat the USSR as a whole social system where one encounters "a dynamic historical process in which all the subsystems interact in time and space, yielding ever more complex and intricate patterns", and which, we may add, is not merely limited to the dynamics of statism. [Lewin, 1988, p.5]

In our discussion, we shall explore the social origins of glasnost and perestroika, drawing much from the analyses of Lewin.

The powerful Party qua State bureaucracy in the Soviet Union, while responsible for several lives lost and futures sacrificed, must also be credited for enhancing the welfare of the Soviet people. [Zhores Medvedev, *Gorbachev* (London: Basil Blackwell, 1986), p. 25] Peter Frank and Ronald Hill, in their introductory primer on the Soviet communist party, observe:

In fact, notwithstanding the horrifying social and political costs, the Soviet one-party system has impressive material achievements to its credit, most notably the social, economic and industrial transformation that was initiated in the late 1920s with the Five-Year Plans, and the heroic performance of the Soviet forces in the Second World War. *The abolition of illiteracy and the spread of education, together with the universal provision of health care and other welfare services, also rank as major positive benefits brought about under that system.* [Peter Frank and Ronald Hill, *The Soviet Communist Party* (Boston and Sydney: George Allen and Unwin, 1983), p. 3]

The social results arising from such economic measures led to a massive urbanization of Soviet society and the metamorphosis of the working force from one that is low-skilled and rural-based to one that is industrialized and "professionalizing". After the civil war, urbanization recovered especially when Stalin launched his bloody industrial program. By 1956, the main bulk of the Soviet population was located in industrial centers. By 1960, the urban population accounted for 49 percent of the national population. This figure increased to 65 percent between 1972 to 1985. Thus, over half of the Soviet population, at least 180 million, today live in the cities -- a phenomenon we can hardly regard as commonplace. [Lewin, 1988, pp. 31-33]

Table 1. Population and Number of Soviet Cities, 1959 and 1980.
[Lewin, 1988, p. 32]

Population	1959	1980
100,000 to 250,000	88	163
250,000 to 500,000	34	65
1,000,000 +	3	23

Industrialization also meant the influx (forced and/or voluntary) of people from the countryside into the urban centers leading to a "re-creation" and increase of the Soviet working class (and the corresponding decline of the peasantry). This development of the Soviet proletariat was a complex process characterized mainly by the initial dominance of a mutated working class whose peasant mentality was sustained by inadequate educational attainment in

the 1930s up to the 1950s. These were the *praktiki* or "people without any specialization, and with a rather poor general education, who took up technical and administrative jobs" as well as manned the industries. [Lewin, 1985, p. 242] By the 1970s, however, developments in education and science paved the way for the gradual dissolution of the *praktiki* and the emergence of a better educated, technically competent and definitely more sophisticated work force. Between 1959 and 1979, says Lewin:

... we see the making of a more variegated and professionally differentiated national and urban social structure. Urbanization, including industrial and scientific-technical development, mass schooling and quality schooling, communications and arts, state policies and a myriad of spontaneous events changed the nation's overall social, professional and cultural profile, and the social structure underwent a significant qualitative transformation. [Lewin, 1988, p. 46]

The process of de-peasantization, especially in the level of consciousness, continues up to the present. It cannot be denied, however, that the urban proletariat has also become the predominant group in society -- 61.5 percent of the population, growing twice its size in 1939. The peasantry, on the other hand, declined from over half the population at the start of the industrialization program to only about 12.5 percent today.

From 1939 to 1959, the majority of the working people had only a modicum of elementary education. But from the 1960s to the present decade, the number of workers with inadequate education declined rapidly such that by 1984, those workers with only an elementary education composed only 18.5 percent of the work force. (Over 46 million people attained partial secondary education; 58 million, full secondary education; 28 million went to specialized technical schools at the secondary level; 18.5 million finished higher education; and 3.6 million have incomplete college degrees. In the case of women, they comprise 51 percent of the labor force; 56 percent of the "educated specialists; and 40 percent of scientists, scholars, etc..") [Lewin, 1988, p. 47] A majority of this work force are skilled physical workers (44 to 46 percent and growing), a small percentage (three to four percent) are highly skilled, and only 10 to 12 percent are said to be unskilled.

More interesting is the rise of the Soviet "intelligentsia", sometimes referred to as the "specialists". After overcoming the trauma of the Stalinist era, the recovery of this social group has been phenomenal, especially between the 1960s and the 1970s. If the Soviet working population increased by as much as 155 percent, the "specialists", or those involved in technical work, management and administration, science, the arts, education, and political cadre work, grew fourfold. Today, apart from the five million students in institutions of higher learning serviced by over half a million professors, "scientists and engineers working in research number about 1.5 million, flanked by a large cadre of auxiliary technicians." [Lewin, 1988, p. 49]

All these were further bolstered by political stabilization in the post-Stalin period. Stalin's successors began a slow but steady re-establishment and rejuvenation of political authority and established some form of "socialist legality". Boris Kagarlitsky describes the Brezhnev period as the high point of these efforts "to maintain a stable compromise between factions in the [party and state] apparatus while simultaneously raising the people's standard of living." [Boris Kagarlitsky, "Perestroika: The Dialectics of Change", *New Left Review* 169, May-June 1988, p. 65] Lewin likewise comments:

In the late 1950s and early 1960s...the battered and much maligned bureaucracy had become more stable and potent, and it succeeded in imposing on the system a more acceptable and, from the bureaucracy's point of view, a far more secure and more professional method of rule. More attention to the laws, better control of the police, elimination of the Stalinist concentration camps, the implementation of group or "collective" leadership -- the list of improvements is impressive. For the first time, a consolidated ruling apparatus exercised control over the whole of the state machinery, and the stabilization and security thereby offered to functionaries resulted in many of the improvements that the citizens of the USSR experienced up through the late sixties. [Lewin, 1988 p. 60]

The Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) has also undergone a recomposition similar and corresponding to that of the larger society. The most noticeable in the metamorphosis of the party is the increase in members belonging to the "white collar" category as against the peasantry and a steady growth of members coming from the working class.

Table 2. Composition by Social Class, CPSU 1917-1982 (%). [Lewin, 1988, p. 40]

Year	Workers	Peasants	White collar, etc.
1917	60.2	7.5	32.2
1927	55.1	27.3	17.6
1947	33.7	18.0	48.3
1957	32.0	17.3	50.7
1967	38.1	16.0	45.9
1977	42.0	13.6	44.4
1982	43.7	12.6	43.7

There has also been a steady rise in terms of cadres with higher education; most of the CPSU leaders have a university education. According to Frank and Hill:

In 1927, a mere 0.8 percent of the party members had higher education, a figure that had risen to 25.1 percent half a century later. In the earlier year, 9.1 percent had completed secondary education, and 63.0 percent primary education, whereas by 1977 these figures were 39.2 percent and 13.6 percent respectively; the trend has continued... The party is clearly coming to consist of relatively well-educated citizens, reflecting the educational opportunities available in Soviet society, but also... making the party much less recognizably "proletarian" in its membership. [Frank and Hill, 1983, p. 36]

Despite incessant factional conflicts, the CPSU "has also managed to preserve a reasonable equilibrium between unity and diversity, homogeneity and heterogeneity", and does not appear to be "in danger of fragmenting or disintegrating". [Frank and Hill, 1983, p. 44] This has been the mark of the post-Stalinist leadership and it continues even up to the present. The inclusion of this new generation into the Party has, therefore, been very constant and regular, although the conflicts continue to persist. [Frank and Hill, 1983, p. 92]

The implications of this demographic and social decomposition are manifold. The Soviet Union is today a highly urbanized society composed of well-educated citizens. This has recasted the ways in which social and political norms are being expressed and exercised. Again we cite Lewin:

[D]uring the preceding thirty years, a period unscarred by Stalinist-style repression and characterized by slower rates of growth, urban society, though not entirely settled (if it ever can be), has been able to solidify. A huge class of educated specialists has emerged and different elites, previously so heavily brutalized, have had time to recreate themselves or to recover. Or, at least, an educated pool of talent from which elites can be quickly composed and recomposed, is now at hand. [Lewin, 1988, p. 146]

The implication here is that urbanized Soviet society has become a powerful "system maker" that could pressure both the economic and political spheres to adapt to its needs. Soviet civil society has now created a myriad of channels and networks from where it could start "talking, gossiping, demanding, sulking, expressing its interest in many ways and thereby creating moods, ideologies, and public opinion". [Lewin, 1988, p. 146] Stalinist control mechanisms must either cope with this or concede to its strength and allow it more overt and broad venues of expression.

Social recomposition has also bred values that correspond to their existence and interests. Foremost of these is an awareness of their capabilities as new social layers which has been

translated into demands for "modernization" in the various spheres of society (a classic example is the demand for mass use of computer technology). Values like individualism and what Soviet intellectuals call the "human factor" have also become pronounced; a "textbook truism" in the West, but definitely a novelty in a society inured by a long tradition of despotic rule.

Both the political leadership and Soviet academia have become increasingly sensitive to this urbanization-induced changes in views, values, and perceptions. Academics and intellectuals have particularly sought to empirically argue the close links between these values and systemic reforms. Already as many as five thousand Soviet sociologists have been assigned in various ministries to assist them in the "services of social development". This attests to the serious concern given by those in the leadership and their intellectual allies to the current urban sensation. [Lewin, 1988, p. 93]

This also means that there is greater unanimity of views between the social layers outside the state and party apparatus and the new generation of cadres on the trajectory of society's development and progress. (Gorbachev, for example, counts among his strongest supporters the current generation of intellectuals.) Both are equipped with the skills and the educational background to deal with the tasks of "modernization" and change. There is also considerable interaction between the members of the party and these social layers, perhaps forged during their days in the universities and strengthened by the nature of Soviet political and economic management. The CPSU has a wide reach in society and it is very likely that communications between cadres and these new layers are maintained and strengthened (it is this connection that cemented the alliance between Gorbachev and the intellectuals).

But more importantly, those inside and outside the state apparatus unanimously acknowledge the need for such measures as the drastic economic reforms to replace the "old way of living", greater *demokratizatsiya*, and lesser "totalitarian" control of the State. As Kagarlitsky puts it:

The new generation, which had grown up during the years of stability was more educated and demanding. An inconsistent modernization of the way of life had generated new demands and, in the end, a new dissatisfaction. People felt themselves more independent and demanded respect for civil and human dignity. The years of stability had passed to the benefit of society: social bonds had been strengthened and people had a better conception of their collective interests. In their turn, the contradictions between bureaucratic departments were exacerbated to the point where it became clear that the "epoch of fine pies" was at an end. The shortage of resources provoked interdepartment clashes and made planning and decision-making at all levels much more complex. The emerging lag in the field of modern technology produced a feeling of horror in the military especially when the United States proclaimed its idea of 'space-based defense'. Thus, not only the lower classes were seized with discontent but also a significant section of those at the top. [Kagarlitsky, 1988, p.66]

Indeed, the old order could no longer rule in the same away. All this optimism, however, must be balanced by the reality of the crisis in Soviet society. The Gorbachev team entered at a time when the crisis had considerably worsened. Abel Aganbegyan, leading Soviet economist and Gorbachev ally, has candidly admitted that the economy "had remarkably slowed down in the last decades". [Abel Aganbegyan, "New Directions in Soviet Economics", *New Left Review* 169 May-June 1988]

Table 3. Average growth of GNP and Agricultural Output over five years. [Aganbegyan, 1988, p. 89]

Period	Growth of GNP (%)	Growth of Agricultural Output (%)
1966-1970	41	21
1971-1975	28	13
1976-1980	21	9
1981-1985	16.5	6

The average growth rate of the Soviet national income has steadily declined from a high 11.2 percent in 1951 to 1955 to a low 3.5 percent in 1981 to 1985. Gross social product declined from 2.64 percent in 1975 to 1979 to 1.74 percent in 1980 to 1984; industrial production, from 2.24 percent to 0.64 percent; and, industrial productivity from 0.47 percent to -0.07 percent. [Ernest Mandel, *Beyond Perestroika: The Future of Gorbachev's USSR* (London and New York: Verso, 1989), p. 5]

Table 4. Average growth of Soviet national income (annual percentage based on five-year plan). [Mandel, 1989, p.5]

Period	Percentage
1951-1955	11.2
1956-1960	9.2
1961-1965	6.6
1966-1970	7.75
1971-1975	5.75
1976-1980	4.75
1981-1985	3.5

Gross industrial production has also declined drastically between the period 1971 to 1975 and 1976 to 1980 by as much as 79.16 percent as compared to only 16.2 percent in the periods 1966 to 1970 and 1971 to 1975. [Mandel, 1989, p.3] Current industrial capabilities have reached a stage where, in order for these to develop further, a shift towards better technology and quality equipment has become imperative.

Revenues derived from external trade have likewise been dipping. When the world price of gas and oil fell in 1986, "the value of Soviet exports fell by eight percent... and again by a further four percent in the first quarter of 1987. [Mandel, 1989, p.39] Its share in the world's gross national production declined from 15 percent in 1960 to 13 percent in 1980.

The crisis has, in turn, spawned social problems. Growth has not resolved "the scandalous backwardness in social allocation". Soviet social scientists have admitted the existence of a "new poor", numbering to about 50 million (roughly 20 percent of the population), whose income falls below the "breadline". [Moscow News, 3 January 1988] Old problems like alcoholism persist (between 1960 and 1973, alcohol sales passed the 100 index and shot to 267) while criminality became endemic. (In Moscow alone, it is reported that five murders, 60 burglaries, and 750 cases of arson occur in a week.) Life expectancy has dropped from 66 in the 1960s to 62 during the period 1978 to 1979. The Soviet Union has the highest infant mortality rate in Eastern Europe: 26:1,000 as against Romania's 22:1,000, Czechoslovakia's 11:1,000, and Hungary, Bulgaria and Poland's 18:1,000. [Mandel, 1989, p. 14]

Gorbachev himself admits that Soviet society has become like a "huge fly-wheel of a powerful machine" whose transmission belts have loosened up. This, to him, has created a social paradox which he aptly describes in these terms:

Our society has ensured full employment and provided fundamental social guarantees. At the same time, we failed to use the full potential of socialism to meet the growing requirements in housing, in quality and sometimes quantity of foodstuff, in the proper organization of the work of transport, and in tackling other problems which naturally arose in the course of society's development. [Mikhail Gorbachev, *Perestroika: New Thinking for Our Country and the World* (New York: Harper and Row, 1987), p. 21]

This is the overall social context from whence Gorbachev has launched his reforms. Perestroika is precisely aimed at resolving on a major scale this social paradox. Gorbachev and company want to do away with an "emasculated image of socialism [characterized by] the exaggerated centralism in management, the neglect for the rich variety of human interests, the underestimation of the active part people play in public life, and the promised egalitarian tendencies. [Gorbachev, 1987, p. 45]

The Soviet state has adopted "management reforms" aimed at increasing enterprise autonomy (including joint ventures with foreign capital), market expansion, partial re-privatization in agriculture, and the legalization of a thriving black market of goods and labor services. The institution of these reforms appears to aim at establishing what Mandel calls "the general framework of a choice between market socialism and the utilization of market mechanisms by the 'socialist plan'". [Mandel, 1989, p. xiii] Glasnost, on the other hand, is supposed to be its political counterpart, aimed at ensuring real popular involvement in this grand restructuring of society and at establishing the appropriate structures for *demokratizatsiya* to flourish (which for Gorbachev means the restoration of the real political role of the Soviets).

A careful examination of the "Gorbachev phenomenon", however, will reveal that the reforms are not new. Aspects of these were already introduced as far back as the Krushchev, Kosygin and Brezhnev eras when these leaders tried to correct the inconsistencies and imbalances in Soviet development. That they failed could be attributed to a number of factors. There was the slow process of State and party reconstitution after the Stalinist upheavals, reaching only a stable point during the Brezhnev period. Soviet society itself had to undergo such a transformation with the current social structure (and its "variegated" social groups), only assuming full maturity in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Revenues from world trade (particularly oil) and Soviet dominance in the COMECON likewise ensured stable returns. [Kagarlitsky, 1988, p. 66]

The same could be said of glasnost. Despite repeated exhortations by Soviet leaders for more sensitivity to "public opinion", the Soviet public remained indifferent and apathetic towards the idea of popular participation. This may be due to the absence of any form of democratic articulation in the upper echelons of the party and the State. [Leonard Schapiro, "Keynote - Compromise", *Problems of Communism*, Vol. XX, No. 4, p.2] The prevalence of such practices as the infamous *nomenklatura* and *podmena* had stifled a lot of initiatives from the populace, thereby intensifying these "negative elements". [Frank and Hill, 1983, pp. 86, 118-119] On the eve of Gorbachev's ascension to power, the Soviet political mood was captured vividly by an American scholar who observed:

The mood was one of gloom, frustration, impatience, and embarrassment – gloom about the country's huge problems, frustration with the inactivity of those who were supposed to lead, impatience with an "old guard" of party leaders who refused to yield power, and embarrassment that a great nation and power was essentially leaderless. [Seweryn Bialer, "Russia's Changing Face", *The Observer*, 17 March 1985, as quoted by Medvedev, 1986, p. 12]

The reforms under Gorbachev and the CPSU stand a better chance of success. Soviet society is today radically different from the early periods. The structural crisis – or what Marx would call the "objective conditions" – has now qualitatively imposed itself on the Soviet society and its leaders.

We must, however, caution that this is no easy road to take (as current difficulties indicate). Problems abound in the implementation of perestroika, glasnost, and *demokratizatsiya*; these are already being pounced upon by Gorbachev's critics as proof of the failure of his project. [Brezinski, 1989 and Mandel, 1989] The most pressing problem would be the economy. Gorbachev has still to find measures to temporarily arrest the crisis and its social consequences. This is the most paramount of his concerns. He has recently admitted that "criticism and discontent with perestroika is growing. A polarization and differentiation... is accelerating". [Gorbachev's 18 June Report to the Central Committee, as cited in *International Viewpoint*, 31



July 1989, p. 10] One of these, he hopes, would be to enhance the democratization process through institutional reforms (as the recent elections to the Congress of People's Deputies) or by allowing the people a wider opportunity for self-organization outside the party and the state.

The Soviet leader has also to contend with the fact that even as the new layers spawned by industrialization and urbanization are more receptive to reforms and there is a stronger basis for a united effort at pursuing the goals of perestroika and glasnost, their very disparate character also means diverse responses to the demand for change. The alternatives espoused within and outside the state apparatus include such extremes as Stalinist restoration (mainly coming from Brezhnevists) or capitalist restoration and outright Russian national chauvinism.

Within the Party itself, Gorbachev presides over an alliance of factions whose initial basis of unity -- formed under the aegis of the late Yuri Andropov -- was their opposition to Brezhnevism. These groups, however, entertain contrasting thoughts on restructuring and openness. There are already signs of certain factions favoring a more technocratic solution to the crisis under the aegis of perestroika; these are being challenged by those who insist that perestroika, glasnost and *demokratizatsiya* are inseparable. [Kagarlitsky, 1986, pp. 70-71 and 79-82]

All told, it cannot be denied that with glasnost and perestroika, the Soviet Union has entered a decisive crossroad. This, by itself, is significant enough. One observer remarks, "We so quickly and lightly overlook the remarkable existence of perestroika and focus on the obstacles that we underestimate the significance of the fact that it has begun at all. [Bulat Okudzhava, *Time*, 10 April 1989, p. 22] A new stage has unfolded where problems and contradictions co-exist with the possibility of recovering some of the ideals and hopes of the October revolution (and even the bourgeois democratic revolution that preceded it). Lewin puts it eloquently with this concluding remark: "The will is now there, and one of the most remarkable stories of our time is unfolding." [Lewin, 1988, p. 153]

DMITRI KOSYEREV (Pravda): Glasnost and perestroika have induced remarkable changes in my country. The most profound changes are those occurring in the Congress and in the network of popular organizations that have emerged following the last elections.

For the first time, my country has elected, with some difficulties of course, a representative assembly. During the electoral campaign, my people learned first-hand how democracy works. From this fresh experience, we now know how to organize, select deputies, listen to other views, and to fight for a cause to the end. More importantly, in the course of the electoral campaign, several popular organizations emerged, promoting diverse views on important issues. These local and national organizations are not called "parties", but have named themselves as "fronts", "clubs", and the like.

I was in Moscow at the time Congress met in the open. On that day, the whole country probably stopped working -- everyone was listening to the proceedings in Congress. The open session showed that we have several talented people who have sound ideas on what ails the country and how to revive it. Of course, these deputies may not organize themselves into some kind of a pressure group in order to promote an idea. They can only air popular grievances and suggest ways to redress them.

On the first day of Congress, a free election for the presidency was conducted. There was a guy, one named Abalenski from a small town in Leningrad, who nominated himself to the presidency. His candidacy was not taken seriously, of course. This incident nevertheless shows that we have become a new people, eager to exercise and defend our rights.

In that election, Gorbachev won the majority of the 2,400 votes in Congress, with 35 votes against him and 40 abstentions. But the people did not spare him (Gorbachev) their criticism. Some of them warned him that, although they voted for him this year because of what he has done to the country, their patience is fast wearing thin.

According to some people, these incidents indicate the extent to which civil society has developed so that it can now press demands on the state and the party for more democracy. I agree with this. But perhaps the more urgent demand is for a deeper restructuring not only of our politics and ideology but also of our economy.

Underlying these demands is a crisis characterized by the following:

First, an economic slowdown. Gorbachev himself stated that, during Breshnev's term, if one deducts from the country's GNP the revenues from the sale of oil to the West and in the country, there would be no GNP figure to speak of. This shows that Breshnev was able to delay the need for perestroika simply by exporting oil and importing goods to meet domestic demands. The need for restructuring, however, has caught up with us. Our domestic debt now stands at 312 billion rubles. Our external debt is 45 billion dollars and still rising, although it is manageable still because of our exports. Our budget deficit at 120 billion dollars is worse than that of the US. The ironic thing is that there are about 400 billion rubles lying idle in banks and in the people's drawers, just waiting to be spent if production increases.

Second, the obsolescence of our equipment. There is no passion to innovate. We lag behind in science, especially in the application of our scientific achievements for industrial use.

Finally, social decay as manifested in widespread apathy and cynicism, crime, and alcoholism. In my country, alcoholism best indicates the depth of a crisis. As already mentioned, my country is currently drinking itself to death.

The economic and political structures of Soviet society today are the same structures that existed 20 to 25 years ago. Why cannot these structures work anymore? It is only now, under glasnost, that we are able to discuss what went wrong under Stalin, in what way Stalinism is not Socialism, and whether the system created under Stalin was wrong from the start or have just become obsolete.

Some Soviet historians say that, in socialist societies, there is some kind of a special stage that occurs after the revolution. At that stage, a socialist society has yet to develop. Meanwhile, some people who suffered terribly under the previous regime grab power and try to push society to its "glorious future". To do this, they promote a cause for which many people would stake their lives; build a political party that embodies this cause and sets the direction towards its achievement; and unite the people behind the party and its cause, so that anyone with a dissenting view shall be socially or physically repressed.

This "Stalinist stage" of the development of a socialist society, which we now see perhaps in China and North Korea, seems to be a logical outgrowth of the social structures that existed before the revolution. The crucial question, however, is whether this stage can be avoided at all. Probably yes.

In the case of the Soviet Union, it was Stalin who hijacked the country from its original course towards real Marxism. But then, Stalin and all Stalinists cannot forever repress the people, nor put a soldier behind every worker, nor make everyone think alike. There must be an end to repression. And the people made their defiance against Stalinism evident by being sluggish in their work. There was no economic incentive to work better. The economy was being run by an appointive bureaucracy over which the people have no control. What has resulted from this is an economy that is now fast stagnating -- where there is "hidden inflation" and a "black market" for basic goods and services that the formal economy cannot produce.

To arrest economic stagnation, perestroika was introduced under which market mechanisms are made to operate and the salaries of some sections of the population upgraded. Resistance to perestroika come mostly from the incompetent, corrupt, and mediocre layers of the bureaucracy composed of party members and economic managers. These conservative forces know that if they cannot handle the competition they shall be replaced by a brighter fellow and lose their power and privileges. Thus, in 1987, when the program of perestroika was well on its second year, glasnost was introduced to enable the people to express their views and organize themselves into a pressure group that would undermine bureaucratic resistance to change. (These conservative forces also include the less literate section of the population who do not appreciate the urgency for change, and those who belong to the generation that defended the country from imperialist aggression.) Under glasnost, members of the bureaucracy and the party, from top to bottom, are all made accountable to the people. Glasnost, therefore, became an integral component of perestroika.

In many quarters of Soviet society, the question often raised is whether the policies of perestroika and glasnost are socialist. To answer this question, one must analyze the goals of perestroika and glasnost. I believe that these policies are directed towards building a society where the people decide what policies to adopt and how to implement them -- where the people stand above the party. I view these developments as a return to the ideals of Lenin.

Another question often asked is whether an opposition party is needed under glasnost. It is an open secret that an opposition, organized into clubs, fronts, etc., exists today in the Soviet Union. Their views are expressed in the papers, radios, and other venues.

All these give the impression that restructuring cannot fail.

Several dangers, however, await us.

The first is conservative resistance to all forms of change. One Soviet sociologist believes that an informal alliance exists between those in the bureaucracy who stand to lose their position and privileges under the new system and those civilians who fear new ideas.

Another danger lies in left-radicalism. Some people are so impatient that they think restructuring is not moving fast enough, and are now proposing a program that has no scientific basis at all. (They want, for instance, absolute equality in distribution. History has proven this to be impossible.) They distrust intellectuals and even economists. This group, however, is fast

gaining strength because of the economic crisis and the high expectations Gorbachev has generated. Their agitation, of course, may be exploited by the advocates of Stalinist restoration.

Also a problem are the present upheavals in the republics. For many years, these republics have been under the management of corrupt and incompetent bureaucrats who have never felt accountable to the people. After all these years of neglect, therefore, these republics are now asking that, given their distinct history and culture, they should be allowed to solve their problems on their own.

Valuable lessons may be derived from all these. Foremost is that one cannot rape a society nor its social or economic laws. One can only study them and develop a program accordingly. Dreams are beautiful, yes, sometimes noble, but you cannot avoid, for instance, the laws of the market. Reality will assert itself.

DR. EMERENCIANA ARCELLANA (RP-USSR Friendship Society): To properly study the current situation in the Soviet Union, it is important that we first remove all our cultural and ideological prejudices.

The Western media, for instance, have often fed us with the image of the "Russian bear". This image is a complete distortion. Recall the most recent hostage crisis in the Soviet Union and the way in which their government managed the crisis. In that hostage situation, involving school children and their teacher, Gorbachev and other top-ranking members of the government personally negotiated with the hostage-takers and gave in to all their demands. To the government, the safety of the hostages was paramount. Now compare this to the manner in which the Aquino government handled the hostage crisis in Davao where some people were killed, including an Australian woman. Which government is compassionate? Where is the Russian bear?

With our bias properly in check, we may be able to draw lessons from Soviet history and society. These lessons would doubtless enrich our understanding of Philippine society.

It is in the area of development that we can learn much from the Soviet Union.

Under Stalin, development was swiftly undertaken through the collectivization of farms and the industrialization of the cities. This resulted in terrible dislocations and loss of lives. In the pursuit of development, the happiness of the people was sacrificed.

Several crucial questions, therefore, cannot be left out in the planning of an economy. The people should be consulted as to their needs and how best to meet them. The leaders should not usurp this role. Otherwise, development will benefit only a few composing a class or a bureaucracy.

As concretized in Tiananmen Square, there cannot be economic development without political democratization. Democratization can best guarantee that the fruits of development will be enjoyed by all. In the absence of democracy, only those who control the levers of the economy and the state will benefit from development. But then again, their power and privileges cannot last for popular agitations will soon catch up with them.

MS. YASMIN JOSE (UP Political Science Department): Widespread misconceptions about the Soviet Union get in the way of a rich understanding of its history and culture. I hope to debunk some of these misconceptions based on my personal experience as a student at the Kiev State University from December 1984 to June 1988.

One misconception is that, before glasnost, Soviet citizens had absolutely no freedom. This is not quite true. As a student at the time before Gorbachev assumed party and state leadership, I had occasion to interact with people who were already openly critical of the government.

Another fallacy is that of the queues. The Western media often flash images of line-ups in every corner in the country. We, the viewing public, then take it for granted that life in the Soviet Union is miserable. We never bother to look closely into the situation. While I was there, I found out that the reason behind these queues is that the workers in every establishment, including the groceries, break for lunch from two to three in the afternoon. These workers always buy their groceries before they return to work and would all wait outside the grocery until it opens. The queues, therefore, are inevitable, considering further that sometime only one cashier handles the sales.

Related to the above fallacy is the erroneous claim that the country suffers constant scarcity. To understand this situation, however, one must consider some peculiar habits of the Soviet consumers. One of these habits is the tendency to buy goods in bulk.

Still another fallacy is that foreigners have limited mobility because they are required a visa to travel from one city to another. For my first trip to Moscow from Kiev, I had to secure a visa. At first, I felt that my freedom to travel was being curtailed, but I soon came to realize the logic behind this policy. The State wants its foreign visitors to be properly cared for. The visa guarantees foreigners access to lodging houses and other facilities wherever they go.

All these show that the Soviet Union is not such a rigid society as most of us have been led to believe. The policies of glasnost and perestroika make it even less so.

DISCUSSION

QUESTION: Is there an emergent opposition party that can effectively challenge the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU)?

DMITRI KOSYEREV: For many years, we lived under the foolish notion that a single party can lead the country to its "glorious future". We have come to realize that this is not so — that some kind of an opposition is needed and that a feedback mechanism must be in place. Such an opposition now exists. It takes the form of such popular organizations as the Moscow Popular Front, People's Democratic Alliance, etc., that cover not only cities but also entire republics. A multi-party system, however, has yet to be *officially* adopted in the Soviet Union.

PROF. ALEXANDER R. MAGNO (Moderator): It is quite possible for a multi-party dynamic to exist even without professional politicians. In Poland, for instance, the Solidarity put together a coalition, not a party, to challenge the Polish Communist Party. This coalition now enjoys a majority in government while the Polish Communist Party has been reduced into a minority opposition.

PATRICIO N. ABINALES: A one-party system is not inherent in Leninism. In fact, when Lenin seized power, the government that was established was a coalition between the Bolsheviks and the Social Revolutionaries. A one-party system became institutionalized only under Stalin who dogmatized a memorandum issued in the 1920s *temporarily* banning, given the circumstances at that time, opposition parties and factions within the communist party.

Further, a one-party system is not peculiar to socialist societies but also exists, or once existed, in capitalist societies such as Japan and the Nordic countries.

QUESTION: Do all these developments in Eastern Europe and China indicate that Marxism-Leninism is a spent ideology?

PATRICIO N. ABINALES: Neither Marx nor Lenin pretended to offer a tight framework for socialist reconstruction. They provided us, though, with a strategy to seize power that has, I believe, remained relevant to the present.

No manual exists that would guide us in restructuring society according to a socialist vision. We can only experiment and debate along the way. China and Eastern Europe are

such experimentations. By synthesizing the concrete experiences of these countries, those who desire a socialist future here need not begin from scratch.

QUESTION: Must all societies experimenting with socialism endure totalitarianism? Must socialism be necessarily authoritarian?

DMITRI KOSYEREV: Totalitarianism is a pitfall that can and must be avoided especially now that we know how it begins and operates.

QUESTION: Can one find the seeds of perestroika and glasnost in Marxism-Leninism?

DMITRI KOSYEREV: Underlying your question is whether perestroika and glasnost contradict Marxism-Leninism. Certainly not. As I stated earlier, glasnost and perestroika are a relearning of the principles of Lenin.

QUESTION: Shall the autonomous organizations now composing the opposition be institutionalized?

DMITRI KOSYEREV: To be "institutionalized", these organizations only need to register with the local councils. Perhaps the more substantial issue is whether they shall be accepted as a part of the political system.

On this issue, the official view is split between Gorbachev and the party Central Committee, and the local party authorities. The latter oppose the idea because their power and privileges shall be greatly reduced.

Personally, I believe that these popular organizations have much to offer the country. They are the staunchest supporters of restructuring and their creative energies must be harnessed.

QUESTION: Do these changes underway in the socialist world signify an irreversible drift away from the model of a strong state as the basis of socialism to one where the free interplay of social forces create the condition for the "withering away of the state"?

PATRICIO N. ABINALES: I view these changes as a process of redefining a strong state. A strong state has well-developed coercive powers that enable it to effectively regulate civil society. In the Soviet Union, there remain aspects (a one-party system, for instance) of a strong state. Under glasnost, what is being modified is the manner in which state power is exercised – the state now relies less on its coercive powers and more on the incorporation or cooptation of the social groupings within and outside the party-state apparatus. This modification became necessary not only because the old method had failed but also because of pressures from civil society.

PROF. ALEXANDER R. MAGNO: The metaphor of the "withering away of the state" appears to lead to an ironic situation where the state, after having disarmed itself of its interventionist capability, is confronted by demands that require of it an interventionist role.

The case of the Philippines is illustrative. Beginning 1986, the state let go of its capability to intervene in society. This was effected through the policies of privatization, denationalization, liberalization, etc. Today, however, the state is being pressured to act on problems that can be resolved only if it restores its interventionist capability.

DR. EMERENCIANA ARCELLANA: The demand for an activist government does not conflict with the demand that government lessen its powers. The people want the government to both increase its capacity to do the right things and lessen its powers to do the wrong things. What is now happening instead is that the government is actively doing the wrong things. Take the issue of privatization. The government is privatizing companies that are profitable while it continues to assume the debts of bankrupt companies.

QUESTION: Is an industrial re-orientation taking place under perestroika? (By "industrial re-orientation" I refer to the production of less military hardware and more civilian goods and services.) How has the system of centralized economic planning been affected? What shall now happen to the local party functionaries?

DMITRI KOSYEREV: Industrial re-orientation is already underway. Last year, about 40 percent of the military economy have been redirected towards the production of consumer goods.

The system of centralized economic planning shall now affect only the major aspects of the economy. The power to determine the other aspects of the economy have been delegated to the local authorities. Private enterprises organized into cooperatives and the like have also been encouraged.

As stated earlier, the local party functionaries and other similar bureaucrats are the prime target of these reforms.

QUESTION: To what extent does the CPSU control the state apparatus?

PATRICIO N. ABINALES: The party maintains control over the state through the practices of *nomenklatura* and *podmena*. According to Peter Frank and Ronald Hill in *The Soviet Communist Party*, under the practice of *nomenklatura*, recruitment into the political and administrative network is made by every party committee on the basis of a list of names of persons to be considered for the posts. *Podmena* refers to the tendency of party officials and organs to assume the functions and authority of the state by interfering in the work of state administrators or economic managers.

These two practices are the obstacles to the democratization of the state and party apparatuses.

DMITRI KOSYEREV: The practices of *nomenklatura* and *podmena* are being undermined but not in every region of the country. The prevailing view, however, is that there must be elections at all levels of the bureaucracy and enterprise.

QUESTION: Is there religious persecution in the Soviet Union? Is it true that more than 300 pastors were imprisoned and have just been released? Is there a ban on the printing and circulation of the bible? Could it be that the country is in all this mess primarily because it left God in all its planning?

PATRICIO N. ABINALES: The most rabid supporter of the barbaric regime of Czar Nicholas was the Orthodox Church. Its god was overthrown with the Czar in 1917.

DMITRI KOSYEREV: If it is true that more than 300 pastors were imprisoned in my country, it is more likely that they were imprisoned for breaking some law rather than for their religious belief. Further, bibles are available in the book shops everywhere in the country. Finally, it is quite correct that we lost some of our moral values and traditions that should have been best preserved. We are now trying to restore this moral fiber.

DR. EMERENCIANA ARCELLANA: Please remember that Cardinal Sin himself, after his visit to the Soviet Union, declared its people as very religious. One must not confuse non-sectarianism with atheism.

MS. YASMIN JOSE: Being distant observers of the Soviet Union, it is only fair that we refrain from applying labels indiscriminately, especially when we cannot substantiate them.