

Crisis in Communism from Stalin to Gorbachev

Rise of Stalin

Joseph Djughashvili (he took the name 'Stalin' -man of steel-some time after joining the Bolsheviks in 1904) was born in 1879 in the small town of Gori in the province of Georgia. His parents were poor peasants; his father, a shoemaker, had been born a serf. Joseph's mother wanted him to become a priest and he was educated for four years at Tiflis Theological Seminary, but he hated its repressive atmosphere and was expelled in 1899 for spreading socialist ideas. After 1917, thanks to his outstanding ability as an administrator, he was quietly able to build up his own position under Lenin. When Lenin died in 1924, Stalin was Secretary-General of the communist party and a member of the seven-man Politburo, the committee which decided government policy. At first it seemed unlikely that Stalin would become the dominant figure; Trotsky called him 'the party's most eminent mediocrity. ...a man destined to play second or third fiddle'. Lenin thought him stubborn and rude, and suggested in his will that Stalin should be removed from his post. The most obvious successor to Lenin was Trotsky, an inspired orator, an intellectual and a man of action -the organizer of the Red Armies.

However, circumstances arose which Stalin was able to use to eliminate his rivals.

Trotsky's brilliance worked against him:

It aroused envy and resentment among the other Politburo members. He was arrogant and condescending and many resented the fact that he had only joined the Bolsheviks shortly before the November revolution. The other Politburo members therefore decided to run the country jointly; collective action was better than a one-man show. They worked together, doing all they could to prevent Trotsky from becoming leader.

The other Politburo members underestimated Stalin: They saw him as nothing more than a competent administrator; they ignored Lenin's advice about removing him.

Stalin used his position : As Secretary-General of the party, Stalin had full powers of appointment and promotion. He used these to place his own supporters in key positions, while at the same time removing the supporters of others to distant parts of the country.

Disagreements in the Politburo : Disagreements in the Politburo over policy arose partly because Marx had never described in detail exactly how the new communist society should be organized. Even Lenin was vague about it, except that 'the dictatorship of the proletariat' would be established that is, workers would run the state and the economy in their own interests. When all opposition had been crushed, the ultimate goal of a classless society would be achieved, in which, according to Marx, the ruling principle would be: 'from each" according to his ability, to each according to his needs', With NEP Lenin had departed from socialist principles, though he probably intended this to be only a temporary measure until the crisis passed. Now the right wing of the party, led by Bukharin, and the left, whose views were most strongly put by Trotsky, Kamenev and Zinoviev, fell out about what to do next:

1. Bukharin wanted to continue NEP, even though it was causing an increase in the numbers of kulaks (wealthy peasants), who were thought to be the enemies of communism. His

opponents wanted to abandon NEP and concentrate on rapid industrialization at the expense of the peasants.

2. Bukharin thought it important to consolidate soviet power in Russia, based on a prosperous peasantry and with a very gradual industrialization; this policy became known as 'socialism in one country'. Trotsky believed that they must work for revolution outside Russia - 'permanent revolution'. When this was achieved, the industrialized states of Western Europe would help Russia with her industrialization.

Stalin, quietly ambitious, seemed to have no strong views either way at first, but he supported the right simply to isolate Trotsky. Later, when a split occurred between Bukharin on the one hand, and Kamenev and Zinoviev, who were feeling unhappy about NEP, on the other, Stalin supported Bukharin. One by one, Trotsky, Kamenev and Zinoviev were voted off the Politburo, replaced by Stalin's yes-men, and expelled from the party (1927). The following year Stalin decided that NEP must go - the kulaks were holding up agricultural progress. When Bukharin protested, he too was expelled (1929) and Stalin was left supreme. Having reached the pinnacle, Stalin attacked the many problems facing Russia, which fell into three categories:

- Economic;
- Political and social; and
- Foreign

Assessment of Stalin in solving Russia's economic problems

1. Although Russian industry was recovering from the effects of the First World War, production from heavy industry was still surprisingly low. In 1929 for example, France, which did not rank as a leading industrial power, produced more coal and steel than Russia, while Germany, Britain and especially the USA were streets ahead. Stalin believed that a rapid expansion of heavy industry was essential to enable Russia to deal with the attack which he

was convinced would come sooner or later from the Western capitalist powers who hated communism. Industrialization would have the added advantage of increasing support for the government, because it was the industrial workers who were the communists' greatest allies: the more industrial workers there were in relation to peasants (whom Stalin saw as the enemies of socialism), the more secure the communist state would be. One serious obstacle to overcome though, was lack of capital to finance expansion, since foreigners were unwilling to invest in a communist state.

2. More food would have to be produced, both to feed the growing industrial population and to provide a surplus for export, which would bring in foreign capital and profits for investment in industry. Yet the primitive agricultural system which was allowed to continue under NEP was incapable of providing such resources.

The Five Year Plans and collectivization :

Although he had no economic experience whatsoever, Stalin seems to have had no hesitation in plunging the country into a series of dramatic changes designed to overcome the problems in the shortest possible time. In a speech in February 1931 he explained why: 'We are 50 or 100 years behind the advanced countries. We must make good this distance in 10 years. Either we do it or we shall be crushed'. NEP had been permissible as a temporary measure, but must now be abandoned: both industry and agriculture must be taken firmly under government control.

1. The Five Year Plans: Industrial expansion was tackled by a series of Five Year Plans, the first two of which (1928-32 and 1933-7) were said to have been completed a year ahead of schedule, although in fact neither of them reached the full target. The first plan concentrated on heavy industry - coal, iron, steel, oil and machinery (including tractors), which were scheduled to triple output. The two later plans provided for some increases in consumer goods as well as in heavy industry. It has to be said that in spite of all kinds of mistakes and some exaggeration of the official Soviet figures, the plans were a remarkable

success: by 1940 the USSR had overtaken Britain in iron and steel production, though not yet in coal, and she was within reach of Germany.

Hundreds of factories were built, many of them in new towns east of the Ural Mountains where they would be safer from invasion. Well-known examples are the iron and steel works at Magnitogorsk, tractor works at Kharkov and Gorki, a hydro-electric dam at Dnepropetrovsk and the oil refineries in the Caucasus.

How was all this achieved? The cash was provided almost entirely by the Russians themselves, with no foreign investment. Some came from grain exports, some from charging peasants heavily for use of government equipment, and the ruthless ploughing back of all profits and surpluses. Hundreds of foreign technicians were brought in and great emphasis was placed on expanding education in colleges and universities, and even in factory schools, to provide a whole new generation of skilled workers. In the factories, the old capitalist methods of piecework and pay differentials between skilled and unskilled workers were used to encourage production. Medals were given to workers who achieved record output; these were known as Stakhanovites, after Alexei Stakhanov, a champion miner who, in August 1935, supported by a well-organized team, managed to cut 102 tons of coal in a single shift (by ordinary methods even the highly efficient miners of the Ruhr in Germany were cutting only 10 tons per shift).

Ordinary workers were ruthlessly disciplined: there were severe punishments for bad workmanship, people were accused of being 'saboteurs' when targets were not met, and given spells in forced labour camps. Primitive housing conditions and a severe shortage of consumer goods (because of the concentration on heavy industry) on top of all the regimentation must have made life grim for most workers. As historian Richard Freeborn points out:

It is probably no exaggeration to claim that the First Five Year Plan represented a declaration of war by the state machine against the workers and

peasants of the USSR who were subjected to a greater exploitation than any they had known under capitalism.

However, by the mid-1930s things were improving as benefits such as medical care, education and holidays with pay became available.

2. Collectivization (Kolkhoz): This process dealt with the problems of agriculture. The idea was that small farms and holdings belonging to the peasants should be merged to form large collective farms (kolkhoz) jointly owned by the peasants. There were two main reasons for Stalin's decision to collectivize:

the existing system of small farms was inefficient, whereas large farms, under state direction, and using tractors and combine harvesters, would vastly increase grain production;

he wanted to eliminate the class of prosperous peasants (kulaks or nepmen) which NEP had encouraged because, he claimed, they were standing in the way of progress.

The real reason was probably political: Stalin saw the kulaks as the enemy of communism. 'We must smash the kulaks so hard that they will never rise to their feet again'. The policy was launched in earnest in 1929, and had to be carried through by sheer brute force, so determined was the resistance in the countryside. It proved to be a disaster from which, it is perhaps no exaggeration to claim, Russia has not fully recovered even today.

There was no problem in collectivizing landless labourers, but all peasants who owned any property at all, whether they were kulaks or not, were hostile to the plan, and had to be forced to join by armies of party members who urged poorer peasants to seize cattle and machinery from the kulaks to be handed over to the collectives. Kulaks often reacted by slaughtering cattle and burning crops rather than allow the state to take them. Peasants who refused to join collective farms were arrested and taken to labour camps, or shot. When newly collectivized peasants tried to sabotage the system by producing only enough for their own needs, local officials insisted on seizing the required quotas.

Total grain production did not increase at all (except for 1930) -in fact it was less in 1934 than it had been in 1928. This led to famine in many areas during 1932-3, especially in the Ukraine. Yet one and three-quarter million tons of grain were exported during that same period while over 5 million peasants died of starvation. Some historians have even claimed that Stalin welcomed the famine, since, along with the 10 million kulaks who were removed or executed, it helped to break peasant resistance. In this way, well over 90 per cent of all farmland had been collectivized by 1937.

In one sense Stalin could claim that collectivization was a success: it allowed greater mechanization, which did achieve a substantial increase in production in 1937. On the other hand, so many animals had been slaughtered that it was 1953 before livestock production recovered to the 1928 figure, and the cost in human life and suffering was enormous.

Stalin's solutions of political and social problems of USSR

The problems: These were to some extent of Stalin's own making. He felt that under his totalitarian regime, political and social activities must be controlled just as much as economic life. He aimed at complete and unchallenged power for himself and became increasingly suspicious and intolerant of criticism.

1. Starting in 1930, there was growing opposition in the party; the Ryutin platform (1932) aimed to slow down industrialization, allow peasants to leave collective farms, and remove Stalin (described as 'the evil genius of the Revolution') from the leadership if necessary. However, Stalin was equally determined that political opponents and critics must be eliminated once and for all.
2. A new constitution was needed to consolidate the hold of Stalin and the communist party over the whole country.
3. Social and cultural aspects of life needed to be brought into line and harnessed to the service

of the state.

4. The non-Russian parts of the country wanted to become independent, but Stalin, although he was non-Russian himself (he was born in Georgia), had no sympathy with nationalist ambitions and was determined to hold the union together.

Stalin's approach was highly dramatic

1. The purges

Using the murder of Sergei Kirov, one of his supporters on the Politburo (December 1934), as an excuse, Stalin launched what became known as the purges. It seems fairly certain that Stalin himself organized Kirov's murder, 'the crime of the century', as historian Robert Conquest calls it, 'the keystone of the entire edifice of terror and suffering by which Stalin secured his grip on the soviet peoples'; but it was blamed on Stalin's critics.

Over the next four years hundreds of important officials were arrested, tortured, made to confess to all sorts of crimes of which they were largely innocent (such as plotting with the exiled Trotsky or with capitalist governments to overthrow the soviet state) and forced to appear in a series of 'show trials' at which they were invariably found guilty and sentenced to death or labour camp. Those executed included M.N. Ryutin (author of the Ryutin platform), all the 'Old Bolsheviks' - Zinoviev, Kamenev, Bukharin and Radek -who had helped to make the 1917 revolution, the Commander-in-Chief of the Red Army, Tukhachevsky, thirteen other generals and about two-thirds of the top officers. Millions of innocent people ended up in labour camps (some estimates put the figure at about 8 million). Even Trotsky was sought out and murdered in exile in Mexico City (1940).

The purges were successful in eliminating possible alternative leaders and in terrorizing the masses into obedience; but the consequences were serious: many of the best brains in the government, in the army and in industry had disappeared. In a country where numbers of highly educated people

were still relatively small, this was bound to hinder progress.

2. A new constitution

In 1936, after much discussion, a new and apparently more democratic constitution was introduced in which everyone was allowed to vote by secret ballot to choose members of a national assembly known as the Supreme Soviet. However, this met for only about two weeks in the year, when it elected a smaller body, the Praesidium, to act on its behalf. The Supreme Soviet also chose the Union Soviet of Commissars, a small group of ministers of which Stalin was the secretary, and which wielded the real power.

In fact the democracy was an illusion: the constitution merely underlined the fact that Stalin and the party ran things, and though there was mention of freedom of speech, anybody who ventured to criticize Stalin was quickly 'purged'.

3. Social and cultural policies

Writers, artists and musicians were expected to produce works of realism glorifying soviet achievements; anyone who did not conform was persecuted, and even those who tried, often fell foul of Stalin. The young composer Dmitri Shostakovich was condemned when his new opera, *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk*, failed to please Stalin, even though the music critics had at first praised it. Further performances were banned, and the American ambassador noted that 'half the artists and musicians in Moscow are having nervous prostration and the others are trying to imagine how to write and compose in a manner to please Stalin'.

Education, like everything else, was closely watched by the secret police, and although it was compulsory and free, it tended to deteriorate into indoctrination; but at least literacy increased, which along with the improvement in social services, was an unprecedented achievement.

Finally, an attempt was made to clamp down on the Orthodox Church. Churches were closed and clergy persecuted; but this was one of Stalin's failures: in 1940 probably half the population were

still convinced believers, and during the war the persecution was relaxed to help maintain morale.

4. Holding the union together

In 1914, before the First World War, the tsarist empire included many non-Russian areas -Poland, Finland, the Ukraine, Belorussia (White Russia), Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kirghizia, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, and the three Baltic states of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. Poland and the three Baltic republics were given independence by the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk (March 1918). Many of the others wanted independence too, and at first the new Bolshevik government was sympathetic to these different nationalities. Lenin gave Finland independence in November 1917.

However, some of the others were not prepared to wait: by March 1918 the Ukraine, Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan had declared themselves independent and soon showed themselves to be anti-Bolshevik. Stalin, who was appointed Commissar (Minister) for Nationalities by Lenin, decided that these hostile states surrounding Russia were too much of a threat; during the civil war they were all forced to become part of Russia again. By 1925 there were six soviet republics -Russia itself, Transcaucasia (consisting of Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan), the Ukraine, Belorussia, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan.

The problem for the communist government was that 47 per cent of the population of the USSR were non-Russian, and it would be difficult to hold them all together if they were bitterly resentful of rule from Moscow. Stalin adopted a two-handed approach which worked successfully until Gorbachev came to power in 1985:

on the one hand, national cultures and languages were encouraged and the republics had a certain amount of independence;

on the other hand, it had to be clearly understood that Moscow had the final say in all important decisions. If necessary, force would be used to preserve control by Moscow.

When the Ukraine communist party stepped out of line in 1932 by admitting that collectivization

had been a failure, Moscow carried out a ruthless purge of what Stalin called 'bourgeois nationalist deviationists'. Similar campaigns followed in Belorussia, Transcaucasia and Central Asia. Later, in 1951, when the Georgian communist leaders tried to take Georgia out of the USSR, Stalin had them removed and shot.

1945-53: After the war, Stalin continued to rule the USSR for a further eight years until his death in 1953. The western half of European Russia was devastated by the war: roads, railways and industries were shattered and 25 million people were homeless. Stalin was determined that there should be no relaxation of government controls: the economy must be reconstructed. The Fourth Five Year Plan was started in 1946, and, incredibly in the circumstances, succeeded in restoring industrial production to its 1940 levels. Just as he was about to launch another set of purges, Stalin died, to the immense relief of his close associates.

Historians have failed to agree about the extent of Stalin's achievement, or indeed whether he achieved any more with his brutality than he could have done using less drastic methods.

Stalin's defenders, who included many Soviet historians, argued that the situation was so desperate that only the pressures of brute force could have produced such a rapid industrialization, together with the necessary food. For them, the supreme justification is that thanks to Stalin, Russia was strong enough to defeat the Germans.

The opposing view is that Stalin's policies, though superficially successful, actually weakened Russia: ridiculously high targets for industrial production placed unnecessary pressure on the workers and led to slipshod work and poor quality products; the brutal enforcement of collectivization vastly reduced the amount of meat available and made peasants so bitter that in the Ukraine the German invaders were welcomed. The purges slowed economic progress by removing many of the most experienced men, and almost caused military defeat during the first few months of the war by depriving the army of all its experienced generals. In fact Russia won the war in spite of

Stalin, not because of him.

Whichever view one accepts, a final point to bear in mind is that many Marxists, both inside and outside Russia, feel that Stalin betrayed the idealism of Marx and Lenin. Russian historian Roy Medvedev thinks that Stalin deserves no credit at all. Instead of a new classless society in which everybody was free and equal, ordinary workers and peasants were just as exploited as they had been under the tsars. The party had taken the place of the capitalists, and enjoyed all the privileges - the best houses, country retreats and cars. Instead of Marxism, socialism and the 'dictatorship of the proletariat', there was merely Stalinism and the dictatorship of Stalin.

USSR President Khrushchev

With the death of Stalin, the situation was similar to that after Lenin's death in 1924: there was no obvious candidate to take over the reins. Stalin had allowed no one to show any initiative in case he developed into a dangerous rival. The leading members of the Politburo or Praesidium as it was now called, decided to share power and rule as a group. Malenkov became Chairman of the Council of Ministers, Khrushchev Party Secretary, and Voroshilov Chairman of the Praesidium. Also involved were Beria, the Chief of the Secret Police, Bulganin and Molotov.

Gradually Nikita Khrushchev began to emerge as the dominant personality. The son of a peasant farmer, he had worked as a farm labourer and then as a mechanic in a coalmine before going to technical college and joining the communist party. Beria, who had an atrocious record of cruelty as chief of police, was executed, probably because the others were nervous in case he turned against them. Malenkov resigned in 1955 after disagreeing with Khrushchev about industrial policies, but it was significant that in the new relaxed atmosphere, he was not executed or imprisoned.

Khrushchev's position was further strengthened by an amazing speech which he delivered at the Twentieth Communist Party Congress (1956) strongly criticizing various aspects of Stalin's policies. He:

- Condemned Stalin for encouraging the cult of his own personality instead of allowing the party to rule;
- Revealed details about Stalin's purges of the 1930s and criticized his conduct of the War;
- Claimed that socialism could be achieved in ways other than those insisted on by Stalin;
- Suggested that peaceful co-existence with the West was not only possible but essential if nuclear war were to be avoided.

Khrushchev was not quite supreme yet; Molotov and Malenkov believed his speech was too drastic and would encourage unrest (they blamed him for the Hungarian revolution of October 1956), and they tried to force him out of office. However, as Party Secretary, Khrushchev, like Stalin before him, had been quietly filling key positions with his own supporters, and since he could rely on the army, it was Molotov and Malenkov who found themselves compulsorily retired (June 1957). After that, Khrushchev was fully responsible for all Russian policy until 1964. But he never wielded as much power as Stalin; the Central Committee of the party was ultimately in charge, and it was the party which voted him out in 1964.

In spite of Russia's recovery during Stalin's last years, there were a number of serious problems: the low standard of living among industrial and agricultural workers, and the inefficiency of agriculture, which was still a long way from providing all Russia's needs. Khrushchev was fully aware of the problems both at home and abroad and was keen to introduce important changes as part of a general de-Stalinization policy.

Industry continued to be organized under the Five Year Plans, but for the first time these concentrated more on light industries producing consumer goods (radios, TV sets, washing machines and sewing machines) in an attempt to raise living standards. To reduce over centralization and encourage efficiency, a hundred Regional Economic Councils were set up to make decisions about and organize their local industries. Managers were encouraged to make profits instead of just

meeting quotas, and wages depended on output.

All this certainly led to an improvement in living standards: a vast housing programme was started in 1958; between 1955 and 1966 the number of radios per thousand of the population increased from 66 to 171, TV sets from 4 to 82, refrigerators from 4 to 40, and washing machines from 1 to 77.

However, this was way behind the USA, which in 1966 could boast per thousand of the population no fewer than 1300 radios, 376 TV sets, 293 refrigerators, and 259 washing machines. Of course, much depends on how one measures progress, but it was Khrushchev himself who had rashly claimed that the gap between Russia and America would be closed within a few years. Another more spectacular piece of technological progress was the first manned orbit of the earth by Yuri Gagarin (1961).

In agriculture there was a drive to increase food production. Khrushchev's special brainchild was the virgin lands scheme (started 1954), which involved cultivating for the first time huge areas of land in Siberia and Kazakhstan. Peasants on collective farms were allowed to keep or sell crops grown on their private plots, and the government increased its payments for crops from the collectives, thus providing incentives to produce more.

By 1958 total farm output had risen by 56 per cent; between 1953 and 1962 grain production rose from 82 million tons to 147 million. But then things began to go wrong; the 1963 grain output was down to 110 million tons, mainly because of the failure of the virgin lands scheme. The trouble was that much of the land was of poor quality, not enough fertilizers were used, and the exhausted soil began to blow away in dust storms. In general there was still too much interference in agriculture from local party officials, and it remained the least efficient sector of the economy. The Russians had to rely on grain imports, often from the USA.

The thaw included the return to party control instead of Stalin's personality cult, a reduction in secret police activities (sacked politicians and officials retired into obscurity instead of being

tortured and executed), more freedom for ordinary people, more tourism, and a slight relaxation of press controls.

Following his Twentieth Congress speech, Khrushchev aimed for peaceful co-existence and a thaw in the Cold War and seemed prepared to allow different 'roads to socialism' among the satellites. However, these departures from strict Marxist-Leninist ideas (including his encouragement of profit and wage incentives) laid him open to Chinese accusations of 'revisionism'. In addition, encouraged by his speech, Poland and Hungary tried to break Moscow's grip. Khrushchev's reaction to the developments in Hungary showed how limited his toleration.

In October 1964 the Central Committee of the party voted Khrushchev into retirement on the grounds of ill-health; in fact, although he was seventy, his health was perfectly good. The real reasons were probably the failure of his agricultural policy (though he had been no less successful than previous governments in this), his loss of prestige over the Cuban missiles crisis, and the widening breach with China, which he made no attempt to heal. Perhaps his colleagues were tired of his extrovert personality (once in a heated moment at the United Nations, he took off his shoe and hammered the table with it) and felt he was taking too much on himself. Without consulting them he had just tried to win the friendship of President Nasser of Egypt by awarding him the Order of Lenin at a time when he was busy arresting Egyptian communists. Khrushchev was a man of outstanding personality: a tough politician and yet at the same time impulsive and full of warmth and humour. He deserves to be remembered for his foreign policy innovations, for the return to comparatively civilized politics (at least inside Russia), and for the improved living standards of the masses.

Stagnation starts in USSR

The Brezhnev era: After Khrushchev's departure, three men, Kosygin, Brezhnev and Podgorny, seemed to be sharing power. At first Kosygin was the leading figure and the chief

spokesman on foreign affairs, while Brezhnev and Podgorny looked after home affairs. In the early 1970s Kosygin was eclipsed by Brezhnev after a disagreement over economic policies. Kosygin pressed for more economic decentralization, but this was unpopular with the other leaders, who claimed that it encouraged too much independence of thought in the satellite states, especially Czechoslovakia. Brezhnev established firm personal control by 1977, and he remained leader until his death in November : 1982. Broadly speaking, his policies were similar to those of the Khrushchev period.

Economic policies maintained wage differentials and profit incentives, and some growth took place, but the rate was slow. The system remained strongly centralized, and Brezhnev was reluctant to take any major initiatives. By 1982 therefore, much of Russian industry was old-fashioned and in need of new production and processing technology. There was concern about the failure of the coal and oil industries to increase output, and the building industry was notorious for slowness and poor quality. Low agricultural yield was still a major problem not once in the period 1980-4 did grain production come anywhere near the targets set. The 1981 harvest was disastrous and 1982 was only slightly better, throwing Russia into an uncomfortable dependency on American wheat. It was calculated that in the USA in 1980 one agricultural worker produced enough to feed seventy-five people, while his counterpart in Russia could manage only enough to feed ten.

The Eastern Bloc states were expected to obey Moscow's wishes and to maintain their existing structure. When liberal trends developed in Czechoslovakia (especially abolition of press censorship), a massive invasion took place by Russian and other Warsaw Pact troops. The reforming government of Dubcek was replaced by a strongly centralized, pro-Moscow regime (1968).

Soon afterwards Brezhnev declared the so-called Brezhnev Doctrine: according to this, intervention in the internal affairs of any communist country was justified if socialism in that country

was considered to be threatened. This caused some friction with Romania, which had always tried to maintain some independence, refusing to send troops into Czechoslovakia and keeping on good terms with China. The Russian invasion of Afghanistan (1979) was the most blatant application of the doctrine, while more subtle pressures were brought to bear on Poland (1981) to control the independent trade union movement, Solidarity.

Brezhnev's record on human rights was not impressive; though he claimed to be in favour of the Helsinki Agreement, and appeared to make important concessions about human rights in the USSR, in fact little progress was made. Groups were set up to check whether the terms of the agreement were being kept, but the authorities put them under intense pressure. Their members were arrested, imprisoned, exiled or deported, and finally the groups were dissolved altogether (September 1982).

The Russians worked towards detente, but after 1979 relations with the West deteriorated sharply as a result of the invasion of Afghanistan. Brezhnev continued to advocate disarmament but presided over a rapid increase in Soviet armed forces, particularly the navy and the new SS-20 missiles. He stepped up Soviet aid to Cuba and offered aid to Angola, Mozambique and Ethiopia.

USSR after Brezhnev: After Brezhnev's death Russia was ruled for a short period by two elderly and ailing politicians -Andropov (November 1982-February 1984) and then Chernenko (February 1984-March 1985).

Head of the KGB until May 1982, Andropov immediately launched a vigorous campaign to modernize and streamline the soviet system. He began an anti-corruption drive and introduced a programme of economic reform, hoping to increase production by encouraging decentralization. Some of the older party officials were replaced with younger, more go-ahead men. Unfortunately he was dogged by ill-health and died after little more than a year in office.

The 72-year-old Chernenko was a more

conventional type of Soviet politician. There was no relaxation in the treatment of human rights activists. Dr Andrei Sakharov, the famous nuclear physicist, was still kept in exile in Siberia (where he had been since 1980), in spite of appeals by Western leaders for his release. Members of an unofficial trade union, supporters of a group 'for the establishment of trust between the US SR and the US A', and members of unofficial religious groups were all arrested.

Gorbachev and the end of communist rule

Mikhail Gorbachev, who came to power in March 1985, was, at fifty-four, the most gifted and dynamic leader Russia had seen for many years. He was determined to transform and revitalize the country after the sterile years following Khrushchev's fall. He intended to achieve this by modernizing and streamlining the communist party with new policies of glasnost (openness) and perestroika (restructuring -which meant economic and social reform).

The new thinking soon made an impact on foreign affairs, with initiatives on detente, relations with China, a withdrawal from Afghanistan, and ultimately the ending of the Cold War in late 1990.

Gorbachev outlined what was wrong at home in a speech to the Party Conference in 1988: the system was too centralized, leaving no room for local individual initiative. It was based almost completely on state ownership and control, and weighted strongly towards defence and heavy industry, leaving consumer goods for ordinary people in short supply.

Gorbachev did not want to end communism; he wanted to replace the existing system, which was still basically Stalinist, with a socialist system which was humane and democratic. He did not have the same success at home as abroad. His policies failed to provide results quickly enough, and led to the collapse of communism, the breakup of the USSR, and the end of his own political career.

(a) Gorbachev's new policies

1. Glasnost: This was soon seen in areas such as human rights and cultural affairs. Several well-

known dissidents were released, and the Sakharovs were allowed to return to Moscow from internal exile in Gorky (December 1986). Leaders like Bukharin who had been disgraced and executed during Stalin's purges of the 1930s were declared innocent of all crimes. Pravda was allowed to print an article criticizing Brezhnev for overreacting against dissidents, and a new law was introduced to prevent dissidents from being sent to mental institutions (January 1988). Important political events like the Nineteenth Party Conference in 1988 and the first session of the new Congress of People's Deputies (May 1989) were televised.

In cultural matters and the media generally, there were some startling developments. In May 1986 both the Union of Soviet Film-makers and the Union of Writers were allowed to sack their reactionary heads and elect more independent-minded leaders. Long banned anti-Stalin films and novels were shown and published, and preparations were made to publish works by the great poet Osip Mandelstam, who died in a labour camp in 1938.

There was a new freedom in news reporting: in April 1986, for example, when a nuclear reactor at Chernobyl in the Ukraine exploded, killing hundreds of people and releasing a massive radioactive cloud which drifted across most of Europe, the disaster was discussed with unprecedented frankness. The aims of this new approach were to:

- ♦ Use the media to publicize the inefficiency and corruption which the government was so anxious to stamp out;
- ♦ Educate public opinion; and
- ♦ Mobilize support for the new policies.

Glasnost was encouraged provided nobody criticized the party itself.

2. Economic affairs: Important changes were soon afoot. In November 1986 Gorbachev announced that '1987 will be the year for broad applications of the new methods of economic management'. Small-scale private enterprise such as family restaurants, family businesses making

clothes or handicrafts or providing services such as car or TV repairs, painting and decorating and private tuition, was to be allowed, and so were workers' co-operatives up to a maximum of fifty workers. One motive behind this reform was to provide competition for the slow and inefficient services provided by the state, in the hope of stimulating a rapid improvement. Another was the need to provide alternative employment as patterns of employment changed over the following decade: as more automation and computerization are introduced into factories and offices, the need for manual and clerical workers declines.

Another important change was that responsibility for quality control throughout industry as a whole was to be taken over by independent state bodies rather than factory management.

The most important part of the reforms was the Law on State Enterprises (June 1987). This removed the central planners' total control over raw materials, production quotas and trade, and made factories work to orders from customers.

3. Political changes: These began in January 1987 when Gorbachev announced moves towards democracy within the party. Instead of members of local Soviets being appointed by the local communist party, they were to be elected by the people, and there was to be a choice of candidates (though, not of parties). There were to be secret elections for top party positions, and elections in factories to choose managers.

During 1988 dramatic changes in central government were achieved. The old parliament (Supreme Soviet) of about 1450 deputies only met for about two weeks each year. Its function was to elect two smaller bodies -the Praesidium (33 members) and the Council of Ministers (71 members). It was these two committees which took all important decisions and saw that policies were carried out. Now the Supreme Soviet was to be replaced by a Congress of People's Deputies (2250 members) whose main function was to elect a new and much smaller Supreme Soviet (450 representatives) which would be a proper working parliament, sitting for about eight months a year.

The chairman of the Supreme Soviet would be head of state.

Elections went ahead, and the first Congress of People's Deputies met in May 1989. During the second session (December 1989) it was decided that reserved seats for the communist party should be abolished. Gorbachev was elected President of the Soviet Union (March 1990), with two councils to advise and help him: one contained his own personal advisers, the other contained representatives from the 15 republics. These new bodies completely sidelined the old system, and it meant that the communist party was on the verge of losing its privileged position.

(b) Lacuna in Gorbachev policies

As the reforms got under way, Gorbachev ran into problems. Some party members, such as Boris Yeltsin, the Moscow party leader, were more radical than Gorbachev, and felt that the reforms were not drastic enough. They wanted a change to a Western-style market economy as quickly as possible, though they knew this would cause great short-term hardship for the Russian people. On the other hand, the traditional (conservative) communists like Yegor Ligachev, felt that the changes were too drastic and that the party was in danger of losing control. This caused a dangerous split in the party and made it difficult for Gorbachev to satisfy either group.

The conservatives were in a large majority, and when the Congress of People's Deputies elected the new Supreme Soviet (May 1989), it was packed with conservatives; Yeltsin and many other radicals were not elected. This led to massive protest demonstrations in Moscow, where Yeltsin was a popular figure since he had cleaned up the corrupt Moscow communist party organization. Demonstrations would not have been allowed before Gorbachev's time, but glasnost encouraging people to voice their criticisms - was now in full flow, and was beginning to turn against the communist party.

The rate of economic growth in 1988 and 1989 stayed exactly the same as it had been in previous years. In 1990 national income actually fell and

continued to fall - by about 15 percent in 1991. Some economists think that the USSR was going through an economic crisis as serious as the one in the USA in the early 1930s.

A major cause of the crisis was the disastrous results of the Law on State Enterprises. The problem was that wages were now dependent on output, but since output was measured by its value in roubles, factories were tempted not to increase overall output, but to concentrate on more expensive goods and reduce output of cheaper goods. This led to higher wages, forcing the government to print more money to pay them with. Inflation soared and so did the government's budget deficit. Basic goods such as soap, washing-powder, razor-blades, cups and saucers, TV sets and food were in very short supply, and the queues in the towns got longer. Disillusion with Gorbachev and his reforms rapidly set in, and, having had their expectations raised by his promises, people became outraged at the shortages. In July 1989 some coalminers in Siberia found there was no soap to wash themselves with at the end of their shift. 'What kind of a regime is it', they asked, 'if we can't even get washed?' After staging a sit-in, they decided to go on strike; they were quickly joined by other miners in Siberia, in Kazakhstan and in the Donbass (Ukraine), the biggest coalmining area in the USSR, until half a million miners were on strike. It was the first major strike since 1917. The miners were well-disciplined and organized, holding mass meetings outside party headquarters in the main towns. They put forward detailed demands, forty-two in all. These included better living and working conditions, better supplies of food, a share in the profits, and more local control over the mines. Later, influenced by what was happening in Poland (where a non-communist prime minister had just been elected, they called for independent trade unions like Poland's Solidarity, and in some areas they demanded an end to the privileged position of the communist party. The government soon gave way and granted many of the demands, promising a complete reorganization of the industry and full local control.

By the end of July the strike was over, but the general economic situation did not improve. Early in 1990 it was calculated that about a quarter of the population was living below the poverty line; worst affected were those with large families, the unemployed and pensioners. Gorbachev was fast losing control of the reform movement which he had started, and the success of the miners was bound to encourage the radicals to press for even more far-reaching changes.

These also contributed towards Gorbachev's failure and led to the breakup of the USSR. The Soviet Union was a federal state consisting of fifteen separate republics each with its own parliament. The Russian republic was just one of the fifteen, with its parliament in Moscow. (Moscow was also the meeting-place for the federal Supreme Soviet and Congress of People's Deputies.) The republics had been kept under tight control since Stalin's time, but glasnost and perestroika encouraged them to hope for more powers for their parliaments and more independence from Moscow. Gorbachev himself seemed sympathetic, provided that the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) remained in overall control. However, once started, demands got out of hand.

- ♦ Trouble began in Nagorno-Karabakh, a small Christian autonomous republic within the Soviet republic of Azerbaijan, which was Muslim. The parliament of Nagorno-Karabakh requested to become part of neighbouring Christian Armenia (February 1988), but Gorbachev refused. He was afraid that if he agreed, this would upset the conservatives (who opposed internal frontier changes) and turn them against his entire reform programme. Fighting broke out between Azerbaijan and Armenia, and Moscow had clearly lost control.
- ♦ Worse was to follow in the three Baltic Soviet republics of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia, which had been taken over against their will by the Russians in 1940. Independence movements denounced by Gorbachev as 'national excesses' had been growing in strength. In March 1990, encouraged by what was

happening in the satellite states of Eastern Europe, Lithuania took the lead by declaring itself independent. The other two soon followed, though they voted to proceed more gradually. Moscow refused to recognize their independence.

- ♦ Boris Yeltsin, who had been excluded from the new Supreme Soviet by the conservatives, made a dramatic comeback when he was elected president of the parliament of the Russian republic (Russian Federation) in May 1990.

They disagreed on many fundamental issues.

- ♦ Yeltsin believed that the union should be voluntary: each republic should be independent but also have joint responsibilities to the Soviet Union as well. If any republic wanted to opt out, as Lithuania did, it should be allowed to do so. However, Gorbachev thought that a purely voluntary union would lead to disintegration.
- ♦ Yeltsin was now completely disillusioned with the communist party and the way the traditionalists had treated him. He thought the party no longer deserved its privileged position in the state. Gorbachev was still a convinced communist and thought the only way forward was through a humane and democratic communist party.
- ♦ On the economy Yeltsin thought the answer was a rapid changeover to a market economy, though he knew that this would be painful for the Russian people. Gorbachev was much more cautious, realizing that Yeltsin's plans would cause massive unemployment and even higher prices. He was fully aware of how unpopular he was already; if things got even worse, he might well be overthrown.

(c) Situation of 1991

As the crisis deepened, Gorbachev and Yeltsin tried to work together, and Gorbachev found himself being pushed towards free multi-party elections. This brought bitter attacks from Ligachev and the conservatives, and Yeltsin resigned from the communist party (July 1990). Gorbachev was

now losing control: many of the republics were demanding independence, and when Soviet troops were used against nationalists in Lithuania and Latvia, the people organized massive demonstrations. In April 1991 Georgia declared independence: it seemed that the USSR was falling apart. However, the following month Gorbachev held a conference with the leaders of the fifteen republics and persuaded them to form a new voluntary union in which they would be largely independent of Moscow. The agreement was to be formally signed on 20 August 1991.

At this point a group of hardline communists, including Gorbachev's vice-president, Gennady Yanayev, decided they had had enough, and launched a coup to remove Gorbachev and reverse his reforms. On 18 August Gorbachev, who was on holiday in the Crimea, was arrested and told to hand over power to Yanayev. When he refused, he was kept under house arrest while the coup went ahead in Moscow. The public was told that Gorbachev was ill and that an eight-member committee was now in charge. They declared a state of emergency, banned demonstrations, and brought in tanks and troops to surround public buildings in Moscow, including the White House (the parliament of the Russian Federation) which they intended to seize. Gorbachev's new union treaty, which was due to be signed the following day, was cancelled. However, the coup was poorly organized and the leaders failed to have Yeltsin arrested. He rushed to the White House, and, standing on a tank outside, he condemned the coup and called on the people of Moscow to rally round in support. The troops were confused, not knowing which side to support, but none of them would make a move against the popular Yeltsin. It soon became clear that some sections of the army were sympathetic to the reformers. By the evening of 20 August, thousands of people were on the streets, barricades were built against the tanks, and the army hesitated to cause heavy casualties by attacking the White House. On 21 August the coup leaders admitted defeat and were eventually arrested. Yeltsin had triumphed and Gorbachev was able to return to Moscow. But things could

never be the same again, and the failed coup had important consequences:

- ♦ The communist party was disgraced and discredited by the actions of the hardliners. Gorbachev soon resigned as party general secretary and the party was banned in the Russian Federation;
- ♦ Yeltsin was seen as the hero and Gorbachev was increasingly sidelined. Yeltsin ruled the Russian Federation as a separate republic, introducing a drastic programme to move to a free-market economy. When the Ukraine, the second largest soviet republic, voted to become independent (1 December 1991), it was clear that the old USSR was finished;
- ♦ Yeltsin was already negotiating for a new union of the republics. This was joined first by the Russian Federation, the Ukraine, and Belorussia (8 December 1991), and eight other republics joined later. The new union was known as the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). Although the member states were fully independent, they agreed to work together on economic matters and defence;
- ♦ These developments meant that Gorbachev's role as president of the USSR had ceased to exist, and he resigned on Christmas Day 1991.

(d) Assessment of

There can be no question that Gorbachev, in spite of his failures, was one of the outstanding leaders of the twentieth century. His achievement, especially in foreign affairs, was enormous. His policies of glasnost and perestroika restored freedom to the people of the USSR. His policies of reducing military expenditure, detente, and withdrawal from Afghanistan and Eastern Europe, made a vital contribution to the ending of the Cold War. It has been suggested that Gorbachev was the real successor of Lenin, and that he was trying to get communism back on the track intended for it by Lenin before it was hi-jacked by Stalin, who twisted and perverted it.

One final point which needs to be emphasized is that 1991 did not mean the end of communism, in Russia or Eastern Europe. Reformed communist

parties re-emerged, sometimes under different names, in a multi-party setting, in Lithuania, Bulgaria, Poland and Russia (see below). What really ended in 1991 was not communism but Stalinism.

(e) Post Gorbachev Russia

Yeltsin was faced with the same problem as Gorbachev: how to transform Russia into a market economy by privatizing the inefficient, subsidized state industries and agriculture. Yeltsin was hugely popular, but this would only last if he could improve the people's living standards. Through 1992 and 1993 the economy continued to decline as output fell even more steeply than under Gorbachev. Living standards declined and many people were worse off than before glasnost and perestroika.

The government was also embarrassed by armed conflict within the Russian Federation: rebel forces in the small republic of Chechnia declared independence, and Yeltsin sent troops and heavy artillery against the Chechens. Although TV viewers worldwide saw pictures of the Chechen capital, Grozny, reduced to rubble, the Russian army seemed unable to defeat the rebels. As the elections for the Duma (the lower house of the Russian Federation parliament) approached (December 1995), Yeltsin's popularity was waning and support for the reformed communist party under their leader, Gennady Zyuganov, was reviving. The communists scored something of a triumph in the elections, winning 23 per cent of the votes and becoming the largest party in the Duma. During the first half of 1996 the economy began to show signs of recovery: the budget deficit and inflation were both coming down steadily, and production was increasing. Elections for a new president were due in June, and Western governments, worried about the prospect of a Zyuganov victory, were clearly hoping that Yeltsin would be reelected. The International Monetary Fund was persuaded to give Russia a \$10.2 billion loan (March). The leaders of the former Soviet republics (members of the Commonwealth of Independent States) also backed Yeltsin, because they were afraid that a communist president might try to end their independence. Yeltsin's chances

received a boost when he succeeded in negotiating a ceasefire in Chechnia (May), and he eventually won a comfortable victory, taking almost 35 per cent of the votes against 32 per cent for Zyuganov. However, this showed that communism (new-style) was far from dead, and there were fears that Yeltsin's failing health (he underwent major heart surgery in November 1996) might prevent him from completing his full term in office.